

HALCYON DAYS.



The Forget-me nots.—Page 26.

London :

GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS,

PATERNOSTER ROW.



" They glided smoothly on under the shade of the high old trees that grew along the banks."—Page 28.

' Oh ! when we reflect on the days of our youth,
A faithful account will our consciences keep,
And teach us with joy or with sorrow the truth,
That ' what a man soweth, the same will he reap.'

HALCYON DAYS.

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CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HALL AND THE YOUNG LADIES—AN ARRIVAL
—A DISCOVERY IN THE WOOD—GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

WATERBROOK HALL is a handsome building of dark red and gray brick, situated among beautiful gardens in the midst of a spacious park, whose clumps and avenues of noble elms and beeches are the admiration of the whole country round. A winding stream shaded by drooping willows, flows through the greater portion of the grounds, and when the stately swans are floating on the waters, another charm is added to the peaceful beauty of a landscape which, in the richness of its living green and its ever-varying lights and shades as the masses of fleecy clouds are carried past on the breeze, could be rivalled in no land but our own. A rustic bridge crossing the stream leads to a wood, where the sweetest of wild flowers bud and bloom in their season, and often tempt wayfarers aside from the path which takes a short cut across the copse to the pretty little village of Waterbrook and its old-fashioned church, the pointed spire of which can be just seen peeping above the trees from the school-room at the Hall.

In the window-seat of this room, a few years ago, sat Louisa Vyning, a little girl ten years old, with a

most discontented face, and apparently in a most uncomfortable state of mind.

'I shall never like her!' she exclaimed, after a silence of a few minutes, in a very cross tone to her sister Minnie, 'all governesses are horrid! Emma Weld told me so the other day, and she ought to know, she has had so many!'

'But this one may be the exception, Loo,' said Minnie, 'you know Mr. Porter says there are exceptions to every rule.'

'He would not say there were to governesses, I'm sure. And only think of the ding-dong at the piano every day, Minnie!—that's the worst of all. Emma says Miss Brooks raps her knuckles for the least little mistake, so of course Miss Forster will rap ours. I shall look upon her as an enemy, Minnie, a real enemy.'

Two hours afterwards the governess arrived, and the little girls were presented to her by their mother; the kind glance of her soft eyes, and the sweet smile with which she spoke, won Minnie's heart at once; but that of the younger and less amiable sister was too intractable to be so quickly gained, and her face wore such an expression of dislike, that Miss Forster was both surprised and shocked.

'I hope,' said she, taking Minnie's hand, 'that we shall soon become very good friends and pleasant companions to one another. I will try that it shall be so—what do you say?'

'I will try, too,' replied Minnie, shyly but smilingly.

'And you, Louisa?' said her mother.

Louisa coloured, and looked uncomfortably at her sister, but gave no reply; and though the question was repeated, still remained silent.

'Poor child!' sighed Mrs. Vynning, 'the fact is, she is a little afraid of you, Miss Forster; she has heard so many tales of cross governesses from her

young acquaintances, that it really is no wonder. You will find neither of them very fond of lessons ; but children, you know, never are. I remember I hated school myself ; but then they cannot expect to be always as idle and happy as they are now, they must give up some little pleasure till they are educated and become great girls.'

'I am very sure,' replied Miss Forster, 'that they will have to give up no real pleasure in order to acquire knowledge. To be idle is certainly not the way to be happy.'

'Well, I only hope they may find it so,' said Mrs. Vynning, 'they will have plenty to do to make up for lost time, for really I am sorry to say they have not had regular study at all yet. While their brother was at home, they learnt French and a few English lessons with his tutor. I don't believe they did much ; and since William went to Eton, I fancy they have run wild.'

'Oh mama ! no ! we have read and practised every day, and Signor Bono has not missed a single lesson,' cried Minnie eagerly.

'I do hope they will get on in music, Miss Forster. Music and French—those are the principal requisites. I shall not see much of them—I never do, somehow, I have so many engagements. And then Mr. Vynning, as well as myself, cannot exist without a few weeks of Paris air occasionally ; but I shall feel quite comfortable now about them. I hope you will find them pretty good ; but if not, you must make them so, you know.' And Mrs. Vynning laughed as she patted the little girls on the cheek, and nodding good-bye, hurried away to dress for a drive.

A short conversation with Minnie, and Louisa's occasional remarks, soon proved to Miss Forster, that what she had inferred from their mother's words was correct. During the frequent absences

of their fashionable parents, the children had been left to the care of the servants, who, however trustworthy, were uneducated and unrefined. The little girls consequently had acquired rude and unpleasant manners. They had good abilities, and were tolerably advanced in their studies (for the tutor had made the most of the short time they were with him), but their hearts were uncultivated. Of duty they understood nothing. They were naturally affectionate and gifted with many amiable qualities, which, however, were defaced by habits of self-will, sulkiness, and obstinacy. To teach such children obedience, self-control, and those feelings of consideration towards others, without which no one can be really happy, was a task that many persons would have regarded as hopeless—not so Miss Forster; she knew by long experience that nothing can withstand the teachings of love and truth, and she doubted not but that she should soon prove to the young impressible minds committed to her care, that to be good is to be happy.

‘This first day,’ said Miss Forster after dinner, ‘shall be devoted to our becoming acquainted, so suppose we take a walk. I quite long to stroll by the winding stream and in the wood I saw as I drove through the park this morning.’

All three were soon rambling about the grounds, enjoying to the fullest the brightness of the sweet spring-tide. It was a delightful afternoon at the beginning of May, when the grass is greenest, and the newly-clad trees look fresh and gay. Violets and primroses, still beautiful and fragrant, enamelled the soft rich turf, while cowslips, blue hyacinths, and milk-white hawthorn in the prime of their sweetness, perfumed the air. The snowy swans floated gracefully on the clear waters of the brook, near whose shady shallow margins were to be seen the delicate bells of the lily of the valley, half hidden

by their broad green leaves. Crossing the pretty bridge, they entered the wood, where the sunlight streamed faintly through the young leaves, and the children were charmed when Miss Forster made them observe that the great branches meeting high above their heads, formed gothic arches, and told them that men had thus taken their first lessons in building their beautiful pillared temples with carved roofs from the living forest. It seemed, indeed, as if every object around afforded her an opportunity of telling them something they had never heard of before, something in which they became interested and amused. Every wild flower they met with had its little history ; and at last so pleased and excited did Minnie become, that she ran hither and thither through the wood, which fortunately was not very extensive, seeking new specimens for Miss Forster to examine and admire. She had just gathered a spray of that curious flower the herb Paris, whose green cup resting on its cross of leaves had surprised her, when she heard a breathing as of a sleeper. She quietly crept in the direction of the sound, and saw lying at the foot of a tree, on a perfect bed of the pretty white flowers of the sweet woodruff, a child



not more than three years old. It seemed to have sunk down there, overpowered by weariness; for its tear-stained cheek, uncovered head, and one foot shoeless and scratched, told of its having wandered long about the wood, most probably trying to find its way out. While she silently gazed at it, the child awoke, and looking around half-bewildered, half-frightened, began to cry.

