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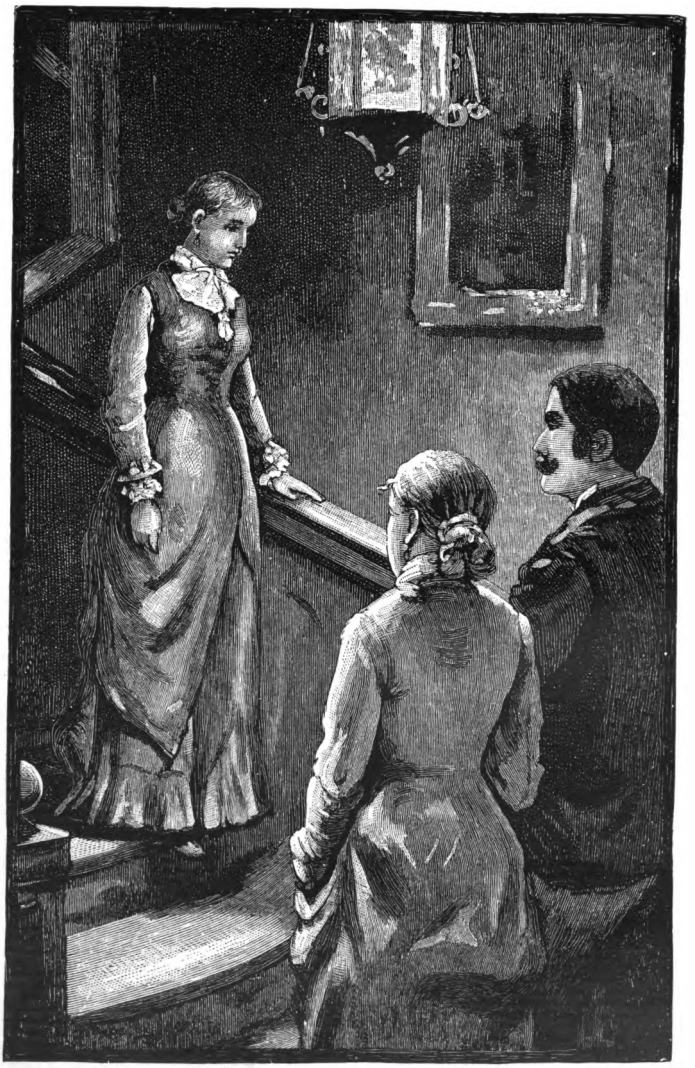
OUT IN THE WORLD.



LOUIS AND ALICE ANSTED CALL ON CLAIRE.

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Out in the World

The Daily Epistle

Page 115.

Thomas Nelson and Sons

London, Edinburgh, and New York

IN THE WORLD

Story of Claire Benedict

BY

Pansy

NEW GRAFT ON THE FAMILY TREE," "ESTHER REID,"
LOWING HEAVENWARD," "A HEDGE FENCE,"
&c. &c.

MAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, and New York

1901

Contents.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

REACHING INTO TO-MORROW.

FROM the back parlour there came the sound of fresh young voices brimming with energy—several voices at once, indeed, after the fashion of eager young ladies well acquainted with one another, and having important schemes to further. Occasionally there were bursts of laughter, indicating that freedom of speech and good fellowship reigned among the workers.

The committee, or the society, or the association, whatever it was, was breaking up; for the door was ajar, one young lady standing near it, her hand out as if to open it wider, preparatory to departure, while she waited to say another of the many last things. Others were drawing wraps about them, or donning furs and overshoes, and talking as they worked. Their voices, clear and brisk, sounded distinctly down the long hall.

"And about the Committee on Award; you will attend to that, Claire, will you not?"

"Oh! and what are we to do about Mrs. Stuart?"

"Why, Claire promised to see her. She is just the one to do it. Mrs. Stuart will do anything for her."

"And, Claire, you must be sure to see the Snyders before the judge starts on his Southern trip. If we don't get his positive promise, we may have trouble."

"Claire Benedict, you promised to help me with my Turkish costume, you know. I haven't the least idea how to get it up."

Then a younger voice:

"Miss Claire, you will drill me on my recitation, won't you? Mamma says you are just the one to show me how."

"And, O Claire, don't forget to see that ponderous Dr. Wheelock and get his subscription. It frightens me to think of going to him."

In the sitting-room opposite stood Claire's younger sister, Dora Benedict. She had just come in from the outer world, and with part of her wraps still gathered about her, stood watching the falling snow, and listening to the voices in the back parlour. At this point she spoke:

"Mamma, just hear the girls! They are heaping up the work on Claire—giving her the planning and the collecting and the drilling and the greater portion of the programme to attend to; and she calmly agrees to do it all!"

"Your sister has a great amount of executive ability, my dear, and is always to be depended on. Such people are sure to have plenty of burdens to carry."

Mrs. Benedict said this in a gently modulated, satisfied voice, and leaned back in her easy-chair and smiled as she spoke. She delayed a stitch in her crimson tidy while she listened a moment to the sound of Claire's voice, calmly and assuringly shouldering the burdens of work—promising here, offering there, until the listeners in the sitting-room were prepared to sympathize with the words spoken in the parlour in a relieved tone of voice:

"I declare, Claire Benedict, you are a host in yourself! What we should do without you is more than I can imagine."

"I should think as much!" This from the girl in the

brown-plumed hat, who listened in the next room. "You couldn't do without her—that is just all there would be about it! Two-thirds of your nice plans, for which you get so much credit, would fall through.—Mamma, do you think Claire ought to attempt so much?"

"Well, I don't know," responded the gentle-faced woman thus appealed to, pausing again in her fancy-work to consider the question. "Claire has remarkable talent, you know, in all these directions. She is a born organizer and leader; and the girls are willing to follow her lead. I don't know but she works too hard. It is difficult to avoid that, with so many people depending on her. I don't myself see how they would manage without her. You know Dr. Ellis feels much the same. He was telling your father, only last night, that there was not another young lady in the church on whom he could depend as he did on her. Your father was amused at his earnestness. He said he should almost feel like giving up his pastorate here, if he should lose her. Claire is certainly a power in the church, and the society generally. I should feel sorry for them if they were to lose her."

The mother spoke this sentence quietly, with the unruffled look of peace and satisfaction on her face. No foreboding of loss came to her. She thought, it is true, of the barely possible time when her eldest daughter might go out from this home into some other, and have other cares and responsibilities, but the day seemed very remote. Claire was young, and was absorbed in her church and home work.

Apparently, even the *suggestion* of another home had not come to her. It might never come. She might live always in the dear home nest, sheltered, and sheltering, in her turn, others less favoured. Or in the event of a change, some time in the future, it might be, possibly, just from one street in the same city to another, and much of the old life go on still: and in any event the mother could say, "Their loss, not mine;" for the sense of possible separation had not come

near enough to shadow the mother's heart as yet—she lived in the dream-land of belief that a married daughter would be as near to the mother and the home as an unmarried one. Therefore her face was placid, and she sewed her crimson threads and talked placidly of what might have been, but was not; the future looked secure and smiling.

"You see," she continued to the young and but half-satisfied daughter, "it is an unusual combination of things that makes your sister so important to this society. There are not many girls in it who have wealth and leisure, and the peculiar talents required for leadership. Run over the list in your mind, and you will notice that those who have plenty of time would not know what to do with it unless Claire were here to tell them; and those who have plenty of money would fritter it all away, without her to guide and set a grand example for them."

"I am not questioning her ability, mamma," the daughter said with a little laugh,—"that is, her mental ability; but it seems to me that they ought to remember that she has a body as well as the others. Still, she will always work at something, I suppose; she is made in that mould. Mamma, what do you suppose Claire would do if she were poor?"

"I haven't the least idea, daughter. I hope she would do the best she could; but I think I feel grateful that there seems little probability of our discovering by experience."

"Still, one can never tell what may happen."

"Oh, no; that is true. I was speaking of probabilities."

Still the mother's face was placid. She called them probabilities, but when she thought of her husband's wealth and position in the mercantile world, they really seemed to her very much like certainties.

And now the little coterie in the back parlour broke up in earnest, and, exclaiming over the lateness of the hour, made haste into the snowy world outside.

Claire followed the last one to the door—a young and

pretty girl, afraid of her own decided capabilities, unless kissed and petted by this stronger spirit into using them.

"You will be sure to do well, Alice dear; and remember I depend on you."

This was the last drop of dew for the frightened young flower, and it brightened visibly under it, and murmured:

"I will do my best; I don't want to disappoint you."

Then Claire came into the sitting-room, and dropped with an air of satisfied weariness into one of the luxurious chairs, and folded her hands to rest.

"Dora thinks you are carrying too much on your shoulders, dear." This from the fancy-worker.

"Oh, no, mamma; my shoulders are strong. Everything is in fine train. I think our girls are really getting interested in missions now, as well as in having a good time: that is what I am after, you know; but some of them don't suspect it. — Why didn't you come to the committee meeting, Dora?"

"I have but just come in from Strausser's, on that commission, you know; and I thought if I appeared there would be so many questions to answer, and so much to explain, that the girls would not get away to-night."

"Oh, did you see Mr. Strausser? Well, what did he say?" And Claire sat erect, her weariness gone, and gave herself to work again.

The door bell rang, and she was presently summoned to the hall.

"One of your poor persons," was the servant's message.

There seemed to be a long story to tell, and Claire listened, and questioned, and commented, and rang the bell to give directions for a certain package from a certain closet to be brought, and sent Dora to her room for her pocket-book; and finally the "poor person" went away, her voice sounding cheered and grateful as she said inquiringly:

"Then you will be sure to come over to-morrow?"

Dora laughed, as Claire returned to the easy-chair.

"How many things you are going to do to-morrow, Claire! I heard you promise the girls a dozen or so. And that reminds me that Dr. Ellis wants to know if you will look in to-morrow, and go with Mrs. Ellis to call on a new family, of whom he said he told you."

"I know," said Claire; "I was thinking about them this morning. I must try to go to-morrow. They are people who ought not to be neglected. Did he say at what hour?—O mamma, have you that broth ready for Aunt Kate? I might go around there with it now; I shall not have time to-morrow, and I promised her I would come myself before the week closed."

Then the fast-falling snow was discussed, and demurred over a little by mother and younger sister, and laughingly accepted by Claire as a pleasant accessory to a winter walk; and it ended, as things were apt to end in that family, in Claire having her own way, and sallying forth equipped for the storm, with her basket of comforts on her arm.

She looked back to Dora to say that mamma must not worry if she were detained, for she had promised to look in at Mr. Ansted's and make some arrangements for to-morrow's committee meeting; and to add that the papers in the library were to be left as they were, ready for to-morrow.

"It is the eventful day," she said laughingly; "our work is to culminate then. We are to discover what the fruit of all this getting ready is; we are to have things just as they are to be, without a break or a pause."

"Perhaps," said Dora.

"Why do you say 'perhaps,' you naughty croaker? Do you dare to think that anything will be less than perfect after the weeks of labour we have given it?"

"How can I tell? Nothing is ever perfect. Did you never notice, Claire, that it is impossible to get through a single day just as one plans it?"

"I have noticed it," Claire answered, smiling, "but I did not know that your young head had taken it in."

"Ah, but I have. *I* plan occasionally myself, but I am like Paul in one thing, anyway—'how to perform I find not.' It is worse on Saturday than on any other day. I almost never do as I intended."

"I wouldn't quote Bible verses with a twisted meaning, if I were you, little girl. It is a dangerous habit; I know by experience. They so perfectly fit into life, that one is sorely tempted. But I am not often troubled in the way you mention; my plans generally come out all right. Possibly because I have studied them from several sides, and foreseen and provided for hindrances. There is a great deal in that. You see, to-morrow, if I don't get through with all the engagements laid out for it. I have studied them all, and there really *can't* anything happen to throw me very far off my programme."

There was an air of complacency about the speaker, and a satisfied smile on her face as she tripped briskly away. She was a skilful and successful general. Was there any harm in her realizing it?

Dora went back to the gentle mother.

"The house will be alive all day to-morrow, mamma. Claire has half-a-dozen committee meetings here at different hours, and a great rehearsal of all their exercises for the literary entertainment. There will be no place for quiet, well-behaved people like you and me. What do you suppose is the matter with me? I feel like a croaker. If Claire had not just scolded me for quoting the Bible to suit my moods, I should have said to her, 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.'"

Mrs. Benedict looked up searchingly into the face of her young daughter, who was so unlike her sister, who took life doubtfully, and bristled with interrogation points, and

dreamed while the other worked, and leaned on Claire everywhere and always, even as she knew she did herself.

"Claire isn't boastful, dear, I think," she said gently. "It is right for her to rest in the brightness of the present and to trust to-morrow."

"Oh, she has planned to-morrow, mamma; there is nothing to trust about."

Then after a moment:

"Mamma, she is good and splendid, just as she always is, and I am cross."

Whereupon she sprang to meet her father, and before he had divested himself of his snowy great-coat, she had covered his bearded face with kisses and dropped some tears on his hands.

It was after family worship that evening, when the father stood with a daughter on either side of him, with an arm around each, that he rallied Dora on her tearful greeting.

"Dora is mercurial," her mother said. "Her birthday comes in April, and there is very apt to be a shower right in the midst of sunshine."

"She has studied too hard to-day," the father said, kissing her fondly. "After a good night's rest, the sunshine will get the better of the showers."

"They both need developing in exactly different ways," he said to the mother when they were left to themselves.

He looked after his two beautiful girls fondly as he spoke, but the last words they had heard from him were:

"Good-night, daughters! Get ready for a bright to-morrow. The storm is about over."

"The storm did not trouble me," said Claire. "Real work often gets on better in a storm; and I think we shall have a chance to try it. I think papa is mistaken; the sky says to me that we shall have a stormy day."

When "to-morrow" came, the sun shone brilliantly in a cloudless sky; but every shutter in the Benedict mansion was closed, and there were mourners within; and during all that memorable day neither daughter did one thing that had been planned for the day before.

CHAPTER II.

WHY?

JUST at midnight—that is, just at the dawning of the "to-morrow" for which so much had been planned—Claire was awakened by a quick, decisive knock at her door, followed by a voice which expressed haste and terror.

"Miss Claire, your mother wants you to come right away, and bring Miss Dora. Your father is sick."

And Claire was alert in an instant, wakening, soothing, and helping the frightened Dora. She herself was not greatly alarmed. It is true, her father was not subject to sudden illnesses; but then men were often sick, and very sick, too, while the attack lasted. She called to mind the story Nettie Stuart had told her that afternoon, how "papa was so ill the night before that they really thought he would die, and everybody in the house was up waiting on him." Yet "papa" had been at the bank that next day, looking nearly as well as usual. Had it been her frail mother who was ill, Claire felt that her pulses would have quickened more than they did now. Mamma did not seem strong enough to bear much pain, but papa was a man of iron frame, everybody said.

She told over some of these encouraging thoughts to Dora, while she helped her to dress.

"Don't tremble so, darling; there is nothing to be frightened about. Papa has one of his dreadful headaches, I presume, and mamma needs us to help to care for him. You know she

is not feeling so well as usual. She promised to call me the next time papa needed nursing. Men are so unused to suffering, that a pain is something terrible to them while it lasts."

They sped down the stairs together, Claire having slackened none of her speed because she believed there was no cause for alarm. Her hand was on her mother's door-knob, when the door swung open, and the mother's white face made her start back in affright.

"Where are they?" she said, in a strange, agonized voice, groping about with her hand as though she did not see distinctly, though the hall was brightly lighted. "O children, children, you are too late! Oh, why—;" and she fell senseless at their feet; and Claire was bending over her, lifting her in trembling arms, trying to speak soothing words, all the time wondering in a terror-stricken way what all this could mean. Too late for what?

They had to settle down to inevitable facts, as so many poor souls before and since have had to do. Of course, the first wildness of grief passed, and they realized but too well that the father who had kissed them and bade them look out for a bright to-morrow, had gone away, and taken all the brightness of the to-morrow with him. At first they could not believe it possible. Father dead! Why, his robust frame and splendid physique had been the remark of guests ever since they could remember! He had been fond of boasting that a physician had not been called for him in twenty years.

Well, the physician arrived too late on this particular night when he had been called; another call had been louder, and the father went to answer to it. Well for him that he had long before made ready for this journey, and that there was nothing in the summons that would have alarmed him, had he been given time to have realized it.

The poor widow went over again and again the details of that awful hour.

"We had a little talk together, just as usual. Much of

it was about you—that was natural, too; he talked a great deal about you, children; and on that evening he said, after you left the room, that you both needed developing in different ways, and sometimes it troubled him to know how it was to be done. I did not understand him, and I asked what he meant. He said some things that I will try to tell you when my head is clearer. He was very earnest about it, and asked me to kneel down with him, and he prayed again for you, dear girls, and for me—a wonderful prayer. It wasn't like any that I ever heard before. Oh, I might have known then that it was to prepare me; but I didn't think of such a thing. I asked him if he felt well, and he said, 'Oh yes, only more tired than usual;'—it had been a hard day, and there were business matters that were not so smooth as he could wish. But he told me there was nothing to worry about—only affairs that would require careful handling, such as he meant to give them. Then he dropped to sleep; and I lay awake a little, thinking over what he had said about you two, and wondering if he was right in his conclusions. At last I slept, too; and I knew nothing more until his heavy breathing awakened me.

"I made all possible haste for lights, and sent for the doctor and for you just as soon as I could get an answer to the bell; and Thomas was quick, too, but it seemed an age. The moment I had a glimpse of your father's face, I knew something dreadful was the matter; but I did not think, even then, that he was going to leave me."

At this point the desolate wife would break into a storm of tears, and the daughters would give themselves to soothing words and tender kisses, and put aside as best they could the consuming desire to know what that dear father's last thoughts had been for them.

Well, the days passed. Isn't it curious how time moves along steadily, after the object for which we think time was made has slipped away?

This sudden death, however, had made an unusual break in the usual order of things. Mr. Benedict's name was too closely identified with all the business interests of the city, as well as with its moral and religious interests, not to have his departure from their midst make great differences, and be widely felt.

The few days following his death were days of general and spontaneous public demonstration. On the afternoon of the funeral, great warehouses were closed, because his name was identified with them: the National Bank was closed, for he was one of the directors: the public schools were closed, because he had been prominent among their board of directors: and it was so that on every street some token of the power of the great man gone was shown.

As for the church, and the Sabbath school, and the prayer-room, they were draped in mourning; but that feebly expressed the sense of loss.

"We cannot close our doors to show our sorrow," said Dr. Ellis, his lips tremulous; "we have need to throw them more widely open, and rally with renewed effort, for one of the mighty is fallen."

To the widow and her girls there was, as the hours passed, a sort of sad pleasure in noting this universal mourning, in listening to the tearful words expressing a sense of personal loss, which came right from the hearts of so many men and women and children. They began to see that they had not half realized his power in the community, as young men in plain, sometimes rough dress, men whose names they had never heard, and whose faces they had never seen, came and stood over the coffin, and dropped great tears as they told in the brief and subdued language of the heart of some lift, or word, or touch of kindness, that this man had given them, just when they needed it most.

Born of these tender and grateful tributes from all classes was a drop of bitterness that seemed to spread as Claire

turned it over in her troubled heart. It could all be suggested, to those familiar with the intricacies of the human heart, by that one little word, Why? It sometimes becomes an awful word, with power to torture the torn heart almost to madness. "Why was father, a man so good, so true, so grand, so sadly needed in this wicked world, snatched from it just in the prime of his power?" She brooded over this in silence and in secret, not wishing to burden her mother's heart by the query, not liking to add a suggestion of bitterness to Dora's sorrowful cup. Only once, when a fresh exhibition of his care for others, and the fruit it bore, was unexpectedly made to them, she was betrayed into exclaiming:

"I cannot understand why it was!"

Whether the mother understood her or not, she did not know. She hoped not: she was sorry she had spoken. But presently the mother roused herself to say gently:

"You girls were on your father's heart in a strange way. That last talk about you I must try to tell you of, when I can. The substance of it I have told you. He thought you both needed developing.—Dora, dear, he said you needed more self-reliance; that you had too many props, and depended on them. He might have said the same of me; I depended on him more than I knew. He said you needed to be thrust out a little, and learn to stand alone, and brave winds and storms.—And Claire, I don't think I fully understood what he wanted for you; only he said that you needed to trust less to your own self, and lean on Christ."

After this word from her father, Claire sat in startled silence for a few minutes, then took it to her room.

Did you ever notice that the storms of life seem almost never to come in detached waves, but follow each other in rapid succession?

When the Benedict family parted for the night, less than a week after the father had been laid in the grave, Dora said listlessly to her sister:

"There is one little alleviation, I think, to a heavy blow —for a while, at least, nothing else seems heavy. Things that troubled me last week seem so utterly foolish to-day. I don't this evening seem to care for anything that could happen to us now—to us three, I mean."

Before noon of the next day she thought of that sentence again with a sort of dull surprise at her own folly.

How do such things occur? I cannot tell. Yet how many times in your life have you personally known of them —families who are millionaires to-day and beggars to-morrow? It was just that sort of blow which came to the Benedicts—came, indeed, because of the other one, and followed hard after it. Business men tried to explain matters to the widow. A peculiar complication of circumstances existed, which called for her husband's clear brain and wise handling. Had he lived, all would have been well; there was scarcely a doubt of it. Had he been able to give one week more to business, he would have shaped everything to his mind; but the call came just at the moment when he could least be spared, and financial ruin had followed.

Mrs. Benedict, in her widow's cap, with her plaintive white face, her delicate, trembling hands working nervously in her lap, from which the crimson fancy-work was gone, tried to understand the bewilderments which, one after another, were presented to her, and grew less and less able to take in the meaning of the great words, and at last raised herself from her easy-chair, looked round pitifully for Claire, and sank back among the cushions, her face, if possible, whiter than before.

The elder daughter came swiftly forward from her obscurity in the back parlour, and stood beside her mother.

"I beg pardon, gentlemen, but mamma does not understand business terms; my father never burdened her with them. Will you let me ask you a few plain questions? Is my father's money all gone?"

The gentlemen looked from one to another and hesitated. At last the lawyer among them said he feared—that is, it was believed—it seemed to be almost certain that when all the business was settled, there would be a mere pittance left.

The next question caused two red spots to glow on Claire's cheeks, but she held her head erect, and her voice was steady.

"And do they—does anybody think that my father did wrong in any way?"

"Mamma," with a tender, apologetic glance at her, "people say such things sometimes, you know, when they do not understand."

But the gentlemen could be voluble now.

"Oh, no! no indeed! not a breath of suspicion is attached to his name. His intentions were as clear as the sunlight; and the fact was, he had perilled his own fortune in a dangerous time, to help others who were in straits; and he has been called to leave it at a dangerous time, and disaster has followed."

One question more:

"Will others be sufferers through this disaster?"

The answer was not so ready. The gentlemen seemed to find it necessary to look again at one another. They, however, finally admitted to each other that there was property enough to cover everybody's loss, if that were the wish of the family; this, without any doubt—but there would be almost nothing left.

"Very well," Claire said; "then we can bear it. We thank you, gentlemen; and you may be sure of this one thing, that no person shall lose a penny through our father's loss, if we can help it. Now, may I ask you to leave further particulars until another time? Mamma has borne as much as she can to-day."

And the gentlemen, as they went down the steps of the great brownstone front, said to each other that Benedict had

left a splendid girl, with self-reliance enough to manage for herself and take care of the family.

Yet I suppose there had never been a time when Claire Benedict felt more as though all the powers which had hitherto sustained her were about to desert and leave her helpless, than she did when she controlled her own dismay, and helped her mother to bed, and sat beside her, and bathed her head, and steadily refused to talk, or to hear her mother talk about this new calamity, but literally hushed her into quiet and to sleep.

Then, indeed, she took time to cry, as few girls cry, as Claire Benedict had never cried before in her life.

Her self-reliance seemed gone. As the passion of her voiceless grief swayed and fairly frightened her, there stole suddenly into her heart the memory of the last message: "Claire needs to trust less to herself, and lean on Christ."

CHAPTER III.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

I AM not sure that I would, even if I could, give you a detailed account of the days which followed.

What is the use of trying to live pain over again on paper? Yet some people need practice of this sort to enable them to have any idea of the sorrows of other hearts.

I wonder if you ever went through a large, elegantly-furnished house, from room to room, and dismantled it;—packing away this thing as far as possible from curious eyes, soiling the velvet, or the satin, or the gilding of it, perhaps, with bitter tears while you worked; marking that thing with a ticket containing two words which had become hateful to you, "For sale;" hiding away some special treasure in haste, lest the unexpected sight of it might break a heart that was just now bearing all it could. Has such experience ever been yours? Then you know all about it, and can in imagination follow Claire Benedict from attic to basement of her father's house; and no words of mine can make the picture plainer. If it is something you have never experienced, or even remotely touched, you may think you are sympathetic, and you may gravely try to be, but nothing that printed words can say will be apt to help you much in realizing the bitterness of such hours.

Isn't it a blessed thing that it is so? Suppose we actually bore on our hearts the individual griefs of the world—how long would our poor bodies be in breaking under the strain?

"He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." It took the Infinite to do this.

Through all the miseries of the two weeks during which the process of dismantling went on, Claire Benedict sustained her character for self-reliance and systematic energy. She stood between her mother and the world. She interviewed carmen, and porters, and auctioneers, and talked calmly about the prices of things, the thought of selling which made her flesh fairly quiver.

She superintended the moving of heavy furniture, and the packing of delicate glasses and vases, after they had been chosen from the home treasures at private sale.

She discussed with possible purchasers the value of this or that carpet, and calculated back to see how long it had been in use, when the very bringing of it into the home had marked an anniversary which made her cheek pale and her breath come hard as she tried to speak the date.

There were some who tried to shield her from some of these bitter experiences. There were kind offers of assistance, made, it is true, in the main, by those who were willing but incompetent; but Claire was in the mood to decline all the help she could. Do her best, there was still so much help actually required, that it made her blush to think of it.

"There are a hundred things they want to know," she would explain to those who begged her not to tear her heart and wear her strength by walking through the rooms with those who had come to purchase, possibly, certainly to see and to ask. "There are a hundred things they want to know that only mamma or I can tell them. It shall never be mamma; and I would rather face them and wait on them alone, than to creep out at call, like an ashamed creature, to answer their demands. There is nothing wicked about it, and I ought to be able to bear what others have had to."

Nevertheless, it was cruel work. She knew when the

two weeks of private sale were over, and she stood battered and bruised in soul over the forlorn wreck of the ruined home, that she had not understood before what a strain it was to be. She had almost borne it alone. It was true, as she had said, that it must be either mamma or herself. Those who in all loving tenderness had tried to help realized this after the first day. "I don't know, really; I will ask Miss Benedict," was the most frequent answer to the endless questions. Dora's pitiful attempts to help to bear the burden seemed to give her sister more pain than anything else. And one day when, to the persistent questioning of a woman in a cotton velvet sack about the first value of a Persian rug of peculiar pattern and colouring, Dora dropped down on a hassock in a burst of tears, and sobbed, "Oh, I don't know how much it cost, but I know papa brought it when he came from Europe the day I was fourteen—O papa, papa, what shall I do!" Claire came from the next room, calm, pale, cold as a statue, just a swift touch of tenderness for Dora as she stooped over her, saying, "Run away, darling, I will attend to this;" then she was ready to discuss the merits, possible and probable, of the Persian rug, or of anything else in the room. When the woman in the sham velvet bunglingly attempted to explain that she did not mean to hurt poor Dora's feelings, she was answered quietly, even gently, that no harm had been done, that Dora was but a child. When the woman was gone, without the Persian rug—the price having been too great for her purse—Claire went softly to the sobbing Dora, and extracted a promise from her that she would never, no never, attempt to enter one of the public rooms again during those hateful two weeks; and she kept her promise.

The next thing, now that the private sale had closed, and Claire could be off guard, was house-hunting—not in the style of some of her acquaintances, with whom she had explored certain handsome rows of houses "for rent," feeling secretly

very sorry for them that they had to submit to the humiliation of living in rented houses and be occasionally subject to the miseries of moving. Claire Benedict had never moved but once, which was when her father changed from his handsome house on one avenue to his far handsomer one on a grander avenue; which experience was full of delight to the energetic young girl. Very different was this moving to be. She was not looking for a house; she was not even looking for a handsome half of a double house, which wore the air of belonging to one family; nor could she even honestly say she was looking for a "flat," because they must, if possible, get along with even less room than this. To so low an estate had they fallen in an hour!

You do not want me to linger over the story, nor try to give you any of the shuddering details. The rooms were found and rented, Claire adding another drop to her bitter cup by seeking out Judge Symonds as her security. They were moved into—not until they had been carefully cleaned and brightened to the best of the determined young girl's ability. Two carpets had been saved from the wreck, for mother's room and the general sitting-room; and a pitiful, not to say painful, effort had been made to throw something like an air of elegance around "mamma's room." She recognized it the moment she looked on it, with lips that quivered, but with a face that bravely smiled as she said, "Daughter, you have done wonders." She wanted, instead, to cry out, "Woe is me! What shall I do?"

This little mother, used to sheltering hands, had been a constant and tender lesson to Claire all through the days.

She had not broken down, and lain down and died, as at first Claire had feared she would; neither had she wept and moaned as one who would not be comforted. She had leaned on Claire, it is true, but not in a way that seemed like an added burden; it was rather a balm to the sore heart to have "mamma" gently turn to her for a decisive

word, and depend on her advice somewhat as she had depended on the father.

It had not been difficult to get a promise from her to have nothing to do with the dreadful sales. "No, dear," she had said quietly, when Claire made her plea, "I will not try to help in that direction; I know that I should hinder rather than help. You can do it all much better than I. You are like your father, my child; he always took the hard things, so that I did not learn how."

The very work with which the mother quietly occupied herself was pathetic. It had been their pleasure to see her fair hands busy with the bright wools and silks and velvets of fancy-work, such as the restless young school-girl was too nervous to care for, and the energetic elder daughter was too busy to find time for. It had been their pride to point to many delicate pieces of cunning workmanship, and say they were "mamma's."

"So different from most other mothers," Dora would say, fondly and proudly.

But on the morning that the sale commenced, the mother had gone over all the wools, and silks, and canvas, and packed them away with that unfinished piece of crimson; and thereafter her needle, though busy, took the stitches that the discharged seamstress had been wont to take. Claire found her one day patiently darning a rent in a fast breaking tablecloth, which had been consigned by the housekeeper to the drawer for old linen. Scarcely anything in the history of the long, weary day touched Claire so much as this.

Such power have the little things to sting us! Some way we make ourselves proof against the larger ones.

There had been very little about the experiences of these trying weeks that had to be brought before the family for discussion. They were spared the pain of argument. There had not been two minds about the matter for a moment.

Everything must go; the creditors must be satisfied to the uttermost farthing, if possible. That, as a matter of course. Never mind what the law allowed them. They knew nothing about the law, cared nothing for it; they would even have given up their keepsakes and their very dresses, had there been need, and they could have found purchasers.

But there had been no need. Disastrous as the failure had been, it was found that there was unencumbered property enough to pay every creditor and have more furniture left than they knew what to do with, besides a sum of money; so small, indeed, that at first poor Claire, unused to calculating on such a small scale, had curled her lip in very scorn, and thought that it might as well have gone with the rest.

There came a day when they were settled in those ridiculously small rooms, with every corner and cranny in immaculate order, and had reached the disastrous moment when they might fold their hands and do nothing. Alas for Claire! If there was one thing that she had always hated, it was to do nothing. She was almost glad that it was not possible for her to do this. The absurd little sum set to their credit in the First National Bank, of which her father had for so many years been a director, would barely suffice to pay the ridiculously small rent of these wretched rooms and provide her mother with food and clothing. She must support herself. She must do more than that. Dora must be kept at school. But how was all this to be done?

The old question! She had puzzled over it a hundred times for some poor woman on her list. She thought of them now only with shivers. Executive ability? Dear! yes, she had always been admired for having it.

But it is one thing to execute, when you have but to put your hand in your pocket for the money that is needed for carrying out your designs, or, if there chance not to be enough therein, trip lightly up the great granite steps of the

all-powerful bank, ask to see "papa" a minute, and come out replenished. It was quite another thing when neither pocket nor bank had aught for her, and the first snows of winter were falling on the father's grave.

She had one talent, marked and cultivated to an unusual degree. She had thought of it several times with a little feeling of assurance. Everybody knew that her musical education had been thorough in the extreme, and that her voice was wonderful.

She had been told by her teachers many a time that a fortune lay locked up in it. Now was the time for the fortune to come forth. She must teach music; she must secure a position in which to sing on a salary. Claire Benedict of two months ago had been given to curling her lip just a little over the thought that Christian young men and women had to be paid for contributing with their voices to the worship of God on the Sabbath day. The Claire Benedict of to-day, with that great gulf of experience between her and her yesterday, said, with a sob, that she would never sneer again at any honest thing which women did to earn their living. She herself would become a salaried singer.

Yes, but how bring it to pass? Did you ever notice how strangely the avenues for employment which have been just at your side seem to close when there is need? More than once had representatives of fashionable churches said wistfully to Claire, "If we could only have your voice in our choir!" Now, a little exertion on her part served to discover to her the surprising fact that there were no vacancies among the churches where salaried singers were in demand.

Yes, there was one, and they sought her out. The offered salary would have been a small fortune to her in her present need; but she could not worship in that church; she would not sing the praises of God merely for money.

There was earnest urging, but she was firm. There was a

specious hint that true worship could be offered anywhere, but Claire replied, "But your hymns ignore the doctrine on which I rest my hope for this life and for the future."

It was a comfort to her to remember that when she mentioned the offer to her mother and sister, and said that she could not accept it, her mother had replied promptly, "Of course not, daughter." And even Dora, who was at the questioning age, inclined to toss her head a little bit at isms and creeds, and hint at the need for liberal views and a broader platform, said, "What an idea! I should have supposed that they would have known better."

But it was the only church that offered. Neither did Claire blame them. It was honest truth; there was no opening. A year ago—six months ago—why, even two months ago, golden opportunities would have awaited her; but just now every vacancy was satisfactorily filled. Why should those giving satisfaction, and needing the money, be discharged to make room for her who needed it no less? Claire was no weak, unreasoning girl who desired any such thing.

As for two months ago, at that time the thought of the possibility of ever being willing to fill such a place had not occurred to her.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OPEN DOOR.

WELL, surely there was a chance to teach music to private pupils? No, if you will credit it, there was not even such a chance! There was less reasonable explanation for this closed door than the other. Surely, in the great city, full of would-be musicians, she might have found a corner! Doubtless she would have done so in time, but it amazed her as the days went by, and one by one the pupils on whom she had counted with almost certainty were found to have excellent reasons why they ought to remain with their present teacher, or why they ought not to take up music for the present.

In some cases the dilemma was real and the excuse good. In others it was born simply of fear. Oh yes, they knew that Miss Benedict was a brilliant player—there was not her equal in the city; and as for her voice, it was simply superb; but then it did not follow that a fine musician was a fine teacher. She had not been educated for a teacher; that had been the farthest removed from her intention until necessity forced it upon her. It stood to reason that a girl who had been brought up in luxury, and had cultivated her musical talent as a passion, merely for her own pleasure, should know nothing about the principles of teaching, and have little patience with the drudgery of it. They had always been warned against broken-down ladies as teachers of anything.

There was a great deal of this feeling; and Claire, as she began to realize it more, was kept from bitterness because of the honesty of her nature. She could see that there was truth in these conclusions; and while she knew that she could give their children such teaching as the parents might have been glad to get, at any price, she admitted that they could not know this as she did, and were not to blame for caution.

She was kept from bitterness by one other experience.

There came to see her one evening a woman who had done plain sewing for her in the days gone by, whom she had paid liberally, and for whom she had interested herself to secure better paid labour than she had found her doing. This woman, with a certain confused air as of one asking a favour, had come to say that she would take it as a great thing if her Fanny could get into Miss Benedict's music class.

Miss Benedict explained kindly that she had no music class, but if she should form one in the city, it would give her pleasure to count Fanny as one of her pupils, and the mother could pay for it, if she wished, in doing a little sewing for them some time, when they should have sewing again to do. The sentence ended with a sigh. But the caller's embarrassment increased. She even forgot to thank the lady for her gracious intention, and looked down at her somewhat faded shawl, and twisted the fringe of it, and blushed, and tried to stammer out something. Claire began to suspect that this was but a small part of her errand, and to be roused to sympathy. Was there anything else she could do for her in any way? she questioned.

No! oh no! there was nothing, only would she—would it not be possible to start a class with her Fanny, and let her pay, not in sewing, but in money, and the full value of the lessons, too; and here the woman stopped twisting the fringe of her shawl, and looked up with womanly dignity.

She was doing better, she said, a great deal better than when Miss Benedict first sought her out. Thanks to her, she had plenty of sewing, as much as she could do, and of a good, paying kind; and she had thought—and here the shawl fringe was twisted again—that is, she had supposed or imagined—well, the long and short of it was, sometimes all that things wanted was a beginning, and she thought maybe if Miss Benedict could be so kind as to begin with Fanny, others would come in, and a good class get started before she knew it.

There was a suspicious quiver of Claire's chin as she listened to this, but her voice was clear and very gentle as she spoke:

"Tell me frankly, Mrs. Jones, do you think Fanny has a decided talent for music, which ought to be cultivated? I don't know the child, I think. Is she a singer?"

Then Mrs. Jones, all unused to subterfuge, and at home in the realm of frankness, was betrayed at once into admitting that she had never thought of such a thing as Fanny taking music lessons. No, she didn't sing, at least, not but very little; and she never said much about music. What she wanted was to learn to draw; but she, Mrs. Jones, had thought, as she said—and maybe it was presumption in her to think so—that what most things needed was to get started. No sooner did she get started in another kind of sewing, and among another kind of customers, than work poured in on her faster than she could do; and she thought Fanny would do maybe to start on. Long before the conclusion of this sentence the shawl fringe was suffering again.

Claire rose from her seat and went over and stood before Mrs. Jones, her voice still clear and controlled:

"I thank you, Mrs. Jones, for your kind thought. So far from being presumptuous, it was worthy of your warm heart and unselfish nature. I shall not forget it, and it has done me good. But if I were you, I would not have Fanny

take music lessons; and I would, if I could, give her drawing lessons. I remember now your telling me that she was always marking up her books with little bits of pictures. She probably has a good deal of talent in this direction, and not for music; I would cultivate her talents in the line in which they lie. Miss Parkhurst has a drawing-class just commencing. She is not very far from your corner, on Clark Street. I hope Fanny can go to her; and if it would be any convenience to you to pay the bills in sewing, I am quite certain that Miss Parkhurst would be glad to do it. She was speaking about some work of the kind only yesterday, and I recommended you to her as one whom she could trust."

So they dropped once more into their natural characters, Claire the suggester and helper, and Mrs. Jones the grateful recipient. She went away thanked and comforted, and convinced that Fanny ought to have a chance at drawing, since Miss Benedict thought she had a talent.

As for Claire, she went back to her mother with two bright spots glowing on her cheeks, and knelt down beside her chair, and said:

"Mamma, I have just had the most delicate little bit of thoughtfulness shown me that I ever received from the world outside; and I'll tell you one thing it has settled,—I mean to accept the first opening, from whatever source, that will take me away from the city. I am almost sure there is no work for me in this city."

Yet you are not to suppose that the great world of friends who had been glad of their recognition forgot them or ignored them. Much less are you to suppose that the great Church—of which Mr. Benedict was such a prominent part that the projected entertainment for which the young people had been so nearly ready, missionary though it was, was indefinitely postponed when he died—forgot them or grew cold. Whatever the world may do, or whatever solitary

individuals in the Church may do under financial ruins, the great heart of the true Church beats away for its own. And bravely they rallied around the widow, and heartily they tried to be helpful, and were helpful, indeed, so far as warm words and earnest efforts were concerned.

