

Little Alice's Palace; or, the Sunny Heart

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P.O. Box 22687
Honolulu, Hawaii 96823
info@WorldLibrary.net



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**LITTLE ALICE'S PALACE;
OR,
THE SUNNY HEART.**

LONDON:
T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW;
EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1872.



Chapter I.

The rain was pattering, pattering steadily upon the roof of a little brown cottage that stood alone by the country roadside.

There had been a long and dreary winter, and now the bright spring was coming, with its buds and leaves and flowers, to gladden the earth, that had all the time seemed to be dead.

As the shower came down, the little green blades of grass sprang up to catch the drops; and they seemed almost to laugh and sing, so full of joy were they when they could lift their heads from the dust.

It was so much sweeter to be out once more from their prison-house and to exult with all God's fair creation; so they bathed themselves in the falling shower, and made themselves fresh and clean; and nobody would ever have believed that they came out from their dark beds in the earth.

Little Alice looked out of the windows of the brown cottage, and saw them nodding gaily to her as they were taking their bath; and so she smiled back again, and talked to them from her perch in the window-seat as if they were brothers and sisters, with eyes and ears to see and hear, and hearts to return her love. Indeed, there was no one else to whom she could talk the livelong day. No father, for he was dead; no living brothers and sisters; no mother at home, for they were very poor, and her mother must be gone at early dawn to labour for their food and clothing and shelter;—and so Alice had to make companions of the blades of grass that nodded at her through the drops.

“Oh, you beauties!” said she gladly; “and I know who made you, too, and what a great, good God he is to send you here—bright little creatures that you are. How pleasant it will be down by the brook-side when the sun comes out, and you and I and the blue violets and the dandelions have our visiting-time together! Never a little girl had such joy as I have!” And Alice put her face close to the pane, and looked up into the sky to thank her kind heavenly Father for sending her such blessings. It seemed as if she could see him bending graciously down towards her, as her Sunday-school teacher had often represented him to her; and then she thought of Him who was upon the

earth, and who took up little children in his arms and blessed them; and she put out her hands towards the heavens, saying earnestly, "Me, too, dear Saviour: bless me too!"

So absorbed was she that she didn't hear anybody enter the room until a timid voice said,—

"Who were you speaking to, Alice?"

There was such a woful figure by the door as she turned her head—no bonnet, no shoes, and a tattered frock, all dragged with dirt and rain, and the long, uncombed locks straggling about the child's shoulders, and such a blue, pinched look in the thin face!

"Oh, it's you, Maddie, is it?" said Alice, jumping from the window and taking the hand of the new-comer. "But it was a pity to get so wet. I'm glad you've come. We'll keep house together till it clears away, and then maybe we'll have a nice walk. First we must dry your clothes, though." And she put some sticks in the fireplace, and putting a match to them, stationed Maddie before the blaze, while she held the skirt out to dry.

"Isn't it pleasant here?" asked Alice, with a beaming smile.

Maddie looked around, with a half shrug, upon the cheerless room, with its bit of a table and the one chair and the low, curtainless window, and then her eyes fell upon the scantily-clad little girl by her side; and then she shivered, as the dampness of her clothes sent a creeping chill through her frame; but she didn't say it was pleasant.

"Aren't you afraid to stay here so much alone, Alice?" she asked, giving another glance about the room.

"But I never stay *alone*, Maddie!" answered the dear child. "I have plenty of company—'Tabby,' and the flies, and now and then a spider, and everything that goes by the door, and the clouds and the sunshine and the leaves and the—oh dear! so many things, Maddie, that I can't begin to tell you." And she stopped short for want of breath.

"And somebody you were talking to. Who was that?" asked Maddie.

"Ah, yes, best of all! Don't you know, Maddie?" said Alice, sinking her voice to a whisper, and gazing earnestly at her young companion. "Miss Mason told me how He is everywhere, and sees and hears us, and that he loves us better

than our mother or father can do, and watches over us and keeps us from all harm. If you go to the school with me you'll learn all about it, Maddie dear. No, no; I'm never *alone* though mother *is gone* all the long day."

"Do you *see* Him, Alice?" asked Maddie earnestly.

"Not as I see *you*, Maddie," returned her companion with reverence; "but when I look up into the sky, and sometimes when I sit here by myself and speak things that I have learned from my Bible, I seem to feel some strange brightness all above and around me; and it's so real to me that it's just like seeing with these eyes. Miss Mason says 'it's my soul that sees.' Whatever it is, it's very beautiful, Maddie." And Alice clasped her hands in a sort of ecstasy, and drew near to the window to look up once more into the heavens, whither her eyes and her heart so continually turned.

