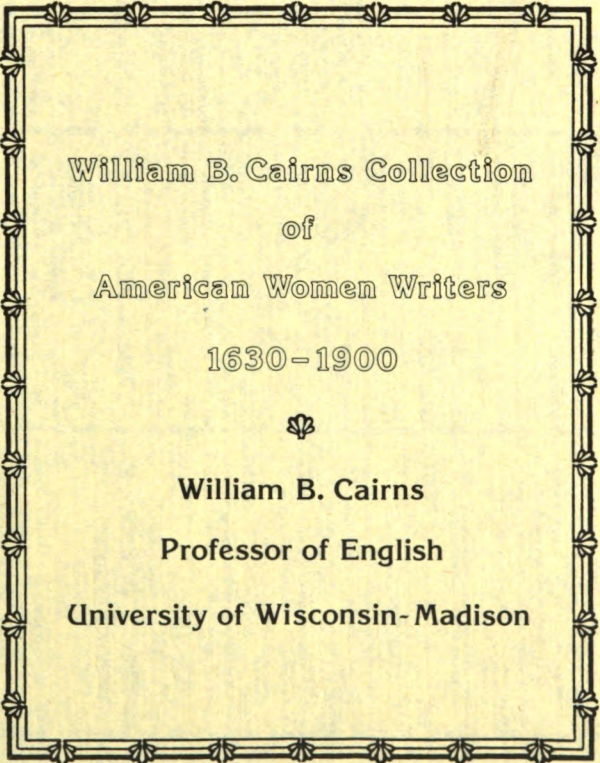


A detailed illustration of red flowers, including large poppies and smaller five-petaled flowers, with green stems and leaves. The flowers are scattered across the cover, with a large poppy in the center and another large one towards the top right. Smaller flowers are clustered at the top and bottom right.

WORKERS TOGETHER  
or an  
Endless Chain

BY PANSY



William B. Cairns Collection  
of  
American Women Writers  
1630-1900



William B. Cairns  
Professor of English  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

MCI-

Fanny Squibb  
A Reward from  
Sandford School  
Jan'y/89 -

WORKERS TOGETHER.



MISS MASON, DELIA'S TEACHER.

*Page 62.*

# WORKERS TOGETHER

OR,

AN ENDLESS CHAIN.



AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

*Page 179.*

**Thomas Nelson and Sons,**  
*LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.*

# WORKERS TOGETHER

OR,

## An Endless Chain.

By

**Pansy,**

*Author of "A Hedge Fence," "Side by Side,"*

*"A New Graft on the Family Tree."*

*&c. &c.*



**London:**

T. NELSON AND SONS, PATERNOSTER ROW.

EDINBURGH; AND NEW YORK.

1887.

RARE BOOKS DEPT.  
Cairns Collection  
P5  
1019  
A5  
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1887

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# WORKERS TOGETHER.

## CHAPTER I.

### CERTAIN LINKS.

In the Packard Place Sabbath school there was a new superintendent. That doesn't sound like a remarkable statement, but certain results sprang therefrom which made a great difference in many lives.

A new man at the helm was something that Packard Place had not known for a long time. The people had met and elected over again the same superintendent for so many years, that most of the scholars had forgotten that anything else could be done. So they had ceased attending the election.

"What is the use," they said, "in going down there to write his name once a year?"

Directly I write that sentence, I am sorry for it; because, while I wish you to have a very high idea of the Packard Place Sabbath school, I have admitted that they were no further advanced than to choose their superintendent by a vote of the scholars.

Mr. Brown, who had served them for many years, was a good man; all the scholars respected him. That is saying a great deal. To be sure, I think they would have respected him rather more if he had been a good reader. He made

many mistakes in reading the Bible. When there occurred a proper name, if he could, by any twisting, give it a wrong pronunciation, he was sure to accomplish that feat. Moreover, he had one certain method for running his school. If you had been there on the first Sabbath of the year 1872, and had not gone again until the year 1882, you might tell, almost to a second, just what had been done each Sabbath during your absence. In fact, with a few mistakes, you might have mentioned the hymns sung. A chapter would be read in the Bible, a prayer would be offered, one of three favourite hymns would be sung, and then would sound the bell for lessons.

At the close, a hymn, and then the school rushed out, and saw their superintendent no more, heard of him no more, and, I am safe in saying, thought of him no more, until the next Sabbath day.

One Sunday, most of the scholars were amazed by a change of programme. The election had occurred during the week, and Mr. Brown had resigned on account of failing health. The scholars were genuinely sorry that his health had failed ; but it was almost like listening to music, to hear the clear, even-toned reading of Dr. Everett. He was the chosen superintendent.

There was nothing specially new in his manner of conducting the school that morning. He was a man of better taste than to commence his work with any startling innovations ; yet the new way of doing very much the old things made it all seem new to the scholars.

There were, also, in the air, hints of new things to come. How given, none of them could have told ; but they began to feel as though the school meant something more than they had supposed, and as though they would be sure to be there next Sabbath, to see what might happen.

Still, it is with Monday work that I have to do at this time. I don't think the idea had ever occurred to Mr.

Brown that Monday had anything to do with Sunday, or, at least, with Sunday school. Dr. Everett, on the contrary, seemed to suppose that being superintendent of the school on Sunday made him superintendent all the week.

The first intimation that he gave of this belief was when he met Miss Mason on the street corner.

"Good morning," he said, halting, holding out his hand, and taking hers in a cordial grasp. Miss Mason was surprised; she had known Dr. Everett for several weeks; he had not impressed her as being a very cordial man; yet certainly this greeting was friendly and genial in the extreme.

His next remark was in the form of a question, and bewildered her:—

"I hope you had a good time yesterday?"

"Yesterday," thought Miss Mason, going rapidly over her immediate past. "Where? When? What day was yesterday? Oh, why, Sunday; a 'good time' on Sunday! What a queer man Dr. Everett must be!"

"In your class, I mean," he explained, smiling a little. He did not understand her bewilderment; he had seen her among her girls but the morning before; he could not realize that they had utterly gone out of her mind.

"Why, I don't know," she said slowly; "I am not sure that I did."

"Have you anything of special interest in your class?"

"Special interest?" she repeated, exactly as though she were an echo or a parrot.

"Yes. Are there any of your scholars who need special attention, either among themselves or at their homes? In short, is there anything about them that I need to know?"

"Need to know?" repeated Miss Mason. She could not help it; she did not know that she was playing the part of an echo; she was dazed.

"You know I am their superintendent," Dr. Everett said, smiling broadly now. "I want to learn in what ways I can

best help you and them. The lessons are somewhat difficult, just now; for drawing practical deductions, I mean. Don't you think we should aim to help the every-day lives of our scholars? Sabbath-school teaching, you know, amounts to very little unless it touches vital points. But I should not detain you now.

"I think I do not even know your young people by name. That is one of the disadvantages under which I labour, in being a comparative stranger in the city. But I shall learn, with your help.

"Will you be at leisure, say, this evening? Suppose I call for a list of the names and residences of your scholars? And if you will add a memoranda of anything that you think will make me better acquainted with them, I shall be greatly obliged. Shall I call at eight?"

Receiving her confused answer, he went his way, still smiling; albeit the smile ended in a sigh. He began to understand: some of his teachers needed waking up, as well as the scholars. Well for him that he was a thoroughly awakened man himself—one who felt at all times that he "must be about his Father's business."

As for Miss Mason, who shall describe the bewilderment of her mind, as she moved slowly away in the opposite direction? She had received a decided jostle in the midst of the nap which she had been comfortably taking for many years.

The names of her scholars she certainly knew, except that girl with a queer bonnet, who only came occasionally, and the girl who came sometimes with the Curtiss girl. But their residences! To answer that question was beyond her.

Dear me! They all lived somewhere, of course; but how was she to learn where? Not one of them but lived outside of the social line which divided the city to her; and she knew no better where to look for them than if their homes had been fifty miles away. But what an awkward thing it

would be to have Dr. Everett call, and she unable to give him a single address! Since he really wanted to know where they lived, she must try to find out in some way; though what difference it could make to him she did not as yet comprehend. "He must be a queer man!" she told herself, as she moved slowly on. "He can't be very busy in his profession, if he finds time for all such fancies. To be sure, he is a new-comer, as he said; and I suppose it is one of the ways in which he means to build up a practice. But he need not waste his time on my class; there are not more than three of them whose people could afford to pay much of a doctor's bill. However, they must be found, and their streets and numbers set down." It made her nervous to think of Dr. Everett looking straight at her, and questioning, and she unable to answer him any better than she did this morning. This led her to think of the question about a "good time." She did not yet understand what he could have meant. Of course, she tried to talk to the girls about the lesson, though it had been hard work, and they had seemed not to care for it in the least. As for making it fit their every-day lives, that was simply absurd! What connection could there be between the beheading of John the Baptist and her six or eight giggling girls? She fell to wondering what the lesson for next Sabbath was about, and whether Dr. Everett would expect her to make it practical, and whether it would be as impossible to do so as it was last Sabbath. She wished she had asked Dr. Everett what he meant; but then he had flurried her so that she could not think connectedly of anything.

She went around to the office on her way home, and plied her father and brothers with questions as to where her girls were possibly to be found; and directly she reached home, she looked up the lesson for the coming Sabbath, and read it over.

Meantime, Dr. Everett went on his way with swift feet;

whether or not he was working up a practice, he walked like a man who had much to accomplish, and was eager to do it. He called himself fortunate that morning, for there, at the Avenue crossing, he met another of his Sabbath-school teachers, Mrs. Saunders by name. He stopped again and shook hands cordially. This time he had to introduce himself. Mrs. Saunders was one whom he had not met before, but he remembered her face; he had studied it yesterday, and wondered whether she was the teacher for that class of boys.

He repeated in substance the questions that he had asked Miss Mason. This teacher, also, was astonished; she had not been educated to expect questions of any sort from her superintendent. But she was of a different type from Miss Mason.

"Yes," she said at once; "there is a boy in my class who needs help of some sort; he is almost discouraged. He has been working in a printing-office;—not that he wanted that kind of employment, but he came to the city to seek his fortune, just as they are all doing, you know, foolish fellows, and a place in a printing-office was the only chance that offered, after a good deal of waiting, and hunting, and some starving; so he took it. Now he has been discharged; some trouble arose. I can't find out whether he was much to blame or not, but anyway he is out of employment, and Satan is looking after him with all his might. There are ways in which people might learn things of that person, Dr. Everett. The boy, or young man I suppose he thinks he is, has a chance to go into a drinking saloon as a clerk; and though he has been brought up in a very different manner, I am afraid he will do it. It is the only chance that has offered, and he only sees far enough ahead to want to pay his board bill."

Mrs. Saunders talked fast and eyed Dr. Everett closely the while. In reality, she was carrying on two trains of

thought at the same time. While she shaped and reported the young man's story, she was saying to herself: "I wonder if I'm not wasting my time. What sort of good will it do for me to stand here on the corner and tell this off to him?" She had, of her own accord, stopped Mr. Brown, one day last week, with the same story.

Mr. Brown, you will remember, was the former superintendent; but it was not in view of that fact that she had consulted him, but because he was in a position of power in a large factory, and she had hoped to hear of a vacancy for her boy. Mr. Brown, she remembered, had rubbed his chin and stroked his moustache thoughtfully, and said it was a sad case; that the flood-gates of sin were open on every side, and it was enough to make any person interested in the young tremble; and he did hope the young man would hold out firmly against such an offer as that. He was sorry, very sorry, that he knew of no opening at present, but he would try to bear it in mind. Times were very hard, and opportunities for earning one's living decidedly scarce, just now; but still something might turn up. Then he had gone away, and whether he had ever thought of it again, Mrs. Saunders much doubted. Certain it was, neither she nor the young man had heard further from him. Was Dr. Everett a man of that stamp?

He, meantime, had drawn out a little red-covered book, opened it, produced a pencil, and was ready with questions.

"What is the young man's name?"

"Barrows; Austin Barrows."

"Was he in your class yesterday?"

"Oh yes; he is pretty regular in attendance."

"Where did he sit in the class?"

"Quite near the organ; next to it, I think. He is the tallest one in my class."

"The young man with gray eyes and a wide forehead? I remember him. What printing-office has he been in?"



"The *Evening Leader*. He was discharged three weeks ago."

"You don't know for what?"

"Well, there was a disturbance among the employés; the foreman gave an order and it was disobeyed. I haven't encouraged him to tell me very much about it, because I have only been able to see him on Sundays. Besides, he felt pretty vindictive, and I thought it might be better to wait until he had cooled down a little."

"Yes; I understand. What saloon is it that has offered him a position?"

"The *Arbour Saloon*, sir, on *Drew Street*; about the worst in the city, I think, because it is kind of respectable, and young men don't feel so much ashamed to go in there. A young fellow who boards near *Austin* is acquainted with one of the owners of the saloon, and I guess the chance has come through him."

"Who is that? Is he in our Sabbath school?"

"Oh, dear, no! nor in any other. He grew too old for Sabbath school years ago. He is a fast young man. His name is *Parks*."

"Can't we get hold of him, *Mrs. Saunders*?" If you could have seen the winning smile which accompanied this question, you would have felt its effect.

"Maybe we can," *Mrs. Saunders* said promptly. "I never dreamed of such a thing as trying until just now, but it seems now as though I should like to."

"Suppose we try for it. Where does this young *Barrows* board?"

Street and number were given, *Dr. Everett* scribbling rapidly, still questioning:—

"Is it the place for him to board?"

"I don't know," said *Mrs. Saunders* meekly. She was taking some lessons. "I don't know a thing about it, except that I don't like the street."

"We must see about it," the new superintendent said, as he returned the red book to his pocket. "One of our young men must not be driven into a liquor saloon, in order to earn his living. I am glad you informed me of this as soon as you could."

In point of fact, she would not have thought of informing him, had he not questioned it out of her. One more question:

"What degree of capacity has he? Would he do for salesman in one of the large stores?"

"I should think he might," his teacher answered eagerly. "He has a very fair education; and I believe he would do his best, if he only had a chance, and some one to say an encouraging word."

"I will see him as soon as possible, Mrs. Saunders. Now about the other young men in your class. You have their names and residences, of course? Could you drop me a line through the post, and give me whatever items you can in regard to them? Say to-morrow, if it is convenient. I shall have to look to my teachers for a great deal of help in this matter of getting acquainted. I am so much a stranger. Thank you again, and good morning."

Mrs. Saunders was a busy woman, and on this particular morning was in a hurry; yet she took time to stand still and look after the rapidly receding form of Dr. Everett, and give her head certain satisfactory little nods, which referred to him.

"He actually knows more about my class now than I believe poor Mr. Brown did, after ten years of experience!" she said to the lamp-post. "I shouldn't wonder if he would help poor Austin."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CURTISS GIRL.

AT the corner of Parsons Street, Dr. Everett halted and looked at his watch, and calculated the probable distance between his office and the place that he would like to reach. He decided in favour of the errand, and walked rapidly down Parsons Street to Drew, and halted before the Arbour Saloon. Pushing open the door, he stepped inside—an apparition in that place. The loungers stared.

“Good morning,” the new-comer said courteously to a showily-dressed young man behind the bar. “I wonder if you could give me the possible whereabouts of my friend Mr. Barrows, this morning? I have a matter of business with him, and am trying to save time in finding him.”

“Barrows?” repeated the young man in astonishment. “Why, you mean Dr. L. Barrows, I suppose? He is at No. 200 Clark Place.”

“Oh no; I mean Mr. Austin Barrows. I had reason to think that he might have an appointment here, or that you could direct me where to find him.”

“Austin Barrows! the young fellow, do you mean? Well, I don’t know exactly where he is this morning. We expect him here about eleven o’clock, but he hasn’t got around yet. He may be at his boarding-house. Do you know where that is?”

“Oh yes, thank you; he is one of my young men, you know. My name is Everett. Good morning.” And the

caller dropped a card on the counter, and hastened away. Two young men came and peered over the shoulder of the clerk as he read the address :—

<p><b>Stuart Everett, M.D.,</b></p> <p>NO. 16 CLARK PLACE.</p> <p>Office hours : 7 to 9 a.m., 5 to 7 p.m. <i>(Over.)</i></p>
--

Obeying the hint, they turned the card, and read :—

STUART EVERETT, M.D., Superintendent of Packard Place Sunday School. Services at Packard Place Church every Sabbath morning and evening. Sabbath school at 2 o'clock P.M., Sabbath-school prayer-meetings, on Saturday evenings, at 8 o'clock.

“The Dickens !” said one of the young men.

“You don’t say !” added the other.

“New style,” said the clerk at the bar. “He’s the new doctor, who is making a sensation because he cured old Mr. Barnes, after Dr. Barrows said he couldn’t be cured. Well, he’ll win ; he has a kind of taking way. This is a neat card ; but I wonder what the mischief he wants of Austin Barrows ? Blessed if I knew before that he was anybody’s young man. Though I guess he does go around to Packard Place Church pretty often : it pleases his mother, he says.” The sentence ended in a slight sigh. A vague passing notion that it might not be an unpleasant thing to be one of Dr. Everett’s young men, if the term did not involve too much self-sacrifice, lingered in his mind. He was showily dressed, and wore much false jewelry ; yet there was that in him which was worth saving ; and he turned with a slight disrelish to the counter, to obey the call for a glass of beer.

Dr. Everett's energies were next bent on finding young Austin Barrows, and saving him before he fell into Satan's trap at eleven o'clock. He went swiftly towards a car that would carry him soonest to the part of the town where the young man boarded, and in his haste came plump upon the very person, moving along sullenly, his eyes on the ground, his hands in his pockets, and a look of general discouragement about him.

"Why, how do you do?" was Dr. Everett's greeting. "This is very fortunate. I was about to take a trip in search of you. I want to see you on particular business. You know me, of course; Dr. Everett, your superintendent."

Whereupon Dr. Everett's hand was held out to grasp cordially the sullen young man's, and shake into it a sense of the importance and brightness of the new relation established between them. Up to this point Austin Barrows had never entertained an idea that the fact of there being a new superintendent in the Packard Place Sunday school could have anything special to do with him.

"I hear that you are out of employment," continued the doctor. "I have in mind a situation that might suit you. I shall have to see one or two gentlemen first, but I was anxious that you made no other engagement until you saw me. I think I can secure this for you. Mrs. Saunders gives you a good recommendation. Will you wait until five o'clock this evening before you decide anything? And will you call at my office at four?"

"Yes, sir," said Austin Barrows to both questions, speaking without a moment's hesitation, and letting the sullen look on his face break into a smile. He didn't want to sell liquor in the Arbour Saloon, if he could help it.

Dr. Everett now made rapid strides towards his office. He was a few minutes late; but he told himself that he could well afford to be, for he believed he had set in motion a train of events that would help to teach next Sabbath's

lesson to some of his young people. Before he started out on his round of professional calls, he wrote and despatched the following note :—

“DEAR FARNSWORTH,—I think I have found a young man whom you will be willing to try at the store : at least I want you to try him ; and, if I am not mistaken, so does the Master. Please take no further steps towards supplying your vacancy until you hear from me again.—Yours,

“EVERETT.”

Austin Barrows had also an errand. He put his head in at the door of the Arbour Saloon, and made this unceremonious statement : “I can’t give you a positive answer until five o’clock.” Then he shut the door again, quickly, and moved on.

The proprietor looked his annoyance. It was part of Satan’s plan to get this particular young man, with his genial face and cheery ways, into the Arbour Saloon. If somebody was at work outwitting them there would be grumbling.

“Young Barrows must have had a streak of luck,” remarked one employé to another. “His face has lost its glumness ; he looks as though he might have had a legacy left him.”

However, he hadn’t, you know ; he had only shaken hands with his new superintendent.

By two o’clock on that same day, Miss Mason was in her room, preparing for an afternoon excursion. She was in a somewhat nervous state of mind. Her eight o’clock engagement still caused her trouble. Vigorous efforts on her part, so far as the male members of her family were concerned, had signally failed in securing a complete list of the residences of her pupils. Three of the girls she knew where to find, at least pretty nearly. Her father had helped her to

the probable address of another, and her brother Dick knew that Fanny Tarrant lived on Arsenal Street; but neither father nor brother knew anything about the girl with a queer bonnet, or the one who sometimes came with the Curtiss girl. Now this state of things was embarrassing. How was she to look up a scholar whose principal clue was a queer bonnet? She could see no way but to call on the Curtiss girl and enlist her help.

Will it be credited that this Sabbath-school teacher was almost as nervous over a prospective call on one of her scholars as she would have been over an appointment to preach? What was she to say to the Curtiss girl when she found her? To come in contact with a young person of her stamp, when it would not be the proper thing to ask, "What is the subject of this lesson? How far is Bethany from Jerusalem? What event is mentioned that took place in Bethany?" and so on down the lesson leaf list of questions, was to plunge one's self at once into an embarrassing position. Miss Mason, as she nervously twitched her hat into position, and opened one drawer, and then another, in search of gloves, had an uncomfortable consciousness that she was guilty of wishing that Dr. Everett were superintendent of a school in Jericho, instead of Packard Place.

If he were going to continue in this manner, tormenting them with all sorts of new notions about names and residences and practical deductions, what an uncomfortable person he would be!

"Away at the other end of the earth!" she muttered, as, having at last reached the front door, she looked again at the name of the street which her father had given her as the abiding place of the Curtiss family. "I never was on that street in my life! I don't believe I know how to get to it; and I don't see what I am going for anyway. I'm not obliged to be at the service of that doctor! I believe I will write him a note, and resign my class." But even while she

questioned, she signalled a passing car and went on her way. It required some changes of lines, and a good deal of questioning, interspersed with mental grumblings. Between times, the perplexed teacher tried to decide what she should say, suppose she did happen to find the house. What excuse could she make for calling? Imagine the pity of it, that there should be in existence a Sabbath-school teacher who thought she needed an excuse for calling on one of her scholars! But Miss Mason was sincere: it was all new ground, and she did not know how to proceed. She wondered whether it would do to ring at the door—provided there was a door-bell to ring—and plunge at once into the subject; ask for the name of the girl with the queer bonnet, and where she was to be found. Also, who was that girl who came once in a while from somewhere, and seemed to have no distinctive mark. What would the Curtiss girl think of that? By the way, what was that Curtiss girl's name? She did wish she could recall it. She had heard it once, she felt sure. Was it Sarah, or Hattie, or what? It would be very awkward to have to ask her point-blank. Yet, on the other hand, it would certainly be awkward to have Dr. Everett ask her, and feel herself unable to answer. He would ask, of course, that and every other question which occurred to him. Hadn't he asked her as many as a dozen that morning?

Puzzling over questions like these, she changed cars once more, and behold, directly opposite to her, sat the girl with the queer bonnet! Queer it certainly was. Not merely the queerness of bad taste in selection, but that worst form of queerness—an attempt at being stylish, which, in this case, resulted only in a profusion of bright, cheap flowers, mingled with yards of bright ribbon of contrasting hue, so arranged that the whole effect was exasperating to refined taste. There were more serious defects about the girl than an ill-chosen bonnet. She was a loud-voiced girl, who talked much,



and laughed much, and was altogether so very familiar with the young man in the gay neck-tie, who stood before her, holding on by the strap, that Miss Mason shuddered as she listened. How could she address this ill-mannered creature and learn her name? By what process could she learn it if she made the attempt? Could she be expected to lean forward in the street car and say, "What is your name?" The girl had recognized her by a careless nod, but seemed by her manner to expect no other attention. Presently, he of the gay neck-tie left the car; so, indeed, at the next crossing, did several others, leaving Miss Mason and her scholar sole occupants. Clearly, this was an opportunity; yet so unaccustomed was Miss Mason to making use of such opportunities that her face was flushed and her manner flurried. "Do you live on this street?" she asked, making a bold attempt at conversation.

"Oh dear, no!" said the loud-voiced girl. "I live at the other end of creation; more than a mile from here."

"You have a long distance, then, to come to Sabbath school. Is that the reason why you were not there last Sabbath?"

"No'm," the girl said, laughing. "It was because I got up too late. I was out most all night on Saturday, and slept most all day on Sunday to make up for it. I don't get to Sunday school very often; there is always something to hinder."

Miss Mason considered for a moment what she ought to say to that, and then concluded that it needed no reply. The momentous question was, How should she discover the girl's name? It did seem too bad to ask her outright. At last her face brightened; she had hit upon an expedient.

"I don't believe I have your name exactly correct on my roll-book. Suppose you write it for me on this card, together with your street and number." It was a miserable sort of subterfuge, such as no thoroughly conscientious heart

would have been guilty of—this pretending that she had the name in some form, when, in reality, there had been no attempt to write it. Miss Mason blushed while she said the words, but comforted her conscience with the thought that it really was the truth, after all ; since, of course, if she hadn't the name at all, it could not be said to be correct. Still, for all that, she was ashamed of it. As a rule, she was careful of the truth, so far, at least, as her conscience was enlightened.

As for the girl, she took the card hesitatingly, with an embarrassed laugh and heightened colour.

"I don't know about putting my name on a card. It most seems like signing a pledge." Nevertheless, she wrote the name in a firm, bold hand : "Hester J. Mason, No. 92 South Worth Street." And as she returned the card, her cheeks still glowing, she couldn't help feeling that she belonged to the Packard Place Sabbath school. She had never realized it before.

It gave Miss Mason a peculiar sensation to discover that the girl in the queer bonnet was her namesake ! The only reply that she made was in reference to the words about signing a pledge. "Let us call it a pledge," she said pleasantly, "that you will not stay up too late on Saturday nights for the next day's school ; but will be there as often as you possibly can." Just then the conductor called the name of the street where she was to stop, and she left the car in haste, a good deal confused over her first attempt at being personal.

Was that what Dr. Everett meant by making the lessons practical ? But then, this wasn't a Sabbath-school lesson ! How came she to say such a thing ? She remembered wondering where the girl spent her Saturday night, and fearing that she did not choose a very wise place ; and then had come a wish that she would come to Sabbath school regularly, if she was coming at all ; the next thing she knew,

Dr. Everett would be asking whether they came regularly, and why they didn't. She had walked some distance before she remembered that she might have asked Hester Mason what the Curtiss girl's first name was, and who that girl was who sometimes came with her. She stopped and looked back, chagrined at her folly; but the street car was already lost to view. There was nothing for it but to make her proposed call.

The next point of interest was to find which was the Curtiss house. This, too, she might have learned from Hester Mason, if she had not been so excited and embarrassed over she knew not what. How perfectly awkward to have to ring door-bells indefinitely and inquire for Jonas Curtiss, and learn whether, when found, he had a daughter in the Packard Place Sabbath school! For she was by no means certain that the Jonas Curtiss of whom her father had knowledge was the father of her pupil. Of one duty, however, she was to be relieved. It soon transpired that she was in a region where there were no door-bells to ring. Force of knuckle was the only power that could be exercised here. She timidly tried it, at a door that might or might not be the one. Of course it seemed to her that she knocked very loud indeed; and, of course, she did not knock loud enough to be heard two feet away. After what seemed long waiting, she tried again. This time there was a response. The narrow door swung open, and, behold the Curtiss girl herself appeared to view! She gave Miss Mason no time for embarrassment or for questions. She had swollen eyes and quivering lips, and she said eagerly: "O Miss Mason!" and burst into tears.

What could be the matter with the Curtiss girl?

## CHAPTER III.

### SET TO WORK.

HERE was an embarrassment, unexpected. Miss Mason stepped into the little square box of a hall to avoid the curious gaze of the passers-by, and questioned :—

“My dear girl, what is the matter?”

“Don’t you know?” asked the Curtiss girl, brushing away the great drops from her eyes. “I thought maybe you had heard, and that was why you came. O Miss Mason, the baby is dead!”

Then the tears burst forth afresh. How sorry was Miss Mason! She forgot to be embarrassed. It is true that she had not so much as known that there had been a baby in this household; but there was one at home, a laughing, cooing baby. Oh, what if he were dead! Her heart thrilled with pain over the bare possibility; but the thought put exceeding tenderness and sympathy into her voice. .

“Poor dear child!” she said; “how sorry I am for you.”

The Curtiss girl felt the sympathy; she had not been to Sabbath school a great deal; she had felt no special interest in it. Miss Mason had possessed no fascination for her; she had just happened to go. But Miss Mason, after this one tenderly-spoken sentence, would be something to her.

“Would you like to see him?” she asked. “You can’t think how sweet he looks.” And not waiting for the answer, which was well, for assuredly it would have been a hurried negative—Miss Mason was wont to shrink away

from every evidence of death—she led the way into a pitiful little front room, with green paper curtains at the windows, and wooden-seated chairs standing in rows on the rag-carpeted floor. And in the centre of the room, on a white-covered table, a beautiful baby lay sleeping.

“Oh, how beautiful!” The exclamation was involuntary. The waxen-faced sleeper was so very lovely that Miss Mason said it without waiting to think what she should say.

“Isn’t he!” And the heart of the Curtiss girl went out to her entirely. “O Miss Mason, I can’t tell you what a sweet, dear baby he was—just beginning to talk. He called me ‘Dadie;’ he couldn’t say ‘Delia,’ you know; and some way his little tongue made that name out of it, and I loved to hear him say it so much! Oh, dear! just to think I will never hear it again.” She was crying again; she couldn’t keep back the tears.

Miss Mason had literally nothing to say. A dim idea that something in the way of consolation or improvement ought to be said stole uncomfortably through her mind; but she didn’t know how to do anything of this kind. It was such a new and strange experience to her. She was strangely moved. The beautiful baby asleep before her must have been just about the age of the little brother at home. She even fancied that she traced a resemblance between them, and some way she couldn’t keep back her own tears.

Delia saw them chase each other down her teacher’s cheeks, and the reason for the old injunction, “Weep with them that weep,” was made apparent in the quick throb of grateful affection which she felt in her heart for Miss Mason. Their tears had fallen together over the sleeping baby. Neither would ever forget it.

“I wanted some flowers to put in his hand,” the sister said, speaking with quivering lips. “He loved flowers, but I couldn’t get any; there are no flowers around here.”

"You shall have them, my dear, quantities of them," Miss Mason answered quickly. "I will see to that."

What a pitiful thing, it seemed to her, that there were actually those who could not get flowers to put about their dead.

"I didn't know that the baby was sick," she added. "Has he been sick long?"

"For three weeks," Delia explained. That was why she had not been to Sabbath school. Whereupon Miss Mason, for the first time, recalled the fact that the Curtiss girl had been absent for several weeks.

A little more talk they had, which developed to the startled teacher several things. For instance, she asked who the pastor was, and Delia, with flushing cheeks, confessed that they had no pastor; father and mother did not go to church, and they didn't know any church people. They had not lived in this city so very long; and she didn't know what they would do for a minister.

"I thought of the one who belongs to our Sunday school," she said doubtfully, looking into Miss Mason's face with a wistful air; "but perhaps he couldn't come? He has such a large church, and so much to do, and we live a long way off."

"He will come, of course," Miss Mason said quickly. "I will—;" and then she hesitated.

She was about to say, "I will speak to him;" but it occurred to her to wonder what Dr. Miller would think of such a proceeding. He had been their pastor but a few months; she did not feel on sufficiently familiar terms with him to take such work upon herself. Truth to tell, Miss Mason was not accustomed to any work. But the sentence must be finished. A happy thought suggested itself, and she seized upon it:—

"I will speak to Dr. Everett, if you wish, and he will attend to it."

"Oh, thank you!" the girl answered, gratitude in her

voice. "Father will be so much obliged to you. He said he did not know where to go nor what to do; and it is all so dreadful! There is no one to think for us. Miss Mason, you will not mind my not calling mother? She is so broken down she feels as though she could not see anybody."