But they could not make vacancies for Claire in the line in which her talents fitted her to work. They could not make a strong woman of the mother, able to shoulder burdens such as are always waiting for strong shoulders. They could and would have supported them. For a time, at least, this would have been done joyfully; they longed to do it. They offered help in all possible delicate ways. The trouble was, this family would have none of it. Grateful? —oh yes, but persistent in gently declining that which was not an absolute necessity.

In the very nature of things, as the days passed, they would be in a sense forgotten. Claire saw this, and the mother saw it. The rooms they had taken were very far removed from the old church and the old home and the old circle of friends. It consumed hours of the day to make the journey back and forth. Of course, it could not be made often, nor by many. Of course, the gaps which their changes had made would be filled in time; it was not reasonable to expect otherwise. Nobody expected it, but it was very bitter.

And the very first open door that Claire saw was an opportunity to teach music in a little unpretentious academy, in a little unpretentious town, away back among the hills, two hundred miles from the city that had always been her home.

It took talking—much of it—to reconcile the mother and sister to the thought of a separation. Through all their changes this one had not been suggested to their minds. They had expected, as a matter of course, to keep together. But necessity is a wonderful logician. The bank account

was alarmingly small, and growing daily smaller. Even the unpractical mother and sister could see this. Something must be done, and here was the open door. Why not enter it at once, instead of waiting in idleness and suspense through the winter for something better? Thus argued Claire: "It will not be very easy to leave you, mamma, as you may well imagine"—and here the sensitive chin would quiver—"but I should feel safe in doing so, for these ugly rooms are really very conveniently arranged; and Dora would learn to look after everything that Molly could not do by giving two days of work in a week. I have made positive arrangements with her for two days, and she depends upon it: you must not disappoint her. And, mamma, I have thought of what papa said about us"—here the low voice took on a tone of peculiar tenderness — "perhaps Dora will learn self-reliance if she is left to shield and care for you; it will be a powerful motive. You know she leans on me now, naturally."

This was Claire's strongest argument, and, together with the argument of necessity, prevailed.

Barely four weeks from the "to-morrow" which had contained her last bright plans, she was installed as music teacher in the plain little academy building situated in South Plains.

And now I know that I need not even attempt to describe the sinking of heart with which she moved down the shabby narrow aisle, and seated herself in the uncushioned pew of the shabby little church on that first Sabbath morning.

Uncushioned! that was by no means the worst of the pew's failings. The back was at least four inches lower than it ought to have been, even for so slight a form as Claire's, and was finished with a moulding that projected enough to form a decided ridge. Of course, for purpose of support the thing was a failure; and as to appearance, nothing more awkward in the line of sittings could be imagined.

Fairly seated in this comfortless spot, the home-sick girl looked about her to take in her dreary surroundings. Bare floors, not over clean; the most offensive-looking faded red curtains flapping disconsolately against the old-fashioned, small-paned, soiled windows; a platform, whose attempts at carpeting represented a large-patterned, soiled-ingrain rag, whose colours, once much too bright for the place, had faded into disreputable ghosts of their former selves. The whole effect seemed to Claire by far more dreary than the bare floor of the aisles. A plain, square, four-legged table, that had not even been dusted lately, did duty as a pulpit desk; and a plain, wooden-backed, wooden-seated chair stood behind it. These were the sole attempts at furnishing. The walls of this desolate sanctuary seemed begrimed with the smoke of ages; they were festooned with cobwebs, these furnishing the only attempts at hiding the unsightly cracks. The few dreary-looking oil-lamps disposed about the room gave the same evidence of neglect in their sadly-smoked chimneys and general air of discouragement. However, had Claire but known it, she had cause for gratitude over the fact that they were not lighted, for they could prove their unfitness for the place they occupied in a much more offensive way.

Such, then, in brief, was the scene that greeted her sad eyes that morning. How utterly home-sick and disheartened she was! It was all so different from the surroundings to which she had all her life been accustomed! She closed her eyes to hide the rush of tears, and to think, foolish girl that she was, of that other church miles and miles away. She could seem to see familiar forms gliding at this moment down the aisles, whose rich carpets gave back no sound of footfall. How soft and clear the colours of that carpet were!—a suggestion of the delicately carpeted woods, and the shimmer of sunlight on a summer day toward the sun setting! She had helped to select that carpet herself, and

she knew that she had an artist's eye for colours and for harmony. It was not an extravagantly-elegant church—as city churches rank—that one to which her heart went back, but just one of those exquisitely-finished buildings where every bit of colour and carving and design which meets the cultured eye rests and satisfies; where the law of harmony touches the delicately-frescoed ceiling, reaches down to the luxuriously-upholstered pews, finds its home in the trailing vines of the carpet, and breathes out in the roll of the deep-toned organ.

It was in such a church, down such a broad and friendly aisle, that Claire Benedict had been wont to follow her father and mother on Sabbath mornings, keeping step to the melody which seemed to steal of itself from the organ and fill the lofty room. Can you imagine something of the contrast?

CHAPTER V.

TRYING TO ENDURE.

OF course there were other contrasts than those suggested by the two churches which persisted in presenting themselves to this lonely girl.

How could she help remembering that in the old home she had been Sidney Benedict's daughter—a fact which of itself gave her place and power in all the doings of the sanctuary? Alas for the changes that a few brief months can make!

Sidney Benedict lying in his grave, and his daughter an obscure music-teacher in an obscure boarding and day school, an object to be stared at, and pointed out by the villagers as the new teacher.

But for another contrast, which from some divine source stole over her just then, the hot tears which burned her eyes would surely have fallen. Sidney Benedict was not sleeping in the grave; that was only the house of clay in which he had lived. She knew, and suddenly remembered it with a thrill, that his freed soul was in heaven. What did that mean? she wondered. In vain her imagination tried to paint the contrast. There had been times since his going when she had longed with all the passion of her intense nature to know by actual experience just what heaven is. But those were cowardly moments. Generally she had been able to feel thankful that she was here to help mamma and Dora. She remembered this now, along with the memory

of her father's joy, and it helped her to choke back the tears, and struggle bravely with her home-sickness.

Meantime, it was hard for her to forget that she was the observed of all observers. But she did not half understand why this was so. She could not know what a rare bit of beauty she looked in the dingy church—almost like a ray of brightness astray from another world.

From her standpoint, her dress was simplicity itself; and she had not lived long enough in this outer circle of society to understand that there are different degrees of simplicity, as well as different opinions concerning the meaning of the word.

Her black silk dress was very plainly made; and her seal jacket had been so long worn that Claire, the millionaire's daughter, had remarked only last winter that it had served its time and must be supplanted by a new one: the present Claire, of course, did not think of such a thing, but meekly accepted it as part of her cross.

Her plain black velvet hat had no other trimming than the long plume which swept all around it, and had been worn the winter before. How could she be expected to have any conception of the effect of her toilet on the country people by whom she was surrounded? Her world had been so far removed from theirs, that had one told her that to them she seemed dressed like a princess, she would have been bewildered and incredulous.

Her dress was very far from suiting herself. Her mood had been to envelop herself in heaviest black, and shroud her face from curious gaze behind folds of crape. The only reason she had not done so had been because the strict sense of honour which governed the fallen family would not allow them to add thus heavily to their expenses. Indeed, to have dressed in such mourning as would have alone appeared suitable to them, would have been impossible. The mother had not seemed to feel this much. "It doesn't matter, children,"

she had said gently; "they know we miss papa; we have no need of crape to help us to tell that story, and for ourselves it would not make our sorrow any less heavy." But the girls had shrunk painfully from curious eyes, and conjectured curious remarks, and had shed tears in secret over even this phase of the trouble.

The bell, whose sharp clang was a continued trial to her cultured ears, ceased its twanging at last, and then it was the wheezy little cabinet organ's turn; and, indeed, those who do not know the capabilities for torture that some of those instruments have, are fortunate. Claire Benedict set her teeth firmly. This was an hundred degrees more painful than the bell, for the name of this was music. How could any person be so depraved in taste as to believe it other than a misnomer!

While the choir of seven voices roared through the hymn, Claire shut her eyes, grasped her hymn-book tightly with both hands, set her lips, and endured. What a tremendous bass it was! How fearfully the leading soprano "sang through her nose," in common parlance, though almost everybody understands that we mean precisely opposite! How horribly the tenor flatted, and how entirely did the alto lose the key more than once during the infliction of those six verses.

The hymn was an old one, a favourite with Claire, as it had been with her father, but as that choir shrieked out the familiar words—

> "I love her gates, I love the road;
> The church adorned with grace,
> Stands like a palace built for God,
> To show his milder face,"

it seemed hardly possible for one reared as she had been to turn from her surroundings and lose herself in the deep spiritual meaning intended. Nay, when the line,

> "Stands like a palace built for God,"

was triumphantly hurled at her through those discordant voices, she could hardly keep her sad lips from curling into a sarcastic smile, as she thought of the cracked and smoky walls, the dreadful curtains, the dust and disorder.

"A palace built for God!" her heart said in disdain, almost in disgust. "It isn't a decent stopping-place for a respectable man."

Then her momentary inclination to smile yielded to genuine indignation. What possible excuse could be offered for such a state of things? Why did respectable people permit such a disgrace? She had seen at least the outside of several of the homes in South Plains, and nothing like the disorder and desolation which reigned here was permitted about those homes. How could Christian people think they were honouring God by meeting for his worship in a place that would have made the worst housekeeper among them blush for shame had it been her own home?

Indignation helped her through the hymn, and with bowed head and throbbing heart, she tried during the prayer to come into accord with the spirit of worship.

But the whole service was one to be remembered as connected with a weary and nearly fruitless struggle with wayward thoughts. What was the burden of the sermon? She tried in vain afterwards to recall it.

A series of well-meant and poorly-expressed platitudes. "Nothing wrong about it," thought poor Claire, "except the sin of calling it the gospel, and reading it off to these sleepy people as though he really thought it might do them some good."

Indeed, the minister was almost sleepy himself, or else utterly discouraged. Claire tried to rouse herself to a little interest in him, to wonder whether he were a down-hearted, disappointed man. His coat was seedy, his collar limp, and his cuffs frayed at the edges.

Yes, these were actually some of the things she thought while he said his sermon over to them.

She brought her thoughts with sharp reprimand back to the work of the hour, but they roved again almost as quickly as recalled. At last she gave over the struggle, and set herself to the dangerous work of wondering what Dr. Ellis was saying this morning in the dear old pulpit; whether mamma and Dora missed him as much as she did; whether he looked over occasionally to their vacant seat and missed all the absent ones, papa most of all. But the seat was not vacant, probably; already somebody sat at the head of the pew in papa's place, and somebody's daughters, or sisters, or friends had her place and mamma's and Dora's. The niches were filled, doubtless, and the work of the church was going on just the same, and it was only they who were left out in the cold, their hearts bleeding over a gap that would never be filled. Dangerous thoughts these!

One little strain in another key came in again to help her. Papa was not left out; he had gone up higher. What was the old church to him now that he had entered into the church triumphant? He might love it still, but there must be a little pity mingled with the love, and a wistful looking forward to the time when they would all reach to his height; and at that time mamma and Dora and she would not be left out.

If this mood had but lasted it would have been well, but her undisciplined heart was too much for her, and constantly she wandered back to the thoughts which made the sense of desolation roll over her.

She was glad when at last the dreary service was concluded, and she could rush away from the dreary church to the privacy of her small plain room in the academy, and throw herself on the bed, and indulge to the utmost the passionate burst of sorrow.

The tears spent their first force soon, but they left their victim almost sullen. She allowed herself to go over in imagination the Sundays which were to come, and pictured all their unutterable dreariness.

Did I tell you about the rusty stoves, whose rusty and cobwebby pipes seemed to wander at their own erratic will about that church? It was curious how poor Claire's excited brain fastened upon those stove-pipes as the drop too much in her accumulation of horrors. It seemed to her that she could not endure to sit under them, no, not for another Sabbath, and here was a long winter and spring stretching out before her! She was not even to go home for the spring vacation; her poor ruined purse would not admit of any such extravagance. It would be almost midsummer before she could hope to see mamma and Dora again. And in the meantime, how many Sundays there were! She vexed herself trying to make out the exact number and their exact dates.

This mood, miserable as it was, possessed her all the afternoon. It seemed not possible to get away from it. She crept forlornly from her bed presently, because of the necessity of seeing to her expiring fire. She was shivering with the cold; but as she struggled with the damp wood, trying to blow the perverse smoke into a flame, she went on with her indignant, not to say defiant thoughts. She went back again to that dreadful church, and the fires in those neglected stoves.

She determined resolutely that her hours spent in that building should be as few as possible. Of course she must attend the morning service, but nothing could induce her to spend her evenings there.

"I might much better sit in my room and read my Bible, and write good Sunday letters to mamma and Dora," she told herself grimly, as the spiteful smoke suddenly changed its course and puffed in her face. "At least, I shall not go to church. I don't belong to that church, I am thankful to remember, and never shall. I have no special duties toward it; I shall just keep away from it and from contact with the people here as much as possible. It is enough for me if I do

my duty toward those giggling girls who think they are to become musicians under my tuition. I will do my best for them, and I shall certainly earn all the salary I am offered here; then my work in this place will be accomplished. I have nothing to do with the horrors of that church. If the people choose to insult God by worshipping him in such an abomination of desolations as that, it is nothing to me. I must just endure so much of it as I am obliged to, until I can get away from here. I am not to spend my life in South Plains, I should hope."

She shuddered over the possibility of this. She did not understand her present state of mind. She seemed to herself not Claire Benedict at all, but a miserable caricature of her. What had become of the strong, bright, willing spirit with which she had been wont to take hold of life? Energetic she had always been called; "self-reliant"—she had heard that word applied to herself almost from childhood. "A girl who had a great deal of executive talent." Yes, she used to have, but she seemed now to have no talent of any sort. She felt crushed, as though the motive power had been removed from her.

She had borne up bravely while with her mother and younger sister. She had felt the necessity for doing so; her mother's last earthly prop must not fail her, and therefore Claire had done her best. But now there was no more need for endurance. Her tears could not pain mamma or Dora; she had a right to give her grief full sway. She felt responsible to nobody. Her work in the world was done—not by any intention of hers, she told herself drearily. She had been willing and glad to work; she had rejoiced in it, and had planned for a vigorous and aggressive future, having to do with the best interests of the church. Only think how full of work her hours had been that day when the clouds shut down on her and set her aside! There was nothing more for her to do. Her plans were shattered, her oppor-

tunities swept away, everything had been cruelly interrupted: she could not help it, and she knew no reason for it; certainly she had tried to do her best. But, at least, with her opportunities closed, her responsibility was gone; nothing more could be expected of her; henceforth she must just *endure.*

This is just the way life looked to the poor girl on this sad Sabbath. She was still trying to rely on herself; and because herself was found to be such a miserable source of reliance, she gloomily blamed her hard fate, and said that at least her responsibility was over. She did not say in words —"God has taken away all my chances, and he must just be willing to bear the consequences of my enforced idleness:" she would have been shocked had she supposed that such thoughts were being nursed in her heart; but when you look the matter over, what else was she saying? A great many of our half-formed thoughts on which we brood will not bear the clear gaze of a quiet hour when we mean honest work.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFTED UP.

IT was a very quiet, cold-faced girl who presently obeyed the summons to dinner. Had it not been for those suspiciously red eyes, and a certain pitiful droop of the eyelids, Mrs. Foster would hardly have ventured to break the casing of haughty reserve in which her young music-teacher had decided to wrap herself.

A rare woman was Mrs. Foster. I wish you knew her well; my pen pauses over an attempt to describe her. I believe descriptions of people never read as the writer intended they should; and there never was a woman harder to put on paper than this same Mrs. Foster.

Ostensibly she was the principal of this little academy, which was at present engaged in reaping the results of years of mismanagement and third-rate work. People shook their heads when she took the position, and said that she was foolish. She would never earn her living there in the world; the academy at South Plains was too much run down ever to revive, and there never had been a decent school there anyway, and they didn't believe there ever would be. And, of course, people of this mind did what they could, with their tongues and their apathy, so far as money and pupils were concerned, to prove the truth of their prophecies.

But Mrs. Foster, wise, sweet, patient woman that she was, quietly bided her time, and worked her way through seem-

ingly endless discouragements. She was after much more than bread and butter. In reality there was never a more persistent and patient and wise and wary fisher for *souls* found among quiet and little known human kind than was Mrs. Foster. Had they but known it, there were communities which could have afforded to support her for the sake of the power she would have been in their midst. Nay, there were fathers who could have afforded to make her independent for life, so far as the needs of this world were concerned, for the sake of the influence she would have exerted over their young and tempted sons and daughters. But they did not know it; and she, being as humble as she was earnest, did not half know it herself, and expected nothing of anybody but a fair chance to earn her living, and do all the good she could.

In point of fact, she had some difficulty in getting hold of the little, badly-used academy at South Plains. The people who thought she was utterly foolish for attempting anything so hopeless were supplemented by the people who thought she could not be much, or she would never be willing to come to South Plains Academy. So between them they made it as hard for her as they could.

Claire Benedict did not know it until long afterwards, but the fact was, that during her father's funeral service she had been selected as the girl whom Mrs. Foster wanted with her at South Plains. It happened—so we are fond of saying—that Mrs. Foster was spending a few days on business in the city that had always been Claire's home, and she saw how wonderfully large portions of that city were stirred by one death when Sidney Benedict went to heaven. She speculated much over the sort of life he must have led to have gotten the hold he had on the people. She began to inquire about his family, about his children. Then she heard much of Claire, and grew interested in her, in a manner which seemed strange even to herself. And when at the funeral

she first caught a glimpse of the pale face and earnest eyes of the girl, who looked only and with a certain watchful air at her mother, as if she would shield her from every touch that she could, Mrs. Foster had murmured under her breath, "I think this is the girl I want with me." She prayed about it a good deal during the next few days, and grew sure of it, and waited only to make the way plain, so that she could venture her modest little offer; and felt sure that if the Master intended it thus, the offer would be accepted. And it was, but in blindness, so far as Claire Benedict was concerned. I have sometimes questioned whether, if a bright angel had come down out of heaven and stood beside Claire, and said, "The King wants you to go with all speed to South Plains; he has special and important work for you there; he has opened the way for you," the child would not have been more content, and had much less of the feeling that her work was interrupted. But I do not know; she might rather have said:

"Why in the world must I go to South Plains? I had work enough to do at home, and I was doing it; and now it will all come to nought because there is no leader! It stands to reason that I, in my poverty and obscurity, down in that out-of-the-way village, cannot do as much as I, with my full purse, and leisure days, and happy surroundings, and large acquaintances, could do here."

We love to be governed by reason, and hate to walk in the dark. I have always wondered what Philip said when called to leave his great meeting, where it seemed hardly possible to do without him, and go toward the south on a desert road. That he went, and promptly, is, I think, a wonderful thing for Philip.

Well, the red eyes of the young music-teacher by no means escaped the watchful ones of Mrs. Foster; neither had her short, almost sharp, negative in reply to a somewhat timidly put question of a pupil as to whether she was going out to

church that evening. There were reasons why Mrs. Foster believed that it would be much better for her sad-hearted music-teacher to go to church than to remain glooming at home. There were, indeed, very special reasons on that particular evening. The Ansted girls' uncle was going to preach, she had heard; but should she go to this young Christian, of whom she as yet knew but little, and offer as a reason for church-going that a stranger was to preach instead of the pastor? However she managed it, Mrs. Foster was sure she would not do that. Yet it will give you a hint of the little woman's ways when I tell you that she was almost equally sure she should manage it in some way.

Half-an-hour before evening service there was a tap at Claire's door, and the principal entered, and came directly to the point: Would Miss Benedict be so kind as to accompany Fanny and Ella Ansted to church that evening? Miss Parsons was suffering with sick headache, and she herself could not leave her. There was no other available chaperon for the young girls, who were not accustomed to going out alone in the evening, but who were unusually anxious to attend church, as their uncle, who had been stopped over the Sabbath by an accident, was to preach.

Miss Benedict had her lips parted, ready to say that she was not going out, but paused in the act. What excuse could she give? No sick headache to plead, and nobody to care for; the night was not stormy, if it was sullen; and the church was not a great distance away. She had been wont to accommodate people always, but she never felt so little like it as to-night. However, there stood Mrs. Foster quietly awaiting an answer, and her face seemed to express the belief that of course the answer would be as she wished.

"Very well," came at last from the teacher's lips; and she began at once to make ready.

"It is for this I was hired," she told herself bitterly. "I must not forget how utterly changed my life is in this

respect as in all others. I am my own mistress no longer, but even in the matter of church-going must hold myself at the call of others."

As for the principal, as she closed the door with a gentle "Thank you," she told herself that it was much better for the poor child to go; and that she must see to it what she could do during the week to brighten that room a little.

The stuffy church was the same; nay, it was more so, for every vile lamp was lighted now, and sent a sickly, smoky shadow to the ceiling, and cast as little light upon the surrounding darkness as possible. But the uncle! I do not know how to describe to you the difference between him and the dreary reader of the morning! It was not simply the difference in appearance and voice, though really these were tremendous, but he had a solemn message for the people; and not only for the people whose Sabbath home was in that church, but for Claire Benedict as well.

She did not think it at first. She smiled drearily over the almost ludicrous incongruity of the text as measured by the surroundings: "If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

The folly of supposing that any sane person preferred such a desolate modern Jerusalem as this above his chief joy! The very care with which the men brushed a clear spot for their hats on the dusty seats, and the manner in which the women gathered their dresses about them, to keep them from contact with the floor, showed the place which the sanctuary held in their affections.

But as the preacher developed his theme, it would almost seem that he had selected it for Claire Benedict's special benefit. It was not what had been done, or was being done, that he desired to impress, but rather what ought to be done.

The earthly Jerusalem, instead of being one particular church building, was any church of Christ where a Christian's lot was cast, even for a single Sabbath. He or she was

bound by solemn covenant vows to do all for that church which lay in his or her power; as fully, as unreservedly, as though that church, and that alone, represented his or her visible connection with the great Head. What solemn words were these, breaking in on the flimsy walls of exclusiveness which this young disciple had been busy all the afternoon building up about her! The church at South Plains her place of service! actually bound to it by the terms of her covenant!

Others had their message from that plainly-worded, intensely-earnest sermon. I have no doubt there was a special crumb for each listener—it is a peculiarity belonging to any real breaking of the bread of life—but Claire Benedict busied herself with none of them. Her roused and startled heart had enough to do to digest the solid food that was given as her portion.

The truth was made very plain to her that she had no more right to build a shell and creep into it, and declare that this church, and this choir, and this Sunday school, and this prayer-meeting, yes, and even this smoking stove and wheezing organ, were nothing to her, because she was to stay in South Plains but a few months, and her home was far away in the city, than she had to say that she had nothing to do with the people or the places on this earth, no sense of responsibility concerning them, no duties connected with them, because she was to be here only for a few years, and her home was in heaven.

Gradually this keen-edged truth seemed to penetrate every fibre of her being. This very church, cobweb-trimmed, musty-smelling, was for the time being her individual working ground, to be preferred above her chief joy! Nay, the very red curtain that swayed to and fro, blown by the north wind, which found its way through a hole in the window, and which she *hated*, became a faded bit of individual property for which she was in a sense responsible.

She walked home almost in silence. The girls about her chattered of the sermon; pronounced it splendid, and admitted that they would just a little rather hear Uncle Eben preach than anybody else, and that it was no wonder his people almost worshipped him, and had raised his salary only last month. Claire listened, or appeared to, and answered directly put questions with some show of knowledge as to what was being discussed; but for herself, Dr. Ansted had gone out of her thoughts. She liked his voice, and his manner, and his elocution, but the force behind all these had put them all aside, and the words which repeated themselves to her soul were these: "If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy!" What then? Why, then I am false to my covenant vows, and the possibilities are that I am none of His.

Mrs. Foster was in the hall when the party from the church arrived. Wide open as to eyes and mental vision, quiet as to voice and manner, she had stayed at home and ministered to the victim of sick headache. She had been tender and low-voiced, and deft-handed and untiring; but during the lulls when there had been comparative quiet, she had bowed her head and prayed that the sad-hearted young music-teacher might meet Christ in his temple that evening, and come home uplifted. She did not know how it was to be done.

She knew nothing about the Ansted uncle save that he was an ambassador of Christ, and she knew that the Lord *could* use the shabbily-dressed ambassador of the morning as well as he. She did not rely on the instruments, except as they lay in the hand of God. She did not ask for any special thought to be given to Claire Benedict; faith left that too in the hand of the Lord. She only asked that she should be ministered unto, and strengthened for the work, whatever it was that he desired of her. And she needed not to question to discover that her prayer, while she had yet

been speaking, was answered. The music-teacher did not bring home the same thoughts that she had taken away with her.

She went swiftly to her room. The fire had been remembered, and was burning brightly.

The first thing she did was to feed its glowing coals with the letter that had been commenced to mamma and Dora during the afternoon. Not that there had been anything in it about her heaped-up sorrows, or her miserable surroundings, or her gloomy resolves, but in the light of the present revelation she did not like the tone of it.

She went to her knees presently, but it would have been noticeable there that she said almost nothing about resolves or failures. Her uttered words were brief; were, indeed, only these: "Dear Christ, it is true I needed less of self and more of thee. Myself has failed me utterly; Jesus, I come to thee."

CHAPTER VII.

"OUR CHURCH."

THE dreary weather was not gone by the next morning. A keen wind was blowing, and ominous flakes of snow were fluttering their signals in the air; but the music-room was warm, and the music-teacher herself had gotten above the weather. She was at the piano, waiting for the bell to ring that should give the signal for morning prayers.

Around the stove were gathered a group of girls who had hushed their voices at her entrance. They were afraid of the pale music-teacher. Hitherto they had regarded her with mingled feelings of awe and dislike.

Her very dress, plain black though it was, with its exquisite fit and finish, seemed to mark her as belonging to another world than themselves. They expected to learn music of her, but they expected nothing else.

It was therefore with a visible start of surprise that they received her first advances in the shape of a question, as she suddenly wheeled on the piano-stool and confronted them:

"Girls, don't you think our church is just dreadful?"

Whether it was a delicate tact, or a sweet spirit born of the last evening's experience, that led Claire Benedict to introduce that potent little "our" into her sentence, I will leave you to judge.

It had a curious effect on the girls around the stove—these bright-faced, keen-brained, thoroughly good girls, who had lived all their lives in a different atmosphere from hers.

They were good scholars in algebra, they were making creditable progress in Latin, and some of them were doing fairly well in music; but they could no more set their hats on their heads with the nameless grace which hovered around Claire Benedict's plainly-trimmed plush one than they could fly through the air. This is just one illustration of the many differences between them. This young lady had lived all her days in the environments of city culture: they had caught glimpses of city life, and it meant to them an unattainable fairy-land, full of lovely opportunities and probabilities, such as would never come to them. It struck every one of those girls as a peculiarly pleasant thing that their lovely music-teacher had said "our" instead of "your."

One of the less timid presently rallied sufficiently to make answer:

"Dreadful! it is just perfectly horrid! It fairly gives me a dislike to the church.—Girls, mother has almost spoiled her new cashmere sweeping the church floor with it. She says she would be ashamed to have our wood-shed look as badly as that floor does. I don't see why the trustees allow such slovenliness."

"It is because we cannot afford to pay a decent sexton," sighed one of the others. "We are so awful poor! That is the cry you always hear if there is a thing said. I don't believe we deserve a church at all."

Claire had partially turned back to the piano, and she touched the keys softly, recalling a long-forgotten strain about "Girding on the armour," before she produced her next startling sentence:

"Girls, let us dress up that church until it doesn't know itself."

If the first words had astonished them, this suggestion for a moment struck them dumb. They looked at one another, then at the resolute face of the musician. Then one of them gasped out:

"Us girls?"

"You don't mean it!" from two dismayed voices.

"How could we do anything?" from a gentle, timid one.

But the girl who had found courage to speak before, and to volunteer her opinion as to the disgraced church, sounded her reply on a different note:

"When?"

"Right away," said the music-teacher, smiling brightly on them all, but answering only the last speaker.

Then she left the piano, and came over to the centre of the group, which parted to let her in.

"Just as soon as we can, I mean. We must first secure the money; but I think we can work fast with such a motive."

Then came the chorus of discouragements.

"Miss Benedict, you don't know South Plains. We never can raise this money in the world. It has been tried a dozen different times, and there are a dozen different parties, as sure as we try to do anything. Some people won't give toward the old church because they want a new one;—as if we could ever have a new church! Others think it is well enough as it is, if it could be swept now and then. And there is one woman who always goes to talking about the time she gave the most for that old rag of a carpet on the platform, and then they went and bought it at another store instead of at theirs, where they ought to, and for her part she will never give another penny toward repairing that church."

Another voice chimed in:

"Yes; and there is an old man who says honesty comes before benevolence. He seems to think it would be quite a benevolence to somebody to repair that old rookery; and they owe him two pounds for coal, and they will never prosper in the world until they pay him."

"Is it true about the society owing him?"

"No, ma'am, it isn't. Father says they paid him more than the coal was worth. He is an old scamp. But it is just a specimen of the way things go here: hundreds of reasons seem to pop up to hinder people from doing a thing; and all the old stories are raked up, and after awhile everybody gets mad with everybody else, and won't try to do anything. You never saw such a place as South Plains."

But the music-teacher laughed. She was so sure of what ought to be done, and therefore, of course, of what could be done, that she could afford to laugh over the ludicrous side of this doleful story.

The girls, however, did not see the ludicrous side.

"It makes me cold all over just thinking about trying to beg money in South Plains for anything, and for the church most of all!"

To be sure this was Nettie Burdick's statement, and she was noted for timidity; but none of the bolder ones controverted her position.

But Miss Benedict had another bombshell to throw into their midst.

"Begging money is dreadful work, I suppose. I never did much of it. My collecting route lay among people who were pledged to give just so much, and who as fully expected to pay it when the collector called as they expected to pay their gas bill or their city taxes. But don't let us think of doing any such thing. Let us raise the money right here among ourselves."

Blank silence greeted her. Had she been able to look into their hearts, she would have seen something like this: Oh, yes! it is all very well for you to talk of raising money. Anybody can see by your dress, and your style, and everything, that you have plenty of it; but if you expect money from us, you don't know what you are talking about. The most of us have to work so hard and coax so long to get decent things to wear, that we are almost tired of a dress or

a bonnet before it is worn.—But this they did not want to put into words. Neither did Miss Benedict wait for them.

"We must earn it, of course, you know."

"Earn it! How?" Half-a-dozen voices this time.

"Oh, in a dozen ways," smiling brightly. "To begin with, there is voluntary contribution. Perhaps we cannot all help in that way, but some of us can, and every little helps. My salary, for instance, is sixty pounds a year."

She caught her breath as she said this, and paled a little. It was much less than Sidney Benedict had allowed his daughter for spending-money; but to those girls it sounded like a little fortune.

"That is five pounds a month, and a tenth of that is ten shillings. Now I propose to start this scheme by giving the 'tenths' of two months' salary.—Come, Nettie, get your pencil, and be our secretary. We might as well put it in black and white, and make a beginning."

"Do you always give a tenth of everything you have?"

It was Nannie Howard's question, asked in a hesitating, thoughtful tone, while Nettie, blushing and laughing, went into the depths of her pocket for a pencil, tore a fly-leaf from her algebra, and wrote Miss Benedict's name.

"Always!" said the music-teacher gently, her lip trembling and her voice quivering a little. "It was my father's rule. He taught it to me when I was a little, little girl."

They could not know how pitiful it seemed to her that the daughter of the man who had given his annual thousands as tenths had really to spend an hour in planning, so that she might see her way clear toward giving ten shillings a month! Not that this young Christian intended to wait until she could see her way clear. Her education had been, The tenth belongs to God. As much more as you can conscientiously spare, of course; but this is to be laid aside without question. Her education, built on the rock of Christian principle, had laid it aside as a matter of course;

and then her human nature had lain awake and planned how to get along without it, and yet not draw on the sacred fund at the bank.

"I suppose it is a good rule," Mary Burton said, "though I never thought of doing such a thing. Well," after another thoughtful pause, "I may as well begin, I suppose. I have five shillings a month to do what I like with. I'll give ten shillings to the fund."

"Good!" said Miss Benedict. "Why, girls, we have a splendid beginning."

But Mary Burton was an exception; not another girl in the group had an allowance. A few minutes of total silence followed; then a new type of character came to the front.

"Father gave me four shillings this morning to get me a new pair of gloves; but I suppose I can make the old ones do. I'll give that."

"O Kate! your gloves look just horrid." This from a younger sister.

"I know they do, but I don't care," with a little laugh that belied the words; "so does the church."

"That's true," said Anna Graves. "It gives one the horrors just to think of it. I gave up all hope of its being repaired long ago, because I knew the men would never do it in the world; but if there is anything we can accomplish, let's do it. I say we try. I was going to trim my brown dress with velvet. It will cost eight shillings. I'll give it up and trim with the same.—Nettie Burdick, put me down for eight shillings."

This, or something else, set the two timid ones, who were sisters, to whispering; presently they nodded their heads in satisfaction. Whatever their plan was they kept it to themselves. It undoubtedly included self-sacrifice, as they belonged to a family who honestly had but little from which to give; but they presently directed that their names be set down for five shillings each.

Apparently the crowning bit of sacrifice came from Ruth Jennings.

"Father has been promising me a piano-stool for more than a year," she explained, laughing. "This morning he gave me the money, and I have a note written to Benny Brooks to bring it down with him next Saturday; but I do so dreadfully hate those red curtains, that if you will promise to do something with the windows the first thing, I'll sit on the dictionary and the Patent Office Reports for another year. A stool such as I was going to get costs fifteen shillings.—Put it down, Nettie, quick!"

A general clapping of hands ensued. Not a girl present but appreciated that to Ruth Jennings this was quite a sacrifice. As for Miss Benedict, her eyes were brimming.

"You dear girls," she said eagerly, "I feel as though I wanted to kiss every one of you. We will certainly have our church renovated. I feel sure of it now. I think some of you must prefer it above your chief joy."

This called forth a chorus of voices.

"O Miss Benedict, you don't think that velvet ribbons, and gloves, and such things, are our chief joys, do you?"

"Or even piano-stools!" This from Ruth Jennings, amid much laughter. But Miss Benedict's face was grave.

"Has the *church* been?" She asked the question gently, yet in a sufficiently significant tone.

The reply was prompt:

"I should think not! Such a horrid old den as it is! How could there be any joy about it?"

The words of the evening's text were repeating themselves so forcibly in their teacher's heart that she could not refrain from quoting: "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

The laughter was hushed.

"But that doesn't mean the building, does it, Miss Benedict?"

"The building is the outward sign of His presence—is it not?—and suggests one of the ways in which we can show our love for the God to whose worship the church is dedicated."

As she spoke she wound an arm around the young girl's waist, and was answered thoughtfully:

"I suppose so. It seems wrong to talk about worshipping God in a place that is not even clean; doesn't it?"

How familiar they were growing with their pretty young teacher, of whom they had thought, only the day before, that they should always be afraid.

"Isn't she sweet?"

This question they repeated one to another as, in answer to the bell summoning them to morning prayers, they moved down the hall.

"So quick-witted and so unselfish!" said a second.

"And not a bit 'stuck up'!" declared a third.

And with their brains throbbing with new ideas they went in to prayers. They glanced at one another and smiled when Mrs. Foster announced the hymn—

> "Work, for the night is coming!
> Work through the morning hours."

They every one meant to work.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES.

THEN began a new era in the life of the girls at South Plains Academy. They had work to do. A common interest possessed them. They had a leader; such an one as they had never known before. She was capable of originating and guiding. She not only knew how to talk, but how to *do*.

Committee meetings became the fashion of the day. No time now for loitering over lessons, no weary yawning behind the covers of wearisome text-books.

Promptly at four o'clock was to be a meeting of importance. It would be "just horrid" to be detained in the recitation-room over an imperfectly-prepared lesson, while the others hastened to Miss Benedict's room, to be met with her questioning as to the where and why of the absent member. Mrs. Foster had never seen better work done than went on among her girls during the weeks that followed.

There was need for committee meetings, and for almost endless discussions of ways and means. The voluntary offerings were all in, and though each had done her best, all knew that the sum total was meagre enough. Money must certainly be earned, but the grave question was, How?

"Oh, there are ways," declared Miss Benedict, with a confidence that of itself inspired courage. "Of course, there are a good many ways, and we must find them out. Earning money is never very easy business, and we must begin

by understanding that, as a matter of course, there is work, and disagreeable work, of some sort, in store for each one of us."

The girls, each and all, declared themselves ready for work, but totally in the dark. They knew how to save money, the most of them, provided they could get hold of any to save; but as for earning it, they really had never earned a penny in their lives. There had been no opportunity; so they declared.

"We will make opportunities," announced the brave young leader, to whom money had hitherto flowed in an unbroken stream. But her courage was contagious, as true courage often is, and the girls laughed, and announced themselves as ready even to *make* opportunities, if somebody would show them how.

"Let me see," said Miss Benedict: her head dropped a little to one side, her chin resting on her hand in the attitude that she used to assume when Dora said she was planning a house and garden for some *protégé*. "To begin with, there are things to be sold by agencies."

Two or three girls gravely shook their heads; one shrugged her shoulders as an evidence of dismay, not to say disgust; and Ruth Jennings spoke:

"Book agents! we can't do it, Miss Benedict. There are not three people in South Plains who ever think of buying a book. One of the girls canvassed the whole town last summer—was in every house within three miles—and she sold just four books. A good book it was, too; but the people who had money to spare didn't want it, and the people who wanted it hadn't the money. I was never more sorry for anybody in my life than I was for that poor girl, who wore out a pair of shoes and a pair of gloves, and spoiled her bonnet, to say nothing of her temper. And she was voted the greatest nuisance we ever had in this village; and that is saying a great deal."

Miss Benedict laughed merrily. Ruth's voluble tongue always amused her.

"I don't mean books," she explained. "There are other things; for instance, hair-pins."

The sentence closed with a little laugh, and seemed to be suggested by the dropping of one of the gleaming things at that moment from her hair; but there was that in her voice which made the girls think there was a real suggestion hidden in it, though they could not see how.

"Hair-pins?" repeated Ruth in puzzled tone.

"Yes; really and truly, not metaphorically. I bought some last night at the store in the village; the best, the clerk gravely assured me, that were to be had. Wretched things! I wore one for an hour, then threw it in the stove; it seemed to me that it pulled each hair of my head during that one hour. Look at the kind we ought to have!" Whereupon she drew the gleaming thing out again, and passed it around for minute scrutiny. "Blued steel they are, you see; that is the trade mark; each one is finished to a high degree of smoothness. One who has used a single paper of them could not be persuaded to content herself with any other kind. Cheap they are, too—actually cheaper than those instruments of torture I bought last night. I sent to my sister, by the morning mail, to send me a box forthwith. That suggested the business to me, I presume. There are worthless imitations, but the genuine sort can be bought by the quantity very cheaply indeed, and a respectable profit might be made on them until the people were supplied. It isn't as though we were at work in a city where women could supply themselves without any trouble. It is a work of genuine mercy, I think, to rescue the ladies from those prongs to which they have to submit."

"Turn hair-pin peddlers!" said Mary Burton. There was a laugh on her face, but the slightest upward curve to her pretty lip. Mary felt above the suggestion.

Her father was a farmer, decidedly well-to-do, and owned and lived in one of the prettiest places about South Plains.

