

and long after the blue garland was faded Belle remembered the helpful little lesson that taught her to read the faces poverty touches with a pathetic eloquence, which says to those who look, "Forget-me-not."

## V.

## OLD MAJOR.

"O MAMMA, don't let them kill him! He isn't doing any harm, and he's old and weak, and hasn't any one to be good to him but Posy and me!" cried little Ned, bursting into his mother's room, red and breathless with anxiety and haste.

"Kill whom, dear? Sit down and tell me all about it."

"I *can't* sit down, and I *must* be quick, for they may do it while I'm gone. I left Posy to watch him, and she is going to scream with all her might the minute she sees them coming back!" cried Ned, hovering restlessly about the doorway, as if expecting the call that was to summon him to the rescue.

"Mercy on us! what is it, child?"

"A dear old horse, mamma, who has been hobbling round the road for a week. I've seen him driven away from all the neighbors, so Posy and I give him clover and pat him; and to-day we found



him at our bars, looking over at us playing in the field. I wanted him to come in, but Mr. White came along and drove him off, and said he was to be killed because he had no master, and was a nuisance. Don't let him do it!"

"But, Neddy, I cannot take him in, as I did the lame chicken, and the cat without a tail. He is too big, and eats too much, and we have no barn. Mr. White can find his master, perhaps, or use him for light work."

Mamma got no further, for Ned said again, —

"No, he can't. He says the poor old thing is of no use but to boil up. And his master won't be found, because he has gone away, and left Major to take care of himself. Mr. White knew the man, and says he had Major more than eighteen years, and he was a good horse, and now he's left to die all alone. Wouldn't I like to pound that man?"

"It *was* cruel, Neddy, and we must see what we can do."

So mamma put down her work and followed her boy, who raced before her to tell Posy it would be "all right" now.

Mrs. West found her small daughter perched on a stone wall, patting the head of an old white horse,

who looked more like a skeleton than a living animal. Ned gave a whoop as he came, and the poor beast hastily hobbled across the road, pressing himself into a nook full of blackberry vines and thorny barberry bushes, as if trying to get out of sight and escape tormentors.

"That's the way he does when any one comes, because the boys plague him, and people drive him about till he doesn't know what to do. Isn't it a pity to see him so, mamma?" said tender-hearted Ned, as he pulled a big handful of clover from his father's field close by.

Indeed, it was sad, for the poor thing had evidently been a fine horse once; one could see that by his intelligent eye, the way he pricked up his ears, and the sorrowful sort of dignity with which he looked about him, as if asking a little compassion in memory of his long faithfulness.

"See his poor legs all swelled up, and the bones in his back, and the burrs the bad boys put in his mane, and the dusty grass he has to eat. Look! he knows me, and isn't afraid, because I'm good to him," said Ned, patting old Major, who gratefully ate fresh clover from the friendly little hand.

"Yes, and he lets me stroke his nose, mamma



It's as soft as velvet, and his big eyes don't frighten me a bit, they are so gentle. Oh, if we could only put him in our field, and keep him till he dies, I should be so happy!" said Posy, with such a wheedlesome arm about mamma's neck, that it was very hard to deny her any thing.

"If you will let me have Major, I won't ask for any other birthday present," cried Ned, with a sudden burst of generosity, inspired, perhaps, by the confiding way in which the poor beast rubbed his gray head against the boy's shoulder.

"Why, Neddy, do you really mean that? I was going to give you something you want very much. Shall I take you at your word, and give you a worn-out old horse instead?" asked mamma, surprised, yet pleased at the offer.

Ned looked at her, then at old Major, and wavered; for he guessed that the other gift was the little wheelbarrow he had begged for so long,—the dear green one, with the delicious creak and rumble to it. He had seen it at the store, and tried it, and longed for it, and planned to trundle every thing in it, from Posy to a load of hay. Yes, it must be his, and Major must be left to his fate.

Just as he decided this, however, Posy gave a cry

that told him Mr. White was coming. Major pressed further into the prickly hedge, with a patient sort of sigh, and a look that went to Ned's heart, for it seemed to say,—

"Good by, little friend. Don't give up any thing for me. I'm not worth it, for I can only love you in return."

Mr. White was very near, but Major was safe; for, with a sudden red in his freckled cheeks, Ned put his arm on the poor beast's drooping neck, and said, manfully,—

"I choose *him*, mamma; and now he's mine, I'd like to see anybody touch him!"

It was a pretty sight,—the generous little lad befriending the old horse, and loving him for pure pity's sake, in the sweet childish way we so soon forget.

