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Ermine kisses Helen. Page 36. *Front.*

THE RANDOLPHS.

BY

PANSY.

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KING'S DAUGHTER," "HOUSEHOLD PUZZLES,"
"GRANDPA'S DARLINGS," "FOUR GIRLS
AT CHAUTAUQUA," &c., &c.



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THE RANDOLPHS.

CHAPTER I.

WHATSOEVER.



MARIA RANDOLPH shut the door of her room and turned the key with an irresolute air. She even flushed a little as the key rasped in the lock ; then she laughed and addressed the door, as she had a habit of doing when there was no more reasonable article to talk to. "I didn't know I *was* such a dunce ! Any one would suppose that reading the Bible was a thing to be ashamed of. I'm sure I don't see why I should hate to be caught in that way. Pshaw ! I won't lock it. Whose business is it

what I do? At the same time I don't deny that if Helen should come promenading this way, as she doubtless will, and walk in, as she always does, it would be rather awkward to be found in that employment."

So she left the key turned and took up, with curious hand, her dust-covered Bible from the table. She was a very busy housekeeper during these days, and dust will accumulate on books that are not in constant use. I wonder if the Bible is such a sealed book to other girls who are not Christians as it was to Maria Randolph? It seems strange that a feeling of curiosity should not prompt them to know more about the book which they accept, in theory, as the one that of all others can throw a little light on the mysterious future. I can not, of course, speak for them all; but this friend of mine, Maria Randolph, sensible as she was in many respects, sharp-sighted to a degree that made her sister Helen call her "The Business Man of the Family," actually knew almost nothing at all of the Bible. I do not mean of course, that she did not know a thousand verses in it, nor that she did not know whole chapters here and there,

relics of those "good old Sabbath-school days" when we used to repeat verses; but about reading it in its connections, understandingly—studying it as she used to study her philosophy when she went to school—she knew nothing. Therefore it was with a feeling of curiosity, not unmixed with awe, that she took it up on this particular evening to see what it said concerning that word which she had promised to make the guide of her future life.

"Where are the 'whatsoevers,' I wonder?" she said, still talking to herself, "Tom ought to have given me some guide-boards. I shall go floundering through this volume for ages, maybe without a single precept to work on. I wonder if it is possible that all those verses could have been skipped in the days when I went to Sunday-school? I don't at this moment remember a single one except the Golden Rule, that Miss Wheeler used to be so persistently tossing at us. It wouldn't be a bad one to practice on, I suppose; though, for the matter of that, if people would let me alone in general it is all I should ask of them, and I am perfectly willing to do the same to them."

Her soliloquy and her aimless turning of the leaves were both cut short by the twisting of the door-nob and then an emphatic knock.

“What in the world do you keep locked doors for, so early in the evening at least? What are you doing?”

This was Helen’s greeting when, with an impatient exclamation and a return of the Bible to its place on the pile of books, Maria had let her in.

“Are you after anything in particular?” was Maria’s only answer to these questions, and the tone said: “If you are, I wish you would make it known in haste, and leave me to myself.”

“No, I am not; but father wants you, and I have been calling you and looking for you all over the house. One would think you had grown suddenly deaf. I shouldn’t think you would shut yourself up in this way until after you had attended to him, since you choose to take upon yourself the sole office of nurse.”

“What does he want?” was still the only answer that her sister made.

“How should I know? He wanted you, he said. You don’t think I presume to enquire

into his affairs and yours, I hope? I know my place better than that."

Helen's role during the last few days had been to affect excëeding humility and a general idea of being overlooked and ignored in the little household. It was a very trying phase of things to Maria, and she answered with more sharpness than the occasion seemed to demand.

"Don't be so ridiculous, Helen, for pity's sake!" and seizing her lamp she ran hurriedly down the hall, leaving Helen to follow more slowly and in the darkness. As she ran the hollow sound of Helen's cough smote on her ear and the leaven of the Golden Rule touched her conscience.

"I needn't have been such a bear," she muttered. "She *is* sick a little, I suppose; perhaps more sick than we give her credit for being. But it is so disagreeable to have her ape the martyr. I wonder how long that demonstration is going to last? I wonder just what my duty is as regards that 'whatsoever?' Certainly, if I know my own heart,' as they say in prayer-meeting, I should want Helen Monroe to cross my path as little as possible; and so, if I do as

I should be done by, where will that lead me in this case? I must ask Tom about it."

Mr. Randolph's wants were easily attended to. He was one of those patient, really suffering invalids who want little, and endure the absence of that little as long as they can; so it was not more than ten minutes before Maria was at her own door again. On the landing, she met her brother Tom. He stopped her.

"How about that promise, Maria?" and he said it with a wistful air, as if it meant a great deal to him."

"I am just getting around to it," she said, gayly. "The cares of this life and the deceitfulness of poverty have held me back for some time. But I have really gone at it in earnest; that is, I have got my Bible down and dusted it. Whether I shall get any further than that before another interruption remains to be seen. But, Tom, I shall be old and gray before I find any of them. I have decided that the first money I earn with washing shall be spent on a concordance. It is a great shame that our father has had to do without one for so many years. I just begin to realize the privation."

“I can give you some help in that line, if you will let me, before you make your purchase,” he said, trying to speak as gayly as she had done, though with an undertone of real anxiety. “I have had access to concordances several times. I can give you some of the verses you are in search of.”

“Come in, then, by all means,” she said, holding the door for him to pass. “I thought over my early store of Bible verses that our old minister used to be forever telling us would prove to be a mine of wealth in our old age, coming to us in just the time of need; but not a single one of them came to *my* aid. I declare, if you are not armed for the conflict,” she added, as Tom drew his chair to the table and produced his little pocket Bible, with slips of paper peeping out here and there, as if they marked certain points.

“I have been thinking a good deal about it,” he said, smiling. “I have a verse here that is just the thing for a beginning.” He turned the leaves rapidly, as one going over familiar ground, and presently read: “‘What thing soever I command you, observe to do it. Thou shalt not

add thereto, nor diminish from it.' Now, Maria, that is the very verse for you. Will you take it up in the way that you do things?"

"Why, I don't know anything about it. I am not conscious of having had any commands."

"Maria!"

"Well, I'm not. What was ever given me to do from that source?"

"You need to study the 'thou shalt' of the Bible as well as the whatsoever," he said. "Don't you remember any of them? 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;' what about that command?"

She shook her head impatiently. "Now, Tom, don't preach; I can stand anything better than that. I didn't promise to do any such thing; I said I would be a whatsoever *worker*. Loving and hating are abstract ideas. I am not responsible for those feelings. The precious few people that I love in this world I love because I can't help it. and not from any willing of mine."

"I know you can not will it," he said, earnestly, "but you can ask for the help that is never denied."

“I don’t want help,” said this self-sufficient young lady. “I don’t feel my need of that sort of help. Don’t look so horrified, Tom, as if I had committed murder, or done something dreadful; I don’t mean anything very terrible. I am as glad as possible that you see your way clear to that sort of life. It is very becoming, and I don’t mean to be hateful when I say that I think *you* needed it. But now, honestly, I don’t think I do; I am not of the same temperament; I always did like to manage my own affairs, and I suppose I always shall. At the same time, I don’t want to be a selfish old thing; I would like to do something for somebody, and do it in the Bible way, too; so if you can put me in the way of a verse that means work, I will do it; but as to the loving, and all that, it must come of itself.”

Now, Maria Randolph actually thought that she was making a very sensible, and, on the whole, rather religious talk. She seldom said as much as that in sober earnest, and at the same time in a kindly spirit. She had no idea how utterly she had disheartened her brother; he had supposed her only careless, not self-right-

eous. There really seemed nothing more to be said to her. Some of her words were true; the loving, or rather the knowledge of her own utter insufficiency, and her need of help, must come of itself. No mere words could teach her as to this; so he remained utterly silent, which, on the whole, rather disappointed her. She expected remonstrance, and to argue was always a refreshment to her soul.

“Then you give it up?” he said at last; saying it inquiringly, and yet with a sort of sound in his voice as though the question were settled. It annoyed her.

“Why, no I don’t do any such thing,” she said, irritably. “Why do you say so? Is there really nothing in the Bible about doing? Is it all sentiment? I’m sure I don’t know what is to become of practical people like myself if that is the case.”

Tom smiled sadly. “You know so little about it, Maria, that I hardly know how to talk to you; how can you separate the feeling and the doing? You work for father and love him. There is practical self-denying work in that, but you work because you love him, and

without the love the work would be irksome to you, and not acceptable to him. Don't you see?"

"That is a different thing," said Maria, turning her head from him that he might not see the look on her face. Did you ever observe what a refuge that sentence is to people who find themselves in a corner when there is an argument in progress? It is so easy to say, and *so* unanswerable; because you feel that if the person really *does not* see the similarity, when to you it is striking, words will only be wasted. So to this Tom made no answer.

"Come," she said, smoothing the frown from her face, "don't let us be cross. We have precious few evenings to spend together; it is a pity to waste them. Find a good verse for me and I'll practice on it in a way that will astonish you."

Tom only smiled. He was grave that evening. "I don't know what verse to give you," he said, "they are all objectionable from your standpoint. I should think the Golden Rule would answer as well as any."

"So it would; I thought of taking that be-

fore you came, only I thought it would be refreshing to have something new. There is an objection to that in my mind too. I don't understand how it can be in accordance with Bible teaching."

"Why?" asked Tom, surprised, and wondering what could be coming next.

"Why, suppose I would like to have you do something for me that would not be right to do at all; according to the Golden Rule I must do that thing for some one else, or for you."

Tom laughed. "What a muddle your mind is in, Maria; I wonder how it ever got so. I suspect it is addressed to Christians; that is, to those people who are trying to govern their lives from a Christian standpoint. In that case it would mean, 'Whatsoever you, as a Christian conscientiously think would be good and right, and for your best good, that you are bound to do for others so far as you can.'"

"Oh, well, if it means only Christians I am excused from trying to live by it, am I not?" and she looked up at him with a wicked little laugh.

"Why, yes, I suppose so, by the same one

who excused you from the obligation of being a Christian. Isn't it just as I told you, Maria? These things are all mixed up together; one obligation rests upon and follows another, and you can no more live by Bible rule, and reject some of its direct teaching, than you can do any other inconsistent thing."

She obstinately shook her head. "I don't believe it; I can practice on that verse, and I can do it without going through any of the mysterious processes that Christians are always talking about, too. I am going to show you,"

"Very well," he said, "I am more than willing to be shown: you can not do better than that verse, certainly, if you are after work."





CHAPTER .II.

PRACTICING.

THE Randolph kitchen was an uncomfortable place on a warm summer morning, such as this one, on which Maria was bound by her promise to commence life on the Golden Rule system. I think you could hardly have found a harder place for her to commence in, or, for that matter, a harder morning.

It was warm, and it was also cloudy and damp and lifeless ; I don't know a meaner morning than that, "sticky," Maria called it, and I think that just describes it.

Kitchens are not—at their best—inviting places in June weather, but there is a difference

between them. Maria said that theirs was one of those that were "different."

It wasn't possible to make a direct draft through the room, so of course in decently warm weather it was a hot place.

Helen was trying to heat dish water, and cook dinner, and iron her black lawn; Maria was washing, and the boiler and the flat-irons were in a constant push at each other.

It was this wash-boiler that was to furnish the first illustration of Maria's new rule of life. As she gave the irons a shove out of her way she opened her mouth to speak, and these were the words that just trembled on her lips:

"Helen, *do* keep these irons out of my way. What is the use of pushing them so far forward? You won't want them in an age; you are not through with the dishes yet, and won't be till noon."

You can see the mood that she was in, when such simple things as flat-irons could call forth such a torrent of words. Her mood wasn't a good one; I may as well tell you that she had no native good-humor with which to commence the battle.

Nothing very special had happened, but I assure you it doesn't need anything very special on a warm June day to make a person of Maria Randolph's temperament uncomfortable. An uncongenial atmosphere and unpleasant employment are all sufficient.

Those words were on her lips, but they were stayed; another sentence came to the surface, that old one, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." It is a wonderful sentence; it occurred to Maria just then that it was. The words sounded solemn even in her thoughts.

"If there is anything I hate," she told herself, "it is to have some one forever poking irons out of the way when I have put them in a good place to heat. It puts me all out of sorts. I don't suppose Helen likes it any better than I do, but she doesn't need them yet for hours. However, I suppose she thinks she does; and, for the matter of that, the boiler is really well enough off, without being pushed just on a square with the covers."

Saying which she carefully restored the irons to their place and pushed the boiler a little one

side, then went back to her washing in a complaisant mood.

“It isn’t a very lofty beginning,” she said, “but it is a *beginning*. That isn’t a bad rule to work by; I wonder I haven’t commenced before.”

It did not have the marked effect on Helen that the girl at the wash-tub seemed to think it ought to have. Maria watched her closely when she went to the stove, and it was certainly not inspiring to discover that she did not seem to bestow a thought or glance on the position of the irons.

Maria rubbed on with a doleful face and a dim idea that it wasn’t worth while to pay any attention to the Golden Rule unless one could be appreciated.

As for Helen, her face always looked doleful during these days; she was utterly out of sympathy with the washing and ironing that were being done, for Maria had stoutly adhered to her determination to take in washing, adhered to it in spite of strong opposition.

“We are not reduced to beggary yet,” Helen had said, scornfully.

“As to that,” Maria would reply, “I don’t know whether we are or not; at least I don’t know how soon we should be if I hadn’t moral courage enough to avert it, or physical courage. I guess it is *that* which is needed after all.”

So she washed and ironed for the street-car drivers exactly as she had planned to do. They had few clothes to spare for the wash, but it must have been a delight to them to see the smoothness and whiteness of those few. Maria took great pains with them for two reasons: one, because she liked to hear Tom tell of their exclamations of delight, and the other, that she had a habit of doing well what she did at all. This new way of earning money was very helpful, and added not a little to the comfort of the invalid who was slipping away from them in such a quiet fashion.

But it had its disagreeable features. There were those even of her few friends who chose to utterly ignore Maria because of this new development. “Such a low thing to do,” they said; “it showed a tendency to tastes which they did not suspect in her.” And though Maria affected to care nothing at all about such people, and

though she really did care as little as any one could, still it left a sore spot ; sometimes it took all her resolution and a fond remembrance of how much her father enjoyed the oranges and strawberries to keep her heart in the work.

There was a boiler full of clothes on the stove, and she seated herself on the steps to wait for them, fanning her heated face violently with her apron the while. It was still early in the day, but she was tired. This young woman was working rather beyond her strength during these days, but she did not know it, and it vexed her to feel such a weariness creeping over her so early in her day's work.

“Great sense in being tired because I have rubbed a boiler full of clothes out,” she grumbled to herself ; “that would do for some fine lady ; I need more work of some kind ; I must be growing lazy.”

An unusual clatter among the dishes just then caused her to look around.

Helen had been baking bread and cookies, and had left the dishes until the oven work was done. Now she had an army of them piled up before her, drained and waiting for the cloth to do its

duty ; and she stood at the stove pushing on the large dish-pan to reheat the water while she rubbed the knives.

As she pushed it on with one hand she clasped her side with the other, and sighed.

“Whatsoever ye would,” said that persistent voice in Maria’s ear. “Fiddlesticks!” she answered it. “It is great things to wash up a few dishes ; what if she had been rubbing clothes for an hour!” “Do ye even so,” said the voice. “Well, I shan’t do it,” Maria said, but in two minutes more she sprang up.

“I’ll wipe these dishes, Helen, while I’m waiting,” she said ; “have you the side-ache again this morning.”

Now, it is a strange state of things to exist between two sisters when such an action as this can awaken surprise ; nevertheless, it existed between these two, and Helen was very much surprised, not at the offer to do her work, for Maria was not one to shirk work, but at the tone of kindly sympathy and inquiry. For this was a very unusual thing for Maria, and it was not because she was heartless and unsympathetic ; it was simply because she was by nature blunt and

outspoken, and didn't know how to express what she felt; and also it was because Helen had a pleasant manner of repelling sympathy of all sorts.

On this occasion she looked her surprise, but with her voice said :

“My side always aches. You needn't wipe the dishes; you will be telling that you had to do your work and mine, too, if you do; though, for the matter of that, I don't see why the dishes are any more my work than yours, only that you choose to employ yourself on other people's work and neglect your own.”

Maria's red cheeks grew redder.

“Am I in the habit of saying that I have to do your work,” she said, “that you should talk in this silly way? I wish you would show a little more sense, Helen; you know as well as I do that we are poor, and that I don't wash and iron clothes for Tom, Dick and Harry for my own amusement, but because I did not know what else to do; I am sure you can see for yourself that father would have to go without even his medicine if I did not earn it, and the least you can do certainly is to help with the house-work, and give me a chance to do what I can.”

“Of course,” Helen said, “I ought to remember that I am working for my living. It is hard for me to realize that I am dependent when I remember what my own home was, but I ought to be able by this time when such pains are taken to keep the fact constantly before me.”

Now, I suppose you realize that all this was not helpful nor inspiring.

“Oh, fiddlesticks!” was all that Maria said, and she wiped the dishes — every one of them — and put them away; but she slammed them most unmercifully, and thumped them to the shelves as though they had been made of pewter. On the whole, she went back to her washing with a feeling that the Golden Rule was a good deal of a humbug, producing hard work and no pay.

You will be amused with the manner in which it next confronted her — it was when she was taking in the clothes after dinner.

By dint of pushing her tubs away out into the piazza and shutting the door communicating with the kitchen, and working very fast and hard, she had contrived to forget all about it for some hours, and it was not until she met Tom at dinner that her promise flashed over her again.

It was growing to be an irksome promise. She was surprised to feel that she resented the surveillance of even her own thoughts over her actions; so it was with a frown on her face that she gave up her pie to Grace because there was not enough to go around, not that pie was a particular favorite of hers, or that it ever made much difference to her what she ate, or did not eat, but because it was so "poky" to have to think about such a silly little matter as that.

"I'm all mixed up besides," she said to herself; "I'm sure I don't want her to give her pie up to me; I would quite as soon she would eat it for herself. If people would only be good-natured and accommodating, they might eat all the pie there is in the world, and I would eat chips."

Then she laughed at the still greater confusion of her ideas. Here was she requiring people to be good-natured; then, of course, according to that tiresome precept, she should be so herself, and she never felt in worse humor nor more inclined to indulge it in her life. So she slipped from the table as soon as she could and went back to the wash. The shape which her

mentor took on the clothes-line was Dick Norton's shirt. What a shirt it was to be sure! Patched and torn again, and buttonless and frayed at the edges.

"Worth while to pay money to get such a shirt as that washed!" she said, giving it an unnecessarily hard twitch to get it down; and then she paused in absolute dismay. Suppose for a moment that she were Dick Norton, and had just this shirt and one other like it in the wide world, what a blessed thing it would be if some one should mend it neatly and restore missing buttons! Wouldn't she be an idiot not to like that? Well, then, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' "But, dear me!" she said, irritably, "where would this thing lead to? I can't mend shirts for all creation. I suppose they would all like some new shirts. I'm sure I would if I were in their place. According to Tom's notion, I ought to set about making some right away."

This, of course, was only a vent for her vexation, for she knew very well that even the Golden Rule did not reach beyond the reasona-

ble possibilities of a person's life. It ended, however, in her sitting down, while the irons heated and Helen stirred a gingerbread for tea, to the mending of the old shirt.

"Do you mend old clothes for a living, as well as wash them?" that lady asked, with a contemptuous glance at the said shirt.

Maria laughed. The queerness of her position was helping to make her good-natured.

"No," she said, "I am doing this for the love of it, or the pity of it. Did you ever see such a forlorn shirt for a man to wear? I have kept saying, What if it were Tom's?"

Helen sniffed, scornfully.

"How remarkably good you are growing. It is positively becoming serious. Which of those worthy car drivers does that garment belong to? I really ought to be congratulated on the brilliant prospects of my sister."

This shaft was too utterly foolish and pointless to disturb Maria. She only laughed good-naturedly.

"This shirt is Dick Norton's, and he is a good-natured fellow who takes Tom's place whenever he can. I owe him a good turn on that ac-

count," she said, as she threaded her needle and set to work with energy. "Besides, Helen, there is no telling what may grow out of it. He has decidedly sharp, bright eyes. I shouldn't wonder if he were a rich man some day. Then what may he not give me for mending his shirt? You see I am looking out for the future. Nothing like being prudent."

Mrs. Munroe stirred violently at her gingerbread for some minutes without speaking; then she said, with one of her heavy sighs;

"It is true enough that there is no telling what strange changes may come. No one, certainly, ought to realize it more than I. What do you suppose poor Horace would say if he could see me now?"

Any reference to "Poor Horace" always served to put Maria in ill-humor. "It is so dreadful to listen to her, and reflect that, perhaps, everything might have been different if she had done right." This the younger sister would say to Tom when he was exhorting her to patience. On this occasion she with difficulty kept her tongue from doing evil, and split one of Dick's few buttons with her needle in the

effort to be controlled. The next episode was a ring at the door-bell.

“My patience!” Helen said. “Who can that be so early in the afternoon? It isn’t time for the doctor. Maria, you will have to go, for I look like a fright.”

“I!” said Maria, in real dismay. “Why, Helen, do you remember that I am washing? I’m sure, if you rub the flour from your face and untie your apron, you will look well enough; but I am really not presentable.”

“Well, then, they will have to ring, whoever they are.” This Mrs. Munroe said in a very decided tone. “If you will persist in doing washing as late in the week as Thursday, when you might be dressed and ready to receive company, I think you ought to take the consequences. It is different with me. I have to bake when we get out of bread, whether it is the first of the week or the last. But I certainly am not going to the door. Not if they ring all night,” she added, as another violent peal showed the anxiety of somebody to make an entrance. It ended, as those discussions generally did, in Maria unpining her dress and letting it down,

and drawing down her sleeves. But she said as she closed the kitchen door.

“You are the most unselfish and accomodating sister that ever was born.” In the hall she added: “There! that was after the Golden Rule pattern, I am sure. People like to be complimented. How utterly tired I am of that verse. I wonder what Tom has done to-day, by way of living up to it? I hope he hasn’t had such a horrid time as I have.”


There was a good deal of bustle in the hall, and banging of trunks, and eager talking; it penetrated even to the distant kitchen, and made Helen say: “Who can have come? Dear me! I hope no company. Think of having to cook for company;” and then, as the voices were evidently nearing the kitchen, she slipped into the pantry and shut the door.





CHAPTER III.

SUBSOILING.



“**HERE** is she?” said a new voice in the kitchen; and Helen in the pantry was half pleased, half annoyed, and wholly surprised, to recognize the voice as belonging to Ermina.

She came out at once.

Mrs. Ermina Harper had been gone from home only a few months; but it is surprising how much one can change in a few months' time. The instant that Helen turned the knob of the pantry door and took a glimpse of her through the crack she felt the change, that subtle, mysterious change that shows in the poise of the head, and the curve of the lips, and, indeed, everywhere.

Mrs. Harper wore her hair done in a fashion that was new to Helen's secluded life; it was wonderfully becoming to her. She wore a traveling dress of rich soft gray, with a faint pinkish tinge to it that fitted her complexion precisely; it was simply made, more simply than Helen Monroe had ever made her dresses, but every fold was exactly on the bias, and every plait was exactly as large as the plait next to it, and over the whole garment hovered that mysterious, unmistakable something that marks the well-dressed lady; but it was not in all these things alone that the change consisted; Helen did not know what it was, and, as I said, she *felt* rather than saw it.

A single instant sufficed to take in all the details that I have been giving you, then she went forward to meet her sister. They had not been loving sisters, you will remember. They had not been congenial sisters at all. But, for all that, they were *sisters*; and Ermina had never been from home before. She turned eagerly as Helen came, and her kiss was warm and clinging, more tender than any kiss that Helen had felt for a long time.

“Where in the world did *you* come from?” she asked, trying to drown the rush of feeling which the kiss had brought in an unusual roughness of tone. “I thought you were to be gone for a century or so and do no end of wonderful traveling before we had the honor of seeing you again.”

Ermina laughed. “We were to,” she said, pleasantly, “but Mr. Harper had a telegram, or a series of them, that changed many of his plans; we had to come to New York, and as I was hungry and thirsting for a sight of home, we ran up here. Maria, can’t I really see father until after tea? It seems a long time to wait.”

“I don’t think you ought,” Maria began with a troubled face; “you see he does not expect you, and a little excitement before he has his tea is apt to leave him with —”

“What nonsense!” interrupted Helen. “You make a perfect muff of father, and would like to, of all the rest of us. It is extremely likely that seeing Ermina will injure him. She is his daughter as well as yourself, you should remember; come on, Ermina, I will take you to him.”

Erminia stood near her, and at this point she

passed an arm winningly around her waist.

“After all,” she said, pleasantly, “perhaps it will be better to wait until I have a good sight at all your faces; you don’t know how like a baby I feel. How delightful that gingerbread smells; I am glad you hit upon this particular afternoon to have one; Mr. Harper is fond of them, and I remember that you used to make remarkably good ones, Helen.”

Again that sense of the peculiar change that had enveloped Ermina came to her sister and kept her silent. They had a very merry tea; Tom and Grace came in just as they were sitting down, and Maria’s heart glowed with pleasure and pride to see the cordial greeting that the rich brother-in-law gave to the car driver. It was a very sore spot to Maria’s heart that this young, handsome brother seemed to be actually pinned down to a life that most effectually cut him off from society and companionship; it was strange how every avenue to better employment seemed to be closed. Tom laughed about it cheerfully, and made gay remarks about the improvements that he was going to have when he rose to the position of stockholder in the road.

But Maria could not laugh; she oftener cried; she could be independent herself, and rather gloried in it; but she coveted large places for this young brother.

“Well, sir,” said Mr. Harper, following Tom into the little sitting-room after tea, while Helen went with Ermina to the bed-room where her father sat propped in the easy-chair awaiting her, the glowing spots on either cheek telling how wise had been Maria’s precaution, “well, sir, it is not particularly congenial business, I suppose.”

“Not remarkably so,” Tom answered, with his usual laugh—he meant to be a cheerful martyr at least—“but after all I owe it a debt of gratitude; these are exceedingly hard times, you know, and I certainly should have had to depend on charity but for this position; I have tried in various ways to better myself, and ended by coming to the conclusion that I am very much to be envied; at least I do not have to be idle.”

“That is the true view of life,” Mr. Harper said; “then what about all the other matters? Do you find leisure to do work for the other Master?”

“Not leisure,” Tom said, smiling a rarely sweet smile, “at least not much of it ; but some of his work I find can be done, even while I am busy about my own. Yes, I am trying ; I have been helped by this : ‘ Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’ It is grand to think that even the street-car driver can drive for the glory of God.”

Mr. Harper turned and looked at his young brother-in-law, and there was an added touch of interest to his voice, not unmingled with respect, as he said : “ I should think it would help, but just in what way do you find that you can do this thing to his glory ? I understand you in a general way, but I am always interested in particulars.”

“ They are trifling ways, of course, but I can better illustrate what I mean by giving you an instance. Do you know that we are required to stop at steam-car crossings and wait while the conductor sights the track for a coming train ? Well, Dick Norton is a fellow-driver of mine ; he was on my car the other evening, going down to meet his own at the junction. Our conductor was off duty long enough for supper, and it fell to me to do his work.

“‘Drive on, Tom,’ Dick said as we neared the crossing; ‘I’m dead certain that there is no train up for the next ten minutes.’

“‘It is contrary to one of my mottoes,’ I said. Of course he was curious to know what motto could apply to car driving, and I quoted to him, ‘Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men.’ Now what I mean is, I take it that God permits all faithful service to be for his glory, and he gave me a chance to let Dick Norton know it; the poor fellow has had few chances of knowing anything about these matters.”

Maria was clearing the supper table; it had been the last smart rap that that Golden Rule had given her, to let Helen go to the father’s room with Ermina while she cleared the table. She heard the illustration, and mused over it as she brushed the crumbs from the cloth.

“His idea of ‘Whatsoever’ is higher than mine,” she said, gravely; and then she wondered dimly if it was living after the fashion of that word that made Mr. Harper unlike any man whom she ever saw before; also whether it was the same influence that was making the

“change” in Ermina which she, too, had noticed.

Meantime the talk went on in the sitting-room. “Is there a Young Men’s Christian Association here?” Mr. Harper asked. “You will think it strange after my long stay here that I do not know all about these things without asking; I was only a transient comer, you will remember, and the truth is, I was so engrossed with other men’s business responsibilities and trusts that were weighing heavily on me that I had to break away from all my usual work and devote myself to business. I remember making inquiries, but just what was told me I do not remember.”

“Well, sir,” said Tom, “there is, and there isn’t. At least that is the way it seems to me. They used to have a flourishing association here, and did much good, they tell me. But it almost died some years ago; and in my opinion it would have been better if it had entirely done so. In that case we might have made a fresh start and accomplished something.”

“You will have to revive the old institution.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders. “That is such

a hard thing to do," he said. "I have heard a great many men say it was easier to build a new house than to repair the old one."

His brother-in-law laughed. "Still it *can* be done," he said. "What is the element most needed for the rebuilding process?"

"A head," Tom said, promptly, as one who had thought earnestly on this subject. "No one seems willing to take the lead in anything. The former president has moved away, and the vice-president died two years ago; so the association is virtually dead, only it won't believe that it is. Now there it no one to make a president of, apparently; at least those who are fitted for the place are unwilling to try it, and nobody seems very anxious that they should."

Mr. Harper laughed heartily. "That is certainly a precarious life," he said. "I am not sure but the best way would be to call it dead, and move for a new creature instead of a resurrection. Still those things are sometimes hard to do. Why don't you make yourself its head?"

Tom flushed deeply, and spoke with quick, nervous accent.

“Do you remember how low down in the scale I very lately was?”

“Yes, I remember. Do you think any one knows more surely the temptations that beset young men, and the need of helping them?”

This was a new phase of the subject. The young man looked thoughtful, and after a moment spoke, rather to himself than in answer:

“There is truth in that. I *do* feel their need of help, and I feel very anxious to help them. But how to do it is the question.”

“I’ll tell you what I would do,” Mr. Harper said, after a moment of silence. Rising and taking a seat near his brother, and leaning one elbow on the table, he bent over toward him, speaking with intense earnestness. “I would have an association between myself and the Master. Elect him President, and put yourself in constant communication with him to follow out his plans. As you from time to time get opportunity to call in other subordinates, do so, and that will give you chance to work the faster. But by all means do not wait for an association, for while they are preparing to organize Satan is at work. He has that advantage over Chris-

tians — his working forces are never disorganized.”

There was a glow on Tom's face again. This time it was born of eager interest in the thought that was being brought before him.

“You mean,” he said, quickly, “that I am to be on the alert in every direction to help men, especially young men; that I am to act as though I were the very embodiment of a Christian association, and carry out their plans as far as I am able, taking for my helpers such help as I can get, and for my leader God himself. Is that what you mean?”

“That is what I mean, now that you have said it,” Mr. Harper said, with a quiet smile. “You have gone deeper into the thought than I had, and made it a better thought. You will be able to carry it out I am certain.”

“I will certainly try,” this young man said, with a quiet air, as one to whom new energies had been suggested and a new development planned.

Mr. Harper had a way of suddenly turning from a subject when he had said just the words he wanted said, and now, with an entire change of tone, he asked :

“How is the Temperance cause prospering in this part of the vineyard?”

A shadow fell over Tom's face.

“There is no Temperance cause here,” he said, quickly. “It is given over to the other side. Nothing is doing for it, and everything against.”

“Yet the Lord has still a cause, I think.”

It was very quietly uttered. Yet it gave Tom that same start and flush, and brought to him a strange new sense of partnership — the remembrance that he was supposed in all these things to be working *with* the Lord. He needed just this word of encouragement — a reminder rather than a revelation. Yet it came to him with all the freshness of the latter word. He was sometimes very sad-hearted, and had a feeling as if he were quite alone, having no sympathy, at least among the class of people with whom he had daily to mingle. What a sudden glow it brought to his heart to realize that the Lord of heaven and earth was looking on, and helping, and interested in the very thought that oppressed him! Surely he could afford to be alone, so far as human helpers were concerned. It suggested an-

other thought, that he would be very careful how he got on the wrong side of a question, so as to feel that the Lord was against him. To work against *that* force was surely to fail in the end; and, apart from every other consideration, who wants to fail?

Thinking these thoughts he was still again, until Mr. Harper asked another question.

“What is the greatest obstacle in the way of work in that direction?”

Again the answer was prompt, as of one who had done the thinking on these themes long ago.

“Consecrated purses.”

Mr. Harper was startled. He had talked this subject over with many people. He had asked this question often before. He had received various answers:

Prejudice — Indifference — Wrong methods — and many another hovering around the same idea, but never once this clear, ringing sentence, two words, the voice decided, firm and earnest: “Consecrated purses.”

Mr. Harper withdrew his arm from the table and sat erect.

“What do you mean?” he asked; and there

was interest not only, but curiosity in his voice.

“Why, I mean this. The great temptation, of course, is rum ; and it is wonderful to think in how many places in this city it can be found. Only think of the fact that, however much you might desire it, you could not find a hotel to stop at, throughout the length and breadth of this whole city, where liquor is not sold.”

“Is that actually so ?” Mr. Harper said, in astonishment.

“It is really so ; and not only that, but the large boarding-houses, where most of the working men who are without homes of their own have to gather, have side tables where they retail beer and whiskey. Temptation is spread on every hand, not only for those who want it fearfully by reason of an already formed taste, but for those who, because of no better place in which to spend their leisure time, are compelled to look on until they too follow the general example.”

“And your remedy is ?” Mr. Harper asked, inquiringly ; and there was a respectful tone in his voice. He was learning something from this young brother-in-law.

“Why, if I had the purse, I would have a tem-

perance hotel ; and it shouldn't be one of those seventh-rate affairs such as you find in some of our large cities. I would use Satan's own weapons — if they do really belong to him — with which to fight him. I mean I would have the carpets, and mirrors, and sofas, and brilliant gas-lights, and the glitter of silver, and everything else that is used to entice and entrap. I would have such a place as would offer not a shadow of excuse to any living man for not stopping at the Temperance House, except the one honest reason that he wanted to go where there was rum. But when you talk to Temperance men they sigh and say : ' But that would take an immense amount of money.' So I say, what we need most is consecrated purses."

To all this eager outburst of words Mr. Harper answered not a single word. He arose and went to walking slowly up and down the room, intent, apparently, on studying the different shades in the carpet.

Tom watching him curiously concluded that he was disturbed by some shadowed memory that the talk had called forth. But the next question was so utterly foreign to anything that

had been said, or that could have been suggested, that he was puzzled.

This was the question :

“By the way, how is Peter Armstrong?”

“Peter is working away as faithfully as ever, and puzzling away over the mistakes and labors of his namesake — Peter Bible. He is the queerest and the best fellow that ever lived,” and Tom in his heart said — “What in creation put him into your mind just at this moment?”

Back and forth went Mr. Harper through the little room several times more. Then he wheeled and said, in a quiet voice :

“Well, suppose we go in and see the dear father.”





CHAPTER IV.

PLANNING A SIEGE.

HR. HARPER was unusually quiet and grave during the evening. Several times his wife's eyes rested on him anxiously, and she speculated whether the talk with Tom that she had caught the murmur of had ought to do with his thoughtfulness. She was greatly troubled about that brother. Like the rest of the world she had been less anxious about him when he had all the semblance of propriety and respectability about his life, and was in actual danger, than now when he had stepped upon the sure foundation. Still it was a life full to the brim with temptation. It is little wonder that she was troubled. Now, as she sat listening to the talk around her, and watching the deepening

gravity of her husband's face, she worked herself into a fever of anxiety and fear. What did his keen eyes see in Tom that warned him of coming danger? The door had scarcely closed upon them, in the privacy of their own room, ere she said, eagerly :

“What is it? I have been so worried all the evening.”

Mr. Harper turned to her in surprise. “Worried, my dear child! I thought this a supremely happy evening to you. What can have happened to worry you?

“It is your face,” she said, with a little laugh. “It has looked sad and anxious and thoughtful and puzzled, all at once. I am sure something is wrong with Tom. Will you tell me exactly what it is?”

He answered her with promptness, but still with gravity: “I believe in my heart that you may dismiss all fears in regard to Tom, now and forever. The Lord himself has put a shield around him such as cannot be moved. He has changed and grown. His Christian development is such as to make me feel what it is possible to attain, and what I have been losing.”

Mrs. Harper answered the sentence with a half-amused laugh. It was such a strange idea that any one could have developed to a degree that would startle her husband, who seemed to be walking with long strides on the upward journey.

“Then what can be the matter?” she asked, returning to the subject of his anxiety. “I know you have been troubled all the evening. Is it father’s state?”

“I don’t think I have been troubled exactly, except about details,” he said, sitting down beside her. “But I have been very busy thinking, and some of the plans need your judgment. They have matured rapidly, for most of them have been outgrowths from your brother’s words, spoken this evening. Let me tell you about our talk.”

Maria was in the kitchen sprinkling and folding clothes preparatory to to-morrow’s ironing Tom was with her. This half hour before bedtime, when the rest of the household had separated, and there were little last things to do, was this brother and sister’s special time. Tom was building a scientific fire that should snap and

sputter and burn vividly the instant the morning match was touched to it. Nobody but Maria knew what a comfort that carefully laid building of chips and papers was to her. She deserved a thorough scolding for the fact that never once did she say such a simple sentence as this: "Tom, that fire arranged over night is a great help to me." It would have been a pleasant sound for Tom's ears. However, being a sensible fellow, he knew it must be a help to her; so he carefully did it every evening. Telling this item to a friend the other day, she quietly remarked: "I don't think it would have hurt him to make the fire in the morning for her, if he was so anxious to help." So, for fear you will have as little wisdom in the matter as that friend, do let me remind you that the duties of a car driver necessitated a departure from the house some time before an economical housekeeper needed a kitchen fire of a summer morning.

"Tom," said Maria, rolling Dick Norton's shirt into a tight little knot, and patting it firmly, "do you like him as well as you used to?" She did not mean Dick Norton, and Tom knew she didn't.

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully, pausing in his

work of breaking a pine stick in two, and speaking slowly. "Yes, I like him very much. I think he is a *grand* man." This last part of the sentence quick and firm, accompanied by a snapping of the pine stick.

"What is hiding behind that answer?" Maria asked, with a quick little laugh in which Tom joined.

"Nothing," he said; "only someway I have a feeling that he is rather abrupt. He goes suddenly from one pole to another in conversation. I tell him an item in answer to a question of his, that seems to me of some interest, and he answers it by asking another question that has no more to do with the subject in hand than this stick has to do with the moon. It gives a fellow a sort of feeling that he is simply talking with you to pass the time away, or because he thinks he must."

"I hate such kind of talking," Maria said, in quick sympathy with this her beloved brother, and indignant that any one should not enjoy a talk with *him*.

"But he is splendid for all that," Tom said, quickly. "Of course he and I can not be ex-

pected to have many topics in common. Our lives are very different." And Tom snapped another kindling, in time to cover a bit of a sigh.

About this time Ermina said to her husband :

"Oh what a splendid thought! What a man you are to plan and to do. Did you really never think of this until your talk with Tom to-night?"

The three sisters spent a quiet day together. Grace went as usual to the store, and Maria devoted herself to her ironing, broken in upon by constant runnings to and fro to care for her father. The coming of Ermina had broken in upon her practice of the Golden Rule — much to her relief it must be confessed. Still, in a general way, she tried not to go directly contrary to its teachings; and owing partly to that, and partly to the presence and subduing influence of Ermina, Helen and her youngest sister had fewer encounters than usual. As for Mr. Harper, he seemed suddenly to have become a man of business, even though he had boasted but the evening before that he came as a guest, with nothing earthly to do for two days but visit. He went out immediately after breakfast, and dinner was waiting when he returned. He waited for but

a few minutes' talk with the invalid, then rushed away again; and it was not until after tea that he sat down as one who had accomplished his work, whatever it was, and was ready for talk.

"Well, sir," he said, sitting beside Tom in precisely the same attitude that he had taken the evening before, and beginning the conversation as though there had been an interruption of but ten minutes, "are you ready to beard the lion in his den?"

"What shape does he happen to assume?" Tom asked, laughing, and without the remotest idea what his brother-in-law meant.

"It isn't a good simile. 'Fighting Satan with his own weapons,' I think you called it — that is better. Well, now, you gave me a new idea yesterday, or started me on a new train of thought, and I have been following it out a little to-day. Now I want to have a business talk with you. What are your plans?"

Tom's face flushed.

"To work to-morrow just as I have done to-day; to the best of my abilities do what I can find to do," he said, earnestly.

"But in the future?"

“I have given up the future, sir. I do not mean by that that I am a lonely old man without a thought or hope in life, and am only engaged in waiting for the end.” Tom spoke laughingly, then instantly sobered. “But I mean, simply, that I tried planning. I made a road and meant to walk in it step by step, precisely as I had it marked out, and if ever a fellow’s way was hedged, so that he could not turn to the right nor the left, mine was. Not startling, solemnizing walls, either, but miserable little thorn hedges, so that it was impossible to get over them, and yet I seemed bound to scratch myself by trying. Instead of understanding it I fought it, and was very near an eternal shipwreck. You know, sir, the awful shadow that stretched around me just in time to save me,” and the young man’s voice grew solemn in its gravity, as it always did when he alluded to the one dark chapter of his life. “So, now, I am afraid of plans. I want to live for to-day. I am not unmindful of to-morrow, and I am not indifferent as to what it will bring. I am only trying to be trustful.”

“I understand,” Mr. Harper said, and he felt again that he was talking to a man, not a boy.

“ But now, entirely in keeping with that idea, is of course a certain reverent intention, with the constant reservation, “if God wills.” Does that sort of plan include a thorough classical education? ”

“ No, sir. ”

“ You are very positive in your plans, after all, ” Mr. Harper said, smiling.

“ Well, ” said Tom with great earnestness, as if it was a subject upon which he had thought much, “ I think I am right, and I will try and make my position clear. That was one of my hedges that I was determined to climb; not so much for the love of books as for a certain ambition that I had; an aim that I am convinced now was not a wise one, at least for me. My views have changed. I should never be a hard student for the love of study. If I were to choose a profession *now* it would be the ministry, and I do not feel that I am specially called to that work. Instead, I feel an eager calling to a something else. Besides, I have not the time to give in which to get the necessary education. My father and sisters need my help, and, although I am not in a position at present to give them help,

yet I am here with them, and am in a degree to be relied upon; and while I am doing the best that I can for to-day, there is always a hope that the "to-morrow" will come. In short, I feel now an earnest desire to work in the Church of Christ, not as a professional worker, but as a layman. It seems to me that we have a great need of strength in that direction."

"Amen!" said Mr. Harper, earnestly. "But, my brother, let me ask you, is that what you mean, or rather is it *all* you mean when you speak of feeling an eager calling to something else?"

"No," said Tom, and his face grew grave and strong and his eyes glowed, "I feel a special grudge against one form of Satan. I have a special desire to fight that form whenever and wherever I can, and with whatever weapons I can get hold of."

"And Satan to you just now means Rum?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now we have reached our point," Mr. Harper said, rising, and walking thoughtfully up and down the room. "The stronger weapons you have of course the better you can fight, and you

think the special need just now is a consecrated purse. Verily I believe you are right. Now, the question is, are we ready for work? Do you know the Burton House?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is the locality a good one for a first-class hotel?"

"I don't think a better one could be found, and it is elegantly fitted up."

"Do you know that there is trouble — a mortgage — and a coming change of hands?"

"I didn't know of that."

