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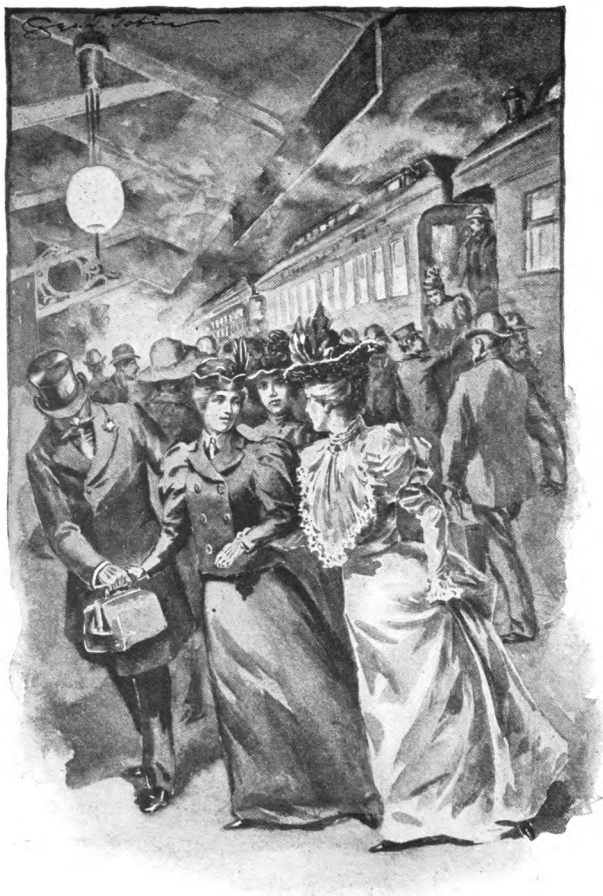
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Agatha's Unknown Way

A Story of Mis-
sionary Guidance

BY

“PANSY”

(MRS. C. R. ALDEN)

Author of “The Prince of Peace,” “Ester Ried,” etc., etc.

“I will go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Over mountain or valley or sea.
I will do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I will be what you want me to be.”



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Agatha's Unknown Way

I

SHE MADE HER ESCAPE

“Now mind you don't get lost,” said Farmer Barnes ; and he said it for perhaps the fifth time, as he waited to see his charge into an uptown car. “You tell the conductor where to let you off,—at the corner of Delaware Street, you know ; tell him where you want to go,—to the Fountain Square Church, remember ; that will be the safest. Then you walk to your right three blocks,—to your *right*, mind you, not your left ; and you'll be there. You can't miss it nohow, if you mind what you are about. It's all nonsense your aunt feeling so fussy about you ; women are always afraid that women folks are going to get lost. And, when the meetin' is out, if you decide not to stay for evening,—and I don't much believe you better ; your aunt will worry,—you take these same yellow cars going the *other* way, you know, and come back to this corner. You can set down in one of them park seats and wait for me. Maybe I'll get here first, though ; then I'll be on the lookout for you ; and remember that the 4:40 is the last train out our way.”

A clear voice answered this long-drawn-out direction. “I shall not get lost, Uncle Joseph ; don't be troubled

about me ; I know just what to do. I shall be here on time if I decide to go home to-night ; but don't expect me ; I feel as though I really *must* stay for that evening meeting. There may be old friends of mine here. I'll come back in the milk-cart to-morrow, uncle, and give you an account of my adventures. Good-bye."

The farmer looked after her anxiously as she gave him a bright little smile and nod that was meant to be reassuring, and disappeared within the crowded car. He had it in his heart to ask the conductor to keep an eye on her ; but, while he was considering how to say it, the car slipped on its way. He took off his hat, and wiped the perspiration from his sunburnt face ; the day was warm, and he had been standing in the broiling sun for nearly five minutes, looking anxiously for the right car. Farmer Barnes was not able to get accustomed to the new style of cars, without horses.

"I hate them slippery things," he had confided to his niece. "You think you're going to git one of 'em, and you start for it, and by the time you git across the street to where you think it will stop, it has gone on and is about half a mile away. I have to be out there on hand, and wait for 'em."

He shook his head at this one as it glided around a curve, and said in troubled tones : "I dunno as it is quite the thing, after all. Harriet doesn't think it is, and maybe she is right. The child is young and pretty to be dodging around city streets alone ; but then, it is a woman's meetin', and she is as sot in her ways as any woman among 'em, if she is young ; so what could I do ? "

Agatha Hunter left the car at the proper corner, with-

out giving the conductor any other information than the street she wanted, and walked rapidly toward the Fountain Square Church.

Her cheeks were a lovely pink, and her breath came in quick little catches that denoted suppressed excitement. Something besides the warmth of the day was affecting her. It was not that she was afraid, although she was alone in a great city for the first time in her life. Perhaps she was less afraid on that account. She was not timid by nature, and it was impossible for her to imagine what there was in this trip of hers to cause her uncle and aunt anxiety. But her whole frame was thrilling with irrepressible excitement over the thought that *at last* she was to realize the fulfilment of some of her eager dreams. In order to understand her mood, you will need to know a bit of her history.

Agatha Hunter, aged twenty, bright-eyed, quick of step, eager for the world, or for what she thought was the world, had been in her mother's home-land for the past five months; yet this was her first little venture into that rose-colored world. She was the daughter of foreign missionaries. Once, when a little girl, she had come to America with her parents; and its beautiful homes, and beautiful churches, and beautiful streets, and lovely people, had lingered with her in memory through the years as a vision of the heavenly city might linger with you.

Contrary to the custom of most missionaries, her parents had taken her back with them to India, and she spent her girlhood in that far-away land, her father and mother being her only teachers. Very efficient and skilful teachers they were, and Agatha, being an apt pupil, and having no society save in her books, at the age of

nineteen had acquired such an education as any American girl might think of with satisfaction.

Then her health, which up to that time had been uniformly good, began to fail. Before the year waned, the anxious parents knew two things,—that they could not be spared to go home, and that their daughter must go.

Meantime, grandfathers and grandmothers had gone to the home from which there is no returning, and the only relative left in America to receive Agatha was a half-sister of her mother, Mrs. Joseph Barnes. To the old farmhouse, whose situation was five miles away from a little dreary village, came Agatha, therefore, on her second visit to her mother's home-land. Agatha's father was a Scotchman, and an orphan from his boyhood.

They had been very good to her, those simple country farmers. Her Aunt Harriet, it is true, had not known the girl's mother very well, being separated from her since she was fourteen, but she received Agatha with as much warmth as her rugged, suppressed nature would allow, and recognized her as kindred. Their own children had grown up, and gone out into the world, and left them; they were boys, and the father and mother felt that they knew nothing about girls, and Agatha was to them a sort of experiment. They watched the frail, dark-skinned girl with the deepest interest; fed her on milk fresh from the cow, and cream almost thick enough to cut, and new-laid eggs, which she became interested in hunting from the nests for herself, and were heartily encouraged and rejoiced to see her growing unmistakably strong and well under their judicious coddling.

Well in body she was certainly; but never, perhaps, in all America could there have been found a more thor-

oughly homesick girl than was Agatha Hunter. Aunt Harriet, while she did her best for her niece, was not in very special sympathy with either her training or her ideas. She did not think, for instance, that she believed very much in foreign missions. Why should people go to the ends of the earth in search of heathen, when they were as thick as grasshoppers in August around one's own door? She had always thought her sister did a foolish thing in marrying Dr. Hunter and going away off to India, leaving her father to mourn for her. She could not help occasionally expressing such views to Agatha, and the girl shrank from them as if they were blows. It was a new experience of life to her. She had lived in the supposition that all America was athrob with missionary zeal.

Joseph Barnes was a man who in most matters agreed with his wife, especially if they were minor matters, like this one! There was also, apparently, the same spirit in the poor little church to which they drove on Sundays, if the roads were not too "heavy," or the day too cold or too warm. There was no missionary organization of any sort connected with that church; and during the weary Sundays that Agatha had passed in its straight-backed, old-fashioned, uncomfortable pews, she had not heard the missionaries even prayed for.