‘Me wants to go to mine mammy,’ sobbed the little one piteously.

‘So you shall. Come with me, little girl,’ replied Minnie, quite moved by its tears, and taking her in her arms. It was more of a burden than she had ever before carried, but she contrived, notwithstanding a few stumbles, to reach Miss Forster in safety. The adventure related, they tried to discover from the child who her mother was, but in vain. Her name was Matty, she said, and she wanted her mammy. Miss Forster therefore determined to take her to the village, where there was no doubt she would be speedily recognised. Carrying the little stranger, and trying to stop her tears, they had nearly reached the stile which divided the wood path from the straggling village street, when they saw a lad coming towards them, and the child screamed with delight.

‘Oh, ma’am,’ cried the boy, as he reached them, and the little one sprang into his arms, ‘where did you find her? Mother has been crying so about her! She was washing behind the house, and Matty was playing in the garden, when all at once mother missed her. At first she thought she had gone to some of the neighbours, and after a while she went to fetch her, and could not find her anywhere.’

‘But how could the little thing get over the stile?’ asked Miss Forster.

‘There’s a hole in the hedge farther down, ma’am;

but I must run home to mother—she will be so grateful to you, ma'am.'

'But tell us her name before you go,' said Miss Forster, 'we shall like to see the little one again.'

'Oh! thank you, ma'am; mother's name is Price, and father's head ploughman to the Squire.'

'Oh, I know where she lives,' cried Minnie, 'and I know you too! you are Dick Price, and you help the gardener.'

'Yes miss, but I'll run home now to mother with Matty, if you please.'

The happy boy ran off after making a kind of bow and scrape with his foot, and Miss Forster and the children, glad to have been the means of giving pleasure, turned homewards. The first part of the return was as cheerful as the walk from home had been, but when some of the excitement about Matty had gone off, and the sun had set, and with the gloom weariness began also to be felt, Minnie as well as Louisa showed a good deal of temper. They complained incessantly, and screamed at the sight of every poor frog, which chanced to hop too near the path.

'Nasty things,' cried Louisa, 'I wonder what they were made for!'

'They are of use I suppose,' said Minnie, 'for nurse told me once that every thing was made for the use of man.'

'They can't be of use,' replied Louisa petulantly, 'and how can everything be made for us? are spiders, and flies and all those nasty insects? everybody kills them whenever they can catch them.'

'Not every one, I am glad to say,' remarked Miss Forster, who had been silently listening, 'only the ignorant and the silly. The living things we think disagreeable, were nevertheless made to be happy, and when we destroy them, we destroy creatures

upon which the Creator looks down with as loving an eye as upon ourselves !'

'After all,' said Louisa that night while she and her sister were being undressed, 'Miss Forster is not so very disagreeable.'

'I shall love her, I'm sure,' replied Minnie, 'she speaks so kindly—and even when she reproves she is not cross ! I shall try to please her, Loo.'

CHAPTER II.

DUTIES BECOME PLEASURES—COTTAGE VISITS—THE FAITHFUL DOG—THE GIPSIES.

IT was quite surprising to Minnie and Louisa, to find that school duties were not disagreeable; certainly never when set about cheerfully and willingly. Only a week after their regular lessons had commenced, they would perhaps have wondered how they should get through the long day, had one been given them to spend as they liked. Three hours of the morning, and two of the afternoon of steady application to books, were thought sufficient by Miss Forster—but every stroll she took with her pupils, in the park and surrounding lanes—every visit to the humble cottages of the villagers—every pleasant laughing conversation she had with them, impressed some lesson of wholesome truth on their young hearts. Yet there were still cloudy days in the school-room—times when impatience prevented a task being properly studied, and ill-temper resented reproof. But as no such demonstrations ever ruffled the calm composed manner of their governess, Louisa as well as Minnie, soon felt that opposition to what she desired would be vain, and obedience, consequently, was not long in being acquired. The selfishness that actuated them—their frequent disputes with one another, and above all, the want of any principle of duty in their actions, were the great defects Miss Forster laboured, she hoped, not vainly, though slowly to correct.

‘I am quite tired of that word “duty,”’ said Louisa one day when Miss Forster had been reproving her for rudeness to her sister, ‘I never heard so much about it in my life before. I should never have

dreamt of my having any duty to perform towards Minnie. It is only servants and people who have to work for their living who have duties.'

'You are mistaken,' replied her governess, 'we have all duties to perform towards one another, from the Queen to the poorest of her subjects—from the gray-haired man to the child just able to distinguish the right from the wrong. We have to make each other happy—we have to help, and to guide to do better all who need—and we must heed, and unceasingly try to profit by the instructions and example of those wiser and better than ourselves.'

'Well if it is my duty to make Minnie as happy as I can, it is hers also to make me happy, and if she does not, and you know how she always wants the very book I am just going to take—and always asks you to let us walk somewhere that I do not wish—why I do not see that I need take any trouble to do my duty to her.'

'Dear Louisa,' said Miss Forster, 'I do not think your sister is so unkind or so unjust as to behave as you describe, but even if she were, your duty remains the same. Believe me, we never can make people better by neglecting our duty, though they may forget theirs, and 'do unto others as you would that they should do unto you,' is the golden rule for happiness.'

Saturday afternoon was considered a holiday, and generally devoted to longer excursions than those taken on other days. A very pretty and commodious little chaise, was kept for the use of Miss Forster and her pupils, and in this, drawn by two fine strong donkeys, they visited the more distant dwellings of their humble neighbours, carrying little comforts to the aged and sick—articles of clothing to the children, or such books as Miss Forster thought they would read with profit as well as pleasure.

'But,' said Minnie, when her governess first pro-

posed these weekly visits, 'cannot we just as well send the poor people what they need?'

'A servant could take the things to them,' remarked Louisa, 'and then we might have Saturday afternoon for nice visits, instead of going to those dirty cottages.'

'It is partly because some of them are dirty that I wish to visit them,' said Miss Forster; 'when the cottagers perceive that we interest ourselves about them, they will endeavour to please us, and they will make it a matter of pride to have their houses decent when we call; this will be laying the foundation of a good habit, and thus we shall do them real good. And then, dear Minnie, the poor value our kind words and sympathy more than they do our gifts—our clothes and jellies may be thankfully accepted when sent by a servant, but if brought by ourselves and presented with friendly looks, and hopeful, encouraging words, they will afford infinitely more comfort and pleasure.'

They started on one of these excursions one lovely Saturday in June, when summer is in all its freshness and glory. Their road lay through charming lanes with high banks, and shaded by an arched roof of oaks and elms. An hour's drive brought them to the dwelling of Dame Graysley, whose youngest girl was just recovering from a long illness. It was a neat pretty cottage, surrounded by a garden gay with flowers, intended for use as well as ornament, for a long row of bee-hives stood beneath a window overhung with honeysuckle and jasmine.

