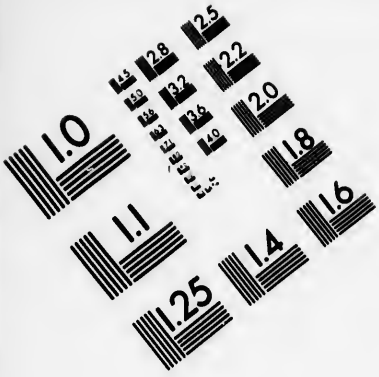

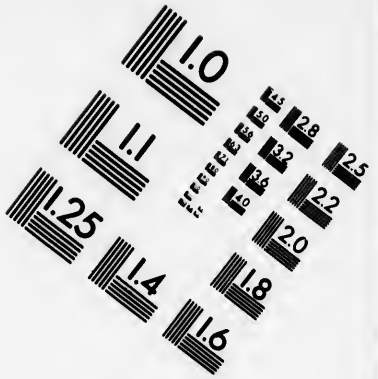

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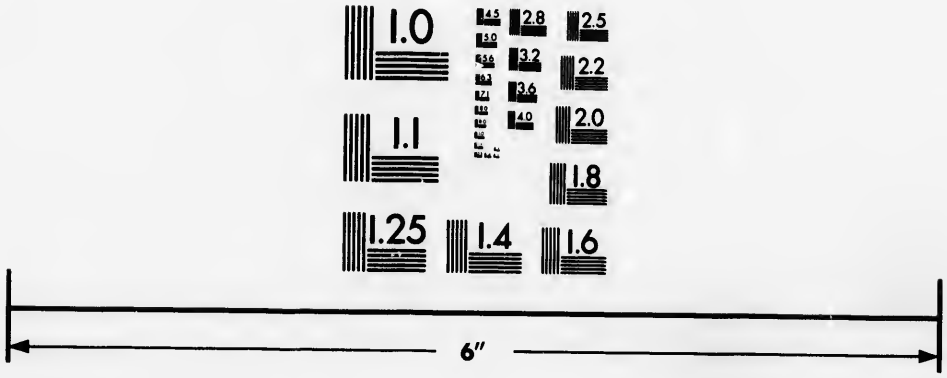

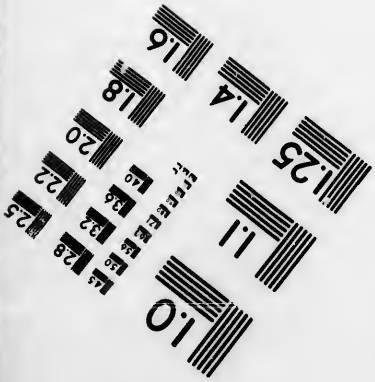

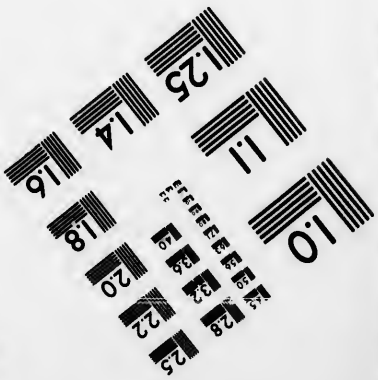

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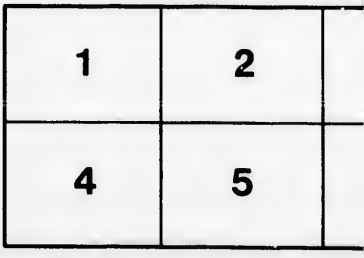

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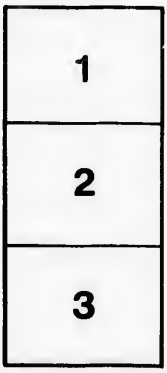

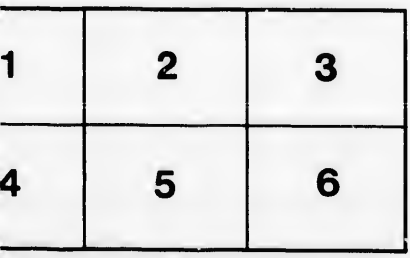

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Helen Frances Dunn

With Mother's love.

Toronto.

19th June 1895.

THE DOCTOR'S DOZEN.

"Thank Heaven you are come, sir."—*Page* 140.

THE DOCTOR'S DOZEN.

BY

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN,

AUTHOR OF

"DOROTHY'S VOCATION," "THE STRONGER WILL," "MRS. ROMAINE'S HOUSEHOLD," ETC. ETC.

Toronto:

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THE DOCTOR'S DOZEN.

CHAPTER I.

IT was indeed a terrible sight. Many persons had prophesied that some day there would be a shocking accident just at that spot where the sharp double curve of the line occurred between the great aqueduct and Tolston. And now their prediction had come true. The down train, striving to make up some time lost earlier on its journey, had taken those sharp curves at too high a speed. The engine had left the lines, and had got right across the up metals, just at the moment when the up express dashed round the bend, and charging full into the down train, literally cut it in half, and became mixed up in the wreck it had occasioned. One engine having broken loose, had rolled down the steep embankment, dragging one

shattered carriage with it. The foremost carriages of both trains were wrecked.

A gang of navvies were already at work. All the living and most of the dead had been extricated from the ruins. Many gentlemen and doctors were upon the scene, the accident having taken place very near to the town of Tolston. Now a train from Klettering Junction, bringing further help to the spot, was cautiously drawing up close to the scene of the accident; and from this train descended a young man of about one-and-twenty, his face white with apprehension and anxiety, his hands clenched tightly, his glance travelling swiftly from object to object, yet seeming scarcely to take in the full meaning of the things looked upon. The youth was tall and broad shouldered, with a face more remarkable for power than beauty. The peculiarly square set of the jaw and the fashion in which the lips closed over each other indicated resolution and determination of character, whilst the straight line formed by the dark bushy brows, from under which the well-opened dark eyes looked keenly forth, intensified this impression in the mind of the observer. The face of Dax Inglehurst was seldom passed by without a second glance.

"My boy, I have been looking for you. I thought it possible the news might have reached

you, and that one of you would soon be here. Your father and mother have both been taken to the farmhouse close by. Follow me, and I will show you the way."

Mechanically Dax took the hand extended to him. His interlocutor was a surgeon from Tolston well known to the Inglehurst family. He followed him without daring to look into his face, but when they had made half a dozen strides forward he said:

"You had better tell me."

"Your father is alive," was the significant answer; "you must bear up for his sake, my lad. He was hoping one of you would come; but was not confident that the news would reach you in time."

"It has not reached home or some of the others would be here," said Dax, speaking as one in a dream. "I had walked over to Klettering Junction to meet them. They had to change carriages there, and a change always bothered my father. He had a way of insisting on getting into the wrong train. At Klettering I heard—this train was just starting. I came on in it. At home they know nothing."

They were now nearing the farmhouse which stood almost close to the line. The friendly surgeon laid a hand upon Dax's arm.

"You must be prepared for the worst, my boy," he said; and Dax gave him one startled look, and read in his face that he had but come to see his father die.

Some shocks are too severe to leave room for outward expression—so severe that they produce a numbness which is like calmness whilst it lasts. Dax had been trembling from head to foot before; now he suddenly became perfectly steady and tranquil. He followed his conductor into a small parlour, and saw that his father was lying, wrapped in blankets, upon a settle beside the fire.

It needed no doctor's eye to see that death was written on that still face. Dax moved forward and bent over the prostrate figure. "Father, I am here."

The dim eyes unclosed, a smile lighted the white face.

"Thank God. I have one of my children with me. Are you alone, Dax?"

"Yes, father. I am the only one that knows."

"My son, I am leaving you to fight the battle of life alone. My heart would bleed for you did I not trust to the Heavenly Father to take my place—to be the father of the fatherless, and to bless the harvest sown, I trust, in not unfruitful soil by the mother's hand. My boy, my time is short; my words must be few. Give my special

love to each one of them, my last blessing, and this charge to all. There are twelve of you at home—twelve young lives all bound into one family. Oh, love and cherish one another! Let the welfare of the whole be the thought, the prayer of each. Love one another—help one another. Let self stand last. Let each think first of his brothers—his sisters. We have always been what the world calls a united family. Yet we know that there are little jealousies, little causes of irritation and friction amongst us. Oh, my boy, try yourself, and bid the others try, to forget all in love—love to the Father above—love to the dear ones He has sent to be our stay and comfort here. And you elder ones, think of the children. Oh, pray that you may guide and train them aright! God will be your helper. The Lord knoweth the children are tender. Would I could have seen them once again—have kissed and blessed them as Jacob did his sons; but God's will be done. My boy, you must do this for me. You will not forget my charge?"

"Never, father."

The other doctor approached and gave a cordial to the dying man. It was swallowed with difficulty, but it gave a temporary access of strength, and the cold fingers closed more firmly upon those of Dax.

"One thing more, my son. I have done what I could to make some small provision for you all in the case of my death; but I had not looked to be cut off whilst so many were yet children. I have not done what I had hoped. There will be something, but not enough. You elder boys will have to help to support the younger ones. Will that be a hard sacrifice to you?"

"No, no. How could we dream of anything else?"

"God bless you, my boy; but it may be harder than you dream of now. It may be a drag and a fetter upon you for the best years of your lives. Yet it is God who sends these trials upon us, and the sweet ties of kindred, and we know He will not try us beyond our strength. Dax, you have perhaps the strongest character in the house. Use it, my boy, upon the right side. It will be a blessing to you if used aright. If misused it may become a terrible curse. Be a good brother at home. Watch over Frank. Let him be your special charge. He is reaching the age when he most needs a father's—a mother's care."

His voice died away in silence. Dax pressed his hand in token of assent, but he could only frame his lips to the utterance of one word, and that word was "Mother."

"She did not suffer, my boy. Thank God for

that. For her it was over in a moment of time. And she does not go alone—she is but hovering around, waiting for me to join her. God is very good to us. 'In their death they were not divided.'"

Those were the last words spoken by Dr. Inglehurst. A sudden vivid smile lit up his face, and Dax sank to his knees beside the couch. He did not know the exact moment; but presently a hand was laid upon his arm, and he found himself raised to his feet.

"My dear lad, you can do no more here. You must go home to break the news to your brothers and sisters. A train is just starting for Klettering and Fossbury. You must go home in that. I will see to everything here."

Dax looked with dim eyes at the speaker.

"Can I do nothing? May I not see her?"

"Better not, my boy. You have been through enough as it is. You can be of no use to any here—your place now is at home. God bless you, my poor lad! I will be with you in the morning, and that will be time enough to settle all that is needful."

Dax turned away with a shudder and a muttered word of thanks, and entered the train just starting back for his native town of Fossbury.

The doctor's house was a pleasant abode. It stood in a small garden of its own, and was a commodious home even for the dozen children it contained. No more popular man than Dr. Inglehurst was to be found in all Fossbury, and his house had always been the centre for pleasant social gatherings, and the place whence kindly acts of good-will and charity seemed to flow as from a never-failing source.

To-night the house was unwontedly bright and warm. Lights gleamed from many windows. Within its doors a pleasant hum of voices was to be heard. For was it not quite a gala evening which was to welcome home the parents who had been a whole fortnight from home? And was it not with a sense of relief which amounted almost to thankfulness that the elder members of the household felt that they might now relax their efforts at ruling the noisy, merry household, and resign the reins of government into the kind and capable hands of the mother?

The whole dozen were gathered together in the long drawing-room to be ready to welcome the parents on their arrival—the whole twelve that is, with the exception of Dax—who had gone to the Junction to meet the travellers.

Dr. Inglehurst counted himself a happy man in that there had been so far no break up of his

family. Even the three sons who had commenced life on their own account were still housed beneath the paternal roof. The only trouble he had had as yet with his boys was that none of them took to medicine, or were prepared to succeed him in his practice.

Edmund and Oswald, the twin brothers of four-and-twenty, who stood at the head of the dozen, were both started in life—Edmund in Mr. Greysart's commercial house, where a partnership was some day to be his, and Oswald as a clergyman, now working as curate in his native town. Then came Nancy, the mother's own right hand, a bright-faced, homely maiden of twenty-two. Dax was next in years—a clever youth employed by a firm of electrical engineers, who were said to think very well of his abilities; and then came Damaris, a daughter who had lived much away from home, taking care of a semi-invalided aunt, who had recently gone out to a son in Australia for the benefit of her health, releasing the girl to return home as a permanent member of the household. Ella, the beauty of the family, came next, a girl with more talents than her other sisters, passionately fond of art, as might almost be guessed by the dainty picturesqueness of her attire as she sat bending over some fine embroidery in coloured silks. Frank was lolling upon a sofa, softly

strumming upon a banjo and breaking out at intervals into snatches of comic songs, to the intense delight of the "babies," whilst Diana, with her hands stuck into her unruly crop of dark curls, was poring over a book, as she sat beside him on the sofa. Kit and Chriss, who were just passing from the pretty to the gawky stage of development, being eleven and ten respectively, were hidden away behind the curtains of the bay window, hoping that they would be the first to hear the sound of wheels, and to rush to the door to welcome the parents home. As for the twin-babies, as they were still called, who completed the dozen, they were sitting at Frank's feet, an inextricable mass of plump arms and legs, which well exemplified and explained their family designation of "Roly-Poly," by which they were generally known; and although Roland and Mary, or Polly, *did* possess individual natures, and were capable of divided action, yet so far the pair had been linked together as Roly-Poly, and it had scarcely occurred to the brothers and sisters that they could be looked upon as anything but a pair of Siamese twins.

"They must have lost the train," Damaris was saying, looking up at the clock which had just chimed seven. "What shall we do about dinner, Nancy? Shall we see if cook can keep it back?"

"I think we will. The next train will be in before eight, and it would be such a disappointment to the little ones not to sit up for it, as we promised them."

"We won't dine without them if we can help it," said Edmund. "I was afraid they might not catch the train. Those cross country journeys are so tiresome, and father is not *very* clever with trains, and always thinks he knows better than mother."

"Roly-Poly must go to bed," said Frank, settling his eye-glasses on his nose—he was the only short-sighted Inglehurst—and glaring with a portentous face at the adoring pair at his feet, and then he struck a few chords on his banjo and broke into song—

"What will Roly-Poly say,
In their bed at break of day?
O, please, mamma, we can't get up yet we were
so late to bed,
So late to bed, so late to bed,
You must please let us sleep all the day instead,"

gabbling off the last and amended lines at a great rate, and ogling the twins in a fashion which sent them off into fits of giggling laughter, although at first their faces had been puckered into doleful gravity.

Frank's threats were not, however, of a very

serious character generally, and though Nancy said something in a low tone about its being dreadfully late for them to be up, and hardly knowing how mother would like it, Di glanced up from her book to remark that it was only for once, and that it would be a shame they should go without seeing mamma and papa when it had been promised; and Damaris, whose opinion was a good deal deferred to by her elder sister, likewise thought that for once the indulgence would do no harm.

But waiting was telling upon the different members of the family, and there was a disposition to put books and work away, and idle about the room in desultory fashion. Di declared her lessons quite perfect now, and shut up her book, declining Frank's generous offer to put her through her tasks backwards way to make sure she knew them really properly. Kit and Chriss had slipped out into the hall, and were having jumping matches down the staircase, whilst Frank had laid aside his banjo, and was strumming softly on the piano, changing his tune from, "O Willy, we have missed you," to "We won't go home till morning," and when Ella declared it vulgar, he returned that it was the most appropriate ditty to the present occasion that occurred to him at the moment.

Altogether there was sufficient noise and hubbub in the house to drown outside sounds to a great extent. Wheels driving up to the door would have been heard, but the slow and dragging footsteps of a solitary pedestrian passed quite unheeded, and the first notification those within received of an arrival was the sound of a latch-key inserted into the door.

There was a general starting up.

"That must be Dax or father! Why didn't they drive up? Has he come alone? Has he missed them? O dear, I hope there has been no muddle."

Out into the hall in a body pressed the whole of the eager family, Frank and Roly-Poly bringing up the rear. Everybody was speaking at once to ask for some explanation as Dax slowly came in alone. But the moment that he crossed the threshold and the light fell upon his face the tumult was succeeded by a dead silence, so terrible that the twins behind set up a frightened cry, they knew not why.

"Dax is ill," said Damaris quickly, "Edmund, Oswald, help him."

The brothers sprang forward, for Dax had staggered as if about to fall. His face was as colourless as marble, with a drawn ashen look which was terrible to see. But he recovered him-

self quickly, and only laid a hand upon Oswald's arm, gripping it tightly as he said:

"Send the children away. I cannot bear them all. Let me go somewhere out of all this glare and noise."

Was he ill, or was he the bearer of terrible news? They did not know—feared even to ask. He turned aside into the little study, their father's special sanctum, and dropped into a chair, covering his eyes with his hand. The elder ones followed him, all faces growing pale, all hearts beating in wild anxiety. Di and Frank remained outside the closed door, restraining the frightened crying of the children, and hushing their incoherent questions.

Within the room all was dead silence for a moment, the only sound being the deep breathing of Dax, who was fighting fiercely with his emotion, angry with himself for giving way before the news was told.

Oswald was the first to guess.

"It was a railway accident," he said, rather as an assertion than a question. "Dax, can't you tell us something more?"

"Their train was cut in half," he answered, "it was just beyond the aqueduct — where father always said——"

A sharp cry broke from Ella. She covered her face with her hands.

"It was their train; they were in it. Oh, Dax, tell us more."

Damaris was supporting Dax's head, as she stood beside him. She was white to the lips but perfectly calm.

"Which of them was it, Dax?" she whispered bending over him. "Try and say."

"Both."

A start went round the whole group. Damaris was the only one who could command her voice.

"Not dead. Not both dead?"

"Yes, both dead. Mother was killed on the spot. I was in time to see father die."

And then Damaris felt that Dax lay against her as a dead-weight. The long strain had done its work at last, and a merciful unconsciousness had blotted out for him the memory of the fearful scene upon which his eyes had looked that day.

The brothers carried him to his room, hardly realising that this thing could be true, and that they were henceforth orphaned.

CHAPTER II.

THE funeral was over. Once more the blinds were up in that solid red-brick mansion. Notes of inquiry and condolence ceased to pour in in quite such a ceaseless stream. All Fossbury was grieving for the loss of one of its most influential and popular members, and great was the interest taken in the bereaved family and their outlook in life.

What would they do? What would become of them? Such were the questions upon every tongue. A man with a dozen children, taken away in the prime of his life, could scarcely have made much provision for his family. Would they have to scatter and be distributed amongst the various charitable asylums, built and endowed for the benefit of young creatures in like case? Or would the private means left them, together with the help of the three elder brothers, suffice to keep a home over their heads? And what would become of the practice? What a pity that there

was no son able to carry it on in the old name.

If without the walls of the home all this interest in the matter was taken, it may well be imagined that within the doors of that house these burning questions were discussed between the brothers and sisters with even keener attention. The kindly family lawyer was closeted long hours with the brothers, whilst the sisters waited with what patience they might for the result of the conferences; and they, on their own account, paid many mysterious visits to various places in the town, and held their peace about these same visits, as the brothers continued yet silent upon the questions which engrossed their energies.

But a day came at length when the sisters were summoned to the study to be enlightened as to the question of ways and means and the prospects of the family. Nancy, Damaris, and Ella were called, and when Francis presented himself he was not denied entrance. Frank, although he was sixteen years old, had hitherto consorted more with the younger half of the family, to which Di unmistakably belonged. But he was considered of an age to be permitted to assist at the family council; and so there were seven out of the dozen who were assembled round the table to hear what their future was to be.

"Girls," said Edmund, who was tacitly considered to be the head of the family from the more lucrative position that he held, and from the uncertainty of Oswald's stay beneath the old roof, "I think that you will side with us brothers in the wish to keep the home, as far as possible, unbroken, and to make sacrifices rather than be separated one from the other."

The eager murmur of assent was answer sufficient. Dax had written out all that he could remember of the dying words addressed to him, and they were branded upon his memory as in characters of fire. So it seemed to the whole family as though a sacred charge had been laid upon them to stand by the home and one another to the last.

"It will not be easy," said Edmund, "and in some ways things will fall most heavily upon you girls. Our father was making two thousand a-year by his practice. You can guess what a loss that will be to the household when it ceases altogether."

"But cannot the practice be sold?" asked Damaris.

"We are in treaty for that. No doubt you have heard father speak of a certain Mr. Leland, a young doctor in London?"

"Oh, yes," answered Nancy, quickly. "He used to say that if ever he wanted a partner, he should try and get him. He thought so well of his talents."

"Exactly. Well, it seems it had even gone

further than that, and that a few months ago, when this fellow took his M.D., father began negotiating with him about a partnership, and it had been arranged for him to pay a thousand down and have a third of the profits, and as much of the work as they mutually arranged. Mr. Watson has been in treaty with him since, and it is now arranged that he pays three thousand, and has the whole practice, if our townsfolk will receive him, as they have promised to do, hearing that Dr. Leland was well thought of by our father. Then there is the insurance money, and some investments father had made with his savings, and something settled on mother and on us after her. And in the end we shall have about six hundred a-year to live upon, when Edmund and Dax have contributed fifty pounds a-year to the expenses of the household, and I, who have more, a hundred. The house, as you know, is our own. The question remains, can we go on living in it, and paying the heavy rates and taxes, and educate all the little ones, on six hundred a-year? Or must we try to let or sell it, and go into a smaller place ourselves?"

"Oh, do let us try to live here!" cried the sisters, in a breath.

And then Nancy and the rest got paper and pencil, and tried to calculate the items of expenditure, and find out how far six hundred would go.

"We have made dozens of calculations before," said Oswald, gravely. "One never realised before what innumerable expenses there were in a large house. Of course the horses and stable expenses will be cut straight off. We shall live very quietly, and keep no company. But we must allow fifty pounds, for rates, taxes, and repairs; we *must* try and give something, poor as we shall be; and we must equally try to save something against the rainy day that so often comes upon poor people. Then there are nine of you to clothe—Edmund, Dax, and I have still enough of our salary left to do that for ourselves—and all the young ones to educate. There are servants' wages to pay; and some sort of premium must be found for Francis, when he leaves school, before he can be put out in the world with a chance of gaining his living. In point of fact it comes to this, Nancy. The house-keeping expenses must be kept down to four hundred a-year—a hundred pounds a quarter—and that must include payments for coal and all the tradesmen's books, and inside repairs, breakages, wages, and a hundred small things which will inevitably be cropping up. Can it be done? Can you form any idea? Because, if it cannot, we must move into smaller quarters so soon as as we can let or sell this house; and we may as well make up our minds to it soon as late. I know it would go

against us all, but we must face the question calmly and bravely."

Here Francis looked up to remark :

"You can knock me off the list of those who need to be clothed from the common fund. Old-Hop-o'-my-thumb has given me a stool in his bank. I'm to begin next Monday, and have twenty-five pounds a-year. I guess I can keep a decent coat to my back for that."

"Frank!" cried a chorus of voices in astonishment and almost dismay. "A stool in Hopper's bank? It can't be true?"

"Ain't it, though! You just wait and see. If you'll step in on Monday, ladies and gentlemen, to cash a cheque, or do a little business, you'll see me there in all my glory."

"But Frankie, you hate desk-work. You said you'd never be a quill-driver at any price. You know you are worth a better place than that can ever be," cried Ella, in distress. "Your music—your music! What will become of that?"

"Why, that's just the best of it! A bank-clerk has such jolly short hours—only nine till four. I shall have all my evenings to myself, and Saturday afternoons too. I'll get an organist's post somewhere in a jiffy, you'll see. Guess I'll be a swell in some capacity as soon as any of the rest of the fellows—if it's only a Mohawk Minstrel.

You shut up, you young Miss. I 'm a man of independent means. I 'm not going to be lectured by my sisters not never no more!"

Edmund looked searchingly into the boy's face, which had put on its comical look as Frank adjusted his eye-glasses upon his nose, and stared at his sister. He laid his hand upon the lad's shoulder.

"My dear old chap, why didn't you ask me about this first?"

"Oh, I knew you 'd be dead against it—say I was throwing myself away, and a lot more such stuff, and I was just certain you 'd not believe anybody would take a youngster like myself and give him any pay. So I just started off to see old Hop-o'-my-thumb myself, and went into the business on my own account; and I 'm to have five-and-twenty for two years for anything I may be able to do; and then it I want to go on, at eighteen I shall be entered like the other young clerks, and have what they have. But I 'm to be welcome to look out for something better for myself meantime, and I needn't stick too close to my desk if I want to be learning any other profession. But of course I shall keep my hours. I 'm not going to let it be just a kindly way of putting money in my pocket for nothing, because old Hop-o'-my-thumb and father were such friends. He shall have his money's worth out of me, and

"Edmund looked searchingly into the boy's face."—*Page* 26.

I dare say I'll like the work as much as most fellows like their grind."

Meantime, Nancy and Damaris, with their heads together, and their mothers' account-books for reference, were making elaborate calculations, and were finding, to their dismay, what a number of items a housekeeper's book contained, in addition to the obvious accounts of butcher, baker, and grocer. Nancy had been her mother's right hand and assistant for the past two years, and Damaris had kept house for her invalid aunt, so that they were not novices in the matter; but they had never before had to consider the subject of pounds, shillings, and pence, and housekeeping presents few difficulties when there is always an amply filled purse out of which to pay all the bills.

"We shall have to do with very few servants, and those young ones who will not want heavy wages. Dear old nurse has begged to be allowed to stop on at the same wage as we should have to give for a good nursery maid for the little ones. I don't know if we must let her suffer in pocket, but have her we must to keep order downstairs, and help us to train the young maids. Cook must go. She knows it herself, though she is very sorry. Boys, you will have to give up late dinner when you come home, and have only a dish of meat for your tea. I hope you won't mind very

much. We will try that you shall not suffer any other way. I am sure we can guarantee that your rooms shall be as well kept as when we had plenty of servants. I always did think that it was my vocation to be an upper servant in the housemaid line. I shall see if it is not true now."

The brothers winced a little, but they said nothing. It was hard to think of their graceful, educated sisters going about with dust-pan and broom. Dax looked the blackest over it. Perhaps he was the proudest, but he made no remark, and Nancy went on.

"The only thing I simply don't see *how* we can meet is Di's school fees. Six guineas a term is a large sum, and she will have had three years at Miss Hilton's by the end of this term, which is paid. Poor Di, she will be heart-broken at leaving. She is devoted to her school, and to Miss Hilton, and has set her heart on being a learned woman, and of course, if she could have gone on she might have qualified herself for some mistress-ship, which would have been very valuable. But Kit *must* be put to school now. Father was only saying the other day that he must not be at home a term longer. Chriss will miss him, but we can teach her and Roly-Poly when they come on. But poor Di—I don't know how to break it to her that she must leave her dear Miss Hilton's."

Damaris had looked up once or twice as if on the point of speaking, but she let Nancy reach the end of her say before she put in her word, and then, as the brothers were sorrowfully agreeing that an expensive collegiate school was beyond the reduced means of the family, she looked up quietly to say:

"You need not trouble about Di. I am going to undertake the cost of her education. I want her to have quite two years more at school."

"You undertake the cost?" cried Dax. "Why, have you a private fortune of your own?"

"I think I have—in a way," answered Damaris, looking full at her brothers, whilst a resolute expression, which enhanced her resemblance to Dax, crossed her face as she met their inquiring glances. "Listen, boys, and I will tell you. I hope you will not be vexed, because my own mind is made up. Did you never wonder what I did with myself all the time I was in London, with Aunt Janet, seeing that she was an invalid, who never left her room till after four o'clock, and did not want me much till evening?"

"We often thought you must be precious dull," said Frank.

"Well, I think perhaps I should have been if it had not been that only five minutes' walk from her house there was a big hospital; and that the lady

superintendent of nurses was a friend of Aunt Janet's, and took a great liking for me."

"We all know you half lived at that hospital," answered Dax, with one of his quick frowning looks, "but I fail to see the bearing."

"You will see it in a moment," answered Damaris, with a very direct look at the brother she thought would be most averse of all to see his sisters enter any kind of calling in which they might receive remuneration for their services. "It had sometimes come into my mind, even in old days, that in our large family there was the possibility of some of us having to make our own way in the world; and I often felt, if such a thing should happen, that I should like nothing so well as nursing. And partly on that account, partly from an inborn love of the work, which perhaps I inherit from father, I went almost daily to the hospital, and for several years was learning nursing under the best possible auspices. Before I left, Miss Lucas said to me that I had done excellently, and that she would give me a certificate of competence, or a berth in her hospital at any time if I should need it."

"But, Damaris, you are not going away to be a nurse?" asked Nancy, anxiously. "I don't know what we should do without you now at home."

