

A ROUND DOZEN :
TRUE STORIES OF SINDHI CHILDREN.



"While the Evil Days Come Not."

A Round Dozen: True Stories of Sindhi Children.

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INTRODUCTION.

The Nursery! What a vision of cosy comfort ! What curtained windows, and ruddy firelight ; what picture-books and playthings ; what happy, light-hearted children, sheltered and shielded from every breath of harm ! What strong, wise Mother-love encircling them !

In Sindh (on the North-Western Coast of India) we have no nurseries, nor any such word in the language. The children wander at will through the city streets—streets that are such a handy receptacle for the evil-smelling rubbish of all the houses—streets enlivened by gambling and quarrelling and loud-voiced cursing. So that when the little ones, driven by hunger, return home at night, it is not their little brown bodies only that come back smeared and defiled, and go uncleansed to bed. Some children of course are stay-at-homes, and fear the clamour of the streets. These spend their days in the midst of the household bustle and turmoil ; and the subjects of which they first learn to prattle are births, deaths, marriages, and the price of jewels. Playthings they have

none ; and the love that should cherish them wisely is oftentimes that of a young, undisciplined girl.

But hearts are the same the wide world over. White or brown, English or Sindhi, carefully nurtured or running wild unchecked, children still *are* children, and yield to the touch of Love as the clay to the potter's thumb.

Then let us see to it, O mothers and all child-lovers, that while yet the evil days come not,—ere the clay stiffen and set, the little child hearts that need Him so sorely are brought to their Saviour's arms.

*“ I wish that His hands had been placed on my
head,
That His arms had been thrown around me.”*

CHAPTER I.

“One-Year-Old.”



ONE-YEAR-OLDS do not, as a rule, come very much in our way, because, you see, we are mostly at school, which is hardly the place for them. All the same, we sometimes have to put up with them there, but then it is a case of “putting up with,” not of writing stories about the poor little creatures! If they are brought to school by a big sister, she is at once asked the reason for this visitation. “Mother is washing her head,” may be the answer; or, “Mother is out at a neighbour’s house mourning”; or, “Mother is ill,” or several other things may have happened to “Mother.” In such a case, we know that to forbid the baby is to forbid the big sister also, so we prefer to make the best of the two together, and only hope he will be good enough to stop crying soon!

There are, of course, One-Year-Olds who belong to the teachers, and they are a far more serious business, as there can be no escape from them till they slowly, slowly grow up into three- or four-year-

olds, and can be handed over to the fascinations of the Kindergarten class. Till then, they spend the school hours in a little room given up to them, hung with Indian hammock-cradles and furnished with queer playthings, but many times during the day a howl will be heard from this haven of peace, and one or other of the teachers, recognizing the voice of her baby, will leave her class to their own unruly devices, and fly off to see " what's the matter " !

We have had One-Year-Olds in the Orphanage, but not often, nor for long. There was one whom we christened Shireen, " The Sweet One." Her advent was the cause of extreme rejoicing and excitement among the orphan girls, and even the Hindu women in the city, hearing the news, would come to their windows with fresh interest to watch the Mission cavalcade on its daily way to school. Not seeing the new-comer,—for the flapping curtains on all sides of the cart hid from outsiders the sight of the perpetual baby-worship going on inside,—they decided that she must be wrapped up inside the horse's hay, which was carried strapped securely on to a bar underneath the cart ! When " Sweet One's " short, sad story here was ended, and our One-Year-Old went Home, the women were scarcely surprised. " Ah ! " they said sympathetically to one another, " What

else could be expected? It was such a very strange way to carry a baby about."

But this story is to be about a robust, sturdy One-Year-Old, who for some time inhabited our Compound.

He was the youngest and dearest son of our Mohammedan coachman, David; and now that it comes to writing about him, I have to confess that none of us even paid him the honour of enquiring his name; among us he always went by the name of "David's Child," or "that great heavy baby." The reason of the latter epithet was that he was always and for ever to be seen sitting on the hip of his little nine-year-old sister, Fatma. She was a slight, thin child, not at all of a size to carry fat babies. There was no one else to carry him; and here the tragedy came in, for One-Year-Old's mother had died some six months before, and no one was left now to mother him but his patient little sister.

He was not the only one to be mothered. There was first the tall, delicate father, who had to be cooked for and have his clothes mended. Then came the two big brothers, who needed early breakfast before going to their work, and something to eat when they returned home ever so late at night. Next came little scampering

Madcap, the four-year-old sister, always ready for a meal, always in rags and mischief. The small house also had to be kept in order, and last, but not least, there was the weight of the responsibility of One-Year-Old. What heavy burdens to be laid upon little Fatma's childish shoulders!

It was not a cheerful look-out for the Baby himself, but he flourished exceedingly, and seemed placidly content with this makeshift of a little mother. What she fed him on we never knew—probably bits of whatever anybody else was eating, administered every time he looked as if he were going to cry; but no “Mellin's-Food”-fed infant ever grew sturdier and stronger than he on his scraps of curry and *chapati*.

How Fatma got through her day's work was an unsolved mystery; but she was always cheerful over it, and ready with a shy smile and a *salaam* at sight of us. Now we would see her setting off to buy the day's provisions from the bazaar; now coming in with a heavy load of fire-wood, Madcap prancing round, trying to help her elder sister by carrying two or three small twigs. Then again she would stand at a respectful distance, waiting to see her father off, when he was dressed up in his best suit, ready to take the carriage out. Or she would bring

“ that great heavy baby ” in to us, and ask for some medicine to cure his teething or a cold in the head, so that he should not cry all night and keep his father awake.

The family all throve and prospered, and only little nine-year-old grew thinner and more careworn, as she laid down each day's burdens, to find the next day's just as heavy.

We did what we could to help her, but it was not much. The big boys were good, steady lads ; and the only thing we could do for them was to persuade them to attend the boys' Sunday classes and there teach them of Christ, who should be the Pattern and Strength of their boyhood.

It was useless to think of ever relieving Fatma of the Baby, for he was the shyest of mortals, and quite impervious to sweets, caresses, coaxing, or any of the blandishments which all our twenty-four orphans longed to shower upon him. If he was not with his father, he *must* be with his big sister, and any separation from her led to roars and howls of fright, which would only be pacified when he once more found himself perched on her hip, with her little thin right arm protecting him from all the dangers of the unknown world around.

So we turned our attention to Miss Madcap, and suggested that her father should let her join

our children and be properly cared for. He was only too delighted at the idea ; but, unfortunately, relations came to hear of it, and scouted the notion of a little daughter of " the Faithful " being brought up as a Christian ; so, after all, he had to say ' No.' There could be no objection to school, however, or to her being looked after ; so this is how we compromised :—Every Saturday the three children would come in, ragged and grubby, to share our children's ablutions. Fatma would deposit One-Year-Old somewhere within a yard of herself, and wash the clothes of the three of them, while Madcap played round in riotous enjoyment. Then all three would have a bath, head and all, and get into clean clothes ; after which some delighted volunteers from among the orphans would comb the hair of the two little girls, and, then, when the sun had well dried it, they would rub in a generous supply of cocoanut oil and do it up in two neat, oily, black plaits. So a smiling, refreshed trio would run home to cook their father's evening meal. Sunday saw Madcap, caged and demure, at Sunday School in the Compound ; but on Monday the excitement began. Early in the morning, Fatma would bring her round, dressed in the best imitation they could manage of Saturday's oily neatness, a

bit of an old, cast-off *sari* would be found for her in the children's piece-box, and tied over her head; and then Madcap, subdued but radiant, would wait till the bullock-cart drove up and she and the twenty-four children started off on their long journey down to school. Evening saw her home again, and, if the housework was finished, she, Fatma and the Baby would all run in for a game of play with our children before the short twilight closed in.

As time went on, David's friends began to urge him to marry again, and not to leave his children motherless so long. But one marriage had been enough for him; and suddenly, to everyone's astonishment, he determined to marry off his children instead of himself, which, he said, would do just as well. So, one fine day, Fatma was dressed up very grandly as a little grown-up Mohammedan lady, and betrothed; not long after, there were more dressings-up and rejoicings, and some days of noise and feasting, and then David and the boys were alone in an empty house, and Fatma, Madcap and One-Year-Old were away in the little mud hut of Fatma's mother-in-law.

It was the father's turn now to get anxious and careworn, with the housework and cooking

added to all his outdoor work ; perhaps he only now began to realize how much patient little Fatma had done for them all, and how dearly he loved the little trio with whom he had parted so lightly. Certain it was that he grew sadder looking every day, and whenever the carriage went in the direction of that mud hut, he would beg to be excused a moment, and race off with a penny, or an apple, or a water-melon to show the children that their father had not forgotten them !

One Monday morning, not many weeks later, David appeared at the front door in a state of great perturbation. A neighbour had just come in and told him that his younger daughter had fallen down the stairs of the mud hut on the previous Friday and broken her leg. This was Monday morning ; and would we remember that she was our child, and drive round to see what could be done for her ? We sighed at the remembrance that she was *not* our child (though she had so nearly become so) ; but we would of course drive round the moment breakfast was over.

Arrived at the hut, we found poor little Madcap with a dirtily bandaged leg, fretful with pain and in high fever, while resourceful little Nine-Year-Old was skilfully attending to her and the exacting Baby, both at once. There was nothing for it

but to take Madcap to hospital, and as she firmly refused to go without Fatma, there was nothing for it but to take *her* too. Then, as One-Year-Old firmly refused to be left behind for an instant, there was nothing for it but to take *him* too ! So finally the whole family, broken leg and all, were safely stowed away in or on the carriage ; and this time it was the mother-in-law who was left alone in an empty house, with her trio of children fled !

Hospitals in India are very long-suffering on the subject of relations who come to stay ; but in this case they *did* make an objection to taking in the Baby for an indefinite time as well as his two sisters ; in the dilemma thus created, David stepped forward with a beaming face and said, ' I will keep my son ; he is always happy with me.'

This is the reason why One-Year-Old came back to live in his father's empty home again. But now there was not even a makeshift of a mother to care for him ; however, the child seemed quite happy and contented. He was getting on towards two years old, and could walk as much as his lazy, chubby legs wished to carry him. He was intelligent enough, too, to obey orders, so that when his father hoisted him up on to the

floor of the carriage-box and told him to sit still, there was no fear of his trying to crawl off the edge, or play dangerous antics on the seat. When the horse was ready harnessed, David would mount the box and place one foot on either side of his little son, to hedge him securely in ; then a little, fat baby hand would grasp each ankle with a firm grip, and off the old black horse would go on his journey through the dusty city. It was usually late in the afternoon before we came back, but there was the same little bewitching face still peering out from between his father's sheltering legs.

They were a silent pair, even when alone ; now and again the father would make some crooning remark, which the child would answer in his own baby way ; and if an outsider spoke to him, and the father gave the order to *salaam*, a little hand would promptly go up to his forehead in shy obedience, while if you happened to be an inmate of the Compound, and so less terrible than most other humans, you might sometimes be favoured with a rare, but very sweet smile.

When Madcap's broken leg was well again, and she and Fatma had left the hospital, poor David had no longer any excuse for keeping his Baby ; and it was a very sad driver who appeared

daily to take us down to the city. The carriage looked empty, too, without the little figure on the floor of the box, and I think we were all a little envious of the old Mother-in-law, who had stolen away our One-Year-Old from the Compound.

*“O Lord, behold these babes are Thine,
Thy treasured nurslings pure and sweet.”*
—Keble.



**"Inasmuch as ye did it . . .
ye did it unto Me."**



Who says "Uncles" ?



Two-Year-Old in Full Dress.

CHAPTER II.

“Two-Year-Old.”



It was 6.30 a.m. one steamy hot June morning, and the big old C.E.Z. Mission House was waking up into sleepy-eyed activity.

The Senior Missionary, sitting in her verandah in the vain hope of finding some breath of cool air, was partaking of tea and toast, and reading “Daily Light” at the same time for her soul’s refreshment.

“Take this child away and nurse it for me,” she read, “and I will give thee thy wages.” Further down came the “Inasmuch” texts—those revelations of the wondrous store set by the King on the very least of earth’s little ones.

The missionary paused in eating her toast, thoughtfully considering. It was only a few days ago that she had received, from a kind friend, a letter containing money to be spent on some needy orphan. At that time it so happened that the small Orphanage was in no immediate want of funds; every child was

being supported by some generous godmother or friend, and their few simple needs were amply supplied. So that the missionary, while gratefully thanking the giver, put away the money till the object for which it was given should be made clear. She had learnt that money was always sent when wanted, and sometimes a little while before.

Now, a light began to shine on that locked-up envelope. "Take this child away and nurse it for me." Was another little homeless child waiting for her to give it a welcome? Had the money come to enable her to do this without anxiety or delay?

The burdens of the heavy work, weighing as all burdens do after an enervating hot-weather night, seemed suddenly lightened, as if the Lord Himself had drawn near and spoken.

* * * * *

A few hours later, a beautifully liveried individual, with snowy turban and polished manners, *salaamed* respectfully before the Senior Missionary, and presented her with an official letter from his master. Half guessing its contents, she broke the seal, and again came that thrill, as of the near Presence of her Lord, when she read a request from the civil authorities, asking

whether she could take charge of a small orphan girl and boy. Their mother had just died of consumption, and the father had been suddenly taken ill with plague, which had ended fatally a few hours later ; so now the children (of sweeper extraction) were homeless waifs, and no one knew what to do with them, especially as the little girl was only two years old and needed motherly care. If they could be given a home in the Mission, perhaps someone could kindly be sent to fetch them without undue delay, as no one at the Hospital had time to look after stray children.

