

## OUR NELL.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a gloomy afternoon in November, and Nell was walking along the high road, in the direction of the Vicarage. Her steps were slower than usual, for her errand was a distasteful one. She was on her way to keep her promise of going to see Miss Lettice. More than two months before had that promise been given, in the first flush of gratitude for Miss Lettice's sympathy. Then it had been the end of August, and the world had still been dressed in its summer glory; now the last leaves were fluttering from the trees. Nell had often repented her promise, but without any intention of evading the performance of it. Her word once given, it would not have struck Nell that she could in any way avoid keeping it. But this was one of the hardest duties she had ever performed. She had a vivid recollection of that day, long ago, when Miss Lettice had warned her concerning Mr. Derwent. Miss Lettice would remember it too; and she would guess her secret, and would scorn her. Nell was full of suspicion, full of defiance; the suffering of the last few months had hardened the shell beneath which Nell had always sheltered herself, yet beneath that shell it had been doing a work of softening and purifying little dreamt of by the girl herself. She had never before been prey to such a nervous dread as now, while she stood outside the Vicarage door. She remembered that Miss Lettice was very good; would she talk to her religiously? How dreadful that would be! She feared she should be rude, and resolved to be altogether silent, lest she should get angry and forget herself.

The trim maidservant ushered her into the drawing-room, but before long returned with a message to the effect that Miss Lettice would be disengaged in a few moments, if Miss Masters would kindly wait for her in her own parlour. Here a bright fire was burning. A bowl of chrysanthemums stood on the table. Heavy crimson curtains framed in the dreary autumn view with a warmth of colour. A low chair stood by the fire; books and work lay on the table. The room had a habitable, comfortable atmosphere. Refinement, culture, taste, had stamped it with a character of its own; and Nell insensibly felt that it was different from the rooms she usually entered. She examined its details, and grew interested. Presently she took up a book that lay on the table. It was a volume of Jean Ingelow's poems. She opened it at "The Letter L." A few months before, she would have cared to read little more than the title; but Nell's emotional nature had had an awakening, and her sympathy was ready to respond eagerly to the expression of any form of love. She sat down in the low chair, and became so absorbed in her book that she did not hear the door open when Miss Lettice entered. Miss Lettice came up to her, stooped down to see what she was reading, and put her hand on her shoulder. Nell looked up quickly, and her eyes met close to hers a strong kind face, and a smile of cordial friendliness. And now, she felt no fear or shrinking, but smiled back again, with a full frank gaze. Nell had a beautiful mouth, moulded firm and full, with curves that grew more lovely as her lips parted. Miss Lettice, with a rare impulse, stooped, and kissed them. Nell flushed, but not with anger.

"I knew you would come some day," said Miss Lettice; "I knew you would keep your promise."

Nell looked at her eloquently, but said nothing. She was quite disarmed; all unconsciously her heart was ready for a friend. She had felt of late a loneliness which was new to her. Her work was no longer enough to fill her days with brimming cheerfulness. There was an aching within her which work could not cure. Her devotion to her father was as entire as before, but it

was no longer a joy. Day by day he grew more morose, more sternly shut in within himself. His blindness had now become almost complete. He could distinguish little save a glimmer from bright colour or strong light. Nell had now practically become manager of the farm business, and overseer of the men. Her father would remain for hours in his chair absorbed in gloomy thoughts; Nell would often sit beside him, his hand in hers, grateful if, at times, he returned her pressure. But her heart was breaking for speech, for expression, for a friend.

Month had succeeded month, and no tidings of Carry had ever reached them. Hers was a dead name in the house. Nell dared not mention it to her father; and with her mother it was the signal for such tears and lamentations as she would do much to avoid. The clinging weight of pain round her heart could never find relief in that pouring out into the responsive heart of another, which can lighten the heaviest grief.

Miss Lettice felt she had gained her end, that the girl had turned to her with heart-welcome; but she was to wise to force the budding friendship. Miss Lettice had set herself many a long day before to win this girl's affection, and she meant to do much with her; but she had the rare faculty for waiting, without which it is impossible fully to accomplish a good end.

