

Divers Women eBook

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Page 1

SUNDAY FRACTURES.

CHAPTER I.

Some people who went up to the temple.

An elegant temple it was, this modern one of which I write—modern in all its appointments. Carpets, cushions, gas fixtures, organ, pulpit furnishings, everything everywhere betokened the presence of wealth and taste. Even the vases that adorned the marble-topped flower-stands on either side of the pulpit wore a foreign air, and in design and workmanship were unique. The subdued light that stole softly in through the stained-glass windows produced the requisite number of tints and shades on the hair and whiskers and noses of the worshippers. The choir was perched high above common humanity, and praised God for the congregation in wonderful voices, four in number, the soprano of which cost more than a preacher's salary, and soared half an octave higher than any other voice in the city. To be sure she was often fatigued, for she frequently danced late of a Saturday night. And occasionally the grand tenor was disabled from appearing at all for morning service by reason of the remarkably late hour and unusual dissipation of the night before. But then he was all right by evening, and, while these little episodes were unfortunate, they had to be borne with meekness and patience; for was he not the envy of three rival churches, any one of which would have increased his salary if they could have gotten him?

The soft, pure tones of the organ were filling this beautiful church on a certain beautiful morning, and the worshippers were treading the aisles, keeping step to its melody as they made their way to their respective pews, the heavy carpeting giving back no sound of footfall, and the carefully prepared inner doors pushing softly back into place, making no jar on the solemnities of the occasion—everything was being done “decently and in order”—not only decently, but exquisitely.

A strange breaking in upon all this propriety and dignity was the sermon that morning. Even the text had a harsh sound, almost startling to ears which had been lifted to the third heaven of rapture by the wonderful music that floated down to them.

“Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” What a harsh text!—Wasn't it almost rough? Why speak of fear in the midst of such melody of sight and sound? Why not hear of the beauties of heaven, the glories of the upper temple, the music of the heavenly choir—something that should lift the thoughts away from earth and *doing* and fear? This was the unspoken greeting that the text received. And the sermon that followed! What had gotten possession of the preacher! He did not observe the proprieties in the least! He dragged stores, and warehouses, and common workshops, even the meat markets and vegetable stalls, into that sermon! Nay, he penetrated to the very inner



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sanctuary of home—the dressing-room and the kitchen—startling the ear with that strange-sounding sentence: “Take heed what ye do.” According to him religion was not a thing of music, and flowers, and soft carpets, and stained lights, and sentiment. It had to do with other days than Sunday, with other hours than those spent in softly cushioned pews. It meant *doing*, and it meant taking heed to each little turn and word and even thought, remembering always that the fear of the Lord was the thing to be dreaded. What a solemn matter that made of life! Who wanted to be so trammelled! It would be fearful. As for the minister, he presented every word of his sermon as though he felt it thrilling to his very soul. And so he did. If you had chanced to pass the parsonage on that Saturday evening which preceded its delivery—passed it as late as midnight—you would have seen a gleam of light from his study window. Not that he was so late with his Sabbath preparation—at least the *written* preparation. It was that he was on his knees, pleading with an unutterable longing for the souls committed to his charge—pleading that the sermon just laid aside might be used to the quickening and converting of some soul—pleading that the Lord would come into his vineyard and see if there were not growing some shoots of love and faith and trust that would bring harvest.

It was not that minister’s custom to so infringe on the sleeping hours of Saturday night—time which had been given to his body, in order that it might be vigorous, instead of clogging the soul with the dullness of its weight. But there are *special* hours in the life of most men, and this Saturday evening was a special time to him. He felt like wrestling for the blessing—felt in a faint degree some of the persistency of the servant of old who said: “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” Hence the special unction of the morning. Somewhat of the same spirit had possessed him during the week, hence the special fervour of the sermon. With his soul glowing then in every sentence, he presented his thoughts to the people. How did they receive them? Some listened with the thoughtful look on their faces that betokened hearts and consciences stirred. There were those who yawned, and thought the sermon unusually long and prosy. Now and then a gentleman more thoughtless or less cultured than the rest snapped his watch-case in the very face of the speaker, by accident, let us hope. A party of young men, who sat under the gallery, exchanged notes about the doings of the week, and even passed a few slips of paper to the young ladies from the seminary, who sat in front of them. The paper contained nothing more formidable than a few refreshments in the shape of caramels with which to beguile the tedious-ness of the hour. There was a less cultured party of young men and women who unceremoniously whispered at intervals through the entire service, and some of the whispers were so funny

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that occasionally a head went down and the seat shook, as the amused party endeavoured, or *professed* to endeavour, to subdue untimely laughter. I presume we have all seen those persons who deem it a mark of vivacity, or special brilliancy, to be unable to control their risibles in certain places. It is curious how often the seeming attempt is, in a glaring way, nothing but *seeming*. These parties perhaps did not break the Sabbath any more directly than the note-writers behind them, but they certainly did it more noisily and with more marked evidence of lack of ordinary culture. The leader of the choir found an absorbing volume in a book of anthems that had been recently introduced. He turned the leaves without regard to their rustle, and surveyed piece after piece with a critical eye, while the occasionally peculiar pucker of his lips showed that he was trying special ones, and that just enough sense of decorum remained with him to prevent the whistle from being audible. Then there were, dotted all over the great church, heads that nodded assent to the minister at regular intervals; but the owners of the heads had closed eyes and open mouths, and the occasional breathing that suggested a coming snore was marked enough to cause nervous nudges from convenient elbows, and make small boys who were looking on chuckle with delight.

And thus, surrounded by all these different specimens of humanity, the pastor strove to declare the whole counsel of God, mindful of the rest of the charge, "whether men will hear or whether they will forbear." He could not help a half-drawn breath of thanksgiving that *that* part was not for him to manage. If he had had their duty as well as his own to answer for what *would* have become of him!

Despite the looking at watches, the cases of which would make an explosive noise, and the audible yawning that occasionally sounded near him, the minister was enabled to carry his sermon through to the close, helped immeasurably by those aforesaid earnest eyes that never turned their gaze from his face, nor let their owners' attention flag for an instant. Then followed the solemn hymn, than which there is surely no more solemn one in the English language. Imagine that congregation after listening, or professing to listen, to such a sermon as I have suggested, from such a text as I have named, standing and hearing rolled forth from magnificent voices such words as these:—

"In all my vast concerns with thee,
In vain my soul would try
To shun thy presence, Lord, or flee
The notice of thine eye.

"My thoughts lie open to the Lord
Before they're formed within;
And ere my lips pronounce the word
He knows the sense I mean.



“Oh, wondrous knowledge, deep and high!
Where can a creature hide!
Within thy circling arm I lie,
Inclosed on every side.”



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Follow that with the wonderful benediction. By the way, did you ever think of that benediction—of its fulness? “The *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *love* of God, the *communion* of the Holy Ghost, be with you *all*. Amen.” Following that earnest amen—nay, *did* it follow, or was it blended with the last syllable of that word, so nearly that word seemed swallowed in it—came the roll of that twenty-thousand-dollar organ. What did the organist select to follow that sermon, that hymn, that benediction? Well, what was it? Is it possible that that familiar strain was the old song, “Comin’ Through the Rye”? No, it changes; that is the ring of “Money Musk.” Anon there is a touch—just a dash, rather—of “Home, Sweet Home,” and then a bewilderment of sounds, wonderfully reminding one of “Dixie” and of “Way down upon the Suwanee River,” and then suddenly it loses all connection with memory, and rolls, and swells, and thunders, and goes off again into an exquisite tinkle of melody that makes an old farmer—for there was here and there an old farmer even in that modern church—murmur as he shook hands with a friend, “Kind of a dancing jig that is, ain’t it?”

To the sound of such music the congregation trip out. Half-way down the aisle Mrs. Denton catches the fringe of Mrs. Ellison’s shawl.

“Excuse me,” she says, “but I was afraid you would escape me, and I have so much to do this week. I want you to come in socially on Tuesday evening; just a few friends; an informal gathering; tea at eight, because the girls want a little dance after it. Now come early.”

Just in front of these two ladies a group have halted to make inquiries.

“Where is Fanny to-day? Is she sick?”

“Oh, no. But the truth is her hat didn’t suit, and she sent it back and didn’t get it again. She waited till one o’clock, but it didn’t come. Milliners are growing so independent and untrustworthy! I told Fanny to wear her old hat and never mind, but she wouldn’t. Estelle and Arthur have gone off to the Cathedral this morning. Absurd, isn’t it? I don’t like to have them go so often. It looks odd. But Arthur runs wild over the music there. I tell him our music is good enough, but he doesn’t think so.”

“I don’t know what the trouble is, but the young people do not seem to be attracted to our church,” the elder lady says, and she says it with a sigh. She belongs to that class of people who *always* say things with a sigh.

Further on Mrs. Hammond has paused to say that if the weather continues so lovely she thinks they would better have that excursion during the week. The gardens will be in all their glory. Tell the girls she thinks they better settle on Wednesday as the day least likely to have engagements. The lady knows that she is mentioning the day for the regular church prayer-meeting, and she is sending word to members of the church. But what of that?



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"I'm tired almost to death," says Mrs. Edwards, "We have been house-cleaning all the week, and it is such a trial, with inefficient help. I wouldn't have come to church at all today but the weather was so lovely, and we have so few days in this climate when one can wear anything decent it seemed a pity to lose one. Have you finished house-cleaning?"

At the foot of the stairs Miss Lily Harrison meets the soprano singer.

"Oh, Lorena!" she exclaims, "your voice was just perfectly divine this morning. Let me tell you what Jim said, when you went up on the high notes of the anthem. He leaned over and whispered to me, 'The angels can't go ahead of that, I know; irreverent fellow!—Lorena, what a perfect match your silk is! Where did you succeed so well? I was *dying* to see that dress! I told mamma if it were not for the first sight of that dress, and of Laura's face when she saw it was so much more elegant than hers, I should have been tempted to take a nap this morning instead of coming to church. However, I got a delicious one as it was. Weren't you horribly sleepy?"

At this point Misses Lily and Lorena are joined by the said "Jim." And be it noticed that he makes the first remark on the sermon that has been heard as yet.

"We had a stunning sermon this morning, didn't we?"

"Oh, you shocking fellow!" murmurs Lorena "How *can* you use such rough words?"

"What words! Stunning? Why, dear me, that is a jolly word; so expressive. I say, you sheep in this fold took it pretty hard. A fellow might be almost glad of being a goat, I think."

"Jim, don't be wicked," puts in Miss Lily who has a cousinship in the said Jim, and therefore can afford to be brusque. Jim shrugs his shoulders.

"Wicked," he says. "If the preacher is to be credited, it is you folks who are wicked. I don't pretend, you know, to be anything else."

A change of subject seems to the fair Lorena to be desirable, so she says:

"Why were you not at the hop last night, Mr. Merchant?"

And Jim replies, "I didn't get home in time. I was at the races. I hear you had a *stunning*—I beg your pardon—a *perfectly splendid* time. Those are the right words, I believe."

And then the two ladies gathered their silken trains into an aristocratic grasp of the left hand, and sailed down town on either side of "Jim" to continue the conversation. And those coral lips had but just sung—



“My thoughts lie open to the Lord,
Before they’re formed within;
And ere my lips pronounce the word
He knows the sense I mean.”

What *could* He have thought of her? Is it not strange that she did not ask this of herself.

“How are you to-day?” Mr. Jackson asked, shaking his old acquaintance, Mr. Dunlap, heartily by the hand. “Beautiful day, isn’t it?”

Now, what will be the next sentence from the lips of those gray-headed men, standing in the sanctuary, with the echo of solemn service still in their ears? Listen:



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“Splendid weather for crops. A man with such a farm as mine on his hands, and so backward with his work, rather grudges such Sundays as these this time of year.”

And the other?

“Yes,” he says, laughing, “you could spare the time better if it rained, I dare say. By the way, Dunlap, have you sold that horse yet? If not, you better make up your mind to let me have it at the price I named. You won’t do better than that this fell.”

Whereupon ensued a discussion on the respective merits and demerits, and the prospective rise and fall in horse-flesh.

“Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” *Had* those two gentlemen heard that text?

CHAPTER II.

SOME PEOPLE WHO FORGOT THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

Let me introduce to you the Harrison dinner-table, and the people gathered there on the afternoon of that Sabbath day. Miss Lily had brought home with her her cousin Jim; he was privileged on the score of relationship. Miss Helen, another daughter of the house, had invited Mr. Harvey Latimer; he was second cousin to Kate’s husband, and Kate was a niece of Mrs. Harrison; relationship again. Also, Miss Fannie and Miss Cecilia Lawrence were there, because they were schoolgirls, and so lonely in boarding-school on Sunday, and their mother was an old friend of Mrs. Harrison; there are always reasons for things.

The dinner-table was a marvel of culinary skill. Clearly Mrs. Harrison’s cook was *not* a church-goer. Roast turkey, and chicken-pie, and all the side dishes attendant upon both, to say nothing of the rich and carefully prepared dessert, of the nature that indicated that its flankiness was *not* developed on Saturday, and left to wait for Sunday. Also, there was wine on Mrs. Harrison’s table; just a little home-made wine, the rare juice of the grape prepared by Mrs. Harrison’s own cook—not at all the sort of wine that others indulged in—the Harrisons were temperance people.

“I invited Dr. Selmsen down to dinner,” remarked Mrs. Harrison, as she sipped her coffee. “I thought since his wife was gone, it would be only common courtesy to invite him in to get a warm dinner, but he declined; he said his Sunday dinners were always very simple.”

Be it known to you that Dr. Selmsen was Mrs. Harrison’s pastor, and the preacher of the morning sermon.



Miss Lily arched her handsome eyebrows.

“Oh, mamma!” she said, “how could you be guilty of such a sin! The *idea* of Dr. Selmser going out to dinner on Sunday! I wonder he did not drop down in a faint! Papa, did you ever hear such a sermon?”

“It slashed right and left, that is a fact,” said Mr. Harrison, between the mouthfuls of chicken salad and oyster pickle.

“A little too sweeping in its scope to be wise for one in his position. Have another piece of the turkey, James? He is running into that style a little too much. Some person whose opinion has weight ought to warn him. A minister loses influence pretty rapidly who meddles with everything.”



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“Well, there was *everything* in that sermon,” said Miss Cecilia. “I just trembled in my shoes at one time. I expected our last escapade in the school hall would be produced to point one of his morals.”

“You admit that it would have pointed it?” said the cousin Jim, with a meaning laugh.

“Oh, yes; it was *awfully* wicked; I’ll admit that. But one didn’t care to hear it rehearsed in a church.”

“That is the trouble,” mamma Harrison said. “Little nonsenses that do very well among schoolgirls, or in the way of a frolic, are not suited to illustrate a sermon with. I think Dr. Selmsler is rather apt to forget the dignity of the pulpit in his illustrations.”

“Lorena says he utterly spoiled the closing anthem by that doleful hymn he gave out,” said Miss Lily. “They were going to give that exquisite bit from the last sacred opera, but the organist positively refused to play it after such woe-begone music. I wish we had a new hymn-book, without any of those horrid, old-fashioned hymns in it, anyhow.”

It was Mr. Harvey Latimer’s turn to speak:

“Oh, well now, say what you please, Selmsler can *preach*. He may not suit one’s taste always, Especially when you get hit; but he has a tremendous way of putting things. Old Professor Marker says he has more power over language than any preacher in the city.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Harrison, struggling with too large a mouthful of turkey, “he is a *preacher*, whatever else may be said about him; and yet of course it is unfortunate for a minister to be always pitching into people; they get tired of it after a while.”

“Jim, did you know that Mrs. Jamison was going to give a reception to the bride next Wednesday evening?” This from Lily.

“No; *is* she? That will be a grand crush, I suppose.”

“I heard her giving informal invitations in church to-day,” Helen said, and one of the schoolgirls said:

“Oh, don’t you think she said she was going to invite us? Celia told her to send the invitation to you, Mrs. Harrison. We felt sure you would ask us to your house to spend the evening; Madam Wilcox will always allow that. But there is no use trying to get her permission for a party. You *will* ask us, *won’t* you?”

Whereupon Mrs. Harrison laughed, and shook her head at them, and told them she was afraid they were naughty girls, and she would have to think about it. All of which seemed to be entirely satisfactory to them. The conversation suddenly changed.



“Wasn’t Mrs. Marsh dressed in horrid taste today?” said Helen Harrison. “Really I don’t see the use in being worth a million in her own right, if she has no better taste than *that* to display. Her camels’-hair shawl is positively the ugliest thing I ever saw, and she had it folded horribly. She is round-shouldered, anyhow—ought never to wear a shawl.”

“I think her shawl was better than her hat,” chimed in Miss Lily. “The *idea* of that hat costing fifty dollars! It isn’t as becoming as her old one; and, to make it look worse than it would have done, she had her hair arranged in that frightful new twist!”

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"Why, Lily Harrison! I heard you tell her you thought her hat was lovely!" This from Lily's youngest sister.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Miss Lily. "One must say something to people. It wouldn't do to tell her she looked horrid." And the mother *laughed*.

"It is a good thing for Mrs. Marsh that she holds her million in her own right," observed cousin Jim. "That husband of hers is getting a little too fast for comfort."

"Is that so?" Mr. Harrison asked, looking up from his turkey bone.

"Yes, sir; his loss at cards was tremendously heavy last week; would have broken a less solid man. He had been drinking when he played last, and made horridly flat moves."

"Disgraceful!" murmured Mr. Harrison; and then he took another sip of his home-made wine.

There were homes representing this same church that were not so stylish, or fashionable, or wealthy. Mrs. Brower and her daughter Jenny had to lay aside their best dresses, and all the array of Sunday toilet, which represented their very best, and repair to the kitchen to cook their own Sunday dinners. "Was it a thoughtful dwelling upon such verses of Scripture as had been presented that morning which made the Sunday dinner the most elaborate, the most carefully prepared, and more general in its variety, than any other dinner in the week? Their breakfast hour was late, and, by putting the dinner hour at half-past three, it gave them time to be elaborate, according to their definition of that word. Not being cumbered with hired help, mother and daughter could have confidential Sabbath conversations with each other as they worked. So while Mrs. Brower carefully washed and stuffed the two plump chickens, Jennie prepared squash, and turnip, and potatoes for cooking, planning meanwhile for the hot apple sauce, and a side dish or two for dessert, and the two talked.

"Well, did you get an invitation?" the mother asked, and the tone of suppressed motherly anxiety showed that the subject was one of importance. Did she mean an invitation to the great feast which is to be held when they sit down to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb, and which this holy Sabbath day was given to help one prepare for? No, on second thought it could not have been that; for, after listening to the morning sermon no thought of anxiety could have mingled with that question. Assuredly Jennie was invited—nay, *urged, entreated*; the only point of Anxiety could have been—*would* she accept? But it was another place that filled the minds of both mother and daughter.

"Indeed I did." There was glee in Miss Jennie's voice. "I thought I wasn't going to. She went right by me and asked people right and left, never once looking at me. But she came away back after she had gone into the hall, and came over to my seat and

whispered that she had been looking for me all the way out, but had missed me. She said I must be sure to

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come, for she depended on us young people to help make the affair less ceremonious. Don't you think, Emma wasn't invited at all, and I don't believe she will be; almost everyone has been now. Emma was so sure of her invitation, because she was such a friend of Lu Jamison's. She thought she would get cards to the wedding, you know; and when they didn't come she felt sure of the reception. She has been holding her head wonderfully high all the week about it, and now she is left out and I am in. Mother, isn't that rich?"

Mrs. Brower plumped her chickens into the oven, and wiped the flour from her cheek and sighed.

"There will be no end of fuss in getting you ready, and expense too. What are you going to wear, anyway?"

"Mother," said Jennie, impressively, turning away from her squash to get a view of her mother's face, "I ought to have a new dress for this party. I haven't anything fit to be seen. It is months since I have had a new one; and everybody is sick of my old blue dress; I'm sure I am."

"It is entirely out of the question," Mrs. Brower said, irritably, "and you know it is. I *wonder* at your even thinking of such a thing, and we so many bills to pay; and there's that pew-rent hasn't been paid in so long that I'm ashamed to go to church."

"I wish the pew-rent was in Jericho, and the pew, too!" was Miss Jennie's spirited answer. "I should think churches ought to be free, if nothing else is. It is a great religion, selling pews so high that poor people can't go to church. If I had thought I couldn't have a new dress I should have declined the invitation at once. I did think it was time for me to have something decent; and I make my own clothes, too, which is more than most any other girls do. I saw a way to make it this morning. I studied Miss Harvey's dress all the while we were standing. I could make trimming precisely like hers, and put it on and all. I could do every thing to it but cut and fit it."

"I tell you you haven't anything to cut and fit, and can't have. What's the use in talking?"

And in her annoyance and motherly bitterness at having to disappoint her daughter, Mrs. Brower let fall the glass jar she had been trying to open, and it opened suddenly, disgorging and mingling its contents with bits of glass on the kitchen floor. Does anyone, having overheard thus much of the conversation, and having a fair knowledge of human nature, need to be told that there were sharp words, bitterly spoken, in that kitchen after that, and that presently the speech settled down into silence and gloom, and preparations for the Sunday dinner went on, with much slamming and banging, and quick nervous movements, that but increased the ferment within and the outside

difficulties. And yet this mother and daughter had been to church and heard that wonderful text, “Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.” Had listened while it was explained and illustrated, going, you will remember, into the very kitchen for details. They had heard that wonderful hymn:



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“In vain my soul would try
To shun thy presence, Lord, or flee
The notice of thine eye.”

Both mother and daughter had their names enrolled on the church record. They were at times earnest and anxious to feel sure that their names were written in the book kept before the throne. Yet the invitation to Mrs. Jamison’s reception, informally whispered to the daughter as she moved down the church aisle, had enveloped the rest of their Sabbath in gloom. “Friend, how earnest thou in hither, not having on the wedding garment?” It was a wedding reception to which Jennie had been invited. Did neither mother nor daughter think of that other wedding, and have a desire to be clothed in the right garment?

CHAPTER III.

SOME PEOPLE WHO FORGOT THE EVER-LISTENING EAR.

There were two other members of the Brower family who had attended church that Sabbath morning. One was Mr. Brower, sen. And at the season of dinner-getting he lay on the couch in the dining-room, with the weekly paper in his hand, himself engaged in running down the column of stock prices. He glanced up once, when the words in the kitchen jarred roughly on his aesthetic ear, and said:

“Seems to me, if I were you, I would remember that to-day is Sunday, and not be quite so sharp with my tongue.”

Then his solemn duty done, he returned to his mental comparison of prices. Also, there was Dwight Brower, a young fellow of nineteen or so, who acted unaccountably. Instead of lounging around, according to his usual custom, hovering between piazza and dining-room, whistling softly, now and then turning over the pile of old magazines between whiles, in search of something with which to pass away the time, he passed through the hall on his return from church, and without exchanging a word with anyone went directly to his room. Once there, he turned the key in the lock, and then, as though that did not make him feel quite enough alone, he slipped the little brass bolt under it, and then began pacing the somewhat long and somewhat narrow floor. Up and down, up and down, with measured step and perplexed, anxious face, hands in his pockets, and his whole air one of abandonment to more serious thought than boys of nineteen usually indulge.

What has happened to Dwight? Something that is not easily settled; for as the chickens sputter in the oven below, and the water boils off the potatoes, and the pudding is manufactured, and the cloud deepens and glooms, he does not recover his free-and-easy air and manner. He ceases his walk after a little, from sheer weariness, but he



thrusts out his arm and seizes a chair with the air of one who has not time to be leisurely, and flings himself into it, and clasps his arms on the table, and bends his head on his hands and thinks on.



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The holy hours of the Sabbath afternoon waned. Mr. Brower exhausted the stock column, read the record of deaths by way of doing a little religious reading, tried a line or two of a religious poem and found it too much for him, then rolled up a shawl for a sofa-pillow, put the paper over his head to shield him from the October flies, and went to sleep. Jennie went in and out setting the table, went to the cellar for bread and cake and cream, went to the closet up-stairs for a glass of jelly, went the entire round of weary steps necessary to the getting ready the Sunday feast, all the time with the flush on her cheek and the fire in her eye that told of a turbulent, eager, disappointed heart, and not once during the time did she think of the solemn words of prayer or hymn or sermon, or even *benediction*, of the morning. She had gotten her text in the church aisle. It was, "Wherewithal shall I be clothed, in order to sit down at the marriage-supper of Mrs. Jamison's son and daughter?" And vigorously was it tormenting her. What an infinitely compassionate God is ours who made it impossible for Dr. Selmser, as he sat alone in his study that afternoon, to know what was transpiring in the hearts and homes of some of his people!

Those chickens sputtered themselves done at last, and the hot and tired mother, with still the anxious look on her face, stooped and took them from their fiery bed, and the father awoke with a yawn to hear himself summoned to the feast. It was later than usual; many things had detained them; four o'clock *quite*, and before the army of dishes could be marshaled back into shape, the bell would certainly toll for evening service. "Let the fear of the Lord be upon you." And *He* said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Dwight Brower was summoned, too, from his room; and his mother, who had just realized the strangeness of his absence, looked up as he came in, and said:

"Are you sick to-day, Dwight?"

"No, ma'am," he answered.

And something in his voice made her look again; and something in his face made her keep looking, with a perplexed, half-awed air. What had happened to Dwight? What change had come to him amid the afternoon hours of that Sabbath day? Very different experiences can be passing in the same house at the same time.

It was only across the street from the Browsers' that little Mrs. Matthews poured coffee for herself and husband, while Mollie, the cook, stood on the side-piazza and sang in a loud, shrill, and yet appreciative tone, "There is rest for the weary." Little Mrs. Matthews had glowing cheeks, though she had done nothing more serious than exchange her silken dress for a wrapper, and lie on the sofa and finish the closing chapters of George Eliot's last new novel, since her return from church. Aye, it is true. She had been a listener in the same sanctuary where the earnest charge had rung, "Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you." At least Mrs. Matthews had taken her



handsomely clothed little body to church; I will not say that her mind was there, or that she had heard much of the sermon. Some of it, however, she undoubtedly *had* heard, and she proved it at this point, breaking in upon Dr. Matthews' musings as he stirred his second cup of coffee:



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“Dr. Matthews, how do you like being preached at?”

“Preached at?” the doctor echoed, with a sleepy air.

“Yes, preached at. I’m sure, if you were not asleep this morning, you must have heard yourself all but called by name. Who else could Dr. Selmsler have been hinting at when he burst forth with such a tirade on whist parties? It isn’t a week since we had ours, and he almost described what we had for supper.”

“Fudge!” said Dr. Matthews. He was occasionally more apt to be expressive than elegant in his expressions. “What do you suppose he knows about our party? There were a dozen, I dare say, that very evening, and as many more the next evening. They are common enough, I am sure. And he didn’t say anything personal, nor anything very bad, anyhow. They all take that position—have to, I suppose; it’s a part of their business. I don’t like them any the less for it. I wouldn’t listen to a preacher who played whist.”

Mrs. Matthews set her pretty lips in a most determined way, and answered, in an injured tone:

“Oh, well, if you like to be singled out in that manner, and held up as an example before the whole congregation, I’m sure you’re welcome to the enjoyment; but as for me, I think it is just an insult.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” echoed the doctor. “How you women can work yourselves into a riot over nothing. Now you know he didn’t say any more than he has a dozen times before. In fact, he was rather mild on that point, I thought; and I concluded he considered he had said about all there was to be said in that line, and might as well slip it over. There wasn’t a personal sentence in it, anyhow. The doctor is a gentleman. More than that, I don’t believe he knows we had a whist party. If he set out to keep track of all the *parties* there are in his congregation it would make a busy life for him. Your conscience must have reproached you, Maria.”

“Well, some people are less sensitive than others, I suppose. I *know* men who wouldn’t like to have their wives talked about as freely as yours was from the pulpit this morning. I tell you, Dr. Matthews, that he meant *me*, and I know it, and I don’t mean to stand it, if you do.”

“How will you help it?” the doctor asked, and he laughed outright. It did seem ridiculously funny to him. “A tempest in a thimble,” he called it. His wife was given to having them.

“What will you do about it? Fight him, or what? It’s a free country, and the man has a right to his opinions, even if *you* don’t agree with him. Better hush up, Maria. I don’t

believe in duels, and they are against the law in this country besides; you are powerless, you see.”



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It is a pity he said that. Mrs. Dr. Matthews being a woman, and being a member of that church, knew she was *not* powerless. And women of her stamp are sure to be *dared* by random, half-earnest sentences, to show the very utmost that their weak selves can do. As truly as I tell you the story here to-day, that is the way the ferment began. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Aye, and a little acid *sours* the whole lump. Do you think Mrs. Dr. Matthews sallied out directly her meal was concluded, and openly and bitterly denounced Dr. Selmser as a pulpit slanderer? She did nothing of the sort. She chose her time and place and persons with skill and tact, and said, “Didn’t they think, just among themselves, not intending to breathe it outside for the world, that Dr. Selmser was getting a *little* unpopular among the young people? He was so *grave*—almost stern. She felt distressed sometimes lest they should cultivate a feeling of fear toward him. She *did* think it was so important that the young people should be attracted.”

