

Months' Department.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Sunday, June 28th, 1868.

MATTHEW viii. 14-17: MARK i. 21-28: i. 29-34:
LUKE iv. 31-37: iv. 38-41: The healing of a
Dæmoniac in the Synagogue. The healing of a
Peter's wife's mother and many others.

Recite—ISAIAH llii. 4-6.

Sunday, July 5th, 1868.

MATTHEW iv. 23-25: viii. 2-4: MARK i. 35-39:
i. 40-45: LUKE iv. 42-44: v. 12-16: Jesus with
his disciples goes from Capernaum throughout
Galilee. The healing of a Leper.

Recite—ISAIAH lxi. 1-3.

Prejudice; or, the Black Polyanthus.

CHAPTER I.

When I was between twelve and thirteen years of age (said my friend Sophia West), I was sent to a school in the country, which was under the care of two ladies, both widows, one the widow of a French Protestant pastor, the other of an English physician. Of the latter we saw but little: she was at the time of my arrival a great invalid.

Including two little girls the children of the French lady, there were twelve pupils, four of whom were nearly grown up, and seldom condescended to play with us, or permitted us to address them by their Christian names. These young ladies were Miss L'Estrange, Miss Ashley, Miss Morton, and Miss Ward.

Of the second four I was the youngest. We slept in four little white beds, in the same large chamber; we learned the same lessons, had the same masters, and were great friends.

The third four were very much petted and played with by the elder girls; but we who held the middle place did not enter much into their sports, as considering them too childish; therefore, though we patronized them, and worked for their dolls, we frequently reminded them of our superior age and importance, and always spoke of them as "the children." Our names were Juliet Ashley, Belle L'Estrange, Margaret Smythe, and Sophia West.

We were very happy at the school, which was a large old brick house, more brown than red; it stood in a valley, and was surrounded by a very large garden, which was bounded on one side by a small shallow river. The lawn sloped down to the river, and several large weeping willows hung over it, and gave the house their name. It was called "The Willows." Beyond the garden was a hop plantation, and again, beyond that, a cherry orchard. We had free access to both, and were permitted to spend much of our half-holidays out of doors. There was an empty coach-house in the yard. It was given up to our use; and there we had a swing, some hutchies for our rabbits and guinea-pigs, and there also we kept numbers of little birds, which we used to buy of a man in the neighborhood, at the rate of 3d. for a red-cap, 6d. for a linnet, 9d. for a robin, 1s for a goldfinch that could sing, and half a crown for a canary.

If one little girl bought a redcap every one else did the same, and so with the rabbits, the guinea-pigs, the white mice, and the jackdaws. More than fifty common little cages garnished the whitewashed walls of the coach-house; and the gardener's children drove a flourishing trade, by supplying us with different kinds of berries, buds of trees, cow parsley, bran, thistle-seed, and other delicacies for our pets.

Though we had so many birds, Madame had passed a sumptuary law limiting them to the species that I have named, for the sufficient reason that if she should give leave to one little girl to purchase a bird of any other sort, each of the others would wish for one also.

Belle L'Estrange and I were especial friends. Our little white beds stood almost close together, and we had our drawers and boxes in common. Therefore, one day in April, when the weather was more than commonly fine, and it was a half-holiday, we were disagreeably surprised, when we came in from our walk, to find our beds moved and separated, and the elderly woman who attended us, Mrs. Massey by name, busily engaged in putting up a small blue bed, and evidently making preparations for a fresh pupil. Massey told us that she had known for some days that a new pupil was expected, and that she was to sleep in our room; "and I thought what a pleasant thing it was for you, young ladies," she proceeded—"makes it so cheerful for you."

"Massey, you didn't think so," said Juliet; "you knew we shouldn't like it."

Massey smiled, and taking up the hammer, began to use it to so much purpose that for the present our murmurs were drowned.

"I'm sure, miss, I don't know any reason why you shouldn't like it," she observed, when she laid the hammer down.

"Why did Madame keep it a secret from us, then?" replied Juliet. "She did not do so when Sophia was coming. And besides, Massey, just see what a mess you have made; every one of our boxes moved, and all the beds pushed out of their places."

"It was Madame's orders, Miss Ashley," said Massey. And she sat at the foot of the little blue bed, making up rosettes to trim it with, and taking all our grumbling and discontent with the most placid composure.

We asked an infinity of questions, but could not obtain much information. "The young lady was in mourning," she said. "She had already arrived. She had dark hair, and seemed to have been crying." She then volun-

teered the information that a parrot in a cage had been handed through the carriage window, and that it was now standing in the hall.

