

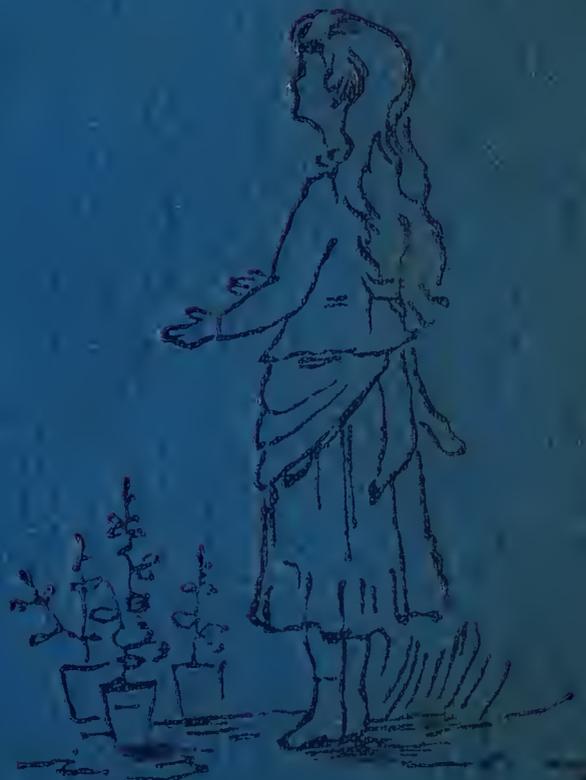
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THE LITTLE SERVANT

By

GRACE LIVINGSTON



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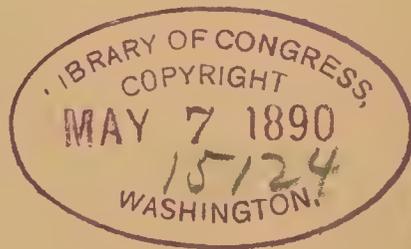
EVERY ONE LOVED LITTLE ESTHER

A LITTLE SERVANT

✓ BY

GRACE LIVINGSTON

ILLUSTRATED



BOSTON
D LOTHROP COMPANY
WASHINGTON STREET OPPOSITE BROMFIELD

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A LITTLE SERVANT.

I.

HIGH in that graceful branch yonder, just under the largest maple leaf, there hides a nest. Look! Do you see the leaf rise in the wind? There! there she is, that little gray bird.

All day long the bough rocks up and down, to and fro, and all night long the stars peep through the leaves at her, and the tender moonlight sheds a golden rain around. Through all the long summer the sweet wind hovers, now singing a song of peace and love and home and joy, now lifting the green canopy overhead, to give the little mother a view of some soft cloud floating in the blue sea above. And so she sits, and broods and broods.

And when it rains? Why, it never rains at all in that sheltered nest; the leaves look out for that.

Watch! Dipping, swooping, curving, with a flutter and a whirl, comes a wee bird, smaller than the other, and she has yellow feathers in her wings. But mother-bird's eyes are on her, and, wondering, she anxiously awaits the result of this unexpected visit.

The small visitor hops about a bit with a saucy air, eying all the time the neat and comfortable nest. Suddenly she makes a dart at a dainty bit of white cotton deftly woven into the nest, and as quickly carries away the pride and joy of the young mother-bird's heart.

It was as if when you had just finished a nice little home, with bay windows, porches and cornices, and had sat down to your sewing to enjoy it all, some one had come and quickly picked off and carried away the bay windows, porches and pretty things, leaving your house bare and forlorn.

Yes, that bit of cotton was a bay window, a

porch, a cornice, and all the other beautifying things to little birdie's heart. So also thought Yellow Wings, or she would never have made such a bold attempt to steal in broad daylight.

With a cry of dismay, mother-bird darted after her, but too late, alas! Yellow Wings



POOR LITTLE BIRDS!

was fleet and wary. She knew the quickest way to get out of sight, and poor little mother-bird must come back to her dismantled home to tell her husband the sorrowful tale, and they two repair the damage as best they can. It is not the work of a day, though, for such bits of cotton are not always to be found for the look-

ing. Poor little birds! And two watchers, standing by, saw it all.

One was — Did you ever know the little girl that lived in the pretty house, with the garden all about it? Her eyes were bits of blue left over when the sky was finished. Her hair was like curling sunbeams, and her lips all kisses and rose leaves. When she laughed 'twas like the spring wind playing amongst the violets, so low and sweet. Every one loved little Esther, and she was queen of the whole house.

There she stood on the balcony, close over the branch where madam-bird rocked all day, and saw the deed done which so darkened the cheer of the little nest. Her heart swelled with indignation that a bird could be so naughty, and her feelings took voice in a sorrowful, horrified “Oh-oo-o! Poor, poor birdie.”

The other watcher stood below, leaning on his rake. He was a dark-browed young man, with a face that would have been good but for

the settled look of gloom and scorn which he wore. There was a certain pride, too, such as did not match the rough gardener's suit.

All about him stretched the broad lawns, smooth as velvet, of the Carleton home, and



THE CARLETON HOME.

above, the blue, blue heavens. It was a perfect day, and yet the perfection jarred on the young man. Here was all this beauty, and none of it for him. If there was a God, how

could he treat him so? Where was the justice in it? He looked down with contempt at the heavy boots, and the rake which must be used, and used faithfully, for some one else, ere he could have a right to his daily bread. He hated the work he was doing, and put no pleasure in the clean-cut curves of the gravel paths on which he was working, or the well-shaped mounds he was preparing for the plants that were soon to fill them.

It was not many years since he was a boy in a home where everything was pleasant and happy; he was the pride of his father and the pet of his mother — their only child — and his every wish was gratified if possible. His father had not been rich, only comfortably off, but he had never wanted for anything. He had been a bright boy in his classes in the public school. His father had intended to educate him for a lawyer; to that end the boy was not expected to devote himself to anything but study, so he grew up with very little practical knowledge of any kind. He had not improved

his opportunities for study as well as he might have done, but he did not realize that yet.

At fifteen he was in a fair way to graduate from the High School in one year more, when his education suddenly stopped. The father was killed in a railroad accident, and the little mother, not very strong at any time, never left her bed after the funeral, and in a few short days was lying beside her husband. When the poor stunned boy tried to look around him to see what he should do, they told him that he had no money, and must leave school and go to work.

The indulgent father, who had never been able to deny his son any wish, who had always granted any request of money from his wife, so that she had no idea he was not able to spare it, had not made allowance for the death angel and his possible summons to the court of heaven. The money had been spent as it was earned on little every-day comforts, and there was nothing left to the boy but hard work, for which he was not in the least prepared.

He had taken, as a matter of necessity, the place that was offered to him, but he did not know how to do the work well, and disliked it. When there came an opportunity for a change he changed, and, as is often the case when people try to better themselves, he only made himself worse off, and hated the new work more than the old. So he went from one thing to another, often out of employment, and so surly and haughty in his manner that no one cared to employ him.

He awoke one day to the fact that he was a man, twenty-four years old, with no regular employment, and, what was worse, no chance of any work whatever. He had drifted in these years far away from the old home, where he might have had friends to help him. He found himself in this strange city, having spent two weeks in fruitless hunting for something to do; in debt to the landlady of his miserable little boarding house for his board for those two weeks. What was to be done? There seemed to be nothing in the world for him to

do. He had even condescended to ask one man if he didn't want his wood sawed, but had received such a sharp "No" from him that he had not the courage to ask any one else.