"No, I am not going away into any hospital,"

answered Damaris, beginning to speak quickly, and with a flush upon her face, for she had now got to the most difficult part of her explanation. "Father wished us all to remain beneath the same roof as far as possible, and it would not be right for me to break through his expressed wishes. What I am going to do is simply to undertake private cases from time to time for Dr. Medlicot. I have seen him about it, and he says that the lack of nurses and the difficulty of getting them is so great, that he will be thankful for my services for his wealthy patients very often indeed. You know his practice lies out towards Carbury, amongst a set of people who are strangers to us. I shall never get less than two guineas a-week, and sometimes three, and even four—so Dr. Medlicot told me. And when I am away from home my 'keep' will be saved. I shall earn enough, by nursing about one-third of my time, to pay Di's school fees, dress myself, and perhaps help a little with other things too. Nancy, you will manage without me for a few weeks at a time in consideration of the practical results of my absences?"

Nancy nodded. She saw at once what a boon any further help would be under present circumstances, but Edmund looked troubled, and Dax rather fierce. It was he who spoke first.

"Our sister to go out as a sort of upper servant amongst stuck-up county aristocrats——"

But Damaris rose and stood behind him, laying her hands upon his lips.

"Dear boy, you know nothing about it. Dr. Medlicot will not send me to any but real gentry—and they are never stuck-up. And you ought to know that in cases of illness the nurse is the most important person in the house, and is waited on hand and foot. I shall have much less servant's work to do there than at home, I suspect," with a merry look at the sisters, with whom she had recently been discussing the necessity of turning to and dividing many household tasks hitherto performed by the servants; and then bending a little lower over Dax, whilst Nancy turned to Edmund and Oswald with her paper of calculations, to see if it agreed with theirs, she added, softly, "And, Dax, dear, why should it seem degradation to you that my work should lie sometimes amongst the sick and suffering? Does it not seem to you sometimes—as it does to me—that our father's life must always be to us an example of tender and self-denying love, especially towards those upon whom the hand of God is laid? I shall be paid for my services, you say. Well, so was he too—paid for the time, the skill, the labour. But do you think any money could repay his tenderness, his brave, comforting words, the deep and fatherly interest he took in each one of

his sick 'family,' as he himself called his patients? And may it not be given to me to follow in some degree in his footsteps? Oh, Dax, there is a blessing and a dignity in such service that he would never have despised, and which you must not despise either. Are not we all brothers and sisters? And do we ever feel the tie so closely drawn as when the shadow of death is brooding over the house in which some sick sister or brother lies? It was not given to us to soothe the dying bed of father or mother; yet all the more for that, I think, I long to have such work to do for other sufferers in this great world of ours."

Dax made no reply. A slight shudder ran through his frame, which Damaris felt. The shock of the parents' death had fallen most heavily upon him, and he had been more silent, more grave, more unhinged than any of the others. He professed himself perfectly well, but Damaris was certain that his nerves would be long in recovering their tone. At times he was intensely irritable, and she knew that it was not temper, but unstrung health which caused these sudden outbreaks. But he would not let her name such a thing as nerves to him, and she could only offer him help and sympathy in little unspoken ways, of which he was hardly conscious. She had looked for the most strenuous opposition to her plan from him, but

these last words of hers silenced him. The other brothers made no open demur. They were too conscious of the need for doing all that was possible to keep the home together; and when Di heard the news she flung herself upon Damaris in a perfect fervour of gratitude.

"For I have been so miserable at thinking I must leave school, for I mean to make myself a learned woman, and have a school of my own some day. I had meant to be very good, and not grumble if I had to go. But, oh, Damaris, I do love you for thinking of me, What can I do to show you how grateful I am?"

"Why, this, dear—try and learn tidy and orderly ways now that there will be no schoolroom maid to tidy up after you; and when I am away nursing, take my little household duties upon yourself. You will have to get up earlier every day to get them done before school, and it will not always be nice work; but I shall trust you to do it very regularly, so that Nancy and Ella have not to suffer for my being away, partly on your behalf."

Di's merry face was very grave and full of purpose.

"Indeed, indeed, Damaris, I will try," she said. "When everybody is being so unselfish, and thinking of the rest first, it would be horrid of me not to do the same. Oh, I will try; I will indeed."

CHAPTER III.

THE first weeks of mourning had passed, and the doctor's family had settled down to their greatly changed life. The heroism with which they had made their resolutions of renunciation was now to be tested by the wear and tear of every-day life; and they were to find, as the sense of novelty wore off, that the innumerable petty troubles and pinches of poverty were both fretting to the temper and depressing to the spirit. The children, who at first had resolved so strenuously to be "very good," and give no trouble, began only too soon to feel the absence of the mother's gentle guiding hand; and Nancy had not the needful authority or experience to enforce obedience without scolding and raising opposition and sometimes defiance. Damaris was, on the whole, most successful with the little ones, partly from the fact of her being more of a stranger, and partly from an in-born knack and tact which always drew

children to her. Earnestly the sisters strove to keep the house a cheerful and orderly home for the brothers to return to at night; but it was often hard and uphill work, and there would come moments when the aching longing for the cheerful, kindly voice of the father, or the loving pressure of the mother's hand, would become almost intolerable, and from Nancy downwards, the house party would go about more or less dissolved in tears. Had it not been for the very warm tie which bound the family together, this attempt to keep beneath the same roof must have ended in utter failure; but the strong give-and-take element which had been cherished and fostered by the parents stood them in good stead now, and where each member of the household thought of the whole family first and individual interest second, much could be happily accomplished that under other circumstances would have been impossible.

Although the most silent on the subject of his own disappointment, Edmund was the one upon whom this family reverse fell the most heavily in the present. Edmund, as has been said, was in a mercantile house, and was doing well there. Mr. Greysart, the owner, had shared in the general high estimation in which Dr. Inglehurst had been held, and when he saw a disposition on the part

of this young man to fall in love with his pretty daughter, Bertha, he looked with complacency upon the incipient courtship. Indeed, matters had gone so far that he had told Dr. Inglehurst that if the lad at some future time could bring a few thousands of capital to put into the business, he should be made a partner, and be welcomed as a son-in-law. Edmund had lately been told by his father of this, and the doctor had resolved to make the effort to give his eldest son this most excellent opening. Edmund had looked upon himself as practically a made man, when in one short hour all his bright hopes were dashed to the ground.

His father's sudden death had thrown upon him the headship of a family of eleven brothers and sisters, some amongst them being quite children. He would never be able to bring any capital to the business—all that his father had left was to be placed in trust investments for the use of the whole family—and he would not be in a position to marry for ten or twelve years to come at least. From the first he had looked his own future steadily in the face, and had spoken out in a manly way to Mr. Greysart, renouncing all hope of being more to him than a paid servant, and by implication giving up all hope of winning Bertha. Mr. Greysart had been kind and sympathetic, but he was a man of business and a man

of the world. He saw that it would be out of the question for a young fellow situated like Edmund Inglehurst to dream of marriage: and he was very glad that his pretty and warm-hearted daughter happened to be safely out of the way at this juncture, visiting some cousins of hers in America. He dispatched a private request to those relatives to keep her over the water for a considerable time. He hoped that, knowing her lover to be hopelessly tied by the claims of his family, and finding herself courted and admired wherever she went, she would forget the liking she had once shown for the doctor's son—it had not gone as far as an engagement, scarcely even so far as a mutual understanding—and would find another suitor equally to her liking, who would console her for the loss she had sustained.

Oswald, too, had his own trials to encounter. He had been accustomed to receive an allowance from his liberal father, in addition to his stipend as curate at St. Margaret's, which was by no means large, and this money had been spent almost entirely upon the needs of the poor amongst whom he laboured in the lowest part of the town. Perhaps there is nothing more trying and heart-rending than to be forced to give up assisting those who have grown used to looking to one for ready help in days of need. Possibly Oswald, with the

inexperience of youth and with the warm-heartedness which the Inglehursts had inherited from their father, had been something overlavish in his givings, but certainly he now felt the difference most painfully and keenly. He was almost ashamed of the good coat he still wore upon his back, and would frequently come in late for the early dinner, so that he might secrete the contents of the plate of meat set aside for himself, and take it to a sick person, contenting himself with a crust of bread and drink of water, or even fasting the whole day.

There were difficulties and some friction, too, in the matter of the giving over of the practice. Dr. Leland appeared to the Inglehursts to be hard and grasping, although their lawyer told them that he had behaved far better than the majority of young men would have done in such circumstances; for if he had chosen to come and settle in the place without paying a penny for the good-will of the practice he might have done so, and no one could have hindered him. It was a manœuvre frequently and successfully accomplished in these days, and Dr. Leland would most likely have made his way almost as well as he was doing now. The Inglehursts were chafed at his expecting the use of the surgery premises at the bottom of the garden which their father had built, and they also thought

that the offer he made for the whole of the stable properties was absurdly low. The lawyer pointed out that so young a man did not really require the establishment necessary to Dr. Inglehurst, and that for the offered sum Dr. Leland could have set himself up in a way he would no doubt prefer to the second-hand carriages and harness and well-worked horses of his predecessor. The family gave way, for the new doctor was willing to keep on the old coachman if he took the whole equipment over; but there was a feeling that the new-comer was hard and grasping, whilst the reports circulated about him in the town were that, although he appeared very clever and inspired confidence wherever he went, he was sarcastic and quick in his ways, and utterly unlike his predecessor, who was openly lamented on all hands.

However, the Inglehursts agreed that they must make the acquaintance of the new-comer some day. Oswald had seen him once or twice, and had exchanged words with him over some sick bed in the back alleys. And he was commissioned to ask him in some evening to the family tea, though Dax and Frank made a wry face at the thought of setting any stranger down to the composite meal which graced the board on their return from business night by night.

Nancy, however, promised that on the day the

guest came the children should have a separate table, and that she and Damaris would take care the cooking did not disgrace the household; so there the matter dropped for the present, and as any time is no time, it seemed as if the sisters might never set eyes upon their father's successor.

Nobody had much leisure to think of these things. What with household tasks, needle-work, and what not, the hours and the days flew by on wings. But Nancy's face began to look worn and harassed at times, and she felt as though the children had never had such large appetites, or been so destructive of their clothes and boots, as when every shilling that had to be spent in repairs came out of that meagrely furnished household purse of hers. Of course Damaris was taken into her confidence, and as the first quarter drew near its close, and the hundred pounds had already all but melted away before the last monthly books were settled, Damaris looked up from the account book over which they were poring and said decisively:

"It is very plain that I must begin my work. I shall speak to Dr. Medlicot to-day and tell him I am ready."

That same evening just before dusk she got out from their drawer the plain black dress and the white cap and apron that she had worn in the

hospital, and arrayed herself in them before the admiring eyes of Chriss and Kit and the infantile twins, who all danced and shrieked aloud with admiration and amusement. The cap was a very pretty and becoming one, and the whole dress suited Damaris well. The little ones begged her to go down and show herself to the boys, who had lately come in, and though she was not very certain how the exhibition would be received, she let herself be led down-stairs, and made her impressive entrance to the dusky drawing-room.

"Any orders for the nurse, ladies and gentlemen?" she asked, making a sweeping and indiscriminate curtsey. The children went off into a shout of laughter, but, from the dead silence which fell upon the rest of the room, Damaris felt sure something unexpected had happened, and the entrance of the maid with the lamp next moment explained the situation at a glance.

The fact was that Oswald, with man-like disregard of warnings, had brought Dr. Leland to the house on the spur of the moment, forgetting that the day of his visit was to be arranged beforehand and provided for accordingly. Nancy was absent from the room, no doubt supplementing the family tea by some extra dish, but the rest of the party was assembled, and the stranger in their midst. He had risen to his feet on becoming

aware that he was in presence of another daughter of the house, and he and Damaris appeared the only self-possessed members of the party as they shook hands on introduction. Dr. Leland was a tall man, slight and spare, with regular features, and very penetrating bright eyes. He was dressed with extreme precision, though without a shade of foppery. His hands were white, with long, strong fingers, which looked well suited to any work that required a combination of strength and dexterity. His face betrayed no surprise at finding one of the Miss Inglehursts arrayed in such a garb.

Damaris quickly removed cap and apron, and gave them to little Chriss to carry away, remarking quietly:

"Nursing is to be my vocation, Dr. Leland; I was just indulging in a 'dress rehearsal' for the benefit of the children upstairs."

"Nursing is quite the fashionable mania of the day with young ladies," returned the doctor in a voice that brought the thundercloud look upon Dax's brow. "Our hospitals are crowded with the fair devotees of the new craze."

Kit, whose sharp eyes had been fastened upon the new-comer all this while, and who had heard enough of his brothers' talk to detest the stranger heartily, now gathered from Dax's face that some-

thing had been said derogatory to Damaris, and he advanced upon the offender with his small fists tightly clenched.

"Damaris isn't a devotee, and she hasn't got a craze, and if she had, it wouldn't be no business of yours. She 's going out nursing because we 're poor now, and she 's going to pay Di's schooling, and mine too by-and-by, and get us new boots, when we kick ours out so fast, and Nancy gets worried. So there!"

And Kit retreated back upon Damaris, still scowling fiercely at the intruder, whilst the silence of utter consternation fell upon the room. Even the self-possessed young doctor flushed crimson, as he realised that his carelessly spoken words had been construed into a sneer at the poverty of his predecessor's family. His gentleman-like instinct made him keenly ashamed, and he would have given anything to have recalled the words now that it was too late. It had never occurred to him that the Inglehursts were poor: the fact of their living on in that large house seemed in itself a guarantee of at least moderate prosperity. Frank came to the rescue by swinging himself round upon the music-stool and breaking into a rattling march, whilst the doctor made a grab at Roly-Poly, and placed one on each knee, asking their names, and professing a vast deal of interest

in the joint one they possessed, and in their vehement declaration that "it wasn't that one was Roly and the other Poly, as *some* people thought, but that they were just Roly-Poly together, and should never be anything different as long as they lived."

As no other arrangement had been made, the whole dozen passed into the dining-room together, where Ella had added a few effective touches to the table, whilst Nancy had contrived a couple of extra dishes, so that there was nothing poverty stricken in the aspect of the repast. There was a little laughter about sitting down thirteen, and Dr. Leland added to the fun by declaring that Roly-Poly only counted as one, and this so delighted the twins that they insisted on placing themselves one on each side of him, and gravely instructed him to shut his eyes and clasp his hands, as they always said grace at tea.

On the whole, the young man appeared at greater advantage in his merry chatter with the children than in his intercourse with the elder members of the family. Edmund was stiff without intending it, and Dax appeared as if "literally made of bristles," as Damaris afterwards told him. He had several sharp encounters with the guest on various topics of the day, on which their opinions differed; and though the younger mem-

bers of the family were not able to enter into the merits of the case, they sided loyally and unreasoningly with their brother, and pronounced the guest a "horrid man" when they went upstairs at the close of the repast.

In the drawing-room things were a little better. Frank's banjo was brought out once more—it had fallen into disuse of late—and he enlivened the company by some of his comical representations of the leading singers of the day. Dr. Leland proved to have a good voice and a musical ear, and the pair got on very well together. Ella was made to sing, and her voice, though not strong, was exquisite in quality, and her performance was warmly appreciated.

The ice melted gradually, and the Inglehursts showed themselves rather less stiff. Nancy and Damaris did everything they could to make the evening pass harmoniously, and only Dax sat apart with a gloomy brow. Dr. Leland told them that he was expecting his mother to join him shortly, when he had got his quarters in readiness to receive a lady. She would come on a long visit at any rate, and possibly, if she took a liking to Fossbury, become a permanent member of the community. Nancy said something polite about hoping to call when she had arrived, and presently the guest rose to take his departure.

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"The whole dress suited Damaris well."—*Page* 44.

There was a good deal of discussion about him when he left. Dax said incisively that he was just the kind of fellow he himself could not bear —stuck-up, conceited, supercilious—and he gave rather a cutting hit at Damaris for "parading the family poverty and degradation before the eyes of a stranger."

Damaris looked across at him with a smile in her eyes, as if she would have spoken, but when she saw the look on his face she refrained, and presently came across and laid her cool hand upon his hot brow.

"You have another headache, Dax," she said, gently. "Poor old boy, I wish you could get rid of them."

His answer was little more than a low growl, but he let her hold her hands upon his throbbing temples, and presently said in a low tone:

"You are a good girl to be so patient with your old bear of a brother. I don't know what we shall do without you when you are gone. No wonder I hate that old nursing scheme of yours."

Damaris felt richly rewarded for her little acts of unobtrusive, apparently unheeded, care for Dax's comfort; and when she and Ella were shut in their room at night she spoke a little of her anxiety about Dax to this sister, and asked

her to watch over him as much as she could do.

"For you know, Ella dear, Nancy has worries enough, and it may be my fancy partly, but I do not like to see Dax looking as he does now. He is certainly thinner than he was, and if you notice, he starts and changes colour at a sudden noise, and he has very frequent headaches, which he never had, and then he is so dreadfully irritable that it is most difficult to do anything with him. It sometimes makes me very uncomfortable about him; for I know enough of his work to be sure that it often needs great nerve and self-possession and steadiness. He has often told me of things he has to do which have made me feel giddy even to hear about. And I cannot help feeling that if he does not get over the shock he has had, and recover tone, he may perhaps meet with some terrible accident at the works. That is why I am more anxious about him than I should be if it were Edmund or Oswald. Will you keep an eye on him, and try and see that he takes his food, and if he does not eat properly, make him strong coffee, as I do, later on, and get him to take that and a poached egg or something? I will leave you a little money, so that you need not trouble Nancy——"

But here Ella flushed scarlet, and laid her hand on Damaris's mouth.

"You need not do that, dear. See here: open that purse and look in. Oh, Damaris, Damaris! I didn't mean to tell anybody till quarter-day, when poor Nancy will have the last months' books coming in. But I will tell you. I dared not say a word that day before the boys, after the way Dax spoke about your nursing; but, oh, Damaris, don't scold me and say it was naughty. It is all my own—indeed it is!"

Damaris was looking into the purse which held five sovereigns, and some loose silver, Ella was almost choking in her quivering excitement. She was a timid little soul at all times, and Damaris could not divine how she had come by that money in three months, for it plainly had been earned by her in some way.

"What do you do, dearest?" she asked.

"I tint photographs for Mr. Fothergill," answered the girl in a whisper. "Have you never wondered what I was doing all day when I wasn't with you? I didn't mean anybody to know till I had really earned something worth calling something. First I went to his rooms behind the shop whenever I could get away, and when I had learned to do it nicely he let me bring work home. Sometimes I colour them, and sometimes I touch up negatives. I did it always in the spare room, which I keep in order, you know, and where

nobody ever comes. Sometimes I thought you would guess there was something, but you never seemed to. Oh, Damaris! you don't think it naughty of me, or sly? I did so want to do something to help, and it seemed the only way."

Damaris answered by a warm kiss.

"My dear little sister, I never did think there was anything degrading in honest labour; I am very pleased that poor Nancy's worries will be lessened in any possible way. I think you are a very brave and persevering little girl."

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK, Frank! Oh, Frankie, dear, see here! Two stall tickets for the concert this afternoon, and I am going to take you. I know you are just thirsting to hear some good music again; and somebody says this concert is to be the best of the whole set."

Di was in the hall, flourishing two pink tickets in her hand as Frank came in from his daily "grind" at the bank—to-day, as it was Saturday, at one o'clock, instead of at four, as on other days. His face brightened eagerly.

"What? Stalls for the concert in the Town Hall this afternoon? Why, Di, however did you get them?"

"Miss Hilton gave them to me," answered Di, flushed with pleasure, for her school-mistress was an object of something like adoration to the enthusiastic school-girl. "She called me into her room after lesson hours and said, oh *such* things —I'll tell you about that as we walk this after-

noon ; and then she gave me the tickets. Something had happened that she and Miss Edwards could not go themselves ; and those are subscribers' tickets, in the very best part of the hall. We shall see and hear everything most beautifully."

Di's eyes were dancing with anticipation. After more than three months of complete seclusion within the walls of home, it was a pleasure for a bright-spirited girl to contemplate an afternoon at an entertainment of such a kind. The Inglehursts were all fond of music, and in old days the doctor's family always attended in full force the series of concerts given annually in the Town Hall. Now, of course, such luxuries were not to be dreamed of, and Frank, with his passion for music, had felt the deprivation keenly. But, as was usual with those of that household, he demurred a moment about taking advantage of the offer made him.

"I think you should take Ella," he said ; "she must be just as keen after music as I am, and she's a girl."

"No, Frank ; I 'm going to take you and nobody else," cried Di gaily. "I offered my ticket to Ella, but she told me that Norah Medlicot was going to take her to the next one, and she wouldn't have it. Nancy doesn't really much care for music, so there's nobody but us who really want to go. We will go by ourselves and have a delightful time."

"Two stall tickets for the concert."—*Page* 55.

Frank's face brightened as he ran upstairs, whistling gaily. After the noisy mid-day meal, the brother and sister were not long in escaping from the house. It was a bright day in June, and Fossbury was looking its best. They intended to amuse themselves by watching the people coming in, and did not mind the least mind waiting before the music began. Then Di was full of her own piece of news, which she was eager to impart to Frank as they pursued their way to the Town Hall.

"Oh, Frankie, what do you think Miss Hilton said to me? You know she has always been so very kind, and when the new literature course was started at half-term, she put down my name for the course, and would not charge a penny for it. Well, to-day she took me into her own pretty rooms, and made me sit down, and she asked me if I had ever thought of teaching as a vocation for myself when I grew older; for, of course, everybody knows now that some of us girls must earn our own living more or less. I quite jumped when she asked me that, and said I had longed all my life to grow up like her and have a school, and try and make it like hers; and she laughed then and the colour came into her face, and she looked *so* pretty. And then she grew grave again, and told me that when she was a girl like myself she had had just that ambition, and that her father

had suddenly died and left them poor, very much as ours had done. She was older than I am now —I think she was eighteen when that happened —and she had been at a very good school, and the principal kept her on as a pupil-teacher, only it wasn't called that, and gradually she worked the school up until at last she had quite a reputation of her own; and when the Fossbury School was built and endowed she was asked to come and take the sole management of it—and here she has been ever since, and she is only thirty-two now. She told me so."

Di was obliged to pause here for breath, and Frank looked at her with a comical expression.

"Well, and what is the moral of all this romantic story? Does Miss Hilton wish to resign the Fossbury School in favour of you?"

"Silly boy, be serious a moment. Indeed, it is very important. Miss Hilton spoke quite gravely about it. She told me that latterly she had been hoping to find amongst her scholars some girls who appeared to have a taste and capacity for teaching, that she might train them for mistresses in her special methods which have been so very successful. She told me that she had often thought that I should suit her very well, if I could only grow out of my harum-scarum ways. I won't tell you all the kind things she said about me, for

it would sound conceited; but she knows I love my lessons, and that it isn't just for the marks or the prizes or the glory I take pains. She said it was difficult to get any hold upon girls in the position she wished them to be—gentlewomen by birth—because they so often lost their interest in study when they came out into society, and married off, or went away and were lost to her. But she saw that things were likely to be different with me, and she has said that if for the next three years I go on as well as I have done—and she will give me every class I like to take at half-fees all that time—then she should very much like to have me as one of her under-mistresses, and that I may consider this a definite project to live for and work for, so far as she is concerned, in the future."

Di's face was all in a glow; she did not see or heed the cloud which had fallen upon Frank's brow. As he made no immediate reply she went on eagerly:

"I'm almost sure she wanted to give me my schooling for nothing. She didn't exactly know how to say it, but I was sure it was coming, and so I broke in and told her about Damaris, and how she had just gone to her first case. She was very much pleased and interested, and thought it very nice of her; but she ended up by saying that I was to be on half-fees for everything the rest of my time at school, in consideration of the fact that

I was qualifying myself to be of use to her afterwards; and she spoke of sending me sometimes to lectures at the Town Hall, and other places, when they have them. Frank, isn't it wonderful how kind everybody has been to us?"

Frank heaved a deep sigh, and his sister looked at him quickly.

"Why, Frankie, aren't you pleased?"

"Oh, I'll try to like the idea if you do; but the notion of seeing you tied down to that sort of teaching drudgery ain't exactly exhilarating offhand to a fellow. It'll make you independent of Edmund in a few years, and of course that's all right enough; but——"

"I don't see that there's any *but* in the matter," answered Di, stoutly. "I hate the sort of silly, fashionable, idle life most women lead, and I've spoken to mamma before now about wanting to be useful and like Miss Hilton, and she never said anything against it. She did not think work drudgery. Why, Frankie, as soon as things were different for us, you went off directly and got that little bit of a place in the bank."

"Exactly," answered the boy with a peculiar grimace, "and so I feel qualified to give advice to those who are rushing headlong into a life of youthful drudgery, and my advice is—*don't*."

Di turned her eager glance upon him.

"Do you mean you are sorry you did it?"

"I won't exactly go so far as that," answered Frank with unwonted gravity. "I'm a boy, and I don't see that boys have any right to go letting themselves be a drag on the family when money's so scarce as it is with us. I'd just finished with school, and father was going to take me in hand to see if I had the making of a doctor in me, and if so, to send me to London to be regularly coached for it there. I couldn't think any more of *that* plan. I was just upon seventeen, and there seemed no possible opening for me to any kind of profession. Banking isn't altogether low sort of work, and it doesn't need any special training, and old Hop-o'-my-thumb, when I went to consult him, really settled the matter for me by making me an offer of a small salary forthwith. It wasn't the time to let any chance go by, however small. But I'm bound to say if I'd known what it was going to be like, I don't know if I could ever have screwed myself up to it. Don't you go and say a word at home, Di, or I'll never tell you anything about myself again; but I positively loathe and abominate it, and if ever the chance comes to emigrate, I'll be off like a shot, you bet."

Di looked very sorrowful and troubled.

"Oh, Frankie, I *am* sorry. What is it that's so horrid?"

"Oh, I don't know—everything. I detest quill-driving, and I don't like the stamp of fellows I meet there. They aren't bad in one way, which makes it all the worse."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Di timidly.

"I mean," explained Frank speaking very fast, "that though they are jolly fellows enough, and it's easy enough to like them and be sociable and all that, I don't think they are the sort of chaps that father and mother would have cared about my knowing or going much with. And it's no good talking, Di, I do like a bit of fun and pleasure, and after the long day of grinding at a desk, it does seem awfully hard just to have nothing to do but come home to a beastly meat-tea, badly cooked if the slavey does it, and only fit to eat when one knows one's sisters have been toasting themselves in the kitchen getting it ready. And the evenings are horrid at home without mother. Nancy is worried and tired, poor girl—and I'm sure I don't wonder—and the children look all anyhow, and won't obey properly, and Dax sits and glowers in a corner, and Ella has turned into such a mouse she won't even sing half the times I ask her. I don't know exactly what it is, but it's all I can do sometimes to make myself come home to it all. The fellows are always asking me to come to see them, and bring

my banjo and have a jolly evening. I've got off so far because you see people don't press one when one has had such a loss in the family recently; but that can't go on for ever; and I know how much I want to go really; and yet——"

"Well, why shouldn't you?" asked Di, eagerly; "I'm sure it would be good for you to have some more enjoyment. You always were the funny sociable one of all the boys, and everybody likes you wherever you go. Father and mother always said so."

Frank made a comical grimace to hide the depth of his feelings.

"That's just it—mother saw it all. She knew that I liked fun only too much, and that I was liked because I could strum most instruments and make people laugh with a comic song. She saw fast enough that as I grew up it would become a temptation to me to be always going out and getting into all sorts of society. I just know she would not have liked the fellows at the bank for my friends, and a fellow does hate to do what she would have been sorry for just because——"

Frank did not finish his sentence, but Di understood and nipped his hand hard.

"What is the matter with the bank clerks? Aren't they gentlemen?"

"Oh, well, that depends upon what you mean

by the term—it 's so very elastic. They would call themselves so, of course. I 'm not quite certain how far the rest of us would. But I 'd not mind a scrap their being a bit lower socially if they were the right sort in themselves; but I hear quite enough to know that there 's a lot of betting and gambling amongst them. They go to billiard rooms to watch matches, and play them amongst themselves; and whenever they can they get a holiday or a half-holiday, and go to race-meetings, and all that sort of thing. They say that it 's only to see the horses run, and that it 's the finest sight in the world. But I know better. And the worst of it is that there are times when I want to do the same as they do, most awfully. I feel just aching for a little brightness and amusement—anything to forget the blank at home and the deadly dulness of the bank work. You won't be able to understand; but it 's a horrid feeling, and yet I do believe if I once make the start, I shall get into the swim, and goodness only knows when I shall stop."

The lad's face was grave, and Di looked almost frightened.