"Yes," said the millionaire's daughter, who had lived all her life in a palatial home such as Mary Burton could not even imagine, "peddlers, if you like the name; why not? It is a good, honest business, if one keeps good stock and sells at honest prices. I like it very much better than selling cake, and flowers, and toys in the church, at wicked prices, in the name of benevolence."

There was a general laugh over this hit. South Plains had had its day at such work as this, and those girls knew just how "wicked" the prices were, and how questionable the ways which had been resorted to in order to secure customers.

"I'd as soon sell hair-pins as anything else," affirmed Ruth Jennings. "I would like some of them myself; we always get wretched ones down at the corner store. But, Miss Benedict, do you believe much could be made just out of hair-pins?"

"Not out of hair-pins alone; but there are other things, plenty of them—little conveniences, you know, that people do not think of until they are brought to their doors, and that are so cheap, it seems a pity not to buy them, if only for the sake of getting pleasantly rid of a nuisance." This with a merry glance at Ruth.

"For instance, there are some charming little calendar cards being gotten up for the holiday sales, on purpose for the children. They are mounted on an easel, and contain a Bible verse for every day in the year, with a bit of a quotation from some good author in verse, you know; exquisite little selections, just suited to children. On each Sabbath the card contains the Golden Text of the Sabbath-school lesson. They are just as pretty as possible, and retail for ninepence. I don't believe there are many mothers who could resist the temptation of buying one for their children. But

useful things, viewed from a practical standpoint, sell the best. I have always heard that the country was the place to get pies, and custards, and all such good things?"

"It is," said one of the girls, with a confident nod of her head. "This is the greatest place for pies you ever saw! I know people who have a pie of some sort for breakfast, dinner, and supper. No use in trying to start a bakery here. People all make their own, and plenty of it."

Miss Benedict looked her satisfaction.

"Then there are plenty of burned fingers, I am sure.—Nettie, my dear, you said you helped your mother on Saturday, which I suppose is baking-day. How many times have you blistered your poor little fingers trying to lift out a hot and heavy pie from the oven?"

"More times than I should think of trying to count; and, for that matter, I have done a great deal worse than to burn my fingers. Only last Saturday I tipped an apple-pie upside down on the floor; mother's clean floor—it had just been washed. The tin was hot, you see, and the cloth slipped somehow, so that my bare fingers came right on the hottest part, and I just squealed, and dropped the whole thing. Oh, such a mess!"

"Precisely," said Miss Benedict, looking unsympathetically pleased with the story. "I have no doubt that we should find quite a noble army of martyrs among you in that very line, or among your mothers; you girls would be more likely to 'squeal and drop it,' as Nettie has said. But now I want to know what is to hinder us from being benefactors to our race, and earning an honest penny in the bargain, by sending for a box of pie-lifters, and offering one to every housekeeper in South Plains? They are cheap, and I don't believe many pie-bakers would refuse one."

"Pie-lifters!"—"I never heard of such an institution."—"What in the world are they?" Three questioning voices.

"Oh, just ingenious little pieces of iron, so contrived that they will open and shut like an old-fashioned pair of tongs, only much more gracefully: they adjust themselves to the size of the tin, or plate, and close firmly, so that even a novice can lift the hottest pie that ever bubbled, and set it with composure and complacency on the table at her leisure."

"I should think they would be splendid!"

This, in varying phraseology, was the general vote.

"Then I'll tell you of one of the greatest nuisances out. Look here! Did you ever see a more starched-up linen cuff than this is?"

The girls looked admiringly. No; they never did. It shone with a lovely polish, the means of securing which was unknown to the most domestic of them.

"Well," explained Miss Benedict, "it isn't linen at all! By the way, I am trying to economize in laundry work. It is nothing but paper, but with such a good linen finish that nobody ever discovers it; and they answer every purpose. I find they don't keep them at the corner store, and your young gentleman friends would like them, I am sure. They can be had at the factory very reasonably indeed. I really think it would be well to invest in some. But that was not what I intended to say. When you get a pair of cuffs nicely laundried, so that they are stiff and shining, how do you enjoy struggling with them to get the cuff button in, or to get it out, especially if you are in a hurry?"

This query produced much merriment among two of the girls, which the elder sister presently explained:

"You ought to ask that question of our brother Dick. He does have the most trying times with his cuff buttons. He wants his cuffs so stiff they can almost walk alone, and then he fusses and struggles to get the buttons in so as not to break the cuff. He is just at the age, Miss Benedict, to

be very particular about such things, and sometimes he gets into such a rage. Last Sunday he split one of his buttons in half-a-dozen pieces tugging at it. I tried to help him, but I couldn't get the thing in. They are a dreadful nuisance."

"Ah, but look at this!" A sudden, dexterous movement, and the button was standing perpendicularly across the button-hole, and could be slipped in or out with perfect ease.

The girls looked and admired and exclaimed. They had never seen such a contrivance.

"But they are very expensive, are they not?" This question came from the ever practical Ruth.

Miss Benedict readjusted her cuff with a sudden quivering of the lip, as a rush of memories swept over her. Those heavy gold cuff-buttons, with their rare and delicate designs, had been among her father's gifts, less than a year ago.

"These are rather so," she said presently, struggling to keep her voice steady; "but the device for opening and shutting is introduced into plain buttons, which can be had for a shilling a set; and I think they are a great comfort, especially to young men."

This is only a hint of the talk. It was continued at several meetings, and plans at last were perfected, and orders made out and sent to the city for a dozen or more useful articles, none of them bulky, all of them cheap. The arrangement was, that each young lady should take her share of the articles, keep her individual account, and thenceforth go armed; hair-pins and cuff-buttons in her pocket, ready, as opportunity offered, to suggest to a friend the advisability of making a desirable purchase. If she went to a neighbour's of an errand, she was in duty bound to take a pie-lifter under her shawl and describe its merits. Did she meet a reasonably indulgent mother, out were to come the pretty calendar cards, and the agent thereof was to hold her

self prepared to descant eloquently on their beauties. Thus through the whole stock in trade.

As for the "nuisance" part, of course it would be a good deal of a nuisance, and a good deal of a cross, especially when they met with surly people, who did not even know how to *refuse* politely. But as workers enlisted for the war they were to be ready to bear such crosses, always endeavouring to carry on their work on strictly business principles; to descend to no urging or unlady-like pressure, but simply to courteously offer their goods at honest prices. If, after such effort, they received replies that were hard to bear, they must just bear them for the sake of the cause. Thus decreed the heroic leader; adding, by way of emphasis, that all ways of earning money had their unpleasant side, she supposed, and all workers had moments in which their work could only be looked upon in the light of a cross. *Would* those girls ever know what a cross it had been to her, Claire Benedict, to come to South Plains and teach them music? This part she *thought*. Such crosses were not to be brought out to be talked about. Hers was connected with such a heavy one that it would bear mentioning only to Him who "carried her sorrows."

CHAPTER IX.

OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE.

"WHY are not the Ansted girls included among our workers?"

It was the music-teacher who asked this question, as she waited in the music-room for recess to close and her work to begin. Around the stove gathered the usual group of girls talking eagerly. An absorbing topic had been opened before them, one with unending resources. Ruth Jennings had had unprecedented success, the Saturday before, disposing of pie-lifters. She was detailing some of her curious experiences. Also she had received an order for a certain kind of egg-beater, the like of which had never been seen in South Plains. She had duly reported the mysteriously-described thing to Miss Benedict, who had at once recognized it, and sent her order out by the morning mail—not for one, but for two dozen! Why should not other families in South Plains beat eggs in comfort? It was strange that she had not thought of those nice little egg-beaters.

This and a dozen other matters of interest were being repeated and discussed, the lady at the piano being constantly appealed to for information, or to confirm some surprising statement. During a momentary lull in the talk she asked her question.

Ruth Jennings answered:

"Oh, the Ansted girls! Why, Miss Benedict, is it possible that you have not discovered that they belong to a higher

sphere? Dear me! They have nothing to do with South Plains, except to tolerate it during a few months of the summer because the old homestead is here, and they can't very well move it to the city. They live in that lovely place at the top of Curve Hill. You have been up there, haven't you? It is the only really lovely spot in South Plains. In summer their grounds are just elegant."

Yes, Miss Benedict had been in that direction, and every other. She rested herself, body and soul, by long, brisk, lonely walks. She had noticed the place and wondered over it, and had meant to ask its history. So unlike every other spot in the withered village. Great broad fields stretching into the distance; handsome iron fence, with massive gate-posts, guarded by fierce-looking dogs in iron; a trellised arbour, the outline of a croquet-ground; a hint of wide-spreading, carefully-kept lawns, showing between patches of the snow; a summer-house that in the season of vines and blossoms must be lovely; a circle that suggested an artificial pond, centred with a fountain, where she could imagine the water playing rainbows with the sunshine in the long summer days.

And, in short, there were all about this place very unmistakable tokens of the sort of refinement which is only to be secured by a full purse and an abundance of elegant leisure on the part of some one whose tastes are cultured to the highest degree. Shrouded in the snows of midwinter, with a shut-up look about the large, old-fashioned, roomy house, kept in a state of perfect repair, yet kept carefully for what it was, a country home, the place was marked and exceptional.

It spoke a language that could be found nowhere else, in the village or out of it, for miles around. Miss Benedict had looked upon it with loving eyes. It spoke to her of the world from which she had come away; of the sort of life which had always heretofore been hers. It did not look

elegant to her, except by contrast with the surrounding shabbiness. She had been used to much greater elegance. It simply said "home" to her sad heart; and only the Saturday before she had wondered whose home it was, and why she never saw people who seemed to match it, and when it would be opened again for residence, and whether she should ever get a chance to visit that lovely greenhouse, all aglow even now.

It came to her as a surprise that it really was the home of two of her pupils.

"Do you mean that the Ansteds *live* there?" she questioned. "Where is the family? and why are the girls here?"

"Oh, the family are everywhere. They scatter in the winter like the birds; go south, you know, or west, or wherever suits their royal fancy. They have no home but this, because they cannot make up their minds where to settle down for one, so they board all over the world. Do business in the city, live in South Plains, and stay in Europe: that is about their history."

"And the girls remain here while their parents are away?"

"Part of the time, at least. Mrs. Ansted was a schoolmate of Mrs. Foster, I have heard, and respects her very highly, and would prefer having the girls with her to sending them anywhere else. Mr. Ansted is a merchant in the city. In the summer he comes home every night; and some of them stay in town with him a great deal. It is only ten miles away, you know. If they did not charge so dreadfully on the new railroad, we might get a chance to look at its splendours once in a while ourselves. But the Ansteds don't care for high prices. Mr. Ansted is one of the directors, and I suppose they ride for nothing, just because they could afford to pay as well as not. That seems to be the way things work."

"But the family attend this church, of course, while they are here. I should think the girls would be interested to join us."

"Oh no, ma'am; indeed, they don't. They haven't been inside the church six times in as many years. They go to town."

"Not to church!"

"Yes, ma'am, they do. Every pleasant day their carriage rolls by our house about half-past eight, and makes me feel cross and envious all day."

"But do you really mean that they habitually go ten miles to church each Sabbath, when there is one right at their doors that they might attend? What denomination are they?"

"The very same as our own," the girl said, laughing over Miss Benedict's astonished face.

Then the gentle Nettie added her explanation:

"Well, but, girls, you know they don't really go *ten* miles. —There is an elegant church, Miss Benedict, just about seven, or maybe almost eight, miles from here. It was built by wealthy people who live out there in the suburbs; and it is said to be the prettiest church in town; and the Ansteds go to that."

"But eight miles every Sabbath, and return, must make a busy and wearying day of the Sabbath, I should think, when there is no occasion. How came they to fall into the habit of going so far?"

"Why, they did not use to spend their summers here, only a few weeks during August. They had a house in town; and then Mrs. Ansted was sick, and the doctors said she could not live in the city; and they had a little delicate baby, who they said would die unless they kept it in the country. So they sold their town house, and came out here to stay until they decided what to do; and then the railroad was made, and Mr. Ansted found it easy enough to get to and from

his business; and the baby began to grow strong; and they spent a great deal of money on the place, and grew to liking it; and they just stay on. They keep rooms in town, and are there a great deal, but they really live in South Plains."

"And drive to church every Sabbath!"

"Well, every Sabbath when it is pleasant. They are not very regular. When it is too warm to go, they lounge under the trees; and when it is too rainy they lounge in their handsome house, I suppose. At any rate, they don't appear in our church. We don't see much more of them when they are at home than when they are in Europe, only riding by."

"And do the girls like to be here at school while the family is away?"

"Well, that is a new thing, you see. Mrs. Foster has only been here since September. Before that, they never looked at our school; but directly they heard she was coming, the Ansted girls came in, and are to board here until the family come back from Florida. We never any of us spoke to Fanny and Ella Ansted in our lives until they appeared here in October."

Then Mary Burton spoke:

"And we shall not get a chance to speak with their highnesses much longer. The Ansteds are coming home in two weeks. Lilian, that's the baby, has had a low fever, and the doctors have decided that she needs to come home and get braced up; and the house is being aired for their coming. Ella Ansted told me this morning. She says she and Fanny will only be here at recitations after next week or week after. She doesn't know just when the folks will get here; they are going to stop in New York."

"Girls," said the music-teacher in her most resolute tone, "let us get the Ansted girls into our circle, and set them at work for the church."

But this met with eager demurs. The Ansteds held

themselves aloof from South Plains. They never made calls among the people, or invited them to their home, or noticed them in any way. They had nothing to do with the poor little church; never came to the prayer-meetings, nor to the socials, nor in any way indicated that they belonged to the same flesh and blood as the worshippers there; and South Plains held its head too high and thought too much of itself to run after them. The girls were well enough, Fanny and Ella, and they had been pleasant to them; but as for stooping to coax them to help, they did not feel that they could do it, even for Miss Benedict.

"I don't want you to stoop," declared Miss Benedict, "nor to coax. I want you to give them a good hearty invitation to join us. Poor things! I am just as sorry for them as I can be. Eight miles away from their church and all church friends; no prayer-meeting to attend, and no pastor to interest himself in all they do! I have wondered why those girls seemed so out in the cold. I begin to understand it. You think you have been cordial; but you have just edged out a little, made a tiny opening in your circle, and said in effect, 'Oh, you may come in, if you will crawl in there! We will tolerate you while you are here, if you won't expect too much, nor ask us to invite you to our special doings of any sort. You are just outsiders, and we are not going to stoop to you and let you be one with us.'"

The girls laughed a little, but Ruth Jennings demurred. Nobody had wanted them to stay outside; they had chosen to do so. They would not attend the church, though the trustees had invited Mr. Ansted; and they never showed in any way an interest in South Plains or its people.

Miss Benedict changed her tactics.

"Girls, wait: let me ask you, are Fanny and Ella Ansted Christians?"

"Not that I ever heard of," Ruth said; and Mary Burton added that she knew they were not, — that one day,

when they were talking about such things, Ella asked the strangest questions, almost as though she were a heathen; and Fanny did not seem to know much better.

"Well, have you made them realize that you young people belong to Christ, and that it is a pleasant way, and you would like to have them join it, and work for his cause? —Ruth, my dear, do they know that you desire to have them happy in Christ, and that you pray for this every day?"

"It isn't likely they do, Miss Benedict, for it isn't true. I never thought about them twice in my life in that connection, and I know I never prayed for them."

"And are there any of you who can give a better record than that?" She looked around upon the silenced group, and waited in vain for an answer. At last she said gently:

"Now, girls, there are only two questions more that I want to ask you. One is: Which is it that stands aloof and makes no effort to help others—you, or the Ansted girls, if you know Christ and they do not? And the other is: Will you all agree to invite them to join us, and do it heartily?"

The pealing bell cut short an answer, if one had been intended. Miss Benedict was glad. She wanted no answer just then; she had planted her little seed, and hoped that it would take root and grow.

"She has a way of taking things for granted," said one of the group which moved out of the music-room, leaving Nettie to take her lesson. "How does she know that any of us are Christians?"

There was a moment's silence; then Mary Burton asked:

"Do you really suppose there is no difference between us and others? Can't we be told in any way?"

"I'm sure I don't know how. There hasn't been a communion service since she came here, and we don't any of us go to prayer-meeting. They say she does. Father said she

sat in one corner of that dark old church the other night; the first woman there, and not many came afterward."

Said Mary Burton:

"I wonder what it means, anyway, to 'come out from among them and be separate'? I came across that verse in my reading the other night, and I wondered then just what it meant. We girls are certainly not any more 'separate' since we joined the church than we were before, so far as I know; and yet the verse some way made me think of Miss Benedict; she seems different from other Christians. I should like to know just what made the difference."

"She is 'gooder,'" said Ruth Jennings, laughing a little, "that is just the whole of it; but I wish she hadn't started out on this idea about the Ansteds. They won't join us, and I don't want to feel myself humiliated by asking them."

But Nettie, usually easy to be turned aside, held persistently to the thought which troubled her.

"I know she is 'gooder,' that is what I say; but ought not we to be the same? Ought the boys and girls with whom we five spend so much time to feel that we just belong to their set, and are in no sense different from them? We are all the church-members there are among the young people, you know. When I told Miss Benedict that the other day, she looked astonished for a minute, and then she said,—'You dear girls, what a work you have to do!' But I don't feel as though we were doing it, and I, for one, don't know how; but I wish I did."

There was no answer to that. The little seed was taking root, though not in the way that the planter had planned.

CHAPTER X.

AN OPEN DOOR.

THEREAFTER Miss Benedict thought much about the Ansteds. She herself could hardly have told why they interested her so much, though she attributed it to the fact that the surroundings of the old house spoke to her of home. The family returned and established themselves there, and the blinds were thrown open, and through the half-drawn shades, as she took her after-school walks, she could see glimpses of bright, beautiful life inside: she longed to get nearer, and saw no way to accomplish it.

The Ansted girls had been invited to join the workers. Miss Benedict's influence reached as far as this, though that lady wished she had been sure that the invitation had sounded cordial and hearty. But they had hesitated and hesitated, and proposed to talk with mamma about it; and mamma was reported to have said that it was hardly worth while—they were such entire strangers to the church and the people that of course they could not be expected to have the interest in it which others had; and the girls had tossed their heads and said they knew it would be just so—they were sorry they had invited them, and they would not be caught that way again, not even for Miss Benedict.

Meantime, Miss Benedict studied the Ansteds from a distance, and tried to understand the reasons for their utter isolation from the good people of the village. She cultivated the friendship of the two girls who were her pupils, and who,

now that they had declined the invitation to join the others, were more shut off from them than before. Miss Benedict took care, however, not to refer to this episode; there were reasons why she did not desire to know the particulars. But she made herself as winning as she could to the girls, and wondered how and when she could reach their home.

As is often the case, the way opened unexpectedly.

It was a wintry evening, and she, having walked further than she had intended, was making the return trip with all speed, lest the darkness, fast closing on the village, should envelop her before she reached the Academy.

"How foolish I was," she told herself, "to go so far! I must have walked two miles; and it is beginning to snow. What would mamma think to see me on the dark street alone?"

In common with most city-bred ladies, accustomed to treading the brightly-lighted city streets with indifference, she looked upon the darkness and silence of the country with a sort of terror, and was making swift strides, not pausing even to get the glimpse of "home" which shone out broadly across the snow from all the front windows of the house on Curve Hill.

It looked very home-like, but her only home was that plain little upper room at the Academy, and thither she must go with all speed. Underneath the freshly-falling snow lay a treacherous block of ice, and as the hurrying feet touched it, they slipped from their owner's control, and she was lying a limp heap at the foot of Curve Hill.

No use to try to rise and hasten on. A very slight effort in that direction told her that one ankle was useless. What was to be done? She looked up and down the street; not a person was to be seen in either direction. Would it be of any use to call through this rising wind for assistance? How plainly she could see the forms flitting about that bright room! yet they might as well be miles away, so far as her

power to reach them was concerned. She made a second effort to rise, and fell back with a groan: it was best not to attempt that again, or she should faint, and certainly she had need of her senses now. If only one of those queer-looking wood-sleighs, over which she had laughed only this afternoon, would come along and pick her up, how grateful she would be! Somebody else was coming to pick her up.

"What have we here?" said a brisk voice. "Fallen humanity?—plenty of that to be found. What is the immediate cause?" Then in a lower tone: "I believe it is a woman!" By this time he had reached her side, a young man prepared to make merry over the fallen fortunes of some child; so he had evidently at first supposed.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," he said; and even at that moment he waited to lift his hat: "did you fall? Are you injured? How can I best help you?"

Claire Benedict of old had one peculiarity which had often vexed her more nervous young sister; under embarrassing or trying circumstances of any sort, where the average young woman would be likely to cry, she was nearly certain to laugh. It was just what she did at this moment.

"I think I have sprained my ankle," she said between her laughs; "at least it will not allow me to move without growing faint, so I am keeping still: I thought I needed my senses just now. If you can think of any way of securing a waggon of some sort in which I can ride to the Academy, it will help me materially."

"To the Academy? why, that is a mile away! You must take a shorter ride than that for the first one. You cannot be very heavy, I should say. Allow me." And before she understood what he was planning sufficiently to attempt a protest, he had stooped and unceremoniously picked her up, and was taking swift strides across the snow-covered lawn to the side piazza of the Ansted house. The

gate leading to the carriage-drive was thrown open, so there had been no obstacle in his way.

It was ridiculous to laugh under such circumstances, but this was just what Claire did, while her porter threw open the door, strode through the wide hall, and dropped her among the cushions of a luxurious couch in one of the bright rooms.

"Here is a maimed lady," he said. "Mamma—Alice—where are some of you?"

"O Louis," said a familiar voice, "what's the matter? Did you run over her?—Why, Fanny, it is Miss Benedict!—Mamma!—Louis, call mamma, quick!"

And then Claire really accomplished what she had so often threatened, and fainted entirely away.

"It is only a sprain," she explained, directly her eyes were open again; "I was very foolish to faint."

A pleasant, motherly face was bending over her, with eyes like Ella's and hair like Fanny's; this must be the mother.

"Is it a sprain, do you think," she asked, "or only a a sort of twist? Those things are sometimes very painful for a while. We have sent for a physician, and shall soon know what to do for you.—In the meantime, Fanny, my dear, her boot should be removed."

Thus reminded, Fanny bent with eager fingers over the injured member.

"Did you fall, Miss Benedict? Wasn't it too bad? But since you were going to fall, I am glad you did it right by our gate."

"Mamma—do you know?—this is our music-teacher."

"So I judged, daughter. We are sorry to make her acquaintance in this manner, and glad to be of service.—Bring another pillow, Ella."

It was all gracefully and graciously said. Mrs. Ansted was not a woman who would have thought of seeking out and calling in a friendly way on her daughters' music-

teacher; but she was one who, when that music-teacher appeared at her door in need of assistance, could bestow it heartily and delicately.

"She is not like mamma in the least—oh, not in any particular; and yet I think she means to be a good woman, so far as she sees the way to it out of the environments of her world. I wonder if there is any way in which I am to help her, and if this is a beginning?"

This was the mental comment of the music-teacher, who was supposed to be absorbed in her own troubles.

It all arranged itself speedily and naturally. The doctor came and pronounced the ankle badly sprained; advised entire quiet for a few days; heartily seconded Mrs. Ansted's suggestion that the patient should remain with them; and when Claire faintly demurred, that lady said decidedly:

"Why, of course, it will be the proper thing to do. It is not as though you were at home. The Academy is at best a poor place in which to secure quiet; and there is no occasion for submitting to the discomfort of getting there. This is decidedly the place for you. Since it was the treacherous ice on our walk that brought you to grief, you must allow us to make what amends we can. I will send word to Mrs. Foster at once."

Claire yielded gracefully; in truth she was rather anxious to do so. She was interested in the Ansteds. She had been wondering how she could make their acquaintance, and interest them in matters that she believed required their aid. She had been doing more than wondering. Only this morning, thinking of the subject, as she locked her door for prayer, she had carried it to Christ, and asked him for opportunities, if indeed he meant that she was to work in this direction. What a signal opportunity! Certainly not of her planning. She must take care how she closed the door on it. Behold her, then, an hour later, domiciled in one of the guest-chambers of the beautiful old home, where

every touch of taste and refinement, yes, and luxury, soothed her heart like a breath from home. This was the home to which she had heretofore been accustomed. More elegant her own had been, it is true, but the same disregard to money that had characterized the belongings of her father's house was apparent here; everything spoke of a full purse and a cultured taste. It was very foolish, but Claire could not help a little sigh of satisfaction over the delicacy of the curtains and the fineness of the bed draperies. Had she really missed things of that sort so much? she asked herself. Yes, she had! her truthful heart responded. She liked all soft and fair and pretty things; but, after all, the main reason for their soothing influence now was that they said "home" and "mother" to her.

Laid aside thus suddenly from her regular line of work, the morning found her, dressed and lying on the fawn-coloured couch in her pretty room, considering what there was to do that day. She had already feasted royally; the delicate breakfast that had been sent up to her was served on rare old china, and accompanied with the finest of damask and the brightest of solid silver.

They commented on her in the dining-room below after this fashion:

"Poor creature! I suppose she thinks she has dropped into fairy-land. She looks as though she could appreciate the little refinements of life. I quite enjoyed sending her that quaint old cream cup. I fancy she has taste enough to admire it." This from the mother. Then Alice:

"Mamma, are not such things a sort of cruel kindness? Think of going back to the thick dishes and cheap knives of the Academy after being served in state for a few days!"

"I know, dear; but we cannot help that part. She will probably not remain long enough to get spoiled. She is really quite interesting. I wonder if she has seen better days?"

How would Claire have answered this question? "Fairy-land?" yes, it was something of that to her, but she was like a fairy who had been astray in a new world and had reached home again. The silver might be choice, but she had seen as choice; and the china might have been handed down for generations, yet the style of it and the feel of it were quite familiar to her. Dainty and delicate things had been every-day matters in her father's house. "Different" days she had seen, oh, very different; yet this young girl, so suddenly stranded on what looked like a rough shore, was already beginning to question whether, after all, these were not her "better days." Had she ever before leaned her heart on Christ as she was learning now to do? Busy in his cause she had always been, eagerly busy, ever since she could remember; but she began to have a dim feeling that it was one thing to be busy in his cause, and quite another to walk with him saying as a child, "What next?" and taking up the "next" with a happy unquestioning as to the right of it. Something of this new experience was beginning to steal over her; there seemed to be less of Claire Benedict than ever before, but there was in her place one who was growing willing to be led, and Claire already felt that she would not be willing to take back the old Claire Benedict; she was growing attached to this new one.

Before that day closed, the Ansteds had a revelation.

It was Alice, the young lady daughter of the house, who had come up to show Mrs. Foster the way, and who lingered and chatted with the cheerful young patient after Mrs. Foster had taken her departure. She stooped for Claire's handkerchief, which had dropped, and said, as her eye fell on the name:

"I know of a young lady who has your full name. That is singular, is it not? The name is not a common one."

"Who is she?" asked Claire, interested. "Is she nice? Shall I immediately claim relationship?"

"I am not in the least acquainted with her, though I fancy from what I have heard that she may be very 'nice.' She was pointed out to me once at a concert in Boston, by a gentleman who had some acquaintance with her. She is the daughter of Sidney L. Benedict, a millionaire. I suppose you do not know of her, though she is a namesake. I heard more about her father perhaps than I did of her. Ever so many people seemed to admire him as a wonderful man; very benevolent, you know, and sort of hopelessly good, he seemed to me. I remember telling my brother Louis that it must be rather oppressive to have such a reputation for goodness to sustain. Were you ever in Boston?"

The music-teacher was so long in answering that Miss Alice turned toward her questioningly, and found that the eyes, but a moment before so bright, were brimming with tears.

"I beg your pardon," she said, sympathetically, "does your ankle pain you so badly? Something ought to be done for it. I will call mamma."

But Claire's hand detained her.

"It is not that," she said gently, and smiled. "I forgot my ankle, and where I was, and everything. He was a good man, Miss Ansted—good and true to the heart's core; and his goodness was not oppressive, it was his joy. He has gone now to wear his crown, and I am proud to be his daughter Claire. But oh, there are times when the longing to see him rolls over me so that it swallows every other thought." And then the poor little teacher buried her head in the lace-trimmed pillows and cried outright.

"Mamma, what do you think!—Louis, can you believe it possible?—she is one of the Boston Benedicts!—a daughter of that Sidney L. about whom we heard so much when we were with the Maitlands!"

"I heard he had gone to smash!" said Louis, when the first astonishment was over; "but I thought he had done it fashionably, and provided handsomely for his family."

CHAPTER XI.

A "FANATIC."

I DO not suppose people realize how much such things influence them. For instance, Alice Ansted was the sort of girl who would have been ashamed of herself had she realized how much more important a person Claire Benedict was to her as soon as it became known that she belonged to the Boston Benedicts. But the fact was very apparent to others, if not to Alice. She had been very glad before this to have Miss Benedict enjoy the comforts of the house; but now she hovered about her, and gave her crumbs of personal attention, and found a fascination in hearing her talk, and, in short, was interested in her to a degree that she could never have been simply in the poor music-teacher.

She brought her work one morning, and sat by the luxurious chair where Claire had been imprisoned, with her injured foot skilfully arranged on a hassock.

"How pretty it is!" Claire said, watching the crimson silk flowers grow on the canvas under skilful fingers; "do you enjoy working on it?"

The tone of voice which answered her was dissatisfied in the extreme.

"Oh, I suppose so; as well as I enjoy anything that there is to do. One must employ one's self in some way, and we live such a humdrum life here that there is chance for very little variety. I am puzzled to know how you manage it, Miss Benedict; you have been accustomed to such different

surroundings. This is a sharp enough contrast to Chester. Have you been in Chester yet, Miss Benedict? Well, it is just a nice little city; hardly large enough to be called a city. The society is good, and there is always something going on; and when I come out here I am at an utter loss what to do with myself. But then, Chester is very far from being Boston, and if I had had the advantages of Boston all my life, as you have had, I feel sure I could not endure a month of South Plains. It is bad enough for me: how do you bear it?"

Claire could only smile in answer to this. There were circumstances connected with her removal from Boston which were too keenly felt to touch with a careless hand. She hastened to ask questions.

"What is there pleasant in Chester? I have promised myself to go there some Saturday, and see what I can find in the library."

"Oh, there is a very fair library there, I believe, for a town of its size; but I never patronize it: we have books enough. By the way, Miss Benedict, you are welcome to the use of our library. Papa will be glad to have some one enjoying the books. The girls have as much as they can endure of books in school, and Louis is not literary in his tastes; I am almost the only reader. Mamma is so busy with various city benevolences, that, what with her housekeeping and social cares, she rarely has time for much reading. Oh, Chester is well enough. There are concerts, you know, and lectures, or entertainments of some sort; one can keep busy there, if one accepts invitations. But, to tell you the truth, the whole thing often bores me beyond endurance, and I am glad to get out here to be away from it all. I don't like my life. I think I have talents for something better, if one could only find what it is—the something better, I mean."

There was a pretty flush on her discontented face as she

looked up eagerly to see how this confidence was being received. Claire's face was gently sympathetic and grave. Alice took courage.

"Mamma laughs at me, and says I am visionary, and that I want to have a career, and that I must be content to fill my sphere in life, as my ancestors have done before me; but really I am not content. I don't like the sort of life spread out before me for generations back,—marrying, you know, and keeping up a handsome house, and receiving and paying visits, and giving a grand party once a year, when you are sure to offend somebody to whom you were indebted in some way, and whom you forgot. Now, do you see any particular enjoyment in that sort of thing?"

"No," said Claire unhesitatingly, "I do not."

"I'm really glad to hear you say so. Mamma thinks it is dreadful to be discontented with one's lot; but I am. I would like a career of some sort—anything that would absorb me. And yet I don't want to be poor. I should shrink from that. Do you really find it easier to get along with life, now that you have not time to think, as you used?"

Another question to be gently put aside. What did this girl know of the charmed life which she had lived at home, and of the father who had been its centre? She could not go into the depths of her heart and drag out its memories, unless there were a very grave reason for so doing.

"I have always lived a very busy life," she answered evasively; "but before I can help you with any of my experiences, I must ask one question: Are you not a Christian, Miss Ansted?"

Apparently it was an amazing question to the young girl. Her cheeks took a deeper flush; she let her canvas half drop from her hand, and fixed inquiring eyes on her questioner:

"Why, yes; that is, I suppose I am, or hope I am, or

something. I am a member of the church, if that is what you mean."

"It is not in the least what I mean. That is only the outward sign — worthless, if it is not indeed a sign of union with Christ; such a union as furnishes a career, Miss Ansted, which alone is worthy of you; such a union as carries you captive, making your time and your money and your talents not your own, but his. There is nothing dissatisfying about such a life, my friend. It almost lifts one above the accident of outward surroundings."

There was an undoubted amazement expressed on Miss Ansted's face now.

"I don't in the least understand you," she said. "What has my being a member of the church to do with all this time which lies on my hands just now, I should like to know? If you mean mission bands, and benevolent societies, and all that sort of thing, my tastes don't lie in that direction in the least. Mamma does enough of that for the entire family; she always has some weary board meeting to attend. I have sat shivering in the carriage, and waited for her last words so many times, that I am utterly sick of the whole thing. Oh, I am a member, of course, and give money; that is all they want. But you are mistaken in supposing that these things help me in the least."

"I don't think so," Claire said, unable to help smiling over the darkness which had so misunderstood and misinterpreted Christian work, and yet feeling that it called for tears rather than smiles; "these things are only more of the 'outward signs.'"

They were interrupted then, and Claire was not sorry. She wanted to think over her ground. There was no use in casting these pearls of truth before Alice Ansted; she was too utterly in the dark to see them. A young lady she was, well educated, in the common acceptation of that term; accomplished, so far as music and French were concerned; skil-

ful as regards embroidery and worsted-work; but evidently the veriest child as regarded the Christian life, though she had been a member of the visible Church for years. If she were to be helped at all, Claire must come down from the heights where she walked and meet her on some common ground.

"I wonder how the old church would do?" she asked herself. "I wish I could get her interested in it, both for her sake and for the sake of the church."

Had she heard the report given below of this brief conversation, she might have been discouraged; for she was but a young worker after all, and had not met with many rebuffs.

"Mamma, she is a regular little fanatic;" so Alice affirmed. "You ought to have heard her talk to me! It sounded just like quotations from that old book of sermons that grandma used to pore over. I didn't know what she meant."

"Probably she did not either," was the comment of this Christian mother. "Some very young people occasionally fall into that style, talking heroics, using theological terms of which they cannot grasp the meaning, and fancy it a higher type of religion. She will probably know both less and more as she grows older."

Then was Miss Benedict's pupil, Ella, emboldened to come to the rescue of her teacher's reputation.

"But, mamma, she is not so very young. I saw her birthday book, and the date made her twenty in September."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Ansted, with amused smile; "that is quite a patriarchal age. She certainly ought to be well posted in all theological dogmas by this time. My dear, it is one of the worst ages for a young woman, if she isn't absorbed with an engagement by that time, to fancy herself superior."

"O mamma, you don't know Miss Benedict. She doesn't fancy herself superior to anybody. She is just as sweet and

lovely as she can be. All the girls like her, and I think she has the nicest religion of anybody I know!" This outburst was from Fanny.

"Very well, dear," answered the mother complacently, "admire her as much as you like. She is quite as safe a shrine as any for a young girl like you to worship at. You must always have some one. I am glad the girls like her, poor thing; her life must be doleful enough at best. It is certainly a great change." And the benevolent mother sighed in sympathy. She was glad to be able to put what she thought was a little sunshine from her elegant home into the poor music-teacher's lot. She even wondered, as she waited for her carriage to drive down town, whether the sprained ankle were not a providential arrangement to enable her to give a few days of rest and luxury to this unfortunate girl.

This thought she kept quite to herself. She did not quite accept such strained and peculiar views of Providence. It savoured a little of fanaticism — a thing which she disapproved, and Mr. Ansted disliked; but then some people thought such things, and it was barely possible that they were sometimes correct.

She went out to her carriage still thinking these thoughts; and Claire, watching her from the upper window, said to herself:

"I wonder if I can help her? I wonder if God means me to? Of course, I am set down here for something." *She* had no doubt at all about the providence in it.

The son of the house had added a few words to the family discussion:

"You might have known that she would be a fanatic, after you found that she was Sidney Benedict's daughter. He was the wildest kind of a visionary. Porter was talking about him to-day. He knew them in Boston. He says Benedict gave away as much every year as would have

supported his family in splendid style. They are reaping the results of his extravagance."

This is only one of the many different ways which there are of looking at things.

Nevertheless the fair fanatic seemed to be an attractive object to the entire family. Louis, not hitherto particularly fond of evenings at home, found himself lingering in the up-stairs library, whither he had himself wheeled the large chair with the patient seated therein. As the days passed, she persisted in making herself useful; and Ella and Fanny, under her daily tuition, were making very marked progress in music, as well as in some other things that their mother did not understand about so well. It was on one of these cozy evenings that Louis occupied the piano-stool, he and Alice having been performing snatches of favourite duets, until Alice was summoned to the parlours.

"Come down, won't you, Louis? that is a good boy. It is the Powell girls; and Dick will be with them, I presume." This had been Alice's petition just as she was leaving the room.

But Louis had elevated both eyebrows and shoulders.

"The Powell girls!" he repeated. "Not if this individual knows himself. I never inflict myself on the Powell girls, if there is any possibility of avoiding it; and as for Dick, I would go a square out of my way any time to save boring him. Excuse me, please, Alice: I am not at home, or I *am* at home, and indisposed—just as you please; the latter has the merit of truth. It is my duty to stay here and entertain Miss Benedict, since the girls have deserted her.

"I have no doubt that you would excuse me with pleasure, but nevertheless I consider it my duty to stay." This last was merrily added, just as Alice closed the door.

Claire did not wait to reply to the banter, but plunged at once into the centre of the thought which had been growing on her for several days.

"Mr. Ansted, do you know, I wish I could enlist both you and your sisters as helpers in the renovation of the old church down town?"

"What! the old brick rookery at the corner? My dear young lady, your faith is sublime, and your knowledge of this precious village limited. That concern was past renovating some years before the Flood. It was about that time, or a little later, that my respected grandfather tried to remodel the seats, and raised such a storm of indignation about his ears that it took a century to calm the people down: so tradition says. Whatever you undertake to do will be a failure; I feel it my duty to inform you of so much. And now I am burning with a desire to ask a rude question: Why do you care to do anything with it? Why does it interest you in the least? I beg your pardon if I am meddling with what does not concern me, but I was amused over the affair when the girls came home and petitioned to join the charmed circle. Why a lady who was here but for a passing season or so should interest herself in the old horror was beyond my comprehension. Is it strictly benevolence, may I ask?"

"I don't think it is benevolence at all. It is a plain-faced duty."

"Duty!" The heavy eyebrows were raised again. "I don't comprehend you. Why should a stranger to this miserable little squeezed-up village, and one who by all the laws of association and affinity will surely not spend much of her time here, have any duties connected with that old box, which the church fathers have allowed to run into desolation and disgrace for so many years that the present generation accepts it as a matter of course?"

"Will you allow me to ask *you* one question, Mr. Ansted? Are you a Christian?"

CHAPTER XII.

LOGIC AND LABOUR.

THE young man thus addressed gave over fingering the piano-keys, as he had been softly doing from time to time, whirled about on the music-stool, and indulged in a prolonged and curious stare at his questioner.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last, with a little laugh, as he recognized the rudeness of the proceeding; "I am struck dumb, I think. In all my previous extended experience no more astonishing query has ever been put to me. I don't know how to take it."

"Won't you simply answer it?"