So when he heard Mr. Carleton inquiring for a man to do a little gardening for him, as his gardener was sick, he was glad in a sullen kind of way to accept the offered work. This was his first day at the place, and he had filled his mind with hard, bitter thoughts about himself, his lot, and the injustice of his God to have allowed it all to happen to him. You see it never occurred to this young man that he had brought part of the trouble on himself.

His mother had been a Christian, in her quiet way, always teaching him that he ought to love God, although he had not any very definite idea why. Just before she died she had said to him in a broken whisper :

"Robert, I haven't been the sort of mother I ought to have been. I haven't told you about Jesus and his love. I don't know what I should do without him now. You must know him, my

son, and get ready to die. You will be sure to come to me in heaven, my boy ?”

He had kissed her and promised, too stunned to know what he was saying, almost ; but later, when his grief had somewhat worn away, he had fallen in with companions who ridiculed his mother's God, and he had grown to think that if there was a God who loved him, he never would have let so much trouble come to him. So the promise to his mother had been set down as a foolish one, made to quiet a dying woman, and the boy grew into manhood trying to make himself believe that he never expected to see his father and mother again.

So with his mind full of gloomy thoughts he worked, looked across the lawn and saw the beauty, but took none of it into his soul. As he heard the flutter and twitter above his head he looked up and saw the little robber bird in the act of stealing the coveted cotton. He scowled at the bird, then told himself it was the way of all the world, and that birds might as well bear it as men. He had thought he was alone

until little Esther's troubled voice startled him. He looked up at the balcony where she stood, a beautiful little vision all in white, with her great sorrowful blue eyes full of tears, watching the distant flutter of wings. He gazed wonderingly up at her until the eyes came back to the nest; then she caught sight of him. She looked at him a moment, perhaps a trifle surprised to find a stranger there, then she said, still with that horror in her voice:

“Did you know there were any such naughty birdies?”

The young man almost laughed, but the little face above him was so grave that he only answered:

“Why, I don't know; why shouldn't there be?”

“But birdies were made to be good and pretty, and sing for God.”

He had nothing ready to say to such an astonishing reply as this, but the little maiden went on:

“Poor little birdie! I wish I could do some-

thing for her. Now her nest is all torn to pieces."

"You might get her another piece of cotton," he suggested.

She was delighted.

"Could I?" she said, her face all changed in an instant. "Oh! could I? And would she use it?"

"I think she would if you hung it on the branch close to her nest," said he.

"Then I will ask my grandma for some; and if I come down there will you lift me up, so I can put it on the branch? 'Cause I'm not very tall, you know," she said quaintly.

The little maiden received the promise and vanished through the open window, leaving Robert Knight with the first real smile on his face that had been there in many a day. Presently she came down the wide piazza and stood beside him on the ground.

"Here I am," she said; "and I have some cotton and some silk rav'lings from my dollie's sash — pink and blue. Do you think the birdie

would like those, too? My grandma thought so.”

The sweet voice asked his opinion as if it were a matter of great import, and the young man smiled again as he assured her he thought madam-bird would be very glad to get them.

A great time they had arranging them on

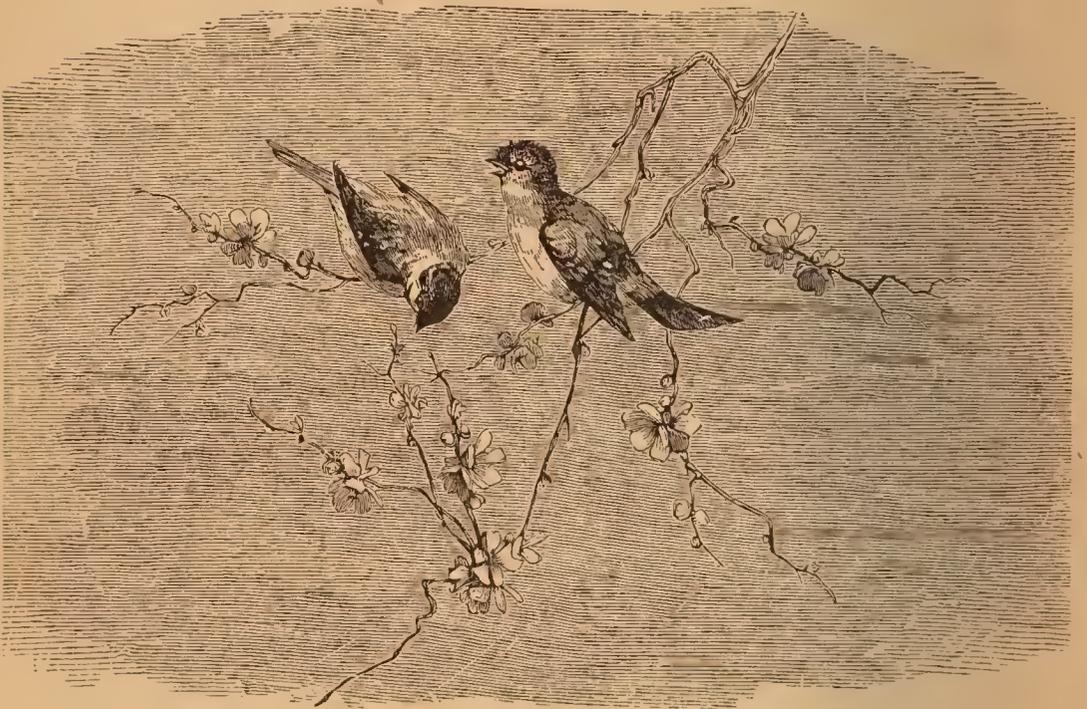


FATHER BIRD.

the branch. Father bird, high up in the branches of the neighboring elm, with his heart in his mouth, watched them, wondering if there was to be an utter destruction of the pretty home he and his wife had labored so hard to make. But perhaps madam-bird saw the pinks

and blues and coveted them, for she went and sat very still, beside her husband, looking down, first out of one eye and then out of the other:

The dainty little maiden, mounted on the



BESIDE HER HUSBAND, LOOKING DOWN.

shoulder of the dark young man, one white arm and hand clasped close about the collar of the dark, rough coat, made a pretty picture, with the maple boughs for a background. They worked eagerly, fixing them "so the birdie would be sure to see them the first thing and not feel bad any more," Esther said; and when it was

done they withdrew to the shadow of a large cedar to watch for the return of the householder.

After eying long and anxiously, madam-bird's love for the beautiful overcame her nervous fears, and she came by various short stages, stopping long at each place, to be sure

all was well, to the branch where hung the ravelings of dollie's sash. She pecked at them once or twice, turned her head to one side, gave a twittering call to her husband, and down



STOPPING LONG AT EACH PLACE.

he came. Busy and happy they were then, as any two birds could be, weaving in and out the delicate threads, and making such a nest as would make the heart of Yellow Wings ache with jealousy for many a day.

Oh! how happy was little Esther, down behind the cedar-tree, her small hands clasped together with delight, her eyes very large and bright with excitement. Robert Knight stood near, silently watching her. Presently he remembered that his time was not his own, to stand thus and idle away the hours watching this beautiful little creature. He turned with a scowl and was about to go back to his work, but Esther looked at him with a smile.

“I think you must be a very nice man,” she said.

