

THE LEGEND OF THE SILVER CUP.

G. Critchley. B.A.



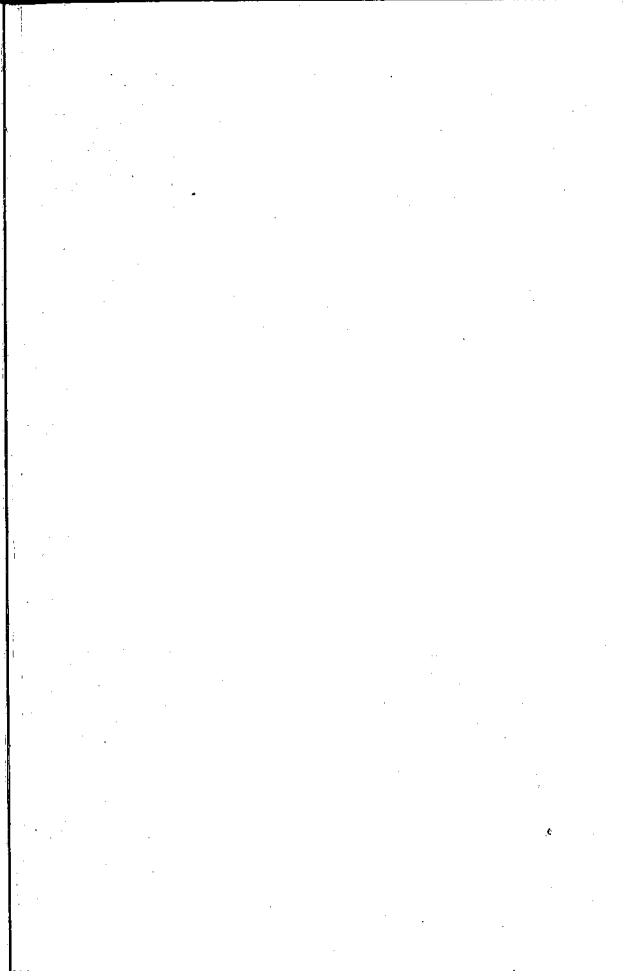
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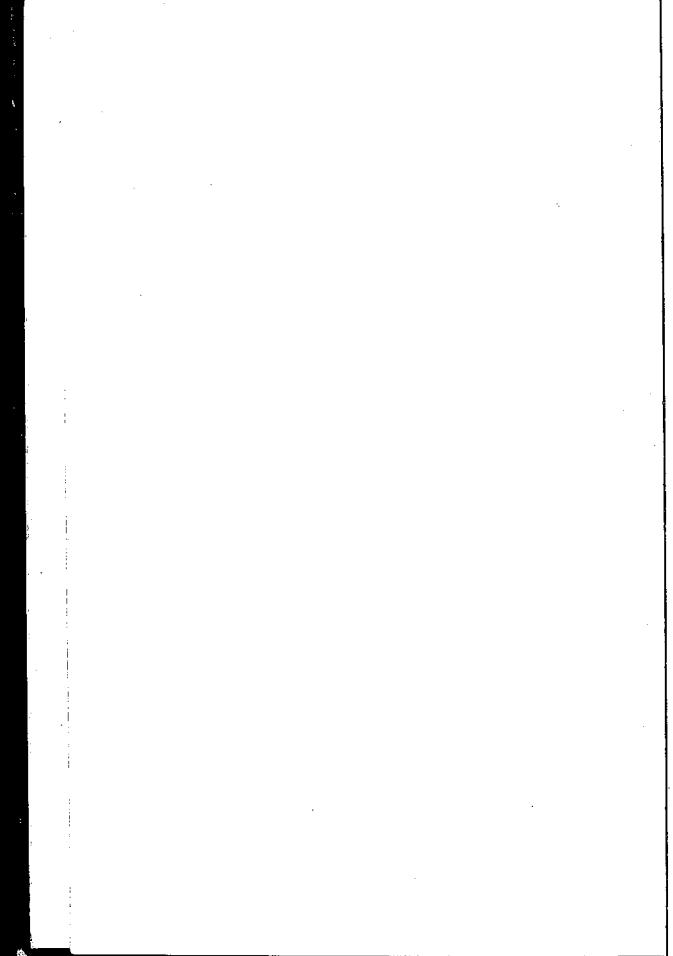


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THE LEGEND OF THE SILVER CUP.



"HE CAME BACK WITH A SILVER CUP IN HIS HAND" (p. 15).

THE LEGEND OF THE SILVER CUP

AND OTHER STORIES FOR CHILDREN

BY

GEORGE CRITCHLEY, B.A.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

SECOND EDITION

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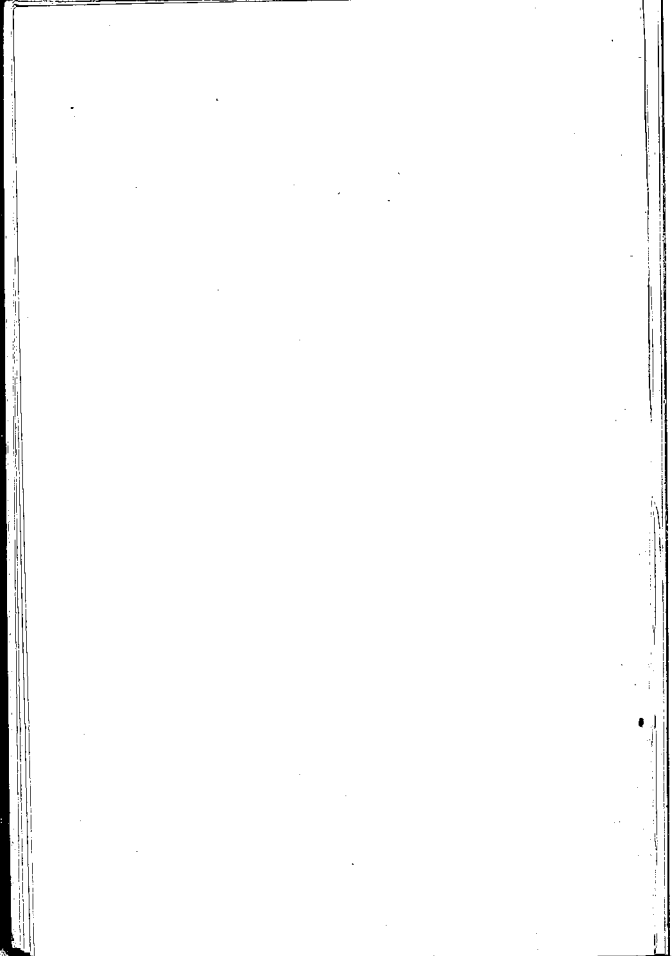
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PREFACE.

THESE stories were written for children, and have been read to children. The children have listened. That is the only word the author ventures to say about his little book.

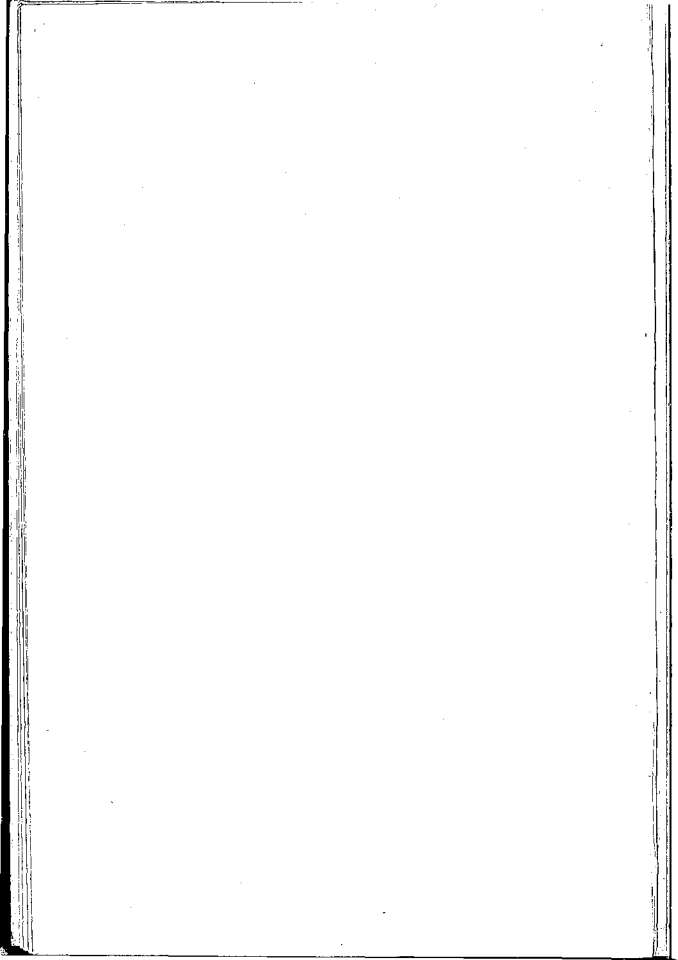
G. C.

LEE, KENT.



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THE LEGEND OF THE SILVER CUP.

ONCE upon a time, many, many years ago, a boy named Cœlestius and his sister Cœlestia were living together in the city of Evanescentia in the country of Chaliphah.

It was a curious place, for this reason—that when any one first went to live there, everything looked fresh and bright and beautiful, but after a little while everything began to fade away and change. There seemed to be something in the light and something in the air of this strange land which made things quickly wither and decay.

When you first came the grass looked green, the flowers glowed with splendid colours, the trees grew tall and strong, and the houses seemed as if they were solid and grand enough to stand for hundreds and hundreds of years.

But in a little while it all began to change, the grass turned brown and dry, the flowers turned pale, the leaves of the trees hung down as if they were nearly dead, and the houses

crumbled and crumbled till they looked like great ruinous heaps of stone.

Well, you must know that like most people who came into this strange land the two children Cœlestius and Cœlestia were highly delighted with it at first, for it was all so beautiful that they fairly danced and sang aloud for joy.

But after a little while the change began; great streaks of yellow came in the grass upon the lawn, rotten branches dropped down from the stately trees, the grand house where they lived began to look worn and old, and everything seemed to be drying up and withering away.

But that was not the worst of it, for one day some terrible things happened which frightened the two children very much, and made them wish to leave the place.

The first was this: when the girl was going up the stairs, just as she put her foot on one of the steps very near the top, that step crumbled up like so much touch-wood, and her leg went right through. My word, she did just scream and make a noise! But what startled them still more was something that happened in the night; for while Cœlestius was fast asleep the house was suddenly struck by a tremendous blow, and this was followed by a loud crash. He jumped up in

alarm, and cried out, "What is the matter? Whatever is the matter?" Then, looking up, he saw that a great piece of the wall had fallen off, and from far, far away the quiet stars of heaven were looking in.

It all made them feel sorrowful and afraid. So in the morning the girl said to her brother, "Oh, do come away, do come away, and let us go somewhere else to live!"

But he said, "Where shall we go? All the houses in the town seem just as bad as ours. I do not know what safer place we can find, I am sure."

And then Cœlestia said to him, "Oh, let us try to find some one who can tell us where there is a place in which things do not break up and get ugly and old so soon. I would go if it were a hundred miles away."

"Well," replied her brother, "there is only the old wise man who lives out on the island in the river that can tell us. It would be no use asking the people round about, for they all seem just as sad and fearful as ourselves."

So they went down the street on an old broken pavement, and along a muddy road worn into deep ruts, and then across a shaky little wooden bridge over the stream to the island in the river.

And when they got across the bridge they found a path winding through a beautiful garden and leading up to the door of a little house. So they went hand in hand along the path until they reached the door, and then they knocked.

They waited ; then they knocked again. And after a little while the door was opened by a tall old man, dressed in a long black robe, who asked them rather sternly " what they wanted, knocking at his door."

They were a little bit afraid at first, but when they looked up and saw his wise, kind old face they took courage, and told him all the trouble they were in, and how they wanted to get away to some safer, happier place, where things did not so soon get broken, worn, and old.

And then the old man said, " Yes, children, I do know of such a place, but it is a long and troublesome journey ; and besides, there are a great many enemies upon the way, who will try to keep you from ever getting there at all. Now, if I tell you, will you be sure to go, and promise never to turn back?"

And they both cried out, " Oh, yes, do tell us ! we will be sure to go."

So he said, " Very well ; but I must ask you to wait here at my door for a few minutes, and I will come to you again."

Then he went into the house, and presently came back with a tall, beautiful Silver Cup in his hand.

It was not shaped like a teacup, or bowl, or anything of that sort, but like a goblet or a chalice.

Well, he gave this cup into the boy's hands, and said, "Now hold it, and look down upon the ground, and tell me whether you can see anything there."

So Cœlestius took the cup and looked—looked very carefully upon the ground; and then he said, "I think I see something red; it's like a foot-mark, as if some one had passed along with bleeding feet, and there is another, and another—oh, they go right along as far as I can see."

And then the girl said, "But, brother, I can't see them; show them to me."

"No," said the old man, "you cannot see them, unless you hold the cup in your own hands. Give her the cup."

And when she took it in her hands she looked down, and then exclaimed, "Oh, yes, I see them—red steps, red steps, all along the way."

"Well," said the old man, "you must take the cup, and go along the path with the red marks, and you must keep on until you come to the fountain, and when you come to the fountain

you must hold the cup under the stream of running water until it is filled. And, near the fountain, you will find a gate, a large wooden gate. Knock at the door of the gate, and if your cup is full you will be let in, and inside is the happy country that you want to find."

Well, they were very glad, and began to hasten away as fast as they could go; but the old man called them back and said, "Not so fast, not so fast; I want to tell you two things before you start. The first is this: Remember there are a good many fountains on the road, so be careful, for it is only that one close to the door which will quite fill your cup.

"That is the first thing, and the second thing is this: There are a great many enemies upon the road, who will try to stop you getting to the fountain; they are of three sorts—dwarfs, wizards, and giants—and the dwarfs are the worst of all."

Then the boy began to laugh, and said, "I never saw any of those things, but I don't care; they sha'n't stop me, never fear."

Then the old man looked at him, and shook his head—as old gentlemen do sometimes when they think that a boy has too good an opinion of himself—but only said, "Very well, only remember; you are warned."

And then he went in and shut the door, and these two went upon their way, happy and singing, feeling more joyful than they had done for many and many a day.

But just then something happened, for all at once the girl gave a little jump and a scream, and cried out, "Oh, my foot, my foot, it's cut!" and there, sure enough, was a cut like a stab from a knife, from which the blood was flowing. When they looked for what could have done it, there was a little ugly dwarf, no bigger than your thumb-nail, with a small, sharp knife in his hand, grinning at the mischief he had done.

And of course the poor foot was very painful, for the cut was like a fifty-power mosquito bite. All the dancing was over, and she could only just limp along.

But she was a brave girl after all, and though the tears would come sometimes, still, when her brother said, "Let us stop and rest until it gets better," she said, "No, no, let us keep on to find the fountain that fills the Silver Cup."

So on they went; but they had not gone far before the boy cried out, "Oh! there is something round my legs; I can hardly walk; it seems as if they were tied round and round." And then they heard a tiny, mocking laugh, down on the ground, and there sure enough was another of these dwarfs;

and, when they came to look, he had been winding a coil of fine cord, not thicker than a spider's thread, round and round the boy's legs. And he had done it so quietly, and made it tighter and tighter so cleverly, that the boy did not find it out till he was almost tumbling down.

But I must not stop to tell you of all the mischievous things that these dwarfs did. Some of them would come and flit by the travellers' faces, and squirt tiny drops of juice into their eyes, that made them see everything wrong; and some others would come and fill the air with a sort of sleepy gas that made these two children want to lie down and go to sleep. So these dwarfs were very troublesome indeed.

Well, as you may suppose, all this made them very tired, and more anxious than ever to get to their journey's end.

And just then, when they stopped at a certain place, they heard a sound—trickle, trickle, trickle, like the murmur of a distant stream. And one said, "Hark! hark! it is the fountain." And then they thought, "No, it is off the red-marked path."

And then they thought again, "Yes, it may be," and resolved to go and see.

So they turned aside, and they found that this road was much pleasanter and smoother than the

old one ; there were flowers along the banks, and birds singing in the trees, and pleasant seats to rest on, and ripe fruit hanging from the branches on the way.

So they thought, Surely this is the end of our journey ; and presently they came to a beautiful fountain, worked all in and out with fanciful pictures and other ornaments, which seemed like the fountain they were looking for, yet somehow not quite the right one, after all.

They came, they held the Silver Cup beneath the stream of water, but though it flowed and flowed the cup would not fill.

They held it there for a long, long time—an hour or more—but it never got even half full. The water turned to froth, and sank down as fast as it came.

They wondered what could be the matter, and while they were wondering about it who should come along but their old friend the sage from the island in the river ; so they said to him, “ Oh, sir, tell us why our cup will not fill ? ”

And the old man replied, “ Oh, children, this is the wrong place ; the frothy waters of this fountain can never fill the Silver Cup ; you must go farther on.”

So they were very sorry, because they had wasted so much time, and because they would

have to go so far back to find the right road again. But they plucked up their courage and trudged back, and after a long walk found the old path with red foot-marks once more.