"Oh, Frankie, dear, please don't begin. It would be so sad if——"

"Oh, yes, I know it all. Haven't I lectured myself all these weeks till I feel as if I could write any number of sermons to the young and flippant?"

answered Frank, hastily. "But it's long chalks easier to preach than to practise, and I'm horribly afraid I'll come a cropper one of these fine days. If only I had something to do that I like, to make up for the beastly grind of everything else."

"I am so sorry for you," said Di.

"Oh, don't you bother; it's a shame to grumble, for you girls have quite as rough a time of it too; but it relieves a fellow's mind to let fly sometimes. I felt very heroic when I offered at the bank, and told Nancy when the buttons boy went away that I would black the boots of the family, as no maid ever did do that office well. I thought I should always feel the 'dignity of service,' but if only you knew how I hate and detest it now. I'm mean enough sometimes to feel degraded by it, and yet the girls dust the rooms and make the beds, and here's Damaris gone out to that beastly nursing, which is enough to make a cat sick."

"Well, she says she likes it, and I hope she does," said Di; "but we do miss her dreadfully at home. Well, here we are at last, and we will try to have a good time of it now. I am so glad, Frankie, dear, that you will have one afternoon of pleasure."

Certainly there was no denying that the brother and sister enjoyed the concert to the full. The "fly-out" had done good to the pent-up irritation

and depression which had been hanging over Frank, and he gave himself up heart and soul to the delight of listening to really good music. They were in the midst of friends, who welcomed this first appearance after their long seclusion with great joy, and between the parts, Frank perambulated the hall, and was seized upon by innumerable acquaintances eager to exchange greetings with him, and ask after the party at home. The brave and resolute way in which the Inglehursts had faced their changed fortunes had won respect and sympathy from all. They had always been a popular family in the place, and now that it was known how hard a struggle they were enduring, numbers of old friends were racking their brains to try and devise some way of lightening the burden for them.

When Frank joined his sister again, his face was so beaming that she would hardly have known it for the same.

"Has something happened?" she asked eagerly.

"I should just think so," he answered in a whisper; "you wait till this piece is over and then I'll tell you."

At the next interval he turned eagerly to her and said—

"I declare I'll never grumble again. If I'd put it off for half an afternoon, I might have

saved myself the trouble of letting fly at everything and everybody. Why, no end of our oldest and nicest friends have begged me to drop in and spend the evening with them, and give them some music whenever I feel disposed for sociability; and best and most wonderful of all—but you shall guess—what do you think old Thompson has promised me?"

"Old Thompson, the Abbey organist? Oh, Frankie, what?"

"Why, some lessons on the organ all for nothing, and leave to play on it as often as I like, if I'll take the week-day evening service for him sometimes when he wants to be away. What do you think of *that?*"

"Oh, Frank, how delightful. You know you were just pining for some organ playing and lessons. Mother had always promised them when you had finished at school. Oh, I am pleased! How did it happen?"

"Well, I don't know if the old boy had it in his head before; but I brushed up against him just now, and we got talking of the organ here, and the improvements they have made in it; and as we talked he seemed to think I knew something of the instrument and asked if I did. I told him the extent of my acquirements in that line, and my performances on the school tin pot, and he asked

if I wouldn't like to play sometimes on the Abbey organ. I said 'Rather,' and he said 'All right,' I might, if I'd come on a regular night, so that he might know. And then he hummed and hawed a little, and finally said he'd teach me, if I'd pay him by saving his time when he was busy with his lessons and things, by taking the even-song service at five o'clock on week-days. You may just guess whether I didn't jump at his offer."

"Oh, I *am* glad," cried Di, with energy, and then silence fell upon the hall, as the next soloist stood forth to sing.

As the brother and sister walked home after the close of the performance in the soft sunshine of a June evening, Frank was silent for a while, and then spoke suddenly and without warning.

"I declare—though it seems a queer thing to say after what I was going on about as we came—I don't think being poor is half a bad thing after all. I don't believe one-half knows how kind other folks are, or how they like to do one a good turn, till one's a bit down the hill one's-self. I say, Di, you forget all the rot I talked as we came. I meant it all then, but I'm hanged if I don't think I had a very mean it on. Look here, old girl, if ever you hear me inclined to get into that way of thinking, just you pull me up, and gently suggest

to me that I 'm an ass. I don't often talk goody-good; I 've a constitutional aversion to it; but really one does see sometimes how there must be somebody watching over one, and keeping things right for one, however little one deserves it. I 'd just felt as if I 'd about got to the end of my tether —as if I must go and do something foolish out of sheer weariness of monotony; and then all this comes just in the very nick of time. I can't tell you what it is like to me. It makes me feel just as if *she* were somehow watching over one still, and seeing that things did not get too hard for one— as she always did, you know."

Sudden tears sprang into the girl's eyes; she turned her head away to hide them.

"I believe she is often near us still," she said quickly, to cover her emotion; "and, oh, Frankie, if she has been with us to-day, I 'm sure she will be very proud of you, for I think you have felt it more than any of us, and you have always been the one to make the home cheerful when everybody else has been wretched. I never even guessed how you were feeling all the while. I think that is being a real hero."

"A real fiddle-stick," answered Frank, with his most comical grimace.

CHAPTER V.

DAMARIS had gone to her first case. It was one of meningitis in a little girl of six—quite hopeless in character, but requiring tender and skilled nursing. Dr. Medlicot had asked the girl if she would like to undertake it, and had received a willing assent. The child was the youngest and only girl of rich parents, and they thought nothing too good for their darling. The kindly old surgeon bespoke every attention for his "lady nurse," and three guineas a week for so long as she remained with them; and Damaris had hardly been an hour in the sick-room before she could have made any terms for herself which she liked to demand.

The little patient—a wailing, feeble, fever-stricken child—took to the gentle-voiced nurse at the first moment of introduction. She could not see the tenderness of the face bent over her, for the sight had faded from the bright brown eyes; but the firm soft touch upon her aching brow, the

skilled handling which was so welcome to the wasted, sensitive limbs, the full gentle tones of the voice in accents of loving comprehension and sympathy, took captive from the first the affec-

"The gentle-voiced nurse."—*Page* 72.

tions of the little patient, and Damaris found that from that time forward her life was to be mainly lived between the walls of the sick-room.

She had made a special study of children in her

hospital days, and her almost motherly love for the little sufferers had always made her a power in the children's ward, which for a few weeks she had had entirely under her care whilst the regular sister had been absent on her holiday. She had seen this sad wasting disease in many of its forms, and was perfectly conversant with the symptoms. She was able to suggest many simple methods for the relief of the child, and before three days had passed was regarded as the greatest and most important person in the house. She had a luxurious bed-chamber of her own leading out of the sick-room, and her meals were served to her in a neighbouring boudoir, which she was welcome at any time to use, though as a matter of fact her little patient was too exacting for her to be able to avail herself of this indulgence, save on very rare occasions.

There were beautiful gardens round the house, in which she was able to take exercise from time to time, and a carriage was always at her disposal if she felt desirous of a drive. She often smiled to think of the contrast between her present surroundings and those of her own home, and thought that if the "boys" could but see how she was treated here, they would soon cease to call her nursing "servants' work," and unfit for her to undertake.

The house to which she had come, stood at the opposite side of the town from her own home, and away from the houses with which she was best acquainted. She had no personal knowledge of the owners, but they knew something of her story, and treated her with marked courtesy and respect.

The electrical works in which Dax was employed, were not very far away, and she had hoped that her brother would occasionally have found his way across to her; but Dax had never quite forgiven her for taking up this work, and he had made no promise of visiting her. After a fortnight had passed away she ceased to look for him, and as all the rest at home were so busy she could not expect that they could walk as far. It was four miles from home, and there were no horses to depend on now. She had once driven across to them, but latterly had not liked to leave her little charge for so long, or to be beyond the reach of a sudden summons. The little one was slowly sinking, and the end might come almost at any hour.

But Damaris was not forgotten by those at home, and on Saturday afternoon, as Di and Frank came home together for the early dinner, Di ran to Nancy to beg that she might go across and see Damaris, as nobody had been all the time she had been there.

"I should be very glad if you could, dear, but

it is such a long way, and the road lies through the worst part of the town, too."

"Oh, but I've thought of all that," answered Di eagerly. "Frank will take me in the tram right through the town—he is going to the Abbey organ to practise, but he will see me through all the slums first, and out into the country. And coming home I will take the field path to the works, and get Dax to bring me home. You know he said he should be late to-day. They were going to try experiments. Perhaps I should be able to see some of them too."

"Well, if you do that I see no objection to your going, and I should be very glad for somebody to see Damaris. I wish I had time myself; but, oh, the mending, the mending, when one pair of hands is missing!"

Di looked a little conscience-stricken, knowing how little help she was over the well-filled work-basket at which Nancy sat so many long hours every day, but her sister smiled and kissed her and told her not to worry over that.

"We each have our own line, and the needle is not yours, dear. But when you are Mistress of Fossbury Collegiate School for Ladies, we shall all be proud to have assisted you on by freeing you from the humble toil of the darning-needle."

Di laughed and blushed and threw her arms

about her sister in one of her bear-like hugs. Her ambition to be a school-mistress was known now throughout the family, and had been received with a good many gibes by the boys, who chiefly knew Di as a regular harum-scarum, though by no means devoid of wits and brains. She had taken a good deal of teasing in excellent part, and Nancy was beginning to note with satisfaction that she was trying to be more orderly, more neat in her room and in her person, more careful than heretofore in the fulfilment of the small domestic duties which fell to her lot.

It was not often that Di cared to leave her studies to take a long walk, but this summer afternoon, though hot, was very tempting, and Nancy was glad for her to go.

"It is such a pity Dax, who is so near, will not go and see Damaris. But I do not know what has come over Dax of late, he will not have a word said to him. He has never been himself since——"

"He says he won't go to any strange house to see his sister acting the part of upper servant," said Di, hastily. She never could endure to bring back to remembrance the events of *that* day. Secretly she did not wonder that Dax, who had been through so much, had never been quite the same since. "But that is all nonsense, by what Damaris says. Anyway I will go and see for

myself, and tell the silly boy when I come home."

Dinner over, Frank carried his sister off, and when they started he whispered in her ear:

"Tell it not in Gath, but you and I are going on the top of the tram. It 's quite the fashion now, even for 'elegant females,' as Jane Austen calls them. Inside it 's so beastly stuffy. You 'd like the outside best?"

"Oh, wouldn't I!" answered Di, eagerly. "I 've so often longed to go. I wouldn't dare to if there were any chance of meeting Dax; but as we shall not go near his place I 'll do it like a shot."

Very merry were the pair, who had the top of the tram pretty much to themselves as it sped down the low-lying streets and across the wide bridge. Only once were they observed by an acquaintance, and that was by Dr. Leland, who emerged from a house as they passed by, and took off his hat ceremoniously and gravely before stepping into his carriage, which, as Di indignantly said, "ought to have been theirs!" Di had a great aversion to the doctor. Perhaps the younger children always would regard their father's successor with jealous eyes. She always declared that he was "horrid," and the girls at school, who had been very fond of Dr. Inglehurst, took delight in telling her stories about the different methods of

the new man, and how little he was liked by his patients.

The girl was vaguely aware that there was another side to the picture, and that Dr. Leland was undoubtedly making his way in the good graces of the townspeople; but it went terribly against her to see him driving through the streets in her father's carriage, with the dear old horses she had petted so often, and their old family coachman on the box, looking exactly as he had done in her own father's time. She never saw the familiar equipage without a quiver of pain, and now she turned to Frank with a grimace of disgust.

"Horrid creature, why need he see us, of all people? Not that I care one button-top what *he* thinks; but I suppose he 'll think me awfully unladylike and all that, and perhaps tell other people too."

"Not he; men don't gossip in that woman's fashion."

"Oh, don't they? I like that. I believe men are twice as bad as women. They always herd about in flocks, and talk scandal like anything. I've heard father say so himself. He always laughed when he heard people talk about gossiping women."

Frank laughed good-humouredly.

"Six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, I

suppose. But anyhow I don't think *that* fellow is much of a gossip."

"No, he 's much too morose and ill-tempered," returned Di, resolved to have no mercy on the offender. "That 's just what all the people complain of. They can't get a word out of him. He just asks a few questions and writes a prescription and is gone, and they don't feel as if they 'd had a visit at all."

Frank laughed heartily at this way of looking at it, and Di, seeing how it had struck him, joined in the laugh; but the tram was stopping now at the terminus, and the brother and sister descended and went their respective ways.

The sun was shining through a thundery haze now, and Di was glad for it to be a little obscured as she had some way to walk to reach the house. It was pleasant, however, to be in the country with green hedgerows and waving grass fields to right and left, and the twitter of the birds in the air.

When Di reached the house she was considerably impressed by its grandeur, and thought that Damaris might really be enjoying the change from the closeness and heat of the town. The time of the year was coming when the Inglehursts had been wont to leave Fossbury to spend a month at the sea-side, or in some thoroughly country place amid beautiful scenery. Of course there had been

no whisper of any such thing this year—it was obviously a pleasure of the past. Di had never realised till to-day how dull the summer holidays would seem cooped up in Fossbury, and she held back a little impatient sigh as she strove to think of the bright side of the future instead of its darker aspect.

Damaris was delighted to see her sister.

"You darling Di, this is an unexpected pleasure. Have you walked all the way? Oh, the tram has helped; that is better. But you have come in the nick of time for a cosy cup of tea with me up here. Is not this a dear little room? It is mine whenever I want it. My poor little mite has just gone off into a quiet sleep, so I hope I may have half-an-hour at least. Tea is just coming up. You will be thirsty after your long, hot walk."

"Yes, but I liked it very much. How tired you look, Damaris! You have such black marks round your eyes. Is it very hard work? The boys would be——"

"The boys would say nothing if they could have seen my poor little patient these last days. She has been so fearfully ill; but the worst is over for her, poor darling. It will be just a sinking away now; they say the pain is over."

"Oh, Damaris, isn't it dreadfully sad?"

"Well, in one way it is; yet it never seems

altogether sad to me to see a little child taken out of the sin and sorrow of the world. If the tender Shepherd thinks it well to gather them with His arm, and bear them away from us, surely we know that they have gone with Him to a better place than ever this could be. I think that the child-band in the bright land beyond the grave, whose garments have scarcely been soiled by stains of earth before they are washed white in the Blood of the Lamb, must be a very glorious happy band. Our poor little darling is ready to be numbered amongst them. She has been asking to be told of Jesus all through these long weary nights when she has had no rest or peace. And so much of that pain and weary restlessness nothing could cure."

"But you do not have night-nursing too, Damaris," said Di, quickly; "I'm sure that was specially agreed on."

"It was only by accident. A second nurse was sent for for the night work, but the poor little mite did not take to her, and it was cruel to try and force her. I am very strong. A few nights will not hurt me. Now, Di, don't try to look like Dax in his worst mood. You know you would have done the same yourself."

Di's face relaxed; she knew that it was the Inglehurst way not to spare labour or fatigue in a

good cause, and the father would have said that Damaris was right. Interruption occurred as the tea was brought, with rich ripe strawberries and cream and other dainties now greatly appreciated by Di. As she did good justice to the repast she unburdened herself of her budget of home news, and Damaris had so many questions to ask that time flew away fast, and both sisters were surprised to find how long they had been together, when a message arrived to the effect that Dr. Leland was in the sick-room and wished to speak to Miss Inglehurst.

"Dr. Leland!" exclaimed Di. "Why, I thought this was Dr. Medlicot's case. The boys would never let you nurse for that horrid man."

"The horrid man has only been called in in consultation, puss, and as he has given a medicine that wants rather close watching, he comes from time to time to see the child. He never stays many minutes, so you need not run away. I shall be back directly. And, oh, dear, look at the rain!"

Di had little else to look at whilst her sister was gone, for the heavy thunder-shower which had burst over the place blotted out the landscape, and rolled in thick rivulets down the window-panes. Di was wondering how she should get home with everything in a swim, when Damaris came back

followed by Dr. Leland, who sat down to a table to write a prescription.

"Here is luck for you, Di," said Damaris; "Dr. Leland is going straight back to Fossbury, and he has kindly offered to take you in his carriage."

Di drew back and gave Damaris a meaning look.

"I am going across the fields to Dax," she said significantly, but Damaris appeared to be quite obtuse.

"Does Dax expect you?"

"N—no," was the reluctant answer. "But——"

"Oh, well then that is all right. He will not wait for you, and Dax is very uncertain in his hours. The field paths will be very dirty this afternoon now, and would spoil your crape dreadfully. You must think of Nancy's feelings, and be thankful for such a good offer as a lift from door to door."

Di looked very mutinous, but she could not argue the point in presence of Dr. Leland, who had now risen and was looking towards her as if waiting for her to move. She kissed Damaris affectionately, and followed the doctor downstairs, feeling it all very much like a dream as she stepped into the brougham which was so entirely familiar to her, even to the stain she had

herself made upon one of the leather loops for drawing up and down the windows. The doctor took the vacant seat at her side and as the carriage rolled smoothly along he remarked, by way of breaking the silence:

"Your sister is an excellent nurse."

"Is she indeed? I suppose she takes kindly to the fashionable craze."

For the life of her Di could not refrain from this retort. She had neither forgotten nor forgiven the young man's words on the evening of their first introduction, and Di was not wont to curb her sharp speeches as an older girl might have done. Perhaps had she been looking at the doctor and had seen how his colour flow up at the taunt she might have regretted her frankness—though possibly she might have rejoiced that her shaft had struck home; but her eyes were fixed upon the window beside her, down which the rain-drops were pouring, and she held her proud little head defiantly, as if to show that *she* had no wish to hold any intercourse with the foe.

Dr. Leland presently gave her a quick glance, his thin lips relaxed into the ghost of a smile as he said:

"I hope you enjoyed your lofty ride this afternoon?"

It was only meant as a bit of sly raillery, but

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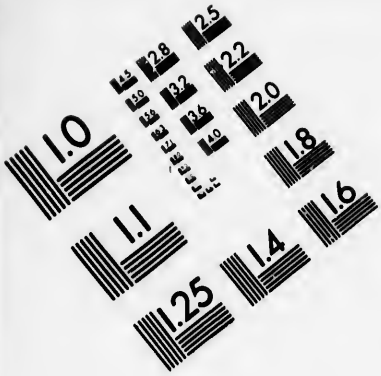

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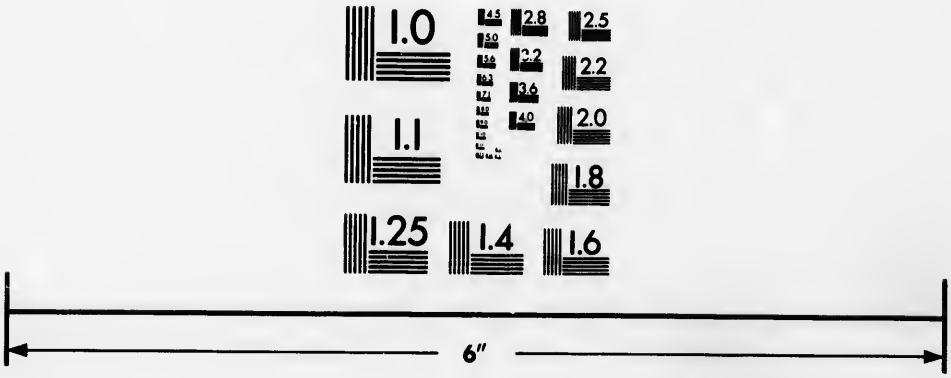

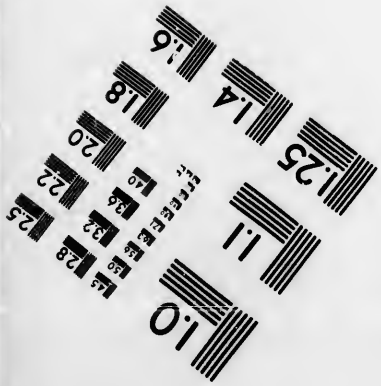

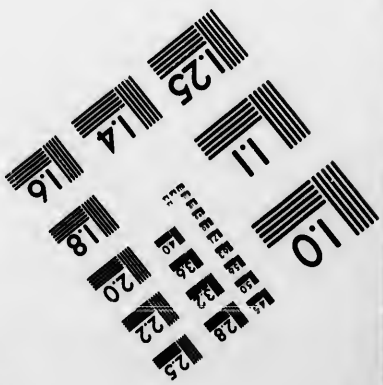

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Di was in the mood to take everything amiss, and her head went up higher than ever.

"We cannot all drive about with broughams and a pair of horses," she said. "And for poor people trams are very convenient."

Again the young man flushed very slightly and bit his lip. He was too wise to attempt to explain away or apologise for the construction put upon his words, and after a short pause merely asked if all the brothers and sisters were well.

"Oh, yes—we are always all right at home," was the sharp reply.

"What a fortunate family to be sure."

"Sensible more than fortunate, I should say," answered the uncompromising Di. "Half the people who are ill, or think they are, only make a fuss because they have nothing else to do, and like to have the doctor bothering round. There's no accounting for tastes certainly," with an intonation of extreme disdain; and Di, who felt that she was being exceedingly and gratuitously rude, was, of course, excessively angry with her companion.

"It is certainly an odd taste," returned Dr. Leland, equably, a gleam appearing in his eye which showed that he did not lack humour. And at that point the carriage stopped, and he told Di he would not keep her ten minutes—probably not five; but so soon as his tall form had disappeared

through the doorway, the wayward girl sprang out of the carriage, and telling the coachman to say she had preferred to go home, sped down a side street, and was at her own door long before the doctor had appeared again.

She did not tell a single soul of her adventure that day with the "horrid man," for somehow she felt as though she had not come off with much glory from the encounter, and rather wished she had been content to be ordinarily polite to the enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

"MOTHER, it is very good to have you sitting there again, presiding over the ancestral teapot."

Mrs. Leland laughed as she replenished her son's cup for the third time, and there was a brightness in the sweet brown eyes which seemed reflected in those of the young doctor, and showed very plainly how strong was the [illegible] of affection which existed between mother and [illegible].

"It is very good to be together again, Giles. I have been quite as impatient as you for the time to come. Your letters are poor little mean things. They tell me nothing."

"Think of all I have had on hand—new patients, new practice, new friends and new enemies to deal with. Where was the time to come from for letter-writing?"

"Not new enemies I hope," said the mother, with a smile which was like one of full comprehension of the exigencies of the situation. "My dear

boy, I had hoped that that uncompromising tongue of yours had learned wisdom by this time."

"Well, mother mine, I don't think it is in me to walk the upright and honourable life I try to do without incurring enmities in some quarters. I 'm not even certain that I covet the happy knack some men have of being all things to all men. Don't think, anyhow, I shall ever acquire it. There's too much evil stalking abroad in the world, and evil has too many devotees for a man to escape altogether from odium who tries to avoid it. But there, we won't moralise to-day. I 'll only tell you of one special foe of mine, who will interest you more than all the rest put together. Her name will take you at once—for it is Diana; and she is, I should say, just about the age of our Di when she was taken from us."

Mrs. Leland's face took that expression which a mother's often wears when something recalls to her mind the image of a lost child. She looked earnestly at her son, who continued:

"She is the daughter of my predecessor, the Dr. Inglehurst who met his death so sadly in that shocking railway accident, his wife being killed at the same time. It has made a great impression upon the town, as you may guess. The little girl detests me heartily. I suppose it is natural under

the circumstances. She interested me from the first, partly because of her name, and partly because there was something in her uncompromising method of talking, in her merry smile, and her short mop of curly hair, that recalled our Di more powerfully than any other child I have ever seen. I should like you to make friends with her if you could. She is a wayward little mortal, but you have a way with you that I have not."

"I suppose you are on friendly terms with Dr. Inglehurst's family, though you have not mentioned them often?"

Giles' face put on a look his mother could not altogether interpret. He answered quietly:

"I hardly know what to say. I suppose it is almost impossible to take over a practice—to step, as it were, into a dead man's shoes—without friction of some kind. There has been no unpleasantness. Everything has been done through their solicitor, who is a very upright and genial man, and who (I don't mind saying this to you) has told me that I have acted very liberally throughout, and in a much more open-handed way than most men in my position would have done. Still, I 'm afraid the family did not quite take the same view of the situation. They could only see their side of the question—which was, that I was stepping into a very large and lucrative

practice, which had been gathered and built up by their father. They could not see the risk I ran—the risk of being unable to keep it together—the possibility, probability even, of many patients calling other doctors from the town, better known to them than a perfect stranger—the chance of some young fellow, with connections in Fossbury, setting himself up as a rival, and drawing patients away from me. I do not think these things *are* happening to any great extent; but there was always the risk, as the man of business saw fast enough, but I doubt if the family did; and they could hardly be expected to realise what a haul it is for a young man to supply so large a capital at one fell swoop. But for your liberality, mother——"

"Nonsense, my son. Liberality between mother and child! Do not talk twaddle to me; but tell me of the Inglehursts. Are they left pretty well provided for? It must have been a crushing blow to them, poor things!"

"Most terrible!" The young man's colour had slightly risen, and he rose and leaned his shoulders against the mantelshelf as he spoke. "I 'm afraid they are rather pinched sometimes. One of the daughters goes out nursing from time to time to bring grist to the mill, I fancy; and some people say that it is a hard struggle to keep the house-

hold going upon the means left by the parents. Twelve children—it is no light thing."

"Twelve! A large family indeed. Poor things!"

"'The doctor's dozen,' they are called in Fossbury; and, to do them justice, I don't think they think themselves one too many. The strong tie that binds them together is a beautiful thing, though it makes them just a little unapproachable to strangers. No doubt you will succeed better than I have done. I am a clumsy kind of a fellow out of a sickroom."

"I shall certainly try," said Mrs. Leland, with a smile. "Where do they live?"

"If you will come here I will show you," answered Giles.

The mother rose and advanced to the window. It was a pleasant latticed oriel, overlooking a quiet street, and exactly opposite, was a range of low buildings, which comprised surgery and consulting-room and dispensary, built by Dr. Inglehurst at the bottom of his own large and pleasant garden. Behind this low range of buildings was a belt of trees, now thickly in leaf, and between these trees could be seen the outlines of a red-brick building of considerable dimensions.

"That is their house. 'The dozen' live there. It is their own private property, I believe."

"'The dozen' live there."—*Page* 92.

"It is quite a large house. I almost wonder they can afford to keep it up."

"Yes; I suppose it may be doubtful if they can continue to do so. But it would be too large a house to let or sell readily, and they are greatly attached to it. I believe it was enlarged and adapted by their father for the needs of his large family. Every one speaks as though it would be heart-breaking to them to see it pass to strangers after all these happy years."

"Poor children!" said Mrs. Leland, tenderly and compassionately. "No father and mother, and twelve of them to keep! What a terrible strain it must be upon some of them!"

Giles replied by a gesture, and for a minute or two silence fell upon the pair. Then Mrs. Leland suddenly looked up and said:

"Giles, do you think there is room in that house, or do you think that they would for a moment contemplate taking boarders to help them to eke out their means?"

"I really do not know, mother. I should say there was room enough, for Dr. Inglehurst and his wife must have had their own apartments; and in so hospitable a mansion as this is reported to have been in old days, there must have been guest-chambers which will be standing empty now. Indeed, I have heard people say that it would be

a wise thing for them to try and get boarders; but I doubt if any one has cared to suggest it to them. A large and very united family naturally resents the intrusion of strangers, and the idea of being paid in that fashion is repugnant to one's own feelings. But why did you ask?"

"I will tell you," answered Mrs. Leland, returning to her arm-chair, and folding her white hands one over the other. "We have had so many things to speak about since my arrival yesterday, that I have not half-finished my budget of news. Giles, you remember my beautiful cousin, the Baroness Steinmetz?"

"The beauty who married the German baron, and was left a widow in ten years, with an estate in Germany? Yes, I just remember her, and you have told me all about her."

"Well, you remember that she grew weary of Germany and German life, and sold the property of which she became sole mistress? Since then she has been travelling about the world, just where her fancy led her. I have met her at various foreign resorts, as you know, and we have never ceased to correspond. Two years ago she adopted an orphaned niece, one Olga de Witt, a girl with some English and some foreign blood in her veins. They have been in America for some time. But the Baroness has recently developed a weak-

ness of the heart, and she is recommended to give up her roving life, and settle down in some quiet spot, at any rate for a couple of years. She has set her mind on England, which she has not visited for a very long time, and Olga is wild to come to what she likes to call 'her native country;' and the last letter I received begged me to find them comfortable rooms in Fossbury, to be near me. And their idea is, after they have had time to turn round and look about them, to find comfortable quarters in some gentleman's house, where they can be received as boarders but have home comforts about them as they cannot in lodgings. My cousin cannot endure the thought of housekeeping, and Olga is plainly as ignorant as herself. It just occurred to me that a pleasant house like that would be the very place for them, whilst the society of a number of lively young people might be excellent for the girl. But, as you say, the Inglehursts themselves might take other views of the situation."

