



THE EVENING PARTY.

RIGHT
IS RIGHT.

Part the first.



LONDON:

GROOMBRIDGE AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW

Right is Right.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD HOUSE, AND WHO LIVED IN IT.

IN the old-fashioned market-place of an old-fashioned town, there was, about thirty years ago, a strange looking old-fashioned house, which has since been pulled down, to make room for two prim new-fashioned houses, which have been built in its stead. It is of no use to argue about old and new fashions. Almost every body in that town points to the new houses, and tells you how much the look of the market-place is improved by them, and what a very ugly old edifice stood there before they were built. But for my part, I cannot help wishing that the old house stood there still. It was an old friend, and we do not like to part with old friends, however much we may be pleased with making new ones.

However ugly that old house might appear outside, it was very convenient within. It had been a grand one, too. When it was first built, which was five hundred years ago, or more, it was thought one of the best and handsomest houses in the

town, and became the residence of a rich and powerful nobleman. Fine doings there were in that mansion then. It is said that one king, at least, had slept a whole night in it; and there was a room which had the name of the king's bed-chamber, until the very day that the masons came and pulled down the walls with their pickaxes. But long before this event happened, great changes had taken place. The house was no longer the residence of a nobleman, but of plain tradespeople. The lower part of it had been turned into a large shop; some of the back buildings became warehouses for huge hogsheads of sugar, butter firkins, piles of cheeses, and sides of bacon, while the other parts of the house, stripped of almost all the fine gilding and carving which had once adorned it, had been the home of two or three generations of shopkeepers, who knew little, and cared perhaps less, about the grand folks who had gone before them.

These grand folks, however, had left traces not so easily removed as fine carving and gilding. At the back of the old house, and beyond a spacious paved yard or court, was a thick hedge of yew, which separated this court from a large and really beautiful garden, such a garden as you would scarcely hope to find belonging to a town house. The quantity of ground it covered was very great, for it spread behind half the other houses in the market-

place, while it was so shut in by thick hedges, high walls, and shrubberies, that, once in the garden, you would hardly fancy yourself to be near a busy town.

I should take up many pages, were I to try to describe all the beauties of the garden, so I will not try ; only I must say, that there was a long serpentine walk in it, shut in between two hedges of yew ; that there was also a wilderness, or labyrinth, or maze ; (it went by all these names,) out of which it was difficult to find the way, when you were once fairly in ; and that there was a grotto, built of great rough stones, so chilly cold in summer, that in the middle of a hot day, you shivered to think of entering it, and yet would be almost sure to go in, if you happened to be near, its very coolness was so inviting. I shall say nothing of grass-plots, broad walks, flower-beds, yew-trees cut into strange shapes, to look like animals ; (and yet, how unlike !) of fruit-trees, and grape-vines. Neither shall I speak of the old gardener, who had laboured on that piece of ground for fifty years and more, and who would not believe there was a finer garden in England, to say nothing of all the world beside.

But I have to speak of Edward Mason and his parents, and dear, dear Sarah, his blind sister, and Fanny, his dear sister also, who was not blind, but had a pair of as bright and dark eyes as are often seen—all

of whom lived about thirty years ago, in the old house just described.

You might search through many large towns, and many pleasant villages, before you could find a happier family than this. If ever anything did disturb their comfort, and cause them for a little while to feel sad, it was poor Sarah's blindness. But she had been blind from her birth, and it seemed natural to her ; so that, in time, all the difference it made, was that she was most tenderly loved by all about her. And, indeed, she deserved their affection ; for it seemed to be the great business of her life to make every living thing around her happy. As to her affliction, no person in the house thought so little about it as she herself did. Having never known the blessing of sight, she knew nothing about the loss of it : nor would a stranger have guessed that the active cheerful girl who ran so quickly from room to room in the large old house—who knew every nook and corner in the rare old garden—whom not even the labyrinth could puzzle—whose needlework was so quickly wrought and so delicately finished—who was so clever at all kinds of games which one is apt to suppose need the use of good sharp eyes to succeed in :—I say, a stranger who witnessed all these and many other of Sarah's actions, would have found it hard to believe that to her all the world was as dark in the brightest day as in the blackest night.

I speak of Sarah first, because she was the oldest of Mr. Mason's children. At the time I am thinking of, she had been in the world about twelve years. Edward came next. He was a frank, hearty, affectionate boy, not quite eight years old. Fanny was the youngest. Her age might be between four and five years. She was generally full of mirth and gladness;—easily pleased, but, alas! too easily offended. However, she bore no malice in her childish anger. One moment she might be seen with a flushed face and heard loudly declaiming against some fancied wrong; and the next moment she would throw her arms round the neck of the offender, and beg to be forgiven for being angry. These little fits of pettishness did not often occur, for her failing was known, and no one around her wished to provoke it; while she herself, young as she was, was convinced that this was her failing; and to do her justice, I believe she got at length to strive against it.

Her little quarrels—if quarrels they may be called—were oftener with her brother Edward than with any one else. He certainly loved her too well ever to try to tease her; though sometimes he was thoughtless. But we will not dwell any longer upon this subject.

I never knew a pleasanter man than Mr. Mason, the father of these children; nor a more kind and judicious mother than *their* mother, Mrs. Mason. Not that they were

perfect ; nor that there are not great numbers of fathers and mothers as near as possible like these old friends of mine. But there is no need to draw comparisons, nor to be too particular in finding out failings in any one. All I shall add here is that neither Sarah, Edward, nor Fanny, ever desired to see any improvement in their parents, and I dare say they were very good judges.