He started. When had any one ever called him nice since his mother used to lay her white hand on his curls and call him her nice boy? It brought a queer sensation in his throat, but he mastered it and said in a rather gruff voice :

“Why?”

“Because you wanted to help the poor birdie so much.”

Then she put that soft little hand in his, looked up into his face, and smiled again.

“ May I stay with you a little while ? ” she went on. “ What are you doing ? I won’t bother.”

Of course he said Yes. How could he help it ? No one ever said No to her when she asked like that.

II.

A CROSS the lawn they went together, over to the big flower garden, and Esther sat down on a box of seeds. She was very much interested in the spading of the flower bed, and made him tell her why he did this and that, and what was to be planted in the bed.

“Dowell doesn’t dig quick like that. He goes very slow. I think your way is the nicest. Dowell is cross, sometimes, but Grandma says little girls shouldn’t bother.” Then, after a thoughtful pause, “Do I bother you?”

“Not a bit,” he said.

“Then I’ll stay a little longer, because I like you,” she said.

“You’re the only one in the world, then, I guess.”

She looked at him in surprise.

“Why, haven’t you any Grandma?” she asked pityingly.

He shook his head.

“Nor Grandpa?”

“No.”

“And haven’t you any mamma?”



WHY, HAVEN'T YOU ANY GRANDMA?

Her voice was full of pity now, and it touched him so he could not trust himself

to reply, except by another shake of the head.

“Why, then you’re just like me, aren’t you? I haven’t any mamma here, either. She has gone to heaven. Has your mamma gone to heaven, too?”

What was this young man, who professed to believe in no such thing as heaven, to say to this baby’s question? He gave a nod which might have meant yes or no, or almost anything else. He couldn’t bring himself to say anything against the heaven which was evidently so real to the little girl. Besides, he felt that, baby though she was, she wouldn’t believe him if he should. But Esther took the nod for yes, and went on.

“Was your mamma sorry to leave you all alone, without any Grandpa or Grandma to stay with? My mamma left me with my Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma says she wanted to take me with her, only Jesus had some work for me to do for him before I went with her, and she said I must do it as quick as

ever I could, and come to her, for she would be waiting for me. She said I was to comfort Grandma and Grandpa, and bimeby Jesus would give me something to do for him, and I must be very good and do it well — just whatever he wanted me to do ; then when it was done I could come home to her, where Jesus is, and see him. Did your mamma leave some work for you to do ? ”

She paused, her eager blue eyes looking up into his, confidently expecting an answer, and he did not know what to say. His mother's last words came to him and kept him from saying no. He stopped work, with one foot on the top of the spade, and looked at her. How was he going to answer such questions ? He could not bring himself to make fun of them.

But the conversation was interrupted just then. A sharp, shrill voice called :

“ Esther ! O, Miss Esther ! Where in the world are you ? Come right in the house.”

“ That's my nurse, and I must go. She wants to get me ready for dinner now, but I'm

coming out again. You are my new friend, you know, and I like you very much. Good-by."

She was gone, and the young man looked after her with wonder again. She was such a quaint make-up of womanly dignity and childish innocence. The nurse had come to meet her, and in no very soft tone was admonishing her :

"Miss Esther, what have you been doing down in the garden, talking to that tramp? Don't you know you shouldn't talk to tramps? They're horrid bad men."

His face darkened as he listened, but he could hear the little girl's answer in clear, positive tones :

"O, no, Sarah! you are mistaken. He isn't a tramp; he is very nice. And besides, his mamma is in heaven, just like mine, and tramps don't have mammas in heaven."

Before the little girl had finished speaking there was a softened light in his eyes, and he turned back to his work to hide from himself his unusual excitement.

He wondered often through the day if the little fairy girl would come to speak to him again, but his experience told him she would probably not be allowed to come, and his face grew dark to think that he had sunken so low as to be a gardener, whose only pleasure was to have the little child of the house come and prattle to him. He worked hard, turning up with the rich earth thoughts as hard as the flinty stones he occasionally came across, and it was not until toward evening, just as the sun was throwing his rosy good-night smiles over all the earth, that the little friend of the morning came again.

She stood in her soft white flannel dress, her long gold curls full of the dying sunlight, her little hands clasped behind her, a study in white and burnished gold. He was working still intently, and thinking, hardly noticing that the day at last was done and his work over for a time, until he heard her gentle sigh.

“I came out to say good-night to the sun,” she said; “I couldn’t come before, because I

went to ride with Grandma and Grandpa, but I'm coming out to-morrow if it's a pleasant day. I told my Grandma all about you, and she asked me what your name was, and I had to say I didn't know. Wasn't that funny not to know what a friend's name was? Won't you tell me what your name is?" The queer mixture of woman and baby gleamed from every dimple as she asked this question.

"Robert Knight," he answered. "And what do they call you, little fairy?"

"My name is Esther Carleton. Grandpa calls me his little Queen, but Grandma calls me God's little servant, because, you know, Queen Esther was a servant when she was a queen. Do you know 'bout Queen Esther?"

"Well, no, I don't know as I do. What about her?"

"Why, you know, she was a queen, an' Hazuerus was a king. He had a friend who hated some of Esther's people and wanted to kill them, and he made the king say they should be killed, and God sent word to Esther to go and

ask the king not to kill her people, and it was very hard work, and she was afraid to go, fear the king would kill her, too, when he found out she was a relation of those people his friend hated; but she went, 'cause God told her to, course, and the king didn't kill her a bit, and he said he would save all those people of hers alive, and so she was God's servant, 'cause she did just what he told her to do. Have you got a story 'bout your name?"

He slowly shook his head: "No, I think not."

But the sinking sun had at last finished his course and slipped away, leaving only a broad band of gold, with a deep crimson thread to mark the place where he had gone out.