Oh no, indeed! Miss Mason would not mind it at all. Or rather, it was a great relief to her. It startled her to think what she could possibly say to the mother of that beautiful dead child. And yet, surely, the poor mother ought to have some comforter. This thought recalled Dr. Everett again, and made her resolve that he should know the circumstances at once. He impressed her as a man who might know what to say, and how to say it. To this end, mindful of Dr. Everett's ability to ask questions, she bethought herself to ask about the other plans for the funeral, and whether there was anything else that should be attended to. Altogether, when she went out from that house, it was with the sound of Delia's earnest "Thank you" in her heart, and a new, strange feeling that she certainly, in making that call, had done a little good.

It was not until she stood on the steps, ready to depart, that she remembered her original errand, and asked and obtained the name of the girl who sometimes came to Sunday school with the Curtiss girl.

She made ready for Dr. Everett's call that evening with much less nervousness than in the morning she had imagined possible. Indeed, she was rather anxious to see him, and make arrangements for that poor Curtiss girl in her sorrow. "I am glad that I discovered her name without asking for it," she told herself, complacently, as she wrote "Delia Curtiss" in her delicate Italian hand.

Dr. Everett was as interested as possible in all her details. He questioned, and cross-questioned, and led her to realize that there were, after all, many details into which she had not inquired.

His little red book was produced, and he wanted to know which Mr. Curtiss it was, and how long he had lived in the city, and whether the family had ever attended church anywhere, and a dozen other things of which Miss Mason knew nothing. "Of course you notified Dr. Miller?" This was the last embarrassing question. Dr. Miller, you will remember, was Miss Mason's pastor.

Why, no, she explained. She had not had time; she had but just reached home, and Dr. Miller, he would remember, lived in another direction.

"Ah, yes; but I mean that you notified him when this new name was added to your list. I understood you to say that she has been with you but a short time?"

"No," said Miss Mason, with flushing cheeks but honest voice; "I never thought of such a thing."

Be sure she resolved that she would never again have to make so foolish an answer to a similar question.

Immediately this new superintendent plunged her into the mazes of more work.

By a question again—the sort of question which involves an affirmative answer, as a matter of course—

"About this funeral; you will attend, of course? And your class; they will attend, as a class, I presume?"

Such an idea had not once entered Miss Mason's mind.

Did Dr. Everett think that was necessary?

Why, as to that, he thought it eminently the proper thing to do. Sympathy under such circumstances was the least that could be expected from classmates: possibly the father and mother might be won by little thoughtfulnesses at this time; at least it was worth trying for. Would she attend to it, then? Very well, that would give him opportunity to call on Dr. Miller in the morning. When he finally, with his list of names in hand, and several items of importance in the red book, and several plans suggested for work that were new to her, bowed himself out, he left Miss Mason



looking after him with a dazed air, wondering meantime if she were the same person who had remarked that morning that she was bored almost to death, and she did wish she had something to do.

Also, I admit that she wondered why they had never had a superintendent in their Sabbath school before.

As for Dr. Everett, delayed by professional duties, he did not get around to the parsonage for a few minutes, as he had planned; instead, he sent thither a note, brief and to the point:—

“MY DEAR PASTOR,—Miss Mason informs me that a baby brother of one of her girls has just died. The name is Curtiss: they live on Barclay Street, near Clay Alley: father and mother not church-goers. Miss Mason thinks your services would be gratefully received. She called this afternoon, and prepared the way. Her class will attend the funeral: she has the matter in charge. Will see you this afternoon as to details?—Yours, in haste,

“EVERETT.”

Two remarks the new pastor made in reply to this note, his face lighting up the while: “Thank God for such a man as Dr. Everett at the head of our Sabbath school.” Then, after a pause: “Miss Mason called, eh? I have evidently done that girl injustice. I didn’t think she was that sort of a teacher. Good! I take courage.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### A PART OF BABY'S MISSION.

"Miss Joy," said Dr. Everett, pausing before the door of the little sitting-room, and holding it ajar while he talked, to indicate his haste, "are you posted as to whom we could ask to form a choir for duty at a funeral this afternoon? People connected with our Sabbath school, if we can."

"To sing at the funeral of that little baby? Why, I could be one."

"Thank you," said the doctor, and there was satisfaction in his voice. The promptness with which this girl came forward always to do what she could, was a source of constant comfort to him.

"So much is settled, then. I fancy Miss Mason will play for us, especially if you ask her. As to bass, I can manage that; and doesn't Austin Barrows sing?"

"Quite well," answered Miss Joy promptly. "Mother has spoken of his voice several times. She thinks it could be cultivated into a fine tenor; but I doubt whether he could get away from the store."

He could manage that also, the doctor said; and then he proceeded to question as to whether she would see Miss Mason about the playing; and then both remembered at once that in the poor little home there was no instrument to play.

"It is a relief in one way," Miss Joy admitted frankly. "I don't know Miss Mason; that is, I am just well enough

acquainted to bow when I meet her, and she always bows as though that were as close an acquaintance as she desired."

"In which respect Miss Joy Saunders fully agrees with her," the doctor said, smiling gravely. Then he added: "I wonder what you would think if I should tell you that I hope to see Miss Mason and yourself quite intimate friends before the season is over?"

"I'm afraid I should think, if I did not say, that you were not very well acquainted with either of us." There was a heightened colour on Joy's cheek, but she said no more.

"Still I mean it," the doctor said, and his face was perfectly grave now. "In proof thereof, I should be very glad if you would see her this afternoon, and inquire into her plans for the class—whether she will have them meet at her home and take a carriage from thence, or whether she has some more convenient place of meeting."

"Dr. Everett, you understand a good many people; but you are evidently not acquainted with Miss Mason. So far from summoning her class to attend with her a little baby's funeral, I don't believe she will have the least idea of being there herself."

"In that you wrong her: I assure you she will be there, and with her class. Did it ever occur to you, Miss Joy, that you might possibly wrong her in other judgments? In order to prove to yourself that you have misjudged her, it is your Christian duty to call there this afternoon, and take my message for me. Tell her, please, that I will have the carriage sent to whatever point she names. Miss Joy, I have a comforting assurance that you will do your duty. Good afternoon."

With that he went, closing the door after him; and the small young woman whom he called Miss Joy was left alone in a somewhat perturbed state of mind. That she did not relish the errand on which he had sent her was evident. The truth was that Joy Saunders, though of the same church

with Miss Mason, had never assimilated with her ; had told herself many a time, with a firm little set of her shapely head, that she had no desire to be on terms of intimacy with any such person. "She is just the sort of person to look down on me because my mother keeps a boarding-house," she had told herself in some heat, after being barely recognized one day by the lady in question ; "and I am just the sort of person to feel like looking down on her because I have a few grains of common sense, and she hasn't." Joy Saunders was rarely so severe as this ; but Miss Mason had heated her. She sewed fast for a few minutes, not speaking even to her mother, who appeared just then with her arms full of towels to look over. This mother and daughter were very apt to have words to say to each other at every opportunity. The mother sorted her towels, watching furtively, meantime, the pretty brown head bent over the sewing, and waited for talk.

"Mother, this new friend of yours has a way of commanding people to go here and go there, just as though he expected to be obeyed."

"Well," said Mrs. Saunders, "a commander isn't a bad sort of person, if he only knows enough to command in the right direction ; and most people who really are commanders by nature are apt to be obeyed. It is only your namby-pamby sort of folks who are for ever complaining that people won't do as they want them to. Why ? What have you been commanded to do ?"

"He is not namby-pamby at all," said Miss Joy, sewing faster.

"I should think not. What does he want of you ?"

"To call on Miss Mason this afternoon, and make some arrangements about that little child's funeral."

"Well, that doesn't seem to me a very extraordinary thing to do, inasmuch as you are a teacher in the same Sabbath school. It isn't very far to Miss Mason's, and it is a nice, clear afternoon. I should think you would like the

walk. I suppose the doctor is very busy ; he is most of the time."

"Mother, I am not one of Miss Mason's calling acquaintances. She has never called on me since I came home ; and when she meets me on the street she treats me as though I were a little girl of ten. She doesn't think that I belong to the same social scale with herself."

"Nonsense !" said Mrs. Saunders. "That reminds me a little of the man who couldn't pull a drowning woman out of the water because he had never been introduced ! Suppose Miss Mason isn't your intimate friend ; need that hinder your taking a message to her about a funeral ? You belong to the same church, child."

The sewing and the sorting went on in silence for a little after that ; neither person was, however, entirely absorbed in her work. Mrs. Saunders took care to put the blue-edged towels, and the yellow-edged ones that were a little finer, in sets by themselves ; but she watched the glow on her daughter's face, and speculated : "He's touched the sore spot in her heart this afternoon. There's something more than a message to carry in this errand ; he sees deeper than that. Joy has but one failing. I'm not over and above anxious to have her intimate with Miss Mason, everyone knows ; but the glow on her cheeks when she meets her isn't a sign of grace. I wish she could rise above it. But I don't believe he can drive her. I never could ; though a more obedient child than my Joy was never born. This minute I could say to her, 'Joy Saunders, I'm ashamed of you ! I want you to put up your sewing and go right over to Miss Mason on that errand ;' and she'd go, and do it gently and pleasantly too. But what would be the gain ? Taking folk's bodies to places doesn't amount to much." Then aloud : "Well, I suppose the doctor thought you wouldn't mind doing a little errand for him on a pleasant afternoon, after all he has done for us. He couldn't be expected to know how you feel about Miss

Mason. What is the message, child? I'll take it. I'd as soon as not. It makes no kind of difference to me whether she bows to the right side or the left or doesn't bow at all when she meets me. My respectability is beyond being affected by a bow.—Joy, were there six or seven of these pink-bordered towels in the wash?"

"There were seven, mother; I gathered them from the rooms myself." Joy had risen, and was rolling up her sewing. When she had it carefully pinned, and laid in the basket beside the small gold thimble and her own blue needle-case, she came over to her mother, and stooping kissed her cheek.

"Motherie," she said, using the quaint name that she kept for very special occasions, "I don't believe I ever shall be as good and sensible as you are; but I'll try for it. I'm going now to do that errand."

The dining-room of Miss Mason's home presented an unusual sight. Everywhere were flowers—bright, glowing flowers—heaped in baskets, on the chairs, on the tables, on every available place; and Miss Mason herself was at work over them, fashioning wreaths and crosses and stars.

"Who is it?" she asked of the girl who answered the bell. "Miss Saunders; that little Joy, I suppose. Kate, just let her come into the dining-room; perhaps she will help me with the flowers; there are so many of them, I feel as though I should never get them in order."

"Oh, how beautiful!" was Joy's exclamation the moment her eyes caught sight of the flowers.

"Aren't they?" said Miss Mason with animation. "I haven't seen such a glow of colour before this season. There are too many, I suppose, for the purpose; but the poor girl seemed so hungry for flowers; and the girls in the class, the moment they heard of it, were all eager to bring baskets. Miss Saunders, do you know how to shape a crown? I would like to make a crown of these lovely golden blossoms, if I

could. The baby is certainly the sweetest I have ever looked on. He ought to be crowned."

"Yes," said Joy, drawing off her gloves; "I know how." And before either realized it, they were at work over those flowers as though they had worked together for whole seasons. Certainly they had one idea in common—a passionate love for flowers.

As she worked, Joy wondered whether she really could be growing intimate with Miss Mason!

Meantime Austin Barrows, for whom the proposed situation in one of the large stores had been secured, was not having a smooth time in his efforts to show his gratitude by doing just right. In fact he was proving the truth of the time-honoured statement, that "the way of transgressors is hard."

A well-meaning boy himself, having a really honest desire to live at least in some degree according to the precepts of his mother, he had yet allowed himself to become interested in a class of young men who were constantly leading him in directions which his well-taught conscience told him were not the right ones; not such as his mother would approve. Prominent among those who had gotten a strong influence over him was young Robert Parks, a gay, handsome, good-hearted fellow, with possibilities for true manhood of such a type as Austin Barrows could never reach; who, nevertheless, seemed to be doing what he could to waste his life, and make his influence tell strongly for Satan.

Over young Barrows he had for weeks held the sort of control which a strong nature can secure over a weaker one; and now that the young man felt the importance of breaking with him and standing on safer ground, he found it hard to do.

It was with a face full of irresolution that he went about the store that afternoon. Mechanically he attended to the calls at his counter for thread and tape and buttons, handing

out often the wrong colour or number or size, it is true, and wishing between times that he were anywhere else than at that counter, with its numberless articles to remember. The fault, however, lay not in the multitude of articles, but in the more important problem which he was trying to solve—namely, whether he should join the gay company who were that evening to take a drive on the Bayville Road, and stop at the Bayville House for supper and a dance, and come home in the glorious moonlight.

Nothing very objectionable in the programme, as Barrows had taught himself to look at these things; only he knew that it involved an expense that for him would be heavy; that the temptation, nay, almost the necessity, would be late hours; that there would be wine to drink, and that he would in all probability take sips of it, although he prided himself on his caution in these directions; but he would be sure to be heavy-eyed and weary of head the next morning, with a strong distaste for all the needles and tape and buttons in the store, and with harassing doubts all day as to how he should pay the debt it would be necessary to contract, in order to meet his share of the expenses. The poor fly did not want to be caught in the net; at least he thought he didn't. All day he debated the question. He told himself that he wished the Bayville House were a hundred miles away, instead of ten; precisely as though the whole trouble lay with the Bayville House. And as often as he thought of his mother, sitting there in her high-backed, old-fashioned rocker, he was sure, for five minutes at a time, that he wouldn't go. Yet when the gay fellows who led the plan came in with their details, seeming to consider it as a matter of course that he would be glad to be one of their party, he had not the courage to say a word and do the right he knew so well. How could he, in fact? Hadn't they marked every step of the way for him, even to the selection of a companion for his carriage? "You must take Delia Curtiss, Barrows;



you remember which one she is—the one with curly hair ; she is as pretty as a witch : not in our set, exactly ; in fact, she has never been on one of these rides with us ; couldn't get around to invite her, you see, there are so many of them ; but she will go fast enough, and you will find her first-class company ; all the fellows like her. Parks would like to take her himself, but we told him he had got to let you have her this time ; she was just your style."

This was intended as a compliment, and young Barrows tried to so consider it, albeit he winced a little ; for he had not been very long away from his mother and the atmosphere of his early home, and had not yet grown accustomed to the careless handling of a young girl's name.

So it was really somewhat against his will that he found himself at the door of the Curtiss homestead that evening, prepared to invite Delia Curtiss to join the party for Bayville.

## CHAPTER V.

### ESCAPING THE NET.

"A FELLOW can't be always struggling with his fate. I didn't want to go, I am sure. Anybody who has watched me all day knows just how hard I tried to get out of it, and I couldn't do it; and that's the whole of it. If I hadn't gone to that supper the other night, and helped make the promises to carry this thing through, I wouldn't have got into the scrape. I half asked the Curtiss girl to go with me then. If it hadn't been for that, I'm almost sure I wouldn't have gone a step. But what would she have thought of me if some of the others had invited her, after what I said!"

All this he told himself, gloomily, while he waited for his knock to be answered. You will perceive that he hadn't quite gotten the better of his conscience, even yet. The truth is, he had taken a letter from the post-office on his way thither. He had not read it yet; instead, he had thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket, with a half resolution to forget all about it until after he was home from the Bayville ride. But he knew the handwriting; every curve of every letter in his name was as familiar to him as though he had watched his mother when she wrote it, and heard her murmured prayer as she bowed her head over it for a moment. And the something which warned him the loudest against his present course was the knowledge of how surely his mother would disapprove. "Still, she would see for herself that I couldn't help it this time." It was the last

self-excusing sentence that he had time to utter, before his knock was answered by Delia herself. But her eyes were swollen with weeping. There were people standing in the little box of a hall; among them Dr. Everett, hat in hand, as if about to depart. The door into the little parlour was ajar; and behold, the object that greeted his amazed eyes was a flower-strown coffin, wherein lay Delia's baby brother! What a strange way out of a snare was this! Dr. Everett held out his hand.

"Ah, Austin, this is kind; come in. I was just going in search of you; we want your help. Step in here with me a moment, will you?" and he led the way into the parlour, with its one silent, beautiful occupant. Standing there, looking down into the little face, the doctor told how opportune was this call; that he especially desired to have singing at the funeral, for the sake, more particularly, of the father and the mother.

"They are not church-going people," he explained, "and they have few friends. Just at this time of sorrow they seem particularly desolate. Whatever we can do now for them, in the most trivial way, to show our sympathy, the Master may be able to use to his glory. I am so glad you came in; it was very thoughtful in you. Poor Delia is stricken: the child seems to have been the very joy of her heart. Her class in Sabbath school have been very kind and thoughtful, so has their teacher: these flowers are their work. Now, Barrows, about to-morrow: I think I can arrange for your absence from the store, if you are willing to help us here." Whereupon he launched into a detailed explanation of the things to be done and the ways of doing. Austin Barrows listened, and commented when necessary, and assented to his share in the work, as one in a dream. Standing beside that little coffin, and looking into that beautiful sleeping face, Bayville House seemed more than a hundred miles away, and all the details connected with the

evening's entertainment faded like a hateful vision. Often afterwards Austin Barrows looked back upon that scene, when everything connected with it became of the past, and remembered curiously how firm his voice was, and how unhesitatingly he spoke the words: "I can't go, Parks. I have another engagement of far more importance."

And when Robert Parks, annoyed as he always was when everything did not go precisely according to his planning, questioned hastily as to what he expected the Curtiss girl would think of that, he remembered the little shade of almost triumph that his voice took on, as he answered that he had no doubt she would excuse him, since his other engagement was to officiate as singer, and then as bearer, at the funeral of her little brother. He remembered, too, the start of surprise and dismay with which the news was received, and the grave response: "Oh, indeed! I did not know; I had not heard. Well, of course, that alters the case; such things must be attended to." There was one power, then, before which Robert Parks would bow in grave submission. Death won respect even from him. Austin Barrows remembered it, and thought much about it.

Dr. Everett stopped that evening in the little sitting-room to have a word with Joy and her mother. You are to understand that, although it was only since he became superintendent of the Packard Place Sabbath school that he had discovered Mrs. Saunders's boarding-house and removed thither, he was already quite at home, even in the little sitting-room, which "belonged" to but few.

"Mrs. Saunders," he said, standing before her, "were not you and I to spread a net somewhere, somehow, to catch that young man Parks?"

"I remember you spoke of it, doctor, and I've thought about it several times since; but I don't see my way clear. Do you?"

He shook his head. "I doubt whether we should wait

always for clear ways; perhaps we are expected to go creeping along in the dark. He needs catching sadly, I fear. Satan has ways, and doesn't scruple to use them. Do you happen to be acquainted with the locality of the Bayville House?"

"Know every foot of the way to it in the dark."

"How would you like to have Miss Joy here invited to take an evening ride with some gentleman, and spend a few hours there in the company that she would meet?"

"Dr. Everett!" said Mrs. Saunders, and her brow darkened, and she half gathered herself up and looked toward Joy, as if to shield her.

"Yes," said the doctor significantly; "so I supposed. And yet, Mrs. Saunders, there are mothers whose daughters go there, and whose sons go there. Some of them are at home, I daresay, weeping and praying. The question is, What are you and I doing for these daughters and sons? That young Parks, I am told, has a mother, and a very good one. On this particular evening he is the leader of a wild party of young men and women, who will spend half the night at the Bayville House. What can we do for him? I am thankful that Austin Barrows escaped that snare. Yet I almost wonder that he did; and I confess I don't in the least know how to reach the other one."

Yet the same Hand that arranged the links in the chain that should hold Austin Barrows away from that evening's danger, knew how also to weave the chain for the other; in point of fact it was being woven at that moment.

It was the very next morning but one, somewhere between the hours of ten and twelve, that the young man Robert Parks attempted to turn himself in his bed, and found that he could not. He tried to raise his right arm to his head, and found that it wouldn't obey his direction. In great amazement over this state of things, he opened his eyes, and encountered a pair of keen gray ones regarding him with attentive interest.

"Good morning," said he of the gray eyes, and was rewarded only by a bewildered stare from young Parks. Presently a question :—

"Who on earth are you?"

"Dr. Everett; at your service. How do you find yourself?"

"Some of myself I don't find. What has become of my left foot?"

"Safe; tucked under the bed-clothes. It hasn't much feeling in it; I daresay; but it will come around all right. For a time I was doubtful; but I hope now that you will pull through."

"Pull through what? What is supposed to be the matter? Why am I here? and for the matter of that, where is 'here'? I never was in this room before. What has happened?"

"Have you no recollection of anything happening?"

"Why, yes, of course; a great many things have happened to me. But just now I mean, how did I happen here?"

"It is a long story, young man. If you don't recall any of it, perhaps it is just as well not to trouble your brain about it yet."

"Excuse me, doctor, my brain is my master; it will be troubled in spite of me. Tell me something about it."

"Oh, well, I can give you a brief summary. The fact is, you have been in the hands of Shishak."

"Shishak! Don't know him. Who is the fellow? He has treated me abominably, I should say."

"So he has. But you are coming off better in the conflict than I expected; that is, if you see to it that he lets you alone after this. Of course, it remains to be seen whether or not you have sense enough for that. I'm a little afraid of you. His victims generally seem to have an insane desire to make another trial."

"What do you mean, doctor? Speak English, please."

"Isn't it English? Your name is Rehoboam, is it not?"

"I hope not; I have never heard of even a relative by that name."

"Possible!" said the doctor, lifting his eyebrows in seeming astonishment. "I have been watching you for some weeks, with the impression that I had found the individual so famous in history. Singular that you and he should have so similar an experience! How do you account for it?"

But Robert Parks's bewildered brain just at that moment wandered in another direction. "You've been watching me, doctor—where, and for how long? I haven't lain here long, have I?"

"Only about thirty-six hours, or a trifle more. You were unconscious for a while; and after your injuries were dressed, you went into a tremendous sleep. There were a couple of hours when I greatly feared that you did not mean to waken; but you see you have."

"Injuries? Why, let me see—I was driving—I was on the Bayville road—ah, I remember now. My horse took fright at his own shadow."

"Whereupon you whipped him," said Dr. Everett, continuing the story; "which, if you were well, I should want to tell you was a very senseless proceeding on your part, under the circumstances. And he ran, as of course, given such an occasion, any sensible horse would have done; and the consequence is, here you are."

"But what about that fellow you spoke of? What had he to do with it, and who is he, anyhow?"

"Oh, that," said the doctor, drawing on his gloves, "was a slip of the tongue. You reminded me strikingly of the young man who fell into his hands. Not only this instance reminds me, but several others connected with you. As I said before, I have been taking observations for some weeks. However, you don't seem to be well posted in ancient history, and my advice to you is to give over thinking of Shishak until you get well. Then you can trace the resemblance if

you choose. What you are to do at present is, to obey my orders with what grace you are able. Don't try to lift yourself; let your arm alone; be as much of an oyster as possible; take what is brought to you meekly, whether it is pill or gruel; and get well as fast as you can. If you are reasonably obedient, which you probably will not be, I look for rapid improvement."

"But, doctor," said young Parks, trying to turn his head to look after the already retreating figure of the doctor, "just one moment, please. Where am I? Do my people know of this accident? And what has become of my situation?"

"One moment! why, my dear sir, that will take at least a dozen! Where are you? In my boarding-house. It was my carriage which came along opportunely about the time that you flung yourself from your own. I picked you up, and not knowing anything better to do, brought you here to the corner of Albany Street; where, with the help of a blundering boy, and my landlady, Mrs. Saunders, as superintendent, and myself too for general-in-chief, we hope to make you as good as new in a short time. I took the liberty of at once writing to your mother—the junior partner in your store gave me the address; and being in need of a patient just then, I offered my services, which were accepted. So you will have to obey me, you observe. Your mother bade me say that she would come to you at once, only you would understand that she could not get away. I assured her that there was no need. Your situation is still waiting for you, and will wait, at least until I can talk with you at more length. You have talked more than is well for you already. I prescribe a nap, and bid you good morning." And that was all Robert Parks could glean of the new story which had suddenly begun in his life.

Despite the orders to lie still, he turned himself restlessly on his pillow, and indulged in a long-drawn sigh. There



was a dark side to this sudden shutting down of his plans. He knew only too well how impossible it was for his mother to get away from his father's bedside, even for an hour,—that sick and suffering father, upon whom disease had wrought such havoc that only one idea seemed left to feed upon—the determination not to lose sight for even a moment of his faithful wife. How much she needed rest and change Robert knew; how sorrowful it was to add a weight of anxiety to her already burdened life he felt. It was no wonder that he sighed. If he could have heard what that mother said, after the doctor's long, kind, carefully worded letter was concluded, I wonder if it would have startled him? When the first burst of anxious fear was over, re-reading the letter, the far-seeing mother had discovered something about the man who wrote it, and had given voice to a hundred nameless anxieties, by saying with a sigh that had yet a note of relief in it: "There is one comfort, Alice—as long as he is on his back, and under that man's care, he will be out of the reach of some of those young men who seem to have been his constant companions of late."

"Yes," Alice had said; and then she had added: "Mamma, sometimes I am afraid that Robert is safer on his back than he is anywhere else." Alice was sixteen, and his only sister. If he had heard her, what would he have thought? At that moment he was thinking of her. "Confound it all!" he said angrily, trying with his lame hand to brush away a tear; "they have enough to bear without this."

Then the door opened very softly, and he turned to look at the intruder.

## CHAPTER VI.

### INVESTIGATION.

IT was a slip of a girl who came in on tiptoe—a fair, girlish face, her fair hair lying about her neck in girlish curls. Robert turned his eyes as she came toward him, and took in the picture. If he had been able to do so, he would have bowed. He wished he could hold out his hand and give her a cordial welcome, she looked so fresh and bright.

But all he could do was to stare.

“Good-morning,” she said, in a quiet voice; whereupon he remembered that he might have said so much. “I am Joy Saunders.”

“I can well believe it,” he said briskly. “You look like it, certainly. Do you mean that your name is really Joy?”

“Really *Joy*. It is a singular name, isn't it? You see it happened in this way: mother didn't name me at all until father came home from the war. Then she said that all she could think of was to call me Joy. I am glad of it; I like the name.”

“So do I; it fits, I am sure. Now will you be so kind as to tell me where I am? I dropped down here, you see, out of the clouds, or might as well, for all the knowledge I have of my present surroundings. Now I think of it, however, it was a mud hole that I dropped into, which had to do with my being stranded here.”

“You are in a boarding-house which my mother keeps. She is Mrs. Saunders; and Dr. Everett boards with her, and

you are his patient. He is a very skilful doctor ; everybody likes him. You are fortunate in being his patient."

"No! Do you think so? I would much rather be in the store, selling tape and calico, even, than to be anybody's patient."

"Of course ; but I mean since you have put yourself in a condition to be somebody's patient, you should be glad that Dr. Everett was chosen for you. He is very skilful, and very good."

The young man closed his eyes, and wrinkled his forehead into an impatient frown. He was not in the mood to consider anything fortunate that had to do with his present affairs.

Joy waited in silence a moment, and then questioned : "Can I do anything for you? Mother was on her way to you, but was detained by important business. She sent me to see if you wanted anything, and to say that she would be here very soon."

"Yes," said Robert, unclosing his eyes suddenly. "I want to know who Shishak was, and what he did, and what became of him. Could you manage those little matters for me, do you think?"

"Shishak? I don't remember that I ever heard of such a person. But I presume Dr. Everett could make inquiries for you."

"Dr. Everett is acquainted with him, but is not disposed to render any assistance. You and I must find out, somehow, without his aid. I am immensely interested in him."

"You must have mistaken Dr. Everett; he is always ready to help everybody. But perhaps he meant that you should not puzzle over matters while you were so weak. Still, I should think it would be better to help you out than to let you lie here and worry over it."

"Of course it would. How will you set about helping me out?"

"Is he a Jew? Doesn't that sound like a Jewish name? I don't know. Perhaps it is merely a nickname. Is he an old man, or a young one? Why, don't you know what the full name is?"

"Unfortunately, no. I don't know anything about him, and have no clue, save that I have reason to think he was a scamp, who got the upper-hand of some poor fellow. But I want the whole story."

"Oh, it is a story! I beg your pardon. I thought you were speaking of some man who lives in the city."

"Well, I take it that his namesake must be living here; or at least some one who conducts himself in a similar manner, from what the doctor said. But the real fellow is historic, I suppose. I'm not very well up in history, and can't recall him. Can you help?"

"I'm afraid not. Was he a Greek, or a Roman, or what?"

"*What*, I guess. At least I don't know what he was."

"I can look for him in the encyclopædia. Dr. Everett keeps his books here, some of them, and those encyclopædias know everything. Will you have some beef-broth first, or—"

"Shishak first, if you please. I feel a burning desire to make his acquaintance. The beef-tea can come in as a dessert."

"Very well," she said, with the quietness of one who might have come in contact every day of her life with men who asked such strange questions and had such strange wants. She vanished like a shadow, but returned almost immediately with a volume of the encyclopædia, over which she bowed her head for a few minutes, and then made this surprising announcement:—

"Why, Shishak is a Bible character!"

"Possible! That must be the reason why we didn't recognize him. Well, what about him? Can you discover?"

"Only that he fought a king named Rehoboam, and conquered him."

"Rehoboam!" repeated Robert, recalled to the fact that Dr. Everett had asked him if that were not his name. "He's the fellow, after all, in whom I ought to be specially interested. Could you hunt him up, and give me some ideas concerning him?"

"I shall have to go for a Bible," explained Joy, with exceeding gravity; and immediately she went.

On the landing she met her mother.

"Where now?" asked that good lady.

"I'm going for my Bible, mother."

"Your Bible!" said Mrs. Saunders, aghast. "Not for him! he might much better be taking gruel. There's a time for all things, child; and what he ought to do now is to take a few spoonfuls of nourishment, and go to sleep."

"Mother, he asked me to find him something that he keeps thinking about that troubles him. It will take but a moment."

She sped on her way; and the mother went in to call on her patient.

On the landing they met again, she and Joy.

"He doesn't look like the sort of person who would fly to the Bible for comfort; not a mite," commented the mother. "But then you can't always tell. We must do the best we can for him, poor fellow. I'm going now to prepare his beef tea. The doctor said he was to have it as soon as possible, and I'll be along in a few minutes. You tell him so. And, Joy, if he wants the Bible read to him, I'll do it after this. Don't you promise to. Mind, I won't have it."

Then Joy and her Bible went in. The young man was waiting for her with wide-open, eager eyes. Dr. Everett's apparently random remark had taken singular hold of him.

"What do you find?" he asked her.

"Well, how much do you know about the history of the Israelites?"

"Nothing."

“Then I must tell you very briefly. Rehoboam was king—king of Judah. He managed some of his affairs splendidly, so that things were shaping very much as he wanted them. And he grew proud over it; made up his mind that he was great and powerful, and could take care of himself. But there came an enemy named Shishak, who stole away his shields, and did him great harm. Now I will read: ‘And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him. And it came to pass, that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord.’ Then follows an account of the greatness of his army, and the amount of harm that he did. Then a prophet came to Rehoboam, with an explanation of the trouble: ‘Thus saith the Lord, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hands of Shishak.’”

“Miss Joy,” said Robert, interrupting her, “can you see any possible connection between that fellow Rehoboam and my humble self?”

“I don’t know,” said Joy, raising her head from the Bible, and regarding him thoughtfully. “There might be, I suppose, in a spiritual sense. Have you an enemy who might represent Shishak?”

“Not unless I’m the fellow. I’m my own worst enemy, I suppose. It is plans of my own making that have been running away with me for some time; that’s a fact. I suppose that’s what he meant. Complimentary he was! I wonder how he knew anything about it?”

“Whom do you mean? Rehoboam?”

“Not exactly. Rehoboam knew a great deal, I fancy—more than he cared to own. What became of the old fellow, finally?”

