

THE LITTLE FOLK.

KITTY'S LESSON.

It's very hard, mother. All the other girls have got nice new frocks or sashes for Rose's birthday party, and I've got nothing. Only my old white muslin, that they all have seen so often."

There was a disconsolate whine in Kitty's voice, very unlike her usual bright little self.

Mrs. Clayton looked up from the little muslin dress she was ironing and getting up so prettily.

"I think this will look very nice, dear. The mark, where I let it down, scarcely shows now."

Kitty still grumbled on. "Rose is going to have such heaps of presents, and a new pink frock."

Mrs. Clayton gave a little sigh, as she looked down at her own black dress, with its rusty crape trimmings.

"I should like you to have a new dress as much as any one, Kitty," she said. "I always like you to be pretty things. Still, it is never too early to learn the lesson that we cannot all be alike. There are a great many little girls much worse off than you, dear."

"Kitty shrugged her shoulders, and picking up a story book, murmured pettishly, 'Always a lesson.'"

Mrs. Clayton and her little daughter had lived together in a small house ever since the father's death. They lived very simply, for Mrs. Clayton gave away all she could spare to others who were in greater need. Her great wish was that Kitty should learn to do the same.

Most of the girls at school had richer and brighter homes than hers; especially Rose Vincent, a much spoiled only child, whose every wish was gratified. Of late, Mrs. Clayton had been sorry to see a growing spirit of discontent and envy in Kitty, especially when she had much of Rose's companionship.

Kitty had not recovered her good temper when she started presently for a walk with her mother. She sauntered along in a sulky silence, lingering behind to look in at the shop windows.

In the High Street they came suddenly upon a little crowd of people.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Clayton of the man next her. "Is it an accident?"

"A boy been stealing," came the gruff answer.

The owner of a neighbouring coffee stall, a big, burly man, was roughly shaking a small boy by the collar of his ragged jacket.

"I saw you!" he cried. "Creeping round the corner so quiet like, with your hand on one of my rolls? You little thief, you! Won't I give you up to the next policeman that comes along!"

Something in the small, piteous face touched Mrs. Clayton. She went forward quickly, and laid her hand on the man's arm.

"Don't be too harsh, Williams. He is such a baby. Let me speak to him one moment."

The man turned round angrily; but Mrs. Clayton had often helped him when trade was bad. So, with a parting shake of the ragged collar, he gave the child a little push towards her, murmuring—

"Stealing's stealing, all the world over. No amount of tender-heartedness can make it anything else."

Mrs. Clayton drew the boy gently on one side, and by degrees got the sad little story from him.

"It weren't for myself. I can bear the empty pains most days, now I'm getting to be a man," and he drew himself up with a piteous little air of dignity inside his rags. "But Polly can't, and she gave me the very last bit of bread she had. Oh, I can't let Polly starve!"

"Will you take me to see Polly?" asked Mrs. Clayton.

This was a matter that must be gone into thoroughly; it was not one to be left to the policeman. Stepping up to Williams—who was looking on, now the crowd had cleared off—she soon explained the matter, and made it right with him.

They found Polly, the little crippled sister, lying in a dismal, poky room, with a sloping roof—everywhere the signs of most utter poverty.

Yet in Polly's drawn, white face there was an expression of such sunny contentment and patience, that even Kitty, child as she was, saw and felt it.

Mrs. Clayton sat down and began to talk and ask a few questions, without mentioning the sad circumstances under which they had come across little Tim.

She knew, without asking, that the desperate desire to save his sister had been the cause of the trouble, and she felt she must do all in her power to save the little lad, and to teach him how near he had been to committing a dreadful sin.

Kitty leant against the smutty window, comparing her own comfortable home with this bare attic. Poor little Polly, lying

here all day alone! No one to amuse and cheer her up, often without any food to eat; only the kind woman on the next floor to come in very occasionally, when she could spare the time, to give Polly a "tidy up," or a few scraps from their own scanty meal.

