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THE
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Little Dot.

THE SIMPLE MADE WISE.

CHAPTER I.—OLD SOLOMON'S VISITOR.



IT was a bright morning in spring, and the cemetery on the outskirts of the town looked more peaceful, if possible, than it usually did. The dew was still on the grass, for it was not yet nine o'clock. The violets and snowdrops on little children's graves were peeping above the soil, and speaking of the resurrection. The robins were singing their sweetest songs on the top of mossy grave-stones—happy in the stillness of the place. And the sunbeams were busy everywhere, sunning the flowers, lighting up the dewdrops, and making everything glad and pleasant. Some of them even found their way into the deep grave in which Solomon Whitaker, the old grave-digger, was working, and they made it a little less dismal, and not quite so dark.

Not that old Whitaker thought it either dismal or dark. He had been a grave-digger nearly all his life, so he looked upon grave-digging as his vocation, and thought it on the

had been in the habit of keeping a diary, and her husband allowed me to peruse it and copy any passages I chose. Amongst others I found this one, written during the period when she was engaged in teaching: "Through all the clouds that are around I see a ray of light to cheer me. By God's help I will rise out of all my difficulties."

And some years later she writes: "Although I am no longer poor, and have not to work for my living as formerly, I can truly say that I was as happy then as now; for I felt I was performing the duties God saw fit to place before me, and for which He gave me the help I asked Him daily."

"Here ends my little sketch, my dear young people," said Mr. Riley; "it scarcely deserves the name of a story; but it may have served to show you my meaning when I said that it is as possible to rise above trouble as for the balloon to soar above the clouds. May you all learn early in life, as Clara Lynel did, to make Him your guide who alone can lead you unto the fulness of His perfect day."

Naaman the Syrian.

BY THE REV. DR. PLUMER.

NEARLY nine hundred years before the coming of Christ, Syria was a great kingdom. One of its leading men was Naaman, a good soldier and a great man with the king, but he had a dreadful disease—the leprosy; so that his fame and his talents did not keep him from being a pitiable object.

In wars between the two nations, a little girl had been carried captive from the land of Israel into Syria. She waited on Naaman's wife. The child seems to have been amiable and intelligent. She saw her master's affliction, and said she wished he would see a prophet in her native land; she was sure that this prophet could heal him.

Where men's temporal comfort and interests are concerned, a word is often enough. It was so here. What the little maid said was reported. The king of Syria wrote a letter to the king of Israel; he was very anxious that his great captain and counsellor should be healed. And Naaman took his journey to Samaria, then the capital of the land of Israel. Nor did he go without a gift, for he took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand pieces of gold and ten changes of raiment. The hope of relief decided him to go. His pride of rank led him to travel in magnificent style.

When Naaman reached Samaria, he gave his master's letter to the king of Israel. It was awkwardly written, and called on the king to work the cure which the maid had said could be wrought by the prophet. So the king of Israel was troubled. He thought his neighbour sought a quarrel with him. He said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" The leprosy could be healed by no power but that which raised the dead, and the king seems not to have known, or to have forgotten, that Elisha was the prophet of the Lord and could work miracles; so he was distressed and rent his clothes. He knew less of the state of religion in his own land than a little captive maid in Syria.

But Elisha learned that his king was in trouble, and sent this message: "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let Naaman come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." This message decided the leprous captain to visit Elisha. So he came in great pomp and stood at the door of Elisha's house. He made known his errand, but the prophet did not even come out to him, but sent him word: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Elisha knew his man, and would not puff him up any more by paying him court. This treatment made Naaman very wroth, and he went away, saying, "Behold, I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers

of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage."

What fools men are! They prescribe to God Himself; they are so proud that they will not do the simplest things God requires. It was the Lord who spake by Elisha. He was testing the obedience, and humbling the pride, and bending the will of the proud leper. At one time it looked as if the test would be too severe. Naaman had formed his plans, and wished to prescribe to Jehovah. When Elisha told him what to do, he was offended at the simplicity of the means, and fell into a passion; he felt the slight put upon him and upon his country; he probably knew that water was thought to inflame leprosy. Then Jordan was a small stream; its waters were turbid and had never healed any one of the leprosy; if any water could effect a cure, the Barrady and Orontes, here called by other names, seemed to the leper to be far better than the Jordan. If money and pomp and gifts and pride and self-will would secure God's blessing, many would have it who hate humility and obedience.