“Why do you call him old? It seems to me that he was young. I don’t know what became of him finally. I haven’t

read far enough to see ; but I know he got the better of some of his trouble, for it says, 'The wrath of the Lord departed from him, as soon as he was humble.'"

"The wrath of the Lord ! I thought it was Shishak who brought all his trouble on him."

"Well, but of course the Lord sent it, or at least permitted it ; if he had not, it could not have touched Rehoboam."

Robert, with a good deal of effort, turned himself so that he could look full into the grave blue eyes beside him, and asked, "Do you fully believe that?"

"Why, of course ! Do not you ? What a fearful world it would be if things just *happened*, with nobody to manage or control !"

"But what kind of management was it, to bring a fellow into a sea of troubles from which he could not escape ?"

"Ah, but how do you know what would have happened if Shishak had not come to bring him to his senses ? Perhaps a much worse fate. I don't know the end of this story ; and I don't know the end of any story that is being lived now—yours or mine, for instance ; but the Lord does, and I would much rather have him do all the planning."

Then occurred a diversion, in the shape of a handsome old china cup of beef-tea.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A TIME TO THINK.

MRS. SAUNDERS and the beef-tea appeared together, and Joy and her Bible vanished.

The new nurse was ready-handed and cheerfully authoritative. She tucked a fine damask napkin under her patient's chin, and skilfully fed him with spoonfuls of beef-tea from a solid silver teaspoon. When she decided that he had taken nourishment enough, she whisked away spoon and cup, without question, straightened the bed-clothes, beat up another pillow and arranged it dexterously under his head, telling him, meantime, that he looked better already, and that he must keep up good courage, which was always half the battle in everything. Then she drew down the shades, and told him to mind the doctor, and go to sleep; and assuring him that Tommy, the bell-boy, should sit just outside the door, and would hear if he but just touched the little silver bell by his side, she disappeared before Robert had had time to reflect on the questions that he wanted to ask her.

But sleep did not come readily to the restless brain. Robert was very sorry for Joy's departure. He even reflected whether it would be likely to do any good to touch that little bell and tell Tommy that he wanted Miss Joy. Then, in case she came, what was he to say to her? That he wanted to know more about Rehoboam? But that would be absurd. What must she think of him already?

"I wish I had never heard of the old scamp, or young



scamp, whichever he was," he said aloud and angrily; and, had he not been too weak and sore to accomplish it, he would have kicked off the bed-clothes, and flung himself to the other side of the bed. He was unaccountably vexed with Dr. Everett and his historic allusions. Though he had had only touches of the story from Joy's lips, his quick wits took in something of the doctor's meaning. So he was Rehoboam, who had managed his affairs with skill, until he had grown proud and careless. There was too much truth in the hint to be pleasant. A Christian home had been Robert's; and back there, in his quiet country home, his morals had been excellent. In fact he had been in the habit, during all his boyhood, of being looked up to as a model boy.

How long ago it seemed since he was a fine-looking, well-dressed country youth—the delight of his mother and the admiration of his sister, and himself afraid of nothing! Barely three years; yet, measured by his experience in city life, they might have been thirty years. Sometimes it almost seemed to him that his boyish home-life was all a dream, and that he had always been a rather fast young man. In the brief half-sentence, "Afraid of nothing," had lain most of his temptations. "When I am weak, then am I strong." He had never learned that verse; he would not have understood its meaning. His handsome lip would have curled contemptuously over every phase of weakness.

No temptation could possibly assail him which he was not prepared to laugh at. He had only contempt for those fellows who could not take care of themselves. Is it any wonder that three years of city life, unrestrained by any home influences, had developed him into the sort of young man whom the people call "gay," speaking the word with ominous uplifting of the eyebrows and grave shakes of the head, and sometimes with sighs?

It did not, in his case, mean all that that little word is capable of conveying to the initiated. It meant simply that

he was a "good fellow." He smoked choice cigars, and gave them away freely. He drove a fast horse, when he could get one. He drank a glass of wine occasionally with the fellows, and was never much the worse for it; in fact, a little more brilliant in conversation after indulging; with a headache next morning, to be sure, but what of that?—everybody had headaches in these fast times.

His old habit of church-going had been given up almost utterly; the real reason—if those who condemned him the sharpest had but known it—being, because he was too sorely home-sick in such places to bring himself to endure it. The Sabbath morning service in the old church at home had always brought his mother out. It was the only time she ever left his suffering father. As far back as in the days when he first became tall enough for his little mother to take his arm, and from that time on, he had walked to church with her of a Sabbath morning, and held open the door of the old-fashioned pew for her to pass, and found the hymns for her, and the text, and rejoiced in being her protector; and had been used to hearing himself spoken of by the neighbours as a fine, manly boy—one who would be the support of his mother's old age. How could he go to church alone, and sit in an obscure corner of the gallery, in the great, dark, cold-looking city church? It was so easy to form the other habit—slipping into it by degrees. Nobody took any notice of him in the formative period. It was not until the other habit was quite fixed that people began to say, "I'm afraid that young Parks is rather wild. It looks bad to see a young man like him driving fast horses and frequenting the summer gardens on Sundays, instead of going to church."

The young man in question had moved so steadily on his downward road, that it is doubtful if he had ever more than half realized that he was on the down grade. He still meant to be "the support of his mother's declining years." He still meant to be a pattern son and brother. What had

cigars to do with it? To be sure, his mother did not like them; that was natural; mothers never did, he supposed. But, of course, when one went to the city to live, a great many things were different from what they were in the country. Everybody smoked; and as for taking rides occasionally, and going to the theatre now and then—why, if a fellow lived in this world, he must act a little like the people in it. He managed to save more of his salary than any of the rest of the boys, and he received less than some of them, too.

Being suddenly caught out of the busy world and laid aside in this strange place, surrounded by strangers, unable to obey orders and go to sleep—unable even to toss about, and so get rid of his restlessness, there seemed nothing for him but to think. It had been a long time since Robert Parks had done any good honest thinking. He found himself wondering just what they said at home when they heard of his trouble;—whether his mother had a chance to go alone and cry a little because she could not come to him; whether Alice had felt very badly about it, or whether in these three years she had almost forgotten him. Could it be nearly three years since he had seen them all at home? How had it happened that so much time had been allowed to pass, when it had been his intention to spend at least the holiday week in the old homestead? For the first time, he wondered whether it really had been the matter of expense alone that had kept him away? Lying there on his back, this excuse—which had seemed such a sensible and praiseworthy one to give his mother—stared him in the face as unreal, as, in part, false. Had there not been a shrinking from meeting his clear-eyed mother?—from looking into her face and answering her searching questions? Moreover, if he should frankly own it, did not the whole atmosphere of home, with the sick and suffering father, and the child-sister, seem dull and uninviting?

Altogether, Dr. Everett's patient did not have an enjoyable time with his thoughts. Self-examination was new and unpleasant work. He wondered, irritably, whether "Shishak" represented himself. Could he really be his own slave? Also, was little Joy's notion possible—that the Lord had sent himself to bind himself, in order that he might be held away from a worse "something" ahead? He laughed over the idea a little bitterly, yet hovered all day around thoughts born of it, and was still so full of the subject that when Dr. Everett returned, after professional questions were answered, his first sentence was,—

"Well, sir, I have made the acquaintance of the historical Rehoboam to-day."

"Have you indeed?" said the doctor, with lifted eyebrows and a peculiarly searching look. "May I know what opinion you have of him?"

"I think he received rather rough handling. Why shouldn't he have felt pretty well, after accomplishing all that he did?"

"Did you get at the starting-point of his entire trouble?"

"I'm not certain as to that; your little Miss Joy gave me the details. She made them vivid, but somewhat condensed; possibly owing to the conflicting claims of beef-tea."

"It is not like Miss Joy to leave out the kernel of a story. However, I can give it to you; it is comprised in one sentence: 'When he had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord.' Then began mischief."

"I perceive," said Robert. His voice did not invite further conversation. The doctor busied himself about the arrangement of certain small phials, and Robert lay thinking of the "law" which his mother had kept so carefully before him, having made him familiar with it from his childhood. In what degree had he forsaken it since his city life commenced? This question was embarrassing. He felt his cheeks growing red over the memory of a record that would

have been nothing but pain to his mother. He was glad when the phials were arranged, and the doctor turned toward him again. Perhaps he would suggest another subject. But no. Robert had himself led the way, and the doctor was not disposed to turn his thoughts aside.

"The next fact in that young man's story which impresses me just now is this: 'He forsook the law, and all Israel followed his example.' A poor record that in a man's life; a miserable example to be followed."

"Rather," said Robert, feeling the necessity for making some answer, with those keen eyes looking steadily down on him. What was the use, just then, of thinking of Austin Barrows and of Fred Briggs? They were two "fellows" who had followed his example somewhat closely; but then there was no need for doing it unless they chose. He tried to comfort himself with this lame logic, but reflected irritably that Rehoboam might have said the same about "all Israel."

On the whole, he could not help realizing that whether the accident had been permitted for reasons, or was purely the result of his own carelessness, it had already been productive of more thought than he had given to any experience for a long time.

"When he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him." He seemed to hear Joy's quiet voice reading this verse. She had read it as though she thought it ought to quiet a listener. It seemed to him that the thought but added to his restlessness. No pleasant sensation could be connected with any sort of humbling, in this young man's opinion.

Dr. Everett, meantime, had settled into quiet, pen in hand, and was apparently engaged in writing prescriptions. In reality, not a change of expression on his patient's face but was carefully noted. When at last Robert's eyes closed in weariness and then in sleep, the doctor arose and came to his side.

“Poor fellow!” he said within himself—“poor fellow! how strange it is that people will not learn from the long line of Rehoboams who have preceded them. Some miserable Shishak gets them in tow, despite ten thousand warnings. And there are plenty to follow their example; some of them professedly belonging to the house of Israel, too. Well, the Lord allowed Shishak to gain a victory, in order to help a self-righteous king to a sense of his folly; and this modern Rehoboam is in the same safe hands. I wonder if he will let me be his prophet? Miss Joy and I must try to set the feet of this young heir on the right road for his Father’s house.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BABY'S LINK.

THE little baby, Delia Curtiss's treasure, was laid to rest amid a wealth of flowers. A very unusual experience in that street was that funeral occasion. Death had come before to many of the homes, and the neighbours had been as sympathetic and as attentive as their hard, busy lives gave them time for being; but they watched curiously the comers and goers at Mr. Curtiss's door—the minister, and the doctor, and the teacher, and the girls and the boys in Mrs. Saunders's class, and Joy. What did it all mean? They questioned, one of another, "Who was that minister?" "Why, he was pastor of Packard Place Church, where Delia Curtiss went to Sabbath school." "And who was that doctor? He had not attended the Curtiss baby, had he?" "Oh no; but they wondered that he hadn't been called. They say he is a great doctor; and he is the new superintendent at Packard Place." "And Miss Mason was Delia's teacher; and all those girls coming and going with flowers and things were in her class; and those boys belonged to another class, and were to act as bearers; and Dr. Everett's carriage was to take Mr. and Mrs. Curtiss and Delia to the grave; and the girls were all going in another carriage, that 'they' said the church provided; and there was to be singing at the funeral, by the Sunday-school choir;" and altogether, the dwellers in that region began to have a feeling, which they did not express in words, that there was a good deal of friendliness and sympathy and

attention connected with the Packard Place Church. "There wasn't six people beside our own, when my baby died; and not a flower to be seen, though it was midsummer, nor a carriage," said one poor mother, half in sadness, half in bitterness, as she went back over her sorrowful past. But she added, in grave truthfulness, "To be sure, my Melissa didn't belong to no Sunday school, and we never went to church; maybe things would have been different if we had."

"Neither do the Curtisses go to church," said a crisp neighbour. "I don't believe they've darkened the doors of a church since they lived here."

"But Delia does; she went every now and then, and to Sunday school too. Them young folks is real attentive; I never see anything like it. I'm glad of it, too," she declared, rising above her envious thoughts with an effort. "If there's ever a time when folks need friends, it's when they are in trouble like this; and flowers and carriages and things mayn't be much, but they make the world seem a little less dreary, after all. Sunday schools is good things, if they make folks do this way; and I wish my Melissa belonged to one."

Meantime "the girls" had been having their lesson. They had forgotten that they were kin to Delia Curtiss, until they saw her tear-swollen eyes, and heard her murmured words of gratitude. Gay little Fanny Tarrant, who lived in a different sphere entirely, and had not known the Curtiss girl even by name, lent her a black sack that just fitted her; and herself arranged the lace in the neck, and took more serious thought, and spoke more serious words, than perhaps she had done in months before. They came and went frequently, all of them, during the hours that intervened between the death and the funeral, and consulted together on the steps, or in the little parlour, about what "we are to do," or how "we are to sit;" and felt a sense of importance, as girls do, over all things that bring them into life as actors, responsible for ever so small a part of the



duties of the hour ; and grew more intimate, in a quiet way, than they had ever thought of being ; and they cried together, every one of them, with Delia around that little coffin, and cemented their interest in her as nothing else could have done. A strange place, perhaps you think, for cultivating friendship, this baby's funeral ; and yet the sense of sisterhood was awakened among those girls that afternoon.

Dr. Everett leaned against the narrow door in the small square hall, and studied them. They were his girls ; and as he looked at responsibilities, he was bound in honour to do for them all that he could. What could he do ? What would this afternoon's experience help him to do ? The beautiful baby in the coffin was at rest—his sweet life here ended, his life in heaven begun ; and yet perhaps, baby though he was, his work here was not ended. Could not those gathered about his coffin be reached and blessed through the influences of this day ?

Among the girls, Hester Mason was the one who held the doctor's thoughts. She was of a different type from the others—in one sense harder to reach. He tried to study her face, softened now under the play of emotions new to her. Trouble had touched her in many forms—most of them hardening forms ; but she had never before sat near to a little coffin, and mingled her tears with mourners. She had a striking face ; beautiful it might have been called, had there only been more refinement of expression ; certainly it was a face which showed strength, or at least possibilities of strength. It remained to be seen whether the world would be better or worse because of her being one of its countless numbers. It was almost certain to be decidedly the one or the other. Hers was not a passive nature.

Man though he was, Dr. Everett studied her dress carefully, and understood its attempts better than many women would have done. It was more subdued than usual. He did not know this ; he had never noticed her carefully

before. Had he known that she went back after she had reached the street and signalled her car, and actually waited for another car, while she unpinned and removed some of the red roses from her hat, because of a certain vague, unreasoning sense of incongruity between them and the house of mourning, he would have felt encouraged—not so much because she saw the incongruity, as because her heart had responded to the suggestion that she should model her dress to suit sorrowful eyes. He plainly saw, this cultured man, that the colours of her dress did not harmonize; but he also felt, rather than saw, what had not occurred to Miss Mason, that it was not because she would not have preferred harmony in colour and texture, or because she did not know to a certain extent what harmony was, but simply that she was poor, and that the blue dress which she had persisted in having one winter would not turn green to fit the felt hat which fell to her from her aunt on another winter; so perforce they must be worn together, and red roses being her delight, red roses she *would* wear, despite the shades of blue and green. Had she been cultured, she would not have worn the contrasting colours—would have had no delight in them. She was not cultured; and yet Dr. Everett felt that it was a certain uneducated sense of the beautiful that made her so eager after all this brightness.

Studying her he made a discovery. Miss Mason's faultless black silk suit, harmonizing in every particular, did not seem to move her namesake Hester. She looked at her, it is true, and admired; but it was with an intelligent sense of the fact that many pounds had been put together to make up the faultlessness. Hester Mason believed that, given the money, she could make herself look as elegant as her Sabbath-school teacher; but as she never expected to have the money, she was, therefore, in a sense indifferent. But the watcher saw that she looked at Joy Saunders with new eyes; almost as an artist might look at a picture. Joy was a revelation to her.

A young girl, nearly as young as Hester herself, with beautiful hair, arranged so simply that she could see all the processes, and felt sure that she could arrange her own after the same fashion; a very simple, very plain black dress—much plainer and simpler than Hester's own; a little puff of soft lace about her neck—and that was all. And about it all was an indescribable charm that Hester Mason felt to her finger-ends. Dr. Everett could not see all the thoughts that ran eagerly through her mind as she gazed at Joy. He did not know that she knew to the fraction of a penny how much the material of Joy's dress had cost, nor that she calculated to a nicety the probable quantity used, and knew how to make a garment exactly like it. He did not know that she said to herself, "That lace is nothing but wash illusion, and there isn't a bit more than half a yard in it; and her gloves are only two-button,—I've got three on mine." And then she looked down at her own, long-worn, carelessly handled, out at the fingers, soiled at the wrists—the only charm left to them being the three buttons. What a contrast they were to Joy's neat-fitting black ones!

Incongruous thoughts these, you think, for a funeral occasion. Yet I hope I shall not shock you when I call them elevating thoughts. Actually, Hester Mason was taking a step forward in the story of her life! She was getting her first dim idea that to be a lady was not necessarily to have plenty of money, and to spend it freely on one's adorning. Until this moment, she had believed that if she had the leisure and the wealth of the fine ladies, she could be as fine as they. Something in Joy Saunders gave her a feeling that this was false reasoning. Here was a refinement that in money was within her reach, and yet was as far beyond and above her as the mountains!

All this, as I said, the doctor did not understand; yet he saw that Joy Saunders was at once a fascination and a puzzle to this keen-eyed girl. "It will do her good to have Joy for

a study," he said to himself. "I wonder what sort of a home she has? Miss Mason knows, possibly; I must try to discover. I wonder what effect an hour or two in Mrs. Saunders's 'sunset' room would have on her? I would like to try it. How can I bring about an invitation—and an acceptance—to that room for an afternoon, with tea in state? The invitation can be more easily managed than the acceptance, possibly. There are several things to learn before I attempt it."

Busy with the train of thought which the circumstances of the hour had started, he found himself presently standing near Miss Mason, while they waited a summons to the carriage. True to his habit, he made use of the opportunity.

"Who is the girl in blue—a decided blue?"

Miss Mason looked her annoyance. "Her name is Mason—Hester Mason; not a relative of mine, I beg you to believe. Had she been, I should have tried to secure her a black dress for this occasion. I wish I had as it is. How that blue dress jars!"

"What sort of a person is she?"

"Oh, I don't know. The sort of person who will wear a bright blue dress to a funeral, doctor, when she forms part of the procession. Does that enlighten you any?" All this in undertone, with a suppressed, nervous little laugh at its close.

"Hardly," said the doctor. "That might be owing to the accident of her having but one dress to wear. Perhaps that does not enlighten you. You may not have realized the possibility of such a situation; but there are people thus circumstanced. Has she parents living?"

"I'm sure I don't know. She is only nominally a member of my class. I don't think she has been present four times this season; I have never known anything about her. I learned by accident where she lived; and it is so far out of

the world that I don't know how to get to it. I don't like the girl's appearance. She is one of the loud-voiced, gay sort; converses on the street-car in a tone loud enough to be heard by all the passengers."

"That may possibly be because she has never been taught the propriety of conversing in a low tone," the doctor said; and then he attended Miss Mason to the carriage, and decided that she was not at present the one to help him materially in trying to help Hester Mason. An apparent accident threw him, later in the day, in the way of receiving a bit of information. He was passing out from Mr. Curtiss's door just at dusk, whither he had returned to call professionally on the worn-out mother, when he heard the woman who stood on the doorstep of the next house, and whom he recognized as a neighbour of the family, say to the woman in the door, "That Hester Mason looked better to-day than I have ever seen her; she left off some of her finery. But she was dreadful out of place, somehow."

The doctor paused. "Mrs. Simmons, I believe. I met you at Mrs. Curtiss's this morning;" and he lifted his hat courteously. "May I ask if you are acquainted with Hester Mason, and if you can tell me anything of her family? She is one of the young ladies of my Sabbath school."

Mrs. Simmons was voluble; she loved to talk; and, besides, gentlemen rarely raised their hats to her.

"Oh yes; I can tell you all about her. She ain't got no folks to speak of; only a drunken father, and an aunt she lives with. She is a fast girl, and no mistake; out of nights till twelve and one o'clock every blessed night of her life. Fact is, I've known of her being out till morning now and then. Goes to balls, you know, and such places, along with any young fellow she can coax to spend money on her. She is a shop-girl, down there in one of them Vale Street stores; and she gets acquainted with all sorts. Her aunt is a decent kind of body—tries to be; but what with a drunken brother,

and this girl who has got away beyond her, she has a hard life of it. You see I know all about them. I lived right next door to them for a year or two. I'm glad if Hester Mason goes to your Sunday school. It is the first good that I've ever heard of her. Oh, I don't know anything so very dreadful *bad*, you know; she is decent enough, as girls of that kind go, I guess. But my Melissa don't have nothing to do with her. Her father won't let her."

"Thank you," said the doctor, in the first pause for breath. He had received all the information from that source that he desired.

One more effort he made that evening. He met Joy on the stairs, as she was going swiftly up and he was going swiftly down; both were in haste.

"Miss Joy," he said, "did you notice the young girl in a blue dress?"

"Yes; I noticed her a good deal."

"What of her, Miss Joy?"

"She—is a girl—to be helped," said Joy, speaking slowly, choosing her words with care, making pauses between them.

"Thank you," he said again; and the tones were different from those which had said it to Mrs. Simmons. As he went on down the stairs and down the street, he told himself that Joy and the "sunset" room would help; but there must be some connecting link to bring it about.

In less than five minutes he saw a possible connecting link; but it filled him with dismay.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PLANNING.

THE view which disturbed Dr. Everett was simply that of a young man and woman.

He stopped in the street and looked after the two, as, absorbed in each other, they failed to discover his presence, but walked gaily on. Loud-voiced the young lady was ; her tones and her laughter indicating an excited state of enjoyment, altogether too marked for the crowded street. It was Hester Mason ; there was no mistaking the peculiar tones of voice, even though the colours of her dress had not by this time been stamped on Dr. Everett's memory. The young man who walked so contentedly by her side was Austin Barrows.

It was this that jarred Dr. Everett. He had designs on the young man ; hoped much for him, was watching him in all earnestness, and laying plans for his advance. But advancement did not lie in that direction ; it was impossible to hope for refining influences in connection with Hester Mason. Neither, on the other hand, was it a profitable companionship for her. Hopeful as he might be in regard to Austin Barrows's future, there was altogether too much yet undone to make it safe for Hester Mason to be much in his society. Yet evidently these two did not accord with this decision. They were eminently satisfied with each other, if one might judge by the glimpse of pleasure which their faces showed as they passed.

What could be done? There was, in Hester's case, no mother to appeal to, to say to her, "Your daughter is in danger; the young man with whom she walks the streets is not a wise companion for her." And though Austin Barrows had a mother, it was evident either that she had not much influence over him or that she did not exert it in the right direction.

Mechanically, the doctor had turned and walked in the direction of the two who filled his thoughts. Not that he meant to follow them; he had no definite end in view. But it troubled him yet more to see them disappear within one of the entrances to a public hall. He recalled the fact that he had heard of a dance which was to take place there that evening. Not exactly an improper place was this hall, in the broad sense of the term; probably three-fourths, perhaps more than that proportion, of the young people who would gather there for the evening's amusement were from respectable quarters of the city, and would conduct themselves in a comparatively respectable manner. I use the phrase thoughtfully—there are degrees of respectability. Mrs. Saunders would not for an instant have thought of permitting her Joy to join the company in that hall; yet, at the same time, it would not have occurred to her as a hopelessly improper thing if the shop-girl who occupied a room in her fifth story back had chosen to spend an evening there. But Dr. Everett was sure that the two who tripped up the stairs would get no benefit from such a gathering. He walked slowly past the brilliantly lighted hall, and pondered. Why should not these two, and hundreds of other twos, seek their pleasure in such ways? The flood of light that streamed from each window was suggestive of warmth and comfort within, and the music which floated softly down to the outside world was gay and winning. What was being done, or, a question more to the point just now, what could be done, at least in individual cases, to counteract these influences? It made



him think of the "sunset" room again. This room, in Mrs. Saunders's house, was so called because it was so situated that the glow of sunset always lighted it up with strange brilliancy, and because Joy had studied the combinations of colour so skilfully that in that room they repeated and intensified the outside glory. Yet there was not an expensive article in the room. It was small, and the carpet was aglow with bright-coloured autumn leaves on a pretty ground; there was an open grate, where always in winter the sort of coal was burning which would bear poking, and shoot up into glorious flames. An old-fashioned lounge, covered with gay cretonne in sunset colours again, having great soft luxurious pillows, three of them belonging to it, occupied a cozy niche between the grate and the hall door; while the other corner was literally filled up with a great home-made chair, cushioned, arms and back and sides covered in the same cretonne, and adorned with a delicate, cream-coloured tidy sewed fast. No tales did the chair tell of having once been a barrel so large that it might almost have been called a hogshead; possibly it had forgotten all those early humiliating experiences when a certain ill-smelling liquid filled it to the brim; or it may be that the bit of crimson which formed the tidy's edge was a blush of remembrance. Who can tell? Certain of this were all who were acquainted with its depth, that a more comfortable chair, or a more home-like corner, was not to be found in the city. Other chairs there were—easy, most of them, home-made, most of them—save a smart little cane-seated rocker, which was Joy's special seat; and there were touches of taste and refinement here and there. A peculiar shell from the Pacific coast, which a boarder had given to Joy; a spray of real coral from another far-away shore; an engraving or two, hanging in just the right light; a full-length picture of a soldier in uniform, whose eyes Joy had, and a touch of whose expression hovered about her mouth, so that people often said, "Mrs. Saunders, she is very

like her father." A hundred little prettinesses had from time to time crept into this choice room. Now for the uses of the room.

Mrs. Saunders, being called upon to state, would have said that it had no use, save as it was a place where she and Joy hid when they felt like it. Once Joy called it, speaking low to Dr. Everett, a photograph of home; for there were features connected with the large boarding-house that the girl disliked, though she did not say so to her mother. Few were the strangers introduced to this room. How did it chance that Dr. Everett, before he had been for a week a member of the family, was installed there, as one who had a sort of right to its home atmosphere? Mrs. Saunders puzzled over it a little herself. She had asked him in one evening, because they were talking about something that interested her much, something that she wanted to hear more of quietly; and his eyes had lighted with such a sense of appreciation, and he had walked over to the easy-chair and seated himself with such a satisfied "Ah!" and a bright, "Mrs. Saunders, do you believe a tired man like myself will relinquish this seat again?" that she could not help telling him to come there when he felt tired, and rest; he worked hard, and had little time for resting. After that he had waited for no second invitation, but came to the sunset room whenever he chose; always knocking, it is true, and always, in numberless little ways, recognizing it as a bit of home privacy into which he came only by invitation. Yet he often came.

"This is the council-chamber where His servants meet to talk over affairs which concern the King," he had said, half laughing half reverently, one evening, as they turned to leave the room. They had been talking about the boys in Mrs. Saunders's class.

She liked the ring of the sentence, and thought of it afterwards, and wondered in what way she could use the room in his service. So she, at least, was prepared to meet the doctor

half-way, when he said one evening, having knocked at the door and gained admittance, and found Joy and her mother alone as he had hoped, and had talked with them but a moment on general questions,—

“I wish, Mrs. Saunders and Miss Joy, we could make the sunshine in this room reach one heart that, if I am not mistaken, is being caught by false glitter.”

“What now, doctor?” Mrs. Saunders was not always able to follow his metaphors; but she believed in him thoroughly, and he gave her enough of the practical side of questions to keep her busy. He turned toward her smiling.

“You don’t believe in imagery, Mrs. Saunders. Do you know Hester Mason?”

“The loud-voiced girl in Miss Mason’s class, who comes one Sunday and stays away three? Yes, I had the curiosity to ask her name—she giggled so much, and whispered, and tried to attract the attention of my boys. I don’t believe I know much good about her. I don’t fancy the girl.”

“Yet she is one of those daughters about whom you and I were talking the other night. Her mother went and left her long ago; but who knows what a sore heart she may have carried even to the verge of the grave, over the thought of leaving her baby?”

“What do you want to do for her?” It was Mrs. Saunders’s abrupt way of saying that she was vanquished, and he might count on her help in doing what he would.

“I may want to do many things; but I do not at present see my way clear to them. I would like to experiment. What effect, do you suppose, an afternoon spent in this room, in company with Miss Joy, would have on her?”

“In this room!” It gave the mother-heart a start to think of Hester Mason received into the home-centre as her daughter’s guest! Did he mean that? “Why, how could that be brought about?”

“Precisely what I don’t see, unless Miss Joy can cast a

spell about her, and weave her into the sunshine here, and hold her bewitched for an hour or two."

"And what would that accomplish?" Mrs. Saunders's tones were brusque; she did not like the plan. The doctor had turned from her as he spoke, and was looking at Joy. He faced round again.

"I don't know; that is what I would like to discover. I fancy that she may never have seen the inside of a home, and felt the atmosphere of a mother, and heard the voice of culture talking with her in a social way, and sat down to a small home table, where all the daintinesses of refined life could speak to her. What effect might it possibly have, Mrs. Saunders? What are homes for? Why did He give you one? May it not possibly be that He wants you to show the photograph to others, for a purpose?"

Whether Mrs. Saunders understood the latter part of the sentence or not, Joy did, and her eyes flashed a sympathetic answer. Mrs. Saunders saw it, felt the power of the first half of the sentence, and spoke meekly: "Whatever you and Joy want to do, I'm willing; though I don't pretend to understand half that you are after. The room is none too good to use in any way that seems to you to be for anybody's help.—What is he after, Joy? Can you make out?"

Joy laughed—a low, sweet laugh. "Copying photographs, mother," she said, her eyes brimming with mischief. Then she grew suddenly grave.

"I don't think I understand, doctor, any better than mother does. I would like to help the girl, her face haunts me; and I would like her to know mother, and see our little piece of home, if that would do her any good; but how could it be brought about? Could I invite her—why, of course I could—to come and see me? But would she come, do you think? And if she did, what could I do to make her feel comfortable, and interest her?"

"That last," said the doctor, smiling gravely, "is a

question that may be difficult to answer. It may be necessary to experiment a little before we shall know how to answer it. As to her coming, I think she would. She would be very much astonished, doubtless, over the invitation; but as for shrinking, with a sense of incongruity, or with a sensitive feeling of any sort, I fancy that is foreign to her nature. She would be comfortable, too, in a sense—that is, I mean, at her ease; but whether there is that in her which could really be entertained by you, and by your surroundings, remains to be seen: let us hope and pray that there is. You see, Miss Joy, it is true, as I said. From the glimpses which I have had of her aunt's face, I feel sure she has no home; and what can a girl do without a home, and a mother?"

"I don't know." Joy said it simply, but with intense gravity, as one to whom the sense of loss which that word "without" conveyed was beyond expression.

Dr. Everett's next sentence shadowed her face, and cleared her mother's.

"One feature of the plan I would like to see tried involves an attempt to bring her into closer acquaintance with her Sabbath-school teacher. If Miss Mason is going to do anything for her on Sabbath, she should become acquainted with her week-day character. I have thought about it earnestly this evening. Her home will not do; it is too set apart and stately; too far removed from any idea of home—that is, I mean, the room in which she receives her friends; it is simply a parlour after the approved sort. It would not say anything but money to a girl like Hester Mason. And then her teacher would not know what in the world to do with her. In fact, I have very little idea that she would consent to try the experiment of inviting her, except, perhaps, in a patronizing way—as one of the lower classes—which is not what I mean at all. But I have thought that if she could meet the girl here, with you and

your mother to bridge over the gulf that separates them, by being always able to remember that both ought to belong to Christ, and become sisters in him, perhaps much might be accomplished. Could you manage to bring about such a strange order of events, do you think?"