'And how is little Mary to-day, Mrs. Graysley?' asked Miss Forster, as the good woman came out curtseying to assist her and the children from the chaise.

'Much better, thank you kindly, ladies; she's getting on finely now. I'm sure we're very much beholden to you for your goodness in coming to see her; but pray come in and sit down, ma'am.'

The little girl was propped [up by pillows in a low comfortable chair, and at her feet lay a large and rather ugly dog—ugly, except in the expression of his honest face and mild eyes, which were fixed on the countenance of his young mistress, whose every movement he watched. Her pale face lighted up with a smile of welcome, as the visitors entered, and her dim eyes quite sparkled with delight, when Minnie unwrapped the paper parcel she carried, and presented a pretty doll to her.

‘There, Mary,’ said the little girl, ‘you said last week you wished you had one—do you like this?’

‘Oh! it is so beautiful!’ laughed the child, ‘I never saw anything so beautiful before.’

‘Yes, it is rather prettier than this ugly old dog you have always by your side,’ said Louisa, glancing disdainfully at the poor animal.

‘Don’t speak so of poor Rover, please don’t;’ and Mary’s eyes filled with tears.

‘No, miss,’ said Mrs. Graysley, ‘pray don’t; for we look upon him as a dear friend.’

‘A faithful dog has a right to be considered such,’ observed Miss Forster; ‘but has Rover shown his attachment in any very striking manner?’

‘You shall hear, ma’am. May be you’ve heard that last year I buried a dear child?’ and poor Mrs. Graysley wiped her eyes with her apron as she spoke. ‘She lies in Waterbrook church-yard, little darling! She was very fond of Rover, ma’am, and he used to sleep at the foot of her little bed, and he would sit by her half the day, and look at her so when she talked to him. Sometimes, ma’am, I really think that dumb animal has as much sense as a human being. But at last she left us, and the day after she was buried, we remembered the dog. We had forgotten him before in our trouble, poor fellow! but we couldn’t find him anywhere—nobody knew aught about him. Well, ma’am, more than a week after-

wards I was at Waterbrook, and I couldn't come home without going to look at the little heap of earth that covers my Susan, and there on the top of it lay Rover !'

'Good Rover!' exclaimed Minnie softly, and she stooped to pat him.

'Poor fellow!' said Miss Forster, 'was he not almost dead from want of food?'

'That he was, ma'am, well-nigh starved. We should have found him sooner, only on Sunday we go to Moreton church, it is nearer to us. Howsoever, you may believe that the creature that neither cold nor hunger could drive away from our lost Susan, will always be a dear friend to us.'

'I suppose he loves Mary now as well as he did Susan?' remarked Minnie.

'I daresay he does, miss,' replied the good woman; 'but it was a long time before he seemed comforted or took to any one.'

'I do not wonder at your loving him, Mary,' whispered Louisa, 'I'll never call him ugly again.'

Mary smiled, and when her visitors had seen her eat some of the nice calf's-foot jelly Miss Forster had brought, they wished her and her mother good-by, and re-entered the chaise.

They returned home by a different road from that they had previously taken, and were chatting merrily, when a sudden turn brought them close to an encampment of gipsies. This was so unexpected, and Minnie and Louisa had heard so many frightful nursery tales concerning these wandering people, that a scream escaped from the lips of each, and they became very pale. Two swarthy dirty women were seated on the ground outside some tents, apparently watching the bubbling of a three-legged black pot suspended over a fire by a triangle of sticks, while a third, nursing a dark-coloured baby, was

reclining beneath a tree by the road-side. The voices of children were heard among the trees, as if at play, and the prostrate body of a sleeping man could be seen within the opening of one of the tents. As the chaise passed, the strangely bright black eyes of the gipsies glared fearfully, as the little girls thought, on them, and one of the women rose and advancing, begged them to have their fortunes told. Miss Forster shook her head smilingly, and at the same time gave her donkey a hint to go faster. Until the encampment was lost to sight, neither Minnie nor Louisa could speak; at last Minnie uttered an exclamation of relief, as if she had escaped some great peril; and Louisa ejaculated heartily, 'those horrid people!'



'They are not nice people, certainly,' said Miss Forster laughing, 'but that is rather a strong expression of yours.'

'Oh! I was so frightened,' cried Louisa, 'those women were so tall, and looked so strong and fierce; and their eyes! how frightful they are!'

'Their eyes are really frightful, so different from ours, are they not?' said Minnie.

'They are very singular, certainly, and unlike the eyes of all other people I know,' replied Miss Forster.

'Why are they called gipsies, I wonder?' said Louisa, after a short pause.

'Because they came from Egypt, I've read,' replied her sister.

'So it used to be thought,' said Miss Forster; 'but now it is believed that their original country was India or Tartary, and their language has lately been found to be a corruption of the Hindoostanee.'

'And when did they first come to England?' asked Minnie, 'did they always steal and ramble about as they do now?'

'They were first known in Europe about four hundred years ago, and in the reign of Henry the Eighth made their first appearance in England. I believe they have always lived by stealing, and pretending to a knowledge of futurity; but happily of late some attempts have been made to reform them, by teaching the children.'

'Why not begin with the grown up gipsies?' asked Louisa, 'and then they could teach their own children.'

'The parents are too much attached to their roving life,' replied Miss Forster, 'to submit to the restraints of civilisation; but if their evil habits be corrected in childhood, and their good qualities cultivated, we may hope to raise these poor wandering tribes from

their degradation to a decent place in society. But see, here we are at home.'

'Home, home, sweet, sweet home!' carolled Minnie, as she ran in, 'I'm glad we're here; but it has been a pleasant afternoon, in spite of the fright those gipsies gave me.'

CHAPTER III.

DUTIFUL DICK—THE FAIRY BALLS—THE BROKEN VASE
—HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS—THE WATER-PARTY—
THE KINGFISHER.

SINCE the adventure in the wood, the cottage of Mrs. Price had been several times visited to see the little truant Matty; she was a happy little child, and Minnie became very fond of her. The whole family, indeed, could not fail to win the respect and good-will of those who knew them. The father was a fine specimen of an English peasant,—hale and hearty in looks—industrious and sober in habits—fond of his wife, his children, and his home—friendly to his neighbours, and manly, while respectful in his deportment to his superiors. The mother was kind and gentle—proud of her husband and her children, and keeping them and all around her so exquisitely neat and clean, that one could well believe that with her, cleanliness was only next to godliness.

This worthy couple had but two children, little Matty, and Dick who worked with the gardener at the Hall. A brave fellow was Dick,—‘a regular trump of a boy,’ said William Vying, to whom he was well known, and who, being of a generous open disposition himself, could appreciate heartily the like good qualities in another.