As strength returned to her body, the hunger grew in her heart. This was by no means the America of her dreams, or of her experiences. Had not Agatha, the young girl, been taken to wonderful meetings, in great, splendid churches, where the platform was crowded with noble-looking men and women, and among them her father and mother, being treated almost like representatives of royalty? There were times when she seemed to

hear again the roll of the great organ, and to feel the thrill that ran through her frame when the audience arose and sung the missionaries' farewell hymn, and many of them mingled their tears of sympathy, as a white-haired pastor, whose voice trembled with feeling, commended the departing missionaries, and their friends who were to be left behind, to the covenant-keeping God.

Oh she was sure that there was a great heart for missions in this beautiful America. It was only the miserable little town where her aunt lived that had failed to catch any of its fire. If she could but escape from the place for a little while, and be with her brothers and sisters! How she longed to get among those who knew of the work that her father and mother were doing, whose faces would glow with sympathy as they heard from her lips some of the wonderful details!

"You ought to go out lecturing," would Farmer Barnes say to her occasionally with a half-skeptical, half-sympathetic laugh, when she had been aroused into giving him some incident connected with her Indian experiences. "What is the reason you couldn't go around holding meetings, like other missionary women, and preach to the folks? What was the name of that woman, mother, that Joel's wife wrote about, who lectured, and preached, and I don't know what not, every night in the week, in their place? She was a missionary from away out in China or somewhere."

Then would Agatha cower and shiver, and declare that she *could* not do anything of that kind. Had she not from very childhood affirmed that that was one thing which she could never, *never* do? How was it possible for a woman to stand before an audience, as she remembered

her mother doing more than once while they were in America, telling the people all about her work and the needs of the mission?

"Mother," she had said in that far-away time, "I can't ever be a missionary, as you and father want me to; because I cannot stand up and *preach* to the people as you do. It would make me faint. I know it would."

It is true her mother had only laughed, and put her arm around her, and bid her remember what Grandfather Judson used to say, "Never cross a bridge until you come to it." But Agatha had grown up with the conviction upon her that, however well fitted she might be for the other duties of missionaries, she could never talk to the people.

Then would Aunt Harriet say: "Mercy! father; don't go to putting any such notions in the child's mind. We don't want no women preachers belonging to our family. It wasn't easy work for her mother to do when she was at home; they just *made* her; I could see that; and Agatha takes after her, and I'm glad of it. There is enough for women folks to keep busy about in this world without their traipsing around the country, doing what the men ought to do."

But the homesickness grew upon Agatha, until it culminated in this visit to this city. A five miles' drive in the farm-wagon; only forty miles by train; and the populous city, with its multitudes of earnest, wide-awake Christians, who kept in touch with the work that the church was doing, could be reached.

It is true that a visit there seemed like a tremendous undertaking to Aunt Harriet. Although Uncle Joseph went once a month to settle his accounts for farm pro-

duce, and to buy the supplies needed, Aunt Harriet had not been with him for five years, and declared that the last time she was there, the noise and confusion nearly killed her.

"You don't know anything about it," she said to Agatha, trying to dissuade her from what she knew was in her heart. "The folks rush up and down the streets like mad; and they don't appear to know half of the time where they are going to, nor how to get there. And there's street-cars in the middle of the wagon-roads, and carts and bells and whistles, and it is as much as your life is worth to get across a street. My! Catch me going to the city unless I had to! I draw a long breath every time I see your uncle drive into the yard after he has been there, and feel as though it was a special providence that had saved him once more."

But Agatha carried a very determined will inside her slight body, and persisted in her determination. She had read in the Saturday's paper that on the following Tuesday the Fountain Square Church would hold its regular missionary meeting in the church parlors at three o'clock. Now, Tuesday of that next week would be her uncle's regular market-day. For a week past all the plans connected with the farm had had to do with his getting an early start for town on Tuesday.

Her resolution was taken. She would coax Uncle Joseph to let her go with him, and to show her how to find the Fountain Square Church. After that, her way would be easy. Once among those blessed missionary women, how many delightful friends she would meet! Had not her father and mother been almost oppressed by hospitality while they were in this country? She had her

plans all made ; she would select some sweet-faced woman who reminded her of her mother, and softly whisper that mother's name, and confess that she was her daughter, come all the way from India, alone, to meet her mother's sisters in the work. How glad they would be to see her, and to hear directly from her lips all about the work that they were helping to do !

They would be sure to ask her to stay to the evening session that was always held during those missionary meetings, and at which returned missionaries nearly always spoke. Why, there might even be somebody there from India, some one whom she knew. That would be almost like a glimpse of home. Oh she must surely go.

II

SHE MADE DISCOVERIES

SHE accomplished it. People learned, in time, that Agatha Hunter would be likely to accomplish what she undertook. Aunt Harriet, it is true, was troubled. She told "father" that she could not think what had come over him to countenance such a thing, and that for her part she did not know what Agatha's mother away off in India would say when she heard of it. Uncle Joseph, however, was a good ally. He rarely took a positive stand that was contrary to his wife's views, in the realm where he believed that she ought to hold sway; but Agatha had won a large place in his heart during her stay with them, and he was disposed to humor her to the extent of his ability. Moreover, he did not share his wife's horror of the city. Had not he been there every month going on for eleven years, and nothing ever happened to him?

Once having given his word, Uncle Joseph was safe. Agatha felt sure that her scheme was to succeed.

Can you understand how her heart throbbed and her breath came quickly as she hurried down the street in the direction of the Fountain Square Church? She laughed softly over Uncle Joseph's anxiety lest she should not reach the train in time for the homeward trip. She had no idea of taking it that night. Those dear people to whom she was hastening would be sure to keep her for the

evening meeting. Why, they would be shocked at the idea of her not staying. It would seem like almost an insult to her father and mother if she should lose such an opportunity. And oh, wouldn't it be blessed to get once more among people who understood ?

The wide, fine street down which she walked was thronged with well-dressed men and women, all hurrying, like herself, intent upon reaching some place of interest. The young woman from India had not the slightest doubt that they were seeking the missionary meeting.

She quickened her steps, with the feeling that the church would be crowded and she would have difficulty in getting a seat. She remembered that at the last meeting at which her mother had spoken the people had to be asked to stand and to close the aisle chairs, in order that her father and she might press through the crowd to get to her side. If the church were to be so full to-day that she could have no chance to reach those dear women on whom her heart was set, what would become of her plan for the evening ? She resolved to push her way, and *make* a chance. She determined to get hold of a programme at once, and to look for familiar names,—some one from India. Several of the missionaries were at home ; one of them, at least, would be likely to be present.

Then she reached what she knew must be the church, and crowds of people were passing it ! For a moment she stood irresolute, with a feeling that she ought to tell some of them that this was the place of meeting. But perhaps in America they did not do such things. She wondered that there were not placards out. Else how were strangers to be sure ? She looked up at the great, solemn doors of the church, and wondered that they were closed, but re-

flected immediately that that was probably necessary to shut out the noises of the street. A strange feeling of timidity began to creep over her ; she had not expected to enter the church quite alone.

At last, with fingers that trembled, she tried one of the doors ; it was locked ! She stepped back and looked at the clock on the tower. It was five minutes after the hour for meeting ; unless, indeed, she had mistaken the hour. Suddenly, while staring about anxiously, she was confronted by a colored gentleman of careful dress and dignified manners, who regarded her with grave suspicion, but asked whether he could do anything for her.

Missionary meeting ? Oh yes, there was to be one this afternoon ; but it was not to be held in the main audience-room. Afternoon missionary meetings were always held in the lower chapel. She was to go around to the left, down the stone steps, then turn to the right, and at the end of that walk turn to the left again, and she would find the chapel door.

Oh yes, the door was unlocked ; but nobody had arrived.

A very meek young woman wound around the bewildering path, turning to the left and right and left again, wondering, as she went, how people who did not happen to meet the colored gentleman could possibly find their way. She came at last to a door that stood ajar, and slipped past it into a great, dark room.

Agatha glided silently down an aisle, chose a corner nearest to an audacious streak of light that came through the stained glass, and waited. Five, ten, fifteen minutes. Then came the colored gentleman, and lighted a single jet of gas to make the gloom more visible.

"The ladies is late to-day," he remarked by way of sociability. "It is so powerful hot, I expect they don't like to come out."

Hot! Why, the small audience was shivering! The transition to the sepulchral gloom within had chilled her.

Just then appeared two ladies, three, a half-dozen. In the course of the next fifteen minutes, Agatha, peering into dark corners and carefully counting, discovered fifteen. One of them tried the organ; it was locked.