"It is so. I discovered it by the merest accident — one of those incidents, at least, that we call accidents. I said to Ermina at the time, 'Those gentlemen before me have given me several pieces of news in the course of their conversation, but I don't know a possible place where the information will ever fit in, and here to-day I found that it fitted. I don't know how a thoughtful man can ever reject the idea of an overruling Providence. Well, we must hasten. It is a good chance. I have been to see about it to-day, and everything is all right — or, rather, all wrong — with the owner. He needs money, and there is to be a sale — public, it was to have

been. I stopped that. We will have a temperance hotel arranged after your own heart."

Tom arose and came over to his brother, his whole face beaming with delight and joy.

"There couldn't be a better place," he said, eagerly, "and this is just the time for an enterprise of the kind. I really think it will be the grandest thing that was ever done for the cause. But where will you find the man? I don't know where to look for him."

"I do," Mr. Harper said, quietly.

"Do you? Have you planned that part already? How fast you work! Where is he to be found?"

He was very eager. Mr. Harper had never seen him so excited. Evidently his whole heart was enlisted in this enterprise. His brother watched his eager face a moment with a smile of satisfaction on his own before he answered, and his answer when it came was very quiet and matter-of-fact.

"I think it is just the thing for you to take hold of. The wonder is that with all my thinking I have never been able to develop anything of the kind."

Tom had not been prepared in the least for

this conclusion. He was utterly astonished; nay, he was dumbfounded. He stood like a statue looking at the quiet gentleman before him. When at last he spoke it was in a bewildered voice.

“I do not think I understand. Do you think I would do for clerk in such an establishment? The business, you know, is utterly new to me, but then my heart would be in it. I think I might do it. But such a thing had not occurred to me.”

“I mean nothing of the kind, my brother.” Mr. Harper had a very peculiar way of saying those words. It may have been the fact that he had loved and lost a brother that gave such a tenderness to his voice, or it may have been that Tom had never known how pleasant they were that made those words sound so much like music to him.

“I mean nothing of the kind, my brother. Doubtless a clerk will be needed, and there flashed across my mind a name last evening that I thought might be trained to serve in that capacity. But what I am telling you is, that if you will go into this thing with all your soul, and see

what you can work out for 'His glory,' why, the building, and the funds to back it to the extent of my ability, shall be at your disposal. Now, what say you?"

Tom turned suddenly from him and walked to the window. It was impossible to speak just then. It was but for a moment. Then he came back, and there wasn't a vestige of a tremble to his voice. Instead, there was a ring of triumph in it.

"It is the effort to which I have consecrated my life, just so far as I had allowed myself to have an effort. I believe God will bless it. I had not hoped to see the way clear for years and years, but I believe I can do it."

"I believe you can," Mr. Harper said, in as earnest a voice as the young man's had been. "At least it is an object well worth trying for. We will try with all our hearts."

At this point a thought, which generally is supposed to be uppermost in business transactions, seemed to flash across Tom's brain.

"Do you suppose such an effort can be made to pay its way?" and there was a touch of doubt and anxiety in his voice.

“No,” said Mr. Harper, decidedly. “And you are not to trammel your ideas and effort with any such consideration. Part of its expenses the thing will doubtless pay, and for the rest, don’t you remember those purses you so unmercifully stormed last evening? I have one of them, please remember, and I verily believe it has not been consecrated to this object as it should have been, and as I thought it was.”

The ready blood mounted in waves to Tom’s forehead.

“I did not know — I mean I did not think of such a thing,” he began in embarrassment. “Indeed I did not think of you at all.”

Mr. Harper interrupted him with a cordial laugh.

“Do you suppose I think you did?” he said, heartily. “The arrow was no less sharp because it found its mark without being aimed. I thank you for it. It is the truth. My dear brother, you and I are *brethren*.”

And then the two men shook hands, heartily, silently, and each had a new realization of the meaning of that word.



CHAPTER V.

GETTING READY.

IT was curious to see the different ways in which the various members of the family received the news of the projected enterprise. Each one of them astonished Tom. Helen, who he fancied would be gratified at what she would consider a rise in fortune, or at least in occupation, was scornfully indifferent, made certain sharp and sarcastic remarks about its being a place of "temptation for a reformed person," and then relapsed into sarcastic silence. If you have never learned how exquisitely sarcastic a certain sort of silence can be you are a fortunate

person. Grace was jubilant with an ecstatic delight that was bewildering to Tom. He did not know his sister Grace very well; she puzzled him.

At first he judged it to be the delight which springs from having something new to enter into and enjoy, only there was an exalted look upon her face as of one who reached beyond this, and the voice in which she said, "What a wonderful work you can do," led him to wonder whether there was not more to Grace than a good-natured girl who sold laces at McAllister's. Maria surprised and disappointed him the most. She was unaffectedly dismayed. Where he had looked for utmost sympathy and encouragement he met only an amazed, appalled face.

"You do not like it?" he said, feeling more disappointed than he liked to show.

"No, I don't." Maria was as outspoken as ever. "It is horrid business; I think you are above it."

"It is so much lower than car driving, I don't wonder that you are disturbed!" Of course it was Helen who said this.

And Maria was quick with her answer:

“Yes, it is. Car driving is only a decent employment for a few days, while he is looking for his place; but hotel-keeping is something that has to be done for a lifetime if one accomplishes anything; and I think it is the smallest and meanest kind of business. I would rather sell tape and codfish for a living.”

“But, Maria,” Tom said, and his lip almost quivered, so great was his surprise and pain, “this is to be a different kind of hotel from any with which you are acquainted. I am going to do the very thing which I have longed to do, the very kind of work that you and I have talked over together.”

“Humph!” said Maria, and she kicked a stick of wood impatiently out of her way, and went abruptly to the kitchen, where she rattled dishes and pans and knives until the sound of the voices in the sitting-room were lost to her. You will have to forgive the poor girl; she had expended a great heart on this brother; there were no heights of learning and position that she did not think him equal to reaching; and she had so hoped that when he chose his work it would be worthy of him. She could not help looking upon this scheme as a downfall.

Of all the family Tom dreaded most to tell his father. He began to have a dim idea of what that father's hopes had been in regard to him, and how bitter his disappointments must have been. This seemed like another blow. All the more he felt this, now that he had come to understand how Maria, his friend and helper, looked upon it. But the father must be told. Tom's respect for him would not admit of his entering upon any plans until he had consulted or at least informed him.

He chose an evening when something kept both Helen and Maria in the kitchen, and Grace was doing extra duty at McAllister's. He sat for half an hour answering questions mechanically, and imparting news in an abstracted manner, trying meanwhile to plan a way of telling the special news that would have the least uncomfortable effect on his father. He succeeded as well as people usually do in such efforts, and suddenly abandoning all attempt at care he plunged into the midst of the subject.

"Father, I am about to desert the cars and try a new way of life."

His father was all attention, and showed by

the sudden glow of his cheek that this was a subject having special interest for him. Tom hurried on :

“I have a chance at last, and one very different from what I expected. I am going to try my hand at keeping hotel.”

Mr. Randolph turned on his pillow, and the hectic flush was very marked as he said :

“What do you mean ?”

“I mean that Mr. Harper has given me a chance to try a work that I never expected to be able to. He has offered to set me up in a first-class temperance hotel, and I am going to fight the enemy in that line with all the wisdom that God will give me.”

The young man drew in his breath quickly as he finished this sentence, and prepared for an argument. It was natural that his father should feel disappointed ; he could not be expected to look at this thing as Mr. Harper did, and as he himself looked at it. He was not prepared for the sudden husking of voice and tremulousness of lip with which his father murmured, evidently speaking not to him : “ Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

“Sir,” said Tom, rising in fright and anxiety. His father’s mind must be wandering; but the smile that met him was strong and bright.

“You can not understand how much I feel this,” he said, eagerly. “You are too young, and you do not know all that I do; but when you were a little boy in your cradle I used to pray for you every night. I used to spend an hour with God asking my heart’s desire for you; and it was not that you should be rich, or wise, or even successful, as men count success, but that you should be to your heart’s core a temperance man, strong, and brave, and wise, and working with all your might to save souls from this form of sin that so besets them. I seem to see what you can do with this chance. It is a greater one than I hoped for; indeed it is greater than I ever thought of, which is just like the way in which the Lord delights to answer prayer. God bless you.”

He raised himself on one elbow. Tom had never seen his eyes shine as they did.

“Shut the door,” he said, “and I will tell you something — something that you never knew in your life, and that I never meant to tell you.

Your mother did not wish it. But I believe the time has come ; it will help you in your work ; it will fall like a benediction on you."

Awed and wondering, Tom went forward and closed the door communicating with the sitting-room, not a little anxious meanwhile as to the effect of this unusual excitement. But his father's voice was still strong and well controlled.

"I stood on the very edge of the chasm," he said, earnestly. "Indeed, I may say that I was *over* the edge. 'My steps were almost gone,' and your mother saved me. She clung to me, and would not let me be lost, even though I was determined to go. She held on with an iron grasp, and through God she conquered."

The knob turned suddenly in the door, and Maria stood before them.

"You are a lovely nurse," was her comment, as she glanced from Tom's astonished, earnest face to the eager invalid with the glow on his cheek and the unusual fire in his eye. "I thought I told you to be quiet and amusing. Is that the way you manage when you are left in charge ?"

“Don’t scold him,” the father said, with a smile, and in his usual quiet, kind voice. “It is all right ; no harm has been done ; he has given me more helpful medicine than I have had for many a day, and I have helped him if I mistake not. Isn’t it so, my boy ?”

“Aye, you have,” Tom said ; and Maria turned and looked curiously at him, there was such a ring in his voice.

“I will never forget it,” he said, again ; and then he went away to think his astonished thoughts. His father, the quiet, grave, controlled, prayerful man, as he had always known him — he a drunkard ! That must have been what he meant. Could anything be more astonishing than that ? Yes ; one thing surprised him even more — that his gentle little doll-mother had ever held any one from doing anything that they chose to do, much less any one with so strong a nature as his father possessed. He could not conceive of her as having any will or wish outside of his ; and yet this revelation explained many things that had always seemed strange. He could understand now the love that had seemed to have a touch of idolatry

in it, and to be mingled at the same time with a strange feeling of almost reverence. He could understand, as he had never been able to before, the anxious, troubled sigh and the half-whispered "If your mother were only here" that he had heard in times of trial or perplexity. The sweet and tender little woman who seemed made to be loved and petted and cared for had possibilities about her, it seemed, of which he had never dreamed—had strength born of God, and had used it valiantly.

How he loved his mother as he thought of all this. How wonderful in her it was to conceal all that dark past from her children, and accord to her husband a deferential respect, mingled with her love, that her children had insensibly copied. Then his mother would be glad of this work which he had taken up? He understood what his father meant by saying, "It will fall like a benediction on you." It had—a benediction from the dear dead mother. Tom was stronger than he had been before. He was better fitted for his work.

Meantime the work of fitting up the old Burton House went on briskly. Mr. Harper made

a hurried journey to New York and planned his business there for a two weeks' absence. Then he gave himself up to the new work with energy; gave himself up both as to time and to purse; and when an energetic man enters into a project with an unlimited command of both these articles great things can be accomplished.

These were very comfortable two weeks for the girls at home. Ermina, with her happy, satisfied face and her full purse, was a perfect blessing.

The comforts and luxuries that found their way into the invalid's room were not to be forgotten either by the father or the grateful youngest daughter. That young lady had "given the Golden Rule a vacation," so she expressed it to Tom; "because" she was in too "much of a hurry to think of such minor matters." Yet, from sundry unselfish acts and words, he imagined that the spirit still lingered about her. There was another comfort during these days, appreciated by Maria more than she would have liked the others to know. Mr. Harper, finding that he was to be present in the family for several weeks, sought the young housekeeper out one evening,

and in a business-like manner arranged to be boarded during the time of his stay.

“It is not the usual custom,” said Maria, with dignity, and with heightened color, “for a son-in-law to pay board for himself and wife during a visit to the old home ; at least it is a custom that I, in my ignorance, never heard of.”

Mr. Harper had studied the character with which he was dealing and understood her perfectly. He turned toward her with a genial smile and said, frankly :

“My good sister, I think you and I understand each other. We are working together for the comfort of the dear father. He is dear to my wife as to you. She has as much a duty to perform in regard to him as you have ; but since we are hurried, business people, and withal take a common-sense, practical view of life, and waste no time in sentimentality, the easiest way to come at it is to settle on a reasonable price for board, and say no more about it.”

Maria turned on him a pair of laughing eyes, out of which all the flash had departed, and said, brightly :

“That is a very soothing way of putting it.

and a very truthful one perhaps, except the 'reasonable price.'" This in reference to the fact that she caught sight of the figure on the bill he was folding for her. "Even Ermina's old boarding mistress, Mrs. Skimp, never dreamed of such extravagant rates as those. But I like your frankness, and under the circumstances my assumption of dignity was absurd; we are poor, and as you have known it all the time I don't suppose you would think any more of us if we should try to pretend that we could afford to have company as well as not."

And Maria pocketed the large bill with a good grace; it was so pleasant to be talked to sensibly without any shamming. The very fact that the money was given in the form of payment for value received was soothing to a temperament like hers, and she felt justified in providing the best for her boarders that the market afforded.

There was one other episode during these weeks of preparation that was curious as to the results that it wrought in the progress of this scheme. It came about in this way:

"Oh, for the hand of a skillful woman here!" Tom had exclaimed as he arranged and

rearranged the table of a certain room in the new house; a room that he wanted to be the very embodiment of home. "Things will look stiff here in spite of all my efforts to the contrary; men haven't the knack, and that's the whole of it."

Mr. Harper seemed more thoughtful than the occasion demanded and presently remarked:

"Your sister Helen has a very happy talent among books and furniture; I used to observe that in her own home she seemed to give speechless things a sort of individuality; how would it do to get her interested here?"

"It wouldn't do at all," Tom said as promptly as if he had thoroughly canvassed the whole question. "Helen can not be trusted with money; her tastes are royal, and so ought her purse to be; she has no more idea of economy than if she had reveled in wealth all her life. Why, she could spend a fortune on the dainties that she could get into this room."

"I did not mean give her command as to supplies, but as to the arrangement of what we already have; she could take away the stiffness that you are deploring with a touch or two."

"I don't think I should like it," the young

man said, and he spoke as decidedly as he did before. "Helen and I don't assimilate — never did; it would be almost impossible for us to work together harmoniously; in fact, I doubt whether she would enjoy it all."

"But the question is, could it help her?"

"Help her?" repeated Tom, and this time his manner was not positive at all, but hesitating and surprised. The question seemed to suggest a new idea.

"Yes; help her out of herself; give her an interest in something that is going on around her."

Tom looked amazed.

"Do you think there is special need of exertion on her account?" he asked incredulously.

"Well, of course I can not tell; only it seems sad to me to see a person interested only in her own sorrows and trials; I would like to rouse her to a thought of the trials of the world at large."

Tom finished the arranging of the table in utmost silence; the new thought was not a pleasant one. The enterprise in which he had embarked was glorified to him; he did not like the

idea of clouds coming in between ; he could not think of Helen as anything but a cloud. Besides, he had enjoyed visions of happy evenings with Maria in work like this ; she would enter into it with zest. True, she had not shown any as yet ; she had not gotten over the first disappointment ; but after a little, when she should see what he was doing, or trying to do, she would be enthusiastic in her help. Could he bear to forestall her place ? Besides, Helen would have nothing to do with it. And then he smiled at his own inconsistency ; if this were really the case, then he had nothing to worry about.

“What do you suppose is your brother-in-law’s last idea ?” he said to Maria as they met in the evening on their way up-stairs.

“I should as soon think of trying to tell the name of the next planet to be discovered,” Maria said, partly in sarcasm and partly in satisfaction over a man who had ideas and worked them out.

“Well, he more than hinted that I ought to try to interest Helen in this new project, and try to get her out of herself.”

“How does he propose that you shall accomplish that interesting exploit ?”

“Why, he suggested that I should ask her help in planning and arranging furniture and ornaments and the like.”

Tom spoke hesitatingly and felt as if he were giving pain. Besides, he shrank from sarcastic words, for he had decided to make the attempt, and in itself it was hard enough, without Maria's words to draw him back. She leaned against the railing and spoke thoughtfully, and without a touch of sarcasm :

“It is a good idea, worthy of its source ; if I were you I would try it. Helen has a pretty hard time I suspect ; she is not like the rest of us in the matter of roughing it, and never was ; perhaps she will really get interested.”

“The leaven of the Golden Rule,” said Tom to himself, in surprise and delight ; aloud he said :

“But, Maria, I had wanted to have you installed as commander over all such things.”

“It is not my forte,” Maria said, coolly. “I haven't the least idea whether books should be set squarely on the table or across the corners, but Helen you may be sure knows the precise angle. I will see whether your cook seasons the meats and sweetens the pies properly ; I am much more fitted to that work.”

Tom seized her hand as she was about to run and said, eagerly, "*Will* you help, Maria? I have so depended on you."


"There is no telling what I will do," Maria said, lightly; "when I get time to dip into that text of yours again it may lead me into as foolish a scheme as it has you," and she broke away from him and ran gayly up-stairs.





CHAPTER VI.

BEGINNINGS.

OW what does this room need?" Tom said, and he halted in the center of the long and elegantly furnished saloon and looked inquiringly at Mrs. Monroe, who was silently following him. "I have studied it all day. In fact, I have been at it for two or three days, and I have made a dozen different twists and turns; but there is something lacking — something that makes a fellow feel stiff and uncomfortable — and I am sure I don't know what it is."

One would have thought that a reasonable mortal might have been satisfied with that room. It was long and rather narrow — a graceful shape for a large room. It was carpeted in soft rich hues, looking like the shimmer of sunlight

among buds and leaves. The curtains at the many windows were long and fine, and beautifully clear. The sofas and easy-chairs, of which there were many, were upholstered in just the right shape to add to the beauty of the carpet. The tables were marble-topped, and graceful as to shade. The piano was a large and a good one; you could see that at a glance. And yet, as Tom surveyed it from mirror to mirror, he turned back again to his sister and shook his head, while he repeated his question, "What is the matter with it?"

"It looks as though you had taken a square and made geometrical lines for everything to stand in and forbidden a person to touch them," Mrs. Monroe said, and as she spoke she instinctively put forth her hand and gave the books on the table before her a scientific *shove* to right and left. Entering into the spirit of the change the little movement had made, she passed up and down that room, setting a chair crooked here, and wheeling a sofa there into a different angle, scattering the music piled squarely into a corner of the piano into systematic confusion. There is such a thing as systematic confusion;

and the people who do not understand its laws, or who ignore its existence, have rooms fixed by rule and square. It would have amused you to note the difference that those few rapid and simple changes made in that room. Tom looked on in silent surprise and approbation, until, as she wheeled a great handsome rocker into a corner where the gas jet threw just the right angle of light and sank into it, he drew a long breath of satisfaction and said :

“It is a room at last! It has been nothing in the world but a great handsome furniture warehouse before in spite of every effort of mine. You women are remarkable!”

It would have been pleasant, perhaps, if these two people could have realized how much had been done in that few minutes. Tom was conscious of feeling that there was an atmosphere about Helen that he had not appreciated before. She knew how to do certain things that looked simple enough in the doing, but were worse than a geometrical puzzle to him. As for Helen, for almost the first time since she could remember she had succeeded in doing Tom a kindness and in gratifying him. It gave her a more kindly feeling to everybody.

“What is all this for?” she asked, gazing up and down the room with satisfied eyes. The beauty and the refinement displayed here actually rested her, she was such a lover of beautiful things, especially of things that meant wealth and cultured taste and leisure to enjoy. She had not deigned to ask any questions up to this time. “What is this room for? It used to be the ball-room, didn’t it? I’ve been in it,” and her eyes took a dreamy cast as they were apt to do when she went back into that past which had been in many respects so pleasant to her, without her realizing much of the pleasure.

“Yes,” Tom said, it *was* the ball-room, but it was something more now. “It is a secret,” he added, with smiling eyes. “Even Mr. Harper doesn’t know what it is for. He thinks it is a great parlor in which, for some reason, I have a special interest. Now I mean to tell you what it is; or, here, I’ll show you what is to go above the windows outside.” He went to the largest sofa, and, wheeling it out, displayed behind it a long board set quietly back against the wall. This being turned displayed on its reverse side, in letters of clear gold, “Young Men’s Christian Association Rooms.”

“Rooms!” quoted Helen, laughing, yet with a softened look in her eyes. It was something so new, and it was certainly very pleasant to be having a confidential chat with Tom. “Where are the ‘Rooms’? I don’t see but one.”

“Oh yes, there are,” he said, eagerly; “only I haven’t had time to show you yet. See here.” There were doors at the end of the old ball-room, and there had been good-sized dressing-rooms opening out of it. These were fitted up elegantly — the one for toilet purposes, and the other was the very perfection of daintiness, evidently intended as a quiet little resort for two who might have a word to say to each other in private. Helen laughed again, but she was becoming intensely interested.

“Where the young men?” she asked, as they came back and she seated herself at the piano. She never played now-days.

“They are to be found,” he said, promptly. “There must be some of the right sort in this great city, and there must be more who can be made. This is a manufactory, Helen, and we have the very best tools that the world affords.” As he spoke he laid his hand with a sudden and

impressive movement on the large Bible resting on the little table where it stood.

“And you are going to manufacture men?” She did not say it scornfully, nor in sarcasm, as she so often spoke, but as if the idea were new and interesting.

“Will you help?” he asked, stepping nearer to her, and speaking with an eager face and voice.

“I help!” she said, and there was that peculiar uplifting of the eyebrows that meant so much. Yet behind it Tom thought he detected a wistful glance, as if it would be pleasant to be a helper anywhere. “What could I do?”

“A great deal, if you will. I will surely find you work to do. Will you occasionally give us some good music here, in the early evening, when we have special need for some?”

It was a simple enough thing to do, and it sounded pleasant enough. At least it would be pleasant if one had appreciative listeners. Helen was not one of those who loved music for its own sake. But she began to feel that she was condescending a good deal in regard to a scheme at which she had hitherto expressed nothing but disapproval. So she said, speaking coldly:

“I don’t think I can promise to do anything. You know I do not approve of the idea. The fancy is pleasant enough, of course, and sounds philanthropic. But for all that it is a great expenditure of money that does not belong to you, and a great risk. For that matter it is more than a risk—it is a direct throwing away of money. Mr. Harper expects it to succeed financially, of course, or he would never have gone into it, and you are young and not expected to be gifted with wonderful wisdom. I am afraid you will come to grief and have endless embarrassments; and as a family we have had trouble enough.”

This was so much nearer a feeling of actual interest in himself and his work than Helen had ever shown before, that, though it may sound very cold and disheartening to you, Tom was decidedly encouraged and not a little touched by it. He drew a chair near her and seated himself.

“I understand your feeling,” he said, heartily, “and it is the most natural one in the world; the more so as I have really never done anything to inspire you with confidence in me.

But, Helen, you don't half know our brother-in-law ; none of us do. I had a feeling very much like yours ; I nearly gave up the hope of this thing after it was all planned. He saw something was amiss and questioned me. 'It is involving an entire fortune,' I said ; 'it amounts to that ; and if it is a stupendous failure, what then ? I can not but feel that I am risking so much that belongs to you.'

“‘It isn't my money at all,' he said, quietly ; 'it is money that has been intrusted to me to invest in a sure thing, and I invest it here because I feel so sure of the dividends.' Well, Helen, I tell you I was startled ; it was bad enough to be using his money, but to use up another's — a stranger's — who would not know if I failed whether I had tried to do my best or not, was a thing not to be thought of.

“‘I can't do that,' I said in great heat. 'I didn't understand it so ; I can't assume such a responsibility as that.' 'Look here,' he said, 'let me show you the lender's name ;' and he took a book from his pocket and showed me those words, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.' 'There !' he

said, 'you know the sort of return that he asks; can he trust you?' And oh! Helen, it made such a difference; I understood Mr. Harper's feeling; he meant that God had called him to do this thing, and I believe he has called me, and I mean to try to be a faithful steward."

"You are an enthusiast, Helen said, smiling and rising as she spoke, "and Mr. Harper is another, and I am not, but I am sure I wish I were; it must be pleasant to have an intense interest in anything."

"You haven't answered my question yet," her brother said, rising also, and walking down the long room with her.

"Oh, as to that I am not an enthusiast on the temperance question either, you know. I don't believe in extremes of any sort. At the same time, if you really want my help, it is a new thing for any one to want anything of me, but if there is anything that I can do, why, let me know and I will try to do it." And as Tom held open the door for her to pass, and thanked her again for the services she had rendered him that afternoon, he felt that he at least had gained a victory. He was more interested in Helen,

and he realized more her need of help than he ever had before.

“Whether she helps me or not,” he said reflectively as he walked back alone, “she shall try to if I can get her into it, for I begin to feel sure that we can help her. I wonder if she is really and truly a Christian at heart? Oh, to know for a certainty whether some who have a name to live are really alive; and so be at rest about them.”

Later that evening Tom had another caller. Maria came in with haste, and business. He did not take her through the handsome room, nor show her the gold-lettered sign. He had a fancy that she would consider those things too visionary. Instead, he took her to the large, light, thoroughly-furnished kitchen, and showed her all the conveniences thereof.

“It is just splendid!” she said. “It will really be nothing but fun for the girls to work, and that brings me to the subject that brought me over just now. I am really almost distracted on that question of girls. I have talked with a dozen to-day, and none of them will do. I thought we had found a perfect treasure for you,

to serve as cook. She came highly recommended; had worked at the Laurie House; did the cooking there for six months. You know that is a first-class house, and I told Helen if half she said about herself as to the work she did there should prove true she would be a treasure. So I had her come in and wait while I posted off to the Laurie House. Not ostensibly, you know. I was supposed to be going to consult you, but instead I whisked around to the Laurie House, and you need not build your hopes on her in the least, for she won't do. All she said about herself as a cook was true, and more too; the half has not been told. But, don't you think, the dreadful being drinks!—like a fish, the colored waiter informed me; said they had some dreadful scenes with her; she would go on nicely enough for a while, and suddenly the breakfast would be *non est*. He actually said it, Tom, in those very words."

"What has become of the girl?"

"She is still waiting, I presume. I left Grace on guard for fear her pastime might be stealing, and as I had to pass here I thought she might as well wait while I ran up for a minute, and

here I am staying an hour. Grace will be distracted. But I came to say that you would do better to advertise in the evening papers. That would bring an army of them ; it always does."

"What is her name?" Tom asked, thoughtfully.

"What, the evening papers? *She* has a good many names. There are several of them if you recollect."

Tom laughed.

"I mean the girl, Maria. I think we will try her, if you have an idea that she will suit in other respects."

"Try her!" And Maria's face expressed horror. "Why, Tom, she *drinks*, I tell you. She has just recovered from a time now. That waiter said she was reeling along the streets night before last. That would be an extraordinary sign for a temperance hotel, to say nothing of the inconvenience it would cause!"

"Maria," said Tom, speaking half lightly, "if your imagination can take such a flight as that, suppose yourself to be a poor girl —"

"I am," promptly interpolated Maria.

"Out of employment."

“ Oh, I am not. ”

“ And suppose you had the appetite of a drunkard upon you. Suppose you were willing and eager to reform, what would you want the Christian — the temperance — public to do for you by way of sympathy and help? Turn you aside because they were temperance people and could not encourage drunkenness, or employ you and give you a chance at reformation? ”

“ But aren't you jumping at conclusions? I may not be willing to try to reform. ”

“ They all are. ”

Tom's face was grave enough now, and he spoke with energy ;

“ I know about it, Maria ; I have been in the meshes ; it is a horrible slavery, and every one wants to be free. I mean to try that girl. Engage her for me, Maria. ”

“ But, Tom, it is really dangerous. She may set the house on fire. ”

“ Not so likely as are dozens of the people who occupy the back rooms of first-class hotels all over the land. She will have to go outside for her poison — the most of them find it within doors. No, I tell you this is the place for her. ”

If she is used to working at hotels she would not be satisfied in a private family even if they would try her, and she can find places enough at hotels where she will breathe a daily atmosphere of temptation. I shall try her."

"All the same I think it is foolish," Maria said, obstinately. "'Charity begins at home.' That's in the Bible, isn't it? If it isn't, it ought to be. Don't endanger your own house trying to do a wild goodness to somebody who doesn't appreciate it is my motto."

"No, it isn't," Tom said, smiling a gravely sweet smile. "Your motto and mine is an infinite reach above that—'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'"

"Oh, that tiresome Golden Rule," Maria said, petulantly, drawing her shawl about her. "I have given that up. I declare to you that I was never so tired in my life as I was after chasing that up for a week. It won't do for me. It reaches too many ways. I must have more leisure before I live by that rule."

"Then you yield the point of argument, do you?"

“What, that I can not live after your mottos? No, not at all. I simply haven't time to follow that out. It keeps me turning too many ways. But every one knows that is the worst verse in the whole Bible to keep track of.”

“Then I'll give you another. Take this, it is shorter. ‘Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.’”

“Doesn't that belong to the one I said I wouldn't have?”

“No,” Tom said, “it is quite distinct; and I mean not to take an unfair advantage of you. I mean simply, when you are in doubt about a question of any sort, that you stop to think what He says on it, or what, with your present knowledge of His character, you honestly believe He would say to you if you could speak face to face with Him, and follow that belief.”

“Taking my own views of things, and not yours nor a commentator's, you mean? Very well; that is easy enough, for I know very little about it, and when I am in doubt I can say I haven't the slightest idea what would be supposed to be the orthodox thing, and then of course I shall do as I please. Yes, I'll try that,

only if I find it as much of a nuisance as the other, will you release me ? ”

“ Not unless you will own yourself conquered. Maria, hurry home and secure that girl. I have decided to see what, first of all, we can do to help her.”





CHAPTER VII.

WISE AS A SERPENT.



ONE day on the following week there was a grand opening of the new hotel. Grand in a newer sense than that word generally means, at least in reference to hotels.

The gold-lettered sign was up: "Young Men's Christian Association Rooms." There was also another sign over the main entrance, simple and unpretentious. There had been several discussions about that sign.

"You are going to announce your principles over the door, in words that every man may read, I suppose?"

This said Mr. Harper when all the main preliminaries were finished, and Tom had answered with emphatic promptness:

"No, sir;" and added, smiling, "that is, I prefer not to say a word about temperance on the sign, if I have your permission to do so."

Mr. Harper looked his surprise.

"I can not imagine why," he said; "give me your line of argument, please."

"This establishment is to be conducted on the principles that the wisdom of this world teaches," Tom said, laughing. "Don't you know that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light? Who ever saw a hotel announce on the sign, 'Intemperance House!' They are wiser than that."

"But my brain is too dull to follow you. People, of course, are not exactly in search of intemperance; but there are supposed to be those who would actually like to find a thorough temperance house. Why not order your advertisements to help that class?"

"A man who actually has the matter at heart, even to the degree that if he saw the announcement in passing he would take the trouble to step in, will not mind asking information of hack driver or porter, and I mean that they shall be so thoroughly informed as to our whereabouts

that they will have no difficulty in giving directions; but I don't propose to blazon the word so that a poor tempted fellow, who is yet in such danger that he can not resist the inclination to run into temptation wherever he can find it, will pass us by because we take care to explain to him that we can not give to him that for which his soul longs."

To this long sentence Mr. Harper made no sort of answer, until Tom, a little disturbed lest he might have been too decided, said :

"At the same time, if you think the other way is better, I will, of course, defer to your judgment."

Then his brother turned to him, brightly smiling: "I think whatever way you suggest is the way to try," he said, heartily. "I am more and more convinced of it. You have gone deeper into this thing than I have."

Maria was remarkable for keeping people to the point.

"What sign will you have then?" she asked. "I supposed, of course, it was to be 'Temperance House.'"

"Would it be improper to use your name?"

Tom asked, bending a somewhat anxious glance upon Mr. Harper. He was not quite certain whether this would be in accordance with his taste.

Helen exclaimed, "*Don't* let them do that, Ermina. I wouldn't have my name blazoned on a hotel."

"I should be proud of it," Mr. Harper said, quickly, "on this sort of a hotel; but we will do a better thing than that. We will call it the 'Randolph House;' and it shall not be in honor of this young fellow either. It shall be father's work. The honored name that has worked so well shall keep on working for him, long after rest from work has come to us all, I trust, and it shall grow to be the synonym for strong, earnest, helping hands, stretched out to our young men."

This talk all went on in the invalid's room, and he was propped up among the pillows to listen. As Mr. Harper spoke he turned toward the bed and watched the glow on Mr. Randolph's cheek deepen and spread.

"He being dead yet speaketh," he said, repeating the words with difficulty, because of the tremor in his voice. "I had not thought that

any such pleasure would be mine. It is an honest name, and it is one that belonged to your mother for many a year. Put it up and we will watch it in heaven to see that it works faithfully."

Chosen under such circumstances, do you wonder that the young man, as he crossed the street to note its effect, and stood and gazed at the familiar name in a new place, and joined to a new word, "Randolph House," presently took out his handkerchief and wiped away a tear? It was not his name, but his father's. It must never be disgraced by failure or carelessness. And to-day was to be the opening. The handsome house was in perfect order; a housekeeper had been secured by Mr. Harper's sister in New York; so they were all at rest upon that point. She was one after Mrs. Laport's own heart, and if you remember that little lady, you know what sort of heart she had. If you have forgotten her, please look up "Household Puzzles" and renew her acquaintance.

The cook was the very one over whom Maria had vainly protested. Even Mr. Harper thought that experiment a risk, but Grace was beaming and Tom resolute,

“We must begin to work according to our principles,” he said. “If we shirk possible dangers at the very start, we will not be as helpful as we should.”

And in undertone to Maria, “I am working on your motto, and I am sure He says to me, ‘lend me a helping hand in this direction.’”

“I am not at all convinced that she wants to be helped,” Maria said, crossly.

“Which is a question not at all to the point,” Tom answered, quickly. “The question is, does she need to be?”

A very good force of girls were engaged for the subordinate positions, and on this particular day there was to be a family dinner party. The grand feature of the day was that Mr. Randolph, carefully propped by pillows at back and feet, had been borne in an easy carriage from his own home to the Randolph House and was at this moment reposing quietly on one of its softest beds, gathering strength to sit at the head of the table. It was to be a royal dinner, requiring all the skill of the new cook and the planning abilities of the housekeeper to execute.

Just before the feast was ready to be served

the family gathered, from their wanderings over the house, in the spacious public parlor to await the summons of the dinner bell. There was a noticeable air of satisfaction about Helen. She had scorned the idea of hotel life. She had persisted, from the very first, in saying that it was a descent in the family history instead of a rise; and yet to be dressed in her best, and to be sitting, a lady of elegant leisure, in an elegant parlor, having no personal interest in the kitchen or the appointments of the dinner table, and yet being all the time serenely conscious that all things in those regions were progressing as they should, and that the glory thereof would shine with reflected light upon her, as one connected with the family — all this was a joy to Helen Monroe's soul. She believed with all her heart that she could be the most amiable of mortals if she could only live, and breathe, and have her being, in the atmosphere suited to her tastes and capacities; and though these which surrounded her now were found in hotel life instead of the aristocratic seclusion of a private house, yet she was rapidly coming to the conclusion that they were not to be utterly scorned.

The social gathering was suddenly, and it seemed to Helen rudely, broken in upon. A stranger, a gentleman, was shown into the room. He advanced with an assured air a few steps, then paused and looked about him with a puzzled face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in courteous and cultured voice, to Tom, who came forward to meet him. "But I think I must have made some unaccountable blunder. I thought I was in a hotel."

"No blunder at all," Tom said, heartily; "this *is* a hotel; a good one, we hope; how can we serve you? Will you have a room? Our dinner will be served in ten minutes."

How very strange it all seemed! Helen would have heartily enjoyed hearing somebody call the new-comer an impudent scoundrel and order him from the house. It was insufferable to have the family party thus rudely broken. She would have done her part toward freezing him with her dignity had she not at that moment been struck with Mr. Harper's manner. How gracious and attentive he was! For all the world as if he had kept hotel all his life, and his

father before him, and yet he belongs to one of the most aristocratic families in Boston. And Mr. Harper's manner had its unconscious influence over her; just as every person's manner must influence every other person's, either consciously or unconsciously, in this mixed and bewildering world.

It was well for the family that they had with them one so thoroughly master of himself and the situation as Mr. Harper; it was just a little difficult not to be embarrassed by the newness and strangeness of their circumstances. The stranger, on his part, seemed not a little bewildered, and in doubt as to whether he must conduct himself like an invited guest to a dinner party, or like a passing traveler enduring hotel life. The dinner bell was a relief; so was the elegant dining-room, with its elegant apportionments, the table glittering in china and silver: at least Helen's eyes took in all these details and her heart feasted upon the long-denied beauties.

There was just an instant's pause as they were seated, and then Tom's clear voice rang down to the other end of the table, where his father sat in a great easy chair:

“Father, will you ask a blessing?”

Something peculiarly touching in the weak and tremulous voice made Mr. Pierson pass his hand quickly across his eyes as he looked upon this strange scene; the next moment his eyes danced with amusement; he had never in his life before heard a blessing asked at what was called the public table of a hotel.

“They’re a set of lunatics, playing at public life, I believe,” he said to himself, vainly trying to conceal a smile. “Yet what a delightful play it is! I wish they would keep on for a century, and let me play, too.”

It seemed almost necessary, as the meal progressed and the family addressed each other by their Christian names, and addressed the man at the head as father, to make some explanation to their puzzled guest, so Tom volunteered it:

“I am just setting out to paddle this canoe, you must know,” he said, turning to Mr. Pierson, “and these my kindred have come to bid me God speed and wish me well. Our house has its formal opening to-day, and I shall have to tell you how auspicious I consider it, that even our first meal in this house is not taken without a

commencement of the legitimate work of the house."

The sentence was too delicately put not to be understood and appreciated; and it had the desired effect of putting the young man quite at his ease, and being of a nature to thoroughly enjoy the novelty before him, he gave himself up to it, and was as merry as the rest. It was toward the close of the meal that the guest apparently began to feel a want that was not provided for. He glanced down the length of the table. He sent quiet side glances about the well-appointed room; no appearance of a sideboard; no provision for liquor of any sort. "Some concession to the whim of the old gentleman," thought this man, looking blandly upon him. He had heard of temperance men, and he was mildly indulgent of their queer ideas. But when the dinner was concluded and they had risen to return to the parlors he approached Tom with a confidential air and said in an undertone:

"Where shall I go to satisfy the thirst of the inner man? You have bountifully provided the substantials."

"I beg pardon," Tom said, speaking quickly;

"I am afraid that we have been very negligent, is it possible that you were not waited upon to another cup of coffee? We are but beginners, you must remember; let me have the pleasure of serving you myself."

"By no means," his guest said, staying his hand, and vainly trying to hide the laugh in his eyes. "I verily believe I have made a mistake and slipped into the Garden of Eden under false pretenses. It isn't possible that you don't understand me to mean that I want a glass of wine, or something of that sort?"

"Oh," Tom said, and the stranger felt that he didn't know his host well enough to be certain whether there was innocence or keenness in his tone; "I beg pardon; I understand; I am sorry that we can not serve you to everything you need; but the fact is we haven't an ounce of liquor of any description in the house. I mean, of course, the poisonous liquors. We have plenty of coffee and water."

It was impossible not to laugh now; there was so much humor in Tom's eyes.

"Is it really a temperance house?" Mr. Pierson asked as they moved toward the parlors.

“To the very core,” Tom said, earnestly ; “we have taken the most extreme and emphatic form of the movement. Absolutely nothing, neither brandy sauces, nor currant wines, nor cider in any shape or manner. At the same time, we intend to let no other conceivable want of the stomach, at least, go ungratified.”

“But you have no advertisement to that effect. May I ask why you didn’t hang out your sign, as your confreres in that scheme usually do ?”

Tom shot a keen glance under heavy eyebrows at the tall young stranger beside him : he fancied he knew the character with whom he had to deal.

“You wouldn’t have dined with me if I had,” he said, with a peculiar emphasis on the word “you.”

Mr. Pierson flushed a little and then laughed. “That is very true,” he said, frankly ; “I presume I should not.”

In the course of conversation it transpired that Mr. Pierson was to be in the city during the coming fall and winter, and was on the look-out for a suitable boarding-place. He expressed himself with great frankness.

“ I was congratulating myself that I had found the very elysium of my hopes in that regard, but I shall have to own that my recent discovery is not according to my views ; I am a temperance man in the main, that is I try to be ; but I confess to liking to be where I can indulge my fancy for a glass of wine when the spirit moves without having much trouble to procure it.”

“ As to that,” Tom said, “ I am sorry to say that we are exceedingly near to glasses of wine, and glasses of everything else that can intoxicate. We have hotels within calling distance from our front door, where they are only too willing to supply customers.”

At which item Mr. Pierson laughed, and gayly protested that he did not even want the trouble of going to the front door and calling ; and he courteously resisted all attempts to beguile him into looking at permanent rooms, and at the same time earnestly assured them that he was himself a temperance man ; that he rarely indulged in anything stronger than a glass of wine, and not even that as a daily thing ; and that he was perfectly willing to give up liquors altogether whenever the country should decide that it was for the public good.

“And yet he can not stop for three months where there is none of it to be had! What nonsense that is to talk!” This Helen Monroe said after their guest had left them and gone to his room. And as she said it she became dimly conscious that she was more decidedly committed by those words to the cause of temperance than she had ever allowed herself to be before. So Mr. Pierson had unwittingly done a trifle for the cause; and no one knows to what great results trifles may lead.

As for that gentleman, while he paced up and down his elegant room that evening, and looked about on the perfection of all appointments, he said: “Confound hobbies! What a very prince of hotels this is likely to be! A charming little family circle withal to drop into when one became disgusted with everything else. That one they call Helen has remarkably fine eyes. Why need they go and ride that most tiresome of all hobbies, and the most hopeless one possible — everlasting temperance? It is the very spot where I would like to locate if it were not for that drawback.” Then he came to a sudden pause, and a curious look overspread his face as,

after a moment, he said ; “ See here ; this is a kind of a queer idea. What difference does it make to me after all ? Am I really so fond of that occasional glass of wine that it is an absolute necessity to my comfort to be always in the very house where it can be bought ? ”





CHAPTER VIII.

TOM AND PETER TALK THINGS OVER.

THERE was another scene during that first day at the Randolph House that is not common to the exercises of hotel openings. It was but a few moments before the family from "The Little House," as the Randolph home was coming to be called, were to return. The carriage had been sent for to take the invalid back, and they were all gathered in what was to be called his room, though every one of them felt in their hearts that he was never likely to occupy it again.

"There is one thing, father, that I would like very much," Tom said; "though I am afraid you are not strong enough for it."

The wan-faced invalid turned smiling eyes on his young son and said, heartily :

“I am strong enough for a good deal to-day. I feel that this look at the new departure for the good of the cause has given me great breaths of strength. What is it?”

“I should like,” and Tom’s voice trembled with the earnestness of his thought — “I should like to have this house and all its belongings consecrated to the work, and I should like to have the first united prayer, offered under this roof, to be led by your voice.”

“I am strong enough for that,” Mr. Randolph said, and there certainly was a sound of strength in his voice ; and they knelt about him, while he prayed. If Mr. Pierson could have heard this prayer, and noticed with what words he was remembered, it might have caused him to think again over his decision that he could not possibly do such a queer thing as to take to patronizing a temperance hotel.

In the evening, when the house was quiet, Tom sat alone in the room that of all the rooms was his favorite — the long, light, cheerful room, that bore over its windows that gold-lettered

sign. No human being knew the hopes that centered around that room, nor the prayers that had already gone up from it. His reverie was broken by the sound of a light tap on the door, and Peter Armstrong was admitted. He came for directions concerning the disposal of some new furniture; and that being settled, Tom pushed a chair toward him.

“Sit down, Peter, and let us talk things over; there has been so much to do that we have not seemed to find time for any talk.”