"Why, it is too astonishing to me that the thing requires an answer. I don't believe I even know what it is to be the sort of character to which you refer."

"Then, am I to understand that you don't know but you may be one?"

The young man laughed again, a slightly embarrassed laugh, and gave his visitor a swift, penetrating glance, as if he would like to know whether she was playing a part; then finding that she waited, he said:

"Oh, not at all! In fact, I may say I am very certain that I don't belong to the class in question, even in name."

"May I ask you why?"

"Why!" He repeated the word. There was something very bewildering and embarrassing about these short, direct, simply-put questions. He had never heard them before.

"Really, that is harder to answer than the first. What is it to be a Christian, Miss Benedict?"

"It is to love the Lord Jesus Christ with a love that places his honour and his cause and his commands first, and all else secondary."

"Who does it?"

"He knows. Perhaps there are many. Why are not you one?"

He dropped his eyes now, but answered lightly:

"Hard to tell. I have never given the matter sufficiently serious thought to be able to witness in the case."

"But is that reply worthy of a reasoning being? Won't you be frank about the matter, Mr. Ansted? I don't mean to preach, and I did not intend to be offensively personal. I was thinking this afternoon how strange it was that so many well-educated, reasoning young men left this subject outside, and were apparently indifferent to it, though they professed to believe in the story of the Bible; and I wondered why it was—what process of reasoning brought them to such a position. Will you tell me about it? How do young men, who are intelligent, who accept the Bible as a standard of morals by which the world ought to be governed, who respect the Church and think it ought to be supported, reason about their individual positions as outsiders? They do not stand outside of political questions where they have a settled opinion; why do they in this?"

"I don't know," he answered at last. "The majority of them, perhaps, never give it a thought; with others the claims which the Church makes are too squarely in contact with prearranged plans of life; and none of them more than half believe in religion as exhibited in the everyday lives about them."

"Have you given me *your* reason for being outside, Mr. Ansted?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so; that is, so far as I can be said to have a reason. I don't reason about these matters."

"Will you tell me which one of the three reasons you gave is yours?"

"Were you educated for the bar, Miss Benedict? Since you press me, I must say that a mixture of all three might be found revolving about my inner consciousness. I rarely trouble myself with the subject. That is foolish, I suppose; but it is really no more foolish than I am about many things. Then, so far as I may be said to have plans, what little I know of the Bible is dreadfully opposed to the most of them; and, well, I don't more than one-third believe in any of the professions which are being lived about me."

"But you believe in the Bible?"

"Oh, I believe it is a fine old book, which has some grand reading in it, and some that is very dull, and I know as little about it as the majority of men and women."

"Oh, then let me put the question a little differently: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?"

"Believe in him!"

"Yes, as one who once lived in person on this earth, and died on a cross, and went back to heaven, and is to come again at some future time?"

"Oh yes; I have no particular reason for doubting prophecy or history on these points. I'm rather inclined to think the whole story is true."

"Do you think his character worthy of admiration?"

"Oh yes, of course; it is a remarkable character. Even infidels concede that, you know; and I am no infidel. Scepticism has no charm for me. I have had that disease, Miss Benedict: like the measles and whooping-cough, it belongs to a certain period of life, you know, and I am past that. I had it in a very mild form, however, and it left no trace. Infidelity has nothing to stand on."

She ignored the entire sentence, save the first two words.

She had not the slightest desire to enter into a discussion, and she went straight to the centre of the subject.

"Then, Mr. Ansted, won't you join his army, and come over and help us?"

Nothing had ever struck the brilliant young man as being more embarrassing than this simple question, with a pair of earnest eyes waiting for his answer. It would not do to be merrily stupid and pretend to misunderstand her question, as he at first meditated. Her grave eyes were fixed on his face too searchingly for that. There was nothing for it but to flit behind one of his flimsy reasons.

"Really, Miss Benedict, there are already enough recruits of the sort that I should make. When I find a Christian man whom I can admire with all my heart—instead of seeing things in him every day that even I, with my limited knowledge, know to be contrary to his orders—I may perhaps give the matter consideration; but, in my opinion, the army is too large now."

"But you told me you admired Jesus Christ. I do not ask you to be like any other person—to act in any sense like any other person whom you ever saw or of whom you ever heard. Will you copy him, Mr. Ansted?"

There was no help for it; there must be a direct answer; she was waiting.

"I do not suppose I will." This was his reply; but the air of gaiety with which he had been speaking was gone. You might almost have imagined that he was ashamed of the words.

"Won't you please tell me why?"

Was there ever a man under such a direct fire of personal questions hard to answer? Banter would not do. There was something in the face and voice of the questioner which made him feel that it would be a personal insult to reply other than seriously.

"There are insurmountable difficulties in the way," he said at last, speaking in a low, grave tone.

"Difficulties too hard for God to surmount? You cannot mean that?"

But he did not explain what he meant, and at that moment he received a peremptory summons from his mother to the parlour. He arose at once, glad, apparently, of the interruption, but did not attempt to return to the free and easy tone with which he had carried on part of the conversation, but bade her a grave and respectful good-night.

Left alone, poor Claire could only sigh in a disappointed way. As usual, she had not said the words she meant to say, and she could but feel that she had accomplished nothing. It had been her father's manner to spend no time alone with a human being without learning whether he belonged to the army; and if not, making an effort to secure his enlistment. Claire, looking on, had known more than one young man, and middle-aged man, and not a few children, who had reported in after days that a word from her father had been their starting-point. Sadly she mourned, oftentimes, because she had not her father's tact and judgment. It had seemed to her that this young man, with his handsome face and his handsome fortune, ought to be won for Christ. Why did not his mother win him, or his sister? Why did not she? She could but try. So she tried, and apparently had failed; and she was still so young a worker that she sighed, and felt discouraged, instead of being willing to drop the seed, and leave the results with God. She belonged to that great company of seed-sowers who are very anxious to see the mysterious processes that go on underground, with which they have nothing whatever to do.

The next day Claire went back to the Academy. Her twisted ankle was still to be petted and nursed, and the piano had to move from the music-room to a vacant one next to Claire's own, and the chapel and dining-room did without her for a while; but the work of the day was resumed, and went steadily forward.

It was not without earnest protest that she left the home which had opened so royally to receive her; and it is safe to say that every member of the family missed her—none more than Alice, who had found a relief in her conversations from the *ennui* and unrest which possessed her. Louis, too, had added his entreaties that the burdens of life at the Academy should not be resumed so soon, and evidently missed something from the home after her departure. It was when he was helping her to the sleigh that he said:

"You did not answer my question about the old church and your interest in it. May I call some evening and get my answer?"

"We shall be glad to see you at the Academy," she had replied cordially; "but I can answer your question now. It is because it is the church of Christ, and it is my duty to do for it in every way all that I can."

"But," he said, puzzled, "how is it that the church fathers, and, for that matter, the church mothers, have let it get into such a wretched state of disrepair? Why haven't they a duty concerning it, rather than a stranger in their midst?"

"I did not say that they had not: but they don't have to report to me; the Head of the Church will see to that."

Then Dennis, the Academy man-of-all-work, had taken the reins, while Louis was in the act of tucking the robes more carefully about her, and driven rapidly away.

"It is queer how things work," Ruth Jennings said as a party of the girls gathered around their teacher to report progress. "There are a dozen things that have had to lie idle, waiting for you. Why do you suppose we had to be interrupted in our plans, and almost stand still and do nothing, while you lay on a couch with a sprained ankle? I'm sure we were doing nice things and right things, and we needed you, and it could do no possible good to anybody for you to lie and suffer up there for a week. I do say it looks sometimes as if things just *happened* in this world, or else were

managed by somebody who hated the world and every good plan that was made for it. Don't you really think that Satan has a good deal of control, Miss Benedict?"

But there were reasons why Miss Benedict thought it would be as well not to let her pupil wander off just then on a misty sea of questionings. As for herself, she had no doubt that the interruption was for some good end. It is true she could not see the end, but she trusted it.

You are to remember that she had had her sharper lessons, beside which all this was the merest child's play. Those girls could not possibly know how that awful "why" had tortured her through days and nights until that memorable Sunday night when God gave her victory. What interruptions had come to her! Father and fortune, and home and life-work, cut off in a moment. The whole current of her life changed—changed in ways that would not do even to hint to the girls. What were a sprained ankle and a few days of inaction compared with these! Yet their evident chafing over the loss of time opened her eyes to a new truth. It seemed such a trivial thing to her, that she could scarce restrain her lips from a smile over their folly in dwelling on it, until suddenly there dashed over her the thought:

"What if, in the light of Heaven, my interruptions all seem as small as this?"

The interrupted work was now taken up with renewed energy, and indeed blossomed at once into new varieties.

"What we must do next is to give a concert."

This was the spark that the music-teacher threw into the midst of the group of girls who occupied various attitudes about her chair. It was evening, and they were gathered in her room for a chat as to ways and means. Several days had passed, and the foot was so far recovered that its owner promised it a walk down the church aisle on the following Sabbath, provided Dennis could arrange to have it taken to

the door. It still, however, occupied a place of honour among the cushions, and Claire sat back in the depths of a great comfortable rocker that had been brought from the parlour for her use.

"A concert!" repeated Ruth, great dismay in her voice; "we?"

"Yes, we."

"Who would come?" This from Nettie.

"Everybody will come after we are ready, if we have managed our part of the work well, and put our tickets low enough, and exerted ourselves to sell them. Oh, I don't mean *play*! I mean work. We would make ready for a first-class entertainment. Let me see: are you not all my music-pupils? Yes, every one of you—either vocal or piano pupils. What is more natural than to suppose that 'Miss Claire Benedict, assisted by her able and efficient class of pupils,' can 'give an entertainment in the audience-room of the church,' etc.? Isn't that the way the advertisements head?"

"For the benefit of the church?"

But to this suggestion Miss Benedict promptly shook her head.

"No; for the benefit of ourselves."

CHAPTER XIII.

INNOVATIONS.

I DISLIKE that way of doing things. People are being educated to suppose that they are engaged in a benevolent enterprise when they attend a benefit concert or entertainment. Those who cannot afford to go ease their consciences by saying, 'Oh, well, it is for benevolence;' when it really isn't, you know: it is for self-gratification or self-improvement; and people who ought to give five pounds for a thing learn to tell themselves that they went to the half-crown supper, or concert, and that is their share, they suppose. Let us invite them to come to our concert because we believe that we can entertain them, and that it will pay them to be present.

"The fact is, girls, the Church of Christ doesn't *need* any benefit. We degrade it by talking as though it did. No; we will divide the proceeds of the concert in shares among ourselves,—that is, we, the workers, will for the time being go into business and earn money that shall be ours. We will not plead poverty, or ask people to listen to us because of benevolence; we will simply give them a chance to hear a good thing if they want to, and the money shall be ours to do exactly what we please with. Of course, if we please to give every penny of it to the Church, that is our individual affair."

New ground this for those girls; they had never before

heard the like. But there was an instant outgrowth of self-respect because of it.

"Then we can't *coax* people to buy tickets?" said Nettie. "I'm so glad."

"Of course not. The very utmost that propriety will allow us to do will be to exhibit our goods for sale, so much for such an equivalent, and allow people the privilege of choosing what they will do, and where they will go."

The girls, each and all, agreed that from that standpoint they would as soon offer tickets for sale as not; and instantly they stepped upon that new platform and argued from it in the future, to the great amazement and somewhat to the bewilderment of some of their elders.

Thereafter, rehearsals for the concert became the daily order of things;—not much time to spend each day, for nothing could be done until lessons were over and all regular duties honourably discharged. The more need, then, for promptness and diligence on the part of each helper, and the more glaringly improper it became to delay matters by having to stay behind for a half-prepared lesson. Never had the Academy, or the village, for that matter, been so full of eager, throbbing, healthy life, as those girls made it.

Their numbers grew, also. At first the music-class was disposed, like the others, to be exclusive, and to shake its head with a lofty negative when one and another of the outsiders proposed this or that thing which they would do to help. But Miss Benedict succeeded in tiding them over that shoal.

"It is their church, girls, as well as ours. We must not hinder them from showing their love."

"Great love they have had!" sneered one: "they never thought of doing a thing until we commenced."

But they were all honest, these girls; and this very one who had offered her sneer, added in sober second thought:

"Though, to be sure, for the matter of that, neither did

we, until you began it. Well, let them come in; I don't care."

"And we want to do so much!" said Miss Benedict with enthusiasm. "If I were you I should take all the help I could get."

Meantime, the other schemes connected with this gigantic enterprise flourished. There seemed no end to the devices for money-making, all of them in somewhat new channels, too.

"Not a tidy in the enterprise," said Ruth Jennings gravely, as she tried to explain some of the work to her mother. "Who ever heard of a church getting itself repaired without the aid of tidies and pin-cushions! I wonder when they began with such things, mother? Do you suppose St. Paul had to patronize fairs, and buy slippers and things for the benefit of churches in Ephesus or Corinth?"

The bewildered mother, with a vague idea that Ruth was being almost irreverent, could not, for all that, decide how to answer her.

"For there isn't any religion in those things, of course," she said to the equally puzzled father; "and it did sound ridiculous to hear St. Paul's name brought into it! That Miss Benedict has all sorts of new ideas."

In the course of time the boys (who are quite likely to become interested in anything that has deeply interested the girls) were drawn into service. Here, too, the ways of working were unusual and suggestive. Miss Benedict heard of one who had promised to give all the cigars he would probably have smoked in two months' time; whereupon she made this eager comment:

"Oh, what a pity that it is not going to take us fifty years to repair the church! Then we would get him to promise to give us the savings of cigars until it was done!"

This was duly reported to him, and gave him food for thought.

Another promised the savings from sleigh-rides that he had intended to take; and another gravely wrote down in Ruth Jennings's note-book: "Harry Matthews, five shillings—the price of two new neckties and a bottle of hair oil." There was more than fun to some of these entries. Some of the boys could not have kept their pledges if there had not been these queer little sacrifices.

One evening there was a new development. Ruth Jennings brought the news. The much-abused, long-suffering, neglectful sexton of the half-alive church notified the startled trustees that he had received a louder call to the church at the other end of the village, and must leave them. It really was startling news; for bad as he had been, not one in the little village could be thought of who would be likely to supply his place.

Ruth reported her father as filled with consternation.

"I wish I were a man!" earnestly announced Anna Graves; "then I would offer myself for the position at once. It is as easy to make ten shillings a month in that way as it is in any other that I know of."

That was the first development of the new idea. Miss Benedict bestowed a sudden glance, half of amusement, half of pleasure, on her aspiring pupil, and was silent.

"If it were not for the fires," was Nettie Burdick's slow-spoken sentence, rather as if she were thinking aloud than talking. That is the way the idea began to grow.

Then Ruth Jennings, with a sudden dash, as she was very apt to enter into a subject:

"It is no harder to make fires in church stoves than it is in sitting-room ones. I've done that often. I say, girls, let's do it."

Every one of them knew that she meant the church stoves instead of the sitting-room ones; and that was the way that the idea took on flesh and stood up before them.

There followed much eager discussion, and of course some demurs. Nothing ever was done yet, or ever will be, with-

out somebody objecting to it. At least this was what Ruth said; and she added that she could not, to save her life, help being a little more settled in a determination after she had heard somebody oppose it a trifle.

However, the trustees opposed it more than a trifle. They were amazed. Such an innovation on the time-honoured ways of South Plains had never been heard of before. Argument ran high. The half-doubtful girls came squarely over to the aggressive side, and waxed eloquent over the plan. It was carried at last, as Miss Benedict, looking on and laughing, told the girls she knew it would be.

"When you get fairly roused, my girls, I observe that you are quite apt to carry the day." She did not tell them that they were girls after her own heart, but I think perhaps she looked it.

One request the trustees growled vigorously over, which was that the new sextons should be paid in advance for a half-year's work. What if they failed?

"We won't fail!" said Ruth indignantly; "and if we do, can't you conceive of the possibility of our being honest? We will not keep a penny of the precious money that has not been earned."

Whereupon Mr. Jennings, in a private conference with the trustees, went over to the enemy's side, and promised to stand security for them; remarking apologetically that the girls had all gone crazy over something, his Ruth among the number. Therefore three pounds were gleefully added to the treasury. The sum was certainly growing.

The Sabbath following the installation of the new sextons marked a change in the appearance of the old church. The floors had been carefully swept and cleansed, the young ladies drawing on their precious funds for the purpose of paying a woman, who had scrubbed vigorously.

"It would be more fascinating," Ruth Jennings frankly admitted, "to let all the improvements come in together in

one grand blaze of glory; but then it would be more decent to have those floors scrubbed, and I move that we go in for decency, to the sacrifice of glory, if need be."

So they did. Not a particle of dust was to be seen on that Sabbath morning anywhere about the sanctuary. From force of habit, the men carefully brushed their hats with their coat-sleeves as they took possession of them again, the service over; but the look of surprise on the faces of some over the discovery that there was nothing to brush away was a source of amusement to a few of the watchful girls.

Also the few stragglers who returned for the evening service were caught looking about them in a dazed sort of way, as though they deemed it just possible that there might be an incipient fire in progress that threatened the building. Not that a new lamp had been added; the chimneys had simply been washed in soap-suds, and polished until they shone, and new wicks had been furnished,—the workers declaring that their consciences really would not allow them to do less. The effect of these very commonplace efforts was somewhat astonishing, even to them.

"It is well we did it," affirmed Anna Graves with serious face. "I believe we ought to get the people used to these things by degrees, or they will be frightened."

One question Claire puzzled over in silence: Did the minister really preach a better sermon that evening? Was it possible that the cleanliness about him might have put a little energy into his discouraged heart, or had she been so tired with her week of toil, that to see every one of her dozen girls out to church, and sit back and look at them through the brightness of clean lamps was restful and satisfying? She found that she could not decide on the minister as yet. Perhaps the carrying of such a load as that church for years was what had taken the spring out of his voice and the life out of his words.

About these things nothing must be said, yet could not something be done? How could she and her girls help that pastor?

Meantime, some of the girls came to her one evening, bursting with laughter.

"O Miss Benedict, we have a new recruit! You couldn't guess who. We shall certainly succeed now, with such a valuable reinforcement.—O girls, we know now why Miss Benedict sprained her ankle, and kept us all waiting for a week! This is a direct result from that week's work."

"What are you talking about?" said Miss Benedict, with smiling eyes and sympathetic voice. It was a great addition to her power over those girls that she held herself in readiness always to join their fun at legitimate moments. Sad-hearted she often was, but what good that those young things should see it? "Who is your recruit?"

"Why, Bud!" they said; and then there were shouts of laughter again, and Ruth could hardly command her voice to explain: "He came to me last night—tramped all the way up to our house in the snow after meeting—because he said he wasn't so 'fraid' of me as he was of 'all them others.'—Was that a compliment, girls, or an insult?—Yes, Miss Benedict, he wants to help—offers to 'tend the fires;' and I shouldn't wonder if he could do it much better than it has been done, at least. It was real funny, and real pitiful, too. He said it was the only 'livin' thing he knew how to do,' and *that* he was sure and certain he could do, and if it would help any he would be awful glad to join."

"But doesn't he want to be paid?" screamed one of the girls.

"Paid? not he! I tell you he wants to join us. He said he wanted to do it to please *her*.—That means you, Miss Benedict. You have won his heart in some way. Oh, it is the fruit of the sprained ankle.—You know, girls, she said it was surely for some good purpose." Then they all went off

into ecstatic laughter again. They were just at the age when it takes so little to convulse girls.

"But I am not yet enlightened," explained Claire, as soon as there was hope of her being heard. "Who is Bud?"

"Oh, is it possible you don't remember him? That is too cruel, when he is just devoted to you. Why, he is the furnace-boy of the Ansteds. I don't know where he saw you. He muttered something about the furnace and the register that I did not understand; but he plainly intimated that he was ready to be your devoted servant, and die for you, if need be, or at least make the church fires as many days and nights as you should want them. Now the question is, What shall we do with the poor fellow?"

The furnace-boy of the Ansteds! Oh yes, Claire remembered him—a great, blundering, apparently half-witted, friendless, hopeless boy. Claire's heart had gone out in pity for him the first time she ever saw him. He had been sent to her room to make some adjustment of the register-screw, and she had asked him if he understood furnaces, and if he liked to work, and if the snow was deep, and a few other aimless questions, just for the sake of speaking to him with a pleasant voice, and seeming to take an interest in his existence. Her father's heart had always overflowed with tenderness and helpfulness for all such boys. Claire had pleased herself—or perhaps I might say saddened herself—with thinking what her father, if he were alive and should come in contact with Bud, would probably try to do for him. She could think of ways in which her father would work to help him, but she sadly told herself that all that was past; her father was gone where he could not help Bud,—and there were few men like him; and the boy would probably have to stumble along through a cold and lonely world. She had not thought of one thing that *she* could do for him; indeed, it had not so much as occurred to her as possible that there could be anything. After that first day she had not seen him again, until he

came to the music-room with a message for Ella; and she had turned her head and smiled, and said, "Good-morning!" And that was really all that she knew about Bud. She had forgotten his existence; and she had been sorrowing because her week at the Ansteds seemed to have accomplished nothing at all.

Her face was averted for a moment from the girls, and some of them noticing, actually thought that their gay banter was offensive, and was what caused the heightened colour on her cheeks as she turned back to them.

They could not have understood, even had she tried to explain, that it was a blush of shame over the thought that the one whom possibly she might have won from that home for the Master's service she had forgotten, and reached out after those whom, possibly, she was not sent to reach. Her eyes were open now; she would do what she could to repair blunders.

"Do with him?" she said, going back to Ruth's last question. "We'll accept him, of course, and set him to work. I should not be greatly surprised if he should prove one of the most useful helpers on our list before the winter is over. Look at the snow coming down, and we have a rehearsal to-night. Don't you believe he can shovel paths as well as make fires?"

"Sure enough!" said those girls; and they went away pleased with the addition to the circle of workers, and prepared every one to greet him as a helper.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLIND.

I SUPPOSE there was never a project that went forward on swifter wings than did this one, born of the stranger's sermon preached that night in the little neglected church at South Plains. Sometimes I am sad over the thought that he knew nothing about it. Nobody, so far as I am aware, ever took time to tell him that he was the prime mover in the entire scheme.

The numerous plans for making money made progress with the rest—prospered, indeed, to a degree that filled the young workers with amazement, I might almost say with awe. They grew into the feeling that Miss Benedict was right, and that God himself smiled on their scheme and gave it the power of his approval.

As the days went by, the leading spirit in the enterprise grew almost too busy to write her daily hurried postals to her mother. These same postals were gradually filled with items that astonished and somewhat bewildered the mother and daughter who watched so eagerly for them.

"Would mamma be so kind as to call on Mr. Parkhurst —the one who was chief man at the carpet-factory up there by papa's old mill, you know? Would she, on the next bright day, take the car and ride up there and talk with him? The ride would do her good, and it would be such a help to the girls. They would need only a little carpeting, it was true; but if Mr. Parkhurst would be so kind as to

sell to them at wholesale factory prices it would make a great difference with their purses; and she was sure he would be pleased to do it if mamma would ask him, because you know, mamma, he felt very grateful to papa for help years ago."

This was the substance of one postal.

"One would think that Claire had bought the little old church, and was fitting it up for her future home," commented Dora, a trifle annoyed. The truth was, her sister seemed almost unpardonably satisfied and happy away from them.

Another day would bring further petitions:—"Would it be too much for mamma to look at wall-papers—something very neat and plain, not at all expensive, but suited to a small church—and make an estimate of the expense in round numbers?" Then would follow a line of figures indicating length and breadth and height.

"What a child she is!" would the mother say, sighing and then smiling—the smiles came last and oftenest in speaking of Claire. "She was always very much like your father, and it grows on her. Well, we must see about the wall-paper; perhaps this afternoon will be a good time to give to it." And the commissions were executed promptly and with painstaking care, and Claire could see that both mother and Dora were becoming interested in the old church at South Plains, and were absorbing a good many of their otherwise leisure and sad hours in travelling hither and thither in search of shades and grades that would be likely to give her satisfaction. Samples were sent to her, and astonishingly low figures accompanied some of them—figures which were communicated with shining eyes to the deeply-interested girls; and they sent messages of thanks to the mother and daughter far away.

Meantime, the Ansteds were not forgotten. There was a special committee meeting one evening in Miss Benedict's

room. A letter had come "from the foreign member of our firm," Miss Benedict had explained, laughing, meaning her mother, and its contents were to be discussed and voted upon. In the midst of the interest came a message from Mrs. Foster: "Would Miss Benedict be kind enough to come to the parlour for a few minutes to see Mr. and Miss Ansted?"

"I must go, girls," Claire said, rising quickly. "This is the third attempt Miss Ansted has made to call on me since their kindness to me, and I have either been out or engaged in giving lessons. You will have to excuse me for a little while. I will return as soon as I can. Meantime, I am going to see if I can't secure help in that direction for our enterprise."

"You won't!" said Mary Burton emphatically. "They say Alice Ansted is a good singer, but she has been heard to say that she would as soon think of singing in a barn as in our church; and that the one time she heard our organ, she thought it was some mice squealing in the ceiling."

"Wait until we get it tuned, and the pedals oiled," said Ruth Jennings; "I don't believe it will be such a bad-sounding instrument. At least, it is my opinion that Alice Ansted will find herself able to endure in that line what Miss Benedict is.—Girls, I heard last night that she is a beautiful singer. Isn't it queer that she has never sung for us?"

This last was after Claire had left them; but as she was about to close the door Ruth Jennings had made a remark which had drawn her back:

"Get Louis Ansted to pledge us the money which he spends in wines each year, and that will do us good, and him too."

"Does he use wines freely?" Claire said, turning back.

"Yes, indeed he does; altogether too freely for his good,

if the village boys can be believed. I heard that he came home intoxicated only the night before last."

"Why, that is nothing new!" added Nettie Burdick; "he often comes home in that condition. Dick Fuller says it is a common experience, and he would know what he is talking about, for he has to be at the station when the last train comes in. Besides, he makes his money in that way; why shouldn't he patronize himself?"

"What do you mean?" Claire asked, her face troubled

"Why, his money is all invested in one of the distilleries. He has a fortune in his own right, Miss Benedict, left him by his grandmother, and he invested it in Westlake's distillery. He is one of the owners, though his name does not appear in the firm—the Ansted pride would not like that; but I know this is true, for my uncle transacted the business for him."

Claire started again, making no comment, but this time she moved more slowly. There were reasons why the news gave her a special thrust.

The callers greeted her with evident pleasure, and expressed their disappointment at having failed to see her in their other attempts, and gave her messages from their mother to the effect that she was to consider their house one of her homes. Fanatic though she was, it was plainly to be seen that they had resolved to tolerate the fanaticism for the sake of the pleasure of her society.

There were other callers; and in a few minutes the conversation, which had been general, dropped into little side channels. Alice Ansted, occupying a seat near Miss Benedict, turned to her and spoke low:

"I have wanted to see you. What you said to me that day has made me more dissatisfied than ever, and that was unnecessary—I was uncomfortable enough before. I did not understand you. What is there that you want me to do?"

"How do you know I want you to do anything?" Claire could not resist the temptation to ask the question, and to laugh a little, her questioner's tone was so nervous, so almost rebellious, and at the same time so pettish.

"Oh, I know well enough. You expressed surprise—and, well, almost bewilderment—that I did not find absorbing work in a channel about which I know nothing. Suppose I am a Christian, what then? What do you want me to do?"

"But, my dear Miss Ansted, I am not the one of whom that inquiry should be made. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, surely he has work for you, and is able to point it out, and to fill your heart with satisfaction while you do his bidding."

There was a gesture almost of impatience. "I tell you I don't understand such talk. It sounds like 'cant' to me, and nothing else;—that is, it does when other people say it, but you seem different. You live differently, some way, and interest yourself about different matters from those which absorb the people whom I have heard talk that way. Now, I ask you a straightforward question: What do you want me to do? What do you see that I could do, if I were what you mean by being a Christian?"

Claire's face brightened. "Oh, that is such a different question!" she said. "I am really very glad of an opportunity to answer it. I know a dozen things that you could do. For instance, you could throw yourself into the life of this neglected, almost deserted church, and help to make it what it should be. You could give your time, and your money, and your voice to making it arise and shine."

"How? What on earth is there that I could do, even if I wanted to do anything in that direction; which I don't?"

"I know it, but that doesn't hinder me from seeing what you *could* do. Why, if you want me to be very specific, if you have no better plan than we are working on to propose, you could join us with all your heart, and work with us, and

worship with us on Sabbaths, and help us in our preparations for a concert."

"And sing in that stuffy room, to the accompaniment of that horrid little organ, and for the benefit of such an audience as South Plains would furnish! Thank you, I don't mean to do it! What else?"

"Of what special use is it for me to suggest ways, since you receive them with such determined refusals?"

"That I may have the pleasure of seeing how far your enthusiasm reaches. I would call it fanaticism if I dared, Miss Benedict; but that would be rude. Tell me, what next?"

Claire considered, Miss Ansted meantime watching her closely. When at last she spoke, her tone dropped lower, and was graver:

"I wish with all my soul that you would interest yourself in Bud."

"In Bud!" It was impossible not to give a start of surprise, not to say dismay. "Now, Miss Benedict, that passes comprehension! What on earth is there that I could do for a great, ignorant, blundering clod like Bud? He has plenty to eat, and is decently clothed without any assistance from me. What more can you imagine he wants?"

"He wants God," said Claire solemnly, "and the knowledge of him in the face of Jesus Christ. He is to live for ever, Miss Ansted, as certainly as you are; and the time hastens when food and clothing for the soul will be a necessity for him as well as for you, or he will appear before God naked and starved; and you will have to meet him there, and bear some of the blame."

"I never heard a person talk so in my life. Bud is not more than half-witted. I doubt whether he knows that there is such a being as God. What can you fancy it possible for me to do for him?"

"Do you think, then, that he has no soul?"

"Why, I did not say that. I suppose he has, of course, He is not an animal, though I must say he approaches very nearly to the level of one."

"And don't you think that he will have to die, and go to the judgment, and meet God?"

"How dreadful all these things are! Of course he will; but how can I help it?"

"Do you suppose he is ready?"

"I don't suppose he ever thought of such a thing in his life. He hasn't mind enough, probably, to comprehend."

"Do you really think so? Don't you believe the boy to whom you can say, 'Close the blinds on the north side, to shut out the wind,' could understand if you said, 'Bud, God is as surely in the world as the wind is, though you cannot see either. He has said that when you die you shall see him, and that you shall live with him in a beautiful home, if you will love him here and obey his orders; and what he wants you to do is all printed in a book that you can learn to read'? Do you think Bud could not comprehend as much as that?"

"I never heard of such an idea in my life!" said Miss Ansted. "I don't know how to teach such things." And she turned away and talked with a caller about the travelling opera company who were to sing in the city on the following evening.

Mr. Ansted had changed his seat meantime, and was waiting for his opportunity. He turned to Claire the moment his sister withdrew.

"I came to ask a favour of you this evening—two of them, in fact; but the first is on such strange ground for me that I have been studying all day how to put it."

"And have you decided?"

"No, left it in despair; only praying that the Fates would be favourable to me, and grant me opportunity and words. Here is the opportunity, but where are the words?"

"I have always found it comfortable to be as simple and

direct as possible with all communications. Suppose you see how fully you can put the thought before me in a single sentence."

The gentleman laughed.

"That would be one way to make an interview brief, if such were my desire. I cannot say, however, that that phase of the subject troubles me. Well, I will take your advice, and put a large portion of my thought into a short sentence: I wish you could and would do something for Harry Matthews."

It was not in the least what she had expected. She supposed his words were to preface a flattering invitation, or something of that character. An apparently earnest sentence concerning a merry young fellow in whom she was already somewhat interested, filled her with surprise and kept her silent.

"Is that brief and abrupt enough?" he asked; and then, without waiting for answer, continued, "I mean it, strange as it may seem; and I so rarely do unselfish things that I can imagine it seems strange enough. I haven't a personal thought in the matter. Harry is a good fellow;—'a little fast,' the old ladies say, and shake their heads; but they don't know what they mean by that. The boy is a favourite of mine, and he is one who has a good deal of force of character without any will-power, if that is not a contradiction. I fancy you know what I mean. I am going to speak more plainly now. Away back in some former generation—no, I am going to tell the naked truth. Do you know anything of his family, Miss Benedict?"

"Not anything."

"Well, his father was a good man and a drunkard. You think that is another contradiction of terms. Perhaps it is, as you would mean it, but not as I do. He was a good, warm-hearted, whole-souled man, and he drank himself into his grave—shipwrecked his property, and left his widow and

this boy dependants on wealthy relatives, or on themselves. Harry is trying to be a man, and works hard, and is specially tempted in the line at which I have hinted. I feel afraid for him; and I think the only person in this little wretch of a village who might help him is yourself. Will you try?"

"Mr. Ansted, why don't you help him?"

It was his turn to be taken aback. He had not expected this answer. He had looked for an instant and interested affirmative, and he had expected to tell her more of Harry Matthews, and of his peculiar associations and temptations.

"I!" he said, and then he laughed. "Miss Benedict, you are most remarkable as regards your talent for asking strange questions. It is evident that you are a stranger in South Plains; and I don't know what the gossips have been about that they have not posted you better. You should know that I am really the last person in the neighbourhood who is expected to help anybody; least of all can I help Harry Matthews. The most helpful thing that I can think of for the boy is to keep away from me. My influence over him is altogether bad, and growing worse. What he needs, is to be drawn away from present associations entirely; and, indeed, from his present associates, of whom I am often one. I fancy that this organization of yours, in which he is already interested, might be managed in a way to help him, and it occurred to me to enlighten you in regard to him, and ask for your helping hand."

"Mr. Ansted, I hope you will pardon the rudeness, but your words sound to me almost like those of an insane person. You recognize your influence over a young man to be evil—realize it to the extent that you make an effort to have him withdrawn from it—and yet, if I understand you, make no attempt to change the character of the influence which you have over him. That cannot possibly be your meaning!"

"I think it is, about that. Don't you understand? What is a mere entertainment to me—a passing luxury, which I

can afford, and which does me no harm—is the very brink of a precipice to poor Harry, owing to his unfortunate inherited tendencies. I would like to see him saved, but there is nothing in particular that I can do."

"Oh!" she said in genuine distress, "I wonder if it is possible for a soul to be so blind! You can do *everything*, Mr. Ansted; and, moreover, how can you think you have a right to say that you are not personally in danger from the same source? Men as assured in position, and as strong in mental power as you, have fallen by hundreds. Surely you know that there is no safety from such a foe save in having none of him."

"Do you think so? In that we would differ. I am not fanatical in this matter. I recognize Harry's danger, but I recognize equally that I am built in a different mould, and have different antecedents."

"And have no responsibilities connected with him?"

"Oh, yes, I have," he said in utmost good humour: "I assumed responsibility when I came here to ask you to help him. It was the best thing I could think of to do for the boy. You think I am playing a part, but upon honour I am not. I know his mother is anxious."

She wondered afterward whether it were not an unwise question to ask, but said,—

"Is not your mother anxious, Mr. Ansted?"

"Not in the least," he answered smilingly.

CHAPTER XV.

STARTING FOR HOME.

IT had been a stormy evening, and the little company of busy people who had gathered in the church for a rehearsal were obliged to plod home through an incipient snow-storm; but they were in happy mood, for the most successful rehearsal of the enterprise had been held, and certain developments had delighted their hearts.

To begin with. Just as they had completed a difficult chorus, the door leading into the outside world had opened with a decisive bang, and there had been an energetic stamping of feet in the little entry, and there appeared Alice and Louis Ansted!

There was still on Alice's face that curious mixture of superiority and discontent which Claire had always seen in her.

"Here we are!" she said, in a tone that expressed a sort of surprise with herself at the idea. "It would be difficult to tell why. Now, what do you want of me?"

Claire went forward to meet them, her face bright with welcome.

"Have you really come to help us?" she asked.

"I suppose so. I don't know why else we should have appeared here in the storm. It is snowing. I don't mind the storm, though; only, why did I come? I don't know; if you do, I wish you would tell me."

"Well, I do; I know exactly. You came to take the

alto in this quartette we are arranging. My girls were just assuring me that there was not an alto voice in our midst that could sustain the other parts.—What do you say now, girls?"

There was a good deal of satisfaction in her tones. It amused her to think of Ruth's discontented grumble but a moment before:

"If Alice Ansted did not feel so much above us, she would be a glorious addition to this piece. Miss Benedict, her voice is splendid. I don't like her, but I would tolerate her presence if we could get her to take the alto in this."

Then Mary Burton:

"Well, she won't; and you needn't think of such a thing."

It was at that moment that the door had opened and she came.

Claire went at once to the organ, and the rehearsal of the quartette began.

I do not know but the girls themselves would have been almost frightened had they been sufficiently skilled in music to know what a rare teacher they had. Claire Benedict's voice was a special talent, God-given as surely as her soul. Time was when it had been one of her temptations, hard to resist. Such brilliant and flattering futures had opened before her, if she would but consent to give "private rehearsals." There is an intoxication about extravagant praise, and Claire had for weeks been intoxicated to the degree that she could not tell where the line was drawn; and when the world stepped in and claimed her as its special prize, it was then that the keen, clear-seeing, wise and tender father had used his fatherly influence and showed her the net which Satan had warily spread.

She had supposed herself secure after that; but when the great financial crash came upon them, and when the father was gone where he could advise and shield no more, there had come to her the temptation of her life. It would have

been so easy to have supported her mother and sister in a style somewhat like that to which they had been accustomed; and to do this, she need not descend in any sense to that which was in itself wrong or unladylike. Those who would have bought her voice were willing that she should be as exclusive as she pleased. But for the clear-sightedness of the father, in those days when the other temptations had been met, she would surely have yielded to the pressure.

She came off victorious, but wounded. When she had with determined face turned from all these flattering offers, and entered the only door which opened to her conscience—this one at South Plains—she had told herself that sixty pounds a year did not hire her voice. So much of herself she would keep to *herself*. She would do no singing, either in public or private—not a note. In order to teach even vocal music, it was not necessary to exhibit her powers of song. That sermon, however, had swept this theory away, along with many others. It is true, it had been almost exclusively about the Church; but you will remember that it had dealt with the conscience, and the conscience awakened on one point is far more likely to see plainly in other directions.

When next the subject of song presented itself to her mind, Claire Benedict was somewhat astonished to discover that she had not given her *voice* when she gave herself. She had not known it at the time, but there had evidently been a mental reservation, else she would not shrink so from using her powers in this direction in this her new sphere of life. Some earnest heart-searching had to be done. Was she vain of her voice, she wondered, that she was so unwilling to use it in the desolate little sanctuary at South Plains—that she could not even bring herself to do other than *peep* the praises of God in the school chapel? It was a revelation of self that brought much humiliation with it. It was even humiliating to discover that it took a long and almost fierce

struggle to overcome the shrinking which possessed her. It was not all pride—there was a relief in remembering that. There was a sense in which her voice seemed to belong to her happy and buried past; something which her father had loved, even exulted in, and which had been largely kept for him. But this thought of her father helped her. There was never a thought connected with him that did not help and strengthen. He would not have approved—no, she did not put it that way, she hated those past tenses as connected with him—he *did not* approve of her hiding her talent in a napkin. Her happiness should not be labelled "Past." Was she not in God's world? Was she not the child of a King? Was not heaven before her, and an eternity there with her father, who had just preceded the family by a few days? Did she grudge him that? Was it well for her to sit down weeping and dumb because he had entered the palace a little in advance?

From this heart-searching there had come another victory, and if Claire Benedict did not say in so many solemn words,

> "Take my voice, and let me sing
> Always, only, for my King,"

she nevertheless consecrated it to his service, and grew joyful over the thought that she had this talent to give.

