

GODEY'S

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BESSIE'S BABY.

BY MARION HARLAND.

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SUCH a wee morsel of a baby as it was! It had been duly trussed up, neck and heels, in papa's new bandanna handkerchief, and swung from the hook of a pair of steelyards, as if it had been born into a cannibal country, and were to be disposed of in the shambles, at so much per pound. Its avoirdupois weight having been ascertained to a fraction, the great family Bible immediately received the following entry:—

"ELIAS, son of John and Elizabeth Leftwich, born at eight o'clock on Sabbath morning, March 15th, 1851. Weight, 6 lbs. 6 oz."

Bessie had watched the whole operation in nervous trepidation. She was sure that baby's spine would never come straight again after being curved into such a frightful semi-circle; fearful lest the sharp hook might, by an unguarded movement of the nurse, or sudden plunge of the infant, enter its eye or mouth, or impale the tender flesh; watchful of the iron rod of the steelyards, lest there should be a flaw somewhere, which, proving treacherous at this momentous crisis, should let the priceless burden fall to the floor. The ordeal over, and the squirming bundle again safe in nurse's arms, a fresh trial awaited her. The record in the Leftwich annals was written at a table in her chamber; transcribed in her husband's clerky hand, and read aloud by him in the hearing of his mother, sister, wife, and the nurse.

"That is quite correct, I believe?" he said.

"Quite correct, and entirely satisfactory, with the exception of the weight," answered the mother. "I could have wished that it had been eight or ten pounds, instead. All my babies were large. You weighed eleven pounds, when you were born, John. But we must make the best of it. It is a healthy-looking, plump child, and it is a boy! So, we will be thankful!"

The nurse was a woman of tact, as well as experience, and while the attention of the others was absorbed by the babe, she noted the bright eyes and faintly flushed cheek of the girlish face resting on the pillow, and lost no time in exercising her professional authority.

"Now, if you please, Mrs. Leftwich, we will darken the room, and let mother and boy sleep, for awhile. There's nothing like sleep for making babies grow, and I want this one to have plenty!"

John Leftwich was prompt to take the hint.

"Good-morning, Bessie!" he said, kindly. "I hope to see you quite rested and comfortable by the time I come back. I am going to church."

He touched her brow with his fingers, as he spoke, and would have kissed her, had not his mother and sister been looking on. The grown man of thirty was shy as a schoolboy, and obeyed the imperious will of the brisk old lady as implicitly as he had done when he wore roundabouts, and was soundly trounced

for derelictions of the duty she laid down for all her household.

Bessie felt his affectionate glance; but she had expected the kiss, too, and when the chamber was left to herself and nurse, there was a pitiful quaver in the weak voice that asked:—

"Mrs. Roberts, will you please let me have baby all to myself, for a little while? Just lay him by me, and I will be very quiet."

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish it. It is very natural that you should want him."

Nobody thought of, or treated Bessie as a matron—she was so youthful in appearance, so unsophisticated in manner. "I used to feel just so about mine," added the kind nurse, laying the boy upon the outstretched arm.

"Did you? I am glad to hear it! I was afraid you would think me silly!" murmured the mother, drawing the tiny roll of flannel closely to her bosom, and loosening the folds surrounding the pink, oddly wrinkled face. "Is he so very small, Mrs. Roberts? I think he is splendid!"

"So he is! My taste isn't for monstrous babies. They are slow in learning to walk and sit alone, and are a terrible burden to those who have the care of them. This one is big enough. He is going to be a pretty child, too."

"Going to be!" The bright eyes were indignant. "Why, he is lovely, now!"

"Of course! of course! and now, dear, you will lie still and not talk, or you will keep him awake!"

She withdrew to the adjoining dressing-room, and although the door of communication was wide open, Bessie enjoyed the delicious sense of being alone with her baby. *Her* baby! her very own! if the grandmother had pronounced its arms and legs to be of the real Leftwich pattern, and they had called him "Elias." Hateful name! She had felt upon her bare nerves every scratch of the pen that condemned him to bear through life a designation so odious.

"But mamma couldn't help it, precious!" she whispered, hugging the atomy as tightly as she dared. "It was all *their* work, and mamma will let you understand this so soon as you are big enough to listen. There is one consolation! they can't, with every law in the land to help them, take you away from me, my treasure!"

Sleep was out of the question, and, while she lay there, stroking the soft, brown hair that covered the little head with silkiest down; holding both clenched fists—not larger than curled rose-leaves—in one of hers; kissing, lightly, with passionate murmurs of fondness, the faintly-traced brows and closed eyelids; she reviewed each event of the life she had led from the day on which John Leftwich had brought her home, a blushing, timid bride, to the present hour of exceeding bliss.