Peter had changed considerably, in a short space of time; his form was rounding out into manly proportions and he was learning to take more pains with the details of his dress. He had been chosen by Tom for the confidential clerk of the establishment—that is, he called him so, when they talked together, and he certainly was very confidential with him. Now, as he leaned back, and surveyed the handsome room again, he said: “Peter, this room is my special pride and joy; I couldn’t begin to tell you how much I think of it, nor how many plans I have in which it takes a prominent place.”

“What is the first one, and how is it to be done?”

This manner of asking far-reaching questions was one of the elements that comprised the essential difference between Peter Armstrong and many other young men. It was this that made him so interesting a companion to Tom, and that made that young man so eagerly detail all his plans.

“The first one,” he repeated, laughing a little, “I’m not sure that I can tell you. It begins whenever we can get a chance, and reaches out in every direction; snares and traps and nets, and all sorts of counter charms I have in mind; we have to make small beginnings of course; there is only you and me; but we shall grow; there are others who can be found to help us; there is ever so much to be done — and do you know I am anxious to begin first among the strangers; young men who have come here recently, who have no home, and no comforts, and nothing to read, and no influence to keep them out of temptation; the city is full of such, and my heart seems to go out to them, as to no others.”

While Tom poured out these eager sentences, Peter sat listening with his steady gray eyes

growing keener, and his whole face showing wrapt attention. "It is working out the old promise," he said, as Tom paused. "Fishing after men, isn't it?"

"The old promise? Oh, yes; you mean the one that was made to Peter Bible. So it is; I had not thought of it. 'I will make you fishers of men,' and the condition: 'Follow me.' Yes; we are called; the commission is ours, and the promise. I had forgotten that there was a promise, that encourages one, doesn't it? By the way, Peter, I was wonderfully interested in your following up your namesake; but so many things have pushed in between, that I forgot about it. Are you studying his character yet?"

"Yes indeed!" Peter said, speaking with great relish. "It is a character that will bear studying a good while."

"Where are you now?"

"Well, I go slowly; and to tell you the truth, I gave him up for a good while. I said I would never have anything more to do with him, as long as I lived. I tell you now I never was so disgusted with any one in my life as I was with that Peter."

Tom leaned back in his chair and indulged in a hearty laugh; it was impossible not to be amused with this Peter's queer way of saying things; and Peter was blessed with that rare sweetness of disposition that allowed people to laugh and be amused over his ways, without taking offense thereat.

"What disgusted you?" the laugher said, when he could speak again.

"Oh, that awful and terrible time at the trial! I never imagined he could be so bad as that! Not only denied Him, you know, but swore about it, and said over and over that he knew nothing about him. Why, the first night I read that, I shut up the Bible and I was just in a storm; it seemed as though I could never stand it; talk about his cutting off that servant's ear! Why, it seemed to me that Peter's whole head ought to be cut off—right straight; and I felt as though, if I'd been there, I'd been willing to undertake the job."

It was impossible for Tom not to laugh. This entire process of dissecting Peter's character was entirely new to him. It was no laughing matter to the young man before him, as his glowing

eyes showed. It seemed almost impossible for him to understand how Tom could laugh; and presently that gentleman sobered, and taking in some of the solemnity of the story, said :

“Tell me about it, Peter. I am wonderfully interested; and don’t think I am laughing at the cruel story; but there is something very quaint about the way in which you tell it.”

“It was no laughing matter to me,” Peter said, earnestly. “I’ll never forget that lesson. I went around for more than a week, feeling more puffed up than I can tell you, and all the while I was mad at Peter. I felt as though I could never forgive him; and some of the time it seemed to me that if ever I came across him in heaven I should feel just exactly like twitting him about having denied his Master. I got cured of that in a way that I’ll never forget.”

There was something so intensely solemn in his voice and manner that Tom said, speaking gently, and with a touch of reverence in his voice :

“Do you mind telling me how you were cured?”

Peter arose suddenly from the low seat that

he had taken, and went to the window, evidently not to look out upon the brightly lighted street below, but to get the mastery over some deep feeling that was stirred within him. He came back presently, and there was a hushed and tremulous sound to his voice as he said :

“I did it myself! Don't you think, I denied him myself. I, that had been mad at Peter for more than a week, went and did that very thing, and without being afraid of my life either, as he was.”

“Do you mind telling me what you did?” Tom asked again, and his voice was very gentle and sympathetic.

“I went to a place where they were laughing and talking, and making fun of religion, and I never said a word — not a word. I just said by my actions as plain as ever Peter did, ‘I never knew him.’ And what did I do it for? Why, just for some miserable little shamefaced feeling about being on the weak side! To think of my finding fault with Peter! They made fun of Jesus Christ's very words, don't you think! and I sat there as dumb as though he had never given me a tongue.”

“What people could you have possibly got among,” Tom asked, in wondering tones, “that in this age of the world could have made their fun out of such material?”

“Oh, they were respectable people enough; they thought so, anyhow. They were having a church sociable, and I thought I had got a lift in the world when I got a chance to go there; and I never came away from any place just dead ashamed of myself before.”

Tom’s curiosity deepened every minute. What strange experience could this young man have had that the memory of it could so cloud his face and solemnize his voice?

“Will you tell me what happened?” he said. “I can not imagine what could have so overwhelmed you.”

“Why, it isn’t a long story to tell. They played games, and they quoted Bible at each other, and made fun of it, and roared over it, even the very words of Jesus Christ himself, until I was ashamed and afraid, and yet I didn’t say a word — not a single word. If ever a fellow denied his Master in the world I did. I’ll never forget the way I felt that night when I

went home. I was all in a storm of trouble. I thought of Peter right away, and of all the scorn I had felt for him, and then it seemed to me that I never felt so sorry for anybody in all my life. I remembered that he went out and wept bitterly. I could understand that. I felt as if I could feel his tears in my heart; it seemed to me that if I could only weep bitterly it would do me good, but the tears wouldn't come. I walked up and down the room, and I didn't know what to do. It seemed as if I was too wicked to pray, as if I ought not to ask Jesus to hear me or forgive me. Then I went to wondering what Peter did, and how his Master treated him after the resurrection. You see I had got so mad at Peter that I had given up reading about him. I got a Bible and turned over the leaves to see if there was any account of Peter meeting Jesus; and what do you think was the very first thing my eyes alighted on?"

"I don't know," Tom said, interest and sympathy in his voice. "What was it?"

"Just this word: 'Go tell my disciples — and Peter.' Just think of that! A special message given to Peter, the one who had treated him the worst.

I tell you I never had anything melt me like *that*; and I never heard anything like it before, either. I got down on my knees right away, and before ever I asked his forgiveness I thanked him for that blessed message to poor Peter!"

Tom's eyes were dim when this little story was concluded. There was something about it that touched him wonderfully. Not the least marked feature was the fact that the conscience of the Peter before him was very tender. His own conscience throbbed with the thought of how many times he had denied his Lord in ways that he and the world called little.

"Peter," he said, rising suddenly, and laying his hand tenderly on the young man's shoulder, "you must help me in this work, you must put your whole soul into it, and give it the best thought of your heart; and to that end we must pray much about it. Do you know, I feel a deep interest in our first guest? Let us try to catch him in our net. Shall we kneel together now here and ask the Master's help?"

And so for the second time that day the Randolph House was consecrated with the voice of prayer.



CHAPTER IX.

A PERPLEXED EVENING.



summer evening, but a dark and rainy one. Maria was in the little sitting-room, her work done for the day. She had just finished the last things, such as locking the kitchen door, drawing down the sitting-room shades, going on tiptoe to her father's room to see if everything was comfortable there and if he was sleeping quietly. Now she sat down in the little rocking-chair and folded her hands, and did what was a very uncommon thing for Maria Randolph to do, gave a long-drawn, weary sigh.

She felt unusually alone. Helen had gone over to the hotel — it was where she often went. That hotel was a real blessing to her, despite her

indignant protest over its projection. It took so much of the time that used to hang heavily, but it also left Maria much alone — not that that young woman imagined that she was any more comfortable with Helen's presence than in her absence, but for all that it was certainly more lonely to have her away.

There was Grace, to be sure, but Grace was often where she was at this moment — in the parlor entertaining young Alfred Parks — and as Maria thought of it, and heard their voices through the half-open door, it suddenly occurred to her for the first time that Alfred Parks was very fond of coming to chatter away the evenings with Grace. It was a thought that troubled her; it kept coming back and would not be dismissed, though she was angry with it and tried hard to put it from her.

“It is natural enough,” she told herself, impatiently. “They are in the store together all day, and the poor fellow has no home, and few enough acquaintances, I dare say. Why shouldn't he like to have a pleasant room to spend his evenings in, and a nice girl to talk with? What talk!” she continued, in disgust, after a few mo-

ments, during which the voices in the parlor had waxed louder, and the merriment over something became extreme. "That such stuff as that should be called conversation! I never heard such vapid nonsense in my life! How *can* Grace be so silly!"

This last after an extremely foolish sentence from the young man, followed by a burst of laughter from Grace, interlarded with several giggling "Oh Alf's!" as if her amusement was so intense that she hardly knew how to express it. Maria sat upright, with glowing cheeks.

"I wish Grace was out of that store," she said, speaking aloud in her earnestness. "She is growing silly, and I never thought she was that."

At this moment there came a quick, decisive rap on the kitchen door. Without a thought of hesitation or nervousness Maria arose, shaded her lamp with her hand as she walked past the open window, and finally setting it down on the kitchen table unbolted the door. Without invitation or permission there walked in a tall girl or woman, in a torn dress and a faded shawl, and sat down in the chair by the table.

Maria surveyed her coolly. If it had been a man she would have trembled a little, but the idea of being afraid of a woman was absurd. "Besides," she said to herself, going over the ground rapidly, "there is that young simpleton in the parlor to appeal to, if she doesn't behave herself. *She* will think he is a man."

"Well," she said, speaking aloud, "that is rather a queer performance! What are you supposed to want?"

"I wanted to come in, and I knew by bitter experience that if I asked permission I shouldn't get it, so I walked in without it."

"So I perceive. Now that you *are* in, what are you pleased to happen to want?"

"Bread!" The tone was sharp and stern and the voice decisive.

"Bread!" repeated Maria, incredulously. "And what if, instead of giving it to you, I have you turned out of doors?"

A visible shiver ran through the strange girl's frame, but she answered in the same stern voice:

"Then at least I shall not have starved without making a last hard effort at something to eat."

The word struck sharply on Maria's ear.

"Do you mean that you are actually starving?" she said, and her hand was on the knob of the pantry door. In a moment more the strange visitor was swallowing the dry bread with an eagerness that Maria had never dreamed of.

"Where on earth have you been?" she asked at last, "that you are in that wild, famished way? What is the matter?"

"The matter is that I am *starving!* Do you know how that feels? Where have I been? Everywhere. Wandering up and down your streets, first for work and then for bread, and I got neither — only doors slammed in my face and answers as angry as if I had stolen instead of begged," and the great mouthfuls of bread disappeared as she spoke.

Maria stood staring at her as if she were perfectly transfixed with amazed curiosity.

"Where are you going to spend the night?" she asked, suddenly.

"At the poor-house, if I can get there."

"It is three miles away!"

"I know it, but I have walked three times

that to-day. It is the poor-house or the street for me. Or, maybe, I can get taken to the station-house as a vagrant if I wander around long enough. Or I might steal something. I've had plenty of chances to-day, and an awful temptation."

Was there ever any talk more wild than this! What was to be done with the poor, forlorn, half-crazy creature? Maria still stood looking at her, feeling dreadfully perplexed. If she only had some one with whom to advise, and she looked wistfully toward the bedroom door. How much she missed that sick father!

"I might talk to those two simpletons in the parlor. Much they know about it!" she said, scornfully, still indignant over the talk she had overheard. But there was no one else to consult, so she went toward the parlor door, taking in with a swift vision the fact that the parlor door was in the line with the chair where the poor creature was, and she needn't lose sight of her.

She called Grace and her companion to the door, and in low tones explained. Before the sentence was concluded young Parks raised his

hands in horror, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

“The wretched imposter! Why didn’t you call on me to turn her out? I wouldn’t have listened to her lies for a minute. Here, let me dispose of her,” and he made a movement as if to pass Maria in the door.

“Dispose of yourself,” she said, rudely. “I’ll attend to the woman. I have your advice, and that is all and more than I need.”

Grace looked timid and confused, and said nothing, and Maria shut the parlor door with a bang that she could not repress and went back to her guest.

“I am going to let you stay here all night,” she began, promptly. “I have had such excellent advice it has moved my heart. I’m going to make up a bed for you on the floor out here, and I’m going to lock you out, so it will not be possible for you to do any mischief if you have any desire to, and I don’t believe you have.”

The reply to this strange address was quite in keeping.

“You’re a queer girl,” the stranger said, looking steadily at her would-be benefactor without

an emotion of gratitude. "I heard every word your adviser said, and I fully expected to be marched out. I think the reason you haven't done it is because you hate to follow advice. But there may be another reason, and for curiosity's sake I should just like to know. Are you a Christian?"

Maria's cheek flushed.

"No, I am not," she said, shortly. "What is it to you?"

"Nothing; except, as I said, a matter of curiosity. I have heard of such a thing as Christianity, and I wanted to know whether it was any such motive that prompted you to show me the first bit of humanity I have seen in three days, at least."

Maria's thoughts went backward on swift wings. She had been in her brother's room at the hotel that afternoon, and while she stood before his table, setting it to rights, she had glanced up at a "Silent Comforter" hanging on the wall. This was the verse that met her eye: "Give to him that asketh thee."

"Where is the particular comfort in that verse?" she had asked Tom; and he smiling had answered:

hands in horror, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

“The wretched imposter! Why didn’t you call on me to turn her out? I wouldn’t have listened to her lies for a minute. Here, let me dispose of her,” and he made a movement as if to pass Maria in the door.

“Dispose of yourself,” she said, rudely. “I’ll attend to the woman. I have your advice, and that is all and more than I need.”

Grace looked timid and confused, and said nothing, and Maria shut the parlor door with a bang that she could not repress and went back to her guest.

“I am going to let you stay here all night,” she began, promptly. “I have had such excellent advice it has moved my heart. I’m going to make up a bed for you on the floor out here, and I’m going to lock you out, so it will not be possible for you to do any mischief if you have any desire to, and I don’t believe you have.”

The reply to this strange address was quite in keeping.

“You’re a queer girl,” the stranger said, looking steadily at her would-be benefactor without

an emotion of gratitude. "I heard every word your adviser said, and I fully expected to be marched out. I think the reason you haven't done it is because you hate to follow advice. But there may be another reason, and for curiosity's sake I should just like to know. Are you a Christian?"

Maria's cheek flushed.

"No, I am not," she said, shortly. "What is it to you?"

"Nothing; except, as I said, a matter of curiosity. I have heard of such a thing as Christianity, and I wanted to know whether it was any such motive that prompted you to show me the first bit of humanity I have seen in three days, at least."

Maria's thoughts went backward on swift wings. She had been in her brother's room at the hotel that afternoon, and while she stood before his table, setting it to rights, she had glanced up at a "Silent Comforter" hanging on the wall. This was the verse that met her eye: "Give to him that asketh thee."

"Where is the particular comfort in that verse?" she had asked Tom; and he smiling had answered:

“It is one of my by-laws, direct from the Master’s hand. It needs to be coupled with your motto; and the two together do good service.”

That verse had persistently staid by her during the evening, and she was conscious of the fact that it had helped her to be prompt in bringing out her bread. But she was by no means disposed to tell all this to a stranger; and, indeed, there wasn’t time.

“I shall do no such thing,” that person said, speaking with energy, and rising as she spoke. “I am not nearly so ready to die as I was when I came in; bread is good yet, I find. Of course I am grateful to you; what fool would not be? But I shall not stay here to get you into trouble. Good-by. And if it is any comfort to you to know it, you can think that you saved my life.”

“But where will you go?” said Maria, trying to stay her guest’s steps. “Wait! let me think.” A reference to the verse had reminded her of Tom. “Will you go where I send you?” she asked, authoritatively.

“It’s likely,” the girl answered, in the same half-fierce tone that she had used during the in-

terview. "I haven't much to choose from ; and besides, you have earned your right to give orders."

Then Maria seized upon a torn envelope that lay on the table, and wrote on it this :

DEAR TOM :

Here is a chance to experiment on your "by-law." She needs it. I believe she is half crazy ; but I wish you would treat her as if she were a friend of mine, for I come nearer to liking her than any girl I ever saw, almost.

MARIA.

Then, with careful directions how to find the Randolph House, she lighted her visitor out.

The bolt had just been pushed again when there came another knock, this time a somewhat timid one.

"My patience!" Maria said, standing irresolute, "another call! This begins to grow exciting. Perhaps I better call that idiot from the parlor to protect me."

A peculiar snuffing sound from the person outside revealed his identity, and Maria promptly

unbolted the door and admitted Dick Norton. He, of course, had come for his clothes. She produced the neatly ironed little pile, and as she did them up for him noticed the sad, tired look on his homely face. "Give to him that asketh," floated through her mind. There are different ways of asking for things. Dick's face certainly looked hungry for something — perhaps it was a kind word.

"Dick," she said, cheerily, "you look as gloomy as an owl. What is the matter?"

"I *be* gloomier than any owl that ever hooted, I do believe," Dick said forlornly. "And there ain't nothin' much the matter neither; nothin' more than common."

"Common things are rather dismal, then. Is that what you mean?" she asked, still speaking in a cheery tone; and added: "If you'll sit down and tell me about some of them I'll mend that rip in your sleeve, so you'll look more comfortable."

At this Dick looked surprised and confused and grateful, all in one; but it ended in his pulling off his coat and sitting down on the edge of

a chair, while Maria brought her work-box from the other room.

“Now what about the ‘common things,’ Dick? They are hateful enough. I’ve found that out all my life. Which are the meanest of yours?”





CHAPTER X.

THE BEWILDERMENT DEEPENS.

DICK rigged uneasily in his chair, as if that were a difficult question to answer; then said, speaking slowly and hesitatingly: "I ain't at all sure that I *can* answer that question; you see, when you go to tell things they slip out of shape somehow, and they don't look a mite like they do when you sit all alone in the dark thinking about them."

Maria laughed. "I understand all about that, too," she said, amused to think how nearly her own experience agreed with Dick's. "I've been through that very place, and I've sometimes thought that an excellent way to get rid of our

troubles would be to come out of the dark and tell them all out in plain English to somebody."

"But then," Dick said, reflectively, "the trouble is, some of 'em come back as soon as ever you get in the dark again, a thinkin' of 'em over; they won't *stay* gone while you are alone: and it stands to reason that you can't be forever keepin' in the lamp light a tellin' 'em off to somebody."

She laughed again heartily, but there were almost tears in her eyes; these words seemed very pathetic to her somehow, and they touched the very depths of her own silent experiences.

"That is all true," she said at last, when the laughter and the tremulousness of voice were both subdued, "but after all I think you would better try to tell me the troubles, some of them at least; it is nice to have things slip away even for a little time. What is the biggest one to-night?"

"You would never guess it," he said, with a sort of wistful air. "But, as true as I'm alive, I'd like to know a little something; I kind of hanker after it, and I can't help it, though I s'pose it is awful foolish at my age."

“To know something!” repeated Maria, very much amazed. This was not the sort of trouble that she had expected to hear. “I don’t think I quite understand you; I’m sure you must know a good many things.”

“Precious few,” he said, shaking his head dolefully. “I don’t suppose you have no kind of an idea what an awful little bit I do know. You see, schooling of any kind was something that didn’t come in my line. I had to work from the time I was born, I do believe. I didn’t even go to school three months in the winter, as the poorest of ’em get a chance to do now-days; and I don’t know nothing at all. Why, I can’t even read the newspaper without spellin’ out more than half of the big words!”

This last bit of information was given in an almost whisper, and with a mixture of pain and shame on his honest face, that arrested the laugh on Maria’s lips and made her pitiful. She had a rareway of expressing pity.

“Well, what’s the use of groaning over it now? It was not your fault anyway if you had no chance. Why don’t you go to work and make up for it? Now you are old enough to understand the value of an education.”

“That’s the trouble,” he said, but his voice wasn’t quite so forlorn as before. “You see, I’m too old.”

“Nonsense!” and now every trace of softness was gone from her voice, and it was brisk and business-like. “You are not nearly as old as Methuselah yet; I don’t believe you are even of age.”

“Yes, I am. I voted last fall for the first.”

“Oh, well, I have known people who were older than you are, and they accomplished something in the world too. If I were you I would waste no more time in groaning for spilt milk. I would just go to work with all my might and show what I could do.”

“I’ve as great a mind to as I ever had to eat,” he said, with considerable energy, the very tones of her voice seeming to put hope in his heart. “Only the trouble is, I shouldn’t know where to begin, nor how to do it; I haven’t got any knowledge to start on, you see.”

“Yes, you have; you know the alphabet, and I dare say you know the nine figures when you see them, and the greatest scholar who ever lived had to begin just there.”

“That’s true,” and this time his voice was full of admiration. “You have a new way of putting it, somehow. I never thought of it before; but then they had teachers, most of them.”

She did not stop to controvert this false bit of history, with the long list of brilliant exceptions that might be made out. Curiously enough there had come to her the sound of that verse which hung on the wall in Tom’s room: “Give to him that asketh thee.”

Was ever help more plainly or more pitifully asked? Not the less eloquently, perhaps, that the pleader was unconscious of his petition; certainly the last thing that Dick Norton expected on earth was the next sentence, spoken in Maria’s most energetic tone:

“*I’ll* help you. I never tried teaching in my life, but I’ve always thought it was easy enough to do; I may have to turn my hand to it some day, and I may as well be practicing.” She did not wait for him to express his awkward and intense gratitude, but hurried through her next sentences eagerly. “We may as well begin to-night, if you like to; there is no time like the present, especially when two people have very

little time. This is the only evening that you have in the week, is it not? Then we will take *this* evening by all means. *Reading* is what seems to be the first thing needing our attention. What book have you of your own that you could use for a reader?"

"I've got a Bible," said Dick, meekly. "Your brother Tom gave me that, and he gave me about every good thing I've got in the world; that is the only book I've got that is fit to read in."

This was a somewhat startling suggestion to Maria. She was not sure that it was just the thing to turn the Bible into a text-book; there could be much less fun gotten out of this affair if they took so solemn a book for their guide. Besides, it would be twice as awkward to be found blundering through a chapter in the Bible with Dick Norton as it would to take any other book in the list. Then came her naturally obstinate nature to the rescue: *Why* would it? What was the use of being so silly about the Bible, and acting as though it was a book to be ashamed of? Why wouldn't it be just as sensible to help Dick Norton learn to read that well **as** it would to help him read some stupid extract

from some old book that neither of them cared for? Besides—and here came in the fun—hadn't Tom been wanting her to study the Bible and discover what her commands were? Wouldn't it be fun to explain to him that Dick Norton and she had taken up the subject together? Above all, wouldn't the whole thing give a delightful shock to the ideas of Mrs. Monroe? This last thought decided her at once, and in much less time than it has taken me to tell you her thoughts she was ready with her answer:

“Then let us take the Bible by all means. We couldn't find any better book, I suppose, and it will have this advantage: you will not have to be troubled bringing yours along with you. I happen to have one lying around somewhere. I'll hunt it up. Meantime we can take the large one out of the sitting-room for this evening, and commence our lessons at once, if you like.”

It was all very strange, and not a little bewildering, and the very last thing that had entered Dick's head when he began to tell his troubles that evening. But how could he be other than glad, and grateful, and excited, even

though he were at the same time so ashamed that his face was the color of the tea rose that blossomed in the window?

In a very short space of time, considering the remarkable issues of the future that were to cluster around that act, the young man was most laboriously at work over the first chapter of Genesis. "We might as well know the whole story since we are about it," Maria had said. By neither word nor look did she express the dismay that she really felt as the poor fellow blundered through the first verse, his embarrassment enabling him to do it much worse than usual, so that hardly a single word was correctly pronounced. But Maria had one of the first elements of a teacher's success about her, and that was a propensity for constant review, so that when Dick had four times repeated the reading of the verse he found to his surprise and satisfaction that he read it glibly enough. By the time the third verse was read without a mistake some of the horrible embarrassment was passing off, and he was beginning to feel able to appreciate the beautiful simplicity of the story.

"Wouldn't you like to do that?" he asked, looking up with shining eyes.

“Do what?” Maria questioned, a trifle startled, her mind having up to this time been occupied with the strangeness of the situation.

“Why, do things in that way; just stand up, you know, in the very thick of some great muddle that nobody understood and say, ‘do it so,’ and right off everything would move in the place you pointed out, and it would all be done.”

For the second time on this strange evening there came over Maria that inclination to melt even to tears. This was such a homely and simple, and yet wonderfully forceful way of expressing the secret longing of one’s heart for a place and a name among those who could do great things and for power over people. She had felt it herself to a degree that had made her sarcastic over the trifles that were left to her life.

“No one but God could do that, of course,” she said, evasively, perhaps a little sharply. It was certainly a strange discovery that this ignorant, uncultured car-driver had aspirations that matched if they did not rival her own.

“Not such big things, of course,” he said, “but little things, or what looked like little things to God, but were great big things to people. It must be nice to be away above other

people, to have them looking up to you and asking you what they should do, and how they should do it, and following your orders. That must be fine. Why —” and he grew excited and almost eloquent with his subject — “it was even nice to try it with horses. Some of the fellows couldn’t manage the horses at all; they didn’t know how to make them mind, and as that was something he *did* know it always made him feel glad and happy to be sent for to make them go across the track when there was an engine whistling on the other side.

“They always go,” he said, eagerly, “and I can’t for the life of me help being awful glad that I can make them do it right straight off, and the others can’t. And if it is so nice with horses, how grand it must be to make *men* mind.”

“But how would he like doing the minding?” Maria asked, with a half embarrassed laugh. This talk was so full of strange suggestings, was so like the outspokening of her own thoughts, that she had never chosen to speak, but had kept hidden in her heart, that she felt embarrassed without understanding why. “It would be all

very nice to order, but would he like to be one who was ordered?" And in her secret soul Maria knew that it was on this thing that she would rebel. She could understand the desire for power, but how hateful to have to submit to it.

"Yes, he would." Dick said it with glowing eyes and eager lips. He had always thought that he should like to be a soldier and have a splendid commander, a grand man that everybody admired and talked about, and then obey every word he said; obey in an instant, no matter what the command was, whether it was a good thing to do or a hateful thing. That would be splendid; it would be almost as grand as giving the order one's self.

"Well, *you* better go on reading; that will be more profitable than mooning over what you will never have a chance to do."

Maria said this as shortly and sharply as if she was a veritable teacher in a district school. And while Dick, utterly quenched, and with a very red face, floundered in the fourth verse, and called "divided" "dived," she heard not a single word.

Not a thought of the application as it came to her had penetrated the ignorant brain of the neglected fellow before her, but how instantly, while he spoke, there had flashed before her mind the thought of the great Commander, wise and good, revered by all decent people on the face of the globe, whose soldier she had been called to be, whose orders it was her privilege to obey, and whose words she had ignored.

Now, strangely enough, all this did not come to her even yet as a personal matter; it was not here that her conscience troubled her; she still considered herself entirely sufficient for *herself*. The trouble was that she believed in religion for those who needed it, and she believed that such young fellows as Dick Norton needed such safeguards, and that it was her manifest duty to remind the stupid fellow, if he could not see it, that here was the very distinction he longed for right at hand.

But, and here was the prick of conscience she felt, the inconsistency, nay, the almost impossibility, of pointing out a course to one which she herself carefully turned from.

On the whole, the first lesson could not be called an absolute success. The teacher cut it short very suddenly, and announced almost crossly that the coat was mended, and that she had no more time to give, and took a savage sort of pleasure in ordering the reading over of the six verses four times every night, and learning to spell every word in them before he presented himself to her on Tuesday evening.

“If you are very anxious to try your skill at obeying,” she said with a grim smile, “you can obey me, and I will give just as positive orders as you can possibly desire.”

As she closed the door after him she said, impatiently :

“It is very strange that I have to be haunted with such ideas. I never had any of them before. I wish Tom’s verses and notions were in the bottom of the river. The last scrape they have led me into is queerer than any yet.”

Then, as she turned from the door, and the damp night wind blew out her lamp, she saw that which drove Dick Norton and his verses and his ambitions utterly out of her head, for

there was a leave-taking in the parlor at this moment. The door was ajar, and a stream of light came from the gas jet under which they stood, and she saw Alfred Parks stoop and touch his hateful moustached lips to Grace's fair, rosy cheek.





CHAPTER XI.

A SHEEP IN WOLF'S CLOTHING.



THE hotel was fairly under way. The first few weeks had been full of work and success. Custom had flowed in upon them until Tom was ready to believe that there were many more people willing to promote the cause of temperance than he had imagined.

Mr. Pierson, however, was not yet caught in their net; he still professed himself a "temperance man," and one who had no special love for liquor and no taste to gratify that was strong in the least, and yet he found it inconvenient to take board at the Randolph House.

It was Saturday evening. Matters were in

train for a pleasant Sabbath, and Tom and his faithful ally, Peter, had donned overcoats and mufflers and gone out into the winter night to do work that was dear to the hearts of both of them — fish for men.

It was an expression that was specially dear to Peter's heart, because of that old promise and direction that he considered as much his commission as it was his namesake's:

“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” Both of these young men longed exceedingly for bait. Their paths did not lie together; they divided their forces.

“Well, good-night,” Tom said as they reached the crossing at Easton Street. “Let us see what this evening will bring to us; I wish you all success.”

Then he turned and went down the brilliantly lighted business street of the city, I mean the special favorite for business and gayety; while Peter dived down into an alley where life was on a smaller scale. A great many people were out on that same mission of fishing, and the eagerness and cunning that they displayed in working for their Master were remarkable to contemplate.

How the gas-lights glittered in the spacious saloons that he passed! How inviting the billiard parlors looked! What time and money had been spent in fitting up the gilded traps where young men were to be caught!

Young Randolph looked eagerly about him with an eye for details. He meant to let the devil have not one inch of vantage ground that he could legitimately occupy. If there was anything new in the line of elegance or fascination that could not be found in that upper room he meant that it should speedily find its way there.

Moving leisurely along, looking in at the gay windows to see what he could see, he reached the largest and grandest of these places and came to a full stop.

At the further window was a young man, also looking in with earnest gaze. His face, and dress, and position, all showed him to be a young man from the country, and Tom's eager eyes were on him. Here was a fish, young and unsuspecting, in danger, too, for his eyes plainly said, "That is a most inviting looking spot." No doubt he was trying to decide the question whether to enter and see for himself what the reception would be.

The door was suddenly opened from the inside, and a young man with a winning face and manner said, as he flung wide the hospitable door and let out a flood of light and warmth into the black night:

“Come in, gentlemen, walk right in; you will find much more comfortable quarters inside; it is a disagreeable night.”

He was dressed in the extreme of city fashions, and his air and manner was that which we are accustomed to call “dashing.” But for all that there was a ring to his voice that expressed friendliness and good fellowship. Tom caught the thought on the instant. It would be well to have some one on the alert at the door of the Randolph House.

This cordial invitation was certainly very agreeable. He sprang eagerly forward, but not to accept the invitation. “Thank you,” he said, courteously, for he had adopted it as a motto to be courteous in the extreme to every one until necessity demanded a different manner. “Thank you, not at present; and I want a word with this young man, if he please. Will you walk with me a few steps, sir?”

The country stranger thus addressed turned and fixed a pair of gray eyes for an instant on Tom's face and then said: "I've no objection to that. Where do you want me to go?"

Now, if Tom had been entirely frank he would have been obliged to answer, "I'm sure I don't know; I have no definite desire about it, and I don't know in the least what to say next to you, nor how to account for my sudden desire for your company. The most I want is to keep you from stepping into that glittering trap which is spread open for you, which I know all about, and of which you are ignorant." But of course it would not do to say this, so he simply said: "Oh, come this way, please. You are a stranger in town, are you not? I thought you looked lonely, and it seemed to me it would be pleasant to have a little talk with you. Do you mind taking a walk with me?"

"Not a bit," the young man said, and his voice was strong and hearty, a voice that Tom fancied at once. "I am a stranger in town; have only been here a week, and I came out to-night on purpose for a walk and to see what was to be seen."

So they went arm in arm down Benson Street, Tom talking briskly the while, pointing out objects of interest and beauty, trying to be as entertaining as he could, and all the time carrying on an undertone of thought as to how he was going to conclude this interview, and how to make it helpful in the least.

“Where do you board?” he asked, suddenly, and as the young man named one of the poorer streets of the city, where the houses were dark and dingy, he thought of the swarm of third-rate boarding-houses to be found there, and pitied him in his heart. No wonder he came out for a walk and to see what was to be seen. What a place such a boarding-house must be in which to spend an evening! Why should he not at once try to toll him away to that beautiful upper room, where were lights and beauty and comfort, and everything that the most cultured taste could desire?

“Not the most fascinating place in which to spend an evening,” he said, trying to speak carelessly, as the young man gave him a brief description of the peculiar boarding-house in which he lodged. “Now I happen to have a much

pleasanter place than that; if you do not mind a long walk I should like to show you where I live." Thus easily was the undertaking accomplished, and the two were very soon thereafter mounting the steps of the Randolph House.

"There!" Tom said, with a little pardonable pride, as he showed his new friend into the long, bright, elegantly furnished parlor. "Here is where you are entirely welcome to pass an evening as often as you choose."

The two seated themselves, and Tom tried with all the force of fascination that he possessed to catch his fish. He talked and laughed; had apples served on elegant dishes, and eaten with silver knives; and apparently he made no headway at all.

The cool, keen, gray eyes studied him as if he had been a rare work of art set up for investigation, and allowed himself to be entertained and amused, but in no way compromised; nor returned the apparent frankness of his host by any communications as to himself, save the most commonplace; and neither by word nor sign pledged himself ever to come again.

Tom was puzzled and disappointed. How

should he contrive to ensnare this fish so that the surroundings should seem as pleasant to him, and as *free* to him, as the paradise into which he had found him peeping?

“Come up-stairs with me,” he said, suddenly springing up after the apples were eaten; and the gray eyes were looking precisely as though, if they could speak, they would say, “Well, what next?” “I want to show you a perfect gem of a room; my special pet, in fact.”

And the gray-coated young man followed him quietly, and walked the length and breadth of the precious, consecrated room without a lighting up of his composed face, or other expression of pleasure than that “it was very beautiful.” Praise spoken in cool, wary tones.

Tom sat on the ottoman and leaned his head against the window in despair. “I don't know how to win him,” he said to himself. “He will never come here again, I see it in his eyes. What is lacking? I wonder what I can say or do to help him? I wonder if he has an idea what a city is? I believe he is a great, good-natured, ignorant fellow; those gray eyes can flash too, I know they can, if they find occasion, but

they are not the sort to grow angry over a little friendly warning; I mean to try."

"Do you know what sort of a place that was where you and I met to-night?" he asked.

"A saloon of some sort, I fancy," said he of the gray eyes, quietly.

"It was more than that," Tom said, speaking earnestly. "It was the largest and the worst gambling hole in the city, the very worst, because they carry on their miserable business in a very respectable and fashionable manner. They are always on the lookout for victims. They thought they had found two this evening. I'm glad they were disappointed for once."

Still no gleam of surprise or interest on the part of his visitor. What should he say next? "Isn't this room as pleasant as the one into which we were peeping?" he asked, suddenly.

"Quite as pleasant, I should say. Are you trying to outdo them?"

"Yes, I am; that is it precisely. I may as well tell you out and out; I'm not good at concealments. This is a trap—it is fitted up in the best manner that I can plan, and I brought you here to-night to see if you, looking at it for

the first time, could suggest something else that would help me to catch the young men of our city and make them want to come here, instead of going to such places as those where we were to-night."

The strange young man up to this time had not taken a seat since he entered the room, instead he had kept his station near the door, his keen eyes on the alert, and his whole face quiet and emotionless. Now he turned, and for the first time his expression changed to one of somewhat puzzled inquiry, and he looked steadily at Tom for several seconds without speaking. At last he said, speaking carelessly:

"Before I answer your question I want you to tell what you want to do with us after you trap us; what is your object in running opposition to the places down town, and what do you expect to gain by it? Those are fair questions. If you answer them satisfactorily I'll engage to answer yours."

Tom had been keenly excited during this interview, and keenly disappointed. This seemed to him like the trial hour of his beloved scheme, and he feared that it was to prove a failure. He

could not conceal the excitement of deep feeling nor the tremor in his voice.

“ I want to help to save men ; I want to be about the business that I promised my Master I would try to do for him. My object is to foil Satan in his schemes and plots for ruining young men ; and I expect to gain the reward promised to me by the Master, whose servant I am.”

You should have seen those gray eyes then ! They fairly glowed with light and feeling. The owner of them left his station by the door and came with a long stride over to the low seat where Tom had dropped himself.

“ Here’s my hand,” he said now. “ Why, man, I belong to the same Master ; he has bought me, and given me my orders ; I belong to the ranks ; I’m working for the very same end. God bless you. Why, in the name of common sense, didn’t you let me know what you were at ? ”

Tom sprang up, smiling and eager, and the country youth and the handsome city gentleman shook hands long and heartily.

“ Sit down,” said Tom, at last. “ Why wouldn’t you sit down, and why wouldn’t you show a bit of interest in my beloved scheme ? You made

me feel that it was an awful blunder from beginning to end, and that you would go and ruin yourself twice as fast after my interference as you would have done without it. By the way, what is your name, please? Mine is Randolph."

"And mine is David Parker, at your service." And then the said David Parker leaned back in his chair and indulged in a long, loud, hearty laugh.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Tom, greatly surprised and a trifle annoyed.

"Why, I'm so amazed," explained his guest, "and so mistaken. Let me tell you, young man. You asked a question or two that I promised to answer. I'm from the country, you know, and I come fresh from a father who knows something of city life, and has cautioned me on every side, until I am fairly bristling with cautions, to beware of sharpers in every shape and form, and I hope you will excuse me for telling you, but if I didn't take you to be a sharper of the tallest kind that I had ever heard or dreamed of, then my name is not David Parker. You know the prince of sharpers is said sometimes to appear as an 'angel of light,' and upon my word and

honor I thought I had come across him in exactly that shape.”

“But what under the sun can you mean?” asked poor puzzled Tom.

“Mean! Why, only think for a minute what you did! Where did I meet you, and what excuse did you give for suddenly pouncing upon me, a perfect stranger, to take a walk with you? and what did you tell me about yourself and your schemes, with all your apparent frankness? and what kind of a paradise is this into which you led me? and how did you entertain me without the shadow of an explanation? I tell you if I hadn’t been wide-awake and a little vain of my ability to keep so, and if I hadn’t besides been honestly desirous to see how you did it — that I might the better help to keep other young men from falling into your hands — I should have turned and fled from you twice as fast as from that gambling saloon, for I considered you twice as dangerous.”

“I begin to see,” said Tom, light breaking over his perplexed face. “I have gone at this work with the idea that every young man I met was either a scamp or an unsuspecting victim, and

not by any shadow of chance a fellow-fisher. I thought I was the only disciple the Master had, it seems. Well, you have answered my question. Thank you. I'm encouraged."

"What is this place?" queried David Parker, his face expressing curiosity and eagerness enough to entirely satisfy his host.

"It is a temperance house."

"And what is this room?"

"It is a Young Men's Christian Association room. That is, it is to be, when we find the men of which to make the Association. At present there are only three—Thomas the Skeptic: that's myself, only my name has been changed to Thompson for family convenience; Peter the Bold, and if ever a fellow was well named it is my friend Peter; and King David; that's yourself. We constitute officers, and rank and file. There are more, though, to be found, I verily believe. I feel surer of it after to-night's experience. Having found our king, we can surely make progress."

"No, I am only the shepherd boy, keeping my Father's sheep," the young man said, quickly, with keen appreciation of Tom's mood.

"And are coming to do good service against

Goliath with your sling and stones, are you? Very well, so be it. Let me ask you this, though. How do you know, since your suspicions were so great—what did you expect to find up in this room, by the way?”

“A secret chamber with padded walls and billiard table as long as the room, with bottles and glasses and iniquity of every sort. It is true,” he added as Tom laughed; “I expected *that*, at the very least.”

“Well, then, how did you know but I was playing sharp when I answered your question as to motives? The veriest scamp can feign pure motives.”

David shook his head. “No, he can’t; not in that tone, and with that sacred name on his lips. At least I don’t believe he could deceive me. I love the Leader too well, and I know the sound of his voice so well, that I don’t believe the counterfeit can deceive me. I don’t know; I won’t say that, either, because good men have often been deceived. I will simply say that I am just as sure of you as if I had known you all my life; and half an hour ago I thought you were the smoothest villain in the city.”

“Well,” Tom said, drawing a long breath, “I

went out to-night praying that I might find some one to help, some one to speak a word to that would be the means of doing good ; but it never entered my heart to pray that I might find a friend and brother. I thank Him from my soul. Shall we kneel together while you tell him so?"

Instantly the two brethren knelt, and young David showed that he was used to holding audience with the great King — that he was to him an "Elder Brother." And the way in which he thanked God for permitting him in his loneliness and sadness to find such a spot as this, and such a friend, made Tom say, with a mixture of tenderness and humor as he arose from his knees :

"I feel as though *my* name ought to be Jonathan."





CHAPTER XII.

A CRISIS.

MARIA stood perfectly still, holding on to her darkened lamp, apparently listening to the retreating footsteps of Dick Norton. In reality she was taking in this new and bewildering, and, to her, utterly distasteful situation. Grace having company that was distinctively hers, that came at stated evenings and assumed rights over her; above all, that kissed her! It was horrid!

Why, Grace was nothing but a child—a school-girl yesterday, and would be yet but for the inconvenience of money, or rather the absence of it. To be sure she was two years older than herself; but then she had always been old.

Who had ever heard any one cautioned, even in her childhood, to look after her? But had not the little mother looked after them hundreds of times, as they trotted off to school, and called:

“Take good care of Gracie, daughter;” not in sarcasm, either, but in real earnestness; for Maria, with her strongly-built figure and firm step and independent air, looked fully two years older than her frail sister, and so every one, even the mother, fell into the habit of considering her the leader, and, in a certain sense, the protector. None of the family, save Helen, had ever rebelled at the leadership, and there had been times when she was glad to avail herself of the convenience of it. And now Grace was in the parlor, at this present moment, bidding a special good-by to a young man! Presently Maria recovered sufficiently to go forward to the kitchen table and fumble for the match-safe.

“It isn’t possible!” she muttered, as the vile fumes of the lucifer curled into her nose. “It can’t be possible that she means anything but girlish nonsense. It isn’t like Grace to be so free. It might do for some girls, but she has been dif-

ferently brought up. But then she has been in that abominable store long enough to get careless. She sees him all the time, too, and I suppose he seems to her like a brother. However, that is altogether too brotherly. I always did detest that sort of sham relationship, anyhow. To think of getting it up with such a goose as Alfred Parks! What can Grace have been thinking about? Faugh!"

Whether this last remark meant Alfred Parks, or the lucifer match, did not appear, for Maria said no more; but she banged the bread-bowl about with a frowning face, and said "scat!" to the old white cat in such a tone that it sent her flying down cellar in dismay. It was not all ill-humor. The young lady had that unfortunate manner of exhibiting perplexity. She did not know what to do. It must all be stopped, of course. It would never do to let Grace go on making a fool of herself. But how to stop it?

She groaned over the thought of the store, and the money coming from it regularly into the family purse. Grace was wonderfully careful and economical. She had the faculty of getting herself up like a lady out of a new ruffle and her

old necktie re-dyed. Maria looked on respectfully, and could never understand how it was done. In case the clerkship came to an end, how was she to get along without the revenue therefrom? and in case it continued, how was she to put a stop to the nonsense?