In making her selections for the coming concert, she had with rare good taste kept in mind the character of the audience which would probably gather to listen, and the capacities of her helpers. She chose simple, tender melodies, narrative poems such as appeal to the heart, with one or two wonderful solos, and this quartette, which was new and difficult, but full of power.

They sang it presently, for the first time—Claire and Alice Ansted, Harry Matthews and a friend of his who had been drawn in for the occasion. It was the first time that even her girls had heard Claire's voice in its power.

They said not a word when it was ended, but they looked at one another in a startled way, and presently Ruth Jennings apologized in undertone for its power over her:

"I'm sure I don't know what was the matter with me. I never cried before at the sound of music. I have read of people doing it, and I thought it rather absurd, but I could not help it. Girls, I wonder what the Ansteds think?"

What Alice Ansted thought might have been expressed in part in her first astonished comment:

"The idea of your singing in South Plains!"

However, she said more than that in the course of the evening—said things which gave Claire much more pleasure; for instance:

"How horridly out of order that little wretch is! Why don't you have it tuned? It would be a little more endurable then, or at least a little less intolerable. Our piano-tuner is coming out to-morrow, and I mean to send him down here. The idea of having nothing but a rickety chair for a music-stool!—Louis, what has become of that piano-stool we used to have in our library in town? Did you store it with the other things? Well, just bring it out to-morrow. Miss Benedict will get another fall if she depends on this old chair any longer.—What is that you are sitting on? A pile of old music-books, I declare! The whole thing is disgraceful. Miss Benedict, do you sing 'Easter Bells'? I should think it would just fit your voice. It runs so high that I can do nothing with it, but I wouldn't mind taking the alto with you.—Louis, suppose you bring out the music to-morrow and let her look at it."

And before the evening was over, it became evident to those girls that Miss Ansted was committed to the concert at least. They were half-jealous, it is true. They had enjoyed having their prize all to themselves. Still, she had bloomed before them that evening into such an unexpected prize that they were almost awed, and a little glad that her

glorious voice should have such an appropriate setting as was found in Alice Ansted; and besides, it was a sort of a triumph to say, "Why, the Ansteds are going to help us at our concert! they have never sung in South Plains before!"

Louis, too, contributed something besides his fine tenor voice.

"What makes your stove smoke so, Bud?" he questioned.

And Bud explained, with some stammering, that there was something wrong about the pipe—one joint did not fit right into another joint; or, as he expressively stated it, "One j'int was too small, and t'other was too large, and so they didn't work well."

"I should say not," said Louis, amused; "the wonder is that they work at all, with such a double difficulty as that to contend with. Well, Bud, you tell Hawkins to come in to-morrow and see what is the matter with the joints, and make the large one small and the small one large, or fix it in any other way that suits his genius, so that the thing won't smoke, and send his bill to me. We will have our throats all raw here before the important day arrives."

"A music-stool, and an organ-tuner, and a new elbow for the stove-pipe," commented Ruth Jennings in a complacent tone as they walked home in the snow. "The Ansteds are good for something in the world, after all."

About the home-going there was some talk. Claire, down by the stove adjusting her rubbers, caught the watchful, wistful gaze of Bud, and remembered what Ruth had said about her influence over him. How could she exert it so that it would tell on Bud for ever? What was there that she could say to him? When was her opportunity? Right at hand, perhaps. She would try.

"Bud," she said, "are you going to see me home through this snowstorm, or must you make haste up the hill?"

It gave her a feeling of pain to see the sudden blaze of light on his dark, swarthy face. What a neglected, friend-

less life he must have led, that a kind word or two could have such power over him!

"Me!" he said. "Do you mean it? I'd like to carry your books and things; and I could take the broom and sweep along before you. Might I go? Oh, I haven't got to hurry; my work is all done."

She laughed lightly. What a picture it would be for Dora, could she see her plunging through the freshly-fallen snow, Bud at her side, or a step ahead, with a broom!

"I don't need the broom," she said; "it has not snowed enough for that; and I am prepared if it has—see my boots. I like the snow. You may carry my books, please, and we will have a nice walk and talk. The girls are all ready now, I think. You put out the lamps, and I will wait for you at the door."

Out in the beautiful snowy world, just as Bud's key clicked in the lock, Louis Ansted came up to Claire.

"Miss Benedict, let me take you home in the sleigh. I am sorry to have kept you waiting a moment, but my blundering driver had something wrong about the harness, and the horses were fractious. They are composed enough now, and Alice is in the sleigh. Let me assist you out to it, please."

If it had been moonlight he might have seen the mischievous sparkle in Claire's eyes. It was so amusing to be engaged to Bud, while his master held out his hands for her books as a matter of course; and poor Bud stood aside, desolate and miserable. Evidently he expected nothing else but to be left.

Claire's voice rang out clear, purposely to reach Bud's ear:

"Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Ansted; I am fond of walking. I don't mind the snow in the least, and I have promised myself the pleasure of a walk through it with Bud. Thank you," as he still urged; "my ankle is quite well again, and

I have had no exercise to-day—I really want the walk. We thank you very much for your help this evening, Mr. Ansted. Good-night.—Are you ready, Bud?"

And they trudged away, leaving the discomfited gentleman standing beside his pawing horses.

"It is some absurd idea of benefiting Bud that has taken possession of her," explained Alice, as the sleigh flew by the two. "She spoke to me about trying to help him. She is just as full of queer notions as she can be. The idea of helping Bud!"

But the master of the horses said nothing. He was prepared to think, but not to confess, that such as she might help even Bud.

That young man, though his tread was certainly heavy enough, seemed to himself to be walking on air, such a wonderful thing had come to him! Years and years had passed since anybody had spoken to him save in short, sharp words, to give an order of some sort. Now this one, who said "Good-morning" and "Good-evening" when she met him, as pleasantly as she spoke to any, who had asked him kind questions about himself, who had told him that the stoves were very clean, and that it seemed pleasant to have the church warm, was actually letting him walk home with her and carry her books! Poor Bud wished there were more of them, and that they were as heavy as lead, that he might show how gladly he carried them for her sake.

She, meantime, was wondering how she could best speak to help him in any way.

"Don't you sing at all?" she asked, her eyes falling on the pile of music-books, and seizing upon the question as a way of opening conversation.

"Me!" said Bud, with an embarrassed laugh. "Oh, no, I can't sing, any more than a calf can."

"But you like music, don't you?" She was still making talk, to try to put him at his ease.

Bud found voice then for some of the feeling which possessed him. "I don't like most folks' music a bit; but I like the kind you make—I do so."

He spoke with tremendous energy; there was no mistaking the intensity of his conclusions. Claire laughed a little. They were not getting on very well.

Bud's musical tastes had probably not been cultivated. He liked the music that she made, because the same voice had spoken kind words to him. Well, in that case, what would he think of the music of the angels? she wondered. Some of the thought she put into words:

"I'll tell you where you will like the music, Bud—when you get to heaven. Did you ever try to think what that singing would sound like?"

"Me!" said Bud again, and this time there was unutterable amazement in his voice. It was clear that the idea of hearing the music of heaven had never dawned on his mind.

Claire replied hesitatingly, in almost a plaintive tone. The desolation of a soul that had no heaven to look to touched her strangely just then:

"Bud, you are going there to hear the music, are you not?"

"I reckon not." He spoke the words gravely, with a singularly mournful intonation. "Heaven ain't for such as me. You see, ma'am, I'm nothing but an ignorant, blundering fellow, that hadn't never ought to have been born."

"O Bud, I am so sorry to hear you speak such dreadful words! I didn't expect it of you. Why, don't you know you are the same as saying that the Lord Jesus Christ has not told the truth? He said he came to earth in order that you might live for ever with him in heaven; and he loves you, Bud, and is watching for you to give yourself to him. And now, you even say you ought not to have been made!"

"I didn't mean no harm. I was only a-sayin' what I've heard folks say time and time again about me: they didn't see what I was made for, and I didn't either."

"You were made to love God, and to do work for him, and to live with him for ever in his beautiful heaven. If you don't go there, it will make his heart sad. O Bud, if I were you I wouldn't treat him so!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LOST FRIENDS.

"I NEVER knew nothing about it," Bud said earnestly. "I never heard as anybody cared in particular what became of me, only so that I got out of folks' way and didn't bother."

"Why, Bud, have you never heard the minister urge you to give yourself to Jesus?"

But Bud shook his head energetically.

"No minister never spoke to me," he said. "I goes to church every once in a while, because I gets my work all done, and don't know what else to do. When the horses are gone, and the dog is gone, I'm awful lonesome up there," inclining his head toward the hill up which the Ansted horses were now speeding; "and the dog always goes to town to church along with the horses, and so I went down here for company kind of. But the minister never said nothing to me. I've listened a good bit, off and on, because I felt lonesome, and did not know what else to do; but he never said nothing about me, nor told me a body cared. It was all for them other folks that has homes and good clothes."

What a pitiful story was this, coming up from the depths of the great, lonesome heart, surrounded on every hand by nominal Christians! Claire could not keep the tears from her eyes, and dared not speak for a moment, her voice was so full of them.

"Did you never read any verses in the Bible?" she asked at last. "You can read, can't you?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, I can read. I learned when I lived with Mr. Stokes back there in the country. Little Jack, he showed me my letters, and my easy readings, and all, and I could read to him quite a bit. Jack wasn't but eight years old; but he was smart, and he was good, and he died." The lonely story ended with a sigh. There was evidently a memory of better times enjoyed in the dim past.

Claire questioned to get at the utmost of his knowledge:

"And didn't Jack tell you anything about Jesus and heaven?"

"He did that, ma'am. He talked a good deal about being sent for to go there; and he was, too. I make sure of that, for he went away sudden in the night—the *life* did, you know; and he had a smile on his face in the morning, just as he looked when he was very glad about anything: and I am about sure that it was just as he said it would be about the angels coming, and all; and he used to think they would come for me too. 'Your turn will come, Bud,' he used to say to me. He was a little fellow, you see"—this last was in an apologetic tone—"he thought the world of Bud, and he thought everybody else was like him, and that what was fixed for him would be fixed for Bud. I used to like to hear him say it, because he was a little fellow, and he liked me; but I knew that what was for him wasn't for me."

"Bud, you are mistaken. Little Jack was right about it all. There was no doubt but that the angels came for him; and they will come for you, if you want to go where Jack is. Jesus Christ, Jack's Saviour, was the one who told him to tell you about it."

"Eh!" said Bud, in a sort of stupid amaze. "Did you know Jack, ma'am?"

"No, I didn't know him, but I know his Saviour, the one who sent for him to go home to heaven; and I know that

what he told you is true, for the same one has told me the same thing—told me to coax you, Bud, to be ready to go where little Jack is. Will you?"

"I'd go on my hands and knees all night through the woods to see little Jack again, but I don't know the way."

"Bud, did you know that the Bible was God's book, and told all about Jack's home and the way to get to it? Have you a Bible?"

"No," said Bud slowly; "I haven't got no book at all. I never had no book."

What desolation of poverty was this! Claire took her instant resolution.

"Bud, I have a Bible which I think little Jack and little Jack's Saviour want me to give to you for your very own. I'll get it for you to-night; and then I want you to promise me that every day you will read one verse in it. It is all marked off into verses. And will you begin to-night?"

"I will so," said Bud with a note of satisfaction in his voice. "I've thought a good many times that it would be nice to have one book; but I didn't much expect to, ever. I'll read in it this very night, ma'am."

And as he received the treasure wrapped in paper, and, tucking it carefully under his arm, trudged away, Claire, could she have followed him, would have found that every once in a while during that long homeward walk he chuckled and hugged the book closer.

Claire went to her room, and to her knees, her heart full for Bud, poor, dreary, homeless Bud! If he *could* be made to understand that there were home and friends waiting for him! If she had only had time to mark a few of the verses, some of those very plain ones, over the meaning of which Bud could not stumble! She was sorry that she had not retained the book for a day and done this work. It was too late now. She could only pray that God would lead him toward

the right verse. To-morrow evening she would ask him for his Bible, and on the Sabbath she would employ her leisure moments in marking such verses as he ought to know.

As she arose from her knees, a letter lying on her table caught her eye—a home letter, from Dora, with perhaps a few lines in it from mamma herself. She seized it like a hungry child, dropping on a hassock before the fire to enjoy it. Four closely-written pages from Dora, crossed and re-crossed, after the fashion of school-girls, who seem to be provident only in the line of note-paper.

Claire looked at it lovingly, and laid it aside to be enjoyed afterward. Here was a scrap from mamma; only a few lines on a half-sheet of paper: after these she dived. Letters from Dora were delightful, and could wait; the heart of the girl was home-sick for mamma.

It was over the last page of Dora's sheet that she lingered the longest:—

"I have not told you our piece of news yet. We have moved! We kept it a secret from you, mamma and I, because we were sure you would think that we could not do such a thing without you; and as we were well aware that the church at South Plains could not spare you—to say nothing of the school—we determined to take the burdens of life upon our own shoulders, and give you nothing to worry over until we were settled. It is done, and we are alive and comfortable; so you may dismiss those troubled wrinkles that I can distinctly see gathering on your forehead.

"Now for the reason why: the same law which seems of late to have taken possession of us—necessity. The house you so deftly settled us in was sold, and three weeks' notice given to renters. We could have held them for a longer time, as Mr. Winfield indignantly told us, and as we very well knew; for you know how papa held that house for the Jones family when the owner said they must vacate. But what was the use? Mamma said she would rather move at

once than have any words about it. So I felt; and one day when we went out hunting the proper shade of curtain for the church you own, we hunted rooms also. Where do you think we found them? Within a square of our old home! In the Jenkins Block, you know. They chanced to be vacant, because the former occupants had bought a place on the square, and gone to housekeeping on a larger scale. The rent is the same as that which we were paying. I think Mr. Cleveland made his conscience somewhat elastic in arranging it so; for while the rooms are smaller and less convenient than those we vacated, you know what the neighbourhood is. However, he offered them on the same terms we were then paying, and of course we could not demur. I urged the taking of them at once, for mamma's sake; for though I think with you that the farther we are away from the old home the better, and though I hate every spot within a mile of our house, still I could see that mamma did not share the feeling. There were old friends for whose faces she pined—good old friends, you know, who love her for herself, and not for the entertainments she used to give. And then there was the old church. I could see mamma's face brighten over the thought of being there once more; and though I hate that too, for mamma's sake I was glad that we listened to Dr. Ellis again last Sabbath. We are comfortably situated, though you know better than I can tell you what a sort of mockery it is of our former way of living; but for mamma I think it will be better in every way, and she is the one to be considered. But I believe in my heart the dear woman thinks I wanted to come, and imagines that that is why she consented to the plan. I hope she does. I never mean to let her know how I grind my teeth over it all. Not fiercely, Claire; I do try to be submissive, and I know that God knows what is best, and that papa is happy, and that I must not wish him back; but the bearing it is very bitter all the time.

"I am less like you even than I used to be, and papa said I was to try to be more like you.

"I wonder if one thing that I have to tell will surprise you, or vex you, or whether you will not care anything about it? I have held my pen for a full minute to try to decide, and I find that I don't know. It is something that has hurt me cruelly, but then I am easily hurt. I don't want to make you feel as I do; but if you care, you ought to know; and if you don't care, no harm can come of my telling you.

"Claire, I used to think in the old days, that seem to have been fifty years ago, that you liked Pierce Douglass rather better than the other young men who used to be so fond of coming to our home; and I thought—in fact, I felt almost certain—that he liked you better than he did anybody else. Well, he has returned; and only yesterday I saw him on Clark Avenue. I was just coming down Reubens Street, and I made all possible haste, because I thought it would be so pleasant to see his familiar face once more, and to answer his many questions. Besides, I presume I was silly, but I thought it more than probable that he was in correspondence with you, and would have some news of you to give me. I called to him, breathlessly, as I saw he was about to enter a car, and I thought more than likely he was looking for our address. 'Pierce,' I cried (you know I have called him Pierce ever since I was a little bit of a girl, and he used to help me down the seminary stairs). He stopped and looked about him, and looked right at me, but made no movement toward me, though I was hastening to him. 'I am so glad to see you,' I said; for even then I did not understand. And then he spoke. 'Miss Benedict, is it? Why, I was not aware that you were in the city. I thought I had heard of a removal. I trust you are having a pleasant winter, Miss Benedict. We have a good deal of snow for this region, have we not? You will pardon my haste; I had signalled my car before you spoke.'

"And he lifted his hat, with one of his graceful bows, and sprang in and was gone. Yes, I pardoned his haste! I was glad to see the car swing around the corner. I was burning and choking. The idea of being met in that way by Pierce Douglass! Only six months since he called me 'little Doralinda Honora,' and begged me not to forget to mention his name ten times a day while he was absent. Claire, I could hardly get home, my limbs trembled so. Mamma was out executing one of your commissions, and I was glad, for I was not fit to see her for hours.

"I have heard to-day that Pierce has been in town for six weeks, and is to be married in the spring to Emmeline Van Antwerp. Is that any reason why he should have insulted me? I am certainly willing that he shall marry whom he pleases, if he can secure her. Claire, do you remember how Emmeline's taste in dress used to amuse him? But she is very rich, you know; at least she is an only daughter, and her father has not failed. How does Pierce know but that in six months it will be Mr. Van Antwerp's turn?

"Well, I only hope, dear Claire, that I was utterly and entirely mistaken in your friendship for that man. It seems to me now that I must have been; for, with so base a nature, he could not have interested you.

"O Claire, do you suppose papa knows of all these little stings that we have to bear? I can hardly see how he can be happy in heaven if he does, for he guarded us all so tenderly. Does that old worn-out church really fill your heart as it seems to, so that you can be happy without papa? That is wicked, I know; and if you are happy, I am glad you are. I do try to shield mamma; and she is like you—meek and patient.

"Good-night, dear! I am very weary of this day. I am going to try to lose the memory of it in sleep."

Claire rose up from reading this sheet with a pale face, out of which the brightness was strangely gone. It seemed a

curious thing to her afterward that she had thought to herself while reading it: "I am glad I spoke those words to Bud; I am glad I told him about a home where there is nothing but brightness. We need such homes."

She went about with a slow step, setting the little room to rights, arranging the fire for the night; then she sat down and worked over her class-book, arranging her averages for the week. She had not meant to do that work on that evening, but she seized upon it as something that would keep her thoughts employed. She did not want to think.

Suddenly, in the midst of the figures, she pushed the book from her, and burying her face in her hands, said to her heart in a determined way: "Now, what is the matter? Why do I not want to look this thing in the face? What is wounded—my pride?" After a little she drew a long, relieved breath, and sat erect. There was no need in covering this thing away; it would bear looking at.

Dora had been both right and wrong. She had liked him better, yes, quite a little better than the other young men of her acquaintance. She had believed in him. When financial ruin came upon them, and friends gathered around with well-meant but often blundering words of sympathy, she had comforted herself with thinking how gracefully Pierce Douglass would have said and done these things had he been at home.

When the burden of life strained heavily upon her, she had found herself imagining how heartily he would have shouldered some of the weights that another could carry, and helped her through. She had not been in correspondence with him. He had asked to write to her, and she had, following her father's gently-offered suggestion, assured him that it would be better not; he was not to be absent many months.

Yet during these weeks at South Plains she had often told herself that perhaps Pierce would write a line for friendship's

sake. He would know that a letter of sympathy offered at such a time would be very different from ordinary correspondence. Yet when no letter came, she had told herself that of course he would not write; he was too thoroughly a gentleman to do so after she had, though never so gently, refused to receive his letters. Sometimes it was this story, and sometimes she reminded herself that of course he had not her address; he would not like to inquire for it; there had been nothing in their friendship to warrant it; when he reached home, and met Dora and her mother again, as he would assuredly, she would be quite likely to get a little message from him. Not a thought had crossed her mind but that he would hasten to the old friends to offer his earnest sympathy and express his sorrow; for her father had been a friend to him. Now here was the end of it. Six weeks in town, and nothing to say to Dora but a comment about the snow! If he had said ice, it would have been more in keeping. Here was a shattered friendship; and no true heart but bleeds over such wounds.

And yet this was the decision which made her lift her head again. There was wounded pride, certainly, and wounded feeling; but there was a sense in which it did not matter how Pierce Douglass met her sister on the street, or whom he married. She had not known it before. There had been a time when she had imagined it otherwise; but something seemed to have come into her life since her brief residence in this little village which made her clear-eyed. She knew that she did not want to marry a man like Pierce Douglass. She knew that had he come to her before the revelations of this letter, and asked her to share his name and home, she would have been grateful and sorrowful, but she would certainly have said, "I cannot." She smiled a little as she recurred to Dora's letter. Had the old church won her heart? Surely it could not be anything else in South Plains! Yes, oh yes, it was something that she had found at South Plains; she

had been lifted up into daily fellowship with the Lord. She was learning to live as "seeing Him who is invisible;" and in the light of his daily companionship she could not come into close relationship with such an one as Pierce Douglass, a man who did not profess allegiance to him.

And yet, you who understand the intricacies of the human heart will be able to see how the letter had stung. She did not want to marry him, but she wanted to respect him, to look upon him as a friend; to feel that he cared for her, and not for her father's millions. It was bitter to feel that here was yet another to whom friendship had been only an empty name, and to wonder how many more there were, and because of him to have less faith in the world.

On the whole, I think it was well that at last she cried. They were healthy tears, and helped to wash away some of the bitterness.

CHAPTER XVII.

SPREADING NETS.

THE morning found her her own quiet self. Her first waking thoughts were of Bud; and the first thing she did, after her toilet was made, was to sit down and study her Bible with a view to selecting some verses that she meant to mark for Bud.

All day she went about her many duties with a quiet heart. Even the sting of a false friendship seemed to have been taken away. In the afternoon, she refused to ride with Mr. Ansted, on the plea that she had a music-lesson to give; but when the scholar failed to appear, she, in nowise discomfited, set herself to the answering of the home letters.

A long, genial letter to her mother; longer than she had taken time for of late, full of detail as to the work that occupied hands and heart.

Something about Bud, his lonely life, his one tender memory; her desire that he might find a Friend who would never fail him; her wish that the mother would remember him when she prayed; her longing to be in some sense a helper to him, as her father would surely have been had he been spared. "I cannot do for him what papa would have done" (so she wrote), "but Christ can do much more; and it gives me a thrill of joy to remember that he is not only in heaven with papa, but here, watching for Bud."

A detailed account of the last evening's rehearsal and the new recruits. A hint of her desire to lead this restless

Alice into clearer light—if, indeed, the true Light had ever shined into her heart. A word even about Louis Ansted: "Would mamma pray for him too? It was said that he was in danger from several sources; and he said that his mother was not at all anxious about him. If you were his mother" (so she wrote), "you would be anxious. Be a mother to him for Christ's sake, mamma dear, and pray for him, as I am afraid his own mother does not. Still, I ought not to say that, for she is a member of the church, and it may be that her son does not know her heart."

To Dora there was but a scrap of paper:—

"It is a pity, Doralinda dear, to put you off with this little torn bit of paper, but I have written all the news to mamma; which means to you, too, of course, and this bit is just large enough for the subject about which I want to speak to you alone. Don't worry, little sister, about me, nor about Pierce Douglass's treatment of me, or of you. If his manliness can afford such a slight as he gave you, we certainly can afford to bear it. In a sense, it was hard; but much harder, I should think, for him than for us.

"No, little Dora; the church here has not my whole heart, though I will own that a large piece of it has gone out to the dreary little sanctuary so sadly in need of a human friend—for the Lord will not do what his people ought to do, you know. But I will tell you who is filling my heart, and keeping me at rest and happy—the Lord Jesus Christ. Not happy without papa, but happy in the sure hope of meeting him again, and never parting any more. Don't you remember, dear, there can never be another parting from papa? Some sorrowful places there may be for your feet and mine on our journey home; but so far as papa is concerned, there will be no more need for tears. Bear the thorns of the way, little sister, in patience, for they are only *on the way* through the woods—not a thorn in the home.

"I trust you will be so brave as to dismiss Pierce Douglass

from your thoughts; unless, indeed, you take the trouble to ask him for what he will let us have some handsome chairs for the pulpit. I remember at this moment that his money is invested in furniture. But perhaps you will not like to do that; and he might not let us have them at any lower rates than we could secure elsewhere.—Good-bye, darling, brave, lonely sister. I both laughed and cried over your letter, though the tears were not about the things you thought would move them."

She folded and addressed this letter with a smile. No need to tell this sensitive, fierce-hearted Dora that the wound rankled for a time, and did not bring tears only because it was too deep for tears.

Yet assuredly her heart was not broken over Pierce Douglass.

The letter sealed and laid aside, an unemployed half-hour lay before her; not that there was not plenty to do, but that curious aversion to setting about any of it, which busy workers so well understand, came over her in full force. A sort of unreasonable and unreasoning desire that the hour might be marked by something special hovered around her. She stood at the window and looked out on the snow, and watched the sleighs fly past. A sleigh-ride would be pleasant. Why could she not have known that her music-scholar was to disappoint her, and so had the benefit of a ride?

Possibly she might have said a word in season to Louis Ansted, though there was about her the feeling that he was not ready for the word in season, and would make poor use of it. Perhaps the Master knew that it was better left unsaid, and so had held her from the opportunity; but she longed to do something.

A sleigh was stopping at the Academy. The young man who sprang out and presently pealed the bell was Harry Matthews. Did he want her? she wondered; and was this

her special opportunity? No, he only wanted a roll of music, to study the part which he was to sing; but on learning that the teacher was in and at leisure, he came to her in the music-room, and asked questions about this particular song, and about the rehearsal, and asked to have the tenor played for him, and as he bent forward to turn the music, the breath of wine floated distinctly to her. Was this an opportunity? Was there something that she might say, and ought to say?

It was Louis Ansted's belief that this young man's special danger lay in this direction; but what a delicate direction it was to touch!

He thanked her heartily for the help which she had given him about the difficult part, and in that brief time her resolution was taken:

"Now, do you know there is something that I want you to do for me?"

No, he did not know it, but was delighted to hear it. Miss Benedict was doing so much for them all, that it would certainly be a great pleasure to feel that he could in any way serve her. He wished he could tell her how much he and some of the other boys appreciated this opportunity to study music. There had never been any good singing in South Plains before.

There was a flush on Claire's cheeks as she replied, holding forward a little book at the same time:

"It *would* serve me." She could think of scarcely anything else so easily done that would give her greater pleasure than to have him write his name on her pledge-book: she had an ambition to fill every blank. There was room for five hundred signatures, and she and her sister at home were trying to see which could get their pledge-book filled first. Would he give her his name?

And so, to his amazement and dismay, was Harry Matthews brought face to face with a total abstinence

pledge. What an apparently simple request to make! How almost impossible it seemed to him to comply with it!

He made no attempt to take the little book, but stood in embarrassment before it.

"Isn't there anything else?" he said at last, trying to laugh. "I hadn't an idea that you would ask anything of this sort. I can't sign it, Miss Benedict; I can't, really, though I would like to please you."

"What is in the way, Mr. Matthews? Have you promised your mother not to sign it?"

The flush on his cheek mounted to his forehead, but still he tried to laugh and speak gaily.

"Hardly! My mother's petitions do not lie in that direction. But I really am principled against signing pledges. I don't believe in a fellow making a coward of himself and hanging his manhood on a piece of paper."

This was foolish. Would it do to let the young fellow know that she knew it was?

"Then you do not believe in bonds, or mortgages, or receipts, or promises to pay, of any sort—not even bank-notes!"

He laughed again.

"That is business," he said.

"Well" (briskly), "this is business. I will be very business-like. What do you want me to do—give you a receipt? Come, I want your name to help to fill my book, and I am making as earnest a business as I know how of securing names."

"Miss Benedict, I am not in the least afraid of becoming a drunkard."

"Mr. Matthews, that has nothing whatever to do with the business in hand. What I want is your name on my total abstinence pledge. If you do not intend to be a drinker, you can certainly have no objection to gratifying me in this way."

"Ah, but I have. The promise trammels me unnecessarily and foolishly. I am often thrown among people with whom it is pleasant to take a sip of wine, and it does no harm to anybody."

"How can you be sure of that? There are drunkards in the world, Mr. Matthews; is it your belief that they started out with the deliberate intention of becoming such, or even with the fear that they might; or were they led along step by step?"

"Oh, I know all that; but I assure you I am very careful with whom I drink liquor. There are people who seem unable to take a very little habitually; they must either let it alone or drink to excess. Such people ought to let it alone, and to sign a pledge to do so. I never drink with any such; and I never drink, anyway, save with men much older than I, who ought to set me the example instead of looking to me, and who are either masters of themselves or too far gone to be influenced by anything that I might do."

Was there ever such idiotic reasoning! But the young man before her was very young, and did not know his own heart, much less understand human nature. He was evidently in earnest, and would need any amount of argument—would need, indeed, a much better knowledge of himself—before she could convince him of his false and dangerous position; and her opportunity, if it were one, was swiftly passing. What was there that she could accomplish here and now? Since he was in such a state of bewilderment as to logic, she resolved to lay a delicate little snare for his feet.

"Well, I am sorry that you will not sign my pledge. I do not like your arguments; I think they are painfully weak. I wish at your leisure you would look into them carefully, and see if you think them worthy of lodgment in an honest mind. But in the meantime there is something else. This

little favour that I am about to ask, will you promise to grant?"

The young man looked immensely relieved. He had not expected her to abandon the ground so promptly; he had been on the verge of pleading fear lest his horse was restive, and so breaking away from the embarrassment. He tumbled eagerly into the pretty net. What could she ask that would not be easy enough, now that the total abstinence pledge was out of the way? He could think of nothing else that a lady such as Miss Benedict certainly was could ask which would not be comparatively easy of accomplishment.

"I don't believe in that way of doing business," he said, looking wise, and smiling down on her in a superior way. "As a rule, I promise nothing with my eyes shut; but I am sure to be able to trust you, and I will try to do anything else that you ask of me, if only to prove how sincere I am in my desire to please."

"It is a very good rule, as a rule," she said quickly,—"I would not violate it often; but this is easy enough to do: I want your signature to that."

She turned the leaves rapidly, and pointed to a few lines in the back part of the little book. Two signatures were appended; but the astounding words that arrested the young man's attention were these:—

"I promise that within twenty-four hours after I have taken a taste of anything that will intoxicate, I will report the same, either in person or by letter, to my friend Miss Benedict."

The hot blood spread all over the face of the gay boy before her, as he read and re-read this singular pledge.

"I am fairly caught," he said at last, in a constrained voice, "and in a way that I least expected. May I ask you what possible good it can do you to burden yourself with such senseless confidences as these?"

"You are right," she said: "they are 'confidences.' I

should not have shown you the book if I were not sure that the names there are utterly unknown to you, and will be likely always to remain so. I had a good motive, and the effort resulted in good. So much you must believe on trust. But I did not mean to 'catch' you—at least not in the way you mean; and to prove it, I will release you from your promise. I judged, from what you told me, that you would not consider it a hard one."

She was speaking with cold dignity now. She was willing that he should not sign this pledge if he wished to be released. If only his unwillingness to sign would lead him to think on what dangerous ground he stood, part of her object would be attained.

But no, his pride was roused now, and came to the rescue. He refused to be released. Since she chose to burden herself in this way, he was quite willing, and should certainly add his name. This he did with a flourish, trying to be gay again, and went away, assuring her that he was sorry for her, for he always kept a pledge.

After he was gone, she tormented herself as to whether she had done wisely. She was more than doubtful. Those two other names had been written by friendless and sorely-tempted boys, who distrusted themselves and their resolutions to such an extent that she had devised this little plan for helping them up from the depths of despair. They were gone now, both of them, where stronger arms than hers upheld them, where they were for ever safe from falling; and Harry Matthews' knowledge of their names could harm no one. But Harry was of a different world. Had she been foolish in thus almost stealing his promise? He had not taken it as she had thought he would. She had believed him to be gaily indifferent to his habits in this direction; she had believed that he was unaware how frequently he accepted business invitations of this character.

On the whole, she was more than doubtful as to the un-

usual work done in this leisure half-hour, and looked with apprehension rather than pleasure at the name in her book. Nevertheless she prayed over it as she had been wont to do for those who were gone now. There was nothing for it but to ask Him who never made mistakes to overrule hers, if it were a mistake, and use it in some way for his glory. This rested her. It was so wonderful to remember that he could make even mistakes serve him!

Meantime, Bud. The little lamp which belonged to his quarters over the stable was left wholly to his care, and he did not get the best. He often stumbled his way to bed in the dark, rather than take the trouble of filling the lamp in the daytime. But to-night, with his treasure under his arm, he rejoiced to remember that part of his morning work had been to fill that lamp and put it in unusual order. It was with satisfaction that he lighted and set it on the inverted barrel that he had improvised for a table. He was to read a verse in a book.

He had little knowledge as to whether the verses were long or short, whether it would take until midnight or longer to read one, and it had nothing to do with his promise. He reflected that the lamp was full, and resolved that as long as it would burn he would work at the verse, if necessary. But where to begin? What a big book it was! If Claire had but marked a verse for him as she had planned! Well, what then? It would not likely have been the one over which he stopped at random, and slowly spelled out, going back over each word until he had the sentence complete: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem." What a verse for poor, ignorant, blundering Bud! Might it not as well have been in Greek?

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUD IN SEARCH OF COMFORT.

LET me tell you that sentences which you believe will be as Greek to certain souls are sometimes fraught with wonderful meaning, because of an illumination about which you know nothing. It was so with Bud.

Back in his memory of those bright days when little Jack was still in the flesh were certain scenes standing out vividly. Little Jack had a mother—a good, motherly, commonplace sort of woman, with no knowledge of or care for Bud, beyond the fact that she wanted him always to have enough to eat and a comfortable place in which to sleep, and was glad that little Jack liked him so well, simply because it was a liking that gave little Jack pleasure. This was all that she would have been to you; but to Bud she would have served for his ideal of an angel, had he known anything about angels.

She was little Jack's mother, and she was motherly, and Bud had never seen a motherly woman before: perhaps, after all, you get an idea of why she was glorified in his eyes. His own mother slept in a neglected grave, when Bud was five years old; but after he came to live at little Jack's, he had lain awake nights to think how she would have looked, and acted, and spoken, had she been alive. And she always looked to him like this one motherly pattern. How Bud longed for her, for the sound of her voice, for the touch of her hand, only he could have told you. Little Jack had

been in the habit of running to mother with every disappointment, every grievance, every pain. He had never been a healthy, rollicking, self-reliant boy, but a gentle, tender one, to be shielded and petted; and Bud had heard again and again and *again* these words, spoken, oh so tenderly, that the memory of them now often brought the tears: "Poor little Jack! mother will comfort him!" and the words were accompanied with a gesture that framed itself in Bud's heart—the enveloping of little Jack's frail form within two strong, motherly arms, suggestive to the boy of boundless power and protectiveness. Could words better fitted to meet Bud's heart have been marked in his Bible? Would Claire Benedict have been likely to mark that particular verse for him?

It is a truth that a certain class of Christian workers need to ponder deeply, that when we have done our best, according to the measure of our opportunities, we may safely leave the Holy Spirit to supplement our work.

The next morning Bud thoughtfully rubbed the shining coats of the horses, his mind awake and busy with a new problem. What did the verse mean, that he had read so many times, that now it seemed to glow before him on the sun-lighted snow? He had wakened in the night and wondered. What *could* it mean? Not that he did not understand some of it; he was too unenlightened to imagine that plain words could mean other than they said.

It had not so much as occurred to him that because they were in the Bible they must necessarily have some obscure meaning utterly foreign to what they appeared to say.

Such logic as that is only the privilege of certain of the educated classes! Bud knew, then, what some of the sentence meant. Somebody was to be comforted by somebody, and the way it was to be done was as a mother would do; and Bud, because of little Jack in heaven, knew how that was. Oh, little Jack! living your short and uneventful life here

below; and oh, commonplace, yes, somewhat narrow-minded mother! bestowing only the natural instincts of the mother-heart on your boy—both of you were educating a soul for the King's palace, and you knew it not!

How wonderful will the revelations of heaven be, when certain, whose lives have touched for a few days and then separated, shall meet, in some of the cycles of eternity, and talk things over!

Who but the Maker of human hearts could have planned Bud's education in this way?

Well, he knew another thing. The Comforter promised must be Jesus; for had not *she*, that only other one who had spoken to him in disinterested kindness, said that Jesus, the same Jesus who had been so much to little Jack, was waiting for him, and wanted him to come up to heaven where Jack was? And if Jesus could do such great things for Jack, and really wanted *him*, could he not plan the way? Bud believed it. To be shown the way to reach such a place as Jack told of, and to be made ready to enter there when he should reach the door, would certainly be comfort enough. He could almost imagine that One saying to the little hurts by the way, "Never mind, Bud; it will be all right by-and-by." That was what the mother used cheerily to say sometimes to little Jack, and the verse read, "as one whom his mother comforteth." You see how the photographs of his earlier years were educating Bud.

But there was one thing shrouded in obscurity. This "comforting" was to be done at Jerusalem. Now what and where was Jerusalem? Poor Bud! he had "never had no book," you will remember, and his knowledge of geography was limited indeed. He knew that this village which had almost bounded his life was named South Plains, and he knew that back in the country among the farms was where little Jack had lived, and he knew the name of the city that lay in the opposite direction: none of these was Jerusalem.

Bud did not know, however, but that the next city or town, or even farming region, might answer to that name, and might be the spot to which those who would have comfort were directed. Little Jack might have lived there, for aught that he knew. They came from some other place to the farm; Miss Benedict might be from there, in which case she would know how to direct him. I want you to take special notice of one thing. It lay clear as sunlight in the boy's ignorant mind. *To Jerusalem he meant to go.* And as to time: just as soon as he possibly could he should start. As to how he should manage by the way, or what he should do after he reached that country, he made no speculations; the road was too dark for that. All that he was sure of was that he would *start.*

"I wouldn't miss of little Jack for anything," he said, rubbing with energy; "and as for the 'comforting,' if that can be for me—and she said so—why, I'd go till I dropped to find it."

A clear voice broke in on his thoughts:

"Bud, mamma wants the light carriage and the pony to be ready to take her to the 12·20 train."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bud; and he had as yet not a thought of saying anything else.

But Miss Alice lingered and watched the rubbing; not that she was interested in that, or, indeed, was thinking about it at all. She was watching Bud, and thinking of him. What did Claire Benedict find in him to interest her? What did she suppose that she, Alice Ansted, could do to help him? The idea seemed fully as absurd as it had when first suggested.

As if the boy had an idea above the horse he was rubbing so carefully! He did not look so intelligent as the animal. She had often wondered what the horses thought about as they trotted along. What did Bud think about as he rubbed? Did he think at all?

"You seem to like that work?"

It was Miss Alice's voice again. It startled Bud, the tone was so gentle, as though possibly she might be saying the words to comfort him. He dropped the brush with which he had been working, but as he stooped to pick it up, answered respectfully,—

"Yes, ma'am."

Alice's lip curled. The idea of Miss Benedict trying to interest her in a boor like that, who could not reply to the merest commonplace without growing red in the face and blundering over his work! She turned to go. She could not think of anything else to say; and if she could, what use to say it! But in that one moment of time Bud had taken his resolution. The voice had been kind; its echo lingered pleasantly; he would summon all his courage and ask the question which was absorbing his thoughts. It might be days before he could see Miss Benedict again, and he could not wait.

"Miss Ansted," he said, and she noticed that his voice trembled, "would you tell me one thing that I want to know right away?"

"That depends," she answered lightly; "I may not know. However, if your question is not too deep, I may try to answer it. What do you want?"

"Why, I've got to know *right away* where Jerusalem is."