‘He is indeed a good dutiful lad, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Price to Miss Forster one evening when she had called in passing with her pupils to see their little pet; ‘he is indeed, and there’s not many like him, I’m sure—more’s the pity! He’s up with the sun every morning, and goes singing like a lark to his work; and then when he comes home at night, he’ll run off to the green for a game at trap, or such like,

with the boys there, but he's sure to come back after a while with 'Mother, have you any job for me; for if you hav'n't, I'll do a bit in the garden:' and true enough he's made it a sweet pretty one.'

It was indeed well worthy of the pride with which Mrs. Price evidently regarded it; there were no sweeter or brighter flowers throughout the whole country round than those which grew so luxuriantly in it; and the little arbour at the end, in which the ploughman smoked his pipe every evening, shaded as it was on one side by a great bush of sweet-briar, and wreathed on the other with garlands of twining purple convolvulus, was the pleasantest retreat imaginable.

'I wish we could get Dick to help us with our gardens,' observed Minnie, as they walked home-wards talking of his skill and industry; 'they want a good deep digging up, papa says, and we can't do it.'

'Suppose we borrow him from the gardener,' suggested Louisa.

'We will try,' replied Miss Forster, 'on condition, however, that you will require him only to dig; you must do the rest.'

'Oh yes! we'll promise that,' cried both the girls at once.

Dick accordingly came one day to work at their flower-beds, which, for want of proper culture and care, were far from being at all ornamental to that part of the grounds in which they lay—fortunately it was a somewhat secluded spot in the shrubbery.

'I think I've found something that keeps your flowers from coming up well, miss,' said the boy to Minnie, when she with her sister and Miss Forster went to see how he was getting on with his job, 'the fairies have been here.'

'The fairies, Dick! what do you mean?'

'Why, see, miss, these are what folks call fairy

balls. I dug them up this afternoon, and no garden thrives, they say, where they are.'

So saying, Dick produced from his handkerchief, which he had carefully hung on the branch of a tree near by, two small balls of the brightest scarlet.



'How pretty!' exclaimed Louisa, 'what are they, Miss Forster?—you know, I'm sure.'

'Nothing mischievous or unlucky, as Dick seems to think, I assure you,' replied her governess smiling, 'but the beautiful nest of the Upholsterer Bee, formed, as you will perceive if you examine it, of the leaves of the poppy.'

'How very curious!' cried the children; 'and what is inside, pray?'

'If we opened it, we should find it lined with the pollen or powder taken from the flowers, and among that probably a little egg or grub, with some honey for its nourishment.'

'How smooth the outside is! and yet if we pluck a poppy leaf, it wrinkles up presently,' remarked Minnie.

'The touch of the insect is so exquisitely delicate, that it leaves no blemish,' replied Miss Forster. 'These are real curiosities, Dick.'

'I never found any but once before, ma'am,'

answered the boy, 'and then folks told me they were unlucky, but I know better now, thank you for the same.'

Dick's part in the garden work was soon finished, and the girls then spent every spare half-hour they had, in replanting their best rose-bushes, and sowing various flower-seeds of quick growth. The gardener gave them some scarlet geraniums and calceolarias in full bloom out of the greenhouse, so that in a short time, with careful watering, the beds presented a very pretty appearance, and they were delighted to think of William's surprise when he came home for the holidays, and found the spot he used to call the 'Shrubbery Desert' so changed.

At length the morning on which this long-wished-for event was to happen arrived, and Minnie and Louisa were granted a holiday that they might have all their little preparations for doing honour to their brother in perfect order. To complete the 'dressing-up' of the school-room, which they had made look quite bowery, Louisa gathered the choicest of her flowers to arrange in the pretty vase which William had given her on her last birth-day.

'See, Minnie,' cried she, when she had grouped her white and red roses and fuchsias to her satisfaction, 'isn't it beautiful? Wont William be pleased to see that I have kept his present so carefully!'

'Yes, it does look very pretty,' replied her sister; 'but don't place it on that out-of-the-way slab, put it on the little table under the window.'

'No, I like it better here. You always make some objection to everything I do, Minnie.'

Minnie made no reply, and after a short silence, Louisa quietly placed the jar where her sister wished, saying pleasantly as she did so, 'It does look better there after all.'

It happened, unfortunately, that a large Angora cat, a favourite with the children, was passing outside

the window at this moment, and seeing it invitingly open, and one of her young mistresses near, she made a spring, and jumped full upon the beautiful vase of flowers, sending it to the floor with a terrible crash. Louisa uttered a passionate cry, and the angry colour reddened her brow, as she exclaimed, 'What made you tell me to put it there?'

'Oh Louisa! Louisa!' said Minnie, bursting into tears, 'I am so sorry, so very sorry.'

Moved by her sister's tears, Louisa conquered her temper; almost as if ashamed of her own gentleness, and blushing as she kissed her, she replied in a low tone, 'Never mind, Minnie; do not cry about it, you see I don't.'

Miss Forster was anxiously watching this scene; and though most happy at the successful effort Louisa had made to subdue her irritation, she said nothing in commendation. She knew well that such a victory would be its own reward. The little girl, indeed, regained her usual cheerfulness after the accident long before her sister, who looked dull and thoughtful until she heard the wheels of the carriage which brought William home for his midsummer holidays.

All clouds disappeared as they then both rushed to the door to receive him, and with kisses and noisy laughter, and a strange confusion of words, took him into the drawing-room to their father and mother. Soon he was conducted thence triumphantly to the school-room, to be introduced to their governess.

'Here he is,' cried Minnie, 'this is William, Miss Forster.'

'Gently, gently,' said Miss Forster, smiling and shaking hands with the pleasant-looking boy, whose laughing blue eyes sparkled with delight at his sisters' wild merriment. He had scarcely time to look at the gay holiday dress of the room he used to

think so dismal, when he was forced out of the house to visit 'the desert,' at sight of which, so blooming and well kept, he was even more surprised than the owners had anticipated, to their infinite gratification.

A rural feast had been arranged for the afternoon, to which most of William's young acquaintances were invited, and an unlimited quantity of strawberries and cream provided for their entertainment. It was a pleasant party, though some of the incidents of the afternoon were at first rather alarming. Tom Weld had insisted on climbing a great tree, and fell from a considerable height, to the consternation of all who beheld him—and then, when they had somewhat recovered from this fright, on finding that the troublesome boy was only slightly bruised, a cry was raised, that William had fallen into the brook, and he presently came running to the house to change his clothes, which were wet and dirty from scrambling down the banks to gather forget-me-nots for some of his sisters' friends. However, all went off well, and the great day of William Vyning's coming home for the holidays was long remembered as one of the happiest and merriest of that pleasant summer.

'I suppose you are going to lessons now,' said William to Minnie and Louisa the next morning after breakfast, 'so I shall go and look after young Toby, and then ride over to Tom Weld's.'

'You'll find Toby to be Toby Troublesome, I think,' remarked Minnie; 'for he has done just as he liked ever since you went away.'

'Why do you make that disagreeable Tom Weld your friend, William?' asked Louisa.

'How is he disagreeable, pray?'

'He is so rude,' replied Louisa; 'how he behaved yesterday!'