Watching her opportunity—and it is wonderful how many opportunities there are in the world, if one only watches for them—she remarked at Mrs. Brower’s that Dr. Selmser was just a little inclined, she thought, to pay rather too much attention to families like the Harrisons. It was natural, she supposed. Ministers were but human, and of course with their wealth and influence they could make their home very attractive to him; but she always felt sorry when she saw a clergyman neglecting the poor. Dr. Selmser certainly had called at Mr. Harrison’s twice during this very week. Of course he might have had business—she did not pretend to say. But there were *some* who were feeling as though their pastor didn’t get time to see them very often. He ought to be willing to divide his attentions.

Now Mrs. Brower belonged by nature to that type of woman who is disposed to keep an almanac account with her pastor. She knew just how many calls Dr. Selmser made on her in a year, and just how far apart they were. It really needed but a suggestion to make her feel doubly alert—on the *qui vive*, indeed—to have her feelings hurt. So of course they were *hurt*.

In point of fact, there is nothing easier to accomplish in this jarring world than to get your feelings injured. If you are bent on being slighted there is no manner of difficulty in finding people who apparently “live and move and breathe” for no other purpose than to slight you. And as often as you think about them, and dwell on their doings, they increase in number. A new name is added to the list every time you think it over; and the fair probability is that every single person you meet on that day when you have just gone over your troubles will say or do, or leave unsaid or undone, that which will cruelly hurt you. I tell you, dear friend, it becomes you to keep those feelings of yours hidden under lock and key, out of sight and memory of anyone but your loving Lord, if you don’t want them *hurt* every hour in the day.



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CHAPTER IV.

SOME PEOPLE WHO WERE FALSE FRIENDS.

Did a woman ever start out, I wonder, with the spirit of turmoil and unrest about her, that she did not find helpers? Especially if she be one of a large congregation she comes in contact with some heedless ones—some malicious ones—some who are led into mischief by their undisciplined tongues—some who have personal grievances. And there are always some people in every community who stand all ready to be led by the last brain with which they come in contact; or, if not that, they are sure to think exactly as Dr. Jones and Judge Tinker and Prof. Bolus do, without reason as to why or wherefore. This class is very easily managed. A little care, a judicious repetition of a sentence which fell from the doctor's or the judge's or the professor's lips, and which might have meant anything or *nothing*, by the slightest possible changes of emphasis, can be made to mean a little or a great deal. It wasn't slow work either—not half so slow as it would have been to attempt the building up of someone's reputation; by reason of the law of gravitation the natural tendency is downward, so prevalent in human nature, and by reason of the intense delight which that wise and wily helper, Satan, has in a *fuss* of any sort. Do Mrs. Dr. Matthews the justice of understanding that she didn't in the least comprehend what she was about; that is, not the magnitude of it. She only knew that she had been stung, either by her conscience or else by Dr. Selmser. She chose to think it was Dr. Selmser, and she felt like repaying him for it. He should be made to understand that people wouldn't bear everything; that he must just learn to be a little more careful about what he said and did. "Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you." Yes, *she* heard the text, and was thinking of her party all the time. Did she think that certain things which occurred in her parlours on that evening were not in accordance with the text? Then did she think to blot out the text by showing her ability to stir up a commotion? What *do* such people think, anyway?

There came a day when even Mrs. Dr. Matthews herself stood aghast over what had been done, and didn't more than half recognise her hand in the matter, so many helpers she had found—non-temperance men, men of antagonistic political views, men who winced at the narrowness of the line drawn by their pastor—a line that shut out the very breath of dishonesty from the true Church of Christ—men and women who were honest and earnest and *petty*—who were not called on enough, or bowed to enough, or consulted enough, or ten thousand other pettinesses, too small or too *mean* to be advanced as excuses, and so were hidden behind the general and vague one that, on the whole, Dr. Selmser didn't seem to "draw;" the "young people" thought him severe or solemn or *something*; his sermons were not "just the thing—did not quite come up to the standard," whatever that may mean.



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So the ball grew—grew so large that one day it rolled toward the parsonage in the shape of a letter, carefully phrased, conciliatory, soothing—meant to be; “every confidence in his integrity and kindness of heart and good intentions,” and every other virtue under the sun. But, well, the fact was the “young people” did not feel quite satisfied, and they felt that, on the whole, by and by, toward spring, perhaps, or when he had had time to look around him and determine what to do, a *change* would be for the best, both, for himself and for the cause. Indeed, they were persuaded that he himself needed a change—his nervous system imperatively demanded it.

Let me tell you what particular day that letter found its way to the parsonage: a rainy, dreary day in the early winter, when the ground had not deliberately frozen over, and things generally settled down to good solid winter weather, but in that muddy slushy, transition state of weather when nothing anywhere seems settled save clouds, dun and dreary, drooping low over a dreary earth; came when the minister was struggling hard with a nervous headache and sleeplessness and anxiety over a sick child; came when every nerve was drawn to its highest tension, and the slightest touch might snap the main cord. It didn't snap, however. He read that long, wise, carefully-written, *sympathetic* letter through twice, without the outward movement of a muscle, only a flush of red rising to his forehead, and then receding, leaving him very pale. Then he called his wife.

“Mattie, see here, have you time to read this? Wait! Have you nerve for it? It will not help you. It is not good news nor encouraging news, and it comes at a hard time; and yet I don't know. We can bear any news, can't we, now that Johnnie is really better?”

With this introduction she read the letter, and the keen, clear gray eye seemed to grow stronger as she read.

“Well,” she said, “it is not such *very* bad news; nothing, at least, but what you ministers ought to be used to. We can go. There is work in the world yet, I suppose.”

“Work in the Lord's vineyard, Mattie, for *us*, if he wants us. If not, why then there is rest.”

Shall I tell you about that breaking up? about how the ties of love, and friendship, and sympathy were severed? You do not think that the whole church spoke through that letter? Bless you, no. Even Mrs. Dr. Matthews cried about it, and said it was a perfect shame, and *she* didn't know what the officers meant. For her part, she thought they would never have such another pastor as Dr. Selmsen. And I may as well tell you, in passing, that she did what she could to cripple the usefulness of the next one by comparing him day and night, in season and out of season, with “dear Dr. Selmsen.” There are worse people in the world than Mrs. Dr. Matthews.



Did he stay all winter and look about him and decide what to do? You know better than that. He sent his resignation in the very next Sabbath; and some of those letter-writers were hurt, and thought he had more Christian principle than that; and thought that ministers, of all men, should not be so hasty in their acts. It showed a bad spirit.



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They went home after that—Dr. Selmsler and his wife—to *her* mother's home. So many people have *her* mother's home to go to. Blessed mothers! He was so glad to get to her. He needed change and rest, and the letter-writers had spoken truthfully. Did he take cold in packing and travelling? Was he overworked? Were the seeds of the disease running riot in his system during that early fall? Were they helped along any by that letter? Who shall tell? We know this much: he took to his bed, and he was no longer pale or quiet; the flush of fever and the unrest of delirium were upon him. He rolled and tossed and muttered; and it was always of his work, of his cares, of his responsibilities—never of *rest*; and yet rest was coming to him on swift wing. The Lord of the vineyard knoweth when his reapers have need of soft, cool days of glory, to follow weeks of service. Rapidly they come to him; but the river must be crossed first, and first there must be a severing of earth-ties, a breaking of cords stronger than life. Never mind, the King knows about this, too; and it must be, and *is*, and *shall be*, well. The rest came—all that we on this side knew of it—a pulseless heart, a shrouded form, lips of ice, forehead of snow, hush and silence. Just the other side of the filmy veil which we call "Time," what was the appearance of it there? He knows, and has known these many years. And, thank God, the wife of his love knows now, but we do not. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart, the things that are prepared" for them.

What said the elegant modern church, that during the process of this change was undergoing a candidating siege? Why, they met in decorous assemblage, and passed resolutions, and had them printed, and draped the pulpit in mourning, and sent a delegation of the church to the funeral, with knots of the finest *crepe* streaming from their shoulders; and, on the Sabbath following, the quartette choir sang the funeral dirge in such a way as to melt almost the entire audience to tears. And then they went home, some of them, and remarked that the candidate who occupied their pulpit that morning had an exceedingly awkward way of managing his handkerchief, and didn't give out notices well. They didn't believe he would "draw" the "young people."

Now, what of all this story of one Sabbath day? Is it overdrawn? Do you say there are no such people as have been described? I beg your pardon, there *are*. It is *not* a story; it is a truthful repetition of Sabbath conversations. Would that such Sabbath desecrations were rare. They are not. You will remember that out of a congregation of five hundred I have not given you a description of a dozen people. The difficulty is that a dozen people can and *do* set in commotion large bodies of humanity, and bring about results of which they themselves do not dream.



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About that minister: If he sunk under such a common matter as having certain ones in a church disaffected with him, it shows a weak mind, do you say? He should have expected trials, and disappointments, and coldness, and disaffection. "The servant is not greater than his lord." All true; he had preached that doctrine to himself for twenty years, and earnestly strove to live by it. I do not say that he sunk under the humiliation; only, don't you remember the fable of the last straw that broke the camel's back? What I *do* say is, that he had borne hundreds and thousands of "straws." Also, remember it was *the Lord* who called him from work. Assuredly he did not call himself. I think the master said: "Let him come; it is enough; and we need him here."

Then what about the unfinished work that he left? What about the midnight prayer over that sermon, the wrestling for a sign of fruit? Was it in vain? There is fruit that you and I do not see, oftentimes. Do you remember the young man, Dwight Brower, and the Sabbath afternoon communion that he had with himself? Not with himself alone; the world, the flesh, and the devil were in full strength before him; and not *them* only—the angel of the covenant was there beside him. There was a conflict—the world and the devil were vanquished. Dwight Brower's name was on the church-roll, but his heart had been with the world. He came over that day, distinctly, firmly, strongly, to the Lord's side. He weighed the solemn words, "Take heed what ye do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you." They sounded to him as they never had before. He resolved then and there that they should mean to him what they never had before, that they should mean to him what they evidently did to his pastor.

That was twenty years ago. There were modern churches even then. Dwight Brower has been a power in the land since then. Not one, but scores—aye, hundreds—aye, thousands of souls has the Lord given him as seals to his ministry; and he is working now. Once I visited where he preached. I heard a lady say to him, "That was a wonderful sermon that you gave us to-day. To begin with, it is a wonderful text. I never before realized that the Lord was actually *watching* all our ways."

He turned toward her with a smile, and said: "It was Dr. Selmsler who preached to-day. He has been gone twenty years, and he is preaching yet."

"And I heard a voice saying unto me, Write Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

Does it seem to you a pity that he could not have known—could not have had one glimpse of the fruit of his work? How do you know what view of waving harvests being garnered in the Lord calls him to look down upon from the heights of Pisgah? "When I awake with thy likeness I shall be satisfied." Be sure the Lord has satisfied him.



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Meantime that modern church is still very modern indeed, and at this present time its pulpit is vacant—they are candidating!

NEW NERVES.

“Margaret, do stop that horrid screeching! You make my head fairly snap.” The music suddenly ceased. The sharp voice came from the pantry, and belonged to Margaret’s mother, Mrs. Murray. She stood before her moulding board weighing out chopped raisins, currants, flour, butter, and all the other ingredients that go to make a fruit-cake. The deep-cut frown between her eyes, the worried expression, and the tightly-shut lips told their own story.

The singer stood at the kitchen-table washing the breakfast dishes—a pretty picture, with her sixteen years just blossoming into pink cheeks and bright eyes—a trim and dainty figure even in her simple dark print and white apron. She looked so happy and caroled forth her song so gaily, while she wiped the delicate china cups on the soft towel. If her mother could but have seen her, would she so rudely have jarred the bright spirit? And this was Margaret. She, too, could frown; now the straight black brows drew themselves together in an ugly way on the white forehead, the cheeks took a deeper pink, and the bright eyes had a snap in them. She flung the cups on the table in place of the almost loving touches she had bestowed upon them. The clatter went on, and at last a luckless cup reeled, and rolled to the very edge of the table, and—off it went! shivering into many fragments. This brought Mrs. Murray to the pantry door.

“Well, I never saw anything like you for carelessness,” she said in a high-keyed voice.

“There goes another of that set! You were vexed, or that wouldn’t have happened. I heard how you slammed about after I spoke to you. Now pick up the pieces and go away. I will wash them myself.”

Every nerve in the girl’s body fairly quivered. Her mother had touched her on a tender point. She had been drilled by her music-teacher for a long time on the high notes of a difficult piece of music, and she had just succeeded in trilling it out to her own satisfaction and delight, when she was startled by her mother’s voice. Poor Margaret! She had a hot temper, and when the severe reprimand for her carelessness was added, she felt so angry and disgraced that she would have said many a word to repent of, but happily she could not control her voice to speak. Every time she attempted it, a choking sob stood right in the doorway, and would not let the wicked words out.

Mrs. Murray was a pattern housekeeper, a model of neatness. Everything in her house shone, from the parlour windows to the kitchen stove. Her cake was always light, her bread sweet. No table could compare with hers for delicious variety. Her housekeeping was a fine art, before which everything else was made to bow. Her parlour was made



most attractive in all its appointments, and everything that goes to make a pleasant home was lavishly supplied by her husband; yet a more uncomfortable family it would be hard to find.



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The parlour was kept closed and dark, except on rare occasion. Flies, and dust, and mud were Mrs. Murray's avowed enemies. To overcome them was the chief end of her life; to this end she tortured her husband, and son, and daughters. Summer and winter she diligently pursued them, and many a tempest was evolved in that house from a source no greater than a muddy foot-print, or stray fly or two, for in summer the house was enclosed in wire screens, and heedless people were for ever leaving them open.

Economy, too, another most desirable virtue, was in this home made to appear almost a vice. She would not let the sunshine in, lest it would fade the carpet. She made her room dingy and unpleasant in the evening, to save gas. She would not make a fire in the parlour in the winter, because it wasted coal. She would not open it in summer because dust ruined the furniture. To make matters worse, Mrs. Murray was a woman made principally of nerves. She was a constitutional fretter. It must be said in her justification that she came of a nervous race. There are different kinds of nervous people; this family did not belong to that limp class who start with affright at every noise, or faint at sight of a spider. Their nerves were too tightly drawn, and like a delicate stringed instrument, when a rude touch came, snap! went a string, making all life's music into discord as far as they were concerned. The discord usually expressed itself in scolding. It is a real luxury for the time, to the wicked nerves to give somebody a sound beating. Mrs. Murray's mother and grandmother and great-grandmother had made a practice of scolding their children, their servants, and their husbands, when necessary, and it never seemed to occur to her that there was any other way to manage affairs.

Another antic those naughty nerves often indulged in, was nervous headache; when anything specially annoying took place, they met in convention in the top of the poor head, and held an indignation meeting; at such times Mrs. Murray was obliged to retreat to her own room. The increasing frequency of these attacks furnished her with an excellent reason for withdrawing herself from society almost entirely. She was not strong enough to entertain company. She was not strong enough even to attend church habitually. Her strength must all be given to her house and her table, for she was one of those housekeepers who consider economy out of place here; the cakes and pies and knick-knacks were counted a necessity, as well as more substantial food. Don't say Mr. Murray should not have chosen such a wife. He did not. This gloomy, fault-finding woman, bore no resemblance to the sweet, bright girl, he married. It had all come about so gradually that neither realized the great change.

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Ralph, the only son, a fine, tall young man, just out of his teens, had lately been taken into his father's firm. He was noble and true, though in a little danger on account of his fondness for company, which, not being gratified at home, was taking him away from its safe boundaries to clubs, and questionable company and amusements, much more than pleased his father; but Ralph declared he must have some pleasure—"didn't want to mope in his room alone after being hard at work all day. As for home, there was nothing there, not even a good place to read—gas at the top of the wall in the dingy old dining-room, and the girls always out—or out of humour; he could do no better." Mr. Murray was uneasy: "Their home was sort of dismal; what was the matter?" The two daughters, just coming up to womanhood, also missed many of the pleasant surroundings and sweet sympathy that other girls seemed to have in their homes. With all her toil and doing, Mrs. Murray was letting her children slip, as it were, through her fingers. The house was well furnished, but there was no room bright and warm, with music and books and papers, where they gathered in the evening and strengthened the home ties.

No servant could long please Mrs. Murray, so the comers and goers to that kitchen for many years were numerous. Now she had hit upon a new plan. She could carry out some good old-fashioned notions she had about training girls in domestic matters. She would do her own work with such assistance as her daughters could give her out of school hours, calling in such help as they needed. But the project did not work well: the girls were always hurried; their school duties left very little time for anything else, so their household tasks were not always well or cheerfully performed, especially Margaret's. Her love for music amounted to a passion, and she grudged the time for practice; then their inexperience tried her mother's patience sadly, and brought the inevitable scoldings, and made Margaret's irritable nerves flash up to meet her mother's. But that Saturday morning that we began to tell about, it was such a very exasperating one all around. One thing after another happened to make things go wrong, till it fairly seemed as if some evil genius had affairs under control. The door opened and a sweet round face, framed by a sweeping cap, appeared. A graceful young girl armed with broom and dustpan stepped lightly across the kitchen, deposited her broom in the corner, and proceeded to empty the contents of the pan in the fire.

"Florence," spoke her mother sharply, "what do you mean by putting dust in the fire when you see this kettle of stewed cranberries on the stove?"

Florence started guiltily, spilling some of the dust on the stove in her agitation.

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“There! now see what you have done! You two make more work than you do; and just see how you have stood the broom in the corner, instead of hanging it up, as I have told you a hundred times to do. It is more trouble to teach you than it is to do things myself. I wonder if you have just got through sweeping; such slow poking works, I could have done it twice over by this time. I don’t see why I should be so tormented; other people have girls that amount to something.” Mrs. Murray, down in her heart, believed there were no girls in all the kingdom like hers. Florence was accustomed to this sort of talk, and yet it hurt her sensitive, affectionate nature every time. The blue eyes took on no indignant light; instead, they filled with tears, which irritated her mother still more, and she said, with increased sharpness:

“There, go away. You are made of too fine stuff for common purposes; getting so touchy that not a word can be said to you.”

Counting time by her mother’s calendar, Florence had been a long time doing a little, but her nature was different from her mother’s, all her movements were gentle. She had been reverently following her mother’s directions. Her untiring patience ferreted dust out of every little corner where it had lodged in the furniture; she had mounted the step-ladder and dusted the pictures, had cleaned and polished all the little ornaments. True, she lingered a moment over a book of engravings, and to kiss a little statuette of “Prayer,” but she thought she had done it all so nicely, and a little word of praise would have made her so happy. It was hard, when she had done her best, to have only fault-findings.

At a very critical stage of affairs in the pastry-making, Nettie Blynn knocked at the side door. She only wanted to see Maggie just a minute about the Christmas entertainment. Maggie set down a half-beaten dish of eggs and ran. The minute lengthened into many more, and the girls talked and talked, as girls will, forgetting all about time. When Margaret returned to the kitchen she found her mother in a perfect fever of haste, and poor Florence trying to go two or three ways at once.

“Now, Margaret,” her mother began, “I might just as well depend upon the wind as you! drop everything and run the minute you are called. That is just as much sense as Nettie Blynn has, running to the neighbours Saturday morning, and staying like that, when I have so much to do. You don’t seem to care whether you help me or not.”

“Why, mother, how could I help it?” Margaret answered with spirit. “I didn’t ask her to come, and I couldn’t tell her to go away. Saturday morning is as good as any other time to her; she doesn’t have to work all day Saturday, and how should she know that I do?”

Just here the front door-bell gave a malicious ting-a-ling. Mrs. Allan, an old friend who lived several miles out of town, had just a few minutes before train time; she was sure there was no one in the world she wanted to see so much as Mrs. Murray, and Mrs. Murray was just as sure that she herself wanted to see nobody just then, but there was



no help for it. She washed the dough from her hands, and saying to Margaret, as she hurriedly left the kitchen:

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“Finish that pie, and watch the fire; don’t let that cake burn, nor the cranberries.”

Alas! for Margaret. She became so absorbed in rolling the upper crust of the mince pie, and in trying to cut a beautiful pine-tree on it, that she forgot all about the fire, and the cake, and the cranberries. An odour, not savoury, came from the stove. Margaret rushed out, but it was too late; the cranberries sent up a dense black smoke, and were burned fast to the new porcelain kettle, and, horrors! on opening the oven door, the fruit-cake was a sight to behold—as black as a hat, and an ominous-looking valley in the centre of it!

“Flo! go tell mother to come here quick!” screamed Margaret. “Everything has gone to destruction.”

Any housekeeper can well imagine what a person, who did not hold firm rule over nerve and tongue would say under such aggravations. Although her mother’s words stung like scorpions, Margaret did not attempt to excuse herself this time, for she felt keenly that she had been guilty of great neglect, and she would have told her mother so if the bitter words had not made her hard and sullen. The longer her mother talked, the less she felt that she cared for the consequences of her fault. This Saturday’s work was unusual, not only because Christmas was near at hand, but an old aunt of Mrs. Murray’s was coming from Philadelphia to make a visit. She had not visited her niece in many years. She also used to be a model housekeeper, and Mrs. Murray was anxious that everything should appear to the best advantage. At last the toil and strife of that day was over, the work was all done up and the girls sought their own room.

“Maggie,” said Florence, “what do you suppose Aunt Deborah will bring us for Christmas presents?” Florence braided her golden locks as she talked, her face cheerful as usual. The trials of that day had left no mark on her sunny face. Not so with Maggie; the frown was still on her forehead, and she flung herself on the lounge in a despairing sort of way as she answered, “I’m sure I don’t know nor care either, whether I ever get another present in my life.”

“Why, Maggie! What’s the matter?”

“The matter is that I am tired of this awful life. I work, work, and be scolded all the time. I wish Aunt Deborah was in Jericho, or anybody else that is coming to make more work for us. I could stand the work, though, but I can’t stand scolding all the time. Mother hasn’t said a pleasant word to me to-day.”

“Sh—h!” said Florence. “Mother is sick and nervous. Don’t you think if—if you wouldn’t provoke mother so much it would be better? And then maybe”—Florence was almost afraid to speak her next thought—“don’t you think you answer back a good deal sometimes?”



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“There! you just hush up,” said Margaret. “I guess you needn’t set up for a lecturer, too; two years younger than I am, you are taking a good deal upon yourself, I should say. I’m nervous, too. Young folks are called cross, but older ones always called nervous, when they are cross. I wish I could go off somewhere. I’d go anywhere to get away from home, for it’s just dreadful. Mother don’t care for me one bit. She don’t scold anybody else as she does me. When I go over to Mrs. Blynn’s it just makes me sick. Nettie and her mother are just like two sisters. They sit under the drop-light with their fancy-work and talk, or Nettie plays her new pieces over for her mother. I could play as well as Nettie if I had time to practice, but mother don’t seem to care anything at all about my music. We might keep a girl like other people. Father is able to. I think it is too bad.”

“Oh, don’t Mag! Don’t say any more,” said Florence. “It makes me shiver to hear you talk so. You know what it says about honouring parents. I’m sure something dreadful will happen to you. You will drop right down dead, maybe, or just think how you would feel if mother should die after you’ve talked so. Oh, Maggie,” she said timidly, “if you only were a Christian, now, how it would help you.”

“Pho,” said Margaret. “Mother is a Christian and it don’t help her one bit.”

Then Margaret put her head down on the arm of the lounge and cried. She had wanted to cry all day, but there was no time.

The door stood partly open between Mrs. Murray’s room and that of her daughters. That ruined fruitcake had accomplished its work, the severe nervous headache had come and obliged her to go up to her room and lie down, while the girls supposed her to be still in the dining-room; so the talk came floating in to her while she lay on her bed pressing her aching temples. What a revelation was this! Was it possible that she was the person meant? One daughter blaming her, and the other excusing her. She almost forgot about her head in this new pain. The first feeling was one of indignation and wounded pride, but conscience told her it was all true, that she was a cross, fretful mother, that she had not made her home a happy one, that she had been selfish and unsympathetic and her children were getting estranged from her. But the last few words touched her most of all. “Her religion did not help her.” Sure enough it did not, any more than a pagan’s, and she had brought dishonour on Christ. The veil had suddenly fallen from her eyes. She excused herself from tea on plea of a headache, telling each one who came softly to the door asking to minister to her, that she wanted nothing but quiet. She wanted to face this dreadful revelation all alone, and yet there came no high resolve that hereafter everything should be different. She lay there disconsolate, discouraged—a mere heap, it seemed to herself, weak, purposeless, a soul who had made a failure of life, with no power to alter it. If she might but slip out of the world entirely; it was all turned to ashes. How small and mean her ambitions all seemed now. She had given years of drudgery and this was the result: made her family miserable.



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Mrs. Murray was one of those who keep the inner sanctuary of their hearts shut and barred, lest some foolish tenderness should find expression; it was there, though, and those dreadful words her dear eldest daughter had spoken were to her like the stab of a knife. Like most nervous persons, her feelings were intense. Such condemnation, remorse, and utter despair as took hold of her: it could not be called repentance, for that has "A purpose of heart and endeavour after new obedience." She was in the Slough of Despond. The twilight had deepened into darkness, when sounds indicated an arrival.

"Aunt Deborah has come," Florence whispered at the door. "You lie still, mother, and Mag and I can do everything just as nicely."

But "mother" hastily arose and met her visitor as calmly as if she had not spent the last three hours in a tempest.

Aunt Deborah Hathaway was a dear old saint. Her name should have been "Peace," for that word was written all over her, from the unruffled brow and calm eyes, to the soft folds of her dove-coloured cashmere.

"Tell me all about your life, my dear," she said to Mrs. Murray, when they were seated alone the next morning—all the rest of the family in church.

"My life has turned out to be a failure," said Mrs. Murray, sadly. "And what is strange, I have only just now found it out."

Then drawn on by the loving sympathy expressed, she unburdened her heart to Aunt Deborah, keeping back nothing. "But then, what am I telling all this to you for? Nobody can help me. I have at times realised that I was growing very irritable, and was ashamed of it. Then I would resolve that I would not do so any more, but my resolves are like ropes of sand. I get started and can't stop. I think if human beings were like sewing-machines, and when they get out of order, could have some skilful hand just put a drop of oil here and there, and loosen the tension or something, it would be so good. But things do annoy me so, sometimes it seems as if Satan himself planned things out to vex me.

"I make no doubt," said Aunt Deborah, "but that Satan is busy enough, but sometimes I think he gets more set down to his account than rightfully belongs. He couldn't accomplish half he does with us if we didn't help him. We put ourselves in such a condition that it is easy for him to carry us captive. But you said 'nobody could help you.' Now I believe I can help you. I came very near being shipwrecked once myself on these very rocks you have struck. It will never do to give up, and go to groaning when we get into trouble. What you want is to get out of it. To help you in the best way, you must give me an old woman's privilege, and let me speak my mind freely. I think I know the secret of the trouble. Your nerves are sick—people used to think that meant

hysterics, but they know better now. You are overworking these sick nerves. The first thing to be done is for you to get relief



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from everything that tries you, as far as you can. Treat yourself like an invalid, as you are. Then change your way of life entirely: go out a good deal in the air, read, and talk, and sing, and play on the piano—you used to be a good player, I remember. Let the housework and the sewing be done by somebody else, except what you can do without a strain upon yourself. Then I should be a little careful about my dress, to have it becoming and all that, and I would invite in a little company once in a while, and go out in a sociable way a little, and try to make my home just the brightest, cheeriest place in all the world. Economy is good in its place, but I believe Satan is even at the bottom of that sometimes, when we drive our boys and girls out from home by saving coal and gas, and shutting the sun out of our houses—they like brightness as well as the birds do. You see you can't tell me anything new on this. I made all these mistakes myself once."

"But Aunt Deborah," said Mrs. Murray, "I am surprised. I thought you used to be such a strict Christian."

"Used to be such a strict Pharisee, you mean," Aunt Deborah answered; "used to imagine religion consisted in wearing the ugliest garment I could put on, combing my hair straight back in a hard knot, being 'a keeper at home,' and making things generally uncomfortable for everybody. Now I think a Christian is one who loves and obeys his Lord. I know I love Him and I am trying to obey Him, but I believe if there is one place on the earth He loves next to the gates of Zion, it is a happy home, and that He smiles upon us in all our innocent efforts to make it so."

"You were surprised that I did not say right off, 'Pray over your troubles,' weren't you? No, no! I believe we have got to take everything out of our way that hinders us before we come and ask him to do some great thing for us. You must lay aside the 'weight,' and the temptations to the 'sin that doth so easily beset us,' then He will do his part. It isn't his way to do for us what we can do. Now if you load yourself down with burdens that He did not ask you to carry, I don't believe you will have the same grace given you to overcome that a poverty-stricken mother of a large family has given to her; grace is bestowed according to our need."

"Yes," said Mrs. Murray, "it is all true. But suppose I do all these things that you suggest. I can't expect to be entirely free from all provocations to anger while I live in this world. What is there in all this that will help me to control my temper? I declare to you, Aunt Deborah, I cannot do it. I have no hope that I can ever be different. I know myself so well."

