

The Family Circle

DOCTOR MOTHER

A little wound, a little ache,
A little blistered thumb to take
With touch of love and make it well—
These things require a mother's spell.
Ah, sweet the progress of the skill
That science brings unto the ill!
Vast range of methods new and fine,
But when our little ones repine,
The mother is the very best
Of doctors into service pressed!

Sunshine and air and mother's spell
Of helping little lads get well,
And helping little lasses, too—
Here are three remedies that do
So much more, often than the grave,
Skilled hands that tried so hard to save.
For Dr. Mother, don't you know,
Gives something more than skill—gives so
Much of herself; gives, oh, so much
Of love's sweet alchemy of touch!

Upon a little wardroom bed
A little curl-encircled head,
A little slender hand and pale,
A little lonesome, home-sick wail.
Loved nursing, best of skill and care;
But, oh! behold the wonder there,
When Dr. Mother, bearing sun
From where the wilding roses run,
Leans down, with hungering love and kiss—
There is no medicine like this!

In little child heart's hour of woe
Pain, ache, or life wound's throb and throe,
The Dr. Mother knows so well—
The weaving of love's wonder spell—
Just what the little heart requires,
Just how to cool the fever fires;
Just how much tenderness and cheer
Will calm the little doubt and fear.
How much of tenderness will ease—
Alone she knows such arts as these!

—Exchange.

A BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

Little Laura Pinder was sitting on the front piazza of her father's house. Beside her, on the porch, lay a bead purse which she had just finished. In her lap was silver to the amount of five dollars, principally dimes, which she had saved from her monthly allowance. She had been putting money aside for several months, for what purpose she had not yet decided; but she had several plans for its disposal. She had deprived herself of much confectionery in order to accumulate this little hoard, and she enjoyed the novel experience of possessing so large a sum.

It was a soft spring day. The trees had put on their dress of green; the freesias and jonquils were all a bloom. As the child sat there, musing, the silver tinkling while she passed it through her fingers, visions of some new story-books, or perhaps some trinkets for her toilet table, succeeded one another in her mind. Suddenly she heard a crash on the sidewalk, followed by loud exclamations and the sound of violent weeping.

Laura hurried to the gate, to find a poorly-olad child of her own age bending over a heap of strawberries, and an overturned tray lying in the dust of the roadway.

'O Barbara! did you spill your strawberries?' exclaimed Laura. 'And how lovely they were, and they are so scarce at this time of the year! Let me help you pick them up.'

'It will be of no use to do that,' answered the girl, between her sobs. 'No one could eat them. Just let them lie there.'

'It is too bad!' said Laura. 'Were you taking them home?'

'Taking them home! No, indeed,' replied the girl. 'I was taking them to the house of a rich lady who would have paid me five dollars for them. She is going to have a big dinner to-night, and now she will be disappointed, and I shall not get the money. And my mother is so sick—so sick!'

Laura sat down on the curbstone beside her friend, full of sympathy and compassion.

'And will you have to pay for the strawberries, besides?' she asked—'I mean to the man you bought them from?'

'I did not buy them,' said the girl. 'I'll tell you how it was. Last summer mother and I went to stay at old Mr. Smithers' place while the family were in Europe. I helped her a good deal, and I took care of the flowers. You know what fine strawberries Mr. Smithers has, don't you?'

'No,' replied Laura. 'I never heard of Mr. Smithers before.'

'Well, he's awfully rich. His house and garden are much nicer than yours—and yours are nice enough, I'm sure. And he raises the best strawberries. Well, the other day I was helping this other rich lady—Mrs. Fithian—and she said she wished she could have some early strawberries for her dinner, that she'd be willing to pay five dollars for them. So I thought maybe Mr. Smithers would sell me some, and I went and asked him. And what do you think he said?'

'That he would?'

'No, not sell me any; but "Barbara," said he, "you were a good little girl last summer, and my first strawberries are coming out unusually plentiful. I'll give you ten boxes, so that you can make a little money for yourself." That's what he said.'

A fresh burst of tears interrupted the poor child's story. Kind-hearted little Laura drew out her dainty handkerchief and wiped Barbara's eyes. Slightly consoled, she resumed her narrative.

'I told Mrs. Fithian, and she said: "All right." And so I went out this afternoon, and Mr. Smithers had them all ready in those nice little baskets, and he lent me the tray. And so I was coming along, and my foot struck against the stump of that old tree—and, that's the last of the strawberries! O dear, O dear, and my poor mother is so sick!'

Laura's eyes sought the piazza. There, in full view, lay the new bead purse, and beside it the little heap of silver which she had polished with a piece of chamouis that very morning. It was all her own; she could do what she pleased with it. No one knew she had it. She had intended to tell her father and mother about it that evening at dinner. For a moment she hesitated, but it was only a moment.

'Wait just a minute,' she said, and ran back to the piazza. When she returned, the money was in her hand. 'Barbara,' she said, 'you don't know me very well, but I know all about you, because Elsal our cook, has told me how good you are to your sick mother. Take this money—it is my own—and buy whatever you need with it.'

Thrusting the money into the hand of the astonished little girl, she was about to run back, when Barbara said:

'O Miss Laura, here is one basket that did not spill! Please take it, and eat the berries. God will reward you for your kindness to me, and some day maybe I can pay you back. Anyway, my mother will let me come over and help if your mother should need me.'

'We have plenty of help, Barbara,' said Laura. 'We do not need you. And you must not tell anybody but your mother. Promise me!'

'I promise,' answered Barbara, though somewhat reluctantly. Her impulse would have been to spread the good deed far and wide.

Laura took the basket of strawberries she offered her, thanked her, and hurried into the house. Barbara picked up the tray and pursued her homeward way—or more likely the way to the house of the lady who was unfortunately to be deprived of the strawberries she had expected. Neither of the girls noticed a gentleman who had been standing behind them, concealed by the drooping branches of a large elm at the edge of the pavement.

Laura ran hastily up to her room, the basket of strawberries in her hand. She did not know what to do with them. Generous child that she was, she would have liked to share the beautiful fresh berries with her family, although there would have been only a bite for each. But she could not do this without an explanation, and that she was especially desirous of avoiding. She almost wished she had refused to accept them. Laying them on her dressing table, she covered them hastily with a piece of netting, as her father stood in the doorway smiling. He had ascended the stairs just behind her. He nodded and went away.

The next day was Laura's birthday. When she woke in the morning, she thought it might be pleasant to eat a few strawberries before breakfast. But when she approached the table she found they were gone. Quite mystified, yet being unwilling, under the circumstances, to question any one about them, she went down to the dining-room, where she received the greetings of her relatives, but no one alluded to strawberries. It was the custom of the family to have on birthdays a little celebration consisting of an extra good dinner, followed by gifts to the one whose anniversary it was.