

CHOISE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER XVII.—MOSAIC WORK.

"After the storm, a calm;
After the bruise, a balm;
For the ill brings good, in the Lord's own time,
And the sigh becomes the psalm."

In the performance of pleasant tasks, and the enjoyment of many blessings, the days slipped by until it was two weeks since the railroad accident, and yet Dr. Waldemar had not returned home. They heard him daily through Mrs. Waldemar. He was improving, but the time when it would be safe for him to travel was still undecided, and Mrs. Waldemar could only bid the girls be patient and hopeful.

They read and worked together, taught Sibly, amused and entertained the dear old grandmother, and, keeping busy, they could not mope nor feel dull. Helen went home several times: she found everything there satisfactory.

Mr. Humphrey went to the city for a week, and during his absence the boys spent their evenings at the cottage.

It was in the early evening of a late March day that the parlour door opened without warning and Dr. Sullivan walked in. Gladly the girls sprang to welcome him, and, taking a hand of each, he looked at them with the pleased smile of one who is the bearer of good news.

"No, no," he said, as Margaret drew forward one of the easiest chairs for him, "my dear I must not stay a minute. How can you be so cruel as to tempt me with the creature comforts you know are so dear to little man? Miss Helen," and he looked at her critically, "though our spring is said to be unusually early, it seems to me that your roses are very backward. What do you think Mrs. Waldemar and the doctor will say to such a pale face when they come?"

Perhaps the faint, wavering colour that tinged Helen's cheeks just then, satisfied the doctor, that he need fear no dearth of roses when his friends returned; but he only smiled at her, and turned to answer Margaret's impatient question.

"When will they come, did you ask? Well, Miss Margaret, if the elements are propitious, if there is just enough sun, and not too much wind, and no hint of rain, you may expect them to-morrow. The carriage must meet them at the noon train, and you are to have the house in festive order, and yourselves in the brightest and happiest spirits possible—not forgetting the roses, Miss Helen; and whatever other directions Mrs. Waldemar may have given, you will find here in this little note."

And placing it in her hand, with a face that beamed with his sympathy in their pleasure, the doctor went off.

The next day was all that even Dr. Sullivan could require. And when all was done, Margaret and Helen took their seats by the window to watch for the return of the carriage from the depot.

It soon came; but as it stopped, and Margaret with a cry of joy, rushed to the door, Helen, moved by an impulse she could not explain, and of which afterwards she felt much ashamed, went as quickly in the opposite direction and hid herself in her own room.

Once there, it seemed quite impossible for her ever to go downstairs again.

She heard the glad voices in the hall, the sound of opening and closing doors, and the hurrying feet that told of happiness and business combined; but she seemed to have no part or lot in the general joy, and yet she was very glad; and with a shower of sunshiny tears she thankfully owned the goodness and mercy of the Lord.

By degrees the house grew quiet; proving that the first glad excitement was subsiding into the sweet calm of peace and contentment; and soon, with a little knock she did not wait to have answered, Mrs. Waldemar came in.

Her greeting of Helen was very tender and affectionate, and if her eyes took quick note of the girl's tear-stained face she asked no questions; she only said quietly,

"Will you now go down and see Guy, my dear? He is in the library resting on the sofa; and I am afraid he will not feel that he is really at home until he has seen all his friends."

Slowly, with an odd feeling at once glad and shy, Helen went downstairs and tapped on the library door. Dr. Waldemar's "Come in" was rather wearily spoken; but, with the first sight of her, face and voice changed.

"Miss Helen," he said, as he took her hand in both his, "I am very glad to see you again. What have you been doing all these weeks, Miss Helen? Margaret has been as chary of information as if she supposed the birds in the air brought me messages. I hope you have a long story to tell me now."

Helen smiled. "We have been doing a great many little things," she said simply. "I don't believe I can make a story of them."

They were gathered in the library that evening enjoying the pleasant consciousness that they were all once more together, when Dr. Waldemar proposed to read to them.

"Wait a moment," Margaret said, as she glanced out of the window: "here comes Fred: we must hear what he wants, first."

Fred's errand proved to be only to see his sisters, and he gladly accepted Dr. Waldemar's invitation to become one of his audience. Mrs. Waldemar came in with some scarlet yarn she wanted his help to wind, and with his hands happily occupied, Fred listened, as did the girls, to the doctor.

Dr. Waldemar read without interruption until he had finished the philosopher's description of what constitutes a country. "Perhaps you have never thought what your country means. It is all that surrounds you, all that has brought you up and fed you, all that you have loved. This landscape that you see—these houses, these trees, those girls who go along there laughing—this is your country. The laws which protect you, the bread which pays for your work,

the words you interchange with others, the joy and grief which come to you from the men and things among which you live, this is your country. The little room where you used to see your mother; the remembrances she has left you, the earth where she rests, this is your country. You see it, you breathe it everywhere.