“ Take this child away and nurse it for Me, and I will give thee thy wages.”

There could be but one answer !

The impassive *peon*, bowing again, was provided with an answering note for his master and silently took his departure ; while the missionary summoned her waiting *gari*, and set off at once to drive to the Hospital, wondering on the way whether the new Two-Year-Old would be as fascinating as her age and the manner of her coming warranted.

At last the carriage drove up to the gates of the deserted looking compound, called by courtesy “ the Plague Hospital.” It was a large, open piece of ground enclosed by a low paling ; in the

middle stood a wooden hut for the Doctor's residence, and round the sides were a few rows of hastily run up huts, made of palm-leaf matting. Here the few patients, who could be persuaded to leave their crowded city homes, were brought, and laid on the mud floor to fight their fight with death and pain, watched and tended by the faithful Indian Doctor.

The Missionary alighted, and went in quest of her orphan children. She soon met the Doctor, and, having explained her errand to him, was taken by him to hunt for the small couple. They could not be far off, and yet the search was unavailing for some time. At last they were discovered, crouching down in hiding behind one of the matting huts.

Brought face to face with her Two-Year-Old, the missionary quickly bade farewell to all dreams of fascination ; she smiled tenderly at the boy of seven or eight, who rose to his feet and stood on guard beside his little sister. The latter was innocent of any clothing (the boy himself had nothing on but a short jacket), and her brown body showed no signs of recent ablutions. Her short, fat legs seemed quite unequal to the task of carrying the rest of her, and small wonder, for did ever any Two-Year-Old boast such a barrel-like corpora-

tion? Her short, unlovely hair was all towsled and matted, and her face appeared to consist of little besides an enormous mouth—which now opened to its fullest extent to emit a roar of protest at the unfamiliar appearance before her. Her brother, wise from long experience, hastily popped something into the yawning chasm, and the small damsel, instantly appeased, started chewing the sticky handful he had been storing up for her, regardless of taste or digestibility. All was grist that came to *her* mill!

The boy stood, one arm thrown protectingly round his little charge, gazing suspiciously at the stranger who had come for them. She in turn gazed back at him; but her thoughts were taken up with wondering how she could best convey such an object as Two-Year-Old home through the busy streets, without too much disgracing the respectable Mission *gari*! A sheet was the only solution that offered; so the kind Doctor was appealed to on the subject, and, though a high-caste Hindu himself, he not only came to the rescue with an old, tattered sheet, but also most nobly assisted in wrapping up the ill-clothed pair.

Thus Two-Year-Old, clothed for perhaps the first time in her short life, made state entrance into her new home!

At the Orphanage, a shy but excited welcome awaited the little waifs, for, to the feminine mind, a baby is a baby, and a new Two-Year-Old of any sort was more than delightful. The one in question, let loose from her wrappings, collapsed on the floor ; and then, perceiving herself to be in yet another unfamiliar place, gave vent to indignant howls. The boy deftly hoisted her on to his hip, and looked round for something, anything, edible or otherwise, to insert into that capacious mouth. A piece of *chapati*, some yellow sweets and a green guava were instantly forthcoming, and the Two-Year-Old, thus fortified, stopped crying and permitted one-sided advances from some of the admiring throng.

But grown-ups were talking business, and soon the ominous word " bath " fell upon the boy's ears. Well, she was in their hands now, and they must do as they pleased ; and certainly it wouldn't come amiss, but—the anxious little mind conjured up visions of the small sister attacked by her mother's ceaseless cough, growing thinner every day, wasted with fever as she had been.

Suddenly his tongue was loosed, and he spoke for the first time.

" If you're going to bath her," he said fervently,

"let it be with warm water. She might get a chill."

The Orphanage little ones were used to a sunshiny bath under the tap in the garden, followed by a quick rub-down by Big Sister, and a scamper round to work off the ensuing spirits. But there was no resisting the anxiety in those child eyes, so water was warmed, and the new couple were marched off, to return in a short time looking many shades lighter, and smelling of clean carbolic soap! Next, they were each fitted out with one or two loose garments, cast-off and old, but clean—the boy having to wear the most boy-like clothes that could be found in a family of girls! Then Two-Year-Old gave earnest of future behaviour, by sitting down plump in the grubbiest spot available, and unconcernedly stuffing her mouth with some dusty potato-parings dropped there by accident!

The next thing was to name the little pair; and from the text that had heralded their arrival that morning, it seemed fittest to call them Moses and Miriam. So Miriam and Moses they became, the positions being reversed, Moses keeping guard day by day in order that no harm should happen to his baby sister Miriam.

Sad to say, there was no Boys' Orphanage in

the place, which meant that the pair must presently be parted, but Moses was taken in at an Orphanage in the Next-Door-But-One-Station, only ten or eleven hours away by train, and news soon came of his settling down there happily enough among the other little boys.

* * * * *

Time went on, and Miriam grew and improved. Regular food and the proper amount of it was making her sturdier and of a size to be able to run about and play; carefully kept hair, neatly parted and oiled, gave her a look of belonging to someone; and the little face, growing chubby and intelligent, gave promise of much that was good in the years to come.

But suddenly one day, in the midst of the sunshine, there swooped down an Uncle! He was the brother of Miriam's dead father, and said he had been searching for the children high and low, ever since the news of their parents' death had filtered through to his home in Northern India. Now he had found out where they were, and had come to fetch them away and bring them up as his own children.

He was a big, burly man, and most determined to have his own way. There seemed no means of opposing him. His claim to uncleship was

evidently a true one, and his wish to adopt the children, though very probably for some reason other than their own good, was at least a natural one ; and the law would be on his side. It was useless to urge the evident benefits that would accrue to Miriam from an up-bringing and education such as the Mission was ready to bestow upon her. All this was counter-balanced by the fact that she would be brought up as a Christian, and at any rate, benefits or no benefits, Miriam was his by right of kinship, and to his home she must go. They would leave by the night mail, and pick up Moses from the Next-Door-But-One-Station early next morning.

The reason of Miriam's sudden summons to the presence of the Senior Missionary, and the appearance of the stalwart, bearded Uncle, had been explained to the wondering other children. The idea of such an onslaught was frightening. They all trembled for Miriam, the petted. If dragged away all alone, by an unknown, terrifying Man she would cry herself sick ! Then, too, which of them knew that it might not be *her* turn next to be pounced upon by some unexpected, never-dreamt-of Uncle ? A shiver ran through the children, and they left off playing to wander about in solemn, anxious groups.

Among them was one small person of eight or nine, christened by the name of "The Right Way." True to human nature, the possession of such a name to live up to seems to induce its owner oftentimes to prefer the Wrong Way, but on this occasion little nine-year-old went straight as an arrow to the mark. "Come inside and let us pray," said she to one and another of her friends among the younger ones, and very soon the compound was emptied of half the anxious faces, and, unknown to any elders, a group of children, little more than babies, were pleading with their Father to keep the youngest of them safe.

Meanwhile, the missionary had been exerting all her powers of persuasion on the obdurate Uncle—but without success. Every argument had been in vain; and now, angered by the delay, he seized Miriam's hand roughly, and rose up to go. The child, frightened out of her wits, howled and kicked, but he dragged her on unheeding and passed out into the verandah towards the outer door. Another minute and the nursling, the child of special command and promise, would be gone for ever.

But, at the door, what stayed them? Was it an invisible barrier, wrought of the prayers of little children? Or was it the very Angel of

His Presence, Whom the babies knew to be so near ?

The Uncle stood still, paused irresolute, then strode back into the room. "Here, take her," he said ; "you can keep her ; what do I want with a girl ?"

And he turned and went.

* * * * *

"Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

And what do those wages amount to, now, at the end of nine long years ?

Just the love of a foolish but loyal little heart ; the ready, glad service of a pair of sturdy arms and legs—more nimble now than in the far-off Two-Year-Old days ; the trusting confidence of a pair of big brown eyes, all too quick to tears and laughter ; the eager recital, on a Sunday afternoon, of lessons learnt during the week from the Book of books.

And as each twentieth of June comes round, and Miriam, growing out of happy childhood into happier girlhood, does the honours of her "birth-day" feast, we thank the King afresh for trusting His priceless little ones to us.

*"I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeon
In the round-tower of my heart."*

—Longfellow.

CHAPTER III.

“Three-Year-Olds.”



SOLEMN little Three-Year-Olds !

There is a short row of them standing at singing-time in the front ranks of the big Kindergarten downstairs.

Really they shouldn't be there at all for another year or so, but harassed mothers, worried with smaller babies, and busy cooking for the men-folk, will do anything to be rid of such small fry as Three-Year-Olds ; and we, considering the indescribable filth of their only playground—the streets—gather them gladly into our Kindergartens.

They mostly start school-life as appendages to elder sisters, and in this stage they are calculated to try the patience of the calmest. They are of many kinds. The shy kind clings tightly to its sister—the one rock of safety in all this turmoil of strangeness—and bursts into lamentations at the sight of an ordinary teacher, increasing them to piercing howls if a white Madam Sahib should chance to come anywhere near.

Nothing will pacify it but to be taken home. The audacious kind is afraid of no one, but stands upright on a desk all alone, and *salaams* at intervals of a minute to show you it is still there, or enters into long and loud conversations with its sister's giggling friends. It has to be taken home before the class can settle down to work. The restless kind cries for water every few minutes, or for the loan of its sister's paint-brush, or sets off on a tour of exploration on its own account, and is rescued by the merest chance from falling head-long downstairs. It also must be taken home, if the big sister is to have any peace or do any work at all.

Whatever kind of Three-Year-Old appears, therefore, the Head Teacher speedily makes it her aim to domicile it in its proper quarters downstairs, in company with thirty or forty other babies. According to its nature it will resist for a longer or a shorter time, but will finally give in, and leave off crying to go back upstairs, or for the familiar alternative of being taken home. So there it will stand in its row at singing-time, waiting with its contemporaries for the Madam Sahib's daily meed of petting.

When she comes, she almost has to sit on the floor in order to get anywhere near little Three-

Year-Olds ; and then their solemn eyes gaze into hers—is it with wonder and mysterious questionings, or is it just with sleepy unimaginationeness ? One child will smile sweetly, with the satisfied knowledge that she is quite irresistible ; another will do a *salaam* on her own account—a reprehensible habit, when it may set forty others on fire to follow her example ; a third will hold out a chubby hand and gravely try to draw the Madam Sahib nearer ; and so on, till the end of the line is reached, or till such time as the sound of scuffling upstairs suggests that even Standard V. on their best behaviour, all ready for Bible Lesson, *may* be left alone too long and come to grief !

Then the Madam Sahib disappears, and the babies sit down in rows to learn verses and see wonderful Bible pictures ; till, one by one, the wee-est ones are overcome with sleep, and roll over on their mats like so many knocked-down ninepins.

When the bell rings, which means going home to lunch, the ninepins open sleepy eyes and sit up to answer the register call.

This register has been drawn up with some little difficulty, as surnames are a commodity not regularly dealt in out here. Every child has to

be questioned as to her father's name (unless there is a big sister upstairs to supply the clue), and a Three-Year-Old's answer will generally be "Daddy." One precocious person, when asked the usual question, replied with a grown-up air, "My father's name is Valu ; and he *is*, so fat ! "

Register over, the Infant Class Teachers reach down, from shelves and other safe corners, various odds and ends that have, for safety or convenience, been confiscated from their small owners during the day. Then one Three-Year-Old will be hustled into her much hated little trousers ; another will open fat hands to grasp her precious *pie** and slate-pencil ; a third will be adorned with a black velvet cap, securely fastened on with a brightly coloured handkerchief, because in India it is very disgraceful to walk the streets with uncovered head. At last all will have vanished, and the large hall be left bare and deserted.

Some little Three-Year-Olds, clad in nothing but very old and ragged silk shirts, will be taken home to wonderful rich houses, cool and shady. Coming into contact with Christians is supposed to make the children defiled and unclean, and that is why they are sent to school dressed so meagrely.

* One-twelfth of a penny.

But now the polluted shirt is taken off and thrown into a far-away corner, ready for to-morrow's use, while its owner is bathed, head and all, till the polluting touch has been washed away. Then only may she be dressed up in the rich, beautiful clothes befitting her father's wealth, and eat her waiting dinner. But there are not many such.

Some come to anchor before smaller houses, full of women and empty of furniture ; some live upstairs and have to perform the difficult operation of clambering up crooked, broken steps, so steep that older people pull themselves up by the help of a rope slung from the ceiling for that purpose. One may be the light of an otherwise childless house ; another goes home to a household of thirteen small brothers and cousins, all of four years old or under.

But however else they may differ, all the little Three-Year-Olds' homes are alike in this, that the children, not the grown-ups, rule the day ! Obedience or discipline are things unknown, and little children, of an age to be lisping nursery rhymes and their first baby prayers, lisp out instead strings of defiant abuse to their mothers. Small wonder then, that many a mother brings her child to us and says distractedly, " See ! at five years old she will obey no one—not even her

father with a stick ! *Can* you teach her wisdom ? " Small wonder that little Three-Year-Olds grown older, and learning strange new lessons of that Holy Child who was subject to His parents, find the struggle a hard one as they try to follow in His steps.

When little Three-Year-Olds fall sick (or any other-year-olds either, for that matter), they are in a bad way indeed. Not that there is any lack of love in their homes—Oh no ! There is mother love which will sit in the heat, through nights and days, patiently fanning away the flies ; love that will never grow weary of her child's fretful crying ; love that no peevish ingratitude will ever rouse to anger ; love that will mourn, still patient, with comfortless, unforgetting grief, should her little one slip away from her out into the unknown world beyond.

