Youths' Department.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Sunday, July 12th, 1868.

MATTHEW ix. 2-8: ix. 9: MARK ii. 1-12: ii. 13-14: LUKE v. 17-26: v. 27-28: The healing of paralytic. The call of Matthew.

Recite—ACTS x. 39-43.

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Sunday, July 19th, 1868.

PART 4.—Our Lord's second passover, and the subsequent transactions until the third.

JOHN v. 1-24: The Pool of Bethesda and the healing of the infirm man.

Recite—JOHN x. 34-38.

Prejudice; or, the Black Polyanthus.

CHAPTER II.

I do not remember that anything particular happened during the remainder of the day; we were called into school almost immediately after our conversation in the garden, and, when it was over, Miss Palmer being present, the subject of the black polyanthus could not be alluded to.

It was not till the next afternoon, when Juliet, Margaret, and I were in the coach-house, feeding our birds, that Miss L'Estrange came in, and inquired what we meant to do about Belle's polyanthus.

'*Do*, Miss L'Estrange,' I answered; 'what is there to do? If you can gum on every one of the leaves, and all the flowers, so that they can grow again, Belle will be very much obliged to you; but if you cannot, there is nothing to be done, that I can see.'

'What a baby you are, little Sophia,' said Miss L'Estrange, laughing; 'you know well as I do that you are talking nonsense. I think I shall make Belle quarrel with you! Don't nod your head at me, as much as to say, 'Do if you can;' I shall certainly set my wits against yours, if you dare to make game of me, you morsel of a child. Gum them on indeed! Come and sit on my knee.'

Miss L'Estrange was sitting on a box, and as I came dancing towards her, she snatched me up, and I felt like a shuttlecock in her hands; she was extremely tall, finely but largely proportioned, and the great fairness of her hair and complexion increased her apparent size. She set me on her knee, and folding one of my feet in her large white fingers, she said,—

'Who suspected *you* of making that foot-mark, you tiny thing? it would take three feet such as yours to fill it! Come now, tell me why you are so much afraid of an investigation; I saw what a fright you were in yesterday; what was the reason?'

Finding that I made no answer, she said,—

'Juliet and Margaret, just go, my dears, and find Belle and Miss Ashley, and tell them I wish they would come here.' The two little girls ran away on their errand, and Miss L'Estrange continued: 'Now, Fairy, i you know anything more than we know, you ought to tell it.'

I assured her that I did not know anything.

'Then,' she said, 'why are you so anxious that no questions should be asked: don't you think it must be very disagreeable to be suspected?'

'Yes.'

'Well, some one is suspected.'

'I know'

'We want to decide whether she is suspected wrongfully.'

'But perhaps asking questions will make you suspect still more.'

'Not if she is innocent; let my curls alone, Fairy, and attend to what I am saying. If she is innocent, she ought to be much obliged to us, for our investigations.'

'But you know, Miss L'Estrange,' said I, trying to convey my confused impressions to her, 'you know that none of us like her, and it seems to me that but for that we never should have suspected her.'

'You uncharitable little thing! you say we dislike her! Well that is quite true; but we have reasons for disliking her; have we not?'

'Oh, yes, we have; I quite forgot that,' said I, not at all aware that we were arguing in a circle, and asserting the reasonableness of our prejudice against her from our belief in things which might themselves be unfounded prejudices.'

'You seem to me,' observed Miss L'Estrange, 'to have a sort of notion that the person in question is innocent.'

'No, I haven't exactly,' I replied; 'I don't think she is a nice girl, and perhaps she has done wrong, but I think we must be doing wrong too.'

'Then it is for our sakes, not hers, that you wish us all to be cowards.'

I considered for a while, and then replied to the effect that if the investigation came to any decided result, Madame must be told—the suspected person would tell her if she really was innocent; some one of us would tell it she was guilty; and it would be sure to make a great deal of unhappiness and quarrelling; but that if it turned out that the suspected person had been accused and suspected *wrongfully*, Madame would be much more seriously angry with Belle and with us for having made up such a disgraceful charge against her, than she would be with *her* if she had really spoiled the primrose; and, either way, Belle was still no better off, since her plant was spoiled for the season, and could not be replaced.