You see there was room for perplexity, and there was no one to advise. She was in just the right mood, by the time Grace had seen her visitor depart and locked the front door and come out to her, to turn fiercely around from the sponge she was stirring, and say:

“Grace Randolph, what in the world has become of your common sense, to say nothing of your decency? What is the meaning of the performance I have had the pleasure of attending, to-night?”

She could hardly have done a more unwise thing. I never claimed an uncommon share of wisdom for my friend Maria. A bright red spot glowed on Grace's round, fair cheek, but she answered, in a mild low voice:

“I don't know what you can mean, Maria? What have I done to disturb you? Is it about the woman? I didn't say a word, I know. But

Alfred really did think it was dangerous for *you*. It was not because he is heartless."

"Fiddlesticks for his heart!" Maria said, growing every minute more vexed. "What do I care about his heart, or whether he has one at all or not? What I want to know is, what business has he to come here so much, and what right have you to be so free with him? I couldn't believe the witness of my own eyes at first. Why, I actually saw that contemptible fellow kiss you, and you stood and endured it! Now what does that all mean? Were you afraid of hurting his feelings or *what?*"

If Maria had taken the trouble to look away from her sponge during this harangue she would have seen that the red spot deepened and spread, until Grace's whole face was a flame of scarlet. Her voice was still low, but wonderfully firm for so slight and yielding a girl, as she answered her irate sister in a way that she had never spoken before in her life.

"Maria, you have utterly forgotten yourself. Remember, I am two years the oldest, and am not to be called to account by you, as if I were responsible to you for my actions. If I were,

you have not spoken to me in a way to invite confidence. If I were your daughter I would almost be justified in an attempt to deceive you after such harsh and cruel words. But I will tell you for all that just what it all means. I meant to tell you, of course, though I hoped it would be in a different way," and just here her voice trembled a little. "Alfred Parks has the right to come and see me, and for that matter to kiss me good-night if he chooses to do so. He has all the right that I can give him at least. I have promised to be his wife ; and as I have no mother to go to, and I dare not disturb father, there is nothing for it but to give him his rights in a less ceremonious but not less sincere way than others have done before me. I don't know how you made the discovery that has made you so angry to-night, and I am sorry for it, because it has disturbed a pleasant story that I meant to tell you this very night, and that I hoped you would receive with sisterly sympathy. As it is you will have to forgive us and make the most of us both. Good-night."

And before Maria had done staring at the rosy face, for she had turned entirely away from the

bread-sponge now, Grace had taken up her lamp and disappeared through the stairway. The water cooled in the bread-bowl, and the flour gathered itself into sticky lumps, and the spoon stood upright in the miserable mass, while still Maria stood staring at the spot where Grace had been, apparently unable to turn her eyes away.

What a revelation ! The previous one had not prepared her for it in the least. It had been miserable enough to suppose that Grace was sinking to the level of very common young ladies, who thought that cordial leave-takings from their gentlemen acquaintances were no harm and no disgrace. She had even feared there might be a silly little feeling in Grace's heart that she rather liked the insipid Alfred, but not for one moment did it occur to her that Grace, their little sister, who it still seemed to her she should watch over and care for, had actually given herself away, thrown herself away rather, on a brainless boy, who was her inferior from every point of view ; so at least he looked to *her*.

The anger had all died out now ; this was something real and tangible ; utter dismay and

bewilderment took its place. Was it possible that they would have to sit tamely down and submit to this state of things? See Grace, the flower and the darling, just frittered away! It was true enough, as she said, that there was no one with authority to whom to appeal. The father must not even hear of this; it was not to be thought of for a moment.

“It is not,” said Maria to herself, with a swelling heart, “it is not as if he were one of whom father could be fond and proud, and to whom it would be a joy to him to think of leaving Grace.”

And with this thought the anger began to rise again, and she was enabled to turn to that unfinished sponge. She tucked it up neatly, and presently sat down to think, or rather to glower at the future, and wonder what would be the end of it all. The next arrivals were Tom and Helen. There was a little glow of interest or satisfaction on Helen’s face, and her voice was kindly as she said, inquiringly :

“Are you studying ways and means, as usual? If I were you I would write a book on domestic economy, and end this struggle by making us all independent. I know it would be a success.”

This she said while she was lighting a lamp, or while Tom was lighting it for her, and she went off immediately.

Tom drew his chair near to his favorite sister, and said :

“ Well, I am prepared to report as to the hopefulness of that new friendship of yours. I thought you would storm me with questions. What do you suppose is her story? or do you know it? She wasn't communicative to me at all.”

The only answer that Maria vouchsafed to this was to whirl herself around so that her eyes were in a line with her brother's, and say in her most abrupt tone :

“ Tom, what do you know of Alfred Parks? ”

“ Know of him? ” Tom repeated, startled. “ Why, not a great deal ; but as much as I care to, perhaps — no, I shouldn't say that. He is one of the kind I am after, only I hadn't thought of him. Is he to be one of your *protégés*? You remember you promised to help.”

“ How should you relish him for a brother-in-law? ”

“ Maria ! ” said Tom, and there was sufficient

amazement, not to say disgust, in his voice to satisfy Maria. "What on *earth* do you mean? I didn't even know that you were acquainted with him; and I had not the remotest idea that you were thinking of any such matters anyway."

This was perhaps just what Maria needed. It was so ridiculous that it took the sting a little from her heart and the gloom from her face, and she waited to laugh before she answered.

"You can't be such an idiot as to suppose that I am talking about myself! Tom, I thought you had common sense."

"What *are* you talking about?" said Tom, and then he stopped suddenly, and the amazed look changed to a flash of understanding, and then to dismay. "Gracie?" he said, breathlessly.

"That is just it. Now what is to be done? Such a thing as that can't be borne, you know, and I want to know how we are to put an end to it."

"That is a good deal easier said than done and I suspect she will tell us that we have no business even to discuss it in that light; but how much of a beginning has it, and how did you discover it, and all about it?"

So Maria began at her beginning, which only

dated back to the feeling of annoyance that had crept over her of late at the frequency of "that simpleton's" calls, and detailed the result of the of the evening's experiences. Tom had arisen before she finished her story, and was twirling his chair on one leg, and looking both annoyed and perplexed. He interrupted her while she was reporting her conversation with Grace, the beginning of it.

"You couldn't have done a more unwise thing than to pounce down on the child in that style."

"I know it. Do you consider that a very helpful and encouraging remark?"

Tom laughed.

"Well, go on," he said. "I see how it was. Surprise and annoyance got the better of you, and I should probably have done just so."

"No, you wouldn't. You are not made of quicksilver." Then she finished her story. By the time it was concluded, Tom was taking a perplexed walk up and down the room; he had learned that of his father.

"He is decent enough, I suppose," he said at last, speaking slowly, as if he were reluctant to admit even that.

"But he is such a perfect ninny — a fellow to

show off new styles in neckties, and perfume his handkerchiefs with the latest fashion. I never imagined there was more than that to him. To think of one of the Randolphs fancying him! What can Grace mean?"

"However, I don't see what we are to do. She will not be disposed to listen to reason, and certainly we have no authority, and would perhaps have no right to exercise it, if we had. Is she two or three years older than you?"

"Two. But you needn't think *I* am going to sit meekly down and submit to such a thing!"

"You haven't," Tom said, laughing a little. "You have entered your protest; how far have you advanced toward stopping it do you suppose? I don't know; there seems to be nothing that we can do. If he were a drunkard, or anything of that sort, it would be different; but, you see, he is a fellow of very decent habits, better perhaps than the average."

"What a pity!" Maria said, imitating his doleful tone; and then this troubled brother and sister broke down in a hearty laugh.

"But I *won't* endure it; all the same," Maria said, rallying; "and you needn't think it. I

shall do something. Grace is nothing but a child ; she doesn't know her own mind any more than a kitten would. She thinks it is nice to have somebody be interested in her, and look after her, that she doesn't get her feet wet on rainy days, and walk a mile out of his way to carry her umbrella for her — he has done that twice — and she imagines *that* is reason enough for promising to marry him ! ”

“ And you are her grandmother's maiden aunt, and know all about it,” Tom said, finding it impossible not to laugh a little over this impetuous girl, two years younger than her sister. But she faced about on him with an unanswerable argument : “ Tom Randolph, *was* I ever as young in my life as Grace is now ? ”

“ Upon my word,” Tom said, speaking with utmost gravity, “ I don't think you ever *were*.” Then he walked the floor again. “ If she were a Christian,” he said, slowly, “ I could appeal to that difference, but as it is — ”

“ If she were, she would wheedle him into thinking he was one in less than ten minutes,” Maria said, spitefully. “ The greatest trouble with him is that he hasn't any brains at all. He

has to borrow his ideas from her. Tom, if you could hear some of his jokes, you would be sick for a week. And Grace actually laughs over them. So, you see, she means it. But I'll do something, I'm sure of that. I won't submit meekly. If the poor wretch ever becomes my brother-in-law, I shall be sorry for him; that's all."

At last that evening was ended. Tom said good-night without having thought what to do, and Maria went up-stairs and locked herself in, and had a luxury she seldom permitted to herself, a real good cry, before she got out writing materials and set to work.





CHAPTER XIII.

INVITATIONS.

TOM had a new scheme on hand, and much work to do to get ready for it. Part of the work was to talk Maria into the right mood for helping.

“What in the world do you want of me?” she asked. “I made no objection to your doing remarkable things; it is your nature; but why I should be dragged in I can’t imagine; it is utterly out of my line.”

“No,” her brother said, speaking positively. “In that you are mistaken. It is *not* out of your line; what I want of you you can do. I need your help. It is to be utterly unlike a prayer-meeting, you know. I don’t want the

least stiffness about it, and I want just as little attention paid to forms as possible.”

“And you think I am without stiffness or form, do you? That might be a compliment and it might not. But, now, just *what* am I to do?”

“Why, in the first place, you are to come; there is a great deal of help in just being there. Then I want you to fit in at vacant places, repeat a Bible verse, ask a question simple enough to be understood by every one, and vital enough to be of importance to all—such questions as you know how to ask.”

“In short, you want me to help conduct a religious meeting! That will be very much like the ‘blind leading the blind.’ Didn’t they both fall into the ditch? I don’t know any Bible verses.”

“You have just quoted one; and, besides, there is time enough to learn a new one. Then I need your help very much in the matter of singing; we want to sing every few minutes.”

“Who will lead your singing? Are your going to have playing?”

“Yes, indeed; this is one of the main uses to

which that piano is consecrated. Helen is going to play and lead the singing ; at least I am going to ask her if she will."

"Helen!" One exclamation point doesn't begin to convey an idea of the astonishment that was in Maria's voice. "Tom Randolph, you *know* she won't do anything of the kind! Why, it is months since she has been to her own prayer-meeting! And do you think she will countenance anything so unheard of as a Sunday afternoon meeting at a hotel, especially where all the servants are to be invited, or that she will lead music in which they are to join?"

"I think she will," Tom said, speaking thoughtfully. "At least I hope so. She knows all about it, and she has made no objections to the plan."

"Well, now, you can hope until you are gray, but I *know* she won't do it. She may have discovered that there is no use in making objections to your notions. I ought to be wise enough for that myself by this time, but taking a prominent part in the entertainment is another thing. I know her better than that. Tom, you ask her when she comes down, and if after a full half

hour of argumentation she engages to have anything to do with it I'll come and recite two verses, and sing like a lark."

This sentence was hurried to its conclusion by the sound of Helen's step in the hall. Her brother turned as she entered, and without circumlocution came directly to the point.

"Helen, will you play and sing for us to-morrow?"

"Sing *for* you! Oh, you mean lead the singing; they are all going to join, aren't they? Why, yes, I suppose so. Maria, your alto is so strong it will make a good background. Are you going to help sing?"

"As loud as I can roar!" said Maria, emphatically, and with a significant look at Tom, and he, with a beaming face and a heart well satisfied with that half hour's work, betook himself to his long room to finish preparations there.

The plans for that first meeting reached out in many directions, and had been carefully studied. In the first place there were little notices tacked in conspicuous places not only, but odd, out of the way and unexpected places. These were written in fine, round print, with dainty

flourishes and graceful shadings: "Praise meeting at the rooms of the Young Men's Christian Association, No. 279 Burton Avenue, at 4 o'clock on next Sabbath afternoon. You are invited."

There had been diplomacy in the getting up of those cards. David Parker had projected the idea, and Tom in much delight had grasped it.

"That's capital! I'll get them printed this very afternoon."

"Not a bit of it," David had answered, briskly. "We are poor, you know; we must economize our resources; besides, it is not to be a printed circular, to belong to the million, but a special, personal invitation."

"Written," said Tom heartily. "Good! I'll bring my German text into requisition then, and do them elegantly."

"With all deference to your skill in that line, may I get a fellow that I know to write them for us? I've been trying to catch him for some time. He is fast, decidedly. I used to know him when he was younger, and he has not improved, but he can write beautifully, and it will serve as an excuse."

"I see," Tom had said, with that touch of re-

spect in his voice that this gray-coated young man from the country often called forth. "I see; it is a good thought; carry it out, by all means; and in the meantime we will pray that the invitation may write itself upon his heart. David, there are endless ways of fishing. I learn a new one of you every day."

The result of this planning was that young David left his work earlier than usual one afternoon and sought one of the clerks in McAllister's store. He had a favor to ask, and he presented his claims with such an air of eager expectancy that the fast young man was won over to an air of patronage.

"How many of them do you want written?" he asked, reading the copy attentively. "Fifty! Why, dear me! that will take time. And you must have them for Sunday? Then they would have to be done this evening, and I had another scheme in view; however, that can wait, and I would rather like to accommodate you, even if it is in such a queer fashion. You stick to the old track, don't you, David? It agrees with you, too; I never saw you look better. Well, you can depend upon me; I'll have them ready for you when you call to-morrow."

Now there was another result growing out from this. Not ten minutes after David Parker had gone his way the clerk at McAllister's had another call. One of his "fast" companions came, proposing a ride into the country and supper at a certain hotel; and this ride and supper included mischief and peril enough to lay the foundation for ruin.

"Can't go," said the clerk, promptly, but with a shade of disappointment in his voice. "I've promised to devote my evening to philanthropy, or religion—both, I guess. Anyhow, it will take the whole evening, what little is left, after business."

There was much laughter and talk over this decision; but it was unalterable, for the young man, who was treading on dangerous ground and going ahead a few steps every day, had still this safe ground holding him back. His early education had taught him that his word once given, however trivial the cause might appear to him, was to be respected.

So he sat at home and wrote those words on that slip of paper fifty times; though, during the first dozen, he got up as many times and stared out of the window, and voted it a glorious even-

ing for a ride, and called himself a stupid fool for not having gone after all; but he *didn't go*.

David Parker knew nothing of this result of his plan, neither then nor afterward. I wonder how many of the events of our life turn on such little invisible hinges as these?

There was another result after which David Parker had aimed, and for the accomplishment of which he and Tom Randolph and Peter Armstrong prayed that evening.

Alone, in his dingy little room, the young clerk sat and wrote for the twentieth time those words, "You are invited;" wrote them with many dainty and graceful variations in the curves and flourishes. Once, as he drew a graceful little line under the "you," he repeated the sentence aloud.

"I've given myself a good many invitations, seems to me," he said. "I wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea to accept one of them and see what it is like. Parker is the queerest fish that ever was, anyhow. I'd like to see what sort of people he has fallen among. This can never be a scheme of his own planning. He must have some one in with him. I wonder where this

meeting is? I didn't know that there was a hall in that part of the city. I just mean to stroll down there on Sunday and see what all this is about."

"I caught him," David had explained to Tom, "so far as writing the notices goes. It is quite an evening's work; but he is a real kind-hearted fellow, likes to accommodate, and is a little bit vain of his writing. So, now, our part is to pray that the invitation will touch home to him."

"Does that mean *me*?" the writer said, as he passed over the notices and pointed to the words, "You are invited."

"Indeed it does," David said, the eagerness in his heart springing up into his voice. "Will you accept it?"

"Why, I don't know but I will, if you won't be hard on a fellow. I don't know how to act in meeting, ain't used to it, you see. What are you up to, David? What are you trying to do?"

"Come and see," David answered, with emphasis. "Come to-morrow; you will find something to enjoy." And as he went down the street the glow in his eyes deepened to a tender

reverence as he thought of the wonderful directness of this answer to the prayer of the night before.

Meantime Peter was at work getting ready for this meeting. In his pocket he had a dozen of the gracefully written slips, and as he walked down the street his eyes were on the watch for just the persons to whom to give them. This was one of his experiences.

It was Saturday evening, and he stood in the bakery at the west end of their street, waiting for his order to be filled. Leaning on the counter, just at his left, was a young fellow of about his own age, rough in appearance and manner, and gloomy looking to the last degree.

Peter, watching him furtively, wondered if he were one to whom it would be wise to offer a slip of paper. He, on his part, was looking, not at Peter, but at a plate of little delicate tarts that were on the counter. What greedy eyes he had! It couldn't be hunger, for actual hunger would have turned toward the piles of buns and loaves on loaves of bread. He did not seem to notice them, but the tarts fairly feasted his eyes.

Whatever the cause of the temptation, it proved too strong for the poor fellow. The hour was late for business, and only one clerk in attendance, and he at the lower end of the room, engaged with Peter's order.

It was the work of a second to reach out two arms and hands and grasp in either hand a tart, then stuff them unceremoniously into either pocket. He seemed to have forgotten Peter's existence. As for him, he stood looking in a sort of pitiful dismay. To steal something to eat was so sad a thing to feel obliged to do! That is the way it appeared to Peter.

He stood studying in his heart what to do until the clerk returned. The poor fellow meantime stood with an air of stolid indifference. Peter glanced over the list of articles, and while he opened his pocket-book said, in a loud, clear voice:

"You may add two tarts to this bill. How much are they?"

"Two tarts!" said the surprised clerk. "Oh, you mean you helped yourself to them? All right; they are ten cents apiece."

And Peter added twenty cents from his own

pocket-book to the amount due. He was leaning carelessly against the door during this transaction, and at its close he turned suddenly to the fellow at his right and handed him a slip of paper.

“Here is an invitation for you,” he said, in a kindly voice. “Will you accept it?”

Then he shouldered his basket, opened the door and went out.

“Will you come?” he asked, as the young man immediately followed him. For answer, he faced about and stared at Peter in the moonlight.

“You didn’t take no tarts,” he said.

“No, but you did, so I paid for them; the man ought not to lose the price of them, you know. Besides, I couldn’t bear to have you steal.”

If he had expected gratitude he was mistaken. “Your conscience is mighty tender,” he said, gruffly. “It was nothing but two mean little pies, and he had lots of ’em. But I don’t want you to do my payin’ for me, and I ain’t got no money to pay you.”

A bright thought struck Peter.

“If you will come to that meeting to-morrow I’ll consider it square.”

“What do you want me to come for?”

“To have a good time. Will you come?”

“You’re a queer chap,” was the muttered answer. But I ain’t afraid of you, nor of no trap that you can set. Yes, I’ll come, if I don’t get took to jail for something before that time.”

So this was the character of the recruit that Peter secured for the first meeting.





CHAPTER XIV.

TURNING THE TABLES.



SUCH a delightful room as that was where they gathered for meeting on that lovely Sabbath afternoon! It looked like a room garnished for a festival scene. On either end of the piano and on each of the many little tables scattered up and down were glowing, sweet-smelling flowers. There was nothing stiff or somber anywhere.

The congregation assembled for this meeting was somewhat peculiar. Helen, in her handsome black silk and soft laces, presided at the piano, and looked every inch a lady. At her

right were two of the chambermaids, in pretty and neat-fitting calicos; very near to them was Irish Kate, red-faced and good-natured, so cumbered with flesh that she waddled instead of walked, and on this day was fairly blazing in the glory of a red and green plaid dress.

On the velvet sofa next to her were two elegant young ladies in elegant costumes: summer silks, and fluttering ribbons, and ruffles, and tucks, and puffs. They were ladies who had come to the house but the day before, and whether they had come in to this meeting from interest or curiosity remained to be seen.

Their nearest neighbor was Dick Norton. And next to him was the young man who had written the invitations, gazing about him with an air of unbounded amazement. He, certainly, was in a strange place.

Peter was there, and so, much to his surprise, it must be confessed, was *his* protégé of the evening before.

There was no beginning to this meeting, and apparently there was no one to lead it; but, like all successful meetings that have this appearance, it meant to the initiated that much thought and

time had been expended, and that some *one* had done his utmost to make the effort a success.

The rule proved true here. Tom had never given himself more entirely to any work than he did to the preparation for this little gathering. There was much singing, impromptu, apparently.

A copy of a certain popular hymn-book lay on each seat, together with a large-type Bible, and one and another of those who had this work at heart called for a favorite hymn, this as the people were gathering; and so naturally was it accomplished that the stylish young ladies, who knew nothing of plans arranged beforehand, concluded it to be the fashion of the place, and fell in with it enough to suggest by whisper to Helen that there was "a pretty one on such a page," which, of course, was instantly announced by the watching Tom.

Suddenly he laid aside his hymn-book and said: "I have been wonderfully interested in some verses which have been grouped together from the Bible. Perhaps we would enjoy reading them over. There is a slip of paper in each Bible, and as I call for the verses, if those who

have the ones called for care to read them aloud, it will make the reading pleasanter. If there are any who do not care to read, and would like to look on, we hope they will do so."

Thus invited, even Dick Norton opened his Bible, which Maria observed, and inwardly hoped he would make no attempt to read aloud. You will remember that she was familiar with his skill in that line.

I wish you had a copy of that Bible reading. Bible readings are strange things, anyway; so different from opening one's Bible in Genesis or Numbers, or *anywhere* at random, and reading a chapter.

Maria had done that a good many times in her life, but with about as little idea of what she had been reading as it was possible for a person to have who had been running her eye over a certain number of words. But this was a connected argument; plain, simple, earnest, and as logical as the brains of Moses and David and St. Paul, touched by the power of the Holy Spirit, could make it, and the subject was the reasonableness of God's requirements.

Mindful of her pledge to repeat a verse, this

obstinate sister had given considerable attention to the subject during the previous evening, and had finally succeeded in finding a verse to her entire satisfaction, and it was this: "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry, but money answereth all things."

She had been very gleeful over this verse while she was committing it to memory. The latter part of it, at least, was so exactly in accordance with her own sentiments that it was a pleasant surprise to find that the wise men of all time so fully agreed with her.

But this new arrangement of her brother's, whereby there was a set verse for each to read, brought to her the straightforward, plain, and she could not help thinking, remarkably reasonable verse, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Despite her effort at unconcern, there was a slight shade of consternation apparent in her voice as she read this sentence, which, viewed in the light of what had preceeded it, seemed the most reasonable consequence in the world.

Altogether, Maria had reason to remember

that Bible reading; not only because it shed new light on the Bible as a book for study, but because every verse selected seemed to be full of barbed arrows, all pointing at her favorite theories of practical common sense.

It was an unusual hour to many present. The clerk who had written the invitations was a good deal astonished at his interest in the matter; it had all the charm of novelty, and filled his soul with wonder as to what the people were about, and what special advantage it could be to them to follow up this sort of thing, and spend time and money on its development. His interest was so great that he tarried, even after the meeting was brought to a close, and sought to draw his old acquaintance out on the subject.

“This is a grand establishment you have got the run of for carrying out your schemes,” he said, as David came over to him. “Upon my word, I don’t think there is a finer gotten-up place in the city. Who runs it, and what do you have to pay for the use of this room?”

“Yonder is the man in authority, talking with the lady at the piano.”

“What, that boy! Why, he is younger than you are. How in the world came he to be at

the head of such an affair as this? And, above all, how does he happen to be mixed up with a religious performance of this sort?"

"This is a religious affair from beginning to end," David said, with a peculiar smile on his face, and adopting the not over choice phraseology of his companion. And then he proceeded to unfold the scheme upon which the foundations of the Randolph House rested to the astonished ears of this young man.

"Upon my word!" he repeated, slowly, after he had asked a dozen questions and been carefully answered, "this beats all the notions I ever heard of! And so he actually has control of a house like this, such a young fellow! And he means to run it without any liquor! He'll get in debt, as sure as my name is Wilders. I've heard of that kind of thing being tried before, and it won't work. I heard the biggest temperance man in the city say so only last week. Hotels *can't* be run without liquor. There isn't a man in the country who can afford to do it. You see you can't make a living in any such way."

He of the keen gray eyes was not in a mood

to argue, and if he had been, this young Wilders was not the sort of person to select when one thirsted for actual argument, so he simply said, with a composed voice :

“Suppose that were all true — proved, you know, beyond the shadow of a mistake. And suppose, also, that I couldn’t make a living at selling boots and shoes unless I first cut your throat, the question is, shall I do that or try to get my living in a less questionable way ?”

An exceedingly dim idea of this queer young fellow’s meaning glimmered in Wilder’s mind, but was not sufficiently clear for him to return other than that easy and unanswerable answer, which is the unfailing refuge of puzzled people :

“That isn’t a parallel case, you know.”

David knew just how much that meant, so he only laughed in reply, and said :

“Well, never mind ; you keep in sight of the Randolph House until it fails, and then you will have another argument for your side. In the meantime you might as well enjoy it ; we are going to have an entertainment here to-morrow evening for some of our friends. Will you come and make yourself useful in entertaining them ?”

“What sort of an entertainment?”

“Oh, music, and talk, and some refreshment. It is for some of those people who never have any good times. You might as well give some of your evenings to helping other people. Come and give us a lift.”

This shrewd young man understood his “fish” perfectly. To have been invited because of needed help to *himself* would have been a terrible blow to his vanity, and sent him away in a condition never to come again. But to be invited to help along a good cause, especially one that had an air of respectability, not to say grandeur about it, was quite another thing, and he gave the required promise with a promptness that entirely satisfied David, and made him especially thankful that he had received it before the young man had been committed to a scheme which he knew to be in process of preparation among another class of entertainers, and into which *this* one was to have been drawn.

Peter, meantime, was not idle. His protege was striding out when he touched his arm and said, kindly :

“If you will wait I will introduce you to Mr.

Randolph, the gentleman who runs this house, and he will invite you to come to the gathering to-morrow evening."

"I ain't a-coming!" was the gruff, loud-spoken reply, and with a jerk he released himself from the kindly hand and tore down the steps. Peter looked after him with a sigh, and said, exactly as you have said, my friend, a dozen times about some pet scheme of yours, "*That did no good,*" when all the time the One who plans and works with you knows the end from the beginning as you and Peter *can not*.

"Was it a success?" Tom said, bending eagerly over Maria.

"No, it was horrid, firing brickbats at people in that style. Why couldn't you have been content with the singing and the praying, and not have shot Bible verses around in that promiscuous fashion. You did not tell me, either, that I was to read a verse of *your* selecting. It was gotten up under false pretences. Next time I will know enough to stay with father and send Grace. What has become of Dick? I was in a perfect tremble, lest he should take it into his head to practice on his recent lessons in reading

and try to perpetrate a verse. He is the most amazing reader you ever heard in your life. I'll tell you what it is, you silly fellow, if you would turn some of your Bible preachings into a little practical instruction as to how to write one's name and add a column of figures, you might think yourself doing some good in the world. Dick says there are four of those car drivers who can not write their names; and I suppose their reading is equal to his."

"That is a good thought," Tom said, speaking heartily. "I am glad you mentioned it. Tomorrow evening will be a good time to take it into consideration. Maria, will you come tomorrow and give us some help about arranging for refreshments?"

"My patience! Are you going to have a party? You are the most absurd boy! I mean to write to Mr. Harper and tell him in what a wild way you are going on! The idea of his trusting his fortune in your hands! He would need to be a Rothschild at the very least. Oh, yes; I'll come over and attend to that. Refreshments are in my line, if Bible verses are not. But, Tom, don't do any other wild thing until next week at least."

And this indifferent sinner betook herself to her home — while Tom sighed over her carelessness and the impossibility of ever getting her to think seriously — and gave her father such a gentle, tender account of the meeting that he more than once wiped a glad tear from his faded eyes and thought in his heart that this dear child was not far from the kingdom. And neither he nor Tom were correct. Thoughtless she was not, with that solemn verse ringing in her ears as it seemed to do; haunting her as she went about her work; following her to her room, and persistently repeating itself in her ear as she lay on her pillow and impatiently refused to answer it.

“What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Reasonable requirements, every one, said her common sense. She was willing enough to be “*just*” to everybody; at least she thought she was. But to walk humbly, with all that her conscience, enlightened by Christian education, knew that sentence involved, her proud heart assured her she was not willing to do; and more that she did not want to be troubled about this matter.

At the same time her inconsistent soul was bubbling over with pride for Tom. She began to realize something of the grandeur of his plans and efforts, and while she wouldn't encourage him by so much as a word, she yet shed in secret delighted tears that he was so utterly unlike other young men, and that his life was consecrated to anything so grand as this out-reach after men. She went to sleep with a strange contradiction of feelings tugging at her heart. She wanted her brother to work for young men, for their present and eternal welfare. In her own wayward way she was even willing to help this work on ; but at the same time she said that *she* was not a young man, and she *did* wish he could learn to let *her* alone.





CHAPTER XV.

“ TO BE, OR NOT TO BE ? ”

BETWEEN the last time that Maria closed and locked the kitchen door after Tom, and the time when she arranged paper and ink before her, she had developed a plan by which she intended to attempt the rescue of Grace from the misery that in her sister's estimation awaited her. This involved a letter, which she proceeded to write, and which I now copy for your consideration :

“ MY DEAR ERMINA :

“ And your husband too, of course, except that I haven't got used to saying it yet. I don't indulge in letter-writing very often, you remem-

ber. Grace is proving a treasure in that direction. But this evening I have something to tell which she might put in a different light.

“Do you remember that smooth-faced yellow-haired, insignificant-looking creature — clerk at McAllister’s — whom they call Al. Parks? I don’t suppose you do; there wasn’t enough of him to remember; but it will be necessary for you to collect your thoughts and try to descend sufficiently low in the social scale to recall him, for he is destined to make you wish he had never been born — in this country, at least.

“Not to linger over disagreeable things, the whole story in a nut-shell is that Grace is engaged to him! Just think of it, Ermina! Our Grace! Doesn’t it seem to you as if she were still a little girl in school, with mother looking after her, and being afraid she would take cold and have the croup? Perhaps you will hint, as Tom does, that during those days I was younger than she — whatever may be said of me now — but you know the time never was when I was smaller than she, and I did not belong to the croupy sort, either. I remember very well that Grace needed taking care of constantly, and that

I did it. She would never remember to wear her tippet, and could never find her mittens, and she needs taking care of to this day.

“But it is not so easy to do as it used to be. When a girl imagines that she has lost her heart, no matter in how insignificant a place it is lost, she seems to grow obstinate. Ermina, I am so thankful that we had one wedding in our family that was a comfort. You know we always had to go around feeling, if not saying, “Poor Horace,” but your husband never seemed to be a special object of pity in any direction. I am not much given to flattery, you know, but I can't help telling you that I never pitied him for securing *you* for his wife.

“Well, now, Ermina, what are we to do about this matter? Tom says, or seems to feel, that there is no use in attempting to stop it. He says Grace is not under our control, and she has a right to marry without regard to us, if she chooses to do so. But that seems to me to be a sort of heartless way of disposing of the matter, and it is an impossible way, so far as I am concerned. I have *got* to attempt, then. If I fail it will not be my fault.

“My first attempt deserved to fail, I suppose, it was such a blunder. You see I have been taken by storm ; never dreamed of anything so absurd until to-night. Then certain developments amazed, not to say vexed me, and I did what Tom calls “pitching into her.” She was as dignified as if she had been my grandmother. But I don’t blame her, for Tom says I could hardly have done anything more ill-advised than to talk to her as I did, and, though I told him that I did not thank him for saying so, still it was the truth, and I knew it. The worst of it is that it has spoiled any further thing that I might do, though I don’t know what I could do unless to order the miserable fellow away from the house at the point of the broomstick. I am willing to attempt that, if it is thought advisable.

“Seriously, Ermina, I am so distressed that I hardly know what I am writing. It is not as if we had a mother, who in her quiet, tender way could talk over these things, or if father were so that he could look after us. We are wonderfully alone, and have to depend on ourselves. But do you suppose we have got to sit tamely

down and submit to such a state of things? I won't make wedding-cake for this party, I can tell you.

“I know that you will be at your wits' ends trying to recall the fellow, and you want me to tell you something definite about him, and I can't; not because I don't know all about him, but because there is nothing of him to tell about. He parts his hair more to the left than any one else does, and he smokes a good many cigars in a day, and he wears a gold ring with a large glass plate in it, on his little finger. These, with his many bright-colored neck-ties, are all the distinctive marks he has. ‘Do you know anything really bad of him?’ Tom said, anxiously, and I assured him that I did not, because I never had thought there was enough of him to be bad. He is simply negative.

“Write and tell me what you think, or what you advise, and do be quick about it. I am all in a twitter. I expect to spoil the starched clothes every one of them to-morrow, just because of my state of mind. I wish I washed for that fellow. I would be sure to see that his collars were stiff.

"Father is as usual. He hasn't coughed quite so much for a night or two. I sleep on the sofa in the sitting-room now, so as to be near at hand to look after him. The new medicine really seems to strengthen him a little.

"Tom is splendid. I don't tell him so, but really that boy does me credit. He is as full of schemes for usefulness as Alfred Parks is of indolence. The fact is, Alfred would make a capital foil to our Tom. Think of having to "brother" such as he!

"I hope Mr. Harper looks well to his purse. I told Tom I should consider it my duty to warn him. He is so busy planning for young men who have no homes and no pleasures. He will need a bank account that will reach around the world. Yet, after all, one needs to expend very little anxiety on such as he. I don't pretend to any goodness myself, but I am thankful to the very sole of my foot that I have such good relations.

"Helen is really getting up some little interest in life again. She goes to the hotel nearly every day, and it is wonderful to see how Tom and she consult together. She thinks he is very

silly and is wasting a great deal of money, but she helps him waste it with a good deal of interest. If the scheme succeeds in giving Helen something to think about besides her troubles I think it will have accomplished something.

“If I had time I would give you an account of a lady visitor I had this evening, but that precious Alfred has occupied so much of my thoughts that all minor matters must be left to another time.

“Having freed my mind I can go to bed now and try to dream some way out of the calamity which stares us in the face. Good-night.

MARIA.

Ermina, sitting in her handsome rooms at home, read this characteristic letter a day later, and laughed and cried over it.

“I have a letter from Gracie’s grandmother,” she said, as her husband entered the room, “and it is impossible to read it without laughing, and yet it makes me feel very anxious. Sit down till I read it to you. You are called to a family council once more.”

The writing of the letter had been a great re-

lief to Maria. Just what it would accomplish she had not an idea. Her judgment told her it was absurd to expect it to accomplish anything. Yet the truth was, she had, during these late experiences of her life, come to have a certain assured feeling that whatever went into Mr. Harper's hands was sure to be acted upon, promptly and wisely. So, without letting herself reason as to what he could possibly do in this case, she allowed the satisfied feeling to creep into her heart that she had secured a strong ally.

There was another thought that was a source of intense gratification to this inconsistent girl, as she put away her pen and went to the window to look out into the night, which was, that Ermina and her husband would be sure to spend a good deal of time in praying about the new development, and getting counsel as to what had better be done. Though why a girl who never prayed, who apparently had more confidence in her own resources than in a lifetime of prayer, should yet be so satisfied over the thought that some people who believe in it were sure to pray, I am certain that I can not explain to the satisfaction of any reasonable mortal. It

was unfortunate for Maria that she did not attempt an explanation, because, being a girl of good common sense, she might have felt the folly of her own position, and so been driven from it.

Passing over the tiresome waiting which Maria had to do, and the continual wonderment in which she kept herself during the Sabbath and the two following days that intervened, I bring you down to a certain Wednesday afternoon when she sat alone in the little sitting-room, the door closed that led to the bedroom that her father might have his afternoon nap, and she with a frowning face sewed on the patches of his dressing-gown, and wondered what was to come of it all, and whether it was possible that another mail should come without her receiving a letter from the New York people.

“It” was not progressing well, so she thought. Grace had gone boldly to church on Sabbath evening, leaning on the obnoxious Alfred’s arm, and on this very evening she was to accompany him to a concert. Helen was in a provokingly indifferent state; not inclined to interfere in any way, which, if Maria had thought of it, was

an alarming feature for her to exhibit; but she did not hesitate to declare that if Grace could get a little comfort out of so insignificant a morsel of humanity as the said Alfred, she did not see what right they had to interfere; and then she went over to the hotel to practice a new piece of music which Tom wanted sung at the next gathering.

So Maria sewed and frowned, and presently the bell rang, a quick, clear peal, as of one who was decided in his own mind, and in haste to prove it. There is a marked degree of character in the very handling of door-bells. It deepened Maria's frown, she was in no mood for the entertainment of the few callers who troubled themselves about the decayed and quiet family, but she put aside her sewing and drew her apron straight, and brushed the threads from it while she went through the hall, and gave in another moment a quick exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

"Mr. Harper! I as soon expected to see the President, and I am a great deal more glad to see *you*. Where is Ermina?"

"At home and well. I came in haste and on

business. She judged it not best to come just now."

"Did you get my letter?" Maria asked, eagerly as he followed her in. "Did she, I mean, and what did she think of it? Has she sent me any answer?"

"We got it, and read it carefully. Yes, she sent an answer by me; at least I came down to answer it to the best of our abilities. We will see what we can do. How is father?"

"Better than usual. I really think if we had a doctor in the world who knew as much as he ought to something could be done for father. I don't believe he has consumption any more than I have."

"Would he miss Grace a good deal, do you think, and would she object to leaving him for awhile?"

"No," Maria said, startled a little. Did he intend to recommend solitary confinement for Grace until she outgrew her folly? "No, he wouldn't miss her much, because he sees very little of her. She goes in the morning before he is awake, and often he is too tired to see her more than a moment or two at night. What are you thinking of?"

“We are thinking of carrying her off to New York with us, and putting her where she ought to be, in a first-class school, for a couple of years, giving her a chance to cultivate her talent for music, and for —”

“Common sense,” interrupted Maria, as he hesitated for a word. A good deal amazed was Maria at this brilliant planning. Could it have been the result of the praying, she found time to wonder? But her surprise never took the form of silence. Her powers of speech were much too active for that. “It is perfectly gorgeous in conception,” she said, with shining eyes. “Just the opportunity that Grace ought to have had, and that if I had been the oldest daughter, as I ought to have been, she should have had. But, do you know, I am afraid she is infatuated to the degree that *she won't do it*; at least if he advises her not she won't; and of course he will. He is just idiot enough to offer such advice as that, and Grace is developing; she is as obstinate as possible; she will not hear a word from me, but goes about the house in an aggrieved sort of way, as if she were a martyr instead of a dunce.”

“I don’t wonder,” the brother-in-law said, laughing in spite of himself. “Maria, you don’t believe in hearts, do you?”

“Hearts!” said Maria, in great indignation. “I believe in common sense.”

“That you do; and a most fortunate thing it is for this family that you have been given your share of that useful article,” he said, heartily, and with genuine affection in his voice. But, in the meantime, I respect Grace for standing up firmly for the man whom she fancies she has chosen. He may be a very simpleton, but be sure that he doesn’t look so to her; and she is giving deference to the man that he ought to be if he wants Grace for a wife. Maria, is it just possible that you may be doing him injustice? I do not mean that he is perfection, and they are both absurdly young to think of such matters, but suppose they were not, and they had a true affection for each other, isn’t it possible that your natural anxiety underrates him?”

“You have a talk with him,” said Maria, with a very sagacious nod of her wise head. “Just spend half an hour in his interesting society, and have a talk on any subject that you choose, I

don't care a pin what it is, and see what you will think then. That is all I have to say.”

The brother-in-law laughed.

“I mean to try it,” he said, quietly. “Well, now, Maria, are you willing to put this matter in my hands, and let me manage it according to my own fancy?”

“Of course,” Maria said, with energy. “If you can manage it at all you can do more than I; and, mind you, more than I suspect *you* will be able to do, for I never knew how obstinate Grace *could* be. We have always thought her yielding, but I'm sure I hope she will be managed.”

“And you will promise not to open your lips to her on the subject, either for or against the young man, or the scheme, or in any way whatever? Because, to tell you the truth, I am rather afraid of your energy in this matter. You can plunge at a thing that is to be done until you pitch it over, so that it can't be righted.”

“Oh, I'll keep still,” Maria said, a little piqued. “It isn't that I want to manage her. It isn't that. I don't want her to be miserable all her life, or to be nothing but a sickly little simple-

ton. If things are only done, I don't care to have any hand in them."

"You have had a hand in this," Mr. Harper said, earnestly; "a most decided hand. Of course but for your warning we should have known nothing of it; and but for your appeal we should hardly have liked to interfere. But, my dear sister, you have learned only half of the verse. You speak the truth earnestly, forcibly, and with strong common sense on your side, but the verse says 'speaking the truth in love.' And don't you know that that part of it you have a way of keeping hidden in your heart, so that the truth sometimes wounds where you would have it heal?"


Maria laughed. Her good nature had returned.

"I knew you would finish up with a Bible verse," she said. "Neither you nor Tom can help it. I'll be as mum as a block, and I wish you joy of your work. Now go in and see father, and I'll get you some dinner. I know in my heart just how glad I am that you have come, but I shall keep the knowledge to myself, for you hinted that I couldn't tell if I tried."



CHAPTER XVI.

ALFRED PARKS' ON EXAMINATION.

R. HARPER entered upon his task of making the acquaintance of Mr. Alfred Parks without any very distinct idea of the magnitude of the effort. The occasion was favorable. The young man came for Grace to attend the concert, and was in holiday attire, with a new and glorious neck-tie, rivaling the rainbow in brilliancy. To Grace he looked particularly charming, and it was with beaming eyes and a satisfied smile that she introduced "my brother, Mr. Harper," and left them together while she went to make her own adornings. It was with a grim sense of having accomplished it that Maria

closed the door on the two gentlemen, and left them alone together.

Young Alfred, on his part, did not feel particularly at his ease. He was sufficiently master of the accomplishment known as "small talk" to feel at home among young people of his own age and stamp, and sufficiently vain to imagine that all *young* ladies, and a large portion of older ones, could be entertained with it; but this dignified gentleman, who was known in their own set as "very religious," Alfred felt greatly at a loss how to proceed with him, especially as it was important to make as good an impression as possible, so he did the wisest thing which, under the circumstances, he could have done—kept silence.

"It is a pleasant evening," Mr. Harper said, plunging at once into the subject that chanced first in his mind, and he was duly answered:

"Yes, very."

"Is it a concert that you are expecting to enjoy this evening?" This was the next question.

"Yes, sir."

"Good singers?"

“I guess so; they are a swell lot who have been largely advertised. I thought we might as well try them.”

“You are fond of music, I judge?”

“Well, some.”

“Do you sing?”

“Not a bit.”

“Miss Grace has a very marked degree of musical talent for so young a girl, I think.”

Mr. Parks did not seem to know what reply to make to this. He looked somewhat conscious, which, considering the fact that he had not chosen to announce his personal interest in her to any member of the family, seemed to Mr. Harper uncalled for. He felt strangely at a loss what to say next. A novel and amusing feeling for him to have; but he had been placed there for a purpose, and it would not do to relinquish it so ingloriously; so with an amused query as to what Maria would say if she were there he made another attempt.

“How did your last course of lectures succeed here?”

“A good many people went to them, I guess.”

“And pecuniarily, were they a success?”

“ I don't know, I am sure. I never heard any of the fellows say.”

“ You do not belong to the Association yourself then?”

“ Oh, no.”