But the children's mothers are like big children themselves, who have never grown up, and know very little more than their own little Three-Year-Olds as to how to prevent or cure illness. There is no white nightgown and softly pillowed bed ; her night clothes are the same as her day ones, and she lies either on the hard stone floor, or on an equally hard wooden bed ; and even so, there is no orderly going to bed and stay-

ing there ; she will be jumping up any minute she feels inclined, and roaming round in search of amusement, or relief from the pain she cannot understand. Then, tired out with the utter exhaustion of fever, she will sink down unnoticed in some corner, and perhaps kindly sleep will soothe her into forgetfulness. All the nursery known to little Three-Year-Old is the large central room of the house, shared by her mother and three or four aunts with the attendant little cousins ; so she will soon be waked up by one of the babies crying, or by some of the women and their friends quarrelling, and now her cries will be louder than ever, after the short-lived bliss of sleep. Her mother will perhaps remember the medicine, which the father had said was to be administered in portions during the day—not all at once, as seemed most natural ! But at sight of the greenish mixture in a dirty bottle, Three-Year-Old begins to stamp and scream, and the mother, anxious only to please her darling, meekly puts it away again. There is momentary comfort in this, so, making the most of the lull, the mother draws the trembling little figure into her arms and says coaxingly, “ What wilt thou eat, my son (a term of great endearment, as a son is the most precious thing in life), my little sweet one ? ” The girl “ son,”

roused to interest, replies that she will eat a guava ; so the nearest cousin is sent off, a farthing in hand, to run and buy two or three nice green, unripe guavas, and on their arrival, Three-Year-Old, sliding on to the floor, munches them slowly—till even her baby intellect begins to connect the guavas with the strange new feelings inside her, and, roaring afresh, she throws away the offending remains. The mother tries to tempt her with almonds or a radish—both nice and tasty, but she will have none of them, and rolls over on the cold stone, crying wearily. And so will pass the endless days and nights, till Three-Year-Old's illness works itself off ; but in countless cases the little life slips away, only for lack of the simplest care and common-sense remedies.*

It is a general theory that girls in India are

* Hindu women are woefully ignorant of the danger of infection. If it is written on your forehead (invisibly, but surely, by the hand of the Almighty) that you will get a certain illness, get it you will and must. If it is not so written, there is no danger ; so why talk of "catching" or "preventing" illness ?

Measles is the visitation of some goddess (" Little Mother"), and therefore the attainment of measles (!) is an honour for the child, and a matter for congratulation, and is also the occasion for the performance of religious customs.

Small-pox is an even greater honour than measles, as the goddess is a more important one, and in this very holy disease, no medicines at all may be used, lest the " Great Mother " might be offended by them.

not so well beloved as boys, but this is not always carried into practice, on account of the fascination of all childhood to the tender-souled Hindu. It is very sweet to see a big, burly father, walking on the sea-shore or in the Gardens, one tiny daughter in his arms, and another clutching his finger to steady herself as she toddles by his side. It is sweeter still to see his tenderness and his efforts at consolation, if some sudden grief or fear seizes either of them. The small person will resent these at first, and perhaps only scream the louder; but presently his love will soothe away the trouble, and the child will allow him to lift a corner of her silken shirt and dry her eyes with it. This is an act of finality in the East; no tears could be so ungracious as to start flowing afresh down the cheeks wiped dry by love! This idea gives, it may be, an added depth of meaning to the age-loved promise, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

The first of our numerous little Three-Year-Olds was the pet of the whole school. Of dimensions so minute that she seemed like nothing but a live doll, she possessed character and "cuteness" out of all proportion to her size. One eye, in moments of excitement, would look sparkingly away in a slightly different direction from the

other, and her mouth was the "roguiest" ever seen ; which combination always gave the impression that, while treating you, as an ignorant grown-up, with great solemnity, she was hugely enjoying the joke of it with some initiated friend on your left. Sometimes it would be the early morning *salaam* that her majesty would pretend to be too shy to give ; sometimes, in answer to the Madam Sahib's question, " And whose little girl are you ? " she would stiffen up with coquetry and answer serenely, " Sister's," " Teacher's," " Big Sister's," and not till next day would the answer come, smilingly, condescendingly, " Thine." She used to go to sleep on the lap of the tiniest big sister imaginable, or on a narrow bench, and the consequent falls on to the stone floor made the Madam Sahib fear for her skull, so she had a small *charpoie* (string bed) made and put in a corner of the class-room, upon which thereafter her majesty reposed luxuriously ; sometimes she would be half smothered by two or three other babies being dumped down on top of her. To acquire learning she made no attempts whatever, and nobody wanted her to ; but she evidently found school an entertaining place, and was held up to the older pupils as a pattern of regularity.

Things went on quietly for a year or eighteen

months—when, one fine day, her majesty discovered a friendly sweet-shop near her home, where there was a possibility of marvellous goodies at any hour of the day. After this the attractions of school waned swiftly, and Pevan's string-bed saw her no more. Mother, sisters, aunts, uncles, father, and the woman who goes round daily fetching the children, all did their utmost to coax her back to school, but she remained obdurate ; come she would not !

However, she had not “ sat ” a whole year in school for nothing ; so when one day the Madam Sahib appeared coming up the street, her majesty instantly realized that the only safety was in flight. Arrived at the house, the Madam Sahib could see no signs of any child, and she had to sit down and enter into a long conversation with the women. After everyone's health and happiness had been duly enquired after, all round, the subject of the small daughter of the house was broached, and met with an unusually ready response. “ Oh, take her with you,” begged the mother ; “ she spends all her time now in the street, and I long for her to be safe in school ; take her off at once.”

“ But where is she ? ” was the natural question.

“ Look for her,” came the prompt answer ;

“ she was here a moment ago, she must have run upstairs.”

The first “ upstairs ” was a large loft, empty save for some bits of matting in one corner. The second “ upstairs ” was let to tenants, who courteously begged the visitor to sit down and rest, but had seen no signs of Pevan that day.

Baffled and surprised, the Madam Sahib went downstairs again, and asked where else the child could be.

“ She's upstairs, ” was the curt response. Then a magnanimous addition—“ You can beat her if you like. I *want* her to go to school.”

Smiling and unconvinced, the Madam Sahib again climbed up to the loft and looked round. Suddenly a slight — a *very* slight — lump in the matting caught her eye; she advanced, turned up the edge, and there, at full length, lay her chuckling majesty, found out but unabashed! There was a slight skirmish on the subject of trousers, which Pevan to this day considers a superfluous article of dress, but in a few minutes she and the Madam Sahib were walking soberly and respectably hand in hand towards school. Her majesty was very soon condescending to receive her old-time homage from the other children, with the same look of extreme amuse-

ment at a joke known only to herself and the other eye.

Solemn little Three-Year-Olds!

“It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

Who will pray them into His fold?

*" Oh, little feet ! that such long years
Must wander on through hopes and fears,
Must ache and bleed beneath your load ;
I, nearer to the Wayside Inn,
Where toil shall cease and rest begin,
Am weary, thinking of your load ! "*



"Suffer the Little Children."

CHAPTER IV.

“Four-Year-Old.”



FOUR-YEAR-OLD was a darling
—Gunga her name.

How you would have laughed to see her! And she would have laughed back at you, shaking her black-brown curls, and making the sparkles come and go in her big, bright eyes. For if her clothes seemed funny to you, so would yours have seemed to her!

I ought hardly to say “clothes” in Gunga’s case, because, as a rule, she wore nothing whatever but a rusty black waistcoat, and that for three reasons. First, because the country where Gunga lives is a very hot one, and one small waistcoat is quite enough to keep anybody warm; second, because Gunga’s mother was a widow, and very poor, and so could not afford to buy her the red silk skirt or brightly coloured trousers that richer little girls always wore. But the third reason is the one I like best, and perhaps it was really the chief one. In the corner of the

world where Gunga's home is, it is an understood thing that a son is an object far more to be desired than any daughter ; but there are some mothers, even there, who love their little girls every bit as much as the boys, and sometimes, in their eagerness to show this, they dress up their small daughters in boys' clothes. So, then, the third reason why Gunga wore an old, spotty, black waistcoat (which would not even fasten up over her round little body) was her widowed mother's tender love.

Gunga was not very devoted to her lessons ; but what could be expected of only four years old ? At any rate everyone in school was very devoted to *her* ! She would come running in any time during the course of the morning, with such a winning smile that no teacher ever had the heart to scold her for being an hour or two late ! And at lunch-time, after demolishing her brass-bowlful of rice-bread *chapaties* and curry, Gunga would run up with a beaming face to her teacher for her daily share of petting and spoiling.

But one sad day, no Gunga appeared in school, and not the next day, nor the next, nor for many days was Gunga either seen or heard of.

When the head teacher had time to go and see her mother, many excuses were made for the child's absence, and it was a long time before the

real reason came out. But at last the mother confessed shamefacedly that she had sent her little daughter out to work.

“What can I do? I have no one to earn money for me, and I cannot earn enough for myself and the child. She is growing big, and is always hungry; and in return for her work, at least they feed her well.”

So there was nothing more to be said, and we only wondered what sort of work our little round-about Gunga was doing in return for her daily bread!

A few days later, the head teacher was threading her way through the narrow streets of the city, when suddenly a small person made a wild dash at her, hugging her round the knees in a transport of joy.

“Why, Gunga, what are you doing here?” was the surprised question.

“I’m working!” replied that small maiden, with proud self-importance.

“And whatever kind of work do you do?” asked her teacher, remembering the restless inattention of her school-days.

“I wash all the dishes and vessels after the men have eaten, and at mid-day, when all are asleep, I watch the shop, that thieves come not.”

How we laughed, to think of Gunga washing up pots and pans ! And very glad we were not to have to eat out of them afterwards !

But beneath the laughter is heartache, to think of little Gunga beginning the battle of life at four years old—bereft of her mother's sheltering love, and taken away for ever from the school where she would have learnt of Jesus Christ, the children's Friend. Who will keep her little feet from stumbling, as she learns the crooked, sinful ways of that big city ? Who will teach her of God her Father, and heaven her Home, and the Saviour who died to make her good ?

And Gunga is not the only one ; there may be other Four-Year-Olds, and there are certainly very many bigger girls and boys, needing someone, oh, so badly ! to teach them and bring them—or pray them—home to God.

Rabb farmātā, Wub din ātā
Jab mere log bōnge ;
Kbāss khazāna, tāj shahāna,
Azīz aur mahbūb.”

(The first verse of Izahak's favourite hymn in Roman Urdu.)



Izahak's Beloved Bair Tree.

CHAPTER V.

“Five-Year-Old.”



AIR as any little Italian boy, with crisp, black curls all over his round head, and bright black eyes brimming over with fun and merriment—this was Five-Year-Old Izahak.

His father and mother had long ago left Hinduism for Christianity ; but they could not quite rid themselves of the Hindu feeling of despair when one little daughter after another was born to them, till the family consisted of four sisters and no brother. Their delight, therefore, was intense when at last a little son made his appearance, and from the day of his birth, mother, father, and four sisters all conspired to spoil him and gratify his slightest wish.

It was no wonder, then, if little Izahak grew into a rather spoilt and very unruly boy, for who would *not* cry and scream, and even kick, if he knew that would be sure to bring everyone flying

to do his bidding? But withal he was such a lovable little person — so irresistible when he smiled at you — such a delightful little romp and tom-boy and rogue!

The boy's fifth birthday was an occasion of great rejoicing in the family. Izahak was really getting old now, and must be dressed like a grown-up man. His father, alas! had died, and the little son was now doubly precious, being the only man of the family. So his mother, with great difficulty, scraped together enough money to pay a tailor to make him a most unnecessarily grand suit of clothes, and, with the rest of her month's earnings, she got him a thick, heavy pair of tight boots, completing the outfit by a round cap, embroidered, with loving pride, in her few spare moments. Of course, these clothes were not for every-day use, but were kept carefully for Sunday morning's Church, and a very different little boy used to make his appearance at the afternoon Sunday School, in ragged, but comfortable old clothes, with dancing bare brown feet, and bare curly head. There was always great rivalry between the two sisters who also came to Sunday School, as to which of them should have the honour of sitting by the small brother, and receiving his snubs when she tried to keep him in order; for

kept in order Izahak would *not* be—at least not by any sister of his own !

In Sunday School, somehow, the last thing he seemed able to do, was to keep still ; arms, legs and body were as if on dancing wires, and the bright, black eyes would wander, with untiring energy, from one window to another, and from lizards on the ceiling to black ants on the floor, carrying his mind away with them to the objects they saw. Verses and bits of the prayer-book had no interest for Izahak—his baby lips found them hard to utter, and his little mind could not grasp their meaning. Stories fascinated him for a few minutes ; and then the sunshiny garden, or the lizard, or the black ants resumed their old attractiveness, and the teacher would feel despairingly that she had lost hold of him. But the suggestion of a hymn always brought back his wandering attention, and in a moment the bright eyes would be fixed on his teacher, and with a bewitching smile Izahak would plead, “ *Let us have ‘ When He cometh, when He cometh.’* ” The other children at last grew tired of having the same hymn so often, and would cry in a body “ Please don’t let Izahak choose ; he’s sure to say ‘ When He cometh ’ ” ; but it needed a very hard-hearted teacher to withstand those beseeching

black eyes ; and so it fell out that ' When He cometh ' was nearly always sung at the children's afternoon Sunday School.