'What a cautious little thing you are!' said Miss L'Estrange, when with much circumlocution I had contrived to convey my meaning to her.

'Belle doesn't care very much about her polyanthus,' I observed, not wishing to appear lukewarm in my friend's cause.

'*Care*,' repeated Miss L'Estrange; 'I should like to know what Belle does care about for five minutes together; no, no, it is not through any fear that she should pine for her lost treasure that I want to have this question settled.'

It was always considered a dangerous thing in the school to meddle or interfere with Belle, for though Miss L'Estrange always declared that she should never think of taking her part merely because she was her sister, and though she said she should never take Belle's part unless she was *right*, we did not reap much benefit from this decision, though it sounded fair, because she never thought her *wrong*. Notwithstanding this vehement partisanship, she always spoke of Belle with a kind of careless, slighting manner, and therefore I was not at all surprised on this occasion to hear her assert that it was not for Belle's sake that she wished to have the matter settled.

'And why do you turn round so anxiously, you little thing?' she continued; 'are you afraid that Miss Palmer's gray parrot should be listening and should repeat our conversation to his mistress?'

As if the mention of his name had roused this respectable bird from a sage reverie, he immediately drew back the film from his eyes, and screamed out, 'Paul,' a word constantly in his mouth (or rather his beak), and which he meant for Poll; 'Paul, Paul,' said the parrot, 'here's a state of things; ha, ha, ha!'

The parrot could only say two sentences, but one of them ended with this laugh, which was quite contagious; it was exactly like that of an old gentleman laughing through his nose. Our laughter, on hearing it, made all the canaries begin to sing, and they roused the linnets and the robins, so that by the time Juliet and Margaret returned with all our schoolfellows, excepting the four little ones and Miss Palmer, there was such a din that we could not hear ourselves speak, the parrot's shrill voice screaming above it all, 'Here's a state of things; ha, ha, ha!' and then, 'Hester, Hester, Paul wants his sop: Hes—ter!'

'Tiresome thing!' cried Miss Ward, stopping her ears; 'somebody put an apron over his cage; he calls so loudly that his mistress will be coming to him, and that will never do.'

The girls made haste to stop the noise by excluding as much light as they could from the various cages; and presently there was something like quiet, excepting that every now and then the parrot repeated, 'Hester, Hes—ter!' with startling distinctness, or burst out laughing in the gravest part of our discourse.

Miss L'Estrange, with me on her lap, was seated on a pile of several boxes, with her back to the wall; the other girls grouped themselves in a semicircle before her, sitting on the floor; and a long discussion began, all about the black polyanthus—who could have done the deed, and why it was likely that Miss Palmer was the doer.

'I often feel afraid of those close silent people,' said Miss Ward; "depend upon it, that girl has a great deal more in her than we think, Fanny; when she flashes those deep gray eyes of hers upon me, I never feel as if I could meet them and look at her steadily.'

'That is exactly my feeling,' answered Miss Ashley.

'I am sure she must be very artful,' said Belle.

'If she is, Belle,' I ventured to remark, 'she did not cut your primrose.'

'Indeed!' said Miss Ward; 'what do you mean, you oracular little creature?'

'I did not say she was artful,' I replied; 'I don't know whether she is or not; I only say that if she is artful, she is more than a match for us, and therefore she has not chosen to revenge herself in a way that we should all discover at once.'

The elder girls all laughed heartily at this, as they generally did when I ventured to give my opinion.

'If she did not do it,' said Margaret, 'we wish to know who did.'

'I think nothing of the foot-mark,' observed Miss Ward, 'for you know the younger ones are constantly jumping over each other's gardens, and we cannot be sure how many days it is since that foot-mark was made; but the polyanthus is cut and left on the mould—is it not natural to think she did it, when there was an obvious motive in her case, and none that we know of in the case of any one else?'

'Of course the motive you allude to is revenge,' said Miss L'Estrange.

'To be sure. *If* she did it—which is still a question—but if she did, then nothing can be more easy than to see why. The second class had that morning shown her how mean they thought her behavior in appropriating their plants; she had been excessively hurt and ashamed at it; it was a sore subject; and when Belle fell over those very plants, she might have thought she did not do it altogether by accident.'

