

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. "The Magic Lamp." In *A Love Token for Children, Designed for Sunday-School Libraries*.

THE MAGIC LAMP.

[p. 34]

"PRAY tell us a story, aunt," said half a dozen young voices at once; "it's Sunday evening, and you know you always tell us a story Sunday evening."

"Well, if I must I must—what shall it be about?"

"Oh, anything! only let it end good," cried one. "No, no. I say let it end horribly," exclaimed another, "like your martyr stories. I like stories where all the people are killed, some way or other."

"Well, I don't love to have people killed," said tender-hearted little Haddy. "I wish you would tell us a fairy story; but I suppose you won't Sunday night."

"No, Haddy, but I will tell you something like a fairy story—a story about a magic lamp."

"Oh! Aladdin's lamp I suppose you mean."

"No. My lamp belonged to a Christian country, and was more useful, though not quite so entertaining, as Aladdin's, I am afraid." The children, however, were satisfied, and, gathering about their aunt, she began. "There was once a mother, a very young mother she was. She had in her childhood, like you, Haddy, loved fairy stories, and her mind was full of them; and as she sat looking at her infant daughter on her lap, 'Oh,' she thought, 'how I should like to have lived in those times when kind fairies were present at the birth of a

[p. 35]

child, and each gave it some good gift; but you, my poor little girl, must plod on in the common way, and work, mind and hands, for everything you get.' As she paused she heard a sound as of some one approaching. She saw no one, but presently a voice whispered in her ear, 'Do not be startled, I am Nature, your mother, and your child's—the mother of all. To all my children I give good gifts. Some bury them; some neglect them; some cast them away; some never find out that they possess them; and some, my faithful children, make the most of them. To your child I have

given a most precious gift. It is an invisible lamp; you will only perceive it by its effects. If she is faithful in keeping it trimmed and burning, I will supply it with oil.'

“‘Oh, thank you, thank you,’ said the surprised and happy mother; ‘but pray tell me how, if she does not see it, can she trim the lamp? How can she carry it unseen about her! May it not burn her?’ and many other questions she put which Dame Nature, no doubt, thought quite idle; for, without answering one of them, she merely said, ‘Give yourself no concern about these matters; experience will give your child all necessary instructions about the management of the lamp. If she fulfil her duty, be sure the oil shall not fail. If the lamp is kept in order, it will diffuse a light that every one loves; the old and the young, the happy and the miserable, the sick and the well, the rich and the poor, all will crave your daughter’s presence. Be content, ask no more, but observe and learn.’

“The voice was silent, and the mother saw, what
[p. 36]

she wondered she had not before noticed, a peculiar and beautiful light playing about her child’s countenance. It seemed to issue from her soft bright eyes, and to beam from the smile into which her pretty lips were for ever curling. ‘This is indeed Nature’s gift!’ thought she; ‘how poor are the imitations of art!’ She named the little girl Serena; and feeling that a child endowed with so precious a gift should have rare care, she did all a mother could do to make her good; she brought her up in the ‘nurture and admonition of the Lord.’ As Serena grew, the light of her lamp waxed stronger and stronger. One of its marvellous properties was, that, if not quite so powerful, its light was more observed and more beautiful when any misfortune befell its owner. Experience gave the promised instruction. The arts of preserving it were curious enough. Constant occupation, activity of body and mind, strict attention to the laws of health, especially eating moderately and drinking only pure water, were most conducive to its clear burning. Serena soon learned that it was miserably dimmed by disobedience to her mother, by hurting the feelings of a friend, or by any wrong doing whatever. These were the lessons that she learned from that sternest and best of teachers, experience; and most attentive was she in applying her knowledge to the management of the lamp, and well was she rewarded for her fidelity. The effect of the lamp seemed, indeed, like magic; she could learn a lesson in half the time by it that others could without it. By the light of her lamp she performed all her tasks as if they were pleasures, while others were grumbling and crying. She

was better satisfied with an old dress by this precious light than

[p. 37]

other girls with the newest and prettiest without it. One might have fancied the colour of everything in life depended on the light that fell on it. Serena would sit out an evening with an old grand-aunt, deaf, and almost blind, she and the old lady as happy as happy could be by the light of the lamp, though Serena knew her companions were amusing themselves with dancing and all manner of gayety at the next house. She has stayed many a day, and day after day, in this same aunt's sickroom, and the old lady said, with grateful tears in her eyes, 'While Serena's light falls on my pillow my drinks refresh me, my food nourishes me, and even my medicines taste less nauseous.'

