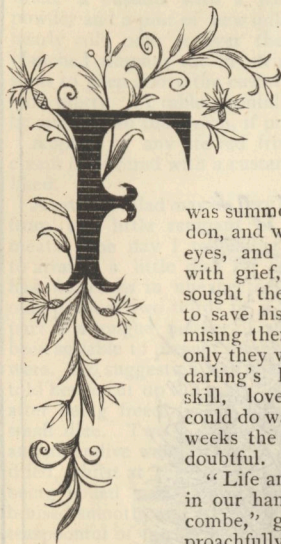


DAISY AND BUTTERCUP.

By the Author of "I Promised Father."

CHAPTER III.



OR weeks poor Stella's life hung upon a single thread. The best professional skill was summoned from London, and with tears in his eyes, and half desperate with grief, the squire besought the medical men to save his daughter, promising them all he had if only they would spare his darling's life. All that skill, love, and money could do was done, but for weeks the result remained doubtful.

"Life and death are not in our hands, Mr. Branscombe," gravely and reproachfully said the gray-haired surgeon, the last of those who had been summoned from London, a kind, tender-hearted man of widespread fame. "This was in answer to the squire's passionate prayers to him to save her. 'Rest assured that we are doing our very utmost. But the results we can only leave in higher hands.'"

But at last, after weary weeks of waiting and suspense, the verdict was given. Stella would not die. She would live, but how? She would be a helpless cripple all her life; would never again be able to walk, though in time she might grow comparatively strong and well. There was some mysterious injury to the spine which the best medical skill could not cure. No; poor Stella would never walk again.

Dr. Marston brought the news home one evening, and long and bitterly did Katy cry over it. It seemed so sad and so cruel to think of Stella, who had always been so full of life and spirits, so blithe and active, chained for life to an invalid's couch.

"Oh! mother," she cried, passionately; "I think I would rather have died outright than have to live as she will have to."

A few more weeks passed away, and then Dr. Marston brought a message from Stella one day. Would Katy come and see her that afternoon? But Katy shrank with a shy, nervous fear.

"Oh! father, I dare not see her! What shall I say to her? She must be in such a sad trouble."

"I think your own heart will teach you what to say, my dear," he replied, kindly. "Do not turn from your friends when they are in trouble; that is the time when we all need love and friendship most. It will do the poor child good to see you, and when she has asked for you, you must not refuse."

So very timidly and reluctantly Katy went up to the hall that afternoon. It was seven weeks since she had been there last. It was glorious July weather then; now the leaves were beginning to show the yellow tints of autumn, and the golden cornfields were beginning to fall beneath the reaper's hand.

Seven weeks since Stella had been in all the strength and brightness of her youth and health, full of happy anticipations and present joys. What a change had come! The tour to Switzerland had been given up. Perhaps such a pleasure was not in store in the future for poor Stella, and as for Paris dresses, pearl necklaces, and all the hundred and one things in which girls take pleasure, what were they

to a helpless invalid, lying on her couch in pain and weariness all through the sunshine of the summer days and the golden glory of the autumn?

Stella's room looked bright and gay enough as Katy timidly entered. Flowers adorned it in every available place, and filled the air with their soft fragrance; there were pictures on the walls, good engravings and brightly tinted paintings; Stella's couch was drawn up in front of the open window, for the air was mild and balmy; by her side was a little table on which lay some hothouse fruit, some magazines newly cut, and some green-backed novels. Upon the rug which covered her lay a snow-white Persian cat stretched in luxurious repose.

Stella was looking listlessly out of the window when Katy entered, and playing absently with her cat's silky ears. She looked round slowly at her visitor's entrance, and in that first momentary glance Katy's heart swelled with a sudden wave of sorrow and pity; the poor little face was so sadly changed.

The golden locks and the blue eyes were unaltered; but under the hair, which was cut over the forehead and curled almost down to her eyebrows, was still to be plainly seen an ugly scar, marking ineffaceably the smooth white skin, while round the blue eyes were dark rings, and the face was pinched and worn and pale.

Poor Stella had hardly the ghost of a smile whereby to welcome Katy; she only held out one wasted hand and bade her sit down by her side in a voice faint and low from weakness. Katy obeyed, but so nervously and timidly that even Stella's dull eyes noticed, and she suddenly exclaimed with a hard unnatural laugh, more sad than tears would have been—

"What are you frightened of? Do you think I am going to hurt you? Why, I could not, even if I wished to!"

"I am not frightened," Katy faltered; "only—oh, Stella, I am so sorry!"

"I do not see why you should mind," Stella replied, in the same hard tone. "It does not affect you; you'll be just as well and happy as ever. I just have got to bear it all as well as I can. Only," with a sudden burst, "it's horrible; it's hateful, and I feel as if it were driving me mad! Oh, I wish I had died first!"

"Oh, hush, dear!" cried Katy, pained and shocked, but not knowing how to reply.