But God's purposes will be accomplished. He knows all things; He controls all hearts; He makes Naaman's servants reprove and advise him; and He causes Naaman to listen to them. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will. Naaman's servants came near and spoke to him tenderly, respectfully, and urgently: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith, Wash and be clean?" By God's blessing, this good advice prevailed, and Naaman did as he was bidden; he dipped himself seven times in Jordan. It was an act of humiliation; it went very much against the grain; he had virtually said he would not. He was a proud and foolish man when anything seemed to touch his dignity, but by God's mercy to him the advice of his servants prevailed, and he used the

prescribed means. He might have done anything else, yea, everything else, but that would have availed nothing; he must wash in Jordan or remain a leper, a loathing to all, even to himself.

Obeying, he was healed; then he was filled with gladness. He had made trial of the means; the result was all he had hoped for. The glow of health was felt again; his heart bounded with joy. Second thoughts are sometimes the best. He had said he would not wash in Jordan, but he got a better mind; he made trial of the remedy, and he was cured.

Indeed, some think that Naaman was truly converted and embraced the true religion. This may be so. He said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. . . . Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." If he was truly a converted man, he had cause to bless God that ever he had been a leper. His disease had made him acquainted with the true God and the true religion. With David he might say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes." God's ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. His counsels are of old faithfulness and truth; His judgments are a mighty deep.

But Elisha had a greedy, covetous servant, and when Naaman went on his way homeward Gehazi felt a great lust of gain; he wanted some of the wealth of which he had seen such a display. So he made up a story, false through-out, went after the Syrian, and succeeded in getting—even more than he asked—two talents of silver and two changes of garments. The ill-gotten treasure was stowed away, and Gehazi, the greedy liar, thought he had done a clever thing; he thought he had made a fortune. His head was already filled, probably, with dreams of costly apparel, and olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and man-servants and maid-servants. He thought he had done the best day's work of his life. He was rich in money, but he came by it

dishonestly. "Better is a little, and the fear of the Lord therewith, than great treasure and trouble therewith." One lie leads to another. Having deceived Naaman, Gehazi vainly thought he could deceive Elisha; so, when questioned, he denied having been off the premises. But the prophet was aware of the whole affair, and told him so; the denial only made worse what was already bad enough. The guilty man stood confounded; he could say no more. Elisha then proceeded to pass sentence on the culprit: "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever." At once the sentence began to be inflicted, and Gehazi went out of the prophet's presence a leper as white as snow. This was a fearful but a just punishment.

This piece of history solemnly teaches these lessons:

1. God is sovereign. He does what He wills with His own; He kills and He makes alive; He does all His pleasure and performs all His will in heaven and in earth. In this case His sovereignty was manifested in two ways. He took the leprosy from Naaman the Syrian, and put it on Gehazi and his posterity; then He healed a Syrian and not an Israelite. In His first sermon at Nazareth, Christ greatly provoked the wicked by reminding them of this truth.¹ But God has a right to bestow His gifts on whom He will.

2. Being near a blessing will not secure it. Naaman was very near a failure, even after he had gone to the prophet and had learned what he must do to be healed. He was on the eve of going home as foul as he came. His pride and his passions almost rendered useless all his journey and all his pains. We must not turn away from the holy commandment; we must be obedient to the heavenly calling. Many have come nigh to the kingdom of God, and yet have perished. It will save no man to know the way of life if he does not walk in it. Many saw Christ, heard His sermons, and witnessed His miracles, and yet lived and died in their sins. Many who know God glorify Him not as God. One may be very near a saving good, and yet never gain it.

¹ Luke iv. 27—29.

3. Means not used will do no good ; commandments known but not kept will pour curses on the soul ; promises not embraced call for wrath ; gracious offers despised cannot but leave the soul more guilty than ever. If Naaman had not dipped in Jordan, his visit to Elisha would have availed him nothing. Christ says, " If ye know His will, happy are ye if ye do it. . . . If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." There is no substitute for obedience to God's will. We must trample on our pride, our prejudice, and our passions, and do whatsoever God commands us. It is not enough to do some things that are right. Herod heard John gladly and did many things, but he would not quit his great sin, and that was his ruin.

4. What a horrible sin is falsehood ! For lying, Gehazi was foul with leprosy ; for lying, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead. Lying deserves all the anger God has ever expressed against it ; it is fouler than the leprosy ; it is more deadly than poison ; it kills the soul ; it follows one beyond the grave. " Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." " All liars shall have their part in the lake of fire."

5. Naaman's first and last opportunity to be healed was when the prophet bade him " wash and be clean." He embraced it. Oh that men were wise and knew their time !

Endure Affliction.

IF God hath sent thee a cross, take it up and follow Him. Use it wisely, lest it be unprofitable : bear it patiently, lest it be intolerable. Behold in it God's anger against sin and His love towards thee, in punishing the one and chastening the other. If it be light, slight it not ; if heavy, murmur not. Not to be sensible of a judgment is the symptom of a hardened heart ; and to be displeased at His pleasure is a sign of a rebellious will.

Quarles.