But they had not gone very far before they saw a kind-looking old gentleman driving along the road, and when he overtook them he said, "Ah, my dear young friends, I am very glad to see you, very glad indeed; but you look very tired—jump up and have a ride."

So they thought that would be first-rate, and they jumped up into the carriage, and the horses went flying along the road.

They rode as it seemed for hours; they hardly thought where they were going, it was such a capital ride; but they said at last they thought it was time to get down.

And when they got down, what do you think? Why, they were just exactly where they had got up. They hadn't moved an inch. It was one of those wizards; his name was "Easy-ways of Doing Things," and Mr. Easy-ways of Doing Things generally sets you down where you began; for short cuts are usually long roads, and lazy people generally take the most pains.

And when the children began to say it was cruel of him to play them such a shabby trick, he only smiled and said, "Good-bye, my dear

young friends ; I do hope you enjoyed your ride." And so he drove away.

Well, when they had got rid of the wizard and tramped a long way farther on, they came to a place where they heard a great roar, as if there were a waterfall close by ; and when they heard it they said, " Listen ! that must be the fountain. Now we shall find the safe home. There must be water enough to fill the cup at this great waterfall."

And so once more they turned aside, and the new path led between high rocks streaked with silver, and glittering with gold. And at the end of this path there was an enormous golden fountain all set about with jewels, and out of the great pipe or mouth, big enough for a river to flow through, there came rushing and thundering a great stream of yellow water.

It was an awful-looking place. They felt almost afraid of going near, especially when they saw that this yellow stream of water was mixed and streaked with blood.

But still they went, and put the Silver Cup beneath the water. But the great pouring river wouldn't fill it. They tried, and tried again, but no ! it seemed just to pour in and melt away, and a few drops of horrible muddy stuff were all that was left at the bottom of the cup.

Then Cœlestia said, "Brother, this is not the place: we have made a mistake again, we must go farther on."

And poor Cœlestius said, "Yes, farther on; oh dear! farther on."

But it was not so easy, for when they turned round to go back and find the red-marked path once more, a great giant came out and straddled right across the path, and lifted up a great club, and roared out that they should never come out of that place any more. Then they were dreadfully afraid, but after a long time of fear and waiting they plucked up courage, and determined to push by.

Then the giant roared at them again, and lifted up his great club to strike them down; but Cœlestius clenched his fists and put his head down, and ran right at the giant's middle, and—what do you think?—he just burst like an air-ball; for you know that this was the Giant Difficulty, and all these giants are generally great wind-bags, after all.

So he collapsed, and they got away. And then after travelling certain days, at last they came to a quiet land, and there beneath the shadow of some trees, such as were never seen in this world yet, for they bore all manner of fruit, and never withered and never died, they saw a plain

white marble fountain. Flowing from it was "living water clear as crystal," that fell into a basin underneath, splash, splash, splash, like the music of a beautiful song.

Then they placed the Silver Cup underneath, and the water flowed into it and it was filled. When it was filled they looked round, and there among the trees was the door of which they had been told.

They knocked, they entered in, and so at last they found the blessed country, where things never fade and wither, where homes are never broken and joy never vanishes away.

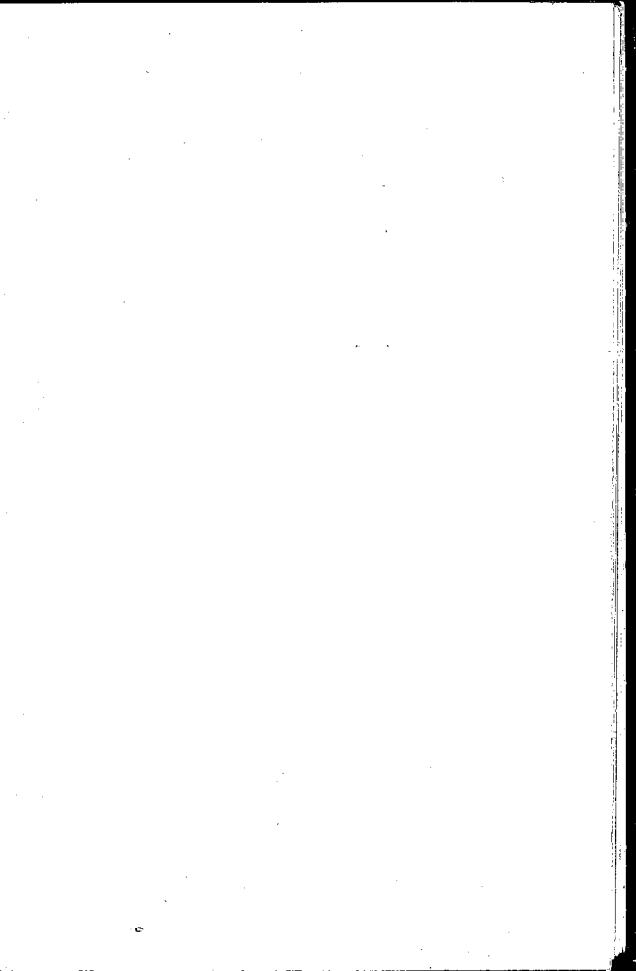
What does it mean? I will just tell you a few things to help, but the rest you must find out for yourselves.

The city of *Evanescencia* is this world of fading things.

The Silver Cup is the human heart, never to be filled except with the love of God and Jesus Christ.

The dwarfs are little sins. The wizards are deceiving sins. The giants are the great big sins, and wrongs, and difficulties of life. And the three fountains—the first and fanciful one is pleasure, and that cannot fill the cup. The second and golden one of yellow water streaked with blood is wealth and ambition, and that cannot fill

the Silver Cup. The third, of plain white marble, with its crystal water, is the love of God and Jesus Christ. The whole story is just a parable of the beautiful pilgrimage of heaven. You can all start upon it, and I pray God you may, so that this word may be true of you every one, "They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly" (Heb. xi. 16).





"SHE PRESSED THE DROP OF PERFUME INTO THE BOX" (p. 33).

THE ALABASTER BOX OF OINTMENT.

ONCE upon a time, late on a gloomy October afternoon, just between light and dark, when it was what old folks used to call "the blind man's holiday," a little group of children were sitting round the fire, in a certain house in one of the many cities in Story-land.

It was a very quiet little group, and they were talking earnestly to one another about something that interested them very much.

It seems that they had been reading in the Bible about "the alabaster box of ointment, very precious."

And just as the story begins, the eldest sister said, "I should like to give Jesus something like that, but I don't see how I can."

"No," said a small boy, whose chair seemed to be growing very uncomfortable, in consequence of his having sat on it for three whole minutes without moving—"no, of course you can't, be-

cause Jesus isn't here now for you to give to Him. He's gone for ever up to heaven, and I don't know what the teachers mean when they tell us to give something to Jesus now."

"But," said his sister, "it must mean something, and I should like to give Him some beautiful thing—shouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course," replied the boy, "but He isn't here, and we haven't anything beautiful to give, so what's the good of talking any more?" And with that he rolled from his chair, gave a mighty yawn, and departed from the room, and the little company broke up.

But the girl thought more about it, and for days after she wished and wished that she could get as near to Jesus as the poor woman did, and could find a box of ointment to pour upon His sacred feet.

But heaven was very far away, and she was very little and very poor, and it did not seem as if she could ever find anything precious enough to give to Jesus, or that she would be able to reach Him with it if she could.

And all this made her rather anxious and rather sad; and since you know, or will know by-and-by, we often dream of what we have been thinking very hard about, one night she had a dream, and

I want you to listen carefully and then try to find out the meaning of her dream.

She seemed but just to have gone to sleep, when in the middle of the dark room there appeared a tiny streak—not nearly so big as a candle flame—a tiny streak of very beautiful and very dazzling light. She did not feel the least afraid, but just lay watching it as the soft radiance spread all over the room.

Presently the gleam of light grew larger and brighter, and changed into the form of a crystal globe of fire. And each ray of light as it darted from the central brightness seemed to twist itself into the letters of a word. The beautiful light grew larger and larger, until it came to be as high as a man, and then it opened just as softly and gently as the clouds do sometimes up in the sky, and from out of these doors of light there stepped the figure of a man. His robe was shining white—whiter than the driven snow. Upon his brow there rested a crown, which looked as if a coronal of thorns had been changed into one of gold, and on his hands there were stains of blood, as if a nail had pierced them through and through.

He drew near her side, and in a gentler voice than she had ever heard, even from her mother's lips, he said, "My child, do you really wish to

find an alabaster box of ointment, very precious, to pour upon your Saviour's feet?"

And she said, "Oh, yes, I do, but Jesus is so far away now; and I am so small and so poor that I shall never be able to find anything good and beautiful enough for Him to take."

The white-robed figure smiled, and stretching out his hand, he said, "Come with me, and I will show you what to do and where to look."

And then all at once the place seemed to change, and she found herself, dressed and standing, hand in hand with the man in the shining raiment, out upon the broad, beautiful, sunlit road.

They went along a little way together, and then they stopped, and the man said, pointing along the road, "You must go along that path, and it will take you to the place where you will find the alabaster box of ointment, very precious, that you wish to give to the Lord." And then he blessed the child and was gone.

So the girl went on her way, but when she began to look about her she found it was a very curious sort of road; for it was paved all the way along, not with real stones, but with all the different things she and her brothers and sisters, and all the different people she knew, had to do.

And these things were turned into what looked

like stones, and with these the whole way was paved.

For example, there was one stone marked "Work," another "Lessons," another "Silence," and another "Help one another." And there were stones of Love, Obedience, Faith, and Truth, and so on all along the way.

But there were more strange things than these about this road. For far, far away, quite at the very end of the way, there was a large, beautiful garden, full of all the loveliest flowers, brought from all parts of the world—roses, and lilies, and violets, and all the rest, larger and lovelier than ever bloomed on earth. And in the little cup of each flower there was a drop of honey, scented with the most delicious perfume, each of its own different kind. But besides this, there was in the centre of the garden a small stand, in the shape of an altar, made of purest gold. And on this was placed an alabaster box of a delicate pink colour, and beautifully carved. But it was an empty box as yet.

And there was something else in the garden beside all this. It was a human shape, but you could hardly tell whether it was an angel, or a spirit, or a girl, only the remarkable thing was that she was exactly like the girl on the road.

Now, you will remember, down there at the beginning of the road was the girl walking along the curious pavement of the stones, and there at the very end was this flower garden, with the altar and box, and this spirit form so like the human girl among the flowers. But there was something else still, and perhaps the strangest thing of all. For from the real girl, right away to the angel-girl among the flowers, there were fine silver threads, that joined them both together. Out from the fingers of the girl upon the road stretched away the threads of silver to join the fingers of the girl in the garden. And so it was from lip to lip, heart to heart, so that everything the girl upon the road did was felt by the girl among the flowers.

The threads did not seem to be in the way at all, but they just joined the two together, like the wires of two electric dials.

And we shall see how it worked.

The real girl went on along the road as she had been told, and presently she heard a soft voice that she knew well say, "Sister, help me," and there was her own little sister, trying to climb over a big stone that was really a hard lesson. And our young traveller stretched out her hand with a pleasant smile to help the child along.

But as she did so there was a gentle musical sound among the silver threads, a thrill passed up them to the angel-girl among the flowers, and she turned round and plucked one of the flowers, and carefully pressed the drop of perfumed honey out of the flower cup into the alabaster box.

Then the girl upon the road went on again, and heard her mother's voice say, "My child, I am very tired; let me lean on you a little over this piece of way."

It was, a rough, stony part of the road; each stone was a home duty and a home care. And the girl did as she was asked—did it directly and cheerfully. And the same thing happened that had occurred before—the same faint sound of music, the same gentle thrill among the silver threads, another flower was plucked, and another drop of the perfumed honey fell into the alabaster box.

And so it was that every time she did a kind and gentle and obedient thing the sweet store was increased, and the angel-girl among the flowers smiled with gladness. But when, as sometimes happened, whole hours and sometimes days passed without a loving deed, the angel of the garden grew pale, and thin, and sad.

Well, time passed on, for you know that years go past like minutes in a dream, and the girl seemed to have travelled a long, long way, and to have changed into a woman too.

But she had not yet found the box of ointment, very precious, to pour upon the Saviour's feet.

Only of course, as she went forward, those silver threads grew shorter, for she was drawing nearer and nearer to the garden that lay at the end of the road.

And not only so, for those musical tones kept sounding higher notes, the electric thrills grew more frequent, and the angel-girl among the flowers was fast filling the alabaster box with the perfumed drops, and there was great joy within the angel-soul.

One day, our traveller was going on along the road, when she heard a cry like that of a little child in pain; she stopped, and there beside the way was a little one, who had fallen down. She asked whose it was, and was told no one's.

And so she took the fatherless and motherless child, and carried it in her own kind and faithful arms—carried it long and far over the rough places of the way. And as she did so there seemed to be a mightier flash along the silver

threads, and in that garden a flower of richer perfume was gathered than had been ever plucked before.

And now as time sped on, and she found herself far upon the road, her hair turned white, her step grew slow; for she was growing very, very old.

But still she had not found the box of ointment which she had come so far to seek, and the silver threads were growing very short.

And she went on and on, till at last she reached the end of the long road, and right across the road was the gate of the garden of the flowers.

She stretched out her hand, lifted the latch, and pushed it gently open.

And as she did so the silver threads trembled to the music for the last time, and the angel-girl of the garden flew to meet the aged woman just entering from the road, and clasped her hand, and kissed her wrinkled face.

And the aged woman said, "Who art thou, beautiful spirit, so young and fair?"

And the angel-girl replied, "I am thine own beautiful self, which ever since thou didst start upon this journey hath been waiting for thee in the garden of the Lord."

"Ah," said the aged woman, "I set out to find

the alabaster box of ointment to pour upon my Saviour's feet, but I have come all the way and never found it."

And then the angel-girl took the aged woman by the hand and led her to the golden altar, on which the alabaster box was standing, and showed her that it was quite filled now with perfumed honey-drops that had been so long gathering from the flowers.

And the aged woman looked at the beautiful thing, and smelt the rich perfume. Then she said, "Tell me what this is, and what it means."

And the angel-girl said, "Ah, human form of mine, this 'alabaster box of ointment, very precious,' is just what you have come so far to seek. Every kind word you spoke, every prayer you offered, every gentle deed that you performed, pressed a perfumed drop from some flower of God. And now you may take this fragrant unguent—your faith, and truth, and goodness—and pour it on our Saviour's feet.

And with that the angel-girl kissed the aged woman, and "she was young again."

Then other angel-forms came thronging down the garden paths and led her to a beautiful palace and into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And lo! as she knelt before Him, she raised her

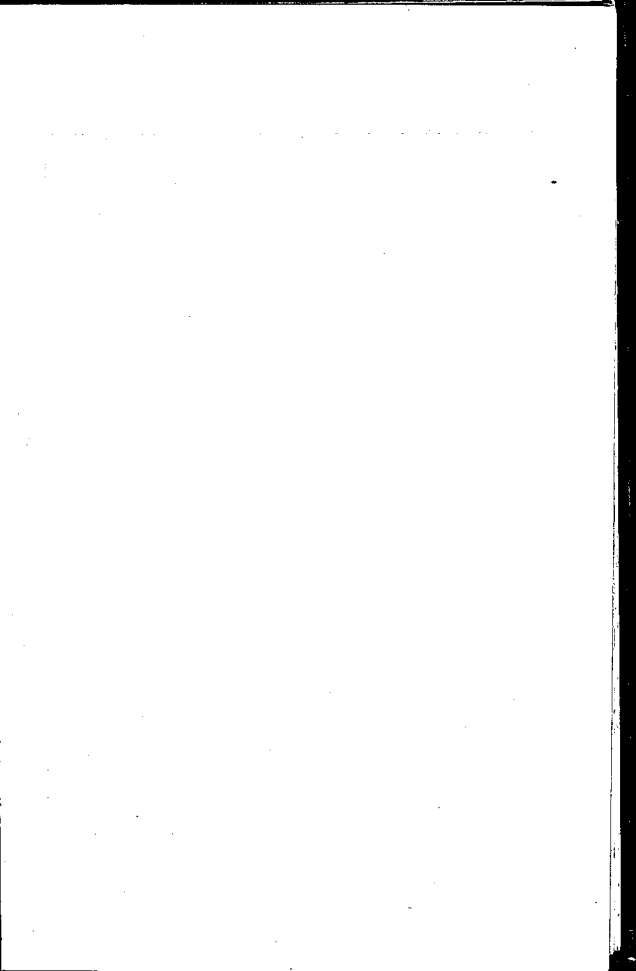
eyes to look upon His face, and she saw that it was He, the very same, who had come to her out of the gleaming light and told her to walk along the road. And she was very glad. She knelt and broke the box of ointment upon His feet, as she had longed to do, and said, "Lord Jesus, I did not know how this precious ointment could be made, but I have learnt now, for it is formed of all those drops of love which fall in humble services and kindly deeds from an earnest and obedient heart. Here is my box of ointment, very precious, here is my life, here is my own self."