Giles bent his brow in earnest thought.

"It certainly sounds likely," he remarked. "The Baroness is very rich, is she not?"

"Very; and spends her money with open-handed lavishness. Accustomed as she has been to living in hotels, you may be sure she will be very liberal in her terms if she could get taken

into a thoroughly good house, and as she would, of course, have her own private sitting-room, she would not necessarily be a tax upon the members of the household. Still, nobody takes boarders without adding to their cares and troubles, and one must not reckon upon it, though it sounds as if it might be a mutual advantage all round."

"It does," said Giles, thoughtfully. "Well, we must keep quiet for the present, and see how things turn."

At this moment the door opened, and the servant came in to say that a young lady had called to see Dr. Leland, and should she meet him in the surgery?

"Do you know the lady, Susan," asked Giles.

"She didn't give her name, sir, but I know her quite well. It is Miss Diana Inglehurst."

"Mother, this is Kismet," whispered Giles, with his flashing smile, and Mrs. Leland said:

"Show the young lady up here at once, Susan, and bring another cup."

The next minute Di was standing upon the threshold of the pleasant parlour, looking out with a strange glance, half defiant and half timid upon the occupants, whilst her pale face and swathed up hand told that she had had good reason for coming to see the detested Dr. Leland.

Giles came quickly forward.

"Good evening, Miss Di. May I introduce you and my mother to each other? But I see, we must go to business at once. You have hurt yourself. Let me see what it is."

Di commenced to unwind the handkerchief.

"I was bitten by a dog just now," she said. "I wouldn't have troubled you if it hadn't been that. I thought you would know what I ought to do. I don't want to frighten anybody at home—they have worry enough without. Please don't be afraid to burn it if you think it best. I'm not afraid of the pain."

"What dog was it?" asked Giles, as he examined the injury.

"The brown retriever that belongs to a little butcher in South Street. I think he is a cross dog. Just as I was passing to-day he flew at a little boy who was running, and I threw my strap of books at him to make him let go—he had hold of his jacket—and then he came at me and bit my hand. I had a glove on, or it would have been worse. I didn't like to go home and tell them. Nancy is always so afraid of bites. I tried to find Mr. Rouse, but he was out, and so——"

"And so you made up your mind to face the enemy in his own entrenchments," said Giles with a smile, which was pleasanter than any expression Di had seen on his face before. "Well, I am very

glad you have come to me, Miss Di, for I think I am a better surgeon than good old Rouse, and I don't think I need take any very severe measures with the bite, though for the sake of precaution we will apply a little caustic to the worst place, where his teeth have marked you. I know that dog. I have spoken to Brooks about him before. Now I shall insist on his being kept chained. But he is only chronically bad-tempered. I have no fear of the brute's being rabid. We will soon make your hand comfortable, and then you shall have a cup of tea with my mother; she is quite pining for a gossiping chat with a lady who can regale her with all the latest scandal of the town."

This conclusion to his sentence, spoken with the utmost gravity, surprised Di into a sudden laugh. The hand was quickly dressed and bandaged. Dr. Leland's touch was so gentle, and his fingers seemed so strong and skilful, whilst he himself appeared so kind and brotherly in his cool, impassive fashion, that Di felt her feelings undergoing something of a revolution, and gradually her colour rose higher and higher, and her lips moved once or twice, as though she was nerving herself to speak.

At last, just as the final bandage was adjusted, out it all came.

"Dr. Leland, I was very rude to you the other

day. I want to tell you I am sorry. I was very angry with myself all the time, but I felt I could not help it. The things *would* come into my head, and I said them without thinking. It was very wrong, and it was very rude to run off without thanking you. I am very sorry now I did it."

"And I am very glad—if it is to help us to be friends at last," answered Giles, as he released the hand and stood up smiling. "You must show your repentance by being very obedient now, and come and show me that hand of yours to-morrow about this time, when I am generally at home. And now I must be off; but you will stay and have tea with my mother. I expect you and she will be great friends one of these days. Good-bye, Miss Di. I hope we may call ourselves friends at last."

Di gave him her hand, but did not look up. Her face was still crimson with the effort she had made, for she was a proud little mortal, and it was not easy for her to bring herself to make an apology—least of all to one who was nearly a stranger, and ranked almost as a foe besides. She was glad when his tall figure disappeared from the room, and she turned impulsively to the bright-eyed old lady, saying in her hasty way:

"I suppose he told you how rude I was."

"No, dear child, he did not. He told me only

enough to make me desire very much to see you, because we once had a little bright-eyed Di of our own, who was the very light of the house till it pleased God to take her from us five short years ago. He had told me that there was a Di here, who brought his sister to his mind, and you may guess that I wanted to see her too; and so you must not be offended if I take the liberty of calling you by your name on a very brief acquaintance, because you do remind me too of our lost child, and I hope you will learn in time to give me a little of the love that I know you have abundant store of, somewhere in your heart."

Di looked eagerly into the sweet face of Mrs. Leland, and (she knew not why) sudden tears rushed to her eyes. Was it the mother-look in those soft sweet eyes which went straight home to the motherless child, and seemed to fill her heart with something between pain and pleasure and yearning? She could not have analysed the feeling herself. She only knew that a new element had somehow entered into her life, and that the hungry longing she so often felt might find something to appease it at last.

The look exchanged between the pair must have been very eloquent, for Mrs. Leland bent forward and kissed the girl very softly and tenderly as she said:

"Thank you, my dear little Di. I know that we shall understand each other well in time."

Then she turned to the tea-table, and Di was soon making a healthy school-girl's meal, talking to Mrs. Leland as she would not have believed it possible to talk to a stranger only made known to her an hour ago, and that stranger the mother of the "horrid Dr. Leland." She stopped suddenly, and broke into one of her hearty laughs at the bare thought, and when called upon to explain herself, did so in the frankest fashion possible, delighting Mrs. Leland by her perfect truthfulness and sincerity.

"But they will understand when they see you," she said, with one of those quick, confiding glances, that went straight to the mother's heart. "They will all love you directly, but I shall feel that I have the first place, because you know I was first in the field, and because you say I am like your Di who died. That will help you to love me, won't it? I am so glad I am the one who has her name, because you know I am not one of the nice ones of the family. Damaris is so much more really bright and good tempered, and Nancy is so patient, and careful, and good, and Ella is *so* pretty. You would never have noticed me amongst the others if you had seen us all together, and I don't pay calls, because I 'm only a school-girl

yet. But I will come to see you sometimes if I may, and I shall want you to go on liking me, too. You will try to, will you not, though I was so rude to Dr. Leland, and helped the little ones to make names for him!"

"You shall come as often as ever you can, dear child, and there will always be a welcome ready for you. You are not the only Di whose freedom of speech has got her into trouble sometimes, and you will not find Giles Leland's mother very critical towards that particular failing."

CHAPTER VII.

THAT summer was a trying time to the inhabitants of Fossbury. The heat was exceptionally great, and coming as it did with a parching east wind, it was more trying than summer weather is wont to be.

The Inglehursts were accustomed to leave the town at the end of July, and not to return till the early part of September. Their father had generally remained behind, often running down for occasional spells of a few days at a time as the claims of his patients allowed, but the young ones had never remained during the hot and glaring month of August cooped up in the streets of a town, and very keenly indeed did they feel the weariness and dreariness of the month which had hitherto been so full of enjoyment to them.

All their friends had fled. Those who were able had sought pleasanter spots in which the summer holiday might be spent, and one or two

invitations had been extended to the elder girls to join parties at the sea-side or elsewhere and enjoy a change of air and scene. But all such invitations had been gratefully but firmly declined. The sisters felt that they must not indulge themselves at the expense of the household. The home was often melancholy enough for the boys, even when the sisters were all there. Blanks in the circle of faces would be keenly felt, and each girl had her own appointed duties at home to keep her on the spot. For the boys no such relaxation was possible. Dax was working away harder than he had ever done in his life, with the idea, as it was supposed, of making himself of value at the works, and rising to a better position. He met with a growl any suggestions from his family as to taking a little relaxation, and declared that work was twice as good as idling about at home, when all the brightness and happiness had gone out of life. He was the most unapproachable of all the family, and whilst bringing home from time to time more money than had been expected by the rest, he seemed to shrink more and more into himself, and to avoid anything like real conversation with any member of the family. Even Damaris, who had always appeared to understand him the best, declared at last that she was fairly beaten. He would not let her say a word to him about himself

or his feelings, and if she breathed an inquiry as to his health, she received such a scathing snub as showed how utterly impossible it was to get any reason out of the irascible young man.

Edmund had his usual holiday, but though he tried to pretend that it was a great luxury to remain at home and lounge about the shady garden with a book, it was but a poor pretence at enjoyment. He was very good in helping to amuse the little ones, who claimed their summer holiday as a natural right, and were uncommonly troublesome when released from lesson hours; but Nancy knew well that he was feeling his changed position more keenly now than he did at first, and that as the heavy loss they had sustained was softened somewhat by lapse of time, the hopelessness of his future prospects would come upon him with more and more force. He was often sick at heart, she knew, at the thought of his lost love, pining for a sight of the face he had loved, yet dreading her return to Fossbury as an aggravation of the burdens of his lot. Never even to her did he breathe a word of his troubles; but she divined them without speech, and gave him such sympathy as might be silently rendered. She loved and reverenced him very much at this time, for, despite all the sacrifices he was making for them, the children seemed the great pleasure and relaxation of his life. His

manner towards the four little ones began to take an almost fatherly tone, and Roly-Poly would follow him about as assiduously as his own shadow, and look forward all day to the walk up and down the High Street to look in at the shop windows—with which he always indulged them after their tea.

Francis was perhaps the best off at this time, as he had his beloved Abbey organ, and could always console himself for the hardships of life by a few hours of music. Moreover, in the absence of the organist on his summer holiday, the lad had got the whole duty, and was to be paid for it too, which was no small matter just now; for he had given the whole of his small salary to Nancy to help her with the household expenses, and he had been rather perplexed to know how the new clothes he needed for the coming winter were to be provided. He had hoped his last year's ones would do, but he had grown so much that he found he could no longer get into them. They must be cut down and passed on to Kit, and Frank had secretly told Di he thought he should have to take to the garment of sackcloth recommended by the ascetics of the Middle Ages, when this appointment put new life into and materially brightened his prospects.

Di found holidays dreadfully dreary, and longed for school to begin again. She often went to the

Abbey with Frank, and often read aloud to Nancy, Damaris, and Ella, as they sat at their needles. Ella had made herself very happy by the purchase for the whole of the girl-section of new black cashmere frocks for summer wear, just when Nancy

"To look in at the shop windows."—*Page* 108.

had reached the conclusion that they could not afford anything lighter than their heavy woollen winter black which they had had at first. Ella's modest earnings were most helpful, though Nancy did not like taking them; but she was finding

that such a household as theirs was a dreadfully expensive one to keep up. Damaris did not feel that she *could* leave home just now, when all were in such doleful dumps, and at the best of times it was difficult enough to spare her.

One evening the three sisters were sitting together in the twilight at their needles. The boys were in the garden with Di, and the strains of Frank's banjo came floating in at the window from time to time. They did not notice that Dax had stolen in by one of the long windows and had thrown himself down in an easy chair, closing his eyes as if in sleep, and they spoke with the freedom they did not usually indulge in when any of the men folk of the household were present, for it was a family rule amongst the sisters that the brothers were not to be needlessly worried over domestic difficulties; they had worry enough without that in keeping the house going at all by their united labours.

"You know, girls," said Nancy, "I don't want to make troubles before they come, but I am terribly afraid we ought to give up this house. I really don't see how we are to go on living in it at this rate. We have paid our way so far, but then Ella has helped me, and so has Frankie, and so has Damaris. The money for the housekeeping which the boys gave me I *cannot* make last out,

and you know the winter is coming, which is always a much worse time. There will be fires, however economical we are in coal, and it is wretched for the boys to come home to cheerless rooms, and the children must not suffer. Then, unless they have a fire upstairs, they will have to be down with us all day, and think of the wear and tear, and the worry to the boys when they come in to have the only warm room in the house a sort of bear garden. I get sadly worried when I think about things. In winter the children wear out more boots, and want warm clothes. Being in mourning is very expensive, for they are out-growing all their old clothes, and though Roly-Poly will be able to take Kit's and Chriss's, their own things will be no good again, and Kit and Chriss will want everything new," and Nancy heaved a great sigh. "We had hoped that all the little extra earnings would be saved against more expensive times, but——"

"Nancy," said Damaris, with some hesitation, "I suppose it never occurred to you that we might let part of the house?"

"Let it, Damaris, how could we?"

"Well, I know such things are done, though I suppose there are difficulties in the way. But the whole of our first-floor is standing empty—three bedrooms and a dressing-room, and a very nice boudoir."

"Mother's boudoir—their room," whispered Ella, and Damaris bent her head over her needle and worked very fast as she spoke on:

"You don't suppose that I like the thought of it any better than you do, but there are the boys and the children to think of. If we had people in those rooms, and were paid for them, we should have the means to keep a proper staff of servants again. The boys could come home to a comfortable well-cooked dinner, instead of the meal we give them now. Doesn't it go to your heart when one of them looks round for something we have been used to, and there is nothing of the kind to be had? I think the economy that is so pinching as ours will have to be as the children grow up, and the winters come upon us, is bad for us all. The boys are most wonderfully good—for these little economies try them more than they do us—but it is bad for them. I know Oswald often half starves himself that he may give away his portion to his poor parishioners, and Dax has never recovered tone one bit, and I'm sure that the poor living, after what we have been accustomed to, has something to do with it. Now, if——"

But Damaris suddenly broke off short, and Ella gave a little startled exclamation, for a dark figure suddenly strode towards them, and Dax appeared

to be towering over Damaris as he stood between her and the dusky window:

"And so because things have been bad enough before, you want to go and make them ten thousand times worse, and make the home into a sort of superior lodging-house, and bring us home to a late dinner, but a dinner, forsooth, shared by a rabble of people who would call themselves our masters, order you girls about like servants, and grumble that they did not get their money's worth, if anything went wrong with the cooking. You must be mad to think of such a thing. Have we not paraded our poverty about enough as it is without going and turning lodging-house keepers into the bargain? You with your nursing, Ella with her painting, Frank with his organ—surely we have sunk low enough without this last drop in the cup of humiliation. I tell you, girls, we brothers will not submit to such an arrangement for a moment. Put the house up for sale any day if you choose. Let us hide our heads in a cottage and live on porridge and potatoes if you will. I have nothing to say against that. But to have a pack of insolent strangers sharing the home with us, and parading their wealth before us in our poverty—that we will not submit to for a moment. We have come down the hill with a run, it is true, but we have not sunk to that level. Let me never

hear another word of lodgers," and Dax flung himself from the room and banged the door, whilst Nancy and Ella exchanged half-frightened glances, and Damaris laid down her work with a smile and a sigh.

"Poor Dax," she said softly.

"Dax is so different from the others. Edmund and Oswald would never have spoken so. But it would not be like that really, would it, Damaris? And it *would* be so hard to leave the dear old home."

"It would not be like that at all, dear," answered Damaris, with a smile; "we should be very particular to have only the right sort of 'lodger,' and if we kept a common table for the sake of economy in time and labour, anybody staying in the house would have private rooms, and would no more wish to share ours than we should wish them to. Twelve in a family would be what most persons would call 'a caution'—though we do not agree in that dictum. But perhaps for the present we may let the matter drop and see what happens. I know Dax is looking forward to some experiments he is making, which he hopes will bring him in something considerable, though I don't like to be too sanguine about anything so uncertain. Still, for a month or two we may be content to wait and see. If we can't make ends meet

by the close of the year we must all put our heads together and think seriously what is to be done. It is easy to talk glibly of selling the house, but it might be long in finding a purchaser, and meantime——"

"While the grass grows the steed starves," said Ella with a sigh. "Oh, dear, I wish being poor was not so difficult."

"We shall grow used to it in time," said Damaris, cheerfully, "and I do think it has taught us to know each other as we have never done before. It is the painful contrast with old days, which of course we feel more in this house; that is the trying part of it. I am not really uncomfortable about anything myself except Dax. But I do not like to see him going on month after month with so little elasticity about him—so little like his old self."

"Perhaps he will be better when the cold weather comes," said Ella. "People say the spring and summer have been very trying. I am sure the summer is. Even nurse is complaining to-day, and saying she hardly knows how to hold up her head."

Oswald was finding in his parish that there was an unwonted press of work which fell the more heavily upon him that his Rector had gone away for a fortnight, leaving him in sole charge. There

was a good deal of low fever down by the water-side, and it was bitterly hard to have case after case to visit where all that was wanted was "kitchen physic," whilst he had not the means to meet half the demands made upon him for soup, jelly, and wine. There were doles, to be sure, from the parish; but he had been used in his father's time to supplement these by generous orders upon butcher or grocer, and by baskets full of delicacies from home. And never had he felt the pinch of poverty more keenly than he was doing now.

Wearily wending his way up an attic stair one day, he was surprised to hear a sweet and clear girl's laugh issuing from the room he was about to visit. Opening the door and entering, he stopped short in amaze to find himself confronted by a fairy-like figure which seemed as if it must be the product of a dream.

A peculiarly radiant-looking young girl, very small and slight, and arrayed in spotless white of some diaphanous texture, stood with a great bunch of roses in her hand beside the bed of the sick girl Oswald had come to visit. Upon the bed was a basket, and its contents were spread out on the coverlet, and seemed to comprise every dainty that was needful to tempt an invalid's appetite. The visitor was laughing gaily at the astonished delight

of the little patient, and as Oswald appeared and stood in mute amaze before her, another silvery laugh rang out, and she made a step forward, extending her hand as if to an old friend.

"How do you do, Mr. Oswald Inglehurst? Oh yes, I know all about you, and I don't see the fun of being ceremonious. I learned the other sort of thing in America, where I have been two years, and it's ever so much better than the stiff ways of Europe. I don't know much about England yet, but I'm longing to, because I have always called myself an Englishwoman all my life, though other people say I am a regular cosmopolitan (as if such a small person *could* be anything so terribly ponderous). I know all about you; for I met Bertha Greysart in New York, and we were great friends. Wasn't it odd my coming to Fossbury after that? But England's such a little place, you see. And I hope I'll soon be friends with your sisters. Bertha says there are no girls like them in all the world."

Oswald went through many stages of surprise and mystification, but gradually as the girl talked on in her peculiar and very musical voice (with the distinct enunciation often found in those who speak in many different tongues), and with an intonation rather than an accent somewhat different from that of an English-born subject, he gradually

began to have an idea as to the individuality of the girl to whom he was speaking, though he was greatly at a loss to account for her presence there.

"I think I shall not be far out when I guess that I have the honour of addressing Miss Olga de Witt? I have heard of your arrival at Fossbury with Baroness Steinmetz; but I certainly did not expect to find you here."

"Didn't you? No, I suppose not, but I guess you will get used to seeing me around your parish before long." Miss Olga sometimes indulged in small Americanisms as she talked, but always with the daintiest little air imaginable, which made her altogether charming. "You know my cousin is a doctor—Giles Leland—what a pity he has such a terrible name as Giles—I can't think what his mother was thinking of to give it him. But it wasn't he who sent me here. When I told him that I wanted to have a district and do a lot of good, he just turned up his nose at me, and called me 'Baby'—that young man requires a good deal of snubbing, I think, and he shall get it too. However, last night I found a woman—a char-woman she was—cleaning down the corridor of the hotel we are staying in, and she was crying. So I stopped and asked her what was the matter, and she told me about her daughter here. So to-day I came to see her, and she tells me there are

lots of sick folks round about here, and that there 's nobody to visit them but Giles and you. So I said directly I heard that, 'I 'll go to Mr. Oswald Inglehurst and get him to give me a district,' and so I 'm ever so glad to have met you so soon. Now don't you go and call me Baby too, and tell me I 'm no use except to be looked at. It isn't true a bit, and it makes me very angry."

"Indeed I shall say nothing of the kind," answered Oswald, greatly entertained by this new specimen of a girl, but sufficiently at home with the race to feel no embarrassment; "but I can't give you an answer offhand exactly. I think I must come and pay my respects to the Baroness first, and ask her what she thinks about it all."

Olga laid down her roses upon the sick girl's bed, and clapped her hands delightfully.

"Oh, will you really? How charming of you! Auntie will be so glad to see you. She loves company, and she is the most beautiful old lady who ever lived. You shall come and talk it all over with her. She is an old dear, and always gives me everything I want in the end. Of course she will be shocked at first—everybody will persist in thinking me a baby still. But she is getting used to being shocked with girls and their ways since we have been in America, and I really think she begins to enjoy the sensation. When will you

come? Please come to-day—at four o'clock. I will make you the most delicious Russian coffee if you will. You know we are at the Triple Crown. We want to find some nice household to take us in some time soon, but we shall stay at the hotel for the present. Do come; we shall expect you. Silence gives consent, so I consider you have promised. *Au revoir.*" And almost before Oswald had had time to make up his mind as to the propriety of accepting the invitation so unconventionally given, that white-robed fairy had flitted past him and was gone, leaving him rather under the impression that he had been the victim of an optical illusion.

CHAPTER VIII.

OSWALD was quite ready, when four o'clock came, to pay his respects to the Baroness Steinmetz, of whom he had heard a good deal by this time, principally from the voice of rumour; but he desired to have the countenance of one of his sisters on his appearance before the travellers, and Damaris was the one whose duties upon that particular afternoon permitted her the relaxation.

The advent of Mrs. Leland had made something of a pleasant break in the monotony of the dull summer holiday month so far as the girls and the children were concerned. As a matter of fact, and quite unexpectedly to themselves, they had all fallen in love upon the spot with their enemy's mother. Perhaps it was something in the exceeding *motherliness* of the sweet old face which had caught the affections of the motherless girls; perhaps it was the ready comprehension and tender sympathy she had from the very first

evinced for them in all their little perplexities and troubles. But from some cause or another they all took to her, and now she was a welcome visitor at any time. Di was often slipping through the garden and out at the door behind the surgery into the quiet street where the Lelands lived, and Mrs. Leland quite looked upon her in the light of a regular companion for her daily marketings in the town, which she liked to do in person. The elder girls found her invaluable as a referee on all vexed household questions, and in the short space of a fortnight she had grown to feel towards them like an old and valued friend. Of the son they saw little more than of old, and though they no longer spoke of him as the "horror," they did not specially desire closer acquaintance at present. They still thought him hard and sarcastic and a trifle "uppish," whilst the boys, who of course did not see much of Mrs. Leland, were rather disposed to chaff the sisters for so promptly "going over to the enemy."

The girls had been rather afraid that with the advent of the Baroness and her niece the friendship with Mrs. Leland would experience a check. She would, they feared, be called upon to spend considerable portions of her time with her cousin, and no doubt the Olga of whom they were frequently hearing would take the place that Di

now held as companion to Mrs. Leland in her walks. Di's school would be opening before long, and her time would be no longer her own, and then by the time the next Christmas holidays came she would find her place filled up.

Damaris was rather amused to find how complete was Mrs. Leland's subjugation of the rather brusque and untamable Di; but she thought the influence very good for the girl, who was in danger of growing into over abruptness and frankness now that the gently controlling eye and hand of the mother was no longer there to check and guide; and the elder sister was very glad to take an early opportunity of paying her respects to Mrs. Leland's relatives, who might possibly turn out to be as charming as herself. Certainly Oswald's account of Olga had been prepossessing, and new people were always more or less interesting.

They found the Baroness and her niece comfortably established in the best rooms at the hotel. They had acquired the knack of old travellers, and were able to make the most of their surroundings, and give them something of a homelike look even if they were only staying for a short time. Their quaint old parlour was a perfect bower of roses and other summer flowers; some of the most uncompromising of the chairs had been draped with pieces of Oriental needlework, and the tea equipage upon

the little spindle-legged table was a marvel of dainty costliness. Olga had also a remarkable-looking machine, hissing and spluttering on another table, which she told them was the thing which made the most excellent coffee in the world. She received the guests with charming cordiality and eagerness, was as friendly and unconcerned as though she had known them for years, and quickly led them to the easy chair where sat a very beautiful old lady. She was watching the meeting with evident interest, and now extended to the visitors a white hand, sparkling with diamonds, and bade them welcome in a voice of silvery sweetness.

Damaris well understood what Mrs. Leland meant when she spoke of the sensation which this woman had produced when she had first appeared in society nearly half a century ago. Now, when she was nearer seventy than sixty, she still retained a beauty that many good-looking women never possess even in the hey-day of youth and freshness. Her features were absolutely perfect, her abundant hair of snowy whiteness was still full of crisp waves, and was most becomingly piled upon her stately head, where it was partially concealed by a lace cap, fastened with diamond pins. The complexion was clear and delicate, and the large dark blue eyes of that rare and peculiar violet tint were still as clear and as full of light as those of

her animated young companion. Damaris and Oswald both fell at once under the spell of her beauty and her unconscious stateliness. They felt somewhat as if in the presence-chamber of an empress or queen.

But there was no lack of conversation. The Baroness was a true gentlewoman as well as a woman of the world, and nothing like an awkward pause could well occur in a company over which she presided. Olga dispensed tea and coffee, perched herself upon the arm of her aunt's chair, and began coaxing and pleading for the "district" upon which her heart was set, rather (or so Damaris thought at first) as though it were a new toy and a thing to be provided for her especial delectation and amusement.

The Baroness asked a good many questions of Damaris as to what it was usual for girls in her position to do in such matters. Damaris frankly told her that they, as the daughters of the doctor of the place, had from childhood been accustomed to visit more or less amongst the sick and poor. As children they had accompanied their mother or nurse; as they grew older they had often gone alone or in couples. No doubt their father had been careful as to what class of house he allowed them to enter; but no bad results of any kind had ever come to any of them from such visiting.

"Of course not—how could there?" cried Olga; "and I 'm sure I 'm better able to take care of myself than half the girls who have perhaps never left their own country. Just think of the experiences I have lived through! Why, I know as much of the world at twenty as many women do in all their lives. You won't find your hypocritical beggars taking *me* in in a hurry." And she looked at Oswald with an arch little nod, whilst Damaris began to suspect that this young lady was more alive to the realities of life and its seamy side than her dainty appearance would lead one to expect.

"I will talk to Mr. Oswald Inglehurst about it a little, my dear," said the Baroness quietly, and Olga took the hint, and drew Damaris away to a distant window overlooking the street.

"You are Damaris, are you not—the one that nurses?" was the first and unexpected question. "You can't think how I admire you all. You have a sister who paints, and your brothers are just splendid; I wish you could hear how everybody talks about you. Oh, not here only—right over in America too. Don't laugh; it 's perfectly true. I sort of admired and adored you all before I ever knew I should see you in the flesh. That is why I was so glad to see Oswald. Please don't think me forward for calling you all by your names; but you see I got into the way of it in America, when

I was always hearing about you and how splendid you were. I do so want to know you all. You should just have heard Bertha going on about you. It 's Edmund she 's engaged to, isn't it ? "

" Oh, hush," said Damaris quickly, but beginning now to understand these mysterious allusions to America. " I suppose you have been meeting Bertha Greysart——"

" Yes ; we were ever so long in the same boarding-house—you know everybody nearly lives in boarding-houses in New York—and we two what they called chummed together, and she told me all about everything. It was whilst I was there that the news came about that fearful accident, and Bertha was so awfully cut up I thought she would have had an illness. Of course it was enough to make her, and she did nothing but talk about you all for nights and days together. Did she ever write to Edmund ? "

" Oh no ; it would not have been right. She wrote to Nancy. Don't you understand, Miss De Witt——"

" You 're to call me Olga," interrupted that imperious little person. " I intend to call all of you by your names, and if you won't do the same I shall feel most awfully snubbed."

" Well, Olga then," answered Damaris, smiling. " If you know so much about us, it is fair you

should know a little more, and you must please not say a word about Edmund's engagement to Bertha. As a matter of fact, they never were engaged, but they were mutually attached, and it was always thought that as soon as she came home from her visit in America they would be formally engaged. But our—trouble—has made everything different. Edmund, instead of being pretty well to do, and able to support a wife, will be a poor man for a long time—perhaps all his life—and until the children grow up——"

"Oh, don't go into all that again," cried the animated Olga, interrupting. "Of course I know every bit of that—how Edmund went to Mr. Greysart and told him that he could no longer aspire to his daughter's hand—isn't that grandly put?—and how Mr. Greysart agreed that it must not be thought of any longer, and wrote to Bertha to explain everything. But do you think Bertha is going to agree to give up the only man she ever loved just because he is poor, when she will have money enough to keep them both? I wish you could have heard her reading her father's letter, and commenting on it. It would have done you good, I know!"

