

and his table is thick with knick knacks, which he treasures as mementoes of his early home.

If Coralie had cause to rejoice in the advent of her Aunt Estelle, she has a double cause in the proficiency of Clarence. But not alone is Coralie benefitted by his coming, Lela is quite enraptured with him, she declares :

"Now I can learn Italian, and no longer fear to sing my pet songs incorrectly, but be sure I have the pure pronunciation from a native ; and then dear Clare, if you can teach me to bring just half the sweetness from my guitar, you do from yours, I will never be done thanking you."

And now every spare moment, (and I am sorry for their sakes, these are so few,) Clare gives Lela a guitar lesson, and she and Marion, a scrap of pure Italian to learn. And they enjoy it wonderfully, although it is more work for them all.

## CHAPTER XXII.

NOVEMBER 30.

"How much do you love me?" asked Clarence of me the other day in his pretty fondling way. "How much do you think you love me?"

"A very great deal, dear boy, what our little blind girl here would call a 'mountain high, and an ocean-full.'"

"Sufficiently to grant me a very great favour?"

"Try me, and see."

"But I want you to say 'yes' first, please say 'yes.' I will do just what you say," and he put his arm round me, and laid his head upon my shoulder.

"What is it, Clarence, which takes so much petting and begging to win? foolish fellow, tell me."

"Promise me first," said he wilfully.

"No, I never promise first, for fear I promise wrongfully, and thus commit two sins."

"Oh dear, then I am afraid to ask," and he looked up piteously.

"You need not be, I will try very hard to grant whatever you desire."

"Well, then here goes ; I want so badly to be really and truly one of the family, just as Stuart is ; not as I am, a stranger, only living here by suffrance."

"Why Clarence ! what makes you talk so ? it is not true ; you know we love you dearly, and would be very, very unhappy to have you go away from us. If we seem to love Stuart better, you must remember he has been with us longer, and shared poverty and sorrow with us, and been an invaluable and earnest son to me. You must not wonder that I seem to lean on Stuart, more than on any one else, for even had I known and loved you equally long, he is so much the stronger, I should always have relied upon him, do you not understand that ?"

"Yes, oh yes, please do not think, I imagine for an instant, that you could give me the love you do him, he is so noble, so good, such a brave true-hearted fellow, oh, I do love him," he added with such frank vehemence, that little Adele, who was on my knee started and looked frightened enough.

"But this is what I mean, I wish you would use my means as you do his. If Stuart makes a little money, as he often does, he brings it to you, and you accept it, as a matter of course. While here am I in receipt of one hundred dollars a quarter, and you are as scrupulous about using a cent, except my board, as if I was an entire stranger. It is not kind, Aunt Bertha."

"But my boy, it is surely enough, that you are compelled to live such an humble secluded life, a life of poverty, both of society, and means, without our depriving you of the pleasure you can buy with your quarterly allowance."

"Now, that is not kind, and besides I must tell you something ; you know although Uncle Graclon is so very rich, my father was a poor artist, and while he lived we often suffered because, he was too proud to let Uncle know he could not support us, by his dear art. And then, when he died, we were so very, very poor that my mother had to forget her own and my dear father's pride, and send to Uncle for some of his abundance. He is good and generous, you know him ; he sent us a very large sum of money, but my father had left many debts and mamma thought it right to

pay them all, and so we were poor again, for it took the greater part of the money; we lived very plainly and saw no one, mamma and I and one servant, in that old house alone; and mamma taught me to paint, and to sing and to play on all the instruments within our reach; poor mamma, oh we were very happy then! I was too young to feel sad at our poverty, and too glad to have mamma always with me, instead, of seeing her beautifully dressed, going out night after night, as she used to. I tell you this because I want you to know I am used to poverty, and then I am used to trying to earn something, to keep it away, for I may tell you what we never told any one else, least it should reach my uncle's ears and offend him, I played the organ in the city of Valentia—for two years before mamma died, oh!—and his eyes kindled and his face flushed, "it was such a grand old organ, there are none like it in this country, for they took me to hear the "great organ," (they called it) in B—and the Messrs N—— said it was the finest instrument in the United States, and it is poor, nothing, nothing, to compare with the organ in Valentia. Now this is what I want to ask you to do. To take the money which remains after my school and painting-master's bills are paid and let Nora and Birdie go to school with Marion, will you? please do, oh you will make me so happy, if you only will, it will seem like mamma back again; please say yes, beg her, Adèle, help me to make her say yes."