'Why, you would not have boys behave like Miss Namby Pamby, that must be seen and not heard, would you?' cried William, somewhat warmly.

‘Boys need not be rough and rude, because they are afraid of being like girls,’ remarked Minnie.

‘And was not Tom Weld disagreeable? Minnie, he would come running among us as hard as he could run, upsetting every one in his way. I do not like him at all; he cares for no one but himself, I believe.’

‘You used to like him, though,’ returned William, ‘and you never were contented unless you had his sister here two or three times a week—perhaps you don’t like her now?’

‘No, I do not, William, for a companion; Miss Forster says it is best not to associate with people of rude manners as there is danger of our becoming rude ourselves.’

‘Oh, just hear Louisa preaching!’ cried her brother laughing, ‘wonders will never cease; I suppose you think yourself better than Emma now?’

‘You ought not to laugh at me—it is unkind of you William;’ said poor Louisa.

‘No, William you ought not,’ remarked Minnie, ‘Louisa does try hard to be well-behaved and good-tempered, and to do her duty in everything, and Emma does not—that is the difference,—but Emma is to be pitied, for Miss Brooks does not teach her as Miss Forster teaches us!’

‘And how does Miss Forster teach you?’ inquired William.

‘By gentleness and good-temper,’ replied Louisa, ‘one can’t help doing what she wishes; but Emma says, that when Miss Brooks shakes her for not knowing her lesson, it makes her hate her so, that she would suffer anything rather than do what she wants.’

‘I should not like that feeling at all,’ remarked William.

‘Oh, it is a dreadful one, I used to have it sometimes before Miss Forster came to us,’ said Louisa.

‘You will like Miss Forster so much William,’ observed Minnie, ‘she talks so pleasantly! do come out with us this afternoon.’

‘Well, we’ll see!’ replied her brother, ‘now I must look after Toby—I hope he is not too wild to let me get on his back.’

To the girls’ great joy, William was waiting for them when their afternoon school duties were over, but instead of a walk, Miss Forster proposed a trip down the river, William and Dick to be the rowers. The children were delighted with the idea, and Miss Forster accordingly proceeded with Minnie and Louisa, to the little landing-place near the bridge, while William ran to fetch Dick, and to bring the boat round from the old thatched boat-house that was built across a little cove at one corner of the park

It was a very pleasant row—they glided smoothly on under the shade of the high old trees that grew along the banks, now among beds of water-lilies, now past thick plantations of flags, among which were hidden the nest of the water-rat, which might be seen as they approached, swiftly and silently seeking its shelter.

‘A kingfisher!’ cried Dick suddenly, as a bird darted from the bank a short distance before them, and crossing the stream alighted on the projecting bough of an alder tree on the opposite side. As it dipped and rose in its rapid flight, its brilliant plumage glittered in the sunlight as brightly as the gems in a queen’s diadem. Presently they saw it dart from the tree into the water and instantly rise again with a small fish in its beak.

‘What a beautiful little creature!’ said Minnie, ‘it almost reminds one of the birds of southern lands.’

‘It is the gayest of ours,’ replied Miss Forster, ‘and it is one famous in poetry—it used to be called

the Halcyon, and the poets said it laid its eggs on the sand of the sea-shore, and that as long as it sat upon them no storms or tempests disturbed the calm waves. The sailors of old therefore called this period of safety "Halcyon days."

'I have often heard that expression,' remarked William, 'and never understood it before; happy days, or days of rest, I suppose they meant!'

'But what made them fancy that the bird had any power over the sea?' asked Minnie.

'It happens,' replied her governess, 'that the kingfisher lays its eggs at that time of the year, when the ocean is less tempestuous than at others, hence the origin of the story.'

'And if you please, ma'am,' said Dick, 'it isn't true that kingfishers lay their eggs on the sea sand; I've often seen their holes in the banks hereabouts, and once I made the opening of one of them bigger, and put my hand in, and found it a good half-yard deep.'

'And did you find any eggs?' asked William.

'Yes, Master William, seven clear white ones, and they were not in a nest, but on a kind of bed made of dirt and fish-bones and the like.'

'So beautiful a bird,' said Miss Forster, 'is deserving of a song in her praise. Perhaps, dear Minnie and Louisa, you will sing those pretty lines by Mary Howitt, which are set to music in your volume of Juvenile Melodies.'

'Oh! by all means,' said William; and without further invitation the young ladies sang in their best style

THE KINGFISHER.

For the handsome Kingfisher go not to the tree,
No bird of the field or the forest is he;
In the dry river rock he did never abide,
And not on the brown heath all barren and wide.

He lives where the fresh sparkling waters are flowing,
Where the tall heavy Typha and Loosestrife are growing ;
By the bright little streams that all joyfully run
A while in the shadow, and then in the sun.

He lives in a hole that is quite to his mind,
With the green mossy hazel roots firmly entwined ;
Where the dark Alder bough waves gracefully o'er,
And the Sword-flag and Arrow-head grow at his door.

There busily, busily, all the day long,
He seeks for small fishes the shallows among,
For he builds his nest of the pearly fish-bone,
Deep, deep in the bank, far retired and alone.

Then the brown Water-rat from his burrow looks out,
To see what his neighbour Kingfisher's about ;
And the green Dragon-fly flitting slowly away,
Just pauses one moment to bid him good-day.

O happy Kingfisher ! what care should he know,
By the clear pleasant streams, as he skims to and fro,
Now lost in the shadow, now bright in the sheen
Of the hot summer sun, glancing scarlet and green.

‘ A beautiful little piece, and very well sung,’ said Miss Forster.

‘ Thank you very much, my dear sisters, I never heard either the words or music before.’

They now emerged from the shadow of the trees upon the broad open river, from which, across the meadows and the waving corn-fields, the village could be seen with its pretty thatched cottages, and its tall steepled church peeping from among the old elm-trees that surrounded it.

‘ Which way shall we go now,’ asked William, ‘ up the river, or down ?’

‘ I think we must turn back,’ replied Miss Forster ‘ we have not time to go farther this evening, and indeed, your hands must be sore already ?’

‘Oh ! I don’t mind that,’ said the good-tempered boy, ‘how are yours, Dick ?’

‘Mine ? Master William, you don’t think such work as this can hurt them ;’ and Dick laughed as he held up one of his horny palms.

‘That hard hand is something to be proud of, Dick,’ observed Miss Forster, ‘you could not show such a one were you an idle lad.’

‘Work’s no hardship, ma’am,’ replied Dick, ‘where there’s such a father and mother as mine, and such a master as Squire Vynning.’

The happy party soon reached the landing-place in the park again, and after wishing Dick a kind good-night, they hastened home to tea, which had been some time awaiting them,—and the welcome meal was as merry a one as young hearts without care or self-reproach ever enjoyed.

CHAPTER IV.

A DISAPPOINTMENT AND A SURPRISE—SPORTS AND PASTIMES—THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS.