A parrot! We wondered whether Madame would permit her to keep it. We did not know that we should consider it particularly fair if she did, for we were not allowed to have parrots. When Massey was not pleased at our remarks, she shook the curtains, or rustled her work. She now evidently wished us to talk of something else, and asked us whether we had bought anything during our walk.

"Only some rape seed," said Belle, "and a black polyanthus. O, dear, how disagreeable this is! Are you sure Madame said my bed was to go into this corner?"

"Yes, Miss Belle. Well, to be sure, what a deal of money you young ladies spend on your pets. Now, if I were you, miss, I should consider what a great room this is—plenty of space for all to be comfortable; and I should make up my mind to be pleased; and make the young lady welcome, instead of looking so melancholy."

"So Madame fetched the new girl from the station in the carriage," observed Belle, in a reflective tone. "I thought I heard a rumbling in the court yard. That was the carriage, no doubt."

The slightest possible smile stole over Massey's features. "Did you, indeed, miss?" she replied, taking up the valance, and pushing the long latch through the slide. "Well, do you know, young ladies, last night I heard a queer kind of rumbling myself?"

"Indeed!" we all exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed, ladies. I was in the linen room, under this, you know, and it had struck ten. First, I heard a pattering exactly like feet running about, and I said to myself, 'That can never be the dear young ladies, for they were snug in bed an hour ago.' Well, I listened, and presently I heard a rumbling sort of noise, just as if somebody was jumping from one of your beds to the other, Miss West and Miss Belle L'Estrange. So I said to myself, 'I shall think it my duty, if ever I hear that noise again'—these are the very words I said, I can assure you—'shall think it my duty to tell Madame.'"

A short silence followed this announcement; but we soon began to question Massey again; she parried most of our questions; and excepting that she said the young lady was brought "by a roughish-spoken gentleman, in a light great-coat," we were not much the wiser for them. We declared there was something mysterious about the whole affair. Massey repeated that she was sure we should like the young lady when we knew her; and having now finished and sewed on the last of her blue rosettes, she began to put on our afternoon frocks.

"A roughish-spoken gentleman, in a light great-coat," said Juliet. "I don't believe he was a gentleman, at all; only farmers wear light great-coats."

"I'll tell you what, Miss Ashley," said Massey, when she had untied Juliet's frock, and it fell to the floor with a thump, "this won't do at all; here's your frock pocket as full of canary seed as it can hold. A pretty thing for a young lady to do, turning her pocket into a seed bin! Some day you'll get an imposition set you for this!"

"Well," said Juliet, "then the man should not sell it in such thin paper: the bag broke, and if I had not put it in my pocket it would all have been spilt on the road."

"Ay, here's Miss West's pocket full of cow-parsley," continued Massey, proceeding to examine my frock with a rueful face. "Deary me, what a life I do lead with you, young ladies! Last Monday was a week I really thought I must speak to Madame, for when I was turning out Miss Belle's pocket for the wash, up spirted a lot of bran into my face, and all over my cap and the clean carpet."

"Well, Massey," replied Belle, "if you would be so kind as to hang up a light great-coat for us, on these pegs, we could all keep our seeds in it. You know there would be six pockets at least; and what a convenience this would be, especially if we could have them without the rough spoken gentleman."

"Dear me," exclaimed Massey, in a tone of vexation, "you young ladies are as sharp as needles; to think that I should have said such a thing, when Madame was so particular that you should not know but what Miss Palmer came unexpected like."

"Oh, her name's Palmer—is it?" said Belle, "and she was expected to come unexpectedly?"

"Tut, tut. There it is again. Such provoking children never did I see. I never gave it a thought, I am sure; but you are as sharp as needles. Keep your head still, Miss Belle, or I shall hurt it with the brush. There's Madame's foot on the stairs, and your bonnets not hung up yet, nor your walking-shoes put away. Let her see the room neat, if you please, young ladies."

We had scarcely put these things away when Madame entered, followed by a girl about our own age. She was dressed in mourning, and had been evidently crying. She seemed painfully shy and awkward; and when Madame introduced us to her, one by one, she blushed till her neck and arms were tinged with crimson. Madame was sure we should be delighted to have another companion; thereupon we shook hands with Miss Palmer. Then Madame was sure Miss Palmer would be very happy, and make herself extremely agreeable; upon which Miss Palmer pinched her fingers, and looked on the floor. Then Madame said she would retire, and leave us to amuse our new friend, till tea-time. Our new friend was to sit down and make herself at home.

Accordingly our new friend sat down at the foot of her blue bed, bent her face, dropped her hand at her side, blushed continuously, and seemed exquisitely uncomfortable.