As near as I can guess, when I first knew Mr. Mason, he was about thirty-five years old. His wife, perhaps, was a year or two younger. *How* I became acquainted with them, does not signify. All that need be told is, that I have proper authority for all I have written, or am about to write.

From what has already been said about warehouses stocked with sugar, butter, cheese, and bacon, my readers will fairly have guessed that Mr. Mason's business was that of buying and selling such kind of goods. Thirty years ago, I believe he was looked upon as one of the most prosperous tradesmen, and his shop as the best-furnished and busiest shop, in the town. It was a pleasure to pass by, and see five or six young men or lads always bustling about, serving customers, packing up goods, or, in some way or other with their hands full of work. It was pleasant also to see the market-carts as they stopped, two or three at a time, at the wide shop doors, waiting for their loads of groceries ;

or to notice the heavy wagons which came into this town once a week from London, leaving at that same spot great packages of goods, in the shape of hogsheads, chests or bales. No fear of starvation, one might suppose, with such a store-house to go to.

In the midst of all the bustle and hurry, and care too, that this flourishing business brought upon Mr. Mason, he seemed always at ease with himself and all around him. Not that he was an easy,—that is, an idle, careless man. He was very far indeed from this. But he never suffered his mind to be overburdened with care and anxiety, as is unhappily the case with some persons. No doubt he had some troubles in his business; but he did not suffer them to break his rest or his peace, nor yet to vex his temper. We may be sure that all about him were the happier for this contented—yes, that was it,—this *contented* disposition. His shopmen and porters and apprentices, all liked him as a master; and you will believe that his wife and children did not love him any the less for his kind, cheerful, affectionate manners.

Although a busy and industrious tradesman, Mr. Mason found time to enjoy himself with his family. He was as fond of his garden as they were, and in fine weather he contrived every day to spend an hour in it, at play with his children. Then, once, or sometimes twice a week, he had to take journeys into the country on

business, in his pony-chaise ; and it was a sad disappointment if any thing happened to prevent at least one of them from accompanying him, although, when the chaise was not thus engaged, their mother frequently drove them out in it, after their day's lessons were over.

And, talking about lessons reminds me of one great omission I have made. Both Mr. and Mrs. Mason had received a good education, and they were desirous that their children, too, should be well taught. And who so fit to teach as a kind and gentle mother ?—that is, if she have time to teach, which many mothers have not. In this case, at least, it seemed an excellent plan ; and a pleasant little study had been fitted up, in which a few—not a great many—hours were passed every day very happily and usefully for both mother and children.

Poor blind Sarah ! she could not indeed learn to read ; but, as I have already said, she learned to employ her hands, although her eyes were shut up in darkness. And it was surprising how quickly and readily she received instruction. Neither did she grow up in ignorance of what is contained in books ; for besides what she heard from her mother—and that was not a little—it would have been thought a dull evening in which her father did not take a book and sit for an hour by her side, pouring instruction into her active and intelligent mind.

You may think it strange, but so it was, that Sarah, though she could not read a book, could write as nicely, and spell as correctly, as most children of her age who have the blessing of sight. But of all her accomplishments, music was that in which she most delighted. Early in life, her kind and anxious parents had discovered how quick and true her sense of hearing was, and how much she was pleased with musical sounds. They were very thankful for this; and great pains had been taken to instruct her. It was a treat—I am still writing of thirty years ago, when Sarah was twelve years of age—it was a treat to see her seated by the piano; her pretty fingers dancing merrily over the keys—her fine expressive face, shaded with glossy dark hair, turned a little, a very little, on one side, as though more clearly to catch the sound of every note—and to hear her soft, musical voice making melody more melodious.

One thing more about dear blind Sarah shall finish this chapter. It was she who, more successfully than any one, could calm down in a moment her sister's little impetuous starts of temper; and no one like Sarah could guide and govern her open-hearted and merry, but *rather* volatile brother. She was, indeed, full of love, and she seemed to have the power of using it for the advantage of all who came near her.

CHAPTER II.

LOSSES AND CROSSES.

IN the same town in which our friends the Masons lived, was a handsome building which every body knew as the Bank. There was no want of activity within the walls of the Bank, any more than in Mr. Mason's shop, although it was of a different kind. The business at the Bank was that of taking care of the money of those who had any to be taken care of, and who chose to place it there for security or for gain. This, at least, was one part of the Bank business. There were other parts of it which it is not needful to mention here.

It was quite believed in the town, and the country for miles round, that the Bankers were very rich men. In consequence of this, great confidence was placed in them, and a very great deal of money was given into their keeping. What then was the surprise and terror of the whole neighbourhood when, one day, not quite thirty years ago, the Bank shutters were kept closed, the doors fast shut, and it was told from one to another, until the news spread far and wide, that these Bankers had failed!

Great were the lamentations when it was found that this heavy news was true. And well they might be great, for hundreds of people suffered, not only at the time, but for the whole of their lives afterwards, in consequence of this very unexpected and sudden event. Some lost all, or nearly all the savings of years of labour and industry; and others, though they did not lose the whole of their property, lost so much of it, that after a few months or years of painful struggling, they sunk into poverty.

I need not attempt to explain how it was, but it certainly did happen that just at the time of this disaster, Mr. Mason had a large sum of money in the Bank. I believe it amounted to several hundred pounds, and that a great part was to have been paid, in a few days, to the wholesale traders in London, of whom Mr. Mason bought his goods.

You may suppose that Mr. Mason, although at that time not a poor man, could very ill afford to lose so much money. He did not, however, like some of the losers, fall into a great rage with the Bankers—accusing them of roguery and every kind of wickedness that could be thought of. Neither did he give way to profitless grief. He first, calmly and with courage, looked his misfortune in the face, to see how really great it was, and then he set himself industriously to remedy it.