And then they begged with kisses and tears, until I was fain to consent; only I stipulated that he should keep for his own private use, a small sum.

This will make all that has distressed us smooth and easy, and now every spare moment must be spent preparing them, making new dresses out of old ones, and using our small means to the best advantage. Estelle has a wonderful faculty for bonnet making, and has been rejuvenating some of our better day bonnets, so that they look as good as new.

DECEMBER 20.

After a world of discussion, we have at length decided, that the girls can be spared, and that they shall begin school

at the commencement of the new year. We have at last concluded that for many reasons, the advertisement of "the excellent and fashionable establishment of Madame Degrade," will suit us better than any other.

It is not very far off, which in bad weather will be a great consideration; and then it is the only school we can hear of, where the French language is used exclusively. The "fashionable" part of the advertisement was somewhat of a drawback at first, but I think I can trust my darlings even into a fashionable atmosphere, especially as they have no means of entering into competition, with those with whom they may be thrown.

I have arranged with Madame to take my daughters for a year, lessening her charges by paying her in advance, and excluding all accomplishments which were enumerated as extras, informing her that they would have private teachers for these.

My days are so engaged out of the house, I have little time to attend to any thing in it, therefore Mrs. Wilbur is to be our housekeeper, Estelle seamstress, teacher of the little girls, and general assistant.

We have found so many of our old dresses available for the girls, that between us all they are well supplied.

A couple of Sabbaths ago, I had a severe cold and Lela sang in my stead, while Stuart made his first public attempt upon the organ, and a very creditable one it was.

It seems there was a gentleman present who has charge of the choir of the "exclusive church," upon L—, st. up town.

He was so charmed with Lela's voice that to-day I have had a visit from him, with an offer to engage her at an exorbitant salary to sing in his choir.

At first I most unequivocally refused to listen to such an arrangement, but this evening we have talked the matter over, and she is so solicitous to accept the situation, and Ernest says it will strengthen her lungs, instead of injure them as I had feared, that I have decided if Mr. J——, will agree to my terms he shall have her.

If he will dismiss his present choir and engage with Lela, Marion as contralto, and Stuart as tenor, I will let her go.

Cora's voice is much the stronger, and suits Lela's in duetts much better than Marion's, but I cannot feel it safe

to trust my giddy girl without either Marion or myself to keep her in order, so Marion will have to suffice.

Then we will have left for our own choir, Cora, Ernest, and myself, and Clare will play for us, sometimes, until Howard or Adèle are far enough advanced.

It seems almost too hazardous a thing for such very young people to take charge of a choir, in such a large church, but Mr. J—— is an old established musician and if he is willing to trust them, I imagine there is no cause for the rest of us to fear for their success.

I have written all this to Mr. J——, and to-morrow will expect an answer from him.

This will be such a lightening of our troubles, that I hardly dare to let myself think it will succeed. It will add several hundred dollars to our income, should he accept all, and we need use none of it but save it, lay it away for the time when Stuart is ready for college.

It is a silly thing I know, to sit here appropriating money which is as yet only a perhaps, and which is not earned; but just the little glimpse I have had of this possibility, shows me how despairingly I have been nourishing the hope.

Oh! if Stuart may only be enabled to get a collegiate education, I shall feel as though half of our difficulties were at an end. I know he will be horror-stricken at the idea of our working for his benefit, but I think I have the ability to make him do what I deem best, even though he may shrink from it, and refuse it at first.

DECEMBER 24.

It is all settled with our new friend Mr. J——, just as I desired, with two changes. The evening after we talked the matter over, Clarence went to Mr. J——'s residence, and after playing for him, offered to engage as organist, if he concluded to accept my arrangement.

I knew nothing of this, until the next day when Mr. J—— made his appearance, although Clarence in his nightly confidencing said:

"I have been doing something to-day, *carissima*, which must be my own secret until to-morrow, and then you must grant my request; indeed, I know you will, for my poor heart would quite break did you refuse me."

When Mr. J—— came the mystery was explained, he was delighted with Clarence's performance.

"Why, Madame," he said, "he plays as well as your daughter sings, and I can give him no higher praise."