"Praise the Lord that you know that," said the old lady. "He says, 'In me is thy help found.' Not a soul of us comes to him for help till we have made this discovery, 'I cannot do it.' When your watch is out of order you do not expect it to right itself; you take it to

the watchmaker. Now lay your heart down before Jesus, and say, Lord won't you fix it for me? As you trust the watchmaker, trust Him."



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"I want to be made over new," said Mrs. Murray sadly, "but oh, have I faith enough for such a great work? I am too unworthy, too far away from Him to expect it."

"Well, He is worthy. Don't you know good old Faber says:

"Pining souls, come nearer Jesus;
Come, but come not doubting thus:
Come with faith that trusts more freely
His great tenderness for us."

And Mrs. Murray came. The promise, "Ask and it shall be given you," was verified to her. When the sun of that Sabbath set, the dove of peace sang in the tired woman's heart. She had the secret of victory. Her brow was almost as placid as Aunt Deborah's.

Monday morning brought the usual work and bustle, "Mary," said Aunt Deborah, "Satan is twice as active Monday morning as other days; perhaps he thinks we get the start of him on the Sabbath. Forewarned is forearmed. Here is my rule when provoked: To shut my lips tight and lock them till a pleasant word feels like coming."

"Yes, Aunt Deborah, Christ helping me, I shall make an entire revolution in this household." And she looked bright and courageous as she had not in years.

"To begin, then: Go out of this kitchen and come when you are called," said Aunt Deborah, briskly.

There was much work accomplished that day. A valuable servant was soon secured and installed in the kitchen; then Mrs. Murray went in and out the stores. No one in all the busy throng was more enthusiastic than she, as with joyful eagerness she selected some little gift for each, adding to her purchases a little stock of evergreens and flowers to brighten up with on the morrow, for this coming Christmas was to be no common one. Aunt Deborah engaged in the business of tying and festooning evergreens with all the gusto of a girl; the two made the parlour into a bower of beauty. When the short winter day drew to its close, the whole was pronounced complete, and Mrs. Murray went to her room to dress. She was strongly tempted to put on the same old gray dress she had worn all winter, and brush her hair straight back as usual; but self and ease should not be consulted, so she shook out her still handsome locks and arranged them in the style her husband used to admire, in loose waves about her forehead; then she donned a neatly fitting black dress, with lace cuffs and collar, fastened with a bright ribbon. When she went down to the parlour, Aunt Deborah looked over and then under her spectacles.

"Child," she said, as she surveyed her, "it does matter how you look."

Father, son, and daughters, all came in together to-night.

“Girls,” said Ralph, advancing first into the dining-room and getting a peep into the back parlour, “is this our house? Everything is trimmed up, and there sits a lady by the fire.”

Wreaths festooned the archway between the parlours, there were vases of flowers, and hanging-baskets of trailing vines, and a canary in a gilded cage, a bright fire in the grate lighting it up cheerily; Aunt Deborah smiling and knitting on one side, “mother” on the other. Florence rushed up to her, showering kisses upon her, while her father looked on with shining eyes.



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“Who knew our mother was such a pretty woman? Where’s her equal in this whole city?” said Ralph.

That glad Christmas was the harbinger of many happy years to the Murrays. The back parlour was that day, by the thankful mother, consecrated to the comfort of the family—thenceforth light, warmth, and beauty reigned in that room. There they gathered evenings, under the drop-light about the round table, with books and work, and talk and music. Father, too, suddenly discovered that there was a lull in business, and that cheerful chimney-corners were more attractive than ledgers. Ralph and the girls brought their young friends there. What was strangest of all, the nervous headaches almost entirely disappeared; even the high notes of a song, or the jingling of piano-keys, failed to bring them back. The crowning climax of the whole was this: there was positively no scolding in that house. The evil spirit had been exorcised, and that mother was given the victory day by day. Peace was in her heart and on her brow.

She was so changed in the eyes of her children that she seemed almost an object of adoration. Not the last drop in her cup of joy were the many little ways in which they showed their keen appreciation of the change in her.

One night, after all had retired, conscience knocked at Margaret’s door. She tried to sleep, but her visitor persisted. Margaret was face to face with all her hard, impertinent words and ways toward her mother.

“Flo,” she said, “a miracle has come to mother, or she’s getting to be an angel, or something,” but “Flo” was fast asleep; then she tossed and turned, again. Then came a tap on mother’s door. Mrs. Murray came quickly.

“Mother,” said Margaret, throwing her arms about her, and hiding her face in her mother’s neck, “I have been a wicked girl. Forgive me, dear precious mother.”

Blessed words! Margaret was soon sleeping quietly, but her mother’s heart was so full, her joy so great, that she lay thinking of the gift that He had sent her at that Christmas time.

“Peace on earth,” had been literally fulfilled to her.

WHERE HE SPENT CHRISTMAS.

“Oh, mother, I will get back before it snows much, and I shall not mind if a few flakes of snow do light on me. Please do not object to my going, a walk is just what I’m longing for;” and Edna Winters drew on her gloves and stepped from the door of her home, a low-roofed farm-house on the hill, which, in its gray old age, seemed a part of the hill itself.



It was not the beauty of the afternoon that tempted Edna out, for the leaden sky almost met the gray hills; and all wore the same sober hue, sky, hills, house, and leafless trees. The wind howled fiercely through the group of pine-trees in the yard, that seemed but deep shadows on the general grayness, and occasional flakes of snow were already flying about. Father Winters looked through the front window after his daughter, and shook his head, saying:



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“Mother, there’s a great storm brewing, if I’m not mistaken. The child ought not to have gone.”

Then the mother came and anxiously inspected the sky, although she only said:

“Oh well, she is young, and don’t mind the weather like us old folks. I was only twenty years old myself, once, and I remember just how tired I used to get cooped up in the house so much; besides, she wanted to go to the post-office. To-morrow is Christmas, you know, and the office will not be open but an hour or two.”

Mr. Winters was growing old, and the rheumatism was keeping him a prisoner just now, so he came back to the fire and his newspaper.

The little city wherein was the post-office lay a little over two miles away, and Edna often walked in and out for the mere pleasure of it. Even on this dismal day she tripped lightly along, humming a glad measure, stopping a moment in the edge of the pine woods to gather a few squaw-berries and a bit of moss; then, casting a glance at the threatening sky, hurried on her way. Before she reached the town the snow was falling thick and fast, and was blown by the wind into little mounds almost as soon as it came down. She was fairly blown inside the door of the post-office, feathery flakes adorning her from head to foot.

Mr. Hugh Monteith had also come to the post-office. He had merely stepped across the street from his banking-house, and stood waiting for the afternoon mail to be distributed. He turned his head carelessly as the door opened to admit Edna. She took off the veil that enveloped her head, shook and brushed herself, and walked over to the stove. Then Mr. Monteith’s inner consciousness told him that there was the very face he had been in search of for years. Then he did what was not found in his code of etiquette—he stared, although he did retreat behind a pillar while doing so. He took in the whole picture. The face, of that pure, clear tint that belongs only to a certain type of brown eyes and hair, the hair gathered into a coil at the back of the head, except one or two loose curls that strayed down from it, the eyes sweet and serious. Mr. Monteith dealt many hours of the day with dollars and cents, notes and bills; still, he knew poetry when he saw it, and that golden-brown curl was to him a bit of a poem. Then her dress was peculiar; his fastidious taste pronounced it perfect for the occasion: walking-dress of soft, dark brown, glistened by a lighter shade of the same colour; a jaunty brown jacket of substantial cloth, a little brown hat, with a brown and white wing perked on one side of it; no colour, except a soft pink that the cold air had laid on the cheeks with delicate skill. His quick eye noted too, the neat glove, the well-fitting little boot poised on the hearth of the stove. She looked like a little brown thrush about to spread its wings; but she did not fly, she walked over to the delivery and received a package of letters and papers, asking in low, clear tones, “Is the Eastern mail in?” The voice was in keeping with eyes, and hair, and dress—pure, refined, cultured.



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Mr. Monteith's resolution was quickly made; he secured his mail and followed Edna. "Who could she be? He supposed he knew all the young ladies in town, but where did this revelation of loveliness drop from?" He turned corner after corner as she did, not caring where he went, only so that he kept her in view. To his astonishment he soon found himself in the open country. It was not a day that he would have chosen for a pleasure-walk in the country: the snow eddied and whirled, and almost blinded him; but if he lost his face, his ideal realised, should he ever find it again? There was no choice, so on he strode, congratulating himself that he happened to have on an overcoat and heavy boots.

The little brown-clad figure ahead of him sped briskly on, and faster and faster came the snow. Things were beginning to look serious; the wind roared and howled through the pine woods, blowing the snow into drifts in the road. Mr. Monteith had a new motive for his journey now. He must protect this young girl in her lonely way; it was out of the question to leave her in such a desolate place and a storm raging. He quickened his steps; she might need assistance.

A feeling of despair was beginning to creep over Edna. What if she should sink down in this lonely place unable to go on. She had left the main road a few minutes before, and this one by the pine woods was not much travelled. It was probable that nobody would find her. In dismay she turned and looked behind her, but no sooner did she see a man rapidly coming towards her than a mortal fear took possession of her, and she started forward with new impetus; on and on she ran as fleetly as a deer. Mr. Monteith ran too at the top of his speed, wondering, inly, if she really were of the earth, and if she had not some means of locomotion that he did not possess. He must reach her at all events.

Edna at last paused in dismay before an immense drift that lay directly across the road. She would have plunged in, but Mr. Monteith was at her side and said pleasantly, "If you will allow me to go on first, I think I can tread a path for you."

Edna looked up quickly, somewhat reassured by the manly tones, and the grey eyes that looked into hers were true eyes; a little child might have known that.

"Before we go on let me introduce myself," and Mr. Monteith drew out a card and handed it to Edna.

When Edna read "Hugh Monteith & Co., Bankers," all her fear left her. The name of Monteith had long been a familiar one to her; she remembered hearing her father speak of having a little business with that bank.

"Well, I am Edna Winters," said Edna simply. "My father is Samuel Winters, and we live a little more than half a mile from here."



“Then we are acquainted, I am sure, for your father is one of our depositors. Now let me break a road through this barricade, if possible,” and Mr. Monteith dashed bravely into it; but as well as he could see through the blinding storm, the drift reached a long distance ahead. It would be a work of time to tread it down, and the cold wind cut like a knife.



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There was a shorter way—this was no time for ceremony or trifling. He came back to Edna's side saying, "It will be almost impossible to do it. We must hasten on or perish in this storm. Trust me, this is best"—and the tall form stooped and lifted Edna from her feet as if she had been a feather, before she had time to realise his purpose, then with long strides he waded into the sea of snow. Neither spoke, but the girl that was borne along in the strong arms did a large amount of thinking. Despite the danger and the gallantry of her protector, she could not but feel a little provoked at being snatched up in that style without her leave, as if she were a bale of cotton; provoked, too, at herself for getting into such a predicament. If she only had stayed at home as mother advised. Mother had always told her she had feared something would happen to her going through those woods by herself, and here it had come. Then the funny side presented itself. She wanted to laugh but was afraid to. She stole a glance at the face below her—a finely-cut face it was, but there was no smile in the grave eyes; instead, an intense, earnest purpose. When they came again to the ground where the snow lay on a level, Edna was put again upon her feet, her hand drawn through Mr. Monteith's arm, and the two plodded on. It was almost a silent journey; the snow coming directly in their faces, and the wind fairly taking their breaths, made it no time for formal talk. Wherever the drifts had thrown up a barrier she was again lifted and borne through them, but not set down again, for Edna's protector had discovered that she was almost overcome by fatigue, try as she might to hide it; and when she said, "Let me walk now if you please," he answered: "Miss Winters, you are my prisoner until I place you at your father's, door."

She submitted with good grace, and began to feel some dawnings of gratitude towards her deliverer.

Old Mr. Winters had walked back and forth from the fire to the window for the last half-hour. "Why don't the child come," he said. "I'm sure something has happened to her. If I could only go out and see, but I should make poor headway, hobbling about in the drifts." He could do nothing himself, so he fled to his unfailing refuge, asking the God who rules the storms to protect his darling.

Mrs. Winters had said for the tenth time, "Why, father, I think she wouldn't start back in this storm." Nevertheless she placed her rocking-chair close by the window and looked down the road far more than she sewed. Their anxiety reached its height when they saw a stranger toiling up the hill bearing their daughter in his arms. The door was opened long before they reached it, and Edna called out, "I'm all right, mother."

"Why, it's Mr. Monteith, as sure as I live," said Edna's father.

"Yes, Mr. Winters," said Mr. Monteith, "I found a stray lamb of yours on the highway, and brought it home."



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“May God reward you,” and Mr. Winters clasped his hand warmly. “I have been very anxious. I did not see what was to become of her if she was on her way in this terrible storm. How providential that you happened to be going her way.”

Mr. Monteith winced a little at this.

“You will stay with us to-night, of course,” Mr. Winters said.

“Oh, no, indeed! Thank you! I must get back before dark. Will rest a few minutes, though.”

The Storm King was out in full force that day, for during those few minutes huge banks piled themselves against windows and doors, and the wind shrieked and moaned like a demon, shaking the house to its foundations.

“Now,” said Mr. Winters as his guest rose to go, “it is madness for you to think of going home tonight, and I must insist that you stay. I am disabled just now, or I would harness old Prince and get you through.”

Here Edna came in with her pleading eyes and, “Do stay; I know it is not safe for you to go.”

Motherly Mrs. Winters entreated also. How could he resist such urgency, especially when it exactly fitted in with what he desired above all things to do. He yielded, and was soon comfortably established in the large old rocker by the fire. And now he enjoyed the pleasure of a new experience. The stereotyped fashionable house he knew all about, but this old house that looked small, and yet stretched itself out into many cosy rooms; it was quaint, it was unique, and so was the little household. It was like stepping into a book, and that a book of poems. What was the charm of that low-browed room he sat in? Could it be the broad fireplace, wherein blazed and snapped a veritable back-log? Mr. Winters had stoves to warm the house, but he insisted on keeping this fire to look at.

When they all gathered about the tea-table, his critical eye noted many little points that a less refined man would not have thought of. The fine white table-linen, delicate old-fashioned china, a piece or two of highly polished silver, and the table not vulgarly loaded with too great variety, yet everything delicious and abundant. Mr. and Mrs. Winters, too, though unpretending, were persons of refinement and intelligence. He was puzzled to understand how a young girl, reared in so much seclusion, should possess such grace and culture as did Edna. After tea, when she played and sang, his mystification increased, for the bird-like voice and delicate touch were superior to much that he heard among his city friends. It came out in the course of conversation, however, that Edna had spent the last six years in one of the finest schools in Boston—an inmate of her aunt’s family; and now she had come back to them to gladden the eyes



of those two, who almost set her up as an idol; come back, not spoiled, taking up her daily little homely duties again with real zest.

Mr. Monteith found Mr. Winters most congenial company. He had read extensively, and was keen in argument, throwing in a bit of poetry or a witty story, as the case required. Edna brought her crotcheting and made herself into a picture in one corner of the fireplace, her changing, speaking face and piquant remarks lending interest to the dullest subject.

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"It is my opinion, Mr. Monteith," said Mr. Winters, as a fierce blast dashed sheets of snow against the windows, "that, in all probability, you will be obliged to spend your Christmas with us. If this storm continues at this rate you will be a prisoner."

"For which I shall be most devoutly thankful," he answered.

"Well, our turkey is all ready, and we shall thank kind Providence for sending you to us, snow-bound as we are."

Mr. Winters took down the old Bible and read "a portion with judicious care," then a hymn and prayer, and the good-nights, and Mr. Monteith was in the guest-chamber—a little white room under the eaves, cold-looking in its purity but for the firelight glow. "The name of that chamber was Peace," thought Mr. Monteith, as his delighted eyes surveyed, it and with Bunyan's Pilgrim he felt that he had reached "already the next door to heaven." It surely must be the "chamber of peace," because "the window opened towards the sunrising," and in the morning a glorious panorama spread itself before him. Fences and all unsightly objects had disappeared. Just one broad expanse of whiteness as far as the eye could reach. The rough old hills, from foot to summit, wore a robe of unsullied whiteness—the soft white garment rested lightly on roof and tree, over all the rising sun shed rays of rosy light. It accorded well with Mr. Monteith's spirit when he heard Mr. Winters singing—

"The New Jerusalem comes down.
Adorned With shining grace."

The host and his visitor launched into a tide of talk immediately after breakfast. They had so many things in common to talk over that there seemed to be no end. So occupied was Mr. Monteith with the father that he seemed to bestow very little attention on the daughter; on the contrary, no word or look of hers escaped him.

At one time the perilous walk of yesterday was the subject of conversation, and Mr. Winters was again expressing his gratitude. "So strange," he remarked, "that you should have been coming this way. How did you happen to start out in such a storm?"

Mr. Monteith did not like to talk upon that subject; he murmured something about "business," while a slight flush tinged his cheeks, and at once asked Mr. Winters "what effect he supposed the resumption of specie payment would have upon the state of the country," and the unsuspecting old gentleman was ready to enter with avidity upon the discussion of that subject.

The Christmas dinner duly disposed of, Edna opened the piano, and Mr. Monteith delighted the old people by joining his exquisite tenor to Edna's voice in some old hymns. Mr. Winters called for his favourites, "St. Martins," "Golden Hill," "Exhortation,"

and listened with tears in his eyes at their faithful rendering, even essaying to put in a few notes of bass himself among the quavers of old St. Martins.

Not until the shadows began to steal into the room did Mr. Monteith take his departure, much to his own regret as well as that of his entertainers, with many promises of future visits.



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A few days after Christmas the stage-driver left at the door a small box marked "Samuel Winters." The old gentleman put on his glasses and opened it with much curiosity. Behold, there lay a lovely bouquet of roses, carnations, and violets. He lifted it with care, and a card marked "Hugh Monteith" fell from it. "That is odd," he said, with a roguish look at Edna, "to send these things to me; they are pretty, though, I declare," and he buried his face in a fragrant rose, then involuntarily hummed—

"How sweet the breath beneath the hill.
Of Sharon's dewy rose."

Another prolonged inhalation and he called, "Mother, come here and smell this pink; it's the very one that my mother used to border her flowerbeds with when I was a boy." Then he gave the bouquet into Edna's care while he went off, in imagination, into his mother's garden, tied up the sweet peas and trained the morning-glories once again. How each flower, like a dear human face, stood before him looking into his eyes. The damask roses, the Johnny-jump-ups, larkspur, bachelor-buttons, ragged ladies, marigolds, hollyhocks, and a host of others that are out of fashion now. That bouquet furnished him a pleasant reverie for an hour. It brought no less pleasure to Edna. Their new friend had not forgotten them, and her intuitions told her for whom the lovely blossoms were intended.

After that it grew to be quite a thing of course for Mr. Samuel Winters to receive a box of flowers. He always pretended to appropriate them to himself, much to Edna's glee, as he did the not infrequent visits of Mr. Monteith to "The Pines," often remarking, after a pleasant evening's discussion—

"That is an uncommon young man, coming so far to chat with me. He's one among a thousand; the most of them haven't time nowadays to give a civil word to an old man."

He had a deeper purpose in this than might have been supposed. There were few things he did not think over as he sat looking into the fire. What if this young man should unwittingly steal away his darling's heart and then flit away to some other flower, and leave this, his own treasure, with all the soul gone out of her life. He believed Mr. Monteith to be an honourable man, but then he would hedge this blossom of his about and guard it carefully. There should be no opportunity for tender speech that meant nothing.

One day Edna was in town, passing through one of the busy streets. Among the gay turnouts came one that caught her attention instantly: a prancing span of grays before a light sleigh. Among the furs and gay robes sat Mr. Monteith and a young lady, beautiful to Edna as a dream. Even in the hurried glance she noted the pink and white complexion, the blue eyes peeping through golden frizzes, set off by a dark-blue velvet hat with a long white plume. Mr. Monteith raised his hat and bowed low to Edna in pleased surprise. Edna went on with a little pang at her heart; it might have been less



had she known that Miss Paulina Percival's invitation to ride came in this fashion: Making it convenient to emerge from a store just as Mr. Monteith came from the bank and was about to step into his sleigh, she engaged him in conversation, then exclaimed:



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“Oh, Mr. Monteith! What a lovely span of greys, they match perfectly.” Then with a pretty pout: “Naughty man, you never asked me to try them.”

“Suppose I ask you now,” he said, and even while he spoke he said to himself, “Edna Winters would never have done that.”

Miss Percival needed no urging; she was soon seated in triumph by Mr. Monteith’s side, the envy of many another city belle.

That night Edna stood at the window of her little chamber, looking out on the fair earth glittering like diamonds in the moonlight. She was not often in the mood she found herself in tonight: restless, gloomy, with no heart for anything. She began to take herself to task for it. Why had the light suddenly gone out of everything and life to seem flat and dull? She knew why. It was simply because she had seen that bewitching-looking girl riding with Mr. Monteith. And what of that? Was she foolish enough to believe that he cared for her, a simple country girl, just because he had given her a few flowers and called there. He probably considered these common attentions that he offered to many others. Her cheeks burned at the remembrance of the delight she had felt in his society. The last few weeks had been the happiest she had ever known. No words of his would justify her, either. She was vexed at herself. Here it had turned out that she was just like any other silly girl, holding her heart in her hand, ready to bestow it unasked. In her self-accusing spirit, she forgot that looks and tones may speak volumes in the absence of words.

“Now, Edna Winters,” she told herself, as she stared out on the white hills, “you might as well look things in the face to-night and have it done with. I shall probably spend a great part of my life on this very hill, living on in just the way I did before I knew him. Why not? That is the way Samantha Moore and Jane Williams have been doing these ever so many years. They keep right on, and on, and on. Nothing happens to them. There is no change in their lives. Why should there be in mine? They clean house spring and fall, can fruit, go to town, have the sewing society, and so on”—and Edna shuddered a little at the picture she had sketched of her own future. These two were neighbours, whose peaceful dwellings nestled among the hills before her. Then she felt condemned as she heard floating up from the sitting-room, the “wild, warbling strains” of Dundee, her dear old father’s voice, with just a little tremble in the tones. “How thankful she ought to be for this blessed home of hers.” The stove-pipe came up from below and warmed her room. She came over to it, and inclined her head to hear the words:

“Oh, God, our help in ages past
Our strength in years to come,
Our refuge from the stormy blast,
And our eternal borne.”



Sure enough! God our “strength in years to come,” even though they be wearisome years. A little “stormy blast” had swept over her. She would fly to her Refuge, and then the “eternal home.” What if this life was not just as we would have it, the next one will be; and Edna “laid her down in peace and slept.”



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“Heigh ho!” said Mr. Winters one bright day, “whom have we here?” A merry jingle of bells suddenly stopped and two gray horses and a handsome sleigh stood in front of the gate. “Mr. Monteith, eh? He has most likely come to take me out riding,” he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

“Miss Edna, will you ride?” Mr. Monteith asked when the greetings were over. Edna’s eyes sought her mother’s for reply. It was not every gentleman, be he ever so great and rich, that this primitive, independent father and mother would entrust with their treasure, their one ewe lamb.

“Yes. Edna might go, but he would be sure to bring her home before dark?”

“Trust me; did I not bring her home before dark once?” he laughingly asked. The two were soon tucked among the robes, skimming briskly over the smooth, hard surface, which is just the next thing to flying. They flew about the streets of the town a little while; met Miss Paulina, who stared at Edna and said to a young lady by her side: “Whoever can that be with Mr. Monteith?” Then their route stretched many miles out into the quiet country. The journey was long, but not tedious. It was beguiled by low-spoken words that kept time to the slow, silvery chime of the bells—the old musical, mysterious words that established a covenant between those two, needing only the word from father and mother and minister to make binding and never-ending.

Mr. Monteith was said, by belles of the town, to be destitute of a heart—at least all their arts had not succeeded in finding it; even Miss Percival, skilful as she was, had also failed, much to her sorrow. To be sure, the heart was of small account to her, only so that she might be mistress of the stately Monteith mansion, might possess those gray ponies for her very own, and glitter in the silks and jewels and laces that his money would buy. She had no heart herself, because in her very shallow nature there was not room for one. Paulina had failed thus far, but she was not discouraged. Mr. Monteith’s mother was old and feeble; she would die some day, then “we shall see what we shall see”—then, of course, he would need someone to preside over his home; and who so well fitted to adorn it as she, the acknowledged beauty of the town?

When the time of birds and blossoms had come again, and picnics and excursions were revived, Paulina said to her dearest friend:

“What do you think that delightful man has gotten up now? Mr. Monteith, I mean. He is to have a little breakfast party in the country—just a few of us, you know. We are to go in carriages. I dare say you’ll be invited, too. Isn’t it a charming novelty? I presume it is to an old uncle and aunt of his, you know,” and the butterfly girl tripped on without waiting for replies. Accordingly, one balmy June morning, a merry company alighted at “The Pines,” and were ushered into a fairy-like room.



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Green vines crept and twined along the white walls, drooping over doors and windows, and trailing down the muslin curtains as if they grew there. The flowers were not made into stiff bouquets, but here and there was a handful of roses or sweet-scented violets. The old fireplace lost itself in callas, ferns, and ivies, while the mantel blossomed out into tube-roses and mosses. One of the recesses formed by the large chimney was turned into a leafy bower, the bells of white lilies fringing the green archway.

“Beautiful!” “Exquisite!” murmured the guests. “I verily believe we have come to a wedding,” said one.

In another moment Mr. Monteith and his bride stood in the niche under the lilies, and the minister spoke the mystic words that declared them “no more twain, but one.”

Edna was not glittering in satin and jewels. Her dress was apparently a soft white cloud floating about her, looped here and there with a cluster of lilies of the valley. A wreath of the same flowers fastened her veil; and the sweet face and luminous eyes that gleamed through its folds seemed just another rare flower.

The formalities and congratulations all over, Mr. and Mrs. Monteith passed down the walk under the spreading branches to their carriage.

The apple-blossoms showered fragrant blessings on them as they went their way, and the bridegroom whispered: “Do you remember the first time you and I came up this hill together?”

VIDA.

There was an audible rustle in the large congregation of St. Paul’s Church, well-bred people though they were, as their young minister came up the aisle with his bride and seated her in the minister’s pew. They not only turned their heads, giving one slight glance, seeing all without seeming to, as cultured people know how to do, but they broke all rules in their code of good manners by a succession of twistings of the neck. It was not easy to settle down content after one short look at the beautiful being who glided by the minister’s side. Had he seated a veritable fairy in that pew the sensation could scarcely have been greater. Her beauty was of that rare blonde type—hair of spun gold, eyes of sapphire, and complexion fine and delicate as a rose-leaf. She was youthful and richly dressed, the dark-green velvet suit, white plumes and fine laces, well setting off her marvellous beauty. Her eyes fairly drooped before the undisguised admiration expressed in many faces.

The minister himself saw nothing of it at all. He was annoyed at finding himself actually late, and his thoughts were intent on getting to his place in the pulpit with all possible speed. It was not one of his ambitions to be conspicuous; he was accustomed to slip



quietly into his place from the chapel door, and his apparently triumphal march into his church on the first Sabbath of his return, after all the people had assembled, as if to say, "Behold us now!" was not to his taste nor of his planning; all this threw his thoughts into a tumult unfitting him in part for his sacred duties.



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At the close of service that day, the congregation did not discuss the minister's sermon, they were absorbed in another subject: the minister's wife. The opinions were various. Grave old deacons looked askance at her in her regal beauty as they passed out, shook their heads, and repeated to each other the familiar saying, that wise men often make fools of themselves when they come to the business of selecting a wife. One lady said she was "perfectly lovely;" another, that she had "a great deal of style;" another, that "her dress must have cost a penny, and she did not see for her part how a Christian could find it in her conscience to dress like that."

"One would have thought," Mrs. Graves said, "that a man like Mr. Eldred would have chosen a modest, sensible person for his wife, who would be useful in the church, but then, that was the way, a minister was just like any other man, money and a pretty face would cover up a good many failings." Mrs. Graves was the mother of three sensible, modest girls, who would have made capital ministers' wives. Why will ministers be so shortsighted?

"But, mother," Tom Graves asked, "aren't you pretty fast? How do you know but she is sensible and modest; you never heard her speak a word?"

"Anybody with half an eye don't need to hear her speak to know all about her."

"The idea of a minister's wife," said Mrs. Meggs, "with her hair frizzed, and such a long trail for church!"

"She paints, I know she does!" said sallow Miss Pry. "There never was such a complexion as that born on to a human being."

Those who did not say anything, who made it a rule never to speak uncharitably of anyone, seemed well satisfied to have others to do it for them, and looked and sighed their holy horror that their minister should have shown so little discretion in choosing a wife. Just to think of her leading the female prayer-meeting and being president of the Missionary society, humph!

Ah! if there had been one dear "mother in Israel," with love enough to bear this young thing in the arms of her faith to the mercy seat and plead a blessing for her—with courage enough to try to win her to see the blessedness of living a consecrated life, it might all have been different.