"It's true all the same," Stella went on recklessly; "it would have been far better to have been killed and get done with it at once than have to lie here like a log for years and years and years; who can tell how long? I am not sixteen yet, and I may live to be nine y. Oh, that wicked horse! I want papa to have him shot; I am sure he deserves it, for it was all through him it happened. Oh, it is horrible! How could God allow such a thing to be? It's so hard and cruel! and I was so happy and I meant always to have such a good time. Why don't you speak, Katy, and tell me how hateful you think it all is?"

But poor Katy knew not what answer to make to the wild reckless words. So she only put one arm round Stella's neck, laid her face down on the pillow, her brown hair mingling with the long golden locks, and began to sob and cry out of the fulness of the pity and sympathy which made her heart ache so keenly.

"Don't cry, you silly girl! Crying won't mend matters."

Stella's voice was as hard and cold as ever, but as Katy continued to weep and sob, gradually the blue eyes clouded over, her lip began to quiver piteously, and presently the assumed stoicism broke down, and Stella turned her head towards Katy's hidden face, and the two girls mingled their tears.

It was the first time Stella had been able to weep since she had heard the fatal news, and those tears, though they were passionate and almost hysterical at first, relieved wonderfully the throbbing of her brain and the burning pain at her heart.

Katy was the first to recover herself. She raised her head and wiped her eyes; then lifted Stella's face until it rested on her own breast, and began to smooth the golden hair, kiss the pale, sad, little face, and murmur tender endearing words in her ear. A great flood of love and tenderness seemed to have filled her heart; she had no idea until now that she loved Stella so much.

And Stella herself was soothed after a time, and permitted Katy to wipe her eyes and comfort her with tender words, and when she spoke again the hardness and recklessness seemed to have almost disappeared from her voice.

"It's a very poor sort of welcome to give you, Katy," she said, with a wan little smile; "I'm afraid you'll never come to see me again, only I have been so very, very miserable; it seems as if nobody ever had such a terrible trouble to bear. But I should not have thought you would have cared so much, Katy!"

"Oh, Stella, when I only wish I could help you to bear it!" cried poor Katy. "I have been so unhappy for you, dear; but perhaps the pain will not be quite so bad to bear soon. The doctors all say, father told me, that you would soon feel a great deal better."

"Pain!" echoed Stella, with a little return of the hard tone. "Do you think I'd mind about pain? I could bear that and be quite happy, looking forward to the time when I should be well again. It isn't that; it's knowing that I shall never walk again. Do you realise what that means? Think of my never being able to walk again as long as I live; never able to move myself from my couch. Think of that, and try to fancy how you'd feel if you knew it was always to be so with you. And, oh, Katy, I was so happy! I was looking forward so to going to Switzerland, and now I never shall go as long as I live. I cannot bear to see the pretty travelling dresses I had meant to wear there, and now never shall. And I shall never dance again, and I did love dancing. It's awfully hard."

And the poor, pale lip began to quiver again.

"My poor darling," Katy whispered fondly, smoothing the bright hair with a soft, tender touch, that said more than words.

Stella went on.

"Then I had looked forward so to coming out; in less than two years now. We should have gone up to London, and I should have been presented. And I'd fixed all about the dress I would wear, and had decided to choose nothing but the dearest white silk, because so few people can wear it; and I thought how proud I should feel to show everyone how I could stand the dead colour, which so few can wear, and are so glad to take advantage of ivory white and cream white on account of their poor complexions; while mine would look as beautiful as could be, because my cheeks were so pink, and my eyes so blue, and my hair so golden. And I was going to have the dress trimmed with nothing but white carnations, and a big bouquet of the same and maidenhair fern, and—"

She broke off suddenly.

"What nonsense I am talking! What's the use of saying anything about my complexion or my beauty? I've nothing left to be proud of now, and I shall never go into company now, much less to the Drawing-room."

She sighed heavily, and then went on after a moment's pause—

"But, Katy, that is not the worst. I'll tell you something I've never told to a soul, but which

has been the very hardest part of all. When I was lying so ill, and they thought I was unconscious, I once heard mamma and one of the doctors—not Dr. Marston—talking, and I heard him say how he feared I should never walk again; and then mamma said—oh, so bitterly!—“That if I was to be a helpless cripple all my life, I had far better have died at once.” Think of that, Katy. Think of one’s own mother feeling one a burden and a weariness. And I know mamma feels me to be so.”

“Oh, hush—hush, Stella! You must be mistaken!” cried Katy, in a shocked and pained voice. “I am sure it cannot be so—I am sure you are wrong. Why, a trouble like yours, you poor darling, is just the very thing to make a mother love and pity you more.”

Katy was thinking of her own mother, and judging Mrs. Branscombe’s affection by that standard; but Stella feebly shook her head.