"At school every one liked to get near her. If the girls were puzzled by a sum, or boggled in a composition, or baffled by a difficult piece of music, they would run to Serena, and they were sure, by the light of her lamp, to be able to overcome the difficulty. Even the domestics in her mother's service found their work lighter when Serena was present. Indeed, it was at home that the lamp was brightest and most beautiful.

"As Serena grew up and took her part in the pleasures and business of the world, the light of her lamp was, of course, more diffused. It was visible in the midday sun, and in the darkest night how far it sent its beams! It added a charm to the most brilliant apartment; and, when Serena visited the humble dwellings of the poor and afflicted, it shone on their walls, played like sunshine over the faces of the children, and sent a ray of pleasure to the saddest, darkest heart.

"Serena had just entered her nineteenth year

[p. 38]

when she lost her mother; the dear parent who had supplied the place of father, brother, sister, and friend to her. In the bitterness of her grief Serena quite forgot her lamp. *At her mother's grave it went out.*

"What a change was there now in her condition! She was alone in the home that had been so pleasant to her. The charm of her lamp was gone. She was so enveloped in gloom and darkness that none came near her but such as were moved by heavenly compassion. If she forced

herself out, and those that loved her tenderly approached her, they gave her little pleasure, for she felt that, without her lamp, she gave them none. Strangers turned involuntarily from her; and children who had always flocked around her ran away at the first glimpse of her slow moving form and sad countenance. She lost all interest in life, and sat, with her hands folded, the picture of indolent grief. If her friends sympathized with her upon the loss of her lamp, she said she cared not, for that it was fitting it should go out for ever at her mother's grave.

“One day, when she was sitting alone, she took up her Bible; and, as she turned from place to place, many a sentence sunk deep into her heart. She felt that she had been unsubmitive to the will of God, and that she was sinning against him in giving herself up to despair and uselessness.

“She now wished again for her lamp, that she might go about doing good; and as she meditated with deep contrition and anxiety she heard a voice, saying, “Serena, I pity thee. Thou hast, by thy want of faith and resignation to the will of God, lost the precious gift that Nature gave thee. Nature has not the power to relight thy lamp. I have.

[p. 39]

My name is *Religion*. Study that book on which thy hand resteth; obey its laws, and I will surely relight thy lamp; and in proportion to thy obedience will it become brighter and brighter, till it burns among those lights where ‘there is no night, and where they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord giveth them light.’

“Serena meekly bowed her head, and, with perfect faith in the promises of religion, resolved to obey her voice. She went forth to perform her neglected duties, and at once a feeble light from her rekindled lamp stole over her. All who knew her now hailed with joy her approach. All observed that the lamp burnt brighter, and with a steadier light, than when the oil was supplied by Nature. In due time she married; she had children. Manifold afflictions came upon her—who escapes them? Her husband lost his property. She buried two children in one grave. She became a widow. Still her lamp went not out. Religion kept the promise she makes to all who trust in her, ‘I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.’

“Old age came at last, and then, when Serena's eyes were dimmed and her limbs feeble, so that she could no more walk abroad, how precious was the light of her lamp! Wherever she was, there her friends desired to be. Children, too, delighted to gather about

her, and said they should love to be old, if they could have such a light as hers to enlighten them; and, finally, she sank to rest, blessing and blessed.”

“Pray tell us, aunt,” asked one of the girls, “what kind of oil was that in the Magic Lamp?”

“The oil of cheerfulness, my dear Grace.”