"Jerusalem!" she repeated. "Why on earth do you wish to know that? I don't know myself precisely. It is across the ocean, somewhere in Asia, you know. Why do you care, Bud, where it is?"

"I've got to go there," said Bud, with simple dignity.

Miss Ansted's laugh rang out merrily.

"That is an undertaking!" she said gaily. "When do you intend to start? and what is the object of the journey, I wonder?" She felt sure now that Bud was little less than an idiot.

But Bud had another question to ask. His face was grave, almost dismayed. "Across the ocean!" That sentence appalled. He had heard of the ocean, and of a storm on it, and a shipwreck. A wandering sailor once told in his hearing a fearful story of wreck and peril. Yet, be it recorded that the boy, though appalled, did not for one moment recede from his fixed resolve to start, and go as far as he could. That Comforter he meant to find. It had taken such hold of his heart that he knew he could never give it up again. This was his next timidly-put question:

"Did you ever go there, Miss Ansted?"

"I never did," she answered, laughing still, and very curious now to know what queer project poor Bud had on his mind. "Why do you want to go, Bud?"

The answer was direct and grave.

"I want to go after Him who said he would comfort me. 'Ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem,' that is what it says; and *she* said it meant me; and little Jack went, I make sure; and I mean to go—I *must* go."

But before that answer Alice Ansted stood dumb. She had never been so amazed in her life. What did the fellow mean? What could have so completely turned his foolish brain? "If this is the outcome of Miss Benedict's efforts, she ought to know it at once, before the poor idiot concludes his career in a lunatic asylum."

This was her rapid thought, but aloud she said at last:

"I don't know what you are talking about, Bud. You have some wild idea that does not seem to be doing you any good. I would advise you to drop it and think about the horses; they are your best friends."

"I can't drop it," said Bud simply; "I read the verse in the Bible. I promised I would, and I did; and I know all about it, and I want to have it; *she* said it was for me."

"What is the verse?" and Miss Alice sat down on a carriage-stool to listen.

Bud repeated with slow and solemn emphasis the words which were now so familiar to his ear: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

"I know about mothers," he explained. "There was little Jack's mother, and she used to say to him just that, 'Mother will comfort you;' and she did. And this one I make sure is Jesus, because *she* said he wanted me to go where little Jack is; and I guess he means me, because I feel as if he did; and I'm going to Jerusalem, if it is across two oceans."

Evidently his heart gathered strength as he talked; his voice grew firmer, and the dignity of a fixed resolve began to settle on his face.

Was there ever a more bewildered young lady than this one who sat on the carriage-stool? She surveyed Bud with the sort of half-curious, half-frightened air, which she might have bestowed on a mild maniac whose wanderings interested her. What was she to say to him? How convince him of his queer mistake?

"That doesn't mean what you think it does, Bud," she began at last.

"Why doesn't it?" Bud asked quickly, almost as one would speak who was holding on to a treasure which another was trying to snatch from him.

"Because it doesn't. It has nothing to do with the city named Jerusalem. It is about something that you don't understand. It has a spiritual meaning; and of course you don't understand what I mean by that. I haven't the least idea how to explain it to you; and, indeed, it is extremely unnecessary for you to know. You see, Bud, it means something entirely beyond your comprehension, and has nothing whatever to do with you."

Bud made not the slightest attempt at answer, but went stolidly on with his work. And Alice sat still and surveyed him for a few minutes longer, then arose and shook out her

robes, and said, "So I hope you will not start for Jerusalem yet a while," and laughed, and sped through the great sliding doors, and picked her way daintily back to luxury, leaving the world blank for Bud.

Miss Ansted was wise about the world, and about books; surely she would know whether the verse meant him, and whether the word Jerusalem meant *Jerusalem*. Was it all a mistake?

The pony was brought forward now and had her share of rubbing and careful handling, and a bit of petting now and then, though the conversation which generally went on between her and the worker was omitted this morning. Bud had graver thoughts. While he worked he went over the old memories. Little Jack, and the comforting mother, and the facts connected with those experiences—no need to tell him that *they* did not mean what they appeared to his eyes; he knew better. Then there were the plain, simple words, standing like a solid wall of granite: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

"Stand around," said Bud in a tone of authority; and while the gray pony obeyed, he told her his resolve—"Them words mean *something*, Dolly; and *she* knows what they mean, and Bud is going to find out."

You are not to suppose that the pronoun referred to Alice Ansted. She had said that she could not tell him what they meant.

If anybody had been looking on with wide-open eyes, it would have been an interesting study in providence to watch how Bud was led. It was Alice Ansted who had a very little hand in it again, though she knew nothing of it. The "leading" was connected, too, with so insignificant a matter as an umbrella.

Mr. Ramsey had overtaken Louis Ansted in a rain-storm a few days before, and had insisted on lending his umbrella; and it suited Louis Ansted's convenience to direct that it be sent home by Bud that morning.

Why Alice Ansted took the trouble to go herself to Bud with the order, instead of sending a servant, she hardly knew; neither did she understand why, after having given it, she should have lingered to say:

"I presume, Bud, that Mr. Ramsey can answer all the questions about Jerusalem that you choose to ask."

Now Mr. Ramsey was the dreary minister who seemed to Claire Benedict to have no life nor heart in any of his work.

Bud stood still to reflect over this new thought suggested to him with a half laugh. He did not think to thank Miss Alice, and yet he knew that he was glad. It was true, the minister would be likely to know all about it; and there might not be a chance to speak to Miss Benedict again, and Bud felt that he could not wait. So as he trudged off down the carriage-drive, he took his resolution. He had never spoken a word to a minister in his life, but he would ask to see him this morning, and find out about Jerusalem if he could.

CHAPTER XIX.

COMFORTED.

SATURDAY morning, and the minister in his dingy study, struggling with an unfinished sermon; struggling with more than this—with an attempt to keep in the background certain sad and startling facts;—that his meat bill was growing larger, and that his last quarter's salary was still unpaid; that his wife was at this moment doing some of the family washing which illness had prevented her from accomplishing before, and taking care of two children at the same time; that his Sunday coat was growing hopelessly shabby, and there was nothing in his pocket-book wherewith to replace it with a new one; that the children needed shoes, and there was no money to buy them; that his wife was wearing herself out with over-work and anxiety, and he was powerless to help it; that his people were absorbed in their farms and stores and shops, and cared little for him or for the truths which he tried to present. What a spirit in which to prepare a sermon for the Sabbath that was hurrying on!

The study was dingy from force of necessity. The carpet was faded, and worn in places into positive holes; the table-cloth was faded, because it had been long worn, and was cheap goods and cheap colours in the first place. Everything about him was wearing out, and the old-young minister felt that he was wearing out, too, years before his time. I do not know that it is any wonder that he frowned when he

heard the knock at the side-door. It was nearly Saturday noon; he had not time for loiterers, yet he must answer that knock; thus much he could save his wife. He threw down his pen, with which he had just written the half-formed sentence, "The inexorable and inscrutable decrees of God," and went to the door to admit Bud and the umbrella.

Not much need for delay here, and yet Bud lingered. The umbrella had been set aside, and the minister had said it was no matter that it had not been brought before, and still Bud did not go. He held his hat in his hand, and worked with nervous fingers at the frayed band around it, and at last, summoning all his courage, dashed into the centre of his subject:

"If you please, sir, will you tell me where Jerusalem is?"

"Jerusalem!" repeated the minister, and he was even more astonished than Alice Ansted had been; but he looked into Bud's eager, wistful face, and saw there something, he did not understand what, which made him throw the door open wider, and say, "Come in;" and almost before he knew what he was doing, he had seated Bud in the old arm-chair by the stove in the study, and was sitting opposite him.

You don't expect me, I hope, to describe that interview? There have been many like it in degree, all over the world, but nothing quite so strange had ever come to this minister before. Actually a hungry soul looking for the Jerusalem above, about which he, the minister, had read that morning, with bated breath and an almost rebellious longing to be there, where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

It was not difficult to show Bud the way. He was like a child who heard with wide-open, wondering eyes, and for the first time, the astounding fact that the Jerusalem toward

which his eyes were turned was near at hand; that there was no ocean to cross, no dangerous journey to take—it was simply to put forth the hand and accept the free gift.

I pause, pen in hand, to wonder how I can make plain to you that this is no made-up story; that Bud is a real character who lives and does his work in the world to-day. It is so natural in reading what people call fiction, to turn from the book with a little sigh, perhaps, and say, 'Oh yes; that is all very well in a *book*, but in real life things do not happen in this way; and there are no people so ignorant as that Bud anyway. But some of us do not write fiction; we merely aim to present in compact form before thoughtful people pictures of the things which are taking place all around them. Bud did live, and *does* live; and he was just so ignorant; and he did hear with joy the simple, wonderful story of the way to the Jerusalem of his desires; and he did plant his feet firmly on the narrow road, and walk therein.

I want to tell you what that minister did after the door had been closed on Bud for a few minutes. He walked the floor of his limited study with quick, excited steps, three times up and down, then he dropped on his knees and uttered this one sentence, "Blessed be the Lord God, who only doeth wondrous things!" Then he went out to the kitchen and kissed his wife, and made up the fire under her wash-boiler, and filled two pails with water, and carried Johnnie away and established him in a high chair in the study, with pencil and paper and a picture-book; and then he took the five sheets of that sermon over which he had been struggling, and tore them in two, and thrust them, decrees and all, into the stove. Not that he was done with the decrees, or that he thought less of them than before? but a miracle had just been wrought in his study, and he had been permitted to be the connecting link in the wondrous chain through which ran the message to a new-born soul, and the decree which held him captive just then was that one in which the eternal

God planned to give his Son to save the world. And he was so glad that this decree was inexorable, that its inscrutability did not trouble him at all. I am glad that he made up that fire, and filled those water-pails, and, busy as he had need to be, gave some gentle attention to Johnnie. A religious uplifting which does not bubble over into whatever practical work the heart or the hands find to do is not apt to continue.

It was on the following Sabbath that Miss Benedict found opportunity to offer to mark the verses in Bud's Bible.

"Bud," she said, stopping at the bell-rope where he tolled the bell, "if you will let me take your Bible after church—did you bring it with you? Well, if you will let me take it, I will mark some verses in it that I think will help you. Did you read a verse each day?"

"Oh yes, ma'am," said Bud; and there was that in his voice which made her turn and look closely at him. "I read it, and I found out the way; and I went and spoke to Him, and He took me right in, as He said He would; and there's no comfort like it, I'm sure. I don't miss little Jack's mother any more."

What did all this mean? Bud began in the middle of things, according to his wont. He forgot that Miss Benedict had heard nothing about the promised comfort in Jerusalem, nor the difficulties he had had in being shown into the right way. Yet there is something in the family language, however awkwardly used, that conveys a meaning to those of the same household.

"Bud, do you really mean that you went to Jesus Christ, and he gave you comfort?"

"I do that, ma'am," said Bud, with hearty voice and shining eyes; and he gave the bell-rope a vigorous pull. "He was right by my side all the time, the minister said, when I bothered so about crossing the ocean, and there wasn't any ocean to cross; and I've got the comfort, and I'm going to

hear the singing that you told about. I didn't think I ever could, but now I know the way."

Claire turned away silently, and walked softly into church, awed. Had poor Bud really met the Lord in the way? It looked so. She need have no more regrets over those unmarked verses. But how wonderful it was! And that is just the truth, dear, half-asleep Christian. Wonders are taking place all about you, and it is possible that you are merely engaged in trying to prove to yourself and others that "the age of miracles is past;" though why you should be very anxious to prove it, does not clearly appear even to yourself.

The minister who preached that morning was the same minister who had stood behind that desk and read his sermons to that people for seven years, though some of his hearers rubbed their eyes and looked about them in a dazed way, and wondered if this *could* be so. What had happened to the man? He had not a scrap of paper before him. In the estimation of some he did not preach. Mrs. Graves, who read sermons aloud at home on Sabbath afternoons, and was inclined to be literary, said that it was not a *sermon* at all—that it was just a talk. But Deacon Graves, who was not literary, replied:

"Well, if he should take to talking very often, we should all have to wake up and look after our living; for it pretty nigh upset everything we have done this good while, and I must say it kind of made me feel as though I should like to see something stirring somewhere."

None of them knew about the minister's uplifting, only Bud; and Bud did not know that it was an uplifting, or that the minister cared, or that the sermon had anything to do with him, or, for that matter, that it was any way different from usual. Bud knew *he* was different, and it gave him the most intense and exquisite joy to discover that he understood nearly every word that the minister said; but this he

attributed not to a change in the sermon, but because he had fairly started on his journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is possible that some listeners need that sort of uplifting before the sermons to which they appear to listen will ever be other than idle words.

Yes, there was one other who knew that a strange and sweet experience had come to the disheartened minister. That was his wife. She had known it ever since he came and kissed her, and made up that fire, and filled those pails. The kiss would have been very precious to her without the other, but the human heart is such a strange bit of mechanism, that I shall have to confess to you that in the light of that new-made fire the tenderness glowed all day.

And now the preparations for the concert went on with rapid strides. The Ansteds slipped into the programme almost before they realized it, and were committed to this and that chorus and solo, and planned and re-arranged and advised with an energy that surprised themselves.

It has been intimated to you that opportunities for enjoying good music were rare at South Plains.

What musical talent they possessed had lain dormant, and the place was too small to attract concert singers; so an invitation to a musical entertainment came to the people with all the charm of novelty. Of course, the girls took care that the invitations should be numerous and cordial. In fact, for three weeks before the eventful evening, almost the sole topic of conversation, even in the corner grocery, had been the young folks' concert and the preparations they were making.

Still, after taking all these things into consideration, both the girls and their leader were amazed, when at last the hour arrived, to discover that every available inch of room in the stuffy little church was taken.

"For once in its life it is full!" announced Anna Graves, peeping out, and then dodging hastily back. "Girls, it is

full to actual suffocation, I should think; and they have come to hear us sing. Think of it!"

Well, whether those girls astonished themselves or not, they certainly did their fathers and mothers. Indeed, I am not sure that their young teacher did not feel an emotion of surprise over the fact that they acquitted themselves so well. Their voices, when not strained in attempting music too difficult for them, had been found capable of much more cultivation than she had at first supposed; and she had done her best for them, without realizing until now how much that "best" was accomplishing. It was really such a success, and, withal, such a surprise, that some of the time it was hard to keep back the happy tears. It is true there was one element in the entertainment which the teacher did not give its proper amount of credit. The fact is, she had so long been accustomed to her own voice as to have forgotten that to strangers it was wonderful. I suppose that really part of the charm of her singing lay in the simplicity of the singer. Her life had been spent in a city, where she came in daily contact with grand and highly cultivated voices, and she therefore gauged her own as simply one among many, and a bird could hardly have appeared less conscious of his powers than did she.

Not so her audience. They thundered their delight until again and again she was obliged to appear; and each time she sang a simple little song or hymn, suited to the musical capacities of the audience, so that she but increased their desire for more.

It was all delightful. Yet really, sordid beings that they were, I shall have to admit that the crowning delight was when they met the next morning, tired, but happy, and counted over their gains, and looked in each other's faces, and exclaimed, and laughed, and actually cried a little over the pecuniary result.

"Girls," said Miss Benedict, her eyes glowing with

delight, "we can carpet the entire aisles. Think of that!"

Then began work.

"Since we haven't been doing anything for the last two months," said Mary Burton with a merry laugh, "I suppose we can have the privilege of going to work now."

Meantime, the days had been moving steadily on. Christmas holidays had come and gone, and the boys, as well as the girls, to whom the holiday season had been apt to be a time of special dissipation and temptation, had been tided safely over it by reason of being so busy that they had no time for their usual festivities. The vacation to which Claire Benedict had looked forward with sad heart, on her first coming to South Plains, because it would be a time when she might honourably go home, if she could afford it, and she knew she could not, had come and passed, and had found her in such a whirl of work, so absorbed from morning until night, as to have time only for very brief notes to her mother and sister.

"When the rush of work is over" (so she wrote), "I will stop for repairs, and take time to write some respectably lengthy letters, but just now we are so overwhelmed with our desire to get the church ready for Easter Sunday that we can think of nothing else. Mamma, I do wish you and Dora could see it now, and again after it emerges from under our hands!"

"What *is* the matter with her?" asked Dora; and then mother and daughter laughed. It was impossible to be very dreary with those breezy notes constantly coming from Claire. It was impossible not to have an almost absorbing interest in the church at South Plains, and think of and plan for it accordingly.

"Mamma," Dora said, after having read the latest letter, as she sat bending it into various graceful shapes, "I suppose that church down on the beach that the girls of our society

are working for, looks something like the one at South Plains. I think I will join that society after all; I suppose I ought to be doing something, since Claire has taken up the repairing of old churches for a life-business."

This last with a little laugh, and the mother wrote to Claire a few days later:

"Your sister has finally succeeded in overcoming her dislike to joining the benevolent society again, and is becoming interested in their work. They have taken up that seaside church again which you were going to do such nice things for, you know. Dora has felt all the time that there was nothing for her to do now, because we are poor, and has held aloof; but yesterday she joined the girls, and brought home aprons to make for the ready-made department of Mr. Stevenson's store. The plan is, that Mr. Stevenson shall furnish shades for the church windows at cost, and the girls are to pay him by making up aprons for that department. I am glad for anything that rouses Dora; not that she is bitter, but she is sad, and feels herself useless. My dear, you are doing more than repairing the church at South Plains; you are reaching, you see, away out to the seaside."

CHAPTER XX.

BUD AS A TEACHER.

IT became a matter of astonishment to discover how many friends the old church had, and from what unexpected quarters they appeared.

It really seemed as though each worker had an uncle, or brother, or cousin, of whom she had not given a thought in this connection, who yet grew interested, and offered help.

It was Anna Graves who started this special form of help, by an announcement that she made one morning:

"Girls, what do you think! My uncle Will is coming to stay two weeks, and he says he will fresco the church ceiling for us, if we will be content with plain work that he can do rapidly."

It did not take the eager listeners long to promise to be content with the very plainest work that could be imagined. Their imagination had not thought of reaching after frescoed ceilings.

"That is an idea!" said Nettie Burdick. "I wonder if Joe and Charlie would not help us?"

Now Joe and Charlie were wall-paperers in the city; and it was only a few days thereafter that Nettie announced with great satisfaction that they would come out and paper the old church, for their share in the good work.

Then came Ruth Jennings's brother-in-law, who was in business in a more distant city, and having called for Ruth and waited for her on the evening when that perplexing

question of window-shades was being discussed, he volunteered a delightful bit of information:

"Didn't they know about the new paper in imitation of stained glass—so good an imitation that when well laid it would take an expert to distinguish the difference?"

No, indeed, they had never heard of such a thing; and all other business was suspended while the brother-in-law was plied with questions; the conclusion of the matter being that he said "their firm" dealt quite largely in this new invention, and he could have enough for this little church supplied at cost, if they would like to go into it. And being able to give in round numbers the probable cost, the girls gleefully voted to "go into it," provided they could secure any person who knew how to manage it. This at once developed further resources belonging to the brother-in-law. He knew all about it, and would lay the paper for them with pleasure, if some of the "fellows" would help. He would just as soon spend a day in that way as not.

"Stained-glass windows!" said Ruth Jennings, with a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction. "As if South Plains had ever dreamed of attaining to such heights! Girls, *will* the old red curtains do for dusters, do you believe, if we wash them tremendously?"

The very next day brought them another surprise. Miss Benedict read part of a letter from "mamma," wherein it appeared that a certain Mr. Stuart, of the firm of Stuart, Greenough, and Co., had become interested in the church at South Plains, through Dora's reports of what absorbed her sister's energies; and in grateful remembrance of certain helps which Claire's father had given their church in its struggling infancy, he had selected a walnut desk and two pulpit chairs, which he had taken the liberty to send to Miss Claire Benedict, with his kind regards and earnest wish that her efforts might be prospered, even as her father's had been before her.

Over this astonishing piece of news some of the girls

actually cried. The pulpit desk and chairs had represented a formidable bill of expense looming up before them.

Each had been privately sure that they would be obliged at last to take those which would jar on their æsthetic tastes, out of respect to the leanness of the church purse. And here was solid walnut, selected by a man of undoubted taste and extensive knowledge in this direction! I don't think it strange that they cried.

Mary Burton, while she wiped her eyes, made a remark which was startling to some of the girls:

"How much your father has done for us this winter!" and she looked directly at Claire Benedict. Didn't Mary remember that the dear father was dead?

But Miss Benedict understood. Her eyes, which had remained bright with excitement until then, suddenly dimmed; but her smile and her voice were very sweet.

"O Mary! thank you," was all she said.

Among the workers it would have been hard to find one more faithful or more energetic than Bud. He was full of eager, happy life. Much depended upon him. He could blacken stoves with the skill of a professional, and none were ever more vigorously rubbed than those rusty, ash-bestrewn ones which had so long disgraced the church. It had been good for Bud to have others awaken to the fact that there were certain things which he could do, and do well.

An eventful winter this was to him. Having made an actual start towards Jerusalem, it was found that he put more energy into the journey than many who had been long on the way; and, as a matter of course, before long it became apparent that he was taking rapid strides.

Miss Alice Ansted was among the first to realize it. She came to Claire one evening with embarrassed laughter, and a half-serious, half-amused request for instruction:

"I'm trying to follow out some of your hints, and they are getting me into more trouble than anything I ever

undertook. Sewing societies and charity parties are as nothing in comparison. I am trying to teach Bud! He wants to study arithmetic: it is an absurd idea, I think; what will he ever want of arithmetic? But he was determined, and you were determined, and between you I have been foolish enough to undertake it; and now it appears that arithmetic is a very small portion of what he wants to learn. He wants to know everything that there is in the Bible; and where church-members get their ideas about all sorts of things, and what the ministers study in the theological seminary, and why all the people in the world don't attend prayer-meeting, and I don't know what not! He acts as though his brain had been under a paralysis all his life, which had just been removed. I must say he astonishes me with his questions; but it is easier to *ask* questions than it is to answer them. What, for instance, am I to say to ideas like these? Since you have gotten me into this scrape, it is no more than fair that you should help me to see daylight."

And then would follow a discussion, nearly always pertaining to some of the practical truths of the Christian life, or to some direction that Bud had found in the course of his daily Bible verse, which seemed to him at variance with the life which was being lived by the professing Christians about him, and which he turned to his arithmetic-teacher to reconcile.

Bud, being ignorant, found it impossible to understand why people who professed to take the Bible for their rule of life did not follow its teachings, and he brought each fresh problem to Alice Ansted with such confident expectation that she knew all about it, that she, who had only volunteered to explain to him the rules of arithmetic, was in daily embarrassment. From these conversations, which constantly grew more close and searching as Bud stumbled on new verses, Claire Benedict used to turn with a smile of satisfaction, as well as with almost a feeling of awe, over the wisdom of the

Great Teacher. Alice Ansted might be teaching Bud the principles of arithmetic, but he was certainly daily teaching her the principles of the religion which she professed, but did not *live*.

In fact, others besides Alice Ansted were being taught, or, at least, were being roused, by the newly-awakened mind. The minister had by no means forgotten the visit which had glorified the study for that day, and he was still bathing his almost discouraged heart in the brightness of its memory, when a vigorous knock one morning again interrupted his studies. His eyes brightened when he saw that the visitor was Bud, and he invited him in with cordial tone. But no, Bud was in haste. There was not a trace of the hesitancy and embarrassment which had characterized his first visit. He spoke with the confidence of one who had obtained great and sufficient help at this source before, and who knew that it was the place where help could be found.

"I haven't any time this morning," he said, speaking with a rapidity which had begun to characterize his newly awakened life. "I'm down at Snyder's, waiting for the pony to be shod, and there is a fellow there talking. He says the Bible ain't true; that it is just a lot of made-up stories to cheat women and children and folks that don't know nothing, like me. Well, now, I *know* that it is no such a thing. I know the Bible is true, because I've tried it; but he hasn't tried it, you see, sir, and he won't because he don't believe in it; and I thought I would just run up here and ask you to give me something to show him that it is all true—something that I can tell him in a hurry, because the pony will be ready in a few minutes."

What in the world was that minister to say? Was ever such an embarrassing question thrust at him?

The evidences of Christianity—yes, he had studied them carefully; of course he had. He had written sermons to prove the truth of the Holy Scriptures; he had a row of

books on the upper shelf of his library, all of them treating more or less of this subject. He turned and looked at them—ponderous volumes; it was not possible to take down even the smallest of them and set Bud to reading it. In the first place, Bud would no more understand the language in which it was written than he would understand the Greek Testament which stood by its side; and in the second place, Bud wanted knowledge that could be transmitted while the pony was being shod!

Certainly, this dilemma had its ludicrous side, but had it not also its humiliating one? Ought there not to be some word which an educated man like himself could give in haste to an ignorant boy like Bud—something so plain that even the pony need not wait while it was being explained? Suppose the man at the blacksmith's shop had chosen to sneer over the fact that the Earth is round, and Bud had come for an argument to prove the truth of this fact, how easy it would be to produce one!

Ought he not to be equally ready to defend this much-slandered Bible? Thoughts are very rapid in their transit. Something like these ideas rushed through the scholar's mind while he stood looking up at his row of books, and Bud stood looking up at him with an air of confident expectation.

"Bud," said the minister, turning suddenly away from his book-shelves, "how many persons are there at Snyder's?"

"Eight or nine, sir; maybe more."

"Are they from around here?"

"No, sir; mostly from the country; I don't know any of 'em."

"Well, Bud, I want you to listen carefully while I ask two or three questions. Suppose you had been there before any of those men, and as one after another began to come in, each should tell of a fire there had been last night in the city; suppose you knew that they were not acquainted with one another, and had not met until they reached the

blacksmith's shop; and suppose they told the same story, without contradicting one another in any of the important particulars; what do you believe you would conclude about them—would you think that they had told the truth, or a made-up story?"

"I reckon it would be the truth, sir; 'cause how would they know how to make it up alike?"

"That is just the point," said the gratified minister. While he talked he had been watching Bud carefully, much in doubt as to whether he had mind enough to grasp the illustration, but so far it had evidently been grasped; now he must see if it could be applied.

"Listen! Did you know that thirty-six people told the story of the Bible, and that many of them not only never saw one another, but many of them died before others of them were born; and that they told the same story, without contradicting one another at all?"

"No, sir," said Bud; "I didn't know nothing about it. Is that so?" Extreme delight glowed in his honest eyes, and he clutched at his cap and made a movement toward the door. "I thank you, sir; I'll go back and tell him; it will be a stunner."

Away went the newly-awakened preacher of the evidences of Christianity, and the minister went back to his Greek Testament with great satisfaction. Bud might not be able to convince the scoffer at the blacksmith's shop; Mr. Ramsey did not expect that he would; he knew that Satan had many skilful ways of using false weapons and making them flash like true steel. The thing which gave him pleasure was, that Bud had understood. He felt nearly certain that the boy's mind would not leave the question there; it would have to be investigated, and he, the minister, would have to get ready to help him.

"We ought to be careful to speak about all these things in such a way that uneducated people could follow us," he said.

And all that morning, while he worked over his sermon for the following Sabbath, he worked to secure simple words in which to clothe his thought; he sought illustrations to give it clearness; in short, he preached to Bud; almost unconsciously he brought the boy before his mind's eye, cap in hand—a symbol of the people whose thoughts rested for a moment on what you were saying, and then flitted away to something else, unless, indeed, the owners were caught during that moment. This particular minister had never before so fully realized this truth. He had never before laboured so hard to catch the attention of the unskilled listener; nor had he ever become so intensely interested in any sermon as he was in that one. If he was to preach it for Bud, it must be very simple; and in making it very simple, his own heart took hold of it as a tremendous reality, instead of a thought out of a book.

I hope I shall be understood when I say that Bud wrote the greater part of the minister's sermon that week; though he, of course, was utterly unconscious of the fact.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE OF THE VICTIMS.

MEANTIME there were other interests at stake that winter than those involved in the renovation of the old church. For instance, there was Harry Matthews, who kept Claire's heart constantly filled with anxious thought.

It became more and more apparent that he was in great and growing danger. Claire saw much of him. He had been one of the most faithful helpers during the preparations for the concert, and he was still one of the energetic workers, being included in all their plans. Moreover, he was a genial, society-loving, warm-hearted young fellow—one of the sort with whom a sympathetic girl soon becomes intimate. Claire had often, in the earlier days of her girlhood, sighed over the fact that she had no brother; and now it seemed sometimes to her as if this Harry were a sort of brother, over whose interests she must watch. So she exercised an older sister's privilege in growing very anxious about him.

Neither was he so gaily happy as he had been early in the season. He had kept his pledge, coming to her at first with laughing eyes and mock gravity of face, pretending to making confession like the good little boy in the story-book, who is sorry, and won't do so any more if he can help it. She always received these admissions with a gentle gravity, so unmistakably tinged with sadness and disappointment that they presently ceased to be amusing to him. He was beginning to make discoveries: first, that it was by no means an

agreeable thing for a manly young man to seek a young woman whom he respected, and voluntarily admit that he had again been guilty of what he knew she looked upon not only with distrust but with actual dismay : and second, that he had the confession to make much more frequently than he had supposed could possibly be the case; that, in short, the habit, which he had supposed such a light one, was growing upon him; that, on occasions when he withstood the invitations and temptations, the struggle was a hard one, which he shrank from renewing. Still he made resolves. It was absurd to suppose that he could keep running after Miss Benedict, or sending her notes to say that he had again indulged in a habit that he had assured her was of no consequence, and that he could break in a day if he chose. He knew now that this was folly. It was not to be broken in a day. He began to suspect that possibly he was a slave, with little or no power to break it at all. The tenor of his notes changed steadily. The first one ran thus :—

"I have to inform your most gracious majesty that I have this day committed the indiscretion of taking about two-thirds of a glass of champagne with an old school-chum whom I have not seen for six months. It is another chapter of the old story—he 'beguiled me, and I did' drink. Of course, it was no fault of mine; and it gives me comfort to inform you that the tempter has gone on his way to Chicago, and that I do not expect to see him for another six months. So humbly craving your majesty's pardon for being thus obliged to trouble you—owing to a certain foolish pledge of mine—I remain your humble subject,

"HARRY MATTHEWS."

The last one she received was briefly this :—

"MISS BENEDICT,—I have failed again, though I did not

mean to do so. I beg you will erase my name from that page, and care nothing more about it or me."

Over the first note Claire had lingered with a troubled air, but on this last one there dropped tears. She had adopted Harry by this time as a young brother, and she could not help carrying his peril about in her heart. Still, if he had not gone too far, there was more hope for the writer of this brief note, with its undertone of fierce self-disgust, than for the one who could so merrily confess what he believed was, at the worst, a foible.

One evening they walked home together from the church. She was silent, and her heart was heavy. She had caught the odour of wine about him, though he had made a weak effort to conceal it with rich spices. They walked half the distance from the Church to the Academy, having spoken nothing beyond an occasional commonplace. Truth to tell, Claire was in doubt what to say, or whether to say anything. She had spoken many words to him; she had written him earnest little notes; what use to say more? It was he who broke the silence, speaking moodily:

"It is of no use, Miss Benedict. I shall have to ask you to release me from that pledge. I cannot keep rushing around to the Academy to tell you what befalls me; it is absurd. And—well, the fact is, as I am situated, I simply cannot keep from using liquor now and then—oftener, indeed, than I had supposed when I signed that paper. It must have been a great bore to you, and I owe you a thousand apologies; but you see how it is—I must be released and left to myself. I have been true to my promise, as I knew I should be when I made it; but I can't have you troubled any longer; and, as I said, I *have* to drink occasionally."

He did not receive the sort of answer which he had expected. He was prepared for an earnest protest, for an argument; but Claire said, her voice very sad the while:

"I know you cannot keep from drinking, Harry, and I have known it for a long while."

Now, although he had told himself several times, in a disgusted way, that he was a coward, and a fool, and a slave, and that he did not deserve to have the respect of a lady, his pride was by no means so far gone that he liked to hear the admission from other lips than his own that he was bound in chains which he could not break.

"What do you mean?" he asked, haughtily enough.

"I mean, Harry, that you are tempted, awfully tempted, to become a drunkard! I mean, that I do not think you can help yourself; I think you have gone beyond the line where your strength would be sufficient. You inherit the taste for liquor. Never mind how I learned that; I know it, and have known it for a long time. As surely as Satan lives, he has you in his toils. O Harry!"

Her voice failed her. She was not one who easily lost self-control before others, but this was a subject on which her heart was sore. He did not know how many times she had said to herself, "What if he were my brother, and mamma sat at home watching and praying for him, and he were as he is! And his mother is a widow, and has only this one, and she sits at home and waits!" And this mother's fast-coming agony of discovery had burned into her soul, until it is no wonder that the emotion choked what else she might have said.

But Harry was haughty still. He was more than that, however; he was frightened. If the darkness of the night had not shielded his face from observation, its pallor would have frightened her. He tried, however, to steady his voice as he said:

"Miss Benedict, what do you mean? I do not understand. Do you mean that I am foreordained to become a drunkard, and that I cannot help myself?"

"O Harry! I mean that the great enemy of your soul

has discovered just how he can ruin you, body and soul, and he means to do it. You have toyed with him until you cannot help yourself. You *cannot*, Harry. There is no use to fancy that you can. He has ruined many a young man as self-reliant as you. He is too strong for you, and too mean. He has ways of dissembling that you would scorn. He is not honest with you. He has made you believe what was utterly false. He has you in his toils, and as surely as you are here to-night, just so surely will you fail in the battle with him. You do not know how to cope with Satan; you need not flatter yourself that you do. He has played with many a soul, coaxed it to feel just that sense of superiority over him which you feel, until it was too late, and then laughed at his victim for being a dupe."

During the first part of this sentence, Harry Matthews, though startled, was also angry. He had always prided himself on his self-control, upon being able to go just so far in a given direction and no farther unless he chose; and even in this matter, when he had accused himself of being a slave, he had not believed it; he had believed simply that he had discovered himself to be more fond of intoxicants than he had supposed, and that the effort to give them up involved more self-sacrifice than it was worth while to make; and while he was vexed that even this was so, he had honestly believed this to be the whole story. It was not until this moment that the sense of being in actual peril, and being insufficient for his own rescue, rushed over him. I do not know why it did at that time, unless the Holy Spirit saw his opportunity and willed that it should be so.

There was almost mortal anguish in the low voice that sounded at last in answer to Claire's cry of fear:

"God help me, then! What can I do?"

The question surprised Claire—startled her. She had prayed for it; but she was like many another Christian worker, in that she had not seemed to expect the answer to

her prayer. Verily, He has to be content with exceeding little faith! Claire had expected the blind young man would go on excusing himself, and assuring her of her mistake. None the less was she eager with her answer:

"If you only *meant* that cry. If you only would give up the unequal strife, and stand aside and cry out, 'O Lord, undertake for me!' what a world would be revealed to you. Harry Matthews, there is just One who fought a battle with Satan and came off victor, and there never will be another. The victory must come through him, or it is at best a very partial and at all times a doubtful one. In him are safety and everlasting strength; outside of him is danger."

She did not say another word, nor did he, other than a half-audible "Good-night," as he held open the Academy gate for her to pass. She went in, feeling frightened over much that she had said. Ought she to have spoken so hopelessly to him? What if he turned in despair, and plunged into excesses such as he had not known before? Men had reformed, and signed the pledge, and kept it, apparently without the aid of Christ; at least, they had not owned allegiance to him, though well she knew that his restraining grace was, after all, what kept any man from rushing headlong to ruin. God held back even those who would not own his detaining arm. But she had felt so hopeless in regard to Harry, so certain that nothing short of an acknowledged leaning on Christ would be sufficient for his needs. The more she had prayed for him, the more sure had she been that in Christ alone lay his refuge. She had not meant to say this to him. Yet the thoughts seemed to crowd out of themselves when he gave them opportunity. Now she went to her room, shivering and trembling over the possible results.

She had very little opportunity, however, for thought; and there was that awaiting her which was not calculated to quiet her mind.

It was Alice Ansted who rose up from before the east

window, where a fine view was to be had of the rising moon, and came forward to meet her as she entered her own room.

"I beg your pardon for having taken possession. There was company in the parlour, and Mrs. Foster said she thought I might come here and wait for you. Is there another committee meeting this evening? or can I hope to have you to myself for five minutes?"

"There is no committee meeting this evening," Claire said, smiling. "We have been down to measure the platform and arrange for the organ, but I believe now that everything is done. Take this easy-chair. I am glad you waited for me. There are several things about which I wish to consult you," she added.

"They have to do with that church, I know. I shall not let you get started on that topic. I should be perfectly certain not to get you back to any other to-night; and I want to do the talking myself. I cannot see why you care so much for that church."

Claire laughed.

"We care for anything for which we work, and especially for which we sacrifice a little, you know. Why, you care for it yourself. Don't you think you do, a little?"

"I care for you, and for your opinion. I have been telling mamma, only this evening, that when the old barn gets renovated, I believe I will go down there to church. I am not so fond of riding that I care to take an eight-mile ride every Sunday; besides, I think it looks silly. Mamma thinks we are all becoming idiotic; for all the daughters and the son sided with me, and papa said he didn't care a rush light which we did—that it would be easier for the horses to come down here."

"Good news," said Claire brightly. "I have been hoping for something of the kind. Then you will begin to attend the prayer-meeting, of course; and it does need you so much."

"I'm sure I don't see why I should. I never attended prayer-meeting in town, and I have belonged to that church for years. The idea of *my* helping along a prayer-meeting! You do have some very absurd ideas, Claire Benedict; though I may as well admit that the only reason I would have for coming here to church would be to give you pleasure. But this is not in the least what I came to talk to you about—I knew we should get on that subject, and never get away from it."

"Let us go right away from it, and tell me, please, just what you want to talk about. Only let me say this one little thing: I want you to come down to prayer-meeting next Wednesday evening, and discover in how many ways you can help it. Now I am ready."

CHAPTER XXII.

NEW LINES OF WORK.

BUT Alice hesitated. The subject, whatever it was that she wanted to talk about, evidently had its embarrassing side. Now that Claire sat in expectant silence, she grew silent too, and looked down, and toyed with the fringe of her wrap, her face in a frown that indicated either perplexity or distrust.

"I don't know why I should come to you," she said at last, speaking half-angrily; "I suppose I am a simpleton, and shall get little thanks for any interference; yet it certainly seems to me as though something ought to be done, and as though you might do it."

"If there is any way in which I can help you," Claire said, "you hardly need to have me say how glad I shall be to do so."

"Would you, I wonder? Would you help in a perplexity that seems to me to be growing into a downright danger, and which I more than half suspect you could avert?"

There was something so significant in her tone, that Claire looked at her in wonderment for a moment, then said, choosing her words with care:

"You surely know that I would be only too glad to help you in any way that was right; and of course you would not ask me to do anything that I thought wrong."

"Oh, I'm not so sure of that. You have such peculiar ideas of right and wrong. They are not according to my

standard, I presume. How I wish I knew, without telling you, just what you would think right: it would settle several questions for me; or else it would unsettle me, for I might not want to do what was right, you see, any more than you would want to do what was wrong."

"I am not a witch," said Claire lightly, "and I confess that I have no more idea what you mean than if you were speaking in Sanscrit. Suppose you speak English for a few minutes, my friend, and enlighten me."

"I will, presently. I want to ask you a few general questions first, which have nothing special to do with the question at hand. Would you marry a man who was not a Christian?"

"No," said Claire, wondering, startled, yet nevertheless prompt enough with her answer; "that is, I do not now see how I could. In the first place, I would not be likely to have the opportunity; for I could not be sufficiently interested in a man who had no sympathy with me in these vital questions, to ever reach the point as to my possible opportunities and duties."