Chapter II.

The shower did not last long, and the warm sun melted the diamonds from the grass, so that it was soon fit for the little girls to go out into the freshness and enjoy the pleasant air.

“Don’t you think this a pretty cottage?” asked Alice, as they stepped outside and stood looking upon her home. “See the moss all over the shingles; how velvety it is! Tabby goes up there to sleep on the soft cushion in the sun. And here’s where I put my convolvuluses, and they climb up and run all over the window and make such a nice curtain, with the pink and blue and white and purple mixed with the green; and they reach up to the very chimney, Maddie, and hug it round, and then trail down upon the roof. Oh, I think it’s elegant! And here’s my flower-bed, right under the window, where mother can smell the blossoms as we sit sewing when she has a day at home. We take real comfort here, mother and I, Maddie.” And so the little blithesome child prattled about her humble home, while her companion looked in astonishment upon her, wondering why it was that Alice always seemed so happy, while *she* was so miserable.

“We’ll go down by the brook-side now,” said Alice. “There’s my grand palace. Such hangings! all blue and gold and crimson; and carpets that your feet sink into; and a great mirror, such as the richest man couldn’t buy. Don’t you know what I mean, Maddie?” And Alice laughed gleefully as they reached the brook-side, and pointed to the heavens above, so brilliant in the sunny radiance, and down to the green and flowery turf beneath their feet, and to the clear stream that reflected all things, like the purest glass. And she said, “Now, don’t you like my palace, Maddie?”

“Yes, it’s very pretty here,” said Maddie; but she didn’t seem to feel about it as Alice did, who was in such good spirits that she could keep neither her feet nor her tongue still, but frisked about the green like a young deer, and chattered like a magpie, only in far sweeter tones.

“*This is my bower,*” said she, lifting up the drooping branches of a willow and shutting herself and Maddie within. “Here I come for a nap when I am tired of play; and the leaves rustle in the wind, making a pleasant sound, and the birds sit on the boughs and sing me asleep, and I dream always happy dreams. When awake, I think about the pure river that my Bible speaks of, and the tree of life that is on either side, and the beautiful light that isn’t like the sun, nor the moon, nor the blaze of a candle, but comes from the face of God, and is never hidden from us to leave us in darkness.”

Maddie sat down upon a large stone that Alice called her throne, and looked eagerly up at her companion for more; for Alice’s words seemed to her like some beautiful story out of a book.

“Did you ever go into any great house, Maddie?” asked Alice.

“No, never,” said Maddie. “I passed by Mrs. Cowper’s one day, and looked in at the open door when somebody was coming out, but I couldn’t see much.”

“That’s just where I went with mother,” said Alice; “and little Mary took me into a high room, the walls all velvet and satin and gold, so that my eyes ached for looking; and there were such heaps of pretty things on the tables and all about the place; but it didn’t make me feel glad as I do when I get out here in my grand palace with these living, breathing things around me. O Maddie, there isn’t anything on earth so beautiful as what God has made!”

“Do you stay out here always?” asked Maddie.

“Oh no,” said Alice; “that would be idle. When mother has work I stay at home to help her. I’ve learned to sew nicely now, and can save mother many a stitch. To-day’s my holiday, and I can play with you as long as you please. I’ve brought some dinner, and we’ll set a table in my dining-hall.” And she took from her pocket a little parcel, and led Maddie from the bower to a hollow near the brook, where was a flat rock, and there she spread her frugal fare.

There were two pieces of homemade bread and a small slice of cold bacon, which she put upon leaves in the middle of the rocky table; and gathering some violets, she placed them in bunches here and there, till the table was sweet with their delicious fragrance.

Just as the children were about to help themselves to the food, there came some little tired feet over the grass; and a more forlorn figure than Maddie's stood a few yards off, looking shyly, but wistfully, at them.

"Now, Lolly, you may just run home again as quick as you can," said Maddie sharply. "We haven't enough dinner for Alice and me. Go, now!" And she went towards her and gave her a slight push, at which the child cried, but without turning away or making a step towards home.

"Is that your sister?" asked Alice, going up to Maddie.

"Yes; she's always running after me," returned Maddie, with an ill-natured frown.

"Poor little thing!" said Alice. "I wish my sister Nellie had lived. I shouldn't be cross to her, I know. Come here, Lolly: you shall have some of *my* dinner." And she led the little grateful child to the wild table, that seemed to her like a fairy scene, with the fresh leaf-plates, and the pure sweet flowers breathing so delightfully.

"Mother makes capital bread—doesn't she, Maddie?" said Alice, as she ate her small portion with evident relish, while she shared the remnant with her guests.