When Thane Eldred first met Vida Irving he was immediately taken captive. So fair a vision never crossed his path before; whatever of enchantment might have been wanting in golden curls and blue eyes was completed by a voice such as few possess, rich, sweet, and fine compass; had she been poor it might have brought her a fortune. When he heard her sing in such angelic strains the sweet hymns he loved, he took it for granted that the words of fervent devotion but gave voice to the feelings of her own

heart. So fair a bit of clay, he reasoned, must contain a soul of corresponding beauty, and he forthwith invested her with all the charms of an angel. A slight misgiving, it is



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true, sometimes crossed his mind as to whether she could adapt herself easily to the difficult position of a pastor's wife. She had the air of an empress, and the hauteur of her manner was often so great as to gain her positive enemies, and yet the deluded man, with blind eyes, reasoned, "I can mould her to what I will when she is mine; it is the fault of a false education, I am quite sure her heart is all right."

And why did the spoiled beauty condescend to smile upon one, who by his very profession, if closely following in the footsteps of the lowly Master, must needs abjure the vanities and enticements of this world, and live a life of self-denying toil. Not a thought of that kind had ever entered her pretty head. A minister in her estimation was an orator, the idol of a wealthy people, and a gentleman of elegant ease. There was a fascination about this dark-eyed young minister; his graceful dignity and impassioned eloquence pleased her fancy, so the sudden attachment was mutual.

Early left a widow, with a large fortune, Mrs. Irving devoted herself to her idol, her only child, with unremitting devotion; nothing that would add to her happiness or her attractions was neglected, and now with her education completed, the fond mother looked about her, seeking a brilliant alliance for this rare daughter, when lo! she found the matter settled. Vida's own sweet will had been the ruling power ever since she came into the world, and the mother was obliged to submit to the inevitable with as good grace as she could command under the circumstances.

A poor minister! who could have dreamed that the daughter would have made such a choice. With this mother's views of life, and life eternal, it is not to be wondered at that she felt bitter disappointment. The prospect, though, was not wholly dark, he was "handsome and talented," and that went far toward consolation; then, too, he would probably be called in time to a large, important church, and have D.D. at the end of his name, and it would sound well to say "My son-in-law, Rev. Dr. Eldred, of Boston, or New York City," and to discourse of his brilliant preaching, his wealthy parishioners, the calls he had declined, *etc.*

St. Paul's Church was situated in a small city of large manufacturing interests, and while there were many families of wealth and position in the church, there were also many who were obliged to toil hard and practice the utmost economy in order to have any left to pay their subscription with. Some of these looked with no kindly eyes on the magnificent changes of toilet that Mrs. Eldred brought out Sabbath after Sabbath; now a sealskin sacque, then an Indian shawl, and suits innumerable of rich silks in all possible tints, suited to all possible occasions.



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“It makes a body feel as if they hadn’t a thing fit to wear, the way Mrs. Eldred comes out in her silks and velvets,” Mrs. Jenks, a mechanic’s wife, remarked to her neighbour. I wonder what she’d say to wearing a black alpaca dress seven years running, for her best dress! I declared, it made me feel as if there wa’n’t any sort of use scrimping and saving as we do, to pay fifteen dollars a year to support the minister; I told John we better not pay but five next year, and I’d put the other ten on my back. He’s got a rich wife, he don’t need much salary now. Just to think of her fur sacque, and great handsome shawl, and here I havn’t had a new cloak this ten years—have to wear my blanket shawl to church.

“Yes, I think’s much!” answered Mrs. Myers, emphatically. “She’s as proud as Lucifer, too. Mr. Eldred shook hands with me real friendly like last Sunday, and asked ‘How is the little one?’—as he always calls my Tommy—then he introduced me to her, and she turned her head toward me, and looked at me from head to foot, exactly as if she was saying to herself ‘Dress, twenty-five cents a yard; shawl five dollars, hat, two dollars;’ then she gave me what she’d call a bow may be, she swept her eyelashes down, and tilted her head back, instead of forward, and I thought I saw the least mite of a curl on her lip, (she’s got a dreadful proud mouth, anyway;) she didn’t offer to put out her hand, not she! she was afraid I’d soil her white kids, with something less than a dozen buttons on them.”

“Well, it’s too bad,” Mrs. Jenks said, “and he such a good Christian man as he is—wonder what he wanted to go and marry such a wife for, anyhow; I don’t believe he more than half approves of her himself, now he sees how she goes on, but, poor man, he’s got to make the best of it now; I shall always think everything of him though, he was so kind to us when Peter was sick.”

Mrs. Eldred was not entirely ignorant of the duties expected from a minister’s wife, but she had resolved, as far as she was concerned, to ignore them. Because she had married a minister was no sign that she was to be subject to the whims of a whole parish; she could consider herself bound by no rules that did not apply equally as well to every other member of the church. Her mother had forewarned her, and advised her to this course:

“A minister’s wife, my dear,” said the worldly-wise mother, “is usually a slave. So just put your foot down in the beginning, and don’t wear yourself out. Enjoy yourself all you can. Poor child! it is a dismal life at best that you have chosen for yourself, I fear.”

Mrs. Eldred did not state her peculiar views to her husband, by any means; she should just quietly carry out her plans, and he would learn to submit in time. Mother said that was the way to manage a husband.

It was Thursday night. The first bell for prayer-meeting was ringing when Mr. Eldred came down from his study. His young wife sat under the drop-light cosily established in



a large easy-chair, absorbed in the last number of Scribner. She was robed in a white flannel wrapper, and her long, fair hair was unbound, lying in bright waves about her shoulders. Mr. Eldred contemplated the pretty picture a moment, then he said:



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“You look comfortable, my dear: but do you know that is the first bell for prayer meeting?”

“Oh, I am not going to meeting. I am perfectly delighted to have an evening to myself once more, when that indefatigable people of yours are engaged. I am actually worn out receiving calls,” she said, languidly.

Mr. Eldred was disappointed. He had thought more than once that day how he should enjoy it; to have his dream realized, Vida walking with him, to his own meeting, and sitting near, singing as none but she could sing. A spice of vanity mingled with it too. How the people would listen and admire! He felt annoyed and was about to protest, but she looked so like an angel in her soft white dress that he had not the heart to find fault. So he kissed her good-bye, and went his way alone.

She accompanied him the next week; to be a disappointment, however. Her voice joined not in the hymns of praise, she remarking at the close of the meeting:—

“Do you think I could sing in all that discord? It is horrible; it sets every nerve in my body on edge. People always sing that way in prayer-meeting, every one trying to sing, though not knowing one note from another. One old man by me sang five notes below the key; a woman on the other side screamed out as many above; a girl before me had a strong nasal twang. I should think you’d go distracted; and, by the way, what a quantity of common people attend your church!”

Mr. Eldred looked into the fire and repeated half aloud, “The common people heard Him gladly.”

As the weeks went on, it became evident to him that he must abandon the pleasant plans he had formed of companionship in his work. He attended meetings alone, made calls alone, and grew weary of apologizing for Vida.

She was willing to attire herself royally and make a round of fashionable calls with him on the first families, but concerning calls on the humbler of the flock she gaily remarked, that she did not purpose turning city missionary. “When ladies called upon her, she would return their calls, that is, if she wished to continue the acquaintance; but as for running all about town hunting out obscure people, that was out of the question.”

There was a gay clique in the church who eagerly welcomed the pastor’s wife to their circle. They organised a literary society and gave Shakespearian entertainments.

Mrs. Eldred’s fine literary taste and musical abilities made her a valuable acquisition. She soon became the centre about which it revolved. Was there a difficult part to be rendered, or a queen of beauty to be represented, Mrs. Eldred was sure to be chosen, and she gave herself with enthusiasm to the absorbing fascination.



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Mr. Eldred had united with them in the beginning, but when he discovered that the members of the society were much more interested in getting up costumes than they were in their own mental improvement, and that the whole thing was degenerating into private theatricals, he withdrew, and urged his wife to do the same, but no amount of persuasion could move her in the least; her own will had been her law too long. And this was the being he had thought to mould! It was all so different from the picture he had sketched of these first months of their married life, the picture of sunny, happy days, flowing on with scarce a ripple. Instead, they held long heated discussions that only served to widen the distance between them.

"I beg your pardon," Vida said, in sarcastic tones, during one of these skirmishes, "but I think it would be much more to your profit to attend the meetings of our society than to find fault with me. If you would study Shakespeare more, it might freshen up your sermons somewhat, and lift them from the commonplace. I cannot but think you are degenerating. The first discourse I heard you preach was filled with poetical fancies and literary allusions, and the language was flowery and beautiful. Your preaching seems to have changed of late; last Sabbath, for example, it was mere 'talk' without rhetoric or eloquence; the most ignorant in the church could have understood them. I thought you would receive a call soon to a wealthy church in a large city, but you never will make a reputation if you preach in this style."

Mrs. Eldred's angry passions were raised to a high pitch, or she would not have spoken thus plainly.

The sorely tried spirit of the man who listened could not repress a groan at the conclusion of this long tirade. He did not trust himself to say one word, but went with a slow, heavy step, like one who had received a mortal hurt, to his study. The irritation he might otherwise have felt at such words, was lost in sorrow at the utter lack of sympathy, and apparent ignorance of the spirit and aims of the gospel.

He had been coming nearer to Christ the last few months, had received a new baptism, and with it a new view of preaching the gospel. He had, doubtless, spoken in an unknown tongue to scores of his hearers. Now he turned the key on his elegant essays, and, asking the Lord for a message, he was trying to tell it with no "great swelling words," but in humility and plainness of speech, holding up Christ, hiding himself, intent only on saving souls.

Satan had told him before that the world and some Christians would count his preaching "not deep;" now his own wife had repeated the thought. He had been so happy in his work, and he longed to throw himself into it with nothing to come between him and "This one thing I do." But daily trials on account of one who should have been his greatest helper, saddened him, so that much of his labour was mechanical, and he carried a heavy burden. The anxiety was continuous, for he was well aware that many busy tongues were censuring her, while kindlier critics were grieved at her course.



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At rare intervals she attended the ladies' meetings, but no persuasions could induce her to take any part in them. She visited those whom she fancied, and persistently refused to visit others; thus he laboured under constant embarrassment, and was in a chronic state of apology for her. And yet Mrs. Eldred could make herself the most fascinating of beings. There were evenings when she chose to shine at home. Then she would with artistic skill brighten the room, and beguile her husband from his books, and the time would go on wings, as they read and discussed a new book, and sung together their old and new songs. At such times the careworn minister forgot that any clouds obscured his sky.

One evening Mrs. Eldred entered her husband's study, resplendent in white satin and diamonds, saying:—

“Thane, it is quite time you too were dressed.”

“Dressed for what?” he said with an astonished air.

“Why, is it possible that you have forgotten that we have an invitation to Mrs. Grantley's tonight?”

“I recall the invitation now, but I never gave it a second thought, nor did I suppose that you had. Did you not notice from the wording that it was to be a dancing party. I think there must be some mistake about it, as I never was invited before our marriage to these parties, nor have we been since; I cannot understand why they should ask us now.”

“Why, pray, should we not be invited? It is not necessary for you to dance, of course. We shall be obliged to go, for I have accepted the invitation,” Mrs. Eldred replied, with a nothing-further-to-be-said air.

“I am sorry you accepted an invitation for me, without consulting me, but I cannot go,” her husband answered gravely.

“Oh fie! How old and strait-laced you are for a young man; why Dr. Henry often went and looked on, and his daughter danced, and people liked him all the better for it. You will be immensely unpopular if you pursue that course. Don't you think,” she continued, encouraged by his silence, “that it savours a little of bigotry and egotism to set one's self up to condemn an amusement that many other Christians approve? What is your ground of objection? One would suppose that you had received a direct revelation on the subject.”

“I have,” he said, and his clear eyes looked full into hers, “directly from the Master himself. Don't you know that a person who is absorbed in Christian work, a consecrated Christian, is not absorbed in all these amusements, and one who is, has no



room in his heart for Christ. There is a law of Natural Philosophy, you know, which says that 'Two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time', and there is a somewhat similar law in regard to a soul, stated by the Lord himself. 'Ye cannot serve two masters.' It is the world or Christ with every soul, and I have chosen Christ."

"I know this much," she said, coldly, "that fanatics are the most intolerable of all people. I have danced all my life, and since I became a church-member, and never had it hinted to me before that I was not a Christian because I loved it. You need not go; John can take me and call for me, and I will make excuses for you."



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“My dear wife! would you do that? Surely you did not yourself intend to dance; the most liberal would be shocked, I fancy, were a minister’s wife to dance.”

“And why? I am not the minister. I recognise no restraints that do not apply as well to every Christian woman. You told me yourself that Mrs. Graham is an excellent lady; she is a member of your church, and dances, I am told. Why should not one professor of religion have the same privileges as another?”

“Vida,” he said, in a tone of mingled pain and tenderness, “it is only a short time since we were pronounced ‘no more twain hut one;’ you said then the thought made you glad. How can you separate your interests from mine now? Will you do what would dishonour my calling were I to do it? The world counts us one, your action is mine, and just or unjust, they do not accord to you the right to wade quite so far into the sea of worldly pleasures as they themselves feel privileged to do. They would point the finger of ridicule at both of us, and charge us with inconsistency. We will not stop to argue the right and wrong of the subject now, supposing your conscience does not shut you out from the dance, let worldly prudence and a desire to keep our names from common gossip, influence you, I pray you, if indeed my wishes and opinion are of no value.”

But the young wife was in no frame for recollecting tender vows, nor listening to reason. She threw off his arm with an impatient gesture, and glancing at her watch, said:—

“I have not only accepted an invitation to this party, but promised to dance. It is getting late and I must go.”

Mr. Eldred controlled his agitation by a mighty effort, and in a low, calm tone said:—

“Then I must save you from disgracing us both. I insist, I *command* you not to go.”

Had he struck her, she would not have been more astonished. She stood as if stunned for a moment; then with a stately air, she swept by him and ascended the stairs to her room. What was his consternation, as he stood gazing out into the moonlight, presently to see her pass down the walk, step into the carriage and drive away!

Turning from the window, he paced the floor with anguish keen as though she had gone from him for ever. What obstinacy, what unreasoning wilfulness—and what would come of it? He spent the long night brooding over his great sorrow, the root of which was the fear that his dear wife did not belong to Christ, for beloved her through all her unloveliness. “Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church.” His love had something in it of the divine pity and patience that our blessed Lord feels for his sinning, stumbling, and exasperating children.



Mrs. Eldred was not that type of womankind who spent their wrath in tears and reproaches. When she was angry, she was unapproachably so, as frigid as an iceberg. The crisis had come. Her husband had dared to command.



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The next morning there was not the turn of an eyelid that could be construed into penitence. A brawling woman is but little less endurable than a perfectly silent one. You may almost as well “flee to the house-top” from one as the other. What few words were spoken by Mr. Eldred at the breakfast table received no replies.

In the course of the forenoon he went to fulfil an engagement a few miles in the country, where he was detained till late in the day. He sat in his study in the gathering twilight longing for, but not expecting, a word from his wife of contrition and conciliation. He was summoned to tea, but no wife appeared. After a little he went in search of her. She was not in the house. It was growing dark. He was perplexed and anxious. Again he went to their room, hoping to find some explanation of the strange absence. On the mantel lay a note addressed to him. As he read he gazed about to assure himself that it was not a horrible dream, half expecting his wife to gleefully spring into his arms from some hiding-place; but all was silent save his own moans of pain.

Vida had gone! Had “fled to her mother for protection from a tyrant.” So the letter ran; it was in her own graceful hand; her name was affixed. It was no cruel joke. She said, moreover, that it was evident that their tastes were not congenial; it was out of the question for her to be tied down to the sort of life he expected of her; that she had borne reflections on her conduct that she had not tolerated from any other being! Tyranny was of all things most hateful to her; the climax was now reached when he ventured “*to command.*”

“She recognised no such right. She never would; she would not be called to account every time she stepped over a forbidden imaginary line; it was plain they had been mistaken in each other, and disappointed; they did not add to each other’s happiness, as appeared from the gloom enveloping him day and night; the last months were months of discord; she felt neglected; he was poring over books or seeking other society in an interminable round of calls; plainly what he needed in a wife was a sort of co-pastor; it was not too late to secure such a person, since the law granted divorce for wilful desertion.”

With this last sentence the letter closed. Not a word betrayed the faintest regret at severing so solemn a bond. He searched it over and over to see if in some corner he could not find one tender word for him, a word that would reveal down deep in her heart the light of her great love for him, even such love as he had for her—a faint glimmer through the clouds of anger and recrimination. It was not there, not one syllable to show that the heart of the writer had not turned to ice. Yes, there was another sentence, more cruel and hopeless still: “Do not try to change my resolution, as though it were made in a pet; it is final—*unalterable.*”

It could not be true. He looked wildly about as if to have the terrible truth dispelled. He opened her closet door and her bureau drawers, but the pretty, festive robes were all gone; the dainty garments were not in their places. A little pair of half-worn slippers, and



the blue ribbon that had tied her hair were all he found. He seized them convulsively, as a part of Vida when she was sweet and simple—as she could be.



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He sat for long hours with the letter in his hand, as one who holds his death-warrant. Then falling upon his face, he cried to his Helper. And He who is of great pity and tender mercies heard, and drew nigh in the darkness and comforted him, even “as one whom his mother comforteth,” and when the morning dawned he arose and took up the burden of life again, where he was, ere Vida Irving stole into his heart. No, not that, it could never be the same again. When the lightning sends his lurid bolt down a noble tree, it may not wave green and fair as once; there will be dead branches and the gnarled seam to tell the story that

“Fire hath scathed the forest oak.”

The grave man who went out into life again carried the marks of the conflict in sad eyes and pale cheeks. Not the least of this great trial was to meet and answer the looks and questions of the curious. For the present he could truthfully say:

“Mrs. Eldred has unexpectedly gone to her mother.”

Meanwhile he resigned his charge, much to the sorrow and dismay of all. He disposed of all the elegant furnishings of the parsonage, and with haste left the spot that had been the scene of an exquisite torture. No defined plans were before him, save to get far away from any who could have had the least knowledge of him previously. No fugitive from justice ever felt more nervous haste. He pushed on, never pausing till he reached the very verge of civilisation in the far south-west. Not that he would be a hermit or misanthrope, but perchance find a people destitute of the gospel. He would bring it to them. He must preach Christ till death. This should be his joy and comfort; henceforth no other love should come between his soul and his dear Master.

And he found his work, as if an unerring path had been marked out straight to the little log church in the woods.

While Vida sat in a lofty temple of arches and massive pillars, the sunlight toned to the appropriate dimness, as it stole through the stained windows, the same hour her husband stood in the log church of the wilderness, its arches and pillars outside—the tall old trees locking arms overhead. Nature softened the fierce rays in this temple as well, for they filtered through thick green boughs, and flecks of light fell here and there, a stray one resting halo-like upon the minister’s head, transfiguring him in the eyes of the hungry souls whose upturned faces drank in the words of life.

This unlearned, simple people with whom he had cast his lot, had their faults, but to the refreshment of his soul, they had no card or dancing parties, theatre or opera to steal the soul from Christ after the manner of more cultured Christians. The church was the apple of their eye. They made sacrifices for it, and travelled weary miles in the worst of weather, rather than lose a “meeting.”



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The young gifted pastor of St. Paul's Church was never more appreciated than now by these hardworking, warm-hearted pioneers. It was their daily wonder and thanksgiving that such a man should ever have been sent to them. Nothing that they could do for him was too much, and their loving devotion was like balm to his weary soul. His people were scattered for miles away, but the pastoral calls were as faithfully made as when they were comprehended within the limits of a few squares. The mild winter climate of that region was like one long autumn of the Eastern States. Mounted on his faithful pony, he spent a large part of every day riding over the prairies. The blue skies and the bright sunshine were tonics to the heart as well as to the body. Sometimes his route lay for miles through the woods, where perfect solitude reigned but for the chatter of birds that circled about him. In these long rides his heart went back over the past, reviving the memory of those first precious days with Vida. They seemed far away, and their recollection, like the perfume of wilted flowers plucked from the grave of a dear one. If he could not have prayed for her then, hourly, his heart would have broken.

Mrs. Irving changed her residence, putting many hundred miles between her new and the old home, so that Vida might begin life anew, as she phrased it, without embarrassment. In a large hotel in the great city, with seaside and mountain trips, parties and operas was much more to Vida's taste than dull life in a quiet parsonage, and she expected to play the role of a pastor's wife.

With her mother as chaperon she led a gay life, going, coming, revelling at will in her freedom. As before her marriage, she attracted much attention. Admired and courted, suitors innumerable paid her homage. But a positive nature and strong will asserted themselves here. Only such attentions as befitted a wife to receive were tolerated. She knew the law did not count her free; and if she had analyzed her secret heart, there was no true reason why she cared to be free. No face she met had power to quicken her pulses or extract from her a second thought. The inner heart had long ago been pre-empted, but the blind wilful creature knew it not. The face most often seen in her dreams; the voice that whispered in her ear; the sad dark eyes that seemed to follow her reproachfully, belonged to none of the gay gallants about her. Her previous history being unknown she was a problem in that circle.

There came a change. Mrs. Irving's health began to fail. The eminent physicians far and near were consulted in vain; and as the symptoms became more denuded and alarming, Vida could not shut her eyes to the fact that her mother was in a most critical state. She was a devoted daughter, though the weeds of selfishness, fostered by the mother's hand, at times almost overtopped filial affection. Now she shut herself in from society and devoted herself to her mother with unremitting care. Every whim of the invalid was gratified.



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One day, after weary months of suffering, she said: "O Vida dear, I would pray to die, if I were not afraid."

"Why afraid, mother? I'm sure you've been a member of a church these many years, and a faithful attendant on its services, and you have been kind to the poor and such a dear mother," said Vida, caressing her. "I don't think you need be afraid."

"O child, that will not stand in the great day. Don't mention anything I've done or been, I beg you," moaned the poor mother. "I've been nothing but a miserable worldling. Now I'm almost through with it all, and I've no peace or comfort. It's all dark, dark. O what shall I do?"

"Let me send for Dr. Hines," said Vida.

"O I cannot talk to him. He's a stranger; and I'm so weak. What must I do, O what?"

Vida had been a member of the same church. But now she sat wrapped in gloom, feeling powerless to help, yet longing to comfort her dying mother. In the midst of her sad thoughts as she sat watching, while gentle slumber had stolen for a moment over the mother, she remembered the words of a text she had heard her husband preach from, "What must I do to be saved?" The sermon was all gone.

"If it asks that question in the Bible, it must answer it," she thought. So finding a Bible, she sat down to search for the old answer to the old question.

"Reading the Bible, dear?" said her mother, opening her eyes.

"Oh, mother, mother, I've found the answer."

The plain short direction was read; the mother repeated it over feebly. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

"Read about Him, O do," and she seemed to summon soul and body to listen, as Vida, led doubtless by the Spirit, read here and there of Him who died for us. Day after day the reading went on; and while the mother slept, the daughter pondered the wonderful words she had read; preached to her for years, apprehended by her only just now. Her heart was filled with horror and fear at her treatment of such a Saviour; at her daring to number herself among his people; then that heart melted as she read of his love and pity, and casting away her robe of self-righteousness for the first time in her life, she knelt before Him a heart-broken, contrite sinner. He took the burden from her heart and gave her "peace."

While she still bowed at the bedside, praying her whispered prayer that her dear mother might "see Jesus," that mother put out her thin hand and laid it on the golden head, murmuring:



“Dear daughter, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; He has forgiven me. It is all peace, peace. Thank Him.”

And Vida’s clear, low tones of thanksgiving came to her dying mother sweet as the voice of angels, whose song soon burst upon her ear.

How clear an “evidence of Christianity” is this. A soul exchanging pride, haughtiness, and rebellion for humility and submission. Vida, meekly bowing to the storm that burst over her head, and filled with joy and peace that had not been hers in the brightest hour of worldly pleasure. It was not so hard, with this new-born love and trust, to see the grave close over that dear mother. It was gilded with the light of that day when “we shall rise again.”

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In these hours of bereavement Vida's heart went out with a longing cry for her husband. The love that she had stifled and called dead was there, deeper and purer. Now that she had been brought by this divine mystery unto full sympathy with him, he was the one soul on earth whose love she craved.

Perverse human heart! Here she was, no one to control her actions, possessed of wealth, youth, beauty, freedom to journey to other lands, and revel in the grand and beautiful of nature and art, yet the one only thing she desired, or that would satisfy, was to creep back into the niche she had filled in that other heart, that large, pure soul that she had thrust from her in her wicked folly and blindness. Now she would devote her life to searching for him, if indeed he were still living, and the doubt brought a keen pang; or had he, too, thrust her out and barred the door, so that she might never more enter? Or—worse than death—had he given the place to another, as she bade him do? It was a weary search, with this terrible uncertainty shrouding it. She advertised in mystical language, so none but he could comprehend it. She examined the church records of the denomination with which he was connected, but found no clue there.

She attended conventions where large companies of ministers were in session, and eagerly looked them over, hoping and praying that her eyes might fall on that one that her heart asked for. It was growing exciting and absorbing, this strange search. She frequently visited towns where a popular preacher or lecturer was announced, and made one of the vast throng that passed about him; then, taking a favourable position, rapidly scanned the upturned faces, wondering, meanwhile, what that strange, subtle something is, by which we recognise each other; that unerring consciousness, so that among ten thousand faces, could we view them one by one, we know at a glance that the one we seek is not there; we do not stop, and doubt, and compare—we know.

She humbled herself to the very dust, and wrote letters far and near to his ministerial friends, that brought only sorrowful replies. And now there came a remembrance that he had often spoken of the far west as a wide and promising field for labour; that some time he should like to go there and build up a church. He might have gone there now. So, with this forlorn hope, she started westward; spending the summer journeying, stopping over the Sabbath at straggling villages, and visiting different churches. Wearied out at length, she recalled the fact that an uncle had removed, with his family, to the south-west, several years before.

She searched out their whereabouts and hastened thither, intending to spend but a brief season. But yielding to their entreaties she remained through the autumn. It was now drawing near to Christmas, and still she lingered. She was growing hopeless, and that pleasant home filled with boys and girls was a diversion from her grief.



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“Do, cousin Vida, go with me to-day, won’t you?” asked Harry, a bright boy of fourteen. “I know a splendid place about ten miles from here, where we can get some evergreens; I want to trim up the house for Christmas just as we used to in New York State. I’ll take the spring waggon and the ponies, and we’ll go—you and I—all alone, and bring home lots of greens, all cut off in short branches.”

“You forget,” his mother said, “that your cousin is not used to riding in spring waggons over rough roads, and ten miles will be a long drive for her.”

“There are some red berries there, too,” went on Harry, as if he had not heard the objections, “and moss, and long vines that the frost hasn’t found yet; besides it’s a grand day to ride.”

“You dear boy,” said Vida, “I’ll go for half of the inducements you offer.” She was only too glad to fall in with any plan that diverted her sad thoughts.

The drive lay for a long distance through the lovely open country, the grass in many parts still green as in midsummer, and over all the perpetual sunshine of that region. A soft golden light that even in mid-winter glorifies the commonest object; bright skies, balmy air, and her lively companion, cheered even Vida’s drooping spirits.

Arrived in the woods, Harry ran here and there with joyful enthusiasm, now climbing a tree like a squirrel, then darting into a thicket for mosses. They loaded the waggon with green boughs and filled their basket with treasures of moss and lichens, and the gay-plumed birds flitted about with hospitable little chirps, welcoming their visitors to their bowers of green. As each became more intent in adding to their store they became separated. Vida was a little distance behind a low, thick growth of trees, disentangling a long vine of bitter-sweet, when she heard a voice that thrilled her very soul. There was just one voice like that in all the world. Trembling, she bent her head and peeped through the branches. One swift glance and she knew him—her husband.

A strong self-control prevented her from swooning or crying out in her great joy. Shaking like a leaf, yet holding firmly to a tree-trunk, she gazed into the dear face. It was paler and thinner, there were dark rings under the eyes, but the finely-curved mouth had the same calm, sweet expression that told of peace within.

How like a king among men he looked, as he stood there, his hands filled too with mosses and lichens, looking kindly on the boy and talking interestedly. She never realised her utter folly so keenly as at this moment. How she longed to fly to him and fall at his feet in sorrowful confession. Two things kept her back: no eyes must witness their first meeting, and another dreadful thought—what if it were too late. What if he had taken her at her word and loved another.



She had not been a woman of the world so long for naught. She was an adept in hiding her heart far out of sight. When Harry returned she could calmly ask him, "Whom he had found in that out-of-the-way place?"



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“Why, don’t you think!” said Harry, “among all the other precious things in these woods I’ve found a minister. Wish we could put him right on top of our boughs and things, and carry him home too, for Christmas. Wouldn’t mother be glad to see him, though! He preaches every Sunday in a log church right down hereaways, and the people come from all round the country to hear him. He looks as if he could preach, too. Such eyes as he has, that look you through and through. Say, let’s you and me go to hear him next Sunday, will you?”