Then spoke Mrs. Saunders briskly. She began to get a glimpse of the doctor's meaning. He was not filling his mind with a wild notion that that Mason girl was on an equality with her Joy, and must be invited and visited with as an equal. He was simply anxious to bring teacher and pupil together, that they might learn more of each other; and he felt the necessity of using Joy's tact and quick-wittedness to bring it about.

"That's easily managed," she said. "Joy can ask Miss Mason here to meet the girl, and help them to get acquainted; of course she can. I'll risk Joy at managing such things. And they can have tea in here. I'll get the poor girl a good supper for once in her life. It's a nice plan, doctor, now that I understand it. I wonder I've never thought to do some such thing."

But Joy was silent; her face grave, and a trifle perplexed. After Dr. Everett went away, being called by the ringing of his night-bell, before he was ready to go, she brought some of the shadow into life, and laid it before her mother.

"Dr. Everett is always finding hard things for me to do."

"Hard things, child! I think he keeps the hard things for himself, and gives you the pleasant ones. I'm sure he has a hard enough time of it. Here he has been running around since before daylight, and now he must go off again; and it is an ugly, dark night, and half rains, half snows—the meanest kind of a night. I don't like half-way doings with the weather, nor anything else. I'd rather it would downright storm any time than mince at it. What is there hard about inviting that poor thing to supper? I should think you would like it."

“It isn’t the ‘poor thing,’ mother; it is the rich one. I wish you hadn’t helped him along. How can I invite Miss Mason here to take tea with me?”

“Why can’t you, pray? I’ll warrant you can give her as good a tea as she can get at home. I’ll make some of my cream muffins for her, and scallop some oysters in a way that no hired help ever thought of doing. She’ll like it, you may depend.”

“O mother! it isn’t the muffins, nor the oysters.” Joy looked half vexed, though she laughed. “Don’t you know she has never called on me, and has no idea of doing so? Think of my going around there, and inviting her to come and take tea! It will look just as though I was creeping after her, and coaxing myself into her circle. And I don’t belong to it, and don’t want to.”

“Well, as to that, child, you are Joy Saunders, the daughter of James L. Saunders, a brave soldier, and the grand-daughter of Adoniram Saunders, and belong to your own circle, without any particular need of creeping after any other. It would be hard to find better blood than yours; and money counts very little with real folks, you’ll find.”

“I wouldn’t exchange my grandfather for all the Masons of three generations together; you know that, mother. But I don’t like to appear to creep after people who have money, and live in grand houses,—especially people who do not notice me.”

“Oh, well,” said Mrs. Saunders soothingly, “there isn’t the least danger of anybody thinking any such thing. You can tell Miss Mason that it is the doctor’s plan for giving her a chance to get acquainted with the girl, without giving her any trouble about it. And she needn’t come unless she likes, of course. You don’t invite her to visit *you*; it’s just lending the room and the supper as a kind of accommodation. As to that, child, suppose she does think you are creeping? Can’t you take the name of creeping, if the King wants you

to? If you are his servant, you needn't be above his work. It is no more than they said of him. There isn't a mean, low motive that you can think of, but what some of the Pharisees hinted that it was the object for which he was working. I guess you can stand it, if he could."

Did she know her daughter so well, that she brought forth this unanswerable argument at the last? Not a word of her soothing explanation as to the object for inviting Miss Mason did Joy accept. But this last was from another standpoint. If it was really and truly work for Him, she was willing even to creep. Yet she told herself, as she went up to her room, that it was a very hard thing for her to do, to invite Miss Mason to take tea with her in the sunset room!



## CHAPTER X.

### INVITATIONS.

HOWEVER, after much worrying as to how she should invite Miss Mason in a way to make her understand the exact cause for the invitation, and how she should make Hester Mason think she really and honestly wanted her to come to tea, it all shaped itself naturally and pleasantly. At least so Joy thought. To be sure she had to go through the ordeal of inviting Miss Mason ; and that lady was sufficiently astonished to make it a trifle uncomfortable. But she was on the eve of departure for a week's visit, and had to decline. Still, on reflection, even the astonishment was not all unpleasant.

“To meet Hester Mason at your house. Why, does she visit at your house? Oh, I understand ; you are asking her there in order to help her. That is very sweet in you. I never should have thought of it. But what will you do with her? Don't you dread it? Isn't she a strange character? I wish I were going to be at home to help you ; though I shouldn't know in the least what to say. Oh, it is Dr. Everett's idea? What a singular man he is ! so full of whims ! Oh yes, the Sabbath school is very much improved since he took hold of it ; but it is harder work to teach, somehow. It seems as though he were listening to every word one said, even when he is at the other end of the room. It makes me nervous. I'm continually wondering whether it is the right thing to say. Well, I hope you will have success with Hester. Isn't it ridiculous that she has our

family name? I think I shall be interested in her marriage. Dr. Everett is real good; and he gives one ever so many new ideas. I might accomplish something by inviting the girl to my house. I don't know exactly what, but it seems as though one ought to try. It does put notions into one's head to see other people at work. Do you go to the party to-night, Miss Saunders? Oh, I beg your pardon. You don't visit at the Belmonts', do you?"

Was that last question asked spitefully, with the intention of leaving a little sting in the shape of a reminder that the Belmonts, and people in their circle, did not invite her to their parties? Joy Saunders pondered over this question, as she walked down the street, and came to the conclusion that there was no intention of stinging. It was simply one of Miss Mason's blundering sentences—plunging into the midst of things without thought, and then retreating with an apology that pointed the embarrassment. Nevertheless it lightened Joy's heart to remember that Miss Mason could not be at the proposed tea-party. It could not be postponed, for Hester was already invited; and this, too, had "happened" and been carried out in a most natural manner. Joy, in a discouraging search for a match to a certain piece of goods, on which her mother had set her heart, wandered out of her usual beat, into the store where Hester Mason spent her days as a shop-girl. Joy caught a glimpse of her behind a distant counter, and bowed and smiled. The girl's face flushed gratefully. Evidently the recognition pleased her. Then, but for the thought of Dr. Everett's plan, Joy would have gone complacently from the store, glad that she had by so much recognized the girl's kinship. As it was, she lingered. What was there that might be said now to help to make a path for a future invitation? Hester was engaged in trying to sell a bright-coloured crocheted trifle, known to the initiated as a sea-foam, to a young girl of about her own age. She had placed it on the girl's head, tied the

ribbons gracefully, and stood back in admiration. "It fits you to a dot," she said in hearty triumph. "You'd better take it. I don't believe you will find another in the city like it."

Did she really think that? Joy wondered. Or was it part of her business? At that moment Hester turned toward her. "Isn't it pretty?" she said, catching the direction of Joy's eye. "And doesn't she look nice in it?" Then was Joy thankful that she could heartily respond in the affirmative to both questions; although the young buyer turned on her a haughty stare, as if to remind her that she was giving her opinion unasked by the person most concerned; and hastily untying the hood, adjusted her hat, and walked away. Hester laughed. "She is foolish," she said. "It is the prettiest colour I ever saw; and she looks like a beauty in it. I think they are a lovely shape. We never had any so nice before. I'd have one myself if I could afford it." The sentence ended in a little sigh.

Joy caught at the opening opportunity. "They are not expensive at all, when you make them yourself; and I think they are much prettier than those you buy."

"Oh, so do I; but then, you see, I don't know how to make one. I should as soon think of trying to build a house."

"The stitch is very simple, and it is rapid work. I crocheted one like this in two evenings. Wouldn't you like to learn, and make one for yourself?" Joy knew that her voice was eager, and did not wonder that Hester regarded her in silent amazement for a moment.

"Why, I should like it of all things," she said at last. "But I don't know who would teach me, I am sure. There isn't a girl in the store who knows the stitch. We were talking about it yesterday. We don't get any time for fancy work."

"But you have certain afternoons occasionally to yourselves, have you not?"

“Oh yes—once a month, when it isn’t the busy season; but we always contrive to have so much on hand for that afternoon that half of it never gets done. And then, besides, only one of us gets out at a time, and she can’t teach herself things. It is an awful busy life, Miss Saunders. You people who don’t have anything to do can’t tell much about it.”

Joy laughed, and took a moment for moralizing. Hester Mason, from her standpoint, believed that she, Joy Saunders, had nothing to do; while Miss Mason, no doubt, would have looked upon her life as an exceedingly laborious one. Was she not cake-maker and dessert-maker for the family of boarders, besides having the dusting and arranging to do? Was there a stratum below Hester Mason that had no afternoons once a month, and that would consider Hester’s position one of ease and comfort? She knew that such was the case; and it made her face shadow to think of the infinite depths below, of which she had only faint conjectures, and about which her mother’s firmly-closed lips and darkening eyebrows told her all she knew. What a world it was! So much to do; and she could only put her hand out an inch, and give an upward touch to a girl who was above the depths, on the comfortable side already. Perhaps she could not even do that. Hester was regarding her with curious eyes. She made haste back into her world.

“When is your next afternoon out to be?” speaking with an interest that increased the girl’s wonder.

“Why, on Thursday of next week, unless there is a great rush for something; or unless some girl I know is sick, and I give up my chance to her. We do such things often. Have to be accommodating, you know.”

“Then suppose, if nothing prevents your freedom, that you spend the afternoon with me, and learn this stitch, and make yourself a sea-foam. I can show you how to shape it. Wouldn’t you like to?”

“With you! Where?” The girl’s tones were simply curious.

“Why, at my home, of course. I live just out of Lexington Avenue.”

“I know where you live,” interrupted the girl. “Dr. Everett boards at your house, doesn’t he? Why, I should like it of all things, of course; only—I—it seems a pity to trouble you.”

She hesitated over this sentence, and did not know how to express her thought. There was a curious sense of gratitude and wonderment as to why Joy Saunders should take the trouble.

“It will be a pleasure,” Joy said eagerly, and felt that her words were very sincere. “I should like to have you come; and you will need to be as early as you can, and take tea, and spend the evening with me; for, of course, there will be a good deal to learn. Only, about the getting home. How will you manage that?”

“Oh, there would be no trouble about that!” Hester’s loud, amused voice grated on Joy’s ear. “I can go home alone at ten o’clock as well as at any other time.”

“But aren’t you afraid to do that, when the city is so full of bad people?” Joy could not keep the sense of having been shocked out of her tones. But the girl laughed. “What good would it do to be afraid?” she asked. “We girls have to go from the store at midnight often, during the holiday season. We have to go home after dark every winter night of our lives; and nine times out of ten something happens to hinder one or two of us, until eight or nine o’clock, or later. Where’s the good of being cowardly about it? Poor folks, you see, have to get used to things. I used to be awful skittish at first though,” she added, as if in sympathy with Joy’s ideas, “but nobody ever hurt me.”

Was that true? Joy wondered. Had not the forced exposure to the streets, and the cars, and the crowds, hurt

her face, her manner, and heart? Must this of necessity be the case? If so, wherein lay the remedy? Here was her own sheltered life, for instance. What would her mother think of an evening street car ride for her, unprotected by some one in whom that mother reposed absolute confidence? What would she think of her walking the square between her home and the street car, in the evening alone? What would tempt her to allow Joy to go at all in the vicinity in which this girl lived? But how could the girl help it? Was she to be blamed, then, if her life and its inevitable necessities pushed her out into a world from which Joy was for ever held back? All this was the open door to a world of puzzles. She must not stop over them now.

She went gaily home, to assure her mother that the muffins must be ready for the following Thursday, and that she desired them to be unprecedentedly good.

"And Miss Mason won't be at home," remarked the mother. "That's too bad! The doctor wanted to get a hold on her, I think; and I was willing she should have some of my muffins. I suppose you couldn't have contrived to postpone the visit until she got home?"

"No, indeed!" Joy said, with marked satisfaction. She felt very jubilant, having done her duty toward Miss Mason, and escaped the embarrassment of her presence.

Preparations for entertaining her guest went on steadily. Just how she should manage the matter of conversation, Joy failed to see; and at last she put it resolutely from her, resolved to do her best and leave the rest.

Preparations also went on elsewhere. It was early in the morning, in Hester Mason's home, and she flew about her room with unusual speed, and came in presently, dressed with unusual care. Much colour about her dress, of course; yet there had been an effort at special neatness, a carefulness as to details, that was not natural to the girl. Hester Mason's home was a representative one, speaking for a large

number of homes in a large city. It was not exactly medium, neither was it by any means the lowest type. Poverty, it is true, there was ; at least the sort of poverty which most people mean when they use the word. A bare floor, save for the bit of carpet on which the aunt rested her feet as she sat all day and sewed ; not many chairs, and those of the hardest ; north windows, two of them, with plain, dark, cheap paper for curtains ; a common table, covered with an oil-cloth spread—this was about the extent of the furniture. But the windows were clean ; so was the floor ; so was the plain dark dress of the woman who sat and sewed. Her hair, too, was combed straight back, stretched across an uncompromising forehead ; her lips were thin and shut closely ; and her gray eyes were keen and sharp as the needle that she drove through the heavy cloth. Not a gleam of brightness about the room or its occupant ; and here was this girl, tingling to the finger-ends with passionate worship for all that is bright and gay, shut into the four walls of this room and the bedroom opening out of it, which she shared with her aunt ; and they were to her all that she knew of home ! Infinitely above the swarming tenement houses, with their chairless, fireless, filthy rooms ! Oh yes, indeed ; but how infinitely below the sunset room at Joy Saunders's !

The stern-faced aunt regarded her niece with a dissatisfied and disapproving air. She had always something to disapprove, and was so accustomed to it that she prepared herself even before the occasion offered. She saw occasion now.

“Dressed in your best, I declare ! The next thing you will have to have a silk dress to wear to the store.”

“I hope so,” in serene good nature. “I'd like a green one, sea-foam green, the new shade, you know, with pale pink ribbons to match. That's the style, only I don't like pale things ; I think rose colour would look prettier. I shall not be home to supper.”

“What now? That’s no news though; you are not home to supper half the time. If you choose to go without your supper so often, I don’t know as I care.”

Hester laughed. “Yes; but instead of going without, this time, I am going out to supper. What do you think of that?”

“Hester Mason,” she said in an impressive tone, “what is going on now? Who has invited you, and why?”

“It is little Joy Saunders, whose face is as pretty as a lily. She lives near Lexington Avenue with her mother, and she has invited me to spend the afternoon, and stay to supper, and learn to make a hood; and if you are good, I’ll make one for you. As to why she invited me, I don’t know; but I strongly suspect it is because she is good.”

Hester’s voice had taken a touch of tenderness, despite her effort to be gay. Joy’s invitation had softened her. She tied her poor little lunch into a brown paper and hastened away, leaving her aunt in a maze of doubt as to whether Hester had really gone so far astray as to deceive her with a trumped-up story of this sort, to cover a wild frolic that she was not willing to own.



## CHAPTER XI.

### CROSS PURPOSES.

Now it happened that there was an occupant of the sunset room on that Thursday afternoon for whose presence Joy had not planned. It came about on this wise. Dr. Everett spent many of his leisure moments at young Parks's bedside, and did for him all that care and skill could; yet the young man rallied slowly. He had had a narrower escape than he knew; and shattered nerves, weakened by late hours, and careless habits in many directions, refused to respond rapidly to treatment. It must be confessed, also, that Robert did what he could to retard matters by chafing over this enforced rest, and worrying much about doctor's bills and board bills, and the fear of losing his situation. This last the doctor set his heart at rest upon, by showing him a written promise from the senior partner of the firm to hold the situation open until the patient was pronounced well enough to return to work. "He happens to be a friend of mine," explained the doctor, "and he readily agreed to the arrangement." So Robert added this to the long list of kindnesses received from Dr. Everett, and continued to puzzle his tired brains over the question, how should he ever repay? Meantime, the doctor was planning to get his patient downstairs.

"If I should pick up my young man and land him in the easy-chair in the sunset room some afternoon, what would you say?"

This he asked Mrs. Saunders, and she had responded heartily:

"I should say he was three times welcome, and I'd set about getting him a nice supper." Mrs. Saunders was apt to agree with whatever Dr. Everett proposed.

Given such a cheery permission, the doctor had settled on this particular Thursday for carrying out his designs, and had Robert tucked comfortably among the cushions, when Joy came in to see that everything was ready for her guest. Had he known of the expected guest, this movement on the doctor's part would certainly not have been made. He saw nothing in Robert Parks calculated to be in any sense a help to Hester Mason, and certainly she was the last person who could help him. But Joy Saunders had perversely kept her own counsel as to the time for carrying out the doctor's suggestions. She did not "want him hovering around, listening to her trying to talk with Hester Mason," she told her mother. "Hester would be afraid of him; she was herself, about half the time; and if she were to entertain the girl she must do it in her own fashion; it would be time enough for the doctor to discover the success of his proposition when he came to his six o'clock dinner. He might come in after dinner and experiment, if he would; but for the afternoon, while the stitch for the hood was being learned, she would have none of him." Therefore they worked at cross purposes; and she stopped midway in the room and gazed at Robert Parks in a surprise that was not unmingled with dismay. What was she to do with him while she taught the stitch for the new hood?

"Well!" he said, "I'm not an apparition—real flesh and blood. What have I done that you shouldn't have a word for me?"

"How do you do?" she said, coming gravely towards him and extending her hand. "You have given me a surprise. I did not think you were well enough to be down. Does Dr. Everett know it?"

"Dr. Everett knows most things, I fancy, and plans them.

At least he seems to have the shaping of them to a surprising degree. I have a right to quarrel with you. Why have you deserted me during all these days? I was left to make Rehoboam's acquaintance in the best way I could. Have you been near me since that first morning?"

"Oh yes, quite near you. I sat outside the door for hours while you were sleeping, ready to answer the bell."

"I wish I had known it; I would have awakened at once and rung it. Nobody ever seemed to answer it but that rosy-headed damsel, who omits all her g's. I take it as very cruel in you to desert a fellow in his sore need. Why didn't you come to see me occasionally?"

"Mother came in my place," said Joy quietly; and added, "I am glad to see you so much better, and able to be downstairs. If you will let me move your chair a little, I can screen your face from the glare of the fire."

While she did this, and other little things to make him comfortable, he meantime watching her grave face with a satisfied air, she wondered what she could do with Hester Mason. It would not do to banish him—no other room was so well suited to an invalid; neither did another room in the house promise the privacy that she desired in carrying out her experiment. Why could not Dr. Everett have given her a chance to plan better?

Even while she wondered thus she smiled at her own folly. Why should he have considered it necessary to explain to her that his patient was coming downstairs to-day? Still, he might have thought that they possibly had uses for their sunset room. "It is our only speck of privacy," she told herself in an injured tone—"or it used to be; it seems we have lost even that."

She had little time for thought. The opening door revealed her mother and Hester Mason, brought directly to that room by her own express command. She went forward to meet

and introduce her to Robert Parks. There was really no other way.

Apparently Hester cared for no other way. The presence of a handsome young man in an interesting state of invalidism was by no means an unpleasant feature of the situation. She was not in the least embarrassed, but was bright and sunny; and if loud-voiced still, it sounded enough like a whiff of the outside world for young Parks to relish it well. Before they were seated, or had had time for embarrassment, Joy was summoned to the hall.

"It's that boy from Foster's," explained her mother in a disturbed tone. "He says he won't keep you a minute, and he must see you, and nobody else. He is in the front hall. I suppose you will have to go." And Joy went.

"I have seen you before," commenced Hester, directly the door closed after Joy. "I remember your face very well."

"Possibly. That is encouraging. Where have I had the honour of being looked at by you?"

"Oh, I didn't look at you much." She detected the sarcasm, but was still good-natured and unconcerned. "I remember I thought you looked cross, and I didn't wonder at it; your counter was in such a tumble. I felt half sorry for you, and had a mind to offer to straighten it out. It was when you were rather new at that counter, and Mrs. Eastman had just been trading, or pretending to. I know her. She comes to our store occasionally, and turns things upside down and inside out, and asks a hundred and fifty questions, and doesn't buy a pennyworth."

"Then you are in the mercantile business?"

"Oh yes, like yourself. I own the entire store, of course, and only spend a little time behind the counter for recreation. I suppose you look in at your store occasionally when you are well. You are the senior partner, I believe?"

Robert Parks laughed a merrier laugh than he had in-

dulged in since his accident; the quickness of the girl amused him. She kept a sober face, but her eyes sparkled roguishly.

"You might as well be friendly," she said presently, in a cheery tone; "for you don't look able to walk out of this room, and I am going to stay here all the afternoon. I have come to learn how to make a hood, and to stay to tea. That was what she said; and we can have a great deal pleasanter time if you are good-natured and friendly."

"All right," said Robert, laughing again, and now disarmed. "We'll call it a bargain. What is the hood to be, and why are you making it?"

"It is to be crimson—a real rich, downright crimson. Lovely colour—look if it isn't. Do you know shades, or don't you have to deal with them? As to why I am making it, I hope it is for me to wear sleigh-riding, and skating, and the like. That is one reason why; and another is, because she is a nice little thing, and offered to show me how. Isn't she sweet?"

"Who? Miss Joy? I hardly know her." Robert was growing stiff again. For some reason he did not like to have this girl speak of her with such easy familiarity.

"You know you admire her very much. Why don't you be honest and say so? People who mean to be friendly must always begin by being honest. I like her, and I know her pretty well; though this afternoon is the second time in my life that I ever spoke to her."

"Then why are you here?" Tone and manner expressed undisguised astonishment. Hester laughed gleefully.

"I can't tell you. It is twice as much as I understand myself. I'll tell you what I suspect. It is my opinion that she is good, *very* good; not one of the sham kind, you know—they are plenty—but I mean away to the core, and she really would like to have me good, and you too, I daresay; and therefore she helps to take care of you, and shows me how to make hoods. But I am afraid she will be disappointed

in me. I don't know how it is with you, but there doesn't seem to be enough to me to be real honest good. I could do the make-believe; but some way, as I have to live, the real thing would come too hard."

What an impudent girl she was!—actually putting herself on the same social scale with him, and talking as though Miss Joy's friendship for him, and kindness to her, must be accounted for on the same ground! Yet he could not help liking her. She was so bright, and gay, and original. After all, why wasn't she his equal? he asked himself cynically. He might have a better knowledge of English grammar than she had; and, thanks to his mother, he had a purer pronunciation, and better manners; but those were trifles easily learned, if one had the chance. On the whole, he resolved to have a good time with her during this one afternoon, whatever she was; he had been bored long enough, it was really time that he had a little fun. So he laid aside his half-patronizing manner, and meeting her on common ground, indulged in the gayest sort of chatter, until, when Joy returned—the boy from Foster's having kept her many minutes instead of one—they seemed as well acquainted as though they had known each other for months. The rest of the afternoon, viewed from Joy's standpoint, was a failure. The making of the "sea-foam" progressed finely—Hester proving herself as quick-witted and deft-fingered as Joy had imagined she might be; but the conversation was the lightest kind of froth—the more silent Joy grew, the more merry did the pair of tongues seem to wax. Whether Robert Parks resented Joy's evident disapprobation, or whether he was really fascinated by the gay girl's fun, did not appear on the surface; certain it is that he met all her sallies half-way, and declared that he was growing better every hour.

When Dr. Everett arrived, Joy hardly knew whether she was soothed or irritated by his evident dismay at the state of affairs; but when he chanced to stand near for a moment,

near enough to her to say in low tones, "If I had been aware of your expecting company this afternoon, I should have advised my patient to remain in seclusion one day longer," she decided to be irritated. What right had Dr. Everett to presume that her mother's private sitting-room would be at the service of patients of his whenever he chose to bring them? Why had he not taken the trouble to inquire whether she expected company, or at least whether his plans would be agreeable?

The muffins were excellent, so was Joy's cake; and the oysters, Robert Parks declared, were actually nicer than those his mother cooked.

Notwithstanding which, in the opinion of at least two persons, the supper was a failure. Dr. Everett, invited by Mrs. Saunders to take tea at the round table, exerted himself bravely to be genial and at the same time sensible. He found the task a hard one. Hester Mason, excited by her unusual surroundings, led on by the quick wits of Robert Parks, was in the highest state of jollity, seeming utterly incapable of appreciating a sensible thought. Mrs. Saunders, conscious that matters were going wrong, yet powerless to right them, vibrated uneasily from the select company in the bright room to the larger company in the usual dining-room, and at intervals wished that the doctor hadn't so many "new-fangled notions" that made Joy's cheeks red in attempting to carry out. Directly the supper was concluded, the doctor somewhat peremptorily remanded his patient back to solitude, and went to see that he was made comfortable for the night; but they might as well have allowed him to stay. The opportunities of the afternoon were beyond redemption. If Hester Mason had at any time the slightest intention of being what she called "good," the afternoon's frolic had apparently frittered all thoughts of it away. She was good-natured and grateful; assured Joy that she had had a splendid time, and that she thought her hood was just

gay, and she would never forget what a nice afternoon she had had, and she would make every girl in the crowd nearly die with envy, by telling them all about it, and—and—and this was all! No chance for even a suggestive little parting sentence; for Hester's tongue ran wildly, even up to the very last moment, when she walked away, attended by grave, gray-haired Thomas, who was father to Mrs. Saunders's boy Jim, and half-a-dozen others besides. Exceedingly amused was Hester at the idea of being guarded to the very door of the street car; but she seized the old man's arm and moved off in utmost good-humour, glancing back to give a familiar parting nod to Joy, who stood in the doorway apparently looking after her, but really looking at space.

Presently Joy turned and went back into the bright little room, where her mother was already at work removing traces of the unusual guests, glancing furtively now and again at her daughter's troubled face, and wondering whether silence were better than speech.

The doctor tapped softly, and, hardly waiting for an invitation, entered, and went over to his favourite position—a corner between the open grate and the sofa, where he could lean his elbow on the mantel and look down on Joy.



## CHAPTER XII.

### WEAKNESS AND PHILOSOPHY.

It is true the doctor looked at Joy ; but it was her mother to whom he spoke. "Mrs. Saunders, we need, I think, a little of your wisdom in this matter. Why are such things? Why, for instance, should we three plan as wisely as we could a bit of net in which to catch this gay young fish who has been with us this afternoon, having good and not evil in mind concerning her ; and then one of the plotters be allowed to blunder so egregiously? The last persons who ought to meet socially and influence each other are the young man upstairs and the young girl who has been frolicking with him this evening. They seem to me eminently calculated to do each other harm ; and I would have made considerable effort to keep them unknown to each other. Had I imagined that our plan was to be carried into effect to-day, I would not have done this other thing, you may be sure."

"I'm sure I supposed Joy had told you," said Mrs. Saunders, trying not to speak irritably to the doctor ; trying, also, not to look with reproachful eyes at Joy. It was hard work. She was a trifle vexed with them both.

"Why should I, mother?" Joy's tones were quiet but cold. "How was I to know that it would be a matter of special interest to Dr. Everett that Hester Mason was coming here this afternoon?"

"Of course I had no intention of attaching blame to any but myself." And now the doctor's voice showed to those

well acquainted with him that he was just a trifle hurt. "I do not wish to interfere with any arrangements; I merely remark that I regret the meeting between those two. I have been worrying a little over the friendship between her and young Barrows; but, of the two, I am less afraid of his influence than I am of Robert's—or rather, of her influence over him. I hardly know which I dread the most, his or hers. Both are bad."

Mrs. Saunders rose up from picking shreds of red wool from the carpet, and looked inquiringly: "Do you mean *my* Austin Barrows? Does he go with her? My patience! I'm sorry to hear it. It does seem to me as though Satan was determined to have that boy. It's my opinion she can lend a helping hand to *him*, whenever she wants to." The grimness of Mrs. Saunders's tone, as well as the emphasis on certain words, explained her meaning; she thought that poor Hester Mason was entirely capable of furthering Satan's efforts in many directions. Nothing in the girl's bright, bold face or gay words had taken hold of her heart. "Well," she said, after a thoughtful pause, "the Book says, 'He maketh the wrath of man to praise him.' I suppose he can make the blunderings of man, and of women too, do the same. We must just leave it with Him, and try again."

"The worst feature of it is, that we cannot undo what has been done," the doctor said pointedly. And then this disappointed trio separated. As for Joy, she cried a little when she reached the privacy of her own room, and confessed to herself that the blundering was largely, if not entirely, her fault—if she had not been such a simpleton, and had let Dr. Everett know what her plans were! But she said nothing of this to her mother or to him.

After this Dr. Everett's plans seemed to stand in abeyance for several weeks. It was not that his desires grew less, or that he gave up any of his hopes; but his way seemed hedged in. No opportunity offered for advancing any of his schemes.

In the meantime, he was painfully conscious that Satan was not idle. He met those two, Austin Barrows and Hester Mason, or those two, Austin Barrows and Delia Curtiss, frequently in his comings and goings. Always they seemed to be eagerly and gaily moving in a direction that he would have preferred them not to have chosen, and always they seemed to be sufficient to themselves. They nodded in a satisfied way in answer to his bows; but were either indifferent to his opinion or too low in the social scale to know that his opinion would have been adverse to their pleasures. Meantime, the only satisfaction he derived from Robert Parks's continued weakness was found in the fact that he was thus held aloof from society which could only injure him.

That young man was having a wearisome convalescence. He seemed to advance rapidly enough up to a certain point, and then to make a halt. At times there came to him a discouraging feeling that his strength was broken—that he would never again be able to rush about through the world as he saw others doing; and the thought was a very bitter one. A life of invalidism was one from which he shrank back in horror. He thought of his father; of the miserable days and dreadful nights spent in turning wearily from side to side in search of rest, which was never found. How could the son endure such living as that? It did not lessen the pain of this possible prospect to remember with what frequency and energy his father, after a night of unusual suffering, was wont to repeat those words, "There remaineth a rest to the people of God." Not a drop of comfort was in the thought. He understood the sentence less than he did the foreign phrases that were wont to be often on his scholarly father's tongue in his younger and brighter days. Persistently did this foolish modern Rehoboam turn away from the fountain of strength and comfort to be found where his father rested. In truth, he was growing irritable over any attempt to impress him in this direction. He was grateful

to Dr. Everett, but wished that he would mix less religion with his doses of medicine. He was grateful to Mrs. Saunders for her appetizing little efforts to tempt him to eat, but would be glad if she could cook without so much seasoning from the Bible. He treasured his mother's letters because they were from his mother, but often folded them away with frowns on his face, and wished aloud that mother wouldn't always preach. "A fellow cannot be driven into this thing," he would occasionally tell himself indignantly, as a sort of excuse for turning his thoughts away from it. So he spent his time in chafing over his hard lot, pondering the probable length of his doctor's bill and board bill, wondering how they would ever get paid; wondering how he would live, suppose strength did not come back; shrinking from the thought of going to the quiet country home to live on his mother—muttering to himself that he would rather die than do that, being conscious meantime that this matter of dying was not in his hands, and that, even if it were, he was far from ready for it. No wonder that his strength came slowly. He crept out one day as far as the store, and looked about him; but the activity and energy displayed there seemed to confuse him, made his head ache, sent him home with a curious feeling of having been wronged, or having had his strength taken out of him to add to the life that was all about the store, while he lay a helpless wreck and looked on it from a distance.

Very much alone he felt during these days. Of Joy he saw almost nothing—a glimpse now and then in the sunset room, whither he occasionally took refuge from his weariness; but even these glimpses grew rarer. He was made heartily welcome to this room, and Mrs. Saunders exerted herself earnestly to make the time hang less heavily. She was willing to bestow much petting on him; but she would have none of Joy's efforts in that direction. As for Hester Mason, whether she came any more Robert could not dis-

cover without direct questioning, which he did not choose ; but if she did, he was carefully guarded from the sight of her or the sound of her cheery voice. Joy had experimented in that direction sufficiently. So the weary days wore away.

“A ride would be the best prescription for you, young man.” It was Dr. Everett’s brisk voice addressing him ; and a searching look was bestowed on the languid-faced young fellow, who played with rather than ate his breakfast. “It is a bright winter day ; I think you may drive with me on my rounds.”