"Now, Maddie," said she, as they finished the repast, "you clear the table and wash the dishes, and Lolly and I'll go to my mirror to make ourselves nice to sit down, and then I'll tell you the story my teacher told me the other day, if you would like to hear it."

Maddie gladly agreed to this; and Lolly gave herself up to the gentle hands of her new friend, who took her to the brook and washed her face until the dirt all vanished and her cheeks were like two red roses. Then she took her pocket-comb, and, dipping it into the water, made the child's hair so smooth that Lolly didn't know herself when she looked into the brook, and asked, "What little girl it was with such bright eyes and fresh rosy cheeks?" And when Alice told her that it was herself, she laughed with delight, and said "she would come every day to dress herself by Alice's mirror if she could look so nice." And then Alice and Maddie and Lolly went to the bower for the story.

Alice sat down on the grassy bank, and Lolly laid her head upon her friend's lap, while Maddie crowded close to her to listen.

“I don’t know that I can remember it very well,” said Alice;
“but I’ll tell it as nearly as I can like Miss Mason. She called it
‘The Little Exiled Princess,’ and this is it.”

Chapter III.

Once upon a time there was a little girl no bigger than Lolly here, sitting in the dirt by the roadside, crying.

Her frock was all ragged and soiled, and the tears had run over the dust upon her face, making it streaked, and disfiguring it sadly.

Altogether, she was a very miserable little object, when a lady, walking along the road, suddenly came upon her, and stopped to see what was the matter.

As the lady gazed upon the strange, ragged little creature, there came tears into her eyes, and she said softly, as if speaking to herself,—

“Who would think that this is the daughter of a great King?”

The child, seeing a beautiful lady before her, jumped from the ground, and, with shame, began to shake herself from the dirt that clung to her garments; but the stranger, taking no notice of her untidy condition, clasped the child’s fingers in her white hand, and told her to lead her to her home.

It was a brown cottage, very like mine, only *that* one was hung with cobwebs, and the dust was an inch thick upon the floor, and the window was so begrimed that scarcely any light came through.

“Ugh!” said the lady, as she stood upon the threshold and looked in.

“Bring me a broom!” And she brushed away the hanging webs, and made the floor neat and clean, and taught the child to wash the window, until the bright sun came in and played about the floor and upon the walls; and then she made the little girl wash her face and hands, and put on a better frock, that she found in the chest.

“Now, my little princess,” said she, “come outside for a while, in the fresh air, and I will talk to you.”

“Why do you call me ‘little princess’?” asked the child, as they sat down upon the cottage-step, while the birds twittered about them and the sweet breath of summer touched their cheeks.

“Because you are the daughter of a great King,” said the lady, gently stroking her soft, brown hair, that she had found so tangled and shaggy, but had made so nice and smooth.

“My father was a poor man, and he lies in the graveyard,” said the little girl, as she looked wonderingly at her friend.

“Yes; but I mean your heavenly Father,” said the lady—“he whom we call GOD. Surely you have heard of him, my dear child!”

The little girl said that she had heard of him; but, from what she could learn, the lady knew that she looked upon him as one that is afar off; and she wished to teach her how very near he is continually, even round about her bed and about her path, and spying out all her ways.

“Do you live here all alone, dear child?” asked she kindly.

Her words were so sweet and gentle that they sounded like the murmur of the brook near the little child’s home.

“All day long alone, while mother is away at her work,” answered the child, with her eyes full of sad tears.

“And what do you do with the weary hours? Do they not seem very dull and dreary to you?” asked the lady.

“Ah, yes,” said the little one. “I have nobody to play with or talk to; and I’m glad when the night comes and I can creep into bed and shut my eyes and forget everything.”

“What if you had some kind friend ever near, to smile on you and bless you,—somebody to whom you could tell all your little sorrows as you are now doing to me?” said the lady. “Would that be pleasant?”

“Oh yes, indeed!” returned the child. “Will you stay?” for she had felt it very sweet to be sitting there with the kind lady’s words falling like music upon her ear, and her heart was lighter and happier than it had been in all her life.

“I cannot always be with you,” said the lady. “But there is One who ‘will never leave you.’ How beautiful he has made everything about you!” And she looked upon the green earth, with the peeping flowers, and upon the delicate shrubs that skirted the roadside, and the wild-roses and creeping plants

along the hedges, and then she looked up into the blue heavens, with such an expression of love that the child gazed at her with rapture.

“Such a good God!” said the lady, still looking up with the bright light upon her face. “And such a wondrously beautiful world, where we may walk joyously, with his love in our hearts as well as all about our path; and yet we sit in the dust weeping, and forget that he is our Father, and that he is watching for us to turn towards him—poor, wandering, wayward children that we are!”

