

MISCELLANEOUS.

MY SISTER RUTH.

"What is it Mark, dearest? Why do you look so troubled, and stay here, instead of going to your supper?"

It was my sister Ruth who spoke thus to me, as I leaned moodily against the mantle in the sitting-room, after having been told twice that supper was ready.

"Why don't you go to supper?" I asked, in answer to her questions.

"I have to get the babies to sleep first," she replied. "The little darlings sleep so much better if I get them off quietly about this time. But father is eating, and you had better go and eat too, while the gems are warm."

"I don't want to eat while father's there," I replied pettishly.

My sister quietly rocked the twins, Joseph and Mary, without speaking again, until father finished his supper and came into the sitting-room. The babies were asleep then, and Ruth went softly into the kitchen, beckoning me to follow her, which I did.

Ruth was seven years older than myself, she was nineteen and I twelve. Our twin brother and sister were not yet one year old, and our mother had died at the time of their birth.

Father had been away from home a great deal during his married life; some of the time on missions preaching the Gospel, and at other times on business of his own. Mother had nearly always been delicate in health, and Ruth had learned to manage and take the oversight of home affairs with an aptness which would have done credit to a woman much older than herself.

We were in almost destitute circumstances when mother died. Reverses in business had brought us into debt, for which our home had to be sacrificed, and still more was due our creditors.

We were not required to give possession of the place at the time, because of mother's illness and death. But after it was all over, father said to sister and me, "We are now homeless, my lambs, with all our other sorrows; and I feel friendless, hopeless and crushed to the earth!"

Then it was that I first saw how brave a woman can be in most trying conditions, and how much a brave, true woman—be she mother or daughter, wife, sister or friend—may do for a man when he is discouraged and sick at heart. My sweet, gentle sister Ruth looked up quickly, and heroically answered that sad speech of father's.

"Oh! no," she said, "not so bad as that, my own, dearest father! Mother has left us, it is true, and our condition seems very lonely indeed. But let us be thankful to God that we are spared to each other. Let us not run the risk of grieving the pure, loving spirit of our dear departed one, by giving way to the spirit of grief and loneliness ourselves."

"My noble girl!" said father, taking Ruth in his arms. "That is so like your angel mother. Always hopeful, always ready with words of consolation and encouragement for others; forgetful of self and self-suffering in the sympathy that is felt for the pains which some one else may be bearing; never uttering a sound of complaint, lest some one might be disturbed by it. Oh! I have cause to be grateful to God for having

doubly blest me with such a wife and such a daughter. But oh, my darling!" he continued, looking round on us all, "I cannot tell you how it hurts me to think of our having to separate and live apart."

"We are not going to do that, are we?" I asked, startled at the suggestion.

"Oh!" that would be too hard, father," said Ruth. "Let us not think of it. Of course we will have to go from here, but we will all have to live somewhere, and let us stay together wherever we go."

"It is on your account, my daughter, that I have thought best to find separate places for us to live in for the present," said father. "You are not strong enough to take care of those two young babes, and keep house and do the work for us all; it would be too much for you."

"Not if, when you and Mark are at home, and not otherwise employed, you will take hold and help me, as I know you will; I can do anything, live anywhere and any way, father, if you will on y keep us together as a family," said Ruth decidedly.

Father again thanked and blest her for the heroism and self-denial she manifested, and then we all talked and agreed on the plan of renting a small place, and staying together in it, trusting in God to open up our way, and in our determination to do whatever we could find to do that would bring us a living.

"Father soon found two rooms that he rented at a reasonable price, and we moved into them. Then he found employment for both himself and me, when I was out of school; and we earned enough to keep us moderately well.

As father said, Ruth was just like mother, so careful and cheerful always, it was like sunshine to be in her presence, so father and I were both glad to spend all the time we could at home. And under her wise and gentle management, the little babies grew nicely, and soon began to be interesting and attractive, so that I liked to help take care of them.

The time I commenced to tell about, when I was cross and would not go and eat supper with father, was the evening before St. Valentine's day. It was nine months' since mother's death; long enough, I thought, so that father need not have been so particular as to forbid my going out, like other boys, to have fun in poking valentines under doors and making noises to bring people out, then running off so as not to be caught.

"But why should such thoughts and feelings come to you tonight, Mark? You know you were never allowed to be out evenings as many boys are," said Ruth. "Neither father nor mother ever approved of such things. They have always thought it a disgrace for children to scatter those ugly valentines about; and have blamed older people for not correcting such bad taste and habits, by cultivating a higher appreciation of really beautiful designs and kindly sentiments, such as may be found in many of the pretty valentines which are sold at the stores."

"Well, I have no money to buy pretty valentines with; nor any one to send to if I had them. The boys were going to give me some ugly ones; if I'd help

to get jokes on people with them," I said.

"I am glad you are not going out for that purpose," answered my sister. "I should have felt very sorry if father had allowed it. But you must not feel hard at father because he has held to his convictions of right, and forbidden you to do wrong."

"You do not realize now, my brother, how hard it is for poor father to deny us anything that we think would add to our happiness. But some time you will thank him much more for the seemingly strict rules, he requires you to observe, than for the tender indulgences, many of which simply gratify, but do not benefit you."

"But you do not feel like being reasoned with this evening, I know; so I will help you to forget your disappointment by giving you a nice story to read, while I do some mending, after father has gone to his quorum meeting."

"I don't want to read," I said, "can't read good enough to understand, and it's no fun anyway."

"You can read well enough for me to understand you," replied Ruth. "And I can correct your mistakes, and help you to understand what you read too; you will be learning, besides entertaining poor sister, who would be very lonely to have you and father both away all evening."

Nothing more was said, and presently father went away to his meeting. Then Ruth and I together cleared off the table and washed up the dishes.

One of the babies sniffling a little, and had to be cuddled to sleep again, and then Ruth sat down to her darning and patching.

I was irresolute then; didn't feel that I could sit down and remain in the house all the evening, and hear the other boys laughing and running outside with all the freedom which I felt naturally belonged to boys. Did not want to disobey my father, but felt that he had been too severe in telling me, positively, not to go away from home that evening.

I went to the window and looked out, then to the door and stepped out, intending to go no farther than the gate. But as I stood there, holding the gate open, I was strongly tempted to break and run down the street, where I could distinctly hear the scampering feet of others who were enjoying their liberty, while mine was prohibited. Most likely, I should have yielded to the tempter—in fact, I felt myself doing so—but for the interposition of a strong, dark figure which ran up against me and knocked me back into the yard. The other fellow tripped too, and came sprawling over me, and then tumbled head over heels into the snow by the path.

He muttered something terribly like a—rough word, and then asked if I were hurt, as he got up and shook the snow off his coat.

When I could stop laughing long enough to speak, I said "No. Is that you Frank?" For I recognized the voice of Frank Wilber, one of the workmen where father was employed, and where I helped sometimes.

"Why! Hello Mark, is it you," he said. "What kind of a new game is this you have, springing suddenly out of a gate and tripping people up as they pass?"

"I didn't mean to Frank, positively," I said, laughing hard again. "I didn't see you till you struck me; was just