“Yes, I will!” Vida said, with such fervour and emphasis that Harry gave her a keen look and wondered why she had a bright red spot in each cheek. He wondered more before they reached home, for his cousin laughed and sung in childlike glee, and was sad and silent by turns. Her restlessness could not wait until the Sabbath. The excitement and suspense were unendurable.

Confiding in her aunt, it was arranged between them that Moses, the old coloured man of all work, should accompany her to Cedar Vale the next afternoon. Just what she would do when she reached there was not clear to her, but stay away she could not.

When the children were well off to school again after the nooning, Vida, mounted on a fleet little pony, attended by her trusty guide, rode quietly away. Her heart beat wildly when they drew near the settlement. They came at last upon the church, standing in a lovely grove of maples. The door stood slightly ajar. At a little distance from it Vida dismounted, and directed Moses to wait there for her. She had a consuming desire to look into the church where her husband preached, to stand a moment in the very spot where he stood Sabbath after Sabbath.

She stepped softly in, and there, kneeling by the little pulpit, his head bowed upon the desk, was—her husband!

Timidly and slowly, as one who has no right, she noiselessly drew near and knelt beside him. Stranger eyes may not look upon a scene so sacred; but the two souls bowed together before that altar came nearer to heaven than mortals often get.

Had not the waning light warned them that they were still upon the earth, they might never have tired of looking into one another’s eyes, and telling each to each the experiences of that lifetime they had lived since their separation, and striving to put into words the depths of joy that crowned this blessed hour.

Before they left the church they knelt again in that sacred spot, and each in low fervent words poured out thanksgivings, craving a blessing on their reunited lives, and, by a mutual and irresistible impulse, both spoke again their marriage vows before the Lord, in his temple.



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When they rode away that Christmas Eve on their second bridal tour, the setting sun, smiling through the trees and slanting across their pathway, fell on them like a benediction. Slowly and dreamily they went on their way, willing that this ride over crackling twigs and rustling leaves, with the soft, light of the dying day closing about them, should go on for ever. The earnest admiring gaze of the husband brought girlish blushes to the face of the bride. He was drawing contrasts; the sweet humble face and the simple adornings of her who rode by his side, made a fairer picture than the queenly lady of haughty airs and magnificent attire, who seemed to have passed out of existence.

Never was fairer Christmas tide than this, in that merry household; those memorable evergreens festooning it as a bower—and a romance—a poem—lived out—not written. There were no costly gifts, and yet, gifts the most precious—two souls given back to each other. If the joy bells in their hearts but had voice, their silvery ringing would have filled all the land.

“Vida, can you be happy here until spring?” Mr. Eldred asked, a few days after Christmas. “My work would suffer, I fear, were I to leave it now.”

“Why leave it in the spring, dear Thane? Let us stay here always, in this beautiful, quiet place, where the people love you so, and—I did not tell you yet,” Vida said, half shyly, “but my money is not mine any more. I gave it all to the dear Lord, I would like to build a pretty church with some of it, and here we will stay and work, you and I together. I can help you now, Thane—a little. Don’t you like my plan?” she said, anxiously, when he did not speak.

“My darling, you have made me so happy that I could not speak,” he said, after a little. “I wish it above all things—to go on with my work here, and a new church is so much needed. How strange that you should be willing to stay, and that we can work together! Oh, Vida! I prayed—with faith, I thought—but I never dreamed of an hour like this; surely ’t has not entered into our hearts to conceive the things which God has prepared for them that love Him—in this life.”

There was another sensation in an audience when the pastor of the log church brought in his wife, for naught so fair and sweet had ever gladdened their rustic eyes before. The singing that day was mostly solo, or at least, duets. Her pure, birdlike voice filled the church, and what could they do but listen, wondering meanwhile whether it might not be a lark, or an angel come down for a season.

When a teeming, busy town covered the prairie, and the heel of agriculture and commerce crushed out the wild flowers, the log church was preserved as a memorial, while the spire of the handsome new one was eagerly pointed out, its story treasured and handed down to children’s children.



These two spent their happy lives ministering to this simple people, their hearts and hands so filled with work that they had no time to sigh for the privileges of more cultivated surroundings. The pastor's wife was the warm friend and sympathizer of the common people, and her name was singularly appropriate—Vida—well-beloved.



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HOW A WOMAN WAS CONVERTED TO MISSIONS.

The poor women and girls are so taken up with cleaning their houses and dishes, and preparing their daily meals, that they will not give themselves up to thinking in the least. So writes Miss Blunt concerning the women of India. It was something of the same sort that prevented Mrs. John Williams from giving herself up to thinking, or from thinking about anything but her own private affairs. Not that Mrs. Williams gave herself up to scrubbing doors and windows and cleaning pots and pans with her own hands, but she was “taken up” all the same. When Christ was a babe on earth there was no room for him in the inn, so to-day many a heart is so full that Christ and his cause are turned out. If a heart is full how can it hold more? Do not suppose that there was no thinking done by Mrs. Williams. She superintended all her work and did much of her own sewing; as her family was not small and her income not large, and she kept but one servant, it took a vast deal of thinking and worrying to keep the Williams family up to the standard, which was one not of neatness and comfort simply, but that she should live in the same style as those of her friends whose incomes were possibly twice as large as her own, that her children’s clothes should be just as fine and as fashionably made as theirs, that she herself should be able to make as good an appearance as the best when she went into society, that her parlour should be furnished as far as in her lay, with all the elegance and taste that the law of the fashionable world required. This was the grand aim to which she bent all her energies.

Mrs. Williams was a member in good and regular standing of an orthodox church. She regularly occupied her pew in the sanctuary, and when she had no other engagement, attended the weekly prayer-meeting, but the most persistent and zealous member of the “Ladies’ Foreign Missionary Society” had never succeeded in inducing her to attend their monthly meetings, but just once. She took pains to explain it carefully to her conscience that she believed in Foreign Missions, but that didn’t prove that it was necessary for her to spend a whole afternoon each month hearing dry reports and “papers” about countries with outlandish names. What good did that do anyway? It was mysterious—how ladies could do justice to their families and spend so much time out. As for herself she could scarcely keep up with her calls. But then! they neglected their families, of course they did; women that were always on a committee for something or other, and running off here and there to all kinds of meetings. Very likely, too, it just suited some women to get up on a platform before an audience, and read a “paper” or “report.” It was just a little leaning to Woman’s Rights. She believed in a woman keeping in her own sphere, and for her part she craved no such notoriety. She had always noticed, too, that the women who gave themselves up to those things seemed to lose all regard for their appearance. Now it really was a duty one owed to their friends, to dress well, and some of those missionary women were wearing their last year’s bonnets; and dresses of the styles of three or four years back—perfect frights!



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She did not see the need of women having a society by themselves either. Probably they raised just as much money before the ladies got to making such a fuss about it, it all came out of their husband's pockets anyway. Her husband always had contributed to Foreign Missions, and always would probably (it's true he did, a dollar a year!) and was not that just as well as for her to be bothering her head about it?

"There!" said Mrs. Williams, one bright afternoon in April, as she glanced from her window. "There comes that Mrs. Brown. I know what she's after. She wants me to go to that stupid missionary meeting. I suppose this is the afternoon for it. I promised her I would go again some time—sorry I did too. That's just as much sense as some persons have; think that one can drop everything and go to a missionary meeting—in the spring of the year, too, when there is so much sewing to be done;" and she hastily instructed Bridget to tell Mrs. Brown that she was "engaged." So Mrs. Brown went on her way to the meeting, and sat in heavenly places, and had her heart stirred with new love and zeal, while Mrs. Williams sat at home, and worked diligently on a dress for her young daughter, an elaborate dress of frills, and lace, and embroidery, and many weary stitches. At the close of the day she congratulated herself that she had accomplished a fine afternoon's work.

There were whole seas of sewing to be waded through, Mrs. Williams said, before she could have any spare afternoons. There was the dressmaking, all her own dresses to be remodelled after the present style, besides new ones (when Mrs. Williams had a dressmaker in the house—to use her own words—she "almost worked herself to death") then there was all the other sewing. It really was appalling to think of the amount of ruffling and tucking and side-pleating and puffing that must be gone through, before the summer wardrobes of herself and her little daughters would be completed. There was the house-cleaning, the smallest detail of which required her personal supervision, for Mrs. Williams was elaborate throughout; all her housekeeping was squared up to certain fine lines. If she ever had a morsel of time from these things, stern necessity compelled her to spend it in fancy work; for tidies, and soft pillows, and bracket-covers, and stand-covers, and mats were indispensable. When Mrs. Williams was asked to subscribe for "Woman's Work for Woman," she assured them that she knew already all about woman's work that she desired to.

It was done at last—the spring sewing and the house cleaning, and the summer heats had come. The day was warm, and Mrs. Williams, in a cool white wrapper, had established herself on the parlour sofa with a book. She had neglected to tell Bridget that she was not at home, and just as she was in the most absorbing part of one of George Eliot's absorbing novels, a caller was ushered in. "Mrs. Brown! that missionary woman again! Was ever



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anyone so persecuted before?" Here she had just come to a breathing spell, where she had hoped to take a little rest and comfort, and now she must be annoyed. To go, was out of the question. It was too hot; and besides, she did not in the least feel like going to a meeting of any sort. She wanted to finish her book; so she told Mrs. Brown that she was very much worn out with over-exertion, and the day was so warm that she would not venture out. She should probably fall asleep in the meeting if she went. It seemed that even when there came a time that work did not fill Mrs. Williams' heart, Satan was on the alert to pre-empt it, and keep her from all Christian activity. How he must rejoice at each new withe he fastens over the heart he covets. Here was a large-hearted, energetic, skilful woman—thoroughly consecrated. She would be a power for Christ. Mrs. Williams was not a hard-hearted woman, but she found no time to listen to the sorrowful story of those who know not God. She knew very little of it at all, and like her heathen sisters, was so "taken up" that she "could not give herself to thinking."

When the rage for decorating and the mania for pottery seized the female mind, it began to dawn across Mrs. Williams' perceptions that all her belongings were exceedingly plain, that she positively needed, and must have two large vases for the parlour at least. She lay awake thinking about it a good part of the night. Something must be done. The expensive imported ware was out of the question—beyond the limits of her purse at present. Mrs. Williams was a woman of resources, who seldom failed to rise to the necessity of the occasion; and from her inner consciousness she evolved a perfectly delightful plan. When a young girl at school, she had taken lessons in oil colours, and possessed not a little artistic ability. Why not manufacture her own pottery and decorate her own china? That was a most inspiring idea; she could scarcely wait for morning to appear, so eager was she to put her plans into execution. She would go into the city, get a few instructions and some materials, "then we shall see what we shall see."

The next day was a harbinger for a hot day; but what of that? What would not one undergo when pottery was in question? So she spent the sultry-summer days examining all the different styles of vases with the same eager minuteness that an amateur milliner studies hats on "opening day." Her vases should be precisely like that elegant pair of Copenhagen ware that cost fifty dollars. Then this ambitious, energetic, deluded woman went home, and proceeded to shut herself in her room, and dabbled in paint from morning till night. Her enthusiasm arose to such a pitch, that she neglected her sewing and her calls; and after she had produced a really creditable pair of vases, she was stimulated to go on. She painted lovely little bouquets on her tea-set, and decorated everything in the house from china to coal-scuttle.



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About this time Mrs. Williams received an invitation to a party, not an unusual thing, but this was a very select affair; the very highest stratum of society. She was holding a counsel with herself, and doing some very close thinking on the all-important subject of her wardrobe, and she came to the usual feminine conclusion that “positively” she had “nothing to wear,” when she was interrupted by a call from the collectors of the missionary society—the faithful, punctual collectors, whose visits were as sure as the sun and the dews. Mrs. Williams had decided that self-defence required her to become a member of that society, afford it she must, in some way. Her bills for the pottery had amounted to a considerable sum, home industry notwithstanding, and the fact stared her in the face that she must have a new silk for that party—but it was plain she had dodged those collectors just as long as she could.

What a relief it was to learn that only ten cents a month constituted one a member of the society. She answered quite graciously that she should be most happy to throw in her mite. If Mrs. Williams could have had a peep into the collectors’ books, and have seen that Mrs. A. and Mrs. B. subscribed fifty cents a month, and that Mrs. C. and D. subscribed one dollar a month, and others whom she copied and followed were even benevolent to the amount of two or three dollars a month, then Mrs. Williams would have compassed sea and land to procure the money, before she would have allowed her name to be among theirs with, that small amount set after it. She suggested that she pay the whole sum at once. “What was the use of troubling them to call every month;” and when they said they preferred to have it in monthly payments, she thought within herself, “Now, that is just like women; they have no business capacity, most of them, travelling up and down, wasting their time, making twelve trips for what they might accomplish in one;” which hasty censure upon her own sex was only another proof that she had not “given herself up to thinking;” certainly not on the philosophy of giving.

Having disposed of the collectors, Mrs. Williams sallied forth on a shopping expedition, in high spirits at having come off so easily, and yet a placid feeling in her conscience that now she had contributed to “foreign missions.” She spent the morning in weighing the merits of this piece of silk and that, and finally purchased a dress, rich and costly, and some soft filmy laces of marvellous beauty at a marvellous price. If her poor weak conscience made a protest it was silenced by “I must have it.” Who shall say that the heathen are all in Africa or China, or the islands of the sea?

And so the busy days went on, dressmaking, house-cleaning, calling, canning, pickling, parties, pottery, and fancy work, time for it all. How could one think much about such far-away interests as heathen women when her hands and heart were so full?



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Sometimes we call such “Marthas,” and make light of the fact that we have loaded ourselves down with such heavy burdens, and take comfort in the thought that one of the women whom Jesus loved was in the same condemnation; but we forget that her anxious housewifely cares were for Jesus. Dare we say as much for ours?

One morning Mrs. Williams was not bustling about with her usual activity. She sat in her own room with a grave, troubled face. She was in deep thought, and it was not some scheme for adding to her wardrobe, or the furnishings of her house, that formed the subject of her meditations. Perhaps the days are not past when the Lord speaks to a soul “in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men.” Mrs. Williams was not a nervous woman, full of strange fancies, and her dreams heretofore had been passed by as idle phantasies of the brain, but the remarkable and solemn one of the previous night could not be so dismissed, and like one of old, her “spirit was troubled.”

In her dream, the day had come for her to die, and leave her busy work for evermore. She could recall it all most vividly, the flash of surprise, the anguish, the feeling that she was not ready, the swift searching of her heart to find her hope, the feeble despairing cry, Oh Christ, forgive me! the weeping friends, not heeded in the all-absorbing thoughts, “What is this? Where am I going?”

Then the sinking away, the last gasp, and eternity opened! In the distance there dawned upon her vision the glory of the city, the golden gates, the crowns, the harps, the white-robed throng, the wonderful music thrilling her soul. As she tremblingly approached the gate, her heart gave a bound, for that kingly One could be no other than Christ the Lord, the one she loved years ago before the world got hold of her. Surely he would recognise her; but when she timidly ventured nearer, and spoke his name, there was no smile of welcome, no “Come, ye blessed;” the look was cold, the face averted. In tears and agony she begged an angel to open the gates and let her in. When he asked her whence she came, and by what right she hoped to enter, she murmured out that she belonged to Christ’s church when she was on earth. Then he bade her come with him. He lifted a veil and said, “Look!”

There were rooms filled with beauty, opening into each other, and stretching off into the distance. There was rich furniture, carpets of softest velvet covered the floors, mirrors and paintings filled the walls; there were exquisite vases of delicate tints and graceful forms, finest statuary, innumerable and endless articles of ornamentation, and, lying about in rich profusion, were costly silks and glittering satins and rare laces; jewellery flashed out here and there; diamonds and pearls and all precious gems in beautiful settings, novels in costly binding, food delicate and tempting in abundance and variety. “It was for such as these,” the sad voice of the angel said, “that you bartered your soul; these are the things you coveted and toiled for in your earth-life.”



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How perfectly empty and unsatisfying it all looked to her now, with that glorious city in full view, and the shining ones gathered about their King; their hallelujahs rising in grand chorus to “Him who loved them and washed them in his blood.” In deep distress she begged to be allowed to go in where the Saviour was. Then the angel lifted another veil.

There were the dark places of the earth spread out before her; millions upon millions of human beings bowing before idols, little children cast into cruel flames, and women, sad, wretched women, a whole world full of them; besides those, there were the poor, degraded, ignorant ones of her own city.

“Did you ever read in your Bible, said the angel, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me?’”

Deep horror seized upon her, for memory brought before her, as in letters of fire, that other word in her own Bible—that awful word, “depart.”

Mrs. Williams needed no Daniel to interpret her dream. Unlike the one of the King of Babylon it brought her in brokenness of spirit to the feet of her Saviour; and he who said, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,” was faithful to his promise.

The woman, who left her room after hours of heart-searching and confession before God, came out of that room with “the new spirit”—a consecrated soul, henceforth to be obedient to the Master’s slightest wish. The whole aim of her life was changed, her pursuits, her style of living. She found, too, ample time to do the Lord’s work, and to “look well to the ways of her household,” and the Lord gave her much service for him, and the work was very sweet.

Does he not wait to give to any of us who have been half-hearted laggard Christians, this “new spirit,” this anointing whenever we shall give our whole hearts to him. Then shall it be “joy, nor duty,” then we shall say, My tongue, dear Lord, to speak for Thee, my hands to minister to Thee, my feet to run Thine errands.

MRS. LEWIS’ BOOK.

PART I.

THE BOOK.

The ladies of Thorndale met one afternoon in early autumn in Mrs. Lee’s parlour for an important purpose. There was a previous understanding that the meeting was for all who felt interested in discussing plans for their own mental improvement during the



coming winter. The chairman said: “Now, ladies, speak out your minds on this subject with freedom and promptness.”

Mrs. Peterson spoke first—she always did—“For my part I wish we could study or read something or other that would give us something to talk about when we meet in sewing society and other places. I’m tired going to sewing society and sitting perfectly mum by the side of my next neighbour, because I don’t know what under the sun to say. After we have done up the weather and house cleaning and pickling and canning, and said what a sight of work it is, and asked whether the children took the measles and whooping-cough, and so on, I’m clear run out, for I *won’t* talk about my neighbours, and I don’t keep any help; I’ve noticed ‘hired girls’ is a subject that doesn’t seem to run out very soon.”



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“Let us form a literary society,” said one; “prepare essays, and discuss some subject that will require considerable study in posting ourselves.” This lady was newly married, and “boarded;” therefore time was one of the things that she possessed in the greatest abundance.

“That will never do,” said a busy little mother, “every lady that was to prepare an essay would be sure to have a sick baby, or a house full of company; then the most of us can only give little snatches of time to this, besides the afternoon or evening that we meet; that would surely be a failure; we want something that will not end in smoke after a few weeks.”

Mrs. Lewis spoke next. When Mrs. Lewis spoke everybody always paid attention. She was a large, fine looking lady of seventy or thereabouts. Old age had crowned her with a halo of soft snowy hair, while her dark eyes still glowed with almost the brightness of youth. Her naturally fine mind, enriched by extensive reading, and her deep religious experience, combined to constitute her almost an oracle in the little town. In all their gatherings she was the centerpiece, a very queen for dignity and elegance, in her invariable black silk, and soft white cap. “Let us study the Bible,” said Mrs. Lewis. “I don’t know of any book we are more ignorant of.”

“Oh, Mrs. Lewis! You wouldn’t make us into a Sabbath-school class, I hope,” said feathery little Mrs. Etheridge. “I thought we did that up years ago. I am sure I can repeat quantities of it,” and she tossed back her pretty head and looked wise. “The Bible is all well enough for the Sabbath, but I should dearly love to read the poets. I am passionately fond of Byron; some of his poems are just too sweet for anything.”

Some of the wise ones almost thought Mrs. Lewis’ text had a spice of sarcasm in it as she quoted for answer, “The testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.”

Miss McIntosh, learned, and strong-mindedly inclined, said that she had heard that the ladies in Millville had spent one afternoon a week in the study of Political Economy, with very much benefit; they felt that their minds had been enlarged and strengthened; her preference would be for something of that sort, some broad, deep subject, that would require study; she would suggest Mental Philosophy.

“The Bible just fits in there,” said Mrs. Lewis. “‘Thy Word is a great deep,’ and Peter said that Paul wrote ‘things hard to be understood,’ you remember.”

“And that’s queer, too,” spoke up Mrs. Peterson. “Such a deep book, and yet I feel more at home in it than in any other book you have talked about, and I haven’t much learning to speak of either. But I get so interested in some of the folks in it, and the Lord’s dealings with them. I’ve been thinking about Moses ever since Mr. Parker preached about his not being allowed to go into the promised land. It seems as if I was acquainted with him. It must have

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been a powerful disappointment to him, after he had trudged along so many years—turned back, too, when he'd got a good piece on his way; then it was so aggravating, to get up there and look over into the nice green meadows, and know that if he hadn't let out his temper so, he might have gone in with the rest of them. I declare, I got so exercised thinking it over when I was a working my butter, that I forgot to salt it."

"I think I should like to study Shakespeare," said Mrs. Berkeley. "Where does one find such knowledge of human nature as there? Where else are such rare gems to be had by digging?"

"In my book," said Mrs. Lewis, "the Psalmist says, 'It is more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold;' and another says, 'It is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' Is not that a knowledge of human nature that excels even Shakespeare?"

"It strikes me a variety would suit all," said another. "George Eliot's writings are full of power, and deep enough for me, I assure you. We might read some of her books, then some of Dickens and Thackeray, then occasionally a book of poems; Longfellow and Whittier, or, if we want to study harder, there is Mrs. Browning, Tennyson, and Shakespeare. It would be excellent discipline to try and get at the exact meaning of the authors, and puzzle out all the obscurities, it would not be long before we should feel quite rich in a literary way. In reading such works together, and talking them over, of course we make them ours as we can in no other way."

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever," quoted Mrs. Lewis. "Do you know that all those writings, valuable and good in their place as they are, when compared with the Bible seem to me just like grass and flowers? Now, if we have but a little time to give to study, why not spend a good part of it in studying the 'endureth-for-ever' book, because, as nearly as I can find out, that book and ourselves are the only things in this world that are going to endure for ever? Don't it strike you that in such a case we ought to be more familiar with it than with all these others?"

Mrs. Lewis' solemn words put a silence on the lips for a few minutes, but practical Mrs. Brown broke it by remarking:

"Perhaps it would be a good plan for us to study hygiene. I have always thought, if we gave more attention to ventilation, and to what we shall eat and wear, and so on, we should have better health."

"Yes," said a still more practical sister, "that would be real nice. Then I was noticing in the paper that there is a Presbyterian cook-book just out. I should like to have some read out of that."



This caused a smile to go around the circle, for Mrs. Boot was one of those inveterate pie and cake makers, whose life consisted in the abundance of pastry; who was an unhappy woman until she had obtained the last new receipt for cake and made it up.



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“I have an idea,” said a bright little lady. “Suppose we all agree to spend at least two evenings a week in reading or study at home, then bring what we gather to the sewing-society and talk it over, each one give some bit of news or scientific fact, or give a review of the last new book.”

“Oh, I have tried that a little on my own book,” said Mrs. Peterson. “I sat up one night after all the rest had gone to bed, and read all about that Dr. Somebody, with a hard name—I can’t pronounce it, it begins with an ‘S.’ Well, he and his wife are digging up buried cities, hundreds and thousands of years old—and finding the most wonderful things, money, and jewellery, and splendid vases, and all sorts of nice things. Now, says I to myself, I’ve got something to talk about at sewing society to-morrow. It’ll make ’em open their eyes, too, I guess, so I read it all over again, to be sure and have it at my tongue’s end. Well, I went to sewing society, and when there was a kind of a lull in talk, I began to tell three or four that sat around me, all about that wonderful story that I’d been reading. Do you believe it, they just poked fun at my story, and said, ‘of course ’twa’n’t true, and we couldn’t believe half we read in the papers, and it would tura out like the Cardiff giant, most likely.’ I was going on to tell how he brought, out the curiosities, and ever so many people saw them, and of course it was true; but la! one wanted the thread, another the scissors, and another called out, ‘Mrs. Peterson, do you overcast your seams or fell ’em?’ Then Mrs. Baker said, ‘Why, Melia Parsons, you’re making that little pair of pants upside down, then they all hollered and yelled at Melia, and I never tried to tell anything more about Dr. What-yer-call-him and his cities; might just as well try to talk in a hornets’ nest.”

This speech produced so much merriment that the chairman playfully called Mrs. Peterson to order, and the talk went on. Some thought a course of history was “just the thing,” in short, there were as many different plans and opinions as there were ladies, it began to look very much as if no decision could ever be reached.

“I hope,” said Mrs. Lewis, “that I shall not be thought persistent or officious if I say a few more words. You know I am fond of reading, there was a time when I read everything, now I am turning away from it all, to the blessed Bible. While I would not disparage liberal culture, nor the reading that conduces to it, I think the time has come when we cannot remain ignorant of the Bible and be guiltless. Some people feel mortified if they cannot tell just where every line of poetry that happens to be quoted can be found, but who thinks of being ashamed because they cannot tell the author of the matchless poems in the Old Testament? I do think there are no poems like Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s and the Psalms. For imagery and pathos and sweetness all other poems are tame in comparison. Do we want works of power?”

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He says, 'My word is as the fire and the hammer.' Is it tragedy that our souls delight in? There is the divine tragedy: 'But He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities.... He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth,' and the closing scene: 'And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened.'"

"If we wish to strengthen and discipline our minds, and grow in knowledge, let us study the Bible by all means, for here we find difficulties enough to tax an angel's powers, and at the same time find rest and consolation, means of growth, too, for we are assured that those who meditate on that Word 'shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.' Oh, you do not know, if you never have tried it, how blessed it is to build up a pyramid of texts, for instance, all about God's love to us, and the names he calls us by; it makes his love such a reality. Theft there are the promises, soft pillows for weary heads, and there are directions for all perplexities. I tell you there is nothing like the Bible. I have tried all the rest. Like Solomon I have found it all vanity. 'Oh, how I love thy law!' 'How sweet are thy words unto my taste!' When this becomes our experience, life will be a different thing to us; it will not be dull and empty. You know how we get absorbed in other reading, perhaps a novel, and it leaves a gloomy, unsatisfied feeling when it is done, but the Bible is never done, and the studying it grows and grows every day. When the Lord comes, I'm afraid we shall not feel comfortable if he finds us studying hard on every other book and his laid by covered with dust. If I were to ask you what book you would advise me to spend the most of my time on, the few years that I live, whether the Bible or the current literature of the day, you would probably say, 'The Bible by all means, because you have but a few years left to you at most,' but the truth is, that many in this room may die before I do. Not one of us knows what day the books will for us be forever closed; and did it never cross your minds that the Bible is the only book we will want to take with us away down to the edge of the river? When I lie down to die I feel sure that I shall not wish for a page of mental philosophy whispered in my ear, nor the finest passage of Shakespeare; but, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; Thou art with me,' and 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.' 'Thou art mine, I have called thee by my name.' 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.'"

"Let us compromise this matter," suggested Mrs. Parker. "Let every other meeting be devoted to Bible study, and a committee be appointed to select something from the works mentioned here to-day as subjects for the intervening meetings."



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This seemed to strike all favourably, and was voted upon, receiving an affirmative vote. It was further suggested and decided that Mrs. Lewis should lead all the Bible meetings.

“Then I shall take you in hand at once,” said Mrs. Lewis, “and announce that the next meeting will be at my house next Thursday afternoon, and the subject will be ‘How to Use the Book.’ I shall ask you to look out texts on the subjects, and to bring pencils and Bibles that you will not be afraid to mark, and do, dear sisters, let us give to the study of this Book the same zeal and painstaking that we do to our housekeeping, or our gardening or fancy work, then we shall receive a blessing—I am sure of it.”

PART II.

THE BOOK OPEN.

Mrs. Lewis' parlour was not like anybody's else. Some of her neighbours said she was “queer, as much money as she had, too.” By “queer” they meant that it was perfectly incomprehensible to them, that Mrs. Lewis did not have her parlour hung in dark paper with gilt blommies; have lace curtains with very long trails, a dark, many-coloured carpet, mirrors, and handsome furniture wearing linen aprons; the whole thing shut up stately and dark, except on high days; this, instead of the cheery room where five-minute callers with cards and best toilets seldom came; people always “ran in” here and stayed awhile. This room was large and light, both wall and carpet a delicate tint of grey, brightened here and there by bits of colour in the shape of gaily-covered easy-chairs, rug tidies, and the like, yet nothing was too fine for daily use.

There were fine engravings on the walls, and plants and sunshine in the south windows. In the centre stood a large round table covered with books, newspapers, pen and ink; altogether it looked much more like a gem of a study than a parlour, but was the best and handsomest room in the house, whatever it might be called; and here Mrs. Lewis knit, and sewed and studied, here the fire was always bright and the welcome warm; young and old went in and out with freedom. Her table was supplied with the best and latest books and magazines, so making a sort of reading-room, as free and open to young men as though it were public.