"Think to yourself, my son, of your rights and your duties, your affections and your wants, your past and your present blessings; write them all under a single name, and that name will be your country."

He closed the book then, and no one spoke until Fred made his characteristic comment.

"Well," he said impulsively, jerking his arms at the same time, to help Mrs. Waldemar with a tangle in the yarn; well, if that is one's country, one hasn't to go far to find it; but what I want to know is, what is one to do for it?"

"A country's a thing men should die for at need," Mrs. Waldemar said, in her soft voice; but the need doesn't often require that, Fred; it is more necessary that you should live for it."

"Yes; but how? Shall I go to West Point or Annapolis? Father was talking of that last night." And as if the words had been spoken before the time for uttering them, Fred bit his lip and looked sharply at Helen.

Interested in her own thoughts, she did not appear conscious of his scrutiny, or to have noticed what he said; like the sayings of many a wise man, spoken before the time was ripe for them, his words produced no impression, and with a look of relief, Fred turned to Mrs. Waldemar for an answer to his question.

"The question is not so much where you shall go, or what you shall do, important as each is in its place, as what you shall be, Fred," she said. "If you are a true, good man, with all your powers wisely and faithfully cultivated and used, you will serve your country well in whatever sphere it may please God to place you."

Fred looked soberly into the fire a moment. "I suppose," he said, in his frank, boyish way, "if a fellow's going to a place, he's got to get into the right road; and if he's going to make something, he's got to have the right tools, and know how to use them; and if I am going to do a good man's work in the world, I've got to learn how to do it, haven't I?" and he looked at Dr. Waldemar.

"Yes, Fred." "And then you see there are a great many kinds of good work in the world, and how am I to know which is the best, or which I ought to learn?" and Fred knotted his smooth forehead, and twisted his fingers, and looked sorely perplexed.

"Is it necessary you should know just now, Fred?" Dr. Waldemar asked quietly.

"No—yes—I don't know—that is, I've got to know pretty soon, I expect," and Fred sent another look towards Helen.

Dr. Waldemar had seen both looks, and he understood, without more words, that the question the boy had asked was really distressing him, and pressing for an answer.

"If you want to be a good man, Fred, you know this much—where you can find all the directions you need for that purpose, do you not?"

Fred nodded. "That is the most important difficulty then, and that is settled. A Bible-reading boy can never be at a loss to know the right from the wrong."

"Fred had listened, his dark eyes riveted on the doctor's face; then started up, and almost shouted in his excitement:

"I know. I'll go to West Point, as father said; but I won't stay in the army unless there's war and it's my duty; I'll be a civil engineer. I'd like to bridge rivers, and tunnel through mountains, and dam up waters. That would be a good work, wouldn't it?" he asked as his voice fell a little, and he looked doubtfully at the doctor, as if dreading disapproval. Dr. Waldemar gave him an encouraging smile.

"Yes, Fred," he said, pleasantly; "if you are a good man, it will be a good work, and perhaps in the doing of it, you may literally help to make the desert blossom as the rose."

It had grown quite dark while they had been talking, and as the doctor stopped tea was announced. Fred started for his hat.

"Stay to tea, Fred," Mrs. Waldemar said kindly.

"No, ma'am, thank you; I have some work to do this evening," the boy answered. "Helen, if it is pleasant to-morrow, papa wants you to come home; he'll send or come for you in the afternoon." And amid the chorus of regrets and exclamations that his last words called forth, Fred took his leave.

"Fred cannot be accused of having kept the best till the last," Dr. Waldemar said, regretfully; "but, Miss Helen, if this is to be your last evening with us, we must make it the pleasantest."

And very effectually he exerted himself to make it so.

"Have you thought," Dr. Waldemar said, the next morning, "that the winter is really over, Miss Helen? Bluebirds and robins were singing this morning; and in a sunny nook under my window, I see the crocuses waking up from their long sleep. Next week will be the first of April."

"Yes," she said as she looked at him, "I know it; the winter seemed very long, when at its beginning I looked forward, but it has passed very quickly." And a little suppressed sigh implied sadly, as well.

"A great many changes usually occur in the spring," he said, much as if he wished to prepare her to expect them in her own life. "After the enforced rest of the winter, people are usually very active and restless as the days lengthen and grow warm. Have you made any plans? Do you anticipate any changes for yourself, Miss Helen?"

She looked at him with eyes that were full of fears and questions.

"Oh no, I hope not," she said quickly. "I cannot think of any changes that could come to us but sad ones. I hope, I pray, we are not to experience any."