And the Lord Jesus answered, "Yes, it is even so, for all the good you ever did, and all the love you ever showed to those you found in want and sorrow, added to the fragrant store, even as I said long ago, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'"

And as the ointment fell upon His feet the perfume spread throughout the palace, and the angels sang so loud that the girl woke up; and behold! it was a dream.

Was there ever such a dream? Oh, yes, there was such a dream, and, what is more, you can make every bit of it a blessed, beautiful reality. You may walk that road and find that gate, and offer to Jesus Christ the precious oint-

ment of loving service, and of a faithful, earnest, obedient life. And if you do so, you will hear Him say at last, to boys and girls, to men and women, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.'





"THE LITTLE BOY WAS OBSERVED TO WASH HIS HANDS MANY TIMES A DAY" (p. 41).

CLEAN HANDS.

IN Psalm xxiv. 3, we read the words: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?" And a part of the answer to that question is, "He that hath clean hands."

This is a bit of Bible picture-talk. It is all true, but sometimes the words do not mean just exactly what they seem to mean; they are only pictures of it, making it really plainer if we take care to understand, but causing us to make rather funny mistakes if we read it in a careless, unintelligent kind of way.

For instance, there is the story told of the little boy who was observed to do what is rather an astonishing thing for almost any boy to do of his own accord, that is, to go and wash his hands many times a day.

After a lesson, or after a bit of play, he would look at his hands, and then trot off and wash them in a most energetic way. He would do it five or six times in the morning and three or four

times in the afternoon, and in between whiles besides—whenever he saw a speck of dirt upon his hands. But friends noticed that he was not nearly so particular about his face. So at last his elder brother asked him what made him wash his hands so often. And this was his answer, “Because I wish to be strong.”

“What do you mean?” said his brother. “Do you think that washing your hands will make you strong?”

“Yes,” said the little fellow; “I am sure of it. I read it in the Bible.”

“Where?” asked the other.

So the little man went and fetched his Bible, and found the Book of Job; then he found the seventeenth chapter, and, putting his finger on the ninth verse, he said, “There you see it says, ‘He that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger,’ and that is why I wash my hands.”

His brother could not help smiling at the innocent mistake, though it was one of a sort sometimes not quite so innocent that a good many other people, wiser and older than little boys, have made; and then the elder brother preached a little sermon. He said that was a bit of Bible picture-talk, a sort of tiny parable; and he told him that there were two kinds of dirt in the world—one that you could see, and another, a

worse kind, that you could not. The sort that you could see was made up of such things as mud and ink, and soot and dust ; while the other sort was made up of cruelty, dishonesty, idleness, mischief, and the rest. And then he showed how the Bible puts the dirt which we can see just as a picture for these wrong, bad things that stain the soul ; and he said that it was not washing the hands with soap and water—though that ought to be done at proper times—which really made them clean, but keeping them away from bad, cruel, mischievous things, and using them in useful work and kindly deeds, that made them look clean and beautiful in the sight of God.

Well, do you know, the little sermon made the boy sleepy, as sermons do sometimes, little boys and little girls too. And so, when the sermon was finished, he went to sleep and had a dream.

He thought he saw an angel standing at the gate of a beautiful garden, and a number of people came up and asked to be let in ; and the angel bade them stretch out their hands, and he looked at them—first at one, and then the other.

But at most he shook his head, and told them to go away ; their hands were not clean.

A dainty lady came, and showed hers—all

white with jewelled rings. But he said, "No, not clean."

And a big, grand man came ; but it was "No" again.

And children came, but many of them, too, were sent away.

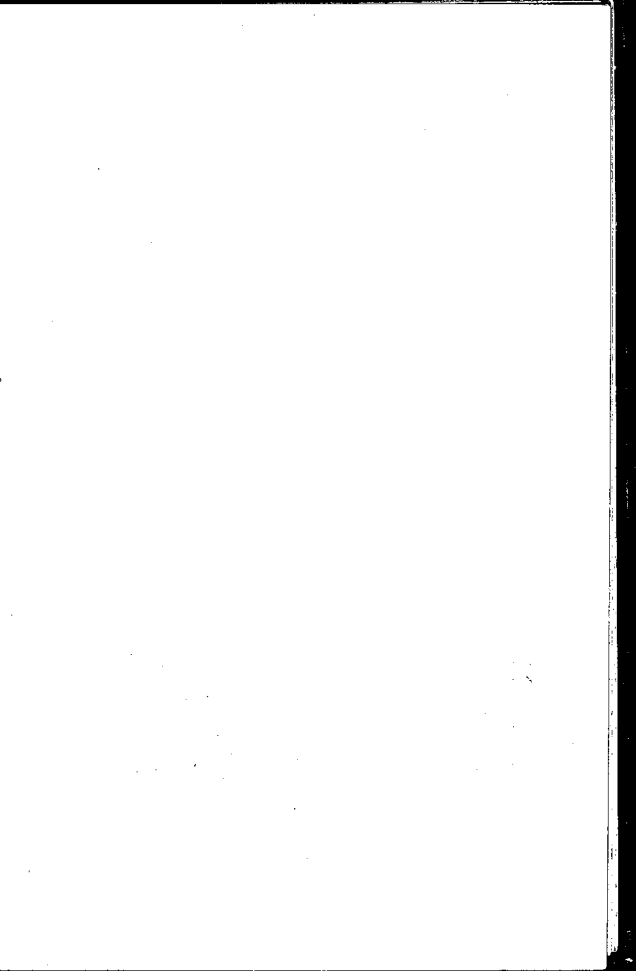
Then by-and-by a poor old woman came, leaning on a stick, for she could only just walk along very slowly with its help, and she held out her hands, one after the other—poor, old, brown, hard, wrinkled hands they were.

But the angel of God said, "Clean hands! beautiful hands!"

And the boy said, "Oh, sir, why?"

"Ah!" said the angel, "those hands, poor, and brown, and wrinkled as they look to you, are beautiful to me. They have nursed little children, and wiped away tears, and bound up wounds, and fed the hungry, and always been used to do kind, gentle, honest things." And then he said again, "Clean hands! beautiful hands! Come into the Lord's garden and rest them now."

And just as she was going in the boy woke up and said, "I know what it means now, and I will ask God to help me to have the real sort of 'clean hands' all my life."





"SHE GAZED ASTONISHED AT THE WONDERFUL APPEARANCE"
(p. 49).

THE RING OF IRON AND GOLD.

ON a certain dull November afternoon many years ago a girl was sitting before the fire in the front room of a little house. The house stood in a poor street just on the borders of a great city.

It was a rather shabby-looking room, not so much because the things were very common or very old, but because the place appeared untidy and neglected, as if no one cared to make it nice and bright. The cloth was all awry upon the table, the ashes were unswept beneath the grate, and dust was everywhere. The girl was dressed in black, as if in mourning for some recent loss, and somehow she looked forlorn and sad as she sat there gazing into the fire, while her thoughts went wandering far away. She had been reading, for a half-closed book was resting on her lap; and the book had sent her off into a sort of waking dream.

It was one of those old-fashioned books of fairy-tales, that told of Aladdin's wonderful lamp, and how when you rubbed the lamp a genie would appear, who did everything that he was asked.

If you told him to build a palace, it would be all ready for you the next day. If you bade him spread a feast, the feast would be upon the table in a flash of time. If you commanded him to bring heaps of gold and jewels, nice brown-skinned servants would instantly appear carrying trays loaded with everything you could desire.

The book told also of those magic crystals into which you could look, and see things that were happening thousands of miles away; and things that were going to happen in time to come; and more than that, it told of those strange mystic words, like *Sesame* and others, that, if you could only manage to say them exactly right, would open doors, change dust into gold, common stones into diamonds, and make you wise and beautiful and rich.

It was a capital book, full of these fanciful old stories, and as she let it fall upon her lap, her mind went off into the fairy-land it conjured up, and she began talking to herself.

This was what she said, "Oh, I do wish some of it were true! It is so unhappy for us all here

since mother died. I wish I had a lamp that I could rub, and then a genie would come to make pleasant things happen for us, and put beautiful things all about the room, and give us exactly what we wished for ; but, alas ! it is only a fairy-tale ; nothing nice like that ever comes—it is only work, work, work, and be tired and poor all the time."

Now, while she was dreamily thinking in this way, and staring into the fire, a strange thing took place ; for the centre of the fire—just the heart of it, we might say—changed into a deep, glowing red ; then the coals just there fell slowly apart until they formed a beautiful crimson arch, and then this arch seemed to grow larger and larger until it looked like the doorway of a splendid temple, and standing on its threshold was the figure of a man. He was clothed in a white dress that seemed to shine and burn ; upon his head there was a crown made of twisted thorns, that somehow had been changed to bands of gold, and in his hand he held a *ring*. A curious ring it was, too, for the hoop was inlaid, worked all in and out with arabesques of gold. The pattern was a very pretty one, for the figures went all round the ring, and were of the same gold as that which was shining in his crown.

She gazed astonished at the wonderful appear-

ance, and while she looked he spoke, and said, "My girl, do you really wish for some charm like those of the old fairy-tales—a charm that will make all things around you beautiful and bright?"

"Ah, yes," she said, "I do indeed."

"Would you use it diligently and kindly if it were yours?" he asked.

And she replied, "I would—I promise faithfully."

"Then," said the man, "stretch out your hand."

She held it out towards him, and he placed upon her finger this ring of iron with the ornaments of gold.

"Now," said he, "when you want any ugly thing changed into something more beautiful; when you want gloomy things made bright; when you want sorrowful things made glad, touch them with this ring, and they will change.

"But remember, if you use it when you are angry, or use it only to please yourself, the ring will lose its power, and will give you no help at all."

She answered, "Sir, I will remember; I will try to use it well."

But now another strange thing took place, for even while she was saying these last words the

form of the man began to fade away, the red arch shrank slowly back to its old size and then fell in, and she found herself sitting before the fire in the dingy room again.

She started up in her chair, and wondered whether it could have been only a dream. But then, there was the ring upon her hand! The iron ring all worked in and out with the tiny threads and ornaments of gold.

She could not understand it; all was so strange. But after a little while she said to herself, "I wonder whether the ring will do the things he said. I will try it now."

Then she looked around the room and said again, "I wish the place did not look so dull; I should so like it to be bright and nice when father and the boys come home; I would love to make it look just as it used to, when mother was here to see that everything was right. I will try the ring."

So she got up and began to move about the room. First she touched the table-cloth that was all awry, and somehow it went back into its place.

Then she quickly touched the mantelpiece, and the chairs on which the dust was lying, and lo! the dust all went away. Then she stooped upon the hearth, and in a few moments it was

swept. She stirred the fire, and it grew bright ; and last of all—for by this time it was almost dark—she lit the lamp upon the table, and drew down the blinds. When it was all done, she looked round again and said, “ Oh, it is all true ! The room does look pleasant now ; it is like the dear old times when mother did it all.”

Presently she heard a step outside, and then a knock at the front door. It was her father’s knock, she knew, and she ran to let him in. Such a white-haired, sorrowful, weary-looking man he was.

But when he felt the gentle touch of his daughter’s hand, *the hand with the ring upon it*, and looked around the room, he brightened up and said, “ Why, my dear, what have you been doing to the place ? It looks quite like home again ! ”

But she only kissed him, and did not tell, for she thought, “ I’ll keep the secret for a little while, and see whether it all comes really true.”

Next morning things did not look quite so bright. The day was dull and cold ; the work was hard, and there was a great deal of it to do ; worse still, the youngest brother was taken with a terribly perverse fit, and was what big sisters call “ dreadful,” which seems to mean

something a little less bad than what is known as the "simply awful" state.

But this good girl did as she had done the night before ; she moved briskly about the house, she touched all the disorder and unpleasantness with her wonderful ring, and when the work was done she took the little fellow up, and won him back to good temper with a few kind words, so that in a short time things began to look bright again, and this was for them all the beginning of many happy days.

But our girl was not a perfect girl at all, and so one day a black fit of evil temper came. She said to herself, " Why should I keep on always thinking about these others ? I never get a bit of pleasure for myself. I am tired of it, and I shall do what I like to-day. Oh, I do wish that something very pleasant would happen, just for me alone ! "

It was not a happy frame of mind to be in at all, and it sent her grumbling and cross about her work.

As might be expected, nothing went right that day, from the beginning to the end. The fire went out, the kettle would not boil, her thread knotted, her needle broke. Everything she tried to do took twice the usual time, and at last she sat down in despair. Just then, her eyes fell upon her ring, and—*the gold of it was gone ;*

it was just a plain black hoop of common iron that no one would care anything about.

Ah, how sad and sorrowful she felt! But while she was grieving over her great loss, a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and turning round there was the man of the fire again. And he said, "Did I not tell you that if you let yourself get angry, or only tried to please yourself, the ring would lose its power?"

And then very solemnly he added, "Give it back to me."

She obeyed, thinking it was to be taken from her for ever. But he did not mean that, for he took it and pressed it underneath his robe close to his heart, and when he drew it out it was just gold-marked, and beautiful as it had been before. With a kind and yet half-sorrowful look he gave it back to her and said, "There, try again, try again."

And she did try, and found that the wonderful ring had regained all its magic power, for the things about her all grew bright and beautiful once more.

And so the time passed on; the girl who once sat dreaming by the fire became a woman with many sorrows and many joys, but through all she kept on wearing her mysterious ring, and no one was more beloved than she.

When people were in trouble, no one seemed able to help them half so well ; when they were sorrowful, no one was able to dry their tears with such a gentle hand ; and when they were sick, no one could so quickly soothe their pain.

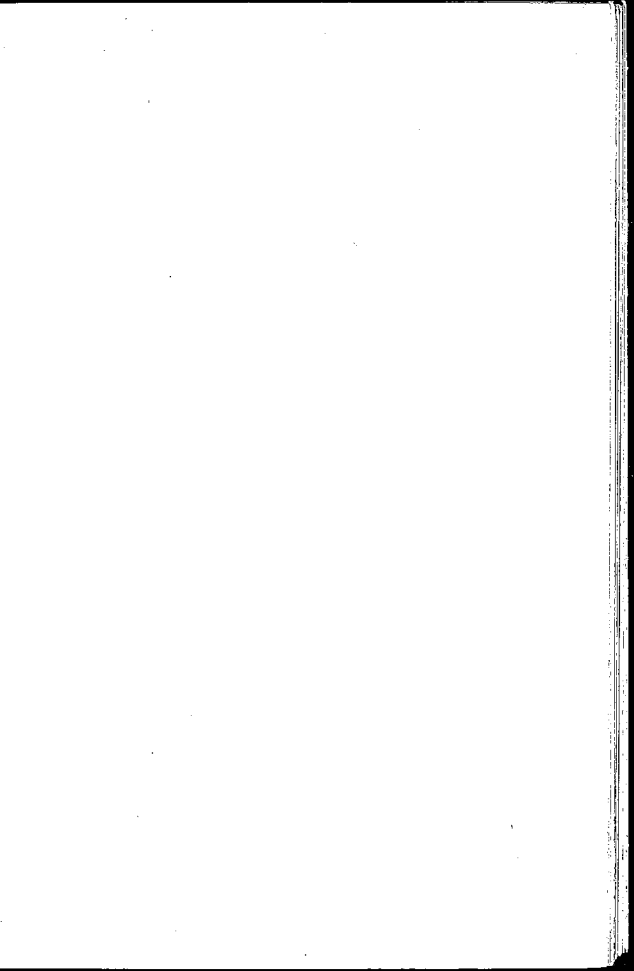
People said, "What a dear woman she has grown !" But she knew it was all the sweet, strange magic of the ring.

At last, when she was very old, and laid herself down to die, her own children gathered round her dying-bed, and she told them all the story of her wonderful ring. Just before she bade them good-bye, she held up her wasted hand and showed them the ring once more. There it was, with the iron worn very thin, but the gold shining more brightly than it had ever done through all the years since that old time of the dream beside the fire. They closed her eyes and said, "Now we know what made her so dear to every one, and why she told us all to seek a blessing like her own."

But many, who in after days heard the strange story of the ring, wondered whether these things were really so, until a wise man came along and said, "I think I know what it really means : the ring of iron and of gold is just the emblem of work made beautiful by love, for work alone is like the iron ring without its golden ornament,

and love alone is the shining gold without the iron's usefulness and strength ; but work and love make all things beautiful and bright.

" And," said he, " I think that I can tell you, too, who was the giver of the ring. The figure which she saw in the fire was a dream picture of Jesus Christ. For it was He who showed not only a little discontented girl, but also the great discontented world, that the secret of happiness was a secret no longer, when people learned of Him to make the iron ring of duty beautiful with the golden ornaments of patience, gentleness, and love.





"JUST PUT THESE ON, AND LOOK AT YOURSELF" (p. 63).

THE ROBE MADE WHITE.

MANY years ago there lived a boy named Philautos in the city of Akatharsia, in the country of Avohn.

It was a very curious place ; for this reason, that everything which belonged to any one else looked never a bit better, and often very much worse than it really was ; while everything that belonged to oneself looked as fine as fine could be.