The room was well filled on the Thursday afternoon appointed for the meeting, which was opened by a few earnest words of prayer; then Mrs. Lewis remarked, “I want to say in the outset, that I do not set myself up as a teacher in these gatherings; we are all learners together. Let us conceive ourselves to be miners digging for gold or precious stones, in the Lord's mine, the Scriptures; then when he points out to one a precious gem that our eyes may not light on as we pass along, let that one hasten to show it to us also with something of the same eagerness that most of us would display if we found a jewel in our path. In thinking of this subject: ‘How to use our Bibles,’ I am reminded

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of my first sewing machine. Many years ago, when sewing machines were not as common as now, my husband sent to New York and purchased one for me. I read the instructions, and followed them as I thought, but I did not succeed, the thread knotted up in heaps and it skipped stitches. After repeated failures I set it aside, and plodded on in the old way, trying to do all the sewing of my large family by hand. At last a lady from a neighbouring town came to visit me. It so happened that she owned a machine of the same kind. She sat down before mine, turned the screws, oiled it, put the work in, and sewed a long seam as by magic. Then she patiently explained every little thing I needed to know. It was a happy day to me when I could sew on it too, I assure you, and you all know from experience just what a comfort and help that machine was to me for years afterwards. I am convinced that in like manner I groped and stumbled along a long time in my Christian life because I did not know how to use my Bible.”

“I am not sure,” said Miss McIntosh, “that I quite understand your illustration. The sewing machine was, of course, no use to you until you had learned all its mysteries, it was the same as locked up to you, you needed a key, but here are our Bibles in plain English; if we read them I cannot see why we will not be benefited.”

“Yes, benefited in a certain way, just as any excellent book will lift one up, but I know people who are well versed in the historical parts of the Bible—can repeat large portions of the Gospels, and yet are blind; they have not apprehended Christ in it all. We need the Spirit’s teachings, or, plain as it is, we may go from Genesis to Revelation and never once look into the eyes of our Saviour with trusting faith, yet there he is on every page. Food is nothing to us when hungry if we do not eat it, and truth will not save us if it be not realised. ‘Then opened he their understanding that they should understand the Scriptures.’ ‘The things of God knoweth no man but by the Spirit of God.’ Not until that light shines upon the book do our souls cry out in joyful recognition, ‘Master’ and ‘My Lord and my God.’ Not until that Divine touch opens our eyes can we say of his words, ‘I love them exceedingly.’”

“But you do not suppose,” said Mrs. Berkely, “that every one can have that wonderful insight into Scripture that some persons have, or that all are expected to really love to read it. I never think that I ought to let a day pass by without reading my chapter, but I confess that I do it because it is my duty. Everybody can’t be like one woman that I used to know. She kept her Bible by her in her work-basket, every few minutes she would take it up and get a bit from it, then go on with her work. Everybody called her a fanatic, but she seemed to enjoy herself, and was the best person I ever knew; I always supposed she possessed a sort of gift that is only given to a very few.”



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“I believe that the promise, ‘He shall teach you all things,’ will be fulfilled to all who claim it,” said Mrs. Lewis.

“You recollect,” said Mrs. Parker, “how Luther loved the Bible after that wonderful light shone into his soul? I have read somewhere that the cxixth Psalm was his favourite, because in all its one hundred and seventy-six verses the Bible is mentioned in every one except two. I have also heard that it is a favourite with Ruskin because he has the same love for the Word that David and Luther possessed. ‘How sweet are Thy words unto my taste,’ was the burden of David’s song.”

“I have had just one thought following me the whole week,” said Mrs. Mills. “It came to me with such power last Sabbath, when I took my Bible to look out some texts for the meeting to-day, that I almost felt as if I had never known it before. It is so wonderful that God and the Holy Spirit have written a Book and we have it! and, what is stranger still, that we dare to neglect it. One would suppose that a superstitious fear would make people read it, if nothing else. I believe that the Lord himself sent that solemn realisation to me; it has seemed a different Book to me ever since. If an angel should come down and bring me ever so short a letter from the Lord, with some expressions of favour, I should be consumed with joy; and here I have not only one, but so many, and never took it in before.”

“My heart standeth in awe of thy word,” repeated Mrs. Lewis; then, turning to one who sat near her, said, “We want a word from you, Mrs. Barnes.” Mrs. Barnes had slipped into the most obscure seat in the room, almost behind Mrs. Lewis’ chair. She was one of Mrs. Lewis’ most intimate friends, and herein was another proof of “queerness” in the eyes of some of Mrs. Lewis’ neighbours, “because she made so much of that Mrs. Barnes.” No one had ever thought of calling such a dignified, intelligent-looking woman a “washer-woman,” and yet she did take some of her neighbours’ clothes to her home and wash and iron them—why not? since she was strong and they were not, and she wanted money and they wanted clean clothes. However it was, these two women saw eye to eye. It was no uncommon thing when Mrs. Barnes’ snowy wash was flapping in the wind, and she had slipped on her clean gingham, and stepped over to Mrs. Lewis’ a minute, to have the minute lengthen to an hour or more, they had so much in common to talk about. Their absent Lord—His work, and how to further it, were themes they did not weary of.

So Mrs. Barnes put on her glasses and opened her old Bible and read, “As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.”



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“I find here,” she said, “that the Bible is to be our food, and that it is intended to make us grow. Now one can’t grow without the right kind of food. The verse makes me think of my dear little grandson Neddie. His mother was taken away, and he was left a wee baby for us to bring up. We had such a hard time to find anything to agree with him. We tried milk and water, and arrowroot, and cracker-water, but he didn’t thrive, he was nothing but skin and bone; finally he got sick and we called the doctor, and he said, ‘Why this child is starving to death! What do you feed him? Don’t give him any more such stuff,’ he said. ‘Try another cow, and give him pure milk.’ So we got a new milch cow and fed him fresh milk, and I can’t begin to tell you what a wonderful change it made in that child in less than three weeks’ time; the dear little fellow got just as plump, his hands were like cushions, and he was well and happy as a robin. Maybe that’s the reason there are so many weakly Christians. I shouldn’t wonder if souls need the right sort of food as well as bodies in order to be healthy. I have some neighbours that my heart just aches for; all their reading is yellow-covered books, such as ‘The Pirate’s Bride,’ and ‘The Fatal Secret.’ Such food is worse than cracker-water, and arrowroot, for they are starving souls instead of bodies, and the Word can’t find any place to take root, much less to grow, when the mind is filled up with such trash.”

“Joseph Cook thinks,” said Mrs. Lewis, “that even Bunyan, Jeremy Taylor, Pascal, and Thomas a’ Kempis himself, work mischief, if these books shut out the Bible from daily and almost hourly use.’

“Is it possible,” said Mrs. Etheridge, “that anybody can make out what Joseph Cook thinks? I know everybody is running wild over him, so I just took one of his lectures the other day after dinner, and sat down by the fire. But dear me! I couldn’t make anything out of it. Now, I can take one of Mrs. Henry Wood’s lovely books and read from dinner to tea, without being tired or sleepy.”

Mrs. Lewis smiled as she answered:

“I admit that, like Paul, Joseph Cook writes some things hard to be understood, and it often takes considerable thought to get at his meaning, but when you have studied it out it is something worth having. He speaks to Boston people mostly, you know, and perhaps they would not understand very plain English. Here is a sentence from him, though, that is clear enough: ‘Do you know a book that you are willing to put under your head for a pillow when you lie dying? Very well, that is the book you want to study while you are living.’”

“But, Mrs. Lewis,” continued Mrs. Etheridge, “you know some physicians think we ought to eat the sort of food that relishes most. Why does that not apply to our minds as well? Now I am naturally melancholy, and need something to raise my spirits. Don’t you think that the Bible is almost too sober, dreary reading for such persons—at least until they begin to grow old?”



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Mrs. Lewis turned a loving, pitying look on the pretty young wife, and whispered a prayer for her as she answered:

“Jeremiah and David did not find it a gloomy book, for they both said this: ‘Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.’ My dear, I want to put my testimony with theirs, that in a long lifetime—part of it spent in every variety of worldly pleasure—that there is nothing, nothing that has or can give me the joy that the words of my dear Lord do. I claim no credit that it is so. I believe that the same sweet experience will be given to all who truly desire it.”

“I can’t agree with that idea, either,” said Mrs. Brown, “that the best kind of food is what one relishes most. My children relish pie and cake and candies wonderfully, but I know it is not good for them to eat much of them. When they have no appetite for good bread and milk, and such nourishing food, I know there is something amiss with them—they are sick—and did you ever notice this? Children who are allowed to live mostly on these knickknacks do not relish plain food, and do not thrive. The text that was last read did not say that we were to read the Bible as a duty, but to desire it. If we have no appetite for the spiritual nourishment that is best for us to grow on, I do not know why we are not sick Christians?”

“It strikes me,” said Mrs. Peterson, who had watched in vain for an opportunity to speak before, “that while you are talking about the Bible being food for us, making us grow, and all that, my text about meditation comes in; David says, ‘I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation.’ I can speak from experience about that; I know it makes a sight of difference how you read. I had quite a sick spell once, a sort of low fever, and when I began to get better I was so weak I couldn’t eat hardly anything; I heard the woman that took care of me tell the doctor that if I didn’t eat more I’d starve as sure as the world; and the doctor said, ‘no I wouldn’t, that the amount a body ate wasn’t the main thing, it was what was digested, and that it did mischief to eat more than one could digest; so I kept on taking my little bit of beef-tea a good many times a day, but I was very weak for a long time: I couldn’t even hold my Bible to read it, and I began to fret about it; I was used to reading my two or three chapters a day, and I felt sort o’ lost without them. One day my next neighbour brought in what she called a ‘Silent Comforter,’ and hung it on the wall; it had only three or four texts on a page in large letters, so that I could read it without glasses. Well, what a comfort that was, to be sure. I had nothing to do all day but lie there and think of those verses; it seemed like a new Bible. Every morning they turned a leaf over, and I was more anxious to see what my new verses would be, than to eat my breakfast. When I got a little stronger I wrote down everything

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I got out of them. Well, I tell you it was just wonderful how much there was in them. I had more good of the Bible, it seemed to me, that three weeks than I ever did before. Then I remembered how I used to read my chapters, my mind half the time on something else, most always in a hurry, thinking it was time I was skimming my milk or at my baking, and wondering whether I should bake apple pies or pumpkin that day; think of it! how awful it was to mix up things like that; but then I thought I must read my three chapters anyhow. Well, I didn't do like that any more when I got around again. I called to mind what the doctor said about eating, and says I, that's exactly the way it is with the Bible, it has got to be digested; so I took what time I could and put all my mind on a small portion, and tried to keep it with me all day. Now I don't want to be boasting about myself, but I do say I love the Lord as I didn't used to, and it all comes of his blessed Book. There, I've talked too long! I always do."

"Can we not now have a number of texts that tell us from the Word itself how it is to be used?" said Mrs. Lewis. And these were promptly given, such as, "Search the Scriptures." "Teach me thy statutes." "Great peace have they that love thy law." "That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. And shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." "I hope in thy Word." "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word there is no light in them." "Thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." "I trust in thy Word." "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently." "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

"Here is another bit from Joseph Cook that I think will help us," said Mrs. Parker. "If every five years you can mark a Bible thoroughly, and memorise what is marked, it will be your best diary. You can do little better in reading than to fill the margins of a copy of the Scriptures once every five years full of the records of the deepest inmost in your souls, to be intelligible to yourself and to no one else. Shut the door on that record. Enter into your closet and keep your secrets with Almighty God."

"Why, I read a most delightful book lately called 'Daniel Quorm'" said Mrs. Lee, "that brought out the same idea. Daniel marked his Bible in that way—marked texts that expressed his state of mind or heart at the time and put the date in the margin. It occurred to me that it would be an excellent plan. One could judge in looking over a Bible so marked whether they were advancing or going back in their Christian experience."



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“I heard Ralph Wells say, in a Sabbath-school convention last summer,” said Miss Day, “that it is he that doeth His will that is to know concerning the doctrine, and that no spectacles are so precious for right understanding of the Word as a conscience void of offence toward God and man.’ He also said in reference to Bible study, ‘Wonderful is the light one gains by simply looking out the references.’ Another good thing that I remember from him, and that I have practised ever since is, that we ’ought to learn a verse of Scripture each day.”

“There is one precious way in which the Scriptures are to be used that has not been mentioned yet,” said one who had been silent thus far, but whose face expressed lively sympathy with all she heard, “we do not get the comfort from the promises that we might. The Lord says, ‘Put me in remembrance, let us plead together.’ I think we ought to take advantage of such a gracious permission, and bring a promise when we come before the Lord in prayer.

“I had an old neighbour once who owned bank stock to the amount of fifty thousand dollars, and yet he got it into his head that if he were not very saving, he should go to the poor-house. This grew upon him so, that he shut up all the rooms in his house, which was large and pleasant, and he and his wife lived in the kitchen, hovering in the coldest weather over a small fire because he thought he ought not to afford any more, when he had only to go to the bank and present his cheque to get all he needed. So we have only to put our names in the promises and plead them, and they are fulfilled to us. Instead of that, we go mourning about in the kitchen and down cellar, instead of sitting in the ‘chamber of peace.’”

“I am sorry to say that our hour is more than up,” Mrs. Lewis said. “Let us glance over what we have learned in the study of the Word: We need the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We are to pray for light on it. We are to love it, obey it, meditate on it, search it, desire it, talk of it, try all things by it, sound our experience by it, plead its promises, commit it to memory, trust in it. It is to be our food; no other food will feed an immortal soul. It is to be our joy, to give to us comfort, peace, faith, hope, patience, wisdom, and I will put the cap-stone on this beautiful arch by—’I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.’”

BUCKWHEAT CAKES.

It was a little house, and a little new family; just two of them, and just six months since they were made into a family, and set up housekeeping. As a matter of course everything in the house was new also. One may prate of antiquities, and the associations clinging about them that render them beautiful, but after all, every couple will always look back with delight to the time all their surroundings were fresh and pretty, yes, even though they were not pretty; there is a charm in a new pine table, or a bright

new tin pan. This house was a little gem, from the delicately appointed guest chamber to the cement-lined cellar.



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Mr. and Mrs. Philip Thorne sat at their breakfast-table sparkling with new china and silver, in a dining-room so cheery with pretty carpet, plants, singing-bird, warmth and sunshine, that the beggar-girl who peeped in at the window might well wonder "if heaven were nicer than that." The coffee-urn sent up a fragrant little cloud as Mrs. Thorne turned it into delicate cups with just the right quantity of cream and sugar, so that it was just the right colour that coffee should be. The steak was tender and juicy, the baked potatoes done to a turn, and yet there was a slight cloud hanging over that table that did not come from the coffee-urn.

"Joanna does not understand making buckwheat cakes very well, I imagine," said Mr. Thorne, eyeing the doubtful looking pile she had just deposited on the table.

"Joanna did not make these, I made them with my own hands," responded Mrs. Thorne. Said hands were very white and small, but truth to tell, they were not much more skilled than were Joanna's.

"Then it must be the baking that spoils them," Mr. Thorne said.

"Why, Philip, how do you know that they are spoiled? I'm sure they look all right," said his wife.

"That is just where you and I do not agree, my dear. They are white-looking, they ought to be a rich brown."

"Whoever heard of brown buckwheat cakes; they are always very light coloured."

"I beg your pardon, but they are not, as far as my observation goes," said her husband; "then these are thick, they ought to be thin and delicate-looking."

"You are thinking of something else, Philip," said Mrs. Thorne, patronisingly.

"Buckwheat cakes never look differently from these; I have noticed them at a great many places."

"You never ate them at my mother's or you could not say so, my dear."

Mrs. Thorne stirred her coffee vigorously. Was Philip going to turn out to be one of those detestable men who always go about telling how "their mother" used to do; "my mother," as if there was no other mother in the world that amounted to anything.

"I always have noticed," she said, "that a person imagines, after being from home a few years that there is nothing quite so good as he used to get at home; even the very same things never tasted quite as they used to. The reason is plain: taste changes as one grows older."



This very sage remark was just a little annoying to Mr. Thorne; he was ten years the senior of his wife, and did not like allusions to “growing older.” “No one need try to convince me,” he answered quite warmly, “that I shall ever cease to enjoy the dishes my mother used to get up if I live to be as old as Methuselah! She is the best cook I ever knew, and she never made cakes like these.”

“My mother is a pattern housekeeper,” said Mrs. Thorne, with a little flash of her blue eye, “and her cakes look precisely like these.”

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating, you will admit, I suppose. Joanna need bring in no more cakes for me; they have a sour, bitter taste which is decidedly unpalatable.”



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And he arose from the table, passed into the hall and out of the front door without his usual leave-taking.

Satan once worked immense mischief by means of an apple; now he must needs come into that pretty dining-room and hide in a plate of buckwheat cakes. The first approach to a quarrel in this household, and the first buckwheat cakes of the season! The truth is, when Mr. Thorne had said the day before, "What if we have some buckwheat cakes?" that Ruey did not feel all the confidence in her ability that her answer implied; but then there was her receipt-book; "they could not be difficult," she reasoned. The receipt said: "Mix warm water, flour and yeast, and let rise until morning,"—these instructions she had faithfully followed, and here was the result.

Ruey Thorne, unlike some young wives, did not think it interesting to profess utter ignorance of domestic matters; on the contrary, she had an ambition to excel as a housekeeper. She had a general knowledge of many things, but every housekeeper knows that practice only brings perfection. It is one thing to watch Bridget making bread a few times, and another thing entirely to make it one's self. So much of Ruey's knowledge was theory, not yet reduced to practice, that she imagined herself much more skilful than she really was, consequently she did not claim her husband's forbearance on account of inexperience. Philip was not rich, and she had a desire to be an economical wife, so she did not employ an experienced cook and chambermaid, but tried to accomplish it all by the aid of a raw German girl.

"Of course I shall want to direct all my work," she had remarked with housewifely pride. If Philip had only understood it all a little better, he need not have brought out his mother's veteran cakes in such cruel comparison with these very young ones.

That day was not a very comfortable one for either of them. The blue eyes flashed out a tear occasionally, and she told herself, "Who would have thought that Philip cared so much for eating! His mother's cakes indeed! As if anybody could equal my dear precious mother in anything!" While he told himself that he "wouldn't have thought Ruey would have flashed up in that way for so slight a cause, and to him, too, humph! He would just like to have her taste his mother's cakes; it would open her eyes a little."

Later in the day they told the same parties, "I'm just ashamed of myself that I got spunky about such a little thing, I wish Philip would come. I'll have muffins for tea just to please him. I know I can make muffins;" and "Poor little Ruey, I went off like a bear this morning; I must hurry home; I'll just step in at Barnard's and get that little panel of lilies for her."

So the muffins and lilies were laid, peace offerings on the domestic altar, and the skies were clear again.



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The next morning Ruey betook herself to her neat little kitchen to reconstruct those cakes. She would see if it were not possible to suit her husband in this. "Let me see, he said they were too thick; I will thin them then. He said they were sour and bitter; sugar is sweet and ought to remedy that." So in went the water to thin them, and the sugar to sweeten them. "He said," she further mused, "that they ought to be brown; brown they shall be, if fire will do it." So she proceeded to make a furious fire, in order to heat the griddle. "Now," she said to Joanna, "carry in the coffee and chops, then come and bake the cakes."

The husband and wife were engaged in cheerful chat when the first instalment of cakes arrived; a few crumpled, burnt scraps of something.

"Why, what is this?" said Mr. Thorne.

"*Cakes!*" said Joanna, triumphantly. "She fixed 'em;" pointing to Mrs. Thorne.

The two looked at the cakes, then at each other, and broke into peals of laughter.

"The griddle must be too hot," said Mrs. Thorne, and she vanished into the kitchen. She scraped the smoking griddle, and washed it and greased it, then she stirred the grey liquid and placed two or three spoonfuls on the griddle, then she essayed to turn them—sticking plaster never stuck tighter than those cakes adhered to that griddle; she worked carefully, she insinuated her knife under just the outer edge of the cake, then gradually approached the centre, but when the final flop came, they went into little sticky hopeless heaps. "They are too thin," she ejaculated. "Joanna, bring flour. Now we shall have it all right." Then another set took their places on the griddle; these held together, they turned—triumph at last! but they did not look inviting. Mrs. Thorne tasted one, she then made a wry face. "Joanna," she said, with forced calmness, "you can throw this batter away." Then she went back to the dining-room, looking very hot and red, and said meekly to Philip: "The cakes are a failure this morning, we will try it again tomorrow."

Philip, who had lost himself in the morning paper, roused up to say:

"Don't trouble about them any more; we have enough else that is nice."

"The cakes will be all right another time, Philip; there was a mistake made, they were too thin this morning; mother never makes them thin."

Philip looked as if he would like to say:

"I don't care what your mother does; my mother's cakes are nice and thin, and can't be beaten;" but he didn't.



Mrs. Thorne had no intention of abandoning buckwheat cakes as a failure, not she; it was not her way to give up easily and yield to discouragement; difficulties only strengthened her determination to conquer.

“I’ll see if I am to be vanquished by a buckwheat cake,” she said, studying her receipt-book that same evening. “I shouldn’t wonder if there was not yeast enough in those others,” she said, as she mixed some fresh butter and added an extra quantity of yeast. “Keep them warm while rising,” the receipt read. She placed them near the register near the dining-room and retired with a complacent feeling that now all the conditions had been surely met.



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“The total depravity of inanimate things.” Mrs. Thorne had reason to believe in that doctrine next morning, when she entered her dining-room and found a small sea of batter on her carpet, surrounding the pail and widening in all directions, though this stuff could hardly be called “inanimate;” it oozed from under the pail cover in a most animated manner.

“It is light, at least; that is one consolation.” said Mrs. Thorne, trying to be philosophical as she ruefully surveyed her carpet, then hastily calling Joanna to clean it up—“Philip should not see that.” When the cakes were brought in this morning, Ruey cast a little triumphant look at Philip. By dint of a hot griddle and much grease they had a streak of brown here and there.

“Horrible!” exclaimed Mrs. Thorne, after her first mouthful; “these cakes are sourer than vinegar.” Philip should not be the first to speak of any lack, as if she were not supposed to know more about such matters than he. “What does ail them? I’m sure I made them exactly right this time. I must tell Joanna to put some sugar in them.”

“My dear wife, if you will allow me, I would suggest soda instead of sugar.”

“Really!” responded Ruey, her pride touched in an instant—there it was, he actually thought he knew more about cooking than she did—“and pray how do you happen to be so wise? You must have assisted your mother in the kitchen,” she said, with a slight curl of her pretty lip. “Up there in the country, boys do those things, I suppose.”

Philip was nettled. Ruey had cast little slurs on his country home before, when she got her spirit up. He controlled himself, however, only saying:

“I don’t profess to understand the science of cookery, but I do know a little chemistry, and understand that an acid requires an alkali to neutralize it.”

Mrs. Thorne went straight to the kitchen—shutting the door after her with the least perceptible bang—and sprinkled a liberal allowance of soda into the batter, and then returned to the dining-room to await developments. These cakes were yellow and spotted, and savoured of hot lye. Mr. Thorne went bravely through a few mouthfuls until he encountered a lump of soda; the wry face that followed was wholly involuntary.

“I declare they are horrid!” exclaimed Ruey, bursting into tears. “I knew soda would spoil them, bitter stuff!”

Mr. Thorne did not then attempt to show why soda would not spoil them, if properly used; grieved at his wife’s distress, and becoming hygienical, he said:

“Don’t have anything more to do with these wretched things. They are unwholesome anyway, and we are better off without them. Give them up.”



“Never!” said Ruey, resolutely. When Ruey spoke in that way, Philip knew she meant it, and he sighed at the prospect of discordant breakfasts through a series of experiments. A text about “A dinner of herbs” floated through his mind as he walked abstractedly toward his store.



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After Mrs. Thorne had dried her tears she walked to the kitchen, and with her own hands scraped that acid, alkaline mess into the drain.

“Buckwheat cakes are very mysterious and trying things,” she remarked to herself, “but I shall never give up till I can make them like Philip’s mother’s.”

“I find,” said Mr. Thorne that evening, “that I must start to-morrow morning for New York, and will need a very early breakfast. Let Joanna just make me a cup of coffee. No cakes, remember,” he laughingly added. “You may have a whole week to experiment upon them in my absence.”

Ruey watched him down the street in the gray dawn of the next morning as he hurried to the depot, and a bright idea came into her head.

Why not take a little trip on her own account? She might run up to father Thorne’s; why not be visiting as well as moping here alone? She wished she had thought of it and mentioned it to Philip, but it was better not; he would probably have thought she could not go so far alone, but what was a day’s journey when it could all be accomplished before dark; then it was going to be a bright day, she could see that by the rosy flush in the east; just the day for a journey. Besides, Philip could not go to visit them this winter, and how delighted they would be to have her come and break up the monotony of their lives. She glanced at the clock; only six o’clock; she would have ample time to get ready for the eight o’clock train, the dress she had on would do to travel in—just slip her black cashmere into her satchel, and she was ready. Yes, she would go.

Artful Ruey! Down in her heart she had a secret reason for this visit, that did not come up to the surface with the others. She wanted to know exactly how Philip’s mother made those cakes. She could not be happy until she succeeded. Here appeared an old trait of the girl Ruey—almost a fault: settled persistency in accomplishing her ends, a determination to walk over all obstacles, however large.

It took much lively stirring about to accomplish it, but the house was put in order, and Mrs. Thorne reached the depot in time for the eight o’clock train; the happy Joanna being dismissed to her home for a week, after carrying her mistress’s satchel to the depot. Mrs. Thorne had visited the old homestead with her husband at the time of their marriage, and looked forward with real pleasure at the prospect before her.

“Won’t they be surprised, though, to see me coming without Philip,” and then she smiled to think how she was whizzing along in one direction, and Philip in another, while he thought her snug at home. There was a spice of adventure about this going off by herself that she enjoyed exceedingly.



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There is no more delightful place to step into, than the home of two old people, who are young, and who love you; they have their “hearts at leisure,” can take time to pet you, and are interested in the smallest details of your lives. Philip’s father and mother belonged to this type; the juices of their natures were not dried up. They received Ruey with open arms, and followed her about with their eyes, apparently fearing she would vanish as unexpectedly as she had appeared—“Philip’s wife” caring enough about them to come so far to see them in the middle of winter, all alone, too—not many daughters-in-law like that. They hung upon her words, and brought out the choicest of everything and urged it upon her. At bed-time mother Thorne came up to “tuck her up,” “just as I did Philip twenty years ago,” she said; then the sweet old face bent over Ruey’s for a moment and left a goodnight kiss, and “The Lord bless and keep you, dear child.” Ruey’s heart went out to her, and from that hour Philip’s mother was her mother.

Breakfast was all ready the next morning when she came down, and she sat in Philip’s old seat, and the sun looked in at the east window, and a stray ray fell upon her, and burnished the gold of her hair, so that she looked more like an angel than ever to those dear old eyes. How happy they were—Philip’s other self in that vacant chair. Moreover, she ate those famous cakes. It was all true, they were brown; they were thin and delicate, and light and sweet, and tender, the most delicious morsels, with the amber maple syrup, that she had ever tasted. She must confess it to herself, they were better than her mother’s; city people could not concoct such amazing cakes as these; then the fragrant golden butter, how she wished poor Philip were there to get some of all these good things.

She had not proposed that her mother-in-law should know that there was anything in the universe that she was ignorant of in the housekeeping line, but now she resolved to lay down all her pride and learn whatever she could, so she followed mother Thorne as she trotted in and out from pantry to kitchen, initiating herself into the mysteries of this and that dish, and storing up many a lesson of housewifely skill. It all came out after a little; the struggle she had been through with those “horrible cakes.” Father Thorne laughed until the tears came, to hear his pretty daughter-in-law naively narrate her many grievous failures in that line, enlarging not a little on Philip’s wry faces, when he tried to eat her cakes to save her feelings. She had confessed it all, now she felt free to watch the process of “setting the cakes” and to ask all the questions she pleased.

“What made mine so horribly bitter once?” she asked.

“Why, you put too much yeast in, I suppose.”

“I only put in a teacupful,” said Ruey.

Then mother Thorne shook her sides with laughter, as she said:

“Why, child, that ought to make cakes enough for two dozen people; you only need about two table-spoonfuls for the quantity you would make.”



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“What made them run all over creation when I left them by the fire to rise?”

“Why, maybe you didn’t have room enough for them to rise, and they must go somewhere, you know.”

“What made them sour?”

“They stood too long after they got light, before they were baked. Very likely they would have raised in time, if you had left them on the table, say.”

“What do you do when they are sour?” asked Ruey.

“Put in a little soda.”

“I did. I put soda in, and you never saw such looking things as they were, yellow and spotted, and ugh! how they tasted. Philip nearly choked himself on one of the lumps of soda in his cake.”

“Don’t you know,” said mother Thorne, indulging in another laugh, “that you must not put in but a little, and you must dissolve that in a spoonful of warm water and then stir it in?”

