

"Now isn't it all nice and cozy and bright in here Aunt Mollie?" he asked.

"Yes indeed, and my boy's face is the brightest of all," she replied, laying her hand fondly on his thick, soft curls.

"But I have such a lot of mending to do," she said with a slightly deprecating air and a longing look at the comfortable lounge and soft cushions which would be so grateful to her aching head and tired body.

"Oh! never mind the mending to-day auntie," exclaimed Bertie with true boyish improvidence. "It would make your headache worse to bend over your work, and see I've fixed everything for you." His pleading was irresistible and the vision of a heaping basket of unpressed garments vanished at once, as she laid herself down with a sigh of content and Bertie sat beside her on the rug with one elbow resting upon the sofa and his book open on his knee. They were both silent for a few moments and then the boy said slowly and with the manner of one who was relieving his mind of some burden which had laid upon it for a long time:

"Aunt Mollie I have been thinking a good deal lately and I have made up my mind that perhaps it would be better for me not to be a minister at all."

"And what would you be then Bertie? What other profession would you choose?"

"No profession at all auntie; I would learn a trade."

"But do you mean that you would *prefer* a trade?" she asked gravely.

There was a struggle in the boy's mind before he answered and when his reply came it was spoken in a low, hesitating tone:

"No auntie."

"Then what put this idea into your head my dear?"

"Because aunt Mollie; it seems mean and unmanly of me to allow you to work so hard as you do just to save money to educate me for a profession, when if I went into trade, I would be old enough in two years to go into a situation and commence to earn a little money; it would be only a little at first but every year it would be more, and soon very soon I would be earning enough to keep you and Lesley without your having to work at all. On the other hand if I go into a profession it will be years before even my education is completed and all these years you will be obliged to work hard teaching and singing as you do now to get the money which will be necessary to educate me for the church. I'm a little fellow now, I know but long before my education was over I would be almost a man and so it wouldn't be fair to let a woman work for me and my little sister too." Mollie had listened to him without interrupting, but when he stopped she laid her hand upon his head caressingly and answered him:

"My darling, I thoroughly appreciate the generosity and manly sense of independence which prompted you to say this; especially as I know how your heart is set upon entering the church, but indeed I cannot permit you to make this sacrifice; it would be almost as great a disappointment to me as to you for the thought of your future Bertie is one of the dearest and brightest of my life. You need not fear for me that I shall work too hard; I know that my two children will repay me with their love."

"That we will Auntie," said the boy earnestly.

"So my boy you need think no more about trade and earning money for Lesley and me, we shall get on very well; I am young and strong and quite able to work; when you are a man you shall work for us. But I thank you my dear all the same for the unselfish offer you made."

"I won't let you do a thing when I'm a man, auntie you'll see."

"How shall I get through the time with nothing to do?" she asked smilingly.

"Oh you shall read a good deal, for I intend to have a famous library; and then you shall sing and play the piano whenever you feel inclined, just to amuse yourself you know, and oh! there are heaps of things you can do that are not work; you could easily get through the time. Don't you think we will be awfully happy, just you and I together auntie?"

"Yes dear, very happy; but what is to become of poor Lesley, you have left her out?"

"Oh! She'll get married I guess; but of course she will

live with us if she doesn't; but girls always do get married and our Lesley is very pretty, eh auntie?"

"Yes very, and you must always remember, my boy, that if your sister does not marry and if anything happens to me that you are her only protector; she is very fond and proud of you now; see that you never by word or deed forfeit her love and respect; she is naturally giddy and thoughtless and will therefore stand all the more in need of your watchful care. Too many brothers nowadays despise their sisters' love and hold their respect in light esteem; and though bound by so close a tie, they drift farther and farther apart, becoming little more than strangers to one other, until at last, perhaps years after, when every other love is dead or lost to them, the brother will turn to his sister, or the sister to her brother, but too late as it often happens for the gulf of years yawns between them and the utmost they can do, is to clasp hands across it."

Mollie stopped suddenly and smiled. "I forget very often, what a little boy you are and find myself talking to you as I would to one more than twice your age; but it only proves what a companion you are to me," she said fondly.

"I love to hear you talk, aunt Mollie, and indeed I quite understand what you say."

"Yes I think you do Bertie, for you are grave and thoughtful beyond your years. And will you keep in mind, dear boy, what I have said to you about Lesley?"

"I will, indeed I will auntie."

"She is a dear, affectionate little soul, and her love will be a blessing to you all your life Bertie." There fell a silence between the two, after this and the only sound in the room was the ticking of the little clock on the mantel-piece. Presently Bertie's book slipped from his lap to the floor, and in bending to pick it up, he observed that his aunt held her hand pressed to her forehead.

"Is your headache very bad auntie?" he asked softly.

"Shall I bathe it for you?"

"No thank you darling; it is not so bad as it was, and will be better soon I have no doubt. What book is that you are reading?"

"This? O the 'Old Curiosity Shop'" answered he, turning the leaves over slowly, as he spoke.

"Do you like Dickens?"

"Yes, very much; I think he must have been a very clever man to know so many different kinds of hearts and to describe them all so well. Don't you auntie?"

"So many different kinds of hearts?" repeated Mollie, looking puzzled; not knowing exactly how to understand his childishly expressed idea.

"Yes; noble hearts and mean hearts, rough and gentle ones, sad ones and merry ones, cowardly and brave; he seemed to be able to read them all equally well."

"You are right; he had certainly a remarkable insight into human nature; but I think, nevertheless that he very often verges upon exaggeration."

"So I think too; but may be, it is only because we cannot see things as he saw them that makes us think so. But don't you think he must have had a very good and gentle heart himself aunt Mollie?"

"Yes"—smilingly—"or he could never have created the character of 'Little Nell.'"

"Let me read you a little bit, auntie; this is what I was thinking about when I said he must have had a gentle heart." And the boy commenced reading:

"She was looking at a humble stone which told of a young man who had died at twenty-three years old, fifty-five years ago; when she heard a faltering step approaching and looking round saw a feeble woman, bent with the weight of years, who tottered to the foot of the same grave and asked her to read the writing on the stone. The old woman thanked her when she had done so, saying that she had had the words by heart for many a long long year but could not see them now."

"Were you his mother?" said the child

"I was his wife my dear."

"She the wife of a young man of three and twenty! Ah true! It was fifty-five years ago."

"You wonder to hear me say that," remarked the old woman shaking her head.

"You're not the first; older folk than you have wondered