* * * * *

A little while after Izahak's fifth birthday, he and his mother went to live in a poky little street, in order to be with the eldest daughter, now married. The three remaining little sisters were left in the Mission Orphanage, where they had been living since their father's death.

It was only a very few days after this, that one Saturday morning the sad news was brought that the mother had sickened with plague. Everyone was very much concerned, for the disease that year was of an unusually virulent kind, and very few cases ever recovered. During the course of the morning, Izahak ran in, hot and flushed, his hands full of toys for his sisters, and announced with grave importance that his mother had plague and was in the hospital, and he himself had been taken to stay with an aunt. He could not stop, he said, because his head was aching ; so off ran the little bare legs, and we saw him no more.

On Sunday morning, the report of the mother was somewhat cheering, but the aunt came in with a sad face to say that Izahak had had high fever

all night, and now had that dreaded pain under his arm. All knew what that meant ; the little chap was carried off at once to his mother's room in the plague-hospital, where the married sister tended both with unfailing devotion and selfless, comforting love.

His fever ran high for some twenty-four hours ; he would now fancy himself playing horses with his boy-friends, now fold his hands together and ask " Our Father " to forgive all his naughtiness, " for Jesus Christ's sake", and then again he would be out under the big *bair* tree in the garden, picking up the forbidden but much-loved fruit. And all through the long hours of that day and night, the patient big sister would go backwards and forwards, from mother to little brother, with cool water to stay their thirst, and a soothing hand on each feverish head.

Till at mid-day on Monday, the mother passed away.

* * * * *

Funerals have to take place quickly in India, and the three little sisters, not home from school till the late afternoon, had hardly time to realize the greatness of their sorrow before they were standing, in the chill of evening, before the cemetery

gates. The sun had long set, and it was by moonlight that we all walked solemnly up the long avenue to the spot where Jeevee bai was to be laid to rest. The service was read by the light of a flickering lantern, but all knew by heart the hymn the little sisters had chosen, and even the smallest of them, choking down her sobs, sang bravely, for her Mother's dear sake, every word of "Safe in the arms of Jesus."

Worn out by grief and tears, the children soon fell asleep that night, but it was not very long before we were once again driving up the winding desert road to the cemetery, for Izahak, only two or three hours later, had followed his mother in through the Golden Gates of Life, and his body was to be laid beside hers at day-break.

The sun had just risen as we trod those avenues again, and was shining aslant on the dusty leaves and on the little white, flower-wreathed coffin; higher it rose in the cloudless sky, as we stood by the graveside, and listened to the solemn and ever more wonderful words of the service; higher still, until all things near and far were bathed in the glory of its shining, and, as we sang the hymn that Izahak's little lips had so often joined in, it seemed as though we could almost see the shining

of the Sun of Love, flashing from him and other precious jewels in the beautiful city of God.

“Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for His crown.”

*“Measure thy life by loss, and not by gain,
Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured
forth ;
For love’s strength standeth in love’s sacrifice.”*

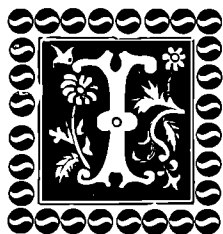
—Mrs. Hamilton King.



Six-Year-Olds in the Garden.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Six - Year - Old.”



It is a lazy, sleepy Sunday afternoon, in that sleepest of places, Karachi. The sun is blazing down fiercely on the big, bare compound of the Mission House, and all the crickets, grasshoppers and tree-frogs have crept into the shade to sleep ; nothing can be heard but the subdued cawing of a few wakeful crows in the spreading branches of the old banyan tree.

Suddenly the stillness is broken by the sound of little voices, and “ the babies ” come trooping out from the Sunday School at the far end of the Compound. Merrily they run past the banana and guava trees, calling out to one another and running all the faster as the hot sand burns their feet. On they run, up the wide dusty drive, and wait in the porch for stragglers and “ tinies.” Then, with hushed voices, they creep into the cool silent house, and call for the “ Bari Miss Sahib.” She is not in her office, and no reply comes to

their eager voices. What is to be done? The older ones hang back politely, to await her coming ; but two or three wee hands seize the heavy curtain which leads into her bedroom, and one or two little faces peep in confidently, for the smaller the children, the better they understand how warm a place there is for their own little orphaned selves in the Bari Miss Sahibjee's loving heart.

“ 'Ta'bjee is asleep,—is asleep on her chair,” is their excited announcement to the others, and the cry has the delightful effect of awaking her—delightful, because, although the Bari Miss Sahib asleep is great fun, and quite a novelty, still the Bari Miss Sahib awake means sweets and talk and a welcome to all. So “ Ta'bjee,” with a smile, gives up her sorely-needed Sunday rest, and gets out of her big chair to come and dispense the good things of life.

The usual weekly allowance is two sweets each ; but to-day there is a new tin which is found to contain great big round “ bulls'-eyes,” and, in deference to their size, only one apiece is dealt out all round.

Now one bull's-eye is certainly larger than two ordinary sweetmeats, to say nothing of its delicious taste and smell, yet there is one very sad face among the little ones. It is that of four-year-old Miri,

and in order to find out the reason of her grief, we will watch her as she leaves. Slowly, with downcast eyes, she makes her way to the children's quarters, clasping in her hand the treasured bull's-eye. More slowly still she climbs the two or three steps into the verandah, and creeps in where she knows she will find that dear "mother" of them all, for whose sake such a struggle is raging in her baby heart. Then, with tear-filled eyes and heaving breast, she holds out a sticky palm and says appealingly, "Go-jee, look, there's only one to-day!"

Only one! And is it not Miri's custom always to share her good things with her beloved "Go-jee"? And how can a hard round bull's-eye be shared by two people? But the thought of giving it up altogether is too terrible—next Sunday is so interminably far away! The only alternative is to put it into her own longing mouth, which she accordingly does, amid many protestations from "Go-jee" that she does not like peppermint, and would never think of accepting her sweetie, and so on. But the taste of the bull's-eye is spoilt by that of tears, and Miri goes away sadder than she came, heaving great sobs every now and then, and feeling life is very empty, whichever way you look at it.

Meanwhile, the last of the children has left the bungalow, after *salaaming* her thanks to the Bari Miss Sahib, and is skipping along the same path that Miri trod so sadly three or four minutes ago. It does not take little Six-Year-Old long to reach the children's house, and a moment later she has darted up to "Go-jee's" chair, and popped her big peppermint into "Go-jee's" unsuspecting mouth! The next instant she is dancing up and down in an ecstasy of joy, to think that the treasure which would so certainly have been refused has safely reached its destination; and without waiting for thanks or expostulations or a kiss, away she skips merrily into the bright sunshine.

* * * * *

And we, God's older children,—have we learned little Six-Year-Old's lesson yet? To give is easy, when we have another for ourselves; but when there is "only one"—one life to live one heart to give—what then?

Shall we hug our treasure close, like Miri, till the canker of self-love has eaten it through, and there is nothing left to give?

Or shall we not rather bring it, in joyous self-sacrifice, to the foot of His dear Cross, who gave His very Self for us?

“ Lay thou thy treasure in the dust, and the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks ; And the Almighty shall be thy treasure, and precious silver unto thee ” (Job xxii. 24-25).

“The sea hath its pearls.”
—Longfellow.



Bridesmaids.



"Saved Big Sister's" Wedding Day.

CHAPTER VII.

“Seven-Year-Old.”



HE heavy monsoon swell was rolling and dashing up against the breakwater of a West Indian harbour. The sunset clouds were stormy and lowering, and the wind whistled shrilly in the big flapping sail of a small native boat, which was with difficulty making its way to the landing jetty. At last, with many a shout and gesticulation, and much running to and fro on the part of the boatmen, the land was reached and the boat made fast, and the occupants jumped nimbly out on to the wharf.

But one still remained behind—a small, cowering figure, that had taken no part in the previous bustle, and excited no one's notice. Failing to attract his attention with cries and shouts, one of the men at last clambered back into the boat, muttering unpleasant remarks on the unknown boy's parents and general disposition. Then, with more force than was necessary, he captured his

small prey, and dragged him up the steps to the group of boatmen, who lost no time in hurling rapid questions at his head.

“ Who are you ? ”

“ Who is your father ? ”

“ Why have you come ? ”

“ Who put you on the boat ? ”

But to one and all, the only answer was a dogged, sulky silence, and a sullen shrug of the half-bare shoulders.

The men were fast losing their tempers when up came a friendly customs officer, and enquired the cause of the hubbub. Seeing how matters stood, he took charge of the speechless little waif, and exonerated the men from all blame.

Further investigations brought nothing new to light about the child. It turned out to be a girl, about seven years of age, on whom boys' clothes had evidently been put as a blind. Not a word could she either speak or understand of any dialect known in the town, so questions were only so much wasted breath, and people soon ceased to ask them. This was evidently one of the world's many unwanted little ones, for whom there is no fond mother's care, no father's sheltering love. So the servants of Christ gladly opened their doors to receive the Seven-Year-Old.

And that is how "Saved From The Sea" became an inmate of the C.E.Z. Mission House.

* * * * *

Some ten or eleven years have passed since then, and now the Mission House is made lively by twenty-four such waifs, of all ages and sizes. One of them is a tall, well-built girl of seventeen or eighteen, with beautiful dark eyes, and thick curly hair, who answers to the Christian name of "Saved," and the surname of "From The Sea." Ever at her side, constant as a shadow, is a little roly-poly tomboy of four. At night nothing will induce Fatty to go to sleep, unless she is allowed to clamber on to "Saved Big-Sister's" bed. At meal times they sit side by side on the verandah floor, and the little dimpled hand copies the big brown one, as she learns how to roll up slippery grains of rice into a neat mouthful that will not spill.

They are separated at school time, as one goes to a Sindhi, the other to a Gujerati School; but, as soon as the big, patient bullock wends his way back from the city in the afternoon, Fatty may be seen climbing independently down the steps of the cart, and setting off at a rolling trot for the house, calling out the while in her baby treble "Saved Big-Sister, oh! Saved Big-Sister."

But the prettiest sight of all is one to be seen only by some hidden observer, for the elder girl is very shy and would jump up at once if she ever suspected an onlooker. The bell rings every morning for the children's half-hour of reading and prayer, and then "Saved" calls her little charge aside to teach her how to pray. "Big-Sister" sits on the floor in the large, empty dormitory, with her knees up in front of her for the little one's benefit. At them kneels Fatty, her chubby hands reverently folded, her merry eyes tight closed, in lisping tones repeating the words the elder girl tells her. So another little motherless one learns, from the waif of years ago, her first lessons of the Father who loves them both so well.

* * * * *

A little while later, and the scene has changed again. It is now the inside of the Mission Church, cool and fresh with its pale green-washed walls. On the right is a new, shining brass tablet, to the memory of one lately called to his rest; older ones in the Chancel tell of men who lived and died in the service of their Lord; through the open windows one catches glimpses of waving cocoanut palms, dusty roads, and a throbbing blue sky beyond.

But to-day no one regards these things, for all

eyes are fixed on the little group of figures in the centre aisle.

Hindmost stands Fatty, bunchy but enchanting, in a tiny pale blue *sari*, her curls neatly smoothed back under a blue-ribboned comb. By her side, in another wee blue *sari*, stands her pair and contrast—slim, upright, motionless.

Before Fatty's wondering eyes stands a transformed, white-robed Big-Sister, with glad, down-cast eyes, and head modestly bent under her silk *chaddab*. At her side stands a stalwart, manly figure, who is announcing in clear tones that he takes Saved "for better, for worse," and that he will love and cherish her "till death us do part."

So there we leave our grown-up "Seven-Year-Old," on the altar-threshold of her new life—a life opening out rosy tinted and beautiful before her. The young couple are to live for a time with his widowed mother, and there in the new home, Saved will find a mother's love, a husband's strong right arm, and several little brothers and sisters to take the place of the little one she is sadly leaving behind.

And those who have loved and tended her since she came to them, an uncared-for orphan, so many years ago, as they watch her shy happiness, give grateful thanks to Him Who "setteth the solitary in families."

*“For the stream of death is narrowed, now a Cross
athwart is thrown,
And a pathway through God’s garden leads up to
His very Throne.”*

—E. J. B.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Eight - Year - Old.”

“ IT down, Parvati ! ”

Mechanically the child obeyed, but she was on her feet again the next minute like a Jack-in-the box, and pressing eagerly towards her teacher.

“ Sit down, Parvati,—and keep sitting,” commanded the teacher severely.

But Parvati couldn't, and, rather than lose the thread of her story, the teacher had to relax discipline and leave the child alone.

It was always so during Bible lessons—nothing could keep Parvati in her seat! Was it a new Bible story the teacher was telling? Then the eager eyes were fixed on her, and the mobile little features changed quickly to joy or sorrow, fear or hope, as the story went on its way. Was the class being questioned on back lessons? Then one little hand would be always waving, one pair of lips always ready with an answer. But best of all, Parvati loved the days when each child in turn was asked to tell some story from our Lord's life,

and having told her own delightedly, she would listen to the others with great eagerness, and sometimes distressedly remark, "Oh, but she never said so and so ; *please* may I put it in ? "

Towards the end of every lesson, Parvati's hand would go up with sudden vehemence. On being asked what she wanted, (an unnecessary question) the child would shyly plead " May we pray to-day ? " and wait longingly for the answer. It was often in the negative ; for many a time the class was in a state of unrepentant naughtiness, and had to be taught that " If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," but her joy was all the greater when permission had been gained, and very sweet it was to hear the little Hindu girl's reverent prayer, in the course of which would invariably come, in lowered, trembling tones, " Oh, Lord Jesus, I am so sorry ; Thou didst suffer so much for me ; they put the thorny crown on Thy brow, and nails in Thy feet and hands, and I am so sorry."