She was an orphan, when John met her at the country home of a friend, two hundred miles away from his native city. Since the death of her mother, a year before this meeting, Bessie had resided with an aunt, the wife of John's acquaintance. The town guest was a bachelor, grave and diffident, but a good son and brother, and a man of means. Bessie's aunt, possessed of these particulars, and being an inveterate match-maker, forthwith determined that the twain should become one, and the deed was done! John was fascinated by the innocent gayety and childlike trustfulness of the girl of eighteen; while she, pleased by his gentle, if serious kindness to herself, feeling the need of some one to love and pet her, as her dead parents had done; flattered by her friends' congratulations upon her conquest, and allured by her aunt's glowing pictures of the luxury and importance of the establishment that would be hers as John's wife, was easily persuaded that she was deeply in love with her enamored suitor. She was slightly chilled and a good deal disappointed when he told her that his home must continue to be, as it had been, from his boyhood, with his widowed mother. Besides himself and an elder sister, who also lived under the maternal roof, Mrs. Leftwich had none remaining of six children who had all outlived their infancy, and John was her mainstay, her only protector.

"But she will love you very dearly, Bessie!" he said, seeing the smile fade from mouth and eyes at this information. "And she, with Jane, will relieve you from all household cares. Your life will be one long playtime."

Bessie tried to smile. "I shouldn't mind the work—and I hope they will like me. I shall be very miserable if they do not."

"No danger!" returned John, confidently. "My wife would be welcome, were she only half so lovely as yourself!"

They made a wedding-tour, lasting ten days,

reaching the city and their future abode at the close of a blustering March afternoon. How well Bessie remembered it, now, as she heard the rising wind shriek around the corner of the house and buffet the shutters of the darkened room! A furious gust whirled down the street as she alighted, caught her veil, and, twisting it from off her face, filled her eyes with sharp, stinging sand. Blind and staggering, she was assisted by John to the house, and had to stand, shivering at the threshold, while he took out his pass-key. She had pictured to herself the portals thrown wide open at her approach, and, standing within them, a venerable, motherly lady, her arms extended to inelasp her new daughter, while Jane waited beside her, impatient for her turn. The door unlooked, John still paused to give directions about the trunks, and Bessie stepped within the hall for shelter from the wind, that seemed freezing her through. A handsome pendant threw a brilliant light upon the carpeted floors, the hat-rack, chairs, and a staircase—also elegantly carpeted—but no human being was visible. It was very strange and doleful! and the bride's spirits sank to the level of the mercury in the material thermometer. Even John did not behave like himself. Without bidding her welcome to his home, he said: "This way!" and opened a door to her left. The hall lamp afforded a partial view of two large parlors, richly furnished, but cold and devoid of all signs of recent habitation. "I thought we might find them here!" remarked John, and Bessie thought that he looked perturbed. "They must be in the sitting-room."

He walked towards the other end of the hall, Bessie following him, feeling almost ready to cry at the downfall of her pleasant expectations and the awkwardness of her situation. The door of the family sitting-room being thrown open, discovered an old lady, in a snuff-colored gown and plain cap, sitting on one side of the fireplace, and a prim, starched, elderly maiden, bolt upright in a straight-backed chair upon the other. Both were silent, and both were knitting as if their existence depended upon their industry.

"Mother!" said John, advancing. "How have you been since I went away? This is my wife—your daughter!"

Mrs. Leftwich arose to receive the kiss her son imprinted upon her withered cheeks, and suffered Bessie to touch her rosy lips—quiver-

ing now, like ripe cherries in a storm—to the same spot.

"I am very well, John. And this is your wife—is it? She looks more as if she might be your daughter!"

Jane had taken a step or two upon the rug to meet her brother, and now offered Bessie a bony hand.

"How do you do, madam?"

John gave an embarrassed laugh at his mother's uncomplimentary allusion to his thirty years and staid appearance.

"I expected to find you in the parlors," he said; "so we went in there first."

"No! my rule is to begin with people as we mean to keep on, and as your wife is to be one of the family, there is no sense in making company of her, at the first. Your room is ready, if you want to take off your things!" she added, to Bessie. "The gas is lighted there, too, and you can go right up. Supper is almost ready. You can't miss your chamber. It is the first to your left, as you stand in the upper hall."

"I will show her the way!" said John.

He had reached the door, when his mother called him back to ask him some trivial question, and Bessie, not daring to wait, went slowly up the staircase, the tears dropping upon her travelling-dress, and making the shining stair-rod look like flashes of chain-lightning. It was full five minutes before John could escape from his mother, and when he entered his room, he found Bessie lying, face downwards, upon the bed, crying her pretty eyes out.