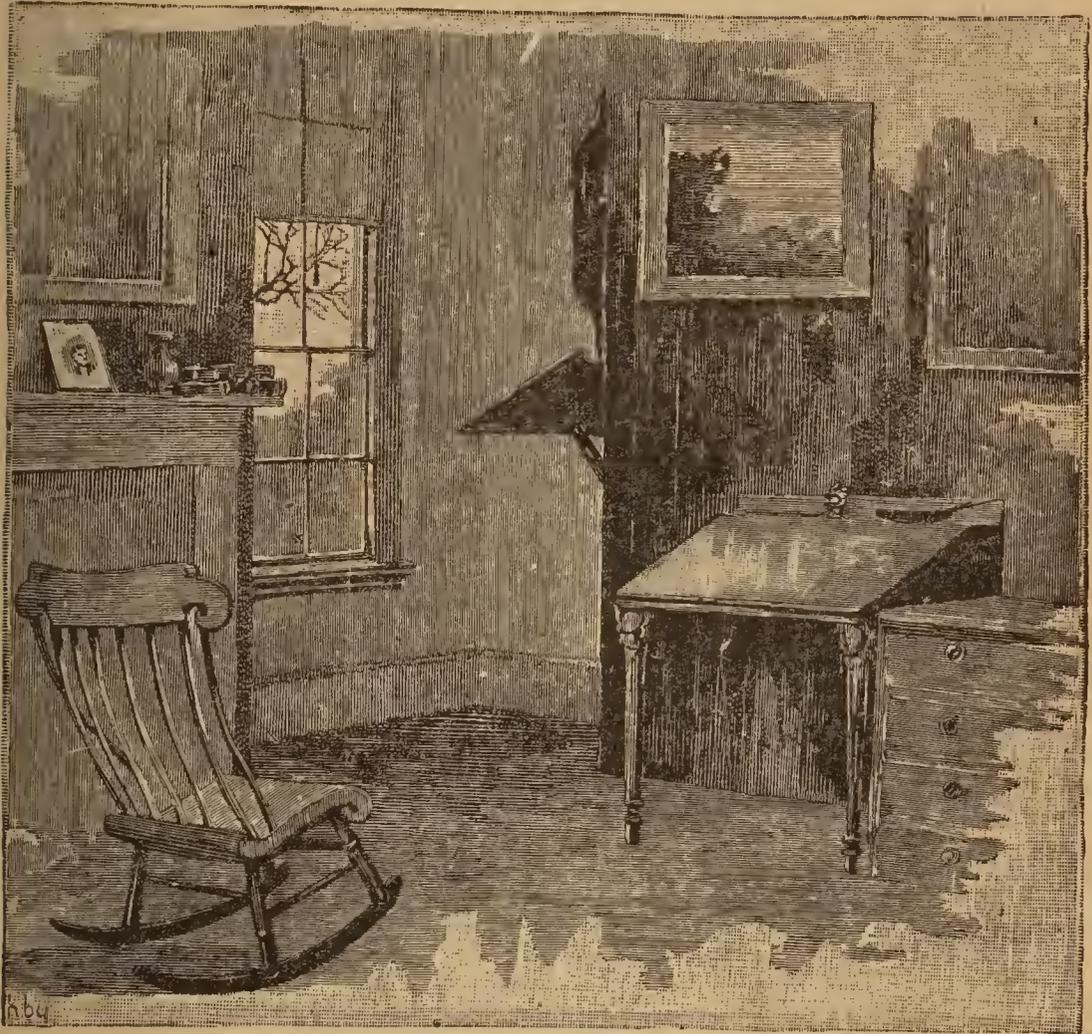
"The sun has gone," said little Esther, "and I must go in, for Grandma says the dew begins to fall as soon as the sun gets out of sight. Are you ready to stop now? Hannah says your supper is ready, and my Grandpa says he wants to see you, and I want to-morrow to hurry and come, so I can watch you make gar-

den." She put her soft hand in his, and together they went through the long, dark tree-shadows up the winding gravel path to the house, she chattering, he listening.

The grandfather, careful that the darling of his heart should have no evil companionship, came out and talked long with the young man. By and by he went in and told the white-haired grandmother that he was interested in the young man and had hired him permanently, for Dowell was getting old and lame, and had told him only that morning that he was afraid he would not be able to do all the work that summer. So, at last, Robert Knight had found permanent work.

Nevertheless, in his room over the carriage house, he felt not one whit grateful as he thought it over. The room was large and light and much more comfortable than the one he had been occupying in the miserable boarding-house. The meals to which Hannah called him regularly would be deemed luxurious beside those he had been accustomed to having of late,

and he could not deny a certain pleasure when he thought of the strange, beautiful little friend. Still he curled his lip over the work he had



THE ROOM WAS LARGE AND BRIGHT.

“come down to,” as he phrased it, and called God hard and unjust — if, indeed, there was a God — which last sentence he never forgot to put in.

The little maiden was on hand bright and early in the morning, sitting on the seed box, a great broad-brimmed hat on the back of her curls, one white satin string in her mouth, and thus she talked eagerly. Queen Esther was always eager.

“Mr. Knight, there is a story 'bout your name. You didn't know it, did you? I was telling my grandma 'bout you, and how you didn't know any story 'bout your name, and she said that perhaps you were a true knight, and if you were you had a story to work out. Then I asked her what a knight was, and she said it was some one who was sent out to do a brave deed, and she told me a beautiful story 'bout a knight who went out to catch a wicked man and shut him up in prison so he couldn't do any more harm. Are you a knight now, do you suppose?”

The young man felt almost gay that morning, despite the rough clothes and the work that he hated. It was so pleasant to have a companion to talk to him.



LITTLE ESTHER HAD A GREAT MANY QUESTIONS TO ASK.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Queen Esther,” he said; “queens always have knights, and I’ll be your knight if you’ll let me.”

“My knight!” said Esther. “And what would I have to do? How could you be my knight? What do queens do with knights?”

“Well, I don’t exactly know,” said he. “You’ll have to ask some one else.”

“Then I’ll ask my grandma. She knows a great deal. She has a caller now, so I can’t ask her yet, but when we have our lunch I’ll ask her. Won’t that be nice?”

And then the talk drifted into gardening. Little Esther had a great many questions to ask, and wanted to try to spade some for herself. So he held a spade for her, and she put her little white hand into the great round handle, and one small kid shoe on the top of the spade, and pushed and pushed with all her might. Her hat fell off, her face grew very red, and the curls blew into her eyes, but still the stubborn earth would not give way.

“Well, well, well, what are we trying to do

now?" came a cheery voice from the shrubbery, and there stood Grandpa, watching and laughing. Esther came down from the spade, her face still very red.

"O, Grandpa!" she said, anxiety and disappointment in her face, "I can't do it the way Mr. Knight does. The spade is too big. When do you think I'll be big enough to use a spade? I want to make a garden so much."

"You want to make a garden? What do you want to do that for? Isn't there garden enough around here for you?"

"Oh! but, Grandpa, it isn't like having one all your own, you know, that you made yourself."

"What would you put in your garden if you had one?"

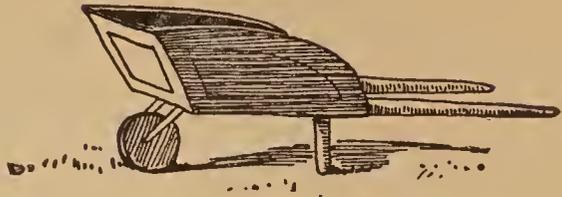
"Flowers," she said quickly.

"And what would you do with the flowers?" he asked again.

The bright eyes wandered around amongst the shrubbery as if in search of an answer, but suddenly they came back to his face, so sweet and earnest and expectant.

“ I would give them to poor sick people who don't have any at all.”

Grandpa looked at her kindly and said :



“ Well, little queen, if you want to go to making garden I'm willing, but you must have some tools that are not so large and heavy.

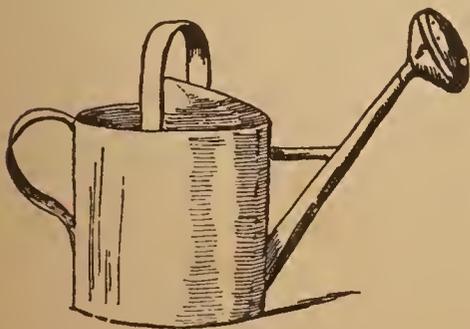
Would you like to go into town this afternoon and get a little hoe and shovel and wheelbarrow? ”



Esther's delight knew no bounds. She danced and clapped her hands, she rushed to her grandfather and kissed him again and again.



“ You may ask your friend here to show you how, and you shall plant just what you want in your garden,” he said indulgently.



So, behold, the next morning Esther came to the garden wheeling before her a little red wheelbarrow, and in it a wee hoe

and shovel and rake. Robert Knight had orders to show her how to work in the best way, and to take all the time necessary for it. He began to like his work, with Esther beside him every morning. And more and more the afternoons, when he was alone, would be filled with thoughts of how he could get up some surprise or some new work for the little maiden.

