

THE MESSENGER.

belonging to home to these outside duties. The dear child will see it so before long, I believe," and Aunt Kezie smiled confidently into the troubled face beside her.

In the meantime Alice, not a little disturbed, walked briskly down the street towards Mrs. Amory's. "Not going?" exclaimed she, finding Mary busily stitching at the machine.

"Really, I cannot, Alice," answered Mary, stopping the incessant click-clack for a moment. "Mother is simply swamped in work, and I tell her the only rescue is for me to drag her out, and there's some sewing which must be finished this afternoon, but I can help Saturday, I think. Good-bye."

As Alice turned thoughtfully from the Amorys' door, again her mind reverted to her mother's words and to the overflowing work-basket she had left by her mother's side.

"Evidently Mary thinks her place is at home to-day," and more perturbed than ever she hastened to the conservatory, where she was to meet her friends.

There Alice joined them, forgetting for a little her mother's parting words in the loveliness about her and in her eager talk with her mates; but inquiries for Mary once more brought uppermost in her mind the words which had followed her from her own door.

"O girls!" exclaimed she, pausing near a pot of double white primrose, "isn't it pretty and doesn't it look like popcorn? It's Aunt Kezie's favorite plant."

Her mother and the two boys were just sitting down to tea when Alice entered the dining-room.

"Where's Aunt Kezie?" inquired she, passing by her mother on the way to her place.

"She is very tired and not quite well, I think, so concluded not to come to tea," said Mrs. Thorne, concisely. "I shall carry her some hot drink after supper is served."

"Oh, let me! do, mother," urged Alice, hurrying to the kitchen after receiving an approving smile from her mother.

As she laid the Japanese tray with a dainty white cloth, toasted the bread a delicate brown, brewed the tea and placed a tempting slice of fowl on her own china plate, Alice's heart beat quickly. Aunt Kezie tired and not quite well! How the words throbbed themselves over and over in her brain! Dear Aunt Kezie, so patient and sweet, always doing for others' comfort—for her to be tired meant a great deal. Then, like a flash, came the thought of what home would be with her chair empty (for Aunt Kezie was always an invalid), and, with a sudden contraction of the throat and blurred eyes, she picked a cluster of geranium and a bit of ageratum, placed them in her tiny vase for the tray, and went towards Aunt Kezie's room.

After the evening lamp had been lighted and her mother, with a late magazine near, had been seated in a comfortable chair before the open fire, she said:

"I'm going out just a few moments, mother, dear, and please," with a lingering caress, "if you have any regard for my feelings, don't touch that basket of work while I am gone;" and slipping into her jacket she walked briskly down the street, her mother's smile warm in her heart. The conservatory was soon reached and with the pot of white primrose, which had attracted her in the afternoon, tucked safely under her arm she hurried on to Nellie Hatch's home.

"I'm very sorry, girls," explained she to her friends of the afternoon, who were already at Nellie's, awaiting her coming. "I'd like ever so much to stay with you, but somehow I've had a new thought come to me since I parted from you at the church door.

The Chautauqua games are instructive, interesting, and all that, and right to play, but to-night I feel as though I just must stay with Aunt Kezie. Do you know, girls, for the last month I have scarcely sat with her at all, I've been so taken up with other things;" and Alice dashed the tears from her eyes with her hand. "Besides, I've left mother to do almost everything at home and—quickly—I'm ashamed of myself, really I am. And, too, you know I do not have a very large allowance, so the plant I thought of contributing must go somewhere else. Of course, those of you who have more than I have can do more, but I do not feel that it would be just right for me to spend my money so. Good-bye, girls, and—do not think that I've withdrawn entirely from the concert plans. What time I can conscientiously spend away from home I'll be more than glad to help;" and Alice, nodding brightly, closed the door.

"Well," said Nellie, "I guess Alice is in the right."

"That's so; for though what we have been doing is perfectly right, it would certainly be more in keeping with the spirit of the concert if I, for instance, had sacrificed some of my natural repugnance to stocking darning and other homely duties, and stayed at home like a good girl and helped my dear old mother. Good-bye, girls; I'll see you some other time. Strange as it may seem, games, just now, have lost their fascination for me while mother's mending basket stares me in the face."

And so, with the exception of two, the girls went homeward, intent on picking up some of the dropped stitches which they were not slow to discover.