Yet Polly looked quite contented, with such a bright look on her face, as she listened to Mrs. Clayton.

Perhaps Kitty would scarcely have felt the difference so keenly, if she had not only that morning been comparing her own life with that of some other luckier little girl's.

Breaking in on Kitty's thoughts came Polly's weak little voice—

"Oh, but we have lots to be thankful for! Mrs. Spratt lets us have this room without any rent—doesn't she, Tim?" And a brilliant smile passed over Polly's face as she looked lovingly at her brother. "And then, as long as Tim and I have got each other, things can't be very bad, you know. Oh, we've got lots to be thankful for, has Tim and me."

Kitty followed her mother downstairs, and stood by while she talked to Mrs. Spratt.

Perhaps mother knew something of what was going on in her little girl's mind. After a time Kitty spoke.

"Mother, I think I know now what you meant this morning—that we cannot be all alike. Just think what heaps of things and pleasures I have compared to poor, poor little Polly!"

"Indeed you have, darling; and I want you to remember the lesson you have learnt to day, because it will help you all through your life. Be thankful for all your blessings; no matter whether they seem small compared to some people's. You may be very sure a great many others have not nearly as much," answered Mrs. Clayton.

BETH'S WHITE MOUSE.

"I'm 'lected," cried Beth, much out of breath and much excited.

"On what ticket?" asked papa.

"Member of the childrens' choir at the church," she answered proudly. Then she fled to tell everyone in the house, and at last to tell Whitey, her latest pet, a tiny white mouse.

She took a seat on the floor in front of its cage, and took it out gently. "You will be very glad when I tell you that I'm going to sing in a lovely choir in the church," she said very tenderly. "I wish you could go with me to rehearsal to-night, and then you would know all about it. Will you be very good if I take you?"

So it fell out that Whitey went to the rehearsal in Beth's pocket, where he lay quietly enough for a while.

It was quite dark in the body of the great church, but the choir stalls were brilliant with light. Beth's mamma sat down with many others who had come to listen to the new choir of girls and boys. The other members of the choir were already in the back seats, when Beth went timidly forward to be placed with the other children in the front seats.

Softly the organ played "Oft in danger, oft in woe," while they stood ready to sing. Then the sweet voices rang through the great church; and, with her head thrown back, her cheeks like crimson flowers, Beth forgot everything but her delight in the music.

The children in the front seat quite forgot the precentor's warning not to lean on the front of their seat, which had been just placed there for that evening without fastening it down. So in the middle of the second verse they pressed upon it so hard that down it went with a terrific crash, and all the children with it.

This was more than Whitey's nerves, already somewhat shaken, could stand. Out of Beth's pocket he bounded, and with a little squeal ran along on the back of the standing seat.

The giggling from the back seats over the childrens' tumble suddenly turned into shrieks of dismay; and when Beth jumped up and turned around she was horrified to see all the young ladies of the choir standing on the seats and screaming, "A mouse!"

"It's mine. Don't—please don't hurt it," she cried, as the precentor made a dash for poor Whitey; but Whitey had fled down into the church. Beth felt that even the honor of being elected a member of the choir could not atone for her loss; and, after the rehearsal was over, she walked home with her mother, feeling very melancholy indeed. She received small sympathy from her mother, however, who, it is needless to say, knew nothing about Whitey's visit to the church until the accident occurred.

But, after they got home, mamma put her hand in her pocket for her handkerchief; and there, far down in one corner, she found Whitey, a timid frightened little ball.

He had fled through the church, with unerring instinct, to her pocket, as a refuge from the commotion so awful to his shaking nerves.

"O you darling!" cried Beth, taking him carefully in her hands, "forgive me, please; and I will never take you there again, for certainly home is the best place for scary things like you."

And Whitey squealed faintly at this, evidently thoroughly agreeing with her.