Though the lady spoke as if to herself, the child knew that she was thinking of her; for she had not quite put away the shame of her first appearance; and she touched her white hand timidly with her brown finger, and said, really in earnest, “I won’t sit in the dirt again.”

“That’s a dear child,” said her friend. “You must never again forget that, although you are poor, and must live in this world for a while, you are in truth a little exiled princess, and your glorious home is with the great King, your Father, in the skies; and it does not become the daughter of so great a King to put herself on a level with the beasts; but you must lift yourself up more and more towards heaven.”

The little girl looked at her, and straightened her figure to its greatest possible height.

“Not to carry yourself proudly, as the daughter of an earthly king might do,” continued the lady, “but be above doing a mean or low thing, and try to be heavenly and pure, like your blessed Lord and Father; and then he will lift you up to his beautiful, high throne.”

The child’s head drooped again, and she looked despondingly at her teacher, as if she did not really know what to do.

“I’m going now,” said the lady; “but I shall come once a week to see how you get on. I shall not expect the cobwebs to gather any more in the cottage, nor the dust to collect upon the floor, nor to shut out the sun from the window, nor the little princess’s face to be dirty and ugly; because that would offend the pure and holy God, who made this world fresh and clean and beautiful, and expects his children to keep it so. Do you think you will remember ‘Our Father’?”

“‘Who art in heaven,’” said the child, calling to mind the prayer taught her some time in her life, but long since almost forgotten.

“Not in heaven *only*, dear child,” said the lady. “I want you to think of him as close beside you always, wherever you go. Can you read?”

“A little.”

The lady opened a pocket-Bible, and drawing the little girl closer to her, said, “Now, say after me,—

“‘Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.’

“You see, my dear child,” said she, as she reverently closed the book, “we cannot get away from God if we would, and surely we would not try to hide ourselves from so kind a Friend and Father if we could. Only when we are doing something that we are ashamed of do we shun the face of one who loves us; and if we try to flee from the eye of God we may be sure we are guilty of some wickedness. How much sweeter is it to do what we know will please him, and look freely up into his face, as a good child delights to meet his earthly parent’s smile!”

The lady rose to go, and the child looked wistfully at her and then at the little Bible.

“Ah yes; I will give you this. It will tell you what to do.” And she put the book into the child’s hands. “You will read a chapter every day till I come?”

The little girl gladly promised, but was sad at the parting; for never an hour passed so cheerily as the hour with the kind teacher.

“You may be sure I’ll come again, for *He* sends me,” said the lady. And she looked up once more with the heavenly face, and then stooped till her soft lips touched the child’s forehead; and, while the pressure of the gentle kiss thrilled through the very soul of the little girl, her friend was gone.

Chapter IV

“Did she come again?” asked Maddie, who had got upon her knees in front of Alice, with mouth and eyes and ears wide open for the story.

“Oh yes; many and many a time,” said Alice. “And she taught the little girl to see her Father’s love in the trees, and the flowers, and all about, as she walked amid his beautiful creation; and she learned to be a neat, tidy little girl, instead of the dirty, miserable creature that sat crying in the dirt by the roadside when she first saw her friend. The lady taught her to look upon herself as greatly beloved by her Father, and after that she was not miserable any more.”

“Did you ever see the little princess?” asked Lolly, raising her head from Alice’s lap and looking earnestly at her.

“Yes, indeed. Every day since the lady came to her,” said Alice. “She lives in the same cottage now; but it has grown to be a beautiful place; for God’s flowers are all about it, and God’s sun streams in at the window, and all over the mossy roof, like a golden flood,—and God himself is always with her to keep her from harm and from being lonely or sad.” And as Alice said this, the tears glistened in her blue eyes, as the dew-drops sparkle through the sunlight in the violets.

“We’ll go and see her now,” continued she; “and I’ll show you two other little exiled princesses.” And she took Lolly and Maddie down by the brook-side, and bade them look in her great mirror; and there they saw themselves and Alice—all children of the great King.

“Ah, now I know!” said Maddie, clapping her hands. “*You* are the little princess, Alice, and Miss Mason is the good lady. Is she so nice as all that?”

“*Just as nice*, dear Maddie,” replied Alice; “and if you and Lolly will go with me to the Sunday-school, she’ll tell us a great many more beautiful stories, to help us on our way to our heavenly home.”

“But come. It is nearly time for us to go now. Mother will be looking for me. Good-bye.”

And the little girl with the sunny heart bounded into the cottage with a smile and a kiss for her mother.

Chapter V.