Aunt Kezie's room never looked more inviting to Alice than when she stepped over the threshold with the nodding plant in her hand. "I have not forgotten your likings, Aunt Kezie," said Alice, kissing the face turned towards her.

"I see you have not, my dear child. Thank you very much. How very pretty it is! It will brighten up Aunt Kezie's room wonderfully," said she, looking over the pretty blooms into Alice's happy face. "I thought you were going over to Nellie's to-night?" added she, noticing the mother's mending bag in Alice's hand.

"So I was, but I found I much preferred to spend the evening with you. Of course, you do not object to the prosaic work I have brought with me."

"By no means, dear. Such work carries with it the poetry of home happiness," said Aunt Kezie in a satisfied tone.

On the hassock by Aunt Kezie's side Alice, as she weaved the thread in and out of the rents in the boys' socks, chatted away of all the bright, pleasant bits which she had stored up for this special member of the family, led from one subject to another by Aunt Kezie's interested questions or remarks. A lull in the conversation proved a thoughtful pause to the young girl longing to do right and puzzling her brains over several things which had that day come to her.

"Aunt Kezie," said she meditatively, "why is it that so often when we are doing what we think is the best that some sudden development of circumstances shows us that we are making a great mistake?"

"My dear," said Aunt Kezie, passing her hand caressingly over the brown head resting against her knee, "'duties never conflict' is an old saying, but as true, as it is old—"

"I know," interrupted Alice eagerly, lifting her head; "then why do they so often seem to conflict?"

"Ah, my dear, older heads than yours have

puzzled over that very question and worn their hearts out with disappointment because they failed to answer it; and yet there is an answer." Aunt Kezie's voice was low and wistful. "My girlie," said she, laying her hand over her niece's restless fingers, "Aunt Kezie would have you while young learn the lesson of dividing your time to such purpose that home and church and pleasure would each hold its own place and no one encroach on the other. Home comes first; but home duties can usually be so apportioned that there will be opportunities for church work right along beside them; and, too, dear, is it not often the case that what at first seems a duty when closely scanned proves not to be so, even though it wear a tempting guise?" Aunt Kezie paused with a winning smile, but Alice's pressure of her hand and almost inaudible though urgent "don't stop" caused her to add:

"I remember when I was a girl my mother used to say to me when I was inclined to shirk my home work for the sake of doing something outside which looked particularly alluring, 'Kezie, my child, never trample on daisies in a wild chase for roses.'"

"And is that the reason, dear Aunt Kezie, why you always have the comfort and happiness of those about you first in your mind?" asked Alice, thinking remorsefully of the daisies, in the shape of home opportunities, which she had lately crushed beneath her feet.

"Perhaps so, dearie; at any rate, I have had reason to well remember and act upon my mother's words, for like yourself, when younger, work away from home ever looked fascinating if it did not always prove satisfying. You have lately entirely ignored home calls, dear, in your enthusiasm over your other affairs which are right in their place. It seems to me that a systematic division of your time would have enabled you to perform all home duties, and help abroad as well. Do you see it, dear?"

"Yes, I see, Aunt Kezie. I always do see things plainer when I talk them over with you. I shall be all ready to do your writing to-morrow, if you are rested and well;" and Alice busied around the dainty room, getting Aunt Kezie ready for the night.

"Good night, Aunt Kezie, and thank you ever so much," said she, kissing the face looking up at her from the pillow; and then she tripped downstairs and finished out the evening helping the boys with their morrow's lessons.

When the next afternoon Alice drew her chair up to the oak desk in Aunt Kezie's room, pretty cards and beautiful tokens of the season lay on the lid, and Alice was soon busily writing off names and dainty little notes, for Aunt Kezie believed in sending a personal line with the gifts to friends in hospital or city or at the homes.

"If Saturday is a fine day, I'd like to drive to the hospital with some flowers, and I want you to go with me, Alice, dear," said Aunt Kezie as the last envelope was directed. "And these cards," holding up some from which dangled pretty pink ribbon, "I want tied on the bouquets."

"O Aunt Kezie, I'd love dearly to go—but—with unusual thoughtfulness and self-denial—" "I think mother would like to go;" and a little flush crept over her face.

"Yes, so she would, I've no doubt, dear, and it was lovely in you to suggest it. I'm glad you thought of it;" and so was Alice when she saw how rested and bright looked her mother's face when she returned from her drive the next Saturday. Tea was all ready, and they sat together about the table with happy hearts; but no one was gladder or more contented than a certain young lady.