"Bessie! Bessie!" he whispered, as if the dread mistress of the house could hear him through flooring and walls. "Don't! for pity's sake! There is nothing my mother dislikes so much as a crying woman!"

"Then, you ought not to have m-m-married me!" sobbed Bessie. "And you t-t-told me she would l-love me!"

"So she will, dear, when she comes to know you well. She is, as I must have informed you before now, somewhat peculiar in her manner; but she is an excellent woman, and you will find her a true friend to you. Only, if you love me, do not awaken her prejudices at the outset, by an appearance of childish petulance. Wipe away your tears, brush your hair, and smile your sweetest, and resolve not to mind if she does speak a little sharply, and seem cold. It is her way."

Bessie was not ill-tempered, and she did brighten up, and resolve, very stoutly, "not to mind;" but she was not long in finding out that the old lady was seriously displeased at the step her son had taken. That he should wish to marry at all was a failure in respect and duty to herself. She kept his house, and a handsome, well-kept house it was. Jane looked after his clothes, and every garment was the pink of even bachelor propriety. His meals were served punctually; his physical ailments, when he confessed to any, attended to as only a mother could do. In a word, he had a home and a family already, and he ought to be satisfied, if ever man could be contented with his share of this world's comforts. But that he should actually fall in love—and at his age—with a round-faced, babyish schoolgirl, with her head full of novels and nonsense, and whose eyes brimmed with tears, if one spoke above her breath to her, or dared to insinuate that she was not exactly perfection—this was absolutely unbearable.

Before a week elapsed, Mrs. Leftwich—Bessie was only "Mrs. John," at home, and among the acquaintances who were conversant with the mother-in-law's whims—Mrs. Leftwich had spoken her mind to her son with regard to his choice, and although he carefully refrained from intimating to Bessie that she had been weighed in the balances and found wanting, she knew it, and was certain, moreover, that he had been lectured for selecting her as his wife. For the first three months she struggled valiantly to live down the dislike of her relations-in-law. She was tamely subservient to the iron rule of the feminine head of the establishment, which establishment, grand as it appeared to the country girl—grander far than the visions created by her aunt's ambitious harangues to her—belonged to her as little as it did to the servant who swept the stairs and made up the beds. Indeed, the Abigail was more at ease in the fine rooms than she, for it was her business to keep them in order, while Bessie never peeped into a mirror, or sat upon a sofa, or handled a mantel ornament, without imagining that mother and daughter accused her mentally of meddling or presuming. In her innocence of any intention of endeavoring to supplant them in the sphere where they had reigned so long, she had, during the nominal honeymoon, tried to ingratiate herself with them, by offering to share the work

of the household. Mrs. Leftwich, still hale and brisk, at the age of sixty-seven, continued to look after the finer kinds of cookery, pies, oakes, jellies, and the like, and Bessie, one day, followed her to the pantry, with a modest entreaty to be allowed to help her. The old lady was terribly incensed.

"You want to qualify yourself to stand in my shoes, I suppose!" she said, with a sniff of defiance. "I'm obliged to you, Mrs. John! but when my son is dissatisfied with my house-keeping, he will tell me for himself. And if you think and hope that I am about to drop into my grave, you may find yourself mistaken. When I need help, my daughter Jane is more competent to relieve me than a girl who has just left off short dresses. No! no! you can go back to the parlor and *storm* on the piano and sit up in a velvet arm-chair to look pretty, like any other doll. That's what John married you for. I can't see that you are fit for anything else!"

The poor "doll" met her master, that day, with swollen eyes, but an attempt at a smile, and however his heart may have ached in secret over the severe discipline she was undergoing, he asked no questions. "She was a sensitive little thing, and must suffer somewhat before she got used to mother's ways. He would only do harm by interfering."

Jane's "ways" were painfully like her mother's in many respects. She did not scold so vehemently, or speak so bluntly, but she was formal and repulsive.

"John!" said Bessie, hesitatingly, one evening, when they were together in their own room, "I have so little to do that I am very lonely when you are not here. Do you think sister Jane would be angry if I were to ask her to let me mend your stockings?"

"Angry! why, no! I am sure that she will be pleased to have you make the request. I know I should like to have you work for me!"

Emboldened by this clause, yet not without a tremor, in remembrance of the ill-success of her application to the mother, Bessie preferred her request. Jane measured her from head to foot, with her owl-like eyes, so gray and ghostly, that Bessie's heart seemed to sink into her heels.