When Alice left the children, they went sauntering along the road towards home. Very slowly they walked, and not joyously and hopefully, as little children do who think of their father's house as the brightest and dearest spot in the whole world.

It was a long distance from the brown cottage of their friend; but the freshness of the evening made it delightful to be out, and they had been resting so many hours that they were not weary. Besides, the twinkling stars came out in the sky, and there was shining above them the calm, bright moon; and altogether it was so serene and lovely, that they almost wished they could be always walking in some pleasant path that should have no unpleasant thing at the end—such as they felt their home to be. Presently they came to a bend in the road, and a few steps from the corner was a low-roofed house, a ruinous-looking place, with rags stuffed in the broken window-panes. There were green fields around it, and tall trees gracefully waving near it; but the old house spoiled the landscape by its slovenly, shabby appearance.

A dim light was burning in the room nearest the children; and as they approached, they could see their father and mother sitting at a table, eating their coarse supper of bread and cold salt pork.

Lolly thought what a pleasant table Alice had by the brook-side, and the scent of the violets seemed even now to reach her, and the music of the waters was in her ears, and the bright, happy face of her little playmate came freshly before her, making the dingy room where her parents sat, with the gloom of the dim light and the tattered dusty furniture, still more uninviting and cheerless.

Lolly lingered outside the door, while Maddie entered. She sat down upon the step, and called to mind all that Alice had said to them that day.

She was younger than Maddie by a year or two, but her soul was older—that is, it was more thoughtful and earnest; and instead of dwelling always on the things of earth, she had a

wistful longing for something higher and better, which Alice's words had begun to satisfy.

The cool breeze played upon her cheek, and the sound of the air, as it rustled the leaves, and the breath of the flower-scented meadows fell soothingly upon her senses; and as she looked up into the starry sky, with its myriads of gleaming lights, and recalled the story, she felt within herself that indeed she was a little princess as well as Alice, and that far above all the glory of the heavens her Father was awaiting her return to the heavenly palace.

"Maddie and I mustn't forget these things," said she to herself; "but must try to get ready for our better home."

So much was Lolly thinking of the things she had heard in the story, that she might have sat there in the dew all night, but that her mother called her to eat her supper and go to bed.

Maddie was already fast asleep upon a trundle-bed, that was pushed under the great bed by day, and drawn out at night; for there were only the two rooms in the house, and they had to make the most of all the space.

Lolly had never felt the house so small and close as on this night; for her soul was swelling with such large free thoughts, that the four narrow walls of the bedroom seemed to press in upon her and almost to stop her breath.

She could not go to bed until she had opened the window and looked up once more into the bright sky; and as she did so, she said very earnestly, "O my Father!"

She did not know any prayers. She had never been taught to call upon God. Most that she had ever heard of the other life was through Alice's story that day; and her heart was so glad of the knowledge, that it already began to go out towards her heavenly home and her gracious Father.

As she spoke these words, there came such a happy feeling to her spirit—a feeling that she was not alone, but that she was watched over and protected; and with a sense of security and safety, such as she had never before known, she lay down beside her sister, and was soon sweetly slumbering.

Chapter VI.

Lolly was awakened in the morning by the fretful voice of her mother, as she went scolding about the house, trying to pick up something for breakfast; and she heard her father answering her in no pleasant mood, and kicking about the floor whatever came in his way.

It was a sad awakening for poor Lolly, and, for the minute, it put wholly out of her mind the pleasure of the previous day, and the lesson learned in the green and sunny place by the brook-side; and she was sorely tempted to cover her head with the bed-clothes, and sleep again, until her parents were off to their work, and then give herself up to idleness and play, as she had always done. But the bright happy face of Alice came before her to help her, and she was out of bed in a minute.

“Maddie, Maddie!” said she, leaning over her sister and giving her the least bit of a shake in order to arouse her; “come, get up. The sun is shining on the wall, and it is a beautiful day. I want you to go with me for Alice.”

“Get away!” returned Maddie in a huff. “I haven’t slept half enough!” And, settling herself again, she dropped off into a heavier slumber; while Lolly, seeing that it would do no good to disturb her, dressed herself and went into the other room.

Her mother was baking a cake, and her father sat near, idle. Both looked surprised to see Lolly up so early.

There was a woollen-factory in the village, perhaps half a mile away, and they were off generally long before the children were up; and Maddie and Lolly usually ate such pickings as they left upon the table, and spent their days as they pleased, with little thought or care from their parents.

