THE DRUNKARDS; OR, "A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

It was Christmas time, and the weather was as cold as the lovers of sharp, stinging Winter weather could desire. The roads were frozen as hard as iron, seemingly; and the biting wind wailed mournfully through the bare and shivering trees, which swayed to and fro like ghosts in the dim, mournful air.

It wanted only a week to Christmas day. Little Faith Harley said to her mother as they sat together in their humble home, sewing by the light of the fading afternoon, "Anybody could tell that Christmas is very near, because it gets dark so early in the afternoons," added the child, looking up from her frill-hemming to the strip of gray sky above the chimney-post over the way. "I remember, mother, that the lamplighter always comes round before 4 o'clock at Christmas time, and then we put away our work and have tea by firelight."

"Yes," said the mother, absently, without looking up from her work. Presently she added, "I shall go to bed, Faith, directly I have finished this nightdress; I don't fell well."

Faith looked rather concerned. "Couldn't you leave it till to-morrow; if you don't feel well, and finish it then, mother?" she said; adding, before her mother could reply, "Oh, but I forget—perhaps you want me to take it home to-night?"

"No, I don't, Faith," said her mother; "but I have tasked myself to finish it to-night."

"I'm not a bit afraid, you know, mother, if you'd like me to go," said Faith, glancing involuntarily at a little crimson cloak hanging behind the door. This was a new garment which she had only just come into possession of. In spare minutes during the past week Mrs. Harley had been making it out of one which once belonged to her own grand-mother—so she told Faith. Faith was delighted with her new possession; she had wished for a red cloak ever since she had first heard the story of Little Red Ridinghood, which she believed in as implicitly as she did in the more beautiful stories of Joseph in Egypt, and Damel in the lions' den. Although she was not the most courageous of children, she thought she might venture to assert that she wasn't a bit afraid to go out after dark, now she had a crimson cloak. The fact was, she wanted to get it round her little plump shoulders.

Her mother understood her glance towards it, and said, "You seem very anxious to get your new cloak on, Faith, I hope it won't make you feel proud, dear, or I should wish a hundred times that I had not made it for you. I cut this up to save expense, but I would much rather it had been a quieter color." Then she gave the little one a mild lecture on the vanity of dress, telling her, that though man regards the outward appearance, God looks upon the heart; and she concluded, in orthodox fashion, with a verse from Dr. Watts. She was a good woman, and it was her earnest and daily study to bring up her only child, the comfort of her widowhood, in the right way.

Poor little Faith seemed now to have some conscientious twinges about the red cloak. She listened very attentively to her mother, and when she raised her bright blue eyes they were glistening with tears.

"I do like my new cloak very much, mother," she said, artlessly; "and this morning I thought perhaps I should be thinking too much about it to-day, so I asked in my prayers that God would keep me from feeling proud about it; and though I am pleased, I don't think I shall feel proud; do you mother?"

"I think not, as you have prayed about it, Faith," said the widow.

The child bent her curly head over her work again, and sat quietly thinking. Presently it grew dark, and the little woman of nine years got up to put the kettle over the fire, and prepare tea, while her mother stayed at the window with her work, to catch the last rays of daylight. By-and-by the widow broke off her thread with a triumphant snap, and said, with a sigh of relief, "There, that's finished."

"I'm so glad, mother," said Faith, placing a chair for her mother at the table. "Now come to tea; it's quite ready. See how cheerful the fire is to-night; it crackles so, and the little flames jump up as if they knew how glad we are that the work is done."

When the widow was seated, and had poured out the tea, the child had rattled on:—

"Let us talk about Christmas to-night, mother. It is such a pretty time, isn't it? The toy shops are crowded with happy little girls and boys choosing and buying such lovely things. I choose things when I stand to look in at the windows, but of course I can't buy anything; it's only *pretending*, you know, mother. And the Christmas trees! you just ought to see them—I wish such trees grew in gardens! Couldn't we give presents away to ragged little children then, and make them glad? You'll try to be well enough to go up-town on Christmas Eve, won't you, mother? It is so nice to see the shops all lighted up, and the people bustling about buying things on the sly for their friends, so as to give them a surprise on the next day; and to see the children out with their mothers and fathers, all so merry and laughing, and to hear the bells ringing like music. If we had a father, p'r'aps we might keep Christmas as well as other people, and have a Christmas pudding, and laugh, and sing carols like they do in other houses. Sometimes, when I'm going along the street, I see shadows of little children pass by on the blinds of lighted windows, and I hear them playing and laughing and singing. It isn't everybody that can be so merry at Christmas time, don't you?"

To be continued.

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