“My Grandma says,” she said, one morning, “that kings and queens make people knights and then give them some great work to do. I can’t think what to give you to do. Some of the knights were sent after such silly things, but you are my very good knight, so I will have to send you after some great and beautiful thing. Besides, you know, I’m God’s little servant, and I must give you something to do that will please him. We’ll think of something nice, Grandma and I, but now you can wait awhile, can’t you? You might have to go away from me if I found something for you to do right away, you see, and I don’t want you to go away yet. You can wait, can’t you? If

I'm God's servant he will show me something nice to send you after by and by."

He assured her he would wait as long as she pleased, but it gave him a strange feeling to think he was expected to do something to please God. He didn't believe in God, he told himself, but there was no need to tell this baby so.

III.

THE days passed on and the warm lovely summer was at its full. Each day little Esther and her knight, as she so loved to call him, worked in the garden; the flowers blossomed the brightest, the forget-me-nots were the bluest, and the lilies the purest, in the carefully-tended bed in the southwest corner of the garden where the little girl daily worked.

Some ladies, friends of Mrs. Carleton, tried to remonstrate with her. They told her the child would get all rough and brown working so constantly out in the sun, and that they should think she would be afraid to have her with a strange young man, about whom she knew nothing; but Grandma and Grandpa were wise, and were looking out for their darling. The ladies were disappointed in one thing. Esther did not grow brown and rough. Her skin was

of that rare, clear kind which would not tan or roughen, and so she only grew rosier and lovelier.

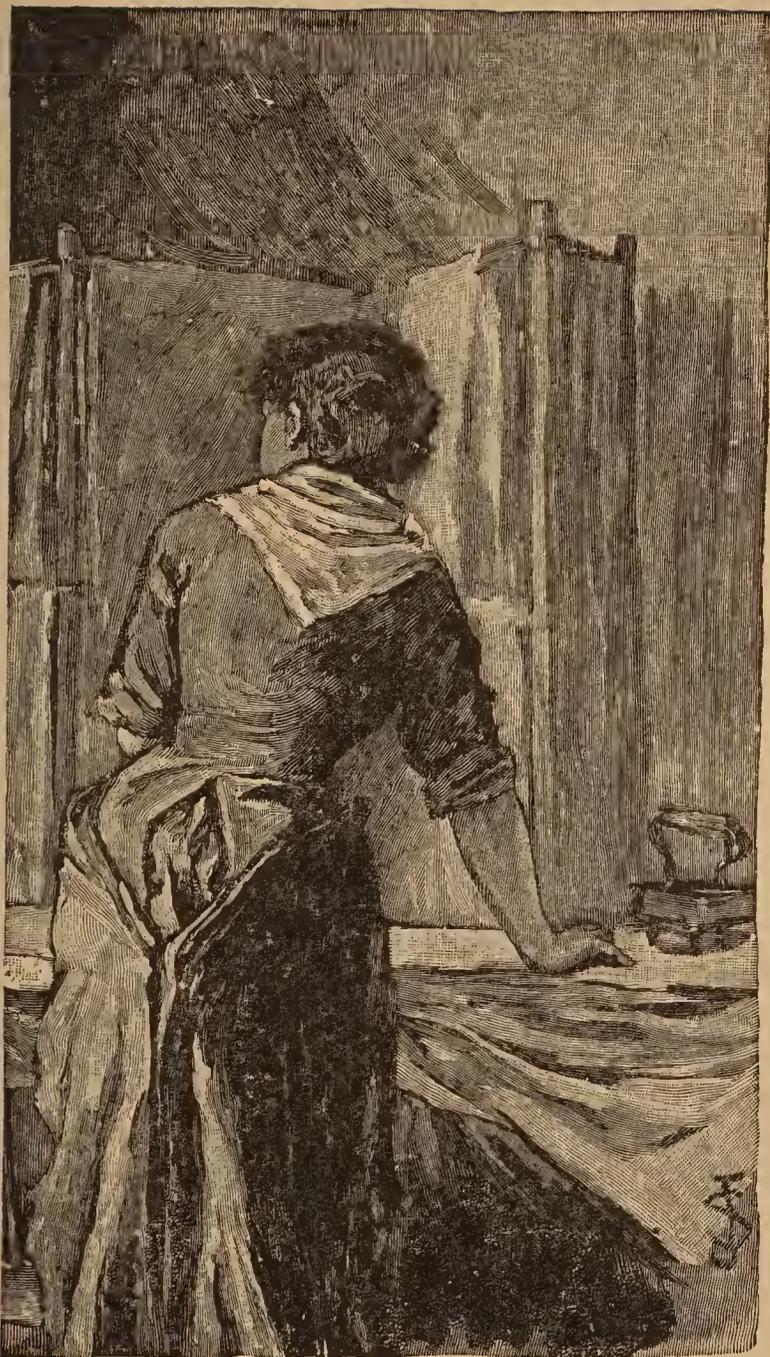
It was a very hot day, and Esther had been left with Sarah while Mr. and Mrs. Carleton went out to dine. She wandered about from window to window, and out on the porch, but everything was uninteresting, and it was so hot everywhere. She wished she were out under that cool maple with Robert. She knew she would have a good time. The house was dull without Grandma, and Sarah was down in the kitchen ironing.

Sarah had told her not to go out of the house until it grew cooler. If Sarah only knew how beautiful it was under that tree she would let her go. She decided to go down to the kitchen and ask her. Down she went, but Sarah was having a discussion with the cook, and did not notice Esther, except to tell her not to lean against the ironing-board or she would be burned. She wandered to the kitchen door. The flowers seemed to be nodding their heads

in an afternoon nap, with the trees bending over to fan them. The bees and butterflies went lazily from one flower to another, as though loth to disturb their slumbers. There was a still hum of heat over everything.

She forgot the injunction about the ironing-board and came back to it, leaning one chubby hand and arm, with its short white sleeve, down right in front of the great hissing iron. Sarah had taken her hand from the iron and placed it on her hip, while laboring to convince Bridget, the cook, that Patrick O'Flannigan's sister had run away with a relation of Bridget's own cousin on her mother's side.

Robert Knight was coming down the gravel path outside with the wheelbarrow. Esther heard him and her head was turned toward the door. The ironing-board tipped a little like an inclined plane, as all ironing-boards will when one end is mounted on the table and the other end on a chair-back one inch and a half higher than the table. And so the great hot iron, placed at the upper end while Sarah discoursed



SARAH WAS DOWN IN THE KITCHEN IRONING.

on the wickedness of Miss O'Flannigan, came sliding slowly down, hissing and scorching its way as it came, till the soft white arm of little Esther stopped its progress for a moment.

Without a word the little girl jumped quickly, drew back her arm, and the iron proceeded on its wicked way, only stopping at the other end of the board to scorch an ugly spot in Sarah's best white apron ruffle. Little Esther stood looking for a moment at the long red scar in her white flesh, the tears welling up and making her eyes twice as large as usual, her little bosom heaving, and her whole form quivering with pain; then without one sound she turned to the door where stood Robert Knight, and sprang into his arms, burying her head in his neck and letting the deep sobs of pain have full vent, now she had found a refuge and a friend.