‘A sad piece of business this!’ said a neighbour—a kind of busy-body—who found his way into Mr. Mason’s little counting-house a day or two after the failure of the Bank:—‘A sad piece of business this!’

‘You mean about the Bank, Mr. Dobbs. Yes, it is. I fear it will bring a great deal of distress into our town.’

‘Ah, yes; they say you had a good round sum there: but, to look at your face, I cannot see how that can be. It must be one of the monstrous stories that have got about.’

‘It is quite true, Mr. Dobbs, I had money in the Bank, which I dare say I shall never see again ———’

‘Dear me! do you really mean it? Well now, I never saw any one take a loss so lightly to heart.’

‘Oh!’ replied Mr. Mason, with a smile; ‘if crying would do any good, perhaps I might cry; but you know the old ditty,—

‘For every evil under the sun,
There is a remedy, or there is none.
If there be one, seek it and find it,
If there be none,—then never mind it.’

‘Well, well, Mr. Mason,’ said Dobbs, as he shuffled away, ‘I wish every body was as contented as you are; but, for my part ———.’ What more he said was never exactly known, and it does not in the least signify.

But take it as calmly as he would, Mr.

Mason well knew that the consequences to him were likely to be serious : he therefore, without loss of time, set about finding out the remedy.

And now Sarah, Edward, and Fanny, all at once found that their father spent less time with them than he had been used to do. On the finest spring and summer days, when their school work was done, and they were ready for a game in the garden, they were told that 'papa' was too busy to take any part in it. Sometimes they scarcely saw him from morning until evening. When they did see him, he was as cheerful and kind as ever ; still it was quite plain that he worked harder in business than had been necessary but a short time before. Yet whatever else he did, or left undone, he never forgot dear blind Sarah, and the hour's pleasant reading and conversation with her before supper. And after a few weeks, Edward was allowed to stay up to have a share of this pleasure, to make up for the loss of his father's society through the day.

Strive as he would, Mr. Mason, after two years' hard and patient struggling, found that he could no longer continue his business with any hope of overcoming his difficulties. It was not altogether the loss of his money in the bank, that had borne him down ; though the bank failure was the principal cause of all that followed. *That* event had led to the ruin of so many persons,

in business, and out of business, who owed money to Mr. Mason, that his first loss was soon doubled. Then, notwithstanding all his efforts, business fell off:— In short, when Sarah—poor blind Sarah—was about fourteen years old, and Edward:— but they shall speak for themselves in the next chapter.



CHAPTER III.

CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS ARE NOT ALWAYS
FOOLISH THOUGHTS.

‘OH, Sarah, Sarah, I shall never be happy again. To think that we must leave this dear old house and garden, where ——’

Here Edward began to sob so loudly that his words were swallowed up in grief.

At this particular time, the brother and sister were seated on a rustic seat in the garden, under a large wide-spreading apple-tree. It was a fine spring afternoon. The fruit-trees around were all in full blossom : the lilacs were just putting forth their large bunches of florets. The air was quite scented with the perfume of numberless flowers, and filled with the hum of bees. Now and then, a beautiful butterfly darted into sight, and as speedily disappeared. Little Fanny was at play on the grass with a favourite kitten, at a little distance from Sarah and Edward, but within the sight of one and the call of both.

But neither the music of the bees, the scent of the flowers, nor the sight of any living thing, seemed to have any effect upon poor Edward, except that of making him more unhappy. If it had been a cold,

dreary day, perhaps he would not so much have minded the sad intelligence which at that very hour and place had come upon him unawares.

‘Never be happy again?’ said Sarah, in a soft sympathizing tone, replying to her brother. ‘Never again! Oh yes, dear Edward, you will, if you are good, and bear this trial manfully. Look at papa and mama; they have had more trouble to bear for a long time past, than we can tell; see how they have borne it. They have not been miserable, have they?’

‘To think,’ said Edward, still sobbing, and paying but little attention to his sister:—‘to think of going away for ever from our own home, and of living in London—in some nasty, dirty, disagreeable place, I dare say, shut in with houses, houses, nothing but houses, on all sides; never seeing a bit of green grass or a beautiful flower growing where it ought to grow,—nothing but stones and bricks, and dust and dirt. But it is of no use to talk to *you* about seeing: and it is very well for *you* to say you will try and be as happy in London as here. It will be all the same to you.’

‘Dear Edward,’ replied Sarah, feeling first for his hand, and kissing it, before she spoke—‘dear Edward, I am sure you do not mean anything unkind; and if I am grieved, it is that you feel the sorrow so much—so very much. It is indeed of no use to talk to me about seeing; for I do

not understand what it means. And yet I love to hear you speak of fine colours and beautiful sights, because they are things that please you, while all the difference I can find between one flower and another, is in the feel and the scent. But you are wrong, indeed you are, to say that it will be all the same to me whether we live here or in London. As if I did not know every step in this pleasant garden, and every corner in the dear old house in which we were born; and as if I do not feel that the very air I shall breathe, will be strange, and perhaps painful, to me at first!

‘My dear patient sister, forgive me,’ exclaimed Edward, putting his arms around her, ‘how cruel it was of me to speak so to you! I did not know what I was saying just then. Indeed I did not mean it: and I will try to be happy, even in London.’

‘We will both be happy, Edward; and that will help to make home happy, wherever it is. But what could put it into your wise little head that we shall be sure to live in a nasty, dirty, disagreeable, part of London? As if papa would, or could, find out such a place for us. You and I do not know much about London, dear brother; and perhaps, after all, it is not such a terrible place.’