"Never mind," she said; "Mrs. Pierce isn't here; there would be nobody to play."

Then she tried the piano; that also was locked. "Dear, dear!" she said, "the janitor ought to look after such things. I wonder where the hymn-books are kept? Oh, here are some under the cushions, three or four; well, we shall not need more, probably. Mrs. Greyson, you don't care for a book, do you? And I'm sure I don't."

From time to time some one glanced over into the corner where the stranger sat, but no one seemed to think of speaking to her.

"This table is horribly dusty!" said a lady, looking at her glove in disgust, and applying her handkerchief to the offending table. "The janitor really does not pay proper attention to these week-day meetings. How very warm it is! I had a mind not to come; but I was not here last month. I wonder where Mrs. Parkwell is."

"She is in the depths of dressmaking," volunteered a lady who was languidly fanning herself. "I called there yesterday, and she said we need not expect to see her at missionary meetings or elsewhere for the next six weeks. She is preparing to go abroad, you know. She was planning a lovely dress for Estelle, trimmed with the most

elegant lace. How they lavish money on that child ! don't they ?”

There was a general sigh of acquiescence, and one added, “She has everything that money can buy ; but then, they are extravagant in all directions.”

“Except in giving.” This came in significant tones from the lady who fanned herself. The others laughed.

“Oh, they can deny themselves in that direction as well as the best of us,” volunteered a fat little woman, chuckling over her own wit.

Then they seemed suddenly to remember the stranger in the near distance, and to decide to have some religious conversation. They discussed somewhat animatedly the question whether it was wise to try to continue the meetings through the heated term, and whether Mrs. Pierce would be able to attend, and why she was not there today. Then they lapsed into the secular again, and agreed as to the trials of housekeeping.

At last the fat lady said : “Really, ladies, I think we might as well commence our meeting. I don't believe Mrs. Pierce is coming ; in fact, I am almost sure she isn't. She is going out to dinner this evening, and you know she isn't very strong. Somebody must lead for us this afternoon. Who will ?”

Apparently nobody would ; several were appealed to, but made eager disclaimers after this fashion : “I ? No, indeed. I haven't two connected ideas on any subject today, to say nothing of missions. I haven't even taken the wrapper from my missionary journal this month. Mrs. Curtiss must lead.”

“Not I, thank you. I'm not interested in missions in India. I never read up about the work there.”

Were any of them interested in India, or in missions, or in anything save their own affairs? Poor Agatha, young, impulsive, bitterly disappointed, jumped to the conclusion that it was all a miserable farce.

One was at last found who would consent to sit in the leader's chair. A hymn was selected at random and sung by three or four cultured voices. In the mood that was fast possessing Agatha, the very words sounded like mockery.

“ When shall thy name from shore to shore
Sound, all the earth abroad,
And distant nations know and love
Their Saviour and their God? ”

When, indeed, if the work must be left to such put-terers?

There followed a prayer that was eminently proper in tone and diction. It abounded in familiar phrases, such as “ millions lying in darkness ” and “ the power of the cross to conquer superstition ” ; but to poor Agatha there was not a heart-throb in it. Not a reference was made to definite work, not a missionary remembered by name. As to India, the topic for the month, apparently the leader was “ not interested in India ” ; she ignored it.

Then followed reports. One was quite long, giving a detailed description of a May festival that was held for the benefit of missions. There had been a May queen whose right to reign had been bought by votes, the gentlemen being allowed to buy as many votes for their favorites as they pleased. There had been a fairy dance about the queen as she was crowned, followed by a formal presentation to her of representatives from all nations, in

costume. Said costumes, according to the reports, had consumed somewhat more than one-half the gross receipts. The entertainment was reported to have been a complete success; one important feature of it being that so many people who did not care anything about missions were interested. "Interested in what?" the stranger queried of her own thoughts; the report failed to tell.

Another hymn followed.

" Why should our passions mix with earth,
And thus debase our heavenly birth?
Why should we cleave to things below,
And let our God, our Saviour, go?"

Immediately after the singing came a discussion as to whether a lawn party could be arranged before the young people left town for the summer. Mrs. Curtiss believed that it could. She offered the use of their grounds, and said that the young ladies might be dressed as wood-nymphs, and they could have some of the mission-band children for sprites; and that, with refreshments, ices, and creams, served by the aforesaid nymphs from grottoes built for the occasion, she was sure it might be made a success. The grounds could be lighted with Chinese lanterns; that would add to the effect, besides being most appropriate for a missionary entertainment. They must certainly exert themselves in some way to raise the special offering. "That self-denial offering that we pledged, you remember. It will be due early in the fall, before we have had time to recover from the fatigues of the summer."

At last the topic for the day occurred to the chairman, and she asked whether anybody had anything to say

about India. She was quite ashamed of herself; but she had lost her magazine, and was therefore totally ignorant. A lady in the corner was induced to admit reluctantly that she had hers, and, being pressed, proceeded to read a long report, one calculated to give valuable statistical information to those desiring it, but utterly useless in a meeting of this kind. The reader's voice was soothing, and the day warm; more than one lady nodded frequent assent as the droning voice went on.

Agatha, meantime, sat bolt upright, two red spots glowing on her cheeks and bitter indignation in her heart. Was this the constituency on which her father and mother were to rest their oft-times fainting souls? Was this the band of praying women whose published words her tired mother read and reread, and wept over, and hoarded as if they were jewels to be worn in her heart?

However, by the time the meeting closed, consternation was beginning to take the place of disappointment and pain in the young stranger's mind. She had been so sure of remaining to an evening session that she had given little heed to her uncle's careful directions as to trains. She awoke suddenly to the memory that her latest train out was at twenty minutes of five, and that it was much more than a half-hour's journey to the station, and it was already half-past four!

Those disappointing women had been so late in gathering; and then had gone over their summer's wardrobes, and the shortcomings of their servants, before they commenced the meeting! That "sweet-faced woman" to whom she had intended to introduce herself had failed her. The desire to remain with these women even for an

hour longer than was necessary had departed. As for the evening session, which she had evolved out of her supposed knowledge of methods, apparently they had not so much as thought of such a thing. What was to be done? She had no money with her ; at least, not enough to serve her at a hotel, and she was an utter stranger.

III

SHE BECAME AN UNWILLING GUEST

MRS. CURTISS must have been looking at the stranger just then, and noting the troubled face, for she moved toward her. Mrs. Curtiss knew nothing about India, and very little about missions, but she had a kind heart.

"I do not remember your face," she said, extending her hand and smiling kindly; "but we are glad to see you here. The young ladies do not come very often. I wish they did. Do you live near the church?"

Thus helped, Agatha essayed to explain. It was difficult work. Mrs. Curtiss was not familiar with the names of missionaries. She had never heard of Dr. Hunter. Still, she was interested.

"Is it possible?" she said. "So you are a missionary's daughter; how strange!" The look that accompanied the words said: "Are you sure this is a true story? Are you not an impostor, a sort of female tramp, who has started out on a new line, to deceive the credulous?"

Agatha felt the look. "My father is Dr. Cornelius Hunter, of India," she repeated quickly. "I have a letter from him in my pocket; I brought it with me because—" she made a sudden pause; she would *not* tell those women that she had brought her dear father's beautiful letter, and a few lines from her precious mother, just to give them the joy of hearing the freshest news from India, if opportunity offered. She must show it now for

a different reason. "You can look at it if you please, madam; it will show you that I am speaking truth."

"Why, of course you are!" said Mrs. Curtiss, hastily; then she raised her voice. "Ladies, here is something interesting; Miss—Hunting, did you say, my dear? O yes, Hunter,—Miss Hunter, of India, is here. She came in from the country to attend our meeting, and has lost her train. She is a stranger in town; can you advise what shall be done?"

It is curious what homes were represented that day; some were full to overflowing; others were torn up and in the hands of plumbers, paper-hangers, and the like. One lady's invalid aunt, who lived with her, dreaded to meet strangers.

Agatha interrupted the explanations. "If you could direct me to a respectable hotel, and be so kind, one of you, as to be responsible for the bill until I can get back to my uncle and return the money, I would—" and then Mrs. Curtiss interrupted.

"No, no, my dear; we will not send a young girl like you to a hotel alone. That is not the way we do things in this country. I shall take you home with me. My young people have friends with them, quite a house full; but there is always room for one more. I can make you comfortable until morning. I would have offered before, only I thought some one else might be less crowded."