“ Had they a good deal of talent displayed in the list of speakers?”

“ Well, I don't know. I guess they thought so. Anyway, the speakers themselves did.” This was intended for a joke, and Alfred showed his appreciation of it by laughing heartily.

“ I'm a school committee, and he is trying to pass examination,” murmured Mr. Harper to himself, whereupon he laughed also.

“ Who was the best speaker you had?” he continued, determined to get at the root of some thought.

“ Oh, I don't know. I didn't hear many of them. The Fat Contributor gave us as good a one as any I guess. His was real rich. He kept the fellows in a perfect roar from the time he commenced until he sat down.”

Mr. Harper did not doubt it. He had got Mr. Alfred Parks' ideas as to lectures at last. On the whole, he was glad that Maria was not

in the room. One other item he was anxious for.

“Was Mr. Beecher on your course this year?”

“Yes, but he was as dry as a stick. I never want to hear him again. I don’t know how people can rave after Beecher as they do. I never thought much of him.”

Mr. Harper changed his seat and his subject.

“How is the Christian Association getting along? Is it revived any?”

“I don’t know much about it. I did hear that Tom Randolph was trying to get up something of the kind, but I don’t know how he succeeds.”

“You have not attended any of his Sunday afternoon meetings then?”

“Oh, no. If I get to church on Sunday evening it is about as much as I contrive to do. Sunday is our only day of rest, you know.”

Young Alfred pronounced the word “our” as though he belonged to a very much-injured, ill-used class of humanity, who had more working days in the week than any other, while his companion had to do with a world that enjoyed a perpetual holiday.

“Are your evenings closely occupied?”

“ Oh, no ; we close at six o'clock.”

“ Yet he didn't attend many of the lectures.”

This was Mr. Harper's mental comment, and he added in the same way : “ I wonder what he does with his evenings ? It can not be that he spends them all with Grace ; at least if he does, I shall try to get the child to start for New York to-morrow.”

“ What about the evenings ? ” he said aloud, and with a genial smile, as of one personally interested in the young man before him. “ Do you young men have any system about them, or do you go wherever it happens ? ”

“ Well, there is a good deal of happen about them. There is always something going on, you know — a concert or a party ; and then there is always the opera, you know, and the theater, for extra nights ; and we have our club once a week.”

“ A reading circle is that ? ” asked innocent Mr. Harper.

“ Oh, the dickens ! no ! ” and Mr. Alfred Parks laughed immoderately, and voted Mr. Harper decidedly “ green,” and a man not to be afraid of in the least ; whereupon he roused himself to be

entertaining, and Mr. Harper fell more and more into the capacity of listener, until Grace, blushing and pretty, came in ready for the concert.

“ Well,” Maria said, as her brother-in-law came out to where she was sitting, and looked at her while she sewed, “ how did you enjoy his society ? ”

“ Maria,” he said, decidedly, “ we must make every effort to get Gracie to New York.”

A clear, good-natured, relieved smile blossomed all over Maria’s face.

“ I am glad you had a pleasant evening,” she said, grimly.

Mr. Harper sat down on the arm of the sofa and folded his arms.

“ The next thing is to accomplish this thing without accomplishing more harm than good by it.”

“ I know a way,” Maria said, decidedly, “ and I don’t see any other way out of it all. That is, to tell father that her associations in the stores are not what they should be, and get him to advise her to go home with you. She will not go contrary to *his* advice. None of us ever did that.”

Mr. Harper shook his head decidedly.

“That must not be done for several reasons. In the first place it would be necessary to take Grace into our confidence, and thereby rouse an opposition that it would take a lifetime perhaps to conquer. She *expects* opposition, and will be all the more indignant over it on that account. Then, in the next place, that would not subdue the danger, it would simply retard it. Maria, he is not the young man *ever* to be received into this family. There will never be enough of him to make it a very pleasant acquisition, but there must be a great deal *less* of him before he can be tolerated at all.”

Maria laid down her sewing, and turned herself around to get a full view of the speaker before she answered:

“I should like to know what you mean? I never did understand you very well, anyway; and I am sure I don't now. You see through the fellow as plainly as that, and yet you say my plan will not do, because we should have to take Grace into our confidence? I should like to know how you intend to accomplish a breaking up of this affair without letting her know any-

thing about it. I should think she would be apt to discover it."

Mr. Harper laughed.

"It is to be done by the natural laws of causes and effects," he said. "I think, my dear, kind, faithful sister, that I see my way clearly through this trouble, and that you may go to sleep with a serene hope that the young gentleman will never have the opportunity of sitting on this sofa arm and lecturing you. Now, in the meantime, I have a letter to write to Ermina, and if your sisterly care can suggest anything in the feminine line that Grace needs to have done for her before she goes away, I hope you will proceed to planning it at once, for I intend to make great haste in this matter."

Following out this train of plans, it was at the breakfast table that Mr. Harper, after bringing a pretty glow to Grace's cheek, by telling of a remarkable music teacher then in the city, turned suddenly to her with the sentence:

"By the way, Grace, I suppose you haven't an idea what brought me up here. But the truth is, I came for you. I am going to carry you away captive."

“For me!” Grace said, holding her spoon suspended on its way to her mouth, and looking the picture of astonishment. Then she laughed lightly. “Messrs. McAllister & Co. would have a word to say. They would not even give me a holiday of one half day, though I coaxed.”

“But they will *have* to, if we put it in the light that I mean to. You see, I am going to assert my rights as a brother. I have never done much in that direction as yet, and you don’t begin to know my power. I propose to release you from the McAllisters: tell them that we can not spare you to them any longer. The fact is, Ermina needs you this coming winter. I have to be confined to business very closely; and, besides, Ermina wants you to continue your music. She thinks, with me, that it is a pity to allow your talent in that direction to go uncultivated. Our plans are all formed, and I have been sent up to carry you off, ‘willy nilly,’ as my Scotch nurse used to say.”

Grace’s face was a pretty study. It flushed and paled by turns, until Maria began to grow alarmed. Neither Maria nor any one else knew how dear and precious to her had been the study

of music, nor what a sacrifice it had been to the family good when she sweetly and quietly relinquished even her practice hour. Ermina suspected much, but even *she* did not know the passion this thing had been to her sister; and Maria never even dreamed of it.

Mr. Harper saw his advantage and hastened on.

“We are very pleasantly situated in the city, except that, as I say, it would be lonely for Ermina; but with you there to keep her company everything will be perfect. Father, I am glad to tell you, is decidedly on our side; thinks you need change and rest, and will be so happy to have you go on with your music that he says he shall dream of it all winter. So you see you have a chance to give him another pleasure.”

Still no answer from Grace, unless a strange choking in her throat and a rush of tears to her soft eyes could have been called answers.

I can not tell you how astonished they would all have been could they have read her heart. There was not one at that table but thought they understood her perfectly, and each had a different view. The truth was, that each had a

little piece of her character, and there was another bit hidden away in her heart that none of them saw or imagined. Maria said within herself:

“She likes the fun of it after all. She has a little sense left. I am glad of that.”

Helen pictured to herself the grandeur and beauty that enveloped the family in New York, and said to *herself*, with a little sigh:

“No wonder she wants to go. Why shouldn't she?”

Mr. Harper, watching her closely, said: “The child is ready to do anything to please her father.”

And all this was true. What girl but would look forward with delight to the prospect of plenty of leisure to pursue her favorite study? What one, with an innate love for the refinement and beauties of wealth, but would enjoy the thought of luxuriating in them? Also, Grace loved to think of her father as pleased and happy over the thought that she was having the advantages which he had so craved for her.

But beyond and above all of these things there was another motive. She had given her

heart into the keeping of Alfred Parks — so she fancied. But in truth it was not Alfred Parks at all. There was in her heart an ideal being, vested with all the grace and goodness of a saint, and she had chosen to give him mortal resemblance to Alfred Parks. How she did it, why there came such a glamour over her eyes and her senses that he seemed to her an embodiment of human excellence, passes me to explain; but haven't you seen the same thing done again and again by fresh, foolish, sweet young girls? Grace had been very little into what we call society. The fortunes of the family had fallen before she came on the stage of young ladyhood; and what to Maria, with her keen visioned-brain, would have been impossible, was to Grace, with her ideal nature, not only possible but probable. Alfred was but the synonym for manhood, and he had condescended from his grand height to notice her! The simple little heart was full of gratitude and of humility. She wanted to go to New York, to enjoy the advantages of society and of study, in order that she might become *worthy of Alfred Parks!* With what utter horror would Maria have viewed her if she could

have known how the silly young heart glowed at the thought of being able to play so that Alfred might be proud of her! It was well for Grace that she had so wise and kind a friend to help her just now as her brother-in-law. Many a bright young girl makes shipwreck of her life and her happiness just here.

Maria had not sense enough to be fully satisfied with the turn that affairs were taking.

“You have not said a single word to her about that fellow,” she grumbled, when Grace had fluttered into the little bed-room to kiss father good morning. “I don’t see that you will accomplish much by taking her to New York, even if she goes — which she won’t. She will go down to the store and stay all day and talk with that idiot between every yard of lace that she measures, and he will persuade her into staying at home; and if she goes she will be writing letters to him all the time, and that will be as bad as talking with him. If I were you I should get father to forbid a correspondence.”

Mr. Harper serenely sipped the remainder of his coffee, and said :

“Neither of these things are going to take

place, my good sister. You promised to leave the matter entirely in my hands, you remember ; and by virtue of that promise you are not to so much as whisper the young man's name, either to Grace or to father, until I give you permission. If you feel anxious to talk about him, there is one safe place. You have my full permission to pray for him and for Grace just as much as your heart prompts." And rising from the table as Grace returned, ready for her walk, he said : " Will you take me to the store with you, Grace ? I want to push my plans ! "





CHAPTER XVII.

“GOOD-BY,”



IN the way down town Mr. Harper was the most delightful of companions. Maria, watching them from the window, fondly supposed that he was taking that opportunity to enlighten Grace as to her folly, and give her good advice for the future. Such was no part of his intention. He talked much about the proposed visit in such an hearty, matter-of-course way that at last Grace found voice to say :

“I should like it of all things, of course ; but I really do not see how it is to be brought about.”

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“Then it will be all the more enjoyable when it is ‘brought about’ for you, will it not? Isn’t that the way these things work? And the beauty of it is, I see the way very clearly, unless indeed you are going to propose some objections that I don’t know anything about. What is the most formidable one in your mind at this present time?”

“My own importance,” Grace said, laughing a little, but with an anxious side glance at him to see if he understood.

“As one of the providers of the family purse,” he said, quickly. “I understand all about that; and Ermina will tell you that we have planned admirably as to it. The memory of it does you credit. This part of the plan belongs essentially to Ermina, and you must allow her to do the work.”

“It is all new to me,” Grace said. “Ermina has never mentioned anything of the sort, either when she was at home or in her letters. I am taken utterly by surprise.”

“Ermina is not one to divulge her plans before they are ready for operation,” Mr. Harper answered quickly, feeling grateful that it was

not necessary for the good of the cause to tell Grace when *this* plan that he was pushing with such energy was first conceived.

By the time they reached the store Grace began to have a dim sense that this delightful scheme might someday, and sometime in the future, be carried into execution, but as yet it was too unreal a thing for her to build any strong hopes upon. In the first place there was the month's notice that the store required before any of the clerks were released. So arbitrary was this rule that Grace almost felt that if she were to be sick it would be a very improper thing to do not to have given notice in ample time to fill her place. Her astonishment was therefore greater when, after introducing her brother to the principal and leaving him at the office, she was called there in the course of an hour and abruptly asked by Mr. Harper if it would be possible to get ready to go home with him in two days if she staid at the store during the remainder of that day. Dumbfounded, Grace flushed and paled, and looked in a frightened sort of way up at her chief, and knew not what to say. But Mr. McAllister in conference with

the well-known capitalist, Mr. Harper, was a different man from the one who generally dealt in short and somewhat crusty fashion with his clerks. Grace had realized this in a measure when she entered the store and was greeted by him with short dignity :

“Fifteen minutes late, Miss Randolph. It is fortunate that this is a rare occurrence or I should have to say more about it.” To this Grace had simply bowed, and replied : “My brother, Mr. Harper, Mr. McAllister.” And Mr. McAllister, recognizing the name and the face, had no more to say.

He smiled down on her now in a way that was utterly new to her, and said, benignly :

“It is utterly against our rules, of course, Miss Randolph, but all rules fail on unprecedented occasions, and this brother of yours is very peremptory. I congratulate you on the brilliant prospect that is opening before you, and of course we are glad to do your brother a favor ; at the same time if you *could* remain during this day it would save us from a good deal of embarrassment, as two of the clerks report illness this morning.”

And having received her wages in full, and a

cordial dismissal at the close of that day's service, coupled with a flattering testimonial of her ability as a saleswoman and the loss it would be to them, unsophisticated Grace went back to her desk with a dim sense of the power of wealth and position dawning upon her.

"Only think, Alfred," she said to that individual in the first moment of confidence that the rush of business gave to these two. "Only think! I am going to New York for the winter!"

Alfred did think, and a blank fell upon him. He realized that the store would be darker and gloomier with that face gone.

"I know it," he said, rather shortly, almost crossly. "That precious brother-in-law of yours has been to inform me of it; at least he condescended to stop at my counter and hint as much. Seems to me he assumes the management of things in a little too lordly a fashion."

This was unwise in Alfred. A sense of the dignity of the family was strong in Grace, and *he* was hardly of the family as yet; not near enough to be allowed to criticise — at least not in that cross tone.

"We are all only too glad to have him assume

what authority he chooses,” she answered, with dignity. “He has been a true friend to us in every way. I thought you would be much pleased at my prospect of a chance to improve.”

“Pleased with the prospect of not seeing you for a year!”

“Not by any means so long as that,” she said, appalled. “Just for a few months — three at the longest; and I can play for you some of those pieces that you liked so much last night when I come home. I know I can. I know the talent is in me, if I can only get a little chance to bring it out. And then, Alfred, you know you have disliked to have me in the store.”

“I know it,” he said, heroically. “I suppose it is the best thing; at least we may as well think so, for it seems it is decided. Only I think you might have told me about it and asked my advice.”

Grace laughed a little silvery laugh.

“*My* advice wasn’t asked,” she said. “I was just taken by storm. I never heard a word about it until this morning, and then I supposed it was something that was to be in the future some

time, if I could get away from the store, and if fifty things did not happen to prevent it. But, Alfred, if you do not like it at all, I might reconsider it in some way, only my position here is given up, and they have sent out for help in my place, and it would make things rather awkward."

"Oh, no," Alfred said, quickly, mollified decidedly by the indication that, after all, *his* judgment was the ruling one, and mindful of the advantages of such relationship as the wealthy brother. "You will have to go now, of course. It is too late to change plans, and I dare say it is the best thing to do. We must keep on the right side of the rich brother-in-law. We may want his help in the future."

Now this was one of the rare, *very* rare occasions in which Alfred made remarks that jarred on the refined sensibilities of Grace Randolph. On such occasions it was not that *Alfred* was rude, not to say coarse in his utterances, but that mankind in general were so much more outspoken on these subjects than women could ever be. This was the way Grace put it. She wished he would not speak in that way of Mr.

Harper. She was glad that Mr. Harper was not there to hear.

Meantime the Randolph household were in a whirl of preparation.

“Helen will be horrid,” Maria complained to Tom when he came over that morning to see how the new ideas were working.

“If Grace decides to go—which I have no hope of—all the time we are at work getting her ready I pity *me*. I know just how much of a martyr all this will make of Helen. No amount of explaining will make it plain that there is special need to get Grace away just now. After I have exhausted my breath and my temper in an attempt of that kind, she will remark, precisely as though I had not said a word, that ‘it would have been natural to suppose that Ermina would have chosen her, the widowed sister, who was nearest her age, to spend the winter with her, instead of “*that child*,” who was well enough off at home.’ I can hear her, as plainly as though she was saying it. And that thing, with variations, is what I shall be destined to listen to all the while I am cutting and contriving for Grace; and how that last is to be

done is more than \bar{I} can see. There are decided inconveniences connected with this plan, even if it works."

Tom only laughed.

"You are borrowing trouble," he said. "Perhaps everything will come out all right. Anyway, trust Mr. Harper for getting his own way, whatever it is — and it is sure to be a good way. I will try, meantime, to keep Helen so busy that she will not have time to make a martyr of you."

But Helen did no such thing. She acquiesced in the arrangements with marvelous good humor, rather, with the air of one who continued to be preoccupied and absent-minded, and helped Maria rip and furn in good-natured silence, until that bewildered girl grew seriously alarmed lest Helen was really sick.

Into the midst of the whirl of preparations and the dismay as to proper wardrobe for city life came a letter from Ermina, not from the post-office, but from the pocket-book of her husband, at an opportune moment.

"Oh, by the way," he said, rising from the table and turning to Grace, "I have a note here

for you from Ermina. I was to give it to you as soon as you commenced preparations for your journey, and I hope they are already commenced.”

This was the note :

“ GRACIE DEAR :

“ Now you are not to be troubled, nor to let Maria puzzle her poor tired brains over the old, vexing question, “ Wherewithal shall I be clothed ? ” Tell that blessed sister it is *my* turn now. I am your good old grandmother, and you are to come to me just as you are exactly, except that I give you leave to exercise your own pretty taste about a traveling dress. For the rest, I will accept nothing, not even an apron, that is not bought and made under my own eye. We will have remarkably nice times arranging it all. Won't I be glad to get hold of you ! You see I take it for granted that you are to come, because I know that every one of our family is gifted with common sense, and *because my husband* has gone for you and said he was to bring you back with him. The idea of his coming home without you after that is pre-

posterous to me, who know him so well. Buy the traveling dress ready made—you can get very good ones in that way; and don't scrimp, please. Let me see what your taste is when you really indulge it. You may consider the dress a birthday present. I remember that last week was the birthday.

“In great haste to see you, I wait.

“**ERMINA.**”

Out of this note there fell a fifty-dollar note. Grace, with the carmine glowing in her cheeks, handed both without a word of comment to the sister nearest her, who happened to be Maria. Mr. Harper had considerately taken himself to the bed-room. Maria read, and the dress that she was ripping, a piece of which she had held on to as she took the letter, dropped from her hand,

“Well!” she said, “Ermina Randolph does credit to her bringing up. Grace, I don't see but the whole story of Cinderella has been remodeled for your express use. I shall rip no more on that old thing!” And she pushed the dress quite away, with a gesture of contempt.

While this new and important view of the subject was being discussed somewhat warmly by Grace, Mr. Harper reappeared. He judged it time for another diversion.

“*Maria,*” he said, taking a seat beside her, “can you get her ready for the day after tomorrow?”

“*My patience!*” said *Maria*.

Then they all began to disclaim the possibility of such haste as that; and it ended, as Mr. Harper’s plans usually did, in an energetic rush of everybody in the house to accomplish the desired end—and it was accomplished! Still *Maria* failed to be quite satisfied.

“*I don’t understand how you are improving things,*” she grumbled to Mr. Harper during that last evening of Grace’s stay at home. The trouble was that Grace at that moment was alone in the parlor with the obnoxious Alfred. “*There they are, as cooing as possible, I dare say. I don’t see why you didn’t forbid that performance, or have father do it.*”

“*See here,*” Mr. Harper said, gravely, “*why didn’t you tell father about this matter yourself, instead of keeping it perfectly quiet and writing*

to us? Didn't you fear the effect of the excitement on him?"

Maria was obliged to admit that she did.

"Then won't you give me credit for sense enough to follow a good example after it has been set me? As to avoiding this evening call, I think I could have done it; but there was a difficulty in the way. I did not think it the best thing to do. I shall do the *best* that I can, Maria." And Maria was silenced if not convinced.

And Mr. Harper endured, with the utmost amiability and composure, the attendance of the said Alfred at the depot the next morning. He even allowed him to assist Grace from the carriage, and check her trunk, and hover around her like a moth. He was kind and gracious in his manner, and entirely won Grace's confidence and gratitude, for could there be a greater contrast between the frowning face and haughty voice of Maria, whenever she looked at the poor fellow, and Mr. Harper's cordial frankness and courteous "Good-bye" when they were fairly moving off?

She looked out of the window, her eyes swimming in tears. It was her first departure from

the old home, her first peep into the outside world. She had no conception of all the strange programme of events that would be enacted before she saw that home again. There was in one room of the dear old house a father who was at this moment praying for the safe-keeping of his darling; praying that if he never saw her again on earth she might be sure to come up to him in heaven.

Looking after the retreating train there were a brother and sister who had thought and planned — and one of them, at least, prayed much for her — and who looked after her with grave faces and unutterably tender longings in their hearts. And yet this little simpleton gave her last look, her last smile, her last tear, to the light-haired young man who paced the walk, looking after the train, indeed, but already sending a puff of cigar smoke to help it on!





CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONFIDENTIAL RIDE.



IT was not until Mr. Harper had spent an entire day in the society of his young sister-in-law — a day filled with all the delicate attentions and courtesies which a man of wealth and refinement can find to bestow upon a young lady who is taking a long journey in his care — that he ventured upon anything like a confidential talk with her.

The train had just left Albany, where they had been delayed for several hours, and where Grace had been established at the Delevan, in

one of the elegant rooms, and waited on with that obsequiousness which wealth buys, and had dined at the most elegant of hotel tables, and had, in short, begun to have a realizing sense of the fact that her brother was a person of consequence in that portion of the world which was estimated by money, and that she had a sort of reflected consequence about her, which was not an unpleasant discovery to a young lady taking her first journey. A sense of deep gratitude began to rise in her heart, and be added to the feeling of respect and love with which she had always regarded her brother.

He disposed of satchels and wraps in that business-like way which the traveled man so well understands ; arranged sash and blind and ventilator with careful regard to his young sister's comfort ; arrested a passing boy and bought a dozen Havana oranges, and laid them beside her with the direction to amuse herself with those ; stopped the " book boy " and bought the last new book that had created a stir in the world, and that he had one day heard her express a desire to read ; then he sat himself down beside her and began without ceremony or preparation a very confidential talk.

“ This young man, Gracie, to whom you introduced me the other evening, and who was at the cars this morning, is he a friend of yours ? ”

Grace's cheeks glowed, but she answered steadily :

“ Yes, sir.”

“ A very special friend ? ”

This question was harder to answer than the last, but it was *answered* in the same way. He had evidently no intention of sparing her.

“ Do you mind telling me just how much that means with young ladies of your age ? ” he asked, not in sarcasm, but with an inflection calculated to remind her that she was *young*. “ Does it mean that you have engaged yourself to him ? ”

It was very disagreeable. If there had been anything to resent Grace would have resented it. She felt sure that Alfred Parks would have considered Mr. Harper impertinent. But yet he surely had a right in view of their relationship — and the valuable way in which he was acting upon that relationship — to a certain degree of confidence ; so she answered, her voice a little lower than before, and with cheeks still glowing, wondering meanwhile whether he would express annoyance or anything disagreeable

about Alfred, and resolving in her loyal little heart that she wouldn't submit to anything of that kind — no, not if he were twenty times her brother-in-law, and were taking her to the royal palace to be presented to the queen!

But there was no change of voice, no expression either of astonishment or annoyance manifested in the next sentence, and it was certainly simple enough, hardly a question at all, rather an intimation that as a matter of course such and such was the case.

“With father's approval, of course?”

There is an art in asking questions; there is a chance to display talent, or to show one's self a bungler. Something either in the words themselves, or in Mr. Harper's way of saying them, or in the keen, clear, quiet eyes that were bent fully on her while they were spoken, made Grace plainly remember that this man who was questioning her had a right to claim her father as his, and therefore had a right to question the daughter who was under his care.

Also it overwhelmed her with a sudden sense of the impropriety of her talking of being engaged to be married to a young man of whom

her father had not even heard! Such a strange thing to do! How could she ever explain it to this clear-eyed man who was looking so steadily at her, and waiting for an answer? It had never seemed strange to her before.

She had said to herself that she was doing just what the rest of the household were doing, shielding her father from excitement or anxiety of any sort; but, somehow, that refuge seemed to fail her, or to shrink into insignificance before those steady, inquiring eyes. She was painfully embarrassed, the blood flowed in rich dark waves up to her very temples, and she looked at her brother with a beseeching air that plainly said, "Ask me some other question, or ask me this in some other way," and he quietly waited.

"No," she said at last, low-voiced and tremulous, and he said not a word; then she went on hurriedly: "It was because father is so feeble, and so easily made nervous and wakeful; we shield him from everything that would be likely to excite or trouble him; we all do so, and therefore I have thought it best to say nothing to him, and I have told Alfred so."

Mr. Harper did not turn his eyes away; he

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Tears gathered in Grace's eyes. Page 257.

did not look less grave and troubled; he did not speak at all for as much as a minute, to Grace it seemed half an hour; then he said:

“Would you *marry* the gentleman without your father’s knowledge?” and Grace started and shivered as she made rapid answer:

“Oh, no, no, of course not! Why, Mr. Harper, you know I wouldn’t? Why do you say such things to me? I have done nothing wrong — at least I meant right. I thought —” And there she stopped. What *was* she doing or undoing? and what would Alfred think of all this?

Still the manner of the very grave man before her did not change a particle, and his tone was, if anything, more solemn than before:

“Then you are waiting for father to die before this matter can be known?”

What a dreadful thing to say! The great tears gathered in Grace’s eyes and rolled down her cheeks; she dropped her vail quickly to shut in the tears and to shut out that dreadful gaze.

“You are cruel,” she said at last, struggling to regain her composure, and speaking earnestly. “You know I had no such thought. I am wait-

ing and hoping that he will get enough better for me to trouble him with my affairs at all ; and I did not mean to do anything that was wrong.”

He had certainly probed very deeply ; it seemed to be time to drop in some oil if he had any. He spoke very quietly, not at all as one who had anything for which to ask forgiveness.

“I can only know you by what you *do*, and not by what you think, you remember ; and I am sure your good sense sees the propriety of my understanding this matter thoroughly. I can not tell you that I think you have done rightly, because there are some risks that must be run even when a person is very feeble. We did not think for a moment of carrying out this plan of a winter in New York without your father’s full consent and approval ; and, surely, it is of very much less importance than the other matter.”

“But, at the same time, I can see that it has been an error of judgment and not of intention. What remains to be decided is — in view of what has already been done — what is to be done in the future. I need not remind you that father gave me many directions and cautions with regard to you, and that he felt that he was intrust-

ing a very precious treasure to my care. I assure you that I feel the responsibility; so you will expect me to speak very plainly to you, as I could hardly be justified in doing otherwise.

“I have not up to this time credited the statement that you were positively, seriously, engaged to this young man without proviso or understanding as to the wishes of your father.” He spoke this sentence very slowly, with a pause at the end sufficiently long for Grace to take it in; and you will do her the justice to understand that it was the first time she had realized what a strange and improper thing she had allowed herself to do.

Then he continued: “I have hoped and believed that those who were anxious for you were over-anxious because mistaken. Now, as I say, though astonished, I can understand that it was an error of judgment, and one that would not have occurred doubtless had there been a mother to advise. It is right that I should tell you that the responsibility is too great for me to assume.”

Another pause, during which it seemed to Grace that her heart stopped beating. What *was* he going to do? Was she to be sent back

to her home to-morrow morning, perhaps this very evening as soon as the train stopped? And what was she to say? Must *she* tell her father, and must she go back to McAllister's store and tell them, and ask for her old situation again? And what would Alfred say to all this? A dim sense that he would feel very much disgraced, and bitterly displeased with her, contributed not a little to her pain. The low, clear voice went on, still talking to that becoming brown veil which shielded the glowing, tear-stained cheeks.

“Would you be willing to write to father, and lay this entire matter before him with utter frankness as to detail and desire, or would it be less painful to you to have me write for you, and get his directions for the future?”

His voice had assumed a gentle, respectful sympathy of tone, which somewhat quieted the poor child beside him, and after a moment of silence she said:

“Wouldn't you be afraid of the excitement resulting from such a letter? Don't you think father is too weak for me to run such a risk, or *don't* you think there is any risk about it?”

“Yes,” he said, firmly, “there is a risk un-

doubtedly. Father is very feeble ; and I do not know what degree of strain he to will be able endure. Of course this would be an excitement to him. If you were older he would be expecting it, and be in a sense prepared. If he knew, and had known the young man as a valued friend of the family, it would not be so exciting, but all the circumstances are against it, and I do not wonder that you were bewildered ; but, as I understand you, the time is past for such considerations to be weighed ; the necessity for plain speaking is upon us, and can not be avoided."

"I do not see why," she said, speaking hurriedly now. "You are cruel to me. I can not risk my father's life — and I will not. Why can I not wait until spring — until he is better, as we so hope he will be ? What is the need of troubling and exhausting him just now ?"

For a few minutes he did not speak at all ; then he said, and Grace never forgot the tone in which the sentence was spoken :

"Grace, you heard your father's last prayer, you heard his last words of direction to me — could I receive you into my family, knowing that you were engaged to be married to a young

man, knowing that you were in constant and special correspondence with a young man, of whose very existence your father is ignorant, and be faithful to my trust? Granting that he should live to know all about it, could he hold me free from blame?"

Then Grace cried with all her might, and it was well that the twilight and the rushing train shielded her from observation or hearing. As for Mr. Harper, he waited quietly, his face sad indeed but not really troubled.

"What *can* I do?" murmured the poor little crushed mouse at his side at last. It was the question that he had been waiting for.

"Of course there is an honorable way to arrange it all. If you feel unequal to assuming the responsibility of a frank talk with your father, you can write to this young man the whole story of your thoughts and views, and explain to him the nature of the difficulty, and you can say to him that you realize that you ought not to have given your word unconditionally, and that you ought not to be in correspondence with him of that nature, and that you must be allowed to hold the promise back until such time as it

can be honorably given. You will understand better what should be written than I can possibly tell you."

"But," pleaded Grace, catching her breath, and feeling that she was going over a precipice that was to whirl her forever away from Alfred Parks, whom she was leaving standing dismally on the shore; "but I *have* given my promise; it *was* unconditional; and however silly it may have been it is done, and I do not see how I have a right to undo it."

He was very prompt with his answer.

"Of course you consider this gentleman an honorable man, and a man of average intelligence; then don't you suppose he knows that a girl of your age, who has a good father, has no moral right to give herself utterly away without that father's knowledge?" Then after a pause, during which he felt the muffled up bundle beside him shrink and wince, he added with that quiet firmness which was characteristic of him:

"At least I see no other way out this matter. I am not dictating, of course, as to what you will do, I am simply answering your question; but it is my duty to be very frank with you. Much

as Ermina and I have looked forward to this winter together, and to all the pleasant details of this plan, and sharp as the disappointment would be to us both, I can not assume the responsibility of a correspondence of this sort with any living man without your father's knowledge and consent. I have no right to do it, and therefore you must be frank with him, or else I must be, or this other plan may come in to relieve us both. It is for you to decide."

Then an utter silence fell between them, broken only by one question from Grace:

"Do you mean that I ought not to write to him at all?"

"No; not that of necessity, though I should prefer that; but I think father trusts your sister and you sufficiently to have no objection to a friendly correspondence which is known in detail to *her*. But, of course, you see that such a correspondence would be very different from the one that you have proposed."

Poor Grace! She saw it very plainly. What long, long letters she was to have written him, and for no eye but his. Then the silence again, until at last, more than an hour since she had

turned that last answer over again bitterly in her mind, seeing all that it involved, she said, speaking in that clear decisive tone that she could assume :

“ Mr. Harper, you need not be afraid. I have been wrong ; I can see it plainly now, and so will Alfred when he thinks of it. I will agree to that last. I *will* not take any risk in regard to my father’s health, but your responsibility shall not be greater than I can help. But I want you to understand this : it is simply because of the condition of father’s health, and it will not change the actual state of feeling an atom.

“ Maria does not like Mr. Parks, and she has prejudiced you against him. All that will not be of the least consequence. I belong to him in heart and always shall. But while I have a father to ask I shall not belong to him in any other way without that father’s consent. And while I am at your house I will do nothing of which you disapprove, but the actual feeling will never change. I am not responsible to any one for that.”

“ Of course I have nothing to do with that,”

Mr. Harper answered, quietly ; “ and I am entirely satisfied, and trust you fully.” But, for the first time since the embarrassing conversation had commenced, he could not restrain a quiet smile.





CHAPTER XIX.

WORK THAT MARIA CAN DO.

MARIA RANDOLPH stood in her kitchen surveying the work spread out there with the air of a general preparing for battle. It was Saturday morning. Washing and ironing were disposed of for the week, and this was the grand day for sweeping, dusting and mopping, to say nothing of the bread and cookies that must bake with the same fire that cooked the dinner and heated the water for mopping. Economy of forces was rapidly reducing itself to a system in the mind of this young lady. She knew almost to a splinter how many sticks of

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wood it took to bake four loaves of bread and two tins of cookies. Five minutes ago she had work planned to fill the day. Now, with a look of utter perplexity on her face, she twisted a slip of paper over her finger and wondered what she should do. Finally she opened the bit of paper and read the brief note again:

“‘Maria, won’t you come over here just as quick as you can? Come prepared to stay for awhile at least, and help us think what to do. We are in great trouble.

“‘Haste,

TOM.’

“What in the world does the boy want, I wonder? Why can’t he tell me? It would have taken less words, I dare say, than he used in *not* telling me. That is just like a man! How does he think I can come to stay, and leave father? I wonder why Helen wouldn’t do?”

At this point Helen came down the back stairs with a broom and dust-pan in hand and an old vail tied over her hair. Maria turned to her.

“See here, Helen, what can be the matter?”

“I don’t know, I am sure,” Helen said, read-

ing the note. "You are going to see, aren't you? It must be something serious; he says, hurry. Where are your things, Maria?"

"How *can* I go?" said Maria, impatiently who had no intention of *not* going, but who wanted to be talked into it. "Just look at the things there are to do, and father to be taken care of and his room put in order!"

"I'll do the very best I can, and perhaps you will not have to stay long. Anyway, I would go, for poor Tom must be in trouble."

Maria turned and bestowed a searching look on her sister. In the midst of her perplexities there intruded this question: "What in the world can have happened to Helen? I wonder if she is going to be sick?" Then she said, aloud:

"Well, I suppose I must run over and see what is wanted. But I don't see how I can; anyway, I can't stay."

So into the midst of the disorder and consternation that prevailed in the kitchen at the Randolph House came Maria. What a looking place it was! In the great cook-stove the fire had utterly died down, the hearth was covered

with ashes and the top of the stove with unwashed cooking utensils, while on every table and shelf appeared the *debris* of the morning meal. Standing around these scenes of confusion, in various stages of bewilderment, were three or four girls, looking as though their wits had utterly deserted them, and they did not know which way to turn.

“What in creation is the matter?” queried Maria of Tom, who had evidently just come in, and whose face expressed sorrow and disgust and dismay.

“Matter enough!” he replied, briefly. “See here, Maria,” and he opened a door leading into a little room and motioned her to follow. “That girl—you remember,” he began as soon as he had carefully closed the door.

“What! my friend?”

“No; the other—the cook.”

“Oh, *your* friend. What about her: has she deserted? Tom, she hasn’t gone to drinking again?”

“Yes, she has. She just managed to blunder through the breakfast; and such a breakfast as it was! There isn’t a boarder who would stand

a repetition of it. And it seems she has smuggled some liquor into the house, and took some every little while until now she is in a state of perfect intoxication. Peter and I had to carry her to her room." And Tom's handsome face clouded, and he shivered at the thought. "Such a sight, Maria, I hope you may never have to witness."

He paused, seeing that comforting expression, "I told you so," in every line of Maria's face, and he got it too. She was not one to disappoint such expectations.

"Tom, what did I tell you? I knew how it would be: and you never did a sillier thing than when you tried to ignore human nature and act as though everybody who had anything to do with the Randolph House was going to be an angel."

"I know you told me," Tom said. "It can't in any sense be said to be your fault for not warning me. But I will not pretend penitence. I am not sorry I did it; and, given the same circumstances, I am afraid I would do it again. In fact, I *know* I should; for I thought I did only what was right. But for all that I am in sore

straits, and I don't know which way to turn. The housekeeper is gone for the day, you know, and I can get no extra help. I have been out to two Intelligence Offices without result. Those poor girls out there know no more about what ought to be done in this line than I do myself, though they are good girls every one of them. I felt as though I must see you for a minute, to advise with you. The house is full of boarders. Shall I call them together and send them all down to the Clinton House to dinner?"

"Nonsense!" said Maria, throwing off her shawl on one chair and her hat on another, and someway the tone and the action inspired him with courage. "You will do no such thing. It is a likely story that four girls can't get up a dinner of some sort. What are there names, Tom? No, never mind what there names are; you go over to the house and tell Helen to warm father's broth at eleven o'clock, and to see that his feet are warm when he lies down; and give me the keys, and let me know in ten minutes how many to expect to dinner. I'll look out for all the rest."

Tom was amazed and dismayed and relieved.

all in one. He had expected no such whirlwind of help as this. He hardly knew what he had expected, except that it seemed natural to think of Maria when he was in trouble. But he utterly distrusted her ability to manage a hotel dinner from the foundation. He began a protest:

“But, Maria, I am afraid you can never ——”
But she turned abruptly away from him.

“I will talk with you after dinner, Tom, if I happen to be alive at that time. It is not talk that we want just now, but work, and we must fly around.” Saying which she opened the little door and went like a fresh young breeze into that dismayed kitchen, leaving Tom standing alone, in doubt whether to be relieved or more perplexed than before. He listened to her brisk voice.

“Come, girls, I hear that you and I have got to get the dinner to-day. We shall have to be brisk, for it is getting late, and our reputation is at stake. We must have a better dinner to-day than was ever eaten in this house before. Who is the dish-washer? Here, let us all be dish-washers. We can't do anything in such a look

ing room. What is your name? Kate? Well, Kate, you get the dish-pans ready and the hot water, and the rest of you get the dishes in shape. I'll make up the fire and my bill of fare at the same time. Then we'll all set to work at it — and I'll risk us."

Tom waited still, five minutes, ten minutes, and by that time the kitchen had assumed the look of a camp-ground, with trained soldiers on drill before a masterly general. Every one was busy and alert, the fire was roaring, and Maria was looking out fresh napkins for the dinner table. He turned on his heel with a relieved smile. Some kind of a dinner they would certainly have, and it would appear at the proper time, too; of that he now felt assured.

Punctually at the appointed hour the noisy gong sounded its summons through the halls, and the guests of the Randolph House rushed in from the balconies and down the stairs, eager to obey its voice. Tom had been there before them, and drew a long breath of relief and intense satisfaction as he surveyed the scene. The most faultless cleanliness and order and propriety prevailed. Not a dish was lacking,

not a spoon out of place; the silver glittered with new luster, and the glasses sparkled and glowed, while the odor of delicious coffee floated faintly through the air.

That dinner was a triumph; certain little irregularities that had been frowned over in the morning were utterly forgotten in the perfect satisfaction with which the fastidious guests disposed of their more than usually dainty desserts; and they told each other that "there certainly was most unusual cookery done in that house." It had not been such a formidable thing after all. The startled girls were ready and willing to do, but they had been used to a head to guide them, and when they found Maria capable and determined to *be* such a head, they fell promptly into line.

Also, there came to them a special blessing in the way of desserts. The girl whom Maria had persistently styled her friend, and whom perhaps you remember as paying her a mysterious visit one evening, had been engaged ever since as a chambermaid at the Randolph House. Maria had not as yet had time to "cultivate her acquaintance," but persisted in the belief that she

was worth cultivating. This girl, in one of her passages through the kitchen, saw the new leader, and instantly recognized her, and as instantly came to her rescue. With a half dozen skillfully put questions she gathered the story, and then turned to Maria.

“I know how to cook all sorts of fancy things for desserts. If you want my help, my morning’s work is nearly done.”

“Of course we want your help,” Maria had answered, quickly, looking relieved; she hated desserts. “Come down as soon as you can, and get us up the most distracting dish that was ever set on a table; only remember you will not be allowed to use a drop of wine or brandy for sauce.”

“I shall not be likely to want to,” the girl had answered, with the frown darkening on her face, that had troubled Maria’s thoughts since the first time she saw her, and she had turned abruptly away. But she came back in the course of an hour, and rendered such good service that more than one guest at the dinner table wondered where they found such a pastry cook this side of Paris.

“No loss without some gain,” Maria had quoted to her brother as a conclusion to the story, and after she had explained to him that the trials of the morning had developed a remarkable pastry cook for future use; and he had made her turn away with an almost irritable “pshaw!” as he had quoted in answer: “All things work together for good.”

Now the day was nearly done. Maria, at home in the sitting-room, leaning back in the arm-chair, rocking and resting after the unusual exertions of the day, gave a detailed account of some of the anxieties and mishaps attendant on that exciting preparation for the stomachs of forty fastidious people. There was a gleam of triumph in her face and voice, and intense satisfaction glowing all through her. If there was any one sin of which this girl was guilty it was that of jealousy. In her own estimation she had not a touch of it; and certainly her life had proved that she was remarkably unselfish—a thing which very few people are. Still, down in her heart, there had lurked a sore, disappointed feeling about this brother Tom. Had she not been the favorite sister all her life? Had he

not told her his plans and hopes and intentions ever since she was old enough to remember anything! She had been the one to do for him, to think for him, to save for him, to help him in every way that she could imagine, until this last scheme; and this had seemed to come between them. In the first place it had been her own fault — she had opposed it; but of late she had fallen in with the young man's plans with remarkable patience, and helped him wherever he had asked it. The sore point was that he had rarely asked, and he had asked and received much from Helen. The younger sister understood perfectly the reason for this. She even remembered that he had drawn Helen in, at her own suggestion, and that they had often planned together to interest her for her good. And yet it was new, and it jarred. *Helen* to receive little notes from Tom asking her to come over and arrange the parlors for special occasions; to arrange flowers for the rooms of special guests; to play for a rare singer who was stopping with them; to sing with the Glee Club in the reading-room! None of these things could Maria do, and there was a score of other trifles that were shut out

from her for the same reason, which made it all the harder. It was well enough when she and Tom together planned ways by which Helen could be tolled in and made to forget her unhappy self for a little ; but gradually Maria knew Helen had come to be a necessity. She was often sent for, not for *her* sake, but for Tom's—sent for to fill places that she, Maria, could not fill. And it had hurt. She had called herself a simpleton ; she had boasted of her inability to tell what flowers looked well together, or whether the reception-chairs should stand at the right or the left of the mirror, yet in her heart it felt hard to have Helen slipping in where she had been needed so long, and to realize that she was almost never needed at the Randolph House. So on this particular morning she had lifted her eyebrows and spoken sharply to the boy who brought the twisted note. "From Mr. Randolph. He must have told you to give it to Mrs. Monroe ; he can not possibly want anything of *me*," quoting insensibly words that she had been long used to from Mrs. Monroe's lips.

Wasn't it a bit of a triumph then to discover that at last there was something more important

than music and flowers? Something that Helen was as unable to do as the veriest child in the street; something that if left undone would bring dismay and disaster to the Randolph House; and then to know that *she* could make it all right, restore order where was chaos, and, in short, make the wheels of domestic life roll along as smoothly as though the road had not thought of being rough. She was not glad that the poor tempted cook had fallen again, but it was a real delight to find herself a necessity to her brother; to find him turning to her to lean on again, and to know that she was strong enough for the strain. It was largely to this feeling — if the well-satisfied guests had but known it — that they were indebted for the remarkably good dinner that she put forth her wits and her skill to secure for them. So now to-night she rested in her chair and was jubilant. Tom had been ignoring her lately, but he had suddenly found that there *were* places where she fitted in very nicely. At the particular moment when she was giving this thought expression, in tone rather than words, Tom opened the door and walked in upon them.