Robert’s face brightened visibly. He had been longing for the fresh air and the sense of motion without personal effort, and had wondered not a little that the doctor had not proposed something of the sort. To be sure, the prospect of waiting while the doctor made professional calls was not particularly inviting ; but it was better than sitting cooped up by the window, watching the unending and uninteresting stream of humanity that passed by. The doctor was a rapid driver too ; and on this particular morning exerted himself to be interesting, so that when he suddenly reined in his horses before a handsome house, Robert admitted that he felt better than he had since the accident.

“Then you are ready to make some calls with me. You will have to come in. I don’t care about your sitting outside facing this wind. Put on a dignified air, and you will be taken for a medical student deeply interested in this case.”

There was no opportunity for demur. Dr. Everett was as rapid in his movements as he was decided in his directions ; and despite his utter disrelish for the proceeding, Robert presently found himself following the doctor’s lead.

The house into which they were promptly admitted was an elegant one ; the wide, handsome hall, with its rich furnishings, suggesting unlimited wealth and cultured taste. Dr. Everett laid aside his outer wrappings, motioning to

Robert to do the same, then raced upstairs, still followed slowly by the reluctant "medical student." "You may sit here," he said at last, a faint smile in his gray eyes, and indicating by his hand the direction of the "here."

It was certainly a pleasant enough place in which to sit: a large, handsome room, its appointments indicating that it was an invalid's parlour—the sort of parlour which only wealth can produce, even for an invalid. There was a bright, clear fire burning in the open grate; a sofa was drawn before it, luxuriating in pillows and cushions of various sizes, and a brilliant afghan lay across the foot. There were rare paintings on the walls, bits of statuary on brackets or in niches here and there, and one entire side of the room was lined with massive book-cases, through whose plate-glass doors shone rows and rows of books in costly binding. The wide centre-table was strown with standard magazines and the latest dailies; at the left of the book-case was a massive writing-desk, modelled after the latest pattern, and evidently stocked with every conceivable thing that the student or the professional could need. Ivies wandered about on the lace curtains, and half-blown roses filled several costly vases.

"A fellow could afford to be sick, and lie by, for one entire season at least," Robert murmured, sinking into one of the easy-chairs with which the beautiful room abounded; whereupon he thought of his father, sick, laid by for many seasons, with no such room as this in which to rest himself. One easy-chair, such as that in which he was lounging, might afford the weary frame some minutes of rest. If he were only rich, how quickly he would send one to his father. How much did they cost? he wondered. If he were well again, and should really save all that was possible from his salary, could he hope to buy one before his father's birthday? Then he thought of the unpaid bills, and groaned softly. If only he had saved during the last two years, he might have had enough laid aside for this rainy day! Why should this sick

one have all the delicacies of life about him, and his father, so good a man as he, actually suffer sometimes for things that money could supply? It was unjust, he told himself; and then he gave himself to wondering who was sick here, and what was the trouble.

The doctor had passed into an inner room, from whence presently his voice was heard, speaking cheerily,—

“Well, sir, how do you feel this morning? The sun is very bright, and the air begins to have almost a hint of spring in it. I think you must be better.”

What the patient said could not be heard save in low, feeble murmurs; but the doctor’s answer came full and round,—

“Oh, you mustn’t be discouraged. Had a bad night, eh? Sorry to hear it; but for all that you are really better. You must take my word for it, even though you don’t feel so, and try to help yourself along by cheerfulness; that’s half the battle. We shall soon have you out taking a ride, if the weather keeps reasonable.”

Then came other murmured words, and the doctor’s answer, “Oh, never mind your business. You have faithful helpers, who are doing their best to try to please you. Besides, my friend, haven’t you given the whole matter into the hands of the Lord, and isn’t it to his interest to see that everything is as it should be?”

This bold statement also made Robert sneer. He didn’t believe a word of it. Hadn’t his father given everything into the Lord’s hands years ago, and was anything as it ought to be in his home? Were not all his affairs going to ruin, and was not his mother killing herself with care and anxiety? Nothing was as it should be anywhere, even in this home of luxury, it seemed. This was evidently a poor dependant—a clerk like himself perhaps—struggling with weakness, and feeling, despite the doctor’s words, that everything was awry.

Presently another voice joined the conversation—a lady's. "O doctor, I am so glad to hear you say he is better. I felt sure that he must be, this morning, though he doesn't think so. He is in such a hurry to be up and out. He hasn't patience to get well. That last medicine, doctor, acted just like a charm. Indeed, all your medicines do."

"Easy enough matter to be a doctor," muttered Robert, determined to be out of sorts with everybody. "I'd like that sort of life myself—handsome carriage and horses, fast driving, a lounge in such elegant rooms as these, chatting with grateful people, who shower him with compliments; by-and-by a large bill, promptly paid, and everlasting gratitude heaped on his head into the bargain. I don't see where the sacrifice comes in, I'm sure. The poor country doctors have a hard time of it, I suppose; but when a man gets to the top, as this one is, it is plain sailing, and he can afford to ride around and preach contentment to other people. Some folks have easy times in this world, and some have abominably hard times; and that's the whole of it. And it is money that makes the difference, and not goodness, or religion, or anything of the sort."



## -CHAPTER XIII.

### FETTERED.

WHEN they were spinning over the road again, Robert had some questions to ask.

“Is your patient in there very sick?”

“Has been; he is better now—in a fair way to get out again, if he doesn’t spoil it all by his impatience and fretfulness. He is a cranky sort of patient; thinks he is having the worst time a man ever had in this world, and all that kind of thing. It is queer to me that people don’t do more in the way of comparing their lot with others.”

“Is he poor?”

“Poor? Did his surroundings look like it? Why, he is Mr. Cady, the moneyed partner of your own firm.”

“The mischief he is! What did his grumbling mean, about his business? I thought I heard him worrying over it; and I fancied he might be a poor clerk, accidentally laid aside in the house of his employer, you know, or something of that sort.”

“Not a bit of it. He might possibly be a cheerful man, if that were the case. Oh, he worries about business half the time; lies awake nights to worry, instead of sleeping, as I want him to. He has heavy responsibilities, of course; probably some money depends on his being on hand to manage certain interests; but he is very far removed from poverty, and would be if his firm should shut down tomorrow. Those people are often the ones who waste the most

time in friction over the inevitable. He is a Christian man, too, and that ought to come to his help now; would, if he had been used to letting it help him."

"There are a good many people who do not seem to be helped by that experience as much as they ought, if profession is worth anything," Robert said, and there was an undertone of sarcasm in his voice.

"That is true," the doctor said emphatically; "and it speaks ill for the people who will not allow themselves to be helped, and nothing whatever against the One who always stands ready to help them. If you are going to cavil at religion, young man, you want at least to try to be logical: shallowness in argument shows plainer on that subject than any other."

They had turned into a narrow street, where the houses grew every moment poorer and meaner, and at one of the meanest of these tenement houses the doctor drew rein.

"Here is a patient of mine," he said—"at least, I have constituted myself his physician. Come in; the inside air is not particularly agreeable, probably. Still you ought to be able to endure for five minutes what they live on. I will not be long; the wind is changing, and I must get you home."

What had become of the pleasant side of the medical profession, if it brought people of necessity in contact with such developments of life? Something of this was in Robert's thoughts as he followed his guide into the one ill-smelling, comfortless room, where a sick man tossed among the soiled bedclothes, and a woman, in sadly torn dress and uncombed hair, stood looking hopelessly down at him, and three dirty children alternately quarrelled and cried in the corner.

"Good-morning," said the doctor cordially. "I am Dr. Everett; I told Mrs. Saunders I would call here. You know Mrs. Saunders? Well, I am a friend of hers. What is the trouble here?" By this time his cool, skilled fingers were pressed to the throbbing pulse. Presently he issued

his orders: "Parks, drop the window at your left six inches from the top.—My friend, please take two of these quilts off; one is quite sufficient. No—I wouldn't leave the comfortable, either; he will be more comfortable without it. Could you get me a dish of some sort, with cold water? That tin basin would do, if you were to rinse it. Don't you think you could find a place for the children to play, away from this room? The noise is bad for your husband."

"There is no place for them, sir. Sometimes it seems to me there is no place for them in the world." And the woman lifted a corner of her soiled apron, and wiped away great tears from her anxious eyes.

"Never mind," the doctor said soothingly. "It is God's world, and he made your little children. You may be sure he has a place for them, both in this world and in heaven."

Meantime he was unfastening the gold-buttoned cuffs and laying them aside. Robert—the fastidious young man, who, with an empty purse and an aching head that refused to be put at anything which would fill the purse, hated poverty and care, and coarseness of surrounding, with an ever-growing hatred—watched with a kind of fascinated horror, and saw the fashionable doctor produce and shake out a fine cambric handkerchief, deliberately dip it into the basin of water that had been brought, and proceed to bathe the sick man's burning face. The wife, too, was horrified, though from a different cause.

"Are you putting water on him?" she exclaimed, dire dismay in her voice. "Why, Timmy said there mustn't a drop of water touch him; and he said the window must be kept tight shut, and the fire was to burn day and night."

"And who is Timmy?" the doctor asked, keeping up the cool, steady passes of the cambric handkerchief.

"Why, he is a good friend that has stayed of nights, and took care of my Tom, faithful, and helped us all; what I should have done without him is more than I know. He is

a good nurse, too, Timmy is, and he said we mustn't wash his face, and we mustn't open the window at all."

"Yes," said Dr. Everett, still in his gentlest tone, not the one that he used at the bedside of his wealthy patient, nor yet such an one as he often used to Robert; "he is a good friend, I have no doubt, and we must be grateful to him. But I'll tell you what it is, he isn't a doctor; and we doctors have all sorts of notions, one of them being that people, sick people especially, must have fresh air to breathe."

At this point the sick man murmured something in a weak and feeble tone. The doctor bent over him.

"Water!" he said cheerily. "Of course you can have all the water you want.—Bring us some, please, the coldest you have; it will refresh him."

The poor wife stood aghast, making no motion to obey.

"I don't know what to do," she moaned. "Oh, what will Timmy say? He said it would be death to him to drink water, and he has been calling for it all night long; and I don't dare to give it to him."

The doctor glanced behind him. "Parks, get that cup and fill it with water, won't you?—Is that water in the pail what you drink, my good woman?—Wait a moment, Parks.—How fresh is it? See here; do you know Miss Joy Saunders?"

"That she did," the woman declared, "and she was an angel in human flesh, too."

"Very well, there is a paper of cookies and playthings in my overcoat pocket, which Miss Joy sent to the children; and she sent word that you were to do exactly as I told you. Now my directions are, that you get as fresh a cup of water for your husband as the old well out there will furnish. It is another notion that belongs to doctors, and everybody has to obey doctors, you know."

With ominous shakes of the head, despite the face which had brightened a little at the mention of Joy Saunders's

name, the woman went for water; and before long the sick man, his head supported by the doctor's skilled arm, was taking long draughts of that which had been denied him all through the burning night. Presently he lay back satisfied, with something very like rest stealing over his face.

"Now," said the doctor, "we have him a little more comfortable. Don't put any more clothing on the bed, please; his fever is high enough to keep him warm. I wouldn't make up any more fire, either—just enough to keep it from going out; and mind you leave the window dropped as it is now. Let your husband have a drink of water every ten minutes if he wants it. I will leave you some powders, one of which you are to give him every hour; and I shall hope, when I call to-morrow, to see him decidedly better. If you follow my directions carefully, I feel sure that he will be. Is your friend Timmy Nolan? I thought so. Timmy is a good fellow; I know him well, and like him much. You say to him that Dr. Everett told you to use plenty of water and fresh air, and he will tell you it is all right. Now about these little ones. Your husband needs coolness and quiet. If you will let the children take a ride with me, I will carry them around to the children's play-room at the Home; they will be well taken care of there, will have a nice time, and a good dinner, and a chance to make all the noise they please. I'll return them to you safely to-night, when I pass this way."

Something—whether it was Joy's cookies, or the fact that Timmy Nolan was the doctor's friend, or whether it was the look of relief that was stealing over her husband's face, perhaps all three combined—disarmed the troubled nurse and brought her over entirely to the doctor's side. She made haste to get the two older children ready, expressing her gratitude meantime, but assuring him that she could keep the baby as quiet as a mouse, if the two others were out from under her feet. It transpired, therefore, that Robert

Parks was soon seated again in the doctor's handsome carriage, with two little bundles of rags at his feet. Some dismay and a good deal of annoyance were visible on his face.

"Aren't there people whose business it is to do things of this sort?" he asked, directly they were out of Mrs. Riley's hearing. His delicate nose was slightly lifted, and his whole manner expressed disapprobation.

"Of course there are," the doctor said heartily. "Aren't we doing them as fast as we can?"

"But I mean—you know what I mean, doctor. It certainly doesn't belong to your profession to spend your time in this way."

"In what way, for instance?"

"Why; washing sick men's faces and taking care of ragged children," intense disgust in his voice.

"That depends: if the face needs washing just then, and there seems to be no one else who understands the business better, I take it the duty becomes mine. I have my commission about this very matter directly from headquarters, and could show it to you if you were interested in such things."

But Robert was not disposed to yield the question. He still held to his disdainful air, as he said, "I should suppose that your taste and talents lay in other directions."

"More in the direction of our first stopping-place, eh? Well, I shouldn't agree with you. I read long ago a sentence that has probably had much to do with keeping me from fastidiousness in my profession: 'There is no respect of persons with God.' That is the wording; and when one stops to study it, it is a tremendous thought. If God, from his infinite height, can look down upon all the world, having the same wonderful, patient, persistent love for all mankind, what am I that I should not give my utmost strength for the poorest and meanest of his creatures? The truth is, young

man, all these things seem to me very small matters. When I remember the infinite height above us all that the Lord occupies, and how he stoops to have anything to do with one of us, I am humiliated at the idea of calling any work of mine lowly. There are times when there seem to me no very great heights or depths to humanity."

To all of which Robert Parks had really no answer to make. In his estimation, there were great heights and depths to humanity. He had been accustomed, all his young life, to look upon himself as one belonging to those on the heights.

To be sure he was poor, but he told himself that that was a mere accident, or misfortune of birth and opportunities; but he was refined and cultured—he belonged to a family who could look back on a long line of scholars; there was good blood in his veins, none better. It had required no condescension on the doctor's part, or any one's part, to show kindness to him; as regarded good breeding and refinement, he was on a par with any of them; but to profess that there was no difference between such as he and the family they had just left, for instance, was an offensive doctrine. What a fanatical person this Dr. Everett was! Such ideas might carry him to any sort of wild action. *He* knew something of self-sacrifice. Hadn't he given up all hope of a collegiate education, and accepted a clerkship, for the sake of his mother and sister? To be sure, his conscience immediately asked him what particular help he had been to his mother and sister since making that sacrifice. He certainly had not expected them to support him at college, and he certainly had done little besides support himself. Still, he had always called it a sacrifice, and looked upon it with complacency. But if one must sacrifice personal comfort, personal taste, and even common decency, in order to do for other people, he had no desire to learn the art.

"Also," said Dr. Everett, suddenly breaking in upon his

thoughts, "I took for my motto, when I entered professional life, an old sentence which is like a flaming sword that reaches every way: 'Take heed what you do; let the fear of the Lord be upon you.' It reads something like that; and keeping it in mind makes living an important matter—just as important for me to do my work well for Thomas Riley as for the senior partner of your firm."

"It is a very disagreeable doctrine," Robert Parks said, drawing his foot away from contact with the little Rileys. "I don't see how a man in your position and with your abilities can be fettered by it."

"Why, the difficulty with that reasoning is that the Lord of glory has chosen to fetter himself with it. 'There is no respect of persons with God.' Those are the very words; they are expressive, you see. What is the use in a man thinking about his 'position' or his 'abilities' after that?"

"Oh, well," said Robert, "that is another matter."

"I should think it was. Not much comparison between my position and the Lord's! Now, being bound to remember that the Saviour died—actually died—for Thomas Riley, you see my bathing his face with my clean handkerchief takes very low grade—isn't worthy of being counted or remembered."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### A CRISIS.

"If they had shown a little gratitude," muttered Robert, "it wouldn't have seemed quite so ridiculous; but that absurd woman kept quoting Timmy somebody to you, as though he must certainly know more than you did."

The doctor laughed good-humouredly. "You must recover from special sensitiveness before you take up any work for the world," he said. "Now that didn't disturb me in the least; in fact, I rather liked it. Why should she immediately throw Timmy Nolan overboard, and take the advice of a total stranger? Timmy is a grand fellow—one of the Lord's freemen; who is trying as earnestly as he can to lessen the misery there is in the world. He puts full faith in me, too. I have no fears but that my directions will be followed as soon as Timmy learns that they are mine. He is a character, that Timmy Nolan; I would like to have you study him. He murders the Queen's English fearfully; but he belongs to the royal family, nevertheless, and with his eight shillings a day, and a wife and four children to support, contrives to do more for the cause of Christ around him than any other two men with whom I am acquainted. But, Parks, since you are sensitive on the subject of my wisdom, what do you think of men who quote all sorts of human authorities, as though they were worth infinitely more than the Word of God?"

Robert answered him in positive irritation: "Your

thoughts all come back to one point, whatever subject is touched. I don't know how to talk on such themes."

"Then you mustn't quarrel with the Lord's plans of work until you understand more about them. By the way, I presume he has a plan for you to work by, that you have never so much as looked into. It is a subject entirely worthy of your consideration."

Saying which, Dr. Everett suddenly whirled around the corner, and reined in his horses before his boarding-house, unceremoniously ordering Robert into the house and up to his bed for a rest. Thither the young man presently went, with some new thoughts stirring in his heart; prominent among them being the one that Dr. Everett certainly ordered his life by motives to which he, Robert Parks, gentleman, was a stranger.

For several days thereafter Dr. Everett watched with no little anxiety the result on his patient of the pictures of life he had shown him in one morning ride;—to the grand house belonging to the senior partner of the store where he was employed, to give him a hint of the fact that sickness came to those who were far above him, so far as this world's goods were concerned, and brought unrest with it, as surely as it did to him, the portionless young clerk. What the doctor wanted was, to have his patient see that the unrest lay not in the fact of his dependence and inability to meet the money demands of the day, but in the fact of an unquiet heart, unable to accept God's planning and rest in it. Then he desired him to see another type of sickness equally far removed from his own, so that Thomas Riley, in his ill-kept home with its comfortless surroundings, might say to the young man, "What am I, that life should have served me better than this?"

"I took him out for a tonic," the doctor told Mrs. Saunders; "and I am not sure but it was too strong a one. I'm watching the effect with no little anxiety."

"Why," said matter-of-fact Mrs. Saunders, "he didn't seem to take a speck of cold; and I should think it was too late now to be afraid of the effect of that ride. It was three days ago."

Whereupon the doctor turned smiling eyes on Joy, as he said,—

"It was fever and not cold that I feared."

"Fever!" said Mrs. Saunders; "why, he is as pale as a ghost!"

And both the doctor and Joy laughed. Yet the anxiety for Robert remained. It very soon became apparent, however, that the tonic or something else had done him good. He roused to something like interest in life; made an effort to eat the strengthening food prepared for him, and resolutely turned his thoughts away from fretting anxieties, as much, at least, as he could. He was even betrayed one evening into asking how Thomas Riley prospered.

"Nicely," said the doctor, much satisfaction in his voice. "The fever was quite subdued by the time I reached him the next morning; the window was just as you arranged it; the extra quilts were banished; and he told me, with a smile of gratitude which would have delighted your heart, that he had just as much water all night as he could drink; that Timmy Nolan came to sit by him, and let the mother get a bit of sleep; and that Timmy said, 'If Dochter Iveritt orders a swallow of arsenic ivery five minutes all night, you just take it and be aisy; it will do you good; he knows what he is about ivery time.' I told you Timmy would be loyal. Mrs. Saunders, the most a great many of these people need is a helping hand; they do the best they can for one another. It is the fact that nobody has taught them how, which makes them so helpless and miserable in sickness."

When, a few days afterwards, Robert inquired for the senior partner, Dr. Everett admitted, somewhat reluctantly, that he was at his post again in the store, feeling certain

that a fit of restlessness would follow this item of news. More than that followed. Robert came down to breakfast the next morning with an air of determination such as he had not worn before, and announced his intention of reporting himself for duty.

"I have lain by just as long as I can," he said emphatically. "If I haven't strength enough yet, I must work without strength; they have waited for me a much longer time than they generally keep places; and now that the senior partner is out, they will not wait quietly much longer. No, Mrs. Saunders, I must go to-day. I will be as careful as I can."

And he went; but he was a very pale-faced and weary-looking young man for several weeks thereafter. Dr. Everett watched him, and reflected sadly over the unnatural life of late hours and nervous excitement which he must have led, to have made his body so unwilling to rally from the effects of a comparatively slight accident. "He lays all his trouble to a frightened horse," the doctor said, speaking to Mrs. Saunders; "but the truth is, late hours, late suppers, much smoking, and occasionally wine, are what have sapped the strength from him."

"Do you tell him so?" questioned Mrs. Saunders. And the doctor shook his head smiling. "What use? I must rather contrive to have him tell himself so." Whereupon Mrs. Saunders shook her head: she did not understand such intricate ways of working; she believed in the outspoken truth. But she had another trait somewhat rare in women of her stamp: she believed in Dr. Everett; and where she could not understand, she trusted.

It was toward the close of a busy, wearing day in the great store. Robert Parks had charge of one of the variety counters, and a most nerve-trying charge he found it. Buttons and thread, and silk and tape, and pins and needles, and a whole army of trifles, had a way of mixing themselves

up in inextricable confusion ; at least the confusion seemed to Robert inextricable. He had lost a great deal of the spring out of his life that makes trifles powerless to annoy us. His head ached. The systematic bustle which had been about him all day long, and which used to give him satisfaction, confused and wearied him in an unaccountable manner. It was his evening out, for which he was thankful. He told himself that if he were obliged to endure the strain of three hours more at that counter, he believed it would end in his being taken to an insane asylum ; and then he had added to the same gloomy being, that it might as well end that way perhaps. Either that or the poor-house was before him. Don't be too harsh in your judgment ; it had been a most trying day ; everything had gone wrong. All sorts of difficulties had beset him. The most troublesome customers in the city had seemed to congregate at his counter, and toss over and disarrange a hundred trifles they did not want, asking questions about them the while, and continually calling for more things to add to the confusion. Twice had the cashier disputed his figures, and angrily silenced him when he tried to explain that he was right. The exasperating cash-boys had giggled outright over several of his mistakes ; the chief of his department had sharply reprimanded him for keeping a disorderly counter, only two minutes after the disorderly female who had tumbled it had turned away, to have her place taken by three others, before he had time to right anything. To climax his trials, Fred Briggs, the most disagreeable clerk, in Robert's estimation, that the store contained, had been removed to the stand next his own, and had proved one of his most prominent thorns all day. Poor Robert was beginning to feel that his flesh was full of thorns, and that life was a very sore and burdensome thing.

But by far the heaviest disturbance of the day was hastening on, to find him all unprepared for it. Half an hour before the time for his release, he was summoned to the pri-

vate office. The senior partner was there, himself suffering from recent illness, and feeling the nervous strain of a long day filled with business cares. Robert, listening to the sharp, keen voice and concise sentences, contrasted them with the weak, complaining tones in which he had heard him address Dr. Everett, when he lay in his luxurious chamber. Had he grown strong since then, he wondered, or did work look hard, almost impossible to perform? It was not probable, for in that case he would have remained in his elegant home; no stern necessity sent him out. Robert, you observe, had yet to learn that the unrest of a man's own heart sends him out oftener than does any other motive.

Presently the metallic voice was ready to address him; the cashier with whom he had been talking was dismissed.

"Mr. Parks"—he did not take the trouble to look at Robert while he spoke, but wrote rapidly the while on a sheet of paper that lay before him—"I hear that you have received a counterfeit note to-day. I regret it, on account of your recent illness and long absence; but our rule must be respected. We have been very lenient with you as regards rules already; perhaps that has been a misfortune to you. The counterfeit note will be deducted from your next month's salary. Of course, if you had obeyed the rule of the house, and reported your note immediately to the cashier, instead of making change yourself, it would have been all right; both you and he would have been saved much trouble. But since you choose to ignore rules, you must abide by the consequences."

Robert's pale face had been taking a flush of colour during the delivery of these sentences; but he controlled his voice to answer with some degree of respect, though with marked hauteur:—

"You have been misinformed, sir; I haven't had the honour of even seeing a note to-day, nor a large sum of any description. It has been a ten-penny business at my counter

all day long. I know nothing about the note in question. May I ask why it is charged to me?"

He had the benefit, then, of a stern look from the senior partner's gray eyes. "Of course it has been traced to your counter before being charged to you," he replied, and his voice was more metallic than ever. "I might add that your manner is somewhat unbecoming; such haughtiness on your part, coupled with insinuations of false or, at best, hasty charges, are, to say the least, decidedly out of place. Of course we know in this store what we are talking about before we speak."

"It seems not, sir"—the red colour glowed on Robert's cheeks now—"else you would not charge me with having received a counterfeit note, when I have received no note to-day. Is it to be supposed that I speak falsely in making this statement, or what am I to think?"

The senior partner arose.

"Mr. Parks, I shall have to remind you to remember to whom you are speaking, and to drop that tone and manner at once. As to what you are to suppose, it really makes extremely little difference, so far as I am concerned, what you suppose. I am not in the habit of being called in question by one of my clerks, especially one to whom the firm has shown such recent and unprecedented kindness. Still, despite the peculiar manner in which my words have been received, I will endeavour to explain for your benefit. Young Briggs says that you twice to-day received notes; that he was at leisure at the time, and observed you making change, and thought strangely of it. Moreover, he frankly owns that he assisted you in breaking the strict rules of the store, emboldened, I presume, by your previous example. He united, he says, an account to yours, and a young lady, who had been making purchases at both counters, made payment to you in a note. Now, of course, you remember that such a process is entirely contrary to the manner in which busi-

ness is conducted in this store. You certainly have not forgotten that the cashier of your department is the proper person to make change."

It was utterly impossible for Robert to control his voice further. It rose to a pitch that might easily have been heard outside :—

"And I repeat, Mr. Cady, that I haven't touched a note to-day. I've never had a poorer day for business. If you choose to believe Fred Briggs's lies, you will have to do so. I cannot explain them. I am not a spy on him. I don't know how many bills he has or has not handled to-day. But I know that I have obeyed rules, and that I am telling the truth. And moreover, sir, I am in the habit of being believed ; and I will not have my word groundlessly challenged by any one."



## CHAPTER XV.

### INSULTS.

It was certainly an unusual way for a young clerk to address his gray-haired employer. Perhaps Mr. Cady may be pardoned for growing sterner and colder in manner every moment. Still, his long habits of self-control did not desert him. His voice was quiet and evenly poised, but icy in its coldness and exasperating in its insinuation. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to explain, then, just how this particular note reports from your cash-box along with your made-up account of the day's sales?"

The flush on Robert's face disappeared for a moment, leaving a gray pallor in its place. Matters were certainly very serious, and, as much as an angry man can, he realized it. His voice was quieter, but not a whit less haughty. "I cannot explain it, sir; I have given you a truthful account of the day's sales. My work has been in bits; nearly always exact change given me; I have had almost no occasion to send to the cashier's desk all day; I have had no notes of any amount to report. When I sent up my money there was not a note with it—of that I am positive; and if it appeared at the desk in company with my report, somebody besides me must explain it, for I cannot." Yet he began to realize how the story sounded. He, Robert Parks, was actually in disgrace over a matter of a note. His word doubted evidently. *His* word! He had been in the habit of imagining that no one would ever dare to doubt it. While he stood hesitating

as to what would be best to say next, Mr. Cady saved him further words.

“You can go, Mr. Parks. This matter will be carefully investigated, of course. We are not in the habit of making false or careless charges. I believe we have the reputation of dealing honourably with our employés in every particular. I will frankly admit that your extremely unbecoming words and manner are very much against you. However, notwithstanding your insinuations, we mean to be, as we have always been, strictly just to every one. There is a discrepancy somewhere, and it shall be discovered.”

A bow was the only possible answer which could be made to an address like this; and presently Robert found himself in the street in no very enviable frame of mind, his one desire being to reach home as quickly as possible.

“Home” was a word that he had never applied to his former boarding-place; but it had transpired that, from being a guest tolerated from motives of benevolence, he had slipped into a vacant corner, and become a member of Mrs. Saunders’s family.

It is true he had to mount several flights of stairs and occupy a small room. Even then, the terms were made to match his salary by a process of arithmetic known only to Dr. Everett and Mrs. Saunders; but that small back room, with Joy Saunders to keep a vigilant eye on the chambermaid, was paradise compared with Robert’s former quarters.

But what a sullen-faced young man dropped himself into a chair in the farther corner of the large sitting-room to await the summons to dinner! He was much too weary to think of mounting the stairs, and too angry to care who studied his gloomy face.

In truth, this young man was passing through an under-current of disappointment known only to his own vexed heart. During the weeks in which he had been laid aside to do vigorous thinking, a strong admiration for Dr. Everett

had gotten possession of him. Not that he agreed with him in every particular ; on the contrary, he believed him to be unnecessarily and inconveniently enthusiastic over everything pertaining to religion. It was all very well for Joy Saunders to live that sort of life ; he was willing to admit that it became her. In fact, the more rugged type of Christianity visible in her mother's life was something to admire, especially when it took the form of making a comfortable home for young men like him ; but for a man of Dr. Everett's stamp to be trammelled on every side, to be making constant reference to One as his Master, as if he were not capable of ruling his own life, even in its smallest concerns—in all this Robert Parks did not believe. Yet he admired Dr. Everett, and, in a certain sense, meant to copy him.

Not that he was aware of that latter fact. He was one who would have scorned to copy any character, even Christ's. What he meant to do was to reform his own life—to live on a different plane from what he had done since he left his country home.

He decided to conduct affairs at the store in such a manner as to win enthusiastic commendation from his employers ; indeed, he meant to make himself really necessary to their comfort and success. This was only one of the many lines in which he intended to launch forth, to show the world what a noble life a man could live. Certainly this day had witnessed a miserable downfall to his hopes ! He couldn't help feeling that he was a miserably ill-used man. Not only Fred Briggs and Mr. Cady, but the Lord himself, seemed to have conspired against him ; else why should so many petty trials, crowned by this large one, have been thrust at him on the very day when he began to live on a higher plane ?

Dr. Everett, who was occupying a lounge in another corner of the room, watched with curious interest the limp bundle sunk in the depths of one of the large chairs. It looked so unlike the fresh young man who had gone out in

the morning, confident in his ability to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil.

“Did it go hard with you?” he asked.

And then young Parks became aware for the first time that he was not alone in the room.

“Confoundedly hard!” he said bitterly, without changing his position, for he recognized the voice.

Dr. Everett came to a sitting posture, and then presently drew a chair, and set it near, but not too near, the one in which Robert lounged.

“Tell us about it,” he said, in a soothingly sympathetic tone.

And Robert, who had not meant to do any such thing, began at the beginning and told the whole exasperating story of that exasperating day, increasing in tone and fervour as his anger rose in recalling his torments—a hundred little pricks and stings, finished off by this actual bite, of a serious nature.

Over some of the troubles Dr. Everett laughed, making light of them, as he recognized that they grew into magnitude only because poor Robert's nerves were weak; but as the story proceeded he looked grave, not so much because of the trouble—for, having utmost confidence in the young man's integrity, he saw nothing so very alarming in a mistake—but because of the passionate nature of the story, showing a spirit at war with itself, enraged with circumstances, and very far away from help in God or trust in his care.