Was there ever a more reluctant guest? Yet what else could poor Agatha do?

Seated, finally, at Mrs. Curtiss's elegant dinner-table, she did not feel more at ease. Although most of the guests were young people, she had never in her life felt so utterly left out and miserable. Her uncle's farm kitchen,

with the hired man sitting opposite her, would have been paradise just then.

The table-talk was of the lightest and gayest, and had to do with matters of which she was ignorant.

Suddenly Mr. Edward Curtiss, the son of the house, started a new topic.

“Well, mother, did you and those other devoted female women convert the heathen world over again, this warm afternoon?”

The mother's warning eyes having failed to arrest her son, she said: “Edward, I am ashamed of you! Did not I tell you that Miss Hunter was a missionary's daughter?”

“I beg a thousand pardons. I remember no such announcement; still, I mean not the slightest offence; it is only your missionary zeal, my dear mother, that moves me to merriment.”

“Edward is always poking fun at our missionary zeal,” said his sister Eva, with a genial laugh. “I think he would better look at home. I'm sure I do more in a single month for the cause than he does in a year. Didn't I work myself almost to death over that May festival? And here is mother come home from this afternoon's meeting with a lawn fête on her conscience! It is for the benefit of the special fund. There are always ‘special funds,’ or ‘self-denial weeks,’ or something of that sort, for missionaries. I haven't yet recovered from that self-denial week. I denied myself that lovely trip to the bay, just on account of the missionary tea. Why, we are always at work for missions in this house; aren't we, mother? Mother goes to the meetings, and promises and I perform.”

The mention of the lawn fête set all young tongues in motion. Mrs. Curtiss's idea had to be explained; and, as they talked, the idea grew. Somebody suggested a band of music to be stationed in one of the grottoes.

"Yes," said Miss Eva, "and we might have a dance on the tennis lawn. Or wouldn't that do on a missionary occasion? Isn't there some way to get money out of it? Each gentleman might be compelled to purchase a partner, and to double the price every time he desired to dance more than once with the same lady. That would be original, at least. I think we should make money. Charlie, you will vote for the scheme, will you not? Think what an opportunity it would afford!"

This evidently meant some local hit, for there was a general burst of laughter, in the midst of which "Charlie," shaking his head, said dolefully: "Do not expect anything of me; I am down on mission enterprises. I'm a sufferer from that self-denial week. I expected father to give me a complete new turnout for my birthday; and he shut down on it, with the announcement that it was just the week for practising self-denial. I call that denial of other people, instead of *self*, don't you?"

They could have no conception of the utter hatefulness of all this to Agatha. "Self-denial week!" yes, indeed, she knew all about that. Had she not humbly denied herself certain small luxuries that were really almost needs, gladly dropping into her mission-box the coins they represented, feeling that she was even in this small way living a part of her mother's and father's life of daily sacrifice?

- Mr. Edward Curtiss, whose nearest neighbor she was at table, decided perhaps, just then, that he had a duty to perform toward this grave-faced stranger. His first effort

at conversation was in pursuance of a thought that had come to him a moment before.

“Miss Hunter, have you relatives of your name in this country?”

“I am thankful to say that I have not.”

The manner of her reply surprised him; it seemed to have a great deal of unnecessary vigor. Not liking to be vanquished, however, he tried again.

“I hope you are enjoying your stay in this country, and that you are having an opportunity to study its beauties. We are so large as a country that this takes time. I do not know how long you have been here.”

“It is five months to-day since I landed, and I wish I could start homeward to-morrow.”

Her tone, though low, was so intense, and seemed to express so much more than homesickness that he was tempted to question further.

“Is it permissible to ask why?”

“Because I am afraid that, if I stay much longer, I shall learn to *hate* America; and it is my mother’s home.”

Mr. Curtiss was astounded. The pent-up torrent of feeling of some sort that showed behind this brief expression bewildered him.

“Now, indeed, I feel as though I must again ask ‘Why?’” he said, smiling, and wondering what reply she could make.

She did not keep him waiting. “It is because I feel insulted,” she said in a low tone that was yet almost fierce. “All the talk I have heard to-day concerning missions is simply an insult to my father and mother. You are playing with the most tremendous interests that can occupy the human mind. You believe that millions of

souls are perishing for lack of help that you could give, and you spend your money and your time and your strength on luxurious nothings, and dole out the paltry sums which you make by your *play* to support the missionaries who are doing your work for you. You talk of sacrifice! I wonder who among you knows by experience the first syllable of its meaning. Do you think my father and mother do not understand it? What have they sacrificed? No young lady of your set had a more lovely home or choicer opportunities for culture than she gave up to go to India. And my father put aside the most flattering opening for making what you call a successful life, and went to that dark land, apparently in order that those who are called by the same name as himself might stay at home and amuse themselves. 'May parties,' indeed! and 'lawn fêtes' and creams and dances and sprites and nymphs to support that for which the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross!"

Did ever a society young man at a fashionable dinner-table hear stranger talk than this? The chatter of tongues was so great all about them that the impassioned words had not been even noticed by the others, but Edward Curtiss was almost overwhelmed by surprise, and a certain feeling that seemed much like self-reproach. He found himself questioning and cross-questioning, bending his head to catch every word of reply. He lingered beside Agatha long after they returned to the parlors, being so absorbed in what she had to tell him as to fail to notice the questioning glances of his other guests.

His sister Eva commented on this conduct when she and her mother were alone together.

"Did you notice Edward? He hardly spoke to any of

the others, just held himself to the side of that large-eyed Miss Hunter. What do you suppose you have done, mother, by bringing that solemn-looking girl home with you?"

As for Edward Curtiss, about that time he was walking thoughtfully up and down his own room, considering the items that he had lately heard.

"She is a perfect cyclone!" he told himself. "I never in my life heard any one talk like her. If the half that she has told me is true,—and of course it is; she knows what she is talking about,—what insufferable fools we must appear in her eyes! Still, our kind has deceived her. There is such a thing as real missionary zeal on this side the water. She ought to hear Dr. Faulkner preach on missions. For that matter, she should hear Mrs. Faulkner pray. But the question is, Why are not all Christians roused? I wonder whether she has the least idea how tremendously she hit me. I confess to having been always more or less amused over my mother's missionary efforts; still, after all, she has done something, while I have done nothing; except to dance at the May festival, and look after a wood-nymph or two! I tell you that was cutting! I mean to look into this thing. I promised I would, and I certainly will."

The very next evening he went to a union missionary meeting that he found advertised in a neighboring church. He had never done such a thing before in his life. It struck him as strange that he had not. Why should he not go to missionary meetings? It was true, as that girl had said, that he called himself by the family name, "Christian." Why was it not his work as well as her father's?

The meeting was not remarkable in any way. It is sometimes very hard to get up remarkable missionary meetings. There are not enough people interested to help do it. But there was a collection taken at its close, and Edward Curtiss left the loose change in his pocket, and drew out his well-filled pocketbook.

The chairman of the missionary committee of the young people's society of Dr. Wardwell's church was at that meeting, and she seized upon the chairman of the lookout committee the moment the meeting closed.

"Did you see Mr. Curtiss here?" she asked. "I never saw him at a missionary meeting before. I didn't know he was interested in any of these things. And he put a ten-dollar bill into the basket. I sat just back of him and saw it. Look here, Fannie Lockhart, you must go for him this very week. He belongs to us. He is a member of our church. Didn't you know it? Yes, of course he is; and he ought to belong to our young people's society. Don't you let another Sunday pass without asking him; those ten-dollar bills ought to drop into our missionary baskets; and there are a hundred other ways in which he can help. I'm so delighted to know that he is one of that kind; someway, I didn't expect it."

O mother, mother Curtiss! you know nothing about India, and not much about any other mission ground; still, you wish in a dreamy, half-awake fashion to have yourself counted as being identified with the cause; but you have not the remotest idea what you did for missions by befriending the large-eyed stranger that sultry summer afternoon.

IV

SHE CREATED A MISSIONARY MEETING

MORE things had been accomplished by that meeting in the Fountain Square Church than any of the actors therein imagined. In the first place, Agatha Hunter went back to the rugged farm transformed. All the while she was bumping along the uneven road, seated in the milk-wagon, she was going over her strange experience, and forming her plans founded on the new resolves that had sprung into being.