Posy clapped her hands, mamma smiled, with a bright look at her boy, while Mr. White threw over his arm the halter, with which he was about to lead Major to his doom, and hastened to say,—

"I don't want to hurt the poor critter, ma'am, but he's no mortal use, and folks complain of his being in the way; so I thought the kindest thing was to put him out of his misery."



"Does he suffer, do you think? for if so, it would be no kindness to keep him alive," said mamma.

"Well, no, I don't suppose he suffers except for food and a little care; but if he can't have 'em, it will go hard with him," answered Mr. White, wondering if the old fellow had any work in him still.

"He never should have been left in this forlorn way. Those who had had his youth and strength should have cared for him in his age;" and Mrs. West looked indignant.

"So they should, ma'am; but Miller was a mean man, and when he moved, he just left the old horse to live or die, though he told me, himself, that Major had served him well, for nigh on to twenty years. What do you calculate to do about it, ma'am?" asked Mr. White, in a hurry to be off.

"I'll show you, sir. Ned, let down the bars, and lead old Major in. That shall be his home while he lives, for so faithful a servant has earned his rest, and he shall have it."

Something in the ring of mamma's voice and the gesture of her hand made Ned's eyes kindle, and Mr. White walk away, saying, affably, —

"All right, ma'am; I haven't a word to say against it."

But somehow Mr. White's big barn did not look as handsome to him as usual when he remembered that his neighbor, who had no barn at all, had taken in the friendless horse.

It was difficult to make Major enter the field; for he had been turned out of so many, driven away from so many lawns, and even begrudged the scanty pickings of the roadside, that he could not understand the invitation given him to enter and take possession of a great, green field, with apple trees for shade, and a brook babbling through the middle of it.

When at last he ventured over the bars, it was both sad and funny to see how hard he tried to enjoy himself and express his delight.

First, he sniffed the air, then he nibbled the sweet grass, took a long look about him, and astonished the children by lying down with a groan, and trying to roll. He could not do it, however, so lay still with his head stretched out, gently flapping his tail as if to say, —

"It's all right, my dears. I'm not very strong, and joy upsets me; but I'm quite comfortable, bless you!"

"Isn't it nice to see him, all safe and happy



mamma?" sighed Posy, folding her hands in childish satisfaction, while Ned sat down beside *his* horse, and began to take the burrs out of his mane.

"Very nice, only don't kill him with kindness, and be careful not to get hurt," answered mamma, as she went back to her work, feeling as if she had bought an elephant, and didn't know what to do with him.

Later in the day a sudden shower came up, and mamma looked about to be sure her little people were under cover, for they played out all day long, if possible. No chickens could the maternal hen find to gather under her wings, and so went clucking anxiously about till Sally, the cook, said, with a laugh,—

"Ned's down in the pastur', mum, holding an umberella over that old horse, and he's got a waterproof on him, too. Calvin see it, and 'most died a-laughing."

Mamma laughed too, but asked if Ned had on his rubber boots and coat.

"Yes, mum, I see him start all in his wet-weather rig, but I never mistrusted what the dear was up to till Calvin told me. Posy wanted to go, but I wouldn't let her, so she went to the upper win-

dow, where she can see the critter under his umberella."

Mamma went up to find her little girl surveying the droll prospect with solemn satisfaction; for there in the field, under the apple tree, stood Major, blanketed with the old waterproof, while his new master held an umbrella over his aged head with a patient devotion that would have endeared him to the heart of good Mr. Bergh.

Fortunately the shower was soon over, and Ned came in to dry himself, quite unconscious of any thing funny in his proceedings. Mamma kept perfectly sober while she proposed to build a rough shed for Major out of some boards on the place. Ned was full of interest at once; and with some help from Calvin, the corner under the apple tree was so sheltered that there would be no need of the umbrella hereafter.

So Major lived in clover, and was a happy horse; for Cockletop, the lame chicken, and Bobtail, the cat, welcomed him to their refuge, and soon became fast friends. Cockle chased grasshoppers or pecked about him with meditative clucks as he fed; while Bob rubbed against his legs, slept in his shed, and nibbled catnip socially as often as his constitution needed it.



But Major loved the children best, and they took good care of him, though some of their kind attentions might have proved fatal if the wise old beast had not been more prudent than they. It was pleasant to see him watch for them, with ears cocked at the first sound of the little voices, his dim eyes brightening at sight of the round faces peeping over the wall, and feeble limbs stirred into sudden activity by the beckoning of a childish hand.