Damaris's eyes were very bright, but her answer was gravely spoken.

"Dear Bertha—it was like her. I guessed by

what she said to Nancy that she had not changed. But, dear Olga, there are many things in the way. I do not think Edmund would ever ask a rich woman to be his wife in present circumstances—I am not sure that it would be right for him to do so——"

"Not if he loved her and she loved him with all their hearts? Oh, Damaris, how can you say such a thing! Do you mean that you put nasty, dead, cold money before real true love? Oh, I am ashamed of you. I thought you could rise superior to that silly, proud, senseless feeling that people in books are always ruining their happiness over."

Damaris smiled, but also shook her head.

"There is a great deal to say on both sides of the question, Olga, and if you were ever to be poor you would find out that you were prouder than you had thought when you were rich. I do not think the pride of poverty is as mean and foolish a feeling as you imply, though no doubt it can be carried too far. But leaving Edmund's pride out of the question, there is Bertha's father to be considered. She is an only child, and she ought to think of her father before anybody else. He has been most loving and indulgent to her all her life. It would be a poor return if she were to fly in the face of his expressed wishes, and set his word at defiance."

Olga's eyes were dancing with fun.

"You dear, conscientious, virtuous person—how you do go on! You don't understand Bertha's position in the least. She isn't going to defy her father; she is a good, dutiful, affectionate daughter—quite a pattern; but then she has a pattern father too—at least so she tells me, and she can twist him round her little finger when she has him in the flesh. Oh, you needn't shake your head like that. I 'm sure it 's a merciful Providence that gives us poor womankind the art of wheedling. I don't know how I should have lived without it. Bertha is just 'lying low' now and biding her time. Her father has told her to extend her visit—and she will obey him. He hopes she is learning to forget—really she is building the most delightful castles in Spain all the while. She will come home some day. Meanwhile Mr. Greysart will have seen how splendidly you have all behaved, and will be half wishing after all that he could have Edmund for a son-in-law, and be feeling perhaps sometimes a qualm at having been so willing to avail himself of Edmund's offer. He has no son himself, but plenty of money. He will be thinking sometimes that a good son-in-law without money would suit him better than an objectionable creature with a fortune of his own. Edmund is in the business—nobody could be so suitable for a partner. And

then there will be Bertha coming home with her story—and with no new lover dangling after her—but her heart still in the same place. And then you will see—ah, you will see!"

Olga nodded her head saucily, and shifted from foot to foot in a sort of little impromptu dance. Damaris could not help looking eager and excited; but all she said was:

"Well, Olga, if all this is going to come true nobody will be more delighted than I; but please do not talk about it to the household at large. It would not do for such a possibility to be discussed or even too much thought of there: and a large family is dreadful for letting out secrets."

"I will be discretion itself," answered Olga with laughing eyes, and Damaris felt that she might trust the promise, for she was beginning to see that this vivacious little fairy had a very decided will of her own and no lack of character.

Oswald had been charmed with the Baroness, and was in brighter mood than he had been for long. It was distinctly good for the Inglehursts as a family to see fresh faces, and make acquaintances with persons who had no associations with the past. With old friends who had known their parents words were constantly being spoken, or incidents recalled, that awoke very painful recollections. At times the family had been disposed to shirk

visiting of any kind, and shut its doors against the world. With these new friends no such dangers existed, and Oswald and Damaris had never looked brighter than they did when they walked home together after that introductory interview.

And it was destined that the tie between the Inglehursts and these strangers was to be strengthened rapidly. Only three days later, as the family were at the late tea which was dinner to the boys, who had been out all the day, a hasty ring at the bell startled them all, and the maid announced that Dr. Leland wished particularly to speak to Miss Damaris for a few moments.

"If that fellow is going to presume to send you to some patient of his, just you refuse straight away to go," said Dax sharply, as Damaris rose to her feet. "It 's intolerable enough to have you at old Medlicot's beck and call; but if that Leland fellow tries it on with you, I shall just give him a piece of my mind, and I don't think he 'll do it again. Oh——"

This ejaculation, which did not express any great dismay, was caused through the speaker's having turned round (in response to some very significant kicks from Frank) to find that Giles Leland was himself in the room, the maid having beckoned him thither in her rather too free and easy fashion. If he had heard Dax's incisive

remarks he took no notice, but addressed himself to Damaris:

"The Baroness Steinmetz has been taken ill with one of her attacks of the heart, and Olga has sent me to ask if you will be so very kind as to come and stay with her for an hour or two, until it has passed off. My mother, it so happens, has a bad headache, and is unable to be of any assistance; and these attacks, though not exactly dangerous, are sufficiently trying to be alarming to a young girl, and the maid is of no use in illness."

"I will go at once," said Damaris, moving to the door.

"Many thanks. The carriage is here. I will drive you if you allow me. I am going back immediately with some drug which I think may give relief."

Damaris was already gone, and with a slight bow to the assembled family, Dr. Leland was retiring also, when Nancy offered him a cup of tea, which he accepted, whilst Dax, who had been looking very mutinous all this time, pushed back his chair and rose to his feet.

"I do not exactly see why my sister is to be at the beck and call of the whole town like this," he said. "If this Baroness of yours is subject to these attacks, why in the name of common sense does she not have an attendant of her own, who can be

of some use on such occasions? I must confess I call this summons an uncommonly unprofessional sort of thing."

"I quite agree with you," answered Giles, equably. "I should certainly never dream of taking the liberty to request Miss Damaris's service in any professional capacity; but to bring her a personal message from a girl who spoke as though the two were friends I have no hesitation in doing. My little cousin said she was sure Miss Damaris would come to help her for a few hours, and I confess I saw nothing very extraordinary in the suggestion. I am sorry if I have given offence. Another time, if such a thing should happen, I will direct Olga to write a note, and send it by her own messenger."

Dax felt that he had got the worst of it, and had put himself in the wrong. It was not a pleasant feeling, and just now he was more prone to harsh speeches than he had ever been in his life before. He turned away from Giles Leland as though he had no more to say to him, and remarked to his sisters in general:

"Well, the way you are all taking up with a rabble of strangers is a mystery to me. One is sick of the very names of these wonderful new friends. I suppose it 's all right for those who like it, but I know I wouldn't have my sisters

ordered about by everybody if I could help it."

Damaris was back before the silence with which this speech was received had been broken. Dr. Leland carried her off to the carriage, and Di broke out impatiently:

"Dax, I wish you could be just decently civil to Dr. Leland;" and then she broke off, flushing hotly at the remembrance of her own rudeness, now many weeks old.

"Oh, so he is added to the list of pets, is he?" asked Dax, tauntingly. "Well, there certainly is no accounting for taste."

CHAPTER IX.

DAMARIS found that her presence beside the sick bed of the Baroness was such a relief to Olga that she not only remained with her the whole night but consented to wait until the patient was fully recovered. These attacks, being only recent in their occurrence, were not a little disquieting to Olga, who had never been used to illness either in herself or in her aunt; and the distressing nature of the paroxysms of breathlessness and acute pain was enough to try the nerve of a more experienced person. Frequently, however, the invalid was at ease, and quietly sleeping for many hours together, and then the two girls left the maid in charge, and enjoyed themselves after their own fashion, exchanging confidences and growing really intimate, learning more of each other's character than would have been possible under ordinary circumstances in so short a time.

It was during these hours so spent that Olga,

with characteristic frankness and boldness, spoke to Damaris of the hope she had already begun to cherish (suggested by a conference between her aunt and Mrs. Leland), that some day she might be an inmate of the red brick house behind the row of lime trees—her hope that the Inglehursts would consent to let them occupy their vacant suite of rooms, and take them in as boarders for at least a considerable period.

"It is the very thing I had set my heart on ever since the doctors told auntie that she must settle down quietly somewhere, and she said she would like to be near the Lelands. I have just longed to have a home, and see what home life in a family is like. I had never thought of anything so delicious as being with *you*. But oh, Damaris, do think about it a little. I know auntie has said that she would pay ten guineas a-week for a nice suite of rooms in a gentleman's house, where we could take luncheon and dinner with the family, and have no cares of house-keeping. Of course, wine and extras, and the maid, if we brought one, would be paid for separately; and I'd much rather not be bothered with a maid, if there were nice servants in the house, who would help me sometimes if auntie were very troublesome. This woman is a perfect gaby—no good at all. And I always do auntie's hair myself. No one can

make her look so nice as I. I don't think we should be so very troublesome, Damaris. We should not bother you with our company when we were not wanted; and I should always know. Do say you are not offended at my saying all this, and tell me you will think about it."

"I am not in the least offended, and I certainly shall think of it, and speak to Edmund and Nancy. Indeed, we have sometimes thought of some such plan ourselves; but so far we have taken no steps. Dax has been against it, and we are rather afraid boarders might not like the children."

"The children are the best part of it. Roly-Poly is—are—I never know what person to use—perfectly bewitching. And we would not be tiresome or *difficile* to deal with. We have knocked about the world far too much for that; and we should be close to Giles when auntie was taken with an attack. Oh, here is Giles, coming in in a great hurry. Why, he saw auntie only two hours ago. I wonder what is the matter now."

The moment that Damaris caught sight of the grave, tense look on Dr. Leland's face, she felt certain that there was bad news in store for her, and his first words showed that she had not divined wrongly.

"Miss Damaris," he said, "I have just had an urgent summons from the works where your

brother is manager. There has been an accident, and he has been hurt in some way. I do not know any particulars. I am on my way there now. I came to speak to you. Would you wish to come with me? Or will you return home to make ready there?"

Damaris was very pale, but perfectly self-possessed.

"I will go with you, please. Olga will send a message home, I know."

Three minutes later the carriage was rapidly threading its way through the streets of the town, and Damaris, leaning back and closing her eyes for a moment, spoke unconsciously half aloud.

"I always knew it would come some day."

"What would come, Miss Damaris?"

She glanced up quickly, and caught such a sympathetic look shining out of those keen brown eyes as she had not known them capable of expressing. She answered readily and frankly:

"I have been afraid Dax would break down. I know he has been unhinged and out of health ever since that other accident. He was the only one of us who saw it, and he has never got over the shock. I have had a horror that something would happen to him. I know that his work wants much nerve and steadiness. I have tried to speak to him sometimes, but it was worse than useless.

That dreadful irritability of his was all part of it. I think you have heard and seen something of it yourself, Dr. Leland."

"Yes; and you are quite right to attribute it to some physical cause. Unhinged nerves will often cause frightful irritation. It is a symptom of the malady. Your brother has been looking ill ever since I knew him. I began to think that it was chronic with him."

"Dax has always been considered the strongest of the family. He has never had a day's illness in his life. It has been unnatural to think of him as being out of health."

"If he has a sound constitution that will be an immense thing in his favour now," said the doctor, encouragingly; and then the carriage rolled beneath an archway, and drew up within a paved yard, surrounded on every side by high buildings, from many parts of which the clank and thud of working machinery was audible. Damaris turned very white as she descended from the carriage, but her manner was perfectly calm and self-contained.

The senior manager, to whom Dax acted as assistant, came hurrying forward.

"Thank Heaven you are come, sir," he said. "It has been a shocking piece of business; but the worst of the bleeding has been stopped now, and we have got him free of the machinery, which I

thought once we never should do till you came. It is the arm which has suffered. It is a mercy it was not torn from the socket; but he had the presence of mind to stop the fly-wheel, and that saved his life. He is in the office now. We got him carried down the ladders before we could do anything for him. There was terrible bleeding at first, but we applied ligatures as well as we could, and it has ceased to a great extent. Is that lady his sister?" And the man, catching sight of Damaris for the first time, took off his hat, and wished he had been more guarded in his words.

But Damaris felt something as Dax had done when he had visited the scene of the railway accident, and she followed the two men to the office without a quiver of weakness. Warm though the day was the manager had had the sense to have a huge fire lighted in the room, and beside this fire wrapped in a warm rug, Dax was lying back, his face drawn and as white as death, his eyes closed and circled with deep shadows, whilst his right arm was covered with a cloth, which was almost soaked through with blood.

Damaris went forward and bent over him.

"Dax," she said, softly.

The heavy eyelids were raised, and Dax looked up in her face.

"Is that you, Damaris?" The words were barely audible. "What is it all?"

"You have hurt yourself, and I have come to look after you," she answered gently; and then, taking from Giles's hand the draught he had been mixing, she put it to her brother's lips, and had the satisfaction of seeing him swallow it.

"That 's a good thing," said the manager, drawing a deep breath. "I couldn't get him to take anything."

"I must look at this arm," said the doctor, with his hand on Dax's wrist. "Miss Damaris, I am not sure that I ought to let you stay."

She looked at him full and fearlessly.

"I shall be very grateful if you will," she said, "for I shall have to be his nurse. You know our old nurse at home is ill with a feverish throat, and must not attempt nursing yet awhile, and I have had experience of this sort of thing. I have been in hospital wards and have had surgical cases under my care. I think I shall be able to help you."

"Hospital cases are different from one's nearest relatives," said Giles, studying her face quietly and intently; "but you shall do as you wish."

"Thank you," answered Damaris, quietly, and then she came round and placed herself at his side, to assist him in the task he had set himself to do.

It was a terrible injury that was revealed to

their eyes as the temporary bandages were removed. The lower arm and hand had escaped to a great extent, but the elbow was terribly crushed, and the upper arm was torn in a fearful way, the bone broken, and the shoulder dislocated. Injuries so severe could not be treated in haste, but it was necessary to secure all the arteries before attempting to move the sufferer, and this matter was quickly and skilfully accomplished by Dr. Leland, with the assistance of Damaris, who never once lost her self-command or presence of mind. Dax was fully conscious, but only shrank and winced a little. He had lost so much blood that his condition was critical, and despite the heat of the fire he was cold, pulseless, and shivering, and it was with a very grave face that Giles Leland had him conveyed at last to the carriage. He had long since despatched a telegram for an eminent surgeon to meet him at the Inglehursts' as quickly as possible.

Damaris sat supporting Dax's head, and the doctor occupied the opposite seat, seldom taking his glance from the death-like face, and occasionally holding the patient's wrist. Damaris did not ask if there were danger—she knew only too well that after such a shock and such an injury there must be danger for many days, even though no vital part was touched. She felt as if the drive home were all

part of some strange dream, and when she saw at the familiar door the white anxious faces of the sisters on the look out for the carriage, she was the first to slip out and go forward to meet them.

"You must not be too much frightened," she said; "he looks dreadful, but everything depends upon getting him to bed and letting him get over the shock. Is everything ready? Is there a fire? That is right. And somebody to help to carry him? That is very good. Di, dear, just go to the horses' heads and then coachman will help in the lifting. You were always friends with the horses: they will stand quiet for you."

Di was only too glad to have some office assigned her. She did not dare to give more than one glance at the death-like face as Dax was carried into the house. Great scalding tears rose to her eyes, and a sob broke from her as she stood. But there was comfort in the thought that Mrs. Leland was in the house. They had sent to tell her of the trouble directly Olga's message had arrived, and she had lost no time in coming to them. She was like a tower of strength in their midst. For never before had the fatherless and motherless children so felt the need of the strong and loving care of parents in such a terrible calamity.

When the coachman came back he spoke a few

kindly words to little Miss Di, who in old days had been his favourite in the family.

"Bless you, Master Dax will pull through like a house on fire, once he gets them bones mended," said the worthy man; "and he's in good hands I take it, for they all say as Dr. Leland is a rare hand with all sorts of cases. Don't you fret, Miss Di. It'll all come right again. Master Dax has as many lives as a cat. He'll be on his pins again in no time, you'll see."

Di tried to take comfort from the kindly-meant speech, but her heart was terribly heavy as she went slowly indoors. Nancy and Damaris and Mrs. Leland had gone upstairs, but Ella, white and tearful, was lingering in the hall, listening for any call from above for what might be wanted. Di rushed into her arms, and for a few minutes they mingled their tears; but then they started apart, for another carriage was driving up to the still open door, and the sisters recognised in the occupant, who quickly alighted, an old friend of their father's, who was associated with him sometimes in difficult and dangerous cases. He spoke courteously to them as he passed upstairs, but his very presence in the house seemed an omen of evil; and for long after there were calls to the two younger sisters for various things wanted from below, and once Dr. Leland came dashing

down the stairs three steps at once, and tore most unceremoniously across the garden to the surgery and back—a liberty he had never before taken, and which impressed the sisters afresh with the urgency of the case.

It seemed a terrible time of waiting; but Ella was thoughtful enough to have tea prepared and brought into the dining-room, though the young maids were so demoralised by the excitement and fear pervading the house that the sisters had to do everything with their own hands. Still, it filled up the time, which was a good thing, and there were no more calls from Dax's room; till at last there were footsteps on the stairs, and Nancy and Damaris came in together.

Di started up, and the question died upon her lips, but Damaris answered by a faint smile.

"They say he is better. They think he will sleep. No, don't let us talk about it just yet. Nancy is new to such things, and she is rather upset. Yes, give her some tea, Ella, and she will be better soon. Good little girls to have got it ready for us. Perhaps the doctors will like some before they go."

Nancy had sunk down in an arm-chair, and was struggling to hold back her tears. Ella hung over her, caressing and tending her, until the tension passed, and the colour began to come back to her face.

Damaris had been too useful throughout to feel the horror of the thing quite in the same way, and she was a more seasoned vessel; but there had been enough to try her nerves too, and Di made her sit still whilst she brought her tea, and refrained from any questions, only looking at her sometimes with eager, wistful eyes.

Damaris understood what that look meant, and answered it.

"They hope the danger will soon pass; but there was dreadful bleeding at the time, and sometimes there is fever or blood-poisoning after such injuries, and then there is always danger. But for the moment he is comfortable, and they will keep him under morphia for many hours, so that he will feel no more pain yet. Rest and sleep will do him great good, and you know he has a splendid constitution."

"How did it happen?"

"I have not heard all the details, but I think it was like this. He was in the machinery room, where they were trying some new effects, and something went a little wrong, and there was a great noise, and Dax started and stepped back, and then his coat sleeve got caught in some other wheel behind him, and was dragged into the works before anybody knew. He was able to get hold of some wheel and stop it, or else he would have been

killed, and they stopped the machinery in a moment. But one arm was crushed and mangled before anything could be done. It is his right arm, too, which makes it worse."

"Will he ever get the use of it properly again?"

"That no one, I should think, could tell so soon. Most wonderful cures are made now. I have not asked anything yet. It is better not to try and know everything at once."

"You were afraid Dax would hurt himself one of these days," said Ella, looking across at them. "Oh, what shall we do with him when he is ill? He has been so——"

"He will probably be much better to deal with ill than well," answered Damaris, with a touch of her customary brightness; "but do not you trouble your little head over that. You will have to concentrate your energies upon making dainty and savoury messes out of nothing for the refractory patient. The nursing I arrogate to myself. I am going to show Master Dax that the much abused talent he has growled and scoffed at, on and off for years, will be thought of very differently when it is exercised on behalf of his lordship himself. I shall have the whip hand of him for the next three months, and I intend to make the best of it."

"Three months," echoed Ella, aghast; "do you mean that he will be ill all that time? Oh, whatever shall we do?"

"He may not be really ill for so long," answered Damaris, who had spoken unguardedly at the moment; "but I'm afraid he will not get back his full strength under that time. Cases like these are very tedious, and there is a great drain on the system. I wish Dax had not run down so all these months."

And there she stopped short, for Nancy was looking at her with troubled eyes. Di suddenly broke out almost wildly:

"Oh, if mamma were only here! How can children live without their mothers when trouble like this comes?"

Ella's head sank down upon the head of the sofa by which she was kneeling, and Nancy's lips quivered again. Damaris rose quickly from her seat and kissed each one of her sisters in turn.

"It is hard; but, darlings, God knows best, and He is our Father, and will watch over us through it all. I think He is never nearer to us really than in the hours when things seem darkest around us. I remember how dear mother used to say so; and if we have not her to help us through the trial that has come, I am sure the best help will be to remember her words, and try and bear

things as she would have done had she been here to face them. And we have each other to love, and troubles *do* bind us closer and closer together, as I have felt again and again since our dear ones have been taken away. Dax has been the only one who has seemed to grow more apart through the trouble, and perhaps this fresh trouble to him and to us will be God's own way of giving him back to us."

CHAPTER X.

"I THINK there must be a change of some kind to-night, Miss Damaris. I shall look in at midnight to see how he is. If you want me sooner you will not hesitate to send."

Damaris raised her tired eyes to Giles Leland's face with an expression of mute inquiry which touched him strangely. He knew so well what that look meant.

"Our patient has a marvellously tough constitution," he said in a tone of kind encouragement. "He has struggled through so much as it is that I am quite hopeful he will pull through. I cannot say more. I must not express greater confidence than I feel: but I have a distinct and well-grounded hope. I think after to-night I shall be able to form a better opinion as to the ultimate issue."

It was half-past nine o'clock in the evening. Damaris, who took the entire charge of the night

nursing, had come into her brother's room simultaneously with the doctor, whose attendance upon Dax during the past weeks had been most assiduous. Night and day he was to be found at the bed-side, and he had long since been furnished with a latch key, so that he could let himself into the house at any hour (the front door was never locked at nights now) to ascertain how his patient was doing. Dax had been fearfully ill for the past three weeks, and the toughness of the family constitution had been terribly tried, not only in his own person, but in that of his assiduous nurses amongst his brothers and sisters. No hired help had been enlisted. From motives of affection as much as from those of economy, the Inglehursts had insisted on tending the sufferer themselves, and most devotedly had he been nursed; but the long strain was beginning to tell upon the whole household, and Giles saw by the tremor of the girl's lips that her self-command was being sorely tried.

His keen face softened to a look which betrayed more than he intended, though Damaris was not looking at him. He took her hand in his and found it cold and trembling.

"I am not certain that I must not put a stop to these night watches of yours. They are growing too much for you."

"Oh, no—I must have him at nights. I would not for anything that the others should know how dreadful the nights sometimes are. They have enough as it is—and they relieve me of everything but that. Nancy has the whole household on her mind, as well as Dax, by day, and Ella is almost worn out as it is with anxiety and work. I have Frank close at hand in the box-room. He always looks in two or three times in the night, and if I want him I have only to knock on the wall; and sometimes Oswald comes and sits with me too; but, poor boy, he has too much illness in his parish for us to let him do much here at home. Indeed, I am the only one fit for it. It will not always be as it has been. There will be a change soon. But I must take him at nights till then, please."

Giles looked at her steadily and then said:

"Very well. It is not for me to dictate; but at least you shall not be alone to-night. If you will allow me I will go across and tell my mother, and bring back some writing that I have to do, and I will do it here. It will be more satisfactory to myself, for if there is a change to-night, as I expect, I would rather be on the spot without delay."

The look of gratitude in the girl's eyes was assent enough. If Dax had been a brother the young doctor could not have been more devoted

in his attentions, and when the night fever and delirium had run high, or the hours of suffering had been unusually severe, the relief to Damaris when she heard Dr. Leland's step upon the stairs had been untold, and he had often remained an hour or more with her, till the worst of the night was passed.

Dax was a difficult subject to deal with, for hardly any kind of sedative affected him, and it was most perplexing how to secure for him the amount of rest and relief absolutely essential to recovery. Fever had set in and had run dangerously high, and this had set up inflammation in the injured arm, so that there had been grave fears that amputation would become necessary. So far, however, there had always been the hope of saving both life and limb, though it had become patent to all that if the fever did not abate shortly the patient must sink from exhaustion.

By day Dax generally lay pretty quiet, in the lethargy of complete prostration, sometimes hardly moving, scarcely seeming even to breathe, and only roused with difficulty to take the necessary nourishment prescribed for him. But at night the fever persistently recurred, sometimes accompanied by strong delirium, at others by attacks of terrible pain, during which he was generally fully conscious of his surroundings, and would address by name

any persons about him, as he seldom did by day. It was these nights that had so tried Damaris; for she had the brunt of them to bear. Frank was often with her—always if he was awakened by sounds from the sick-room, or if she called him to her aid. But she seldom did this unless obliged, and the strain upon her had been very great—greater perhaps than any one realised.

To-night Dax lay still and quiet as he had done all the day. She did not know whether or not to call it sleep, but still it was rest of a kind, and she longed for it to continue. It was generally about ten o'clock that the restlessness began to come on: but the hour had struck some little time, and the sounds in the house had ceased, still he did not move, and she fancied that his breathing was a little less rapid and feeble.

And Giles Leland was in the house—there was great restfulness for her in that thought. He had been upstairs again to look at the patient and tell her that he was in the library at work, and that she must send Frank for him the moment there was the least change. He had made her settle herself in the easy-chair by the fire, from which spot she commanded a view of the bed, and the room had been left dark and dim, lighted only by the gleam of the fire and the ray of a carefully shaded candle. Damaris lay back in her chair

with a sense of strange restfulness, conscious that some crisis was at hand, yet so numbed by mental and bodily fatigue as to be incapable of any strong emotion or excitement. She was not sleepy exactly. Her mind was clear, and her eyes were not closed, but were fixed upon the flickering flames as they licked the sides of the log of wood upon the hearth. Her mind had gone back to the past—the home of old days, with its unbroken circle of loved faces—the father and mother and their "twelve olive branches," as he had loved to call them. What a happy home it had been! How the tender guiding hand of the mother and the watchful strengthening love of the father had been felt through every event of their youth! How wonderfully those loving parents had trained and taught their children, fitting them for the trials and crosses which had fallen upon them, little as they had been expected then!

Damaris had been enough away from home, and had seen family life in other homes sufficiently often to be able to appreciate the difference between her brothers and sisters and some others she had met: and as she mused to-night of the events of the past months, a smile of tender pride curved her lips, and her eyes shone brightly through a suspicious gleam of tears. She recalled the terrible trouble of the early spring. What a blow it had

been to the household, and how nobly it had been borne. She thought of Edmund and the uncomplaining way in which he had renounced, without a word, and as a matter of course, those prospects most dear to the heart of man—a home and a wife of his own—that he might take the father's place with the children here, and strive to keep the old home together for all. Then there was Oswald, with his life of strictest self-denial, his unremitting labours amongst the poor, his acts of almost ascetic self-deprivation, that his flock might not suffer more than was absolutely inevitable through his own lack of private funds. Latterly she had discovered that he had undertaken the copying of music for the Abbey church, and had sat up till one or two in the mornings over it, in order that he might have something more to give away. He never spoke of this to any one, and it was only accident that revealed it to her. There was something in the expression of the girl's eyes as she thought of these things which showed how proud she felt of her brothers. And this self-devotion was not confined to the two elders of the family. Had not Dax been labouring more and more assiduously at his vocation, despite shattered nerves and visibly impaired health? And as for Frank—dear Frank—was he not the very sunshine of the house, although his prospects in life were perhaps

the dreariest of all? Had he not without a single murmur given up all idea of the career which had been marked out for him, and taken to a most monotonous and uncongenial life rather than add to the burdens of the heavily burdened household? And since this cloud of illness had rested upon them, had he not given up every sort of recreation and pleasure to come and sit with Dax from tea-time till he went to bed, that Nan[illegible] and Ella might have their evenings free after the long hours of watching by day?

Damaris did indeed feel that she had cause to be proud of her brothers. Of the goodness of the sisters she thought, perhaps, something less, though not the less tenderly. But it was always the mission of women and girls to turn to and keep things going smoothly. It appeared to be a part of nature's vocation. But men (young men, particularly) and boys were seldom brought up to think after this fashion, and it seemed to Damaris a touching and beautiful thing that they had each one so put aside personal wishes, personal advantage, and personal ambition, to work and think and labour for the good of the united family. The interests of the weaker ones were to come first, and the stronger ones could take care of themselves later. The strongest, not the weakest, were to go to the wall, if any one did. The children were to

feel the difference as little as possible ; and Damaris knew well that one of Dax's motives in his unremitting toil had been to earn money enough to put Kit to some good school, as she herself was working to keep Di at hers. This fact had come out during Dax's illness, when he had dropped words in his delirium that she had understood perfectly. Had any girls such brothers as hers ? She looked towards the motionless figure on the bed, and a quick stab of pain shot through her heart.

Was there to be a blank in the familiar circle of faces ? Was the " doctor's dozen " to be no longer a dozen, no longer a complete number, as before ? So far there had been no deaths in the younger generation. Twelve children had been born in the dear old home, and the twelve had grown up there without one gap in the ranks. Was one of their number to be taken away now ? Was the life that had seemed to be the strongest, perhaps the most promising of all, to be cut off just on the threshold of manhood's prime ?