"Oh, well, that doesn't materially enlighten me. You see I am talking about people who *could* become sufficiently interested to reach a great many questionings, and not know what to do with them. Let me suppose a case. We will say the people live in China, and become deeply interested in each other. In the course of time one of them goes to the Fiji Islands, for instance, and meets a missionary, and comes somewhat under her influence—enough, we will say, to make her uncomfortable and to make her suspect that she is a good deal of a heathen herself, though she was a member in good and regular standing of a church in China. To make the circumstances more interesting, you may suppose that one of the converted heathen begins to interest himself in her, and to enlighten her as to the power of genuine religion over the heathen heart and mind to such an extent that she is

almost sure she knows nothing about it experimentally, and at the same time has a yearning desire to know and to receive the mysterious *something* which she discovers in this one. We will also suppose that she receives letters from China occasionally, which show her that the other party has met neither missionary nor heathen to impress him in any way, and that his plans and determinations are all of the earth, and decidedly earthy, and yet that he is disposed to think that the lady ought to be thinking about returning to China, and joining him in his effort to have a good time. What, in your estimation, ought the half-awakened Fiji resident to do?"

"Alice, is some not very distant city representing China? and is South Plains Fiji? and is Bud the converted heathen?"

"There is enough witch about you to have secured you a very warm experience in the olden days. Never mind translating, if you please; this was not to be in English. What ought the Fiji to do?"

"I should think there could be no question. A half-awakened person would still be in danger of dropping back into darkness, and should, as surely as she believes in the petition, 'Lead us not into temptation,' guard against anything that would be a contradiction to that prayer."

"Well, but suppose this half-awakened person were married to the party in China—what then?"

"That would be a very different matter. The irrevocable vows would have been taken before the world; the 'until death do you part' would have been accepted, and there would be no liberty of choice."

"I don't see the reasoning clearly. Suppose a person should take a vow to commit murder, and announce her determination before the world to do so, with as solemn a vow as you please, ought her conscience to hold her? Not," she added, with a slight and embarrassed laugh, "that I would put the idea of murder as a parallel case with the other

supposition. I don't mean anything, you know, by all this; I am simply dealing with some imaginary people in China."

But Claire did not smile, and held herself carefully to the analogy of the illustration.

"You are supposing a moral impossibility, Alice. No one would be allowed to take a public and solemn oath to commit murder. The very oath would be a violation of the laws of God and of the land; but in the other case, the oath taken professes to be in keeping with God's revealed will and with the demands of respectable society. Surely you see what an infinite difference this would make."

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, I'll suppose one thing more. For purposes of convenience, let us have these two people engaged to each other, but the pledge not consummated before the public—what then?"

But over this question Claire kept a troubled silence.

"I do not know," she said at last; "I am not sure how that ought to be answered. Perhaps it is one of the things which each individual is called upon to answer for himself, or herself, taking it to God for special light. A betrothal seems to me a very solemn thing, not to be either entered into or broken lightly; and yet I can conceive of circumstances wherein it would be right to break the pledge—where it was wrong ever to have made it—and two wrongs cannot make a right, you know. But, Alice, this is dangerous ground. I am almost inclined to think it is ground where a third party, on the human side, should not intermeddle; at least, unless it is one who has far more wisdom than I. It is not possible for me to advise you in this."

"You *have* advised me," Alice said with exceeding gravity. "All I wanted was your individual opinion, and that you have given plainly, though you may not be aware of it. When one knows one is doing a thing that is wrong, I suppose the time has come to draw back."

"If the drawing back can right the wrong."

"It can help toward it. These people—who live in China, remember—are perhaps among those who ought never to have made the pledge. However, let us drop them. I want to talk to you about a more important matter."

Still she did not talk, but relapsed again into troubled silence; and Claire, not knowing what to say, waited, and said nothing.

"Would you marry a man, if you thought you might possibly be the means of saving his soul?"

Claire was startled and a trifle disturbed to think that the conversation was still to run in a channel with which she was so unfamiliar. Still, this first question was comparatively easy to deal with.

"That might depend on whether I could do so without assuming false vows. I could not promise a lie for the sake of saving any soul. Besides, it being wrong in itself, I would have no reason to hope that it would be productive of any good; for God does not save souls by means which are sinful. Why do you ask me all these questions, Alice? I have no experience, and am not wise. I wish you would seek a better counsellor."

"Never mind, I have all the counsel I desire. I am not talking about those people in China any more, though you think I am. I was thinking of you, and of somebody who is in danger, and whom I believe you could save, but I know you won't—at least not in that way. Claire Benedict, I am troubled about my brother. Tell me this: do you know that he is in danger?"

"Yes," said Claire, her voice low and troubled.

"Do you know from what source I mean?"

"I think I do."

"I thought you did, else I am not sure that my pride would have allowed me to open my lips. Well, do you know there is something you might do to help him?"

"Alice!"

"No, you are not to interrupt me. I don't mean anything insulting. There are ways of which I would be more sure, and they are connected with you, but I know they are out of the question. I am not going to talk of them. But there is something I want you to do. I want you to talk with mamma. It is of no use for me to say a word to her. There are family reasons why she is specially vexed with me just now, and will not listen reasonably to anything that I might say. But she respects you, and likes you, and you have more or less influence over her. Are you willing to use it for Louis's sake?"

"But, my dear Alice, I do not understand you in the least. What could I say to your mother that she does not already know? and in any case, how could she materially help your brother? He needs the help of his own will."

"That is true, but there are ways in which mamma might help him, if she would. I can tell you of some. In the first place, you are mistaken as to her knowledge. She knows, it is true, that he takes more wine occasionally than is good for him, and has violent headaches in consequence; but she doesn't know that two nights in a week, at least, he comes home intoxicated! Isn't that a terrible thing to say of one's brother? What has become of the Ansted pride, when I can say it to almost a stranger?"

"Why does not your mother know?"

"Partly because she is blind, and partly because I have promised Louis not to tell her, and partly because there are reasons why it would be especially hard on my mother to have this knowledge brought to her through me. You see there are reasons enough. Now, for what she could do. Claire, she fairly drives him into temptation. There is a certain house in the city which she is very anxious to see united to ours. She contrives daily pretexts for sending Louis there, and it is almost impossible for him to go there without coming home the worse for liquor. I *wish* I could

talk more plainly to you. I will tell you this. There is a brother as well as a sister in that house, and it has been a pet dream of my mother to exchange the sons and daughters. It is a romantic scheme, grown up with the families from their early days; and mamma, who has never been accustomed to having her plans thwarted, is in danger of seeing all of these come to naught, and more than half believes that I am plotting against it for Louis, having first shown myself to be an undutiful and ungrateful daughter. Do you see how entirely my tongue is silenced? I wonder if you do understand?"

"I understand, my dear friend, and I thank you for your confidence; but I do not see how a stranger can help, or indeed, can interfere in any way, without being guilty of gross rudeness. How could I hope to approach your mother on such subjects as these without having her feel herself insulted?"

Alice made a gesture of impatience.

"You *cannot*," she said, "if you think more of the irritable words that a troubled mother may say to you than you do of a soul in peril; but I did not think you were of that sort."

Claire waited a moment before replying:

"I think I may be trusted to try to do what seems right, even though it were personally hard," she said at last, speaking very gently; "but, Alice, I do not understand how words of mine could do other than mischief."

"I can show you. This family, I have told you, is a continual snare to Louis. He simply cannot go there without being led into great temptation, and mamma is responsible for the most of his visits. It would not be difficult for Louis to remain away, if mamma did not make errands for him. He would go abroad with the Husons next week, and be safe from this and many other temptations; or he would go to the Rocky Mountains with Harold Chessney—and he could not be in better society—if mamma would consent; and she would, if she could be made to realize his peril—if she knew that outsiders were talking about it. Don't you see?

"Now, who is going to enlighten her? I am not in favour—less so just at present than ever before; the girls, poor young things, do not know of our disgrace, and would have no influence with mamma if they did; and papa would like the alliance from a business point of view as well as mamma would from a romantic and fashionable one. Do you see the accumulation of troubles? and do you imagine, I wonder, what it is to *me*, when I have humbled myself to tell it all to you?"

"And this young lady?" said Claire, ignoring the personal questions. "Do you feel sure that there is no hope of help from that source? Is not her interest deep enough and her influence strong enough to come to the rescue if she fully understood?"

There was again that gesture of extreme impatience.

"That young lady! She has no more character than a painted doll! Claire Benedict, she is in as great danger to-day as Louis is, and from the same source! She dances every night, and buoys up her flagging strength by stimulants every day. I have seen her repeatedly when she was so excited with wine that I knew she did not know what she was saying."

"Is it possible!" This was Claire's startled exclamation.

"It is not only possible, but is an almost daily occurrence. And she fills the glass with her own silly little hand, which trembles at the moment with the excitement of wine, and holds it to my brother; and he, poor foolish boy, accepts it, because he knows that he likes it better than anything else in the world—at least, that is attainable. Claire, if my mother could be prevailed upon to urge Louis to go away with Harold Chessney, I believe he might be saved."

"Who is Harold Chessney?"

"He is one of God's saints, made for the purpose of showing us what a man might be, if he would. Claire Benedict, will you try?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNPALATABLE TRUTHS.

"YES," said Claire, "I will try."

But she said it with a long-drawn sigh. This was work that was utterly distasteful to her, and she saw but little hope of accomplishing anything by attempting it.

She wanted to fight the demon of alcohol wherever found —at least, she had thought that she did; but who would have supposed that it could bring her into such strange contact with Mrs. Russel Ansted?

In order that you may understand why this plan of rescue had suggested itself to Alice Ansted's mind, it will be necessary to explain that the acquaintance which had been commenced by accident had been allowed to mature into what might almost be called friendship.

At least, it had pleased Mrs. Ansted to encourage the intimacy between her young people and the attractive music-teacher.

"It is not as though she had been simply a music-teacher, and nothing else, all her life," was Mrs. Ansted wont to explain to her city friends. "She is a daughter of the Boston Benedicts, and, of course, her opportunities have been rare. She is simply faultless in her manners; the girls learn a great deal from her, and are devoted to her; and she really is a charming companion. You know in the country we have no society."

So Claire had been made almost oppressively welcome to

the lovely house on the hill, and the sleigh or the carriage had been sent for her many times when she could not go, and in many kind and pleasant ways had the entire family sought to show their interest in her society. Mrs. Ansted, indeed, patronized her to such an extent that Alice had made herself imagine that in this direction might be found the light which would open the mother's eyes to certain things which she ought to see and did not.

Claire did not share her hopes. She had always felt herself held back from real heart intimacy with the fair and worldly woman; had always detected the tinge of patronage in the kindness shown her; and had even smiled sometimes at the thought of how the very attentions which she received placidly, and in a sense gratefully, would chafe her hot-headed young sister Dora. It had given her joy of heart and cause for gratitude to realize that she herself had been lifted above such chafings. There were trials in her lot, but Mrs. Ansted's patronage was not one of them. Still it made her feel that little would be gained by attempted interference in her family affairs. Under the circumstances, she felt herself intrusive, yet determined to submit, and thereby convince Alice of her willingness and powerlessness. The most she had to fear was a little drawing up of the aristocratic shoulders, and a cold and courteous hint that some things belonged exclusively to the domain of very close friendship.

It was on the following Saturday that opportunity offered for an attempt. Claire was spending the day with the Ansteds; the invitation had come from the mother, and was unusually cordial. Louis was in town, would probably remain over the Sabbath, and the girls were lonely. The mother did not know how much more readily the invitation was accepted because Louis was in town.

They were in Mrs. Ansted's own sitting-room. The young girls had been called to the sewing-room at the mandate of the dressmaker; and Alice, telegraphing Claire that now was

her opportunity, slipped away. Have you ever observed how much harder it becomes to set about a delicate and embarrassing duty when circumstances have been carefully made for you, and you are left to stare in the face the thought, "I am to do this thing *now*; it is expected of me"?

Immediately Claire began to feel that it would be preposterous in her to try to advise or enlighten Mrs. Ansted. But that lady unconsciously helped her by asking:

"Did you ever meet Mr. Harold Chessney in Boston? I believe he calls that his home, though he is abroad a great deal. I wish he were abroad now, instead of planning an excursion to the Rocky Mountains and all sorts of out-of-the-world places, and putting Louis into a fever to accompany him. I have a horror of those western expeditions entered into by young men. Louis will not go contrary to my approval, however, so I need not worry about it. It is a great comfort to a mother to have a dutiful son, my dear."

"It must be," Claire hastened to say, but added that she should think it would be a delightful trip for a young man, and a rare opportunity to see his own country. She was not personally acquainted with Mr. Chessney, but she had heard him very highly spoken of.

"Oh, he is perfection, I suppose," Mrs. Ansted said carelessly—"too perfect, my dear, for ordinary flesh and blood. He is very wealthy and very eccentric; has innumerable ways for wasting his money on savages, and all that sort of thing. I should really almost fear his influence over Louis, he is such an impressible boy. Harold might fancy it his duty to become a home missionary!" This last was spoken with a little satisfied laugh, as though Louis Ansted's position was too well assured, after all, to suggest any reasonable fears of his sinking to the level of a home missionary! The matron speedily composed her face, however, and added:

"Harold is a magnificent man, I have no doubt, and if Louis were a young man of depraved tendencies and low

tastes, probably I should hope for nothing better than to exile him for a while with such a guard; but in his position, and with his prospects, the idea is, of course, absurd. I don't know what fancies Alice has in her mind; the child seems quite to favour Louis's going. Alice is a little inclined to be fanatical, I am afraid, in some things. I hope you will not encourage such tendencies, my dear. I have seen with pleasure that she is becoming more interested in religion, and disposed to help poor Bud, though she has chosen some foolish ways of doing that—but still it is quite as it should be to rouse to the importance of these things; I have been pained with her indifference in the past. However, we should not carry anything to extremes, you know."

They were not getting on. Claire did not feel like a diplomatist. She was disposed to be straightforward. Would not simple truth serve her purpose in this case? At least, it would be less humiliating than to try to worm herself into family confidences. So she spoke her plain question:

"Mrs. Ansted, has it never seemed to you that it would be well for Louis to get away for a time from some of his associates who tempt him in the direction in which he is least able to bear temptation?"

Plain English was not palatable, or else it was not understood. Two red spots glowed on the mother's cheeks, but her eyes were cold.

"And what is that, if you please? I was not aware that my son was particularly susceptible to any temptation."

Could this be true? Did she not know that he was tempted to reel home at midnight like a common drunkard? If so, what an awful revelation for a stranger to make!

Claire hesitated, and the lady looked steadily at her and waited. Simple truth should serve her again; it would be insulting to offer anything else.

"Mrs. Ansted, you will pardon me for referring to it, but

I know from your son's own statements that he is tempted in the direction of liquor, and that he finds it hard to resist these temptations, and I am afraid he is in great danger. If I were his mother, and had confidence in this Mr. Chessney, I should beg him to go out with him, and break away from his present surroundings."

She was deceived in the mother—in the calm with which she listened to these words. She did not cry out like one amazed and hurt, nor did she look like one who was being shocked into a faint; and Claire, watching her, hurried on, determined to make her disagreeable revelations as brief as she could, and then to get away from the subject. Surely the mother could not feel much humiliated before her, when she confessed that she had received these intimations from the son.

But directly her voice ceased, the mother arose, her own tones low and ladylike as usual:

"I am not aware, Miss Benedict, that our kind treatment of you can have furnished any excuse for this direct and open insult. I did not know that you had succeeded in securing my son's confidence to such a degree that he had been led to traduce his friends. I cannot imagine his motive; but allow me to say that yours is plain, and will fail. The lady to whom Mr. Louis Ansted has been paying special attention for years, cannot be thrown off, even by his taking a trip to the Rocky Mountains; and if you hope to ingratiate yourself in the mother's heart by trying to arouse her fears, you have made a grievous mistake. My daughters are evidently more susceptible, and I now understand some things that were before mysterious to me.

"I am sorry for you, Miss Benedict. I can well imagine that it is a hard thing to be poor; but it is a pity to add disgrace to poverty. You have been unwise to try to work up fanatical ideas on my son. We are none of us temperance fanatics."

There was a dangerous fire in Claire's eyes, but she struggled to keep back the words that hurried forward, clamouring to be spoken. This woman before her was old enough to be her mother, and was the mother of a young man whom she would try to save.

Besides, she had the force of habit to help her. The controlled voice which belongs to the cultured lady, even under strong provocation, was as much a part of her as it was of Mrs. Ansted :

"I will pass by your personalities, Mrs. Ansted, as unworthy of you, and ask you to pardon my apparent intrusion into family affairs, on the sole ground that I have come into possession of some knowledge concerning your son's danger which I have reason to believe you do not possess, and I thought I ought, as a Christian woman, to warn you."

Mrs. Ansted was already repenting of some of her words—beginning, that is, to realize that she had been unnecessarily insulting to a guest in her own home, and one whom her son, as well as her daughters, liked and admired. She was not less angry, but more controlled.

"Possibly you mean well," she said, dropping into the patronizing tone which was habitual, "and I may have spoken too plainly in my haste ; a mother's feelings, when she considers the characters of her children insulted, are sometimes not sufficiently held in check. We will conclude, Miss Benedict, that your motive was good, though your words were unfortunate and your conclusions unwarrantable. My son is entirely capable of taking care of himself. If you are really sincere in supposing him to be in danger, because he takes an occasional glass of wine, it only proves you to be lamentably ignorant of the customs of polite society. And now I must beg you to excuse me. Excitement always wearies me, and I feel that I must lie down for a while. I presume my daughter will be in soon."

And Claire was left alone to gather her startled thoughts

and determine what to do next. She was greatly excited. In all her imaginings of a mother's heart, nothing of this kind had occurred.

It had been a serious failure, as she had feared it would be, but not of the kind which she had planned.

She looked about her for paper on which to write a line to Alice; then determined that she would do no such thing, lest Alice might have to bear blame in consequence.

She would just slip quietly away, and go home and think. It was not clear in her mind what ought to be said to Alice. She had been insulted, and by Alice's mother, and she could not longer remain a guest in the house; but perhaps it was not necessary that Alice should know all this. She must wait, and think, and pray.

At least, it would not be wise to make any expression about Mrs. Ansted until she could think less bitterly of the words spoken to her; for it is by no means a pleasant thing to be misjudged, and it is especially difficult to keep one's mouth closed when one has that to tell which would silence all the hints for ever. It had required all the self-control which Claire possessed not to tell Mrs. Ansted to ask her son whether the insinuations which had been flung at her meant anything. Certainly she was not in the mood to have an interview with Alice.

She hastily and quietly possessed herself of her wraps, and stole out of the house and down the avenue which had in the few weeks past become so familiar to her. Bud saw her from the distant stables, but he only made her a most respectful bow. It was no strange sight to him. He knew that she came and went often during these days; he did not know she was thinking that in all probability she would never walk down that avenue again.

There is no use explaining to you that she cried when she reached home—cried bitterly, and with a perfect abandon, as though her heart were broken. She was young and had not

had many hard words to bear, and all her sharp thrusts from life had come upon her lately; her knowledge of human nature had been increasing with painful rapidity, and there were times when she shrank from it all, and wanted to go to her father.

But after the crying—or, indeed, in the very midst of it—she prayed: for herself first—she felt so sore, and ill-used, and friendless; then for Louis Ansted—the special danger and the special friendlessness of a man with such a mother, took hold of her with power; and at last she prayed for the mother—not *at* her, but for her.

There is a way of praying about a soul with whom we are offended—or, at least, we call it praying—which is simply pouring out one's knowledge of that person's shortcomings in an almost vindictive way before the One whom we almost unconsciously feel ought to come to our help and administer rebuke. Claire honestly prayed for Louis Ansted's mother. Her eyes must be opened; but how? Must it be that they were to be opened by the utter ruin of her only son?

That this might not be necessary, Claire prayed, and rose up presently, almost forgetful that she had received deep wounds, and quite ready to shield that mother's shortcomings from her children.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RECOGNITION.

AND now I desire you to imagine the worshippers gathered one morning in the little church at South Plains. The winter over and gone, the time of the singing of birds and of sweet-scented flowers had come. The marvel of the annual resurrection from the grave of winter was being lived over again in nature. But within the sanctuary it seemed more than resurrection—almost creation. Was it the same church at all? What had become of the dusty floors, and the smoky walls, and the rusty stove-pipe, and the smoking stoves, and the square table, and the swaying, faded, red curtains, and the faded and worn ingrain rag which had covered the platform, and the dust, and the rust, and the dreariness? What a strange effect that paper of a quiet tint, and yet with a suggestion of sunlight in it, had on those hitherto bare and smoky walls! How high the frescoing made the ceiling look! What an excellent imitation of "real" were the carefully-grained seats! How perfectly the carpet harmonized in pattern and colouring with the paper on the walls! Small wonder, this last, if you had known how many patient hours mamma and Dora had spent in reaching the important decision, "Which shall we send?"

As for the pulpit, it was "real," without any paint about it, and so neat, and pretty, and graceful, that the girls had exhausted all adjectives on it. And really the stove-pipe,

though it wandered about according to some wild freak that was considered necessary in order to "draw," did not look so objectionable now that it was real Russia; and nothing could glow more brilliantly than the stoves, which smoked no more. Engineer Bud had been a success.

Still, I know I cannot make you realize the difference in that church. Unless you were there on that dreary winter morning when Claire Benedict first looked upon it with utter sinking of heart, and then were there again on that spring morning, and caught the breath of the flowers, and saw the shimmer of awakened life over everything within and without, you will never understand it—unless, indeed, you look up some other man-forsaken sanctuary, and try the delightful experiment of transformation.

There were those in South Plains who knew and felt the difference.

They gathered softly, the worshippers, the men on tiptoe; though they need not have done that, for the heavy carpet gave back no sound of footfall, but it was one of their ways of expressing admiration and reverence. They gave quick, admiring, amazed glances about them, then riveted their eyes, as the workers had meant they should, on the motto which glowed before them, strung from lamp to lamp in some spirit-like fashion which those unacquainted with the management of silver ware cannot comprehend, and which made the triumphant announcement: "The Lord is in his holy temple." And I tell you, that so much has the outward and tangible to do with our spiritual vision, there were those present who grasped this stupendous fact for the first time.

The organ squeaked no more. It had only been a matter of a drop of oil which quieted that, and yet that congregation had actually sat under its squeak for some years! So many things in this world squeak for the want of a thoughtful hand to administer a drop of oil!

Then the choir—that almost hardest thing in country or

city to manage successfully—had been transformed. There had been no violent wrenches; occasionally it happens that a combination of circumstances brings about unlooked-for and delightful results. The discordant alto had married, bless her, and gone to another town; the flatting tenor had sprained his ankle, poor man, and must needs abide at home. The tremendous bass had that rare quality, common sense, and discovered on the evening of the concert that South Plains had taken a musical prize, and was himself the one to propose that Miss Benedict and her class should be invited to join the choir; and further, that Miss Benedict should be requested to drill the choir, and had put himself under training, and his voice being really grand, he bade fair, under culture, to become the power in song that God designed.

I do not know whether it was accident, or a blessed design, that the much-astonished, much-encouraged, young-old minister, in a new coat which was an Easter gift from the young men of his congregation, read the hymn:—

"I love her gates, I love the road;
The church adorned with grace
Stands like a palace built for God,
To show his milder face."

But I know that he read it as that people had never heard him read a hymn before; with an unction and a quiver of feeling which said almost as plainly as words: "The Lord reigneth; and this is his holy temple, and I am his chosen mouthpiece to this people. I had almost forgotten it, but it is so." Then when that reconstructed choir rolled out the words, led by the centre voice of exquisite melody and power, the worshippers felt the sentiment of the hymn fill their hearts, and admitted that they did love her gates, and that they must rouse up and show their love as they had not done heretofore.

Ah! there was more in that church that day than new

carpet, and new furniture, and paint, and paper, and light, and beauty. These were all well enough, and Claire Benedict's sense of the fitness of things rejoiced in them all; but what were they to the thrill in her heart as she heard the minister read among the names announced for reception into the visible communion of the church that of Hubbard Myers! There were some who did not know to whom the name belonged; and it was not surprising, for Hubbard Myers had been called only Bud for so many years, the wonder was that he remembered his name himself.

There had been great astonishment among some, and not a little shaking of heads, when Bud presented himself as a candidate for church-membership. It had not been supposed that he had intellect enough to understand the meaning of the step. There was close questioning on the part of the minister, not for himself alone, but for the enlightenment of others; but before the examination closed, more than one of the listeners drew out their red handkerchiefs, and blew their noses suspiciously; and at last, one of the most stolid of them remarked:

"It is my opinion, brethren, that the boy has been taught of God; and I think we would do well to accept him without any further delay." And they did.

There were other trophies. Where would be the Church of Christ without its living, working members? One who was pledged to prefer Jerusalem above her chief joy, had not been, and in the very nature of the case *could not* have been, content with toiling simply for the outward adorning of the temple.

A history of the quiet work which had been done in hearts during that one winter would fill a volume. I have but given you a hint of it here and there. The Head of the Church has the complete record. There is perhaps little need that I should try to give you even scattered notes of it. Yet there was one name which made the tears come very

near to falling, as Claire listened for it, fearful that it might not come, and at the same moment hopeful for it. It was only a transferral from a church in the city to membership with the one at South Plains, and it was only Alice Ansted. Her parents were not even present in the church. But Claire knew that a visible union with the Church of Christ meant to Alice Ansted to-day what it never had before. And she knew that the two girls, Fanny and Ella Ansted, who sat and cried in the pew beside Alice, were only left out because parental authority had asserted itself, and said they were not to come. Claire knew that they had united themselves with the great Head, and were members of the Church in the "Jerusalem which is above and is free." They could afford to bide their time.

And there was another still which gave Claire's heart a peculiar thrill of joy. Not that his name was read, or that many, as yet, knew about Satan's defeat by him. It had been recent, and the public recognition of the fact was yet to come. But the Lord Jesus Christ knew, for he had been the victor.

It was only the night before, as they were about to leave the reconstructed church, and Mary Burton, with a long-drawn breath of repressed excitement, had declared that everything was ready for to-morrow, and that the victory was complete, that Harry Matthews had bent toward Claire and murmured:

"Miss Benedict, there has been another victory. You will know that it is far more wonderful than this. He has 'undertaken' for me."

There had only been time to grasp his hand and flash back an answer from sympathetic eyes, but there was a song in her heart this morning over the news. Occasionally she glanced at Harry, and told herself that she would have known, just to look at him, that the highest experience this life has for us had come to him.

The little church was unusually full on this triumphant morning, and yet most of the faces were known to Claire. Strangers were not frequent at South Plains. Yet there was one, a gentleman, who gave that reverent heed to the service which even among strangers distinguishes those who really join in worship from those who merely look on. This man joined, and with his heart. Claire was sure of it. It was this man that Harry Matthews watched, a satisfied smile on his face the while. Harry could imagine just how surprised the stranger was.

On the evening before, when he had reached his room, after giving his wonderful news to Claire, instead of finding it in darkness, his lamp had been turned to its highest capacity, and a gentleman was sitting in front of his little stove, feeding it from time to time, apparently for the sole purpose of brightening the somewhat dismal room.

"Hallo!" had been Harry's greeting.

"Just so," was the quiet response. "You did not know you had company, did you, my boy?"

And then there had been such eager grasping of hands, and such lighting up of faces, as evinced the satisfaction of both parties at meeting. For this was Harry Matthews's favourite uncle, and he must lately have come from the home where Harry's mother waited for him.

Of course there was a high tide of question and answer at once. It was not until an hour afterward that Harry reached the subject of which he had instantly thought on seeing his uncle.

"Uncle Harold, didn't you know the Benedicts?"

"What Benedicts?"

"Why, the Boston ones. Sidney L. He failed, and died, less than a year ago; don't you remember?"

"I remember. I knew him well; I met him abroad."

"And didn't you know his daughter?"

"I knew that he had a daughter, and in fact I think I saw her once; but we were not acquainted."

"Why, I wonder?"

"Why?" with a slightly curious laugh. "There might be many reasons, I am sure. Boston spreads over a good deal of ground. Besides, you know I never spent a great deal of time in Boston, and I am not a society man. Why do you ask?"

"No reason in particular; only the lady is here, and I thought if you were old acquaintances, it would be pleasant to meet her."

"Here, in South Plains! What in the world is she doing here?"

"Teaching music."

"I wonder if this is where she has hidden herself! I occasionally hear queries as to what has become of her, but I believe I never met a person who knew. No, I don't suppose there would be any mutual pleasure in a meeting. I may be said to be a stranger. I have not the least idea how she looks; and I may never have met her, though I think I did somewhere. I remember having a passing interest in seeing how a daughter of Sidney Benedict would look. He was a grand man, but I suspected that his daughter was a butterfly of fashion. She lived in the very centre of that sort of thing, and her father was supposed to have immense wealth. I suppose she is a poor, crushed little morsel, done up in crape and disappointment. I am always sorry for music-scholars who have to take broken-down ladies for teachers. Still, I don't know but I would like to shake hands with her for her father's sake. Have you met her?"

"I should say I had! but I don't believe you ever have. You couldn't draw such a queer picture of her as that, if you had ever seen her. She doesn't wear crape at all. Somebody told me she did not believe in mourning for people who

had gone to heaven—at least, not in putting on black clothes and looking doleful, you know. And as to being crushed, why, Uncle Harold, she is the brightest, sweetest, grandest girl I ever heard of in all my life."

"Possible!" said his uncle, with a good-humoured laugh. "Why, my boy, she must be several years older than you! What does this mean?"

"Oh, nonsense!" was the impatient reply of the excited young man. "It is just as evident as can be, that you don't know what you are talking about. If you had been here this winter, and watched things work, and known the hand that she had in it all—why, look here, you wait until to-morrow; I can show you a few things, I fancy."

Whereupon he immediately closed his lips; and although his uncle pretended to be extremely curious, and to be unable to wait until morning for light, no hints or questions could draw out further information in the same direction.

CHAPTER XXV.

DANGERS SEEN AND UNSEEN.

IT was this man, then, to whom Harry Matthews's eyes often wandered during that morning service. The look of profound amazement which had settled on his uncle's face after the first sweeping glance which he gave the little church, had caused Harry the keenest satisfaction;—the more so that during the morning he had been addressed after this fashion:

"The only regret I had, when I found that I could drop off at South Plains and spend a day or two, was that it was Saturday, and the Sabbath would have to be spent in that forlorn little box where you go to church. I have vivid recollections of the day I spent with you a year ago. Harry, my boy, I don't like to think of your Sabbaths being passed amid such unpleasant surroundings. I shall be glad when your engagement here closes. You don't think of renewing it, I hope? I have plans which I want to talk over with you to-morrow."

But Harry had been too full of the surprise in store to make any reply to these questionings other than to say:

"Come on, uncle Harold; I sing in the choir, and I promised to be there in good time."

None the less was he watching for that first look, and it satisfied him. He wanted to laugh outright, but of course he did no such thing; instead, he seated his amazed relative

in one of the best pews, then took his place in the choir, all of his face save his eyes in decorous repose.

All the bright Sabbath afternoon they sat together, uncle and nephew; the one an eager narrator, the other an attentive listener. Every step of the colossal plan, as it appeared to others, and was matured and carried out by the unfaltering zeal of Claire Benedict, was detailed for the uncle's benefit. And certainly Claire's reputation did not suffer in the young man's hands. He could not help glorifying her. None knew better than he what she had been to him; but of this more sacred story he as yet said nothing. Its time was to come.

"Why, uncle Harold, you remember Bud," he burst forth afresh after a moment's silence, "that queer fellow who worked for the Ansteds; he came down that night you spent here last spring, with papers, you know, for Mr. Ansted, and you talked with him a little, and laughed so over his queer notions. Remember? Well, sir, that fellow is simply made over! It is really a great deal more wonderful than the church! We used to think he was not more than half-witted. I'll tell you what it is, I shouldn't wonder if it turned out that he was double-witted. You didn't recognize his name to-day, of course; it is a wonder that he did himself. Hubbard Myers, that's the boy. Yes, sir, he has joined the church; and a help he will be to it, too. Uncle Harold, you ought to hear him pray. He says queer things even in prayer; at least, they sound queer, but in spite of yourself you cannot help wondering sometimes whether it is not because he has gotten ahead of all the rest, and sees things that they don't understand. I believe he thinks Miss Benedict is an angel sent here from heaven to help him. That's no wonder, though—perhaps she is; anyhow, she has helped him as well, and perhaps better than a real angel could have done; and she is the first person who ever took any notice of him, or remembered that he had a soul."

It is no special wonder that the uncle was deeply interested in this story. It told more than Harry suspected. How came this gay young nephew, who had cost him many sleepless nights, to be sufficiently familiar with a prayer-meeting to know who prayed, or how? He studied the bright face before him most attentively. It was changed, certainly; he had felt the change in the boy all day. What was it? How much did it mean? There had certainly been need for change. It made his heart beat fast to think of Harry's mother, and the possibility of news for her such as would make her feel young again.

"Harry," he said gently, "do you know, I half hope that I have not heard the best yet of this wonderful story; that there has been another 'making over.' How is it, my boy?"

A bright flush mantled Harry's face as he bent his eyes closer over the paper on which he was scribbling his own and his uncle's names with all sorts of flourishes.

Suddenly he raised his head, and looked full into the kind eyes bent wistfully on him, and smiled.

"I don't know why I should hesitate to tell you that, I am sure," he said, speaking in a firm, manly tone. "It is true enough. I have been made over, I believe. Certainly nobody ever needed it more; and nobody ever struggled harder against it, as you very well know. At least, you know part; but I have been lower down than you think, Uncle Harold. Talk about angels! I know that I don't see how any angel can ever do more for me than Miss Benedict has done. I've engaged for life as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I owe more to Miss Benedict, this minute, than I do to any human being, not excepting even you and my mother."

The uncle was out of his chair by this time, one hand on the shoulder of his dear boy, while he held out the other, which was promptly grasped; but he could not speak yet,

and he could not see for the tears. This young fellow was very dear to him, and the waiting had been long.

"God bless you!" he said at last, his lips quivering, and unable to utter another word.

When he could speak again he said:

"My dear boy, have you told your mother?"

"Not yet," said Harry, his eyes shining, "but you may be sure that I am going to. You see, Uncle Harold, the articles of surrender were only signed, sealed, and delivered the night before last, in the middle of the night. Since then I have not had a moment's time that belonged to me; but I'll write her such a letter as she has never had from me."

While the uncle walked the parlour of the boarding-house, and waited for his nephew to make ready for evening service, he had some questions to settle which were personal. He became aware of the fact that he had certainly jumped to conclusions regarding some of the workers in the Master's vineyard which were apparently without foundation. Here was this Miss Benedict. He had heard her name mentioned frequently in the days gone by, and always as one of the dependences of the church to which she belonged; and yet he had always thought of her with curling lip. "Workers!" he had told himself, being mentally very sarcastic—"yes, didn't all the initiated know what that meant when applied to a fashionable young lady who lived in an elegant home and mingled with the fashionable world? It meant that she helped at the fancy fairs, and festivals, and bazaars, and what not,—worked them up, probably, with all their accompanying train of evils. It meant that she was a district visitor, perhaps, and left a tract on 'Redeeming the Time' in a home where they were starving for lack of employment, and needed a loaf of bread." He had seen workers of that sort, and he found it difficult to feel for them anything but contempt. The thing for which he was now to take himself to task was the fact that he had classed Claire Benedict

among these, knowing nothing of her, meantime, save that she was a member of a fashionable up-town church; and that, too, after knowing her father, and singling him out as a man among thousands. The simple truth was, that he had imagined a character of which he disapproved, and named it Claire Benedict, and then let himself disapprove of her heartily.

"The sole thing that I know about the young woman is that she was once wealthy, and on this account I have judged her as I have; and I find that it is what I am apt to do." This is what he told himself as he walked the length of that little parlour, and waited. He was much ashamed of himself. "It is an excellent standpoint from which to judge character," he said, severely. "If there is any justice in it, I must be a worthless person myself. I wonder how many people are setting me down as one who merely plays at Christian work, because my father left me one fortune and my old aunt another."

I am glad that this man had this severe talk with himself. He needed it. The truth is, he was very apt to judge of people in masses, as though they were certain specimens, and belonged to certain types.

The conclusion of his self-examination at this time was, that he declared that if one-third of what Harry thought about this young person was true, it had taught him a lesson. He went to church that evening apparently for the purpose of studying the lesson more thoroughly; at least, he gave some attention to the organist. He had recognized her in the morning, because she had eyes like her father; and this evening he decided that her head was shaped like his, and that she had the firm mouth and yet sweet set of lips that had characterized the father; and he told himself that he might have known that the daughter of such a man would be an unusual woman.

After service was concluded, he walked deliberately for-

ward and claimed acquaintance with Sidney Benedict's daughter. The glow that he brought to her face, and the tender light which shone in her eyes, when he mentioned that dear father's name, gave him a glimpse of what the daughter's memories were.

Harry came up to them eagerly, having been detained by the pastor for a moment.

"You have introduced yourself, Uncle Harold, I see.—Miss Benedict, I wanted my Uncle Harold to know you, for very special reasons."

Uncle Harold was unaccountably embarrassed. What a strange thing for that boy to say! and what did he intend to say next? But Claire relieved the embarrassment, and plunged him into a maze of questioning, by the sudden eager interest which flashed in her face with the mention of his name.

"Are you Harold Chessney?" she asked, as though a new thought came to her with the union of the two names; "and are you going to the Rocky Mountains?"

"I am Harold Chessney," he said, smiling; "and I have in mind a trip to the Rocky Mountains, if I can make my plans in that direction what I wish.—But why this should be of interest to you passes my comprehension." Of course this last he thought.

She did not leave him long in doubt.

"Is Louis Ansted going with you?"

"He is, if I can prevail upon him to do so. That is part of my errand here at this time, and has to do with the plans I mentioned." And now his face plainly asked the question: "Why do *you* care?"

She seemed to answer the look.

"He needs to go, Mr. Chessney. He needs help—such help as perhaps you can give him. I don't know. Something must be done for him, and that soon. Mr. Chessney, I *hope* you will succeed."

There was no time for more. Alice Ansted came up, and claimed the stranger as an acquaintance, and stood talking with him for a minute, and expressed extreme anxiety that he should find her brother in the city the next day.

"He is somewhere in town, but we never know where. Still, I could give you a dozen addresses, at any one of which you might find him. I hope you will not return without seeing him."

"I shall not," Mr. Chessney said decidedly. "Is he inclined to accompany me, do you think? Has he mentioned to you my designs?"

"Yes, and would go if it were not for— Mr. Chessney, if you could make mamma understand. No one seems able to. Claire Benedict has tried and failed; and what she fails in perhaps cannot be done. I don't know; but something must be done, and that speedily."

Almost Claire Benedict's words repeated. The new-comer walked home in almost silence. As they neared Harry's door, he said:

"What is young Ansted about just now?"

"Drinking hard, sir; he is running downhill very fast. If you don't get him away with you, I am afraid he will go to the dogs in a hurry."

"Is he still on terms of special intimacy with the Van-Marters?"

"Well, as to that, I do not know. Things look mixed. He rails against Willis VanMarter once in a while, when he has been taking enough to make him imprudent; and Miss Alice seems to have broken with them altogether, at least, Willis does not come out any more, I think, and Miss Alice is not in town often; but Mrs. Ansted seems to be as intimate with them as ever, and Louis goes there with his mother. I don't know anything about it, but it looks like a house divided against itself. If I had such a mother as Louis Ansted has, I don't believe I would try to be anybody."

"Mothers don't seem to count for much sometimes, my boy."