"I can do all the mending that my brother requires. I prefer to do it. My brother is very particular about his clothes." Jane's sentences were always short, and these were

jerked out with solemn snappishness. "I am certain that your sewing would not suit him."

Thus repulsed, what could Bessie do, being of an industrious turn, but execute slippers and ottomans in worsted work, and crochet bags and tidies and purses, to while away the time? These were wrought upon in her chamber, for their appearance down-stairs was the signal for a volley of sarcasms and invectives from Mrs. Leftwich, against the flippery and vanity and idleness of the present generation of young women.

In her day, "girls were taught to make shirts and puddings, instead of wasting their time over fancy-work and the piano!"

Of course, under this raking fire, the music Bessie and John both loved was not to be thought of. He soon ceased to ask for it, and she would as soon have paid a second visit to the pantry as proposed to sing or play for him. A dull, dull life, and a wearing one it was to the girl-wife, yet she could see no probable way of escape from it, look where she would. She had no near kins-people to whom she could confide her griefs; no mother, father, sister, or brother, who could represent to John his gross injustice in keeping the whilome merry, affectionate creature in continual bondage, through fear of those whose claims were, legally and morally considered, less binding upon him than hers. John meant to do right. In his ignorance of womankind, and the rules which generally govern the softer sex in their deportment towards their relations-in-law—sons' and brothers' wives in particular—he had really conceived the idea that his Bessie would be a welcome inmate of the house which he, with his quiet tastes, often found too still and gloomy. Undeceived, in some degree, by his mother's reception of the news of his betrothal, he was still sure that Bessie would prevail, in the long run, over her objections and prejudices.

A very long run it was to her who knew best the true state of home-politics. She soon ceased to complain to her husband, and in this reticence, there was as much wounded and prideful feeling as consideration for his peace of mind. If he loved her, he would see how she was trampled upon, and insulted, and thwarted, and railed at, and remove her, at all risks, to a real home of her own. That he stood in awe of his mother, she perceived, the first moment she saw them together, and,

miscalculating the power of long-continued associations and his exaggerated sense of filial piety, she was tempted to despise him for what looked like craven submission to a female autocracy. Convinced of the inutility of further attempts to conciliate the powers that were; persuaded, moreover, that her heroic endurance of slight, and taunt, and peevishness, and her efforts to return these with gentleness and cheerful obedience were overlooked by him for whose sake they were made, Bessie withdrew more and more from intercourse with the family, and spent most of her time in her own room. In her singlehood she had abhorred solitude, but there was sweetness in loneliness and silence now, when compared with the old lady's conversation and Jane's icy taciturnity. Like a wild bird in a cage, the young wife sat, day after day, at her window, overlooking the street, finding amusement in watching the passers-by; plying her needle, or devouring, by stealth, the romances at which John shook his head whenever he caught a glimpse of them, and her *penchant* for which served Mrs. Leftwich with the text for many a tirade.

But there came a time when life was no longer rapid and drear, and she a drone, forbidden to find solace in useful employment; when novel and magazine were left unmolested in their hiding-places; when the sad eyes no more surveyed, in weary listlessness, the motley, but stale panorama of the thoroughfare; when she wept no more through the long twilights and stormy afternoons, to hear the wail of the wind—there was always a sighing wind at that corner; when the blue eyes were once again eloquent of hope, and, as the busy fingers fashioned, with laborious love and nicety, the small garments, the materials for which she had purchased privately; her lips hummed fragments of old ballads, while brain and heart were full of happy anticipations; building bright dream-castles of coming days of joy, when she would not be alone and unloved. She did not notice the softened conduct and visages of the two stern-browed women below stairs; the awkward, often apparently ungracious attempts to promote her physical comfort, such as setting out an easy chair for her use when she entered the room, pushing a footstool towards her if she were seated, and procuring for her meals every dainty which they fancied would tempt her capricious appetite. She did not expect

friendliness, or even toleration from them, and it was easier to feel independent of them now, than it was eight or ten months ago. Yet she might have remarked and been grateful for the lingering delicacy in the mind of each, that withheld her from speaking openly of the subject that occupied the wife's every thought, waking or sleeping. If they had refused to do her justice, she did not deal fairly by them in the construction she put upon their silence. She believed that it arose from indifference or displeasure, and her heart hardened against them in proportion to her resentment of the slight offered her, and the coming blessing. Another circumstance heightened this feeling.

"My dear," said John, one day, after listening to some of her plans for the future, which were now the staple of her talks to him, "my mother is very desirous that our first son, if we ever have one, shall be called 'Elias,' after my father."