'Certainly,' said Juliet, half sarcastically, 'she might have thought that the second class had arranged that some one should demolish her plants, and had chosen Belle to do it; nothing so natural than that we should choose Belle, for she is twice the weight of any of us.'

'Pooh!' said Miss Ward; 'we are not joking now, Juliet. Well, she is scolded for leaving her plants on the walk, and then left alone to brood over her misfortune; opposite to her flourishes the favorite plant of the very girl who had tumbled over hers, and who has shown her plainly that she never ought to have possessed them; what more natural than that, in a moment of irritation, she should cut off its head? And if she did, then what more natural than all her subsequent conduct—her low spirits during the rainy weather, her disinclination to go into the garden, her lingering behind, that we might discover what had been done before she came up, her trying to account for the mischief and for the foot-mark, her confusion when she was shown that it fronted the wrong way—— '

'Well, but go on to the end,' said Miss L'Estrange. 'I think her turning upon us with her 'No one said she did not,' was unnatural; I declare those words haunt me even now.'

'Yes, that was unnatural,' said Miss Ward frankly, 'unless she is a very artful girl indeed; but I am inclined to agree with this little creature, that if she did it she is not artful; it was such a clumsy contrivance—it was striking such an open blow.'

'No matter with whom you agree,' said Miss Ashley; 'we all know what you think, and what we all think. I never liked that girl, and I have reason to like her less and less every day.'

'*She did it*,' said Miss Morton; and she was generally so silent and cautious, that her words had twice the effect of other people's; and they all nodded assent.

'What does Sophia think?' said Miss L'Estrange, raising my head from her shoulder, and looking into my face.

'Oh,' I replied, 'I am sure now that it must be as you all say; I did not know before that it was so certain, but now I am quite convinced.'

'Well, then, the thing is, what shall we do?' asked Belle.

There was a pause, which the parrot filled with bursts of asthmatic laughter, and calls for Hester.

'Shall we tell Madame?' asked Juliet.

'No,' said Belle stoutly; 'it was my polyanthus, and it ought not to be told unless I choose.'

'Very well,' said her sister, 'but something should be done.'

'Yes, we can be cold to her, and never address her by her Chritian name.'

'And leave her to associate with the little ones, as we are doing now,' said Miss Ashley; 'why, she must be perfectly aware now that we are all in conclave together somewhere, and I dare say she suspects what we are talking about.'

'I am very sorry for her,' said Belle; 'but she certainly ought to suffer for her behavior. And yet only suppose, Mary, *if* she never did it after all!'

'*If* the sky were to fall,' Miss L'Estrange replied, 'then we should catch larks.'

'Come now, Belle,' said Juliet, 'could it have been done without hands?'

'No, of course not.'

'Did you do it yourself then? answer me that.'

'No, of course not, you absurd creature.'

'Did you, Sophia?'

'No'

And so she went all round.

'Did Nannette?'

'No, a thousand times no; nor Pauline, and the other two little ones were in before us.'

'Did Madame do it then?'

'Nonsense, Juliet.'

'Well, then, Massey might have got up in the night, for we should have seen her if she had done it in the daytime; she might have come to Madame in the night, and asked for the key of the house door, saying that she felt it a duty to go and cut Belle's polyanthus.'

'There, now, you have named everybody,' said Miss Ward; 'so be quiet, you ridiculous child.'

'Every one but gardener,' said Margaret, 'and he never comes on wet days.'

'And yet somebody did it,' said Juliet; 'so, as we are all tired of the subject, let us drop it; only by way of reflection, I must say, that this is a wicked world.'

'So it is,' said Belle.

'And if that canary of yours goes on much longer with his piercing, distracting shrill notes, he must be made an example of, for he is not fit to associate with reasonable creatures.'

'Hush!' said Belle; 'there is some one at the door.'

Miss L'Estrange, as I have said before, was seated against the wall on a pile of empty boxes, having one for a footstool, and me on her lap; she had opened a blue parasol to shade us both from the sun, for just under the roof over her head was a wide low casement window, very dim through dust, and having on its ledge some empty blacking bottles, some dry bulbs, a red saucer full of nails, some bundles of list for the trees, the gardener's ink, a few stumpy pens, and a little cracked slate, with his accounts upon it.