The kind-hearted Massey, pitying her shy-

ness, asked if she would like her boxes to be brought up stairs, doubtless thinking they might afford her something to do.

When she was gone down to fetch them, an awkward silence ensued. At last Belle L'Estrange said, "We were told that you brought a parrot to school, Miss Palmer."

"Yes," she replied, without lifting up her eyes.

I inquired what she gave him to eat.

With the same air of constraint, she murmured, "Sopped bread."

"Sopped bread," I repeated, glad of something to remark upon. "I did not know that a parrot could live on that alone."

As if it cost her a great effort, she then said, "Sometimes he has Indian corn."

Presently, to our great relief, Massey returned, and helped Miss Palmer to unpack her clothes. We could scarcely contrive to keep up any sort of conversation with her, and therefore were delighted when the tea bell rang, and we could be released from the constraint which her shyness imposed upon us.

We had already made up our minds that we did not like her, and told the elder girls that our room was spoiled now, and we should never enjoy ourselves as we had done.

However, after tea, we were permitted to go into the garden for a few minutes, and Madame gave a little plot of ground to Miss Palmer; then she brightened up a little, and it appeared that she was not only very fond of gardening, but that she knew much more about the cultivation of flowers than we did; she also pleased us by her evident admiration of the black polyanthus, which was brought out in triumph by its happy owner, and planted in the middle of her own peculiar property.

Belle had bought it of an old woman, in whose garden she saw it flourishing. The old woman said it had been left there by the man who lived there before her. He was a gardener, but he had emigrated to America, and she should be happy to dispose of it. Belle being equally anxious to purchase it, the bargain was soon struck; and certainly it was the most beautiful polyanthus possible, black and velvet like. Madame had not one in the garden that could compare with it.

I think that first evening we did try to overcome Miss Palmer's shyness; but the next day, when morning school was over, and we went into the garden for our short play, we found her such a restraint, that we begged Miss L'Estrange, Belle's elder sister, to walk about with her, while we ran away to feed our birds. Miss L'Estrange did as she was asked, but very injudiciously broached the subject of the shyness; told her how very uncomfortable she made us by it, and how much we lamented it. She begged her to try and feel at home, and talk and play with her school-fellows. But it was not at all surprising that her well-meant harangue should have increased the evil; the idea it made other people uncomfortable could scarcely fail to augment her awkwardness.

She, however, asked Miss L'Estrange to take her to the coach-house; and I well remember her appearance as she entered with her, and stood within the door. She had a sort of resolute air, as if determined to perform some very hard duty. At first Miss L'Estrange did not seem to know what to say; but when we all turned from our birds, and looked for an explanation, she exclaimed—"Oh; I've brought Miss Palmer—she—I suppose she wishes to play with you."

Miss Palmer, on this, looked, and said, hurriedly, "No; I didn't mean—at least, I mean that I don't wish to intrude; I only meant—"

"Oh, this is not intruding," said Miss L'Estrange; "the coach-house is given to the second class."

Miss Palmer colored with confusion. She was not pretty; her black hair was stiff and intractable, her shoulders were high, and she stooped very awkwardly; but she had exceedingly large, dark-gray eyes, and when she raised them, they had a peculiarly searching, but, at the same time, somewhat of a beseeching, expression.

"I don't want to stay," she continued, drawing back towards the door; "but I meant to tell you, that—I'm sorry I made you so uncomfortable."

We all looked at Miss L'Estrange; but before anything explanatory could be said, Miss Palmer murmured that she did not know her afternoon lesson and made her escape.

"Well, said Juliet, "so we are to be tormented with apologies and misunderstandings, as well as shyness! She will be sensitive, I suppose—I cannot bear touchy, sensitive people."

"No," said Belle; "don't you remember how tiresome Fanny Moore used to be? writing notes of apology for things she had done days before, and which no one had noticed; and asking us what we had meant by things we had said a long while ago; and quarrelling, and then crying and making it up, and expecting us to cry, too. I've no patience with that kind of thing. Miss Palmer will be just like Fanny."

"Tiresome girl," said Miss L'Estrange; "and when I had been particularly begging her not to be so shy, and saying what a disadvantage it was to her!"

I do not remember that anything particular happened during the rest of that day; but the next being fine, we were sent out for a long walk, Madame giving leave to Miss Palmer to stay in the garden, and work at her own little plot, which was, no doubt, kindly intended as an indulgence both to us and to her.