"Horrible!" cried Bessie, aghast. *She* had been vibrating between Herbert and Clarence.

"My mother wishes it!" returned John, sturdily; "and in such a trifle as this, we may surely oblige her."

"It is no trifle, John!" with rising spirit. "And I must say that I think I might have my way in this matter, at least. I have had it in nothing else since I entered this house."

John looked deeply pained. "I regret the necessity of opposing your will as much as you can feel that opposition, Bessie; but to tell you the truth, I have already assured my mother that I could answer for your willingness to accede to her wishes in this regard, and I cannot take back my word. If she is undeceived, you must speak to her yourself. She will be bitterly disappointed."

"You know perfectly well that I had rather be burned alive than have a quarrel with your mother!" Bessie was growing very angry. "You have done me an unkind turn, John! and I hope never to have a son while I live, if he is to be called by that hateful, *hateful* name!"

There the matter rested; but both understood that in default of an appeal from Bessie, Mrs. Leftwich's wish was as stringent as the decrees of the Medo-Persian dynasty. John was not a hard-hearted tyrant; he was only his mother's slave, yet Bessie did feel aggrieved, when, after a swift, furtive glance at her to note whether she meditated opposition,

at the eleventh hour, he penned, without demur, seemingly without regret—the irrevocable "Elias." But she could not be very indignant even about this, while she held her baby, warm, palpitating, *living* flesh and blood, in her arms; feasted her hungry eyes upon his formless features.

"I shall never be comfortless again! never weary and dispirited because I have nothing to do; nothing to think of; nothing to love! And when you are older, you will take mamma's part!" Not a very Christian-like reflection, assuredly, yet it was balm to her, and sleep finally succeeded to the calm it induced.

John came in, when the service, of which he had heard, perhaps, ten words, was over. He was strangely restless to be at home again. He did not despise riches. On the contrary, he had the name, in commercial circles, of loving money well enough to be zealous in its pursuit and careful to prevent it from slipping away from his fingers. But had the "6-lbs. 6 oz." he had written, that morning, represented that weight of diamonds, all as large and pure as the famous Bengalese brilliant, he could not have been more impatient for renewed inspection of his wealth. His mother met him in the hall below, and advised him not to go up stairs, lest he should awaken the sleepers.

"I won't disturb them!" was all the answer she got, and he mounted as gingerly as though each step were strewn with eggs, and to crush one were a capital offence.

He did not break their slumber. Even the wary nurse, who dozed in an arm-chair, within the dressing-room, did not hear him. He stood by the bed, gazing upon his treasures, with no inquisitive spectators to mark his moved admiration. None saw the gray eyes, usually cold and steady, melt and glow, until they might have been filled with sunlit dew; the sallow cheek reddened and the lips part in a trembling smile of unutterable delight. By and by, he sank to his knees, and without removing his eyes from the faces of mother and babe, prayed fervently, yet wordlessly. Then it was that Bessie, aroused by a slight movement of the tiny hands folded in hers, slowly opened her eyes upon her husband's countenance. So beautified was it, by love and rapture, that she believed it to be a part of a fleeting dream, until he sprang to his feet, ashamed and disconcerted, when she

understood, with womanly intuition, that he was a participant in the fulness of her joy.

"You have been looking at him?" she whispered, tenderly smiling down at the babe.

"Yes—and at you!" John said it bravely, and stooping over, gave her the kiss bashfulness had forbidden him to offer when he left her earlier in the day.

But one arm was free to pass around his neck, but that did duty for both, in the energy of the embrace.

"Sit there!" motioning him to a chair at the bedside, "and we will watch him together."

Five minutes of silence went by. Baby slept on, and the nurse's doze was unbroken by the cautious whispers.

"Isn't it strange, John, darling," said Bessie, raising her violet eyes lovingly to his, "that, although my heart is overflowing with fondness for him, I yet love you more than I ever did before?"

"It may be strange, love, but you were never half so dear to me as at this moment," replied he. "I feel as if we, to-day, stood, hand in hand, upon the threshold of a new and beautiful life."

"Why, John! you dear old fellow! do you know that is poetical?" Bessie's laugh—the merry laugh of her girlish days—bubbled up, sweet and low. "The only bit of poetry I ever knew you to perpetrate! But we are beginning a new life, and I mean to try to be a better wife. I am sure I am a happier woman."

"And it shall be my study to make you happier still. I must not leave all that for baby to do."

He was still sitting beside her and holding her hand, when the nurse looked in to see that all was right. Finding that Mr. Leftwich was there, she retreated discreetly, being, as I have intimated, a nonpareil in her profession for tact and judgment. Mrs. Leftwich was the next intruder. Bessie tried to snatch her hand away as the door unclosed, but John retained it in a grasp that almost bruised the tender flesh. He did not rise or turn, but smiled when his mother stood at his side.