Of course they rushed around her to know what was the matter. No one but Knight had seen what had happened. Sarah was fairly frantic, and tried to take her darling from him,

but Esther clung to him and he held her fast. It almost seemed as if the burn was his own. He could feel every quiver of pain that went through the little frame as he held her close, and never until then had he realized how she had crept into his heart.

Tenderly they bound up the arm, he holding her the while, for she would not leave him, much to the chagrin of her nurse. When the pain was eased and the little arm all carefully shielded, she felt better and asked him to take her out under the pretty shady trees. So they went out, and he stopped all his work and held her in his arms a long, long time.

When they were fixed to her satisfaction she leaned back and said, "It hurted very bad, Mr. Knight."

In a tone that almost astonished himself, so full was it of love and revenge for his darling, he said, "How could God let it happen?"

He would have taken the words back the next instant, but they had been in his heart, and had come out before he could stop them.

She threw back her head, a startled, wondering look in her eyes.

“Why, Mr. Knight, God didn’t let it happen; I did it myself. Sarah told me not to come near the table, and I came. She told me I would get burned, and I did. God sent me word and I didn’t mind.”

He was startled and ashamed. The little believer’s forcible reasoning had silenced him. Her next question startled him yet more.

“Mr. Knight, don’t you love my Jesus?”

He couldn’t give her any answer but a shake of the head, and he saw she was disappointed.

“Mr. Knight, don’t you know my Jesus? He loves you very much.”

He shook his head again. The grieved look deepened.

“Then you must find him right away, for you can’t be a good knight unless you know Jesus. How can you go on a great errand unless you know him? You can’t be a brave knight without him, for you won’t have anybody to help you.”

She paused, and he looked down at the sad little face, starting to find great tears rolling down her cheeks and dropping thick and fast on his hands. It was anguish to be the cause of those tears. His soul writhed under it. What could he say to comfort her?

“Mr. Knight,” came the soft, troubled voice again, “won’t you please to go right away and find Jesus? Won’t you?”

The pleading eyes, full of tears, looked up at him for an answer, and he felt it was a solemn thing she asked of him, which if he promised he must surely do, and he waited. His proud spirit could not bear to say yes, and he could not say no to his little queen. They heard the distant grind of the carriage wheels as they turned into the gravel driveway, and Esther put up the little well hand and touched him softly on the cheek.

“Won’t you please, Mr. Knight?”

“Yes, I will,” he said earnestly, and bent over and kissed the bright curl that had strayed out on the breast of his rough coat.

Then Esther was so happy! The tears all melted into smiles, and she wiped her face vigorously with her wee handkerchief, that Grandma might not think her arm "hurted so very much now." The carriage came, and Esther, in the arms of her knight, went to tell Grandma and Grandpa all about the burn. She was carried to the house to be petted, and Grandma was heard to remark that she never would leave her again.

Robert Knight went to his room and set himself to his strange task. To find God! This was solemn business. It was not merely his promise to Esther that had stirred his heart to the depths this afternoon. God's spirit had been striving with him for some time. The weeks of contact with the lovely life of this trustful little servant of Jesus had softened his heart and set him to thinking. He took up the Bible that had lain untouched on the stand in his room ever since he came there. As he opened it there rushed over him the feeling that he was coming into the presence

of the great God, and a sense of his unworthy life filled him with shame. His whole past stood out before him and seemed hateful when he thought that the pure eyes of God were looking upon it. It seemed a hopeless undertaking, this trying to make peace with an angry God, and he felt like giving up all effort; but little Esther's troubled face came to his mind, and he remembered he had promised.

Back again to his life he went and searched carefully through every detail to see if by any possibility he might find something that would justify him in the eyes of God. He remembered the unkept promise to his dying mother, and fell on his knees beside the chair, crying: "O God, forgive me! I am very wicked. Forgive me and save me, for Jesus' sake!" Over and over again he sent up the same petition, till, worn out by the excitement, he leaned his head against the little table to steady it, and closed his eyes.

There floated through his brain a picture. He saw himself a little boy again, sitting beside

his mother in the dim twilight of a Sabbath afternoon, the last faint sunbeam glancing through the stained glass windows of the great dark church, and throwing a glimmer over the white communion-table with its high, stately silver; the sound of a sweet hymn had just died away, and the gentle voice of the white-haired minister was speaking these words:

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

It was a verse his mother had taught him long before, and he remembered the sense of satisfaction which had filled him that afternoon, that the minister had used his verse; but no clear idea of the meaning of those words had entered his mind then. Now he began to realize what they meant. It was a promise from God that he would receive him.

“Him that cometh,” he slowly repeated. “Why, I have come already, and He must have received me, for He has promised, but, oh! what shall I do with my wicked, wasted life? It is just filled with sin from beginning to end!”

Then, like an answer to this earnest cry from his awakened soul, came another verse from his childhood memories, and he blest his mother who had taught him the precious words:

“The blood of Jesus Christ, his son, cleanseth us from all sin.”

Yes, he had known that verse a long time, why had it never brought him such joy as it brought now? But then, he had never before realized what an awful sinner he was. He had often, with his wild companions, sneered at that very verse; at the idea that the blood of Jesus could help any man; but now he felt a blessed relief in the thought that Jesus would bear all the burden of the terrible load he had just begun to see had been upon him for years. With his head still bowed he knelt there a long time, trying to tell Jesus all that was in his heart: the humiliation; the sense of sin; the sorrow; and the overwhelming thankfulness that Christ was willing to save such as he.

“Did you find Him?” whispered Esther in the garden the next morning, while Grandma

and Mrs. Senator Brownlee went around amongst the flowers.

“Yes,” he answered with a bright smile.

The dreadful burn proved not to be so bad. after all, and after a few days the little girl was out among her dear flowers again, very glad to be back and talk to her knight, and glad indeed he was to have her again, for he had missed her sadly.

And then, soon, came Esther's birthday, and she had a party. Nine little girls and ten little boys. They came, their faces shining with the expectation of a good time. How pretty they looked in their dainty dresses and bright sashes flying about among the trees. Madam-bird, just hatching her second brood, sat and watched them, and thought, with a passing bird sigh, how many, many lovely nests all those sashes would make if they were only raveled out. Out under the great elm at the upper end of the lawn, Robert Knight was fixing something about the swing, and around him stood Frankie Elbright, Minnie Haines, Georgie

Forbes, and Esther. Little mites they were, with such baby faces, but you should have heard them talk.

“I’ve got a cousin lives in Boston,” said Minnie Haines, with an important little air, “an’ she’s got a great big doll ’s big ’s she is, an’ it talks, an’ walks, an’ does ev’ryfing.”

“Ho! that’s nothin’,” said Georgie Forbes. “My papa knows the President,” and he swung his little kilts back and forth, and gave a very short jump in the air.

“Presidents ain’t as big as kings,” said Frankie Elbright. “My papa saw a king once. There ain’t anybody bigger’n kings.”

Esther had stood very quiet, watching her little guests, but now she said in a positive tone :

“Yes, there is. God is bigger than any one else, and my mamma is in heaven where she sees him every day, and I’m his little servant.”

A queer little hush fell over the baby group, and Georgie Forbes stopped jumping for full half a minute, but Frankie Elbright put his



“POOH! THAT DON'T COUNT.”

hands in his small pockets, and with the air of some of his elders, walked off saying : “ Pooh ! that don't count.” Robert Knight drew the back of his hand across his eyes before he could see to tie the last knot of the big rope.