How earnestly had this servant of the King longed and prayed for this young man, desiring to have him as a brother in the Lord; and yet how far away he seemed! “Still,” Dr. Everett said within himself, “how can I tell? The Lord leads in strange ways sometimes. I cannot be sure but he sees the need for leading this young man through trials and annoyances up to himself.”

Not for Robert Parks's benefit at all, but rather because of a habit the doctor had of thinking aloud, he at this

moment, in a sort of dreamy undertone, repeated the words, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent."

For the moment he had forgotten the presence of the one who had started this train of thought, and was not prepared for the instant effect which his quotation had. Young Parks came to an erect posture, his head lifted haughtily, a glow of anger on his cheeks, his voice sharp:—

"Doctor, I may as well admit frankly that I don't want any such love as that. A hundred years of it wouldn't do me any good. I can't be driven, and I won't be. Whoever supposes that I am to be 'chastened' into improvement is very much mistaken. I should go to the dogs quicker in that way than in any other in the world, I verily believe.

"I've tried all my life to be a decent sort of fellow; but if I am to be paid for it by being chastened, as you are pleased to call it, I'll soon show everybody that that sort of thing won't do for me. I won't repent of anything. For that matter, I must say I don't know of anything very special to repent about. I don't amount to much, I suppose, but I certainly have never accomplished anything very dreadful. I presume it sounds ridiculously egotistical to you, but I cannot very well help knowing that I am fifty per cent. ahead of most of the fellows in my position; and I've always been ground down by circumstances, so that I never had half a chance. Such reasoning as you have been indulging in stirs all the evil in me. I needn't be afraid of being considered egotistical after all. It takes a Christian to be a genuine egotist. Just look at the professions they make! 'Meekness,' and 'gentleness,' and 'long-suffering,' and Heaven only knows what! Then look at my 'long-suffering' employer, Mr. Cady; he is one of your Christians. I've served him faithfully, and he knows it; yet, at the very first opportunity, what does he do but fly into a passion and accuse me of all sorts of wrong-doing, and end by as good

as calling me a liar! I tell you, sir, I've had enough of religion. I believe it is all a humbug. Some men are good and noble because they choose to be, and some are not. Such religion as Mr. Cady has is calculated, I believe, to make a man meaner than he would naturally have been. I want none of it. And as for the Lord's 'chastening,' whatever that cant phrase may cover, I want none of that either. I won't be driven by anybody into doing a single thing that—"

But before this sentence could be concluded Dr. Everett had risen to his feet, placed himself directly in front of the chair where the angry young man sat, and looking down at him, spoke with firm voice and rapid utterance :—

"Look here, young man, you have gone far enough—quite too far, indeed. You mustn't talk in that sort of a way to me. I'm not the person to stand quietly by and hear a friend insulted, especially when that friend is dearer to me than life. I quoted the Lord's own words to you—his own call after you—and you treated them with scorn and contempt. You must never do anything of the kind again before me. I warn you that I won't bear it. The idea of waxing indignant over the possibility of *your* word not being believed, and at the same time trying to falsify the word of the Lord of heaven and earth !

"*You* nothing to repent of! A young man of average intelligence, who for twenty-one years has deliberately slighted the call of the King to accept a position of honour which could never be wrested from you! You have never even taken the trouble to respond to his invitations, but have simply insulted him by silent indifference. Yet when he who, if he made you at all, certainly has a right to you, body and soul, sees fit to remind you that he is still waiting to be your almighty Friend—because he sees that, by means of a petty trial or two, a noble soul might be awakened to a sense of its need and its false position—you fly into a passion

like a child and dare him to remind you of your folly. You even assure him that you won't repent; as if that could harm any one so much as yourself.

“And you expect me to sit quietly by, listening to talk like that about my King, and never say a word for him! Young man, if you had insulted my mother, I should feel like knocking you down; and my Lord is dearer to me than my mother. If I don't avenge his name by any such method it is because he withholds me; because he counsels forgiveness and endurance and love, when the world says ‘Be revenged.’ But I warn you that you have touched a sore spot in my heart. I will not stay to hear my King insulted.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### LOGIC.

It would be difficult for me to describe what a strange effect all this had on Robert Parks.

Directly Dr. Everett had left the room, he sat erect and looked about him like one dazed. *He* insult a friend of Dr. Everett! If there was one person on the earth to whom this lofty young man felt grateful, it was the doctor. What would he not have borne rather than have said a word to hurt his feelings?

*Were* they hurt? What a strange idea! Did people really feel that way about the Lord? Wait—what was it that Dr. Everett said? Had he actually insulted the *Lord*? His cheek paled at the thought. He had not meant that. He had always prided himself on the respect which he felt for religion. He really did not know what he had meant by his tirade, save that he was angry with Mr. Cady, and wanted to express his feelings in some severe way. He had fallen into the habit, common to many young men, of speaking about God in a free and careless manner, as though he were but another human being. His mother would have been shocked by this habit, as she would by many another. Robert, in thinking the matter over, was rather ashamed of himself; but the thought that lingered was this strange one, of having offended Dr. Everett by insulting his Friend. The doctor had said that this Friend was dearer to him than his mother; and what would not Robert Parks have endured



rather than be guilty of speaking a disrespectful word of Dr. Everett's mother?

Another thought clung—that word which at first he had not noticed: “As many as I *love*—” He felt sick, and sad, and desolate; just at that moment, a reaction having taken place in his feelings, he felt very worthless; it seemed marvellously improbable that the Lord loved him. Yet his long years of early training by a Christian mother had taught him intellectually that such was the case. Really, when he came to think of it, the fact that one so neglected and insulted should continue to love him, was enough to fill his heart with amazement. Another thing: they believed, these Christians, that God looked down on all the minute affairs of men, and so directed and guided matters that in the end the right thing was worked out. He had laughed at this belief during these later years, but he had not quite sneered at it, because he knew that his mother leaned on it for support in all her trials, and he had to admit to himself that somehow she was wonderfully supported in heavy trials. Yet, what an absurd belief! Suppose, for instance, that God knew all about what had transpired at the store that day; interested himself in it. Would he, if the trial had come to one of his servants, arrange so that it should eventually be an aid to him? Preposterous!

Yet, now that he was calmer, and was ashamed of his former passion, he forced himself to look the matter steadily in the face, and ask, Why? Was it because God was not capable of attending to the multitudinous affairs of all created beings? But what sort of a God would that be to create worlds which he was powerless to manage? And, after all, somebody certainly managed greater issues than these. Robert's hoped-for college course had been a false hope; yet he was sufficiently educated to be aware of the fact that there went on, every day, all about him in earth, and air, and sea, and sky, wonders and mysteries that called for

infinitely greater wisdom than it would take to manage the details of any man's business, however complicated those details might be. It was folly to say that God was not equal to the exercise of a very minute providence, if he chose. Then did the difficulty lie in the fact that these matters were of such small consequence as to be beneath him? But it was one evidence of a great mind to be able to stoop from great and important matters, and interest itself in trivialities. Had he not once seen President Lincoln stop in his walk along the street, and help to hunt for a penny that had rolled away from a little girl? Had he not heard the Secretary of the Treasury say to the Secretary of War that there shone out the great mind, which could not only grapple with and conquer grave state problems, but in the very act of discussing these problems could stop to find a penny for a crying child? Robert Parks remembered just how much he had admired the act. Was his brain really so obtuse that he could not see in it an illustration of what God's providential care of the world might be? Was it common sense to speak of this little act as a mark of Mr. Lincoln's superior mind, and then, when the act was multiplied by millions and repeated each moment of time, sneer at it as a thing belittling to one's idea of God?

Robert's lip curled a little over the remembrance that he had himself presented this illogical argument at one time, in debating the question with what he now called a "wooden-headed" young man, who couldn't see the folly of it.

But directly his face darkened in a frown; there was one of the verses learned in his boyhood which he did not like: "All things work together for good *to them that love God.*" "If I were God"—and he said the words almost angrily—"I wouldn't be vindictive toward those who didn't love me. I would use my infinite power to make things work for their good also." He was somewhat shocked at himself for this mental outburst, and, besides, recognized almost immediately

the folly of it. How could the commander of an army so manage matters that a soldier in rebellion would believe that his highest good was being sought?

Only then did there dawn on Robert Parks's mind a suggestion that possibly God was at this moment at work for the highest good of all his subjects, and it was only because those in rebellion thwarted his will that they did not reap the benefit of the promise. There seemed just then to rush over this poor Satan-tempted young man such a sense of the rest that there might be in just lying passive in the heart of an infinitely wise Friend—letting him plan the way, and point it out, step by step, thus for ever removing one from labyrinths of doubt and nerve-trying decisions—that the thought almost brought the tears.

“It cannot be true!”

He did not realize that he had spoken the words aloud until they were answered:—

“I daresay it is, though. Ever so many things are true which seem as though they could not be.”

It was Joy Saunders—another friend of this One of whom Dr. Everett always spoke as though he were a man living just within hearing all the time. Would she have felt personally hurt had she heard the words he spoke but a little while ago? Robert Parks was very fond of talking with Joy. He was in the habit of seizing every opportunity—though, to be sure, there were few.

Mrs. Saunders had relaxed none of her vigilance since he became a member of the family; and while the touch of Joy's fingers was felt all about the house, glimpses of her were rare.

Suppose he should speak aloud again, and hear her view of what was passing in his mind? She had a way of talking about unreal things as though she saw with keener eyes than others.

“I'm moralizing,” he said, trying to speak lightly; “study-

ing up an abstruse religious point. You never gave me credit for being so worthily employed, did you? Miss Joy, are you one of those who think that the Lord keeps guard over people—looks after their affairs, you know, small as well as great, plans for them, and brings things out all right? I don't believe it."

"Don't you?" said Joy quietly.

She had an advantage over this young man in that he couldn't shock her. Robert rather liked to shock people occasionally, but Joy seemed quietly indifferent to his views.

"Possibly he only does it for some people," she said. "There was once a man in trouble, who had brought the trouble on himself by living a very foolish life; but the Lord looked after him, and brought him safely through, and gave him prosperity. That is certainly true; and, of course, what he has done he may choose to do again. In fact, he has promised, you know; only there are conditions. The man of whom I spoke met the conditions. Some people will not."

"What are the conditions?"

"They are hard—harder than anything else that he has given people to do. I mean they are hard for some persons—for *you*, Mr. Parks. So hard that I am often afraid you will keep on refusing them until you have lost all your opportunities. But the returns are very sure. History says that this man 'humbled himself greatly' and 'besought the Lord.' I don't think any other way than that has ever been found."

And then Joy, having delivered her message, slipped quietly away, leaving the haughty spirit to fight out his battle—alone, if he would, with an Infinite Helper, if he would "meet the conditions."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### GLIMPSES OF PROVIDENCE.

It need not be supposed that, although Dr. Everett felt his blood boil with indignation over the follies and blasphemies of this foolish young man, he therefore deserted his cause. On the contrary, he spent two sleepless hours that night in trying to devise ways of helping him out of his present embarrassments. At the end of the two hours' vigil, he gave himself this bit of information :—

“I'm a remarkably consistent individual, it must be confessed. Angry with that poor young scamp because he won't believe truths of which he has no experimental knowledge whatever, and acting meantime like the veriest unbeliever—as though I had to take the world on my shoulders and carry it.”

Whereupon he went to his knees, carrying Robert's case to his King in a simple fashion.

He had barely settled himself again, ready now for sleep, when his night-bell gave a loud clang, right at his bedside.

“Serves you right,” he said, addressing himself and not the bell. “If you had gone directly to sleep, instead of trying to manage things about which you know nothing, you would have had so much preparation for night work.”

However, he applied his mouth and then his ear to the speaking-tube, and distinctly heard this message :—

“You are wanted immediately at Mr. W. B. Cady's ;—a very sick child.”

"Cady's!" repeated the doctor with a start. "Could the way to helping Robert be opening?" Then floated through his mind this promise: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." But he only said to the tube, "I will be down in a very few moments,"—then made swift preparations.

Not much chance for Robert Parks, nor, indeed, thought of him, during the next two hours. The sick child claimed all the doctor's thought and all his skill. His loud breathing and his hoarse and at the same time shrill cough telling the skilled ear, even at the foot of the stairs, how far the disease had progressed, and how rapidly he must work if anything was to be accomplished.

Nearly three hours after his horses had pranced around the carriage drive, they stood together in the library, father and physician. Upstairs in the nursery the mother was still bending over her child; but he was sleeping peacefully enough, his soft, even breathing, and the moisture which made his yellow hair into little rings all about his forehead, testifying that the disease was conquered.

The father wrung his physician's hand.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, his voice still shaken with strong emotion. "The Lord has been very good to us to-night."

"You don't deserve it."

Such was Dr. Everett's outspoken rejoinder; whereat Mr. Cady arched his eyebrows and recovered steadiness to his voice.

"That is undoubtedly true; but is there any reason why it becomes specially true on this occasion?"

"In my opinion, yes. The Lord gave you opportunity to witness for him this very day in showing a young man, who has no experimental knowledge of Christ, that a disciple of his can be patient and forbearing, and have abounding charity; and you didn't do it. On the contrary, you made

him believe that there is no difference between a Christian and a man of the world. That is plain speaking, isn't it?"

"Not at all. On the contrary, I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

The doctor smiled.

"Well," he said, in a lighter tone, "the fact is, I am meddling with what is none of my business; but I am more deeply interested in a young employé of yours than I can perhaps make plain to you. Robert Parks has been through some trying experiences lately. I coaxed him back to health with a great deal of difficulty; in fact, he hasn't much health to boast of yet, and things went hard with him at the store yesterday."

"Upon my word!" said the astonished Mr. Cady. "Why, my dear doctor, what would you have had me do? He made an error in his accounts, growing out of disobedience to rules, and I told him of it, and he was exceedingly impudent; then I dismissed him with the promise that the matter should be investigated. What more could I do?"

"Nothing, perhaps. I have not the least right to dictate in the matter; and it is by a sort of accident that I know anything about it. I'll tell you the impression the whole left on me—that you had not been Christ-like in your treatment of the case. Now, were you?"

"Well as to that," said Mr. Cady, hesitating, his pale face flushing slightly, "I was business-like. I began by merely stating the case to him, calling his attention to the rules of the store. If he hadn't been so impudent, I—" and then he stopped.

"That is, if he hadn't shown himself to be a sinner, you might possibly have shown a more Christ-like spirit towards him? Is that it? It was sinners that Christ came to save, my friend; and this young man is unsaved, and you and I are bound to do what we can for him. Are we doing it?"

"But, doctor, you surely cannot suppose that a business

man can ignore blunders and disobedience in his employés? How long should I be able to continue a business conducted on such principles?"

"Oh, I'm not arguing the question. As I told you, it is none of my business, and I suppose I know very little about it. I'll tell you the impression that I received from Parks; but first let me ask you a question. How long has he been with you?"

"Between two and three years."

"And during that time have you found him fairly reliable—one whose word you could trust?"

"Entirely so, I believe; at least I have never heard any complaints in that direction. He has been heedless at times—most young fellows are—and occasionally he has annoyed us by touchiness; but we consider him trustworthy. What is all this catechism about, doctor?"

"Why, I understood from him, or inferred from what he said, that yesterday you doubted his statements, which it did not seem to me a just man would have done, if heretofore the person had been found worthy of confidence. But then, Robert was excited, and may have misconstrued your words. I really know nothing about the matter, and I beg your pardon for seeming to interfere. I spoke abruptly the thoughts which were in my mind, as I am too apt to do. The simple fact is, Satan is having a hard fight for this particular young man; and it becomes the King's servants to be on the alert, that he gains no advantage through words of theirs. Well, I am glad this night has turned out as it has for you. When I came into the hall, and heard that breathing, I trembled. The Lord is good, as you say. How wonderfully he bears with our mistakes and unfaithfulness, doesn't he? I'll just run up and see how the child is now, and then I'll be off. Good-night!"

The library-door closed after him, and left the rich merchant alone with some plain truths. Very few people



spoke plainly to him ; he was used to being admired and deferred to.

“ How wonderfully He bears with our mistakes and unfaithfulness ! ” This was the thought which repeated itself directly he was left alone. He had many mistakes to regret ; and in the solemn light, following that almost parting with his youngest child, he saw nothing in his life but unfaithfulness.

There was work done in the rich man’s library that night.

If Robert Parks could have been cognizant of, and followed the making of the links in, the chain by which God was drawing him, his faith in a special providence would have been greater.

What had a ten minutes’ stay in Thomas Riley’s home, with his aristocratic nose turned up in disgust over all its surroundings, to do with helping him to-day ? Why, young Thomas Riley, aged nine, was one of the cash-boys in Mr. Cady’s store. It was Dr. Everett who secured him the position and dressed him up neatly—with Mrs. Saunders’s help—that he might be a credit to it. It was Dr. Everett who cured his father ; and Dr. Everett’s name was a household word with all the Rileys. Now it happened that something of this homage lapped over and rested on the head of Robert Parks. Was he not Dr. Everett’s friend, and did he not come with him to visit father ? and did he not hold the cup of water from which that grateful father drank his first cooling draught ? They knew nothing about the aristocratic nose ; and the little Rileys who sat at Robert’s feet in the carriage were too young to understand the contemptuous words, or shrink from the young man’s evident disgust.

All through the morning rumours floated through the store about a counterfeit note, and came down to the ears of the cash-boys in such exaggerated forms that they filled the heart of young Thomas Riley with dismay.

What was done with people who had anything to do with

counterfeit money? He wished that he knew. Were they sent to prison, he wondered? and did they have to stay there always?

He knew something about counterfeit money, but he would never tell it—never in the world!

He wished that he did not know—that he was as ignorant and as light-hearted about it as he was only the day before yesterday morning.

But the rumours increased in multitude, and flew thickly about the little cash-boy's ears.

"They say there was a precious row in the office when the old fellow himself found it out," reported Fred Briggs.

"I don't s'pose he meant anything but a little fun," replied one of the younger clerks.

"Well, I don't know about that; he's been pretty hard up lately—what with being sick, and having to pay for that smashed-up carriage, and all. A fellow in his senses would hardly undertake to joke with old Cady."

This from a third clerk.

Then Fred Briggs again:—

"It is a pretty mean business, and I'm afraid it will go hard with him. I'm as sorry for the fellow as I can be, and I'd tell him so if I dared; but you can't come near enough to speak to him to-day. Did you ever see anybody look so like a thundercloud?"

"He's none too pleasant at any time, with folks whom he doesn't think it worth while to please," said the chief of the hosiery department. "I'm surprised to hear you stand up for him, Briggs. Seems to me he has sneered at you oftener than at any of the others."

"Oh, well," said Briggs good-naturedly, "I don't bear malice, especially when a fellow is in trouble. I've tormented him a good deal, too. I can't help it very well, when people are so dreadfully easy to put out. That is one of Parks's weak points. He loses his temper. They say he

even roared at old Cady like a cataract. Simms says he could hear his voice away in the outer office—he even caught some of his words—and they were not too carefully chosen. I'm afraid he is in an awful mess."

Just at the commencement of this sentence, young Thomas Riley reported at the desk next to where Fred Briggs was standing, with a basket of goods, and a handful of checks to be made up. This required waiting, and while he waited he listened. Suddenly his red and somewhat freckled face grew pale. He touched Fred Briggs's arm, and there was a tremor in his voice:—

"Did you say it was Mr. Parks, sir—the Mr. Parks over by the round counter? Is he the one that's got into trouble?"

"He's the very one, my fine young man—the Mr. Parks who is the very apple of your eye. You had better skurry around, if you know of any way of getting him out of this scrape, or before you know it he'll be off to prison, or some other place—and you'll never set eyes on him again in this world."

For a moment young Thomas stood as if transfixed; then, while the watching clerks burst into laughter at his expense, he sped away.

"For shame, Briggs!" laughed one of the trio. "What do you want to frighten the youngster for?"

"Couldn't help it, he is such a literal genius. He believes now, with all his heart, that the prison-doors are soon to close for ever on his friend!—There is something queer about his fondness for Parks," he added, when the laughter had subsided. "I've watched him hover around, trying to do something for the lofty young man—pick up his notions, you know, when some careless fellow has tumbled them on the floor, and open doors for him, or fly to do his bidding like a little slave. Parks doesn't notice him any more than he would a little dog; still, he's pretty good-natured to him."

Meantime Thomas Riley, as he sped away, carried in his heart and glowing in his face a great resolve. He would do it! Come what might he would certainly do it. Dr. Everett's friend, and his friend, should never come to harm, if he could help it.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FATHER'S FRIEND.

MR. CADY was in his private office, and his cashier was with him. Both gentlemen looked perplexed.

"It is a very extraordinary circumstance to occur in our business," Mr. Cady was saying, and he passed his hand across his forehead in a weary way, and looked as though he did not approve of extraordinary circumstances.

The cashier's pale face flushed. He knew perfectly well that this was a polite way of saying, "Mr. Wilson, I am perfectly astonished at you for allowing such a thing to occur."

"I cannot account for it, sir," he said. "Of course, my attention was called at once to the counterfeit note, and I made immediate note of the fact that it came up in Parks's basket, and so reported it. It did not at once occur to me that perhaps accounts would balance without the bad note. Why should it?"

"True enough, but it is always well to get at one's balance-sheet as soon as possible, after an error has been discovered; and in point of fact, no statement should have been made to the young man until this was done. As it is, the clerks are all aware of a disturbance, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir; he was, unfortunately, so much excited when he came to you that he talked very loud. And besides, such things leak out, one hardly knows how."

This statement made Mr. Cady twist uneasily in his chair.

He had been very much annoyed with his young clerk's manner ; he remembered now that he had been a good deal annoyed by some other matters, and he wondered whether *his* voice had been loud. It was altogether a new phase of business to the successful merchant.

"I regret it exceedingly," he said to the cashier ; "the more so because the young man has been sick and is easily excited. It is quite as great a mystery as before, but it looks as though he might not be to blame. In fact, I may say I have no doubt but that he speaks the exact truth ; but I want this thing searched out. If we have any one in our employ who is slipping counterfeit notes into our hands for the purpose of learning whether we are sharp enough to detect them, it is desirable that we should know who he is."

Mr. Wilson hesitated, feeling in doubt as to whether his thought might not be better left unspoken.

"You have no fears of his having been tempted in that way ?" he said inquiringly. "You see, sir, the note came up with his basket ; I am certain of that, and I don't know how to account for it."

"Well, what now ?"

It was Mr. Cady's voice, and was a somewhat ungracious response to a knock at the door. He was in no mood for interruptions.

The knocking, which was of a timid character, continued, and must receive attention. "Just see who that is, if you please, and say that I am engaged." Thus ordered, Mr. Wilson attended to the door, while his chief sat back in his chair and gave himself up to troubled thought. He was roused by the earnestness of a young voice : "Oh, if you please, couldn't you let me just speak three words to him ? I'll talk awful fast, and there isn't much to say. Only he is father's friend, he is, and held the cup of water that helped him so, and I can't have him go to jail, not if I went myself ; and I didn't mean no harm."

"What are you talking about?" Mr. Wilson said impatiently. "Don't I tell you he is very busy, and cannot be interrupted?"

"I'm talking about Mr. Robert Parks, if you please, father's friend, and the doctor's friend. He didn't do nothing wrong; and I'm going to tell all about it, whatever happens to me."

So much Mr. Cady heard before he arose and went to the door.

"Come in," he said, "and close the door. Now who are you, and what is this all about?"

"I'm Thomas Riley," the mite said, trying to keep his voice from trembling. "I'm a cash-boy; Dr. Everett got me the place; you said I was too little, but you would try me. I'll tell you all about the note, sir. It was my father give it to me, because I never had no paper money in my life before; and I knew this wasn't money, only just to make believe. You see the way it was: three men paid father for a lot of work, on the very same day. He waited weeks and weeks, and then they all took it in their heads to pay him at once; and there were two notes, and they, both of them, looked nice and right; but one of them wasn't good for nothing. Every one of the men said that they did not give it, but father knew they did; and he said he would make him sweat for it, if he knew which one it was. But he had to lose it, and he give it to me to play I had money, and I brought it to the store—bad luck to me for doing that; but I didn't mean no harm. I had it out, looking at it, but I dare not show it to the fellows; father said I must not, because they would think that I wanted to pass bad money. I was looking at it when Mr. Parks—my father's friend—he called my number, sharp-like, and sent me up to the desk, and told me to step spry; and somebody else called me right afterwards; and business was awful brisk for a few minutes; and when I got a chance to look for my money—I had tucked it up my

sleeve to keep it safe—it was gone. I took off my jacket and turned it inside out, but I couldn't find the thing nowhere. When I heard the fuss about the note, I says to myself, 'It went and dropped into one of them baskets that I took up; that's what it did!' and I was scared; but I didn't mean no harm, and I made up my mind to just keep still. But when I found out that it was Mr. Robert, who is my father's friend, that had got into trouble by it, I couldn't do that nohow; and I made up my mind to speak out, if I did have to go to jail. I didn't mean no harm."

It would be impossible to give you an idea of how pitiful, and at the same time how comical, poor Thomas looked as he stood, with red face and eager trembling voice, before the great man, and told his tale. Little they understood, those two men, the tremendous force of courage which it took. Had they seen the rage into which the elder Thomas Riley had worked himself when he first discovered that his hard-earned money was worthless; had they heard his oft-repeated assurance that he would find out yet who gave the worthless rag to him, and the wretch should spend his life in jail; had they been aware of the careful teaching that, in calmer moments, he gave his boy, lest some one should catch him with bad money,—they might have understood something of the terror and resolution of the brave little heart.

As it was, Mr. Cady—who, you will remember, had been up all night, and had had his heart torn with fearful forebodings—had much ado not to laugh outright, and was yet not a little astonished to discover that his eyes were suddenly dim with tears. He turned abruptly away from Thomas; it would hardly do to let his small cash-boy see such an unwonted sight. "I think I understand the matter fully," he said, speaking not unkindly. "You may go to your work. You shall hear from me later in the day."

Thus dismissed, the little cash-boy vanished, his heart almost too heavy to carry baskets of goods and moneys.



Had his employer in the least understood the turmoil in the little fellow's heart, he would have said a word to set it to rest; or had the boy been older, he would not have been frightened anew by the tremor in the great man's voice. As it was, he went about fully expecting to spend the night in the lock-up; longing eagerly to ask somebody what would finally be done with him, and whether he might possibly be allowed to run home and see mother and kiss the baby before he went to jail. Robert Parks, much wondering why he was not summoned to the office for dismissal, tried to interest himself in his work, and at the same time determine what his chances for obtaining employment might be, provided he was dismissed without a character—he could hardly expect one, when he was suspected of dishonesty in word and deed. What if they should demand immediate payment of the note? Dr. Everett would lend him the money; but would he like to ask for it after last night? In all these ways he contrived to weary his brain. It was a wonder that he noticed Thomas Riley; but during the morning that young man managed to find time to shed a few tears, thus making his eyes red, as well as his cheeks and hair. "You in trouble too?" Robert asked, looking at him closely, as he lingered a moment near the desk, a wistful look in his eyes that Robert did not in the least understand. "Here," and he fumbled in his pocket and produced a red-cheeked apple, left from yesterday's lunch; "take this, and run away and munch it, and be happy."

Very much astonished was he when Thomas, instead of reaching forth his hand for the apple, bestowed a mingled look of love and sorrow on the giver, burst into tears, and ran away.

"Something the matter there that an apple won't cure," Robert said to himself with a sigh, and fell to moralizing a little about the amount of sorrow there was in the world. He knew nothing of Thomas; had not the least idea that he had the honour of being considered "father's friend;" and

was utterly unprepared for the heights of self-sacrifice which the boy had that morning climbed. Meantime, Mr. Wilson was dismissed from the chief's presence with only a little more ceremony than had been bestowed on Thomas.

"I will not detain you longer at present, Mr. Wilson. I shall want to consult you later about several items of business; meantime, with regard to this affair, you need give yourself no farther anxiety. I will see that it is settled. It is awkward; but nobody, perhaps, can really be said to be to blame. A careful attendance to our balance-sheets will save any such awkwardness in the future."

Whereupon Mr. Wilson bowed himself out, and tried to shut the door softly. He had an uncomfortable suspicion that he had been told that the blame of the whole matter attached to him. His zeal for his master's interest had suggested undue haste. This was hard, since his hair was gray; and he had been trying for twenty-five years to be faithful. But forgive Mr. Cady; he had a hard task before him. The young man to whom he had spoken so sharply but the evening before must receive an apology. Mr. Cady was not used to making apologies; still, he was a gentleman. He did not so much dislike the idea of setting this young man right; the main difficulty lay in the fact that some public statement ought to be made. Here was the store so full of wild rumours over the trouble that the cash-boys were talking about jails! Moreover, how was the man to forget certain plain words which were spoken to him in the gray dawn of morning by the man who had been the human means of saving the life of his child? Something must be done.

Yet the morning wore away, every added hour of it but increasing the nervousness of both Robert and poor little Thomas: and nothing was done.

At last, just as the early winter day was closing in around them, the great store had a sensation. Message after message

of an unusual import was delivered at the different counters, until, by that mysterious witchcraft which seems to obtain in all stores, it became noised abroad that every clerk in the variety department had been summoned to the private office—Robert Parks among the number—and the call made the blood rush angrily over his face. He told himself that this was a little too much—to be publicly insulted. If Mr. Cady wanted to make an example of him, he should find that he had chosen the wrong person. He, Robert, would give all the rest of his life and every penny he could earn in proving to the world that he had been cruelly wronged by a man who called himself a Christian.

But among all the cash-boys who seemed on this particular afternoon to be swarming over the store, only one received a call to the office. Imagine the redness of Thomas Riley's cheeks and eyes by this time. I do not suppose that his hair really reddened any, and yet it seemed to. When the hushed company was seated, Mr. Cady opened the door of his inner office and entered.

He looked around upon his guests with a curious air; they had never been summoned in this manner before. He could not help wondering what they thought; what they would think, by the time he was through. Robert Parks's eyes were flashing; he was growing more angry every moment.

"Young men," began Mr. Cady, his voice quiet and firm, "I shall not detain you long. I am aware that after a busy day at your posts you are not in the mood for long speeches; but I have a word to say that, in justice to one of your number, should be said in this public manner. I do not know how many of you have heard of the apparent discrepancy which occurred in our cash account yesterday, but judging from reports which have come to me, I should say that the affair must have been very thoroughly discussed. I want now to say that while it was at no time supposed that your fellow-clerk, Robert Parks, had been to blame, except

for a departure from the strict rules of the store, it has transpired that he is absolutely without blame.

"I therefore take pleasure in publicly apologizing to him for any discomfort which may have arisen through this misunderstanding, and expressing my interest in his welfare and earnest desire and belief that his career in the future may be as honourable as it has been thus far in our employ. That you may all have opportunity to shake hands with and congratulate him on this happy termination of what was an annoyance, and what I am told some of you feared was a serious matter, I propose to excuse you from further duties to-day, and wish you all a pleasant evening. I will just say, however, before I forget it, that Thomas Riley may remain a moment after the rest. I have a word in private for him."

Thus concluding what Mr. Cady was fond of remembering, long afterward, as the great speech of his life, he advanced to Robert Parks, and set the fashion of the hour by cordially shaking hands with him.

Poor Thomas Riley! His terrors were added to a hundredfold. Robert Parks was free, was being shaken hands with; no more fears for him. But what was to be done with his miserable little self? As he stood there, quivering in every nerve, the room seemed to be whirling around. His eyes dimmed so that the astonished young men, passing out, looked like black specks dancing before his eyes; and but for the heavy table, with its rows and rows of drawers with great brass handles, to one of which he clung, I think Thomas Riley would have fallen.

"My boy, do you know what a hero is?" It was Mr. Cady's voice that roused him from the dizzy darkness in which his frightened senses were whirling. It would never do to give way to dizziness and not answer Mr. Cady. He struggled with his voice:—

"Ye-yes, sir. Father told me once: 'It is a brave man who fights.'"