"Did you awaken her?" she asked.

Bessie answered for him. "No, indeed, ma'am!"

"Have you had a good nap?" next questioned the old lady.

Bessie stared in amazement at the gentle

voice and the interest the grim mother-in-law evinced in her comfort.

"Very good, thank you, ma'am."

"You ought to have something to eat. I came up to speak to Mrs. Roberts about it. Does your room feel warm enough?"

More astonished, Bessie replied in the affirmative, and when the conference with Mrs. Roberts was over, ventured to accost the potentate with something akin to her natural vivacity.

"Mother! do you think that baby's hair will remain brown, or turn light and be like mine?"

This was a serious question. Mrs. Leftwich put on her spectacles, and, after close examination, decided, that since the boy's eyelashes were golden, his hair would change to match it.

"I am sorry!" uttered Bessie, in unintentional diplomacy. "I do not admire light hair. I hoped that his would be the same shade as—his father's!" smiling, shyly, at her husband.

Mrs. Leftwich smiled, too. "We can't have the ordering of these things, child! Your baby is healthy and well-made, and will, I hope, grow up to be a comfort to us all. If he is as good a son as his father has been, you won't quarrel with the color of his hair."

She trotted off, with Mrs. Roberts at her heels, and Bessie lay quietly thoughtful for a long time. At last, answering, as if her husband had spoken, she said:—

"You are right, John! Nothing can excuse one for failing to obey and honor a faithful mother, whatever may be her foibles!"

A very wise speech from a little woman, who was not eminent for wisdom! Nor was this the only lesson she learned from her babe, before his winking eyes could bear the light. If the first half day of his life had revealed to her depths of feeling in her husband's heart she had never sounded until she opened her eyes upon his transfigured countenance bending over her and their child, the infant immortal was also her instructor in charity towards John's relations, and gave her a more correct understanding of their rugged natures. Rugged they were, and their outward aspects unlovely, but all that was attractive in them was brought into play by the birth of a son to their house. As Bessie grew stronger and could bear conversation, Jane fell into the habit of relieving Mrs. Roberts in

her chamber. Sitting by her nephew's cradle, or holding him upon her lap, she thawed out so far as to impart to her auditor some scraps of family history, which greatly excited her sympathy for the mother and sister. Bessie heard how, out of the three sons of Mrs. Leftwich, two had been, for years, a living sorrow to her; had squandered her means; defied her authority, and disgraced the name she was so proud to keep unspotted.

"It was a relief to her when, first one—then the other—died," said Jane. "She had lost one daughter, some years before. A second, the youngest of us all, died eighteen months afterwards. But for John's society and kindness, I think mother would not have survived her death. She looked to him to repair the damage done to her fortune, and by his upright conduct, to make the public forget his brothers' misconduct. And all this he has done—and more!"

"How she must have suffered!" exclaimed Bessie. "And can you recollect these events? Your brothers were older than yourself—were they not?"

"Yes; but I remember them. I can never forget the misery of the ten long years that made me old before my time. They changed mother, too. She was not stern when we were all young together. She has been disappointed and deceived until she has become suspicious. At one time, she believed that she had not a friend upon earth. And it did seem as if everybody had conspired to cheat and malign her. Not only her children, but her own brothers robbed her."

"She must have great strength of mind, or she could not have borne it," said Bessie.

"That is just it! An ordinary woman would have sunk under the load. She was spared no form of sorrow. Her eldest son married while he lived here with us. His wife was a coarse, bold virago, who had been a waitress in a liquor saloon. He brought her home, and mother let her stay. We tried to make the best of her. But she led him on from bad to worse. After her baby was born, she would leave it with us, and go off with him, night after night, to some low ball or concert, not returning until morning. Sometimes, both came home intoxicated. It was dreadful!"

"And the baby?"

"We took care of him. He was a beautiful child. After the father died, mother offered

the wife a home, if she would conduct herself like a respectable woman. She refused insolently to be led by her advice. They quarrelled and parted. The mother took away the boy, and has never let us see or hear from him since. He must be twenty years old, now, if he is living."

Bessie comprehended and was moved by the care with which the aunt laid the sleeping babe in the cradle, and tucked the coverings about him.

"I hope that our boy will help console you for his loss!" she said, softly.

"I have not seen mother so happy since my sister's death, as his birth has made her," answered Jane. "It seems to her like a promise of better days."