The neighbors laughed at Ned, yet liked him all the better for the lesson in kindness he had taught them; and a time came when even Mr. White showed his respect for old Major. 283

All that summer Neddy's horse took his rest in the green meadow, but it was evident that he was failing fast, and that his "good time" came too late. Mamma prepared the children for the end as well as she could, and would have spared them the sorrow of parting by having Major killed quietly, if Ned had not begged so hard to let his horse die naturally; for age was the only disease, and Major seemed to suffer little pain, though he daily grew more weak, and lame, and blind.

One morning when the children went to carry him a soft, warm mash for breakfast, they found

him dead; not in the shed, where they had left him warmly covered, but at the low place in the wall where they always got over to visit him.

There he lay, with head outstretched, as if his last desire had been to get as near them as possible, his last breath spent in thanking them. They liked to think that he crept there to say good by, and took great comfort in the memory of all they had done for him.

They cried over him tenderly, even while they agreed that it was better for him to die; and then they covered him with green boughs, after Ned had smoothed his coat for the last time, and Posy cut a lock from his mane to make mourning rings of.

Calvin said he would attend to the funeral, and went off to dig the grave in a lonely place behind the sand-bank. Ned declared that he could not have his horse dragged away and tumbled into a hole, but must see him buried in a proper manner; and mamma, with the utmost kindness, said she would provide all that was needed.

The hour was set at four in the afternoon, and the two little mourners, provided with large handkerchiefs, Ned, with a black bow on his arm, and Posy



in a crape veil, went to drop a last tear over their departed friend.

At the appointed time Calvin appeared, followed by Mr. White, with a drag drawn by black Bill. This delicate attention touched Neddy; for it might have been bay Kitty, and that would have marred the solemnity of the scene.

As the funeral train passed the house on its way down the lane, mamma, with another crape veil on, came out and joined the procession, so full of sympathy that the children felt deeply grateful.

The October woods were gay with red and yellow leaves, that rustled softly as they went through the wood; and when they came to the grave, Ned thanked Calvin for choosing such a pretty place. A pine sighed overhead, late asters waved beside it, and poor Major's last bed was made soft with hemlock boughs.

When he was laid in it, mamma bade them leave the old waterproof that had served for a pall still about him, and then they showered in bright leaves till nothing was visible but a glimpse of the dear white tail.

The earth was thrown in, green sods heaped over it, and then the men departed, feeling that the mourners would like to linger a little while.

As he left, Mr. White said, with the same gravity which he had preserved all through the scene, —

"You are welcome to the use of the team and my time, ma'am. I don't wish any pay for 'em; in fact, I should feel more comfortable to do this job for old Major quite free and hearty."

Mamma thanked him, and when he was gone, Ned proposed that they should sing a hymn, and Posy added, "They always sing, 'Sister, thou art mild and lovely' at funerals, you know."

Mamma with difficulty kept sober at this idea but suggested the song about "Good old Charlie," as more appropriate. So it was sung with great feeling, and then Posy said, as she "wiped her weeping eyes," —

"Now, Ned, show mamma our eppytap."

"She means epytarf," explained Ned, with a superior air, as he produced a board, on which he had printed with India ink the following words, —

"Here lies dear old Major. He was a good horse when he was young. But people were not kind to him when he was old. We made him as happy as we could. He loved us, and we mourn for him. Amen."

Ned's knowledge of epitaphs was very slight, so he asked mamma if this one would do; and she answered warmly, —



"It is a very good one; for it has what many lack, — the merit of being true. Put it up, dear, and I'll make a wreath to hang on the gravestone."

Much gratified, Ned planted the board at the head of the grave, Posy gathered the brightest leaves, and mamma made a lovely garland in which to frame the "eppytap."

Then they left old Major to his rest, feeling sure that somewhere there must be a lower heaven for the souls of brave and faithful animals when their unrewarded work is done.

Many children went to see that lonely grave, but not one of them disturbed a leaf, or laughed at the little epitaph that preached them a sermon from the text, —

"Blessed are the merciful."

## VI.

## WHAT THE GIRLS DID.

"I'M so disappointed that I can't go; but papa says he can't afford it this summer. You know we lost a good deal by the great fire, so we must all give up something;" and Nelly gave a sigh, as if her sacrifice was not an easy one.

"I'm sorry, too, for I depend on hearing all about your adventures every summer. It is almost as good as going myself. What a pity Newport is such an expensive place," answered Kitty Fisher, Nelly's bosom friend.

"I dare say papa could manage to let me go for a week or so; but my outfit would cost so much I dare not ask him. One must dress there, you know, and I haven't had a new thing this summer," said Nelly.

"I'm sure your old things as you call them, are nice enough for any place. I should think I was made, if I had such a lovely wardrobe;" and Kitty's