Her former terror at the thought of "talking" in a public meeting, as she knew missionaries were expected to do when they came home for rest, seemed to have gone from her. She *wanted* to talk ; she panted for the opportunity. Those women with their apathy for missions and their enthusiasm for play had roused within her a new sense of power and desire. *She* could have told them things about women in India that would have made their blood seem fairly to freeze in their veins, oppressive summer day though it was. They were ignorant, densely ignorant ; she had not imagined that such a condition of things could be possible in this Christian land. While her father and mother had gone on, up the heights of self-sacrifice, the home-land had stood still, or retrograded. If ever any people needed rousing, Christians such as those she had met at the missionary meeting needed it.

There was another small matter that had helped to fire

her zeal. During a break in her conversation with Edward Curtiss that evening, while he was summoned elsewhere for a moment, she had listened to talk near her, her attention having been arrested by the sound of her own name.

“Do you know that Miss Hunter has a career opening before her?”

“Miss Hunter? Julia, do you mean? Why, certainly, several of them.”

“Ah, but this is something quite new. She has promised to attend the closing exercises of the Star Club, and give them an exhibition of fancy club-swinging.”

“The idea! I shouldn't think she would like to do that.”

“Oh, she does it for benevolence. The club is raising funds for the reading-room, and it is thought that people will come to see Miss Hunter perform who wouldn't ordinarily think of attending; and that is true; it will be quite a lift for them. But I don't think Mr. Curtiss likes the idea very well, and I confess that I shouldn't think he would.”

The talk degenerated after that into actual gossip about the affairs of Miss Julia Hunter and Mr. Curtiss; but the thought that had stayed with Agatha Hunter was that this unknown namesake of hers was able to make exhibition of physical strength and grace for the sake of some benevolence, while she, the daughter of missionaries, could not get the consent of her will to stand before an audience of Christian women and tell them of things that they ought to know! After that, she assured herself that she could, and would.

Over her decision Aunt Harriet was astonished and a

trifle annoyed ; but Uncle Joseph was decidedly upon Agatha's side.

“ The girl knows things that are worth telling,” he said sturdily, “ things that I didn't know about myself.” And Uncle Joseph put a crisp five-dollar bill in the next annual collection for foreign missions.

By September, Agatha's plans were fully formed, and she was in communication with dozens of churches that were glad to pay her expenses and take up a special collection for the cause of missions, for the sake of having the daughter of a missionary speak to them.

Her experiences during that never-to-be-forgotten campaign would fill a volume. She encountered all sorts of devices for raising money. Fairs, festivals, fêtes, flower shows, carnivals, private theatricals, dinners, suppers, teas innumerable. She became filled with admiration over the ingenuity of the human mind in devising ways and means for extracting money in the name of benevolence.

She came in contact with some earnest men and women, whole-hearted souls who put Christ always first, and labored incessantly for the coming of His kingdom. Gradually her knowledge of America and its virtues, as well as its faults, increased as her horizon widened. She was not now in danger of “ hating ” the home-land ; she had met too many noble workers here, whom to know was to love for all time, as well as all eternity. But she found, Oh, *so* many wearing the name of Christ and utterly indifferent to His last command.

Out of her many and varied experiences there is time to describe but one. She had accepted an invitation to an important city church. The missionary meeting was to be held in the evening, and the belief was that on

this account the attendance would be larger than the average.

“I should not be surprised if there should be as many as a hundred women out, Aunt Harriet,” said the youthful missionary as she packed her bag, “and perhaps a dozen men. A few of them always come to an evening meeting.”

“Pity’s sake !” said Aunt Harriet, grimly, “I should think they could raise more folks than that who would like to hear about a country they had never seen, from one who has lived there all her life.”

Aunt Harriet, having gone over to the enemy’s side, had gone wholly, and wanted to have her niece honored with large audiences. But Agatha laughed ; she was not in search of honor ; if she could get to the hearts of a hundred women at once, she would “thank God and take courage.” Large missionary gatherings outside of the popular annual meetings of the great boards of the church she had learned not even to hope for.

Other engagements had made it impossible for her to plan to reach the city, on the evening of which I write, until almost the appointed hour for the meeting to open. To make this more trying, the train was late. She was therefore not surprised at being hurried most unceremoniously into a carriage by a committee of two ladies and a gentleman, who waited only to ask whether this was Miss Hunter, and to tell her, what she had been nervously considering for the last half-hour, that the audience was waiting for her. During the rapid drive from the station she was occupied in explaining the causes of detention. The only information given her was that she would find an enthusiastic audience, the largest they had had this

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winter. Whereupon her hopes began to rise higher. It might be that she would have a chance to speak to as many as two hundred women, and that would be a triumph indeed!

Arrived at the building, she was hurried through a maze of side doors and ante-rooms quite unlike any church arrangement familiar to her; but on reaching the platform her surprise was lost in admiration and also bewilderment at the size of the audience. An immense room with galleries rising tier on tier; and everywhere, floor, galleries, even the space in front of the platform, packed closely with humanity.

The mammoth missionary meeting of which she had read, and over which her soul had thrilled, was before her at last. But oh, the terror of it—she was to speak to them! This thought almost took away her breath. In her day-dreams there had always been present some favorite missionary who held his audience spellbound. What had she done in gathering such a mighty concourse of people to listen to her? Could she say anything worthy of the cause she represented? Could she do justice to her father and mother?

She turned back to speak to the reception committee.

“I did not understand that you were to meet in a hall. Is there—are there not other exercises?”

“O yes,” one of the ladies explained; there was a programme prepared that they had intended to carry out; but they had decided, when they found the train was so late, to waive all preliminaries and place her first, because there were suburban trains that left soon after nine o'clock, which some of the audience would have to take. She was instructed to take all the time she wished; the programme

was of no consequence. It would not make a particle of difference whether any other feature of it was carried out or not. What the people wanted this evening was Miss Hunter. She was informed that the pianist was in his place before the instrument, and could be directed as to what was desired ; then the reception committee vanished behind mysterious screens.

All this was a new and strange way to arrange a missionary meeting. Where was the pastor of the church ? Or, as this must be a union of several churches, where were all the pastors ? How was she expected to manage the music ? She did not know what book, even, was to be used. If they had wanted her to make selections, why had they not instructed her to that effect ? And why in the world did they not have somebody to offer the opening prayer, and to introduce her ? She had never heard of such proceedings. She looked about her anxiously. Not a person was at hand to consult, save the pianist ; and he looked like a young man who would not understand how to manage a missionary meeting.

Never mind ; that great audience was waiting. Perhaps the committee wanted as informal and social a meeting as possible. There were some hymns that everybody sung. How magnificent, for instance, "All hail the power of Jesus name !" would sound issuing from so many throats ! She resolved to ask the pianist to play the first line, without any announcement.

She recalled afterward the look on that pianist's face as she bent toward him and asked : " Will you play ' Coronation,' and lead it ? I mean without announcement. I would like to get the effect of its almost spontaneous outburst from the lips of this great audience."

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There was a single moment of hesitation; evidently there was no "Coronation" music in the pile at the pianist's side. But he was equal to the situation. The keys of the grand piano were suddenly struck by a master hand, and his splendid voice at once took up the strain. A wave of bewildered surprise seemed to sweep over the audience. They looked at one another. Then, in obedience to an emphatic nod from the pianist, certain voices joined his; and then the entire audience seemed to catch the inspiration, and old "Coronation" held sway once more. Not one verse only, but several; Agatha's voice guiding the pianist. When they sang:

"O that with yonder sacred throng
We at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown him Lord of all!"

the glorious hope of the future held the girl on the platform in such strong bonds that earthly fear shrunk away; and she felt willing to speak, even to that audience, of the throngs in India who ought at least to be permitted to hear of such possibilities for them.

"After that song," she said, her clear voice filling the silence, "nothing seems appropriate but the Lord's Prayer, voiced by us all. Will every one join?"

Again the house was filled with measured sound. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come." On those three words, "Thy kingdom come," Agatha had thought to hinge her message to the hundred women she hoped to meet. All the week her heart had been filled with longing for the coming of His kingdom on the earth; for the putting away of ignorance

and apathy in this privileged land, and the rising of the people, His people, to meet the needs of their brethren and sisters in other lands. Then India, her home, the scene of her father's and mother's sacrifices and consecrations, might indeed join in that "everlasting song." These people, she thought, sang and prayed as if they were in sympathy. She could tell them of India's needs as they had presented themselves to her, a young woman living in the midst.