Bessie added another pet-name to the vocabulary she whispered over the infant's unconscious head, whenever he lay in her bosom—"Mamma's olive branch!" It was easy to pardon the asperities and downright unkindness of a mother, who had loved her boys as she did him who now hung at her breast, and been, in the end, mocked, despised, ruined by them. What marvel that the sweetness of her nature had soured, and that she had entrenched herself behind a bulwark bristling with all the weapons her stern, suspicious pride could muster? Jane had said that a decade of misery had changed her mother. Whom would it not have altered into a pitiful, or repulsive caricature of her natural self?

"Why did you never tell me this sad story, John?" Bessie asked, that evening. "It is the key to so much that has distressed and baffled me, that I must have been more forbearing in my judgment, more patient in my actions, had I known it from the first."

"I could not foresee that!" was the reply. "And this is a tabooed subject with us all. My mother has not named my brothers in my hearing since I was twelve years old. I wonder that Jane confided their history to you. You are certainly gaining favor in her eyes."

"Baby is doing it for me!" and the whole list of sugared epithets, punctuated by kisses, was repeated in the pink ears, to the father's infinite diversion, while the boy lay, staring at the ceiling, profoundly indifferent to the benedictions rained upon him like a shower of comfits.

Not that Bessie acquired a practical knowledge of her new study, in a course of two, three, or a dozen lessons. She was very

human, which is to say, very weak and fallible, and not a day passed, after her recovery, in which something did not occur to test her temper and her resolutions of charity and duty. It was no more comfortable to be scolded now than it had been before she knew why caustic words had become the habitual utterance of the faded lips. To overcome evil with good is the sublimest work set for mortals, but, as with all other sublime heights, the ascent to the peak of self-abnegation is slow, toilsome, and often cruelly sharp to the feet of beginners. Bessie was not now the volatile child the grave bachelor had wedded. Dense shade and vivid sunlight had each contributed to develop and strengthen her character. As her babe learned to look up to her for daily sustenance and support, she, almost as ignorant, began to lean upon a Parent whose strength and wisdom are as boundless as His love.

When "the boy" was six months old he was baptized, and the same afternoon, as he sat upon his mother's lap, "grandma" remarked, in her dry, hard tone, "he is getting too old now to be called 'baby.' He must be taught his real name."

"He knows it already!" said Bessie, pleasantly. "Elly!"

The child turned and looked up at her.

"Now, papa, you try him!"

"Elly!" called papa, innocently abetting his wife's ruse.

The laughing blue eyes glanced quickly in the direction of the manly voice.

"One more trial!" proposed Bessie. "Grandma shall call him, and hold out her arms at the same time."

Half reluctantly grandma obeyed. She wanted the babe to come to her, but she was not altogether pleased with the perversion of her favorite "Elias."

"Elly!" she pronounced, and to his mother's delight the babe falsified the adage setting forth the "contrariness" of children, by giving a crow and a leap into the extended arms.

Thenceforward he was "Elly" to all, and by no lips was the pretty diminutive spoken more frequently than by grandma's. Her devotion to him was intense and un concealed, and, inheriting Bessie's warm heart, he recompensed it by love, true and honest, although second in degree to that which he felt for his mother. Despite the small stock in trade of flesh with which he began life, he speedily

grew into a bouncing boy, sturdy of limb and stout of spirit. One instance of the latter trait will show how he fulfilled Bessie's hopes as her champion.

When he was about three years of age, Mrs. Leftwich had, or thought she had occasion to take her daughter-in-law roundly to task for some of her "new fangled fashions," and performed the task *con spirito*, if not *con amore*. Elly was riding his hobby-horse in the parlor across the hall. Hearing his grandmother's raised tones, he dismounted and came to the door of the sitting-room. Bessie was mute under the castigation, but her bent head and crimson cheek aroused the chivalric fire of her son. Stamping across the floor, he confronted his grandparent, every hair of his golden curls seeming to be instinct with the electric blaze sparkling in his eyes.

"What are 'ou scolding *my* mamma for?"

"It is none of your business!" retorted grandma.

"It is none of 'our bidness! and I won't ever kiss 'ou again, not in ten hun'ed 'ears, if 'ou ever scold her again! Don't, *p'ease*, mamma!" for Bessie was sobbing at this unexpected interference—"or 'ou will make me *cwy*, too!"

This was too much for grandma. She honored the boy's fearlessness, perhaps recognizing in it a gleam of her own temper; she dreaded to lose the least fraction of his love, and the mist that began to obscure the big, blue eyes, with the premonitory quiver of the baby-lip, finished the conquest.

"There, there, Elly!" she said, offering her hand, as to her equal. "We'll make friends, and I promise not to scold mamma any more."