Miss L'Estrange was also detained to finish a drawing. Our new friend, however, had not long been out when she appeared at the window, saying that there was a man in the yard with a basket of flowers, and might she buy

some? Madame gave her leave. "And I supposed that they were nosegays of cut flowers," said Miss L'Estrange, from whom we had this account, "or I should have asked leave to go also, particularly as I had heard you all say that a man had been ordered to come 'for once,' by Madame's consent."

"Yes to be sure," we all exclaimed, when Miss L'Estrange met us at the gate of the hop plantation, and gave us this description of what had occurred. "Surely the man is not gone?"

"You shall hear," she replied. "In half an hour my drawing was finished, and Madame dismissed me; so I went into the garden, and there I found that sly little thing, sitting on a garden bench, with six plants in pots standing before her. There were two polyanthus plants, with flowers nearly as black as Belle's; and two lovely purple auriculas; and two other plants, that I did not much notice because they were not in flower. 'Oh,' I exclaimed, 'so these were the plants that the man brought! Why did you not say so to Madame?' She looked confused, but only said, 'I did not know that I ought.' I said, I knew that the man had been ordered to call, and that you would all be dreadfully disappointed to find him gone. So she looked up, and said, 'He told me he could not wait; but that does not much signify, for he had only these polyanthus plants, and I have bought them; besides them and the auriculas, and these cyclamen flowers, there was no thing in his basket that was worth having. I gave four shillings and sixpence for these, and he took away nothing but some fading hyacinths, and some common plants, such as they have got. It would have done no good to detain him; and, besides, he said he could not wait.' 'Oh, of course,' I said, 'if you had chosen all that was worth having yourself, it was no use detaining the man.' 'Indeed, I did not send him away,' she replied; 'he said he could not wait.' 'But,' I continued, 'I am afraid they will be very much disappointed, for they have been expecting this man for weeks; and I know they particularly wanted some of those shuttlecock-flowers, and some auriculas.' 'The man said he expected to sell them to the young ladies,' she answered; 'but as they were out, and he would not wait, I thought—'

"Oh, yes," I interrupted, for I was disgusted at her selfishness, "I understand perfectly—as they were out, you thought you might as well have them yourself."

All this Miss L'Estrange told us as we advanced towards the house; and we were in the full eloquence of regret and indignation, when, at a turn in the walk, we saw Miss Palmer on a garden-seat, with all her purchases before her.

She started up when we appeared, and advanced hastily to meet us, but the moment she observed Miss L'Estrange with us, shrunk back again, and, lifting up her garden-apron, began to knot the corners, and twist them with an agitated face.

That our man should have been suffered to depart before we had seen him, and that all his best plants should have been picked out by a stranger for herself, was such a decided grievance, that offended dignity would scarcely permit us to pause before the flower-pots; and I believe we should have passed on, lovely and tempting as they looked, if Miss Palmer had not risen again, and, coloring up to the eyes, begun some stammered excuse about the man's departure.

"It was of no consequence," we answered, rather coldly.

She seemed to be attempting some explanation, but stood as if shame and shyness overcame her; when we effectually stopped her by saying that Miss L'Estrange had explained to us that the man had nothing left for us—that we were sorry, but hoped we should be more fortunate another time.

Then we swept on towards the house, and she, to our extreme surprise, burst into a passion of tears, which arrested us, for we felt that, being such a new comer, we ought not to have annoyed her so much.

An awkward pause ensued, during which she cried most bitterly, and we stood looking on, till, happily, the first school-bell rang, and with a sudden effort, she controlled her tears, and rushed on into the house to bathe her face and recover herself.

"How odd that any one with such a keen sense of shame should have done so mean an action!" observed Miss Ward.

"I was always sure that I should never like her," said Margaret. "I felt it the moment I saw her."

"As for me," Juliet added, "I knew it before I saw her."

"Oh, come," said the elder Miss Ashley, "that really is prejudice, Juliet."

"Prejudice," I replied, taking up Juliet's cause; "not at all; our room was pulled to pieces for her before she had even entered the house; and besides, we knew by the way Madame brought her up stairs herself, showing her so much more attention than she did to us when we arrived, and saying so many times that she knew we should be such good friends, we were sure by all this that she expected we should not."

The elder girls laughed heartily at this.

"There certainly was nothing of the kind done when I arrived," said Miss Ward to Miss Ashley; "on the contrary, just as grandpa put me down out of the carriage, I saw Madame standing on the step with you in her hand; and while she talked to grandpa, you walked up to me and said, 'How do you do? do you like lemon drops?' and immediately put one into my mouth. We were about six years old then, Fanny, and from that moment to this we have been on strictly confidential terms."

To be continued.