The thought was a very sad and solemn one—the more so, perhaps, to Damaris, in that she loved Dax with a very special love, feeling that she understood him better than any of the rest, and also that that she knew less of his heart and mind than she did of those of the other brothers. Had it been Edmund, Oswald, or Frank who lay there,

she would have felt confident that if the call came it would find the spirit ready to go forth fearlessly to meet the Unseen. But though all youths are reserved where their deeper thoughts are concerned, Dax was peculiarly silent, and she had never really read him as she had read the others. Had he really and truly accepted the salvation offered by Christ? Had his sins been washed white in the Blood of the Lamb?

She rose under the stress of deep emotion and anxiety and approached the bed. To her surprise she saw that his eyes were open, and that he was looking at her with a faint smile upon his white lips. The flush of fever, which generally glowed in his cheeks at this time, had quite faded away, leaving a marble pallor behind. The face was terribly wasted and hollow, and the square line of the jaw was more marked than ever. But the eyes looked calm and natural in their expression and Damaris felt a throb at her heart—she scarcely knew whether it were of joy or of fear. The looked-for change or crisis had come. But was it for life or death?

"Damaris, is that you?"

"Yes, Dax; but you must not talk. Can you take this?"

He swallowed with more ease than before, and again looked at her long and earnestly.

"Damaris, where is mother?"

She hardly knew what to reply. Had he forgotten? At such a time as this he must not be agitated. She answered him by a question:

"Do you want her, dear boy?"

"She was here just now," answered Dax. "Did you not see her? She came in at the door—she had on the dress with the white line in it that I liked so much—and she came and stood by the bed and looked at me, and held her hand over me and said 'Peace.' You must have seen her. You were in that chair by the fire all the time."

Damaris did not answer. A sort of awe fell upon her. Was the veil indeed so thin between the visible and the invisible world that her brother's eyes could pierce it? Dax was looking through her, as it seemed, rather than at her. There was something in his glance which awed yet comforted her. It was as if a deep peace had indeed fallen upon him.

"I thought she would have taken me with her," said Dax. "But she has left me here instead. Damaris—I can't remember—but read to me about the multitude in white robes that no man can number, for I know that *she* must be amongst them, though she did come to me in the guise in which I knew her."

Damaris turned to get the little well-worn Bible, a mist of tears rising in her eyes the while. But her voice was steady as she read the wonderful words, and Dax lay with closed eyes, listening or sleeping, she scarcely knew which.

She had only just ended when she heard a step on the stairs, and the door was softly opened. She knew that Giles Leland had come in, and was bending over Dax; but she still kept her seat beside the table on which stood the shaded candle; her head was bent, and her hands were clasped in deep and silent emotion.

What would she have to hear when he came to her side again? The crisis had come—was the change to be for life or death?

What was the import of that vision from the unseen land, which is not, perhaps, so very far from ours if we could but realise it? Was it the call for the son to join the parents on the other side of the river, or was it but a gracious vision vouchsafed to one who had stood at the threshold of the everlasting gates, but who had been sent back to a renewed battle upon earth, strengthened by a word of peace from the loved ones on the other side?

Perhaps it was strange that Damaris should take her brother's words so literally and seriously. Most watchers by a sick bed would have attributed

the whole thing to an illusion of the weakened senses—a simple hallucination such as fever-patients continually experience. Somehow Damaris never sought to explain it after this fashion. It seemed very natural to her that the mother should be near them at such an hour. Had she not been herself experiencing a wonderful sense of rest and calm? Love is stronger than death; that Damaris truly believed. And surely the yearning mother-love in that faithful heart would draw the mother towards her loved ones at this hour of intense anxiety and peril! Surely she might have been graciously permitted to show herself to her boy—to breathe a single word to strengthen him either for life or death! To Damaris it all seemed a natural and beautiful outcome of the eternal love of God—that love which is shadowed forth and reflected in the human heart of man. And as she sat still, waiting for the sentence she knew must soon be spoken, she was able to say, as she had never yet been able to do in her heart of hearts, "Thy will be done;" for she had received such a blessed assurance of the deep and tender love overshadowing them all, that it no longer seemed hard to let Dax go.

Was it minutes, or was it hours, that passed before the silence was broken? She herself could never have told. But at last she was aware that

a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and Giles Leland's voice was in her ear.

"He will *do* now, Miss Damaris. There has been a wonderful change for the better. The fever has gone, and for the present the pain also. He is sleeping like a child, and looks as though he would sleep till morning. If he does so, I think that he will wake up out of all danger. I think you may rest assured that the worst is past."

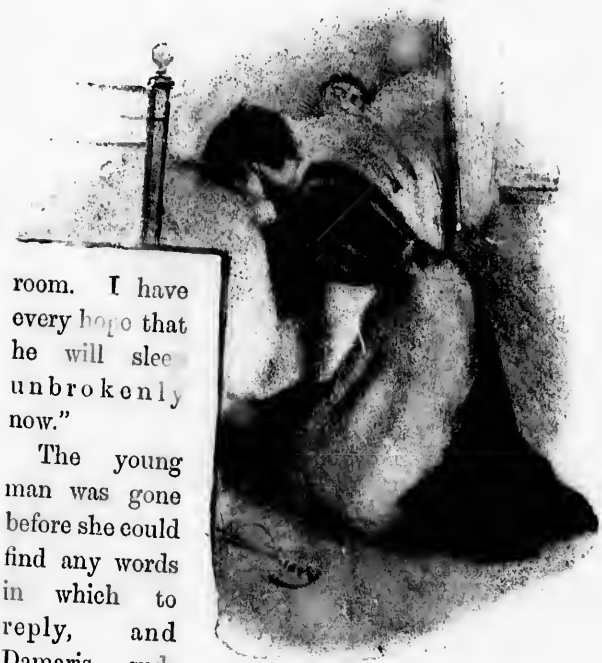
Damaris could not trust herself to speak. She stood up and looked into the kindly face bending over her, and she held out her hand. It was taken in a close clasp that brought her back somewhat to the realities of life. Her lips quivered, and she dashed her hand across her eyes.

"I think I am just a little upset," she said, commanding her voice with difficulty. "But, oh, Dr. Leland, I am very grateful to you—we all are. I do not know what we should have done without you. You have been so good to us all this while."

He still held her hand. His voice, too, was not quite under its ordinary control.

"I should like to think that you could never do without me any more, Damaris," he said. And then, quickly recovering his usual manner, he dropped her hand, and said:

"I will go and tell any of your brothers who may be up. This room must be kept perfectly quiet; but I think there are watchers in the house. You can rest yourself, though you will stay in the room. I have every hope that he will slee unbrokenly now."



"Damaris suddenly sank to her knees."

The young man was gone before she could find any words in which to reply, and Damaris suddenly sank to her knees and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh! mother, mother, mother!" she cried in

a sobbing whisper. "Sweet mother! I am very sure that you have been with your children to-night!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE long terrible strain was over. The danger had passed, and Dax was recovering. The brothers and sisters were able to breathe once more, but it seemed as if there were other troubles ready to spring upon them the moment one load of anxiety was removed. Nancy came to Edmund one evening with a very grave face, and he knew exactly what was coming before she spoke.

"Edmund," she said, "I am so sorry. I have put it off as long as I can; but I have to ask you for more money; you see——"

"Of course I see. I knew it must be so We have had a terrible time of expense to go through, and though friends have been very kind to us ——"

"Yes, I do not know what we should have done without those grapes, peaches, and jellies that were sent, and even now Dax often hardly touches anything else. But if you knew how meat has flown

when there has been strong beef-tea to be made every day, and then nurse has been so poorly we have had to have a charwoman in regularly to help in the house. We girls have been so taken up with the nursing, and——"

"Of course, of course. I was going to ask how the funds were holding out. To be sure you must have more. You know we have a small reserve fund laid by against a rainy day—and I'm sure this has been one if anything could be."

"Yes, indeed," answered Nancy with a sigh, and then she hesitated a little and presently added, "Edmund I don't know if I ought to tell you—I hate to bother you, and we have kept everything as far as possible to ourselves, we girls; but I do not think we *can* go on living in this house unless we make some sort of different arrangement. I don't think you know how many expenses there are in a big house, and it's not as though the furniture or carpets were all new to start with. Things are showing signs of wear, and how they are ever to be replaced I do not know. And listen, for I think you ought to know, I could never have got on upon the money you can spare me for the housekeeping, without actually pinching the children and you all, if it had not been that Damaris and Ella and Frank all brought money to help me. You knew about Damaris and her

nursing, but Ella begged that her painting might be a secret, for she was afraid Dax would be vexed; and we could not bear him worried when he was so unwell and irritable. But she colours photographs, and touches up negatives for Mr. Fothergill, and she has done some designs for Wells and Turner, the art decorators, and has some commissions for more. But since Dax has been ill, nobody has been able to do anything extra, and the money has just seemed to fly. Frankie has given me every penny he possesses, and I don't think the boy has clothes enough to take him through the winter; he looks growing out of everything he has, and I know he has nothing of his own. Edmund, dear, please don't look so troubled, or I shall be sorry I have told you, but I did think——"

"That I ought to know—and so I ought, Nancy. You are quite right to speak. I have been afraid for some time that we were wrong in trying to live on in this big house; but it was hard to think of leaving it. Still, we must face the future and its outlook manfully. Here is Dax now earning nothing, and I am afraid to think what his future may be. I know Leland thinks his nerves have been fearfully shattered, and will not recover for a long time, so that his going back to the works is out of the question, even if he ever gets the use of

his arm again. And he ought to have a thorough change of scene and air later on—a sea voyage or something of that kind—if he is ever to be a sound man again." Edmund pulled up short with a deep sigh. "Well, we must see what we can do—one step at a time, as we see our way. Dax has been given back to us from the dead, as it almost seems. It is not the time to repine. But we must seriously think about some radical change in our way of living. I suppose we must try and sell the house."

"There is another way," said Nancy, rather timidly. "But I do not know if you would like it."

"I think we should all like anything better than turning out," said Edmund. "What is the alternative, Nancy?"

"The alternative is to let our first floor rooms to Baroness Steinmetz and Olga, who have made a definite offer for them. They very much want to board with a family of what they call 'nice people,' and offer ten guineas a-week simply for their board and lodging, every extra to be paid for, and I know they are very liberal people. Of course, we should have to keep a good cook, a kitchenmaid, and two maids for house and parlour work, in addition to nurse, but just think of the margin that would remain out of the five hundred

and fifty pounds, or thereabouts, which ten guineas a-week comes to in a year. I believe all the extra service, the extra fires, and extra living, would not cost three hundred, even if we did things on a very generous scale. And that puts more than two hundred into our pockets, in addition to the fact that we all live in the old fashion, with properly served and cooked meals, and no more of that pinching and paring which has been trying for us all, though you boys have been so good about it, and have never complained. Oh, Edmund, Damaris and Ella and I have talked it over and over again; but we were almost afraid to mention it to you boys. Dax did once hear us talking, and he was furious; but then he was thinking of our keeping a regular boarding-house — it does make a difference when our inmates would be people like the Baroness and Olga, who have been so wonderfully kind and sympathetic and friendly all these weeks. I'm sure the fruit and flowers they have sent—and oh, Edmund, when it comes to the choice between that and turning out, and the expense and anxiety of a move, and the uncertainty of ever selling the house——"

"Why, of course, there can be no question about it," answered Edmund, whose face, grave and intent to start with, had cleared wonderfully as Nancy proceeded. "My dear child, I can only

say that this most liberal offer, coming at such a time, ought to show us, if anything can, that we are never tried beyond what we are able to bear. If you girls are willing to have these people in the house, I will answer for the rest of us. Come and let us look at the rooms at once. Will they be good enough for the Baroness?—commodious enough and all that?—and one of them will surely have to be turned into a sitting-room?"

"Yes, but we have got all that arranged for," cried Nancy, brightening up. "Do come and see, Edmund. The Baroness, will, of course, have the room that belonged to our parents, and if she brings a maid, which is not quite settled—but I almost think she will do, as she is growing so much the invalid—the dressing-room, which has a bed in it, will do for her. Then the small spare room will be Olga's, with the best furniture out of the large spare room, and the large spare room — see here it is — will make a capital sitting-room. The Baroness wishes (if she comes) to furnish it after her own fancy. We have talked it all over with Olga, who has set her heart on being our boarder; and the little boudoir will be Olga's special sanctum. You see there is exactly the accommodation they require, and we have all grown very fond of Olga. I don't think anybody will really mind, if you don't, except

perhaps poor Dax; and we need not tell him till he is better."

"I think when Dax is better, and hears how this arrangement will save his sisters and Frank from unfitting and sometimes uncongenial toil—not that I have the least false shame about working, or even seeing my sisters work when there is need—he will become reconciled to the innovation. Indeed, I believe it will be as much a relief to him as it is to me; for as soon as he has grown stronger, the sense of helplessness will be certain to come upon him and try him very much. Then, I am sure, he will be glad enough to know that the household wheels can revolve more smoothly and easily than ever they have done since our trouble, notwithstanding the fact that he is helpless for the present, and may have to remain for a long time in idleness."

It seemed to Nancy as if a load was rolled from her heart.

"Oh, Edmund," she said, "I wish I had asked you before. But Dax's illness came in the way, when we could not have begun any new arrangement; but we girls have had it in our minds all these weeks, and have been so hoping it might be arranged. Oh, are you going out? Is it not rather late?"

"I am going to pay my respects to the Baroness,

and have a little business conversation with her, putting before her some of the drawbacks of coming into a house with twelve inmates, and after she knows them, perhaps we may settle something definite. I know she does not object to an evening visitor, for Oswald often goes in to have a chat."

"She likes it," said Nancy, "and so does Olga. I believe they know all the drawbacks and do not mind them a bit. To people who have lived in hotels and boarding-houses, the noise of our children upstairs will not seem much."

Edmund went off, and Nancy, with a great sigh of relief, stole up to Dax's room to whisper the news to Frank and Ella, who were keeping guard there, and then she went to seek Damaris, who was resting by the school-room fire whilst Roly-Poly played at her feet, and Di did her lessons for the next day.

"Oh, I am so glad," answered Damaris, whose pale, tired face, told a tale of the long strain she had put upon herself during the anxious days they had just lived through, "for I did not see what we were to do. I shall have my hands full with Dax for a long time to come, and we have run through a terrible amount of money during these weeks of illness. Will Dax mind, poor dear boy? If he does have a little growl, he will soon see the sense

of it. Indeed, I think it will be the best thing possible for him when he is beginning to get better. Olga's brightness and vivacity will cheer him up, and the Baroness is so interesting and full of conversation, that a visit to her room will be quite a tonic to him, when once he gets over his first shyness. It sounds an odd thing to say, but I believe it will do us all good to have comparative strangers in the house, and then dear Frankie can be released from the drudgery of the bank, and seriously consider if he cannot take up a more congenial profession. Ah, Nancy, I believe it 's a true saying that it 's always darkest before the dawn. We have lived through a very dark spell; but I think the sunshine is coming back now."

"And I am sure the darkness has not hurt us," answered Nancy, softly. "For I don't think we should ever have known each other, and loved each other quite so well if we had not lived through those dark days together."

Edmund and Oswald came back together, having met at the Triple Crown. Di had begun to laugh at Oswald, and tell him that the hotel where the Baroness lived seemed to lie in his homeward route from everywhere. As a matter of fact, it did lie between home and his parish, and it had become something of a habit with him to drop in for a chat with the vivacious old lady, and her equally viva-

cious niece. As he was getting from one or the other such substantial help for his poor parishioners during this time of sickness, it seemed only common gratitude to go in frequently to report upon the cases in which they were interested, and set to the daring and indefatigable Olga the bounds of her district visiting, carefully keeping her away from all danger of infection.

"It is all settled," cried Edmund with a glad look of relief, "and the Baroness is coming to-morrow to look over the rooms and order in everything that she wants. We are to have no trouble about the alterations. Our furniture, which she does not want, will be either housed by her or put into other rooms, as we like, and she will send in everything she wishes for her own comfort. She has decided to bring a maid, which I think is best myself; but she has got a very nice respectable elderly woman, who nursed under our father in the town, and is delighted to be coming to our house. Two guineas a-week extra are to be paid for her, if you please. I did try and remonstrate, but the Baroness would not listen, and that little fairy danced about all the time and said that it was no use ever trying to get the best of it with 'Auntie' —though I think she knows pretty well how to turn the said auntie round her little finger. We may expect our new inmates within a fortnight,

and I really feel as though it would be a pleasure to have them. If they were difficult to get on with and disagreeable, it would be worth the sacrifice; but as it is, I do not see where the sacrifice is to come in."

Dax was gradually mending, but progress was very, very slow, and for many days his life was little more than a long sleep, which was the best thing they could wish for him. He needed very little actual nursing now, save that it was not thought well to leave him alone; but with so many in the house it was not difficult to find a succession of watchers. The arm was entirely the doctor's care, and only Damaris ever assisted at the dressings, which were for long the dread of Dax's life, though he bore them unflinchingly. But, though very silent and apparently apathetic, he was, perhaps, more alive to what went on in the house than the brothers and sisters were aware of, and one day, when alone with Frank, he spoke.

"I say, old fellow, what is this new game going on?"

"What new game?"

"Oh, come now, don't pretend you don't know. There's been no end of tramping about the house these last days; and people go about with a different look, and yesterday there was an arrival of some kind—a carriage first, and then

a cab and luggage. I think it's time I was enlightened."

"You've got sharp ears, old man."

"Yes, I wish I hadn't. It's a fearful nuisance hearing every single thing that goes on in the house. But I don't know that I need bother you to enlighten me. I think I can pretty well guess. The girls have got their way at last, and we have turned the establishment into a boarding-house."

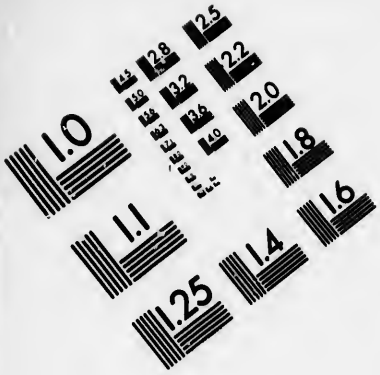
"We've let our first floor, which was standing empty, to Baroness Steinmetz and her pretty niece—if that's turning the establishment into a boarding-house; and now we have old cookie back again, and a slavey under her, and two decent maids in the house; and we dine late and the girls dress for dinner, and have none of that everlasting pinching and screwing which was wearing them into thread-papers, and Oswald does not have to starve himself to take his own food to his parishioners. On the whole, I'm decidedly inclined to think well of the boarding-house, and I have special cause to approve it on my own account."

Dax's eyes were now wide open. Something of the old look of purpose and resolution had flashed into them. He half raised himself upon his pillows, bade Frank prop him up into a sitting posture, and then he said:

"So that's the meaning of it all. Well, if it's personal friends and relatives of the Lelands it alters the case a good bit. Why did nobody tell me before?"

"He half raised himself upon his pillows."—*Page* 178.

"You were thought to be a rather prickly customer," answered Frank, with one of his comical glances, "and it was considered best



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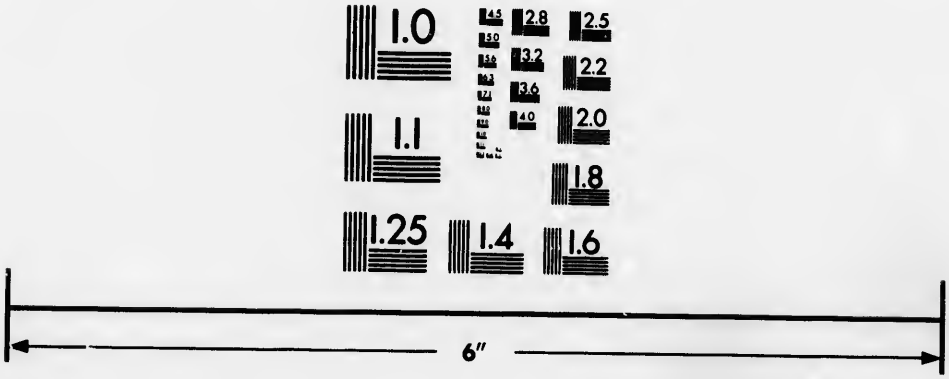

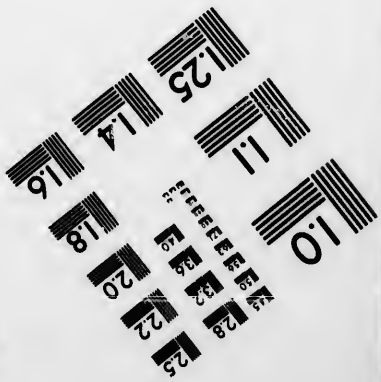

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not to irritate the animal until a more fitting season."

Dax smiled languidly, but it was the first smile Frank had seen for a long time, and it seemed to mark an era in recovery.

"I'm afraid I was an awful bear at home. I believe I used the girls shamefully sometimes; and they have been heaping coals of fire on my head all the while, nursing me as no fellow ever was nursed before, I do believe."

"It's a way girls have—girls like ours, I mean," answered Frank with pardonable pride; "but I think they will have their reward, especially Damaris, who had the lion's share," and his eyes twinkled meaningly.

"What do you mean?" asked Dax quickly.

"Why, seeing you get well, to be sure," answered the boy with the gravity which betrayed a lurking fun behind. "What better reward could she have?"

Dax was looking intently at Frank.

"Have *you* seen it too?" he asked. "I thought, perhaps, it was my fancy; you are thinking of Giles Leland?"

The brothers had of late fallen into the way of calling the doctor either by his Christian or surname, and he returned the compliment on his

side. Frank carefully adjusted his eyeglass and looked at his brother, saying:

"My dear fellow, we shall have to be careful; you appear to be all ears and eyes, and desperately sharp perceptions. It's hardly canny. Though, to be sure, you have had opportunities for judging. However, I don't believe one of the girls knows—I'm not sure that Damaris does herself. But I smelt a rat some time ago, and when Giles came to me with his offer the other day——"

"Hold hard, you're not going to pretend he proposed to *you* for Damaris?"

"Not exactly; I'd have given him my blessing, though, if he had. His offer was to me, and an uncommonly good one it is; but it made assurance doubly sure."

"What did he offer?"

"Why, to take me in hand and put me in the way of studying medicine under him, and later on, if it could be managed, in London, or at some good medical school, so as to be his assistant and partner in due course—the thing that father always planned for me if I took to it, as I always felt I should. He says I have the making of a doctor in me, and regular surgeon's fingers, and that I believe," said the lad, looking at his long mobile digits. "Any way, I am free of the bank now, and I mean to read medicine and other

things like old boots. I've not given Giles an answer yet. That sort of thing wants thinking over; but if he's really going to turn into a brother, I don't see that I need be too proud to let him help me, and I don't believe there's anything that our father would like better than for one of his sons to live to follow in his footsteps as a doctor in Fossbury."

CHAPTER XII.

"EDMUND, you must come and help us; promise that you will."

"I, Olga? Why should I come? I shall be of no use. My fingers are all thumbs at decorating. You will find I hinder more than help."

But Olga shook her determined little head, and insisted.

"You know nothing at all about it. By the time you are free we shall just be wanting strong clumsy people, without any ideas of their own, to help in carrying the heavy plants to their places and in fixing up the wreaths and things we have made. Now, Edmund, do promise. The Abbey is only a few steps out of your way as you leave your office. Do come."

It was not in Edmund's nature to refuse anything asked of him unless for some very good reason, and Olga's coaxing was always successful, as she well knew. They were discussing the

Christmas decoration at the Abbey church on the morrow, in which several of the Inglehursts and Olga de Witt had promised assistance, and she was plainly determined that Edmund should not escape without bearing his share in the labour of love. Generally it was Oswald to whom Olga looked for assistance in any scheme of her own—she and Oswald were professedly "great friends," and she was growing to be a right hand to him in his parish work. But this evening it was upon Edmund that her interest seemed to concentrate.

The arrangement entered upon in October with regard to admitting the Baroness and Olga as residents beneath the family roof had turned out a signal success so far as the Inglehursts were themselves concerned, whilst Olga did not hesitate to assert that she had never been so happy in her life as she was now, and she did not believe her aunt had ever been so contented or so thoroughly well.

Olga was more like a sister than a mere acquaintance of the home party. They all called her by her Christian name. She had even visited Dax so soon as he was able to exchange his bed for a couch beside the fire, and she certainly acted upon him almost like a tonic. She it was who was able to provoke him to laughter by her droll stories, who had leisure to come and chatter to

him when others were busy, who brought him fruit and flowers—luxuries beyond the means of the Inglehursts even now, unless there was actual necessity for them—and posted him up in all the news of the day by reading the paper to him whilst Damaris was engaged with her duties about the house or the lessons of the children. Frank and she were constantly to be found practising music together, or deep in the mysteries of composition or transcription. Frank was composing a service for the Abbey, which Olga declared the loveliest music ever yet heard. She was his right hand in the matter of copying and arranging it into parts, and she had been heard to utter dark hints as to getting it published in due course, if it passed the ordeal of the Fossbury critics, who were supposed to rank high in the musical world.

Frank was his old bright comical self now without effort. Released from the uncongenial work at the bank, and with the prospect before him of a profession to which he had always felt considerable leanings, he was reaping to the full the reward of his patient bravery and cheerfulness under great trial and provocation. He spent the mornings daily in hard study, or else in Giles Leland's surgery, learning from him the art of dispensing, which, though not particularly interesting, was very necessary, and in which he could

be of more present assistance to the doctor than in any other matter. At times he accompanied him on his rounds, and assisted at any small operation or surgical dressing where his quickness of manipulation, and dexterity, and readiness were all very useful. Giles was more and more convinced that Frank had the making of an excellent surgeon in him, and the lad felt an increasing interest in the work as he experienced growing power and aptitude. Music was relegated to the second place, and to it were given up his hours of recreation. For six or eight hours daily he worked diligently either at his books or in the company of the doctor, and by the time Christmas had come he felt as though his walk in life had been thoroughly settled for him.

As for the sisters, the past two months had done great things for them. The large household engrossed most of Nancy's time and energy, and the lessons of the children had been handed over to Damaris and Ella. But there was no longer any need for the sisters to turn to and toil with their own hands, and though they all agreed that it had been very good for them, and that they should never regret the insight it had given them into household work and management, it certainly was pleasant to fall back into their usual habits, whilst the little ones had the benefit of a more

regular education than had been possible when their sisters had so much on their hands besides teaching.

There was no need now for Damaris to go out nursing, or for Ella to apply to Mr. Fothergill for remunerative work to help to keep the household wheels in motion. Indeed, until Dax was much better than he could be called yet, Damaris would not think of leaving home, for he depended more upon her than upon any one, and the maimed arm was terribly slow in mending, and likely to be both a painful and unserviceable member for a long time to come. Ella, however, did not let her talents rust. She was deeply engaged in painting a water-colour portrait of Olga, which the latter declared she knew her aunt would insist on purchasing when completed. It was to be sent to the Fossbury Picture Exhibition in the spring, and Olga declared that if Ella went on flattering her to the extent she was doing now, half the ladies of the town would come to her to get their portraits painted. Ella indeed had a very happy knack of catching the best and brightest expression upon a sitter's face, and her steady and conscientious work for Mr. Fothergill had taught her much and had given her a greater command over her brush. The work of portrait painting generally took place in the mornings, before the Baroness

was up, in her commodious drawing-room; and the old lady grew quite accustomed to find the artist there, and took so much interest in the picture, and was so much pleased with its progress, that the sittings were always extended until the Baroness appeared. She seemed to take a great fancy to Ella from the first, and if Olga were out, would often ring and ask if her favourite could spare the time to come and sit with her. The rest of the family saw little of the elder guest save at lunch and dinner, unless they visited her in her rooms, as all did from time to time; but Olga quickly became almost like one of themselves, and was as welcome in dining-room, drawing-room, or nursery as if she had been a sister. Roly-Poly adored her, and she was the most charming of playmates for the baby-twins; Kit and Chriss were convinced that she was a species of fairy, and were of opinion that she had been created for their express benefit, just at the time when they most needed some help of a magical character. All the sisters loved her dearly, and felt as though she were really one of themselves, and Damaris, who continued perhaps to be her favourite amongst them all, knew her intimately, and was admitted to the fullest confidences of her heart.

It was she who, looking into the bright laughing face, as the girl pirouetted lightly on one foot

in front of Edmund, extracting his promise with pretty persistence, guessed from the arch and mischievous gleam of the dark eyes that more was meant than met the ear, and the conviction was strengthened by the fact that Frank, who was softly strumming his banjo in the corner, began to twang out in a gently suggestive fashion the air of "Jock o' Hazeldean," which had been Bertha Greysart's favourite song in days past, and which Edmund had always made her sing to him whenever she had spent an evening at their house.

She glanced across quickly at Frank, who gave her one of his comical smiles, but nothing passed between them then. Later on, when the party was dispersing to bed, and Damaris was bidding Frank good-night, she looked at him once again, and he returned the stare with one of his most imperturbable glances.