But the happy little party was over at last ; the summer past away ; Esther's bright flowers sighed and died, except for a few red-mitted geraniums that she helped transplant to the conservatory ; and the brilliant autumn came.

IV.

IT was October. The clear, sharp weather had strewn the lawn and carriage drive with crimson and gold from the boughs of the soft maple-trees, which were scattered so plentifully all about the house. Little Esther, in her long white wool cloak and soft white cap, the gold curls blowing in the breeze, looked like a fair leaf herself, as she stooped to pick the crimson beauties from the gravel. She was gathering a bouquet for Grandma.

How was it that the great iron gates that guarded the carriage drive had been left open that morning! Had Patrick forgotten to close them the night before, or was it that some children had been passing that way and stopped to stand on the iron opener for the fun of seeing the gates slowly swing open, moved by their weight? No one knows. Only the two frantic



IT WAS OCTOBER.

horses, who fancied they were pursued by the pieces of broken carriage which were attached to them, and which kept hitting their flying heels, saw in that opening a refuge from their enemy, and dashed in. Up the broad drive among the trees, nearer and nearer they came, more maddened by each step, and there was little Esther, stooping down in that gravel drive-way with her back to them, and no one by to watch !

Robert Knight, away at the upper end of the garden, heard their rushing feet, looked up, saw them coming, and saw his little queen just before them. He shouted and ran and made frantic efforts to turn the attention of the furious horses, but he was a long way off and they were close upon his little friend. No one else saw or heard until it was too late. After that nobody seemed to care what other mischief the horses did. Some one caught them — they never knew who — for the servants were all busy rushing here and there after doctors and water and this and that. The doctor came and

worked hard and fast for a little time, and by and by the blue eyes opened and looked wonderingly on the group that stood around her.

“Jesus has sent for me. I must go pretty soon. Where is my knight? Grandma, won’t you ask him to come here? I want to tell him something.” They made way for him, and he went to her bedside.

“She may live a day or two, and it may be but a few hours,” said the doctor to the broken-hearted grandfather. “There are internal injuries. No, she is not in pain — will probably not suffer much.”

And so they gathered around their darling for the few short hours that were left to them — the poor grandmother and grandfather and Robert Knight; for Esther wanted her knight with her all the time, and the two old people were ready to grant any request she might make.

“I’ve found out what to tell you to do, Mr. Knight,” she said, with eager voice and shining eyes. “I think an angel whispered it to me

just now. I couldn't think of anything beautiful enough to send you to do, but now I know, and it will please Jesus. You must find some people that don't know all about Jesus, and don't know how good he is, and don't love him, and you must go and tell them all about him. Will you go, Mr. Knight?"

His voice was too choked to answer, but he bowed his head. The poor grandmother sat close by, sobbing.

"O, Grandma!" said the little girl, "please don't cry. I'm going to my mamma and Jesus. You said my mamma wanted me so, only she left me to do some work for Jesus; but now my knight is going to do it for me, and so Jesus has sent for me. Please don't cry, Grandma, dear. You will come so soon, and then we'll all be in heaven with Jesus."

Now Grandma and Grandpa were getting old, and had been through many sorrows which had at first seemed impossible to bear, but they had found that the Lord had helped them to bear them; and although this was their last

little lamb, and dearer to them than life, and to lose her seemed to them harder than anything that had ever come to them before, yet they remembered that heaven for them was very near, and that the separation could not be for long. So they put their sorrow by and tried to wear bright faces and make the little one's last hours on earth happy ones. They wanted her to feel glad that she was going to heaven.

“Grandpa,” she said, “will you help my knight to do my work for me?”

It was a long, hard afternoon for the three watchers — to feel their darling slipping from them, minute by minute, and not be able to help her; and yet it was a wonderful afternoon. Not one of them would have been willing to lose a moment of it. The little girl was so happy that she was going home to Jesus. She would talk of heaven, and wonder what it would be like.

“Do you think my mamma will come to meet me?” she asked once. But most of her thoughts were full of her knight and the work

he was to do. She charged him many times that he must tell the people how Jesus loved them, and be sure that they all found him. Then her Grandpa made her very happy by promising that all the money which should have been hers should go to help along the work, and so she planned her pretty angel plans until the sun went down behind the cedar hedge and threw a glory over the room. She had just laid her little hand on Robert Knight's dark, bowed head and said :

“When I get to heaven I'll go straight to Jesus and tell him all about my dear knight, and how he is going to do my work for me, and I'll ask him to help you, and when you get it all done and are ready to come up there too, I'll be at the gate waiting for you, and Grandma and Grandpa will be there too, and my mamma and papa, and your mamma and papa, and Jesus, and we will all be so glad, and the angels will sing” — and the golden head had sunk back upon the pillows. But just as the last glow of sunset lit up the room she raised her

head, her face almost gleeful in its brightness, her eyes looking up, her voice very clear :

“ I see my Jesus and my mamma ; they have come for me. Good-by ! ”

The bright head sank back upon the pillow



“ I SEE MY JESUS AND MY MAMMA. ”

and the soft lids closed over the blue eyes. Grandma and Grandpa had no more need to hide their tears, for their darling was beyond “ the smiling and the weeping. ”

Robert Knight went out from that room with the feeling that he had watched the gate of heaven open and shut again, taking away the dearest thing in life from him ; but greater

than the deep sorrow which he felt was the solemnity which filled him. He had spent an afternoon in a room where God surely was, waiting to take away one of his own, and he had seen little Esther's face when she had said: "I see my Jesus," and he had felt that she really did. Never again could he be tempted to say there was no God. He knew there was. He had felt his presence. Life was full of a great responsibility that had never been there before. He had been called to a mission, to finish some work for one of Christ's little ones. How he was to do it he did not know, but it was a precious privilege, and he meant to do it. He would begin by telling of Jesus' love to all who came in his way.

He walked out of the front door and down that awful gravel road where only a few short hours before the life and brightness of the house had been, so glad and well; and now she was gone. It was a dreadful thought, but with it also came the remembrance that she was with Jesus, and how glad she had been to