“Well,” Maria said, “I didn’t expect to see the sight of your countenance again to-night. I thought you had seen quite enough of me for one day. What is the matter now? You look as if some new trouble had overtaken you. Didn’t the housekeeper come?”

“Yes, she came —”

“Oh, well, then, you will do nicely. That friend of mine is a perfect host in herself; you will do well to promote her. I believe I would give her that miserable cook’s place right away.”


“It isn’t that,” Tom said, sitting down. “Maria, we seem to be in need of your help a good deal. You are wanted at the Randolph House again, and to-night.”





CHAPTER XX.

UNEQUAL TO THE EMERGENCY.

OUR friend," Tom continued in answer to his sister's startled and inquiring look, "persists in seeing you to-night, and at once. No one else will do."

"What does she want? Is she sick?"

"I think not; at least she has been about her work as usual. I think she is sick at heart; in trouble, mental trouble, I am afraid. She came to me a few minutes ago, with so worn and sad a face that it hurt me to look at her, and begged me to let her send a boy for you, as she must see you at once. I tried to discover the trouble,

but she seemed unable to tell me, and as I feared you might not understand the message I judged it best to come myself. Will you go over and see what you can do for her?"

Maria arose composedly, and with her intense satisfaction in herself not a whit lessened. "I will go, of course," she said, "though I *did* suppose I was tired. I expect to find nothing more formidable than a broken pitcher, or platter, to confess. You contrive to make those girls of yours mortally afraid of you, while they seem very anxious to please you, but I do wish she had left her confession until morning."

"It isn't possible that there can be anything so trivial as that. If I thought so I wouldn't let you go at all. Perhaps it would be as well to send her word that you will come over in the morning, or she may come to you."

Maria's only answer was to go in search of hat and shawl, and in a very few minutes to announce herself ready.

Arrived at the hotel, she went directly to the room assigned to the girl. That neat little room! Few chamber-maids at hotels or elsewhere have such spots to call their own as was that. It had

been one of Ermina's blissful whims to have the servants' rooms at the Randolph House furnished with every appliance of convenience and comfort that the needs of respectable girls could suggest. There was even what most mistresses would call luxuries, when they were found in servants' rooms, though these same mistresses have a way of recognizing such articles as common necessities when found elsewhere.

"It is safe to conclude," Maria thought, glancing complacently around it as she entered, "that *she* never had such comfortable quarters before." Maria enjoyed her having them. She believed in it with all her heart, but she wanted people to be sensible of, and loyal to, the superiority of the Randolph House over the rest of the world.

"What can I do for you to-night, Maggie?" she said, trying to speak composedly; for the girl was walking up and down the room, and her eyes looked scarcely less fierce and unreadable than they did on that first meeting with her. She could not be half starved *now*; what could be the matter with her?

"Sit down, please; I have something to tell you," she said in a husky voice, evidently strug-

gling to appear composed and respectful, as became a girl talking to the sister of her employer.

Puzzled and half awed by her manner, Maria took the low chair by the stand and waited in silence for her to speak, which she did not seem in haste to do. She renewed her walk through the room, and Maria studied the flushed face and hungry-looking eyes, and tried to determine what could possibly be the matter.

“Does it rain?” she asked, suddenly.

“Yes,” Maria said, more astonished than before.

“Hard?”

“Yes, quite hard.”

“Such nights drive me wild,” Maggie said, and she looked as though she might really be wild. “Because, you see, I don’t know where he is, nor that he may not be out in all the storm. It was on just such a night as this that I lost him.”

“What are you talking about?” said Maria, thoroughly aroused and alarmed. “Sit down, Maggie, and don’t walk the floor like an insane woman; I think you must be sick; you would better let me call my brother and send him for a doctor.”

“I am not sick at all,” Maggie said, speaking more quietly and ; bringing a chair she sat down opposite her guest. “I beg your pardon for frightening you, and for sending for you at all ; but, Miss Randolph, I had a new thought, a new hope, I might almost call it, and it seemed to me that you were the one to help me, and I could not resist sending for you. But first I must tell you something about myself. You think I am insane, and I wonder that I am not. What would you think if I told you that somewhere in this great miserable world I have a little boy, a baby, only three years old, wandering up and down in the storm maybe, or lying sick in the gutter, or, oh, I don’t know where — dead, perhaps ; if I *could only* know that he *was*, how happy I could be ! What do you think of a trouble like that ?”

“Do you really mean it ?” Maria said, horror and pain in her voice. “Maggie, what *can* you mean ? and how could such a thing be ?”

Maggie laughed a laugh that had no sweetness in it. “You may well ask,” she said, “and you are dying to ask me a hundred questions. Why didn’t I take care of my boy, if I had one, and not let him get lost ? Oh, only God knows

how I tried! My darling, I did everything and bore everything for you, and what did it amount to? It isn't a long story, Miss Randolph, to those who are familiar with such things; I could tell it in one word. It was rum that stole my baby and lost him, and I have been without him for two dreadful years. Now you know it all."

"But how, *how?*" repeated Maria, her face pale with sympathy and dismay. "Tell me about it; how could it be, and what have you done?"

"Done! I've done everything; no, I thought of one thing I have *not* done, and I have sent for you to-night to help me do that. His father took him, took him from his warm little crib out into the night and storm. Think of that! And he was sick, too. I had run to the doctor's next door for some medicine for him, and when I came back he was gone, and I have never seen nor heard of him since. And don't you wonder that my reason has not gone? But it will not; I will keep that, and I will find him yet. I will never give it up, never."

Maria sat as one stunned. What a strange

terrible story to whirl right in to the midst of her quiet, uneventful life! Could such sorrow as that be possible? She began after a little to pour out questions, and Maggie, who seemed to have grown calmer in the telling of her bitterness, answered briefly and promptly every one.

Her husband had been a post-office clerk in a neighboring city. They had been very happy once. He only took a spoonful of medicated wine to strengthen him after night work, when he had to sit late making up the books. The doctor ordered it; said, indeed, that he would break down without it.

"I hate doctors," Maggie said, flashing into sudden fire, then quieting at once and going on with her story.

Little by little the habit grew, until he was very often "exhausted," and the wine was soon used without any medication, and it ceased to strengthen him, and something stronger was obtained, and, oh me!

Maria had heard the whole story dozens of times. There wasn't a new feature about it. It was that which is being worked out with every day's history, only it had never come to one with

whom she could sit and talk till she could not only know, but *feel* the sorrow. There is a great difference between the two. Helen's tragedy had been cut off in its early days by death. It might have been as terrible as this.

It took an hour to tell the story in all its pitifulness. How the drunken father had come just as she ran out. She saw him come and she felt no fear, for in his wildest moments he had never been other than loving to the boy. She saw him go out again with a bundle in his arms, and wondered what had been sacrificed now, and hastened home to see, and she found an empty crib. *

What had been the father's object, where he went, or what he did, or why he did it, the poor half-wild mother did not know, and could never conjecture. She knew only too well that from that day forth she had seen neither husband nor baby; nor had any trace of them ever come to her, though she had used all ways and means that keen brains and determined wills could devise. Before the story was concluded the poor mother had talked herself into calmness.

* Founded on fact—the incident came within my own knowledge.—

“I was on the very verge of insanity that evening when I came to you,” she said, quietly. “I can never tell any one the story of my wanderings, nor of the cruel things that were said to me. I used to look at happy mothers with their darlings in their arms and think, ‘If you knew, I wonder what you would say?’”

“Why didn’t you tell them and see?”

“Once I did,” she answered, with a *flash* in her eyes that told of smothered fire, “and the woman said, ‘The miserable creature is not only intoxicated, but crazy; she ought to be taken to the mad-house.’ But don’t let me talk of it; I can’t.

“There is one thing I have never done. I did not even think of it until this morning, when your brother was praying at family prayers, you know. I have never prayed for him. I do not mean that I have not got down on my knees and cried out wildly to God to give him back to me. But that is not the kind of prayer that I mean. My prayers are not acceptable to God; I am not a Christian woman; I never have been, but I *mean* to be; I want to know *now* how to be a Christian, so that I can go to God and pray for

my baby, and feel sure that he hears, and trust him, just as your brother does. I must learn to pray.

“I did not know who to ask; I can not talk to a man and tell him my bitter story; but to-day when I worked with you, and saw how efficient you were, and how prompt to do just the right thing at the right time, it flashed upon me how much I would give to hear you pray to God for my darling, and then I thought you were just the one to help me learn to pray for him myself, and I thought about it and kept going back to it until I felt to-night that I had got to see you. Now, will you help me?”

Imagine, if you can, how Maria Randolph felt! She had come over there with an assured feeling that, whatever was asked of her, she was equal to the occasion. A sense of superiority, a sense of power, had possessed her all day, and grown upon her with each added call. Yet here she was, asked to pray! Not only that, but asked to show another how to pray! She who had never prayed in her life! What could she do or say? Here was this miserable mother de-

vouring her with hungry eyes, and with a hope so eager and strong springing up in her poor heart that it seemed a solemn thing to crush it.

Why had she not asked Tom? How gladly he would have prayed and pointed out the way to her. Still, Maggie waited for the answer. Something must be said. Must she make the humiliating confession?

“You have come to the wrong one,” she said at last, speaking desperately; “I don’t know how to pray for myself; I never prayed in my life.” What a monstrous admission for a sane woman to make! Maria felt it as she spoke the words. “Yes, I used to pray at my mother’s knee, but I don’t know how now. Why didn’t you ask my brother? If there is any one in the world who knows how to pray it is he, and you would find him one to sympathize with you in your trouble, as few people can.”

Maggie had left her chair, and was walking the floor again. “I felt as if I needed a woman to speak to,” she said; “I felt sure that you could help me. I thought you were just the one; and you had been so kind to me kind when every

one else was cruel. I am sorry I troubled you. I should not have sent for you, I suppose, but I felt so sure. I am awfully disappointed."

"Let me call my brother," Maria said, moving toward the door, speaking in a low, subdued voice. She felt utterly humiliated.

"No." Maggie said, "Not now, please; I could not explain; I can not talk about it any more; it would do no good either. What good can praying do? *You* don't believe in it, do you?"

"Yes, I do, with all my heart. I had a mother who prayed, and I have a father whom I know God hears and answers. Yes, if there is anything in the world that I have unshaken faith in, it is prayer."

"Then why don't you pray?"

Now, what was a sensible person to answer to such a question as that, in the face of such a declaration as she had just made, and upon which she had prided herself? Maria felt the force of her own folly, and was puzzled and embarrassed. There really seemed to be nothing to say. Being one who was not accustomed to answer with silence, she said the only thing left to her under the circumstances :

"I don't know, I am sure."

Maggie regarded her fixedly, and something very like a smile hovered about the corners of her drawn mouth. Could it be a derisive smile? "I think I was mistaken in you," she said simply. "I imagined you were like your brother, only with a certain natural force that drew me, made me feel like resting on you. I thought, perhaps, you were very high in favor with God."

What a strange sentence! It sent a thrill like an electric shock through Maria's sensitive nerves. She was fond of power; she delighted in being leaned upon; she enjoyed reflected greatness; she liked being Tom Randolph's sister, and Mr. Harper's sister-in-law. What a thing it would be to be high in favor with God! To be so familiar at court that she could present a friend there, as she had been asked to do this evening, without a fear or doubt as to the result! Yet what a broken reed she had been. She felt a bitter, utterly new sense of humiliation.

There came a low, quick knock at the door and Tom's voice outside:

"Maria, will you stop with us all night? If so, I will go over to tell father. I am afraid they will be anxious."

“No,” Maria said, rising suddenly. “I can’t stay; I am coming now. Maggie, let me ask my brother to come in. He can help you.”

“It would not be a suitable thing to do,” Maggie said, quietly, and there was that strange smile on her face. “Don’t you know the world would be shocked at such an indecorous proceeding? You see I am shut up to your help tonight or none.”

How true it was! Tom could not come in there at that hour, even to pray with a young and beautiful woman.

“Then go to God,” Maria said, suddenly and with intense energy. “I am sorry I can not help you, but because I have shown myself a fool you need not be one. Go right to him; I know my father’s God will hear you and help you.”

“What a long conference!” Tom said, when his sister came out to him. “It couldn’t have been about a pitcher. What did she want, if I may be told?”

“She wanted me to pray with her.” Maria’s voice was abrupt and hard. Tom was very much startled.

“And did you?” he asked after a few minutes of silence, during which it appeared that she had no more to tell him.

“What a foolish question!” she said, bitterly. “Whatever else I may be, I am not a hypocrite.”

He was still until they were crossing the road; then he said: “What do you think of your ability to follow out the orders of your motto now? It can not be possible, that you think when a waiting soul asks you to pray, Christ does not say to you, ‘Do it’?”


She answered not a word; but it was a new sting. She had forgotten her motto, “Whatever He saith unto you do it.” She had boasted of her ability to follow it. Had she? She went into the house and up to her room in utter humiliation.





CHAPTER XXI.

WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN.

 LIFE now began to take a very humdrum aspect to Maria Randolph; and if there was any one aspect of life above another that was hateful to her it was humdrumness. Real tangible trouble was almost more endurable. She dreaded the winter; it stretched before her in interminable stupidity. She grumbled over the prospect to Tom one morning.

“I know just exactly what will happen to-morrow, just as well as I do what is going on to-day, and the day after to-morrow will be the same. Helen is gloomy or sharp all the time, and father sick in his room, and you at that

tiresome house that swallows all your strength and all your heart, and Grace gone! The prospect is dismal, now *isn't* it? I don't fret very often, do I? But it does seem to me as if life was very forlorn. I like to have things happen even if they are troublesome to manage. My washing is really the only excitement I have, and there isn't enough of that to keep me busy; though Dick Norton *does* get his clothes horribly dirty, and he contrives to tear them every week just for the pleasure of seeing me mend them, I verily believe."

"How does his education progress?" Tom asked. "I thought you were fitting him for college?"

"Now, Tom Randolph, you are not to make fun of him; he is doing real well, poor fellow. If he were ten or twenty years younger, and had a chance, he would make a scholar yet. He can read chapters in the Bible now without stumbling at all, and he is just as interested as possible."

"I am glad of it," Tom said, laughing; "though it seems to me there are important 'ifs' in the way of his becoming a scholar. But,

Maria, don't you think Helen improves? She is less gloomy than she used to be, isn't she?"

"Why, she is different," Maria said, thoughtfully, as if the idea had just been suggested to her. "Yes, there *is* a difference. She is preoccupied, seems to have very little time to devote to me, or to fault-finding either. Now I think of it, I have been struck with her silence several times when I expected an outburst; but she always impresses me with the idea that she has forgotten to say anything, rather than that she didn't intend to. What interests her so much over at the Randolph House? She spends a great deal of her time there."

"She is interested in everything that pertains to it," Tom said heartily; "and she is a real help to us. I think she is very different. I wouldn't worry about the winter, Maria; enough things may happen — things that you do not want perhaps."

"Don't croak!" said Maria, impatiently. "What *could* happen? Father is better — every one thinks so. I can see that he is improving every day. If we had a doctor who knew anything I believe he would get real well. Mr. Harper thinks he gains."

"I think so myself," Tom said, with heartiness enough to comfort Maria, whose irritation arose from an excessive desire to make every one confess that her father was at least not growing worse. "But you have certainly a care in looking to his comfort, and I know it must be a pleasure."

"Of course," she said, in her practical way; "but the thing is, what to do with myself when I have done everything for him that I possibly can, and more too. When the work is all done — there is only a little handful of work now — and when I am alone, it is very easy for you to preach contentment; but I am *not* content, I wasn't made to be, I don't believe, unless my hands were so full that I didn't know what to do first. I tell you I am restless, and I can't help it."

Tom looked at her wistfully.

"It seems strange," he said, "to hear you complaining of not enough to do, when there is so much work waiting to be done. 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.' Think what a very broad command that is."

"Don't preach!" said Maria, and she turned away from him impatiently again. But his

words seemed to have suggested to her a new train of thought. She turned back presently with a question: "Tom, what did you do with that girl? I left her in a forlorn state, and when I met her yesterday she smiled and bowed and looked as sunshiny as though she had found her baby. Isn't that perfectly horrible, anyway? I *would* find him. If I were she I would travel through the world night and day until I got him again."

"You would do much better to earn your living, and something over, to help prosecute the search intelligently and with system, as she is doing." Tom spoke so quietly that Maria's blaze of enthusiasm died down.

"What did you do for her?" she asked, speaking more quietly.

"Sent Kate up to her; she spent the night, and in the morning she told me that Maggie had gone to the only One who could possibly help her much, and given her cause into his hands. She feels surer of success now than she ever did."

Now Kate was the Scotch-Irish waiter at the Randolph House, a red-cheeked, broad-shouldered maid of all work, with a certain native re-

finement of speech and manner that seemed to belong to her heart more than her education, and so in truth it did; she was being educated, into the delicacy and tenderness of Christian fellowship. Maria had heard her brother speak of her before as an earnest Christian girl, whose influence was very strong for good. But what a humiliating discovery that where she utterly failed, Kate, with her disregard for the king's English — Kate, who said "him" and "her," and even "his'n" and "your'n," with perfect indifference, should have been able to afford signal and efficient help! This fact was a perfect irritation to Maria. It was *so* hard to be recognized as a failure!

"I am glad you have such a perfect treasure as Kate in your family," she said, speaking contemptuously, answering what she had heard him say before rather than anything which he had said then. "I should think you would set her at the work of reforming that precious cook of yours, who will burn the house down over your head one of these nights. If she is such a powerful agent for good you ought to try what she can do in that direction."

"I have," Tom said, still speaking with the

utmost quiet and patience. "She is doing better than you propose; she is trying to help her to look to the only One who can give her strength to reform; and we are all praying that she may be helped to 'look.' You should have heard Maggie pray for her last evening in the girls' meeting. Kate said it made them all cry."

"What a melting time," Maria said, with scoffing voice and a sore heart. Maggie had learned to pray, and she had not helped her in that, nor in anything, and she had felt such an interest in her, such a burning desire to help her in her great sorrow! Tom looked at his young sister with a pitying sigh.

"You need a place to rest, Maria," he said, tenderly. "Why *will* you not come to it?"

Maria rallied her pride, and turned to him with a laugh.

"I need a scolding," she said, cheerily, "for being so cross. Do me the credit of remembering that I am not often such a dragon as I have shown myself this morning. I hope you will all get just as good over there as you can, and then come here and made me over. I realize that I need it. I'm sure — Tom, who in the world

is this standing at the door with Helen?"

They were near the side window, and the piazza door was plainly discernible from where they stood. Tom looked.

"Don't you know him?" he said. "I thought you had met him. He is a good man. Why, he is a home missionary; been two or three years in Southern Michigan, and is going back in two months or so. He has been sent on here to collect funds toward helping forward their church building. Didn't you hear him in our church one Sunday? Oh, I remember, you staid with father that morning. Well, he gave us a good sermon. I know you didn't hear him now, for I remember wishing you had let Helen stay with father, and had come to church. I thought it was a sermon which would have helped you."

"About Home Missions?" said Maria. "Do you think I would make a good missionary, Tom?" and she laughed gleefully.

"It wasn't on that subject," said Tom, thoughtfully; "at least only incidentally. It was on the need of personal consecration."

"Well, in the meantime, what is he doing on the piazza talking with Helen?"

"Why, I suppose he met her on the street and

walked down with her. He said to me he would 'like to call on father sometime, if he was able to see him. He met some men in Michigan whom father once helped, and who are very grateful. He said it might be pleasant to father to hear the story from him. Perhaps that is his present errand."

"He won't see father this morning," Maria said, positively, "unless his business is much more urgent than that. I have been giving his room a tremendous clearing up, and he is tired out. Tom, come over to tea to-night. We are going to have flapjacks, and you know you are too fashionable to have them at the Randolph House; so come where you can enjoy them. He is coming in, I declare!" and Maria suddenly vanished up the back stairs.

Now I want to take you back for perhaps two months and explain to you certain items of which Maria was in ignorance.

It was Sunday morning, one of Helen Monroe's miserable days. I hardly know why it was that Sunday seemed to be her worst day; but you will often find it so among people to whom that day ought to be a blessing. She had spent

the morning in a miserable state of doubt whether to try to drag herself to church or to stay at home. If she could have staid in her own room and spent her time on the bed, half sleeping, half crying, and wholly miserable, she would not have hesitated a moment; but the consciousness that she would have either to go to church or to spend the time in or near her father's room made her undecided. He was very particular that the family should be represented at church; and the effort to invent an excuse for not going, and at the same time for not giving Maria a chance to go, would have involved more energy than she possessed. So, after delaying until it was almost too late for any one to go, she decided that a morning in church would be preferable to a morning under the possible questionings of her father. So she went.

A stranger preached — a common, uninteresting-looking stranger. So she called him the moment her eye rested on him. As for him, something perhaps in the wan pale face shrouded behind the widow's weeds, looking at him presently with earnest, haunting eyes, may have attracted him to turn often during his more pointed sen-

tences to the Randolph pew. There were many pointed sentences in his sermon. The text, in the first place, was startling; at least it startled Helen. She could not remember ever having heard the words before: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou has vowed."

The subject, of course, from such a text, was "Unpaid Vows." I do not know that there was anything particularly new in that sermon. I know the man was not specially eloquent. In fact Helen Monroe listened, or sat in the seat and pretended to listen, every Sabbath of her life to sermons that had five times the rhetoric and talent shown in them that this one possessed. I do not know what it was, except that the man was solemnly, I might almost say tremendously, in earnest; also, I suppose the Spirit of God had a message that day for just that woman sitting in the Randolph pew, and he chose the stranger preacher to deliver it. Perhaps the reason for that might have been that the stranger had that very morning spent an hour on his knees, making the bold petition that

the morning in a miserable state of doubt whether to try to drag herself to church or to stay at home. If she could have staid in her own room and spent her time on the bed, half sleeping, half crying, and wholly miserable, she would not have hesitated a moment; but the consciousness that she would have either to go to church or to spend the time in or near her father's room made her undecided. He was very particular that the family should be represented at church; and the effort to invent an excuse for not going, and at the same time for not giving Maria a chance to go, would have involved more energy than she possessed. So, after delaying until it was almost too late for any one to go, she decided that a morning in church would be preferable to a morning under the possible questionings of her father. So she went.

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God would honor his work to some *special* soul, and do it *that very day*.

At least all of these things occurred, and who shall be able to say that they were not connected, each with the other? Helen Monroë had never heard such solemn truth as came home to her conscience that morning. Yes, *she* had vowed; she remembered the summer morning long ago in which she had stood in that very church and taken the solemn vows of its covenant upon her; while the gentle little mother down in that pew where she sat now brushed sweet and grateful tears from her flushed cheeks, and her father looked his gladness and his love from eyes that were dim with excess of feeling. The scene was very vivid. It had made a strong impression on her at the time, and she could recall some of the very language of the covenant. Now as to payment — had she deferred?

For a long time, in fact for years, Helen Monroe had had a dim, uncomfortable sense in her heart that her religion was a very weak and worthless type. She had felt a sort of contempt for her own profession, even when she strenuously clung to it, as though there was that in it

that somehow made life a little more safe for her. But I do not think that she had ever stood face to face with her heart and felt it laid bare of all hiding-places and subterfuges until that morning.

Somehow those simple, plain words of the preacher seemed to scald her. She passed through many phases of feeling during that half hour. At first she was interested, then shocked, then angry, then alarmed, then utterly and, as she felt, hopelessly miserable! It was pitiful to see how she clung to her poor little rag that she had called religion, and felt as though if she should actually let go and say, "I am not a Christian," it would be a settled doom to her; and yet, as the searching work went on, how could it be that she knew anything experimentally about this matter to have lived the life she had?

When the service closed she was conscious of but one strong desire — to get away from everybody, to get to her room, to lock her door, to have a chance to be utterly miserable; and I have no doubt she would have carried out that design. She had decided, before the sermon's

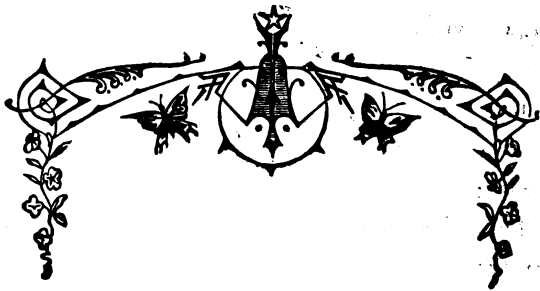
close, that it was not possible that she could ever have any right to take the vows of the church upon her, and that having a name to live was of small comfort after all. She would give it all up. She would never come to the communion again. She would stop going to prayer-meeting (she still went occasionally). She would not be a hypocrite, whatever else she might be. But this resolve did little toward quieting the tumult in her heart; for, after all, it was toward no such resolve that the preacher or the text was aiming. "*Pay* that which thou hast vowed" were the concluding words of the text, and she was not allowed to lose sight of them. Tom came over to her the instant the benediction was pronounced.

"Won't you go over to the house with me?" he said, and he looked anxious. "I have some strangers there for the Sabbath, and they talk 'all sorts' when they get in the parlors, unless there is something to entertain them. Will you just go over and give us some music?"

It was the very last thing that it seemed to Helen she could do, and she was ready with a decided negative. But she had been accommo-


dating of late, and Tom seemed to expect it, and did not wait for a negative. He turned to greet the preacher. "Good-morning; Mr. Leonard, let me introduce my sister. Helen, will you walk along with Mr. Leonard? He is to dine with us, and I have to go to my class, you know."





CHAPTER XXII.

HOME MISSIONS.

ND there was Helen standing in the aisle, calmly waited for by the minister, while the unsuspecting brother hurried away, supposing he had arranged matters very satisfactorily.

There was no resource but to lead the way to the Randolph House with what grace she could, and Helen walked on before, feeling that this thing was sorely against her will, for more reasons than one.

The clergyman was not a difficult person to entertain. Indeed, from the first, he was unlike any one she had ever seen. His first opening of conversation was strikingly unlike what she ex-

pected. He made no remark on the weather or the beauty of the elegant church which they had just left. Instead, he said, suddenly, as one absorbed in the thought and imagining that all others were equally interested :

“That was a remarkable text that I preached from this morning, wasn't it? I don't know when any verse of the Bible has come to me with such force. Unpaid vows!—only think of it. Isn't it startling when we remember to whom they are due?”

“Very,” Helen said, and something in her voice caused him to turn his eyes from space and look searchingly at her. “Who *does* pay them?” she asked, bridling suddenly, as if he had accused her of unfaithfulness, and speaking almost fiercely. “I am sure I don't know of any one who lives up to his profession in the sense that you talked about this morning.”

His answer, if answer it could be called, was certainly very peculiar.

“Don't you know *one* who is trying to?” The emphasis on the word *one* was very marked. There was no escaping the fact that he meant her to understand that she, *herself*, was the one meant.

is this standing at the door with Helen ? ”

They were near the side window, and the piazza door was plainly discernible from where they stood. Tom looked.

“ Don’t you know him ? ” he said. “ I thought you had met him. He is a good man. Why, he is a home missionary ; been two or three years in Southern Michigan, and is going back in two months or so. He has been sent on here to collect funds toward helping forward their church building. Didn’t you hear him in our church one Sunday ? Oh, I remember, you staid with father that morning. Well, he gave us a good sermon. I know you didn’t hear him now, for I remember wishing you had let Helen stay with father, and had come to church. I thought it was a sermon which would have helped you.”

“ About Home Missions ? ” said Maria. “ Do you think I would make a good missionary, Tom ? ” and she laughed gleefully.

“ It wasn’t on that subject,” said Tom, thoughtfully ; “ at least only incidentally. It was on the need of personal consecration.”

“ Well, in the meantime, what is he doing on the piazza talking with Helen ? ”

“ Why, I suppose he met her on the street and

walked down with her. He said to me he would like to call on father sometime, if he was able to see him. He met some men in Michigan whom father once helped, and who are very grateful. He said it might be pleasant to father to hear the story from him. Perhaps that is his present errand."

"He won't see father this morning," Maria said, positively, "unless his business is much more urgent than that. I have been giving his room a tremendous clearing up, and he is tired out. Tom, come over to tea to-night. We are going to have flapjacks, and you know you are too fashionable to have them at the Randolph House; so come where you can enjoy them. He is coming in, I declare!" and Maria suddenly vanished up the back stairs.

Now I want to take you back for perhaps two months and explain to you certain items of which Maria was in ignorance.

It was Sunday morning, one of Helen Monroe's miserable days. I hardly know why it was that Sunday seemed to be her worst day; but you will often find it so among people to whom that day ought to be a blessing. She had spent

“No,” she said, speaking as before with a sharpness that was almost fierce.

“Do you mean that you have never made any vows?”

No; she could not say that. It would not be true. She had too recently gone over that day, when the solemn public vows were taken, to be able to ignore them now. Her answer was less sharp, but it was distinct.

“Yes; I have vowed.”

“Then you can not mean that you are not trying!”

There was consternation in his voice; not feigned, but real genuine dismay. To this honest man it was evidently no light thing to promise and not perform, even when the one promised was the Lord himself. It is a strange thing, but how can we help believing it to be actually the case, that people who would be shocked at the idea of violating their word given to their fellow-men, yet seem to ignore without much trouble of conscience the most solemn obligations made to God!

The actual enormity of this proceeding had never struck to Helen's conscience so forcibly as it did at the moment when that probing ques-

tion was put. Natures constituted like hers are rarely stirred deeply without becoming, or seeming to become, very irritable. She answered in great heat and haste :

“ Yes, I mean just that ! I don't think I have tried at all, not for this long time. I doubt whether I ever *really* tried. I was led into a public profession, as many another person has been, when I did not know what I was about ; and much good I have ever done the church ! I am in a false position. I never realized it as I have done to-day. Your sermon has accomplished so much. Perhaps you can tell me how to get out of it. Does the church release people from its roll ? How shall I manage ? I have no desire to be where I do not belong.”

“ I know of but one way,” he said — his voice had lost its excited, astonished tone and was quiet and firm — “ I know of but one *honorable* way — ‘ Pay that which thou hast vowed.’ It is the command of God himself. It seems to be the way he has chosen for helping people who are in trouble, and who are sincerely desirous of getting out.

“ I know there is such talk as ‘ release from

the church roll,' as though the vows were all made to the church, instead of the church being only a witness. I know people think they are doing a very honorable thing to stay away from the communion when they feel that they have not lived a right sort of life. But only see how foolish that is! If you had made your brother a promise, and had called on me to witness to it, and had broken that promise again and again, would it make matters all right for you to refuse to have anything to do with *me*, the witness?"

This was the beginning of it. The Randolph House was some distance away, and the talk continued. It continued after they went to the parlor: and though Helen broke away from it for a time, after dinner, when she came down to play, after the music was over chance led her to the seat near the clergyman, and some sentence that seemed to her to be a chance one led them back into the very topic again.

That was weeks ago; much had transpired since then. The Home Missionary still lingered in the city, taking trips constantly to other cities and towns, but making the Randolph House his head-quarters by the eager invitation of the host.

Tom felt the influence of such guests in the house. Helen saw much of this guest, heard much from him, chiefly at first on this to him absorbing subject: Personal and entire consecration.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly to herself, her ideas and feelings began to change. I do not know, and I am not sure that she knows herself, whether during all those past years of church-membership she was a Christian or not. She vexed her soul over the weary question for long days, but she had finally to give it up as, after all, of minor importance, compared with the vital one waiting to be answered. She came finally to understand that the point was not, Was I a Christian last year, or last week, or even yesterday? but, Do I mean to be one to-day — now?

When at last she was enabled to rest her heart on that one question, she began to feel that there was such a thing as solid rock, and that she must have it for a foundation. There was no sudden experience of light and brightness; instead, the way was obscured for a good while. She had had much light given her heretofore, and had

chosen to go veiled, refusing to receive it. Why should it come in floods of glory to her now?

But, after all, there came to be a sense of peace, of security, of humility, and yet of assurance. She walked softly, as one almost in a dream, as one who feared a rude awakening. She worked softly, so softly that she herself hardly realized that she was working at all. But she realized that she was looking for work and wanted to do it, and such people are generally at faithful work, though they may not know it.

Maria had felt the change and wondered over it, and feared at times that Helen was going to be very sick. That is as far as she reached in understanding the secret. I am not sure but sickness was the only power she recognized as a subduing agency.

Among other things about her sister that she did not know, it so happened that she had never met and never heard of this man whose sermon had been the instrument used to set these new experiences in motion.

We left him, you may remember, standing with Helen on the side piazza, or rather they

were just about to enter as Maria vanished upstairs. She was gone just long enough to brush over her somewhat ruffled hair, exchange a somewhat soiled kitchen apron for a fresh one of the same fashion, and then she descended.

It would have been too great a concession to the manners and customs of the silly world to have left that kitchen apron hanging in its place and gone down without one, though she had no special use for such an article for some time to come; but this girl was so *sensible* that any such foolish concession to the pride of other people was not to be thought of.

There are a great many such sensible people in the world, and the world does not love them at all, and half of the time it is their own foolish fault for being so "cranky" over trifles.

So down came Maria in a big dark calico apron which nearly covered her up. Her action lost half of its martyr element this time, for the two people standing in the little sitting-room both looked and acted as though they did not know whether her apron was of silk or tow cloth.

"Maria," Helen said, turning to her the mo-

ment the door opened, and there was a flush on her cheek deeper than usual, "let me introduce you to the Rev. Mr. Leonard. My sister Maria, Mr. Leonard."

"How do you do?" asked the reverend gentleman, and his voice was genial and hearty, and he shook her hand in an altogether unconventional manner. "I have heard of this sister several times in the course of the last few weeks. How is your father to-day? Do you mean to let me have a little bit of talk with him? or don't you think it would be prudent? They tell me you watch over his comfort with a forethought and carefulness that are wonderful."

Then he helped himself to a seat, and continued talking about her father, asking questions as to his sickness, and the remedies in use and their effect, with such interest and with evidently so thorough an understanding of sickness, and such a common sense view of its needs, that Maria felt her stiff dignity, which she had put on to greet a stranger and a minister, thawing rapidly. She surprised herself by the detail with which she entered into a description of her father's state, and became deeply interested in

Mr. Leonard's suggestion as to certain strength-giving potions.

Helen, meantime, seemed suddenly to have lost the grace and ease for which she had always been remarkable in the entertainment of strangers, and was silent and flushed. Maria could not tell what to think of her.

Presently the question of a call on the father came up again, and Maria was sufficiently thawed to admit, graciously, that when he awoke, if he felt as well as usual, she knew of no reason why he would not like to see Mr. Leonard for a few minutes.

“I should imagine from some things you have said that you have seen a sick man before, and have a little common sense left as to what weakness is able to bear, which is more than can be said of the majority of people who come to call on him.”

This sentence, uttered in a half-savage tone, was as nearly a compliment as any that Maria had ever spoken. It ended in her going to the sick-room and returning presently with the gracious permission to make a ten minutes' call, or, if her father did not seem very tired, fifteen minutes.

No, it did not end in that way: Mr. Leonard had risen and was moving toward the bedroom door, when he suddenly turned, and said, thoughtfully:

“Perhaps this is hardly the right thing after all, Helen. I think we can be wiser than this.”

“What on earth does the man mean?” was Maria’s mental comment. Then he turned to her:

“The truth is, my friend, I shall have to make a *confidante* of you. I am very willing to do so, I am sure; and it seems to be the prudent way. Do you think your father sufficiently strong this morning for an important conversation? I am going home in another month, and I want to take your sister Helen with me. Do you think I may ask him for such a favor, or ought I to wait until a more favorable time?”

Now, of all the experiences of Maria’s life, and some of them had been startling enough, nothing had ever so amazed her. She stood still, with her hand on the knob of her father’s door, and looked from one to the other of the two people standing near her, with a face in which astonishment and incredulity curiously blended. Helen’s face flushed crimson before the look,

the flush running up to her very hair. She could realize, in a measure, what this surprise was to Maria. As for Mr. Leonard, he laughed good-naturedly.

“What do you mean?” Maria asked at last. “Where is your home, if you will be so kind as to state? And what can you possibly want of Helen? She is not strong enough for a teacher and, besides, it would be a dreadful life for her. I should hate to have her a martyr to that extent.”

There was a tremulousness in her voice, and an evident desire to shield Helen, that strangely moved that older sister. Someway, she felt then, as she never had before, what a care-taking, burden-bearing life Maria led, and was willing to lead, for them all. Mr. Leonard seemed to appreciate it. He spoke quickly and with feeling:

“I will shield her in every way in my power. Her life shall not be harder than I can help: and as for the trials and privations, I think she is ready for them and willing to bear the burden. My home is in Southern Michigan, and she will have but one scholar. As her husband, I think

I can make the work easier for her than if she went out alone. I am a home missionary, you know."

Still Maria stood looking at them; the surprise in no way lessening, the incredulous look deepening, if anything. It was becoming very embarrassing, at least to Helen, until suddenly Maria ejaculated three words, so full of pent-up astonishment that they bristled with exclamation points:

"Helen Monroe a missionary!"

They had the effect of producing a reaction on Helen's excited nerves. She had been on the verge of tears. Now she laughed. Dropping into the nearest chair she covered her glowing face with her hands and shook with laughter, in which Mr. Leonard seemed to feel moved to join with great apparent satisfaction.

In the midst of this Mr. Randolph's voice was heard calling Maria. She escaped into his room, and when, a few minutes thereafter, she emerged, propriety had returned to the two in the sitting-room, and they were sitting in decorous quiet waiting for a chance to make that call.

"Go on, Helen," said Maria, leaving the door

ajar and motioning them in. She seemed to have determined that it was Helen's place to introduce the stranger. And Helen, followed by Mr. Leonard, went softly into the quiet room, and Maria herself shut the door after them with a little nervous click and a curious sensation in her throat.





CHAPTER XXIII.

ONCE AND AGAIN.



MARIA walked to that side window out of which she and Tom had looked but a few minutes before, and it seemed to her that the world must have changed a good deal in that time, such a surprise had come into her life! There remained that queer feeling in her throat, as of one who was choking back tears; though why should she cry? She heard the steady murmur of voices in the bedroom. It was an earnest conference. She had doubted the wisdom of exciting her father with such an astounding revelation; she had even taken time to won-

der what Grace would say to their consistency when her poor little affair had to be so carefully guarded from troubling him. But there was nothing else that it seemed possible to do. This was altogether different from two simpletons like Grace and Alfred Parks playing at grown-up-ness. These were man and woman, each with years and dignity enough to decide questions for themselves; having decided, it was the father's blessing that they sought now. Maria could not doubt that they would get it; she knew that it would be a joy to her father's heart to have the family represented in such work as the home mission cause afforded; but what a queer representative! This thought almost caused a reaction. It certainly had its ludicrous side, to think of Helen Monroe in such a position! Tom came somewhat hurriedly across the street and entered the side door.

"Why, I thought Mr. Leonard was here," he said, looking about him in surprise.

"He is," said Maria, briefly, and she nodded her head toward the bedroom. "A private conference, Tom."

"Ah!" he said, "I expected that."

“One would have supposed you might have given me a slight hint then ; at least of the existence of such a person.” And Maria looked dignified.

“My dear Maria, there was nothing for me to hint. I was just suspicious without having any reasonable ground for being so. I had a presentiment, perhaps some would call it; but it wouldn't have looked well for me to have told you so. I wonder when the conference will be ended? I am not sure but I ought to intrude. There is a man waiting to see Mr. Leonard, and the business is urgent.”

“Tom, isn't it the queerest thing that ever happened?”

“What, this? I think it is the best thing that has happened to the Randolph family, yet.” Whereupon Tom crossed to the bedroom door, and without further ceremony knocked. A half-dozen words exchanged with Mr. Leonard, and that gentleman made hurried adieus, and left in his company. Helen lingered a little with her father, the door still shut. When she came out there were traces of tears on her face, but her eyes were smiling. Maria seemed glued

to that window seat. Helen went over to her.

“Were you very much surprised?” she asked, speaking gently.

“Surprise is no name for it. I don’t think I would have been much more bewildered if he had come after me.”

Helen laughed.

“In many respects it would have been a much better thing for him to do,” she said; “but, for the comfort of the entire Randolph family, we rejoice that he did not.”

“Why? It does not follow that I would have rushed out there after a home missionary life at the first opportunity. I don’t think I am fitted for such a place; and, for the matter of that, I don’t think *you* are.”

Now the Helen of Maria’s acquaintance heretofore would have bridled at this, and strongly hinted that she, Maria, was not a proper person to judge of one’s fitness for places, and that it made very little difference to any one what she thought. Maria knew this, and expected something in that line; but she felt most unusually severe; in proportion as her heart had been touched, and trembled under the shadow of

coming changes, did her resolute will resist this invasion of feeling, and resort to positive roughness to hide its softness. Helen remained beside her keeping silence for two or three minutes, then she said :

“I do not wonder at that remark, Maria. I have been at work all my life proving to you my unfitness for any place of trust. No one certainly can feel less qualified than I in many respects feel myself to be. But there is one thing which I ought to tell you. In some degree I am different from what I was a few weeks ago. I hardly know what to call it, I do not try to name it, but for the first time in my life I am sure I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and I long to show my love by anything that I can do. I did not seek for this thing — I did not hope for it — I did not dream of it; I simply prayed to be shown the way in which to walk, to be led as a child, and God seemed to send to me this answer. How much I thank him for *such* an answer, I can not explain even to you.”

And then this reserved, oftentimes haughty, woman, stooped and kissed her youngest sister as she stood there, sticking a pin as far into the

window seat as it could be forced to go. Then she went away up-stairs to the privacy of her own room, and Maria stood still and worked at that pin. The excitement in no wise lessened; the bewilderment greatly deepened by this latest development. Only this feeling was strong and clear in the midst of all the whirl of conflicting and excited thought:

“There is a power beyond anything that has ever touched my life, beyond anything that I have ever imagined!” The power that could make Helen Monroe acknowledge *anything* that should be humbling to her pride was a power that her sister Maria did not understand, and that she felt compelled to respect. After she had buried that pin in the wood so deeply that no amount of digging could bring it out, she set about getting dinner as usual.

Yet it was not as usual. The shadow of a surprising change had fallen over the family; she felt it and could not rid herself of it, even as she walked to and fro in that room, looking in every respect as it had looked for so long. The “something” which she had craved, “no matter what,” but an hour before, had come to her with a vengeance.

There was no more need to mourn over not enough to do. The new plans brought a great influx of work, and not only work, but responsibility. A dozen times a day during the next few weeks did Maria have occasion to contrast the lives of the two persons, Helen Randolph and Helen Monroe, under like circumstances, and be filled with amazement over the latter.

"Helen," she said, "aren't you going to get a new silk?"

"Dear me, no! How could I? And what should I need of one if I could? I am going to live in a long cabin for the next few years."

"But what will you be married in?"

"Oh — why, my traveling dress."

"What is that to be?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; I haven't thought. Alpaca of some sort, I guess, or empress cloth."

"Alpaca!" and Maria stood aghast. How would Helen Randolph have looked in an alpaca! It really became bewildering as a new experience. She had to learn how to fight Helen to have things instead of combating her expensive tastes. This seemed the more strange since Ermina in her long, long letter of congratulation had enclosed a bank check as a wedding

gift that stood for any amount of finery, and hinted that such was its intended use. Helen and Maria had changed places; Maria was intent on sustaining the Randolph honor, and Helen was engaged in saying:

“What’s the use? I really shall not need anything of the kind.” The same bewilderments occurred over the wedding arrangements.

“Where will we set the table?” Maria said. “In the back parlor, or just leave it in the dining-room?”

“When?”

“When? Why, when the day comes. Helen, what’s the matter with you?”

“Well,” says Helen, laughing, “I should say, let’s have breakfast in the dining-room just as usual.”

“And what shall we have?”

“Oh, I don’t know — beefsteak and griddle-cakes, I guess. I must learn how to make your kind of griddle-cakes. Mr. Leonard says they are better than Westerners get.”