There was something in the light or something in the people's eyes that produced this curious effect, so that if you looked at what belonged to any one else it appeared crooked and ugly, while if you looked at what belonged to yourself there was never anything so splendid in the world. And so some strange things happened in this curious land, for if a mother went into somebody else's house and the children were brought in, she would say to herself, " Well, these are the plainest children I ever saw," but when she got home and looked at her own she would say, " Oh, how beautiful they are ! "

And it was just so with all their other things ; if they only had a tin teapot of their own they would think it was silver, while anybody else's real silver they would fancy was only plated, or German, or some sort of imitation. It was just the same about their clothes. The men could see a hole in anybody else's coat directly, but if they were all over rags themselves they would strut about fancying they were the best-dressed people in the place.

It was the same with their looks. They could see grey hairs, and wrinkled faces, and turned-up noses in other people quite plainly, but they thought themselves the handsomest, and finest, and youngest-looking people in the world.

Well, you must know that our young friend Philautos was pretty much like all the rest : very well satisfied with himself indeed. I do not know that he thought very much about his figure or his face ; boys don't very often think about these things till they get to be rather large boys, old enough to have other things in view.

But he did think a good deal about his dress ; and as his parents were very well off, and gave him the very best clothes the best shops in the city could afford, he used to think that he looked rather well—ever so much better than a good many of his friends.

Now, I must tell you in that country boys did not dress as we do, but they wore a white robe reaching about down to the knees, with a purple hem round the bottom, round the neck, and round the sleeves, and it was clasped round the waist with a golden girdle. When it was quite fresh and clean, and they came out with a gilt circlet on their heads, and boots or buskins with gilded clasps on their feet, they certainly did look rather fine.

Only unfortunately with this fault, that in their own eyes they used very often to think that they were all right when they were all wrong, and were not really looking half so handsome as they supposed.

And I must tell you another thing, that long, long before this time the King of this country had been so offended by the people's self-conceit that he had left off living in his splendid palace in the city, and had built another at a distance from the place.

But every now and then he used to send word that if any of them would come to his house with a really white robe, he would not only be glad to see them, but would make them his companions and friends, for, said he, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

Well, one day a messenger of the King came to the city of Akatharsia, and made a proclamation. And this was what he said :—

“Oyez ! oyez ! this is to give notice, that who-soever will, may come to the King’s palace, if he will come with a white robe, without spot or stain.”

And the messenger went to the market-place, and in front of every public building, and at every place where the streets crossed each other he gave this notice, so that every one in the city might hear and know.

Now, it happened that our young friend Philautos was passing across the great market-place just as the messenger arrived. So he listened to the proclamation, and then he said, “Why, I am just the very one to go. There is no one else here with a robe half so white as mine. I will go and see the King.”

So he set off at once, and went along the streets, through the city gates, and out along the road. But he had not got far before he met a venerable-looking old gentleman, who said, “Whither away so fast, young sir ? You seem in haste.”

“So I am,” was the reply. “I am going to see the King.”

“But,” said the old man, “you are not fit to go, for does not the proclamation say that who-

soever comes must have a robe without spot or stain?"

"Yes," was the lad's response, "it does say so, and that's just why I am going. Look at my dress; what's the matter with me?"

Then the old man did look, and a very curious look it was, but he did not say anything just then. Only he put his hand in his pocket and took out a little black leather case; he opened it very slowly and drew out a pair of spectacles, and then he said, "Just put these on, and look at yourself; these are the true *orthopanoptikon spectacles*, which show all things as they really are."

"Well," said the boy, "that is a very long word, but how am I to know that you are telling me the truth?"

"Never you mind about the long word," said the old man; "here is my certificate," and he pulled out a parchment signed and sealed, which showed that he was a true servant of the King.

So the lad put on his spectacles, and for the first time in his life saw himself and his dress as they really were. He was frightened and amazed.

His robe was not white—anything but that. All down one side was a great smear of red, stamped with green letters, P R I D E.

All along the other side was a streak of dull

blue, stamped with sleepy-looking grey letters, S L O T H.

Down the front was a yellow stain, with black letters, S E L F.

What was on the back he couldn't see. Only a girl can manage to see her back; boys can't see theirs. But an instant's glance at himself, as he really was, was enough to make his lips quiver and his cheeks turn pale, and he clasped his hands and said, "Oh, sir, am I really so bad as this? Then I can never, never see the King."

And the old man said, "What you see now is what you really are, but still you may see the King, for all these stains may be washed away."

Then Philautos said, "Oh, show me how, for I want to look upon his face, and so I want the garment that is without a stain."

And the old man said, "Do you really mean it? If I show you how, will you persevere?"

And he said, "I will."

Then the aged man pointed off the great high road to a very narrow path that led away across the fields and hills, far as the eye could reach—not a very pleasant-looking path, for in some places it was muddy as if with recent rain.

And all along it was marked with a red line. And he said, "Follow that path, and you will discover how your robe will be made white and

clean. I will meet you sometimes on the way," and saying this the old man turned from him and was gone.

So after standing for a moment Philautos went also upon his way. And presently he came to a river, neither very deep nor wide, but with muddy banks on either side; and as he came to the brink he heard a cry—the cry of a voice which he knew very well—"Brother, brother, help me," and there was his own little brother struggling in the water and tossing up his arms for help.

But for a moment Philautos thought, "Dare I go down there and get my robe more stained? Must I not cross by the bridge?" But it was only for a moment, for, do you know, the red trail went straight down to where the child was crying in its need.

So down he went, dashed through the water, clutched the child, and then struggled to the other side. But when he reached the bank he looked at himself, and he said, "Oh, my robe, it is worse now than ever it was before; even I can see the stain."

But while he was speaking the old man appeared, just as he had promised he would, and he said, "What is the matter? why are you mourning in this way?"

And the boy said, "Oh, master, master, look at my dress, it's worse than it was before; but I was obliged to go right down into that muddy river, for my brother was there, and I could not see him sink."

Then the old man smiled, and putting his hand into his pocket, he drew out the spectacles again, and said, "Look at yourself and see what you really are."

So Philautos put them on, and lo! the great yellow stripe of selfishness was paler than it was before, the letters had grown fainter, and his robe looked cleaner than it had ever done.

Then the old man said, "Never be afraid to follow where the red line leads; nothing can leave any stain upon you which comes to you in that way. Go forward; I shall see you by-and-by again."

Then the path led on into a great wide sandy plain, where the sun was beating down all day long; and he had often to stoop down to make sure that he was in the right way, for the wind swept the sand over the red trail and almost hid it from view.

But he persevered; and when he met, or rather overtook, some other traveller, who was old and very tired, or young and weak, he would help him on the way, tell him how he could not be

wrong if he would only keep to the path ; and sometimes he would sing a song about the rest that was waiting and the glory of the King.

But as time went on, the boy changed into a man, his head grew grey, and then white, his hands were hard with toil, and his dress grew travel-stained and worn and old, and began to drop in holes. And one day when he was very tired he sat down, and he said, " Alas, alas, the palace of the King is very far away, and my robe instead of becoming whiter is wearing out ; how shall I dare to appear in such a poor old dress as this ? "

But just then he heard a voice asking, " What did you say ? " and looking up he saw his old friend again.

" Ah," said Philautos, " I was saying I am so old, so unclean, so unfit. "

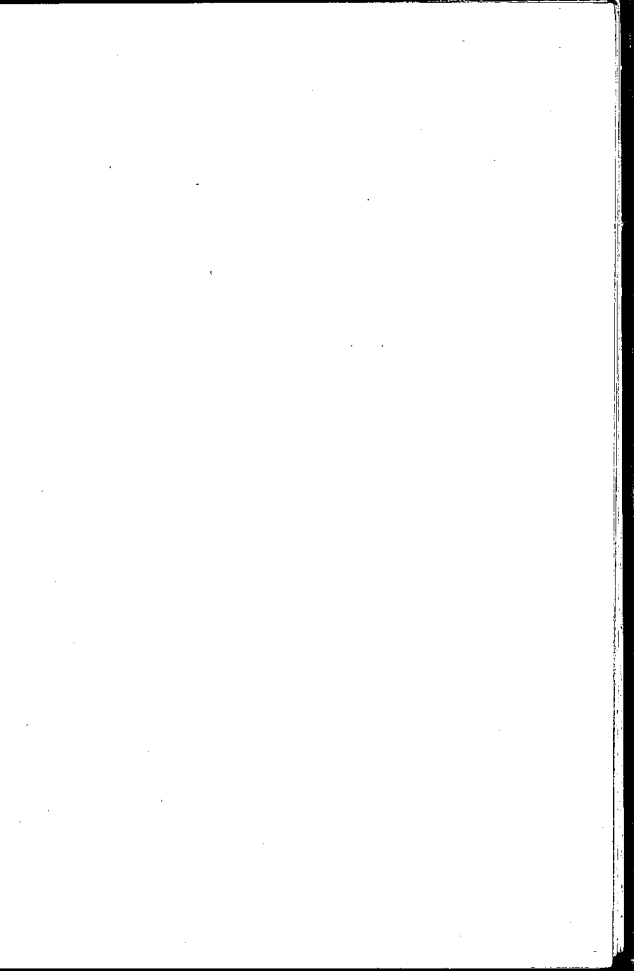
But the aged man took out the spectacles once more. And when the pilgrim put them on and looked he was astonished, for the stains were almost gone ; you could hardly make out a single letter of the words " Pride," " Sloth," or " Self," that once were there. They had been bleached out by the light and brightness of the sun.

" But it is ragged," he said.

" Never mind that," said his friend ; " the King doesn't mind rags. If they are white rags he will take you all the same. "

And now as time sped on he found himself nearing the end of the road, and he had become a very aged man ; the path led through a valley, with high rocks on either side, and at the bottom was a river, deeper and darker than he had ever seen before. But he went on, and down, and presently was lost to sight.

And just then the thick dark cloud on the other side of the river parted, and a light—clear, beautiful, brighter than ever came from the brightest sun upon a summer's day—shone down upon him as he struggled up the farther bank. And one came down the pathway of glory, with a kingly crown upon his head and love unspeakable shining on his face. And he drew near the old man as he knelt, and raised him up. And as he rose, in that wondrous light, the old stained garment changed into a spotless robe of matchless purity, and the King said, "Welcome home, my brother ; keep by my side, thou shalt walk with me in white ; for thou art worthy, thy robe hath grown white by thy faithful following of the appointed way. Thou shalt be no more called *Philautos, self-lover*, but *Philo-Christus, Christ-lover*." And so they went up, up the hill into the gates of the shining city, and as they entered the cloud settled down once more upon the river. But all the watchers knew he had gone home to God.





"THE ROAD WAS CROWDED WITH CHILDREN" (p. 74).

THE BEAUTIFUL GATES.

THIS is the story of a dream. It all began in a little room, where three children were sitting round the fire. At least the eldest would hardly have liked to be called a child, for she was more than sixteen years of age, and was seriously thinking of putting her hair up and having a dress that really touched the ground behind. Her name was Agatha ; and if you had asked her what she was doing, she would have said, with all the dignity of elder sisterhood, that she was there to keep the children quiet.

The second did not always take kindly to his sister's superior ways, for he was a boy of fourteen or thereabouts, and objected to be ordered about and told to behave himself, so that there was occasionally a small breeze in the family. His name was Mark.

The third was a rosy-cheeked, sunny-haired girl of ten, named Muriel, but generally called Dimples ; and, as I said, these three were sitting round the fire in the little room.

It was a winter's Sunday night at the beginning of the year, and at the morning service the minister had been preaching to them from this text: "The beautiful gate of the temple." And he had been telling them that though the old temple at Jerusalem was all burnt up and destroyed hundreds of years ago, yet there were many beautiful gates of God, still opening into glorious temples for us in this world—Gates of Knowledge, Gates of Service, Gates of Self-denial—and he spoke to them particularly about the New Gate of Time, which had just opened for them on the morning of this New Year's Day.

Well, these three were talking about the sermon, for it was one of those parable sermons that the right sort of young people generally like. And the elder sister was trying to improve the occasion, or as her brother used to say when he wanted to stir her up a little, "she was talking good."

But he thought about it afterwards, for he was a good fellow in the main, and these three were very fond of one another indeed, though things got lively among them now and then.

Well, the night wore on, and it became time for them to go to bed, and all the while Mark kept thinking of the words, "The gates, the beautiful

gates of God." He thought about it when he knelt to say his prayers, he thought about it while he hunched up his pillow into comfortable untidiness for going to sleep, he thought about it after he lay down, and then he began talking to himself.

"Ah," he said, "if they were real gates, made of wood or iron or anything of that sort, so that one could really go into them and do the things they talk about, it would be easy enough, and I would very soon go and find them out; but then they are not, and there's the trouble of it, so it's no good thinking about it any more."

But somehow the words would not go away. It was like something whispering in the room, "The gates—come into the gates—the beautiful gates of God."

And then he said, "I wonder what they are? I wonder whether I could find them if I tried? I wonder—I wonder——"

And then something happened, for all at once he found himself dressed, and standing up out-of-doors wide awake. But it was not the out-of-doors he knew—it was quite a different place; for he was in a sort of field or park at the foot of a grand hill, and he could see all about in the distance cottages and houses peeping out amongst the trees. And there was a clear, shining river,

sparkling and dimpling in the sunlight as it went along ; and there was a long, straight road, leading on and on as far as ever you could see ; and there was what Alice in Wonderland would have called " the most curiosest thing of all " ; for the place and the road were crowded with children and quite young people—there were scarcely any old folks there at all.

You can very well believe he was surprised : he rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to make sure that he was awake, and then looked again. But there it all was as natural as life—the park, the river, the houses in the distance, children crowding along the road ; and so he said at last, and quite loud, " Where am I ? where am I ? " For though he was a big fellow, fourteen years old, and not in the least a coward, yet he did feel a little bit frightened too, so he said, " Where am I ? where on earth have I got to now ? "

And just then he heard some one speaking close behind him, saying, " My boy, was that you who said, ' Where on earth have I got to now ? ' "

And Mark said, " Yes, sir, that was me. " He ought to have said, " That was I, " of course, but he was frightened out of his grammar for the moment, just as some bigger people are sometimes, and so he said, " Yes, sir, that was me, "

"Well," the old man said, "I'll tell you; you are not on the earth at all. You are in Soul-land, and I have brought you here to show you the beautiful gates of God. Would you like to see them?"

And Mark said, "Oh, yes, sir, that I should!"

Then the old man said, "It will give you some trouble and some hard work; shall you mind that?"

"Oh, no," said Mark, "I won't mind that at all."

Then said the old man, "Come along with me."

But then something happened which surprised Mark very much, for the old man turned right round and went down the road just the opposite way to that in which all the people were going. Mark went along with him, of course; but when they had gone a good long way, and kept on meeting the crowds and crowds all going in the opposite direction, Mark said at last, "I say, sir, aren't we going wrong? All the other people are going the other way; is this the way to one of the gates?"

"Yes," answered his guide, "it is all right; we are going down to see the first gate. Don't you know that you are inside one of God's gates already?"

"No," said Mark, "I didn't. What is it?"

"You wait and see," said his companion; "I'll tell you about it when we get there."

So they went on, and here was another curious thing, for as they went down the road the children they met kept getting smaller and smaller, and younger and younger, until it seemed that only quite babies were coming along. And by-and-by Mark saw in the distance something glittering like a pile of snow when the sun is shining on it, only this was so high that you could hardly tell when the top ended among the white clouds of the sky.

They went nearer and nearer, and then Mark saw that it was an enormous Silver Gate, and when they came quite close they could see the gate swing open pretty nearly every minute with a musical sound, partly like the chime of a silver bell and partly like a gentle song, and every time the gate swung open a little child came in and began following the rest along the road.

"What is this?" said Mark; "what is this?"

And the old man answered, "It is the Silver Gate of Life, the first of the beautiful gates of God."

"Did I come in there?" said Mark.

"Yes," was the answer, "you came in there fourteen years ago. And never forget it any more; you were God's from the very beginning, for you came in by one of His beautiful gates, the Silver Gate of Life."

Then for a minute the dream went out—you know how it is in dreams—and Mark was back again where he was at first.

Then he said to the old man, "Let us make haste and go on and see another of the gates. I like this; let us make haste."

But his old friend—for he was quite like a friend by now—said, "No, we can't make haste, for you have a great deal to do upon the way!"

Mark didn't like that quite so well, but of course he couldn't help himself in a dream, so they went on just as the dream took them along this road, and presently Mark said, "Why, look there, that's my old school. Must I go in there?"

"Yes," said his guide, "you must."

And in a minute Mark was inside grinding over Latin verbs, puzzling out equations, learning as hard as ever he could, for he was so anxious to get on to the next gate.

Presently school was done and he came out.

But by this time he was growing up, and he

was beginning to look like a man, for across his upper lip a moustache was coming that he was very careful of indeed, and he had taken to stand-up collars and all the rest of it, so that he thought he was quite ready to go on.

His old friend met him at the bottom of the school-house steps, and Mark said, "Let us make haste to the next gate. I am all ready."

So on these two went along the road that went up and got steeper with every step they took.

