

DEAN'S

Illustrated Farthing Books.

ONE STEP AT A TIME.



LONDON: DEAN & SON,
11, Ludgate Hill.

31

ONE STEP AT A TIME.



Who has not felt at times bowed down
under an oppressive weight on heart and

spirit, which, when closely examined, is found to consist not so much of the real present burdens of to-day, as the anticipated ones of to-morrow? "If the cares of to-day are so oppressive, where am I to find strength for those of to-morrow?"

It was under the influence of feelings such as I have described, that I set out on a country walk one summer morning. I knew by experience the reviving effects of fresh air and exercise, of the sweet sights and sounds of nature; but that day they were all powerless to cheer, and I could but adopt the poet's desponding language—

"I may not hope from outward forms to win
The Spirit and the life, whose fountains are within."

I had as companion a gentle child, whose lively prattle I was accustomed on such occasions to encourage. This morning, the effort seemed impossible. I was abstracted and silent; and my young friend, after a few vain attempts at sociability, amused herself by silently gathering the flowers, and chasing the butterflies of the wayside. In order to take a circuit home, it was necessary to cross a stream,

which, though shallow, was of considerable breadth. There was no bridge, and the water, deepened by late rains, now dashed noisily against the stepping-stones, and, in some cases, almost covered them. I began abstractedly to cross over, till I perceived



that my young companion stood still on the side I had left, evidently fearing to follow. I beckoned her, to follow me over the stream, pointing out how she should proceed; but I observed that she still hesitated.

“What, Jane! why are you not coming?”

“ Oh ! aunt, I dare not ; I am afraid,” she answered.

“ Afraid ! do you not see how firm the stones are ?”

“ Oh ! there are so *many* ; and the water is so deep ! I shall never get over. I cannot, I dare not !” and the poor little thing, naturally timid, now burst into tears.

I passed rapidly to the other side, and then returned to her. “ Come, silly child,” I said, half-angry, half-amused, “ do not be so foolish ; you see how easily I have done it. I am not bidding you leap over the whole at once.”

“ Oh ! aunt, who could do that ? I am sure I cannot !”

“ Well, neither you nor I have to do it. We have only to take one step at a time ; and *you* are not even alone ; nor would the water drown you if you were to slip. Come, here is my hand ; you will find each stone in itself quite firm, as you stand upon it.”

Trembling and weeping, yet fearing to disobey, she began the perilous passage.

The first few steps were the worst. Her courage rose when they were over; and at last we both stood safely on the opposite bank. Little Jane sank down on the grass, as if to recover from her agitation. I seated myself beside her, and for some minutes neither of us spoke. At last she said—

“Aunt, you were quite right; *one step at a time* was not difficult.”

“Yes, my dear,” I replied; “and remember *that* in your future life, when you have more difficult undertakings to get through than crossing the Avon.”

The words of the child, and my almost involuntary answer, went at once to my own heart. “Oh!” I thought, “is not this a lesson for myself? Have not I been sinking under the anticipation of tomorrow’s burdens, instead of simply attending to the duties of to-day? Have not I been looking to the stormy waters, rather than the Saviour who walks upon their waves? Where is my confidence in

the wisdom that cannot err, the love that cannot deal unkindly, the strength that is made perfect in weakness? Lord, pardon thy sinful servant; and, as regards things to come, let this henceforth be my only prayer—‘Not my will, but Thine, be done. Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.’”

The spell of despondency was broken, the clouds dispelled. Little Jane and I both talked cheerfully, as we walked home together; and often since that day has the remembrance of the ford on the Avon acted as a reproof and a charm, when fears and forebodings have again assailed my faithless heart. “One step at a time,” I have repeated to myself, as I lay down at night; “one step at a time,” as I commenced the first duties of a new day. And faith and hope, though too feebly in exercise, have never been disappointed. “The thing that I greatly feared” has often *not* “come upon me,” or, if it has, there have been with it alleviations and comfort such as I could

not have foreseen or imagined. The tasks which at a distance seemed overwhelming, patient and prayerful effort has been enabled steadily to fulfil. Never has the promise failed, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be."