This interest in the Bible lesson was not merely a school matter either, to be dropped as soon as she got home, together with soft school voices, and tiresomely clean hands and polite manners ! No, on the contrary, it was a subject that loomed very large on Parvati's small horizon, and coloured

all her life. Arrived at home in the afternoon, she would set to work to read "Line upon Line," or any other such book allowed inside the house. There were not many, for her father and big brother kept a strict watch on her, and immediately consigned to the flames such books as her precious gospels or hymn-books, for were not these full of the Name of that hated "Mohammedan,"* Jesus Christ? The brother, too, with a boy's bullying love for his little sister, would keep an anxious look-out on all her movements; for the Christian schools taught many evil practices—amongst them one of praying in secret in a strange way, in that same despised Name. *His* sister, at least should not do this; so, dogging the child's footsteps at each suspected move, he often caught her in the very act, and was able to administer a wholesome kick or slap, accompanied by a volley of that abuse in which Sindhis, from childhood, are past masters. But little cared Parvati! It was natural that such a thing should make him angry, and the right to kick and scold was essentially that of a brother; while as for her interrupted prayers, there were plenty of little unused rooms in school, where none would say

* Among Hindus, to call anyone a Mohammedan is to use a strong term of abuse.

her nay, and the big doors were always open a full hour before school-time.

For the rest, Parvati, though unfortunately born a girl, was the darling of the household. What other child in the whole caste was so good and helpful at home? Who so obedient to her mother, or so tenderly mindful of a wilful younger sister? Who, at the age of eight, such a good cook? Clever at her books too,—who stood such a good chance of passing that coveted Fifth Standard before the marriage age of ten or eleven?

So the parents congratulated themselves on their little daughter's merits, contrasted her with the neighbours' children, and loved her well.

* * * * *

The cool, bright winter days passed by, giving place to what in other lands would have been a green spring-tide, but here it only meant warm, damp days, with streets thick in slimy mud, and an oppressive feeling in the air.

Presently dread rumours began floating round, and in a few days all the women, their faces stolid with fatalism or blanched by fear, were asking each other, "Is it true that the plague-sickness has begun again in the city?"

Yes, it was but too true, and the only safety now lay in flight; but some were poor, and had no

huts to go to outside the city, while others, with household goods ready packed, and hands as it were on the door-latch, had to wait with what patience they could muster till the dilatory chief men of their particular caste chose to make a move. So the great city emptied itself but slowly ; and if folk died in the meantime, it was the will of God, and was written on their foreheads.*

At last came a glad Friday ; the school was practically empty—only five or six children put in an appearance, and these were full of delight because their head-man had at last been induced to start, and now all lesser people might respectfully follow. The holiday was to be a long one, as most families would stay away a full three months till the hot summer sun should have effectually burnt up all traces of the dread disease ; so the children, in the midst of their excitement, were unusually affectionate, and lessons were of course all thrown to the winds.

Nathan, the pet of the school, was there, and nestled up lovingly to her teacher, as any little English child might have done. Nathan was small and stunted in stature, and her poor little body had never yet allowed her small mind to rise to the mastery of such complications as the

* See Note on page 48.

Sindhi alphabet ; but her heart was wide awake, and very loving, and as any small, fragile flower might turn its face to the sun for life and warmth, so did she, with child-like simplicity, turn to the " Sun of her soul," and love Him as her " Saviour dear."

" We are going out to my village next week," said she to her teacher ; " you must be *sure* to come and see us there."

Then, after a short, last Bible lesson and prayer, the school broke up, and the children ran excitedly home to help and hinder in the packing up of the family possessions.

But in a house not many yards away, lying on a mattress in a corner of the room, was a child sick unto death. Fever had only taken her the night before, but already the pale, drawn face looked strangely unlike the merry Parvati of yesterday, and the lips that, a few short hours ago, had been so full of laughter and happy talk, were only now and then parted in a weary groan. The house was full to overflowing ; children ran noisily in and out, clambering up the steep stone steps, and jumping off again with unconcerned enjoyment ; women, in blissful unconsciousness of the proximity of germs or bacilli, sat on the floor closely round the bed, in sympathetic, huddled-up heaps.

At the child's head sat her mother, in quiet despair—now cooling her temples with ice, now calling in low, heart-broken tones the loved name “Parvati,” and all the while watching that dread swelling already apparent on neck and arm, which she knew meant probable death to her child.

Parvati lingered for a week, tended devotedly, if ignorantly, by her weeping mother. Then at last the end came; mourners and wailers filled the house, while the little still body was carried away to the burning. But away above earth's tumult and clamour—ah, who can tell the joy of a ransomed soul when it reaches “the land that is very far off”?

Meanwhile, rain had come, and it was ten days before any of us were down in the city again. Passing through the muddy, evil-smelling streets, the teacher was hailed by a small boy, who had grown familiar from being constantly brought to school by his small elder sister, and insisting on howling dismally most of the time.

“*Salaam, salaam,*” he now called out cheerfully; “Nathan has gone away, far away, and we are going to the jungles to look for her—see our cart! And come in; grandmother calls.”

Wondering what this strange piece of infor-

mation might mean, the teacher turned and went in—to be met at the threshold by a heavy-eyed, sobbing old lady.

“My dead daughter’s only daughter, Nathan, light of my eyes,” she wailed.

“What has happened? What is it?” was the startled question.

“It was the plague-sickness. It was the will of God. God is great, and what can we do? She was a little ill on Wednesday, but not much, and then on Friday she died! And I am left alone, old and alone.” And the poor old soul, doubly bereft in this world, and with no hope for the world to come, crouched down again on the bare floor, and swayed to and fro in the abandonment of her despairing grief.

But we were hushed to awe as we heard it, and remembered that it was the same day on which Parvati had died. And we wondered at the tender Love which called its little ones Home together, mayhap lest one alone might be dazzled by the glory of that shining, sinless land.

“Oh, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
The Reaper came that day;
’Twas an angel visited the green earth,
And took the flowers away.”

*“It should be ours the oil and wine to pour
Into the bleeding wounds of stricken ones ;
To take the smitten and the sick and sore,
And bear them where a stream of blessing runs.”*



In Camp.



Wanted—a Medical Missionary for the Empty Camel!

CHAPTER IX.

“Nine - Year - Old.”

“ISS Sahib-ji ”

The call, two or three times repeated, at last elicited a sleepy grunt from the inside of the tent.

Then, realizing suddenly that unwelcome morning had come, and that it was time to plunge out of the warmth of bed into the cold, dark dampness of 6.30 a.m., both missionaries made a desperate effort to free themselves of rugs and blankets, as each tried to secure for herself the chilly work of making and serving tea, and for her companion a few minutes' extra bliss in bed.

However, all good things have an end ; and this morning even tea and Quiet Hour had to be hurried over, for a far-away hamlet must be visited before the desert sun, fierce even in its wintriness, made this changeable climate too hot for English heads.

Accordingly, an hour later, the tiny village, near which the tents had been pitched, was enter-

tained by the sight of the Madam Sahibs' start. Each was mounted on a camel, driven by a tight-jacketed, blue-trousered Mohammedan ;* both ladies wore dark spectacles and large sun-topees, and carried still larger umbrellas and a bag of books—truly a peculiar and fearsome sight they looked !

Their path, though across desert country, was extremely pretty that early morning. The low, feathery juniper bushes were covered with dew, which sparkled in the sunlight as surely no diamonds ever shone. The tall, thick, quaintly-fashioned cactus bushes were all tipped with tiny red flowers, and the cool damp air was something to be remembered with longing a few hours hence.

The place to be visited was some five miles away, so the journey lasted well over an hour. Once the silence was broken by the hinder camel-man remarking serenely to the other, " Your camel's saddle is nearly off ; the Madam Sahib will fall." This naturally resulted in the Madam Sahib commanding him to stop the camel at once, and readjust the strappings. Another time the other camel, coming unexpectedly upon a herd of buffaloes, shied violently, and darted off into the

* See Cover.

brushwood, and was only coaxed back again with great difficulty.

Save for these two interruptions, the ride was a silent one. The missionaries' hearts were full as they went off to answer the pitiful summons—they, who could do nothing and were powerless to help.

The message had come the night before, from the lips of a well-to-do man who had ridden up in hot haste on a short-legged pony. Hardly waiting to *salaam*, he had exclaimed imperatively, "Come and give medicine; the boy is ill."

"Which boy? Where? What is the matter with him?" had been the natural questions, as the missionaries (neither of them medical) had turned quickly to their very simple supply of common-sense remedies.

But the answers had shown that the boy was far beyond their skill. He had been ill eighteen months already, and evidently the disease was such that nothing short of long and careful treatment could ever make him well.

They had said so to the hasty man, who had shaken his head emphatically. "His father is a Big man," he had pleaded, "and this is his only son; you *must* make him well. He will send two beasts of burden in the morning to fetch you, if you will not come now."

It had been useless to argue that a year's illness could never be cured in a day, or that they were not doctors, and knew nothing of the treatment of such cases. The only answer had been an unbelieving shake of the head, and the vigorous assertion, often repeated,—“Sahib people *can* do everything, if they only care to.”

So, unable to convince the man of their powerlessness, they had to promise a visit to the sick child, if only to show their sympathy and desire to help.

It was not the first time during that tour—perhaps not the twentieth time!—that they had fervently longed for the presence of a medical worker. In many a village, as they had sat preaching the Word of God, they had been interrupted by a throng of sick folk clamouring for healing and relief; and many a time dull, pain-filled eyes had turned wearily away, unable to listen to the message for their souls, for lack of tender ministry to their stricken bodies.

At last the Big man's settlement was reached, and the camels, with their usual groans and three stiff jerks, knelt down for their riders to alight. Then children and servants came out *salaaming*, fierce wolf-dogs barked defiance, and the newcomers were led in and out among huts, large and

small, till they arrived at the large central one where the son and heir lay sick.

The floor was of hard mud, and scrupulously clean; the hut was lofty and roomy, with a fresh palm-thatched roof supported on wooden posts.

At one end were cooking vessels, set on fires whose smoke curled round, seeking in vain for an exit, and finally dispersed itself all over the room. Near these utensils sat two or three girls and women; a little way off were some men playing cards, and in the middle of the floor was stretched a long, thick eiderdown.

The missionaries stopped on the threshold, asking leave to enter; but one of the women, eagerly greeting them, drew them quickly in with a beseeching hand. "He is my only son; give him good medicine that he may live; for the love of God give him medicine." So saying, she pulled back the eiderdown, and disclosed to view beneath it a boy of about nine.

One glance was enough to tell the visitors that the child needed the very best and most skilful treatment; and even so, he was perhaps too far gone for human aid. His frame was emaciated and worn; his face was lined with suffering, and when his mother, anxious to prove the reality of his

symptoms, pressed a large swelling on his knee, he opened his eyes and cried out with pain.

"It is the Sahib people," she explained to him ; "they have come to make you well."

In the meantime, the father had been sent for, and he now came in from his work in the fields,—a stern-faced man, watching his life's hope fade away before his eyes.

"I had an older son, who died," he said, "and this one only is left. He was strong and well as a child, but, when he was eight years old, he fell and hurt himself. We thought nothing of it—other children fall and hurt themselves, but after this fall he got fever, then much pain in his leg, and when that got better the pain went into his other knee and under his arm, and there you see him ; and unless you will give him good medicine, he will die."

The subject of the discussion looked unmoved at the visitors. Evidently death was no new thought to him ; perhaps he did not greatly care to live.

The parents looked at them too. *Would* they open their wondrous stores and save him ? *How* could they be made to understand, these queer, pale-faced strangers, how all life would be black and bitter for ever when the sandy desert grave

had closed over that little wasted figure ? Trembling, the mother poured out all her heart in fervent entreaty for her child's life ; with folded hands and streaming eyes, she implored them to have pity and to spare him a little of the medicine of which they had so much. " You great ones who rule the earth, is there any medicine that you have not ? In Allah's Name I ask for some ; do not say me nay."

Very gently, very sadly, the Englishwomen tried to explain. " God alone is Great, and rules the earth, and holds the keys of life and death ; but He has given His healing wisdom to a few—not, alas ! to us. What you ask of us, God only can give ; still, if you will consent to send your son to a hospital, where doctors will tend him carefully, there may yet be hope for him, and we will make all arrangements gladly."

It was no use then ; they would not have pity ! What was it to them if the boy died ? They were white, and rich, and ruled the earth ; a poor man's only son was nothing to them.

The father kept silence ; the boy pulled the eiderdown over his head to keep off the worrying flies ; the mother restrained her tears, and sat down with the patient resignation of her race.

" Will you let him go to the hospital ? "

pursued the missionaries. "You can go yourselves and stay there with him, to see that he is safe and not afraid; and we will arrange it all, and give you letters to the big doctors."

"Why send him to a far city to die? No, he shall die here in his father's house, if you will not give him medicine," was the quiet answer, and all further urging was useless.

So the missionaries set to work and tried at least to alleviate his sufferings a little. The sun was high now, beating down on the thin matting roof; that could not be helped, nor could the heat of the fires, but the eiderdown was a most unnecessary addition to the temperature, so they sent for fans, and called the playing child-cousins to sit by the boy in turns and fan the flies away.