Without further preliminary she began her story. For an hour and ten minutes the people sat silent, intent, listening to what was to many of them as a message from another world, so new and strange were the truths presented. The truth made eloquent by the heart-throbs of a soul tremendously in earnest must always reach other souls.

When at last the voice from the platform ceased, another voice in the audience said instantly, "Let us pray." And Agatha Hunter heard what Edward Curtiss had wished she could hear, for it was Dr. Faulkner who prayed.

After that, the congregation seemed to consider itself dismissed. It was all very strange management. No one apparently thought of such a thing as a collection; there was no attempt at a closing hymn; there was not even the benediction; the people simply rushed away, as from an entertainment. That is, most of them did. There were groups that lingered in aisles or doorways, and talked together, and laughed, some of them immoderately.

V

SHE MET "THE CHAMPION"

WHILE Agatha waited, still on the platform, that reception committee came to her once more, bringing with them a tall young man. "This is our champion," explained one of the young ladies, "the gentleman whose mother is to entertain you."

"O," said Agatha, who had wondered why he had not appeared before, "is this Mr. Vaughn? Champion missionary worker, I suppose?"

There were bursts of laughter from the young ladies, in which "the champion" seemed obliged at first to join; but he controlled himself promptly and hastened to explain.

"O no, I am not Mr. Vaughn; I'm only Charlie Dennis, champion club-swinging, so-called, of our set. I think you must be very weary, Miss Hunter. May I show you at once to the carriage? My mother is sorry not to be here to welcome you herself; the illness of my little sister detained her at home this evening. Nothing serious, you understand; only Pet thinks she needs her mother when she has any sort of discomfort, and mother could not feel willing to leave her."

He hurried Agatha away from the people who now seemed inclined to gather about her, and yet held themselves back in an unusual way. In truth, the girl was by this time so bewildered that she hardly knew how to carry

on her part of the conversations, and was glad to find herself seated in a private carriage with "the champion" opposite her. Yet this, too, was bewildering. Since he was not Mr. Vaughn, the son of her missionary hostess,—that was to have been,—why was she here, and where was Mr. Vaughn?

"I beg your pardon," she said, as the carriage rolled away, "but I think there must be some mistake. I had correspondence with a Mrs. W. T. Vaughn, of Forty-fifth Street, who said that her son would conduct me by street-car to their home. He was also to have met me at the train, and, indeed, I supposed it was he who accompanied the ladies. Do you know whether he did? And are you sure your mother expects me?"

"O yes, indeed!" he said eagerly, "she expects you, or—that is, she expects Miss Hunter. You are Miss Hunter, are you not? Yes; well, that's all right, you see; only—well, the fact is, there has been a mistake somewhere, and we have reaped the benefit. We are very sorry, not for ourselves, you understand, but for somebody, we don't quite know who. If the Forty-fifth Street Vaughns are in it, it must be the Central Avenue Church people."

"Yes," said Agatha, "that is the name; and that is another strange thing. I thought the meeting was to be held in a church. At least, nothing was said about a hall, and I supposed of course that a missionary meeting would be—"

"Exactly," interrupted the champion, "I presume it was; but you see ours—we didn't have a missionary meeting."

"Didn't have a missionary meeting!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I don't mean that, of course; we had a tiptop missionary meeting. But I mean, we didn't go in for that sort of thing, you know. I told you there was a little mistake. I don't feel sure that I understand it; I'm not in the least acquainted with the lady, never saw her, in fact, but—. Do you suppose, now, that you are Miss Julia Hunter, of Philadelphia?"

"O no! I am Agatha Hunter, daughter of Dr. Hunter of India. I came from Philadelphia to-night by train; that is, I changed cars at Philadelphia; I came from a country town a few miles from there, and I was to speak to the Central Avenue people to-night on missions."

"Exactly; that was something like what I thought. But you see you spoke, instead, to the Physical Culture Club of the West Side."

"*The Physical Culture Club!*" It would not be possible to put more astonishment and dismay into four words than poor Agatha managed to convey by this repetition.

"Yes," said Charlie Dennis, speaking eagerly, as one anxious to convey all possible information and also to be conciliating. "You see, we planned to have a gathering to-night to raise money for the dinner that our club is to tender to the Albany Club; and Miss Hunter,—Miss Julia Hunter, I mean,—who is a friend of some of our people, offered to help us. She was to swing clubs for us, and give a wand exercise, and things of that sort, you know."

"Then it was a paid entertainment?"

"O yes; we sold tickets at fifty cents. I think I can see just how the blunder happened; the Burtons, who are Miss Julia Hunter's friends here, and were to entertain her, were called out of town suddenly by the death of a

relative; they telegraphed her that they must be away, and that a committee would meet her at the train; and the committee met you, instead, don't you see? At the last minute there wasn't any one around who had ever seen you,—who had ever seen Miss Julia Hunter, I mean,—and the train was awfully late, and that complicated matters. I suppose they only waited to hear that you were Miss Hunter, and then rushed you away without giving you a chance to take breath, or to answer any questions."

The young man paused for breath, and they looked at each other, the "champion club-swinging" and his would-be rival. His good-natured face was one broad expanse of sympathy and anxiety to make everything as comfortable as possible. Then they both, as by common consent, took in the utterly absurd features connected with the mistake, and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

It did them good, this outburst. Both had been wrought up to a most uncomfortable pitch of excitement, and the reaction was an immense relief.

After that they could talk, and plan together the best methods for explaining the blunder. The champion behaved royally.

"We sold five hundred dollars' worth of tickets," he said; "and I guess the people thought they got a thousand dollars' worth of good. It was better than any clubs that were ever swung, Miss Hunter; it was, indeed. You see, a lot of us never heard such talk before in our lives. We hadn't the least idea there was such a state of things anywhere as you described. I give you my word of honor that it was all new and strange to me. I'll tell you what it is. Those schools and things need money, don't

they? They need it a great deal worse than the Physical Culture Clubs need dinners. I'm as sure as anything that our folks will vote to give you every cent of the money, to send out there to your mother's school. Eight hundred dollars for a single dinner, when there is such a state of things as you told us about to-night, is awful, isn't it? That is the way the thing is going to work; I saw signs of it to-night. Fanny Ellsler said to me as I passed her: 'I'm ashamed of myself, and of our club, and of everything. Aren't you?' 'Of course I am,' I told her; and I am; and what is more, all the rest of them will be, when they hear that Fanny is; for what Fanny Ellsler thinks is contagious, you understand. Dr. Faulkner held out his hand to me after you got through to-night, and said he: 'Never mind the five hundred dollars, Charlie, give them to her for that little children's school that she described, and our people will make it a thousand.' Dr. Faulkner was the man who prayed. But what do you suppose the Central Avenue people did? I'm awfully sorry for them."

What they did was to send Mr. Vaughn, according to appointment, to meet the train. Now Mr. Vaughn was a scholarly, near-sighted, timid man of forty-five or fifty, who looked about him in nervous uncertainty when the passengers from the belated train began to sweep through the gates. He asked at least a dozen women whether they were not Miss Hunter before he found one who admitted that she was. Then he looked relieved, told her—what she already knew—that the train was very late; and hurried her into a crowded street-car, where he stood as far away from her as the limits of the car would permit, until, after a long ride, he motioned her to follow him, and

dashed into a pleasantly lighted chapel connected with a large, plain-looking church.

Here were seated from seventy to a hundred women and a dozen or so gentlemen, Agatha's audience, waiting patiently for a black-robed young woman with earnest grey eyes. Several of the ladies had both seen and heard her. The apparition that Mr. Vaughn introduced in triumph was not black-robed, nor grey-eyed, and belonged manifestly to a totally different world. Truth to tell, her costume, which was revealed as soon as she had thrown open her traveling-wrap, was of a character to strike consternation to the heart of a missionary woman.

Aware of the fact that there would be no opportunity for making her toilet after the arrival of the train she felt compelled to take, Miss Julia Hunter had dressed for the first part of her programme, and covered all defects with a neat, close-fitting traveling-wrap. Laying it aside, she stood before them in modern gymnasium dress, full trousers, short skirt, long stockings, and dainty slippers.

As soon as Miss Hunter had arranged her dress to her satisfaction, she began to look around her, and seemed to be at once struck by some discrepancy between her surroundings and her expectations.