Gently he laid his hand on hers.

"Hush!" he said, for she was trembling with excitement; "my child, you must not attach any importance to my words: they are probably due solely to my own uneasiness and restlessness in being kept a prisoner here, when life is stirring all around me. But, Miss Helen, if you will allow me, I would like to ask a promise from you—one perhaps you will never have to fulfil: before you do make any important plans or arrangements this spring, if you should be called upon to make any, will you let me—I mean my mother—know and advise you?"

"I could not go to any one else," she said, gratefully.

"Thank you," he answered; and quitting the subject he proceeded to select some books for her, and give her hints and suggestions to aid her in their reading.

"What books has Guy been giving you to read?" asked Margaret, as she bent down to see the titles.

"First volume of 'Gibbon's Rome.' Helen, don't I pity you? Guy, why don't you give her something easier to read? If she must read history why not give her 'Motley'?"

"Because," he answered, coolly, "I am hard-hearted enough not to make Miss Helen's path through the world of books too easy. It would not please me at all to find her some fine day among the novel-reading young ladies in the Castle of Indolence. And then, too, if I am going to build a house, I expect to lay a firm foundation before I finish of the chimneys. So, if Miss Helen is to read history with true pleasure and profit she wants to begin as near the beginning as possible. 'Gibbon' will prove an excellent introduction to 'Motley' and 'Prescott.'"

"I have never read it," Margaret said, opening the book.

"No? why not, Margie?"

"I don't know. Guy. I have always meant to, but it looks so hard, and there are always so many other things I want to do."

"I know," Dr. Waldemar said quietly, almost sadly. "You make me think often of the grave old Bible words, Margie: 'Thy servant was busy here and there, and he was gone.'"

"Guy what do you mean? You are always talking in riddles."

"Am I?" he said with a little smile. "The meaning of this one is not hard to read, Margie. Many precious opportunities are given to you, dear: time and talent, youth and health. You do not intentionally neglect them; you are always going to improve them: but your days pass away while you are 'busy here and there,' and by-and-by you will find that their loss can only be regretted—never repaired. The opportunities you did not use and appreciate are gone beyond recall."

Margaret's sunny face grew very serious.

"Guy," she said, as lovingly she just touched his lips with hers, "I suppose I deserve you should say this, but I will never deserve it again. If Helen is going to be a wise woman, why, then, so will I, and after you will have to bestow your scoldings—and your praises—impartially on us both."

"Agreed," he said, with a smile; and there was no time then for more words, for Sibly came in to claim their attention, and soon dinner summoned them; and shortly after dinner Philip came with the waggon and took his sisters home.

CHAPTER XVIII.—A SHOCK THAT TRIES THE FOUNDATION.

"I know not where His islands lift

Their fronded palms in air,

I only know I cannot drift

Beyond His love and care."—Whittier.

Helen had supposed that on her return home she would take up the old life again with the old duties, and cheerfully and bravely she had girded herself for her task. But she soon learned that new plans were forming, and that the closing of the winter was to mark the closing of a chapter in her life, one that was to stand alone—never to be continued or repeated.

When that evening, after tea, she proposed that the boys should bring their books and read and study with her as usual, she was surprised by Mr. Humphrey's unusual interference.

"No, no," he said, quickly, "Helen the boys can do well enough without you; let them go off and study by themselves: it is not necessary you should devote your evenings to them any longer; and besides, I want to have a little conversation with you myself, after Sibly has gone to bed."

Mr. Humphrey's expressed wish was always equal to a command, and Helen did not venture to remonstrate against his arrangements now. She watched her brothers collect their books and go out, and then silently wondering what her father could have to say to her, she called Sibly, and, sorely against that young lady's will carried her off to bed. After the pleasant bed-time story had been told, and she had seen the bright eyes close in childhood's untroubled sleep, she went back to her father. But Mr. Humphrey, whatever he had to say, was evidently in no haste to say it; with his evening paper in his hand he sat apparently engrossed with its contents, and, taking her work, Helen sat down to wonder and wait. The housekeeper came in for a little while; but soon wearying of the silent society of the father and daughter, she remembered some business she had with a neighbour, and went to attend to it.

Finding it useless to puzzle over questions she could not answer, Helen soon ceased to wonder about the topic on which her father desired to speak to her, and her thoughts wandered away, and before long were happily at home in Mrs. Waldemar's pleasant library.

Mr. Humphrey finally laid down his paper and turned towards her.

"Helen," he said gravely, "this has been a very trying winter for you, has it not?"

Full of sweet truthfulness Helen's clear brown eyes met her father's.

"It has been a sad winter, papa," she answered, gently; "how could it be otherwise, when we missed and wanted mamma so much, and now Ronald, but—" and here her