Lolly could not wait to get her breakfast. She cared for nothing to eat, now that her mind was intent upon some great thing, and she sped away over the dewy grass to find her new friend. She had never been in Alice’s house, for they had only lived a little while in the place where they now were, and Maddie alone had

found out their neighbour. Her sister would not always let her play with her, and it was only a mere chance that led her to follow Maddie the day before and get acquainted with Alice.

I did not mean to say *chance*. I would rather say a kind watchful *Providence*—which is the true and right word for a Christian to use; because everything that happens in this world is governed by God’s over-ruling power for some good purpose; and Lolly was led to the spot where her sister and Alice were at play, expressly that she might learn something of her bright, eternal home.

Now that she had seen the sunny-hearted little girl once, it took her but very few minutes to find her again.

The distance seemed nothing at all; and, from the time she left her own door, she could see the cheerful face all along her way, making her walk very pleasant and not in the least lonely.

The cottage door was wide open, and the sunlight lay in golden streaks on the floor at the entrance, where Tabby had stretched herself comfortably. Lolly could see into the little square room at the right.

The table was spread with a neat, white cloth, and Alice and her mother were eating their breakfast together. There were two white plates on the table, and white cups and saucers, and a smoking dish of porridge. All this Lolly could see as she stood hesitating near the door; but, in a minute, Alice caught a glimpse of her little, shy face, and ran to lead her in.

“You must have some of this nice breakfast,” said she, giving Lolly a plateful of the porridge, and pouring some milk on it from a small white pitcher.

Lolly looked timidly at Alice’s mother, to see if she might eat it; and the kind pleasant smile she received made her feel quite at home, so that she needed no further urging.

Soon after the mother went away, and left Alice to put the room in order; and, when all things were right, Alice said “she could go with Lolly as well as not that day, and they would make a pretty place of the shabby cottage; for it was just in the best spot—so wild and shady and green.”

It was rather a sorrowful task at the beginning, and almost any other little girl than Alice would have been quite discouraged.

There was a great deal of rubbish in the sitting-room, and the floor and windows looked as if they had never known anything

of soap and water. Maddie sat upon the top of a half-barrel, swinging her brown, soiled feet, and playing with a black puppy, that was snapping at her toes; while the table was strewn with crumbs and dirty dishes from the morning's meal, and chips and sticks and bits of rags were upon the floor.

She looked as if she had just got out of bed. Her face was dull, and her hair showed no touch of brush or comb, and her nails were long and dirty; but she jumped from her perch with some signs of shame as she saw Alice, so neat and tidy, at the door; and she began to scramble about as if she wished to make things a little better.

“May I help you to-day, Maddie?” asked Alice. “I haven't any work at home, and I like to get things tidy. We'll make such a room of this before night!” And, without another word, she began in earnest to bring order out of strange confusion.

Lolly was a capital helper, because her heart was in the matter, and she really wanted a pleasant, cheerful home; but Maddie was content to look on, and scarcely moved a finger to help.

They packed away the wood and chips in the closet under the lowest shelf, and washed the dishes and set them up edgewise in their proper places; and they mopped the floor, and scrubbed the windows and table, and brought boughs of evergreen to hang upon the nails around the walls and make it cheerful and pretty.

Alice thought of this. She said, “Rich folks hang paintings on their walls—and these are God's pictures, the work of his almighty fingers, and so beautiful! Why not put them where we can always look at them, and in them see his love and kindness?”

Lolly thought her the most wonderful little girl in all the world, and clapped her hands for joy as she looked upon the altered room.

Then they went outside, and swept the sticks and chips from the lawn; and Maddie managed to hunt up a hammer and some old rusty nails, and to help Alice to fasten the loose boards upon the door, which improved it more than anything else could do.

It was so low from the roof to the ground that by stepping on a chair they could easily reach; and they trained a running rose-bush, that had been long neglected, and hung, trailing, over the grass, so that it nearly covered the whole side of the cottage, and would soon be like a bright green mantle over the dark walls.

Chapter VII.

Just as they had finished their labours, and Alice had prevailed upon Maddie to put herself in a little better order, and the three young friends had seated themselves upon the step to get something from Alice's Bible—some words of love and blessing, as Alice said, from their heavenly Father—there came a lady up the road towards them. She was walking very slowly along, with her parasol shielding her face, so that it was quite concealed from the children; but Alice knew her dress, and ran quickly to meet her, crying joyously, "It is Miss Mason, dear Lolly!"

Maddie ran into the cottage and hid behind the door, like a foolish little girl; but Lolly sat still, very glad that the good teacher was coming to speak to her, yet trembling with a sort of nervous fear; because she was a shy little girl, and so seldom saw strangers.

