

Childrens' Department.

LITTLE AGNES AND HER BEST DOLL.

A TRUE STORY.

Little faces thronged the nursery window, and nurse's patience was well nigh worn out with questions about the time.

"Isn't it nearly three, nurse dear?" cried first one and then another. "Oh, nurse, did you say it wanted only ten minutes?"

At last wheels were heard on the stones in the court-yard, and oh what a clapping of little hands there followed as the chaise, so long expected, drove up through the old gates.

"Aunt Mary! Aunt Mary! She's come! she's come!" the whole group shouted; and if it had not been for the stout iron bars, more than one window pane must have been broken.

Aunt Mary was eagerly watched leaving the chaise, and long before she had received her full welcome from their elders the little rebels in the nursery were in a state of agitation that threatened nurse with a headache, and obliged her to speak mysteriously of a part of the room never popular with young spirits, namely, "the corner."

"Nurse," said a servant, appearing at the very moment when things were coming to a crisis, "Master Alfred and Miss Emily are to go down to the drawing-room directly."

"There! there!" cried the happy chosen ones. "I said mamma would send for us." And it was with difficulty they were able to stand still and listen as if they heard them to the final directions, to "walk down quietly, speak softly, and not be troublesome."

"Why, Miss Agnes!" cried nurse, turning round to a pretty little girl who was perched on the low-window seat, looking with black despair at the door as it closed after Alfred and Emily. "What, crying!—why, it's not like Agnes to cry!"

But it was Agnes that cried, and heartily too.

"Well, well!—why, you forget that your Aunt is too tired to see everybody at once, and of course the eldest must go first. Come, now, don't cry; your time is close at hand. Mamma will send for you before—before you have dressed Dolly, I shouldn't wonder."

And she held up an old wax doll, that was not in the handsomest trim by any means.

"Look, now, how shabby she is. Aunt Mary will wonder to see her in this poor way. Put on her best frock, and I'll find you some new ribbon for a sash; and you must put on her bonnet, to hide the loss of her wig."

Agnes was seduced into a calmer state of mind by this able diversion of her thoughts, and was soon immersed in profound cogitations as to the best manner of hiding the ravages that time and some severe trials had made in Dolly's charms.

Prudent nurse, putting sleeping baby in her crib, now gave herself up to advising and assisting in the renovating process, while Agnes stood with breathless interest at each fresh touch of improvement; and when the work was done, clapped her little hands again, forgot her troubles, and hugged first nurse and then Dolly in the fullness of her delight.

"I think aunt Mary will say she's quite pretty," she cried, looking enquiringly at her friend.

"Yes, yes,—now she will. It's a very good thing we thought of it, wasn't it?" answered nurse.

Agnes thought so too. She had not seen her wax baby look so well for many a day, and entered on a game of play with it, quite as though she had been an entire novelty.

She was in the very zenith of her enjoyment when the door opened, and who should appear but aunt Mary. In another moment little Agnes was in her arms.

"Mamma is not strong enough to have all down stairs together, so I said I would come and see my little Agnes," she said; and seating herself, she took her on her knee, while she asked nurse about the rest of the nursery people.

Agnes, however, was impatient that she should attend to any one but herself, and continually interrupted her with items of her own particular concerns, and such affairs as she thought most important.

"And, dear aunty, when I come down to-morrow, will you ask mamma to let you have the key, to show you and me all the beautiful things for the Christmas tree?"

"Christmas tree? Are you going to have one?" asked aunt Mary, pretending surprise.

"Oh yes,—such dear little dolls, and everything you can think of, on it," said Agnes, with great animation; and she proceeded to describing the "everything you could think of" with all her powers.

"Why, it will be a wonderful tree indeed!" said aunt Mary. "But Christmas is over; so how is it you have it now?"

"Oh," answered Agnes, considering, "it's because poor little children want to be taught to love God."

She evidently considered she had delivered herself with great propriety, as she looked gravely at her aunt and nurse, who stood smiling by.

"And how will this fine tree help poor children to love God?" asked aunt Mary.

Agnes was perplexed for a moment, but catching at the truth, cried out, "I know: it's for missionaries. They shall have all the money,—mamma said they should."

"Now we have come to the rights of it," cried aunt Mary, kissing her; "and to-morrow, I am quite sure, when we ask mamma, she will let us have the key. But first, what have I got for my little child?" Here she drew from a paper a most delightful doll, dressed to the life like a Welsh milkmaid.

In a moment the poor furbished-up wax baby was discarded, and no words were sufficient to proclaim the gratitude and admiration of the happy Agnes.

The next mornings' sunrise saw her sitting up in her little bed playing with her new doll, taking off and re-fixing the hat, talking to it, singing to it, calling it her "dearest Dolly."

"Oh, Miss Agnes, you don't mean to say you love her better than the old one?" said nurse, as the compliments to the milkmaid became stronger and stronger. "We oughtn't to give up old friends for new ones, ought we?"

Agnes frowned a little at this appeal to her fidelity. She thought in her conscience nurse was right; but she was persuaded at the same time that

she loved her milkmaid exceedingly above the wigless wax baby, whose temporary restoration didn't bring her into a faint comparison with the fresh and rosy Welsh woman.

"I think, nurse,—I think—I'll play with baby doll to-morrow. Poor baby doll!" she added, with a look of "auld lang syne" regard to the degraded favourite, who lay neglected in the cradle.

But "to-morrow" didn't restore the "cast off" to her notice. No; to-morrow, and the day after, and the next day to that, found the milkmaid queen of her affections.

At last came the day for dressing the tree, preparatory to the next evening's exhibition and sale.

How lovely it looked!—but it wasn't quite full. "We want something here," said Agnes's mamma.

"You shall have my new humming top," cried Alfred.

"That will do nicely. But here is another gap," said mamma again.

"Take my Tonbridge ware puzzle, mamma," said Emily; "it is quite new."

Still gaps were found, and nobody was busier than little Agnes in trying to fill them out of other people's possessions.

"Suppose Agnes gave her doll," said Emily.

"Oh yes,—I'll fetch Dolly," said Agnes, quite charmed to get rid of her old favourite in so honourable a way; and she ran to the nursery crying, "Nurse, nurse, my doll,—baby doll. I'm going to give it to the missionaries, nurse."

On her way back to the drawing-room she gave sundry little pulls and twitches to her intended gift to improve its appearance; and when she held it up to her mother, she did it with a very self-righteous smile, as if she were making a most commendable sacrifice.

"Oh, Agnes, I didn't mean this doll," said her mother.

Agnes looked at her, and holding down her head, began to roll up the corners of her pinafore.

"The milkmaid is what I want," said her mother.

"But I want that," said Agnes, colouring, and still looking down.

"And you won't give it up for the poor little children who want to be taught to love God?" said aunt Mary.

"No," said Agnes, softly. "I'll give baby doll."

"Then you may take baby doll too; it is not good enough now to put on the tree. So run off with it. You can keep both your dolls. We won't have anything more except from cheerful givers."

Agnes paused a moment; but the thought of her dear little milkmaid being handed over to some other little girl was too much for her. She walked slowly away and returned to the nursery, where she went to play at once with her darling.

Care was taken not to let her suppose that the sacrifice had been expected from her. No reproachful word or look escaped any one; but for all that, when she heard nurse tell Anne that Master Alfred must have had love for the souls of little children before he would have given up his top which he was so fond of, she felt uncomfortable, and an uneasy conviction that she had shown herself selfish and unloving quite spoilt her play all the evening.

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