She said, "What are you so interested in, my dear?"

Nell showed her the book.

"If you like to finish reading it, you shall take it home with you; and, in return, I am going to ask a service from you. I want you to come down some day, when you have an hour to spare, to show my Martha how to make those famous curd cheese-cakes of your mother's. If I am out, you must come in here and read, or look at my photographs; there are some in that portfolio which, I think, will interest you."

Nell's face looked radiant. She knew not why; but she felt entirely at ease, and entirely happy. After a little discussion on the subject of the farm cookery, Miss Lettice said—

"And now, my dear child, I am going to be rude enough to send you away. I have to go down to see old Mrs. Neighbour this afternoon, and it is getting late. You must please forgive my lack of ceremony."

Nell laughed. This frankness suited her. The two rose, and Miss Lettice held out her hand. She said—

"Nell, I am often lonely in this little room of mine. I think you and I might be friends."

"Yes," said Nell earnestly, and forgetting everything in a strange inspiration of gratitude and affection, she put up her face to be kissed.

All the evening there was a glow of happiness at her heart, such as she had not felt for months. She even found herself humming a tune for very gladness.

Something else happened that evening which helped to make this a memorable day to her. She was sitting in the parlour at work. Jack and Bob were playing quietly in the window-seat talking in whispers, that they might not disturb their father, who sat by the fire with his handkerchief thrown over his head. The was picturing over again all the details of the afternoon, when her attention was drawn to the talk of the two boys by the sound of the word "Carry." Jack was saying—

"Hold your tongue, you naughty boy. You're not to talk about Carry."

"I's not a naughty boy. She's my dear pretty sissy, and I love her," retorted Bob, stoutly.

"You're not to love her, then; she's awfully wicked, I can tell you."

"I shall love her," persisted Bob, putting up his fist.

"Eh, lad, you'd best take care. Father'll wake, and hear what you're saying, and then I wouldn't be in your shoes for a trifle."

The boys had raised their voices, in spite of warning gestures from Nell.

She fetched Bobby from the window, and took him on her knee.

"Bobby," she said, "it's quite right to love Carry. Love her as much as ever you can. She has been naughty; but, oh, Bob, when you and me are naughty, what should we do, if no one would love us any more?"

Bobby put up his chubby hand and stroked his sister's cheek.

"Don't cry, Nell," he said, "I'm going to love Carry ever so much." He put his arms round her neck, and Nell hugged him close.

The silence that ensued was broken by a sound which startled all the children. It came from Mr. Masters, and it seemed like a groan and a sob together. He rose hurriedly, and started to walk across the room to the door, but without his stick, and with unaccustomed haste. Nell ran forward to give him her arm, but he pushed her away.

"Give me my stick," he said. His chest was heaving, and his voice was hoarse with emotion.

(To be continued)

## SOULS AND BODIES.

God calls us to serve Him with body and with spirit. Both are God's work and are made for God's use. One is put into our care as well as the other. We are bound to keep both in good order. Where either is neglected, there is a want in the full service claimed for God. And this is true of that part which is cared for, as well as of that which is not. For a man is one; and the parts of which he is made up act together, and hinder or help one another.

When the body is weak and languid, or diseased, the spiritual part of man must more or less feel it. The mind cannot think with the same freedom; the thoughts are turned on self. If the mind do keep some vigour, the body is not ready to do its bidding; it needs to be driven instead of acting freely and with hardly a conscious effort. And new temptations crowd. Sloth and self-indulgence call themselves duties. Sins of temper seem things of course, and claim to be excused. All temptations of the flesh and of the devil come most strongly.

Many live as if they were only body. They feed, and dress, and guard their earthly part, but leave all else to take its chance; no matter how that fares, and looks to God. But there are those who forget that it is, in one way, just as plain a duty to care for the body as to care for the soul. Some, indeed, have thought that their weakened bodies were proof that their souls were strong.