ALTHOUGH these were William's holidays, he did not therefore pass all his time in play: by Miss Forster's advice, his former tutor was engaged to study with him two hours every morning, and when his Greek and Latin exercises were concluded, he usually spent another hour in his sister's school-room—Miss Forster's geography and history lessons, were he declared so interesting, that he learnt more from listening to her than he ever could from dry books. As all the boys of his acquaintance, however, were also at home for the vacation, many juvenile parties were continually being planned. Among the rest a fishing excursion was talked of, which William anticipated with great pleasure.

'It is settled at last,' said he one day to his sisters, 'and next Wednesday we shall have some capital sport!'

'Next Wednesday!' cried Minnie dolefully, 'then you can't be with us, and you know the Patersons and the Greys are coming to take tea with us.'

'I never thought of that, Minnie, but if I had, I could not have helped it,' returned William, 'it was not I who fixed the day. But put off your party, can't you?'

'Oh no! they all live too far off for that, and they have been invited such a time,' said Louisa; 'what a pity! I am so sorry.'

'So am I,' said her brother, 'but I really can't help it.'

It was indeed a great disappointment to the girls, for three of the expected guests were boys, and as

Minnie said, 'how could she and Louisa know what would amuse them most?' It seemed, however, as if it could not now be remedied, and they tried not to feel vexed, still the days passed very dully till the morning of the fishing-party arrived.

'I wish we had never thought of having any one here to-day,' cried Louisa as she sat down to breakfast, 'it is the most provoking thing I ever knew; everything seems determined to go wrong!'

'What is the matter?' asked William, 'anything very particular?'

'Now don't laugh in that way, William!' replied Louisa, 'you know how provoking it is to Minnie and me that you will be away all day, and now we find that we cannot even have the magic lantern for the evening—we had been counting on it, but that man at Dutton, who promised to put it in good order a week ago, has never sent it home yet.'

'But cannot one of the servants go for it?' inquired her brother.

'No, the housekeeper says that not one can be spared for such a long errand. Is it not extremely provoking?'

'Dick Price can go,' said William after a moment's pause, 'I will run off to him directly after breakfast and send him.'

'Oh, thank you, William!' cried both the girls joyfully, 'that is a good thought—he will go for us certainly.'

But even this expectation was not to be realised—Dick Price had been sent to some distance by the gardener, and might be detained until late in the afternoon. As William walked slowly back to the house, to announce this new disappointment, he felt a kind of self-reproach in thus a second time giving pain to his sisters; 'I must be selfish, I'm afraid,' said he to himself, 'I have been thinking of nothing but my own pleasure to-day. They were so sorry

that I could not join their little party, and now shall I tell them that they must do without the magic-lantern they wished for so much? I could fetch it myself, if I could only make up my mind to give up going with those fellows.'

A few minutes more, and William's eyes sparkled as he pictured to himself the delight of his sisters when they should know that he had made such a sacrifice for them—another minute, and his mind was made up, and he was running to the stables to order his pony.

It was meanwhile a morning of suspense to poor Minnie and Louisa. As William had not returned to inform them of the result of his application to Dick, they imagined that he had joined his friends on the river, and they waited as patiently as they could for the arrival of some tidings of the magic-lantern.

Miss Forster sympathised heartily with them, and endeavoured to divert their thoughts; she suggested many arrangements for the evening, which occupied a portion of the slow hours, but at length all seemed done that they could do, and Louisa had just seated herself on her favourite window-seat, when the door of the room burst open, and William, red with excitement and his long ride under the August sun, rushed in, bearing in his arms the wished-for magic-lantern! His sisters ran to take it from him with cries of glad surprise.

'Who went for it? How did you get it?' was asked at the same moment by each.

'Dick was away for the day,' replied William, 'and I could not bear that you should be disappointed again.'

'And so you went for it yourself?' said Louisa; 'oh, you are a good brother!'

'And you gave up the fishing-party?' cried Minnie, kissing him; 'how kind you are, William!'

If William had before felt any regret for the amusement he had given up, it was all dissipated now, when he saw his sisters so pleased, and received their loving thanks ; as he afterwards told them, he felt all that day so cheerful and contented, that every thing around him seemed charming, and he never enjoyed himself more. Nor did he regret his self-denial even when he heard from his friends the following day how perfectly successful and delightful the excursion had proved : his share in it, he felt, would have been purchased at the price of grievous disappointment to others.

There certainly never was a more perfectly successful party than this one of Minnie's and Louisa's. The Patersons and Greys arrived nearly at the same time, about four o'clock, and as they had ridden, and were not at all tired, they preferred rambling about the grounds before tea, to remaining in the house ; the wood was visited, and the girls' gardens admired and criticised, and the swans fed. At last, a game of hide-and-seek in the shrubbery was proposed, and all went on merrily, until James Paterson, the eldest of the visitors, becoming excited, became also rather boisterous in his play, and running heedlessly, stumbled against Minnie, sending her to the ground with some violence. Confused and ashamed, he offered to assist her up, but Minnie, more angry than hurt, chose to rise without help.

'You are too rough to play with girls !' exclaimed she.

'I am so sorry—I didn't mean—I hope you're not hurt ?' stammered James.

'Why, Minnie !' cried her brother, 'don't bear malice. You know he didn't mean to throw you down ; so shake hands and be friends.'

Minnie could not long feel resentment when conscious that it was unjust ; so she held out her hand

smilingly, saying, 'Don't run without looking where you are going to another time.'

'No, that I wont!—I promise you I wont,' replied James eagerly; and he kept his word, and was quite an example all the afternoon of how a boy can be very merry without being rude.

Scarcely was this uncomfortable interruption settled when Miss Forster joined them, and it was then determined to go and see the herons, of which the Greys had often heard but never seen.

The birds had taken possession of three large trees on the banks of a quiet bend in the stream, and the children were much amused to watch them flying round and round in great circles, their long legs stretched out behind them, serving as a rudder to direct their flight, or settling every now and then on their nest, in the most awkward manner imaginable.



'This is really a curious sight,' remarked Miss Forster, 'for there are not more than eleven or twelve heronries remaining in all England.'

'How I should like to see one of those battles between a heron and a falcon, that used to be thought such fine sport,' cried William.

‘Capital fun it must have been, to be sure,’ remarked James Paterson.

‘I don’t think so at all,’ exclaimed Louisa; ‘when I have read of hawking parties, it always seemed to me a very cruel amusement for ladies and gentlemen.’

Miss Forster now looking at her watch, announced that it was time to return home to tea, which had been ordered early, in order to give more time for the great amusement of the evening—the exhibition of the magic-lantern.

The well-spread table was a welcome sight, for every one had taken exercise enough to be hungry, and the thin bread and butter, and bread and honey, and spiced buns disappeared very rapidly. The most conspicuous of all the good things, however, was an immense cake covered with snow-white sugar, and adorned with sugar flowers, and coloured figures of lilliputian ladies and gentlemen. ‘It seemed a pity to eat such a *tasteful* composition,’ William said; but he did not hesitate doing so when Miss Forster desired him to cut it; he soon sliced and handed it round, presenting to each little girl at the same time one of the ornaments. It was a merry party, such talking and laughing! especially when James Paterson began asking riddles, of which he seemed to know a great number.