It was downright hard climbing sometimes, and now and then they had to stop while Mark cut out some steps in the rock so that they could clamber up. And once or twice he had to roll some big stones out of the road, and Mark often grumbled at it. "It was such hard work," "It was such a jolly fag," he said, just as boys do down here when they have to get up in the cold morning and go to work and have hard things to do.

But the old man only laughed, and said, "Never mind, you will find the good of it by-and-by."

And so he did, for in a little while they came to an enormous Iron Gate, built right across the road. It was splendidly wrought into all sorts

of ornamental patterns, and from the other side there came the sound of the voices and tramping of mighty crowds.

But what was very strange, there was no one in front of the gate, and the gate was shut, only there was a great big key in the lock outside.

"What is it? what is it?" said Mark.

"This," was the reply,—*"this is the Iron Gate of Manhood, the second of the beautiful gates of God."*

"How can we get in?" he asked. "Shall we knock?"

"No," said his guide; "there is the key; you must turn it yourself."

"But it is so big and heavy," said the boy. "I can't, and I shall never get in."

"Nonsense!" the old man said; "try."

So he tried. It didn't turn. Then he took his coat off and tried again. It did just move a little bit. Then he turned his sleeves up, and with a mighty scroop the key turned round, the lock shot back, the gate opened, and in another minute they were both inside.

"That's the way to do it," said the old man. "Always remember it. Never say 'I can't' when a thing is hard to do. Take off your coat, turn your sleeves up, and go at it with all your might."

Nearly all the keys of God's gates are turned that way. And remember this as well : it was to make you strong enough to do it that you had all that hard work of climbing and cutting and learning a little while ago."

So they went in, and found themselves in a wonderful place indeed. There were great factories, where all sorts of things were made. There were great furnaces melting iron, making glass, and men moulding things out of brass and silver and gold.

There were great markets where all sorts of things were sold, there were homes where the people lived, and everybody as busy as they could possibly be.

At first Mark was very much pleased indeed, and went working away at one thing and another like the rest. And what pleased him most of all was that when he had settled down to work the first day he found that many of his old friends and schoolfellows were there too, and when he went home at night, to his surprise he found himself knocking at the old house door. And when he got inside there were father and mother, sisters, and those he loved ; the only thing was that they had got older now.

But time passed on, and by-and-by he began to feel restless ; it was all very happy, but he wanted

something more, and every now and then he looked up and saw great mountain heights above him, shining with splendour brighter than any sunshine he had ever known.

And so one day when work was done, he met his old friend again and told him all about what he felt.

And the old man said, "Ah, yes, I know; you want to go on, and go in to another of the gates of God. Come along with me."

So they started out again, and this time on a very narrow, quiet way.

At one part there were trees on either side, and birds sang among the branches.

At another, there were great rocks, like mighty walls, with just a narrow path between.

And at another, there were sharp, rough stones upon the road; but at last they came out on a beautiful sunshiny plain, and there in front of them was a great Golden Gate, shining in the sunlight, like a pile of yellow fire.

On the front of it, just above the entrance, there was a cross, and the curious thing about it was that the gate itself was open, but it was only just big enough for a man to get through if he stooped very low.

It was quite amusing to see the people coming up and trying to get through with the things they

brought, and then going away so angry and surprised.

While Mark and his friend were standing there, a great lord, with a coronet upon his head, came riding up on a fine horse, all as grand as could be. But of course he could not get through at all. Then he got down from his horse, and tried to walk through in a very dignified way with his coronet on ; but that would not do either—he had to take that off. Then he tried just walking upright, but he only struck his head against the top of the door, and at last had to stoop down and go in in a very humble sort of way.

A rich man came up, carrying great bags of jewels and money on his shoulders ; but, to his great amazement, he could not squeeze through at all.

Mark wondered what it meant, and said, "What is this?"

And the old man told him that, "this was the Golden Gate of Religion, always open, but very strait, narrow, and small, the third of the beautiful gates of God."

So Mark went in, and there inside he saw people moving about. Some were teaching children, others were healing the sick. One man went along with a big, knobby bundle, with all sorts of queer shapes sticking out of it ; and when

they asked him what it was, he said, "Oh, toys for the children's hospital, you know; they have been holding a service yonder, and a lot of kind-hearted children brought these for the little ones who are sick and poor."

Then Mark said to him, "Why, what is it you do here inside the Golden Gate?"

"Oh," said the man, "we serve the Lord Jesus Christ."

"What?" Mark said. "Say prayers and sing hymns, and go to church all the time?"

And the man gave a great laugh, and said, "Oh, no, we do that, but we don't call that service, we call that refreshment. Service of the Lord Jesus Christ is helping one another, doing kind things to those in trouble, learning to be right and good and true, getting ready to go up yonder into the Gates of Pearl by-and-by."

"Is that it?" said Mark. "Can I serve Him?"

"To be sure you can," said the man. "Come along, and I'll show you."

So Mark joined him, and away they went together, and Mark set about the new work of serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, by this time (in the dream, you know) Mark felt that he was getting quite old—his hair was white, his steps were feeble, and he was getting very tired; so he went in search of his

old friend one day, and told him that he wanted a place of rest.

"Ah," said the old man, "that is it, is it? Very well; but, my friend, how is it you have nobody with you? The Lord of the way dislikes any one to go in at the next gate alone."

"What shall I do?" said Mark.

"Why," said his guide, "go and find some one that wants helping along."

So Mark went, but for a long time he could not find anybody that seemed to want his help.

But one day he went down to the Golden Gate, and just outside was a woman peeping in. And he said to her, "Why do you stay outside? Come in."

And she said, "May I? I am afraid."

But he answered, "There is nothing to be afraid of; stoop down right under the cross and come in."

So she came, stooping through the low, narrow gate; and when she got through and stood up, who do you think it was? Why, his own sister, Dimples of long ago.

Then they were both very glad, and they went hand in hand together after the old guide, and asked him to show them the way to the next gate.

He told them to follow him, for he was going that way himself, and he led them up the gentle slope of a hill with something shining at the top like a great white star. It was the gate they sought. It was made of a beautiful white pearl, and there were angels standing all about.

And Mark said, "What is this?"

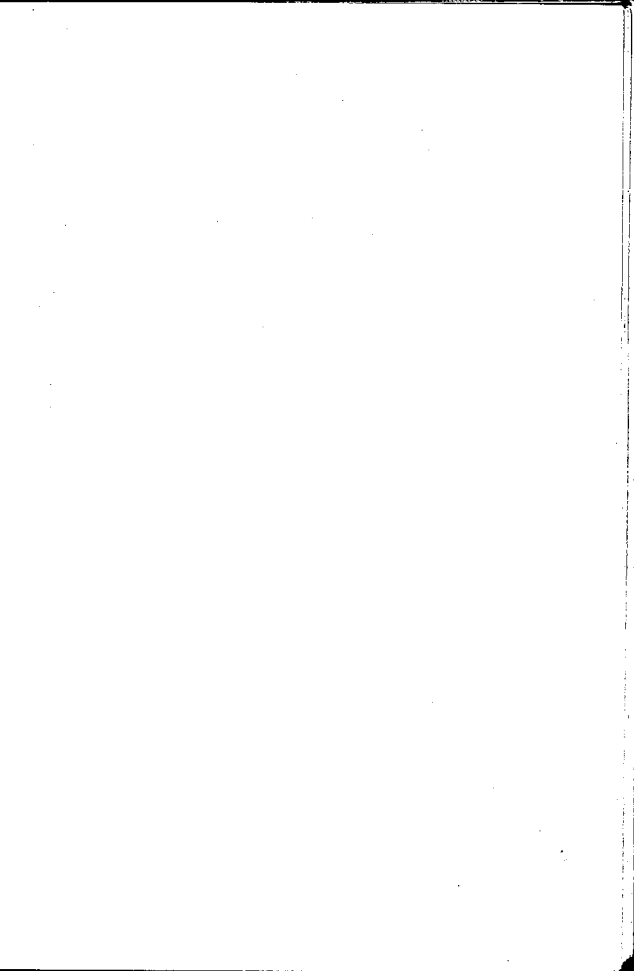
And his old friend said, "This is the Gate of Heaven, the last of the beautiful gates of God."

They went up to it, and looked at the shining figures of the angels standing there. And Dimples said, "Look, Mark, there's mother, and there's Agatha, and there's father too!" and so they both ran forward with a cry of joy, and there was a shout and a song of greeting—a shout so loud that Mark woke up, to find it was nothing but a dream.

But he remembered it, and often thought of that dream-journey in Soul-land, and of how he passed one by one through the Silver Gate of Life, the Iron Gate of Manhood, the Golden Gate of Religion, and had stood at last by the Pearly Gate of Heaven.

He did more than think, for the dream made him understand what these "Beautiful Gates of God" really were, and as he grew up he tried to go through them one by one.

May God send to each one of us the Guide, the Holy Spirit of His love, so that we too may pass through all God's beautiful gates of life's experience on earth, and find at last all love and goodness waiting for us at heaven's Gate of Pearl.





"THEY STOOD LISTENING TO WHAT A MAN WAS SAYING TO THE
PEOPLE" (p 89).

THE MAGIC OIL.

TWO boys, named Marcus and Marcellus, were standing together in the market-place of the City of Biopolis, watching a great crowd.

It was easy to see that they were brothers, for they were so much alike, from the very tips of their chubby noses to the holes in the toes of their boots. And very nice, clever-looking boys they were so their mother said. But then mothers do say queer things of the sort about their boys, you know.

However, there they stood in the market-place, watching the great crowd, and listening to what a man in a very showy dress was saying to the people gathered there.

Now, you must understand that the country in which this City of Biopolis was situated was a very curious sort of place; there was not one builded house in it. I mean a house built of brick, of stone, or of wood; there was not one builded house in all the land, except the palace of the King, for all the people lived in tents.

And then another thing was this, that the King's palace was built on the top of a lofty hill, right in the middle of the country ; and since this was the very highest hill in all the land, in fact was quite a mountain, the King's palace could be seen on every fine, clear day, by any one who chose to look at it, for miles and miles around. And it was very beautiful indeed to see, for the hill itself was of pure white stone, while on the top of it was built the palace made of marble whiter still.

The gates were gold, the ornaments were different-coloured jewels, the turrets were carved into all kinds of lovely forms, and you may just think how beautiful it looked, shimmering and shining in the clear light of a summer's day.

And sometimes in the evening, when the sunset glory fell upon the lovely place, the children would stop playing in the street, and old men would come to their tent doors to look, and mothers would stand and hush their babies with this song :

“ They stand, those halls of beauty,
All jubilant with song,
And bright with many an angel,
And all the martyr throng ;
The Prince is ever in them,
The daylight is serene,
The pastures of the blessed
Are decked in glorious sheen.”

But the most curious thing of all was that the tents of which the city was built all moved.

The streets did not alter, the places where the tents stood did not appear to change, but still the tents moved; only a little, but just a little at every ticking of the clock, so slowly that the people who lived in them hardly knew that they moved at all; but they did, and always a little nearer and a little nearer to the white mountain on which was the palace of the King; for there was the strange thing, that this City of Biopolis was not a continuing city, not one that stood still, but one that kept moving all the time.

Well, the two boys Marcus and Marcellus were standing, on the day I told you of just now, in the market-place of this strange city, watching the crowd and listening to what the man in the showy dress was saying to the people there.

It seems that he was one of the King's messengers, and after blowing his trumpet to call all the people out, he said,—

“Oyez! oyez! this is to give notice, that it is the King's pleasure, that whosoever will try to keep his tent beautiful and bright, and fill it with such ornaments as the King shall approve, shall be called the King's friend, and shall have a crown to wear, and splendid raiment

to put on, and shall have a home in the King's palace with the golden gates."

Then the people shouted and seemed very glad ; but when they had all gone away the two boys still stood there, and watched the messenger as he folded up the paper from which he had been reading this royal proclamation, and began to walk slowly along the street.

Then Marcus said to his younger brother, "Shouldn't you like to have that?"

"Have what?" said the little fellow.

"Why," said the other, "the crown, and the beautiful dress, and go to live always in that splendid palace on the white hill yonder, that the man has just been telling us about."

"Yes," said the younger one, "I should, but I don't think he meant boys ; that's all for grown-up people ; the King would not care for the little bits of things we could do, I am sure."

"Do you think so?" said Marcus. "Mother told me the King was very kind, and once when he came to our city took a great deal of notice of the children. Tell you what, I'll run after that man and ask him."

So they ran, and when they got near the King's messenger, they shouted, "I say, sir! I say, sir!"

The messenger turned round and smiled when

he saw their bright, eager faces, and said, "Well, what is it?"

"Oh," said one of them, "if you please, do you mean boys?"

He looked at them as if he didn't understand; so the youngster said, "We want to know if boys can try for that reward."

"Why, yes," replied the messenger, "of course—boys and girls too; didn't you hear the word 'whosoever' in the King's message that I read?"

"Yes, well, we did, but we were not quite sure, so we thought we would come and ask you."

Then the man said, "And I am very glad you did, for you are the only ones who have. All the people shouted and said 'Hooray,' just as if they thought it was a very easy thing to keep their tents beautiful and bright, and fill them with ornaments with which the King will be well pleased."

"Why, is it so very hard, then?" said Marcus.

"Very hard indeed; almost impossible without the 'Magic Oil,'" replied the messenger.

"What is that?" said both the boys in the same breath.

"Come with me, and I will show you," said the man.

So they went with him along the road until they came to a lane, on either side of which some

trees were growing; and when they had gone down this a little way it led them into a wood, where everything was still.

They trod swiftly on the pine-needles that made a carpet beneath their feet, so that not even the sound of their own footsteps broke the silence. The trees grew thicker, and the place grew darker and darker, but they still went on.

Until at last they came to a spot where the trees had all been cleared away—all but one. A strange, strange tree it was, which stretched out its branches and grew into a shape that was very like a cross.

Then the King's messenger went up to this wonderful tree, and held a cup beneath the leaves which grew in the middle near the top, and—what do you think?—some drops of red oil began to fall from the tips of the leaves into the cup. Then, after a little while, he moved the cup to the right, and some iron-coloured oil began to drop off the leaves that were hanging there; and then he moved it to the left-hand side, and golden oil began to flow.

But these were all mixed together in the cup, and as they mixed and melted into each other, the oil was dark red with a golden gleam.

When the cup was quite full, and the three sorts were quite mixed together, the King's

messenger drew from his side pocket a silver flask, poured the cupful of oil into that, and gave it to the boys, and said, "There, now, you take this, and when you set about making your tents beautiful, drop one drop upon your tools, for it will make them work so easily you will be quite surprised; and when your eyes grow dull, or your hands tired, do the same—just drop one drop upon them, and they will be all right again, for this is the Magic Oil. Keep it carefully, and use it always, and your work will be easily and happily done."

So they promised and thanked him, and went away.

And it all turned out to be beautifully true, for when they got back home again, Marcellus—that was the little one—said, "See, brother, I am going to make that little corner of my tent pretty with a picture I shall paint upon the canvas;" and so he got his brushes and his colours and began to work. But somehow it didn't go right at first—it was all "wobbly like," as I heard a boy once say about a drawing; but then he took a drop of the Magic Oil, and though it was only a child's picture after all, there was something in it that made people stop and look, and talk of "A light more beautiful than ever shone on land and sea."

Then Marcus, the elder brother, said to himself, "That brother of mine is a good little chap. Tell

you what I'll do—I'll get some pieces of wood and carve out some toys ; they'll be an ornament to the tent as well."

And so he got out his tools ; but being older he was wiser (elder brothers always are wiser, you know—at least they seem to think they are, and give themselves mighty airs in consequence—but, however, this one really was), so he was careful to touch all his tools with the Magic Oil before he began, and though a toy-maker might have called it clumsy work, yet somehow there was a charm about these things that costlier toys did not possess.

And so it was with everything. When the lesson books were brought out, and the school-tasks began, the work was sometimes very hard to do, but a drop of this Magic Oil rubbed just above the eyes seemed to get into their brains, and make them so bright and sharp and clever that the task, if not always quickly, was always well done.

But I must not stay to tell you of every wonder wrought by the Magic Oil—it would take too long ; but there is one thing that must be told. You remember that I said these tents were moving tents, and went creeping and creeping on towards the King's palace on the hill. Well, one day they had crept up to where a forest lay across the path. And so the question was how to clear the great trees from the way. Some said, "Burn them up."

Others said, "Chop them down," and so the people went to work in these different ways.

But the boys, who by this time had grown into young men, knew what to do, for they got out their axes and touched them with the Magic Oil, and surprised everybody with the swiftness by which they were enabled to clear the way. Well, time went on, and at last the tents had nearly reached the foot of the Palace Hill.

The day was fixed when the King would come to look at the tents and distribute the rewards. Many of them looked very beautiful, for they were hung with purple and crimson and all the rest of it, and many of them were filled with costly things. Of course everybody said, "Oh, there are the people who will get the prize."

But when the King came, what do you think he did? He lifted up his hand, and in the palm of it there was a great ruby, from which the light went flashing out, and he turned it on all these different things.