“And sometimes it is a brave boy. I want you to run home and tell your father that he has a boy named Thomas, who is a hero. And, Thomas, it isn't a safe business to carry around counterfeit notes. They are apt to make trouble for us when we don't intend it. But I don't want you to lose your pleasure in your make-believe money; so I have decided to give you a good, clean, fresh note. It is yours to do what you like with. It will 'pass' at any store or bank; but don't put it up your sleeve for safe-keeping. And now, my boy, good-night. You will not be needed this evening; you may go home and tell your mother I am pleased with you.”

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PROBLEMS.

THE human heart is a very curious instrument. Over this thought Dr. Everett lingered much in the days which immediately followed the episode at the store. He exulted in the outcome of it all. Mr. Cady had exceeded his hopes. He knew the whole story, having received it from voluble and excited Thomas Riley, helped frequently by his no less excited father ; and he had heard it again in detail from Robert Parks. That young man had been more deeply and tenderly moved than, perhaps, ever in his life before. He had come home with eyes that bore traces of tears ; had sought for Dr. Everett, and frankly assured him that he believed himself to be a fool and a villain. He had taken back with lavish tongue all the severe words spoken but the night before. He had declared that Mr. Cady was a Christian, if there was one on earth. He told how Mr. Cady, when he sought him in the inner office as soon as he could, to express his gratitude, had grasped his hand, and said, "Young man, I don't want you to judge of religion by my life. I am very far from being Christlike ; look to him."

And when he repeated the words in his wonderfully subdued voice, Dr. Everett could not help thinking concerning him, "This young man is not far from the kingdom."

Yet, strange to say, as the days passed, the entire incident seemed to be having a hardening influence. True, Robert Parks did not grow sullen again ; on the contrary, as his

strength increased and his health became firm, he grew gay and flippant to a degree that often sorely tried Mrs. Saunders's patience.

"I don't know what you two see in that fellow to give you any patience with him," she would occasionally remark, in a half-vexed tone. "It seems to me that he grows worthless every hour."

"You two" always meant, to Mrs. Saunders, Joy and Dr. Everett. Not that she intended to couple their names, but that it seemed so natural to speak of their work in this way; for it was very evident that these two were interested in the same people, and were earnestly trying to do the same things. Neither was Mrs. Saunders by any means ready to desert the young man, Robert, and leave a fair field to the enemy. She faithfully did her share and seconded every effort that was made to win him; at the same time it was a relief to speak her mind occasionally, when he was especially exasperating. And even the doctor was obliged to own, as the days went by, that provocation in this direction was increasing.

One thing concerning him added greatly to the doctor's sorrow and Joy's distress. This was the undeniable influence which the girl Hester Mason had over him. He had never dropped the acquaintance commenced in the sunset room on that unfortunate afternoon.

Neither had Joy apparently accomplished anything with the girl, beyond the fact that Hester Mason was proud of being recognized on the street by Joy, and showed her gratitude by favouring Joy's purchases in the store to such a degree that she grew alarmed, lest she was simply a temptation to the girl, and did her shopping elsewhere. Hester came no more to the sunset room.

General invitations to call on her Joy freely gave; but after the disastrous result of her first attempt, she seemed not to have courage for a second special effort, and the doctor was silent on the subject. So it really seemed that the only

outcome of that day had been a new worsted sea-foam which Hester Mason wore and looked pretty in, and a friendship formed which was unfortunate for both parties. Over this one result the doctor mused a good deal. Why had the effort been allowed to produce positive harm? Had he not been single-hearted in his desire to help a soul?

He was studying over these and kindred trying problems, when he rang Miss Mason's door-bell one evening. The evening, by the way, was a summer one, several months having elapsed since the episode at the store. It was not Miss Hester Mason, you understand, but the Sabbath-school teacher, whom he had earnestly tried to rouse to a sense of her duties and responsibilities.

His failure in that direction had, he believed, been almost as marked as in the other. At least, Miss Mason's interest in her work, if real, was fitful to a degree that an earnest worker could not understand. She made many visits which kept her away from home over the Sabbath; and the idea that she should inform her superintendent of intended absence, or secure a suitable substitute for her class, seemed never to have dawned upon her. Then there were Sabbaths when her bodily presence was all that she seemed able to give her class. The eyes and attention of the very gayest of her number were not more easily diverted than were hers. And Dr. Everett would observe her yawning wearily behind her fan during the closing exercises. These disappointing Sabbaths were occasionally relieved by an oasis, when Miss Mason seemed roused and eager—earnest in her class, anxious for results. The superintendent studied her, trying to account for these changing moods, and having little difficulty in doing so as he came to know her better.

She was pre-eminently a woman who was moved by impulse. The last person who had speech with her—given the fact that he was a person of any strength of mind—held her to his views, until the next comer jostled against them.



The fact was, she was struggling with that old problem which continually occupies so many minds—namely, how to serve two masters. The gay world had her in possession more than half her time, during which she dressed and danced, and frequented the theatre and played her social game of cards, and was altogether of the earth, earthy.

Into the midst of this sort of life would come a jostle in the shape of a few minutes' talk with Dr. Everett, during which he would contrive to ask her many questions, of such a character that her conscience would awaken to the difference between his Christian life and hers. Then would occur that oasis. Or she would meet Joy Saunders, and, not by question so much as by the very atmosphere which at all times seemed to surround Joy, be impressed in a similar manner. If only some vigorous mind could have held steady control over Miss Mason, and swayed her to his wishes, what a worker she might have made. Something of this, also, Dr. Everett was thinking while he waited in the parlour for her coming. It coloured the very first words he uttered, after greeting her,—

“How much do you believe in personal magnetism, Miss Mason?”

“Not much, I think; or, yes, I do. Well, I don't know that I understand you. Why?”

This answer was eminently characteristic of Miss Mason, at least when she tried to talk with Dr. Everett. She seemed never sure of her ground—always a trifle fearful lest he should mean something which her mind did not reach.

“I wish you could magnetize your namesake,” he said, coming abruptly to the subject of his thoughts. “I met her just now in bad company for her and for him. Can't we do anything toward saving that girl?”

“Do you mean Hester Mason? I'm sure I don't know what to do. She isn't interested in anything but fun. I can't get

hold of her, doctor ; I don't know how to do things of that sort. I don't believe I ought to be a Sabbath-school teacher, anyhow. I tried to help Hester Mason. That time in the winter when you were so much interested in her, I went to her house to call. She lives in a very disagreeable neighbourhood ; but I braved it. I didn't do any good. She was at home, which her aunt said was a wonder, for she was generally out. I tried to talk with her about being careful of her voice and manner on the street, and to give her a hint or two about dress ; and she didn't take it kindly at all. She very nearly told me it was none of my business. And she did not come to Sunday school again for four weeks. I don't believe she would have come again at all if Joy Saunders had not coaxed her back. I'm sure I almost hoped she wouldn't come back. I don't know what to do with her."

"What are you going to do with her to-morrow?" This was one of Dr. Everett's peculiar questions, which greatly tried Miss Mason. He would not generalize ; he would not talk about past failures ; he took swift strides ahead, aiming at definite points—aiming at something which she had not thought of before. This is why she repeated,—

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, in your class. What is there in the lesson for Hester Mason, for instance, provided she is present?"

"I haven't the least idea. I am always hoping that she will not come, because I don't know what to do with her—nor with any of the rest of them, for that matter ; but she is the worst."

The poor superintendent could not restrain a sigh. How was he to do the Master's work with such helpers as this? However, he struggled with the problem, going over the lesson-story, calling Miss Mason's attention to points which he deemed of the most importance or best suited to her class. She interrupted him once to say that if she knew how to manage the Bible as he did, she was sure she could get some-

thing out of it to help even those girls ; but as it was, she believed he simply discouraged her.

“If you would but form the habit of attending the teachers’ meeting,” he told her, “you would find regular help and stimulus.” This was an old topic often discussed between them. Miss Mason felt her face flushing, admitted she always meant to attend, but the week was so full of engagements she never seemed to get time.

On the whole, the doctor went away feeling that his call had done no good, and that something ought to be done about that class.

Since she could not teach it, why did she not resign, and give him a chance to supply her place ?

## CHAPTER XX.

### SUNDAY LESSONS.

WHAT a morning of beauty it was!—the budding of summer. There were those in the Packard Place Sabbath school who remembered always afterwards the very colour of the sunshine as it reached after the flowers on the desk, and seemed, as they thought it over, to smell again the fragrance of the blossoms.

It was a beautiful Sabbath-school room. I cannot remember whether I have told you about it. It was not that the furnishings were so much richer and grander than they are in many another church—though they were grand enough—but the most exquisite harmony in colour and design prevailed. Certainly, if beautiful surroundings are helpful for the development of religious truth, the teachers in Packard Place Sabbath school should have done a good work. Miss Mason was in her accustomed seat, midway between the organ and the folding doors on the right of the grand central aisle.

Five of her girls were there in all the glory of their very best summer toilets, and really their best was not to be looked down on. In winter, when seal jackets and ostrich plumes and velvet dresses marked the distinctions in costume, these girls looked on hopelessly, making no attempt to compete; but when the delightful season of gossamer robes and delicate lace bonnets came again, it was wonderful what a few dollars and a good deal of skill and taste could accom-

plish. The initiated saw of course at a glance when the lace was cotton and the flowers but an imitation of French workmanship; yet what fine imitations some of them were, and how exceedingly pretty were the Valenciennes laces! Hester Mason had appeared on the scene again this morning for the first time in three weeks. She had sat up until long after midnight making herself a bit of a lace bonnet, trimmed with a real French flower that had been damaged in the packing, and so had been sold to her for a trifle. The damaged portions had been skilfully covered with a knot of lace, and the bonnet was a beauty. The rest of her toilet, from the bright, large-figured muslin—a style which just then chanced to be in vogue—to the pretty kids which encased a pair of plump, well-shaped hands, was in remarkably good taste. Hester had not studied Joy Saunders all the winter to no purpose.

Intimate friends the five girls were—that is, they were on sufficiently intimate terms to exchange nods and smiles and meaning glances; to pass whispers down the seat for each to enjoy; and to join in the laugh that rippled out every now and then despite the faint pretence of subduing it.

When one stopped to think of it, what a bewildering mass of flesh and blood did that schoolroom present before troubled teachers! More than one looked at her class of beautiful creatures, arrived at that mysterious age when one does not know whether to address them as girls or young ladies, and wondered what to do with them.

Next to Miss Mason sat Joy Saunders's girls—bright, gay, beautiful. Their very toilets were bewildering,—summer silks or soft-tinted suitings, ruffled, and tucked, and flounced, and plaited; fancy skirts and cut-away jackets; and jaunty hats trimmed with bright plumes, and mosses, and grasses, and vines; delicate, exquisitely-fitted four and five and six-buttoned kids; and yellow frizzed hair and brown curly hair; and sashes and bows, and dainty fans and perfumed handkerchiefs; and any and every thing else which goes to

make up the irresistible and irrepressible young person in the enchanting, rose-coloured age when they are neither children nor women, but rosebuds waiting for their hour to bloom, and are more exquisite in the budded state than any full-blown rose in the garden.

Joy found herself looking at them timidly, awed by the very *abandon* with which they dashed at this mysterious and solemn thing which we call life and played with it as a toy.

"The Widow of Nain." That was the subject of the lesson. How was she to fit that strange story to suit their moods? The very name "widow" suggested something shadowy to them. The young wives, sitting in their class near at hand, read the words with a shiver, and glanced across the aisles at their husbands with little tender smiles and heart-murmurs of gratitude that the word did not apply to them. They fancied that they somewhat grasped its meaning.

There were mothers in that class-room who thought of their only sons, their special objects of love and pride, and felt throbs of sympathy for that mother who lived in Nain, and who followed the bier on that morning long ago. There was one black-robed woman who, as she read with the school the sentence, "The only son of his mother, and she was a widow," put her arm gently around her only son and thought of that day when she was widowed, and comprehended that there were depths of sorrow which even she had not reached. Nay, there was one who could not read the words, but who, with bowed head and streaming eyes, thought of the graves side by side of husband and only son; and felt in all its bitterness the depths of that widowed mother's sorrow, and longed with all her soul for the time when that wonderful Voice should speak to her dead with his penetrating tone, "I say unto thee, Arise." Joy felt that she could talk with any of these about the lesson; but she could hardly help a sigh as she looked at her girls. What was to be said to them?

But if Joy Saunders was at a loss, what can be said of Miss Mason? She had not studied and prayed over the lesson as Joy had; neither was she in the indifferent stage, when what was said to the girls seemed of little consequence. Her talk with Dr. Everett had had the usual effect. She was roused and unhappy; anxious to do some work, and conscious that she did not know how. The "widow" suggested to these girls of hers only a giggle. There were of necessity so many scenes to pass through preceding that name, so many romantic and interesting experiences; and they were so far removed from the reality of any of it that positively it was simply funny to them. They looked over at the boys in Mr. Ludlow's class, and exchanged bows and smiles, and whispered to one another. Suppose you could have heard one of the whispers, what do you think it would perhaps have been? Why, this,—

"Tell Nellie to remember that she may be Fred Peters's widow one of these days; he looks rather pale and solemn this morning." This remarkable sentence was passed down the class until it reached the said Nellie. And she blushed indeed; but her heart was not sufficiently touched to keep her from the giddy little laugh that followed.

It was well for their teacher that she did not hear this; she heard and saw enough. And yet you are not to suppose that these five girls were heartless; they had quick and ready sympathy for sorrow. Had they been of that procession as it wound slowly and sadly out of the gates of Nain, without doubt their eyes would have been red with weeping. Indeed there were some who, if the story had been about a dead mother, would have looked grave for a minute and have thought of their mothers at home. But this sorrow came so long ago, and the city where it occurred was so dim and unreal a place to them, that they fluttered their fans and their ribbons, and said their gay little undertone sentences to one another, and cared no more for the widow of Nain and

her great sorrow and her great joy than did the bright-winged butterfly who hovered about the flowers on the desk. Miss Mason struggled hard; she had tried to shape in her own mind some of the hints which Dr. Everett had given her. She attempted to locate the place where the scene was laid, and so make it real to them. To this end she asked a question; and she asked it of Hester Mason.

“Where is the city of Nain, Hester?”

Now, as you may readily suppose, Hester was not versed in Bible geography, and of course she had not studied this lesson. She flushed a little, and it is possible might have been embarrassed, had not the mischievous eyes of two of the girls said plainly that they knew no more about Nain than she did.

“I don’t know,” she said at last, speaking lightly, and with that upward inflection which almost adds, “and I don’t care.”

Fanny Tarrant was the pretty-faced, good-natured special dunce of the class; she did not know enough to know that she knew nothing. But because she was good-natured and pitied the evident distress of the teacher, she essayed to help.

“Miss Mason, isn’t it somewhere in Europe?”

This gave the girls excessive amusement. “O Fanny,” one said, “are you sure it isn’t in America?”

“Perhaps it is in Florida,” suggested another.

“Or right here in this city,” said Hester Mason, with a burst of laughter. “Most things are.”

Whereupon they all laughed good-naturedly, Fanny with the rest, none of them quite knowing at what.

Miss Mason having been posted the evening before as to the geographical position of Nain, hastened to explain that for which the girls cared nothing; then she tried to draw their attention elsewhere. It was easily drawn elsewhere, but not by her.

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her,



and said unto her, Weep not." Thus read one of the girls at her teacher's request, and then, with not even a comma between, "Girls, only look at Fred Peters's mustache. I do believe he waxes it."

"He ought to braid it," said Hester Mason, "and tie it with a blue ribbon to match his eyes;" and then she read, "And he came and touched the bier: and—"

And Miss Mason had reached the utmost limit of her patience.

"Stop!" she said. "Wait. What are you thinking of? Is it possible that you have no sense of reverence? About whom are you reading?"

But Hester had not meant to be irreverent; she had not even noticed of whom she was reading. Something unusual in Miss Mason's voice held her quiet; and the teacher tried in all earnestness to impress the giddy group with the fact that they were reading about death—the one experience which was absolutely sure, sooner or later, to come to each one of them. For the space of five minutes they felt abashed; yet even then the strongest feeling which most of them had was that they had been rude to Miss Mason, not to the Lord Jesus. No more unreal presence than his did this world contain for them. Their hearts refused to take in his existence. One of the points in the lesson which Dr. Everett had made had been: Christ a present help in trouble. He thought of the Curtiss girl, and of the sad fact that her mother, who had never rallied from the loss of the beautiful baby, was making swift preparations to go to him: trouble was hastening on for the Curtiss girl. Could not Miss Mason help her with that lesson? But it transpired that she was not there to be helped; and Miss Mason, ignoring that fact, tried to impress the thought on these girls who had, most of them, very little comprehension of any trouble associated with death. "You know, Fanny," she said, trying to be personal, "that the time will surely come when either you will stand by Harry's

coffin or he by yours. It is not as though you could think that perhaps this would never happen ; it is something that must come."

Fanny looked serious for two minutes, and tried to realize the truth of this. Harry was her handsome young brother, of whom she was proud ; and Miss Mason believed her to be more impressible than the rest of the girls. But on the other side of the room sat Harry, at this moment aglow with life and health, and keeping his teacher's wits on the alert to hold him in check. Fanny glanced over at him. How was it possible to associate death with him ? She turned her gaze from him to herself, and the subject of her thoughts was presently made apparent by a half-audible whisper,—

"Don't these gloves match my dress nicely ? I had a perfectly awful time matching them."

And the half-hour was gone. The warning bell sounded its note—five minutes for closing the lesson. What was Miss Mason to do with them ? She realized that the lesson had hardly been begun. The air had been full of new gloves and fans and laces, and it had all been too much for her. Her honest desire to be helpful had come to naught. She looked from one to another of her girls as they fluttered and whispered, and passed a paper of caramels to the boys in the class across the aisle. She looked down at her Lesson Paper and longed for the next bell. The Golden Text stared at her—

"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her."

Just then Hester Mason laughed louder than she had before, and Fanny Tarrant joined. Then did Miss Mason speak aloud the thought that came to her,—

"O girls, when the Lord sees you what will he say ?"

Then she turned away, and the bell rang again, and the hour was over. Do you want to know what Miss Mason

did? She went home and shut herself in her room and cried. Poor soul! she was utterly discouraged. She had never before felt so strong a desire to be a real teacher, and she had never before so utterly failed.

As for the girls, they fluttered out with the crowd. They were none of them from Christian homes; they all belonged to the stamp of family that left it entirely optional with themselves whether they went to church, or whether they did anything else that might chance to please their fancy.

"Going to church?" said one.

"Oh, dear, no! It's too pleasant weather for church; besides, I'm tired of sermons. Let's go to the Park. It'll be lovely there to-day. Come on, Hester; will you go?"

"I don't know," said Hester irresolutely. "No; I don't believe I will. I don't feel like the Park. I guess I'm going home."

They exclaimed and urged, but she broke away from them and went on alone. At the very next corner stood a trap which Satan had carefully prepared for her unwary feet. Robert Parks, who for the past few weeks had been taking rapid downward strides, had settled on this Sabbath morning as the time to break away from old superstitions and restraints, and join an excursion party to a neighbouring city. Moreover, he had alternately coaxed and laughed at Austin Barrows until he had prevailed on him to overcome what Robert called "old-fashioned notions," and keep him company.

The determination to make Hester Mason one of the party was an after-thought that pleased Robert greatly, and he waited at the street corner to carry it out.

It did not occur to poor Hester to take umbrage at being joined on the street by a young gentleman who had evidently been lying in wait for her. You are to remember that she had not been guarded all her life by a wise and loving mother. She had never so much as heard that the

daughters from sheltered homes allowed none of these things ; so she greeted Robert Parks with a smile.

"I wonder what you will say to keeping me company to-day?" he asked her, with the gay air of one on very familiar terms. "I have one of the nicest plans arranged that has come into my head in a long time. This is the day of days for a garden concert. Isn't the air fine? Sorry I couldn't have given you longer notice, little girl ; but pleasures gotten up in a hurry always turn out the best. Did you see me? I was watching to see if you were going to join that set. I hadn't planned just how to get hold of you in that case, for there really isn't much time to spare."

He was taking for granted her acceptance of his invitation, if invitation it could be called ; but she interrupted him to ask,—

"Where do you want to go?"

"Why, to the garden concert. You have heard of it, surely. A large party is going. When I saw what a lovely morning it was, I knew that the garden was just the place for you and me to spend the day."

"On the excursion train! Robert Parks, I wouldn't do it."

Never was a person more astonished than was Robert Parks at this reply. He knew that remonstrances against such excursions were common enough, but he had not expected one from such a source.

"Why not?" he said, trying to conceal his surprise. "A sacred concert is a good enough place to go, I'm sure."

"Yes ; but on a Sunday train!"

"Bother the Sunday train!" he said impatiently ; scruples from Hester Mason were irritating. "I don't ask it to run on Sunday, and it will go anyhow, whether I ride on it or not. I might as well have the convenience of it. It is only an hour's ride. Time enough to go to church all day after that, if you want to. What's the matter, Hester? I didn't know you were squeamish."

Hester laughed a little.

"I'm not squeamish," she said; "at least, not generally. I'll own that I feel queer to-day. We had the oddest kind of a time in Sunday school. I guess Miss Mason feels queer too. I can't get something that she said out of my mind. It didn't fit that Sunday train a bit, and I do wish you wouldn't go."

"Miss Mason had better preach to herself," declared Robert, in great disgust. "She went down on the Sunday train the day Governor Burke was buried."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### UNSEEN FORCES.

THERE was a moment of disturbed silence. Robert had not before realized that it would make any special difference to him what Hester thought. If she was getting "squeamish," he felt that it would be very inconvenient.

At last she came to the rescue with a frank little laugh. "I know I don't act like myself, Robert, not a bit; and I don't feel at all like myself. I don't know what is the matter with me. Miss Mason said the queerest thing this morning, just before Sunday school was over. I never had anything make me feel so in my life; and I'm sure I don't know why it does. I'm not apt to pay much attention to what she says. Between you and me, I don't think there is enough of her to keep anybody's attention. She isn't a bit like Joy Saunders, nor like that awfully-in-earnest Dr. Everett that you admire so much. Oh my! I guess she isn't. But this morning she didn't feel like herself either, I guess; anyhow, she said a queer thing. We girls hadn't been behaving very well. Oh, we hadn't done anything so very bad, you know; but we whispered some, and two or three funny things happened, and we laughed. We worried her, I guess. At last she said—and she looked right at me when she said it—'O girls, when the Lord sees you what will he say?' Wasn't that strange? I can't help thinking of it. All the time Dr. Everett was closing I kept saying the words over. Of course, you know He will see us some

time, though I don't believe I ever thought of it before. I'll tell you what it is, Rob: if I were you, I would rather meet Him somewhere else than on the cars."

"Pooh," said Robert. As a rule, he was more polite to ladies; but this feature of Hester's character annoyed him exceedingly, the more so because he had a certain startled feeling that what she said was true. For some reason unknown to himself that old truth struck him strangely. They walked on, Hester talking eagerly, and growing more and more earnest in her determination to carry her point.

"I don't care," she said, in the free and decidedly unconventional way she had of talking with gentlemen; "I believe it, and so do you, that one of these days I shall have to meet Him and answer his questions. I don't see why I shouldn't be careful when I think of it. I never did before, and perhaps I never shall again."

"Oh, well," Robert said coldly, "I suppose you will have to do as you will; but I must say I am sorry you chose this particular day on which to try your experiment. I had looked forward to giving you a day of pleasure."

"Then give it me," she answered eagerly. "I don't want you to go on that train a bit. I can't, to save my life, tell why, and I daresay I am acting like a fool; but I think you ought to humour me once in a while, because you know I don't indulge in this line very often."

"What do you want me to do?" Robert asked, and there was indecision in his tones. This curious Hester was growing interesting; he had never heard her coax before; she was generally entirely and gayly willing to carry out his plans.

Still, half the anticipated pleasure of the day had been in thinking what Hester would say to the sights he meant to show her. Besides, what would young Barrows say to him for deserting him in this fashion, when he had exhausted half an hour but the evening before in overcoming that young gentleman's scruples to the Sunday excursion?

"I promised Barrows I would meet him at the train," he said; but Hester detected the tone of irresolution in his voice.

"Send him word that you can't come," she said, her eyes bright and expectant. "I'm sure I am of more importance than Austin Barrows, and I never asked you to do anything for me before."

Whether Robert would have settled the matter as he did, could he have had a longer time for decision, will not be known; but at that moment there came, with long strides down the street, one who he knew was going on the excursion. Here was a chance to send a message, if he had really given it up.

"Hallo, Fred!" he called; "going to the train? I guess I want you to take a line to Barrows for me; you'll find him there, I presume."

"Hurry up, then; make your story short; it is ten minutes of starting-time. I thought you were going to the train yourself."

"Changed my mind," said Robert shortly, tearing a leaf from his note-book, and writing rapidly, while the young man in waiting stared curiously at Hester.

"There!" said Robert Parks, when he had delivered the note and the messenger had departed. "I've done a very strange thing for your benefit; I really hope you appreciate it. What are we supposed to do next?"

His tone tried to be gay, but in reality it was almost cross; he was unused to having his plans turned aside in this fashion. It was a surprise to him that he had submitted to it.

"Now," said Hester, with infinite satisfaction, "I want you to take me to church."

"Upon my word," Robert said, almost pausing in the street to look at her, "I shall have to get acquainted with you over again. You are blossoming out in a new character



altogether. Is there any special church which we are supposed to honour with our presence this morning?"

"Yes," Hester said with a satisfied giggle.

There was a stranger to preach at the Olin Street Church. He had been in the store with Mr. Hudson the night before, and he was really handsome; she wanted to hear how he would preach: besides, she was tired of Dr. Miller and all the folks at the Packard Place Church; she wanted some new ones to look at. It was actually just such reasons as these that took these two to the Olin Street Church that Sabbath morning; that is, these were the only moving forces visible to them.

"This night thy soul shall be required of thee." These were the words which the young minister announced as his text. Hester Mason hardly heard them. She admired the perfect-fitting clerical dress, and the fine height and well-developed form of the preacher, and whispered to Robert that he had a really splendid voice. But Robert scarcely heard her. The words of the text had thrilled through him like an electric shock. He had heard them before; was indeed tolerably familiar with the story from which they were taken. They had never made any marked impression on his mind before. Why should they now? There was certainly a startling connection between the thought which they suggested and the one which had roused Hester. He glanced at the girl to see if she noticed it; but Hester, apparently, had entirely satisfied her conscience by coming to church and prevailing on him to do the same. Once there, she had no idea of listening. She was at that moment giving attention to a new style of collar worn by a fashionable lady just in front of her, trying to decide whether it would be possible to imitate it, with the aid of some old lace in a certain box at the store that she could get for a trifle. Robert Parks, seeing the indifference on her face, was annoyed at the feeling which possessed him, and tried hard to throw it off. He

twirled his cane and gazed about him, he even rustled the leaves of the hymn-book, which on ordinary occasions he would have thought rude. It was all to no purpose; he could not get away from the solemn words which seemed staring at him and obliging him to listen: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

"Young man," said the preacher, bending over the open Bible and speaking in a singularly low and impressive tone, "what if this word from the Lord should apply to you?"

Robert gave a sudden nervous start, which seemed to him so marked that the blood rushed to his face; and he looked about him in dismay to see whether he had been noticed. To his excited imagination it seemed as though the preacher was looking right at him, speaking to him directly.

Well, how was he to answer the question? What if it should be his case? It was possible, certainly. Suppose it were certain? What then? It was of no use for the young man to change his position and declare that he would not listen to a word the speaker was saying; that he was nothing but a young fanatic. He could no more hush the questioning voice of the Holy Spirit striving with his heart than he could will to have that heart suddenly cease its beating.

You are to remember that he was a well-taught young man; that from his youth up he had been familiar with the commonly accepted doctrines of Christianity. He knew perfectly well that he had been fighting against this whole question for weeks; he had heard the repeated calls to his conscience; he knew that not only his mother, but Dr. Everett and Joy Saunders, and perhaps others, were making him a special subject of prayer. Sometimes the thought of this had irritated him. He had never resented his mother's prayers. It had seemed eminently fitting that she should weep and pray for her son; but sometimes he felt as though he should like to ask the rest of them to be kind enough to let him alone. At the same time he was aware that he ought

to be ashamed of this feeling, and in a sense was ashamed of it. There had been times during the last few months when he had been on the very verge of settling this whole question, when he had said to himself, "I believe I will take a new start and live a Christian life. I really mean to do it some time; why not now, as well as any?" Yet perhaps in ten minutes his entire mood would change, and he would feel himself farther than ever from the decision. But this Sabbath morning he was passing through a new experience. There came to him a feeling, searching and solemn, that it must be now or never with him; that the time had come when the long-waiting, long-insulted Spirit demanded a decision; and that if he made it a negative one, so far as he was concerned, his soul might as well go to the judgment that night as at any other time, for the question would be settled. He could not get away from the belief that he had trifled with this matter just as long as it was safe.

In one respect Robert Parks had the advantage of some young men. He had toyed with scepticism, it is true,—he had told himself angrily, many a time, that he did not believe in this religion at all; but having been fairly well educated, and having a really clear, logical mind, he had never even for an hour convinced himself that he believed such statements as these. In reality, he knew, as well as he knew he was alive, that he, for instance, was a sinner, and that Christ was a Saviour. He knew that nothing but his own will lay between him and safety. Certainly it was a very unsafe thing for a man to dally with such light as this.

He did not hear very much of the sermon; a stray sentence now and then, delivered with all the earnestness of an earnest soul intent on his Master's business, God used to deepen this soul's sense of responsibility. But for most of the time the battle was fought between his will and God's—that old battle which must always sooner or later be fought before Satan loses his hold on the struggling soul.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN UNEXPECTED PASSENGER.

BUT he settled the question that day. It was done quietly enough to all outward seeming, though he sat in a conspicuous seat, surrounded on all sides by worshippers. They saw nothing beyond the ordinary taking place. Yet there occurred at that time and place one of those miraculous experiences which have been going on for thousands of years, although we are wont to say that the age of miracles is past. During that brief hour in which the minister preached and the choir sang, and the worshippers listened or joined, the momentous question as to where Robert Parks meant to spend his eternity was settled.

Yet there was no sound of trumpet, or roll of drum, or shout of triumph here on earth. There were those beside him who were complacent over their summer toilets, and thought of nothing else, during the ten minutes in which the decision was made; there were those in front of him who continued the mental operations of buying and selling, and counting gains; there were those near him who were asleep! and there was joy in heaven among the angels.

As for Hester Mason, she was gratified beyond measure with her success in getting young Parks to give up his Sunday excursion and go with her to church. She felt virtuous over it; she believed that she was keeping the Sabbath better than she had in a long time. By no means so well trained as Robert, she even fancied that she had made a

slight advance step towards being ready for that dread moment of which Miss Mason had spoken, though she hoped and believed that it was far off. She made sundry resolutions as to her future living, and then resolved not to spoil the brightness of the day by thinking about such solemn things any longer, and gave her attention to Nettie Goldwyn's new bonnet. That young lady sat just in front of her, and afforded her active mind a fruitful theme. She decided that the bonnet was unbecoming, and that if she had as much money as the Goldwyns she would see whether she would come to church in such a fright as that.

So she who had been one of the instruments used in setting at work forces that would re-echo through all eternity, thought no more about her own soul than she would have done had she been one of the lovely colours in the rainbow-tinted window, to which she next turned her attention.

You will notice that it was not simply blind chance which was at work that day. Else why did not chance do as much for her as it did for the young man at her side?