“You don’t understand,” she said. “My mamma was very fond of me when she could be proud of me. You know she has always been a great beauty, and been very much admired, and she has always looked forward to my being a belle too—and I meant to be, I meant to be the belle of the county. But now there is nothing left for her to be proud of; I never can be a credit to her, only an incumbrance and a nuisance, and she is growing tired of me. She said she would rather I had died,” she went on, in a tone of conviction; “and if she wished it, can you wonder that I should? What do you think it feels like to have all the sunshine suddenly shut out of your life, and to know you can never take any more pleasure in things you used to like better than anything in the world? Used to like!” she repeated bitterly. “I do like them still; I love dancing, and travelling, and pretty dresses, and everything that I never can enjoy again. Oh, it is terribly hard! The vicar’s wife called one day, and talked about dispensations of Providence and bowing beneath the rod, and all that sort of thing. It didn’t do me a bit of good. It all sounded as if she had got it off by heart before she came, and she said it all as if she was repeating a lesson. It’s easy enough for her to talk when she’s well and strong, and has everything she wants, but if she felt as I did she wouldn’t talk so glibly about bowing beneath the rod—and—”

“Oh, hush, dear, you mustn’t talk so!” cried Katy, deeply shocked at Stella’s tone.

“It’s true, all the same,” was the reply.

“I’m not religious, Katy, and I don’t think I ever cared a rap for good things, or perhaps I should feel grateful to Mrs. Lowe, as no doubt I ought to. But she didn’t do me a bit of good, and I don’t want to see her again. You’ve helped me far more, dear, than she did with all her set speeches and nice little phrases. Now we’ll try to talk of something livelier. Won’t you have a peach? And please ring the bell and we’ll have tea, and you shall pour it out for me.”

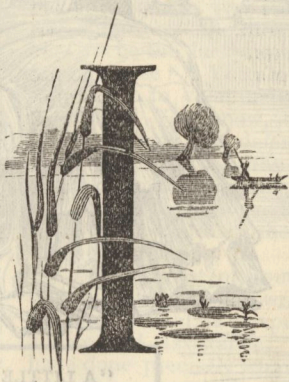
But though Katy did her best to entertain Stella with pleasant gossip and chit-chat, the attempt was a dismal failure. The careless words, “I am not religious,” had grieved Katy’s tender little heart, but she knew not how to answer them. It seemed to her that in Stella’s position religion was the only comfort she could find. How she wished she knew what to say that would be fit and appropriate! She thought of her favourite little poem of the daisy and buttercup, but feared whether Stella would care for the application. Besides, the positions seemed to have changed altogether.

It was the daisy that might envy the buttercup now.

(To be continued.)

ON ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS.

A WORD OF WARNING.



In the pressure of many subjects, we feel that we have not spoken with necessary emphasis on the danger of trusting to advertisements which offer a great return for very small investments.

Among our readers there are many just entering on life as workers, who are anxious to be put in the way of earning

money for their support, and many more who, inheriting a small patrimony insufficient to supply all their wants, are desirous to add to it with as little disturbance to their domestic comfort as possible. From these classes, as well as from elderly women whose means have been straitened by circumstances, many dishonest advertisers draw their victims, and although only a small outlay need be made, promise an immediate return, and that at the ratio of at least 100 per cent., and if art is to be the source of wealth, it is an art which can be learnt with little expense of time, and the work can be done at home. In one case, where the increase of income is to be obtained without study and without interference with ordinary pursuits, the respondent is informed that the desired accession is easily procurable from the percentage on the sale of cheap jewellery, to be supplied by the advertisers!

Among a host of other absurd and cruel advertisements, one which has lately come under our notice promises to teach china-painting to persons who have no previous knowledge of art in an incredibly short time; but we will quote the words of a letter sent to a lady who answered an advertisement. “By my system of teaching any person of ordinary capacity can learn the art in about a month or five weeks, and a thorough good income can always be made either by giving lessons or by working for some of the many firms who deal in artistic products.” After much more to the same effect, he informs his client that if she follows the “clear, lucid instructions which he sends she can learn the art with facility at home.”

The young lady, we need hardly say, having spent time and money on this *ignis fatuus*, is very far from being in the receipt of a “thorough good income”—in fact, she has nothing but a few spoilt tiles, though she is a person of at least “ordinary capacity,” and most anxious to learn.

This is the third case of which we have become personally cognisant within the last six months, and in one instance a lady of more than middle life and very straitened means was mulcted of over £60.

Surely, then, it is high time that young mariners on the sea of life be warned off these dangerous quicksands, and exhorted to trust to nothing but the true mariner’s compass of steady and persistent work, which alone will certainly guide them into good havens at last.



WHEN THE MISTS HAVE ROLLED AWAY.

When the mists have rolled in splendour
From the beauty of the hills,
And the sunshine, warm and tender,
Falls in kisses on the rills,
We may read love’s shining letter
In the rainbow of the spray;
We shall know each other better
When the mists have rolled away.

If we err, in human blindness,
And forget that we are dust;
If we miss the law of kindness
When we struggle to be just,
Snowy wings of peace shall cover
All the anguish of to-day,
When the weary watch is over,
And the mists have cleared away.

When the silver mist has veiled us
From the faces of our own,
Oft we deem their love has tailed us,
And we tread our path alone.
We should see them near and truly,
We should see them day by day;
Never love nor blame unduly
If the mists have cleared away.

When the mists have ris’n above us,
As our Father knows His own,
Face to face with those that love us,
We shall know as we are known.
Lo, beyond the orient meadows
Floats the golden fringe of day;
Heart to heart we’ll bide the shadows
Till the mists have cleared away.