Ah, and when the light from the blood-red stone fell upon many of these showy tents, and on the things of which the people were so proud, you should have seen how poor, and pale, and wretched many of those things looked.

While some of them that looked old and ragged, and were filled with clumsy things, at which

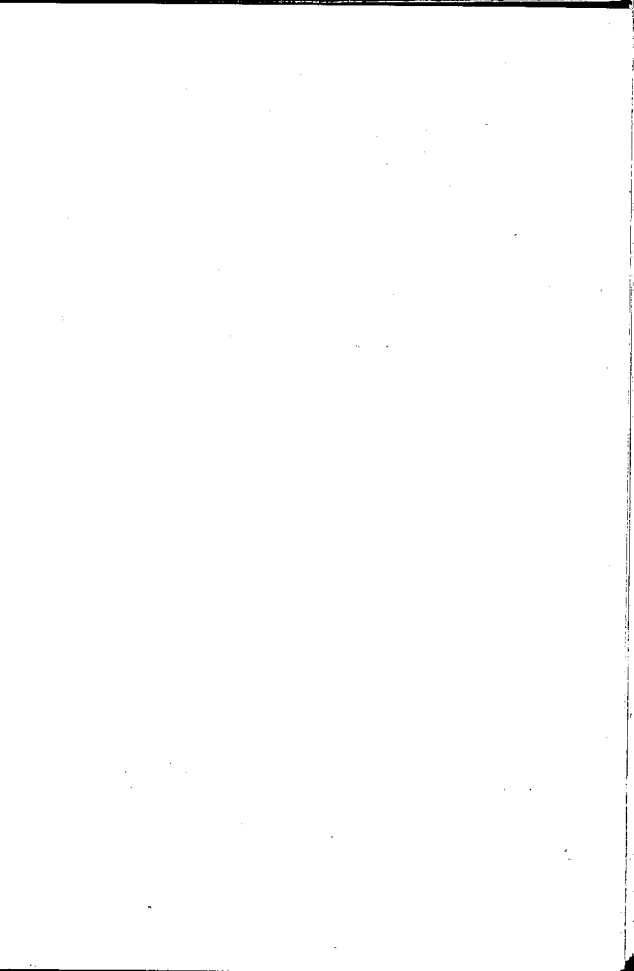
the great folk laughed, turned to the softest silk, and loveliest colours, and most splendid shapes, and the King said, "These must have the prize."

The two brothers—they were old men now—looked on in wonder, and waited anxiously for the King to come to their tent. And when he did, it was so very strange, for lots of things that they had got together looked just good for nothing when the ruby light fell on them, but the old toys, the little picture, and all those other things that they had made themselves with the help of the Magic Oil, began to shine and sparkle, and look grandly beautiful, so that their hearts grew glad.

And the King called the two old men before him and said, "You have made some mistakes, you have spent your time and money over many worthless things, but still you have been faithful and obedient in many more. See, these things shall win for you the prize; enter ye into the 'Joy of the Lord.'"

That is the story. Let me only tell you what were the three liquids mixed in the Magic Oil gathered at the tree shaped like a cross. The red was love, the iron-coloured was industry, the gold was cheerfulness.

These three make up the Magic Oil of Life, when we get them from the grace and goodness of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.





"WHEN HE TRIED TO SING THE MUSIC CAME" (p. 109).

THE NEW SONG.

ONCE upon a time three or four boys were standing together in the gallery of a certain church. They belonged to the choir, and were talking together about the different ways in which the members sang. They said some were too high and some too low, some too sharp and some too flat, some too fast and some too slow, and made all the pleasant little remarks people are apt to make about each other, and which older people do not speak out loud, but only whisper and think.

At last the boy in the little group who was regarded as the best singer of them all, and who was not a little proud—one ought to say bounce-able—about it either, said concerning another boy whose name was mentioned, "Oh, what is the use of him? He can't sing at all."

Now, it happened that night that this same boy, who was so proud of his singing, had a very wonderful dream. He thought that as he sank to sleep the darkness of night vanished, the walls

of his room melted away, and that he was gently lifted up by a soft, strong wind and floated up to a land more beautiful than he had ever seen or known before. Green hills swept gently upwards from the flowery plain, until their tops were lost in gold and crimson light. Along the fields there flowed a beautiful and shining river, with trees growing on either side. White-robed forms were passing to and fro, and yonder in the far distance was a great light, brighter than the sun, which took the shape of a golden throne, on which was seated the figure of a man. And somehow, as the boy looked, he knew without any one telling him that it was Jesus Christ.

And as he looked and listened, he heard the sound as of singing far away; now it was soft and low, as the whisper of a summer wind among the trees, and then it swelled louder and louder, until it became the shout of a great multitude, like the distant thunder of the sea when it beats and breaks upon the shore. The boy stood still and listened, and still the grand song went on, when presently he felt a hand laid on his shoulder and heard a voice say to him, "My boy, can you sing?" The boy turned round, and saw a man standing beside him with a kind smile upon his face, and he said again, "My boy, can you sing?"

And the boy answered, "Oh, yes, sir, I can sing; I sing in the church at home."

A graver smile came upon the man's face as he heard the confident reply, and he said, "Would you like to join the singers yonder?"

And the boy said, "Yes, I should, very much."

So the man took him by the hand and led him along a path that ran beside the river, which was overshadowed by the trees, and they went on and on until they came into a place that looked like a vast cathedral, filled with a multitude no man could number, singing the song the boy had heard when far away.

They gave him a piece of music, but it was the strangest the boy had ever seen, for instead of notes in treble and bass like ours, or letters like those in the tonic sol-fa books, this music was written with lines and strokes and marks that the boy could not understand.

He stood and stared, but he could not read a note, and still the song went on, and only he was silent in the crowd. Presently they broke into a hymn tune that he knew very well, and he thought, "Now I can sing that." He opened his mouth, but not a sound would come. He began to be alarmed and feel ashamed, and while he stood there wondering what had happened,

and with a very good mind to cry, the man who brought him there said, "I thought you said you could sing."

"Oh, sir," replied the boy, "I thought I could sing, but not this music, for I have never learned."

"Then," said the man, "you must go away, for no one can remain here who does not know both the words and the music of this song."

"But," said the boy, "can I never come back? can I not learn?"

"Oh, yes," replied the man, "you can learn it if you will. Do you really wish to learn?"

And when the boy said, "Yes, oh yes, I do," the man stretched out his hand and touched him, and it seemed to grow all dark, the beautiful land disappeared, the grand song was hushed to silence, and they seemed to go down, down to earth again. And when they reached the solid ground and the light came back, the man pointed out a certain narrow path, and on this path were marks made by the footprints of some one who had passed on before; and many of those footprints were *red*, as if stained with blood, and deep, as if the traveller had carried a heavy load.

And the man said to the boy, "Now, you must keep along this way, and try to tread in each one

of those steps, and that will lead you to where you will be able to sing the heavenly song."

Now, it seems that this path was so made that every time you put your foot down upon it, and every kind, good word you spoke, and every prayer you said, made a soft, gentle sound like a low note of music, and the sound went up and up to heaven and made a mark upon a scroll of what we must call paper, like the piece of music which was given to the boy, but which he could not sing.

At the very beginning of this path there stood a cross, and the man said to the boy, "The first thing you must do is to touch that cross, and then you will be able to keep along the way."

He did so, and instantly, just as quickly as when you touch the handle of an electric telegraph the needle moves upon another needle miles away, so, as soon as the boy touched the cross, somehow a mark was made upon the scroll of music up in heaven, and the first note of the soul's new song was written which he would one day sing before the throne of God.

And so he stood beside the cross at the head of the narrow path, and presently found himself alone.

He went forward, and thought that he would

have but a little way to go, and he would find the teacher of the great song; but it was not so, for he went on for a long time, and then heard a voice which he knew very well say, "Will you let me take your hand?"

And there was his own younger brother trying to walk along the same path, but not able to climb up one of the steep, rough places in the road. He thought at first it was very troublesome, and would hinder him in his way; but he did what he was asked, and helped the other one along. And as his foot pressed down on one of the dented footsteps, to stretch out his helping hand, there was a gentle quiver in the air around, and that went up and up and made a second note upon the scroll on which was the music of the heavenly song. Then he went along the road again, and it seemed as if he were growing big and strong, for you know that years are like minutes, and minutes seem to be like years in a dream, and there seemed to come to him one like his father, but old and bent and grey.

And the old man said, "Let me lean on your arm, my son, for I am growing tired and weary; give me your help upon the road."

But this seemed to prevent the boy from getting on himself, and for a moment he thought, "Shall I do it, shall I let myself be hindered,

or shall I let the old man lean upon me as we walk along?"

And then he turned back, and saw the cross far away in the distance at the beginning of the way, and it seemed as if Jesus were standing beside it; and there came the words, "If any one will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me." And as he listened, his hesitation passed away; he bent his shoulder for the old man to lean upon, and as he did so the same thing happened which had occurred before. There was the same faint sound of music, the same gentle thrill in the air, another mark was made upon the scroll, and another line was written of the holy song.

And so it was, that every time he did a kind, true, generous thing, the writing kept going on; but when, as sometimes happened, a long while, whole hours and sometimes days, passed without a lovely deed, all that time left a silence and a blank.

Well, time passed on, for, as I said, years go past in minutes in a dream, and the boy seemed to have travelled a long, long way, and to have changed into a man. But he had not yet found the teacher of the heavenly song, and he sometimes felt a little disappointed and a little sad. But still it did not make him leave that narrow path—it only made him more and more careful

to follow the crimson line, and to put his foot into every one of those steps that made the red marks on the way.

Sometimes the path led to houses where the people were sick and poor, and he helped them. Sometimes it led him to the Sunday School, and there he taught the children what he knew of holiness and of God. Sometimes it took him down into a dark, sombre garden of pain and suffering, and then he would kneel down and say, "Father, not my will, but Thine be done." And at every step, at every prayer, a note flashed up to heaven, and the scroll of music was fast getting full.

And now as time sped on, and he got far along the road, his hair turned white, his steps grew slower and slower every day, for he was growing very, very old.

But still he seemed to feel that he had not learnt the song of heaven, and had not found the teacher he had come so far to find. And he said, "Shall I ever learn the song and find the teacher of that strain?"

And at last one day the old man found he could not travel any farther, and he laid himself down to sleep, his hands grew cold, his face grew white, and the people came and whispered to each other that he was dead.

But to himself he seemed to have become a boy again, and the darkness once more vanished, the same soft strong wind lifted him gently up, and he stood in the beautiful land that he had seen long, long before. There was the flowing river, there were the cloud-capped hills, there was the shining presence of Jesus upon the throne.

And as he looked and listened there came the music of the same grand song.

And when the man came to him again and asked, "Can you sing? will you join the singers?" he did not say "Oh, yes," with the proud confidence that he did before.

He only said, "Master, I tried to keep along the way, but I never met the great teacher who would teach me all the words and music of the song."

But the man said, "Come with me."

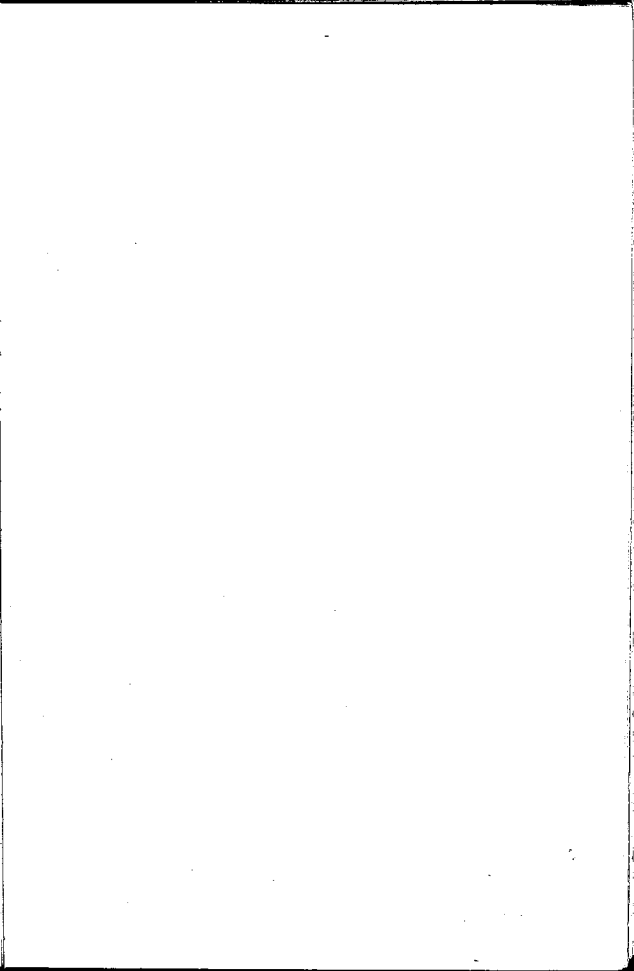
And so they went along the path beside the river, and entered the place where the great multitude of singers were assembled, and he stood once more in the great crowd.

And one gave him a piece of music. He was almost afraid to take it, lest he should not be able to understand; but when he unrolled it he could read it all, he knew every note; and when he tried to sing the music came, and with the first notes

of his voice in heaven the vision passed away,
for it was nothing but a long, strange dream.

And yet it was all true, for we are writing our
own music as we go on from day to day.

These deeds and words and thoughts of ours
all go up to God, and if down here we keep to
the narrow way and follow in the steps of Jesus
our Master, we shall find at last that we too can
read the heavenly music, and sing that heavenly
song which none can sing but those who are
redeemed from sin and selfishness and wrong.





"THERE, STANDING IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM, WAS A FIGURE
COVERED WITH WHITE CLOTH" (p. 115).

A PERFECT MAN.

ONCE upon a time, in a certain street of a great city, there lived a celebrated sculptor, a man who made statues and images, and all sorts of ornaments for building, carved in marble and in stone.

And it happened that just a little while before my story begins a certain great man had died, and the people had determined to erect a splendid monument above his tomb in the great cathedral where he had been buried. And this sculptor had been asked to make the statue of the great man who had died.

You have seen such statues, I daresay, in St. Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, and places of that kind.

Now, this sculptor had a son, a rather bright, sharp boy he was, who did not get into more mischief than boys usually do.

Of course, like most boys he came to grief now and then, and presented himself to his mother's astonished gaze with a dilapidated jacket and a

damaged face. But by-and-by she got used to it, as mothers do, and even began to think if nothing of the sort happened for two whole weeks together that something was the matter with the child.

Well, this lad had one very special pleasure, and as it was neither mischievous nor wrong, it would seem that upon the whole he was a rather remarkable kind of youth.

It was this : He was very fond of looking at the drawings and pictures which his father's skilful pencil made, and when allowed, as he sometimes was, to see his father at work, he was highly delighted to watch the block of stone change into the form and figure of a man.

Well, this being so, it was rather a trial for his feelings that his father strictly forbade him or any one else seeing the statue of the great man who had died.

He kept it locked up until it was finished.

The boy said, " Might he come just once ? "

" No, no, he mightn't come just once. "

" Might he have just one look, and come away ? "

" No, he might not do even that. "

But he thought, " Never mind, I shall see it when they take it away to put it up in its place. " So he asked whether he might go to see it moved.

His father said "Yes." And he waited for the time to come with eager expectancy.

At last the day arrived, and he started to the room where his father worked.

The door was unlocked ; he pushed it, and then came to a full stop. For there, standing in the centre of the room, was a figure rather taller than a man covered with white cloth or canvas, and with one arm stretched out pointing right at the boy as he thought, and looking so very ghostly that though he did not turn round and run away he thought it better just to respectfully retire, which he did, and felt very much more comfortable when he could take hold of his father's hand. After a little time he felt better, and then said to his father, " When shall we see it ? "

And his father told him when it was " unveiled," for you know that these things are sometimes kept covered up until they are put in their place, and then people hold a meeting and take the covering off, and that is called " Unveiling the Statue."

So the boy had to wait, not very long, only a day or so, and then the people gathered into the great cathedral to which the statue was carried, and after some music, and singing, and speeches, the covering was removed, and there, carved in pure white marble, stood the form of the great

man, with his arm stretched out, just as if he were going to speak. The people all stood hushed and still; they seemed to almost think that the stone would speak, for the face was so like the man that it seemed to be alive.

When it was all over, and they were going home, the boy asked his mother whether she didn't think his father the cleverest man in the world to be able to do a thing like that.

I don't know exactly what the lady said, but it is very likely she pretty much agreed.

However, when he was talking about it afterwards to his father, his father said, "Yes, my boy, it is like the great man who has died, but there is one thing I could not do—I could not make the stone show his beautiful mind, his gentle nature, and his noble heart. I could make his face and form, but the best of him only God could see, for he was grand and good, almost a perfect man; and it was for that goodness and greatness the people have done his memory the honour of to-day."

Now, all this made the boy think, and by-and-by in the evening, when he was lying on the hearthrug before the fire, what with the excitement and the pleasure and the thought, he fell into a kind of doze; and his mind kept going over and over what his father had been saying

about the greatness and goodness of the man whose statue had been unveiled. And he said to himself, "I wish I could be great and good like that. I should like people to—people to——" when all at once he heard a strange sound above his head.