"You mean with their sons, and I daresay you mean me, Uncle Harold; but it is not true. My mother always counted for ten times more than you think. It was she who held me back. If Louis Ansted had a tenth part of the craving for liquor that I have, with his mother to push him, he would have been gone long ago, beyond reach. I don't know but he is now. He has been going down very fast in the last few weeks."

"What is the accelerating cause?"

"That I don't positively know. Partly, it is the natural result of a bad habit indulged, I suppose; but there are other influences at which I can guess. Still it is pure guess-work. I am not in any one's confidence, except when Louis has been drinking too much, he says to me things that he would not want me to know if he were sober, and those, of course, I don't repeat. I think that his mother is bent on this union of the two houses, VanMarter's and theirs, and I think neither Louis nor Miss Alice is of her mind in the matter; and I think, moreover, that Louis would rather have an hour of Miss Benedict's society than a lifetime of Miss Eva VanMarter's, and I don't think he can get what he wants. Now, isn't that an interesting little romance for a young fellow like me to think out, especially when I don't know a thing about it? The only fact is that Louis Ansted is in great danger, and nobody seems to have much influence over him—at least, nobody who uses it in the right direction."

"His sister seems to be roused. I was surprised to hear her speak as she did."

"His sister is not the woman she was when you saw her last. She has been under Miss Benedict's influence all winter."

"Evidently you incline to the belief that Miss Benedict is a remarkable woman," his uncle said, with a slight laugh.

"Why has she not been exerting her influence to help poor Louis?"

"She has tried as hard as a woman can. But, Uncle Harold, she is not the sort of woman to promise to marry a man merely to save him from becoming a drunkard."

"I should hope not," Mr. Chessney answered promptly.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ESCAPED VICTIM.

IN the quiet of Harry's own room, his uncle having spent fifteen minutes in silent and apparently puzzled thought, suddenly asked a question:

"When did Louis go into town?"

"Several days ago. He has a way of disappearing suddenly, not giving the family an idea of where he is going or when he expects to return; and when he does get back he shows to any one who is not blind that he has been pretty low down."

"They expect him back to-morrow?"

"Why, as to that, they have been expecting him ever since he went away. I heard Miss Alice say that he went unexpectedly, leaving word that he should probably be back to dinner."

"Harry, my boy, I am almost inclined to think that I ought to start out to-night and try to look him up."

"To-night! Why, Uncle Harold, how could you? It would be midnight and after before you could reach the city; and then where would you go? The addresses that Miss Alice can give you must be respectable places, with closed doors to-night."

"That is true," Mr. Chessney answered, after a thoughtful pause; "it would be a wild kind of proceeding, apparently, with very little excuse; and yet I am some way impressed that it is the thing to do."

Alas for the Christian world which believes in theory

that there is a direct link between the seen and the unseen, by which the earnest soul can be told in what way to walk, and in practice thinks it must search out its own way! Mr. Chessney did not go out in search of his friend. He did not even ask his Master whether it was his will that the apparently "wild proceeding" should be attempted. He prayed, it is true, and he prayed for Louis Ansted, but only in a general way; and he retired to rest, saying within himself that directly after breakfast he would go into town and see what he could do.

Before he was awake the next morning, the piazza of the little country hotel where he stopped was filled with loungers who had something unusual and exciting to talk about. There were a dozen different stories, it is true; but out of them all the interested listener could glean certain things which were painfully likely to be facts. There had been a runaway—to that all parties agreed; and Louis Ansted had been in the carriage, and had been thrown; but whether he was killed or only seriously hurt, or whether the horse had taken fright at the approaching train, or whether the driver had attempted to cross the railroad-track in the face of the train or whether there had been any train at all, authorities differed. It was still early when Harry Matthews knocked at his uncle's door with the confused particles of story.

"And you don't know whether he is living or not?" asked the startled uncle who was now making his toilet with all possible speed.

"No, I can't find out. Some of them say he was killed instantly, and others have it that he was only stunned, and has revived. It may be nothing but a scare. South Plains has so little excitement that it is apt to make as much as it can out of everything. Uncle Harold, I can't go up there and find out, for my train will be due in five minutes, and I must be at the telegraph office, you know."

"Yes; I will be down in less than five minutes, and will go immediately up there. I hope it is chiefly talk." Yet when he was left alone, he said aloud and mournfully: "If I had only followed my impressions last night!"

He had occasion to say it, or at least to think it often, in the days which followed. South Plains had not exaggerated this time. Louis Ansted was not dead—at least, the heart was beating—but he lay a bruised, unconscious heap among the snowy draperies of his bed, his soiled and matted clothing, which as yet they had not dared remove, telling to the practised eye a story of more than a mere runaway. The skilful doctor, who had already been summoned from the city, was silent as well as skilful. He issued his orders in as few words as possible, and kept his own counsel, until, left alone with Mr. Chessney for a moment, in answer to the question, "What does this stupor mean?" he shook his head.

"Hard to tell. It was on him before the accident, if that gives you any light."

It gave him bitter light, and made him groan in spirit over the fact that he had been tempted to go out in the night and hunt for his friend, and had not gone.

Later in the day, bits of the facts came to him. Louis Ansted had been alone; had hired a horse at the livery, and started for home. "More under the influence of liquor than usual, perhaps," the reluctant hostler at the livery had admitted, "still I thought he would get through all right." For the rest, the silent lips on the bed told no tales. He had been found, not very far from the railroad crossing, lying under a tree, and the horse had made his way back to the stables. Whether a train had frightened the animal, or whether being left to himself while the driver sank into a drunken sleep had caused his alarm, or how the accident had occurred, was left to conjecture.

His mother continually repeated the story—and succeeded

in making herself believe it—that a vicious horse had been given him, that evidently became unmanageable at the sound of the locomotive; but some of the listeners went out and said that there was no train passing between the hours that the horse left the stables and returned there; and the doctor shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

Then followed one of those periods of waiting and watching which some people know all about, the miseries of which can only be understood by having to live them. The trip to the Rocky Mountains was indefinitely postponed, and Harold Chessney, having made a journey to the city, and rearranged his business, returned to take his place among the watchers.

He was fully roused now; so were all the friends of the sufferer; his *body* was in danger. It was not at all difficult to make his mother understand this, and no means were left untried by which the frail shell might possibly be rescued from impending ruin.

In this way passed weeks, while the soul of the injured man hovered on the edge of another world. Gradually the excitement in the village calmed down, and everywhere outside of that house on the hill every-day life went on again. Mr. Chessney came and went, keeping a hand on his business interests where he must, but keeping the most of his thoughts and the most of his time waiting, in the hope that consciousness would return once more to the wreck on the bed. There was one other who watched and waited, too, though she could not now go to the house to inquire. She could pray; and this she did. Sometimes it seemed to her that every thought was a prayer for that perilled soul. And often and often she too had to think,—

"What if I had been more anxious, and earnest, and constant, while the body was comparatively in health; might not things possibly have been different?"

It was in the middle of the night, and Mr. Chessney sat

alone with the sick man. There was nothing to do but wait, and he had prevailed upon other weary watchers to rest, and let him take his turn. So there was only himself to be startled by a low voice from one who had been for so many weeks speechless: "Harold, is it you?"

Great was the rejoicing in the troubled home the next morning. Louis was awake and conscious, knew them all, smiled feebly on his mother, and watched hungrily every movement of Mr. Chessney.

The worst was over; he would gain rapidly now. So the mother said, with eager voice and joyful eyes. Alice looked up questioningly when Mr. Chessney remained silent and grave, and as soon as opportunity came, asked her anxious question:

"Mr. Chessney, I can see that you do not share mamma's joy. Do you think the indications unfavourable?"

"I don't know, Miss Ansted. I am not a physician, only a nurse, and I hope I may be mistaken; but it is true that I am anxious."

And the doctor, when he came, expressed no surprise and no pleasure over the change.

"But then he is so utterly unimpressible!" said the mother; "one might almost as well have a marble statue for a physician."

Yet the statue worked faithfully and tirelessly, and, it must be confessed, hopelessly. To Mr. Chessney he would talk occasionally; and there came a day when that gentleman followed him out to the lawn.

"Doctor, what do you think?"

"That it is a charming morning."

"Doctor, is our patient gaining?"

"No."

"Is there hope that he will in time?"

"No."

"Do you mean that you have no hope of his recovery?"

"None at all; have not had from the first. Brains like his never recover from such treatment as they have received."

"But, doctor, this is very sudden. Do you mean that he will lie there helpless for the rest of his life?"

"I don't think he will lie there three weeks longer, but he may; we are not infallible. I shall have to hasten this morning. Young Marshall came home in a drunken rage last night, and kicked his wife, and she is going to die, I think. I don't know what we doctors would do if this were not a free country, and liquor-sellers had not a right to kill by inches all the people they choose. This victim over whom you are watching is only one of many. That ought to comfort the friends, ought it not? Good-morning."

"I haven't told them," said Mr. Chessney, two hours later, speaking to Claire. He had come out to get a breath of the sweet morning air, and to give Claire the news. During the weeks past he had been very thoughtful of her anxiety, and very careful that she should receive daily bulletins. "I have not told them, but I must. Miss Benedict, this is the hardest task a man ever has to do. How can I tell that mother that she has robbed herself of her son? She has steadily thwarted for two years every scheme that I devised to help him; and she did not know what she was about either, poor mother!"

"Did you ever try to tell her?"

"Yes, and failed, as you did. Alice told me of your effort. But I ought to have tried again. I knew she was deceived. She thought me a fanatic, and I could have told her of scenes that would have made one of her. I shrank from it."

It was more than two weeks before she saw him again. During this time she twice received little twisted slips of paper, brought to her by the faithful Bud, and on them would be written a request that she would pray for a soul in peril. One long letter, blistered with tears, Alice wrote to

her, the burden of it being the same; and this was all she knew of what was passing in the house on the hill. She had not entered it since that day when its mistress turned from her. Not that she would not quickly have done so had occasion arisen, but there seemed no need to force herself on the poor mother.

"I shall never see him again," she told herself sorrowfully; "and I have seen him so many times when I might have tried to help him, and did not!"

Then there came one brief, never-to-be-forgotten note, written hurriedly by Mr. Chessney:

"I believe that Louis rests in the Everlasting Arms."

One Saturday morning she was summoned to the parlour to see Mr. Chessney. He came forward quickly, with an anxious air, as of one having a request to make which he feared might not be granted.

"I have come for you," he said. "Louis wants to see you. I have been charged to bring you back with me, if possible. I wish I could save you from this ordeal. Do you shrink from it very much?"

"No," she said with quiet gravity. "Only as one shrinks from seeing errors that one is powerless to help. Why am I wanted, Mr. Chessney? What can I do?"

"I do not know. Louis wants you. He wishes to see you and his mother and his sister Alice together; and I shall have to add that he wants me to be present. I tried to spare you all this last, but he grew excited over it."

"I would quite as soon have you present," Claire said with gentle wonder. She did not understand why it was supposed to be a time of special trial to her individually. If she could have heard Mrs. Ansted's voice in confidential talk with Mr. Chessney, she would have been enlightened:

"The girl is well enough, Mr. Chessney, and she has been of help to some of the lower classes here during the winter. I have nothing against her; on the contrary, I would like to

shield her. The simple fact is, that she has become too deeply interested in my son. It is not strange, I am sure, but it is sad; and that is why I do not wish Alice to have her here at this time. As a mother, it is my duty to shield the girl, though I must say she showed very little consideration for a mother's feelings when she talked with me." All this, and much more, Mr. Chessney weighed, putting his nephew's views beside them, and came to the conclusion that there was an attachment between the two young people which had not been smiled upon by their elders.

Although Claire knew nothing of this, her appearance in the sick-room was attended with sufficient embarrassment. Mrs. Ansted received her with a sort of grave tolerance, as one who was humouring the whim of a sick man, and doing violence to her own sense of propriety thereby. But the change in Louis Ansted was so great, that, after the first moment, it held Claire's thoughts, to the exclusion of all trivial things.

He held toward her a thin and trembling hand, as he said:

"It was good in you to come. I have changed a great deal since that night you refused to ride with me; haven't I? Yes, I have changed since then. Has Harold told you that I have found help at last?"

"He has told me wonderful and blessed news of you," Claire said, taking the chair that Mr. Chessney brought to the bedside. "I do not need to tell you how glad I was to hear it."

"No, you don't; that is true. You have given ample proof that nothing which could happen to a friend of yours could rejoice you more. I wish I had met you earlier; it would have made a difference, a great difference in my life. I did not know that religion meant much of anything. Harold, here, was of your mind, but he seemed exceptional—a kind of fanatic; I could not keep within sight of him. The other

people whom I knew intimately, seemed to have very little to do with their religion.—I beg your pardon, mother, but that was the way it seemed to me. There are different degrees, I suppose."

"Louis, you are talking too much," here interposed Mr. Chessney, as he brought the medicine to administer; "your pulse is rising."

"Never mind; it won't hurt me. It is almost over now; you know that Chessney, as well as I do. And I have something to say that for the good of all parties concerned must be said now.—Mother, I want you to know one thing: from words which you let fall yesterday, I have discovered that you have a mistaken idea about one matter. I am going to die, and I am glad of it. I have gone so far down hill, that to climb back again, for one so awfully bruised as I am, would be hard, very hard; perhaps the Lord sees that it would be impossible, and so gives me this easy way. But, mother, before I go, I want to tell you something which will remove from your mind a false impression. I saw my danger some time ago, and struggled for a way of escape. It was a weak way that I chose; God would not let me build on it. I fancied that if I could have Claire Benedict for my wife, I could be a good and true man. I implored her to help me in this way, and she utterly and hopelessly refused.

"You know why I am telling you this, but she does not, and I ask her to forgive me."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SUMMER'S STORY.

AFTER this Louis Ansted steadily failed. It had seemed as though he summoned all the strength left in his worn-out body for that one interview wherein he had resolved that his mother should know the truth from his lips.

After that the lamp of life burned lower and lower. He rallied again, two days afterward, and was locked in with his lawyer, and gave critical attention to business.

"I imagine that he made important changes in his will," Mr. Chessney said to Claire. "I do not know of what character, though I was called in as a witness. I hope he made special provision for his sister Alice. I think that she is likely to disappoint her parents in their schemes, and it might be greatly to her comfort to be independent, so far as property is concerned. But Louis kept his own counsel. His lawyer told me that he might be failing in body, but he had never seen him clearer in brain. So there will be no trouble about carrying out whatever he has planned."

"I did not know," Claire said, "that he had property to leave, independent of his parents."

"Oh, yes; a large estate, willed to him from his grandfather, absolutely in his own right. It is what has helped to ruin him."

"How good it would be if he could make his money undo, as far as money could, some of the mischief he has done."

"How could money undo it, my friend?"

"Oh, it couldn't. Still, it might relieve the misery which comes from want. I was thinking just then of poor little Mrs. Simpson and her fatherless baby. I have heard that her husband drank his first glass while in Louis Ansted's employ; and that Louis offered it to him, and he did not like to refuse for fear of giving offence. He died with the delirium tremens, and his wife sold her bedclothes and her shoes to buy food for him at the last. Perhaps she would rather starve than take money from poor Louis. Haven't I heard that he was connected with one of the distilleries?"

"Some of his property is invested in that way," Mr. Chessney answered, startled with the remembrance. "I had not thought of it. Poor Alice! I am afraid there is great trouble for her in whatever direction one looks. If Louis leaves his property to her, her father and mother will violently oppose what her intense temperance principles would advocate. I wish Louis had felt like talking these things over with me a little."

Well, the day came when they followed the ruined body to the grave. It rested in a costly coffin, and the funeral appointments were such as became large wealth and the habit of lavish expenditure.

Later, when the will was read, it appeared that the poor heart had taken counsel of One who makes no mistakes. He had done what he could to undo wrong. The income from valuable investments was large, and was left in trust to his sister Alice, to be used at her discretion in relieving the woes of those who had been brought low through the influence of intoxicants. As for the distillery, from which half of his income was derived, its business was immediately to cease, its stock was to be destroyed, and its buildings to be made into tenement-houses for the poor.

"The poor boy was not in his right mind when he made such a will," the father said. "Why, it is a sinful waste; it is simply throwing thousands of pounds into the river."

"It is all the influence of that Benedict girl," the mother said in bitterness of spirit.

But the will stood, and its directions were obeyed with all the promptness that the sister to whose trust the work was left could force her lawyers. She seemed in feverish haste to have the work of destruction go on. And when her mother accused her of being hopelessly under the influence of "that Benedict girl," and having no mind of her own, her answer was:

"Mamma, you are mistaken. At last I am under the influence of One who has a right to own me, body and soul. Poor Louis found him at last, and yielded to his power, and followed his direction, and it was through Claire Benedict's influence that he did; and, mamma, if he had known Claire Benedict a few years earlier, we should have had him with us to-day. Mamma, the time has come for me to speak plainly. Religion has been nothing but a name to me until lately. I have not believed in its power. It is Claire Benedict who has shown me my mistake, and helped me to see Christ as a sufficient Saviour. I belong to him now, for time and eternity; and, mamma, I will never marry a man who does not with his whole heart own Christ as his master, and who is not as intense and fanatical on the temperance question as my brother became."

She had always been strong-willed. The mother had been wont to say, somewhat boastfully, that her eldest daughter resembled her in strength of purpose.

Human nature is a curious study. What Mrs. Ansted would do, had been a matter of extreme solicitude to several people. Mr. Chessney believed that she would make Alice's life miserable; that she would become Claire Benedict's enemy, and injure her if she could; and that she would withdraw her younger daughters from not only Claire's, but their eldest sister's influence, and from the church to which they had become attached.

"I do not mean that she will do this in revenge," he said to Claire, "or that she will really intend to injure anybody. She is one of those persons who can make herself believe that she is doing God's service by just such management as this. I am sorry for Alice and for the young girls. It gives me a sense of relief and joy to remember that Louis is for ever safe from pitfalls, and yet sometimes I cannot help wishing that he could have lived for a few months longer. He had great influence over his mother. She tried to manage him, and his indolent will allowed himself to be influenced in a wonderful manner; but when he did really rouse he had great power over his mother."

Mrs. Ansted did none of the things which were feared. Instead, she turned suddenly, and with apparent loathing, from the life which she had heretofore lived. She sent for Claire one morning, greeted her with a burst of tears as her dear child, and declared that had she understood the feeling between Louis and herself, nothing would have given her greater joy than to have welcomed her into the family!

Claire opened her mouth to protest, and then closed it again. If this were the form of cross that she was to bear, it was peculiar, certainly; but why not bear it as well as any other? Of what use to explain again, what the son's own lips had told—that she had utterly refused the honour offered her—that she had never for a moment desired to be received into this family? If the bereaved mother had really succeeded in making herself believe such folly as this, why not let it pass—the grave had closed over the possibility of its ever being realized?

It was a strange part to play—to accept without outward protest the position of one who would have been a daughter of the house; to hear herself mentioned as Louis Ansted's intended wife; to ride, and walk, and talk with the mother, and help her make believe that she would not for the world

have thwarted her son's desires; but Claire, after a few attempts at explanation, dropped the effort. The mother did not wish to believe the truth about this, or many other things, and therefore closed her eyes to it.

She wished also to impress herself and others with the belief that Louis had been in every respect an exemplary, and, indeed, a remarkable young man! She withdrew her connection with the church in town, and united by letter with the one at South Plains, avowedly because "dear Louis was interested in it more than in any other church in the world." She imagined plans that he might have had for the church, and called them his, and eagerly worked them out. She adopted the minister, and his wife, and his children, because she had often heard Louis say that he would rather hear that man preach than go to hear Dr. Archer; and once he told her that the minister's little girl had a very sweet face, and was a cunning little witch whom he liked to tease. She turned with something like disgust from the very name of VanMarter, protesting that "poor Louis had had a great deal to bear from their advances," and that she had no desire to cultivate their acquaintance further.

On all these strange changes in her mother Alice looked with bewilderment.

"She frightens me," she said to Claire one evening; "I don't know what to think. She contradicts every theory of life I ever heard her express. She attributes to Louis graces that he did not possess. She accuses people of injuring him who really tried to help him; and she adopts as plans of his things of which I know he had not even thought. I do not know my mother at all; and as I said, it frightens me. Is she losing her mind?"

Claire had no ready reply to these questionings, for she, too, was puzzled. But Mr. Chessney, as they walked slowly down from the house on the hill, discussing once more the strange change in the woman of the world, advanced a theory

which Claire adopted, but which was hardly the one to explain to Alice.

"I think," said Mr. Chessney, "that she is hushing her conscience. It would like to speak loudly to her, and tell her that she is responsible for a ruined life, and she does not mean to listen to it. She is imagining a life she believes Louis might have lived, after the change that came to him on his sick-bed, and is making herself believe that he did live it, and that she was, and is, in hearty accord with it. It is a strange freak of the bewildering human mind; but unless I am mistaken, the woman will not find the peace in it that she is seeking. I think she will have to cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' before her heart will find rest."

And then he added one sentence which set Claire's heart into a strange flutter:

"Claire, when I see the energy with which she carries out one of her imaginings connected with you, I am very grateful that Louis insisted on my being present at that first interview between you and him, and that I heard the truth from his own lips; for the mother is succeeding in deceiving every one else."

"And I do not know how to help it," Claire said with troubled voice. "It seems a strange thing to be living a falsehood; but when I try to explain to her, she puts me gently aside, and acts as though I had not spoken; and others have no right to question me about the truth of her theories."

"Except myself. Have I the right? Was it as emphatic a refusal as poor Louis understood it? Believe me, I am not asking merely to gratify idle curiosity."

"There never was anything in it, Mr. Chessney; and there never could have been."

The passage of all these and many other events not chronicled here consumed the greater portion of the summer vacation. For Claire Benedict was letting the summer slip

from her without going home. Sore had been the trial at first; but a few weeks before the term closed, opportunity had been offered her to teach a summer class of city pupils, at prices that were almost equal to her year's salary. What right had she, who wanted to bestow so many luxuries on her mother, to close her eyes to such an opportunity as this, merely because she was homesick for a sight of that mother's face? It had been hard to reconcile the sister, especially, to this new state of things. The gentle mother had long ago learned the lesson that what looked like manifest duty must not be tampered with, no matter how hard to bear; but the hot-headed young sister refused to see anything in it except an added trial too great to be borne. Many letters had to be written before there was a final reluctant admission that fifty pounds more to depend on, paltry sum though it was, would make a great difference with the mother's winter comforts. The letter in which poor Dora admitted this was blistered with tears; but the sacrifice was made, and the extra term had been well entered upon.

There was much outside of the class and the life being lived on the hill to occupy Claire's thoughts. I hope you do not suppose that the work on the part of "the girls" had been accomplished during a sort of "spasm," and that now they were ready to drop back into inaction. Nothing was farther from their thoughts. If you have imagined so, you have not understood how thoroughly some of them had sacrificed in order to help. We never forget that for which we sacrifice.

Besides, the habit of thinking first of the church, and the various causes which are the tributaries of the church, was formed. That the work was to go on, was demonstrated in many ways; not the least by the random remarks which came so naturally from the lips of the workers.

"Girls," had Ruth Jennings said, when they lingered one evening after prayer-meeting, "when we cushion these seats,

we shall have to send somebody after the material who can carry the carpet and wall-paper in his mind's eye. It will never do to have a false note put in here to jar this harmony."

"When we cushion these seats!" Claire heard it, and laughed softly. Who had said that the seats were ever to be cushioned? But she knew they would be, and that before very long.

On another evening, Mary Burton had said:

"Look here! don't you think our very next thing, or, at least, one of the next, ought to be a furnace? I don't like those stove-pipes. A furnace would heat more evenly, and with less dust, and Bud could manage a furnace as well as he can those stoves."

How naturally they talked about their future sacrifices! What would have utterly appalled them a few months before were spoken of carelessly now as "next things."

Ruth Jennings readily assented to the necessity for a furnace, but added:

"I don't believe we shall have Bud for engineer. He wants to go to school; did you know it? And what is more, Mrs. Ansted intends to send him. Fanny told me about it last night. She says her mother thinks Louis intended that Bud should have an education, and she wants to carry out all his plans. I did not know that Louis Ansted ever had any such plans, did you?"

Then Nettie Burdick, after a thoughtful pause:

"Oh, well, girls, if we can't have Bud for engineer, perhaps we can have him to preach for us some day. He told me last night that if he lived he meant to preach; and I believe he will, and preach well, too. Just think of it: Bud a minister!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FAMILY SECRET.

YOU are not to suppose that during this press of work the moving spirit in it did not have her homesick hours, when it seemed to her that she must fly to her mother, and that at once; that she did not have her anxious hours, when to provide as she would like for that dear mother and that beautiful young sister seemed a dreary impossibility; that she did not have her discouraged hours, when new carpet and frescoing and stained-glass windows seemed only "vanity of vanities," and the sharp-toned cabinet organ seemed to wheeze loud enough to drive all other improvements out of mind. But there was always this comfort—she was much too busy to brood long or often over thoughts like these; and another thing—weary and disheartened as some rainy evening might find her, there was for ever an undertone of thanksgiving, not only about Bud and Harry Matthews, but about others as well, not excepting several of the girls, who, though Christians before she knew them, had stepped upon higher platforms of thought and action—been vitalized, indeed, in their Christian life, and would never go back to the follies of the past. Then came the trouble in the Ansted home, and the weeks of waiting and watching, and the final defeat which was still a triumph. During the solemnities of those hours, things which had seemed like trials sank into trivialities, and life grew to her more earnest and solemn than ever before.

In all these ways the summer waned. And now changes of various kinds were pending. Harry Matthews was about closing his engagement with the telegraph company, to enter upon a secretaryship under his uncle—a position involving grave responsibilities and conscientious stewardship. What joy it was to remember that the new young man was equal to the trust. Bud was to be regularly entered as a pupil at the Academy, and his face was radiant. The Ansteds were to stay at South Plains all winter, and the girls were happy over the prospect of uniting with the little church at its coming communion. Mrs. Ansted had subscribed twenty pounds to increase the minister's salary, and told the people that they ought to feel disgraced for not each giving double the original amount; that her son Louis, she felt sure, would have taken the matter up had he lived, and she could not rest until she saw it accomplished.

Meantime, there was more or less gossip in the town, of course, about affairs with which the people, if they had really stopped to think, had nothing to do. Among other things, there was wonderment as to why Harold Chessney came to South Plains so often. What business was there in this direction which could require so much of his attention? To be sure, he was one of the directors of the railroad, but this branch of it had not heretofore been considered so important as to need constant looking after by its chief. Also there were some who thought it very strange that Miss Benedict should receive so many attentions from him, when she was as good as Louis Ansted's widow! Of course that was so, for Mrs. Ansted herself had as good as said so dozens of times; and see how intimate she was with the entire family. Yes, they knew that Harold Chessney was a very particular friend of Louis Ansted; but they should think that would hardly account for such a degree of intimacy, when Louis had only been buried a few weeks.

Meantime, the central figures of this anxious talk went

their busy ways, and seemed in no sense troubled by the tongues. Harold Chessney came often, and always visited the Ansteds and the Academy, and the intimacy between all parties seemed to increase instead of diminish.

It was about this time that Claire received an unusually lengthy letter from Dora—a letter over which she laughed much, and also shed some tears.

Dora had some family perplexities to ask advice about, and indulged rather more than was her wont over forebodings in regard to the coming winter. Then suddenly she launched into the main channel of her letter after this fashion:

"O Claire, my dear, you are good! If I could be half like you, or even one-third, it would be such a relief to mamma as well as to myself. But, Claire (this next that I am going to say is mean and small, and will serve to show you that I have a correct estimate of myself), I cannot help thinking it would be much easier for me to be good if I were away off in South Plains, or North Mountains, or anywhere else than here, right around the corner from the old home. Do you have any conception of what a difference it makes to be around the corner from things, instead of being on the same street with them? I think it possible that I might throw myself intensely into plans for that North Mountain church, you know, if I were there, and forget this one, and these people, and the old ways.

"Claire, part of the time I am pretty good—I am, indeed; but really and truly it is hard. The girls try to be good, too, some of them. Occasionally I think if they did not *try* so hard, I could get along better. You see, they stop talking about things when I appear, for fear I will be hurt; and I am hurt, but it is because they think I will be foolish enough to care for what they have been saying. Do you understand that? It reads as though there were no sense in it; but I know what I mean. It is clothes half of the time. Clothes are dreadful! I find I had no conception of their

cost. Not that I am having any new ones. Don't be frightened, dear. I am not so lost to a sense of what has befallen us, as such a proceeding would indicate. Why, even a pair of gloves is often beyond my means! Neither am I complaining. It is not the gloves; I am quite willing to go without them. If mamma could have the things which we used to consider necessities for her, I would be willing to go bare-handed for the rest of my days.

"Well, what am I talking about? Let me see if I can put it into words. The girls, you know, are always arranging for this and that entertainment. I meet them oftener, now that you have insisted on my going back to the music class. To some of these entertainments I am invited, and to more of them I am not. I never go, on account of clothes and some other things.

"Imagine a party of girls gathered in the music-room or the hall, in full tide of talk about what they will wear, and how they will arrange their hair, and their ribbons, and all that sort of thing; and imagine a sudden silence settling over them because I have appeared in sight—as though I were a grim fairy before whom it was their misfortune to have to be for ever silent about everything that was pretty or cost money!

"Now I am going to make a confession, and I know it is just as silly as it can be, but sometimes I cannot help rushing home, and running up to my room, and locking my door, and crying as though my heart would break.

"I am thoughtful, though, about choosing times and occasions for these outbreaks. I generally select an afternoon when mamma is out executing some of your numerous commissions; but even then I have to bathe my eyes for half an hour, so that the poor, dear, sweet, patient woman will know nothing about it. I never do let her know, Claire. She thinks that I am good and happy; and occasionally she tells me that I am growing self-controlled like you, and then I

feel like a hypocrite; but all the same, for her own good I don't enlighten her.

"Claire, dear, don't you suppose it is the silly parties to which I do not go which trouble me. I have not the slightest desire to go, and I don't think of them often—I don't, really. Well, that about having no desire needs qualifying. I mean I would not have, if I could go; I mean I should like to be perfectly able to go if I chose, and then to choose to remain at home. Do you understand?

"If the girls would only be free and social, and talk with me as though nothing had happened, I should learn not to care. But it is so hard to always feel that people are saying,—'Hush! there she comes, poor thing; don't talk about it now, or we shall hurt her feelings!' I would rather have them drop me entirely, I believe, as Estelle Mitchell has done. She doesn't bow to me any more, even when we meet face to face—doesn't see me, you know; but she does even *that* politely. I don't know how she manages. Claire, do you remember the time papa signed that thousand pound bill for her father? Well, never mind. I am writing a silly and a wicked letter. I haven't written so to you before, have I? I'll tell you what has stirred me so, lately—everybody is in a flutter about the house. Claire, it is sold! You know what house I mean—the dear old one on the avenue, every separate stone of which speaks of papa. That Mr. Chessney bought it, who spends half of his time abroad. There is a rumour that he is to be married some time—nobody seems to know just when—and bring his bride there to live. It is well for me that I shall not have a chance to move in her circle, for I feel almost certain that I should have to hate her a little.

"It is very absurd, of course, but the girls are actually beginning already to talk about the possible reception, though they don't even know who the prospective bride is. Some have located her in Chicago, and some in Europe. I cannot

discover that there is an absolute certainty about there being any bride, and yet some of the young ladies are planning what would be pretty and unique to wear.

"Estelle Mitchell is sure of being invited, because her brother Dick used to be quite intimately acquainted with one of the Chessney family; and Dora Benedict is sure of not being invited, because she is not intimately acquainted with anybody any more. I wonder who will have our rooms —our dear old rooms? Yes, that largest blot is a tear. I couldn't help it; and I haven't time to copy, and could not afford to waste the paper, if I had. I don't cry very often, but I was foolish enough to walk by the dear old home this morning, and look up at the open window in papa's study!

"O Claire, darling, I wish you could come home, if it were only for a little while, and we could go away from here. Don't you think mamma might be made comfortable in South Plains for the winter?

"Oh, that is foolish, I know; and you are a dear, brave, self-sacrificing sister, to give up your vacation and work away all summer to help to support us. To-morrow I shall not care anything about this, only to be dreadfully ashamed that I sent you this wicked letter.

"I am going down now to make tea, and a bit of cream toast for mother, and I shall be as bright as a golden eagle, and hover around her like a moth-miller in the gas-light, and tell her all sorts of pleasant nothings, and never a word of the house, or the sale, or the possible new mistress for the old home. I am learning, dear, though from this letter you might not think it. But I live such a pent-up, every-day life, that I have to say things to you once in a while, else what would become of me?"

Claire laughed a great deal over this letter, pitiful as the undertone in it must have been to a sympathetic heart. The tears came once or twice; but after all, the predominant

feeling seemed to be amusement. It was not answered promptly; in fact, she waited three days; then came Mr. Chessney for one of his brief visits, and she read the letter aloud to him.

What Dora would have thought, could she have seen that proceeding, passes my imagination.

What would she have thought of human sympathy, could she have heard the bursts of laughter over parts of it, albeit Mr. Chessney did once or twice brush away a tear?

What would she have thought could she have heard the conversation which followed?

"Now, my dear Claire, I hope you are convinced of your hard-heartedness. Poor Dora ought not to have this strain kept on her during the autumn, especially when it is so utterly unnecessary.

"The house will be in complete order in a few weeks' time, and Dora's reception is just the thing. I can write to Phillips, and put every arrangement into his hands, and we can appoint Dora manager-in-chief.

"Claire, I have a plan worth a dozen of yours. Let us have the mother and Dora here for a visit. They want to see the little church which they have helped to renovate. Nothing could be pleasanter. Then all your girls and all your boys could be present at the ceremony. Think what that would be for Bud! He would never forget it. Neither would this struggling minister; it would afford an excuse for doing for him just what we want to do. The law does not regulate the amount of marriage fees, you know."

Mr. Chessney was an eloquent pleader; and Dora's letter, it must be confessed, pleaded against the delay that Claire had thought was wise. Of course, she demurred; of course, she hinted at the plans that she had formed for getting ready; but the party on the opposite side had an answer for every argument. He was sure that the way to do would be to get ready afterward, when she would have leisure and his in-

valuable presence and advice, instead of being hampered with music-scholars, and he miles away, alone, waiting, and Dora waiting and suffering, and the mother thinking her sad thoughts. Happy surprises were all very well; they were delightful. He was entirely in sympathy with her desire to tell mamma and Dora the story of her new home in person, only he believed with all his heart that it would be cruel, and therefore wrong, to burden that young heart with the question of ways and means a moment longer than was necessary. As for Mrs. Foster, she could supply Claire's place quietly, and thereby make some poor music-teacher's heart unexpectedly glad.

Of course, Claire was overruled. She had really not one sensible reason to offer why she should remain exiled from mamma and Dora any longer.

There was a little feeling of pride, it is true, about the "getting ready afterward;" but as she looked it over carefully and prayerfully, it seemed, even to herself, a mean pride, unworthy of the woman who was to be Harold Chessney's wife.

Then there was a fascination in the thought of Dora planning for that reception—really being the one to invite whom she would among "the girls," instead of being the one left out in the cold.

Also it was pleasant to think what an event it would be to her girls, and to Bud; and her cheeks glowed over the thought of the marriage fee that would find its way into the lean pocket-book of the overburdened minister.

I should like to tell you the whole story in detail:—what Dora said when the letter came imploring her mother and herself to come to South Plains for a few weeks' visit; how the mother demurred on the ground of expense, and yet confessed that it made her heart beat wildly to think of getting her arms around Claire again.

"But I cannot think what has become of the dear child's good sense," she would add with a sigh. "Why, Dora dear,

she did not come home, you know, because the trip would cost so much, and here she is planning for two of us to take it."

"Never mind, mamma," would Dora reply (for Dora was determined on this trip to South Plains), "Claire has planned a way; and we shall save our food if we stay two weeks, and that will be something; and she has sent us the tickets, so the money is spent. O mamma, let us go *anyway*."

And of course they went. Yes, I should delight to tell you all about it:—what a sensation there was in South Plains; and how full the little church was; and how well Bud looked walking down the aisle as one of the ushers; and how people said the Ansteds certainly would not come, they would feel it a family insult, but how the Ansteds not only came, but took almost entire charge of everything.

Above all, I should like to have you look in with me at the parsonage, in the study, where the minister and his wife stopped to break the seal of that special envelope after it was all over; how he rubbed his eyes, and looked, and looked again, and turned pale, and said, huskily: "There is some mistake here, Mary; he has given me the wrong paper."

And how she came and looked over his shoulder, and said: "Why, it has your full name. How can there be a mistake?" And then she read, "Pay to Rev. Henry Ramsey, or order, one hundred pounds. —— ——."

Who ever heard of such a marriage fee as that?

Oh, now, I have; there have been just such marriage fees as that, really and truly. There had been such before Harold Chessney and Claire Benedict were married, and there will be such again. There are poor ministers, and grand, rich men; and there will be, I presume, while the world stands. More things than some people dream of are going on in this world of ours.

There is one thing which it gives me great pleasure to record. There was a reception given in the old home. It was after mamma and Dora had been established for several

days in their old rooms, and it was the evening after the arrival of the bride and bridegroom; and Estelle Mitchell was invited to the reception, not because her brother Dick had been intimate with one of the Chessneys, but because—"My brother Harold gave me liberty to invite whoever I pleased, and it would give me pleasure to see you there."

Dora spoke truth. It really gave her great pleasure to see Estelle Mitchell at the wedding reception of the Chessneys, and to realize that she was her guest!

"Oh, you wicked, wicked Dora!" some of them said, when the excitement caused by the reception cards was at its height, "there you heard us talking about the new furniture, and wondering as to who was the bride, and you never gave us so much as a hint!"

Dora laughed, and kept her own counsel. She did not choose to tell them that during those trying days no hint of it had come to her. That was their pretty family secret, with which outsiders were not to intermeddle.

They agreed, every one of them, that Dora made a charming young hostess; and Estelle Mitchell said she was glad she was back in her old home, for she just fitted.

There are but two things which remain to tell you. One grew out of Ruth Jennings's farewell words to her beloved music-teacher, spoken while she was half-laughing, half-crying, and wholly heart-broken:

"But the organ *does* squeak horribly; you know it does; and it is always getting out of tune."

Mr. Chessney heard it, and during their wedding-trip he said to his wife:

"There is one thing I want you to help me to select. I have not made my thank-offering yet to that dear little church where I found you. It must have an organ that will keep in tune, and that will worthily commemorate the harmony that was begun there."

Imagine, please, for I shall not attempt to tell you, the

delight, to say nothing of the unspeakable wonder of the girls, and of the entire community, when the beautifully-finished, exquisitely-toned bit of mechanism was set up in the church.

Accompanying it were two organ stools, one for the church and one for Ruth Jennings's home; so she sits on dictionaries and Patent Office Reports no more.

The other item can be told more briefly. It is embodied in a sentence which the gentle mother spoke one morning at the breakfast-table:

"By the way, Claire, the committee about the Mission Band entertainment was here yesterday while you and Harold were out, to see if you would help them. I told them I thought you would."

The face of the bride flushed deeply, and a peculiarly tender light shone in her eyes as she said:

"How very strange that is! It is the same band which was preparing for that exercise about which I told you. We were to have had it on the day in which papa was buried."

"It is the same exercise," Dora said, speaking gently. "The girls dropped it entirely, and could never persuade themselves to take hold of it again, until last week they voted to attempt it."

"You were only interrupted in your work, you see," Mr. Chessney said, smiling down on eyes that were filling with tears—"interrupted, that you might set some wheels in motion that had been clogged; now you are called back to finish the other, and I am here to help you."

THE END.