‘What wig cannot a barber make, Minnie?’

‘What a hard riddle, James! Of course he can make all kinds of wigs if he knows his business. Let me see—a—a—oh! I can’t imagine.’

‘D’ye give it up? Well, an earwig!’

Great laughter followed this unexpected answer, and then James began again, till at length tea was finished, and while the servants, under Miss Forster’s direction, were hanging up a large white cloth in the next room, and arranging seats for the spectators, William in his turn amused the little party with

various tricks. Much wonder was excited by an "enchanted" shilling, which he laid on the table and defied all present to take up. One after another tried, but as each hand approached, up jumped the coin into its master's! At last he showed them that the secret of this was a fine horse-hair fastened to it, and which he held, taking care to play the trick in a dull light. After this he took a small box from his pocket (his money-box, he said), and opening it, showed a fine new half-crown; shutting it again and tapping the lid, he cried "Presto!" and behold there was a bean in the place of the coin! James Paterson wished to do this trick; so taking the box, and tapping it as William had done, he opened, when with a loud buzz, out flew a chafer into his face! James started back quite frightened, letting the box fall, while every one laughed heartily.



By the time that the united efforts of all had made the chafer retreat through the open window, the magic-lantern was ready. It was a very large one, with a great number of beautiful slides, and afforded the whole company much pleasure. It was quite nine o'clock before the entertainment concluded, and the guests departed after heartily thanking their friends for the happy evening they had enjoyed.

'Yesterday,' said William the next morning, 'did really come up to my idea of a "Halcyon-day." I don't think I ever passed a pleasanter one, although I was so tired last night.'

'Every one was good-tempered, and tried to give pleasure as well as receive it,' replied Miss Forster; 'but cannot you understand, William, why you especially were so happy?'

'I know, if he does not,' cried Louisa, 'he felt that he had acted very kindly, and so was contented with himself.'

'Yes,' answered Miss Forster, 'that is one of the secrets of true happiness. When we have made a sacrifice of our inclinations in order to perform a duty, whether a kind service to another or a task to ourselves, we are sure of our reward. There is no cheerfulness so sweet as that which springs from the consciousness of having done right.'

CHAPTER V.

THE HOLIDAYS OVER—THE RIDE ON THE PONY—THE ESCAPE—A REWARD, A REGRET, AND CONCLUSION.

THE vacation passed swiftly away, and but a few days remained before William's return to Eton. Every one regretted his approaching departure, and none more than his sisters, who, wiser and better than they used to be, now appreciated fully his good temper and kind obliging disposition.

'I really think you are a much nicer boy than you were before you went to Eton,' said Louisa to him one day.

'I am quite sure that you are a much nicer girl,' replied her brother; 'you used to care for nobody but yourself.'

'Don't talk of that, William dear,' cried Louisa kissing him. 'I used to be very ill-natured, I know, but half of it was because I was so thoughtless.'

'“Let bygones be bygones,” and “Live and mend,” are your maxims, I suppose,' said her brother, laughing; 'well, now, I'll tell you what I was thinking of when you complimented me. Let us ask Miss Forster to allow you girls to go out with me and Toby this afternoon, and you shall ride him turn and turn about.'

'Oh! how delightful!' cried both, and away they ran to obtain the desired permission, which was readily granted when William promised to take the very greatest care of them, and to keep in the neighbouring lanes. The pony was soon ready, and the three set out, Minnie riding while her brother and sister walked near her. The harvest had just begun, and bands of labourers were to be seen in the corn-fields, some reaping the ripe golden grain, some

binding it in sheaves, while women and children gleaned the scattered ears.

‘What a pleasant scene!’ exclaimed Minnie, ‘does it not make you feel happy, Louisa?—it does me.’

‘I always feel happy now when I am in the lanes and fields,’ replied Louisa; ‘do you know, William, since Miss Forster has been with us, we have found such a difference in our walks!’

‘How so?’ asked William laughing; ‘you don’t find the crooked lanes straight, do you?’

‘No no, William, you know what Louisa means,’ said Minnie; ‘we used not to take notice of things as we do now. But since Miss Forster has showed us that the hedges are full of curious flowers, and that every ditch and streamlet contains living creatures which are singular in their habits and shapes, and that whether the sun shines on the landscape, or the clouds shade it, there is always beauty—our walks are really delightful.’

‘Why, even the insects we used to call horrid are interesting to us, now that we know something about them,’ added Louisa.

‘An interesting earwig; only fancy!’ exclaimed William.

‘Yes, even an earwig can be interesting, Master William,’ returned Louisa; ‘Minnie and I watched one the other day sitting upon its eggs in the hollow it had scooped for a nest, and it was very interesting to think that that little creature could feel and act as a tender mother.’

‘Well, so it was. I never thought of it that way,’ replied William; ‘but Minnie, isn’t Louisa changed? I remember that she used to stamp so viciously on every creeping thing she met; and actually I have not seen her sulky once all the six weeks I have been at home!’

‘I hope you never will again either,’ said Louisa, blushing and smiling; ‘but you have forgotten about “bygones.”’

‘Never mind, you shall ride now to make up for it; so get down, Minnie, when you come to that stile.’

The change was made, and the little girl trotted gently forwards. She was not, however, as expert a rider as her sister, and Toby soon began to be restive under her management. At length, on turning an angle of the road, the unexpected sight of two children, one of whom had put his wide-brimmed straw-hat on the end of a rake which he was carrying to the field, so terrified the animal, that he suddenly shied, and then started at a frightful gallop. Poor Louisa screamed, and to save herself from falling, clung in terror to Toby’s mane. Minnie burst into tears, and sank trembling on the bank, while William, shouting after the flying pony, started in pursuit at the top of his speed, striving, but in vain, to overtake him. His loud cries attracted the attention of some reapers, one of



whom, looking up, at once became aware of Louisa’s danger. Quick as thought, he saw that by running across the corner of the field, he might be in time to catch Toby before he reached the steep hill at the turn of the lane. Off he ran as fast as his legs would

carry him, and just as he had calculated, he jumped down into the narrow road at the instant that the pony, in turning the sharp corner, had somewhat slackened his speed. Seizing the animal by the bridle with a vigorous grasp, he stopped his career, and at the same time caught Louisa in his arm as she fell almost lifeless from the saddle.

William now came running up, panting for breath. 'Is she hurt? Oh! is she dead?' he cried, as he looked in her pale face. She opened her eyes when she heard his voice, but had not yet sufficiently recovered from her fright to be able to speak.

'No, young master,' said the man, placing her gently on the bank under a spreading tree, 'she is not a bit hurt, only dreadfully skeared.'

'Oh Price! is it you?' exclaimed the boy, recognizing the worthy ploughman, 'how thankful I am to you! But where is Minnie? she is so frightened.'