Thud—thud—thud—thud, and then a clang like the sound of pickaxes at work. He went to start up, but found he could not move. He tried to kick out his leg, but he hadn't a leg to kick with or to stand upon. He tried to feel, but his arms had disappeared. But although he thought it very queer, he did not feel afraid, and he seemed to be changing into a block of stone, lying down in the quarry in the dark. Still he heard the thud, thud, of the workmen above, and presently the light came in, and he felt himself lifted up into the sunshine, brighter sunshine than he had ever seen before.

And two men stood there, with shining raiment and angel faces, looking very carefully at him, only he had changed into a block of beautiful white stone.

Then one of the men said to the other, "Do you think it will do?"

"Oh, yes," replied the second man, "this will do; don't you see the white colour of the wish to be good and great is upon it? It is just the

sort of stone the master loves to work upon when he wants to make a man."

And so the boy, who was changed into a block of stone, felt himself gently carried through the air. On and on the two men seemed to go, as if their feet had wings, until they came to a vast and splendid building, which they entered, and where they set their burden down.

It seemed to him that he was in his father's studio or workroom, and yet that he was back in the cathedral at the same time. He looked up, and there was the fretted roof of the chancel far away above him, and the light of the evening sunset kindling behind the painted windows made the faces of the saints and angels gleam as with heavenly beauty and immortal life. He was not frightened, as I said before, but it seemed very strange ; still more so when, looking up into one shadowed corner, he saw a pale soft light grow and glow while all the rest grew dark.

And then he saw, in this place where the light fell, two figures, very like the angels in the stained glass windows of the church, only these spoke and moved as if they were alive.

One looked rather old, with a face so thoughtful and so kind that you would have thought all the love of all the world was in that spirit heart. And the elder angel form was sitting at a desk,

with a scroll of paper before him, drawing something upon it with earnest care. The other angel figure had a young, bright face, and was bending over the desk looking at the elder's work. "What art thou doing, master?" he asked.

And the elder spirit answered, "I am drawing the picture for the statue of a beautiful soul, a perfect man."

"Whose soul? what man?" asked the younger.

"The soul that lies within yonder block of stone," replied the other. "I want to carve out of it a fine, true, strong man, that shall be a blessing to earth, and one day a gladness and a joy to heaven."

The boy who had been changed into a block of stone, or the block of stone that used to be a boy, listened and wondered, and thought, "Now I shall find out how to do what father said he could not—how to make the stone show a beautiful mind and a noble heart."

He waited a while, and then the elder angel said to the younger, "Go and bring me the first set of tools for the work."

And he brought a case, on which was written in large white letters, "Beginnings."

He set it gently down at the elder angel's feet. Presently the case was opened, and then a strange thing was to be seen, for the tools in the case

were not at all like the tools this boy's father used, but were of wonderful and curious shape.

One was marked "The Lesson Tool," another was marked "The Obedience Tool," a third "The Duty Tool," and so on.

And the master angel took them up one by one; he lifted them against the block of stone, that used to be a boy, with firm and skilful strokes. And as he did so it seemed that the rough corners and edges of the block began to fall away, and the stone began to change into the shape of a man.

"Oh," said the boy who had been changed into a stone to himself, "that is it, is it?—these lessons that are sometimes such a bother, and this having to do what you are told, which is so disagreeable, and this having duties to perform when you would rather be at play, are the tools that take the roughness off of us, and bring our souls into shape. Ah, yes, I see, these are the beginnings of a beautiful soul."

Well, this work went on for some time, until all the tools in the box of "Beginnings" had been used. And then the two angels stood together before the stone, and the younger one said, "Do you think it will do?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other, "I think I shall

make something of it by-and-by, but he is very rough yet ; go now, and bring me the second set of tools for this work."

He went, and returned with a case like the first, but on this second one was written in silver letters, "Polishings." And when the case was opened there were only three tools inside, sharp and glittering and strong. And they were marked with these three names, "Sorrow," "Joy," "Temptation."

And the master angel used them as before ; he took up the tool of Temptation and used it upon the arm of the statue, and whereas it was just the shape of an arm before, after this tool was used you could see the great strong muscles stand out upon it, and the arm looked as if it could strike a mighty blow.

And then he took up the tool of Sorrow, and as he touched the face of the statue with it, firmness came about the mouth and thought upon the brow, and the face became that of a wise and gentle man.

And then he took up the tool of Joy, and when the work of this was done there was a smile upon the countenance, and it seemed as if the lips could tremble into song.

And the boy within the stone said to himself once more, "Oh, this is the meaning. Now I

understand ; God lets us be tempted to make us strong, and sends sorrow to make us wise, and joy to make us bright and glad. . And that is the way He makes a beautiful soul."

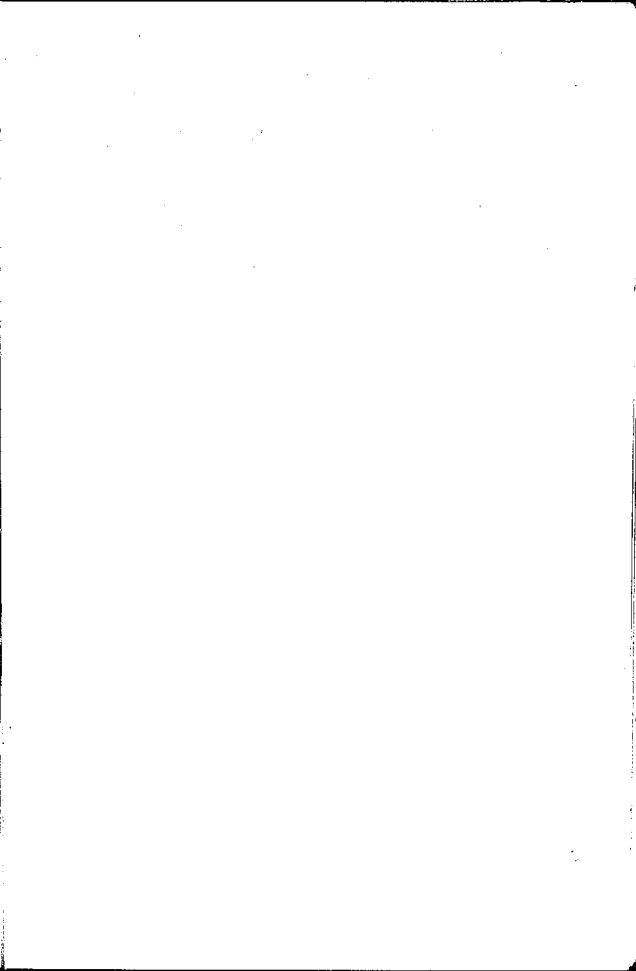
But something else was needed ; it was but an image after all, a stone with a soul inside it, but not a warm, living man.

Something else was needed, and this was what was done. The master drew near and touched the eyes, and they changed from stone to living ones ; touched the hand, and it became warm with life ; kissed the lips, and the heart began to beat. And there out of the stone had been made a grand and beautiful nature, almost a perfect man.

But here a strange thing took place, for with the first heart-beat the boy felt himself changed back into a boy again, and heard the voice of the great master sculptor say, " Will you let me carve yours into a beautiful soul, my child ? will you try to understand that work and sorrow and temptation and all the rest are only God's tools for the making of a perfect man ? "

And the boy answered, " Yes, yes."

And then it seemed that through the great aisles of the great church there came a grand thanksgiving song, and the dreamer woke, but it was not all a dream.





"TWO LITTLE CHILDREN WALKING SIDE BY SIDE" (p. 128)

FURNISHING THE HOUSE OF LIFE.

I.

ON the last day of a certain year, two souls silently passed down the street of the City of Chronopolis and stopped before a certain house.

It was not a house of any considerable size, but like all the other houses in that strange city it presented a very curious appearance, for it was built of days and hours and minutes all transfigured into stone. The large stones of the outer walls were all stones of a day, and the smaller stones which formed the interior walls of the beautiful rooms were all stones of an hour. These were of different colours; some were dark as the night, some were pink like the sky at dawn, others gleamed like the golden brightness of a summer's noon, and others yet again were red,

like the clouds of evening when the sun is just sinking out of sight.

But beside all these, there were some very tiny stones, much smaller than any of the rest, and these were all stones of a minute. They also were of different colours, but they were also carved into all sorts of lovely shapes, and were used for the cornices and ornaments of this wonderful house.

All the houses in this City of Chronopolis were thus built of minutes, hours, and days. Some of these buildings were much smaller than the others, but they were all constructed of these materials, only that the largest—the mansions, and the palaces, and the churches—were made of years, centuries, and millenniums.

II.

Now, the house before which these two souls stopped was one of the ordinary size, and was several stories high.

It had a garden in front, at the entrance of which stood a gate, and over this gate was an arch with certain words across it. They were written in curious letters, like those which we sometimes see on very ancient buildings. The

inscription read thus, "TES ZOES TA OIKIA."¹ But there was something else to be told about this house, for although the garden paths were swept and rolled, and all the borders trimmed, and everything put ready as if for some expected guests, yet the house itself was perfectly empty and perfectly dark.

For those houses in the City of Chronopolis are never light except when somebody alive is within them, and what is stranger still, there is never any furniture in any of the houses, except somebody alive is inside the door. Directly the living being, man or woman, boy or girl, angel or spirit, leaves one of those dwellings and shuts the door, then in an instant the light goes out, the chairs and tables vanish, the pictures and everything else disappear, and there is nothing but the bare walls left behind. So you can just imagine what a mysterious place that was.

III.

WELL, these two souls passed down the street of the city and stopped before the house with the strange inscription stretching across the gate. And as they looked up and read the words,

¹ The House of Life.

one of them said, "Brother, this is the place." "Yes," was the reply, "this is to be our home." So they went in through the gate and along the path; they climbed the steps and entered by the door, which opened to them of its own accord. It was a two-leaved door, and while it was opening, something in the shadow, or something in the light, sent out two gleams of brightness that seemed like a mother's arm stretched out to take them in.

And just here a very wonderful thing took place, for exactly as they crossed the threshold of the house those two souls changed into the forms of two little children walking side by side. And as they changed, a light broke forth from their two little bodies, which made the whole house shine.

It resembled that halo of glory which may be seen in pictures circling round the head of Jesus Christ like a coronal of light, only that in the case of these children it shone from every part of them, from the crown of their heads to the very tips of their toes.

And this light was of two kinds. One sort was golden like the glory of the sun, and this was called Life-light; the other was a soft, rich crimson, like the shimmer of a dewdrop in a dark red rose, and that was called Love-light.

As this beautiful light, blended of crimson and of gold, shone from the two little bodies into which those two souls had changed, it just filled the house with brightness, and the old darkness disappeared.

IV.

AND so they went softly on, across the hall or vestibule of this strange house, and the light shining from their bodies revealed the beautiful colours of the hour-stones which formed the wall.

There were the stones of the morning flushed with a delicate pink as soft as the colour on a baby's cheek ; there were the stones of noon shining like still, deep gold ; there were the stones of the sunset hours with their rich, red hushfulness of quiet ; and there were the dark stones of the night, very bright and very tender, that made one think of a mother's eyes watching in loving silence while the children slept.

The two children passed slowly on, doing nothing else but just moving forward, wrapped in the light of life and love, quite across the hall, until they reached the door of a room before which a curtain hung.

The stuff of which that curtain was made was called "TO THAUMA KAI HE PERIERGIA,"¹ and though you may not all know what that means without looking at the dictionary, I can assure you that you have used large quantities of the material already in your lives. Well, these two children approached the door before which the curtain hung, and as they did so it was slowly drawn aside, and one of the children gently knocked. But for a time it remained closed, so he knocked louder, and then the door opened with a soft noise, like the sound of music far out upon the sea, and it seemed as if a gentle voice were singing the words of this little song :—

"Come in, come in;
Gaze on life's beauty,
Wake to love's duty;
For all life's pathway,
By loving feet trod,
Climbs ever upward,
Leading to God."

And so they entered in.

V.

Now it must be remembered that all the rooms in the house were dark, unless some

¹ Wonder and Curiosity.

living thing was there ; therefore as soon as the two children came into the room it was all lighted up, and you could see the beautiful coloured walls and lovely ornaments, but you could also see that it was quite a bare, unfurnished, empty room.

And here another wonderful thing began to happen, for the moment they had passed the door and entered the room, everything which those two children did changed into a real thing—became an article of furniture ; and though the room was very large, the children did so many things that these transfigured actions gradually filled the place. For example, when they kissed each other, the kiss floated off from their lips, like a soft white cloud, and changed and changed till it became a beautiful picture hanging on the wall. When they frowned or looked cross at one another, then the frown went off like an ugly black patch, and fixed itself upon one of those shining stones, spoiling a red or golden hour. When they helped one another in their lessons or their work, a soft velvet carpet rolled out from their feet upon the floor. When one of them felt ill, then the kindness of the other changed into a couch spread with soft cushions, on which the weary little one could rest ; and when they prayed, as they often did together, the prayers went

floating away towards a certain marble pedestal, where they rested, and changed into a lovely statue of Jesus blessing the little children.

Love changed into a bright fire burning in the empty grate. Industry changed into a table spread with all kinds of pleasant food. And so in course of time the room was filled and furnished from end to end.

And still the beautiful gold and crimson light kept streaming from their bodies, and filled the room with a brightness which was only dimmed when anger, idleness, or falsehood made them do something wrong.

VI.

ONE day, when the two children had been a long time in the room, and the things about them were beginning to look a little old and worn, they noticed at the farther end of it a winding stair. They went to the foot of the staircase several times and wondered whither it would lead. At last they determined to go up and find out whether there was anything fresh which they might see or do. So they went up, and as they ascended the staircase the poor old room, where they had been so long, began to grow dark, for

they took the light with them, but all those things which had been so wonderfully made remained the same. There was the black patch of anger on the wall ; there was the soft carpet of helpfulness upon the floor ; there was the fire of love burning in the grate ; every word which the children had spoken, every deed that they had done, was changed into a thing, and stood there after the children had gone away.

Well, they went up the winding stair until they reached the landing, and there they came to another door with a curtain hung in front.

But this curtain was made of different material from that hanging before the door of the room downstairs, for it was made out of a stuff called "HE ELPIS KAI HE PHILODOXIA,"¹ and although, as was said before, the name cannot be deciphered without a dictionary, yet every one who has been to school, and tried to get to the top of the class, has used quantities of this material.

But now the second curtain lifts just as did the first, and one of the children knocks at the new door. The door swings open, showing another room, bare, empty, but also beautiful just like that one which they had already travelled through. And as the two children passed onward, they

¹ Hope and Emulation.

found that they were no longer children, but had grown up into a maiden and a youth. But the beautiful light still shone from them, and around them, and the old wonder by which their words and actions changed into things still remained. Only they were different things, and yet not always so much different, as grander and more noble things.

For example, when they were kind to one another a carpet still spread itself beneath their feet, only that it was thicker, softer, and of more splendid colours than in the former room, and love now lit a fire of deeper glow. But there were some quite different things as well, for when the youth said, "I must begin to learn," the words as they fell from his lips changed into a study table, with a row of books upon it; and when a long time after he said, "Now I must begin to work," these words were transformed into a bench with all sorts of tools ready for his use.

Thus as time went on and he grew to be a man, his words and deeds kept on changing into all sorts of beautiful and useful things—ships, houses, machines, pictures, and the like—which were continually filling up the room.

So also when the girl tried to help in the hard work, her kindness transfigured all ugly shapes

into forms of loveliness, her pleasant looks changed into bouquets of flowers, and her gentle words were transformed into instruments of music. And so working on together, this room at last grew almost full.

VII.

Now, on one side of this second room there was a narrow door painted quite black, with two words written on it in white letters, and the words were "TO PATHOS."¹ And one day when the room was almost full of things, they both stopped working, and very slowly went to this side door, and as they feebly knocked the door swung open, and they entered in.

No one ever knew what went on inside that room, but after a long time an old man came out with white hair and bended head, and he came out all alone; the other, his companion, was gone, and gone for ever.

And the light radiating from the old man's form was growing dim, only that from his face there shone a celestial glory, like that which lighted up the face of Moses when he had been very near to God. But where it was brightest it

¹ Suffering.

shone on a beautiful image which he carried in his hands. That was all his companion had left behind—a beautiful memory.

And with that in his hands the old man went slowly on and climbed another winding stair, and passed away; and he was never seen in that wonderful City of Chronopolis again.

VIII.

ALMOST directly after he had gone the King of the city came, as he always did when any of the inhabitants had left.

He came to see how the house had been furnished, and what work they had left behind. And as he passed through the rooms, which were of course all lighted up by his presence, all the good, faithful, holy things which they had done looked lovelier than they had ever done before. And it was noticed that when the King left the lovely house and closed the door, there was a smile upon his face.