"I don't betray no secrets, mum," he said. "I've been told to hold my tongue, and hold it I will. But Bertha Greysart is home again in the paternal home; and I dare say is at this very moment engaged in the congenial and filial task of turning the old gentleman round her fingers, as she always did when she wished. Good-night, mum—that's all;" and he went off, singing under his breath:

"They sought her both by bower and ha',
The ladye was not seen,
She 's o'er the Border and awa'
Wi' Jock o' Hazeldean."

Damaris went up to her room smiling to herself. "I wonder what plan that little witch has in her head now."

Next day was Christmas Eve, and a busy day it was. In the morning the house had to be decorated with shining green and scarlet berries, and preparations for the morrow's festivity set in hand. But in the afternoon the girls were mostly engaged with church decoration, and only Nancy and Damaris were in the house, one busy with household matters, the other as a companion to Dax.

Frank was pressed into the service at the Abbey, and Oswald as a matter of course was to be there. The four in the nursery were taken too, eager to be helpful, and under Olga's special protection. She was herself in the gayest of gay spirits, but she said nothing to betray the cause; and if Damaris had her suspicions she kept them to herself. Frank was plainly in the secret, but he betrayed no more than he had done the previous night.

Dax was to make his first essay at coming downstairs to-night, to surprise everybody by

being present at the Christmas Eve family dinner. That had been long arranged between him and his nurses, and he was impatient for the house to be quiet that he might make his move in peace. A dressing-gown had hitherto been his easy garb, but he was ambitious now to attempt another style of attire: and it was a work of time getting matters adjusted to his satisfaction, for he was still soon tired, and disposed to be irritable if things did not go just to his mind. He had, however, learned to look upon this irritation with dread, as a sign of nervous weakness, and he kept it in check as much as he could. Damaris was so helpful, so cheerful, so comforting, that there was little provocation, and at last he was arrayed to his satisfaction in a suit of his own clothes, though he had at first declared they must be his father's, they hung upon him so limply and baggily.

"Dear boy, I assure you they are your own, and you will have to fill them up in due course. I declare, Dax, I believe you have had the audacity to grow whilst you have been ill. I'm sure you look taller than you did. Now sit down and I'll bring you some tea, and then you shall try and get downstairs. I should like you to be there by the time the others come in. I suspect we shall have a piece of news to hear then."

Dax looked up inquiringly, but Damaris did not explain, and he was willing enough to rest a little. However, he managed to get down to the drawing-room later on with her assistance, though he arrived there in a white and breathless condition, and she was not quite certain if the attempt had not been made a little too early.

"How large everything looks, and how pretty," he said, as he sat looking about him, feeling as though the familiar house were almost new to him, and then catching sight of himself in a mirror opposite he gave a slight start and then laughed.

"Goodness—I didn't know I was such a scare-crow. I'm hardly fit for civilised society."

"Oh, you're nothing to what you have been, dear boy," answered Damaris, laughing and stroking the dark head with its close-cropped hair that had only just begun to recover from its clipping at the time of the fever.

Dax smiled as he lay back in the chair and closed his eyes wearily. He did indeed look terribly gaunt and haggard and frail—more so now that he was up and dressed again—at least it was more noticeable—than when he had been content with invalid ways in his own room.

Damaris, as she looked at him with shining eyes, felt that he had been given back to them from the

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"He managed to get down."—*Page* 192.

very jaws of death, and the same thought was perhaps in his mind, for he glanced up presently to ask a question he had never asked before:

"I suppose it was touch and go with me at one time?"

"We hardly knew how it would turn," answered Damaris, coming and laying her hand upon his shoulder, whilst he put up his long thin fingers, now much whiter than hers, and possessed himself of it; "but you always had a splendid constitution, and as Dr. Leland said, you had never trifled with it—you had always led a temperate, abstemious life. That helped very much."

"And your nursing—I believe that did it," said Dax. "I have never thanked you all this while for your goodness to me, Damaris. I don't think I could have pulled through without it."

She stooped and touched his head with her lips.

"You need not thank me, Dax: I am only glad I was able—that we were not obliged to have a stranger in. Are you not one of ourselves? Could we ever have borne to let you go?"

"I sometimes wonder if it might not have been better," said Dax in a very low voice. "Damaris, am I ever going to be any good again? Shall I ever have a serviceable right arm?"

She put her arm closely about him.

"Oh, Dax, we hope so. No one can say more yet—it is too soon. But there have been more wonderful cures made before now. It will be trying and tedious and sometimes very painful, I am afraid, but there is plenty of room for hope."

He was silent and very grave. She came round and knelt down so that she might look into his face. What she saw there made her ask:

"Dax, dear, you are not going to let yourself worry over this? You have been so brave and patient all this time—you are not tired of holding on?"

He smiled, but the smile was a rather sad one.

"I think I could bear anything, if I really felt that at the end I should come out of it all right, again; but Damaris, I have a hateful fear upon me sometimes."

Damaris had raised her head, for the room door had been softly opened during the last few moments, and she saw that Giles Leland stood upon the threshold. He had known of the attempt about to be made to-day, and had come in softly, thinking possibly from the silence in the room that Dax might be sleeping after his unwonted exertion. Damaris gave him a look which he well understood, and he remained where he was in the shadow, unseen by Dax.

"What fear is that?" she asked softly.

"The fear that I shall never be good for anything again. I can't tell you what a perfect *fool* I often feel at the very thought of going back to the works, and hearing the whizz of wheels about me again. It had begun before. It was growing on me before this. I don't know what it meant; but it was as if the wheels got into my head and were turning there, and I couldn't see straight, or be certain of myself from moment to moment. Some days it was better—some worse. I never could count upon myself; and when I lie and think of going back there——"

He finished the sentence by a convulsive shudder, and at that moment Giles stepped forward out of the shadow.

"The best thing you can do is not to think about it any more," he said cheerfully. "It will be quite time enough to cross that bridge when you come to it. By the time your arm is well enough for you to be able to think of such a thing as going back to the works, you will see how you feel upon the subject. And there are other berths open to you besides that one. You have plenty of brains——"

Dax made a little impatient movement with his hand.

"Good berths are not snapped up every day by a fellow who may have only one serviceable arm,

and not half the pluck of an ordinary boy of twelve. Oh, I know you are all very kind, and want to keep it from me; but I know something hateful has come over me, and I wish you would tell me candidly what chance there is of my ever being half the fellow I was before——"

"Before your nervous system got thoroughly unhinged," concluded the doctor kindly and firmly. "Well, Dax, I will tell you exactly my own opinion upon that matter. I wish you could have been content to leave it alone; but since you have realised so fully that your nerves are out of order I will tell you candidly what I think your chances of ultimate restoration are. You have not much chance of getting over this weakness whilst your arm continues as painful and troublesome as it will do, I am afraid, while we are treating it to get back its full use. But if that is once accomplished—as I believe, with patience and fortitude on your part, it will be—and if after that you will still be content not to press matters with yourself, but will make up your mind to something like a year of idleness, getting all the change of air and scene that can be contrived for you, then I quite believe that you will gradually outgrow this temporary condition, and will be almost, if not quite as strong as you were before."

"A year of idleness, dependence—of being a

burden upon those whom I ought to be helping and working for, and with," said Dax slowly. "Giles, old fellow, I think you and Damaris made a great mistake in pulling me through this at all."

But though he said this, and spoke the words almost sadly, yet they knew that he did not exactly mean them, and Damaris, still holding his hands closely in hers, said:

"Dax dear, things have been so wonderfully ordered for us that there is no difficulty now about ways and means. You need not let that worry you—and we have our dozen unbroken. Is not that worth it all?"

"And I owe, indirectly, such a debt of gratitude to you, Dax, as I know not how to repay; but some day perhaps I shall find out how it may be done."

It was Giles who spoke these words, and when he had spoken them he suddenly vanished. Damaris looked wonderingly into her brother's face and said:

"What did he mean?"

But though Dax did not answer he thought he knew, and was not a little comforted. His illness had done some good to somebody.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE party from the church came home in detachments; and Frank and Olga were the first to arrive. Frank was whistling "Jock o' Hazeldean" as he took off his overcoat in the hall, and then the pair came in together, and stopped short in astonishment at sight of Dax.

"Gracious! You should prepare a fellow for these shocks. I say, Olga, my nerves won't stand all these surprises. Come along in and tell them. We needn't keep secrets from Dax. Awfully glad to see you down again, old scarecrow. Now, Olga, Damaris has got some tea for you. Sit down and tell them the astonishing news. We were quite thunderstruck when we got to the church, weren't we—especially you and I?"

Olga's face was dimpling with fun, but she looked as demure as a little mouse. She sipped her tea in her dainty fashion, with her head on one side rather like a bird, and at last she said:

"I hope Edmund won't be angry with me; but Miss Greysart was in the church this afternoon, decorating."

"Bertha Greysart," echoed both brother and sister in a breath, and Olga continued in the same would-be grave way:

"Yes, perhaps you had not heard that she came back a few days ago. I think she was tired of being away, and rather took the law into her own hands. Some friends of hers were coming to England, and she came with them, and arrived only two days after the letter announcing that she was going to do so."

"Did Mr. Greysart mind?" asked Damaris.

Olga's face dimpled all over with pleasure.

"Mind? He is just delighted to have her back. She says she does not know how ever she stayed away so long. You know Bertha and I are great friends. We knew each other in America, and as I did not know many of the people at the Abbey we worked together; and by-and-by, when Edmund came, he helped us. That gave me leisure to go and see after the children. And when I got back to them they had managed somehow to spoil everything they were doing, and I had to set them to something quite easy, and do the work over again. It 's a pity I asked Edmund at all—I didn't know he was quite such a *clumper*. But Bertha

was almost as bad when he was there. And, oh, I forgot to tell you. I have a message from Edmund. He is not coming home to dinner—he is going to dine at the Greysarts. Mr. Greysart came to fetch Bertha, and carried him off with them. I said I was sure he could be spared, and Frankie said just the same. We didn't know that Dax would be his substitute. But I assure you he would have been no good at home. He was in a very queer mood—wasn't he, Frankie?"

"Awful odd," answered Frank solemnly. "I think he 's a bit touched in the head, you know. Fellows do get like that sometimes. You don't mind, I suppose, Damaris? Anyhow, he 's gone."

Damaris and Dax exchanged glances, and then Damaris burst out laughing, and Olga joined in with her merriest peal. Frank shook his head and continued to look preternaturally solemn; but his face was as provocative of mirth as the laughter of the girls.

"What does it all mean?" asked Dax.

Frank shrugged his shoulders with an air of exaggerated innocence, and professed himself absolutely in the dark; but when Olga could recover herself, she looked from one to the other and said:

"Oh, it 's no good pretending we don't know. It 's as plain as a pikestaff, as you boys would say.

Bertha has never cared for anybody but Edmund all her life, and though she has been a year away, and has been told she must forget him, she comes home just as much in love as she went out, when they were on the verge of being engaged. Damaris, I told you long ago how it would be. She is an only child, and Mr. Greysart is a very kind man really, and idolises her. She has gone and told him everything—perhaps it 's mean of me to let it out; but you will none of you love her less for it, and he has given way. He has told her that he could never find any one he more thoroughly liked or respected than Edmund, and since these troubles which came to you he has seen his worth more than ever. I don't know exactly how it 's all to end; but you may be sure Bertha will get her own way in the long run, and, as I tell her, next year being leap-year, if he is too proud to propose to her, she must just propose to him," and Olga nodded her dainty little head, and set them off laughing out of sheer sympathy and the contagion of her happy feeling. "I must go now, and tell auntie that I am in, and prepare her for seeing the scarecrow at dinner to-night. Are Giles and his mother coming too? I thought so. What a nice party we shall be! It 's almost a pity Edmund won't be here; but I do assure you he would have been no good to-night."

And then Olga danced off, whilst the others looked at each other, and Dax was the first to break the silence:

"It's all very fine, and I'm awfully glad for Edmund's sake; but I don't quite see how it's to be done yet. A man can't be dependent upon his wife—at least that's not *my* idea of conjugal happiness, and I don't believe it's Edmund's either—and he can spare nothing from the general fund towards an establishment of his own. If there were no other people in the house he might possibly have brought a wife here; but I don't think Mr. Greysart would have tolerated such an idea for his daughter, and I'm bound to say I think he would have been right. If Bertha cares for him, and refuses to care for anybody else, I think her father is quite right to see what can be done, and it's proper, I suppose, to give love the first place. But there are other difficulties of a sternly practical nature to be overcome, too; and I don't see how Edmund is to get out of them."

"Well, we shall see," cried Damaris, who had caught the infection of Olga's brightness, and was prepared to look at everything through rose-coloured spectacles. "Mr. Greysart is an eminently practical man, and he knows all the circumstances of the case perfectly."

"That's true," answered Dax, and Frank

got up and wandered towards the door remarking:

"It must either be an exodus of brothers, or a sort of happy family arrangement on the premises. Edmund's goose is cooked for him to-day, you'll see. By-the-by, it ought to be a turkey at this season; but no matter—and Oswald and Olga will be the next. What? You don't profess that that's news to you? I saw it from the first. It was only the other day that Oswald asked me privately if I knew whether Olga had a fortune of her own, or whether she were simply dependent on the old lady upstairs, and I told him I believed she was a poor dependant. He brightened up wonderfully at that—he's just the sort of fellow to go in for love in a cottage—or a curacy—it's much the same. It strikes me I shall soon be practically the head of the family. Married brothers don't count."

Dax and Damaris, who had been living a good deal upstairs of late, and had therefore been rather out of the swim of family life, exchanged wondering glances, and Dax asked sharply:

"What is the meaning of all this, Frank?—is it your nonsense?—or do you really mean it?"

"Oh, I don't know nothing," answered Frank, setting his eye-glass, and staring at Dax with his exaggerated air of innocence. "I've only confined

myself to bare facts. Oswald did ask me that, and when I told Olga what had passed, she said I had spoken words of wisdom, as I always do, and so I suppose it 's all right. I 'll give him my blessing if he marries Olga, for she 's a jolly little soul, too good to be allowed to go out of the family, and I 'm a little averse to present matrimony myself. Well, I 'm off to dress. You can make what use you like of my information, as the advertisements say. I 'm not ashamed of nothing I ever say. If you keep your eyes open you can see it all for yourselves."

The boy was gone, leaving Dax and Damaris rather breathless with astonishment. But Dax was unfit for excitement, and she would not let him talk, or even think very much about it.

"We can't quite see what the end of it is to be," she said gently, "but we need not worry our heads over that now. We have been so wonderfully led and guided all this while that I am sure we can trust. We could not have looked, I suppose, all to live under the same roof all our lives. Some sort of change must come in time; and if the boys can only see their way to happy and independent homes of their own, why, it ought to make us all very happy."

"Ah, it 's just that *if* that makes the difficulty."

"And I will not have you troubling your head with it now."

"I cannot help it. If I were not such a useless log—if I were in the position I might have been but for this, it might perhaps have been managed with the help that has come to us lately."

"Which perhaps might never have come had you been yourself, and had worked your way up as you hoped. You would have tried hard to keep strangers out of the home. But there, Dax, I cannot let you talk or think any more, or you will be quite unfit for dinner this evening, and I shall get into disgrace."

But if there was some weight upon the patient's spirit, at least the rest of the faces round the long table that night were bright enough; and such a babble of merry voices had not been heard in that room for many a long day before.

Christmas—the first Christmas without the parents—had been a season looked forward to with dread by many members of the family: but the presence of these kind friends, whose faces and voices raised no painful associations, and who did their very utmost to keep conversation flowing and avert all painful topics, did much to lessen the sense of blank and change; whilst the first appearance of Dax amongst them, after these long months of seclusion, was in itself enough to promote

happiness and cheerful thankfulness. There was an undefined feeling besides in many minds that something good was happening to the eldest brother, who had acted his part as head of the bereaved family so generously and well.

No company could be dull that counted Olga, the Baroness, and Frank amongst its numbers. And to-night Giles Leland was at his very best, and kept the company alive with his sallies, many of which were answered by Olga or Frank in the happiest manner, and set the whole table in a roar. Mrs. Leland's motherly presence was always felt by the children as soothing and welcome, and Di had begun to go to her for counsel and help almost as she would have done to her own mother had she lived. Di had greatly softened and improved of late, and was growing a very pretty, animated, but lady-like and gentle girl. The qualities her mother had most wished developed in her were being carefully cultivated by Mrs. Leland, who felt almost as if she had found a daughter, so loving and unfailing were the attentions and little marks of affection that she was constantly receiving from Di.

Roly-Poly had been for the first time in their youthful lives admitted to the late dinner, and exceedingly did they enjoy the promotion in their own solemn way. They must needs taste every

dish in due course and pronounce upon its merits, and once they set the whole company laughing by their looks of melancholy gravity at seeing the table cleared previous to dessert. They had been looking with longing eyes at the dishes laden with sweetmeats and candied fruits; and when they saw the systematic clearance of the table before these dainties had been partaken of, they

"Isn't nobody going to eat those?"

exchanged doleful glances and exclaimed in a breath:

"Oh, is it done already? Isn't nobody going to eat those?"

To compensate them for their brief alarm, Olga would have plied them with dainties till they could eat no more, had not Damaris interposed

and carried them off to bed sleepy, but deeply delighted by the dignity of having had late dinner and drunk everybody's health.

The evening passed pleasantly and swiftly, and the guests had just left the family party alone, when the sound of the latch-key in the lock announced the return of Edmund, and his brothers and sisters greeted him with questioning glances. His face was very bright and hopeful, though it was grave too. He did not profess to misunderstand the nature of the looks bent upon him. He greeted Dax with a brotherly pat on the shoulder, and then stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"I don't know what to say or think about it all, but nothing could have been kinder or more generous than the offer I have had made to me. I said it was a thing that needed thought, and I could not speak definitely without consulting you at home. The facts of the case are briefly these:— Bertha, dear girl, has never given me up since we were poor. She obeyed her father in staying away; but she has never changed one whit, and she has brought him round to her way of thinking. Then there is another thing. Mr. Greysart is beginning to wish to retire from active participation in the business. To do so he must find a partner. You all know he used to

look to me for that, but I was to bring grist to the mill, and that I cannot do. Since he gave up that idea he has been looking about. Many people have come forward, but none to his liking. So now he has made up his mind that he would rather have me with nothing but my brains and my knowledge of the business than a stranger with capital at his back."

"Good for him," said Frank, nodding. "I suppose Bertha brought him to that way of thinking?"

"He tells me he had arrived at it before—unless he found his little girl had fallen in love with some enterprising Yankee who would take the vacant post. As she had not done this, he decided to let things be as they would have been had our father lived to furnish the funds, as he had always intended, to start me in life. This is what he told me as we sat over our dessert after Bertha had left. He told me that he intended getting the deeds of partnership drawn, and that a few months would see the formalities through. He had been told by his doctor—Giles Leland, you know—that he needed a real change and holiday; and he proposed, when I was fully installed, to go to visit the relatives in America whom Bertha has just been to see. In fact, to make a long story short, what he wants me to do

is this. To take upon myself the full management of the business—a great part of which I have practically been managing for a long time now—but with the authority of partner, so that he can be free. I shall have then a comfortable income—sufficient to allow you here at home more than I have been doing hitherto, and still support Bertha in modest comfort. As a matter of fact she has money of her own from her mother; so, without any allowance from her father, we should be very comfortably off; but what he wants us to do is to go on living in his house, keeping up the establishment there, first during his absence, and then after his return home. He said to me that Bertha was his only child, and that it would be hard to part with her; but he could not see why we could not make our home under his roof—making it ours, as he put it—and giving him a corner by our fireside when he wanted it, so that he would not be alone in his old age."

"Well," said Oswald, "I don't think any man could have spoken fairer than that. Why did you hesitate, Edmund?"

"It seemed too good to be true," answered the young man, passing his hands across his eyes. "I was afraid of being led away by my own wishes. My place is here, if I am wanted or

needed to keep this house together. Nothing in the world can take the place of the claim upon me of this home, and of my own brothers and sisters. I told Mr. Greysart so, even whilst I thanked him for his most noble offer, and said I could give no answer without consulting all of you."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He said I was quite right. He said—no, never mind that."

"Oh, yes, be fair and square; what did he say?"

Edmund's colour rose for a moment, but he answered quietly:

"Well, he said that he trusted Bertha to me all the more gladly because he had seen how we brothers and sisters had all hung together when things had been difficult and dark. And then he said I was to go and talk to Bertha."

"And so you stand before us a betrothed husband," said Frank, putting up his eye-glass and treating his brother to a long stare. "Well, on the whole, I think it seems to agree with you."

"I am engaged," answered Edmund, quietly enough, though his eyes shone with a very bright light. "But we are both prepared to wait, and let it be a long engagement if my duty seems to

be here. Bertha wants to have Roly-Poly to adopt and bring up, as our special share of the dozen if I do leave this roof; but I made no promise—no stipulations. I felt that I was not calm enough to arrive at any conclusion. I must talk it all over with you first."

Silence fell upon the room for a moment, but it did not last long.

"I can't see any objection to it," said Oswald at last slowly. "I shall be left here. I am your twin, Edmund. I ought surely to be able to take your place if duty takes you elsewhere. I think you need not fear to accept your happiness. I am sure you have deserved it. Bertha's faithful trust deserves its reward—and so does your generous care for us all. You gave up all that seemed like the happiness of your life for our sakes once. Now that the happiness has been given back you need not be afraid to take it. I am sure that with it there will be a blessing—the blessing that always follows self-denial and trust in God."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE April sunshine was pouring cheerfully into the dining-room and lighting up the circle of bright faces round the breakfast table, but Damaris did not appear to hear any of the gay talk that went on around her. Her head was bent over a letter closely written upon foreign paper, which she had that morning received, and presently she put it aside without comment of any kind, folding it and slipping it into her pocket, and though she went steadily on with her breakfast, it did not seem as though she heard any of the chatter of the party as the meal proceeded.

There were a few faces missing from the circle of the doctor's dozen. Edmund was gone. He had been married just five weeks, and upon his return to Mr. Greysart's house with his young wife he had carried off Roly-Poly, to be at any-rate temporary inmates of his home; and there was a feeling in the minds of the brothers and

sisters left behind that their eldest brother, now in a position of ease and even of some affluence, intended to take upon himself for the future the charge of the youngest pair in the large family. It had not been exactly stated in set terms, but there was a conviction that the little twins would henceforth be the special charge of the brother whose path in life had been so wonderfully smoothed, and it was also felt that perhaps, all things considered, it was right and just that he should undertake that charge. Certainly it was like both him and Bertha to wish to do it.

No other marked change had taken place in the ranks of the family. Dax was once more in his familiar seat, and had just begun to discard the sling in which his arm had been carried so long. He was able to cut his own food, though in a lame and feeble manner, and it was very hard to believe that the crippled member would ever be sound and serviceable again. Still, the doctors who had seen it all declared that it would, though only very slowly and gradually. Dax was still very gaunt and worn, and his languid movements told how his strength had been drained away by this long and wasting illness. He had never got back any colour after the bleeding, which had so nearly cost him his life, and those about him were beginning to feel anxious—more anxious

than they cared to confess, for he certainly seemed to require some stimulating treatment or thorough change of air and scene; and yet, where was he to go, or how could he go alone anywhere, maimed and helpless as he was? Things were better with the Inglehurst family than they had been of old, but they were not yet beyond the reach of pecuniary cares, and Dax had been a source of considerable expense already. True, Giles Leland absolutely and curtly refused to send in any bill for his attendance upon a son of his predecessor, but there had been fees to pay to London surgeons who had been consulted, and it was not easy to see how funds were to be found for two of the party to go away and enjoy themselves at the seaside or take a sea trip. Dax himself always refused to listen to such a proposition if ever so slightly hinted at, and spoke of getting into harness before long; but by this time he and the whole family knew that his place had been filled at the works, and the very thought of going there again always brought on an access of nervous tremor, which showed how utterly unfit he was to try to get employment in his old firm again.

He had been very silent and quiet of late, but Damaris was certain his dependence and helplessness were preying on his mind. She had done

all she could to brighten his tardy convalescence, and, on the whole, he had been very good and patient; but he was feeling keenly that his prospects in life had received a distinct check, and his mental depression naturally re-acted upon his physical state.

As the meal proceeded Damaris stole more than one glance at him, but she did not speak, and as soon as the party rose from table she slipped away quietly and quickly, and, taking a cap from the hall table, glided through the garden and opened the door at the end to find herself almost immediately ascending the stairs which led to the Lelands' comfortable quarters in their lodgings.

Mother and son were at breakfast, as Damaris had expected. Very free and easy relations had now been established between the two houses, yet it was not often that Damaris appeared in this unceremonious fashion. As she shook hands she looked straight at Giles and said:

"I am glad you have not gone out. I wanted to speak to you first of all. I have had a letter. It is about Dax. Will you tell me exactly what you think of him? Why does he not get on faster? Will he ever be strong and well again?"

"There is no reason at all why he should not; but he cannot help worrying himself over his helplessness, and of course his present prospects

are not bright. Then he has had a year of bad health, and to be perfectly candid with you, he wants a change of air, and even a change of faces. A sea voyage would be the best thing of all for him."

"Do you mean that if he were to go to Australia," interrupted Damaris, quickly, "that it would set him up, and that when he got to the end of the voyage he would be a different being from what he is now?"

"I am tolerably certain that if he were to go to Australia in a sailing vessel which would give him several months at sea, you would not know him by the time he landed there. He would be as fit as he ever was in his life, all but the arm; and that, if he had salt water bathing regularly all the while he was on board, would be about twice as strong and serviceable as it is now, and would rapidly improve. But why do you ask? Has some chance come?"

"Yes; and I wished to speak to you before I mentioned it to him. Listen, and I will tell you. You have heard me speak of our Aunt Janet, our mother's sister, with whom I lived so long? She went out to Australia two years ago to be with her brother, an uncle of ours whom we have never seen. Of course I have written regularly to her, and told her all about ourselves

and our troubles and our pleasures. She has always written kindly and sympathetically, but until to-day it never occurred to me that she could help us. Now, this morning I have had a long letter from her, and the point of it all is that she wants Dax to go out to Australia, not just on a visit, but to make a career for himself out there, in connection with our uncle, who is an immense landowner, it seems, but who is going to be employed in some capacity by Government, and would give anything to have a nephew who is a trained engineer to help him in what he has undertaken to do. I don't understand the technical part of it—that is to be explained to Dax later; but what I do understand is that there is work and a career for him; that he will lead an outdoor life, mostly in the saddle, and have good pay and a home with relatives too. It sounds just the very thing, and I know he would jump at it; but he will be afraid of accepting lest he should prove only to be a useless log when he got there, and so I came to ask you if he might reasonably reckon on getting back his health by the time he had crossed the water."

"To be sure he may. If he will not believe you, let him come to me, and I will soon set his morbid mind at rest on that score. Why the thing might have been made for him. I wish he

had heard of it before. It would have been a better tonic than anything I could give him."

"I don't think things have taken shape very long. It is only lately there has been any plan of opening up this particular part of the country, and there were our uncle's own boys to think of first; but one has set up for himself, and another died last autumn, and his two daughters have married settlers and have left him alone; and so —and so—Aunt Janet says she is feeling very lonely, and begs that we will come to make it more homelike for her on the other side of the water, and if you say it is just the thing for Dax——"

But Giles had sprung to his feet, and was looking at Damaris with a very different expression on his face.

"*We*," he repeated quickly and almost sternly, "and pray what do you mean by *we?* It is only of Dax we have been speaking so far."

"Of course Dax is the one that matters," answered Damaris, not lifting her face or her eyes. "But I do not see how we could possibly let him go out there alone; and besides there was another invitation in Aunt Janet's letter. When she went to our uncle's there were two daughters at home; now, as I say, they are both married and gone. And she wants one of us girls to go over with

Dax, perhaps on a long visit, perhaps to settle. She said it had better be either Nancy or I; she would like me best because I know her ways best."

"But it shall not be you," cried Giles with sudden vehemence, as he made a step forward and caught Damaris by the hand. "It shall not —it must not be you. Damaris, I forbid you to go. I cannot spare you. Oh, my darling, my darling, do you need that I should tell you that I love you more than life itself, that you are everything in the world to me?"

Damaris looked up suddenly, and saw a strange light burning in the eyes bent upon her, a light so bright and keen and withal so unspeakably tender, that she felt her whole heart going out from her own keeping, whilst the room seemed rocking beneath her feet. She saw that Mrs. Leland had discreetly slipped away, and the next thing she knew was that she was drawn closer and closer within the strong arms of Giles, until her head rested upon his shoulder, and his face was closely bent over hers.