“Helen Monroe!” Maria exclaims, and she drops the skirt she is basting, and looks the picture of despair. “Who ever heard of beefsteak and griddle-cakes for a wedding breakfast!”

“Oh, a *wedding* breakfast,” repeats Helen, as if that were an entirely new idea. “Why, Maria, it need not be different from any other breakfast that I see. Tom will be the only one besides the Harpers.”

“Don’t you mean to have any company at all?”

“Oh, dear, no! Whom could I have? Father is too feeble for company, you know; besides I really don’t think of anybody that I want. I’ll tell you, Maria, fix it just exactly as you think it ought to be; then I shall know they are all right. You know more about things than I ever shall, I am afraid. I am only particular about this one thing—that you shall give yourself as little work and as little anxiety, and spend as little on me, as possible, for I honestly don’t think any of these things are worth the trouble. If I were going to Washington or Boston, or some of those cities, to live, and had a reputation to sustain, it would be different; but I am just to be nobody but a missionary’s wife, you know, and live in the back woods.” Whereupon Helen would fold up her work, looking serenely happy the while, and set out for a tramp into the west end with Mr. Leonard.

“Going down in the very scum to practice,” Maria would say, with a turned-up nose. “I should think they might wait until they got out West.” For the west end of that little city was another name for Five Points, or some of those well-known resorts; and yet Maria, looking after them both, was proud, with a pride that no sight of Helen in her silken robes, and poor Horace Monroe in his lavender kids, had ever awakened. Mr. Leonard had brought his Western habits with him, and wore no gloves at all.

All anxiety in regard to the effect of such unusual excitement on the invalid was quieted by his evident satisfaction in and enjoyment of his prospective son-in-law. Mr. Randolph’s own very early life had been spent at the West, and the family were intimately connected with the home mission work in its earlier days. Old memories, therefore, were revived, and the green spot in his heart blossomed and glowed under the thought that the Randolph blood would flow again in the old channel.

Despite all bewilderments as to plans, preparations for the coming event went swiftly forward. The days went forward rapidly, too, and brought them presently to the very breakfast

over which Maria had done much needless worrying; for it transpired that Tom finally took the matter in hand, and a strong force from the Randolph House came over to do everything in perfection, Tom declaring that the care of the father and the bride were as much as Maria's nerves ought to manage; so, though there were almost no guests, Peter Armstrong only being invited in token of his former place in the family, and Dick Norton being added, for no other reason than because it suited Maria's fancy to include him, the breakfast was as dainty and tasteful in all its details as though the guests had been numerous.

Also Maria had done some worrying over Grace coming home so soon and mingling again with the obnoxious Alfred; that, too, being needless, as it transpired, for Mr. Harper came alone. Ermina was not quite well, and Grace thought it not wise to leave her alone, as she was very anxious that he should attend.

Maria heard, and mused as to whether Ermina had considerably sickened at this opportune time in order to arrange this convenient and satisfactory programme.

Mr. Harper brought their love and remem-

brance in the shape of a trunk full of most satisfactory things, chosen, Mr. Leonard said, with as much wisdom as though they had been the "granddaughters of pioneer missionaries," and Mr. Randolph answered with pride :

" They are."

To Maria came a little private note from Grace, containing these, only these, words, much underscored :

" DEAR MARIA :

" *Won't you please* invite Alfred to the wedding *for my sake ? Please* do, that's a *dear* sister. " Gracie."

Over this note Maria gloomed and scolded, and finally settled down into the serene conviction that for once everything was going nicely ; for it transpired that the said Alfred considerably took himself off on a vacation tour, and did not return in time to be either invited, or slighted.

So on this morning, when Maria, having no coffee to manage and no Mrs. Dickson to watch as there was in Helen Randolph's time, suddenly re-

remembered that she and Grace paid a last visit to Helen that other time, and had a farewell talk, though there was no Grace to go with her, she decided to go alone. Helen was dressed and standing by the window looking out.

“All ready?” asked Maria; and Helen turned toward her. There were traces of tears in her eyes.

“I have been saying good-by to mother’s grave,” she said. “Graves seem to me hard things to leave. People who are alive, and from whom I can hear, and to whom I can write long letters, are different; but, somehow, one holds on to graves and wants to be near them.”

Straightway Maria thought of Horace’s grave, and wondered if that was remembered by the widow, who was almost a bride. It did not seem to be the thing to ask, but Helen, as if in answer to her thoughts, suddenly added:

“Some graves are very hard to think about. There has been one very bitter spot in my life that, however much joy may come to me in the future, I can never forget. If I had been a different woman, Horace’s grave might have been bright with the light of resurrection. Think of

that! Oh, Maria, I hope you will never have to look on any grave and feel that thought."

The tears were flowing freely now.

"Come," said Maria, not knowing what to say, "I wouldn't cry; you will look like a fright. What will Mr. Leonard think?"

"He'll know there were no tears shed about him," Helen said, quickly, and her eyes flashed with a sudden brightness.

Altogether it was in striking contrast with that other call. Maria felt the difference and respected it. Life was changed, and circumstances were changed, and, yes, Helen was changed by something besides time and circumstances — some great motive power had come into her life and lifted her up. It had been so with Ermina, it had been so with Tom. "I am left at the bottom," she said to herself, with that queer, choking feeling in her throat again; and yet she *would* stay at the bottom! Wasn't she a strange girl?



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NEXT THING.

THAT next, I wonder?" It was Maria who said this. She and Tom were turning away from the depot once more. They had been watching a departing train. Mr. and Mrs. Leonard were being whirled off on their Western journey. The last flutter of Helen's handkerchief had just disappeared from view. Mr. Harper had departed in the train which went East just five minutes before this one started West. So there was nothing for it, Maria said, but to go home and be humdrum.

That wedding was a very quiet and very pretty affair. Brides can look well, even in Empress cloth, as Maria discovered. *Something* about Helen was wonderfully becoming. She

had never looked so well, nor appeared so well, in her life before. Some discussion had been held as to the proper place for the couple to stand during the ceremony; but it finally arranged itself in a manner that had not been thought of till the last minute. It was found, on the morning in question, that Mr. Randolph appeared too feeble to sit up, so the bridal party stood directly at the foot of his bed.

“Helen Monroe being married in the bedroom!” was Maria’s amazed comment to Tom when she went to tell him of the change of plans.

“What does she think of it?” Tom asked.

“She? Why, it was her own proposal. She would not mind being married in the pantry. I am not sure but she would think it more convenient, and trouble could be saved by taking a cold bite off the pantry shelves! Mr. Leonard, or somebody else, has transformed her. I should have to begin and get acquainted with her all over again if she were going to stay at home.”

That walk from the depot was the opportunity for more gloomy lookings forward into the future. They had dismissed the carriage in order to have a long walk and talk together.

“There isn’t any ‘next’” Maria said, answering her own question. “Everything that can possibly happen to our family *has* happened. There is absolutely nothing but sweeping, and dusting, and getting dinners, for the future.”

Tom shivered visibly.

“Maria, how *can* you talk so recklessly, even in sport?” And his voice was almost stern. “You surely see ways in which great and terrible changes could come to us as a family — changes which we have almost held our breaths for fear *would* come. Do not let us court them by a spirit of unrest.”

“If you mean father,” said Maria, with utmost coolness, as if every nerve in her heart did not quiver, “I see that he grows stronger every hour. Mr. Harper said the improvement in him during the short time since he had seen him was very marked. Why, Tom, if you were not as blind as a bat, you would see it too. Fancy our allowing him, three months ago, to go through such an experience as he had this morning!”

“I *do* see it,” Tom said, “with a very thankful heart, I assure you. And yet, Maria, you and I know that he is far from well; and we do

not know what our Father in heaven has decided concerning him."

Maria twitched angrily.

"Don't!" she said, sharply. "I don't want to hear that sort of talk. Father is going to get well again. I know it as well as though I saw him on the street this morning. Let me have so much comfort in the world."

What was the use of talking to Maria? Tom felt, with a sigh, that she was not in the least subdued.

Meantime changes were coming swiftly. Maria had hardly time to settle down after the unwanted excitement to the quiet of the times that had come to them before plans started up which made a great stir in the household, and especially in her heart. She was in the kitchen. The rain was falling softly out of doors; but before it commenced sun and air had done duty in drying and whitening a great basket of clothes.

Over these Maria, in trim kitchen apron, cuffs off and sleeves rolled up, was now at work, sprinkling and rolling into tight little heaps ready for the next day's ironing.

The gate clicked, and she wondered whether

Tom was going to take pity on them and come over to supper. It was a quick, manly step and came round to the side door — yes, and came in without knocking. Of course it was Tom. She turned to greet him, and said, in alarmed surprise :

“ My conscience ! ”

“ It is only your brother,” Mr. Harper said, shaking the rain from his hat, and opening the door again to let out his umbrella. “ I have surprised you, haven't I ? ”

“ What is the matter ? Is it Gracie or Ermina ? ”

Mr. Harper laughed reassuringly.

“ It is neither,” he said. They are perfectly well, and send love. The fact is, I had a plan which I am trying to develop. I came up to talk to you about it. I came around to the side door because I thought it was about time for father's afternoon nap, and I feared the bell might disturb him. How is he ? ”

“ He is better. I think he improves every day.”

“ That is encouraging for my plan then. Do you know it is about him that I have come ? ”

And Mr. Harper took a seat on the corner of the table and unfolded his plan. It overwhelmed Maria with astonishment and dismay. There was an earnest argument, somewhat heated on her part. Tom found them still talking when he came, almost an hour afterward.

“What in the world is the matter?” he said, quite as much surprised as Maria had been.

“I have come all the way from New York to unfold a plan which has filled me with satisfaction, and to my sorrow I find that our good practical sister does not approve at all. This Mr. Harper said while he was shaking hands with Tom.

“Of course I don’t,” said Maria, with energy. “I wonder how I could be expected to? Tom, he wants to carry father off to New York now.”

“To New York?” echoed Tom, in astonishment.

“Yes. I am encouraged to feel that a change of air and of physicians will work great results for him. I believe the doctors are mistaken in thinking his lungs hopelessly diseased. I believe he can be cured.”

“Of *course* he can be,” chimed in Maria; “and he is *being* cured as fast as possible! See how

he has improved in the last four weeks! But if you carry him off to New York you will just upset it all. I don't like it at all."

Though there was grim determination in this, there was also an undertone of satisfaction, as one who knew she reigned there, and that it would be very hard to carry out plans to which she did not consent. Tom seemed astonished.

"But, Maria," he said, "think how often we have said if he could *only* have salt air to breathe and be under the care of Dr. Conyers."

"What do I know about Dr. Conyers? Because he lives in New York is no sign he knows more than all creation. What I say is that a sick man needs his own home and his own things about him, and he needs my care too. You will find that *he*, at least, will object to going away from *me*."

Mr. Harper interrupted eagerly.

"My dear sister! did you suppose for a moment that we could think of having father go without you? I took it for granted that your good sense would *know* yourself included in this arrangement. Of course he needs you; no other could take your place."

"Well, I shall *never* go, you may feel sure of

that. I am not going to have the name of living upon my brother-in-law so long as I can earn my own living." And Maria, as she jerked these words out between lips that wanted to quiver, sprinkled clothes with an energy that sent the water over Mr. Harper's broadcloth. He wiped the shining drops off composedly as he answered :

"That is a very foolish way to talk, Maria; not at all in accordance with your usual good sense; I *am* your brother-in-law, however much you may feel disposed to ignore the relationship, and as such have certain rights and privileges. I know you do not mean that you will not do whatever shall seem in the end to be the best thing for the father, whose health and welfare are to be put by us all before every other consideration. What we want is to talk this matter over calmly, and then decide as shall seem best to us all."

He might as well have talked about talking calmly with a tornado; Maria's blood was all on fire; she was like a lion afraid of being robbed of her young. Her father had so long been her charge, had been so entirely under her sway,

that to give up the right to plan, and work, and sacrifice for him, was like giving up her life. For the time she was incapable of reasoning, or of talking intelligently on the subject. So Mr. Harper presently decided, and, breaking off suddenly, he began to talk to Tom about the Randolph House, and finally went away with him to have a look at certain improvements in the reading room.

They both came back to tea, Maria having gained sufficient control to say that her father would be ready to see them at that time. At table the subject came up again, Mr. Harper apparently being no whit less determined, and Maria being calmer, having had time to intrench herself in the firm belief that her father would put an end to all such planning.

By mutual consent the subject was not broached to the invalid that night. But Mr. Harper commenced it promptly the next morning. It was a stormy day with Maria; also it was a day in which much planning was done.

Contrary to the expectations of any, and the hope of one, Mr. Randolph entered with eagerness into the new plans. He had long felt that

a mistake was being made in his case; latterly he had begun to hope and believe that if he could get a change of air, above all a whiff of sea air, perhaps he might get strength again to support his family.

He was willing, nay, *anxious* to try the proposed change; he was deeply grateful for the thoughtful love that had planned it; more than that, he agreed with Maria that it would be better for her to remain behind to look after the old home, and the cow, and the hens, and the garden, and all those tiresome details that need so much looking after, and that are looked after so thankfully when there is some one in the house for whose comfort you are planning, and to whose comforts they will add a share.

But how utterly trivial they become when you are only taking care of them because they *must* be taken care of. Maria realized this part. But she had little more to say; indeed you would have pitied her if you had been in the kitchen with her while she washed the dishes that had come from her father's room. Her hands moved slowly, as if they had lost their energy. Every now and then a great tear splashed on the table,

or was brushed suddenly as it was about to fall. Her father was willing to go away, to leave the little room that she had made so sweet and fair for him, and that she had so delighted to fill with all the comforts her hands could furnish! He was willing to go without *her!* to be waited upon by other hands than hers! How *could* he think that *she* could bear it! Mr. Harper felt sorry for her, and objected earnestly to the plan of leaving her at home, helped, however, by neither father nor Tom. Mr. Randolph said that she had been confined too closely to a sick-room, that she needed rest and change almost as much as he did; that she was growing old before her time.

“It has been a loving service,” he said, looking after her with eyes that glistened, “but it has been a hard one for a girl of her age. She needs her freedom for a little while; she will stay at the Randolph House and look after Thomson, and get rested and brightened up, and then everything will be looked after at home.”

“Then would it not be better to explain to her that it is for her sake you wish her to remain, and not because of the house?” Mr.

Harper asked the question; he could not bear that the sore heart should be made sorer by being apparently underrated.

Mr. Randolph shook his head with a smile.

“You do not understand my youngest daughter as well as you do Ermina,” he said; “I doubt if she would do anything for her *own* sake. She understands the art of doing for others, but she is too young to understand that each one owes a duty to himself in this world that can not rightly be neglected. She needs to learn that.”

Tom said nothing until his brother and himself were walking down town; then to Mr. Harper’s anxious remark:

“It seems to be a mistake, leaving Maria behind; I am sorry for her. She has lived for father so long that she will not know how to live without him; besides, he will miss her more, I am afraid, than he realizes.”

“He realizes it,” Tom said, with a smile. “The truth is, my father is sublimely unselfish; he sees, I think, that it is for Maria’s good. I believe she needs to learn that life *can* go on without her; not that she is conceited in the

usual acceptation of that word, but she has so long managed us all, and especially father, that she feels herself absolutely necessary to the affairs of this life. She has not a grain of trust in her nature. I doubt if she could be got to go to New York and live with your family even for father's sake. Independence is her weakness; a good trait carried to excess. Maria has to have everything in excess; it is her nature."

"Is she progressing any, do you think? Has she discovered yet that it is hard to live by her motto while she ignores the foundation?"

Tom shook his head.

"I don't know what she has *discovered*," he said, gravely. "She has *admitted* nothing of the sort. The fact is, Maria, more than any other person I ever knew, needs to be taught the lesson of dependence. She doesn't want to depend on anybody but her own self; she even rebels at the idea of a daily dependence on God! She thinks herself sufficient to herself, apparently, not only for this life, but for the life to come. Sometimes I tremble for her, and wonder how it will be necessary to teach her the lesson. I hope to do something for her while she

is at the Randolph House. We have good influences there now in every direction."

He need not have built many plans on that hope. If Maria would not go to New York, neither, it, appeared would she go to the Randolph House. Somewhat crushed she was by having discovered that her will was not so potent as she had imagined; but only crushed, not broken. If she could not control the disposal of other people, she could at least control herself. She kept her own counsel; she worked day and night to prepare her father; she planned indefatigably for his comfort. It was her hand that arranged his collar and neck-tie on the morning of the prospective journey. It was her hand that arranged the pillows at his back when he was seated in the carriage. It was she who arranged a couch for him in the palace car that had been retained for this occasion. It was she who saw the annoying sunbeam creeping in at the wrong corner and shining right in his eyes. It was she who hovered around him, anticipating every motion, every fancy. She made herself an absolute necessity until the train gave its warning whistle. She wrung from him with the good-by kiss this tender whisper :

“ My darling child, I could not bear this separation even for a little while if it were not for your good.”

“ My good ! ” she said to herself, with a grim smile, as she watched the train around the curve. “ What possible *good* does he think can come to me ! If harm doesn't come to *him* through it all, I shall be only too thankful. But I shall have him back in a little while. They will all see their folly ; I only hope it may not do any mischief that I can not repair.” Then she turned to Tom :

“ Well, here we are again at this depot ! Can't we just take rooms here and wait for astonishing things to happen ? They all seem to center around departing trains. Tom, either you or I must get married or go to Europe for the next event ; that is absolutely all there is left to happen *now !* ”

Tom turned away in silence. He was not constituted like Maria. His father had looked very pale and feeble. It was a hazardous experiment after all. Who could tell whether they were ever to see the dear face again in life ! He could not put on gayety of voice just then, even to help Maria. He could sleep


quietly and calmly to-night after his earnest prayer for his father's safety; sleep quietly while she was burying her lonely head in her pillow, and sobbing aloud in her loneliness and sore-heartedness. But there was the difference between the two natures.





CHAPTER XXV.

SIGNS — NOT UNDERSTOOD.

 “HEN will you be over to the house?” Tom asked, as the carriage rolled toward home.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ll call as usual, I suppose, whenever the spirit moves me.”

“Maria, what do you mean? Aren’t you coming over there to live?”

“Not by any means am I. So long as I have a house of my own to live in, I am not disposed to live on charity, especially as I have a trade and can support myself.”

Of course this was the beginning of a long discussion. Tom dismissed the carriage, and

went into the deserted house and sat down to it; but he might as well have discussed with the wind. Maria was even less reasonable than usual. It appeared that she had her plans all formed. She was going to stay in the house of course; how else could she take care of things properly and be ready for her father when he should return next week or next month? Of course she expected him as soon as that—sooner. She had no hope at all of this wild scheme doing him any good; she was not so foolish. If it only didn't do him permanent harm she should be thankful. No, she was not afraid in the least. What on earth was there to be afraid of more than there was when her father lay sick and helpless in that bedroom? She had not been supposed to be afraid then; why must she be so now? Do? He would find there was plenty of work that even *she* could do, if she wasn't of sufficient consequence to have her opinion count for anything.

In short, she had her way of course, as she meant to have from the first; all the more determined to have it because she had not yet rallied from the disappointment and humiliation of

being overmatched in this last planning. Tom went away at last, more thoroughly vexed with her than he had ever allowed himself to be before. The utmost concession that she could be prevailed upon to make was to submit, it must be confessed with a very ill grace, to Tom's quiet announcement that since she would be so foolish and unkind she must take the extra work of getting a room ready for him, for he should sleep in the house of course; and when she rudely questioned what earthly use there was in putting himself and her to that extra trouble, he answered more coldly than she had ever known him to, "That you find it necessary to ask such a question only goes to prove how young and foolish you are, and how very improper it is for you to be left to yourself." And then Tom allowed himself to bang that door just a little, and as he went down town he felt that really he had a most heavy and most unwilling responsibility. His heart would have been softer if he could have seen how bitterly the stoical sister cried the moment the door banged after him. She really was sore-hearted, and she did not understand the feeling.

Tom found it difficult to determine whether the strongest feeling was vexation or amusement when he made his next call in the daytime and discovered the improvement that had been made. The old Randolph homestead — which had sheltered a long line of Randolphs — not imposing in any way, but eminently respectable, had a new ornament, a sign, tacked in a conspicuous spot, and the letters on it were unmistakably clear and plain: "Clear starching and fine ironing done here."

Tom was democratic. He thought no one could be more so. He was most remarkably free from false pride. Had he not been a street-car driver? Yet this sign made the blood flow faster in his veins. It did seem a little too great a departure from the beaten track; especially since now, more than at any time during the last struggling years of their fortunes, it was unnecessary. The troubled brother walked quite past the house and took a turn around the block, before he had settled in his mind how to treat this new departure. Acting upon a plan thus carefully considered he had been in the house ten minutes before he made any remark concern

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ing the sign ; then he said, in as quiet and careless a voice as he could assume :

“ You have enlarged your business, I see. Do you propose to take in a partner ? ”

“ Perhaps I shall, if I can find one of sufficient mental capacity to be of use. Have you a *protégé* that you want to get rid of ? ”

“ Not at present. What was the object of the enlargement ? ”

“ No special object — only you seemed afraid that I would lack for occupation ; and as I didn't seem to be of use to anybody, nor have any sphere whatever in life, I concluded to make one for myself, or to make money at least. There is money in it. If you need any to carry on your schemes, you will know where to come.”

“ *He* doesn't care what I do, nor how many signs I tack to the old house, so that I don't trouble him.” This Maria said with a swelling heart as she watched that same brother walk away a few minutes thereafter without raising his eyes to the sign. He, on his part, drew a long sigh and said : “ She will have to learn by experience. I see no other way, and I don't know how to help her in the least.” After all,

they understood each other's hearts about as well as those articles get understood in this surface world.

Outwardly I shall have to admit that Maria's plan bade fair to succeed better than anything that the Randolphs had ever undertaken, that is, so far as their purses were concerned. Maria had said truly that there was money in it, provided (she was apt to add) you have no pride to speak of and a good strong back.

While the world seems to be full of people who are willing to teach our children to strum on the piano, to draw impossible-looking trees and people, to jabber in a dozen different tongues, the lamentable fact remains that in every town and city it is really a difficult matter to get one's collars and cuffs starched and ironed decently without paying a fabulous price for it.

As Maria had a great deal of pride of execution, and an indomitable determination, and a secret plan to make herself and her father independent thereby, she worked with a will, and in process of time actually took in, not partners exactly, but hard-working girls who were glad to be taught that which she had worked out by her

own wits and the help of her eyes when she visited certain famous laundries. For time went on, and the father did not return to them; in fact, she became unwilling to have him return, though this she did not own to anybody. But she gloated in secret joy over the wonderful accounts of rapid progress and increasing strength.

There came a day when her eyes were red all day with the happy tears she had shed in the privacy of her own room the night before over a half dozen lines actually written her by her father's hand, in which words he communicated to her his dear ambition to get well enough to go back to his clerkship, so that she might have leisure and money in return for all her self-sacrificing love.

"He will never do it if I can help it," she said with energy. And she ironed eleven shirts that day; she saw a way to help it, by making it unnecessary. This she would do if they would give her time enough; so she became reconciled to the visit to New York.

So the days passed, and snarly March, and tearful April, and uncertain May, came and went again, and, except a flying visit from Mr.

Harper, none of the New York family were to be seen. Mr. Harper came with plans; they wanted to take father to the White Mountains. Grace had been studying hard and needed the change, and the doctor said nothing wiser could be done for the father, so he had come down to see about it. Father was anxious to have Maria go; he longed for a sight of her; besides, he felt sure she needed the change.

Unlucky sentence! Maria was inexorable. Her heart throbbed fast at the thought of getting through the long summer without one peep at her father; but she was taking care of herself, and was not to be cuddled at the White Mountains, or any other mountains, on the plea that *she* needed anything. "I am willing father should go," was her magnanimous conclusion. "I have no doubt it will do him good. Your plan of taking him to New York has resulted as I never thought it would: but there is no use in talking about *my* going, because I can't, and won't."

I hope they appreciated this admission; it cost Maria a great deal to make it, and it was splendid in her. It was more than for most people to get

down on their knees and humbly beg your pardon. It was her misfortune, perhaps, rather than her fault, that she was gifted with a marvelously obstinate disposition, though, to be sure, she had done what she could to cultivate her gifts in that direction.

But no amount of coaxing served to change in the least her determination not to be made happy herself; other people might be as happy as they could, she was going to wash and iron clothes. That is what it looked like to Tom and Mr. Harper; they knew nothing at all about her bank account, or her cherished plans.

But our washer-woman had long, lonely hours in which she could neither wash nor iron, and in which she did not know what to do with herself. Tom was so busy and so eager over his hotel, and his reading-room, and his Sabbath services, and his hundred other plans, some in which she could not, and others in which she *would not*, be interested, and allow herself to help, that he had little leisure time to bestow.

In fact, it was not till years after that it dawned upon Maria that he actually made a sacrifice of time and convenience in order to occupy

at night the pleasant little room which she took care to make so inviting for him. She was still skeptical over the hotel; not that she did not see and feel the good it was doing, not that she did not admire the idea, only how was Tom ever to marry and support a family on fine ideas?

All the more she felt this for being present one evening when the accounts had been gone over, closing the financial year of the house. Mr. Harper and Tom had been at work all day. An hour before she had heard Mr. Harper say, "Now, subtracting the expenditures for furniture and for extra matters that will not naturally come in another year, how do we balance as to accounts?" Then there had been some very silent and rapid figuring on Tom's part, until presently he sat back with the lines of crimson creeping up on his forehead, and the white lines about his mouth, showing how intense and keen was his interest in this experiment. "We net just exactly seventy-two cents," he said, trying to control the tremble in his voice.

Instantly Mr. Harper stretched his hand across the table and grasped Tom's in an eager grip.

“Victory!” he said in a voice of triumph. “Then it is demonstrated beyond the shadow of a reasonable doubt that a first class hotel *can* be sustained with even a moderate degree of patronage, and not have a drop of liquor brought into it. I congratulate you, my brother. Are you ready to go on with the work?”

“If it fell seventy-two cents behind, instead of netting that, I should try to contrive some way to earn that sum and go ahead,” said Tom, trying to cover his evident emotion with gayety, “but your property at that rate is lying waste, even if we should do so well in the next year, and your expenses for furnishings have been enormous.”

“My property belongs to the cause, and sinks or swims with it. I am grateful to you for letting it help.” Mr. Harper said this quietly, but with shining eyes, and both gentlemen arose and shook hands again, even as they had done after that first compact between them.

But I regret to be obliged to state that poor, mercenary Maria looked scornful. “Seventy-two cents!” she said within her heart. “How does the boy ever expect to support a family

with such an income as that? and it will grow worse instead of better, for he will have new schemes every year." And she made a resolution to work harder than ever at her chosen calling. *Some* of them must have some money.

That was the evening before the Fourth of July. Maria had so far laid aside her obstinacy that she came over to the Randolph House, "bag and baggage," as she phrased it, to spend the Fourth. A curious intimacy had sprung up between Maria and the girl Maggie. For the first time in her life Maria was near having a particular friend. Maggie interested her as no girl or woman had ever done before. To those few among her acquaintances who were sufficiently intimate to remonstrate with her on the strangeness of making a friend out of a "hired girl," Maria delighted to answer: "She is a pastry cook and I am a washer-woman; what is the difference?"

So she spent the Fourth in the Randolph kitchen, helping Maggie to concoct elegant desserts for the unusual rush of visitors. She and Maggie were the only ones who did not desert the work in the kitchen for a sight at the parade. And it was not until everything was in order for

the night that the two girls decided to take their holiday by mounting to the highest balcony that overlooked the square, and getting a view of the fire-works.

“I like bonfires better than any of these new-fashioned fizzes, rockets, and Roman candles, and all those; I used to like the fire-balls that they whirled through the air; I don't care if they were dangerous, they were a dozen times more romantic than these namby-pamby affairs.”

This Maria said as she watched the flames curling slowly around a great pyramid of tar barrels, gathering strength and volume every minute, and beginning to light up the square with a lurid glare. Maggie made no answer; she was watching the curling flames like one fascinated.

“I like them too,” she said after a little; “I like *power*.”

The way in which she spoke those words, under her breath, made Maria smile as she looked curiously at her. “She has power;” she said to herself; I wonder what she would do in an emergency! I don't believe she would faint, or scream; I'd like to know.”

“I'm glad I haven't power,” began Maggie

again. "I should be afraid of myself; I think I might do something dreadful, just for the sake of doing it. If I had the power of God, for instance, I would sweep out half the people in the world at one swoop, I think."

"No, you wouldn't," said Maria, amused, and yet a little startled; "you would hate to destroy machines that your own power had made."

"No, I shouldn't; not if they utterly disappointed me, failed, you know, of the object for which they were made."

There was something in that. Maria went to thinking about it, and found she had no reply ready. Still the flames grew and made more than sunlight in the square; the faces of the people looked weird and fantastic in the growing glare. Suddenly Maggie gave a little scream, not a scream, either. It was not loud enough for that; it was a suggestion of a scream that a strong will had instantly suppressed. She clutched Maria's arm.

"What on earth is the matter?" Maria said, greatly startled. Before the sentence was concluded Maggie said:

"Do you see that man standing by the lamp-

post, the blue-light post, with a child in his arms?"

Yes, he was defined distinctly against the dark background; a glow of light shone full upon the child's face.

"That man," said Maggie, and again there was that sense of a powerful, controlling will about her voice, "that man is my husband, and he has my baby in his arms."

All this was said in an instant of time. Swift and low her voice had been, and the grasp on Maria's arm had been like a vise. Then she was off, through the room, down the hall, down the stairs, down another hall, another flight of stairs, so swift and noiseless that she seemed almost like a spirit, and though Maria followed, breathless and panting, it was hard to keep her in sight.





CHAPTER XXVI.

EMERGENCIES.

BY dint of eager pushing and breathless haste Maria kept the flying feet ahead of her in sight, and at last they reached the goal. Such a wonderful change as those few minutes had accomplished! Where was the light which had made a glow on all the faces but a moment before? A sudden tumbling of a few tar barrels, a sudden change in the current of wind, and that part of the square was in gloom; besides, the people tired suddenly, it would seem, of the sight on which they were so eagerly gazing but a moment before, had surged and swayed, and were breaking in all directions — men, women, and children, in crowds and throngs, but not *the* man nor *the* child — at least Maggie seemed not

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to find them, as she pushed her way through, peering eagerly into the face of every man or woman who held a child by the hand. It was a hopeless search. It looked so to Maria in a very few minutes after she got among that throng, yet she dared not speak, dared not say: "It is of no use, the child is gone; you were mistaken; or if you were not, he is lost in the crowd." That would seem too bitter a thing to say, so near to him, and yet to have lost him. Could any pain be harder than that?

"It was perfectly awful," she said, telling over the experience to Tom the next day; for the search ended, and they got back to the hotel. Maria hardly knew how.

"I don't know how *Maggie* could have felt, I know *I* felt like death. Was there ever anything so dreadful?"

"The police ought to have been instantly notified," said Tom. "Much precious time was lost."

"The police," echoed Maria, and her countenance fell. "Why, what could they do, and how should they have been notified?"

"Do! They could have stationed guards and

watched the trains and boats. There were three trains and two boats left before they were notified. They could have been sure that the persons were not on any of them. It would have been easy enough to notify them; any decent man you met would have sent a message to headquarters; you should learn what to do in emergencies, Maria."

Now, wasn't this a hard sentence to bear? She who had prided herself on her talent for managing emergencies. Who had puzzled her brains half the night over the query, What *could* she do, to help Maggie? And had finally settled down into the belief that there was *nothing* to do but accept the hard fate.

Then she spent hours in planning what *might* have been done. How easy God might have ruled that they should have been in time to have seized that child, and have borne him off in triumph. This was what *she* would have arranged had she ruled the world. By so much then was she wiser and more merciful than God. She did not see that this was the inevitable conclusion which her logic reached. She would have been shocked at that thought.

Most grumblers would be shocked at the mathematical results of their reasoning. But now Maria was more than shocked, she was disgusted. And of all persons with whom to be disgusted in this trying world, the most trying one is one's self; because one does not like to set to work and give one's self a real downright talking to, though nothing would be more profitable sometimes. Maria contented herself with frowning gloomily.

"I wonder *she* didn't think of that," she said at last; the necessity for blaming somebody seeming to be upon her.

"I don't wonder at that at all; she was almost wild I suppose, and was not to be expected to think connectedly. The wonder is that you allowed such a sensible move as that to be neglected for so long a time."

"How should *I* think anything about the police?" grumbled Maria. "I haven't had to do with such scrapes."

"Then I advise you to impress it upon your memory, that, hereafter, when you want to find a lost child, the most reasonable thing you can do is to notify the authorities whose business it

is to help you, and the sooner you do this, the better will you exhibit your common sense."

Tom spoke quickly, vexed by Maria's apparent hardness into a departure from his quiet manner.

"Have you been over to see Maggie this morning?" he presently asked, speaking in his usual tone.

"No, I haven't, and I have no desire to go."

"Why?"

"Because I have a little bit of feeling left, though you seem to think you are the only one so affected; I don't want to see her; I can not imagine anything more terrible. It is a wonder to me that she keeps her senses. I wonder what she thinks of all her prayers now! Great good they did. It was as bad as losing him the second time; just a tantalizing glimpse and then gone. I should go wild, or be an infidel. I am sure I have nothing at all to say to comfort her. If anybody has, I advise them to say it. All I can say is, I don't understand such dealings; there is no man living who would be so inhuman as that. Can't endure the thought of meeting her again."

Tom smiled a peculiar smile.

“You go over and see her, Maria — go as soon as you can; it will do you good.”

Now, though Maria had not the slightest intention of following this advice, though she assured herself that she wouldn't go near there for at least a week, an irresistible impulse seemed to draw her in that direction. She went that very afternoon; went up the stairs with a softly tread — such as one instinctively assumes in the presence of death — and tapped softly at the door; no answer. Was Maggie buried among her pillows in bitter weeping, or was she sitting in apathy — her senses dulled by the bitterness of her grief?

Maria waited a minute, then softly opened the door; the room was vacant. Maria preserved an outward calm; but in inward anxiety sought for her friend. Who could tell but in her despair she had wandered away, as she had done before, leaving no trace of her flight? One and another of the girls she met, putting the same question: “Do you know where Maggie is?” and received the same answer: “No, ma'am; I haven't seen her since dinner.”

It began to grow very serious; still Maria bravely kept her own counsel, for which she could not be too thankful, when she finally reached the store-room and found Maggie weighing out sugar preparatory to making sponge cake for tea. She was very pale, and there were dark rings under her eyes, as one might look who had not slept much the night before, and who had shed some hot tears. But she turned with her usual smile to greet her friend.

“I have been hoping for you all day,” she said, speaking with utmost quietness of voice. “I was afraid the wild way I led you last night might have tired you very much.

“I am not so easily tired, but I am very much astonished; I went to your room, and expected to find you in bed.”

“Oh, no, I am not sleepy. I slept some last night, and I have had to be very busy all day. I suppose there is no news yet,” and she looked up with a sudden gleam of wild hope in her eyes.

Maria shook her head.

“Your brother has been so kind,” she said. “He was up half the night, putting the police

on the track, writing out descriptions of them to post in conspicuous places, and I don't know what he *has* done—everything that could be done I am sure. What a blessed thing it is to have friends at such a time.”

“Do you expect any results? ” Maria asked, skeptically.

She was so wonderfully quiet, and stirred that flour and egg so dexterously, it did not seem cruel to say *anything* to her.

“Results? indeed I do: I feel hopeful to-day, more so than I have for a long time. I have had a good deal to encourage me. Think what a blessed sight it was. I saw my darling as plainly as I see you at this moment, and he looked plump and well, and he clung to his papa's neck, not as if he were frightened, but as if he was happy, and enjoyed it all; and his papa was sober; I know that, for I have watched him so long and so well, I can tell with one swift glance. Oh, if there was ever a direct answer to prayer, my gleam last night was one. My prayer has been a mixture of petition and thanksgiving to-day.”

Now, all this might as well have been spoken

in Greek so far as Maria's understanding of such a state of mind was concerned. But that which we do not understand can sometimes thrill us mightily, and Maria Randolph turned away from that pantry door with a strange sense of her own littleness and uselessness, and of the wonderful nature of prayer.

"I admire her pluck, anyhow," she said. But she knew it was not pluck. She knew it was something that she had not, and that Maggie had never possessed, until that night when she learned to pray. She had taken great strides in the Christian life in a little time. A great sorrow is a wonderful educator. But all that, Maria did not understand. She went directly home, and she thought much about it all during the rest of that day.

"If you would go and hear him," said Dick Norton, speaking to her with a sort of wistful earnestness that amused, while it surprised her, "you would know how he says these things that I try to tell you. They ain't queer as they sound when I tell them in a blundering fashion; they are worth hearing."

"What if I *should* go?" Maria said, pausing

on her way to the pantry as she cleared the tea-table. Tom had been over to tea, and the table had been set with ceremony once more.

“That is a new idea. I am eager for something new, I live a stupid life nowadays. But this is the reading-room night, isn't it? My brother will be engaged. Dick, will you take care of me if I will go to the meeting with you?”

“I will that; there is nothing I would like to do better.”

The energy with which he spoke amused her again. And, adding to the sudden impulse to have something new in her humdrum life a kindly desire to give Dick Norton pleasure, she made ready to accompany him to the Fleet Street Church to hear the minister who had been preaching there every evening for a week, and in whom Dick was wonderfully interested.

The church was crowded when they reached there, and the exercises were commenced. A gentleman arose to let Maria have his seat. She glanced up at him with a bow of thanks. He had a child in his arms—a little boy. The boy had an arm wound half around the gentleman's

neck, and his hand toyed caressingly with gray locks of hair.

The sermon may have been effective: indeed I know it was. There were those present who will remember it, not only for this world but for the next; because of the power it had in influencing their future lives.

But Maria heard not a word of it all. From first to last she never took her fascinated eyes away from the face of the man who held the little child in his arms, and who found a sitting on one of the aisle seats near her. She shielded her gaze by peeping through her fingers; but not a movement of the stranger's escaped her.

Something, she could not have told what nor why, either the caressing hand of the child, or the likeness to the shadow that she had seen defined against the glare of light in the square, or the mysterious sense of insight that seems sometimes given — either, or all of these, so powerfully impressed the matter-of-fact Maria Randolph, that she had just self-control enough left to wait with feverish impatience for the benediction before she executed a bold plan which she had formed.

“Follow close to me, Dick, and don't let that man escape us for the world!”

This was the tragic whisper that fell on Dick's astonished ear as the “Amen” was spoken and the crowd began to surge toward the door.

There was to be an inquiry meeting, and many stood quietly in their seats waiting for the people to pass out.

Maria moved toward the door, followed closely by Dick, and she on her part following, with eager steps, the man who held the little child, now sleeping quietly in his arms.

In the vestibule he halted; so did Maria.

“Won't you go to the second meeting?” a man asked, stopping before the stranger.

“I would,” he answered, promptly, “if it were not for my little boy; he ought to be at rest.”

“We need much help to-night,” the other said. “It is a blessed time.”

And the man with the child answered, heartily, “Indeed it is.”

Every word he spoke made it less probable that Maria was right; yet she clung to her determination. No police could be more vigilant than she would be to-night.

She turned toward him. "Dick, stand close by me," she said in a low voice. Then she addressed the stranger:

"Aren't you Mr. Henry Reeder? and isn't this child named Wallace?"

He looked down at her quickly. "Yes," he said, and if Maria had not been intent on carrying out her plans, she would have noted the sudden catching of his breath; "who are you?"

"Never mind who I am; if you will give me that child I will take him to his mother, and the sooner you give yourself into the hands of the police as a disreputable vagrant, the less trouble you will make us all."

Maria prided herself on the cool contempt, stinging in every word, of this sentence; so sure was she of her man that she had been preparing this message during the sermon. She had not planned the result that speedily followed; she had reckoned as if the man before her were a puppet to be played on as she chose: had she leveled a pistol at his heart and taken true aim, he couldn't have dropped more suddenly and silently than he did before her.

There was much confusion now, and Maria had the benefit of seeing how well she could act

in an emergency. Her wits served her well ; she talked rapidly and to the point. " Don't surround him so," she said ; " the man is in a dead faint ; I gave him news too suddenly. Take the child, one of you. Dick, call a carriage, or no, one of you gentlemen please call a carriage, and then if you will help him into it we shall be all right in a few minutes.

" Dick, see here ; get a policeman to take a ride with us ;" this in a low tone to the amazed Dick.

Then Maria raised her eyes again, and met the searching gaze of one of Tom's friends ; she was equal to that.

" Dr. Preston," she said, coolly, " I shall have to press you into service ; is this anything more than a faint ? "

" No," he said, quietly, " the man is reviving. What do you want done ? "

" I want him taken to the Randolph House as speedily as possible ; he is one for whom my brother has been searching."

In much less time than it has taken me to tell it, the strange party were on their way to the Randolph House.

Dr. Preston, who had invited himself to go

with them, resting the head of the fainting man on his shoulder, Maria with the sleeping boy in her arms, Dick close beside her, and the policeman mounting guard with the driver, and wondering for what he could be wanted to accompany a respectable looking party, three of them gentlemen, home from a religious meeting!

Tom was standing on the brightly lighted piazza, looking after a carriage-load of departing guests. He waited while the next carriage drove up.

"What now?" he asked, as the policeman swung himself to the ground.

"Don't know, sir," said the policeman, touching his hat; "I am detailed to convey this party from Fleet Street Church to this house, and I believe they are all here."

Dick Norton was the first to alight; he could give no sort of information as to why he was there. Dr. Preston followed, steadying the steps of the man, who seemed dizzy and bewildered.

"Preston!" exclaimed Tom, his surprise increasing every moment, "what's up?"

"A sick man is down, and we are ordered here; for the reason why, ask your sister. I

must get this man safe, he is like to faint again."


Finally down clambered Maria, clinging closely to the sleeping boy. She issued her orders like a general. "Is he going to faint again, did you say? Take him to the hall sofa. Dick, pay the carriage and dismiss it. Tom, here is Maggie's boy; I have him safe you see; and — no, thank you — I mean to *keep* him safe until I can put him in her arms, but I desire you to see that I notified the police, as you gave me direction to do; as to what his duty is in the matter, you will have to inform him, for *I* don't know. And she vanished with her precious burden from Tom's astounded gaze.





CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT MARIA DID NEXT.

 **W**HAT that girl will do next is more than I can imagine." That was what her brother Tom said as he followed Maria in, looking after her in a dazed kind of a way, before he turned to Dr. Preston and his charge.

"The next thing, she will be responsible for a human life, I am afraid," Dr. Preston said, as he bent with grave and troubled face over the apparently lifeless man. "This man has had a fearful shock of some sort. Where is he to be put, Randolph?"

Whereupon Tom roused himself and gave di-

rections right and left. The doctor looked around him, his eye falling on Dick Norton, who stood waiting and watching.

“See here, my man,” he said, “can you do an errand for me?”

“Yes, sir.”

The promptness of the answer and something in the tone told how eager was Dick to be made helpful. Dr. Preston drew him one side, and was evidently giving careful directions, watching him meantime with keen eyes to see whether he took the complicated windings of the different errands into intelligent consideration. Dick listened in silent attention until the sentences were concluded; then he made one solitary observation:

“Do you want me to report on the first errand before I do the others?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, his eyes lighting; “I do. I had forgotten it.”

“All right, sir,” Dick said, and he was off.

It was just that little incident that had to do with Dick Norton's future.