Then he sent messengers to another city which was very, very far away—a city where there was no darkness, no pain, no separation,

no suffering; and the message which he sent was to this effect, that these two had been "good and faithful while they dwelt beneath his rule." And presently these two came along, not boy and girl, or youth and maiden, or aged man and suffering woman any more; but two beautiful white-robed souls. For they had left their bodies behind them in the old city, where they had been living, and they went up into the glorious light of this other city far away.

And when they came to the gate, one whom they called the Master met them and said, "Come in, come in. Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

And so ends the little parable of how two souls lived in the House of Life, in the City of Time, and then went away to the Eternal City of God.

IX.

THE parable needs very little explanation. My readers' bright young wits will soon find out the meaning of every part. It is all about ourselves, for we all come into that City of Time when we first open our baby eyes, and from that moment down to the very last, when, as people say, "we

die," we are engaged in furnishing the House of Life. We are just passing on and on through these several rooms, and all we think or say or do is just making those things both good or evil on which the King will come and look at last.





"THE KING WAS SITTING IN HIS PALACE, TURNING OVER THE PAGES OF A
LARGE BOOK" (p. 141).

THE JOURNEY OF THE KING.

IN a fair and beautiful city which was the capital of a mighty kingdom, the King was sitting in his palace, turning over the pages of a large book which was called "The Book of Things Asked For," or "The Book of Requests."

It was rather a curious book, and was called "The Book of Requests" because on its pages were written down all the petitions or things asked for—we might almost call them prayers—which people had left at the gate of the palace on the preceding day.

Now, as the King read one after another of these prayers, petitions, and requests, he found that one man asked to be made a captain in the King's army, another asked for a piece of land on which to build a house, another asked to be made one of the musicians in the King's band, and so on—one asking for one thing, and one asking for another. But the King also found that at the end of each petition or request almost

every one wrote down a promise that he or she would do anything they could to serve him. Now, as the King read these different requests and these different promises which the people made, he sometimes smiled as if he were very glad ; and at other times his face looked grave and sorrowful, and he shook his head as if he were saying to himself, "I do not think these people will keep their promises and will do what they say."

And here I must tell you something about the appearance of the King, for there were several things about the look of him that were very strange.

He had a crown upon his brow, but it was as if a wreath of thorns had been changed into gold. His robe was white, pure white, and was clasped around the waist with a golden girdle ; but the white robe had upon it, just at the side where the heart was beating, a large crimson stain like that of blood, and as he stretched forth his hand to turn the leaves of the great book before him, it looked as if it had been pierced through and through with a nail, for the mark of the wound was there. Well, as the King kept on turning over the pages of his book, and reading the various requests and promises the different people made, it came into his mind that he would go

and see whether these people would keep their promises and do what they could to please him if they were tried.

Not long before this time the King had caused to be proclaimed what was called the Golden Law or the Golden Rule of his kingdom, which was to this effect: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." He had caused this "Golden Law" to be written down in the great Book of his kingdom, and he had sent out hundreds and thousands of his servants to tell everybody that if they really wished to please him they must keep this "Golden Law."

So the King determined to go down into the streets of the city and to some places of the country to see whether the promise was kept. He rose from his seat and went out of the palace door, and began to go down the marble steps leading to the street outside.

But here a wonderful thing took place, for as he began to go down the steps his shape and appearance began to change. The golden crown changed into the thin white hairs of an aged man; the sceptre in his hand into a plain piece of wood like a pilgrim's staff; the white robe with the crimson stain changed into an old thread-bare coat; and by the time he reached the

bottom of the steps he looked like a very poor, toil-worn and weary old man.

So he went along the street ; but he had not gone far along the way before he met a big, pompous-looking man, who came bustling along with a roll of paper in his hand. The King, who had changed into the likeness of a poor old man, stopped, and began to say, " If you please, can you tell me the way——"

But the big, pompous-looking man thrust him on one side and said, " Don't stop me, old man ; don't you see this great roll in my hand ? It is a petition from a large meeting, at which some of the richest and greatest men in the city were present. I am taking it to the King ; it's going to be put down in the great book, and do you think I can stop bothering about an old man like you ? " And so he puffed and bustled away to the steps of the palace, and gave his great roll to the man who kept the door.

And the King, who had changed into the likeness of a poor old man, shook his head and frowned, as if he thought the man was not keeping his promise and was not keeping the " Golden Law."

Well, the King passed on, still in the likeness of an aged man, and presently he stopped before the door of a large and beautiful house. Now,

you must know the master of this house had once been a poor man himself, but he had sent a petition to the King, and the King had kindly answered his petition, and given him wealth and fine clothes and this beautiful house, and so the King thought, "I will see if this man will keep the 'Golden Law.'" Then he went up to the door and knocked, and presently the door swung open, and the old man who was the King asked to see the master of the house.

He was told to send in his name, and then it turned out that the King had put himself into the shape of an old man who had been the servant of the house for many years, but had been dismissed when he got weak and old and could not work any more. So he sent in his name and was told to wait, and there he stood on one side of the rich man's hall, waiting till he could be seen. And the carriages drove up, and the grand people went in and out, and some of them stared at the poor old man standing there, but they did not know it was the King.

By-and-by the great man came out and said, "I can't attend to you now, I am too busy ; you must come another time ; besides, I paid you as long as you could work, and I haven't anything to give away ?"

And the old man looked round the splendid

hall and said, "You are quite sure you haven't anything to give away?"

"No," said the other; "now don't be troublesome, and go away."

So the King, who had changed into the likeness of a poor old man, looked at the rich man, and turned away and passed into the street once more.

Then he resumed his journey, and presently came to a magnificent church. By this time the old man was growing weary, and he thought, "I will go in here, for at least I shall be able to get some rest."

As he entered he found the building thronged with people, the organ was playing, and the choir was chanting from the Psalm "The rich and poor meet together, and the Lord is the maker of them all."

But none took notice of the aged man, and at last, when the singing ceased, some one rather roughly said, "You can go and sit down there," and as he passed meekly to his place the fine ladies gathered up their skirts, and the people looked at each other as if they wondered at the man coming to church in such a shabby coat.

The service went on. The King, who had changed into the likeness of an old man, listened. The people stood to sing again, but no one took any notice of the stranger, except a little girl, who

leant across the seat and shyly placed an open book before him. And as she did so a smile passed over the King's face, the first one that had lighted there since he left the palace steps.

The service was over; the old man crept gently away and travelled on until he left the city behind, and the shadows of the evening began to fall.

And he came, after a long, long walk, to a little cottage beside the way.

It was not a pretty cottage with flowers in the garden and well-kept paths, but it looked neglected and forlorn, and very poor.

The old man went up to the open door, and asked for a cup of water and to be allowed to rest.

A cross, rough-looking woman came in answer to his knock. At first she was going to send him away, but when she saw how very poor and tired and aged the old man looked, she bade him come in; she placed a chair for him and brought the water for which he asked, and then after looking for a minute or two at the only loaf she had upon the shelf, she took it down and gave the man a slice of bread.

And again the smile came upon the face of the King, but he said nothing except to thank the woman. And soon after he went upon his way.

But here another thing took place, for as the King, who had changed into the likeness of an old man, went along, another change passed over him, for the old man grew smaller and smaller, his face became younger and younger, and at last he was there in the likeness of a little child.

One may often see little children resembling him tramping along the country roads, leading a horse by the side of a wide canal, or shivering along the streets on a winter's night, for the King made himself like one of the poor, because he wanted to try the people and see whether they would do what they could to please him.

Now, the road on which the child was travelling led down to the river-side, and the boats were crossing from the one bank to the other, taking the people to and fro.

And the child tried to cross, but one after another drove him back, for he was only a poor ragged-looking little child, and he had no money to pay.

So at last he went to one man, who was just going to start, and asked to be allowed to come with him.

"What do you want to go for?" said the man.

And the boy replied, "Because it is my way home."

So the man said, "Jump in, then."

And the child got in, and though nobody noticed it the boat glided across the river more swiftly and easily than it had ever done before, and it seemed as if the wavelets of the river laughed and whispered as they rippled past in the red glory of the setting sun. But by the time that they had reached the other side it was almost dark, and the child set out upon his journey along the dusty road.

Presently it grew quite dark, and the rain began to fall, but the child kept trudging along, when all at once he saw in the distance two bright lights and heard the tramp of a horse's furious feet.

It came rushing along and seemed to go all sides of the road at once. The child could not get out of the way: there was a crash and a cry, and when the people in the cart gathered themselves together, they took out of the ruin a little child with a death-like face and a broken limb.

Quickly and gently they carried him to the hospital in the neighbouring town, and there for many days he lay in fever and pain. Now, it happened just about that time a flower service was held in the town, and on the morning of the day on which it was to take place a girl had gone into her garden—her own garden—and after some hesitation, for she did not quite at first like giving

it away, she plucked the one choice rose which she had managed to grow. She thought at first of keeping it for herself, but at last she determined to give it for "Jesus' sake."

And somehow when the sick child woke, his eyes rested on this flower, and it seemed as if the flower told him the little story of the giver's sacrifice. He begged that it might be given him, and after it had withered he treasured up the leaves. And when he got well and went away from the hospital, the last thing seen of him was his going along looking down, and smiling on the petals of the withered rose.

Well, time went on, and one day a messenger was sent down from the palace to summon all these people to the presence of the King.

First came the big, pompous man who was going along with a big petition; then came the rich man from the beautiful home; and then came the child who had lent the hymn-book to the stranger in church; and then came the poor woman from the cottage on the road, and the boatman who had helped the child across the river; and last of all the girl who had sent her best and choicest flower. They were led up the marble steps of the palace, through the great hall, and at last into the presence-chamber of the King.

But what was their surprise to find standing on the lowest step of the throne the little child whom the boatman helped across the river, holding in his hands a beautiful and perfect rose, which the girl felt sure must be her own.

But their surprise was greater still as they stood and watched the child go slowly up the steps of the throne, and as he did so change into the likeness of a poor old man, with the white hair and the pilgrim's staff and the thread-bare coat.

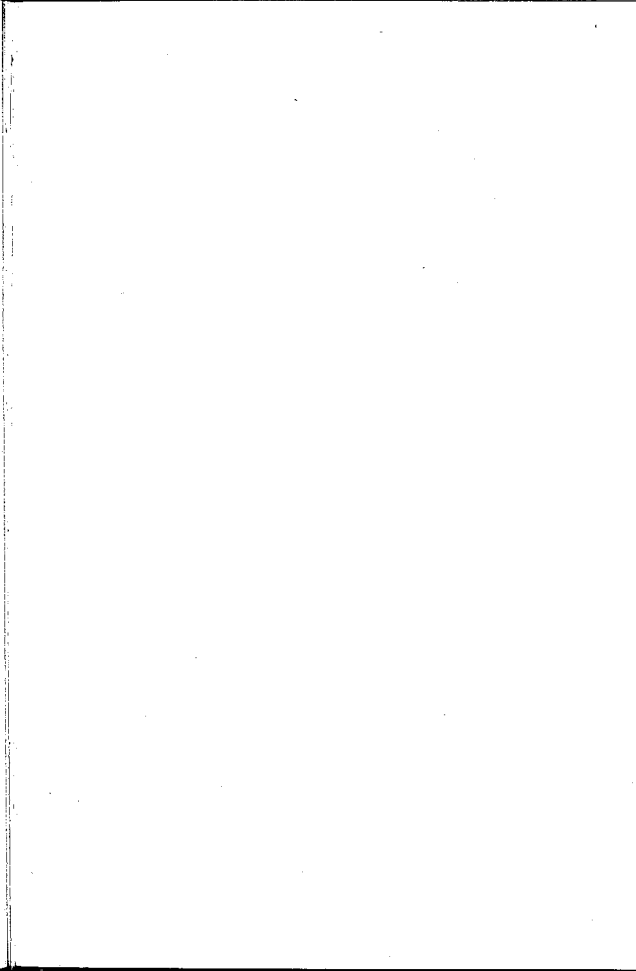
And their surprise was greatest of all as they watched these things change again—the shabby coat into a white robe with a crimson stain, the thin white hair into a crown of gold, the pilgrim's staff into a jewelled sceptre, and to find, when the last step was reached, that this was none other than the King. They all knelt down, and the King turned round and looked first upon those who had treated him unkindly; but they said, "Master, Master, we did not know that it was you."

But he said, "You should have remembered, you should have kept the 'Golden Law.' You have lost the blessing and the prize. Go forth, and remember that your King often comes to you in poor garments and lowly forms." And so they went out.

Then he turned to the others who had treated

him kindly. But they also said, "Master, we did not know that it was you."

But he said, "Never mind that. 'Come, ye blessed of My father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you.' You thought you were helping a poor old man, or a little child, but 'inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'"





CROSSING THE BLACK RIVER.

THE KING'S FERRY BOAT.

“AND there went over a ferry boat to carry over the King's household, and to do what he thought good.” Those words are written in 2 Samuel xix. 18.

Now, there were once some people living in a beautiful country named Chronogea. It is one of those countries not marked down in any map, and yet it is a place we all know very well indeed. It was a beautiful country; there were splendid cities, and noble forests, and pleasant fields, and flower-filled gardens, and all those things which made that country a very delightful land. There were little children playing in the parks, and birds singing in the trees, and every place seemed fully of happy, busy life.

And yet in this beautiful and happy place there was one thing that often made the people sorrowful and sad.

It was this. All along one side of this very pleasant country there was a river, so deep that no one had ever been able to find out

how deep it was, and so black that no one could see far down its dark waters as they swept on beside the shore.

But perhaps the strangest thing about this river was, that when you stood upon the banks you could never see to the other side. You could hear the waters beating upon the shore, you could sometimes hear what sounded like a shout or a song, but you could never see right over to the other side, for a thick grey cloud of fog or mist spread all up and down the river, and, try as those people would, they never could see right over to the other side. They tried with telescopes, and burning-glasses, and electric lights, and all sorts of things; but no, they never could get anything strong enough to pierce the cloud and show them what there was upon the other side.

"Well, but," you will say, "were they not very foolish people to keep on wasting their time by looking and looking for what they could not see? Why did they not leave off?" They would have done so, without a doubt, and would have forgotten all about the cloud which hid the other side of the river, but for one strange thing. Every now and then a black boat with gold letters upon its prow would come out of the cloud and row across the river to the side where these

people lived ; and when it got near the shore they could read what the gold letters said, and it was this :

“ THE KING'S FERRY BOAT.”

But there was something more, for when the boat came quite to land and was fastened to the bank, certain of the rowers would get out and go to some one or other among the people standing on the shore, or else they would go and knock at one of the doors in the city streets and say, “ It is time to go ! It is time to go ! ” and then in a little while they would be seen returning to their boat, taking one of these people with them—sometimes a little child, sometimes an aged man, sometimes one that looked strong and well, sometimes one bent and broken with sickness and disease.

And so the people always knew that when the King's ferry boat came out of the cloud across the river, some one of them would have to go away.

They would follow their friend down to the bank of the river and say farewell, and often weep bitter tears, and then the boat would go over to that other side which they could never see, carrying away some one whom they loved.

Well, you may suppose that made them very sad ; and what made them even more sad than

being parted was that they did not know what happened to their friends when they reached the other side.

Now, the King heard about all this, and when he found how sorrowful they were, he was sorry for them too, and so one day he said to his son, "Will you go and tell these poor people that they need not be afraid; that all of those who come over in the King's ferry boat come to me, and that although they cannot see through the cloud, they may be quite sure that all is well, and that they are safe under the protection of the King."

And so one day the young Prince came, and when he heard the people say, "Oh, here is the King's ferry boat again, and some of us will have to go away," he said, "Do not be afraid, do not be afraid. They are only going to the King. 'In my father's house are many mansions;' they will all be quite safe with him."

Then the people were very glad, and they said, "Oh, Prince, is that really so?"

And the King's son said, "Oh, yes—'if it were not so, I would have told you; let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'"

And then the people said, "We will not let the boat be black any longer; we will paint it a shining white, and we will put flowers all about it when it comes, for we shall not be so sorry any more.

We shall be sorry to be parted, for that is always hard, but we shall not mind so much now we know they are all going to the King."

And then they thanked the kind Prince for coming to tell them this good news, and blessed him, because they said, "'He hath brought life and immortality to light by his Gospel.'"

And so the King's ferry boat still comes and goes across the river, but it is not black now as it used to be. Its colours now are white and gold, and travellers who depart carry beautiful flowers with them, and they say to those they leave behind, "Farewell, until we all meet together in the palace of our King."

Well, children, I think most of you will understand the story. The King's ferry boat sometimes comes and fetches little ones whom we know and love, but it is a white boat adorned with gold and flowers. Our little friends go away from us across the river, whose other side we cannot see; but Jesus, the King's Beloved Son, has told us not to be afraid. Behind the veiling cloud there is the Father's Home, and better still, the Father's loving Self; and of these children the dear Saviour said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Just you try to think of it as in this parable; and when people talk of some one being dead,

remember it is only this, that the King's ferry boat has come over to carry one of the King's children across the river to His beautiful home.

Only give your heart's love to Jesus Christ and do God's holy will, be good and faithful, kind and true, and then the meaning of death will all be told out in those Bible words as in a parable: "There went over a ferry boat to carry over the King's household, and to do what he thought good."

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