'I say, Bob Jones!' called Price to a boy in the adjoining field, 'just run up the road and tell the young lady that her sister is safe, and then bring her here—do you hear?'

'Aye, aye!' replied the lad, 'I'm off!'

Minnie was soon kneeling on the grass beside poor Louisa, whose cheek was fast regaining its usual colour.

'Oh Price!' she cried as soon as she found strength to speak, 'how shall I thank you?'

'Don't talk about me now,' replied the honest fellow, 'I'm very glad I was in the way, and strong enough too to help you. But hadn't you best go home now, miss; I'll lead the pony, Master William.'

It was the evening before William's return to Eton, when Mr. and Mrs. Vynning, with Miss Forster and the children reached the door of the ploughman's cottage. The little family were at their afternoon meal, and Mrs. Price was fluttered beyond measure

when she saw who were her visitors. The party nearly filled the neat little room, and occupied every chair in it, while Mrs. Price stood by her husband's side with Matty, who half frightened, clung to her mother's skirts, and hid her face in her apron, notwithstanding Minnie's and Louisa's repeated efforts to entice her to them.

'We have come,' said Mr. Vynning, after a few kind questions and answers had passed, 'we have come, Price, to propose something we hope will be acceptable to you.'

'It is William's thought,' added Mrs. Vynning, 'and as he is well acquainted with your son Dick, we think he will certainly not object to it.'

'Now wouldn't you like to be a gardener, Dick,' interrupted William, 'a real out and out gardener, you know?'

'That I should!' replied Dick with sparkling eyes; 'nothing better.'

'Well then, Dick,' said Mr. Vynning, 'I have come to ask your father to let me take care of your future prospects. I will send you to a school where you will receive a good plain education, and then place you with a gentleman who will instruct you in everything connected with gardening—it will be your own fault Dick, if you do not learn, and if you do not thrive.'

'I thank you, Sir!' replied the ploughman, speaking with difficulty, 'I thank you from my heart!'

Mrs. Price fairly sobbed, while Dick could scarcely refrain from dancing and shouting, his favourite manner of expressing pleasure.

Tears stood in Mrs. Vynning's eyes also when she said, 'we are happy in being able thus to prove to you how grateful we are that our child has been preserved to us—though, nothing we can do, Mrs. Price, can ever repay the service your husband has rendered us.'

The next morning William returned to Eton, for another half year's absence from home—the parting of the brother and sisters was a great contrast to their meeting—then they were so noisy and glad—now, so downcast and silent.

‘I know I shall like school when I get there,’ were the boy's last words as he tried to smile good-bye, ‘but I am sorry to leave you girls, that I am!’

The day seemed so long and tedious to Minnie and Louisa, that they almost feared they should not be happy again until William came back. Time, however, especially when well employed, can work wonders, and so by the end of the week, they had regained all their usual cheerfulness, and even begun to anticipate the pleasures of the Christmas vacation.

‘When I think of it,’ remarked Minnie one day, ‘I feel quite surprised that we go on so happily without William, and yet we missed him almost painfully when first he went.’

‘And cannot you find a reason for it?’ asked her governess, smiling.

‘Perhaps it is because we take pleasure in our lessons,’ replied Minnie, ‘I can think of no other reason.’

‘Or perhaps, because we so seldom quarrel now, Minnie,’ cried Louisa.

‘You are both partly right,’ said Miss Forster, ‘but it is chiefly because your time is fully employed—occupation of mind and body is the secret of your happiness. You have no leisure for fretting, dear Minnie, so you see that every incident of life proves that duty is happiness, and that no real pleasure is ever sacrificed in performing it.’

Duty, that ‘tiresome word,’ as Louisa called it four months before, had strangely changed in meaning to the sisters, since Miss Forster had endeavoured to make it one of the principal motives of all their actions. Now each little girl when she rose in the

morning, thought of the perfect fulfilment of it as the great object of the day, and very heavy-hearted indeed did she feel who laid her head on her pillow at night, conscious that she had neglected it. Several times when their governess visited their bed-room before retiring to her own, she found either Minnie or Louisa awake and sobbing with self-reproach. On these occasions, even while condemning the acknowledged fault, Miss Forster comforted the mourner, and inspired hope and determination to do better—a determination not of the passing moment only, but firmly and successfully persevered in on the morrow.

Thus the weeks passed away improvingly and happily, with few incidents to mark one day more than another, when the unexpected return to England of a brother whom she had not seen for several years, made Miss Forster desirous to go home for a short time. It was soon arranged that her absence should be for a couple of months, during which period the children might visit one of their aunts in Somersetshire. But not even the anticipation of the gaiety promised them at Broadlands, of fun and frolic with their half-dozen merry cousins there, could reconcile the girls to the thought of so long a separation from their friend.

‘It is very pleasant to know that one is loved,’ said Miss Forster the last evening they were to spend together for ‘eight long weeks,’ as Louisa had just counted them, ‘but does it not occur to you that there is something selfish in your regret at my leaving you for a time?’

‘Selfish! oh dear Miss Forster, how is it selfish?’ exclaimed both at once.

‘You know that I am going to meet a brother whom I dearly love, and have not seen for as many years as you are old—ought you not rather to be

glad that I am to be so happy, than repine because I am thereby compelled to be absent from you ?'

Minnie blushed, while Louisa threw her arms around Miss Forster's neck, and said in a low tone—'we will not say another word about it, only don't think us selfish.'

'I do hope we shall not get any bad habits at Broadlands, but I am a little afraid ;' cried Minnie suddenly, after a short silence.

'And why so, pray ?' asked Miss Forster, laughing.

'Oh, because our cousins there are apt to be very troublesome—we used to quarrel so sometimes. Jane is so very passionate—and George contradicts every one, and thinks he always knows best.'

'And the little ones are very peevish, and cry for everything they see,' added Louisa, 'and it seems so ill-natured to refuse them.'

'These are disagreeables, certainly,' replied Miss Forster, 'yet not such as to make you behave ill when you know what is right. It is right to be mistrustful of ourselves, but we must not allow this feeling to prevent our persevering in the path of duty.'

'But with bad examples always before us ?' urged Minnie.

'Overcome the bad examples by your own good ones ;' replied Miss Forster smiling, 'perhaps too, you will recognise some of the faults which you once had, and seeing them so unlovely, you will be inclined to wonder how you could ever have cherished them, and I think you will also be ready to do all in your power to prevent their appearance in your cousins.'

'How shall we do that ?' asked Minnie eagerly.

'By patience and loving-kindness towards them—by not provoking Jane, or teasing George—by gentleness and good-temper at all times, and with every one. If you follow these rules, I think you will tell me when we meet again, that your stay at Broadlands

proved a period of enjoyment—some day we may find that it was also one of improvement. Believe me, dear children, there is not a spot on this wide earth, where we may not be happy if we are good-tempered and do our duty—not a spot where we may not spend even “Halcyon-days.”

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