‘But still,’ said Edward, mournfully, ‘it is very, very dreadful, that papa should lose all his money, as he has done——’

‘Not dreadful, dear Edward. If you &

I, or papa, or mama, or dear little Fanny, had been burned to death, or starved to death—that *would* have been dreadful : but to lose money—no, no, Edward,—and the blind girl shook her head, as much as to say, ‘There, that matter is settled between us,’ at the same time fondly stroking Edward’s cheek.

‘Well, not dreadful, Sarah—not dreadful perhaps ; but—but sad, sorrowful, mournful, then——’

‘May be, dear brother,—but perhaps, after all, it will not be so sadly sad : but you were going to say something else, Edward.’

——‘And that somebody else should come in our place, to enjoy all our pleasant things, and gain money too, while papa, who has worked at business ever since he was a man, has lost all he ever gained, and must be another person’s servant all the rest of his life. Is it not enough to make us all sad ?’

‘It might be, dear Edward, if there were not something else to make us all happy again,’ replied the blind sister. ‘But as there are more things than one to do this, I do not see why we should be so very, very mournful.’

‘What things ?’ asked Edward, still in a peevish sort of tone,—though talking with Sarah had relieved his mind a little.

‘What things, dear Edward ? Why, first, you know, that none of these things happen

by chance, any more than it happened by chance that you are able to see, as you say, all the beautiful things around you, while I was born blind, and cannot understand what you mean when you talk of seeing. You know that all our trials are meant to do us good, and make us holy and happy. Then another thing that should make us happy, is that we have so many good things left us. We are all healthy—papa and all—and he says that constant employment, and the regular walk to the counting-house every morning, and home again at night, will help to preserve his health. Then, after all, we shall not be so poor,—so very poor. Papa says he shall have a little property left when his business is quite settled; and the situation he has taken is a very good one.'

'Is it indeed Sarah, and does dear papa really say so? Oh, I am so glad,' exclaimed Edward, with animation, and returning cheerfulness. 'Well, after all, perhaps, it will not be such a dreary place to live in—that great, big, ugly London.'

'Not if we do not make it so, dear brother. And then, perhaps, it may be a good thing for you, you know, to see more of business, when you are old enough I mean. I have been thinking what pleasant, happy evenings we shall have, in winter time especially—and why not in summer too?—after papa and you come home from the city, as the busy middle part of London is called, I believe;—how full we shall all

be of news, and what grand things you will have to tell :—but dear Edward, your hand trembles ; you do not like my plans.'

' Dear, dear, Sarah,' said Edward, once more fondly caressing her, ' indeed I was not thinking of myself then, but of you. I was thinking that if some of the great clever doctors in London could see you—'

' Do not think any more of it then, Edward. You know that papa has consulted many, many more than I can remember. It has cost him much money ; but it was of no use, and never will be. Dear Edward, I shall never see ; and indeed, I have not a wish about it. I shall see, though ; I was wrong to say *never*. Yes, dear brother, *I shall see some day* : but never in this world. But this is a digression, as papa would say, and there is another thing, Edward, that ought to make us happy. Only think how honourably papa has acted ! He might have kept on business longer ——'

' Then, I am sure I wish he had,'—Edward's discontent was not quite removed—' I heartily wish he had.'

' Yes, but dear brother, if he had, he would have lost not only his own money, but that of others ; and I am sure you could not wish that. But now, he is able to pay all his debts. Do you not understand this ? I will tell you what Mr. Ellis said,—you know I was in the parlour while he and papa and mama were talking together about these things. He said, ' Well,

Mr. Mason, not many tradesmen would have dealt so fairly by us, and I promise you the best situation our house can afford. *Right is right*; and if you have lost money, you have gained honour—yes, and friends too.’

‘Well, that is something, after all,’ replied Edward, ‘and I will try to be happy, even in London; but ‘right is right’—‘right is right’—to be sure it is—what an odd expression! Just like saying, ‘brown is brown,’ or, ‘trees are trees.’’

‘It means more than that, I think, Edward. Mr. Ellis meant that what seems right to us in our conscience, is right to be done, though it may go against our wishes; and that what is right in theory, is right in practice, and that to do the opposite thing would be wrong.’

‘Theory and practice—oh yes, I remember that story of Jane Taylor’s, that you liked so much when papa read it—about Frank and Harry. Well, *right is right*, then. I like it. It shall be my motto. Thank you, dear Sarah, for helping me out of my discontent. Yes, *right is right*; and papa is right, and mama, and you are right too; and I was wrong. And there is Fanny, tired of the kitten, and wondering what keeps us so long from her,—poor Fanny, what will she say to the change, I should like to know! Well, let us have one more good game at least in the dear old garden. Now Fanny, dear little good Fanny—who will get first to the grotto?’

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW HOME.

Good-bye to the country, the old house, and the pleasant garden ; our friends are now in London, big, ugly London, as Edward would have it ; and thither we must follow them.

As Sarah had reminded her brother, Edward might have trusted his father to find a home that should be neither dirty nor disagreeable. It is true, Mr. Mason could not obtain for his family in London, all the advantages they had enjoyed in the country ; but in choosing a house, he had consulted the tastes of his children, much more than his own convenience.

It is very well known, that though London is, in some parts of it, crowded enough, and shut in, as Edward had said, with ' houses, houses, nothing but houses ; ' there are other parts more open and agreeable, and that there are, also, a number of pleasant villages, as they are called, though by no means like country villages, close joined on one side to the great city, but on the other, having green fields, and quiet rural walks.

In one of these villages, about three miles from London-bridge, did Mr. Mason

establish his family, and even Edward was constrained to say, that after all, the change was not so very terrible as he had expected it to be.