Ruey studied those cakes as thoroughly as she ever had a problem, or a French verb. She insisted on setting them at night, and baking them every morning during her stay, and she was finally pronounced an adept in the work. This was not all she did. She put new life in the silent old house, sung all her songs, read the newspapers aloud, made a cap for mother Thorne, and a marvellous tidy for the best chair, besides telling them all about Philip, as if she could tell them anything new. But the pleasant visit must come to an end: it was almost time for Philip’s return.

“Daughter, I am really afraid to have you set out this morning,” Mr. Thorne said on the day that Ruey had fixed upon for her return. “It has been snowing hard all night, and if it keeps on at this rate the railroads will be blocked up.”

“Oh, father! I must start; Philip will be home to-night, and what will he think if he does not find me there?” Ruey said eagerly.

“Better,” said the wise old father, “better stay and telegraph to Ralph.”

“Oh, no, indeed, that would spoil all the fun; you know I will get home at four and Philip at seven. I shall have tea all ready and sit there demurely waiting for him, and he never will imagine that I have been off on a frolic until I tell him.” And so she started, with many misgivings, however, on the part of the old people.

“She’s such a bright little thing,” father Thorne said to his wife when they were toasting their feet at the fire that night before going to bed.



“It’s like seeing the crocuses and daffodils coming up, or getting a sniff at the hyacinth, to have her light down here like a pretty bird, to sing and chatter to us. Philip always did know just the right thing to do; he couldn’t have found a better wife if he had searched the whole land through.”

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The train that carried Ruyi thundered on its way, as though it disdained the thought that the snowflakes that filled the air could have aught to do with its progress. When the first tiny white feather came and softly laid itself down on the iron rails, did it secretly exult that it was one of a myriad that should rear a gigantic barrier before which this puffing fiery monster should stand powerless, and acknowledge the soft bits of down master of the situation? The storm raged through the day, increasing each hour in strength and fury. The long train began to plod in a laboured, tired way, after the manner of mortals, stopping often, while snow-ploughs in advance cleared the track. Darkness came down and still the fearful mass of whiteness piled itself in huge billows about them. The snow-ploughs were unavailing; as fast as they cleared a space the wind surged down and filled it up in a trice. The mighty engine struggled in vain to press forward, but only crept at snail's pace and finally came to a dead halt. There they were fast shut out from the world. They could do nothing but wait for morning. Most of the passengers might not have resigned themselves to sleep so contentedly had they known that they were in the midst of the woods many miles from any town of much size, not near, even, to one of the straggling hamlets that dotted the country.

When the morning dawned they found themselves literally enclosed in snow—snow above, beneath, to right, to left, behind, before—a beleaguered host. Those who understood the situation looked appalled. The world was well represented there in that restless company that stared from their windows into snow. How strange that one particular class did not set out on this journey, but each class had its type, as if some one had gone about, and gathering up handfuls of people stowed them on this train. They were all there, the woman with five children and the one with a lap-dog, and all acted out their individual natures more fully than they might have done under other circumstances; many lost that reticence that is supposed to belong to well-bred people on a journey, and told out their private affairs. The man of business knit his brows and said that he “must reach C—— by a certain time or the consequences would be most disastrous.” The fashionable lady wrapped herself in her furs and bestowed withering looks on the crying baby. The grumbler grumbled, and was sure somebody was to blame somewhere. The funny man bubbled and sparkled as usual, and sent rays akin to sunshine over lugubrious faces. The profane man opened his mouth and out came toads and scorpions, and the tobacco-chewers made dark pools on the floor to vex the souls of cleanly people. By the close of the day they were a very forlorn, hungry people.



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There was one among them, though, who seemed to rise above it all; a plain-looking woman with an unfashionable bonnet, and a face like a benediction. She drew a little worn Bible from her satchel, and read it awhile by the dim light. Ruey wondered if she did not get something from that book that made her patient when others were not—that sent her to relieve the tired mother, by caring for the fretful baby a long time; and when another, a sad mother, unable longer to control her grief, moaned out, “My child will die before I can get to her,” this woman was the one who went to her with words of comfort. Ruey’s poor perturbed heart envied that calm face. She felt well-nigh distracted, not so much at the fact that she was cold and hungry, but what would Philip think when he returned and found her gone? No one knew where; not even a neighbour had the least intimation of her whereabouts. What a night of horrors he must have had! Oh, to be obliged to sit there and wait when she felt like flying! She heard the woman with the Bible whisper to the poor mother, “Pray; that will surely help you.” “Perhaps it would help me,” thought Ruey. She was not used to praying, but she needed help. So she put her tired head down, and whispered a request for deliverance.

What did Philip do? He essayed to walk into his house. The door was locked, and there was no response to his repeated rings. He tried other doors with no better success; then he visited his neighbours. They could give him no clue. He came back and stood in a dazed way on his own steps, looking up and down the street. He went down into the town and peered into the stores, but no Ruey. He called upon her most intimate friends—they didn’t know she was absent. He racked his brain; was she out to tea? but she expected him home that very day. As the evening advanced he began to be thoroughly alarmed. Perhaps she had met with some horrible fate in her own home. He forced the door and entered. The pretty rooms were in exquisite order. He searched wildly about for some scrap of paper that might explain the mystery. Wherever she was, she had evidently been gone some time; the fires were dead and cold. He rushed down into the town again and consulted detectives, who suggested elopement as an explanation. Whereupon his anger rose to a white heat, and he left them.

Another idea struck him. Joanna must know something of this strange affair. She lived in the country. The polar wave had, by this time, reached that region. In the face of a blinding storm Mr. Thorne drove at a rapid pace to Joanna’s home. The sleepy girl, when roused, could at first give but an exasperating “Nix” to his eager questions. Finally from her broken English he gathered that her mistress had gone away on the cars; had directed her to come back to her duties that very afternoon. She did so, only to find the house closed.



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Here was a little light, but it did not relieve his perplexity. Ruey's father's home was in a distant State. She certainly would not go so far away in the dead of winter. He could recall no acquaintances living near. Had she become insane and wandered away? But she evidently meant to return that day. Why did she not come? Where was she? The cold sweat stood upon his face when he remembered stories of abductions. He went to the depot and remained the whole night, watching the trains that came from anywhere. Morning dawned; she had not come. As a last resort, he would telegraph to his own home. But why would she go there, and without him? It seemed a useless thing, but he did it. After an age of waiting he received answer—"Ruey left here for home yesterday morning on the seven o'clock train." He soon learned that said train was snow-bound a hundred miles away. His anxiety now assumed a new phase. Would she starve or freeze before he could reach her? There was no time to be lost. Supplying himself with provisions, blankets, *etc.*, he took the first northerly train, travelled as far as he could by rail, then hired conveyances to carry him to where men and snow-ploughs were cutting a road to the imprisoned cars. Mr. Thorne joined them in their work. His strength seemed superhuman. Muscular men were amazed at his swift, dexterous movements. All day they toiled. The following night was a terrible one to the heart-sick passengers. The fires were out; not a morsel of food to eat. Ruey, chilled and weak, could not even find relief in sleep. Her fortitude nearly deserted her. The tears had their way. She lay curled in her seat, a wretched, disconsolate little heap, when a brown-bearded man, muffled in furs, entered, flashing the light of his lantern here and there, eagerly scrutinizing the faces. He paused at Ruey's seat, an indefinable something attracting him, though the face was covered by two hands. Suddenly she looked up, and there were Philip's dear eyes gazing into hers. No questions were asked or answered just then. She was gathered in his arms for an instant; then he wrapped her in blankets, brought food, and nursed the colour back to the white cheeks.

Then there were long stories told on both sides, and Ruey laughed and cried by turns, and all the passengers were in lively sympathy with the little lady who had found her husband, or rather whose husband had found her.

When Mr. and Mrs. Thorne next sat at their breakfast table it was graced by a plate of cakes that might have come straight from mother Thorne's kitchen; and some of the home butter was there, sweet as roses; some of the golden maple syrup, too, from the trees Philip had played under; and Ruey sat triumphant, with a little air that said—

"Didn't I tell you I'd do it?"

"Ruey," said Philip, "I do believe that 'elopement' of yours paid, notwithstanding the outlay of doubts and fears, money and tears, to say nothing of the muscle I put into that huge drift."

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Ruey knew why it “paid,” though she didn’t tell her husband just then; she should never forget that night, nor the plain woman with the old bonnet who carried the untroubled face and the worn book. Deep in her heart a new purpose had taken root; an ambition not only to make cakes like Philip’s mother, but to attain to that blessed something which made this other woman so different from those about her.

FAITH AND GASOLINE.

Mrs. Faith Vincent was crying; there was no denying it, veritable tears were in her eyes and on her cheeks all the time she was bathing the plump limbs of her baby and robing her in dainty garments of flannel and embroidery. Then she struggled through the notes of a sad lullaby, and now the long lashes lay quietly on the pretty cheek, and the fair young mamma was free to lay her head on the side of the crib and indulge in a good cry.

The clue to all this trouble was condensed in a sentence that the young husband let fall just as he left for his business a few moments before—“I see no other way, my dear: you will be obliged to take baby and go to Uncle Joshua’s for the summer. The extreme heat will come on now very soon, and then neither you nor Daisy will be able to endure it in this room.”

Now that would not be a very appalling statement to make to most wives, that they must pack up and get out of the hot dusty city to a farmhouse in the country, even though they did leave their husbands sweltering behind, but there were several points to be taken into consideration in this case. In the first place, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent had not yet learned how to maintain a separate existence. Life apart from each other was a tame, spiritless thing, simply to be endured, not enjoyed; then, too, Uncle Joshua’s home was not a Paradise, although he and Aunt Patty were kind and pleasant. Faith had vivid memories of a few weeks spent there soon after her marriage. They lived on their farm, two simple-minded old people, spending the evening of their lives in quiet happiness; but the place was dreary, remote from any town or neighbours. She had found it pleasant when her husband was with her and the two took long rambles, or spent the day under the trees, reading and talking, but how could she endure it alone? rising with the birds to an early breakfast, then an interminable day stretching before her, the long afternoon of silence broken only by the click of Aunt Patty’s knitting-needles, the ticking of the old clock, and the hum of the bees; for these old people had lived too long in quiet on these silent hills to make much conversation. She could not see herself going through the same monotonous round as each long day dragged its slow length, while miles stretched between her and her beloved, toiling on in the distant city. The dreary separation—that was the hard part of it, after all.

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It was just two years since Frank Vincent brought home his bride. He had succeeded in securing rooms in a pleasant boarding-house in one of the wide, airy streets of the city; he felt justified in going to the utmost of his means in providing an attractive home; for his Faith had been delicately reared by a wealthy uncle who had frowned upon the love-making of the young bookkeeper, handsome, intelligent, and with unblemished reputation though he was, and held a good position in one of the largest and oldest firms in the city. The uncle had more ambitious plans for his favourite niece. He did not forbid the marriage, but gave Faith to understand that if she persisted in marrying a poor man, when a good half million awaited her acceptance, she did it at her own peril, not a penny of his should go to eke out the scanty living of a poor clerk. The end of it all was a quiet wedding one morning in her uncle's parlour, and a hasty flitting away of the young couple—away from ominous looks and cold politeness, out into their own bright world, where no dark shadows in the shape of grim mercenary uncles should ever cross their path.

It was not without many misgivings that the young husband conducted his wife to her apartments, for neat and pretty though they were, they were in marked contrast with the roomy, elegant mansion where she had spent her life, and so was the noisy, dusty city with the beautiful, quiet old town where trees and flowers and birds and pure air and room to breathe in, made existence doubly delightful. The anxiety was needless; never was child more pleased with play-house than the young bride with her new home.

Life glided peacefully on for many months, then the clouds began to gather in the sky of the financial world. Business men were anxious, and retrenchment was the order of the day. Among others to draw in sail was the well-established firm whom Mr. Vincent had served for many years. The salaries of their employe's were cut down, in some instances to a mere pittance. Upon none did the blow fall more heavily than these two inexperienced ones who had made no provision for any such change in their affairs. They were dismayed; Mr. Vincent tried in vain to secure some more lucrative position, but he soon began to feel that he was most fortunate in such times to have any assured income. The outgo was greater than the income, and it was plain that they must seek a less expensive home. They made many trips to the suburbs in the hope of obtaining board at a price that would be within their means, in some pleasant rural home, but no such home opened its doors; evidently the dwellers in the suburbs, when they did take boarders, meant to make it "pay." Then they searched the papers and read all the advertisements under the head of "Boarding" within the city. They climbed long flights of stairs, and interviewed landladies, and looked at rooms with the customary faded carpets and shabby wall-paper and musty smell, in narrow streets withal, that seemed



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to Faith like prisons. In vain they tried to make their tastes and their purse agree. They had to come to it, a third-story room, faded carpet, shabby paper, and hard bed. It was a great change, especially when they descended three dark stairways into a comfortless basement dining-room, and were served with sour bread and strong butter, muddy coffee and tough, steak. It tried their fortitude sometimes severely, but they were young and brave; they had each other and dear little Daisy; that was almost enough for this world.

One can't have everything, so Faith stirred the fire and put a bright spread on the bare table, and another bit of bright colour on the wooden rocking-chair, so that if they had not been forced to live by eating, things would not have been so bad after all. Spring, though, brought troubles; the sun shining squarely upon them through the winter had served to brighten up things and save coal; but now he became an enemy, pouring his fierce rays nearly all the long day into the two windows, old paper shades filled with pin holes the only protection against him. Large companies of flies, too, arrived daily, and evidently came to stay; the butter turned to oil; eatables grew unpalatable; the whole house seemed stuffy and unendurable.

It was one of those warm spring mornings when vital energies flag, that Mr. and Mrs. Vincent toiled up the third flight of stairs; the halls filled with execrable odours of fried ham and cheap coffee; each busy with their own thoughts, possibly of green fields, apple-blossoms, spring violets, tables with damask and silver, cool, inviting rooms, and other equally tantalising suggestions. Faith, at the top, panting and pale as any lily, drew from her husband the exclamation:

"My dear, you cannot endure it any longer; something must be done."

That something seemed all the more imperative, since Daisy was beginning to droop and have feverish days over the advent of each little white tooth. Many perplexed conferences followed.

"You see," said Mr. Vincent, trying to speak cheerfully, "one of us orphans ought to have married some one who had a father and mother, and an old homestead to go to in an emergency like this. As it is, I do not see any other way but for you to take baby and go to my uncle Joshua's for the summer. You will be made welcome, at least, and have good food and good air."

"What if we go to housekeeping in a small way?" Faith suggested.

"It would have to be in a very small way indeed," laughed Frank. "Why, the birds of the air have more to set up housekeeping with than we; they have furnished rooms, rent free. Think of rent, furniture, and all the pots and kettles and pans that housekeeping



requires, besides wages to a girl. Never do, wine, my salary wouldn't cover. I have often heard people say it was much cheaper to board than to keep house."

"But we might take a small house in the suburbs and furnish it by degrees, and I could do my own work," persisted Faith.



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“My poor little white lily,” said Frank, “you know not whereof you speak, Think of a little hot house, you broiling over a cook-stove, and baby crying for your care; besides, my dear, you are not accustomed to work. I shouldn’t wonder, now, if I knew just about as much as you do about cooking. I think I can see you with blistered fingers and aching head, studying cook-books. No, Faith, we shall be obliged to live in two places this summer, I fear. I know it will be lonely for you at uncle Joshua’s, but for your own sake and the dear baby’s, it must be done. Let us be of good cheer, and perhaps by fall business will revive and my salary be increased, or I can get a better position. Now good-bye, my blossoms, I must be gone,” and he sprang away down the stairs hastily, lest Faith should see that his courage was more than half assumed, for the prospect before him was dismal in the extreme.

What Mrs. Vincent did when her husband left her we already know, yet she was not one to sit down in weeping despair before a difficulty until every energy had been put forth to remove it. She sat long and pondered the question; no light came, although she bent her white brows into a deep frown in perplexed thought.

“If I could only keep house,” she mused. “Frank imagines I know nothing of cooking. I’d just like to have him eat some bread and puffy biscuits of my making. I am so glad I never told him that I took lessons of Dinah all one winter before we were married. I’ll surprise that boy some day with my knowledge. If it were not for the horrid heat of the cook-stove, I know I could keep house nicely, and save money, too, I dare say; but, my head never would endure a hot kitchen, I suppose.”

Just here the clock chimed out ten, reminding Faith of an engagement at the dressmaker’s. Leaving Daisy with her young nurse, she was soon on her way, not to “Madame Aubrey’s,” but to plain Mrs. Macpherson’s, who lived up two flights of stairs, and was nevertheless “a good fitter,” and kept her rooms and herself as neat as wax.

While Faith waited, and the busy shears slipped and snipped her wrapper, she had time to look about her. The rooms wore such a pleasant, home-like air; they were cool and comfortable-looking, and not a fly to be seen. Faith, reared to the finest and best of everything, now looked with almost covetous eyes on this poor, plain home.

“What a cosy place you have here, Mrs. Macpherson,” she said, and she wearily leaned her head back in the comfortable old rocking-chair, newly covered with chintz. “It is so nice, I would like to stay.”

Mrs. Macpherson glanced up in surprise, the tones were such tired, sad ones. She noticed for the first time the dark rings under Faith’s eyes, and the eyes themselves looked suspiciously red. Her motherly heart went out to the “poor young thing” straightway.

“Something troubles you, child,” she said, “or you don’t feel well. Can’t I help you?”



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The tender tones almost made the tears come anew; and Faith, contrary to her reticent nature, found herself telling kind-hearted Mrs. Macpherson just what did trouble her.

“Poor dear!” Mrs. Macpherson said, “that is hard; if I can’t help you, I know one who can. Why don’t you go straight to the dear Lord and tell him all about it? You see everything is at his disposal. You know the way to him, don’t you?”

Faith nodded assent, and then said despairingly, “It never seemed to me that God would condescend to think about the small affairs of our everyday life.”

“But, Mrs. Vincent, you surely read in the Word how he numbers the hairs of our heads, and he says himself if he gives thought to such little things as lilies and grass, he’ll surely look after us. Doesn’t the Good Shepherd care when the sheep are worried? Indeed he does. Would you stay up-stairs when you heard your dear baby crying? Oh! but you’d run fast to her. He says himself that he is our Father, and we are his children, and is he going to stay away off up in heaven and not care about our everyday troubles. No, just you tell him, and believe that he’ll help you in some way, and he surely will. You see I can tell all about this because I’ve proved it. I know it is so, and it’s not every minister that knows that. We had a real young minister to preach for us last Sunday; he preached about God’s care for his people, and I just thought to myself, ‘If you had ever been in a real tight place, my lad, and the Lord had come and helped you out, you wouldn’t be standing there reading off pretty sounding words to us; you’d just tell it to us, hearty like, as if you meant it.’ But here I am, going on just like a clock; I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vincent.”

“Go on, Mrs. Macpherson,” said Faith, “I love to hear you talk. Tell me how you came to feel so sure about things. I need to know. I am wrongly called ‘Faith,’ for I have scarcely any.”

“Oh, I couldn’t but feel sure. He hears and helps me so quick when I call to him. He has been so kind to me. When I was left alone in the world with no home and not a penny that I could call my own, I didn’t know which way to turn; I had no trade, and I was not strong enough to do housework. I fretted and worried over it a spell, then it came to me all of a sudden one day that the Lord could help me if he would. I called to mind all the verses that tell how kind he is, and I just went and told him all about it, feeling as sure that he’d help me in some way as if I’d heard him say it. Sure enough he did! the very next day a lady advertised for an apprentice to learn the dressmaker’s trade. I went, and she took me, and I got just in my right place. I learned fast, and in a year from that time I could fit as well as she could herself. She offered me good wages to stay and sew with her, but I was tired of shop life and wanted a bit of a home of my own, so I rented these rooms, and I have all I can do and more



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too. It is a nice pleasant place, I think to myself. It's cool and comfortable, even if it is two flights. You see I have a north and south window, and if there isn't a good breeze from one way there is from the other; here's my bedroom" (opening the door into a good-sized room with a large window), "blinds too. I can make it as dark as a pocket; and here's my dining-room, and kitchen all in one; here the lake water comes in; oh I tell you, I lack for nothing."

"But don't your rooms get all heated up when you cook?" Faith asked.

"Not a bit of it! See here"—calling Faith's attention to what appeared to be a small light table made of iron. "This is a gasoline stove, and the man that invented it ought to have every woman that owns one blessing him as long as he lives, for it's a jewel," and Mrs. Macpherson turned a screw and the flame flickered and glowed in one of the burners like a bright star. "Here's my fire all made, pretty soon I shall cook my dinner; over this burner I'll put my oven, and bake a potato or two nice and brown in twenty minutes or so; over the other burner I'll boil my tea-kettle and make my tea, then I'll clap on the gridiron and cook a bit of steak; nicest way in the world to cook steak, it is so quick, you know that makes steak juicy; the quicker you can cook it the better it is."

"Will it bake bread nicely?" Faith asked, growing deeply interested.

"To be sure," and Mrs. Macpherson produced a plump brown loaf. "You can see it is beautifully done; the least bit over half an hour bakes my loaves. Oh, there isn't a thing the creature won't do. I can tuck a chicken in the oven and it comes out done to a turn, or put in a joint of meat to boil and go on with my sewing, it cooks itself, you know. I can roast a turkey; last Christmas I roasted one (invited in a neighbour or two, you know), and you would have thought it came out of my mother's old-fashioned brick oven, it was done so beautifully. I can wash and iron on it too, heats the irons as fast as you can use them. It's my opinion that women wouldn't get so used up at their work if they would have these stoves; it is the heat that takes all the life and soul out of one. It is pleasant to work if you know how, and can keep cool; it is a real saving of tempers—this stove is—for if you ever noticed it, folks begin to get cross just as soon as they get well heated up over a cook-stove. No, it doesn't give out any heat, and there are no ashes, or smoke, or soot, or dirt of any kind about it, and it is cheaper to burn than coal."

"But have I not heard that gasoline is explosive?" Faith asked.



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“It isn’t. It will take fire if you bring it near a flame, just as alcohol will, but it can’t explode. There might be a little danger of its taking fire if you filled it when burning, but nobody would be foolish enough to do that. I meant to tell you that this little stove is another proof to me that our Father pities us in our little troubles, and helps us. I used to have an iron cook-stove, and even with my little work it would heat up everything so. Just as I got all tuckered out with it, I heard of the gasoline stove, but I couldn’t afford to get one, for work was rather scarce just then. I expected, though, he would send me one before long, and sure enough he did. It wasn’t many days, don’t you believe, till a lady came and asked me if I wanted to sew for her, and take a gasoline stove for pay; her husband was a dealer in them. You may be sure I said ‘Yes’ pretty quick; so I got it, and a great comfort it’s been to me these three years. No, we don’t plod along here with nobody to care how we get along. He cares. I believe he thought about me and sent me the stove, and I always shall.”

“Well, good-bye, Mrs. Macpherson,” said Faith. “I am truly obliged to you. You have cheered and helped me. I think I shall have more trust hereafter, and who knows hut I shall set up housekeeping with a gasoline stove,” she added, laughingly.

“Dear heart, I wish you might.”

Mrs. Vincent walked home with an idea in her head and a light in her eye that were not there when she started. Trust a woman for doing what she wants to. It did not take Faith long to lay a plan, and by the time she reached home a plan lay fair and clear before her. Once in her room she sat down and mentally inventoried her possessions. She went to her trunk and brought out her jewellery; they made a goodly array, all the birthday and holiday gifts of many years, several of them quite costly. She hesitated a little over a beautiful watch and chain, but finally laid them with the others—a fair offering at the shrine of love, retaining only a plain gold pin and the rings her husband gave her. When baby took her afternoon nap, Faith gathered up her rings, and pins, and ear-rings, and bracelets, and chains, and all the other “tinkling ornaments,” made them into a package, and went with a resolute look in her eyes to Mr. Seymour’s—one of the largest jewellery stores in the city. Mr. Seymour was a member of the same church, and took a fatherly interest in the young couple. Faith, with much inward trepidation, unfolded her plans to him. After careful examination he named a price for each article that made her heart bound with joy.

“As a matter of course,” he explained, “we never give full value for goods bought in this way; but when a woman sacrifices her ornaments for such an object I want to bid her God-speed, and I shall give you what I think I can dispose of them for.”

He counted out the fresh bills to Faith; she could have hugged him, but she only said, in low excited tones:



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“Mr. Seymour, I cannot tell you how much I thank you.”

She almost flew home, and then dismissing the nurse, acted in a most extraordinary manner. She danced about the room with baby, nearly squeezing the breath out of her, and laughed and cried by turns; then she did some tender serious thinking How had the clouds of the morning turned into sunshine! She recognized the hand of the dear Lord in it all; these suggestions and plans were given by him. His loving kindness was over her; she would never doubt it more. When her husband returned at evening she tried to banish from her tell-tale face all traces of exultation. This was her secret; he could not know it yet. So poorly did she succeed that he was happily surprised by finding her cheerful, instead of sad; and yet, inconsistent mortal, he began to feel slightly annoyed that she seemed to be taking the prospective separation so coolly.

“How soon can you be ready to go?” he asked in the course of the evening.

That roll of bills in Faith’s pocket made her eyes dance with glee, as she answered:

“Oh, in about a fortnight; but let us not talk about that to-night, let me read you this exquisite little bit I found to-day.”

“Women are queer,” soliloquized Frank. “I don’t believe Faith is going to feel our first separation as much as I shall myself.”

Faith studied the daily newspapers diligently for a few days. “To Rent” was always the subject.

“I do believe I have found the right thing at last,” she announced to baby one day, and she read aloud: “To rent at Maplewood, a cottage of four rooms, convenient to street and steam cars, pleasantly located, rent low.” Another hurried consultation with the paper disclosed the fact that a train for Maplewood left in an hour. Baby was put to sleep to a hurried tune, and Faith had just time enough to reach the train. Maplewood proved to be a pretty little suburb four miles out; it was rather new, so that it seemed quite like being in the country. Green fields and hills stretched away on either side, and the one broad, quiet avenue was shaded with maples, grand old forest trees. It looked like Paradise to Faith. She soon found the cottage, a lovely nest of white and green glimmering through the trees, the smooth lawn gay with daffodils and crocuses. Vines clambered over the porch, and the sweet breath of lilies and violets distilled subtle perfume on the spring air. She stood on the porch almost afraid to ring, lest she should hear that the house was rented yesterday; but no, it was to be had, and the nice old lady who owned it wanted to rent it, and take up her abode with her daughter, was just as much delighted as Faith. So eager and enthusiastic a tenant was not found every day. The four pretty rooms—parlours, bedroom, dining-room, and kitchen—exactly suited; a bargain was soon concluded, and Faith on a homeward train, congratulating herself on the success of a part of her plan.



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Many visits were made during the next few days to furniture, carpet, and china stores. One would have supposed, at the least, that Mrs. Vincent was furnishing a hotel; but it is no easy matter to take fine tastes and a small purse, and make both ends meet.

The purchases were all made at last, first and foremost the gasoline stove; then the pretty light carpets, the matting, the neat furniture, some cheap white muslin curtains for the windows, and a small store of china. The young housekeeper bought carefully; there was nothing for mere show, but when it was all arranged in the little house, and Faith's pictures hung on the white walls, there was nothing to be desired in the way of beauty or comfort—that is, in the estimation of those most nearly concerned. Meanwhile Faith had kept her secret well, going to and fro to the cottage, busy and happy as any other robin in spring-time preparing her nest.

The nest was all finished now, and Faith stood one afternoon in her kitchen door, taking a critical and comprehensive view of the whole, then turning with great satisfaction to survey the kitchen. It was a mite of a room, but Faith was very proud of it; this was to be her workshop; here cooking was to be carried on as a fine art. No ruthless Bidy should soil the purity of her new pine table, or tread out the gray matting of the floor. She took a last peep into the china closet, looked lovingly at a row of tin dishes new and shining, bestowed admiring glances at the gasoline stove, the presiding genius of the whole, then she opened the outside door into an old-fashioned garden, filled with lilacs and roses, and pinks and southernwood, and all spicy plants and fragrant herbs. She sat down to rest a few minutes, she had accomplished such wonders to-day. Daisy had been left for the day in the care of a kind old lady, and Faith, hiring a woman to help her a few hours, had been hard at work. There was a stone jar filled with golden brown loaves of delicious bread, another jar with cake light as down, a tempting bit of roast lamb sat in the refrigerator; all was in readiness for tomorrow, when the grand secret would be revealed. Faith felt so happy and satisfied; she had tried and proved the stove, it was all that it was represented to be; there was assuredly nothing, now, in the way of a home together in the country.

“Will you not come home early, and let us take a little trip on the street car out into the country?” Faith asked her husband next morning.

“Yes, indeed!” he answered, sighing. “I must make the most of my family now; only three days more left, I believe.”

The unsuspecting man little thought that all his worldly possessions were not long after on the way to Maplewood, and that his wife waited impatiently to take him there too.

“Now you are out on my invitation, you and baby,” Faith said, as they alighted from the car at Maplewood. “You are to ask no questions, but do as you are told.”