"Then are you willing for the sake of securing such stars," I asked smiling, "to take the others?"

"If they are in the least endurable, I will do anything within reason," he replied.

After he had heard them sing, he declared his entire satisfaction, only as he himself sings tenor, Ernest is to be substituted for Stuart, who will therefore take Nora's place at our organ.

I am so pleased with Mr. J——, and feel the girls are quite safe with him, especially as Ernest and Clare are to be with them.

The salary will make us rich indeed, and by close economy, and strict industry we can live without touching one cent of it, so it will be clear profit.

We were talking the matter over to-night, when Ernest said: "This money will just pay Stuart's way next year at college, if he gets through his examination successfully. I suppose he will if hard work will help him. Then he can take this money, and as much more as we can save and go."

"Only he will never, *never, never* take it, how dare you think me such a dastard as to allow you and all the rest, to be working night and day while I am sporting at college. You are unkind, Uncle Ernest, to think me such a selfish heathen, I will never do it I tell you."

"My! what a fine rage his lordship's in," laughed Ernest.

"Oh you may laugh, but I will be a shoemaker or a blacksmith, before I will go to college under such circumstances," said Stuart, still in a vehement fury.

"You might be a worse thing," said Mr. Raymond.

"Yes and I would be a worse thing, if I so forgot my manhood as to allow, my frail, sweet sisters to work for me," he replied.

"Your *manhood* is a budding thing as yet, I would not mention it too prominently," said Ernest mockingly. "Nevertheless to college you shall go next year."

"I will not, I vow I will not," he said angrily, "I would not mind if you and Clare were going to give me the means, but not the rest."

"Oh dear! we are not going to *give* you the means if you please, do not be so fast, we are only going to loan them until you become a celebrated lawyer, and then we will demand them with an enormous per centage, will we not?" and Ernest threw a laughing glance around the circle.

"Yes, indeed we will," answered one and all.

"Nonsense," said Stuart half laughing, but looking more like crying, "that is a poor get off, you shan't cheat me, I will never take the old money, I tell you."

"Do not say so," said Marion as she came up behind him and laid her hand upon his shoulder, "for you know you will do exactly as mamma says, after all."

"So I will, but she will never be so cruel or unkind as"—

"Mamma is never cruel or unkind, you saucy boy, how dare you insinuate such a thing," cried Birdie boxing his ears so fiercely, that for a while all protest was at an end.

When he began again, I silenced him by saying,

"My dear boy, it is hardly necessary to get into a dispute about something which will not happen for at least a year, as it is not likely you will be able to pass so severe an examination, this term at least; indeed I do not think it right you should try, eighteen will be quite young enough for you to commence a college career."

I saw Stuart give Marion a quizzical glance, which she answered by a low laugh. I suppose by that he means to try, even if he fails.

"But mamma," said Lela, "papa graduated, at 'Harvard' when he was only eighteen, did he not?"

"Yes, my dear, but the circumstances were different."

"Oh, of course, no one else could be like dear papa," she answered "not even Stuart although he is so talented."

We are satisfied with our present state, we have a thousand things each day of our lives for which to thank our Father.

He has brought us safely through much tribulation thus far, and surrounded us with many and manifold mercies.

Save that the loss of sight must ever be a severe cross to my darling Adèle, she is as happy as the day is long: every one attends to her first of all.

Gracie studies all her lessons aloud, so that Adèle may learn them too, and Lela gives her a music lesson every

day, so she will be by no means deficient. And then like almost all other blind people, music is her inspiration.

When I see her seated at the organ, and listen to the strains her little wandering fingers woo from the keys, I clasp her to my heart and weep over her, saying,

"Muriel, Muriel, I cannot spare thee, even for such a fate as Muriel's."

#### JANUARY 1.

We have had a gayer Christmas holiday this year than the last; first, because time has softened the grief of the departure of our beloved one into a sad but fragrant memory, for the younger ones at least, and again our hearts put on a lighter guise, because the ways of life are less covered with the clouds of poverty, and our hopes for the future seem more certain;—then too we are such a large family we could hardly know the quiet of the last year.

Even in our poverty, we have exchanged love tokens—for where there are fond hearts to contrive the way—willing hands can weave some bright nothing, for the dear ones, who prize the gift more for the care which wrought it, than if it were ten times the value,—thus it is ever, even the feeblest life has some flower to gladden it.