The house in which they were henceforward to live, was one of a row, built all after the same fashion ; rather small, and very prim. It had a little flower-garden in front, which was separated from the road, or street, by green palings ; and it had a narrow strip of ground behind, in which Edward discovered two apple-trees, one pear-tree, a glorious laburnum, and a really magnificent grape-vine, to say nothing of a whole army of currant and gooseberry-trees, trained and nailed to the low brick wall. There was a narrow border all round, trimly edged with box, then a neat gravel-path, then the grand bed in the middle, which contained the trees I have mentioned, and left room besides for such vegetables as the family might choose to cultivate. Altogether it was a garden, which though bearing no comparison with ‘our own dear old garden at home,’ was still far better than none at all.

The prospect from the windows—especially of the upper windows at the back of the house, was not a bad one. When the wind was the right way, and did not blow the smoke of London in that direction, Edward and Fanny could see the green fields and hedges of Surrey—and very pleasant ones they are. And though alas! dear

Sarah could not see them, she was pleased to hear them described to her, and anticipated many a happy ramble in them with her brother and sister.

It was a new life for them all ; and the very novelty of it had its charms for the young folks. Fanny especially, was delighted with everything she saw ; and Edward had the good sense to look at the bright side of things. As to Sarah, she was the same cheerful, happy girl. You would not have guessed that her heart had room for a single regret for herself ; and you would have been astonished to see how soon she had learned her way all over the house, from the underground kitchen, to the small attic which was to be Edward's bed-room ; and how quickly she could run, after once or twice leading, round and round the gravel-walk in the garden, without making a false step in her progress.

The change to the parents was very great, especially to Mr. Mason ; but whatever they felt, they were not, in appearance, at all less happy than they had been in past years. ' Right is right,' Mr. Mason said ; ' we are where it is our duty to be, and why should we fret about what cannot be helped ? All is for the best ; let us do what we ought, and peace will not leave us.'

So, from the first day in which he entered on his situation as counting-house clerk, he cheerfully put up with all its inconve-

niences—rising in winter before it was light, and walking through rain, snow, or wind, four long miles into the city, and back again at night—sometimes after his children were in bed, without a grumbling word ; but looking forward with pleasure to long summer days, when the walk would be more agreeable, and when, after his return, he should be able to take a pleasant evening stroll with his family in the neighbouring country ; or enjoy an hour's conversation with them at home.

Mrs. Mason, meantime, showed the same happy temper. She did not repine at the long daily absence of her husband, but actively employed herself in *her* duties. She taught her children as before, dispensing at the same time with the help of a regular servant, in order that the expenses of the family might be kept within bounds. In all these household matters, Sarah, (blind though she was,) was more helpful than some daughters who have the full use of their eyes, but want the will to be useful ; and even Fanny, young as she was, soon became ' a clever, handy little maid.'

And thus, nearly two years passed quickly away, without much variation.

A trial now fell upon Mr. Mason and his children, which they felt more than all they had before passed through : this was nothing less than the dangerous illness of Mrs. Mason. For several weeks, after the first attack her life was almost despaired

of. Then her affectionate husband felt the painful inconvenience of being daily called away by his duty, from a home which was dearer to him than ever. But 'right is right;' and except for two or three days, when the greatest danger was feared, and when he obtained the willing permission of his employers to be absent from the counting-house, Mr. Mason did not shrink from his post. On several evenings, indeed, he hurried home, yet dreading to enter it, lest he should find it desolated by death. This sad trial, however, was spared him.

Meanwhile it had been necessary to make some alterations in the arrangements of the home. A suitable nurse, or house-keeper, was obtained, to wait on Mrs. Mason, and attend to the young people; and Edward, now more than twelve years old, was placed at a public grammar-school, a mile or two distant, as a day-boarder.

After a long illness, Mrs. Mason slowly recovered; but so much weakness remained, that it was thought needful for her to pass several weeks, if not months, in the country, and it was arranged that Fanny should accompany her.

It was a sorrowful parting for them all; but still, as Mr. Mason said—(the words had never been forgotten since Mr. Ellis first used them, and were often repeated by all of them, especially by Sarah and her father)—'Right is right: it is right for you to go, dear; and it is right for us to

stay behind. Let us all do what is right, and what is good for us will follow.' So, places were taken for Fanny and her mother in the coach which, twenty-five years ago, travelled daily from Ludgate Hill, in London, to a certain town in Sussex. And here my readers may as well say 'good-bye' to them; for their stay in the country was so much longer than was at first thought of, that I fear we shall not, in this little book at least, meet with them again.



CHAPTER V.

A TRIAL OF PRINCIPLE.

THE departure of Mrs. Mason and Fanny made a sad blank at home ; but after a little while, those who were left behind were cheered with good news about dear mama's health, and felt themselves able to settle down cheerfully to their regular duties. Dear blind Sarah found plenty of employment for her time at home, in numberless little works which practice had made easy and pleasant to her. There was the housekeeper to take care of the house, and be society to Sarah through the day ; and the anticipation of Edward's return from school at five o'clock, and that of her father from his office at seven or eight, kept up her spirits wonderfully through the day. It was fine summer weather then, and seldom an evening passed without a pleasant ramble after the late tea ; or if this were out of the question, there were hundreds of things to talk about, letters to write to mama and Fanny, lessons for Edward to look over for the next day, and music—dear Sarah's delicious music—to listen to.

