

Chapter XVI. The Child.

During the first week there was an improvement in the child's health, which justified the doctor's hopeful anticipations. Mrs. Linley wrote cheerfully to her husband; and the better nature of Mrs. Linley's mother seemed, by some inscrutable process, to thrive morally under the encouraging influences of the sea air. It may be a bold thing to say, but it is surely true that our virtues depend greatly on the state of our health.

During the second week, the reports sent to Mount Morven were less encouraging. The improvement in Kitty was maintained; but it made no further progress.

The lapse of the third week brought with it depressing results. There could be no doubt now that the child was losing ground. Bitterly disappointed, Mrs. Linley wrote to her medical adviser, describing the symptoms, and asking for instructions. The doctor wrote back: "Find out where your supply of drinking water comes from. If from a well, let me know how it is situated. Answer by telegraph." The reply arrived: "A well near the parish church." The doctor's advice ran back along the wires: "Come home instantly."

They returned the same day--and they returned too late.

Kitty's first night at home was wakeful and restless; her little hands felt feverish, and she was tormented by perpetual thirst. The good doctor still spoke hopefully; attributing the symptoms to fatigue after the journey. But, as the days followed each other, his medical visits were paid at shorter intervals. The mother noticed that his pleasant face became grave and anxious, and implored him to tell her the truth. The truth was told in two dreadful words: "Typhoid Fever."

A day or two later, the doctor spoke privately with Mr. Linley. The child's debilitated condition--that lowered state of the vital power which he had observed when Kitty's case was first submitted to him--placed a terrible obstacle in the way of successful resistance to the advance of the disease. "Say nothing to Mrs. Linley just yet. There is no absolute danger so far, unless delirium sets in." "Do you think it likely?" Linley asked. The doctor shook his head, and said "God knows."

On the next evening but one, the fatal symptom showed itself. There was nothing violent in the delirium. Unconscious of past events in the family life,

the poor child supposed that her governess was living in the house as usual. She piteously wondered why Sydney remained downstairs in the schoolroom. "Oh, don't keep her away from me! I want Syd! I want Syd!" That was her one cry. When exhaustion silenced her, they hoped that the sad delusion was at an end. No! As the slow fire of the fever flamed up again, the same words were on the child's lips, the same fond hope was in her sinking heart.

The doctor led Mrs. Linley out of the room. "Is this the governess?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Is she within easy reach?"

"She is employed in the family of a friend of ours, living five miles away from us."

"Send for her instantly!"

Mrs. Linley looked at him with a wildly-mingled expression of hope and fear. She was not thinking of herself--she was not even thinking, for that one moment, of the child. What would her husband say, if she (who had extorted his promise never to see the governess again) brought Sydney Westerfield back to the house?

The doctor spoke to her more strongly still.

"I don't presume to inquire into your private reasons for hesitating to follow my advice," he said; "but I am bound to tell you the truth. My poor little patient is in serious danger--every hour of delay is an hour gained by death. Bring that lady to the bedside as fast as your carriage can fetch her, and let us see the result. If Kitty recognizes her governess--there, I tell you plainly, is the one chance of saving the child's life."

Mrs. Linley's resolution flashed on him in her weary eyes--the eyes which, by day and night alike, had known so little rest. She rang for her maid. "Tell your master I want to speak to him."

The woman answered: "My master has gone out."

The doctor watched the mother's face. No sign of hesitation appeared in it--the one thought in her mind now was the thought of the child. She called the maid back.

"Order the carriage."

"At what time do you want it, ma'am?"

"At once!"