Stuart's present came nearer to my heart than any of the others;—it was his long worked for prize, and the very first offered for competition, a veritable surprise to all of us, save Marion who is always his confidant.—and such eulogy, as was lavished upon my dear boy by his examiners.

"He can do any thing," they write at the end of a letter filled with praises of his indefatigable industry and determination.—"God has endowed him with rare gifts—has given him emphatically *the ten talents*—it will be his own fault if he is second to any one, in anything."—This and more made our hearts full of gladness for our noble, great hearted Stuart.

The congratulations and praises which were rained upon him on all hands, made him declare as we sat together a happy family party upon New Year's eve,

"I vow there never was a fellow so happy and so blessed as your humble servant, or with such a host of friends to be

happy with him," then suddenly springing up from the stool at my feet, "May, you are real glad it is all over at last,—we have been anxious enough all this while, poor little May it was too bad to make you share the anxiety so long."

"I do not think I am at all the worse for my share of the uncertainty, for I had no fear for your success, you could not help but win," and she pushed back his brown clustering curls, "but oh I am glad, now you shall have some rest, you proudly humble victor."

He had given Adèle as much pleasure as the rest although she was longer telling him of it. Later in the evening as he sat with his head leaning upon my knee—half listening to the rest—half dreaming of his hard won victories—Adèle said:

"Call me, Arty," this is always the way in which she asks if she may come in safety. The trust evidenced by it, is so beautiful we are very careful naught shall break in upon her confidence.

"Come pet," said Stuart, when the way had been cleared; silently, and fearlessly she walked to him, nestling closely in his arms, and passing her hand over his face—

"How happy you are to-night, Arty, your face is full of smiles—and your voice sounds as if you wanted to be saying all the while, 'I am glad.'"

"And I am happy, *mignonne*, very happy."

"And so are Gracie and I, we always are, when the rest are glad."

"But you and Gracie have not told me you were glad, or kissed me either."

"We are so little, we cannot tell all we mean, but," and she laughed merrily, "we can kiss equal to any one, can we not, Gracie?"

Gracie came in her shy, blushing way, and added her kisses and praises.

"Why did you not come before little one?" asked Stuart. "I have half a mind to think you do not care for all this fun of making a grand to-do over the prize fighter, as How does."

"Oh yes, indeed, indeed, we do," was her earnest protestation, speaking as usual for both herself and Adèle, whom she does not think it possible can be separate for an instant. "We are as proud and happy as possible, and have been saying how we liked to hear all the voices have a quiver of

joy in them, especially mamma's and May's,—and how much we wished you, or Clare, or How, could win prizes every day, but then May and Nora teach us," she added gravely, "that it is not proper or lady-like, for little girls to scream out what they think first of all, for May says the modest hidden flowers are always the sweetest and dearest; so now we always wait until we are asked, before we speak."

"A very nice reason, and you did quite right, now I must show my present to my good little sisters; Gracie, shut your eyes until Adèle sees it first."

"Oh Gracie, it is a book, is not that good?"

"And such a beauty, right new, Adèle," cried Gracie.

"What is its name, Stuart?" asked Adèle.

"No, I must not tell, you told Gracie what it was, so she must tell you its name; turn and turn about is fair play you know; there Gracie, read its name."

"Oh! what a nice name, 'Blossoms and Berries,' what does it mean Arty? What kind of blossoms and berries?"

"We must just peep into the inside and see, shall I read you something?"

"Oh please, please do," said both in one breath.

So with Adèle upon his knee, and Gracie's arm tightly clasped around his neck, he read piece after piece from this gem of a child's book, and I doubt whether the children found more enjoyment from the reading than their elders evinced.

I am quite sure could the author have seen the ecstasy of delight, into which his "Kitten Gossip," threw old and young, he would have thought it worth the pains of writing, and would have declared "I am glad I wrote it."

The inimitable and startling manner in which Arty rendered the lines

"The kitten's heart beat with great pit-pats,  
But her whiskers quivered, and from their sheaths  
Flashed out the sharp white pearly teeth.  
R—r—r—rats."

Set his audience in a roar, and caused Howard, such exceeding delight, that according to Gracie—

"He really and truly stood on his head when 'Arty' did the R— part, forgetting what his feet were made for."