Edward, especially, was generally full of life and spirits : but now and then there was something in his way of speaking—his tone of voice—and the subjects he chose

to talk about, which did not quite satisfy his sister. She could not certainly say that it was so, and she would scarcely suffer herself to think it, but she began to fear that the companions he was with through the day, and the lessons he learned from them, were not of the best kind. In proportion as he became more youthful, and rapidly advanced—as was really the case—in knowledge of school learning, he seemed also, so dear Sarah feared, to have made progress in some of that knowledge which Solomon says ‘causeth to err.’ He brought home, indeed, many tokens of his master’s approbation; but there were other tokens which made Sarah, who had more opportunity for this observation than their father had, almost tremble for his safety.

One half-holiday, when Edward was more than usually elated with his success at school, he proposed to Sarah to take a long walk with him, quite away from the houses, and she willingly consented. In the course of their ramble they came to a pleasant lane, shaded with a thick hedge on either side. All at once Edward started forward, saying—

‘Stand still one moment, Sarah—there is a beautiful stick in the hedge that I must have. Wait till I have cut it.’

‘Have you a knife to cut it with, Edward?’ Sarah asked. ‘I thought you had lost yours.’

‘Yes, so I did lose my old one,’ said Edward, from the hedge into which he had

thrust himself ; ‘ but stop until I get back to you, and you shall feel my new one.’

A minute afterwards, Edward was by his sister’s side, and the knife in her hand.

‘ What do you think of it ?’ he asked.

‘ It seems a very good one,’ replied the blind sister ; ‘ where did you get it ?’

‘ I bought it only yesterday—and a good bargain too,’ he added, laughingly.

‘ How was that ?’ Sarah inquired.

Was it Edward’s conscience that struck him just at that moment, and caused him to falter and blush, and pretend not to have noticed the question ? We shall see.

His dear Sarah seemed to know that something was amiss. She slipped her hand out of her glove, and passed it *very* gently over Edward’s face. The hand and the face scarcely touched ; but the hand *felt* the blush.



Edward turned pettishly away.

‘You bought the knife a bargain, you were saying?’ Sarah quietly remarked.

‘Oh, never mind the knife and the bargain,’ said Edward; ‘it does not signify a pin.’

‘You did not use to be mysterious with your dear blind sister,’ Sarah replied, in a rather mournful tone.

Edward hesitated one moment longer; it was but a moment:—‘And I will not now, dear Sarah. I do not know how it is, but you always get the better of me. But now I am with you, I seem as if I could not make out a good story about the knife and the bargain, after all.’

‘Do not try to make out a good story, dear Edward; and tell me nothing, if you had rather not.’

‘Yes, I will, Sarah; after all, it was only fair play,—at least, Tom Brown said so, and he was with me.’

‘I do not know Tom Brown,’ said Sarah, ‘but I have heard more of him from you than I think is good.’

‘Tom Brown’s father is a gentleman,’ interposed Edward.

‘Very likely, Edward; but never mind Tom Brown now. If I were you, however, I would call him *Thomas*. It does not seem respectful nor creditable to use *nick-names*. You remember what Cowper says about—

‘The man who calls you Tom or Jack,
 And proves by thumps upon your back,
 How he esteems your merit,
 Is such a friend, that one had need
 Be very much a friend indeed,
 To pardon, or to bear it.’

But we will not argue about this now. What was the bargain, Edward, which you and Thomas Brown think fair play ?

‘Well, about the knife, Sarah ; I bought it at a shop near the school. The price was a shilling, but it cost me only sixpence.’

‘That certainly was a bargain, Edward ; but how could you get it for half-price ?’

‘I know you will not think it right, but I said I would tell you, and I will. I laid down half-a-crown to pay for it, and the silly stup——’

‘The what, Edward ?’

‘Why—the shopkeeper, then—you do take me up—criticise me, I mean ; you do criticise me so, I shall never get to the end of my story. The shopkeeper took the half-crown, and instead of eighteenpence, he gave me two shillings in change. There, now you know it all.’

‘Did he do this in mistake, dear Edward ?’ Sarah asked eagerly.

‘To be sure he did. Would he have been so silly else ?’

‘And you did not—dear, dear Edward’—poor Sarah trembled with excitement—‘and you did not tell him of it ?’

‘No; it was his fault, not mine, that he lost the sixpence and I gained it.’

‘Edward,’ said the blind girl, in a solemn but sweet, affectionate tone, ‘have you quite forgotten the saying that pleased you so once,—more than once:—‘Right is right?’’

Edward was silent. His conscience told him he *had* almost forgotten it.

‘Was it doing to another as you would like another to do to you, dear brother?’

Edward was still silent; but he was fast coming over to Sarah’s opinion, and to see his own conduct in no flattering light.

‘Edward, dear, was it not almost like *stealing*?’

‘Stealing!’ he exclaimed. ‘Sarah, can you think so badly of me?’

‘It was taking an unfair advantage, at least, Edward; and that, you know, is not honest. Do you think papa would have done so?’

‘Papa is a man, and I am only a boy;’ said Edward; ‘but he would not have done it. No, I am sure he would not.’

‘But if it were right for you, it would be right for him; and what would be wrong in a man, is wrong in a boy. Do you not see this, dear Edward?’

Yes, Edward did see it. He was conquered, and had no more to say for himself, except that he wished the shopkeeper had the sixpence. But what was to be done?

‘Only one thing Edward; you must go

back directly, and return the money. I will go with you.'

This was an unpleasant idea to Edward; and he made many excuses. First, the shop was three, if not four miles from where they then were. Then he had a lesson to learn that evening, and if they went so far out of the way, he should not have time to learn it before their father returned from the city. Then, Sarah would be too tired. And lastly and principally, he was ashamed to let it be seen, or even guessed by the shopkeeper, who probably now knew nothing of the mistake, how unworthily he had acted.

But Sarah — dear persuasive Sarah — would not be convinced by these poor attempts at avoiding a duty.