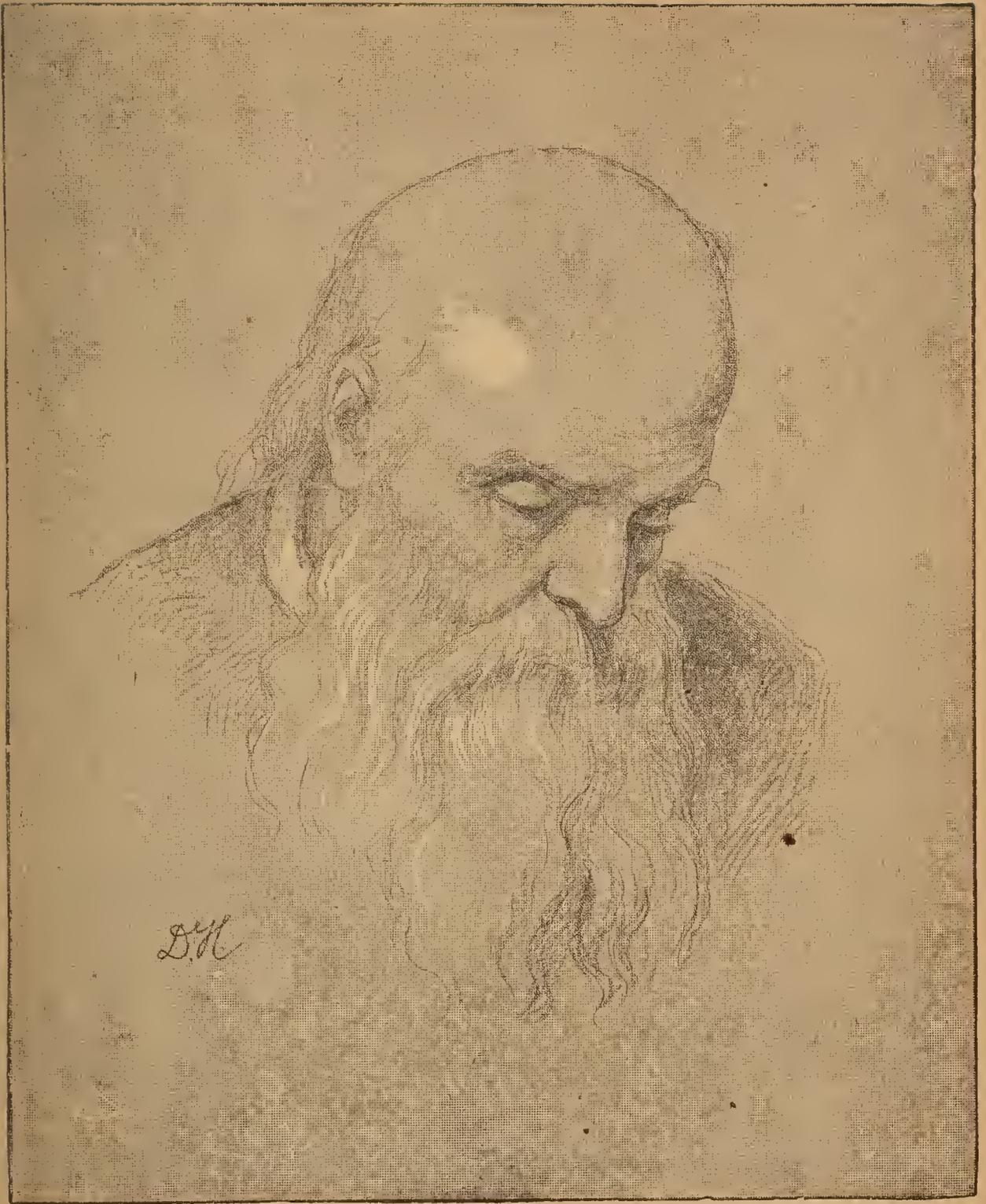
go. He shuddered as he crossed the spot where the horses had done their fearful work, and stepped into the grass, just under the maple-tree where madam-bird had first introduced them.

Deep down in the velvety grass, close by the



COLD AND STILL.

tree trunk, cold and still, its little feet stretched stiffly up to the branches overhead, its bright black eyes glazed over, lay little madam-bird, dead. Poor little bird! He picked her up, with the sad feeling of how Esther would grieve, and instantly came the remembrance that she was where she would never grieve again. As he carried the little bird tenderly out to the



HIS VOICE WAS BROKEN AND HUSKY.

garden to bury it in the flower bed she had so loved, he remembered the poem she had learned only a little while before, and recited to him, all about a little sparrow, and how the Heavenly Father knew when one fell to the ground. The blinding tears came thick as he worked, but he knew now that the Heavenly Father cared for him, too.

In the course of the next day he was sent for by Mr. Carleton. He went in, supposing that he was wanted to go on some special errand, but the old man called him into the library and made him sit down. The tears were streaming down his cheeks, his voice was husky and broken, he walked the floor nervously back and forth, his hands behind him, his head bent over. Presently he broke out:

“Knight, we would like to have you take up your education just where you left off. Wife and I have been talking it over and we think it would please the little girl. We would like to have you think it over. It would be the best thing you could do, if you mean to carry out

the commission she gave you. It would please her" —

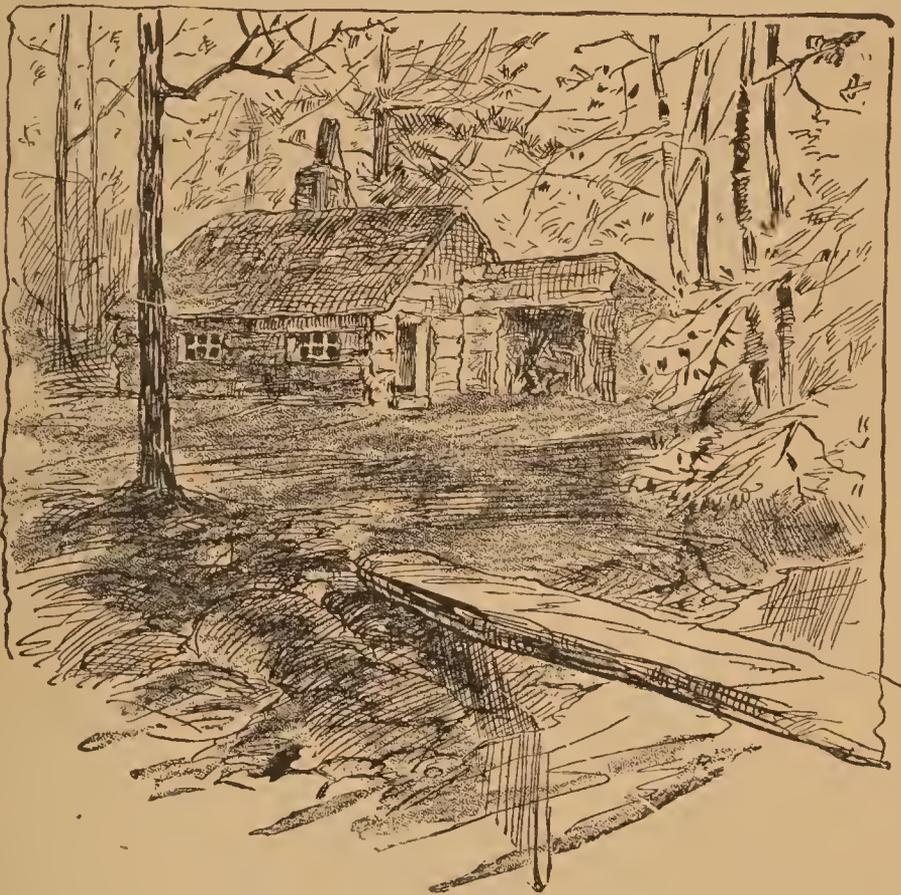
The old man broke down then, but by and by they talked it over more. Robert told him how gratefully he would accept the kind offer, and how much he longed to carry out the wishes of little Esther.

So it came about that only a few days after they had laid the little girl to rest beside her young mother in the cemetery, Robert Knight began to prepare for college. He was growing old to enter college, and it was hard to go back to study after so long a vacation, but he worked with a will, remembering his commission and Esther's words: "I'll ask Him to help you."

Two people were passing the Carleton home one day, and one said to the other: "That little Esther Carleton is dead. Doesn't it seem a pity that she didn't die when her mother did? Then the old people wouldn't have missed her so. It is said that they are very lonely. I wonder why such little things are allowed to live at all, if they are not to grow up. Her

life was only long enough to have those miss her who have had all the care and trouble of her bringing up.”

But what did those two know about it?



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