It was an anxious night to those interested in the family trouble. The stranger who had so

suddenly come among them was wild with delirium all night; knew neither his wife, who hovered over him, nor the sleeping boy whom they brought to lie beside him. Both Dr. Preston and Dick Norton spent the night, and by tacit consent it seemed to be understood that Dick was the doctor's special helper. With the morning came a change and hopefulness. The fever was subdued, and the patient quietly sleeping. Dr. Preston came from the room on tiptoe.

"If he is carefully watched and not unduly excited he will get along without a fever after all, I think," he said. "His pulse seems to be growing natural. Now what is it all about? I was never more suddenly whirled into the middle of a mystery and put so steadily at work that I had not time to question my way out."

"What we know of it ourselves can be told in a dozen sentences," Tom said; whereupon he gave the story as far as his knowledge went.

"I can guess at some of the rest," Maria said. "It seems Maggie, in her wildness, never for a moment thought of such a thing as that the man might come to his senses and hunt for her in their old home. She left as suddenly as he did,

and in the night ; and has never made known to any of the people her whereabouts.”

“ What an idea ! ” said the doctor.

“ I know it ; but she seems all the time to have been haunted with the idea that he wanted to avoid her, and that he would never come in her supposed vicinity of his own will.”

Tom drew a long sigh.

“ For her sake I don't know whether we ought to wish him to live or die,” he said sadly. “ I suppose there is nothing but trouble in store for her.”

Maria struggled with her dislike to say a word on that topic ; but at last burst forth :

“ As to that, I suppose you will think he is all right, Tom. He is a convert, it seems, of that man who is preaching every evening down at the Fleet Street Church. He says he followed him here. Dick Norton says he has taken part in the prayer-meetings, or inquiry-meetings, or whatever you call them, every evening. Done as well as the minister, Dick thinks.”

She was neither blind nor insensible to the lighting up of both her brother's and the doctor's face.

“Thank God,” they both said, speaking in the same breath. And the doctor added reverently : “His ways are certainly not as our ways.”

“You are not going home?” Tom said, turning to Maria and speaking in a dismayed tone.

“Yes, I am ; there is nothing for me to do just now. The boy and the patient are both asleep, and the mother is crooning over them both. By and by, when there is work to do, I can come over again ; but in the meantime I have some fine ironing that *must* be done.”

Dr. Preston was one of the people before whom Maria liked to parade her fine ironing. She went off with a merry good-morning and in a most amiable mood. The world had righted itself once more, and she had come out on top.

Once more she was a person of importance, whose rapid and common-sense action had restored the lost child to his mother and the lost husband to his family, though she had not planned *that* part of it. The first half of the night had been troubled. Who supposed that the man had a brain to be shocked, or a heart to be overstrained? She had no idea of such responsibility ; but the shadow was lifting.

Dr. Preston had pronounced him almost out of danger, and she was in a fair way to be a heroine. Not that she used that high-sounding word in her thoughts — not that she realized that she was in any sense working for herself.

It was natural for her to plan and perform, and it was very fortunate for a large class of people that such was the case.

Can any one be blamed for liking to be of importance in this world? Throughout all the duties, many and important, of that entire day, Maria carried about with her a sense of satisfaction. She was needed yet; and there were those who realized it. As for Maggie, how would it be possible for *her* ever to repay what she had done for her? She was glad that it was not possible; she had no desire to work for pay.

Maria certainly had a way of making herself a necessity in the world when she chose to do so. She went back to the Randolph House the moment her fine ironing was disposed of; and in the sick room not only, but in the kitchen, taking Maggie's place, and in fact everywhere, her quick wits, and willing hands, and skillful brain, all on the alert, proved that she was mis-

tress of the occasion ; or, as she phrased it, “ was capable of taking care of herself and several other things at the same time.”

By evening it was almost transformed from a sick room to a place of festival. The shock had been a tremendous one, but the man rallied rapidly, and drank in the medicine of his wife’s face as if it were a draught from the fountain of life. Even Maria, who had supposed herself hopelessly his enemy, felt herself warming toward him as she watched his great hungry eyes following every step of his wife, every change in her countenance. And as she took her way home at nightfall she said, complacently :

“ Well, it is a fortunate thing that there is such a refuge as religion for such poor weak wretches as he ! I’m sure I’m thankful that he has a strong arm to lean on.” But as for Maria Randolph, she needs no other arm than her own. She did not *say* that ; the sound of the words would have shocked her. People often think what to put into words would make them blush.

Maria hurried through her preparations for tomorrow’s work, and treated herself to a fresh

white, ruffled apron, as she sat down to await the arrival of her scholar. It was Dick Norton's evening, and his progress of late had been so rapid, his improvement so marked that it had begun to be a source of great satisfaction, not to say pride, to his young teacher. She had exerted herself to the utmost to give him lessons, not only in spelling and writing, but in etiquette, until really among his companions he was a marvel.

Tom, too, had begun to notice the decided change in his manners, and had more than once heartily commended Maria for the work she was doing ; and had told her that Dick would have occasion to be thankful to her all his life for the help she was giving him now. Maria was very fond of receiving praise from Tom. She was smiling yet over the pleasant thought of being a real and lasting benefit to him, and planning new ways of helping him, when she heard his quick, eager step on the walk.

Only an hour later she sat just there where she had been when he knocked ; her cheeks, and indeed her entire face, aflame ; her eyes unnaturally bright, and her whole face working, strug-

gling with strong emotions. Whether wounded pride, or anger, or dismay, or amusement, had the mastery, it would have been hard to say. "To think," she burst forth, "that all my planning for him should end in this way! Oh, the idiot! What could have possessed him? Is the world made up of fools, and nothing else? I never heard of anything so perfectly *ridiculously* idiotic in my whole life!" Should she laugh, or should she cry? She felt equally able to do either, but she waived both with a sudden spring and gave her energies to getting up-stairs and out of sound before Tom, who seemed to be unusually early to-night, should let himself in. She was in no mood to talk with him.

Usually Tom let himself into the house late at night, and out of it early in the morning. It was no small inconvenience often to get away from the Randolph House, but this was his patient concession to his sister's obstinacy. However, the next morning he lingered late in the hope of a talk with Maria. He even knocked softly at her door and waited a moment, but finally thought better of it and went away.

Maria, on her part, waiting in breathless si-

lence over by the window, not choosing to leave her room until she saw him safely around the corner. She still had no desire to meet him. She was still flushed with an unusual excitement, and went about her work with nervous starts, as if on the very edge of expected earthquakes. "There is no telling what may *not* happen next!" she muttered, as she found herself flushing to her temples simply at the sound of the postman's knock. He brought a sealed drop-letter, addressed in Tom's familiar hand.

"I have been trying for an hour to get over," it said; "but an unusual press of business has held me. I tried to see you last night, but failed in making you hear."

"No, you didn't," interpolated Maria.

"My dear sister, I know all about it. Dick came, in his excitement and dismay, directly to me, whom, next to you, he considers his best friend. I know it is absurd, and I hardly see what can have possessed the poor fellow; but he is young, you must remember. He was in great distress, feared that you felt yourself insulted. I comforted him; for, after all, however absurd it may be, a human heart is not to be treated

scornfully. He is in dead earnest, poor fellow; at least he thinks he is, and his heart is large and honest. Of course I made plain to him the utter folly of such an idea, and we will arrange so that it shall not be uncomfortable for you. I shall be over during the day if possible; and I beg you will not give me the trouble of looking you up. Your family — husband and boy — are doing well. The doctor pronounces all danger over.

In haste,

“TOM.”

Maria tore this note into half-inch pieces, and felt like fleeing from the face of the earth, or at least from Tom. But she thought better of it, and presented herself with a very glowing face when he came. It was impossible not to feel horribly embarrassed. Perhaps they did the best thing possible under the circumstances — they both laughed!

“Poor fellow!” Tom said, when the laugh was over. “I feel just as sorry for him as possible; but it is absurd.”

“How could he be such an idiot?” Maria said, with reddening face.

“Well, as to that,” Tom said, “he is at the

age when it is more natural to be foolish than to be anything else ; and as for considering you his best friend, I don't know that I blame him. Though, of course, he has been a simpleton."

"What is to be done next?" Maria asked, speaking with evident disgust. It set her brother off into another laugh.

"Why, we must send one of you off to that asylum for sick and wounded hearts, I suppose ; which shall it be ? I don't think we ought to appeal to our brother-in-law again, do you ?"

"Tom, don't be more absurd than is necessary under the circumstances !"

"Why, I'll try not to be ; but you see the circumstances warrant a good deal. Well, to be sensible, we have plans all perfected, I think ; and I don't know but it is to be the making of the boy. You had given him a lift educationally, and it is just possible that having tasted he will be on the lookout for more. Of course he must go where he will not annoy you. In fact, it is almost time for him to start."

"What a perfectly absurd performance all around ! Do you mean to say that the poor fellow must be caught away from the place where

he earns his bread and butter, and be smuggled off, because he has made a fool of himself?"

"Well, not quite that. Of course he could stay where he is; but it will be infinitely more agreeable for him *not* to do so: and he has a splendid opportunity to better himself. He deserves a better place in life than that. Now, upon my honor, I think so. And Dr. Preston is going back to New York this very evening, takes the 5:15 Express, and he has taken a most remarkable fancy to Dick; so you see the way is clear. He wants an office boy, and Dick wants with all his heart to be *the* boy."

"You didn't tell Dr. Preston?" Maria said, her face aflame.

"Maria, I had to. You see he burst in upon us in such an astounding way, Dick did, last evening. Preston and I were sitting together, and in *he* came, and from his incoherent way of talking, and bringing in your name, he actually startled *me*. I had to take him alone and find out what was the matter; and then I was afraid Preston would think strangely of it all, and I told him. Maria, why do you care? I tell you an honest heart is not an insult, however impos-

sible it may be to have anything to do with it."

"Of course not," Maria said. "But then, pshaw! what a perfectly idiotic performance from beginning to end!" And she jerked open the damper, and poked her clothes in the boiler with a spiteful air.

"What are you boiling clothes for at this time of day? Maria, I wish you would give up that thing. It seems as if you might do so much to gratify me."

"I'm doing so much to keep you and your wife from the poor-house!" Maria said, with energy. "If you go on in as philanthropic a manner in the future as you have in the past, you will certainly have to depend on me for support. Remember, I heard what your last year's income was!"

"Well," said Tom, flushing and laughing, "I can live on it; I shall not run in debt. And as for my wife, I don't think you have ever heard her complain. Why are you working so late?"

"Because I didn't work early. I was worried, and vexed, and bewildered. I am sick of *plans*, anyway. I had a good many for that silly boy, and there he has gone and spilled them all in the

most senseless manner. Tom, help me off with this boiler. I'm going to get these clothes hung out before tea. They will dry between this and ten o'clock."

"Do you lift that great boiler alone when I am not here? Maria, I dislike this plan of yours above *all* things. I could wish that this would be the last boiler full of clothes you would ever touch."

"Well, it won't be. I expect to touch hundreds of them, and make my fortune and yours too, as I said."

"Wait a minute," Tom said, with his hand on the boiler; "the door-bell rang. I will see who it is. Perhaps you will need to let the creatures boil away for awhile while you attend to callers." And he went to the door.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," muttered Maria. "I can lift the boiler myself; I've done it a hundred times, and you can entertain the callers."

It was one of those little, commonplace things that are happening around us every day. A hundred times she had lifted that boiler in safety; but the hundred and first time she staggered under it. Her unsteady foot hit against a

block of wood that she herself dropped there but a moment before, and down she went. A slight fall, just on the smooth floor, and by some miraculous intervention the boiler remained right side up, with its scalding contents. It all took place in a minute of time, and Tom was back in the kitchen, beholding with dumbfounded face the scene before him.


“Lift me,” said Maria, “instead of the boiler. I can’t stir; I’ve hurt my back a little. Just open father’s room and help me in there; I shall have to lie down for a while; and then set that horrid boiler back on the stove as you planned. I believe it was the wicked spirit in you that made all this happen. Oh, I’m not killed; I shall be up in an hour and rinse those clothes out.”





CHAPTER XXVIII.

FACING RESULTS.

he didn't come out and finish those clothes. What a strange look into the future it would have been if, as Tom carried her in his arms to their father's room, and she gave a swift look back to see if the damper was open or shut, she could have seen the hours that would intervene before she looked around that room again!

What was not permitted to her is given now to you, her friends: to have a look at the *present* future without living over the waste of days that lies between. It is a summer day, in all the perfection of beauty that that sentence some-

times implies. Maria Randolph sits in the little sitting-room in the arm-chair; her hair combed smoothly back, and coiled in a not ungraceful twist; her dress is a wrapper of flowing white; a spray of lilies of the valley is pinned at her throat, and her hands, lying idly in her lap, are almost as white as the dress on which they lie.

There is still an invalid in the Randolph household. The pretty house and all its neat and pretty appointments look much the same as they did on that day when Maria left them and was carried into the invalid bedroom.

And yet there are changes in many things. A toy cart, with one wheel off, lies against the fence in the yard; a one-armed doll is sleeping on the center-table, and a doll's cradle occupies the niche between the two doors. There is an air of quiet bustle about the house; the very chairs wear a look of expectancy; the only perfectly reposeful feature of the room is Maria herself, as she leans back in the chair.

Exactly five years and seventeen days has Maria sat in that chair and quietly watched the flow of life go on about her. That step from the stove to the outer door, tugging at the boiler,

was the last step that she took. What if she had known it! How utterly it would have crushed her! Now, looking back and knowing it, she smiles a quiet, hushed smile, a smile that rests you to see, and tells you in an instant of time that what life, busy life, and work, and care, and responsibility, failed to bring to Maria Randolph, the quiet and pain of a sick-room have wrought.

This is a gala day in the household; a family reunion, actually the first they have had since the spirit of change fluttered down upon them. Helen is at home, and her husband and her child; the broken cart and armless doll belong to him. Helen is serene in a dress of not quite the right shade of gray to suit her complexion best.

“Mr. Leonard bought it,” she says, laughing, “and I was not going to tell him that it would make me look peach color, for, after all, what difference does it make?” It is not as perfect a fit as Helen Monroe always used to wear, but that, too, is explainable.

“It is a trifle loose, and cut a little too low on the shoulders,” Helen says; “a young girl made it who is just beginning. The poor thing has to

support herself and her mother; I wanted to give her work, if I possibly could, and it does very well.”

Maria listens and smiles, and says to herself, “How different she is! and she doesn’t know it; that is the queerest of all!” And in that *she* only *smiles* and says nothing, keeping all her thoughts within herself, you see how Maria Randolph has changed; and *she* doesn’t know it! but every one else does.

Mr. Randolph comes and goes with brisk business air. He is not a clerk. The neat, and tasteful, and thriving store is his own, and free from debt, by the last handsome Christmas gift of the rich son-in-law. Moreover, he is well. New York and the White Mountains, and the rest from care-taking helplessness, a looker-on at life’s burdens, and not a helper, rest from that heaviest lot of mortal, have lifted the wrinkles from his white face and made him young again.

There is a housekeeper flitting in and out, busy, and bright, and serene. Is her face familiar? It is Maria’s one friend — Maggie, or, rather, Mrs. Reeder. When Maria laid down the burden of the household Maggie promptly

lifted it. It took but a very few hours for Maria to discover that there was ample chance for the kindness she had shown her friend to be repaid.

Mr. Reeder is the superintendent at the Randolph House, and the boy is superintendent of them all. Maggie flutters here and there, the air of expectancy on her face, as well as on the house.

There is a new building in the back yard, long and low, from whose chimney the smoke constantly issues. Can you guess that it is a wash-room, and that all the appliances for carrying on Maria's chosen profession in the most approved style are there? That is Maria's pet; she watches the work from her window, day after day; a dozen girls hard at work there, girls who have been forlorn wanderers in search of employment.

Under Maggie's skillful training they do good work; they earn high wages. They are bright, and neat, and happy; and Maria, well, sitting there in her chair, taking not a step from one year's end to another, her scheme is more nearly being realized than that of many; she is actually

growing rich. "There is money in it," she had said, emphatically; and with Maggie's efficient help she proves it, even now.

The door of the little sitting-room pushes open and a yellow head bobs in, and says this one sentence: "Auntie Rye, they've come." The head pops out again and the door closes; and Maria, hearing the bustle, and the eager voices, and the laughter, sits still and waits.

There is a wonderful home-coming. Grace is getting back to the early home for the first time since that morning when she went out so tearfully, five years ago. "Just for the winter, you know," and yet it is true that five winters have come and gone since she went away. Five years since Maria had seen the young sister who used to be her charge and her care! Nobody intended that it should be so long; everybody would have been shocked if they had imagined
which shape them-
on our

York late, just in time for the opening of the school : a little overwork and a heavy cold keeping her from her plan of a home-coming during the winter vacation ; a sudden and alarming sickness on Ermina's part, in the spring, and a rush off to the sea-side for the summer ; a summer of anxious watching, when there was not a day in which to leave Ermina and peep in on the helpless sister at home. Then school and the whirl of coming graduation to occupy time and brain during another winter. No need to take time for running home during the short winter vacation, since she was going in the spring to stay. But what did the spring do but so arrange business matters with the mercantile house that suddenly, with but twenty-four hours' notice, the junior partner had to be off for Europe. Of course he took his wife ; the junior partner was one of those men who always took his wife ; and of course so grand an opportunity for Grace to go abroad could not be lost if it did defer the long-promised going home.

And once in Europe, who can tell the numberless schemes and plans that constantly arose to keep them there ? The brief history is, that in-

stead of staying three months, as they had planned, it was a trifle over two years before they landed in New York again. Now, at last, they had come home.

And there Maria sat with folded hands and *waited*, hearing the sound of the voice in the hall that was familiar, and yet *not* familiar. There was a certain indefinable change to it that made it remind one of flowers and music; one couldn't tell why. Maria waited with the color deepening on her cheeks, until presently the door opened, and a vision appeared therein. Both sisters looked eagerly at each other. Both spoke at once:

“Gracie!”

“Oh, Maria!”

Each voice expressed intense surprise.

Of course Maria had known that five years bring changes, especially when they come in at that period of life when the girl is changing into the woman; she knew that Grace must be developed in form and matured in manner, and yet so to know a fact is one thing, and to *realize* it is another. Maria had not realized in the least that the fair-faced shrinking Grace was utterly

gone from them, and that in her place would come a brilliant woman.

Grace, on her part, had known that Maria was an invalid and helpless, and yet she had imagined her always as bustling eagerly about, accomplishing the work of two, even as she had always known her. To see Maria quiet and thin, and, now that the flush was passing, pale, was a startling surprise. Seeing is *so* different from hearing.

They had all been together for some hours, and had broken bread together at the home tea-table, before anything like a settled feeling began to come to them. There were callers expected for the evening, and presently one and another went their various ways to make ready for the evening; all but Maria, who could not go, and who was always ready, and Mr. Harper, who, being a gentleman, had no toilet to make.

He came over to Maria's side as the door closed on the last departure.

"What do you think of our experiment?" he asked. "I saw your eyes follow Grace; has she changed?"

"Changed!" repeated Maria; then she said:

“Oh, Mr. Harper! Think of Alfred Parks in connection with her *now!* What is to be the end of it all? Do you know he boasts of his connection with her? I heard only this week of his saying that his lady was just home from Europe.”

Mr. Harper shook his head, and his voice was sad.

“I don’t know what the end is to be. I hoped that long before this it would die a natural death. But Grace was more of a woman than I gave her credit for being. She still clings to her ideal friend. Whether she will give it up when she finds that it is nothing *but an ideal* friendship, is a question which gives me anxious thought. In any case it will be a pain and mortification to her. People can not play at hearts, Maria, without being injured.”

“But you say that Grace was not playing; that she even clings to it yet.”

“I know. Yes, she clings to her imagination somewhat, and to her promise a great deal. But if the promise had never been made, as it ought not to have been at her age, this trouble would all be avoided. As it is, I am sure I don’t know

what the end will be. Perhaps he has improved; at least we shall have a chance to see. He will be in this evening."

"Who else is coming this evening? Who came up from New York with you? Gracie spoke of your party."

"Why, Dr. Preston came up, and several other New York friends, and stopped at the Randolph House."

"Dr. Preston. I haven't seen him since the day I was hurt. Oh, that reminds me. What has become of poor Dick Norton? Did you ever hear Dr. Preston mention him?"

"Often. He has been in New York all the time. Why, he came up to-day."

"Did he, really? How much I should like to see the poor fellow again. Will he come to see us, do you think?"

"I should think there would be no doubt of it," Mr. Harper said, and his eyes had a mysterious twinkle.

The talk was interrupted by a caller — no less a person than Alfred Parks himself. I wish I could take his photograph for you as he sat there making talk with Mr. Harper and Maria, while

he waited for the coming of his early friend. The five years had wrought changes in him also. He had grown fleshy, and his nose had reddened suspiciously, so had his eyes. His dress, which was evidently arranged with great care, and with an eye to details, was what those given to the use of slang phrases are won't to denominate "flashy." His neck-tie was rainbow-hued, and there was an uncomfortable commingling of liquor and cigar smoke, hair oil and cologne, about him; while the ring on his little finger was far too large and flashing to be other than washed gold and paste diamonds.

Altogether, Mr. Harper surveyed him with a sinking heart, and tried to conceal the dismay which he felt from appearing too much in his manner. As for Maria, something of the old indignation throbbed about her as she watched him and tried to imagine him as the life-long companion of Grace. He, on his part, was entirely at his ease, and insufferably familiar. The time seemed to him to have come for being received into familiar relations, and he said "Maria" and "Harper" without the least show of embarrassment, notwithstanding the fact that

Maria put unusual emphasis on the word "Mr." whenever she addressed her brother ; and he became suddenly very careful, when he spoke to her, to say "Miss Randolph."

Suddenly the young man paused in the midst of a sentence and stared toward the door as one bewildered. Maria turned quickly. Grace was coming down the room. What is there about a lady's dress when it can neither be called showy nor extremely expensive, and yet marks her as the perfect lady? Verily this question of dress is a strange study. I have a friend who has an artist eye for effect, and who delights in seeing rare combinations of taste. "Her dress," he said, speaking of a friend whom he admired — "her dress was simply perfect." "What was it," I ventured, "as to texture and color?" People like to be perfect, you know. Why should not I learn what constituted perfect dress in the eyes of this fastidious gentleman? "What was it? Something soft and clinging and noiseless." What a definite description! I ventured again. "What was the color?" "Subdued; some of those soft, quiet colors blending together, reminding one of sunset and peace." "I

dare say. But what *were* the colors, and what is the material called when one goes shopping?" "Ah! what, indeed! I am sure I *don't* know. I simply know that the effect was perfect. What matters it what things are, so long as the right effects are produced by them?"

Now this is my description of Grace Randolph's dress; and without knowing what was the matter with him it had a strange effect on Alfred Parks. It embarrassed him. There seemed suddenly to come upon him a sense of incongruity, as if the elements in his appearance and hers did not assimilate. It made the contrast in their manner all the more striking. It was a horribly embarrassing moment. Neither of them acted as they had planned. There was a glow on Grace's cheek that deepened as she came forward. All these years she had clung to the ideal that she had fashioned in her heart when she gave it the name of "Alfred Parks," nursing it with patient zeal whenever it seemed to be fading: and now that she stood again before the original, lo! she did not know it. Was this ill-dressed, ill-smelling, ill-mannered man the one with whom she had been corresponding, of whom

she had been thinking, during the maturing years of her girlhood? Not that she put it in that language. There was simply a rush of dismayed feeling, a sudden heavy sinking of her heart, a sensation as if the world was sinking away into chaos again. Then she rallied, and though every vestige of color left her face, and her voice faltered over the name, she spoke it simply and sweetly — “Alfred.”

But he on his part did the only thing for which Maria ever gave him any credit. He did not offer to take the proffered hand, and the familiar greeting which he had eagerly planned, that should show her proud relatives on what footing he stood with her, fled from his memory. He managed to stammer out, “How you do, Miss Randolph” — and that was all. And then Grace took the chair that Mr. Harper brought for her, and through a painful half hour they tried to converse. What had they talked about during those early days in which they had spent long evenings together? I doubt if either of them knew; but it was only too apparent that they had not a thought in common now.

Art, history, travel, music, pictures, science,

religion — Alfred Park's brain seemed equally barren of an idea about any of them; and the absurd blunders that he made in his attempt to express his views were not amusing to the little company who had to hear them. They were simply and painfully humiliating. Not one of them but would have tried earnestly to make the fellow at ease had he been an accidental caller: but with the spell upon them all, that he had actually for five years been living in the belief that he was almost a member of the family, they seemed powerless to help him.

The color did not return to Grace's cheeks. She looked as if the weight of a dozen added years had suddenly fallen upon her, and Mr. Harper at least grew silent in his sympathy for her pain. It was evidently a rude awakening. His plan, after all, had not worked so well as he had hoped. "It can not be done," he said to himself. "It can not be done at all. Where these solemn matters of life-long vows are played with while people are still children, and do not know their own minds nor their own powers, it will leave its scar. I see plainly that it can not be helped. Grace can never marry him; it

would be a horrible mockery. But then there must be broken promises and humiliating explanations, and the memory all her life of loving words and titles which did not belong to him, and should never have been given. It is miserable business. I wonder when the world will learn that promises are solemn things, and that living is serious business, and that when we are young we are not called upon to decide questions which belong to mature judgments. I wish I saw the way plain through the rest of this." And he looked pitifully at Grace, who was struggling to continue the conversation with Alfred; a conversation which he continually marred by coarse, slang phrases that sounded to her unaccustomed ears even coarser than they really were. And yet she was this man's promised wife!





CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST OF THE RANDOLPHS.

THE embarrassment did not lessen as the evening waned. On the contrary, when Tom and Dr. Preston came, and the three gentlemen tried to converse with Alfred, the difference in culture and refinement of thought and feeling, and above all in purity of language and high moral tone, was even more painfully marked than before.

Grace stood her ground bravely, and beyond the pallor of her face, and the occasional half-nervous, half-timid appeals that her eyes made to Dr. Preston, she showed nothing of her feelings. Dr. Preston seemed to appreciate the appealing look; he tried patiently to draw the at-

tention away from Alfred, and to interest the party in talk that would require only silence on the part of that young man. But Mr. Harper chose to be merciless; he kept up a steady fire of questions, so direct as to require from Alfred at least an attempt at answering, and as his embarrassment grew upon him his blunders became more frequent and glaring, until Dr. Preston darted an angry glance at Mr. Harper, and seemed to feel that the misery had been carried far enough.

Maria, looking on, studied the situation, and began to comprehend that it was more complicated even than she had feared. There was no mistaking the anxious light in Dr. Preston's eyes, and the patient, manly way in which he tried to shield Grace from pain. Besides, the grateful and pleading glances which she seemed almost unaware that she gave him, told their pitiful story.

"It is all confusion," said Maria, within her heart, leaning wearily back on the pillow which was always at her back. "How glad I am that the responsibility of working it out, and making the right and wise answer, doesn't rest with me."

Something of this thought she expressed in low tones to Mr. Harper, when at last he gave up the effort to draw out the guest, and retired to Maria's corner, while he allowed Tom and Dr. Preston to make the conversation general.

He looked down at her, smiling quietly.

"And yet you are the young lady who once courted and coveted responsibility, and bore your part in life's tangle remarkably well."

Maria smiled back.

"That was before I had an idea that I was not responsible at all, at least in the sense in which I used to put it. I thought that all the plans and successes of this family, at least, hung in my hands; and I worked so hard to prove it, not only to myself but others, that you see it was necessary to take all work, and influence, and power of every sort, away from me before I could be made to believe that the world would move on without me. How I fought over my lesson!"

"And have only half learned it yet, I should say, if you have ignored all responsibility. Did you ever accomplish so much in the full possession of your powers as you have since you sat here? Don't you know that you have responsi-

bilities resting upon you now of three times the importance of those from which you were put aside?"

She looked up at him with her clear, full gray eyes.

"No," she said, quietly. "It is blessed not to have to agree with you; my feeling is utterly different. Work I have done; results have been shown to me; but the *responsibility* I have forever laid aside. I do now what my Master gives me. 'Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.' Don't you remember how hard I tried to adopt that motto before I understood the first letter of it? It is my motto now, and for all the rest of my life; unquestioning obedience, just so far as the *doing* goes, but so far as the *results* are concerned I think I have no business at all with any of them. Mine is the *doing*, when he says the word, but his is the bringing to pass. And that, you see, is the end of all worrying and planning and doubt. There is no rest nor comfort outside of that conclusion."

"You are right," he said, looking down at her with respectful eyes. "You have learned in your quiet chair the lesson that we out in the world at work find it awfully hard to realize,

therefore much of the worrying and doubting is still my portion."

Whereupon he looked toward Grace and sighed.

"Doesn't that really worry you in the least?" he asked.

"Don't you think Grace is the Lord's very own?" she asked him.

"Aye, I do indeed, with all my soul."

"Do you think when he said, 'All things work together for good, to them that love God,' that he meant it?"

"Yes," he said, after a moment's thoughtful silence. "I think I have unquestioning faith in the truth that even our *mistakes* he will overrule for our good. But, because of that, should we not be sorry for the mistakes of our lives that made rough leading necessary?"

"I think we should, and are. But are 'being sorry' and 'worrying' synonymous terms? Can not I be sorry for the innumerable blunders of my headstrong girlhood, and yet rejoice, and even *rest*, in the thought that the Lord has forgiven, and will lead?"

"Then you think that with regard to Gracie we may rest?"

“Why, if the past blunders are to ‘work together for good,’ should not that rest us? Those are not my words, you know.”

“Your arm-chair has been a good teacher,” he said, smiling. Then suddenly, as though the words had in some way grown out of the conversation, he added: “Tell me about your boys; do they come to you every Monday now?”

Maria’s eyes brightened.

“Yes,” she said, “and I am doing them good; I know I am. And, but for my blundering with poor Dick Norton, I should never have thought of it. Mr. Harper, do you know Dick? Has his life been a very forlorn one?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Harper, “I know Dick. Thompson, I thought Norton was coming over with you this evening?”

“I was to call for him at half past eight,” said Tom, glancing at his watch, “and it is nearly that now. Maria, do you feel able to see him this evening?”

And then he went at once to bring him.

Maria, relieved by her invalidism from the necessity for talking unless she chose to do so, leaned back among her cushions and watched

the play of feeling on the faces before her, and went back over the histories of each life and took in the changes.

Ermina had not grown old: her face had the bright, fresh look of one whose life had never lost its bloom; neither care nor trouble had come to age her, and strong, healthy work for human hearts had kept her fresh and vigorous.

Helen's face had softened. All the lines were clear and tender. The worn look, the lines of impatient martyrdom, had passed away. In their place had come a vivid, glowing interest in life and in work, and a healthy certainty of feeling that Mr. Leonard and his views and plans and ways of work were infinitely superior to all others. He was the same strong-souled, vigorous man who had come for her five years before, and the boy was a match for them both.

In Grace the change was more striking and startling than in any of the others; and, sitting beside Alfred, the contrast showed more vividly still that he, too, had changed—had grown coarser in feature and grosser in mind. What grand men they were, those others! And how like a pigmy he appeared by the side of them!

It was not a pleasant subject, and she was willing to turn from it to meet Tom and her old friend, Dick Norton. Time, and the many changes in herself, had removed all feeling of vexation at the folly of his youth, and she found herself eager to meet her old scholar again. She made the mistake common to many people of forgetting that the five years had left their stamp upon him also. And, without realizing it, whenever she thought of him she called up his image exactly as it had appeared to her the last time she saw him — tall, somewhat overgrown in fact, with a shock of wiry hair that would never lie where its owner desired, and with his ungainly figure arrayed in coarse and ill-fitting and ill-chosen garments.

“What a contrast he will present to them all,” she said, glancing at the others; “and yet he will be an improvement on that poor attempt at gentility.” She added this with a sort of pitying contempt. Then she turned to greet her old friend.

“Maria,” Tom said, “this is your old acquaintance, Dr. Norton.”

And Maria neither answered nor gave her

hand in greeting. She simply stared. Dr. Norton! Who on earth could *he* be? Not certainly any one who had ever been known to her. This man was tall, finely formed and finely dressed — that is, his dress was of the quiet kind which can not be described, but which makes you instantly think of a gentleman. Moreover, his bow was easy and graceful, and his voice, as he said, “Will you shake hands with an old acquaintance, Miss Randolph?” was smooth and cultured.

“You are not Dick!” stammered forth Maria at last, the flush on her cheek deepening, and her bewilderment rapidly becoming an embarrassment.

“I am indeed the veritable Dick, though I have worked hard for the title behind which your brother has hidden me. Don’t you remember me at all, Miss Randolph?”

And then they shook hands; and Tom, seeing his sister’s confusion, hurried his friend away to meet the other members of the circle.

Maria listened as one in a maze to the talk that followed. Changes! Why, none of them had so utterly bewildered her, nor seemed so im-

possible to understand. She watched the newcomer as he took his place in the circle with the assured air of one who was accustomed to the society of those who greeted him as their equal. She listened to the animated talk in which, owing to the fact that it fell upon some subject which he had lately examined, he took the greater share. And as she listened the strangeness did not diminish, though certain touches of tone and a sort of intensity of manner began to remind her of the Dick Norton that she had known in the days that seemed suddenly to have receded into the very distant past.

Tom came over to her for a bit of confidential talk.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she said, reproachfully. “I was never so amazed in my life. They give me a strange feeling, all these changes, as if I had suddenly lost my identity, and this were a new world, where the shadows of the people whom I used to know were gathering around me.”

“What a ghostly scene it must be,” Tom said, gayly. Then he proceeded to answering her question. “Well, there are two reasons for my not talking of Dick to you. In the first place, I

find that I had not the remotest idea that there had been such a development as there has. I knew he was studying medicine; in fact, I knew that Dr. Preston went away with that idea in his mind; but for a long time I regarded it as a freak of his, and a very unwise one. I thought nothing would come of it but disappointment for them both. Afterward, when I heard that Dick had become an indefatigable student, and that Dr. Preston believed that he was destined to distinguish himself in medicine, I thought it would be such a pleasant surprise to you that I would wait and give time a chance to do its work. But, mind you, I hadn't an idea that she worked so rapidly. I expected to see him improved, but nothing at all like this. He has actually graduated and commenced practice with Dr. Preston, and the doctor tells me that he is certainly destined to a brilliant career. Looking at him now, it isn't hard to credit the prophecy. Maria, the best of it all is that he says he owes it all to you; that he would to this day have been nothing but a street-car driver, earning his daily wages, but for your helping hand."

"That is nonsense!" Maria said, with a trace

of her old vehemence of manner. "It was his forlorn reachings after a better place in the world that first suggested to me to help him."

"No," said her brother, quietly; "you forget that you helped him about those shirts before he ever dreamed of such a thing as an aspiration. That shirt business was the most sublime reach that your genius ever took, Maria. Not a day passes but I hear of some fruit."

Maria was laughing. It was a novel subject to call "sublime," and it had its ludicrous side; but there were tears in her eyes — the fruit was certainly beyond anything that she had dreamed.

"Is he a Christian man?" she asked, suddenly.

"Aye, that he is — a grand one, Preston says; doing a splendid work in the city; and his headquarters are at the street-car stations among the drivers and hostlers. Preston says not a man of them but knows him, and would give their lives to serve him. Think of that! Don't you see how you are working while you sit here?"

At this point the young doctor abruptly drew his chair away from Mr. Leonard, with whom he had been talking, and came over to Maria's side.

“Will you tell me just what the different stages of your sickness have been ?”

“What a formidable question to put to a girl who has been sick for five years !” she said with a serio-comic look at the earnest face. But he was evidently very much in earnest. He began a rapid fire of questions, clear, penetrating, and intensely professional. Dr. Preston evidently caught the sound of familiar professional words, and came over to their side of the room, stationing himself behind Tom’s chair, and listening intently. At last the new doctor paused and looked up at him.

“Well, sir,” said Dr. Preston, “what do you think ?”

“I think that electrical treatment will restore her.”

Maria turned suddenly and looked up in Dr. Preston’s face, the sudden paling of her own revealing the keen eagerness of her desire to be in and of the world again, instead of being shut up within the two arms of her easy-chair. Dr. Preston was a name well known in the medical world ; he was one whose judgment was almost proof against mistakes, and if he did other than smile

on this young enthusiast, if he even treated the sentence with a show of gravity as though there *might* be something in it, why then, indeed, she might almost begin to hope. Tom, too, had turned and was waiting for his answer. He did not keep them waiting. His voice was quick and firm.

“I have been thinking of the same thing. I have been listening with keen interest to your examination. I am almost sure you are right.”

It would be difficult to describe the state of eager excitement into which this simple sentence threw the circle. They had ceased their conversation, and were listening. As a family they were all in eager sympathy with his answer. They gathered around Maria, and were so voluble in their exclamations of delight and of hopefulness that Dr. Norton, who had the air of one who had been called as professional adviser, and therefore had the care of the patient, peremptorily advised them not to excite themselves and weary her, but to wait and see,

At this opportune moment Alfred Parks seemed to have determined that he had endured as long as he could the strain upon *his* nerves,

and arose to leave. It was a somewhat embarrassing moment. Tom did not choose to act the part of host, and Mr. Randolph had not yet arrived. Mr. Harper half arose as one accustomed to act in his sister's stead, and then sat down again as Grace resolutely turned toward the hall door as if to accompany her guest. Dr. Preston turned promptly toward them.

"By the way, Mr. Parks," he said, "did I hear you speaking of young Wheeler? Where is he now?" And as he spoke he threw open the hall door. A sudden and marked interest in young Wheeler seemed to have come to him, for he continued his questions, following Alfred and Grace into the hall in the most natural manner possible, and keeping the former engaged in answering, while he selected his hat. It was finally Dr. Preston who drew back the night latch, and opened the door for him, and bowed him from the steps. Utter silence filled the hall while Grace waited, and he closed the door. Then he said:

"Gracie, are broken promises worse than false vows?"

"Oh, doctor!" she answered, while her cheeks

glowed and her eyes burned painfully, "it is all a bitter humiliation."

"I know," he said; "but take care. Do not make it worse by adding false vows. Remember that. Remember that no early mistake can be righted by adding to it a later and a graver one." Then they went back to the sitting-room.

I do not know that you are as interested in all these people as I am. Probably you are not. It is one thing to live lives right along with people, and another to tell about lives after they have been lived.

But I really would like to tell you about the weeks and months that followed; about what blessed times this united family had together during the next month; about the vigorous way in which the two doctors entered upon the new treatment that was to do so much for Maria; about the number of times it became necessary for the young doctor to come up from New York to be sure that his directions were being carried out, and that the longed-for effects were being produced; about the new plans that were being developed for the Randolph House, so that they reached out far beyond the first hopes or even

thoughts of the early days of the enterprise, plans in which our old friend, Peter Armstrong, took such an eager and practical interest that the rest said of him, laughingly, that the mantle of his namesake, Peter Bible, must surely have fallen upon him, such was the vim and zeal that he threw into the work.

“If I should lose him,” Tom said, looking after him one night, as, after having given a brief, rapid account of the day’s grand results in the reaching out after tempted men, he rushed away to fresh work; “if I should lose *him*, I am afraid I should give up the enterprise in awful grief and dismay. He is the most indefatigable ‘fisher’ I ever met. Blessed be the day when his heart took in those words, ‘I will make you fishers of men.’ They will be the key-note to his life.”

Of all these things I have neither time nor space to tell you. I must just take you over months of time, down to a winter evening when there was a jubilee at the Randolph house — not the newly fitted up hotel, but the family home.

They were all gathered at the homestead; Helen unexpectedly back again from her Western home, because everybody must come home

to weddings. The wedding had been, and the bridal pair were about starting on their journey.

Of course you know it was Grace, and of course you know that the bridegroom was *not* Alfred Parks — that folly of her girlhood had to be atoned for as best she could, and, at the best, it left sore spots, and a feeling of pain and shame at the thought; but the bridegroom was Dr. Preston.

It was well that he was so good, and so great, and so patient a man; few would have borne with the folly of her early days with the spirit he had shown. It was a discomfort, a pain, to feel that such a man had been defrauded of many a tender word and touch that should have been his own, and that were wasted before the bride was old enough to feel their sacredness.

But it had righted itself at last, as well at least as mistakes ever right themselves, and now they lingered about that side piazza door, looking wistfully after the carriage that bore away the youngest born. Mr. Randolph walked to the end of the piazza and stood in the darkness and the silence for a little. When he walked back he said to Maria in a husky voice:

“It is hard to give up mother’s baby.”

That little mother was the name still that brought the tears to the fading eyes of this gray-haired man. Yes, he said this to Maria. She stood beside him in the doorway. It is a wonderful thing to stand in a doorway when you are doing it for the first time in six years! The new doctor’s positiveness had been founded on wisdom. The dear dream was realized, and she could walk!

“Not too long,” an anxious voice said just behind her. “My dear Maria, I don’t want you to stand long at a time; not yet awhile. Wait a little, and you will be able to stand as long as you want and to walk where you choose.”

“This is the first time I have been in the kitchen, you know,” she said, turning smiling eyes on familiar, yet unfamiliar, objects. “I don’t suppose you have any idea of how strange it all seems to me. Dick, I stood just there when that horrid boiler tipped over with me.”

It was a strange place for sentiment, that winter kitchen, with the coffee-boiler steaming on the stove, and the remains of the wedding feast strewn everywhere; but they stood there for a

long time despite the caution, and went over many an old time that the familiar furnishings of that room brought back to them.

“I must go now,” Dr. Dick Norton said, as he looked at his watch. “It will not do not to be in New York early in the morning. I shall have double duty now until Dr. Preston returns. Well, Maria, I shall be down by New Year’s, and by that time I have strong hope that you can travel in safety.”

A moment afterward he went with a brisk step down the walk. Maria stood looking after him. Before the sound of his footsteps died away Tom came up the same walk. He had been to look after the departing train that carried away the new bride.

“Dick will be late,” he said. “I hear the train whistling.”

Maria made no answer. Her brother paused in the cheery little winter kitchen and looked at her searchingly; then he reached forth his hand after hers.

“The last of the Randolphs?” he said, inquiringly.

“Don’t, Tom,” she said, laughing, though there

were tears in her eyes. "You don't intend to commit suicide, do you? I am sure you are a Randolph."

"But you intend to take care of Dick's buttons for the rest of your days? Is it so? I was sure of it. Well, let me see. Didn't you once tell me that Dick was the first-fruit of your first attempt to follow out the teachings of your 'whatsoever'? It was the golden rule, too, wasn't it? How grand it is that you taught him to follow its teachings also! Maria, the story of the leadings of the Randolph family would make a book, wouldn't it?"

And you see, dear friends, it has.

THE END.

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WORD PICTURES. Thoughts and Descriptions from Popular Authors. Boston: D. Lothrop & Co. Illustrated, Price \$1.75.—Gilt edges, \$2.00.

This volume is inscribed by the author to "the Memory of My Beloved Mether, Margaret Guthrie Strohm, and of the happy days when we read together." A note of acknowledgment to the authors and the publishers represented, answers as a preface to this compilation. One hundred authors are quoted, among whom many are well-known to all, as Grace Aguilar, Louisa M. Alcott, Charlotte Bronte, Bulwer, Dickens, Disraeli, Amanda M. Douglass, Edward Everett Hale, Hawthorne, Victor Hugo, Jean Ingelow, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Charles Reade, Mrs. Stowe, and Bayard Taylor. There is no lack of deep meanings in this collection, and of course all the popular authors could not be represented in a small volume. Forty-two pages of the three hundred and fifteen are devoted to various subjects under the title "Thoughts." The remaining pages are classed "Descriptions and Scenes."

Some selections seem to be chosen to illustrate certain styles of picturesque narrative and are allotted several pages, while others are terse enough to be contained in a few lines. Dickens is awarded the first place, and the opening thoughts are concerning "children." "I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they who are so fresh from God love us."

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