She kept her word. The germ of respect for her son's wife, which had been set by the duteous conduct and sweet temper of her she had regarded as an intruder, grew more rapidly from this hour. "The mother of such a child," as she privately remarked to Jane, "must be something better than a doll-headed simpleton."

Other sons and daughters have been added to Bessie's treasures, and grandma is fond of all, but Elly still maintains his supremacy in her heart. She has become very infirm with declining years, and Bessie has, by imperceptible degrees, glided into her proper place as mistress of the house, for Jane devotes herself entirely to her mother. The old lady still creeps abroad for exercise, on

fine days, but she rarely demands the aid of John's arm upon these excursions.

Should you chance, as you are walking, on some bright morning, along the principal promenade of a town not a hundred miles from the city of Brotherly Love, to meet a lady, bent with age, but with quick, black eyes, and a keen, sensible face, leaning, on one side, upon a prim woman of fifty, and supported, on the other, by a fine manly boy of fourteen, with blue eyes, ready alike to flash with fun or melt into fondness; a saucy, pouting mouth, that yet smiles sweetly, as his companion addresses some query or observation to him; if he steadies his fleet footsteps to keep pace with her tottering walk, watching warily at crossings and in the crowd, lest she should trip or be jostled; doing all brightly and readily, as if it were a labor of love; you may be pretty sure that you have seen the once imperious, independent granddame, her faithful daughter, and BESSIE'S BABY.

THE EFFECTS OF IMPATIENCE.

Nothing more incapacitates a man for the lead than impatience. No constitutionally impatient man, who has indulged his tendency, ever gets to the bottom of things, or knows with any nicety the standing disposition and circumstances of the people he is thrown, or has thrown himself amongst. Certain salient points he is possessed of, but not what reconciles and accounts for them. Something in him—an obtrusive self, or a train of thought, or liking and antipathies—will always come between him and an impartial judgment. Neither does he win confidence, for he checks the coy, uncertain advances which are the precursors of it. We doubt if a thoroughly impatient man can read the heart or be a fair critic, or understand the rights of any knotty question, or make himself master of any difficult situation. The power of waiting, deliberating, hanging in suspense, is necessary for all these—the power of staying off for considerable periods of time merely personal learnings.

PASSION.

PASSION sweeps o'er the soul like a cataract for its fury; like a poisonous snake for the envenomed lava its surgings emit; and like a basilisk for the sparks its lightning-like

glances send forth; yet it has its revenge on the human frame, causing a weak, trembling state of the nerves shadowed forth in the melancholy morbidness that usually follows such outbursts; and in conscience's reminder of the recording angel's mission, which haunts the unfortunate one long, long after its degrading indulgence, till, repentance ensuing, a tear blots from the recording book all sign of the debasing sin's entrance there.

THE ILEX-TREE.

BY MINNIE WILLIS BARNES.

BENEATH the ilex-tree we stood—

The Italian fire-flies swarmed the air,
The Arno rolled its silvery flood,
Bathed in a mist of moonlit air;
The languid tuberoses half exhaled
Its fainting spirit in a sigh,
A white swan, from its native grove,
Was floating down the stream to die.

A subtle perfume filled the night,
Half tranquillizing sense and soul,
The nightingale among the thorns
Yielded its singing as a dole;
A cypress near us, tall and dark,
Shivered its branches 'neath the stars;
Venus hung, shield-like, in the sky,
But fading seemed the disk of Mars.

The lilies Dante loved so well,
Had gone to sleep upon the stream,
Their creamy bosoms on the flood
With trailing leaves of tender green;
The gray mist of the olive-trees
Stretched, veil-like, o'er the hills above—
The tranced glory of the moon
Gleamed on it like a spell of love.

She leaned against the ilex-tree—
The fire-flies seemed to light her hair,
Whose golden shadows, tenderly,
Lay on her shoulders white and fair;
Her sacred garments round her fell
Like snow-wreaths on a gentle slope;
Her eyes (like "prayers before a shrine")
Seemed lighted up with faith and hope.

I told her, 'neath the ilex-tree,
The depth and passion of my love:
An echo seemed to sweep the leaves
And waft my whisper through the grove:
I offered her my hand and name—
The heritage of wealth and power,
The shadows in her gentle eyes
Seem haunting me this very hour.

She loved me not—she spake it soft—
Oh how the cypress shivered then!
We parted 'neath the ilex-tree
And never since have met again;
Yet, when the moon hangs in the sky,
And starry shadows kiss the stream,
I sit beneath the ilex-tree
And woo again the vanished dream.