They next enquired about his food, and were told that he ate nothing at all—had not for six months! Further investigations proved that he lived on odd mouthfuls of *chapatie*, or rice, or whatever took his fancy; but it should be as the Sahib people wished—what should he eat?

Milk was suggested; so milk came in a brass bowl. Hot? Very well. Half water? Oh no, water should never be mixed with milk—he might drink water one time and milk another, but never

the two together. Did not the Sahib people know that no one ever did such a thing?

So the milk came back warm, and behind it came an uncle with two or three large bolsters. These he erected somewhere behind the boy's head; then with a firm grasp he seized the poor little thin body, jerked it backwards, and propped it bolt upright against the bolsters!

The child screamed with pain at this ungentle handling, and the missionaries protested, horrified.

"But he must sit up to eat," remarked the mother. "Well, if you wish it, he shall lie down again."

So the bolsters were removed, and the child was laid down, groaning.

"Now give me a spoon," was the elder missionary's request; and the women stared in amazement. Two or three different words were tried, all unsuccessfully; but when at last, by pantomime and drawing, the article was more clearly explained, someone said "Oh yes, we have *that*," ran off, and returned triumphant with a large, shapeless ladle—the only one in the house!

The missionary, raising the boy's head gently, fed him by spoonfuls with the warm milk, while the women looked on at the strange proceeding.

" See, is he crying with pain ? " she asked them.

" No, he is quiet, and he has drunk nearly all the milk," was the wondering answer.

" Then you must always feed him so, and never lift him up and hurt him."

Then came instructions as to when the milk was to be given—at cock-crow, when the sun was high, when the men returned for their mid-day rest, and so on ; but after repeating many times that he must be fed often with very little the mother relapsed into, " I will ask him of course whether he wants it or not ; all shall be as he says." From which nothing could move her.

While all this was going on, the boy called for the hookah, and took a few deep pulls at it.

" Oh, he does that all day," said the mother ; " what use to forbid him ? It is his only comfort, and he loves it."

There was nothing more to do in the way of easing the child ; for, lacking medical treatment, there would probably be little rest for him till death gave sleep to his worn-out body ; so the missionaries brought out their books and read some simple story from the Gospels, telling of the Christ who bare our sicknesses and carried our griefs ; but they spoke to deaf ears that heard not, and to hearts intent on their own despairing grief.

And riding home to their tents in the fierce blaze of the sun, and many a busy day and silent night since then, they were haunted by the pain they could not cure, and by the blind faith that had turned to them in vain, and wished they had had a medical missionary with them who might have done something for the poor little sufferer

*“Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!”*

—Browning.



Grinding Spices for Curry.

CHAPTER X.

“Ten - Year - Old.”



HE first years of Ten-Year-Old's life were sad ones.

She was handicapped at the very outset by being born with a club foot, which no one thought of trying to remedy.

This was a most serious matter, for it meant that no one would want to marry her when she grew older ; and, since married she must be, her relations would have to manœuvre, and either offer such a very large dowry with her that her deformity would be overlooked, or else find a willing bridegroom with a deformity of his own, such as blindness, deafness (or extreme old age !), which would counter-balance that of the girl.

Another disadvantage under which Ten-Year-Old laboured was a dire lack of brains ! Whether this deficiency dated from the time of her birth, or whether it had been caused later on by shortage of food, ill-treatment, or any illness, we never knew. Nor did we ever know the history of her

early years. Whether she had parents who cared less than nothing for her ; or whether she was an orphan, clothed and fed by grudging relations on the fewest possible halfpence a week ; or whether she had no relations at all, but was kept by some neighbours for the sake of the work they could get out of her ; or whether she had any other story, she never vouchsafed to tell. But, whatever were the facts of the case, it happened that the child, tried beyond endurance, suddenly, at ten years of age, awoke to a gleam of sound common-sense, ran away, and put herself under the protection of the police.

We, of course, had not made her acquaintance at the time ; and it was not until her case had been settled, and the court had decided that she must be permanently released from her tormentors, that the authorities appealed to us to give her a home.

Such an appeal could not be refused, so the ragged, limping girl was brought in amongst our wondering, well-fed orphans, and seemed surprised that no one wanted to molest her.

The marks of bruises and kicks on her thin body soon disappeared, and she began to learn from the other children how to smile, and even laugh. She was nicely dressed now, and went

to school every day ; and, in course of time, she developed such a supply of brains that she succeeded, after Herculean efforts, in mastering the queer, pretty strokes of the Gujerati alphabet, and managed to learn to read and write that language. Later on she began wrestling with Romanized Urdu, which she needed in order to follow the Church service ; and she finally rose to some dim understanding of the four simple rules of Arithmetic !

All this of course took some years, and meanwhile the girl was growing affectionate and responsive, and seemed to be making every effort to live as a true Christian — “ sometime darkness, now—light in the Lord.” So she was baptized (by the name of Eve), and then confirmed ; and gradually she came to be one of the elder girls of the fast growing household of little ones.

When the girls of her age began training as teachers, Eve was of necessity left behind. She had evidently reached the topmost height of her brain-power ; and whereas they were beginning to go to evening classes and learn all kinds of new, interesting things, she was allowed to leave off the now wearisome task of school-work, and give her poor brains a rest ! She must make her contribution, though, to the general usefulness, so

it was decreed that she should get up at 5 a.m. daily (instead of once a fortnight, as did all the others in turn) to help prepare the morning meal. She could make up the lost sleep by a leisurely doze in the middle of the day, while all the family were away at school ; and for the rest, she should have charge of the store-cupboards, lamp-oil and wood, besides being the " odd-man " of the house, ready to wash clothes for any girl taken sick on washing-day, or for a teacher busy with examination work.

This is a round of duties which Eve sometimes (having slept half the day !) growlingly declares to be far beyond the powers of any mortal to accomplish ! Those dark years of her childhood have left their shadow, not only on her mind, but also on her temper and disposition. Still, on the whole she works well and cheerfully, and many a time we say to each other, " *Good* old Eve ; whatever should we do without her ? "

In the way of outside interest and help, Eve has three faithful " Prayer-Relations," in distant England. They all send her something for Christmas, or write her an occasional letter—a letter which she hugs close and carries round with her perhaps for days before she will approach anyone on the subject of reading and translating it to her.

When at last she does so, she listens smilingly to what is read, and comments delightedly in her gruff voice, "*What* a nice letter, isn't it!" Then the treasure goes back to its hiding-place, and its contents probably vanish out of Eve's slow brain; but she gratefully remembers the love in the heart of the far-away writer, and sometimes she will triumphantly remark, "My Prayer-Relations are nicer than anybody else's, because they never forget me as the other girls' Prayer-Relations do."

Eve has one pathetic personal vanity, which causes secret joy to her, and open amusement to the other girls. She is very tall, but cares nothing for her height. She has a nice face, which, when lighted up with an animated smile, might be almost called handsome; but little recks Eve of features. What does afford her unlimited delight is her hair—and here is the pathos of the matter, for Eve is practically bald! She has a large, round, shiny scalp—so round and shiny, in fact, that we have to give her old stocking-tops to make into black "skull-caps" for herself!—and on each side grows a thin wisp of about a dozen long hairs. These are her joy and pride, and appear to her more beautiful than all the thick tresses of the other girls. No present is

so acceptable to Eve as a piece of brightly coloured ribbon to tie them up. We always long to get inside her mind for a moment, to see just how she is planning to arrange the ribbons ; but they go away among her treasures, and we never see them again. A stranger coming in will look at her in pity for her sorrowful, bald skull, but she will turn away with a self-conscious smile, convinced that the newcomer is struck dumb in admiration of the beauty of her hair. Poor old Eve ! Well, we all have our own illusions, less or more ; may they only be as harmless as hers !

Eve is renowned, as might be expected, for doing unusual, perhaps rather upsetting, things. One day she may prolong her mid-day “doze” till four or five p.m., and then the hungry household comes racing in, pell-mell, from school, to be met by angry growls from the kitchen—“Dinner ! Why I haven’t lit the fire yet ! You won’t get dinner for hours !”

Another day she will be selected to do a particular piece of cooking for some special purpose ; and, being enchanted with the result, will furiously gobble it up herself till only a spoonful, not worth mentioning, remains !

But, one day, by a small oversight, Eve surpassed herself, and brought down on her own



Partakers of Curried Knife, off to School.

devoted head a storm of teasing which may be echoing still !

It was the day of the visit of a very " Big " Mem Sahib to all the schools, and the teachers, who had been preparing for weeks beforehand, were busy in the early morning putting last touches to several things that were to be carried down to adorn their various schools. Thus it was that when the breakfast bell rang, they begged to be excused a few minutes longer, and the little ones sat down to eat without them. The " turn-one " for the day, i.e. the one whose turn it was to assist in cooking at 5 a.m., and then to serve out the food, ladled out generous platefuls of rice and curry, which the luckless little ones all unsuspectingly demolished. When they had nearly finished, the elder girls and teachers came running in, all hunger and hurry, and the " turn-one " quickly set to work to fill the remainder of the plates. When she arrived at the bottom of the enormous saucepan in which the whole family's curry had been cooked, her spoon touched—What ? She peered in, fished up the object, and waved it aloft amid peals of laughter from all the on-lookers. It was the old, rusty kitchen-knife, which Eve had " curried " up with the vegetables for breakfast ! Many were the specimens of

school-girl wit that were hurled at Eve's stocking-covered head that morning ; but the elders took it more seriously, and called a halt in the proceedings, while they consulted with each other as to whether any evil results were likely to ensue to the children from the eating of curried essence of rusty knife ! They thought not, as it had been well boiled, but one never knows, and some of the small ones, who had partaken freely, are delicate. So the decree went forth (and was received with groans !) that all who had eaten were to come at once and be given a dose of medicine, and all who had not eaten (Oh how thankful they felt !) were to take their rice dry, embellished by anything they could lay hands on in the store-cupboard.

And the grown-ups, who were nearly run off their legs that morning without any unnecessary mischances of this kind, felt for once by no means inclined to say "*Good old Eve ! whatever should we do without her ?*"

*“Star of the East, how sweet art Thou,
Seen in life’s early morning sky,
Ere yet a cloud has dimm’d the brow,
While yet we gaze with childish eye.”*

—Keble.



"Big Eleven-Year-Olds—Bright-Eyed and Merry."

CHAPTER XI.

“ Eleven - Year - Olds.”



LITTLE Three-Year-Olds, in the course of long, happy years, turn at last into big Eleven-Year-Olds. Then, they were the sleepy, solemn tail of the school, now they are its head—dignified at times as befits their position, but always bright-eyed and merry, the laughing leaders in every game and frolic.

During the eight years many and most of the class of forty babies have been regretfully left behind somewhere; a few are still in school, having stuck wofully in the 1st or 2nd standard, among tiny, sharp-brained girls, who pass the annual examination gleefully, and leave them stranded there. A few have died in the yearly scourge of plague, or from some neglected childish ailment; some have been married very young, some have been sent to other schools, some have been taken away from school to mind the baby brothers and sisters at home. So the few who

have survived all these mischances, and now form the elated Top Standard, are doubly, trebly dear to us, for love of the many who have passed out of our reach. There is a shadow on our hearts, too, whenever we look at them—the shadow of which the next chapter will tell. For the days of the Eleven-Year-Olds with us are numbered, and soon the iron hand of custom will snatch them away to a life where we can seldom see them, and where childhood and freedom and light-hearted happiness will be to them “as a dream when one awaketh.”

They are tall and slight and very upright, and their dress is quaint, but English visitors always exclaim “*How beautiful!*” at sight of the richly blended colourings of silken, gold-embroidered trousers, shirt, and *chaddar*. The heavy nose and ear-rings and countless ivory bangles formerly worn are beginning to go out of fashion, but the black eyes of Eleven-Year-Olds sparkle more brightly than any jewels, and their gold-ringed hands, with dainty gold bracelets on the slender wrists, glint in the sunshine as they wave their arms in eager gesticulation. Each one of them is a school monitress, trusted to check, and if necessary report, any reprehensible doings that may take place on the school premises before the

arrival or after the departure of the Madam Sahib and her teachers ; and though sometimes, being human after all, and only eleven, they fall into temptation and become a party to the wickedness themselves, still they are very dependable on the whole, and can at least be trusted, if the worst comes to the worst, to give a truthful account of it afterwards, not minimizing their own share.

Very sensitive to praise or blame have Eleven-Year-Olds become—so much so that a reproof to one will cause the whole class to hang their heads in shame, and a word of praise is sufficient reward for any difficult task accomplished. Thus it was that they one day grasped the solution of a problem that baffled their quick brains for long. It was a lesson on self-forgetfulness, and the illustration was one of those newspaper paragraphs, so common nowadays, telling in a few terse words a tale of dauntless heroism. The men of whom it spoke had risked their lives to save others—and, saving them, had found no help for themselves,—no reward but wounds and death. The merry faces saddened as the children listened, with brows knit to keep the tears back. What did it all mean ? To forget oneself was good and brave, but if the end of it was that —— ? To save their own lives meant letting their comrades die ; and why should

cowards live and brave men die? "Tell us, Madam Sahib," they said at last, when nothing would come right anywhere; so I put them on the track of the Other world, where this world's questions all find their answers. Instantly there was radiance, the sadness all forgotten; and one Eleven-Year-Old, voicing the thoughts of the rest, said softly, with shining eyes, "Yes, there they are, sitting beside God now, and *He* is saying to them, 'Well done!' Oh, how glad they must be that they did it, those brave men who gave their lives for the others."