A man may, it is true, do well in sacrificing health and strength for the sake of others; he may wear himself out in work which would be left undone did he not do it; he may go where disease and death seem to wait for him, just as a soldier goes into battle. But most of the waste of power through bad health is due either to man's thoughtlessness or his self-indulgence; not at all or not chiefly to any high-minded following of duty. Men do not learn, or do not act upon the common laws of health. They do things, or neglect to do things which they know quite well are likely to make them less fit for work, or more open to temptations.

For instance, many people eat and drink more than is good for them, or what they know will do them harm. They like what is set before them, and to please their palate, they damage their digestions and confuse their brain. It is not wrong to like one's food; God has made it pleasant to eat and drink, and no one need be ashamed to say that he is glad God has not made taking meals a mere duty. Moreover, it is right to thank God for the least sinless pleasure that He gives us, whether it be in the scent of a flower, or in the beauty of a landscape, or the taste of a fruit. We must not affect to be too good and spiritual to care whether things are pleasant or nauseous. But it is plain sin to please our appetite in a way that is likely to

make us cross and drowsy, and to force us to spend time and thought and money in getting our bodies put right.

Again; many are careless about cleanliness of house, clothes, and person. I do not speak now of the want of self-respect shewn, or the want of charity to their neighbours whom they offend, or the want of reverence for the Holy Spirit Whose temple their body is. I only point out that dirt invites disease, and that if they do not remove thoroughly what is always dying away from their bodies, they are sure to fail in vigour for the duty given them to do in life.

Again; many are content to breathe dirty air, and air that is even full of deadly poison. They do not let fresh air in or foul air out. At night they shut all the doors and windows, stop up the chimney, and put sandbags over every chink. In the morning they can hardly get out of bed. They think they are tired from not having enough sleep and rest. So they lie longer, and when they do rise they are languid, drowsy, and ill-humoured. The fact is they have been almost poisoned by foul air, breathed over and over again, and almost drained of what can support life.

Again; people catch cold and neglect colds from sheer thoughtlessness or laziness. Then they become unpleasant to themselves and to others, even if they do not throw themselves into bad illness which makes them useless in the world, except as a means to bring out the love and patience and self-denial of their friends.

Good people often need to be reminded that they have bodies as well as souls, and that, in this world, both must be in order if they are to work well together. We are bound to do our duty to God and our neighbour, and we are bound to think of those things that help or hinder us in this doing. If "without charity we are nothing" we must beware of what is likely to make us selfish and ill-tempered. Many a man has repented bitterly over a week's sourliness which has made all near him wretched, and has not thought that his repentance should have begun at the sin of eating something which he knew would upset him.

## I AM SO PUT ABOUT.

TROUBLE sometimes drives people to God; and sometimes when they draw near to Him from a motive that is not the highest, they find what He is, and gain from Him true love and faith. Trouble often keeps people away from God, and drives them from Him. They get soured and embittered, out of heart, almost despairing. They seem to feel that things in this life are all wrong, and that there is no use in trying to make their religious life prosper. So trouble is a great temptation, to which it is very hard not to give way.

But, surely, when we are weak that is the time when we need most the strong help of God; when friends are false or unkind, then we should lean most closely on the one sure Friend who never fails, and is always Love. When this world gives us little to cheer, and there seems small hope of good in the life we live now, we ought, with fresh earnestness, to seek the things above, to lay up treasure in heaven, and gain that light from God that cheers the darkest and most lonely earthly path. When there is need of more help than we feel we have of our own, then we ought not sullenly to try to go on by ourselves.

Many people act as if God only expected them to use means of grace and to live godly when it is quite easy, as if temptation and difficulty took away all the fault of sins and of neglect. No one has a plain course free from trial. There is no such way to heaven. The path that leads to destruction is broad and smooth, but those who would reach the soft place of life must press on through dangers and past foes. They must go with the Church in the wilderness as pilgrims and warriors, if they are to enjoy the quiet and plenty of the promised Land. Those who wait to go to

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