"What is all this?" she asked. "Is this a church? You look as if you were arranged for a prayer meeting. Where is the pianist? Why, where in the world is the piano? It is impossible to go through with my part of the programme without music."

"There is a very good cabinet organ," said Mr. Vaughn meekly.

"An organ! Who ever heard of playing such music on an organ? We don't use psalm tunes, you know. By

the way, did you look after my box? I never thought to speak to you about it, but it ought to have come right along with us. I brought my own clubs, you know."

"Clubs?" repeated the near-sighted and greatly embarrassed Mr. Vaughn, looking about him in hopeless bewilderment, and signalling his mother to his aid.

"Yes, of course. Don't you remember that I wrote you I would bring my own clubs and bells? And I brought my Greek costume as well. For the second part of the programme I meant to give you some poses."

"Poses." In such connection, what could poses mean? Poor Mr. Vaughn! He could handle Greek roots in a way to bewilder every student at the university, but this would-be Greek maiden in her extremely un-Greek dress was incomprehensible and appalling. It was with infinite relief that he hailed the approach of a meek-faced, sweet-eyed woman in a widow's cap. His mother was a missionary's widow, and had looked forward to greeting this daughter of a missionary with almost a mother's tenderness. But she, too, felt overwhelmed.

"My dear," she said gently, "there must be some mistake. You are—Miss Hunter?"

"Of course I am; but your arrangements are all very peculiar. What am I to do for a piano? It is simply impossible to get along without one. The postures are not pretty without music, and to use an organ would be ridiculous. I want to represent the emotions, you know,—fear, and astonishment, and the like."

Mrs. Vaughn's face represented the latter emotion, both of them, indeed. Miss Hunter turned from her gaze in impatience.

"Where is your committee of arrangements?" she

asked. "Where are all the members of the club, anyway? Surely this handful of elderly women and a few white-haired men do not constitute your club."

Then the white-haired woman summoned all her courage, and rose to the occasion.

VI

SHE FOUND KINDRED SPIRITS

"THERE is certainly some mistake," she said firmly; "we are expecting Miss Agatha Hunter to speak to us to-night. She is the daughter of a missionary, and has lived all her life, until a few months ago, in India. It cannot be possible that you are—" She paused in confusion. It seemed impossible to complete her sentence with those bright young eyes looking at her curiously, with a mixture of surprise and indignation, through which gleams of fun were now struggling.

"That I am Miss Agatha Hunter, of India," she said, completing the sentence. "No, madam, I am not. I am Julia Hunter, of Philadelphia, and have come to your city by special request to assist in an entertainment of a Physical Culture Club. So this is a missionary meeting? I confess that it struck me as a remarkable-looking club. What is to be done? I wonder. I do not know where the club is to be found. I haven't even a street and number to guide me. I expected to be met, you understand, and cared for. My personal friends were unexpectedly called from the city, and I therefore expected to meet only strangers, and supposed of course that—"

"I am very, *very* sorry," said Mrs. Vaughn, earnestly; "my son should have been more careful. I don't quite know what ought to be done now. I am afraid there is no one here who is acquainted with—*clubs*." She spoke

the word hesitatingly, as if it represented something which, if not reprehensible, was so foreign to her life that she knew not how to meet it.

Something in her gentle, hesitating, anxious manner made Miss Hunter laugh; at the same time, she felt sorry for her. "Never mind the club," she said cheerfully; "they will learn in due time that there has been a mistake made, and will hunt me up, probably. If they do not need me enough for that, they may do without me; but what will you do if the right Miss Hunter does not appear?"

"Oh, we shall be able to manage. This is a home and foreign missionary meeting; and you were—I mean Miss Hunter was—to speak of the foreign work, and Mr. Dunning, a missionary from Idaho, is to talk to us about home missions. We can give him the entire time, unless, indeed—." She stopped in marked embarrassment, and with an appeal in her eyes that almost set Miss Hunter off into another laugh.

"Unless I will take part of the time? Thank you; I am afraid that would not be profitable. I never attended a missionary meeting in my life. But I shall stay to this one, unless I am found; and I hope I shall not be. Let us hear from Mr. Dunning, by all means."

Whereupon she slipped swiftly into her decorous wrap, buttoned out of sight her disreputably short skirt, and helped herself to a seat.

There was a whispered consultation with several women; then presently a young man went quickly toward the platform, and the belated exercises commenced.

To the enforced listener the first fifteen minutes were of unmixed amusement. To her there was something ir-

resistibly comic in this complete change of programme. Instead of delighting an appreciative audience with her skilful manipulation of clubs and dumb-bells, she was actually seated in a church, and somebody was praying! Memories of the last conversation she had held with Mr. Edward Curtiss came vividly before her. He had disapproved of her benevolent designs for the West Side Physical Culture Club.

“Physical exhibitions of all sorts are offensive,” he had said in his most aristocratic tone; “quite disagreeable enough when the exhibitors are men; when they are ladies, what shall be said?”

She had resented the curl of his lip and the veiled sarcasm of his words, and would have none of his advice. What was Edward Curtiss to her? If she was skilful enough in any line to make people willing to pay money to see her work, she had a right to utilize the skill for others, if she chose. She had persisted in her intentions, but had been much disturbed over Mr. Curtiss’s disapproval. She knew that he had business in the city where the exhibition was to take place, but had hoped that he would be too fastidious to come and see her perform. She had felt that she might even fail, if she saw his keen, cold eyes fixed upon her in disapproval. Now she had visions of the airy way in which she would toss her head and say to him: “While you were attending a physical-culture exhibition I was at a missionary meeting. There is no accounting for people’s tastes.”

Just when she ceased following her own memories and fancies, and began to give attention to Mr. Dunning, she could not have told. Something in the quality of his voice arrested her. The story he was telling was one of

homely life, an account of a girl no older than herself, whose struggle for even a common-school education, and, above all, for a knowledge of the Bible, in the face of privations and persecutions enough to crush a less heroic soul, was told in a manner to arrest the attention of the most thoughtless. Julia Hunter was not thoughtless by nature; she was simply a young woman hemmed in by the environments of society life. As she had frankly said, she had never before attended a missionary meeting. She had supposed that missionary meetings were stupid. Some of them are.

Her attention once arrested, she listened; she could hardly have helped it. Mr. Dunning knew how to hold the attention. He lived and toiled among the people for whom he spoke; he had sacrificed much for them; he knew what they needed, nay, what before very long they must have, if they were to be saved to this country and to God. As Julia Hunter listened, her very soul caught fire. Was it possible that the earth—ay, more than that, her own home-land—held such girls as these, envired by such perils, alive to such possibilities, if only—!

Talk about an exhibit of emotions! Julia Hunter had come to that city to pose for an admiring audience. She had planned to show them how easily, without a word, one could express sorrow and surprise and indignation and pain. Could she have had a view of her face during Mr. Dunning's address, she would have discovered that the human face alone, without aid from any other part of the body, could express all these, because the soul could feel them.

Never had she been so wrought upon by human speech. She forgot the strange and ludicrous combination of cir-

cumstances that had brought her to a missionary meeting. She forgot the incongruous dress she wore, and the elaborate Greek costume she had expected to don ; she forgot everything but those stories of human struggle and disappointment and courage and victory. Why had she never heard such stories before ? If this was what the missionaries were trying to accomplish in the face of such terrible obstacles, why were not she and every other creature with a soul helping to the extent of their power ? Why had not Mr. Curtiss suggested to her some of these ways for employing her time and strength, instead of contenting himself with curling his handsome lip almost into a sneer over her good-natured offer to help the Physical Culture Club ?

“*Physical* culture, indeed !” she said to herself, her own lip curling at thought of the words. “It is moral culture that we need, every one of us ; Mr. Curtiss with the rest. I don’t believe he knows these things.”

It came to pass that the two young ladies named Hunter, whose lives for one day became so strangely mixed, did not immediately get back to their individual environments.

Agatha Hunter had planned to remain in the city for several days, in attendance upon a missionary convocation. She was to have been the guest of Mrs. Vaughn. But the morning after her address before the Physical Culture Club found her so overwhelmed with confusion over the mistake, and she so shrank from meeting any of the ladies whom she had failed, that what she did was to insist upon being taken to the ten-o’clock train.