On the floor, in a semicircle, sat our schoolfellows in various attitudes, the sunbeams passing over their heads, or just edging their bright hair with a golden border

When Belle said, 'Hush!' I lifted my head from Miss L'Estrange's shoulder; the girls turned on their elbows to see who might be coming; the latch was lifted, and in walked Miss Palmer.

A bag of Indian corn under her arm, and a little pan of sopped bread in her hand, she advanced a step or two before she saw us, and when she did, it was with such a start that it shook some of the bread on to the floor.

She stood still, and those flashing gray eyes swept over us, and seemed to take back to her the inmost thoughts of our hearts; they noted everything in an instant, from the sunbeam on the floor which lay across her knees, to the rows of dried herbs hanging in bundles from the rafters, the green, and yellow, and wickerwork cages, the chalk pictures of little girls that we had drawn in profile on the whitewashed walls, the piles of empty flower-pots in the corners, the sudden silence that had fallen upon us, that it was on account of her entrance, and that the words which preceded it had concerned *her*.

As has before been said, she was exceedingly shy and reserved; but by her behavior then I learned, as if by instinct (for I was by no means capable of explaining what I saw, or of setting it in language till long after), that her shyness and reserve had arisen from a desire to please, from over-estimation of those about her, and an extreme wish that we might love her; she did not at all fear when there was no hope that she might be loved, and when now, alas! she could neither admire nor esteem.

When the dark gray eyes had passed over the place, they again returned to us: no one had stirred, nor spoken; still as a picture we sat before her, and some of us were conscious of a great change in her demeanor since the previous day. She turned without speaking, and advancing to her parrot's cage, took off the apron with which we had covered it, folded it up, fed her bird, and talked to him, as if she was truly unconscious of our presence. Then she quietly came up nearly close to where we were sitting, hung her seed-bag upon a nail, and without looking at us again, walked to the door, and shutting it behind her, left us to our meditations.

'Well,' exclaimed Miss Morton, when, as if released from a spell, we all changed our position, 'is that hardihood, or is it injured innocence?'

Miss L'Estrange made no answer; but as I reclined against her, I perceived that she was agitated.

'I should be extremely sorry to do anything unjust,' said Miss Ashley, in an uneasy tone.

Miss L'Estrange was playing with my coral neck-lace when her schoolfellow spoke; and giving it a nervous twitch, the string gave way, and instantly she, and I, and the girls below were pelted with a shower like little red hail-stones; they shook them out of their laps, out of their hair; they chased them along the floor; and picked them out of seed-bags and out of flower pots, but the half were not found; and in an animated search for the remainder, the play-hour slipped away, and Miss Palmer and the polyanthus were forgotten.

And now followed two, or perhaps three weeks, which have left no vivid pictures of themselves on my memory; but such as they are I always look back on them with regret.

Children, though they may make rules and resolutions for themselves, do not often keep them consistently; and I believe that our determination to show Miss Palmer how much we were displeased with her would constantly have been forgotten, if she herself had not helped to keep it in our remembrance: when she forgot, and talked in a friendly way unawares, some one of us, perhaps, remembered it, and answered with chilling coldness; and then, if we shortly forgot it, any unwonted familiarity seemed to bring it to her mind, and make her instantly shrink back.

Day by day the space between us widened; she would walk for hours together by herself in the shrubbery; and in our own room, while we talked, she would take a book: we were always affectionate and friendly to each other, she was always shut out; we played together, she amused herself; we had always done very well without her, now she was trying hard to do without us.

Madame, besides her little girls, had two sons, Prosper and Emile by name, two troublesome little monkeys, of the respective ages of ten and twelve. It should have been mentioned before, that though she had long kept this school, she had not long been a widow. Her husband during his lifetime had superintended the religious training of the pupils; but now this care devolved on the minister of the parish, who once a week had us, class by class in the vestry, and instructed us together with two or three farmers' daughters, of about our own ages.

To be Continued.

The cables for the new bridges at Niagara Falls have been received, and will be put up immediately. They are in fourteen coils, each coil weighing fourteen tons.