'You must do it: indeed you must. Does it not seem right *in thought?*' she asked.

'Yes, but ——'

'Then, dear Edward, it is right *indeed*, and what is more, it is the *only* right thing to do. Come, dear brother, you will be happier when it is done.'

And it was decided that it should be done, and in that very hour; so, leaving behind them the shady lane, Edward and Sarah made the best of their way towards the vicinity of the school.

As they walked along, it might easily be seen that the mind of each was troubled; but they said little to each other until they

came to the very street in which was the shop where Edward had bought his knife. Then Edward said,—

‘Sarah, you had better not go in with me. Wait at the shop door, and I will just lay the sixpence down, and come out again quickly.’

But no, this would not do, Sarah said; she would stand by her brother and encourage him by her presence, to do what was right. Edward was obliged to submit, and they arrived at the shop.

‘Let me look first through the window, and see if any customers are there,’ said Edward.

Yes, there was one gentleman, but he was at the far end of the shop, examining some stoves, as it seemed. It was not likely that he would notice what passed; so Edward and his sister went in.

Was it Edward’s consciousness of having done wrong that made him notice the actions of the ironmonger’s apprentice? The counter was partly covered with little packages of brown paper, some open, and containing scissors, penknives, and other small goods; some were tied up. But tied up or open, as soon as Edward and Sarah entered, these parcels were hastily removed from the counter, until nothing remained within reach; and then, without speaking to Edward, the lad proceeded to the end of the shop, and whispered to his master.

‘The mistake *was* found out then,’ thought Edward, ‘and I am suspected of

being a cheat, if not a thief !' Oh, if Sarah had passed her hand at that time over her brother's cheek, what a burning blush would she have felt !

Full two minutes passed, during which time, Sarah and her brother stood by the counter, and opposite to them the apprentice, who seemed attentively to watch them, without saying a word. Poor Sarah was spared feeling the awkwardness of this situation, and as the shop was not a very large one, heard some words that passed between the tradesman and his customer. There was nothing particular in them : they were merely about a new kind of stove. But Edward felt his degradation, or what he fancied was such. He could scarcely refrain from tears. ' Oh,' he thought, ' if I had but remembered that right is right, we should not be here now.'

At length the shopkeeper came towards the brother and sister. ' He looks cross,' thought Edward, whose heart was beating very fast.

' Well, sir !' was all the man said.

' I bought a knife of you yesterday,' Edward stammered out.

' Yes, sir,' replied the man.

' I gave you half-a-crown, and you made a mistake in giving the change.'

' Yes I did, my little fellow. I found it out directly you were gone ; but you were too quick for me.'

Poor Edward could not go on. His heart was too full of shame. It was plain then

that he was looked upon with suspicion. What a good thing his sister was with him—she came to his aid—dear blind Sarah!

‘My brother,’ she said, in her mild gentle way, ‘is sorry that he did not tell you of the mistake at the time; but he is come now, sir, to return the sixpence.’

Edward had held the sixpence in his hand until it was quite warm. He now laid it on the counter.

‘Thank you, miss; thank you, sir,’ the man said, in a much softened tone. ‘I was afraid,’ he continued, ‘that the money was gone—not that I care for sixpence—but I did think the young gentleman knew of the mistake, and ought to have returned the money at once: but better late than never; and I am very glad he is so honest as to do it now. And to show you that I do not care for the money, you shall have anything in the shop that the sixpence can buy.’

Sarah thanked the shopkeeper, but said that she could not think of doing that; and after a few more words, kindly spoken, the brother and sister went away, leaving the ironmonger to finish his bargain with his stove customer.

And oh! how glad was Edward to get into the street again, and feel the soft air upon his hot cheeks and brow.

‘I am glad it is done,’ he said, ‘and that the sixpence is in the shop and not in my pocket; but I shall not forget again in a hurry, that *Right is right.*’

CHAPTER VI.

NEW FRIENDS.

THE Masons, since they had lived in London, had not made many acquaintances. The father's engagements abroad, and the mother's at home, had made it more than inconvenient, almost impossible, for any part of their time to be taken up with paying or receiving visits, while what family friends they had, lived at a distance from London.

Mr. Mason, however, was known and respected by a few of his neighbours. There was, especially, a gentleman, who lived about half-a-mile nearer to the city than himself, with whom he of late had sometimes walked thither, as often indeed, as they happened to fall in with each other. This gentleman, whom I may call Mr. Tierney, was a wholesale tea-dealer, who had warehouses near London-bridge, and with whom Mr. Mason had first become acquainted in some matters of business, in which they had more than once had occasion to meet.

Mr. Mason had found Mr. Tierney a pleasant, sensible companion, and had not been sorry to have the solitude of his daily walk thus occasionally lightened.

Not many days after the occurrences of the last chapter, the two gentlemen were walking together towards the city.

‘By the way,’ said Mr. Tierney; ‘I believe you have a family, Mr. Mason.’

Mr. Mason replied that he had—that the younger part of it consisted of three children, one of whom was at that time with her mother in the country, and the two older ones at home.

‘And I too,’ said Mr. Tierney, ‘have children, and I do not see why our young folks should not know each other. Will you allow yours to join a small party at my house some evening shortly?’

Mr. Mason consented to this, and the two gentlemen soon afterwards parted.

The next day, an invitation was duly sent to Sarah and Edward, who wondered much who their inviters could be, until the matter was explained to them by their father.

I shall not take up time and space by describing the preparations which the brother and sister thought proper to make for this unusual event, and shall altogether pass over the time between the invitation and the visit.