She wondered that Alice dared go so fearlessly up and walk along, with her hand in Miss Mason's hand, and her face upturned towards the lady's, while she talked as freely as if it had been herself or Maddie listening. But when Miss Mason stood by the step and stooped down to kiss her sun-burned cheek, and said sweetly, "So this is your little friend Lolly, is it, Alice?" she did not wonder any longer; for her heart leaped to meet the gentle lady, and she could not take her eyes from such a kind and loving face.

"Where's Maddie?" asked Miss Mason, with a smile.

She could see her peeping through the crack of the door; and, understanding the case, she said carelessly,—

"I suppose she will join us by-and-by. We will sit here and read in Alice's book until she comes, and then I want to talk to you. Alice told me you lived here, Lolly, and I want you to go to the Sunday-school. We are very happy there, are we not, Alice?"

Alice answered with a beaming face, and she and Lolly sat, one on each side of the teacher, and listened as she read to them from God's holy Word.

She read first about the creation of this beautiful world, and the garden where Adam and Eve were placed; and, when she had made Lolly and Maddie understand all about how sin came—for Maddie, attracted by the sweet voice and pleasant manner, had crept softly from her hiding-place and curled herself upon the step behind the lady—Miss Mason turned to the New Testament and read to them a few verses about Jesus, who took upon himself our nature and suffered for our sins.

The children were much impressed by the story of the Saviour's sufferings and death; and when the teacher told them that every naughty word and deed of theirs was like a nail in the Saviour's feet or hands, they felt that they would never again do a wicked thing.

Then she told them how impossible it would be for them to keep from sin without God's continual help; and she taught them how to look up to him and ask for his aid and blessing. And when she had made sure that they could say a short prayer, and had obtained a promise from them that they would go every Sunday to the Sunday-school, she kissed them all three very affectionately, and went on to search for others of her heavenly Father's wandering children.

"When she had gone quite out of sight, and they were taking another good look at the changed rooms, that seemed so grand to them all, Lolly said thoughtfully to Alice,—

"Do you think the great King will like to come here now?"

"He *is* here," said Alice reverently. "Don't you feel it, Lolly? We never see him, you know, as we see each other; but we feel that he is near, just as you feel that your mother is in the room even when the darkness hides her from your eyes."

Lolly repeated the little prayer softly, "O my heavenly Father, I will try to love thee. Wilt thou not come unto me, and be with me wherever I am, and help me to be thy child?" And, as she said the words, she knew that God was with her, and that from that hour there was a Presence in the house that would drive away all the gloom, and make such brightness as filled the cottage of her little friend.

It was time for Alice to go; but she lingered a little while longer to teach Maddie how to prepare the supper, so that when her

mother came home weary from her labour, there might be no more hard work for her to do, but real comfort and rest.

“Now, don’t get tired of housekeeping,” said she, as she tied on her sun-bonnet to go. “I shall run over some day to see how you get on; and I’m sure it’s so much prettier to be sweet, and clean, and tidy, that you’ll love to keep the house nice.” And away she tripped to make things pleasant for her own dear, hard-working mother.

Sunny little girl! She knew how many tiresome steps her diligent hands and loving heart could save her poor widowed mother; and in everything she did there was a tender thought of the warm heart against which her infant head had lain when her little feet and hands were weak and helpless.

She was glad now that they had grown strong to aid, that she could give back some of the care and effort. Alice never dreamed of growing impatient in her mother’s service. She did not wait to be asked to help her, but watched for opportunities, and so proved a great blessing and treasure in the lowly cottage home, that would have been very dismal and sad without her sunny, buoyant little body.

Chapter VIII.

Peter Rand and his wife came lagging up the road as the sun was setting. They had passed an uncommonly laborious day, and were completely tired out with their toil. They were very silent, and were thinking what a sad, miserable home was theirs, and how little of cheer they had in life. Nothing seemed bright to them, although the earth was like a paradise for greenness and fragrance and beauty. As they drew near the house, Mr. Rand was very much surprised by the great change in the outward aspect of the place. He could scarcely believe that he had not mistaken the road, and come to some other cottage than the slovenly one that he had left in the morning.

His wife, intent upon the supper that her hungry appetite craved, had pressed forward in haste to prepare it.

As she entered the door, however, she started back with the strange feeling that she was in the house of some neighbour; but Pug, the little dog, ran frisking about her, and convinced her that it was indeed her own house.

The table was set in the middle of the room, and the dishes were arranged in nice order; and just in the centre was Lolly's pewter mug, with a bunch of sweet, blue violets to grace it all.

There was the savoury odour of the baking cake from the fire, and the fumes of the steeping tea filled the room, and already gave a sense of refreshing to the weary work-people.