Did it come upon her as a surprise that this strong man loved her with all the fervour of his intense nature? It seemed to Damaris at that moment as though she had known it a long time —and yet only an hour ago her mind had been

full of the idea of going with Dax to Australia. Now she knew that, dearly as she loved Dax, dear as his welfare must always be to her, there was one even nearer and dearer—one who must ever stand first in her heart, and to whom her deepest love must be given.

"Damaris, Damaris, you are mine. You are mine by that immutable law of love which is given us by God Himself." Giles's voice above her was almost hoarse in its earnestness and intensity. The clasp of his arm tightened involuntarily upon her, and she had no wish to loose its restraining pressure. After the long battle, the protracted anxiety, the loss of relatives who had been their natural protectors, together with the stress of circumstances which had tried them all so keenly, it was inexpressibly sweet to feel once more able to depend—to trust in some one else—to have one to whom to look up as by a natural right. And then Damaris had learned to love Giles Leland as she had never loved another, and she did not struggle against the surrender of herself, although after a few moments of the most exquisite happiness something of the old rule of her life asserted itself, and she looked up into his face, and slowly drew herself away.

"Giles," she said tremulously, for happiness was harder to bear with composure than trouble had

often been, "I do love you. I think you know it. But there are the others to think of still. I must not be selfish because this great happiness has come to me."

"You shall not, dearest," he answered impetuously—impetuosity in Giles Leland was something new, and it even evoked a smile from Damaris, as she stood close beside him looking up into his face. "My darling, do you think I do not recognise to the full the sacredness of the family tie which has bound you together all this while? Was it not in part your devoted love to each other, so unselfishly and unconsciously shown in your lives that drew me to you from the first, though you did not like me for a long time?"—they exchanged smiles then, and Giles continued, speaking rapidly, "Damaris, my own, my wife that is to be, in claiming you I claim the right to be a brother to those who call you sister, to act a brother's part by them, and to take my share of the family burden as well as of the family joy and happiness. I think they trust me already. I think soon they will learn to love me for your sake. Did you think I should ask you to give up for me any one of the sweet duties towards your own kindred which you have so nobly fulfilled? No, Damaris, I only ask and claim the right to share them all with you, and to be one of you in very truth—

to show them all that I have not robbed them of a sister, but have given them another brother."

"Oh, Giles, Giles," cried Damaris, with a little sob in her voice, and then he took her once more in his arms.

But time and tide wait for no man—neither do doctors' patients. The telephone from the surgery had already rung several alarms, and at this moment Mrs. Leland re-entered the room with a sweet smile upon her face, and Giles, understanding the hint, just waited to push Damaris into his mother's outstretched arms, and as he turned to go he said:

"It is all right, mother; but we have had no time for talk. You tell her some of our castles in the air, when we have been conning over the future together."

He was gone, and Damaris, clinging to the sweet motherly woman she had learned to love so well, cried with a little sob in her voice:

"Oh, tell me, it is not wrong and selfish to be so very happy. Tell me that I am not doing a wrong to the others in taking this great joy to myself."

"My darling, I do assure you from the bottom of my heart that you are doing no wrong to any one. It is God's best gift to us, this deep and wonderful love, nor will you love the others less

because you will some day be Giles's wife. He will share the sweetness and the trials with you. He will best make up to you for the loss you will sustain in Dax."

Damaris put her hand to her head as if to clear away the mists which had clouded her vision.

"I want to think," she said. "I cannot realise it all in a moment. I must not be selfish. If Dax goes, and Nancy with him, as I think she must now, how can I be spared from home? Ella and Di cannot——

Mrs. Leland interrupted by drawing the girl to her side upon the couch, saying gently as she did so:

"Damaris, dear, this idea is quite new to you, but it is not new to us. Giles and I have talked over it and its attendant difficulties many, many times already, and have made many plans. These plans will in some way be simplified if Dax goes away taking Nancy with him, for his future did seem terribly uncertain, poor boy, until this opening came. Will you let me tell you what we have sometimes planned together?—for I believe the way is opening for the realisation of our dreams."

"Yes, please tell me," said Damaris.

"I will, and you try to follow me as I do so. Edmund is gone to a home of his own, and it

"Oh, tell me, it is not wrong."—*Page* 225.

seems probable that Oswald will not be very long in following his example. I did not mean to speak of that so soon, but I will tell you all now. A relative of ours, a large landed proprietor in the midland counties, is at present engaged in building and endowing a church in a terribly neglected manufacturing district there, and is most anxious to hear of a really zealous young clergyman, strong in health and with his heart in his work, to take the living and enter upon the work of evangelising this almost heathen neighbourhood. We have written to him several times about Oswald, and I am almost sure he will offer it to him first. The stipend is not large, only three hundred a-year; but," and here Mrs. Leland's face quivered into a smile, "I do not think that Oswald fears poverty, nor does our merry little Olga, whom I think he will take with him, for as she sometimes says, How *could* he manage a parish without her? And the little puss will have enough of her own not to be a burden upon him. You look surprised, dear Damaris. Have you not seen that those two have been wrapped up in each other these past six months—almost ever since their acquaintance first began?"

"Yes, we have all known that," answered Damaris slowly, "but I never saw how Oswald could possibly marry, and——"

"My dear, if he goes away from the atmosphere of home, as a clergyman must do, if he is to obey the call of suffering humanity and keep his ordination vow, it is almost a necessity that he should take a wife with him. Think what his life would be like in a new place, amid degradation and vice, such as he will have to grapple with."

"Oh, yes, yes, I am only too glad and thankful that it will be possible for him. Oswald is so gentle and affectionate. He would miss the home influences almost more than any of them. But it makes my head spin to think of it. Edmund gone, Oswald gone, Dax and Nancy in Australia. What is to become of the rest of us? And however am I to be spared, too?"

"Dear child, it is all perfectly simple. You will marry Giles, and he will take the vacant place of the brothers who have gone. You and he will be master and mistress of that big house, which has always been the doctor's house at Fossbury, and Frank will be with Giles to be educated for his assistant and partner, and when he is old enough it will become the joint practice of Leland and Inglehurst. Then what more simple or natural than that Giles should live with you there, to make a home for the brothers and sisters that remain? Did he not tell you that he claimed the rights of brotherhood? I am his mother, and I

must not praise him; but I do tell you this, that what he has undertaken will be nobly performed."

Tears of proud happiness and relief stood in the girl's eyes. She pressed the hand that held her own.

"It seems almost too good to be true," she said. "But you? What will you do? You will come to us, too?"

"I think not, dearest, I think I shall remain where I am in these pleasant rooms close beside you; and I shall claim my favourite Di as my companion—my almost daughter. It will not be taking her away, as we are so close together; but the child has given me such a wealth of love that I think she will like to call herself my child. I have sometimes told her that when Giles marries she must come to me if she can be spared, and she has almost promised. As for sweet Ella, I do not think it will be very long before she finds a nest of her own. Some wise man will learn to value her at her true worth, and so long as the Baroness lives—Giles fears it cannot be very long now—I doubt not she will help to fill the place that Olga's marriage will leave vacant. And now you have the outline of the airy castles that Giles and I have often been engaged in building together. Do you not think that they are taking substance, and that we may look upon some of

them almost as accomplished facts?" Damaris looked up with eyes that were blinded by tears, but the tears were all of happiness.

"Oh, Mrs. Leland, indeed I do. I think it is like a rebuke to me for want of faith, for there have been times—I will not deny it now—when I have been thinking of Giles, and wondering how it would end. I have not seen how I could dream of leaving the home, when they have said again and again that they did not know how to spare me even to do a little nursing; and I have thought that the way could never open. I think I shall never doubt God's goodness any more now. It must be His hand that is guiding us through all."

"My dearest, you need never doubt that, nor doubt that the closer we walk in love to those He has given us to love and cherish the closer we are walking to Him. That deep and true love which He has put into our hearts, that holy tie of brotherhood which makes the sweetness of this life, is but the foretaste of that rapturous love that will make the happiness of Heaven. God is love. Is not the whole of our religion summed up in those words? We are told that we love the brethren because we love God—though to us it often seems as though the love to man came first. But God's love is eternal, unfathomable, there is no first or last there, it is all part of the infinity

of love which spans about our life and enfolds us and enwraps us whether we know it or not. Oh, my dear, dear daughter, if I may call you so now, thank God for the capacity for love He has put into your heart, for I think the day will come when it will be by some such capacity as that, that we ourselves shall be judged."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT busy, exciting, tumultuous days were those that followed! It seemed as if life, after stagnating for a few months, were now rushing on at headlong speed.

Dax went about with a new look upon his face, a new energy of manner, a new purpose in his heart. Hope had sprung into fresh life, and hope, as all men know, is the best tonic in the world. There had been more letters from Australia, full of technical details for the young engineer, and Dax was busy over them from morning to night, often rushing down to the works—his old dread quite forgotten—to consult the manager there upon some point which perplexed him. He was in some danger of overtaxing his slender stock of strength by these exertions, but he was so much more his old self than he had been before that nobody really scolded him. Every day he seemed to pick up a little lost ground. Even the arm seemed to take a fresh start, and though the

tardiness of the exchange of letters between England and Australia made waiting an absolute necessity, the days now seemed to fly by on golden instead of leaden wings, whilst the new brightness of the spring and summer all helped to give tone to the invalid and to restore him to health. A sailing-vessel was no longer talked of for the voyage. Dax was in far too great a hurry to get to his new duties to tolerate such an idea, and he was making such satisfactory progress now that Giles declared he would be almost well before he started, and that a few weeks in the steamer would be all that was necessary to restore him completely.

As for Nancy, when the first astonishment and dismay had passed, the idea of going to Australia with Dax upon a long visit exercised a complete fascination over her, and her chief fear was lest it should be selfish of her to go away and leave the cares of housekeeping that she had found so onerous and burdensome to Damaris.

Good Nancy had always been the home daughter —the one bird who had never left the nest on any pretext whatsoever. As the eldest daughter and for many years the most useful one, she had grown into the way of being the mother's right hand, taking her place as far as possible when she had been laid aside by illness and family cares, and

when the house had been robbed of its natural heads, falling as a matter of course into the position of housekeeper. It had never occurred to her as possible that she would be able to marry or to leave her post in any other way, and the thought of this long holiday, this going out into the world in independent luxury as a sight-seer and pleasure-taker, was almost intoxicating to her. Had it not been that Dax was not considered fit to go alone, and that Damaris had a still stronger claim upon her, Nancy would have thought it hardly right to consent; but Aunt Janet's pleading, the determination of her family to give her the treat, and the need for Dax to have a sister with him, won the day, and Nancy found herself almost as excited at the prospect, and almost as delighted as the brother himself.

If there were those amongst the brothers and sisters who thought that so sweet and helpful and pretty a girl as Nancy would never be allowed to leave the colony again, nobody said as much in set terms. They liked to speak of it and to think of it merely as a long visit, and Nancy probably never thought of anything else. Time would show whether or not she was to come back to them.

"We shall come out to see you sometimes," Olga would assert, with the assurance of an experienced traveller, to whom distance was a mere

detail. Olga and Oswald were openly affianced now, and were to marry on the same day as Damaris and Giles, and go to their new parish in the Midlands, regarding which Olga was keenly interested. "I know my old man"—this was her habitual way of speaking of her affianced husband —"will break down with overwork by-and-by—it's the kind of thing men of his calibre are bound to do sometimes—and then I shall send for Giles and tell him to order a sea-voyage and six months' rest; and off we will start for the antipodes, and pay you a long visit, Nancy. Why, no place is any distance now. We will go by the Red Sea and come back by the Canadian Pacific route, which will be quite open by then. Oswald, I think we'd better both overwork ourselves as hard as we can from the very first. I'm quite in a hurry to be starting off to see them."

As the parties thus indicated were sitting in the same room, this characteristic speech from Olga evoked hearty laughter. She put her head on one side, and waved her hand, as she said:

"Oh, you are not interesting *now*—I don't take the least interest in you yet. I'm thinking of the future, but you, none of you, have any imagination——"

"Well, my love, you make up for that lack for the whole family," answered Oswald with a smile.

"I wonder where you think the fairy gold is coming from that is to take us flying across the world at will. You must remember that you and I will be poor folks for many years to come, and that anything we have left over from our own necessities will be needed by those around us."

Whilst Oswald was speaking Frank was adjusting his glasses, and now looked full at Olga with one of those glances she never could resist. She went off into a peal of silvery laughter, though Frank's face never changed, and he remarked reprovingly:

"Olga, you are flippant. It does not become the wife of the 'meenister' to comport herself thus. What would they say to you if your destination were to be Scotland?"

"It 's your fault, Frankie—it 's you who make me laugh. I shall never dare to have you to stay with us. You always make me what you are pleased to call flippant."

Damaris had long felt that some secret understanding existed between Olga and Frank. She did not exactly know what it might mean, but she began to have a shrewd suspicion that the dainty little "cosmopolitan" who had won Oswald's heart, and who talked so cheerfully about sharing his poverty with him, was not quite the dependent young person she was popularly supposed to be.

All that Oswald appeared to know upon the subject was that the Baroness, in sanctioning the engagement, had told him that Olga would have enough of her own to dress herself upon, and that she would not be a burden upon him. He had been afraid that the change from the luxury to which she had been accustomed would be painfully felt by her, and had been very diffident of declaring his affections. But both the sprite herself and the Baroness likewise made light of this difficulty. Olga declared that she always had a yearning after a little house of her own, with only one servant, and a kitchen she could potter about in at will; whilst the Baroness had told Oswald plainly that, in her own very critical and uncertain state of health, it was an immense relief to her to see the child safely married to some good man, who would make her a loyal and loving husband, and protect her from the perils that might beset her had she been left alone in the world. As for the Baroness herself, it was arranged that she should remain as an inmate of the old house. Ella was eager to take Olga's place as the companion of the invalid, and Giles was glad to think that she would be under his immediate care, as her life now hung on a thread, and it was imperative that she should be spared all exertion or anxiety.

Matters were smoothing themselves out wonder-

fully for the Inglehursts. The double wedding was fixed for early in November, and, to the great delight of the whole party, Giles Leland had announced his intention of taking a good holiday on the occasion of his honeymoon, and had declared that, if Damaris liked it, they would go as far as Malt.. in the vessel that was taking Dax and Nancy to Australia—a suggestion which was hailed with delight by those concerned, and which did away at once with half the burden of the thought of the parting.

Olga, of course, was ready to cap this suggestion with another, that they should charter a yacht, and all go together to Australia, and land Dax and Nancy there before returning. Frank retorted that in that case they would find on their return that the house and all the property had been sold, and that the family had taken to the life of a caravan, with himself as master of the ceremonies. Olga declared that that would be the most ideal life of all, and was again rebuked for her flippancy.

Mrs. Leland, in the absence of Giles and Damaris, would keep house for the remaining members of "the dozen" who still dwelt beneath the roof of the old home. Di had willingly entered into the agreement of being Mrs. Leland's companion, and almost adopted child, when she was left alone through her son's marriage. To do this

did not take her from her own people nor from her beloved school and studies; and Mrs. Leland was always on her side in regarding the office of future schoolmistress as an honourable and suitable one for her, if no nearer and dearer claim upon her should in course of time be made. Di, of course, was quite certain that *she* should never marry, and no rival in her heart to Mrs. Leland and Miss Hilton had ever for a moment appeared. She had one of the self-reliant natures well fitted to fight the battle of life alone, and Mrs. Leland thought it quite probable she would end by attaining the zenith of her ambition—a well-worked and high-class school of her own.

A few weeks before the wedding Olga came of age, and upon the afternoon of that day Oswald was summoned to a private conference with the Baroness and Giles Leland, who had of late undertaken the business arrangements of his kinswomen.

Whilst Oswald was gone, Frank sat strumming upon his banjo, his favourite tune for the nonce appearing to be, "Oh, what a surprise!" which he kept twanging in various keys, softly enunciating the words of the refrain to himself with every inflection of emphasis.

At last Damaris, who had long entertained suspicions of her own, looked up from her stitching

of some of her trousseau garments, and said quickly:

"What *is* it, Frank? I know you are bubbling over with some kind of nonsense. You might as well let us have the benefit of it, too."

"No, mum; it ain't no nonsense," answered the lad, adjusting his glasses, as he laid down his banjo and strolled across the room. "It's all serious, solemn earnest this time. 'Oh, what a surprise!'"

"What is 'a surprise,' you ridiculous boy?"

"Why, what old Oswald is getting now. Wouldn't I have liked to be there to see his face!"

"What is he getting, Frankie?"

"Why, he's hearing all about Olga—that's all."

"What about her?"

"Why, that she's an heiress—got a whole pile of money somewhere, even if the old Baroness don't leave her all hers, which I expect she will. That's all, mum. Pity I wasn't a bit older, and I'd have cut old Oswald out!"

"Frank, do you really mean it? Olga always said she hadn't a penny except what the Baroness allowed her."

"Neither she had till to-day. It was all tied up as tight as wax. She didn't have a penny, not

even the interest of it, till she was of age. If the Baroness hadn't given her a home she'd have had to go to the workhouse. It was a queer will her father made, and she's not had anything of her own till now. But now—oh, now it's a very different pair of shoes! Won't old Oswald stare!"

"But why didn't Olga tell him? why did she only tell you?"

"'Cause I'm too 'cute a chap to be hoodwinked, and I was her friend all through, throwing dust into Oswald's ostrich-eyes, for the fellow would never have asked her if he thought she'd above a few dozen penny pieces to bless herself with. But I guessed all along a girl like that, coming of such a stock, must have something in the back-ground, and, when I put it to her plump, she told me she should have some money some day, but didn't know how much, and didn't want anything said till she could tell all. So we bottled up our information till to-day, and now—'Oh, what a surprise!'"

"Well," answered Damaris, "I won't pretend that I am either very much astonished, or at all sorry. I had my suspicions before. And dear old Oswald deserves his good luck, though, as you say, he never would have tried to get an heiress if he had known. But she certainly is the very wife

for him. I don't think anybody could get really low-spirited or disheartened with Olga for a wife. And of course it will be up-hill work for him in that parish, and he is rather given to self-distrust and depression by nature. I think they will make a noble use of their wealth, and be a model clergyman and his wife. Oh, here they come. I hear their voices. Olga seems to have a great deal to say."

"As per usual," murmured Frank, as he planted himself upon the rug opposite the door, and stared through his glasses at the advancing pair who came in—Oswald looking bewildered, and Olga dimpling and bubbling over with mirth.

As soon as she caught sight of Frank she went off into a peal of mirth that was irresistibly infectious.

"It 's going to be a case of breach of promise of marriage," she said, running over to Frank, and returning his glance with one equally full of fun. "He wants to repudiate me, but I 'll have the law of him, you see if I don't; and you 'll be a witness for the prosecution, and bear testimony that he did promise to marry me. I 'll have him up in all the courts. I 'll not be treated like this." And then, suddenly breaking off, she glided across the room with her own peculiarly airy motion, and put her arms about Oswald's neck; for he had

now seated himself near to Damaris, still looking bewildered and perplexed.

"Dear boy," she said, softly, "you do not really mind, do you? If you do I will give it all away. I will——"

"Found a lunatic asylum with it," suggested Frank, gravely. "That will be the most appropriate thing to do, and Oswald shall have the first nomination to the benefits of the institution."

There was a general laugh at this, and Oswald's face cleared as he saw the pleading glance in the eyes of his little betrothed shining through all the mirth and laughter. He drew her fondly to him.

"I shall get used to the idea. I think I shall learn to be very glad and thankful in time, only I am very much surprised; and I had no idea that I was aspiring to the hand of an heiress."

She suddenly pulled her hand from his and stood up before him, looking very proud and glad.

"Do you think I should have loved you as I do if I thought you were?" she asked. "Was it not because it was the hand of Olga de Witt—not the hand of the heiress you wanted, that I was so happy, so glad, so satisfied? Do you think I would divide the honours with my senseless gold? And has it not been my horror all my life that I should fall a victim to some one who would deceive me, loving my fortune, whilst

I thought he loved me, and only found out the mistake too late? Oh, if you could know how I have sometimes—reading the stories of other blighted lives—dreaded a like fate for myself, you would not blame me for keeping my little secret. I kept it first, and auntie for me, because we both feared some such thing as that; and afterwards, after I knew you, and thought, and hoped—oh, I guarded it more closely than ever; for I was afraid if you knew you would be scared away, and I should lose——"

She did not finish the sentence, but slipped her arm about his neck again, not ashamed of speaking with this unreserve before others who loved them both. Then, looking in his face, she asked, half wistfully, half triumphantly:

"And you are not angry with me, are you? You forgive me for what I did?"

His answer was not spoken in words, but it abundantly satisfied even the exacting Olga.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT, after all, things were not pushed through quite so rapidly as was at first contemplated, and before the farewells were said and the travellers speeded across the ocean to their new home, the dozen met once again beneath the dear old roof of home, to spend the happy Christmas-tide there together.

No one could regret that such was the case. Despite the brightness of the future opening out for each, the tie of brotherhood was too strong for the wrench of parting to be anything but severe, and when small delays had arisen, and Giles had declared it would be far better for Dax not to reach Australia till after the heat of its summer season had passed, no one regretted the decision; and when at Christmas time the house was filled once more to overflowing—for there were the new sisters and the new brother to be accommodated in that elastic mansion now—the whole party

rejoiced at this happy reunion, before the day came when the dozen must finally split up into its component parts.

Giles and Damaris were married now, and Giles had taken up his position as master of the house, and elder brother of all its inmates. The double wedding was quite a recent event, and Oswald and his bride had not yet returned from their honeymoon trip; but they were expected back this very evening—Christmas Eve—and Frank had got together all the reports published in the local papers of the imposing ceremony, and was employing the idle moments of the twilight in reciting the most flowery passages to Roly-Poly, and making the eager twins repeat them after him, so as to be able to retail them later on to Olga. When it came to the concluding passage, in which their own costumes of crimson and white were described, and they were spoken of as "a perfect picture of childish beauty," their giggles became irrepressible. Indeed, the whole room was by this time in fits of laughter, and Damaris in vain begged Frank to desist, as it was really too ridiculous for anything.

"Not at all, mum," he returned. "It's all in print—so it must be true, and Olga will appreciate the high falutin' of our aboriginal reporter, if you don't. It's right these 'perfect pictures' should

have their lesson pat. Go on, Roly-Poly, begin from the 'gleaming white robes, and the soft fall of filmy lace, white as driven snow, fresh from the breast of the graceful swan.' I do love a well-mixed metaphor, and this fellow is a first-rate hand at it."

"Hark!" cried Nancy, raising her hand. "I'm

"The reports published in the local papers."—*Page* 248.

sure I hear wheels. It is the carriage coming back. They have come. It is Olga and Oswald, I know it is."

There was a general rush of all the children. The elders rose from their seats, but resumed them again, laughing.

"It is hopeless all to try and go," said Damaris; "let the little ones have the first kisses."

"There are limits to the powers of endurance even of brides," said Frank. "Olga has only got a dozen new brothers and sisters, not counting Bertha and Giles——"

"Who decidedly mean to be counted," said Mrs. Inglehurst, as Frank sometimes dubbed the bright-eyed Bertha; "but I don't think that Olga will be daunted by numbers."

"Or she 'd have been choked off long ago?—well, perhaps so. It 's a wonder you either of you had the courage to take a header into such a family as this. Hallo, mum? So here you are again like a bad halfpenny! I did think, when we made all that outlay on rice and old shoes, that we had seen the last of you for some little time to come. Thank you, mum; the same to you, mum," and Frank returned Olga's warm sisterly kiss with a sounding smack that set the whole company off into a laugh.

"This is delightful; how nice and Christmassy you do look. Frank, I am sure you are responsible for all the mistletoe in the hall——"

"No I ain't; who cares about kissing nobody but his own sisters?—and who else will ever try to stick so much as the tip of a nose into a house so chock full of one family as this is now? It 's an awful swindle belonging to such a family—it 's

enough to frighten a horse. I say, Olga, doesn't your heart begin to sink at the thought of what you've been and gone and done? With your fortune, you might have been my lady by this time, with a nice extravagant husband on the turf, and the *entrée* into the most fashionable society of the day. And you've gone and chosen a whipping-post of a parson, with a patriarchal family of brothers and sisters, and only one of them any good," and Frank favoured Olga with one of the looks which always convulsed her, and she sank into a chair breathless with kissing and laughing.

"Frankie, you are delightful as usual; but do let me have a look at everybody: and, oh, I have such a lot to say, I don't know where to begin. Dax, you *do* look better. I am so glad, Nancy; I don't think you will have much trouble with your invalid on the voyage. Tea? Oh, to be sure; I am as thirsty as a fish, and Oswald never thinks of indulging me with little extras on a journey. It must be nearly dinner time though. My news must keep till after dinner; but oh, Damaris, we did just run down to look at our new home—I made my old man take me—and I am just aching to be there for good, setting things going for the people. And the house is to be ready very soon now. I will tell you everything when I get a chance."

The chance did not come during that merry Christmas Eve dinner, which the whole family partook of together. All was fun and merriment and brightness then, each member of the party determining to banish the memory of all that was sad, not forgetting absent ones taken from their midst, but resolved not to grieve for those called away from the sorrow and trial of this world; and equally resolved not to let the shadow of coming parting mar the present happiness of being all together again.

Roly-Poly had to go through their lesson, to the great delight of Olga; and the whole party laughed till all were weary. It was only when the little ones had gone to bed that Olga was able to tell her tale.

"It is a perfectly ideal place," she began in her pretty emphatic way—"ideal for people like Oswald and me. It looks as if nobody in the least respectable had ever lived in it before, or ever could live there——"

"Just the very place for you, then," breathed Frank, softly.

"Yes, so it is," she cried, turning upon him with a bright smile and kindling eyes, "just the very place for two people who are all in all to one another, and are thirsting to carry some of their own happiness to others, and to share with them

the light, the hope, the brightness given to them. It would not be the least use for any people to go there who couldn't be quite independent of outside things—who could not enjoy a laugh at their own failures, at their owr expense, and, after a tumble, pick themselves up and start afresh, and walk and work always hand in hand. We must have our own sunshine ready made at home—for it won't be much we shall get outside. The church is the bright spot, though—that is, really beautiful. And, Frankie, I am going to have you down almost first thing to see about an organ; for I mean that to be my thankoffering for all this new happiness that has come to me; and I believe in music for helping people to understand that we want the worship of the Church below to be something like an echo of the eternal worship of Heaven." She paused a moment, her eyes glowing and sparkling as if with unshed tears, and then suddenly breaking off she plunged into another subject:

"The house? Oh, I shall make that charming in time, though outside it is rather uncompromisingly bare and new. But I shall coax hardy creepers up it—creepers that can stand smoke; and inside it is really very comfortable, and if it wasn't I should love it all the same, because you know it will be the first home I have ever had of my very own, and I and my old man mean it to be

the very best and brightest home that ever was; and if ever we are the least bit dull or low, why all we have got to do is to telegraph straight off for Frankie."

"Little puss, doesn't she like talking about her husband—her 'old man,'" said Damaris later on in the evening, as she and Giles escaped from the room for just a few words together in the frosty moonlight, with the crisp white snow beneath their feet. Giles had received a summons to a patient which had sent him forth, and his wife walked with him as far as the gate, holding to his arm and looking up lovingly into his face.

"It is such a happy, happy Christmas," she said, drawing a long breath. "I never thought once that so much happiness could be ours again. It is not selfish, is it, Giles? It is not that we forget them or love them less. If they could see us now I know they would rejoice in our happiness. I believe they do know. I believe that they do rejoice."

"I, too, believe that those who are not lost but only gone before have some share in our joys and our happiness," he answered gravely. "I think it is part of the wonderful, mysterious truth embodied in the words—'I believe in the communion of saints.' My wife need scarcely ask if

such happiness as that is wrong or selfish. She knows better."

"I suppose I do," answered Damaris, drawing a long breath. "I will take it as God's best gift to me, and thank Him for it. I think He will help us to use it as all His gifts should be used—to His honour and glory."

Giles was silent for a moment, and then he said softly and gravely:

"I think He will, my precious one—nay, I am sure He will. The cloud has lifted from your life, my brave sweet wife. And you need not be afraid of the happiness which has taken its place. Had you not borne the time of trial so bravely, this present sunshine would hardly have shone so brightly."

She looked up quickly, smilingly, at him.

"I like to be praised by *you*, Giles—it is very sweet; but I do not think I deserve it. I did not do anything to be praised for. It was natural to all of us to do what we could because we loved each other."

"Exactly. Love was the motive power which ruled your home. And I trust that love will be the motive power of all our lives, Damaris—love to God and love to man. We are going back presently to the old home, and we will rule it after the old fashion. It shall be a happy home for

many, ruled by the golden law of love; and I trust that it will continue to be the bright and happy home that in past years it has been, when it housed the unbroken circle of 'The Doctor's Dozen!'"

THE END.

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