

Keeping my Word.

IN THREE PARTS.

('Sunday at Home.')

CHAPTER III.

All the afternoon we explored wood, and lane, and meadows in vain, a dreadful haunting fear filling my heart at every step, a guilty remorse possessing me at the remembrance that, but for my folly, all this could never have happened. Six o'clock came and still we discovered no trace of the lost Effie, and I was getting weary and faint in body, as well as sick at heart, with increasing anxiety and terror. One of the search party had gone back, in case by any possibility Effie had returned safely by another road, and I was feeling that I should soon be obliged to give up, when I suddenly remembered a spot which we had not yet explored. It was a remote corner of Briermead Wood, in reality private property, but into which Effie and I sometimes found our way together by a little foot-bridge which crossed a rushing brook, flowing over a stony bed through the depths of the wood.

I hastened thither, alone. Ah, our search was ended now! As I came to the bridge something white on the opposite bank caught my eye in the fading twilight. It was Effie's hat! At my feet on the rough planks of the bridge lay a few scattered primroses. I called loudly again and again, 'Effie! Effie!'

But there was no answer. No sound but the steady rush and ripple of the water below, eddying round the huge boulders that blocked its course, or falling in tiny cascades into deep green pools in its bed. Only one hand-rail guarded the bridge, and it was easy to step off, and let myself down by the ferny, bramble-covered bank to the brink of the stream. The water was much higher than usual, swollen by recent heavy rains, and it was dashing along impetuously. Caught between two jutting rocks I found Effie's little basket, quite empty, all the flowers had been swept away, and after reaching it with some difficulty, I clambered round a big rock and met a sight that froze my blood, and turned me sick and dizzy with horror.

There, just beneath the bridge, her fair curls floating on the swift stream, her little light frock clinging to the moss-grown rock, lay our Effie. The ice-cold waters were enveloping her in their chilling flood, but they scarcely covered her, yet I saw at once there was not one hope that she would ever speak to me again. The little girl must have slipped in crossing the bridge, and with no friendly hand to clasp hers, fallen on the rocks below. Seriously hurt or stunned by the fall, she had then had no power to resist the strong current which had caught and swept her along beneath its cold waters. One minute's help and succor would have saved her, and now it was too late!

I had yielded to my pride; I had resisted the voice of conscience; I had 'kept my word,' and it had cost me my little friend's life! The truth all flashed upon me as I stood clinging for support to the damp, slimy rock I had just climbed. Then I roused myself by a great effort, and with a cold, sickening despair at my heart, called loudly for help.

My worst fears were realised. When they lifted the child from the water and laid her on the bank, I knew that my loved com-

panion was gone from me, never to return, and as I pushed back the wet, clinging curls from the white face, and called her lovingly by name, the dreadful silence seemed almost more than I could bear. Those parted lips would never speak to me again, or ask a favor, now that their last request had been denied. My voice, which Effie had longed in vain to hear, could never reach her now. I had refused to humble myself that I might give her pleasure, I had withstood her gentle patience with my own obstinate folly, I had accused her cruelly and unjustly, and inflicted on her an undeserved punishment, because I was too proud to own myself in the wrong. I had resisted tenderer and better feelings that very morning, and had thrown away my last chance—and this was the end!

No tears, perhaps, have ever been so bitter as those I shed that day beside the cold lifeless form of my little friend, poisoned as those tears were by remorse and self-reproach.

And I could not suffer alone. My sin brought terrible suffering to others. Effie's widowed mother never recovered the shock of that dreadful day, she never seemed to be quite herself again after the loss of her only child. With the most patient forgiveness and compassion, she let me go to her, and minister to her as well as I could, and she soothed my self-reproaches by letting me take, in some small way, the place of her lost darling; but, though others forgave me, I could never forgive myself.

At school I met with the scorn and bitter reproaches that I well deserved, for Effie had been a general favorite, and her tragic fate awakened no little sympathy. Those who had most encouraged my dogged resolution to 'keep my word' were now the first to condemn my conduct, seeing it had borne such terrible consequences.

Only two girls showed any sympathy for me—Norah, my fancied rival, towards whom I had behaved by no means kindly, and Rose Gilham. If any of my companions had a right to reproach me, surely it was Rose, for had she not warned me against persevering in my foolish silence, which alone prevented my being with Effie on that sad day.

But Rose came to me with no reproaches. When I was heart-broken with remorseful sorrow, when I trembled to face the scorn and bitter words of my companions, it was Rose whose gentle hands were laid in mine, whose kind voice spoke encouraging, soothing words. It was on Rose's breast that I wept repentant tears, it was through her tender sympathy that I was enabled to seek forgiveness for the past, and to gather hope for the future. She did not make light of sin, perhaps she even made it seem more hateful and despicable in my eyes, but she lovingly led me to the feet of One who 'receiveth sinners,' and bears away their sin. She helped me not only to accept pardon and peace from him against whom I had sinned, but to give up leaning to my own understanding, and learn of him who is meek and lowly in heart.

(The End.)

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The Cape and the Counterpane.

(By Mary Hoge Wardlaw.)

This is a story mother wants me to write in my diary, and she says it won't be complete unless I tell how I happened to hear it.

One day, while grandma was at our house last summer, I wanted to do something one way and mother said I must do it another. I have forgotten what it was, but I know I wanted to do it my way dreadfully, because that's the way I always want to do things. Grandma gave mother a queer look and said, 'Charlotte, don't you think Marietta should hear the history of my dimity cape?'

And mother said, 'By all means.'

That minute some ladies came, and afterwards I thought grandma had forgotten. I hadn't, but I wouldn't remind her. I love stories dearly, but I felt certain from the way they looked that there was a lecture, or what grandma might call an 'admonition' wrapped up in that story.

Well, last week, on my twelfth birthday, came a good-sized package for me from grandma, and on top there was a letter. But, of course, I opened the package first. There was a dimity cape, cut in a curious fashion, and trimmed round with ball fringe. But the thing that made the bundle so large was a counterpane of dimity exactly like the cape, but, taking up all the centre of it was a great square of crocheted roses, done very fine and even. I couldn't make out what I was to do with the cape but I saw that the counterpane was a treasure.

Then I read the letter, Grandma said first that it pained her very much to discover that her dear little grand-daughter was so fond of her own way. She wrote nearly a page about self-will and obstinacy and the trouble they give the people who indulge them, and other people besides. Then she said it distressed her still more to think it was from her that her beloved namesake had inherited this fault. She called it my besetting sin. She said she sent me the cape as an illustration to the story she had promised me, and that the counterpane was her birthday present; although it belonged to the story, too. Then she said that when she was a little girl she was perfectly devoted to having her own way (she isn't now though, a bit; I say that, it isn't part of her letter) and often made her mother very unhappy by her stubbornness. They tried punishments and praying and everything. Sometimes they let her have her own way to see what it led to, when they knew beforehand that it would lead to something horrid. Once when she was just about my age a new kind of cape came in fashion, and she was very anxious to have one. She was going to make it herself. (Grandma is perfectly wonderful with her needle, and always was. Why couldn't I have taken that from her while I was inheriting.) Then she asked her mother to let her cut it. There was something very peculiar about the cut, and her mother said 'No.' But grandma begged so that at last her mother said, 'Well, Marietta, I shall give you a piece of red calico that I have no use for. This afternoon, when I have had my nap, you may cut out a red cape as an experiment. If it succeeds, I will trust you to cut out the white merino cape.'

This permission set grandma wild to cut out the trial cape at once, but her mother was firm. It had to be done under her eye