The mothers, friendly and confiding, often hold us responsible for all the children say and do at home, in the streets, or wherever they may be, and we are divided between annoyance at having to scold and punish our children for faults committed we know not when or how, and pleasure at the added influence it gives us over their whole lives. It helps them perhaps to realize that God, to whose voice in their conscience they are learning now to listen, must always be given full control of every action; it helps them to understand that the holiness God orders in His children is not for school wear, or the Bible lesson only, but for Saturdays and Sundays and all times, and for the long, coming years at home.

One of the vices of the great city where our Eleven-Year-Olds live is gambling, which begins in children of six or seven, and leads to countless evils in later life. There are even days marked in their Calendar as Public Holidays, that they may be given up, from early morning till late at night, to systematic gambling. One such day was once drawing near (all unknown to us), when the Eleven-Year-Olds put their heads together and held a consultation to see what could be done. The result was a sudden remark in the middle of the Bible lesson next day, seemingly *a propos* of nothing, "Madam Sahib, are you going to close school on Thursday?"

It was evidently *a propos* of something, then, for the whole body of them rose to their feet in excitement, and waited anxiously for the reply.

"Yes," I answered, "it is your Big Day, so you will want a holiday, won't you?"

"Oh no, please, we don't," was the emphatic answer of the spokeswoman.

"Really! Why not?" I asked, quite in the dark as to their motive.

Then they all spoke at once, in bits, each trying to explain the fastest. "It's the Gambling Festival, and all the schools will be shut—all our friends will be at home, gambling in the streets—

we shall see them—they will call us—we shall want to gamble too ! But we don't want to really, because we know God doesn't like it—if you will open school, we'll come here instead, then we shan't see the other children and we won't want to join them."

Needless to say, we opened school that day ; and, to judge by the shouts of happy laughter that pealed through the old school as game after game was played, up and down the double staircase, in and out of the empty class-rooms, no one seemed to be regretting the choice they had made !

Our little Eleven-Year-Olds have quick, resourceful brains, and are always very loth to "give it up." One day in June there was a tremendous downpour of rain—it only rains once or twice a year with us, so this was an exciting event—and shortly afterwards came the day of the Annual Inspection. So, naturally, when Geography came round, they were questioned as to the origin of rain. Now, sad to say, this was a subject on which they were grossly ignorant, rain being, as you see, such a scarcity in our parts. A little reflection pointed to its having originated in the clouds, which they announced, only to be met by the damping response, "Of course, but how does it get there?" I murmured that it

was no use to ask them, as they had never heard how it got there, and didn't know ; but they held on, determined to say something, and the Inspectress repeated, " Well, how *does* the water get into the clouds ? " Then a shy, delicate child looked up and saved the class. " God puts it there," she said.

But to see Eleven-Year-Olds at their best, you should see them at their much-loved Bible lesson. People in India are not fettered by that reserve which ties and binds us in religious matters and prevents our talking freely of the things of God, however willing we really are to do so. There, the Scripture lesson is one at which the children talk as much as the teacher—more, usually, for they are many and she is one!—and sometimes, in the exuberance of their delighted interest, they make so much noise that she has to threaten to go away and not tell them any more till to-morrow. The Old Testament stories appeal to them immensely, and stern indeed must be the discipline if they are to be kept to " Hands up those who know ! " instead of a babel of delighted answers. They take in the stories, turn them over in their minds, and unconsciously add dramatic touches of their own when re-telling them. Saul, for instance, when he awoke in the cave after David's

midnight visit, was surprised to find a piece of his trousers gone. (The children wear trousers, so of course Saul must have !) He said to his men "Look here"—with an expressive indication of the garment—"how-*ever* did that happen? It must have been a rat that came in the night and ate it."

Their very favourite stories are the ones about idols, and these often lead to long talks on the subject of their own Hindu gods. One day the conversation was opened by a determined little person, who said, "I was telling my grandmother yesterday how useless it is to worship idols, for they can't even hear her speak; but she never will listen to me, and goes to the Temple just the same." "Yes," chimed in a second, "just like my aunt; she has a room full of little idols, and every morning she goes in with a little bell to wake them up; then she washes and dresses them, and puts food before them, and then she prays to them for ages; but you know, Madam Sahib, if they can't wash and dress themselves even, I don't see how they can ever help her. Besides, they're not gods—there is only One, and these are nothing but bits of silver." "They *are* bits of silver," went on a third, "and people rub them up and make them shine and think that's

lovely ; but Jesus Christ, now, He shines all of Himself, and He shines, oh, more than the bright shining of the sun."

Another great delight to Eleven-Year-Olds is the Pilgrim's Progress, to which they have only lately been promoted. Christian's distress over the burden on his back touched their tender consciences. " Oh, dear," was the conclusion they arrived at, " that's what we ought to be like ; we've all got sin burdens too, and we ought to care heaps more, and be dreadfully sorry as he was." Christian's account of the Celestial City, if it impressed Pliable for the moment, had still more effect on our Eleven-Year-Olds, and for days, the most unlikely subjects would somehow all come round to that. There was the strange thrill of knowing that we shall see so many people there —David with his harp, Samuel the obedient, Elijah, Solomon, and many another who seems like a household friend to the children. Then the wonderful journey there ; " Angels will carry us, you know ; I've seen them in a picture " ; " Or it might be the Lord Himself "—" Oh, Madam Sahib, suppose the Lord Jesus should come this very night, and take us all Home Himself ! " and the dark eyes shone, while the other children smiled a welcome to the thought. And then Heaven

itself ; “ Won’t it be just *lovely* when nobody’s sick or cries any more ? Don’t you just wish, now *don’t* you, that everyone in the whole wide world would believe on the Lord Jesus and come to heaven ? ”

Eleven-Year-Olds’ belief in prayer is very firm and true. I could tell you many a story of children praying confidently for help in examinations, in work, at home, and getting the answers that they never doubted would come ; but let me finish up with a war story.

It was in the first early, terrible days, when the Germans began strewing the North Sea with mines. Everyone’s thoughts had been taken up with the soldiers, but now we had to include the sailors in our noon-day prayer ; and the children had a lesson on under-sea dangers, and were told to remember the Fleet in their own prayers at home. They listened open-eyed to the account of this new kind of warfare ; and then the lesson went on to something else. But one small person was revolving plans in her mind, and presently she interrupted with a wave of the arm.

“ Well ? ”

She is a timid child, who rarely speaks in class ; but the war and her plans carried her out of herself for once.

"Suppose the Germans," she said, slowly and distinctly, her brow furrowed with thought, "were to lay a mine here"—indicating the schoolroom floor—"and went away and forgot where it was. Then supposing they or their friends came back again *just* here, and knocked on it, would it blow them up?"

"Certainly," I answered; "the mine couldn't know she was a German ship."

"That will do, then," was the answer, with a sigh of relief. Her plans were succeeding, and the whole class waited, surprised, to hear them. "Now let us pray that the Germans may lay *lots* of mines, forget where they all are, and come back on top of them and all be blown up!" And the serious eyes looked solemnly up at mine for approval. I had gently to suggest that such a prayer would be a little too unkind, and that it would be better to pray for our own men, rather than against our enemies.

An Eleven-Year-Old enlarged on this idea immediately. "Yes, we'll ask Him to come and guide each of our boats Himself, in and out like this" (making a serpentine movement with her hand) "so that they won't hit any mines, because of course He knows where they all are under the water."

It was a few days after this, that one morning's scanty telegrams brought the news of the British naval success off Heligoland. The children were wild with delight, and capered about exclaiming, "Not *one* of our ships sunk, and look at all the German mines!" But one of the Eleven-Year-Olds suddenly remembered, and stood still. "Isn't that just what we have been praying for," she said, awe in her face, "see how God has answered our prayers!"

“Ob! Love, that will not let me go —.”



Twelve-Year-Old Brides of Sindh.

CHAPTER XII.

“Twelve-Year-Old.”



WOULD that this chapter might remain unwritten for many a long year to come !

But it is already over-due, and the caste-people are beginning to make unpleasant remarks, for Shanti, one of our light-hearted Eleven-Year-Olds, has crossed the staid border-line of twelve, and gossiping friends, looking at her long, lanky legs, shake their heads reproachfully and say : “ Well, her mother is only a widow, you see ; she can’t afford the marriage dowry, or Shanti would have been married ages ago.”

India is a strange country, where people are valued very much according to the amount of their jewels and ready money ; so this remark is a deliberate slight on Shanti and her widowed mother ; and, oft repeated, it goads the whole household into strenuous activity. The child left school six months ago, because even then people were saying she was too big to walk the streets

freely ; and that, besides, she should be learning to do something useful, instead of wasting her time over such nonsense as History, Arithmetic and what not. So there had been a last proud Prize-giving at the Madam Sahib's bungalow, at which Shanti, as Best Girl of the whole school, had received a truly beautiful doll from the gracious hand of the Commissioner Sahib's Mem Sahib, and then she had had to give way to her mother's tears and beseechings, fetch home all her beloved books from school, and say a long good-bye to the happy days she had spent there.

Her heart had failed her as she opened her little desk and began slowly turning out the contents. There was her lovely big map of India on top, so neatly painted and filled in that the Inspector had been moved to open admiration, and had said that none of even his big boys could have done it so well ! Then came her books of careful notes (for printed text-books are mostly non-existent in this Province) on Indian History, Grammar, Geography, and so on. The Arithmetic book was not quite such a favourite, and the red-ink " W "s were a little more prevalent than the " R "s ; but " W "s and " R "s and even " $\frac{0}{10}$ "s, — all were precious to her now, because written by the hand of the dear teacher

who would never teach her again. At one side was a bag containing her sewing ; well, there would be plenty of that to do at home, but, oh, there were her Drawing, Brushwork, and Nature Study books—the cream of the whole collection. Lingeringly she turned over page after page, oblivious of the merry crowd of children who were now filling the school, chattering gaily, and comparing the dolls and other prizes received at the Bungalow yesterday.

“ $\frac{9}{10}$, Very Good ” came over and over again for Brushwork ; and for Drawing, after full marks and “ Good ” many times, “ Excellent ” came three times in succession, which she had been made to show, in shy delight, to the “ Biggest ” Madam Sahib of all ! Here, in her interleaved Nature Diary book was a page with a piece torn out, over which she had once wept bitter tears, for Heti, her implacable rival, had in a fit of jealousy deliberately torn the paper, and Shanti had thereby lost two precious marks for untidiness ; but discovery and disgrace had overtaken the culprit, and Shanti smiled now, with a softening of the heart, as she thought of Heti, far away and lonely in her mother-in-law’s house.

Now, however, these school treasures are lying, dusty and unregarded, in a corner of the shelf,

and Shanti is sitting cross-legged, as she has been learning to sit with quiet patience, sewing and embroidering endless and exquisitely beautiful garments for her own wedding trousseau. Her mother and aunts (all widows) are busy with the same work, and the housework, marketing, cooking, and bargaining over silks, satins and gold thread, are all done for them by the indefatigable old grandmother. The trousseau must be an unusually fine one, for the widowed mother, proudly mindful of the good family from which she springs, and defying the taunts of the neighbours, has sought for her only child the honour of marriage into a rich, "big" house, and this honour must be duly paid for in hard cash and very much besides. In order to produce the enormous dowry necessary, she has sold all her own possessions, and then with difficulty borrowed a large sum of money as well; and the stacks of many coloured silken trousers and *cholos* (a kind of loose jacket worn by Sindhis) now nearing completion, would provide a good start in life for any reasonably-minded princess!

The great day of the wedding is near at hand, and many are the critical visitors to the widow's two-roomed home, and many the disparaging remarks made about the costly array of clothes

perpetually on view. Nothing must be admitted to be good enough for that very grand house into which Shanti is going to wed. The girl herself is quieter than of old, and not so demonstratively affectionate ; the first intense longing for school and playmates has worn off, and she is beginning to enjoy being the centre of so much trouble, expenditure, and interest. Her mother, too, as she looks up from time to time at the quiet girlish form so intent on her sewing, and stopping to think how empty the bare room will seem without her, lavishes upon the child, in these last days, all the clinging devotion of her widowed heart ; and Twelve-Year-Old, childlike, tyrannizes over the love whose depth she is not yet old enough to understand.

But at last all the preparations are complete ; the fateful day has arrived, and as the wedding is to begin at the unusually early hour of 10 p.m., you and I and her favourite teacher have yielded to Shanti's shy entreaties and her father-in-law's polite invitation, and are driving down to be present at the ceremony. The evening air is refreshingly cool, and the streets are silent and deserted, so the drive seems a shorter one than by bustling daylight, and we soon arrive at the house of the bridegroom, where the performance is to begin.

We enter on a scene of noise and confusion, for we have come punctually at 10, and in the East punctuality is an unexpected virtue. Still, everyone is courteously pleased to see us, and three rickety chairs are brought for us to sit on, while women, children, babies, men, all press forward to greet us and make us feel at home. We are in the large, central living-room of the house; in the centre of it stand one or two unclothed serving-men, feeding smoky fires, and stirring large cauldrons of home-made sweets, which will be consumed during the small hours of the morning.

"Here he is," someone presently exclaims; and all eyes are turned upon the bridegroom—a tall, awkward schoolboy, who comes up looking as if he fervently wished he were someone else! He shakes hands with us, and explains in English that he is on his way to his bath; and we, recognizing that as the first of the rites of the evening, gladly hurry him off to it!