The rags were taken from the windows, and square bits of paper were pinned over the openings; and the floor was neat and clean, and the beautiful green boughs hung upon the walls, and the children sat, with clean hands and faces, awaiting the return of father and mother.

They looked so bright and happy that the weary couple quite forgot their fatigue, and chatted merrily over their pleasant meal, praising the children for their thoughtful work, and saying they didn't believe there was a more beautiful home in the world than theirs.

Altogether, it was a very happy evening. Maddie and Lolly made their father and mother sit down quietly while they cleared off the table, and washed the dishes, and swept the crumbs away; and then they all had a cozy little time, talking of new hopes and plans. For the change was so comfortable that it put life and spirits into every soul; and the father said he would get some glass and putty and mend the windows; and the mother would make some white curtains, and the children would get evergreen and form it into wreaths to loop them up. Oh, it takes so little to make a cheerful, happy home! It is only the idle and vicious that need be really miserable. If God does not always give us plenty of money, he furnishes us with so many rich things in this world of his, that we may adorn even a lowly and barren place until it shall appear richer than the gayest palace. Maddie and Lolly found this out through Alice; and every day they hunted the woods for mosses and flowers, and their father made little shelves to put them on, and formed many a pretty seat of twisted branches of trees; so that by-and-by their cottage was one of the prettiest places anywhere around, and attracted the notice of everybody that passed it.

Miss Mason came very often, now that she had found them out; and she not only prevailed on the parents to send their children to Sunday-school, but they themselves went regularly to church, and tried to serve the great and holy God who had put it into the hearts of their children to make their earthly place of abode something akin to the better home.

So soon as they began to feel the presence of the heavenly King, all the despondency and gloom vanished, and, even though poor and hard-working, they were happy in the possession of such riches as nothing but the love and favour of our heavenly Father can give.

Chapter IX.

It was not very long after the children learned to look away from earth to the blest abode beyond the skies, when Lolly began to droop and grow weak and listless; and, although her parents and Maddie thought it was but a trifling illness, she herself felt that her Father was about to call her home. She was not afraid to die; and, when she grew so languid that her little feet lost the power to take her to the Sunday-school, Miss Mason and Alice and the kind minister came often to talk to her of her approaching joy.

There was one beautiful little story that the minister used to tell her over and over again, she liked it so much. I do not know whether he made it, or whether he got it from some book; but I want to tell it to you, for I like it as well as Lolly did. It is this:—"There was a bright, beautiful butterfly that was about to die. She had laid her eggs on a cabbage-leaf in the garden; and, as she thought of her children, she said to a caterpillar that was crawling upon the leaf, 'I am going to die. I feel my strength fast failing, and I want you to take care of my little ones.'

"The caterpillar promised, and the butterfly folded her wings and breathed her last.

"Then the caterpillar did not know what to do. She wanted some instruction with regard to her charge: so she thought she would ask a lark, that went soaring up into the blue sky. At first the lark was silent, and plumed his wings and went up—up—up, as if to gather wisdom for his answer; and then he came, singing, down and said,—

"I'll tell you something about your charge; but you won't believe me. These young butterflies that you look for will become caterpillars.'

"Poh! poh!' said the old caterpillar. 'I don't believe a word of it.'

"No; I told you you wouldn't. And what do you suppose they will live upon?' said the lark.

“‘Why, the dew and the sweet honey from the flowers, to be sure,’ replied the caterpillar. ‘That is what all butterflies live on.’

“‘They won’t, indeed,’ said the lark. ‘They will eat cabbage-leaves.’ And he went soaring away again into the clear heavens.

“Presently, back he came and said to the caterpillar,—

“‘I’ll tell you something stranger still about yourself. You’ll be a beautiful butterfly.’

“The caterpillar laughed at the idea; but, as she turned around and saw the eggs upon the leaf all hatched into little crawling caterpillars, she was forced to believe what the lark had said concerning herself; and she went about as happy as could be, telling everybody what a glorious change would come to her after she had folded herself in her close chrysalis.”

The minister told Lolly that this caterpillar in the chrysalis was like us worms of the dust when lying in the narrow grave enshrouded in our death-ropes; and that, like as the caterpillar bursts his darksome bonds and soars away upon butterfly pinions, so shall we come forth from the tomb on the resurrection day, and with angel-wings mount upward to the world of light and peace. Then he read a few verses to her from that beautiful account of the rising from the dead, in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Lolly would lie upon her sick-bed and fasten her earnest eyes upon him as he read and as he spoke so sweetly to her of the other life; and then she would look away through the open window to the heavens above, and seem to see the face of her Father, who was drawing her slowly to himself.

The End.