It was certainly a small party, but a very pleasant one. There were two daughters and two sons of Mr. Tierney—four or five other young persons—these, with Sarah and Edward, made up the entire number. One or two were nearly as old as

Sarah ; and one or two were younger than Edward.

It is not in my power to tell how the first part of that evening was spent. I can only say that dear Sarah speedily became the favourite of the party—that her blindness, though it did not, in any degree, cause her to be less cheerful than the rest, excited their sympathy and kindness, and that the artless, unassuming manner in which she exercised her fine musical talents, obtained their admiring applause. As to Edward, he was soon at home among his new friends—frank and open-hearted as he had ever been, and more than usually elated, not only by his own personal pleasure, but by the homage which all seemed desirous to pay to his dear blind sister.

Two or three hours had passed rapidly away, when the drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Tierney entered with Mr. Mason.

‘I should have been among you an hour ago,’ said Mr. Tierney ; ‘but was unexpectedly detained by business. And now, young ladies ;’ speaking to his own daughters ; ‘you must introduce me to your new friends.’

Sarah, who was standing by her brother, could not help starting at the first sound of Mr. Tierney’s voice. In a moment she knew that she was in the presence of the gentleman whom she had heard talking about stoves in the ironmonger’s shop. At that same instant, her hand sought that

of her brother ; and it was a relief to her to find that his pulse did not quicken ; a sure sign, as she knew by experience, that he had not recognized the speaker.

‘And this is your daughter, Mr. Mason, and this your son. Welcome, my young friends. I am happy to see you, and I hope —— but surely!’ he exclaimed, and then suddenly stopped short.

‘My daughter,’ said Mr. Mason, ‘has one blessing less than we all besides have reason to be thankful for. Dear Sarah is blind.’

‘I see, I see it is so ;’ returned Mr. Tierney, in a low voice. ‘But surely I have met these young folks before, though where it could be I cannot at this moment recollect. Am I right, young gentleman?’

Edward, with perfect truth, declared that he had never within his knowledge seen Mr. Tierney.

‘It is odd,’ said the gentleman ; ‘but I certainly have known something of these young people, or I have dreamed about them. What do you say, Miss Mason, Have we not met?’

Poor Sarah ! she well knew when and where that meeting had been ; and she would willingly have sacrificed much—anything but truth—to save Edward from exposure. And she felt sure that the gentleman had watched what had passed between the shopkeeper, her brother and herself, and had probably received an unfavourable impression concerning Ed-

ward from the unhappy transaction. But what could she say when thus appealed to? Why, she thought 'Right is right. I must dare to be true—nothing can need or justify falsehood or equivocation.'

'We have met once before sir. I remembered your voice directly I heard it.'

A sudden thought seemed now to enter the mind of Mr. Tierney:—'And I now remember you, my dear young lady. Yes, yes, I remember;' and he turned rather hastily away, to speak to some other of the party; and no more was afterwards said on the subject. To dear Sarah, however, the pleasure of the party had departed, and it was a relief to her when the time for returning home arrived. It might be only fancy, but she certainly did fancy that during the remainder of the evening, Mr. Tierney, though affable and kind to Edward and herself, had laid aside the freedom with which he first addressed them; and she was glad to hear her brother say as they walked homewards, what a kind and pleasant person Mr. Tierney appeared to be. 'But where can he have met with us?' he asked; 'perhaps in one of our walks, only then you would not have known him.'

'That is very true,' said Mr. Mason, joining in the conversation; 'and I have been wondering. But here we are at home—now for the latch key—and now in with you both.'

‘ Now Sarah, no secrets you know ! ’ exclaimed Edward, when they were quietly seated in their own little parlour ; ‘ now you must tell me where you have met Mr. Tierney, or I shall be jealous.’

It was a low whisper, and only a word or two spoken ; but oh ! what a change in Edward’s feelings ! what a sinking of heart when he found when and how Mr. Tierney had first seen him ! A bold, bad boy would have cared nothing about this ; but to Edward, honour was indeed above all price : and here, in the very first *open* transgression of morality of which he had been guilty, he felt that he had exposed himself to the contempt of one on whose continued kind friendship he had too securely reckoned. Poor Edward !

It is well when children can and will place confidence in kind and wise parents. Before he went to bed that night, Mr. Mason knew all that then distressed his son ; and was able to comfort and encourage him.

‘ One false step, my dear boy,’ he said, ‘ often leads to much suffering and remorse. But at whatever expense, a false step must be retraced, if we would not lay down in sorrow. You may be tempted to think it would have been better had you not yielded to your sister’s counsel in this instance. But indeed you have no reason to regret having done so. Right is right—it was right to make restitution ; it would have been a crime had you kept back from it.

What the consequences to you may be as regards Mr. Tierney's friendship, I cannot say, though I venture to think they will not be very serious ; but after all, what he may think of you, is a consideration of no value compared with the approbation of the ALL-WISE and JUST.'

Mr. Mason was right. It does not signify what others think of us if God approves. It certainly seemed hard to Edward that while some whom he knew—'Tom Brown,' for instance—could be perpetually confounding right and wrong, until they could scarcely tell one from the other ; the very first time *he* gave his conscience the slip, and committed a dishonourable action, he should be found out, exposed, perhaps disgraced and injured ; and that, too, by the very act and deed of making amends for his wrong doing. But never did a hard lesson find a more willing learner than this found in Edward Mason ; and if my young readers will wait until the next of these little books be published, I can promise them the remainder of his history. In that history they will be pleased to find that Edward never lost a real friend, nor a real pleasure, but gained many of each, together with peace of mind and much prosperity, by never more losing sight of, and constantly practising *in every particular*, the valuable motto he had laid hold upon in his boyhood :—RIGHT IS RIGHT.