

twice ; do not press the bag, or the jelly will not be so clear. Lastly add half a pint of sherry and one tablespoonful of best brandy. To ensure the removal of every particle of fat from the jelly before flavouring and clearing, wipe the surface with a warm cloth.

Two were disqualified, one being received after the date given, and the other for not being written upon a post-card.

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.*

An Autobiographical Story.

By GEORGE MACDONALD, LL.D.,

Author of "David Elginbrod," "Alec Forbes," "Within and Without," "Malcolm," &c.

CHAPTER XII.—AN INTRODUCTION.

I WOKE one morning after a sound sleep—not so sound however but that I had been dreaming, and that when I awoke I could recall my dream. It was a very odd one. I thought I was a hen strutting about amongst ricks of corn, picking here and scratching there, followed by a whole brood of chickens, towards which I felt exceedingly benevolent and attentive. Suddenly I heard the scream of a hawk in the air above me, and instantly gave the proper cry to fetch the little creatures under my wings. They came scurrying to me as fast as their legs could carry them—all but one, which wouldn't mind my cry, although I kept repeating it again and again. Meantime the hawk kept screaming, and I felt as if I didn't care for any of those that were safe under my wings, but only for the solitary creature that kept pecking away as if nothing was the matter. About it I grew so terribly anxious that at length I woke with a cry of misery and terror.

The moment I opened my eyes there was my mother standing beside me. The room was so dark that I thought for a moment what a fog there must be ; but the next I forgot everything at hearing a little cry, which I verily believe in my stupid dream I had taken for the voice of the hawk, whereas it was the cry of my first and only chicken, which I had not yet seen, but which my mother now held in her grandmotherly arms, ready to hand her to me. I dared not speak, for I felt very weak, and was afraid of crying from delight. I looked in my mother's face, and she folded back the clothes, and laid the baby down beside me, with its little head resting on my arm.

"Draw back the curtain a little bit, mother dear," I whispered, "and let me see what it is like."

I believe I said *it*, for I was not quite a mother yet. My mother did as I requested ; a ray of clear spring light fell on the face of the little white thing by my side—for white she was, though most babies are red—and if I dared not speak before, I couldn't now. My mother went away again, and sat down by the fireside, leaving me with my baby. Never shall I forget the unutterable content of that hour. It was not gladness, nor was it thankfulness that filled my heart, but a certain absolute contentment—just on the point, but for my want of strength, of blossoming into unspeakable gladness and thankfulness. Somehow too there was mingled with it a sense of dignity, as if I had vindicated for myself a right to a part in the creation, for was I not proved at least a link in the marvellous chain of existence, in carrying on the designs of the great Maker ? Not that the thought was there—only the feeling which afterwards found the thought in order to account for its own being. Besides, the state of perfect repose after what had passed was in itself bliss ; the very sense of weakness was delightful, for I had earned the right to be weak, to rest as much as I pleased, to be important and to be congratulated.

Somehow I had got through. The trouble lay behind me ; and here, for the sake of any who will read my poor words, I record the conviction that, in one way or other, special individual help is given to every creature to endure to the end. I think I have heard my father say, and hitherto it has been my own experience, that always when suffering, whether mental or bodily, approached the point where further endurance appeared impossible, the pulse of it began to ebb, and a lull ensued. I do not venture to found any general assertion upon this : I only state it as a fact of my own experience. He who does not allow any man to be tempted above that he is able to bear, doubtless acts in the same way in all kinds of trials.

I was listening to the gentle talk about me in the darkened room—not listening, indeed, only aware that loving words were spoken. Whether I was dozing I do not know, but something touched my lips. I did not start. I had been dreadfully given to starting for a long time—so much so that I was quite ashamed sometimes, for I would even cry out—I who had always been so sharp on feminine affectations before ; but now it seemed as if nothing could startle me. I only opened my eyes—and there was my great big huge bear looking down on me with something in his eyes I had never seen there before. But even

* Copyright.—Sampson Low, Marston, & Co., Limited, St. Dunstan's House, Fetter Lane, London, E.C.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)