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She led the way up the pleasant street, her husband following in silent wonder as she passed up the walk, turned the key of the cottage door, invited him to come in and be seated, while she passed on into the next room. A few moments, and then the door swung open, revealing that cool darkened dining-room, and Faith, with ill-concealed triumph in the tones, said:—

“Please walk out to tea, my dear; I’m sure you must be hungry by this time.” He saw as through a mist the white table arranged with exquisite neatness and care, decked with flowers and spread with angel’s fare, he almost thought, for he turned to Faith a bewildered look, as he said:—

“Where are we? Is this heaven? Tell me quick!”

What a merry tea-table it was; how they talked and laughed, and almost cried by turns! and even baby seemed to realise that some great event had happened, and laughed and crowed appropriately.

After tea, when they talked it all over, Frank said:—

“Who but you would have thought of all this? How happy we shall be here, and I owe it all to you!”

“You forget Mrs. Macpherson,” Faith said.

“Yes, and the gasoline stove; but for that it seems this could not have been accomplished,” said her husband.

“We both forget the dear Father in heaven,” Faith said, in reverent tones, “that we owe everything to him alone.”

By a mutual impulse they knelt down, and the husband, in a few words of prayer, consecrated this new home to the Lord, and themselves anew to his service, thereby feeling added dignity and joy in his manhood, now that “he was a priest in his own house” indeed.

So the months go on in peace and joy. Faith sings at her work, and baby plays in the garden, and Frank Vincent thinks there is but just one woman in the whole world that knows how to cook. The plan failed in no particular; the magical stove has proved itself a most efficient servant, and moreover, Faith manages to lay aside a snug sum every week.



BENJAMIN'S WIFE.

A busy, toilsome life she had led—this mother. She had reared a family; had laid some of them down to sleep in the old cemetery; had struggled through poverty, sickness, and sorrow—she and Ephraim together—always together. He brought her to no stately home that day so long ago, that she put her hand in his, and he had no stocks or bonds or broad acres, yet Mrs. Kensett had for forty years counted herself a rich woman. She possessed the true, tender, undivided heart of a good man—a love that nothing dimmed, that trials only made stronger, that hedged her life about with thoughtful care; even when grey hairs crowned the heads of both, this husband and wife rejoiced in the love of their youth. Nay, that love purified, tried, as gold is tried in the fire. In the last few years this good old couple seemed to have reached a Beulah land. They had enough laid by to support them comfortably now that their children had all flown from the home nest, and their quiet happy life flowed on without a ripple.



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“Mother,” Mr. Kensett had said, “I’m going to stop work now and lay by. I’m getting old and we’ve got enough to do us I guess as long as we stay. You can tend your flower-beds and darn my stockings, and I’ll make the garden and take care of the chickens, we’ll just take comfort a spell; if any body has earned the right to we have.”

As often as once a week he remarked, “There’s one thing I must see to, right away; I must make my will, so that if I go first you’ll be sure to have the old place all to yourself. I want you to have every cent of it to do as you please with.”

And “Mother” always answered, “Now, father, don’t! It won’t make much difference how it’s fixed; it isn’t anyways likely that I’ll stay long behind you, we’ve been together so long.”

There came a morning when the hale, cheery old man did not rise with the sun and step briskly about his work. The messenger came for him in the night; and when the first streak of light in the early dawn stole through his chamber window, and fell upon his face to waken him, he did not awake, he had gone—in the darkness alone with the messenger. Strange journey! Mysterious messenger! His grey coat hung over the chair where he laid it off, the garden tools stood against the fence, the house had a strange silence, the sunshine a cold glare. He who passed in and out yesterday, and worked and smiled and talked and read the news, to-day lay in the darkened parlour white, cold, and still. No, not that! To-day walked the golden streets—joined in the everlasting song, and looked upon the face of his Lord. The old Bible lay open on the stand, the psalm-book beside it, his glasses shut into the place where he sung at family worship a few hours before, and the psalm he sung—his favourite—was in the words of the quaint old version:

“I will both lay me down in peace,
And quiet sleep will take;
Because then only me to dwell
In safety, Lord, dost make.”

Had he known how quiet the sleep was to be, the calm triumphant faith of the singer would not have wavered, nor would the peace with which he laid down have been less.

The will had never been made, so the old homestead must be sold and divided among them all. They met at an early day to arrange affairs. Mr. John Kensett, the eldest son, and Mrs. Maria Sinclair, the eldest daughter, were the self-appointed managers. They were both wealthy, but were just as eager to secure the small sum that would fall to them as was Hannah, another daughter, who married a poor man and had many mouths to feed. Whatever of sentiment or tender feeling these two might originally have possessed had been well rubbed out by the world. In their catechism, the answer to “What is the chief end of man?” read: To make money, to be fashionable, to please ourselves, now and here, always and everywhere.



In Benjamin, the youngest of the family, were condensed all the noble qualities and tender, poetical nature of both father and mother, while the other children brought out the unlovely characters of some distant ancestors.



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“Why not give it all up to mother?” said Benjamin. “It will only be enough to keep her in comfort.”

“No doubt you think that would be a most excellent arrangement,” John answered, “inasmuch as you being the youngest would naturally live with her, and share the benefits, and in the end hope to fall heir to the whole, by skilful management. Pretty sharp, Benny! I see you have an eye to business.”

“I am willing to go to the end of the earth and never set foot in the house again, nor get a cent,” Ben exclaimed indignantly, “if mother can have a place of her own to live in comfort while she does live.”

“Hold on, my dear boy! Who said she was not going to live in comfort? I believe we all have comfortable homes, and it will be much more sensible for her to live amongst us than try to keep house, and take care of this place. Women always let property run down; it will only be a trouble.”

After much talk and some bickerings, it was arranged that mother had better not try to keep house, but would spend a year or two at a time around among them all.

“A year or two in a place,” burst out Benjamin again. “The idea of mother running about like that, begging to be taken in, no place that she can call home; it’s too bad! This place is hers, she helped to earn it, and father meant she should have it all; I heard him say so.”

“Really, Benjie!” Mrs. Sinclair said, “you are getting excited. Mother does not care for the property; it would only be a trouble to her; she will live much more easily with us. You ought to see that we propose to be quite generous with mother. Of course the interest of her share will not pay her board anywhere else, but we shall take turns in keeping her, for that, besides making her presents of clothing.”

“Keep her!” Ben groaned.

“Perhaps Benny proposes to set up housekeeping on his own account, soon,” said John, “then mother will have a royal place to go to, and stay, no doubt.”

“By the way, my dear young brother, do you think it quite the thing for you to come around finding fault with us who propose to bear all the burdens ourselves, knowing that you haven’t a cent to give toward it?”

The young man restrained the bitter answer that was rising to his lips, for father’s mild eye looked into his from the photograph on the wall. He made a firm resolve, though, as he walked sadly away, that the one purpose of his life should be to make a home for mother, and he would never say “burden,” either.



Dear old Mrs. Kensett was so smitten, so amazed to find that her other self had gone—where she could not follow, that for days it seemed as if she sat waiting, expecting the summons to go herself.

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“Surely, Ephraim would send for me,” she thought in her sorrow and bewilderment. It mattered little to her, then, how or where she lived; all places were alike, since he was not in any of them, and she mechanically assented to any proposal that was made her, though she did cry out as one hurt, when John proposed an auction for the sale of household effects. “Oh, I can’t,” she moaned. “Your father made some of that furniture with his own hands,” but the worldly-wise son, who had outgrown “foolish sentimentality,” over-ruled her. It all went, the cradle in which they rocked, the old clock, the table they surrounded so many years. The rage for the antique had not yet shown itself, or John’s wife and Maria, would have secured some of the old-fashioned furniture. As it was, they could not think of having their houses lumbered by it. The other two daughters were not well-to-do, and prized money more than mementos. Benjamin protested most earnestly at this sacrilegious disposal of the dear home things. He could do but little himself, as he was still pursuing his law studies, though he did bid in his father’s armchair and a few other cherished articles. John touched him on the shoulder, and said, “Ben, are you crazy? What in the world will you do with a lot of old furniture?”

“You’ll see,” said Ben quickly.

If John could have seen his brother’s next proceeding he would certainly have pronounced him a hopeless lunatic. He took the sum that fell to him and placed it in the bank to his mother’s credit. “The interest money won’t amount to much, mother,” he said, as he handed her the certificate of deposit, “but I shall enjoy thinking that if you want some little thing you can get it without asking anybody.”

Mrs. Sinclair was a woman who lived for society; she had long ago cast aside as Puritanical the wholesome restraints that had governed her girlhood. What with parties, operas and theatres, she was a very busy woman. Her young family was much neglected and she was only too glad to transfer to her old mother what little care she did give them. The restful days were gone, one would have supposed that Mrs. Sinclair had engaged, in her mother, a maid and seamstress. “It’s so nice,” she told her friends. “Mother takes the entire charge of them, and relieves me; children are such a responsibility.” It was news to her friends, the fact that she was an anxious burdened mother.

It was hard for Mrs. Kensett to take up her life at the beginning again, to be confined day after day in a close room with noisy, fretful children, to go through the round of story-telling, tying shoes, mending tops and dolls, and minister to the thousand small wants and worries of undisciplined childhood. She had gone through all that, those chapters of her life she had considered finished and sealed up.

There is no occupation in this world more soul and body trying than the care of young children. What patience and wisdom, skill, and unlimited love it calls for. God gave the work to mothers and has furnished them for it, and they cannot shirk it and be guiltless.

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It was not unusual when there was a heavy press of work in the house, calling for all the forces, for baby too to be bundled into grandma's room and left for hours. This worked very well while all were in good humour, for grandma loved children, but when baby writhed and fretted with aching teeth and would not be comforted, and Master Freddy resented the least correction by vigorous kicks from his stout little boots, and Miss Maude lisped, "I shan't! You ain't my mamma!"—what wonder that grandma, absorbed as she was by sad memories, should lose her patience too, and speak the sharp word that did not mend matters, while she sighed in spirit for the days that would not come back again.

The daughter remembered, too, that mother was cunning with her needle; how very convenient it became to send the mending basket to her room, "just for some work to pass the time away," and in time numberless little garments were sent there too, aprons and dresses, and she sat and stitched from morning till night when she was not tending baby. Nobody suggested a ride or a walk for her, or invited her down stairs to while away an evening when there was company.

"Mother isn't used to it," Maria said; "besides, she can't hear half that is said. She enjoys herself better alone; I suppose all old people do." This course of reasoning seemed to soothe Mrs. Sinclair's conscience when it proved troublesome, but in truth she would not have enjoyed introducing her plain-looking mother to her fashionable friends. "So old style." The old ladies she was accustomed to meet wore trail and puffs and dress caps; she might have searched long, though, to find another old face of such sweet placid dignity as her mother's.

This life in the crowded city was so new and strange and dismal. How the mother longed amid its dust and smoke for the sweet air of Hawthorn, for a sprig of lilac, or a June rose from the garden. Once in a rare while she succeeded in getting to church. It was a difficult thing to bring about, though; when nothing happened to prevent, the carriage was driven there, but apparently in that family there were more hindrances to church-going than to any other sort of going.

Now that spring had come again, Mrs. Kensett looked forward to a change of her home with pleasure; she wanted to get into the country once more, and Martha, the second daughter, had married a farmer and lived in the country; it was a long distance from Hawthorn, and she had not visited her daughter since her marriage. The pleasant home among trees and flowers and greenness that she had pictured was not there; instead, a bare frame house on a side hill without a tree or vine; there was no time to enjoy them had they been there; the long hot days were filled up with work; endless milking and baking and churning, and the unselfish mother put in her waning strength, early and late, did what she could to lighten the burden that was making her daughter prematurely old. Then the dismal winter settled down upon them, monotonous days of sleet and snow and darkness, when nothing happened from week to week to break the dreary routine, when even the Sabbaths brought no relief.



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Mrs. Kensett had ever been an untiring church goer; rain or shine, she was in her place. Her son-in-law was not a Christian, and always had an excellent excuse for remaining at home, in the summer the horses were tired, or it was too hot; in the winter it was too cold, or too something. Many a dreary Sabbath the sad mother sat at her chamber window and watched the rain come down in slow, straight drizzle, repeating to herself rather than singing, as she rocked too and fro,

“How lovely is thy dwelling-place,
O Lord of hosts to me!
The tabernacles of thy grace,
How pleasant, Lord, they be!

“My thirsty soul longs vehemently,
Yea, faints thy courts to see;
My very heart and flesh cry out,
O living God for thee.”

Longing meanwhile with intense desire to sit once again in the old pew, and hear the familiar tones of her pastor's voice in that far-away, pleasant village that used to be her home; now she had no home, a wanderer from house to house, and yet she was not a murmurer, her faith and love did not falter.

In due course of time she went on her pilgrim way and tarried for a time at her daughter Hannah's; a good-natured soul, who loved her mother and gave her welcome to such as she had, but she lived in a small house, with a large flock of children, undisciplined, rough, and noisy. It seemed that in the full little house there was no quiet corner for retreat, and grandma often moaned in the words of one of her dear psalms

“O that I like a dove had wings,
Said I, then would I flee,
Far hence that I might find a place
Where I in rest might be.”

“After all I need all this,” the old saint would say to herself. “It's a part of my dear Lord's schooling. I was having too nice a time, Ephraim and I all alone. I dare say I got out of the way and he had to bring me back. He sent me all that peaceful, comfortable time; I was very glad to have his will done when it was according to my notion; this is his will all the same, and shall not I be willing to take what he sends? He is only getting me ready.

“Soon the delightful day will come
When my dear Lord will call me home,
And I shall see his face.”



Albeit the house was small, and the children noisy, this persecuted grandmother of many homes found herself dreading to leave it and find a new home with her eldest son. John's wife had always been to her a most uncomfortable sort of person; she had dreaded her not frequent visits to their home. Both were glad when they were over. Twenty years had passed since his marriage; she never seemed to get any nearer to his wife. Now the time had come to go and live with them, she shrank from it, and postponed it for weeks, but John was inflexible, he was an upright man, and bound to do his part in sharing the burden of his mother's maintenance.



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Mrs. John Kensett was one of those icy women with thin lips and cold grey eyes, made up from the first without a heart—women who make a cool atmosphere about them even in the heat of summer. She was tall and stylish and handsomely dressed, and when she mounted her gold eyeglasses and through them severely looked one over, she was formidable indeed to so meek a woman as her mother-in-law. She must have married John Kensett because an establishment is more complete with a man at the head of it, for that was the chief end of her life to keep all things in perfect running order in that elegantly appointed home, and to keep abreast of the times in all new adornings and furnishings under the sun. One Scripture admonition at least she gave heed to: she looked well to the ways of her household. One might explore from garret to cellar in that house and find nothing out of place, nothing soiled, nothing left undone that should have been done. She was withal, a rigid economist in small things. Everything was kept under lock and key, and doled out in very small quantities to the servants. Her table could never merit the charge of being vulgarly loaded; the furnace heat was never allowed to run above a certain mark on the thermometer, no matter who shivered, and she had doubtless walked miles in turning gas jets to just the right point.

In this most elegant, precise, immaculate house, where everything and everybody was controlled by certain unvarying and inflexible rules, the old mother felt almost as straitened as she ever had in the small topsy-turvy one.

Her room was scarcely above shivering point, and the back windows overlooked no cheerful prospect. Here day after day she sat alone; she had food and shelter and clothes, what more could old people possibly want? At meal times her son was silent and abstracted or absorbed in his newspaper. If anybody had told him that his old mother's heart was nearly breaking for lack of loving sympathy, he would have been astonished. The faded eyes often grew dim with tears as she looked at him—the frigid, unbending man—and remembered him as he was in those first years of her married life, darling little Johnnie in white dresses and long curls, running after butterflies and picking flowers; if he only would kiss her once more, or do something to make her sure that he was Johnnie, she was hungry for a tender word from him. Ah! if mothers could see down the years that stretch ahead, it would not always be so hard to lay the little lisping ones under the ground. Was it decreed that most mothers shall be in sympathy with that other one, of whom it is written, "A sword shall pierce thine, own heart also"?

We shall never know about the wounds from those dear, self-sacrificing mothers, but they are there, even though they may strive to hide them and find excuses for the cold neglect, indifference to their comfort, impatience, and the putting them one side as if to say: "What is all this to you? It is time you were dead."



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“John is busy,” she would say, as she mounted the stairs to her lonely room, and he buttoned his coat and hastened away to business, without a ‘good-bye’ or a ‘good night,’ then she would draw out her knitting and knit on, often through tear-blinded eyes. Sometimes she did not hear a remark the first time and would ask to have it repeated, but the manifest impatience with which it was done always sent a pang well-likened to a sword-thrust, but the dear mother would cover the wound and think within herself, “I know it is a great trouble to talk to deaf people, I ought to keep still.”

Strange that these stabs come not alone from the lost sheep of the family, but from the son who is the honoured citizen; from the daughter who shines in her circle as a woman of many virtues; from grandchildren trained up in the Sabbath-school.

“Into each life some sunshine must fall, as well as rain,” and Mrs. Kensett had much of hers from Benjie’s letters; they were regular as the dew and cheery as the sun, a balsam for the wounds in the poor heart. They were not mere scribbles either—“I am well, and I hope you are; I haven’t time to write more now”—but good long letters, with accounts of all his comings and goings, the people he met, the books he read, here a dash of fun and there a poetical fancy; and through them all ran like a golden thread the dear boy’s tender love and reverence for his mother. Never did maiden watch for lover’s missive with more ardour; sometimes he wrote one day, sometimes another, but always once a week, and Mrs. Kensett kept a sharp look out for the postman; when the time drew near for him to come she made many journeys down the stairs to see if she could get a glimpse of him. When the expected letter was not forthcoming she felt somehow as if the postman were to blame. But when he did come, ah! that was the one bright day of the week; how she read and re-read it, and put it in her pocket and thought it over, while she went on with her knitting, then when some little point was not quite distinct in her mind, brought it out and read it again, so that by the time another one came this one was worn out. John’s wife thought to regulate this one small pleasant excitement of her mother-in-law’s life by remarking to her husband that “somebody ought to tell Benjamin to write on a particular day, mother was so fidgety when it was time for the mail.”

How small a thing is a letter to make one happy! and yet some of us let the sword pierce the dear mother heart by withholding that which costs us so little. God pity us when our mothers are gone beyond the reach of voice or pen.

One day her letter contained news of great importance. It was read and pondered long. Benjie was going to be married! The mother did not like the news; somehow in all her plans for Benjie the wife had not come in. Now this would be the last of her comfort in him; he would marry and settle down, and probably be just like John—given up to business. He pictured out his future bride as good and lovely. Of course he thought so, but poor Mrs. Kensett could get no vision of a daughter-in-law except a tall woman with severe expression. “She is an heiress,” Benjie wrote. Well, what of that? John’s wife

had property too. She would likely be proud, and ashamed of a plain old woman like her.



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Benjamin was no fortune-hunter; he was hard at work in his profession with no other ambition directly before him but to get together a humble home to which he might take his mother; he intended to surprise her as soon as his income would at all warrant it. But as John Milton when he met Mary Powell fastened his eyes earnestly upon her, knowing that he had found "Mistress Milton," so Benjamin, the first Sabbath he took a class in the mission Sabbath-school, and found himself near neighbour to a sweet-faced young teacher, knew that no other face in all the world could so closely resemble the ideal picture he had sketched of that dim, shadowy, far-off person, his wife.

Marian Ledyard, too, would not willingly have confessed with what a thrill of pleasure she noticed the young stranger was in his place again on the following Sabbath, nor how for a time she searched diligently through every assembly for that one face that had such strange power to attract her; in no place, though, did she happen to meet him except that one, where there was no opportunity for acquaintance.

Benjamin had fully resolved to seek her out, but learning that she was an orphan who possessed a large fortune in her own right, he was too proud to be counted one of the moths that flutter about a candle, so he made another resolve, to think no more about her, which stoical purpose was not easy to carry out, especially as the blue eyes were often meeting his, much to the discomfiture of their owner. The coveted opportunity came at last. The holidays brought the annual entertainment for the children, and under the friendly boughs of the Christmas tree the acquaintance began, and progressed remarkably fast. It was not strange either, considering that each had been in the other's thoughts constantly for the last six weeks. They walked home in the moonlight wondering at the singular beauty that crowned the earth. The tell-tale eyes of each must have revealed the secret to the heart of the other, for the usual preliminaries, formalities, windings and turnings of modern courtship seemed unnecessary; the two drifted together as naturally as fleecy, white clouds in the blue sky. He forgot that she was worth half a million, and what did she care that he possessed not anything but his own precious self! Had she not enough for both?

Not alone in stocks and bonds were Marian Ledyard's riches. She had been a mere butterfly of fashion and frivolity, absorbed in worldly gaieties, but the Lord met her, and she fell at his feet, saying, "What wilt thou have me to do?" And as she had eagerly, unreservedly followed the world, so now she gave herself up body, soul, time and wealth, to the service of the Lord, and she was far more sweet and fascinating in her joyful abandonment to her blessed Master's service than ever she had been in the service of that other master. She was that rare combination, a young, wealthy, consecrated Christian.



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“Now, mother,” wrote Benjamin, “just as soon as we are married, which will be very soon, you are to come to us. Marian says she remembers her own dear mother, and has been lonely without her these many years.” This was no welcome news to the weary mother; had it been dear Benjamin alone that she was to live with, how she would have hailed her deliverance, but another son’s wife! How could she face her, and be dependent on her? It would be her house and her money that provided everything. She would feel like a beggar she was sure. She could by no stretch of imagination conceive of a son’s wife to be other than a person to be dreaded. She spent many sleepless nights over it and shed tears in secret. Her triumphant faith was never more tried than now.

It may be that in some far-off day, by means of some wonderful instrument yet uncreated, our eyes shall look upon our friends, separated from them by long distances, shall know their comings and goings, their thoughts and motives. Being not possessed of any such power, mother Kensett vexed her soul in one city, while in another, two young people, happy as birds, held long consultations as to which should be mother’s room, just how it should be furnished, and ran here and there with the eagerness of children gathering moss and bits of china, and all rare and pretty things for a play-house under the trees.

Marian’s ancestral home had been closed for a long time. It was a stately mansion, of wide halls and towers and spacious apartments, surrounded by magnificent grounds. During the last few months it had been thoroughly remodelled and refurnished, and now the young couple, after a brief bridal tour, were fairly established in it.

One might suppose that Mrs. Kensett would have felt some risings of pride, as, leaning on the arm of her youngest son, she mounted the marble steps, and walked through the spacious halls and beautiful parlours of his home.

But John’s home was handsome, too; the carpets were soft and rich, the chairs luxurious, and curtained windows spread their drapery about them in soft fine folds.

What of all that when hearts were frozen? Wealth to this mother meant pride, selfishness, and irreligion.

She looked about her, feeling sure that a tall, elegant lady in a stiff silk train would sweep in, extend the tips of her fingers, and call a servant to get her off to her room with all possible despatch.

There was no one in the parlours, and Benjamin led his mother on into the dining-room—a room full of warmth and light—the tea-table already spread, and a delicate, home-like aroma of toast and tea pervading it.



A slight girlish figure in a simple dress of dark blue, her bright hair rippling away into a knot behind, was bending over the grate toasting a piece of bread by the coals. So noiselessly had they approached, that she heard no sound until they stood before her.

Mrs. Kensett was still looking for Benjamin's wife to appear in the shape of a cold, grim person of imposing appearance, wearing gold eye-glasses—when suddenly the toasting-fork was dropped, and with a low cry of joy Marian sprang into her husband's arms; then, without waiting for formal words of introduction, clasped loving arms about the tired mother, and nestled a rosy face close to hers, and gave her warm clinging kisses, such as are reserved only for our best beloved.



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“Dear mother,” she said, “I am so glad you have come! You are cold; sit right here,” and she wheeled a large chair into the warmest corner, and with her own hands removed the wrappings and carried them away. “I wanted to have the toast just the right brown, so I was doing it myself,” she explained, as she took up her toasting-fork and went on with her work, and the old mother sat and feasted her eyes on the pretty picture—the bright, happy face, the quick, graceful movements, as she dexterously put last little touches to the table, chatting pleasantly meanwhile, making tender inquiries about her health and her journey. Mrs. Kensett began already to feel as if this was a dear daughter separated from her years ago and now restored. “It seemed just as if I had been away visiting and got home again,” she told someone afterward.

After tea and resting, they both went with her in merry procession to her room, carrying shawls and satchel, and waiting with the eager joy of two children to see how she liked everything. She would have been hard to suit if she had not liked it. The room was a large, pleasant one, with a sunny bay window, a stand of plants, a case of books, and every other thing that she could possibly need or desire.

Mrs. Kensett started as her eye fell on familiar objects; there was the claw-footed mahogany centre-table with antique carvings, her straight-backed old rocker, and “father’s” dear arm-chair, both newly cushioned, and otherwise brightened up. The sofa, too, of ancient pattern, that had stood in her parlour at Hawthorn for forty years, looked like an old friend in a new dress. Benjamin had ransacked all the carpet stores to find a carpet that would resemble as nearly as possible, in colour and design, his mother’s parlour carpet when he was a boy. He succeeded so well that his mother put on her glasses and bent nearer to make sure that it was not that identical one.

In an out-of-the-way corner she discovered her little three-legged stand holding a tiny brass candlestick (one of her wedding presents) and the snuffers on the japanned trays. It was not alone that the old times were brought back so vividly that made the tears come, but this one little thing showed such loving thoughtfulness for her comfort. (John’s wife would never have allowed a candle in the house.)

This was Benjamin’s hour of triumph and gladness; for this he had spent years of patient toil, and now it had come in such a strange, unexpected way, it, and so much more than he had asked or looked for; this princely home, this precious wife, and mother abiding with them all the rest of her days; it was too much, such loving-kindness!

Marian understood; she did not express surprise when he brought out a little worn psalm-book that she had never seen, and said:

“Sing this for me, dear, to some old tune that fits it; I wish I knew what my father sang it to when I was a boy.”

“I have a book of old music here, perhaps I can find the very one,” she said; and then the pure voice soared out in the song of praise his father had loved:



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“Praise God, for he is kind;
His mercy lasts for aye;
Give thanks with heart and mind
To God of Gods alway.
For certainly
His mercies dure,
Most firm and sure,
Eternally.”

The quaint rendering—new to her—pleased her, and she sang others, closing in low, soft notes, with:

“The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want,
He makes me down to lie;
In pastures green he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.”

And the dear old mother dreamed, as a strain or two of Lenox and St. Martin’s floated up to her room, that she was in the old home, and “father” was conducting family worship. Little by little, with her coaxing ways, Marian succeeded in effecting a change in her mother-in-law’s dress, and when one day everything was finished, and she had her arrayed in a fine black cashmere, made according to her own ideas of simplicity, the white hair crowned with a soft white lace cap, and the same soft folds about her neck, her delight was complete.

“You dear, beautiful mother,” she said, clasping the lace with a plain jet pin; “it is just delightful to fix you up, everything sets you out so; it’s better than dressing dolls. Won’t Benjie be delighted?”

When Maria, and John, and John’s wife came to visit their new sister-in-law, they were astonished beyond measure to find that mother had been transformed into that handsome old lady who moved about this elegant home with easy dignity, as if it were her own. This rare son and daughter never made their mother feel that she was that uncomfortable third person who spoiled delightful confidences for young people; they talked freely together, and with her, and she renewed her youth in their lively intercourse. When company was announced she was given to retiring in haste from the room, just as she did at Maria’s and John’s, but Marian stopped that with “Please do stay, mother, and help us entertain them; besides, I want you in that corner with your bright knitting to make our rooms picturesque; you’re the greatest ornament they contain.” Then the old lady would say, “Pooh! you don’t want an old body like me,” albeit she was well pleased that she was wanted, and would remain, occasionally throwing in her quaint remark, adding zest to the conversation.



If an old lady could be easily spoiled, Mrs. Kensett was in danger; these two fond children were continually bringing offerings to her shrine, flowers, choice fruit, new books, wherever they went they remembered her. It was an altogether new and delightful life that she had entered upon. With Marian she visited charitable institutions, dispensed bounties—read the Bible to the sick and poor, and ministered comfort to many a distressed soul. They attended wonderful meetings, and sat in heavenly places, and Marian and she enjoyed each other quite as much as they did everything else. The tie that united them was not Benjamin alone; each recognised in the other the lineaments of the Lord she loved, their sympathies flowed together as if half a century did not stretch between them.



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Is there any other influence known that levels all differences and brings souls so near together as this strange personal love to Christ? They talked and read together, they were dear, confidential friends—such intercourse is rarely found between mother and daughter.

The following summer, when they all took up their abode in Hawthorn, in the old home that Marian had purchased and refitted for a summer residence, and Mrs. Kensett trained again the vines in her garden, her cup was full; especially when in the old church she joined her voice to the great congregation and sang her joy and thanks in the sweet psalm:

“O thou my soul, bless God the Lord;
And all that in me is,
Be stirred up, his holy name
To magnify and bless.
Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God,
And not forgetful be
Of all his gracious benefits.”

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