In point of fact, none of the people who had planned did as they had planned. For instance, Mr. Edward Curtiss meant to have escorted Miss Julia Hunter to the morning train, and traveled with her homeward. Also, he had planned to be present at the physical-culture entertainment the evening before. He felt that he knew just how the exercises of that club would impress him, and resolved that during that homeward journey he would speak some plain words to Miss Hunter. He would express in frankest terms his utter disapproval of her share in that entertainment, giving his reasons therefor, not with sarcasm, as he admitted that he had spoken before, but kindly and earnestly. At any cost she should know his views.

“And, if she does not respect my views enough to give earnest heed to them, why then—” he drew himself up as he thought this, and set his lips firmly, but did not trouble himself to complete the sentence. His name had been coupled with that of Miss Julia Hunter for more than a year; he told himself that it did not disturb him that such was the case. Still, if she really did not even respect his judgment—and again he left the thought unfinished.

As he boarded the morning express, there was only one certainty in his mind, that he would speak his views very plainly as soon as opportunity afforded. He was not very sure at that time but he would be sarcastic. It is true he had not attended a physical-culture exhibition on the previous evening, although he had bought his ticket and presented himself at the opera house for that purpose; instead, he had heard that which made him feel very plain-spoken indeed, almost savage, toward all physical cultur-

ists of whatever sort. This was, of course, unreasonable. Mr. Edward Curtiss could be unreasonable, on occasion.

Then he went forward and took a seat beside—Miss Hunter, indeed; but instead of Miss Julia, it was Miss Agatha; and he talked with her, not sarcastically, but certainly with great frankness, during that entire homeward journey.

He came, in the course of the day, to some marked decisions. One was, that, instead of stopping in Philadelphia, he would make a business trip westward. Another was, that, instead of keeping to the main road, he would swing off at the junction and hunt up a college friend who lived somewhere in that region. Another was, that, when the train reached Branchport, he would stop there and make inquiries for his friend, who he knew must be at least thirty miles farther on! Also, he promptly accepted Miss Agatha Hunter's invitation to call at her uncle's house in the country that evening, if he should have time; and he knew he should have time. So much for Mr. Edward Curtiss and his plans.

As for Miss Julia Hunter, instead of taking that morning express as she had planned, she put herself into the very becoming traveling-costume that her valise contained, and attended the three days' missionary meeting, remaining as the guest of Mrs. Vaughn.

Mr. Dunning was also the guest of the Vaughns. He escorted Miss Hunter dutifully to and from the meetings, visited with her in the parlor between sessions, visited with her on the piazza in the early twilight, and in all ways that he could, relieved his hostess of care for her un-

expected guest. Among other duties, he expressed the box of dumb-bells and Indian clubs to Miss Hunter's home, and sent a telegram to her mother to the effect that she had decided to accompany her friend, Mrs. Vaughn, to Eastport to attend the convention. It was another missionary gathering, but Mr. Dunning was instructed to say "convention" in his telegram; and the mother thought it was a physical-culture convention.

The months went by; and it came to pass, in the course of time, that on a lovely September evening the opera house of the West Side was even more closely packed than it had been on the memorable day when Agatha Hunter first made its acquaintance.

But the platform presented a different appearance. Rows of chairs had been placed on it as closely as space would allow, and they were being occupied by clergymen and other dignitaries of the church, as well as by many missionaries who were not clergymen.

A mammoth missionary meeting was this to be, like unto the one of which Agatha Hunter used to dream; larger, indeed, and more enthusiastic than any that her dreams had evolved out of early experiences. The waiting audience occupied itself with whispering. Intimate friends of the parties most concerned were giving other friends interesting particulars connected with certain events that had lately transpired.

"Why, yes," whispered one lady, "Edward Curtiss studied medicine and graduated with the highest honors; then he went abroad and studied. I knew all about it at the time. I remember we thought it queer in him, and we said he would never practise, the Curtiss family is so

wealthy, you know ; and, behold, he has become a medical missionary ! I should have selected the president of the United States as more probable."

Then Whisperer Number Two : " Do you remember that evening at Mrs. Curtiss's, when he first met the lady he is to marry ? It was evident then that he regarded her with more interest than he had ever shown for any other lady, but who imagined that she would weave such a spell over him as she has ? "

" Sure enough ! But Mrs. Curtiss and Eva are as pleased as possible. They just idolize Agatha, and they are going out to India in a few months to visit them. Isn't that interesting ? The fact is, the entire Curtiss family have become missionary fanatics ; they can talk of nothing else. I can remember when Mrs. Curtiss did not know one mission station from another ; and as for Miss Eva, you could not interest her in anything connected with missions, and now they are by far the best-posted people in our church. "

A third voice chimed in : " Nothing about the Curtiss family astonishes me so much as that other Hunter girl has. Only imagine Julia Hunter as the wife of a home missionary away out in Idaho. There is something romantic about going to India, but a *home missionary* ! I am prepared for anything to happen now. "

" It has happened ! " laughed a voice just back of them, and the lady leaned forward to add her word. " What do you suppose the West Side Physical Culture Club voted at its last meeting ? To pledge a thousand dollars a year to the support of whatever work Mrs. Dunning and Mrs. Edward Curtiss were engaged in ! Isn't that a new departure for a Physical Culture Club ? "

"Hush!" sounded a warning whisper, and this particular group of whisperers sat erect, and gave attention to the platform; for the chairs were nearly all filled, and the presiding officer was on his feet.

Again the audience sung, "All hail the power of Jesus' name!" but this time the pianist was prepared. Moreover, the piano, though doing its best, was lost in the splendid orchestra that was present in full power. Those grand men who knew how to give missionary addresses were also present; and never had the theme of missions, both home and foreign, so inspired their tongues as on that evening.

Notably was this the case with Dr. Cornelius Hunter. The audience sat spellbound by the magic of his voice and the power of the tremendous truths he had to tell, until, as he sat down, more than one brushed away tears, as they told themselves it was not strange that the daughter of such a man should want to give herself to the work.

Following Dr. Hunter's address the entire audience joined in a missionary hymn, and, during its singing, trained helpers made quick work with some of those platform chairs. As if by magic a space was cleared, which was presently occupied by two white-robed maidens and two young men.

"A marriage ceremony to be performed in an opera house!"

Yes, two marriage ceremonies.

"And to take place in the very midst of a missionary meeting?"

Yes, to become a vital part of that missionary meeting. The brides were Julia Hunter, of Philadelphia, and Agatha Hunter, of India. And the grooms were the Rev. Oliver

Dunning, missionary in Idaho, and Dr. Edward Curtiss, medical missionary to India, or at least under appointment for that post.

It was Dr. Cornelius Hunter who performed both ceremonies, and the vote was general afterward that there never were two more beautiful brides, nor a more impressive marriage service.

At the close of the missionary meeting, there was a reception given to missionaries, at the house of Mrs. Curtiss. At this reception the members of the West Side Physical Culture Club were exceedingly prominent. The "champion club-swinger," especially, showed his broad, good-natured face, first in one group and then in another; and his resonant voice could be heard affirming: "I give you my word for it that our club to a man and woman voted for the whole thing; we are pretty well up on missions, these days, I can tell you. That first missionary meeting we had here in the opera house did the business for us."

Julia Hunter Dunning overheard the sentence, and said softly to her husband, "It was my first missionary meeting that did the business for me, also."

Mr. Edward Curtiss turned toward her at the moment, and she said: "I am wondering what would have happened had you not expressed yourself so openly against my helping in the physical-culture entertainment. But for that, I suppose I should not have promised them. Are you not glad that I did?"

"Very glad, indeed," he said, smiling into her merry eyes, "both for your sake and for mine. What has become of your clubs and bells and general apparatus? Have you donated them to the West Side Club?"

“Indeed not! They have started for Idaho. Mr. Dunning expects my class in physical culture to open the way for me among the girls out there as nothing else could do. Moreover, I have been advising Mrs. Curtiss to undertake something of the same sort among her girls in India. You do not know the possibilities of physical-culture clubs, Mr. Curtiss.”

“Certainly I realize some of the possibilities,” he said, his eyes still merry, “and I assure you that I am a convert.” Then suddenly he grew grave, and his voice was rich with feeling as he bent toward her, speaking low, and quoted: “‘I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.’ Mrs. Dunning, you and my wife and Dunning and I have surely lived that promise out thus far; we may safely write it in our Bibles as ‘tried and proved,’ and trust it to the end.”

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