Again the talk and confusion, the stirring of the sweetmeats and the stoking of those roasting fires, and we are getting hard up for topics of conversation; when "Here he is," again rouses everyone's interest, and the bridegroom emerges, wet-headed and shiny, from his tub. He is now

seized upon by his waiting relations, who deck him out in some queer garments, cover him up from head to foot in a large quilted cloak like an eiderdown, and crown him with a painted erection two feet high, which he balances with difficulty on the topmost peak. Thus arrayed, he is assisted to seat himself on the floor, in the centre of a group of little earthenware dishes, and opposite him, on rugs hastily spread over the stone floor, there assemble his many girl-cousins, nieces, aunts, and sundry crying babies. The male relatives stand looking on indifferently ; not even when a tall, fine-looking Brahman appears, do they show any sign of interest in the proceedings. The new-comer sits down opposite the fidgetting mass of eiderdown and top-heavy crown, and looks round at the dishes provided. One is filled with rice, another with *dal*, a third with flour, and so on, and, seeing them all in order, he begins to chant, in a monotonous nasal tone, something to which no one listens, but which seems to be connected with these fruits of the earth and their enjoyment. We turn and ask the young men standing by what is being said, and what is the meaning of this ceremony. They answer in stiff, bored English, " The ceremony has no meaning, for who knows what is being said ? We men would

do away with it ; but it pleases the women, so we acquiesce."

" But what is its origin ? There must have been some meaning in it once ? "

" Who knows its origin ? It pleases the women, that is all."

After more monotonous chanting, the Brahman suddenly comes to a full-stop, and then begins a long bargain as to the price which he is to be paid for this performance of the first of his duties. He asks only a small fee, but the bridegroom's relations explain to us that there will be so many such demands before the happy pair are duly wed, that it behoves them to show fight over each one ! However, go on he will not until the specified sum is safely handed over ; so the family give in with a bad grace, and we are ready for the second act of the drama.

This is to be the procession from the house of the bridegroom to that of the bride, but there will be a delay of half an hour, we are calmly told, because the torchbearers have been commandeered for another bridal party, and we must wait our turn !

We do this with all the patience we can muster, and pass the time by watching the Headman of the caste, in an adjacent room, call the roll and

note absentees. Some thirty or forty men have been collecting here, while we sat inside with the women, and we are told that any man failing to put in an appearance at the house will be fined a sum of eightpence, to atone for the slight to the bride's father-in-law !

When at last the torchbearers arrive, the bridegroom is bundled out, down the steps into the street, and on to a white mare, with a small, gleeful cousin perched up behind to bring good luck ; and then we guests are packed by fours into the waiting carriages, and set off slowly down the road—torchbearers at the side, and a dismal, out-of-tune band leading the way. The bride's house is, as the crow flies, about a hundred yards away ; but we must go the round of half the city, before arriving there, to let everyone have a chance of seeing us, and enjoying the music of our expensive band.

The bride's house is quite transformed and unrecognizable, for the whole street has been roofed in and carpeted for the occasion, and it is all ablaze with electric light and decorations. We are again received most courteously, presented with bowls of sugar, and led up to seats of honour on a comfortable sofa. We beg, however, to be allowed to go and speak to the bride,

as it is now nearly midnight, and we cannot stay much longer. So they kindly take us into a small, stuffy room, and say we can have ten minutes with her while the bridegroom is having his second bath ; and there, the silent centre of an excited crowd of shouting women, we find Shanti. She is dressed in clinging garments of fine red silk (they will presently be changed for her gorgeous wedding clothes), and our merry little schoolgirl seems already to have grown up into sedateness and gravity. She is glad to see us, but will not speak, as her mother-in-law and other older women are standing near ; soon we go out again, to make way for the Brahman and near relatives to come in and begin the evening's work. The first thing they will do will be to take a hand of bride and bridegroom, and tie them together, to the sound of weird nasal chantings ; then the couple will be led outside to where a small fire is blazing, and will sit before it to receive the blessing of the onlookers. As each blessing is given, with hands outspread first over the fire, then over the bride's downcast head, the girl and boy will rise and walk once round the fire and then return to their places. There will be anxious following of the bridegroom round with a screen warranted to keep away all evil spirits ; there will be many more Sanskrit

hymns and chantings, and more strange ceremonies whose meaning has long been forgotten. But all this will not be over till at least three or four in the morning, and that is nearly our time for starting to-morrow's busy work, so we decide to stay no longer, and, with many apologies and farewell greetings, we hurry back to our sleepy horse and make tracks for bed.

We only see our Twelve-Year-Old once more, after this eventful night ; and a week later, she is standing with her mother-in-law and all the household-in-law, on the crowded railway platform, waiting for the train which is to carry them off to their real home. She is excited at the thought of entering a train for the first time in her life, and interested by what she sees and wondering what another town will look like ; but deeper down is a dull ache at her heart, a fear of all this strangeness, and the haunting picture of her mother's pale, tear-stained face at home.

* * * * *

Three years have come and gone since then, and Shanti is back on a week's visit to her mother. To look at her face, you might think her twenty-five years old instead of fifteen ; but when she looks up and smiles, it is the same face that used to turn to us so confidingly in the happy school-days.

These three years have not been without their own joys and interests, but they have taught her many a lesson she was full young to learn, and there is something pathetic in the sight of her now, sitting quietly at her mother's side, or helping soberly with the housework, without a trace of the old imperiousness or girlish spirits.

Homesickness has had much to do with this change in her, for the grand, rich house, with its constant bickerings over money, jewels, clothes, and finery, is a great contrast to Shanti's quiet home. Then, too, the honour of this grand house has to be kept up by perpetually comparing it with other houses—especially with that from which the youngest and poorest of the daughters-in-law came ; so that Shanti was first made angry, then miserable, and finally stoical, by the constant contempt showered upon her and her absent mother and the old home in general.

The dull, empty life, too, galled our Twelve-Year-Old nearly into frenzy at times. She had taken all her school-books with her, hoping to while away some dreary hours with them, but had soon been told, in strong terms, that she would be an impudent daughter-in-law indeed who should sit down with a book and read or write in a house where the mother-in-law had never felt the neces-

sity of learning so much as her letters ! So books were henceforth sealed to her, and, since pen and ink were also forbidden, it was impossible to even pour out her heart in long letters to her mother ; the most she could do was to send a message by any chance friend who might happen to be traveling in that direction.

No wonder then that her spirits had flagged, and when the unaccustomed climate and secluded life brought on low fever, it was not to be expected that she would shake it off easily. The household were kindly, but not at all concerned ; and as the girl grew more listless and heavy-eyed, and the ache in her tired limbs more ceaseless, she felt intuitively that if this really were the beginning of consumption—as the women daily assured her !—and she were on her way to the Great Unknown, there would be short mourning for her, and a successor (with a large dowry) would be found within the month.

However, her boy-husband having one day suddenly and unexpectedly put down his foot, Shanti had been sent home to her mother for a change of air, which, with the old-time love and fond caressing, the eager reading of her little old gospels and hymns, visits to school and teacher, and all the old joys of her childhood, had worked

wonders, so that she had gone back a new, brave Shanti, to face a sharp-tongued mother-in-law and all life's hurts, in the steady peace of the Love that passeth knowledge.

Since when, things were never quite so bad again.

But every time she comes home, there are fresh care-lines on her mother's face, and the signs of poverty in the little house are more apparent. The grandfather is getting old, and unable to earn enough for the support of his three widowed daughters; and while half the scanty earnings of Shanti's mother has to be sent regularly as a present to that wealthy mother-in-law, the other half is not enough to pay the exorbitant interest demanded monthly by the man from whom she borrowed the dowry money.

The girl is beginning to understand the depth of the sacrifice her mother has made, in order to secure (as she thought) her child's future happiness; and that understanding writes lines of sorrow on Shanti's young face.

Coming home with a heavy heart from visiting her old schoolgirl in the city, the missionary goes to take a look at her own children, orphans many, holiday-making in the Compound, among whom are Two-Year-Old, Six-Year-Old, Seven-Year-

Old, Ten-Year-Old. The elder ones are sitting sewing and chatting together, but a band of Ten-, Eleven-, and Twelve-Year-Olds are busy erecting large huts in a corner, destined to shelter dolls. Their leader and chief engineer is Dya, a girl who was at school with Shanti, and is about her age. She has now become a pupil teacher, and besides carrying on her work with extreme dignity in school, she is a very good cook, and makes, mends and washes all her own clothes *and* those of her small orphan charge. She is an inveterate lover of dolls, however, and to-day, like all other holidays, is devoted to their service.

Seeing the Miss Sahib coming along, and a little apprehensive on the question of a tidy compound, she now runs up laughingly, shaking the wisps of lanky hair out of her eyes, and begs, "*Please* come and see what we're doing ; we've nearly finished our dolls' houses."

" Oh ! You baby ! " is the smiling answer ; " is there no work you might be doing instead of wasting your time so shockingly ? "

But the dolls' houses are duly seen and admired, and, after that, have to be allowed to stand ! and Dya triumphantly explains, " Mine is to be *much* bigger yet, for it has got to take in all my dolls " — a tall order that, for her family, though always

carefully locked away in her play-box, and only talked of freely in moments of confidence, is said to run to seven or eight at the very least !

Some hours later, the missionary is on her good-night tour round the children's house. It is early, but they all, wearied out with play, have dropped off quickly to sleep ; and the lantern shines on chubby, motionless limbs and strangely silent lips. With a prayer in her heart for each, the missionary passes by the sleeping figures—and then pauses as she comes to Dya's string bed. For Dya's face, " fair " and childish, is happy with a smile, as if she were playing in her sleep, and by her side, also fast asleep, lies her favourite *sari*-dressed doll.

" Such a baby," murmurs the missionary, tenderly smiling on her little teacher ; and with a sudden tightening of the heart her thoughts fly back to Shanti—yes, and so many other little Twelve-Year-Olds and younger, who have too soon forgotten how to be " babies " and play.

*“Far was the call, and farther as I followed,
‘Grew there a silence round the Lord and me.”*

’ —Myers.



East and West. Aged Four and Six.

CHAPTER XIII.

East and West.



AN you see them all, I wonder,
as you put down the book,
O you of the far-away West?
Can you hear our children's
voices — merry, sad, eager?
Can you see their little hands
stretched out, beckoning to you
from across the blue waters?

There are so many little Two-Year-Olds, Seven-Year-Olds, Ten-Year-Olds who have no one to love them, and who call to you to come and give them of the love poured out on you.

There are Nine-Year-Olds and younger, all worn and weary with pain, who cry, beseeching, for the rest that none of their own people know how to give them. But the West is skilled in healing, and shall they cry to you in vain?

There are children of all ages, aye, and countless grown-ups too, whose hearts are sad even in happiness, because there is no one to tell them of the true joy that God gives.

There are child-orphans, and girl-wives, widows

now, mourning those slain on a foreign battle-field, and they sorrow as those that have no hope, for the dear ones lost to earth. Are there none in the West to come and lead them to the God of all comfort, who comforteth us?

Yet it is not *their* voices that must call you, sad and imploring though they be. One Voice only can call, and, calling, give the grace to go. But, should He be calling you through their needs, then remember little Six-Year-Old, and how she gave her all to her heart's beloved. Can you withhold aught from Christ?

Perhaps you are not old enough yet to go, and you think you will listen to the call a few years hence. But if you decide to take a journey—especially if you are to spend some time at the other end—you generally begin packing some little time before. So if you should be planning to take that longest of all journeys, right into the hearts of a strange people—and especially if your life-long home is to be among them—you can never begin to pack too soon. For there are many things you will need to take with you, and they cannot be bought, ready made, at the last minute! You will need Patience untiring, glad and sweet. You will need a Cheerfulness that can keep afloat, and not be sunk by the choppy waves of contrary

circumstances. You will need the Perseverance that goes on placidly through and after defeat, and cares not whether victory comes to it or to its successor. But the list is an endless one, and you can really write it yourself ; only be sure that over and above everything else, inside and out and through and through it all, is Love—and that of the right kind. Many things are labelled Love, which are not Love at all ; they may be jealousy dressed up, or selfishness disguised, and when these and others are stored up in the place of Love, they bring disaster. But the true Love, which is of God alone, and has nothing to do with this earth, is that which smooths the way and will lead you safely right into the great, wonderful heart of the people of India.

There was once an English Seven-Year-Old, who lived near your busy, bustling London Town. Some way or other she heard the Call—no, not of India, but of Christ ; only He spoke to her through India. So she started straight away to pack up and get ready, and it was none too soon ! For we not only have to pack up the good things, but also to unpack and throw away so much that is either bad in itself, or else useless weight for that far-away foreign land ; and one thing alone may take years to throw away !

The time went by,—slowly for Seven-Year-Old, because always, in lessons and games, in school time and holidays, her heart was hearing that far-off cry. Impetuously she would answer, “Yes, I’m coming,” then shrink back, fearing “Could even He ever make her fit?”

But at last, when Seven-Year-Old had reached the prodigious age of Twenty-Four, there came a time when she stood in the dazzling, dusty sunshine of the East, with strange brown faces all around, and home a far dream across the water.

And now the Call, that she had heard so long from afar, came fresh and near from a hundred human hearts—came from little orphan arms stretching up for Mother-kisses; came from grown-up children who had grown up sad while no one cared, and came from the naughty, who had never heard how to be good.

So Twenty-Four-Year-Old’s heart, in the stranger land, had rest as it had not had for years, because the Call no longer haunted it from far; and she still gives heartfelt thanks that she, so unworthy, was allowed to come.

Should God so will, may the Call haunt all you who read, until you, too, can give Him humble thanks on the far-off Indian shore.