Certainly, if Dr. Everett could have had the ordering of events, the very last person whom he would have chosen as likely to have the smallest influence for good on the young man for whom he was praying would have been this girl whom God used. He still dreaded her influence more than that of any other person. So much for man's wisdom.

Meantime Austin Barrows on the Sunday excursion train waited for his travelling companion, and received instead a note which read thus :—

“BARROWS, my boy,—I have been waylaid and captured. The little girl I decided to bring with me is determined to smuggle me off in another direction. She has a fit of the blues; has been to Sunday school, and the lesson was particularly lugubrious, or else the teacher was. Anyway, she has been thrown off the track, and has pulled me with her.

I am the more willing to change my plans, because I know the change would please my mother. She is worth pleasing, and I don't do it very often nowadays. Sorry I coaxed you to go, old fellow ; I felt more like it last night than I do this morning ; but I presume you will have a grand time, and I'll stay at home and be good for both of us.                   PARKS."

Austin Barrows read this hurriedly scribbled note twice through, then twisted it with restless thumb and finger into every shape which he could contrive, whistling, meanwhile, in that absent-minded way which would have told a close listener that he was not thinking of the tune he whistled, nor of anything else connected with his present surroundings.

In truth, he was thinking of that note. The first feeling was one of indignation. Sunday excursions were not in his line ; he had never been to but one before, and Robert Parks had been the moving force at that time as well as now. He would not have thought of going but for the pressure which had been brought to bear upon him ; and now to be deserted by the very one who had insisted on his going, merely because the girl whom he had invited chose to show her influence over him, was, he thought, a strange way of being treated.

Little he cared for any young lady's blues. It would have made no difference had he known it was Hester Mason. She was a gay, pleasant girl, and he liked well enough to chat with her ; but he would not have given up an excursion on her account, nor have been influenced in any way by her fancies. He felt himself ill used ; but this was not, after all, what left the shade on his face. There was one sentence in the scrawl which he was still twisting that clung to him—"It would please my mother, and she is worth pleasing."

It so happened that Austin Barrows had a mother whom

this day's work would not please ; none knew it better than himself. He knew it would hurt, to her heart's core. So sensible had he been of this fact that it was what had made him hesitate longest under Parks's urging. He had said nothing about her, but he had sturdily borne up against the pressure as long as he felt able ; and here was Parks flaunting the desire to please his mother in his face. He believed in his heart that his mother was better worth pleasing than twenty mothers such as Robert Parks boasted.

He was at this moment on the way to the very town where she lived ; and although he had not seen her for two months, and really longed for a glimpse of her, he had resolved not to go around to the little house to-day, for fear of giving her pain. He meant to return on the evening train, and he pleased himself with the thought that he could have a day of pleasure and rest, and not burden her conscience with the sin of it.

Mind you, Satan did not let him know that he was ashamed to meet his mother ; he was merely tender-hearted, and did not want to grieve her. He told himself also that he had not time to go around to mother's. It was a long walk, and he had promised Parks to go to the garden concert, and then to drop in at the Cathedral and hear the great organ, and then to call on a friend of his ;—a nice quiet Sabbath it was to be, after all. Where was the harm ? He whistled and thought about it.

But Parks had deserted him ; what was he to do with the day now, after the famous garden concert—the ostensible reason for getting up the excursion—was over ?

“I'll get in an hour for mother, after all,” he muttered. “She will be so glad to see me that she will forget how I got there, perhaps.” Still he did not believe that, and fell to wondering how he should answer her questions, how she would look, and if he would give her more pain than pleasure.

In no pleasant mood, twisting restlessly in his seat, he said to himself,—

“What’s the reason that a fellow can never have any fun, I wonder, without something coming in to spoil it? I believe I am a fool. Why can’t I just go on with my day as I had planned it? I’m not bound to be miserable just because Parks has made a fool of me. He needn’t lug in his mother; that’s just an excuse. Precious little he thinks of her, by the way he goes on. I’m sure I write to mother every two weeks; and I spare every copper that I can for her. He owned up to me once that he never sent any money home. He needn’t talk. It isn’t often I take any pleasure, I’m sure. I don’t see any harm in taking a little holiday like this, when a fellow has to work as hard as I do. People who have plenty of money, and all the time they want, can afford to be squeamish. Mother isn’t a man, and she can’t know how a fellow feels tied up all the time. She just sits there in that chair; what does she know about the world? I need the change and rest.”

One would have thought it would have puzzled the irate young man to know with whom he was arguing. There certainly seemed to be a conflicting party whose views irritated him.

He took the morning paper from his pocket and tried to read it; that would seem more respectable than whistling.

In the course of time, he began to be aware that there was a good deal of running through the car, by conductor and brakeman, and presently by some of the passengers. Something somewhere must be wrong; yet the train was whizzing along at its usual rate of speed. He lowered his paper and took a view of his travelling companions. It was a curious thing that he had taken a seat in a car where every face was unknown to him. But Austin Barrows was by no means well acquainted in the city where he was employed, and the young people in the next car with whom



he was on speaking terms were each accompanied by ladies ; so he had felt out of place. This was, by the way, another grievance ; he had not known that Robert Parks meant to invite any lady to accompany him ; nothing had been said about such an intention the evening before, when all the plans had been made. On the whole, it cannot be said that our young man's arrangements for a day of pleasure were the most inviting in the world ; and now, to add to his discomfort, was this vague sense of something being wrong. The passengers seemed to be, like himself, restless, excited about something. They kept turning their heads in the direction of the rear car, seemingly watching for some development.

"Is anything wrong?" Austin asked of a young man who occupied the seat in front of him, but who was turned around gazing at the door with so expectant and so grave an air that he felt justified in asking the question.

"There's a fellow in the next car that they think is dying," he said gravely.

"Dying!" repeated Barrows aghast. "What a place to die in! What is the matter with him?"

"I don't know; a fit, or a faint, or something of that kind. They say he won't get over it. He looks awful. The conductor telegraphed to Chester for a doctor to be at the station, but they say he won't live until the train gets in. They've been running through the train for a doctor, but there ain't none; then they tried for a minister, but that sort ain't often found on the cars this day of the week."

Nothing more full of distress than young Barrows's face can be imagined.

"Did the man want to see a minister?" he asked in a low, awe-stricken tone.

"No, poor fellow! he wants his mother; that's all he thinks about; he keeps asking for her. He's young, not older than you or I; and she isn't far off, only down here in Chester, they say; but she might as well be a thousand miles

off for all he'll ever have of her, I guess. But it is kind of decent to have a minister around at such a time, you know ; he ought to have something said to him, I s'pose. You see, he comes to a little, and then goes off again into another faint. They telegraphed the Rev. Dr. Holden to meet the train at Chester. Yes, he did ask for a minister the last time he roused ; at least he wanted somebody to pray, but not one could be found. The fact is, the praying folks all stay at home to-day. I wouldn't have thought of looking for one on the cars. I wouldn't want a body that rode on the cars on Sunday to pray for me, if I was dying ; would you ?”

But young Barrows was too much distressed for even such grave moralizing as this. His informant was grave enough ; chewed the end of his cane thoughtfully, and seemed deeply impressed with the sadness of the whole thing ; but the arrow in his words that pierced Barrows's heart was found in the sentence : “ He wants his mother.”

“ I'll go straight down to mother's,” he muttered, “ as soon as ever I get off the train.”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### PARLEYING.

THIS resolve he carried into effect. He had that advantage over some: when he came to a downright decision, he was very apt to act on it. Sometimes the difficulty was to bring himself to a decision.

He waited only to learn, if he could, who the poor young man was, and to find that he had drawn his last gasp before doctor or minister or mother could reach him.

Then he turned his back on the gayly-painted pleasure-waggons drawn by four horses, waiting to take passengers to the summer gardens, and took long strides toward the lower end of the town, in search of a little white house set back from the road, with a tree in front. As he walked and thought, he could not keep back an occasional shudder. What a place in which to die! A railroad train, and a Sabbath morning, and the mothers, and the ministers, and all the praying folks at home.

Ah, there was the little house! How came he to think that he could go away from the city without a sight of it? He felt now that there was no sight anywhere in the world quite equal to it, for it sheltered his mother. He went softly around to the back door. He peeped in at the window. No fear of mother not being there to receive him; for she was lame, and never went away from home. There she sat in her little rocking-chair, the one that he had bought for her; the little square stand, old-fashioned and

worn, was drawn near the open window, within reach of her hand, and on it lay that old, large-print, brown-covered Bible, out of which she had read when she rocked him to sleep on her bosom. It was open, and her spectacles lay on it: she was ready to read.

The little room had a cleared-up, Sabbath air all about it; all traces of the week-day sewing and knitting had disappeared. The work-table was covered with a fresh white cloth, and on it stood a tumbler filled with sweet-smelling blossoms.

How quiet it was and pleasant! And the look of peace on his mother's face was good to see. He would not have gone back again to his work without it for the world. And that poor fellow down at the station could not see his mother's face, though she was bending over him, raining the tears down on it.

He turned the knob softly, and went in. He knew well that the joy of seeing him would be mingled with pain; but he must go in—he must hear his mother's voice.

“Well, mother,” he said.

Then he saw her face gleam in eager, joyful greeting. “Oh, my dear boy!” she said, and he was beside her and felt her arms about his neck, and her kiss upon his cheek; and that young man lying down in the station would never feel his mother's kiss again!

The day was very different from anything that he had planned. It surprised him to think that it should be so, but at first he had no inclination to leave his mother's side. Her face had shadowed when she heard how he came, and how he was going back; but she said nothing. She was a very wise mother, and had learned that there was a time to keep silence—that hardest lesson, perhaps, which anxious mothers have to learn. Still, he felt the shadow; the more, possibly, because it was wordless.

It was after the little sister came home from Sabbath

school that he told about the sick young man on the train.

Somehow he had not felt like telling his mother in the hush and privacy of the morning ; but with the twelve-year-old sister fluttering about, it had seemed to him that it would not be so awfully solemn. But as it happened, the child deepened the impression.

“ I wonder if his mother is a widow ! ” she exclaimed.

“ Why, darling ? ” questioned the mother. “ Do you think you know who it may be ? ”

“ No, mamma ; but it makes me think of the lesson for to-day. Don't you know, mamma ? ‘ He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. ’ I was thinking that when Jesus saw that mother he ‘ had compassion on her. ’ Oh dear ! if he could only have been on the cars this morning ! ”

“ Do you think he would have been this morning, daughter, if he had been on earth ? ”

“ Oh no, mamma, of course not. ” And the little sister gave a quick, startled glance at the brother who had come to them on the Sunday train. He felt that glance, and was thinking at that moment that another must be added to the list of people who were not to be found on Sunday trains.

“ Poor mother ! ” his mother said tenderly ; “ my heart bleeds for her. But there are many widows, daughter, who have only sons ; and there are more sorrowful things than death in the world. ”

“ Yes, but, mamma, Jesus said to this one, ‘ Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. ’ He is stronger than death. ”

“ Dear child, he says those words to many a young man who will not listen to them. Oh that my son would hear his voice calling to him ! ”

The words were low-spoken and tremulous. They hardly reached the ears of the sister standing a little way off, but the son heard distinctly ; there was something about them

that made him shiver ; they seemed to pass through his outer consciousness—if I may use the term—and touch his soul.

The young sister looked from one to the other of the two faces, and moved softly away, awed with a sense of a third Presence which she could feel but could not understand.

Austin Barrows arose from his seat near his mother, shook himself impatiently as if he would shake off the clinging thoughts, and went out into the little porch where the roses waved and blossomed. He picked one and pulled its leaves off with nervous hand, and scattered them for the wind to blow away ; meantime he gave himself an irritating lecture.

“I should really like to know what is the matter with me. I was never so upset in my life. I’m sure I was always aware that there was such a thing as death in the world ; and since a man has got to die when his time comes, I don’t know why it is any worse to die on a railroad train than anywhere else.” Yet as he spoke he shivered again ; and he knew in his heart that it was not, after all, the railroad train, nor yet the dying, that made him shrink ; it was the thought that he was not prepared to die. If the summons had been to him, instead of to that young man, he would have been utterly unprepared to meet it.

Then came conscience up to have his word with this parleying soul. “You are a fool,” said this plain-spoken monitor, “simply a fool ! You say you always knew that a man must die when his time came, and certainly you knew that your time might be to-day—you have no assurance to the contrary ; why, then, did not common sense lead you to make the necessary preparations ? If you were certain of going to Europe within a few years, and if it were possible that you might be called upon to start to-day, would you not consider yourself an idiot if you gave no attention to the preparations, especially if there was nothing in the world to hinder you getting all ready at once, so that it would not inconvenience you to start at a moment’s notice ? You mean to get ready

some time to die—you have always said so; you know just what to do in order to be ready; yet you let the days go by, and keep yourself at the beck of such fellows as that Robert Parks, and keep your mother in constant anxiety, so that she is paler and feebler to-day than you have ever seen her before. Now, really, if you are not a fool, what do you call such conduct?"

The young man's face flushed a little. Nobody but himself would have been allowed to use such language to himself; but he could not help feeling that it was true.

His mother had been faithful in her teachings. Miss Saunders had been a faithful Sabbath-school teacher. Dr. Everett had been a faithful friend. Like Robert Parks, he knew the way perfectly. Neither had he gone so far out of the way, in some respects, as had Robert Parks—for instance, he had never neglected his mother; yet this afforded him small relief just now.

Glancing in at the little window, he could see her worn face. She was fading, it was very apparent; he would not have her long; was it worth while to burden her heart with unnecessary fears for him? What did he want to do with his life that would be hindered if he should make the decision now, and settle this question for ever?

Parks would sneer, of course; but was he really afraid of that fellow's sneers? Then he must be a coward, and he never supposed himself to be that. The boys in his set would cut him; but he was not so attached to them that this ought to make any great difference. His mother was praying for him; he could see her lips move behind the hand which was shielding her face. Her head lay back against the cushion, and he noticed that her hair was very gray, although she was young. Sorrowful days had his mother seen. He had it in his power to give her a great joy this day; should he do it?

These were some of his thoughts, and others ran counter to

them. "Pshaw!" he said, kicking the fallen rose-leaves right and left. "Fiddlesticks! what a gay time I was going to have to-day! Not a thing have I done that I planned to do. What will the fellows think? Some of them are looking for me, I daresay. What am I to tell them about how I spent the day?"

"This won't do; I believe I will go down to the gardens as soon as I have had my dinner. Mother can't complain; I have given most of the day to her, and I must get back to-night, of course. I don't know when I have had such a day; I hope it will be a long time before I have another like it. I wouldn't have supposed myself so easily upset. It is all owing to that Parks: if he had kept his appointment this morning, as he ought to have done, we should have carried out our programme and had a good time, and mother wouldn't have had it to worry her. I must get away as soon as dinner is over."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### DECISIONS AND PERPLEXITIES.

BUT the dinner was late—unaccountably so. The little housekeeper who had it all to do tried her best; but the wind was contrary, and the fire refused to burn as promptly as it should, and puffed out clouds of smoke at her, until her eyes were red. Then, in her hurry, she spilled the hot water, pouring some of it on her poor little hand. After that she tried hard to keep back the tears over the smarting, while she hurried the dinner, lest Austin should be tired waiting. What trivial causes were detaining the brother!

He thought the question of going was settled; but it unsettled itself the moment he took a seat beside his mother and began to talk of indifferent things. She was not in the mood to talk of indifferent things; the very sound of her voice seemed to press upon him the subject from which he was trying to get away. He went, at last, out into the tiny summer kitchen, to help the little housekeeper; this was what he was in the habit of doing, and she had wondered over his not coming. But while he was giving his entire attention to the broiling of the bit of steak, she said: "Austin, don't you hope that poor young man was a Christian? And yet I am afraid he wasn't. He wouldn't have been on the train on Sunday if he had been good, would he?" Then blushing scarlet over her blundering, the little woman said, "O Austin, I don't mean that, you know; I mean, well—O Austin, you know Christians don't travel on Sunday."

He tried to laugh at her confusion, and told her that he guessed she didn't know what she meant, and that the steak was broiled, and so was he. Then he hurried away from the kitchen. There was no safe spot in that house.

When the dinner was finally over, and he had helped Janie with the heavy things, it was too late to think of going to the gardens. He felt half glad about it—they had no attraction for him. A dozen topics of conversation he started; but his mother, gentle, patient, would not talk about them other than to give the simplest answers, which left no chance for continuing. At last the little sister finished her work in the summer kitchen, then stole away somewhere, seeming to realize that in that room there were forces at work which she must not disturb by careless words.

The young man had yielded again to the restlessness which possessed him, and was walking up and down the narrow space, trying not to think. Yet he thought.

There was a great battle being fought that day. Very few human beings knew or indeed ever heard of it; but the legions of darkness, and the hosts of heaven, and one mother, and one son, knew all about it. By-and-by a whistle sounded in the distance. Austin looked at the little clock in the corner, at his watch, then at his mother.

"Never mind the train, my son," the mother said. "Let it go."

"I shall lose the return fare, mother, unless I go in this train or the next one."

"Never mind the fare; money is of the very smallest consequence just now. Settle this question, dear boy; don't let anything come between."

"Settle what question, mother?"

But he needed no answer. He knew what his mother considered the most important question in life. Also he knew that money was scarce in that cottage.

"I will go on the next train, I think," he said doubtfully.

"The excursion tickets are taken on that one, and it doesn't go for an hour yet."

"My dear son, do not wait another hour before you decide this matter. You do not know that you have an hour to spare."

Then there was silence again, and thinking and praying, in that little room.

The clock ticked, and the soft wind blew and scattered rose-leaves about the room; and the mother leaned back in her rocker and made no outward sign, but her bleeding heart said: "O Christ of Galilee, thou who didst have compassion on that mother at the gates of Nain, he is the only son of his mother, and she is a widow. Let it be now, Lord, now."

Could we but have looked into heaven during that solemn hour, what would we have seen and heard there? The angels, you know, must have been watching; probably they waited in suspense the result of the battle. But He who was to "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" needed not to wait as the mother did; but long before, Austin Barrows went over to her side and said: "Mother, will you pray for me?" He knew that the conflict was over—that once again he had battled with Satan for a soul, and had won.

Less than an hour afterward the whistle of the second excursion train sounded; but Austin's mother, with smiling eyes, said, "Let it go, my son; men who pray, you know, have no place on a Sunday train."

So the excursion train swept out of the city with two passengers less than it carried in the morning. To both of them the Christ of Nain had spoken: to the one, "This day thy soul shall be required of thee;" to the other, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."

Meantime, Dr. Everett, all unaware of what God was doing, passed these two young men on Monday—met them, indeed, several times; and as often as he did so he let his mind wander sadly over the hopes he had had for them,

and the efforts he had made to reach them. He believed that all had thus far been in vain; and while he was not exactly discouraged, he was certainly sad and disappointed. He thought himself thoroughly posted as to the events of the Sabbath just past. He knew that Robert Parks had wandered away from the church which of late he had been in the habit of attending, and had gone in disreputable company. It was very apparent that Hester Mason was the one who had influence with him; if something could only be done for her! But Joy Saunders had failed; so what was there to hope for? The doctor would have been ashamed of himself had he put that thought into words. The fact is, we have many thoughts that will not bear voicing.

As for Austin Barrows, the doctor knew that he had joined the Sunday excursionists without apparently having the excuse of being led in that direction by Robert Parks. From his standpoint, this seemed a rapid downward stride; and so perhaps it is not to be wondered at that he felt more than usually disheartened, and passed and repassed the young men several times without attempting to speak with them. His professional duties were crowding him during these days, so that he rarely met Robert at the table. I would not have you understand that the young gentlemen in question were together. The truth is that during the earlier days of that eventful week they carefully avoided each other's society. Perhaps Austin Barrows had good reason for this course. He realized that he had been led astray by young Parks, and he did not yet feel strong enough to meet the ridicule to which he believed he would be subject. Why Robert Parks should avoid him would perhaps be more difficult to explain, save that Robert had an idea that a radical change of associates was necessary for him.

It was Monday evening, and Dr. Everett, who had been planning all day with a view to a leisure hour, having succeeded, spent it in Miss Mason's parlour.

Sorely perplexed was Dr. Everett. Was he, as a superintendent, doing all that he could for a girl like Hester Mason, if he left her under the influence of such a teacher? Yet how could he make any changes?

Miss Mason had her story to tell. It was not encouraging. The girls had never seemed so listless and uninterested as on the previous Sabbath.

"I tried really hard," said the poor teacher, "and I couldn't do a thing with them. They would talk about their gloves and their bonnets; and, Dr. Everett, that Hester Mason does try me beyond anything! It is queer that a girl like her should have such an influence in the class. You would think they would feel superior to her; but it almost seems as though they copied her. Anyhow, when she chatters, the rest of them do."

"She seems to have a great deal of influence over her associates," admitted the doctor, "and for that reason, among others, I wish we could reach her. She has a very decided character, and might be a power for good. Perhaps we ought to feel less discouraged about her when we remember the teaching she has had. I mean that less ought to be expected of her."

"Well," Miss Mason said, "so far as that was concerned, she was sure she expected very little of her. If the girl would only stay away from the class altogether, she would feel that she had done the best thing she could for all concerned; as for influencing her to behave herself, she had not the least hope of it. She didn't believe she knew how, or wanted to know."

And then the doctor began to feel sure that he was not doing his duty by Hester Mason. Think of leaving her with a teacher whose strongest wish concerning her was that she might stay away!

Suppose he should remove her to another class. The probabilities were very strong that she would take offence,

and remove herself from the Sabbath school. Slight as was her attachment to the school, it was associated of course with that particular corner of the room, and that set of girls ; and she was just the one to resent interference. Besides, poor man, he cast about hurriedly to see where he would place her, supposing he saw his way clear to making a change ; but not a class presented itself as the wise place for this stray sheep.

There could be no possible assimilation between the girls of Joy Saunders's class and this one. Mrs. Saunders was teaching boys, and besides did not like Hester ; and, in short, there was some excellent reason why she should not have a place in any class of which he could think. The fact was, Miss Mason ought to be removed, and a suitable teacher set in her place. But how accomplish the removal, and where find the suitable teacher to take her place ?

There was at that moment something like a groan in the superintendent's heart, and if he had given it voice it would have said, "O Miss Mason, Miss Mason ! If you could only be made over ; if your love for poor Hester's perilled soul was so great that you would cling to her despite all obstacles, and cry to God continually for her rescue, you would be the teacher for her above all others !" Then immediately there came to his own heart the question,—

"Have you prayed in this way for Hester Mason ? Have you prayed in this way for Hester Mason's teacher ? Do you believe that God is able to change the heart of the one and renew the zeal of the other ? And if you do, why don't you cry to him to do it ?"

He sat silent for so long a time that Miss Mason wondered what was in his mind. At last he told her.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### SURPRISES.

“MISS MASON, I'll tell you what you and I have not been doing : we have not been praying for this girl as we should. I have thought much about her, because she seemed to me to be in special need of help, and in a general way I have made her a subject of prayer ; but it seems to me at this moment as though the words I had said over on my knees for her could not have been called prayer at all. Something like a sense of the worth of her soul has flashed upon me while I have been sitting here, and I am conscience-stricken. I don't believe really that I have ever prayed for anybody in such a way that God was pledged to answer. Have you ?”

“I don't know what you mean,” said Miss Mason, her face flushing. “Of course I pray for people ; all Christians do. I'm sure I pray for myself. I kneeled down only last Sunday, just before I went out, and asked God to help me teach that Sunday's lesson ; and I tried to teach it too. I don't think I ever tried harder, and I'm sure I never had a meaner time.”

Miss Mason's hands were working nervously with the bit of embroidery that lay in her lap, her lips were quivering, and there was a suspicious look in her drooping eyes. The doctor watched her narrowly, and pitiful as was the admission about the hurried little prayer offered just as she was ready to go to her class, it gave him courage. He believed

that even the little prayer was an advance step ; he believed that she was struggling with a sense of failure, and a faint, fitful desire to do better. What if she were waking to something like a sense of responsibility !

He lost the desire to throw Miss Mason overboard and fill her place more worthily ; he lost even the desire to lecture her. He felt only an overpowering desire to fall on his knees, just then and there, and pray for her as he knew he had not done before.

“My friend,” he said, and the tones of his voice were so changed that she glanced at him, wondering, “I have a confession to make to you. I have not prayed for you as I ought ; not that I have not remembered all my fellow-workers daily on my knees, but I have not felt for them as I should. I want you to kneel down with me now, and help me ask God to forgive me, and let me take a new start in the service.”

They knelt down, Miss Mason in a great maze. This was unlike any other experience of hers.

It is safe to say that the experience of the next few minutes was unlike anything that she had ever imagined. She must have heard herself prayed for before ; but this was different. She could not get away from the feeling that things ought to be different after that prayer ; that her life, at least, ought to run in a new channel.

She was weeping when they rose up. But even when Dr. Everett held out his hand to say good-bye, she did not believe that she would put into words the thought of her heart ; something in the clasp of his hand seemed to give her courage.

“I don't think I am a fit person for a Sabbath-school teacher,” she said, speaking with difficulty. “I have told you so before, but I mean it in a different way now. I ought to give up that class. I don't think I am a Christian at all.”



Half an hour before, Dr. Everett believed that to this he would have said, "Perhaps it would be as well for you to give up teaching for the present." But now he found that the last thing he desired of this trying teacher was to resign her class. He made haste to answer her in the spirit born of his prayer,—

"Suppose you and I just drop the past, as something with which we have not wisdom to deal. Will you give yourself to Christ from this moment? Then if you are already his, you will only have renewed the consecration; and if you are not, he will accept you now as his own. Will you?"

There was a struggle. Miss Mason had been a member of the church, "in good and regular standing," for years, and it was only very lately that she had come to feel any dissatisfaction with that standing. Satan, of course, was at her elbow, ready to tell her that it was a strange thing for her to act just as though she were an irreligious person. But Miss Mason's heart was tired. The unrest within it had grown upon her; she was dissatisfied with all her efforts, as well as with her want of effort. She felt just then that she would give anything to be such a Christian as that prayer for her implied; she would give anything to be able to pray like that.

"Will you?" asked Dr. Everett again; and she spoke at least some of her thoughts aloud,—

"I don't care how it looks. If I am a church-member, I don't believe it means anything; and I want a religion that means something. Yes, I will."

"Will you kneel down with me now and tell Him so?"

"I can't pray," she said, and she was sobbing again. But she dropped on her knees, and when Dr. Everett had poured out his whole soul to God for her, she stammered forth the words,—

"O God, take me and make of me such a Christian as I ought to be."

She may have been mistaken, but years afterward she was in the habit of looking back to that sentence as the first real prayer she had ever offered.

A singularly humble man was Dr. Everett as he made his way down town a short time thereafter. The interview had not been in the least like what he had intended. He had gone to Miss Mason, hoping, it is true, to do her good; at least he thought he hoped that. But in the clearer light in which he could now see his heart, he realized that the strongest feeling concerning her had been indignation that she should fulfil her trust so badly; and his strongest hope had been to see his way clear towards removing her, and filling her place with one more worthy. How wonderful it was that the moment he began to realize his own lack of faithfulness the Lord let him help her into the light.

To some of the meditations in which he indulged during that homeward walk he gave expression as soon as he let himself into the hall and came face to face with his landlady. "Mrs. Saunders, I have made a discovery to-night. Hereafter when I feel particularly tried with a person, I shall know that I am myself at fault toward that person, and shall ask God for a special view of my own heart concerning it."

"Is that so?" said Mrs. Saunders, stopping on the first stair, her pile of clean towels balanced on her arm, her face expressing surprise and concern. "Does it always work that way? I've got a lodger this minute that I'm just completely out of all patience with. I'm sure I can't see how I'm to blame; but perhaps I am."

The doctor went away smiling. It was a satisfaction to talk to Mrs. Saunders. A new idea presented to her was sure to receive careful consideration. He felt almost certain that her lodger would have occasion to thank him for dropping this seed-thought.

I suppose if anybody had told the two young men who were engaged in trying to avoid each other that their place

of meeting would be the Packard Place Church, they would have been equally astonished.

There were others present who had reason to be astonished over the strangeness of the situation.

It was just as Hester Mason was putting her counter in order, preparatory to taking her evening out, that young Parks presented himself, and, after a few moments' chat, came boldly to the point.

"Look here, I went to church last Sabbath, you know, solely to please you ; now it is your turn. I want you to go somewhere to please me."

"I daresay you won't have to coax as hard as I had," Hester said with a frank laugh. "I don't get so many chances to go anywhere that I am hard to persuade. What do you want?"

"I want you to attend the Packard Place meeting with me."

"What kind of a meeting? I didn't know there was anything going on there to-night."

"Didn't you? Haven't you noticed that they always have a prayer-meeting there on Wednesday evenings?"

"Prayer-meeting!" Hester was so astonished that her voice was even louder than usual. There was a heightened colour on Robert's cheeks. Several of the clerks were regarding them curiously.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Hester at last. "You don't say you want to go to a week-day prayer-meeting? Robert Parks, what has come over you? I'm getting anxious. I almost think I ought to send word to your mother."

"Will you go?" said Robert, and he tried to keep his voice steady. He had gone about all day with a feeling that he must show his new colours to this girl as soon as possible ; but she was making it very hard.

"Oh, go?" she said. "Why, of course, if it is for nothing but to take care of you. But I must say, Robert"—and

here, to his intense relief, she lowered her voice—"I'm kind of disappointed in you. I like a frolic as well as the next one; but I wouldn't choose a prayer-meeting or a church to have it in. And I haven't any mother to think about, either. If I were you, and had the kind of mother that you told me yours was, I wouldn't do such things. It is worse than going on Sunday trains, I think."

"I'm not going for any such purpose as you think," he answered hurriedly. "I'll tell you about it this evening."

But he did not. They walked quite to the church door, when the hour came, talking busily about something else—Hester, at least, absorbed with a thought that had recently come to her—and it was not until they halted before the door that she remembered where they were going, and held him back to say,—

"Now you won't do anything mean to-night, will you? If there were no other reason, I wouldn't be caught in any scrape on that little Joy Saunders's account. She always comes here to prayer-meeting."

"I will try not to do anything mean," Robert said, and his face was pale. He began to realize how low he had fallen.

But the person who was most startled by Robert Parks's appearance at prayer-meeting was Austin Barrows. He had gone thither confidently believing that there was one place in which he was sure of not meeting his old acquaintance. He came in just after Robert and Hester had seated themselves; and as on passing down the aisle he caught sight of them, he half halted, and his face actually paled with a feeling of dismay. What had brought Robert Parks to prayer-meeting? How did he intend to conduct himself? For, if the truth must be told, Robert Parks had fallen so low that he was not always noted for propriety of behaviour in church, even on a Sabbath evening.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### SEVERAL ADDED LINKS.

THE influences which had drawn young Barrows to the house of prayer thus early in his Christian life were easily traced. In the first place—though Robert Parks might have been astonished had any one told him that such was the case—he really had greater moral courage than Robert. He was ready and willing, the momentous question having been decided once for all, to show his colours.

Besides, his mother, when she bade him good-bye on Monday at daybreak, had said to him: "Let me think of you as in prayer-meeting on Wednesday evening, my son. I'll try to imagine what you will say, and I shall be the happiest mother there is in the world."

After that, it would have taken a good deal to have kept him away from the meeting. He had always loved his mother with a very tender love, and it astonished him not a little to see how much dearer she had grown under the spell of this new experience.

He had given a good deal of thought to the part of his mother's sentence which indicated that she took it as a matter of course that he would have something to say in the prayer-meeting. It made his face burn to think of such a thing; yet it looked altogether reasonable, and he had almost decided that he would, when the time came, rise to his feet and make it known that he was now on the Lord's side. But he had not counted on the presence of Robert Parks.

There were certain other things connected with that evening which were matters of surprise to the two young gentlemen who were unacquainted with prayer-meetings.

They both knew that a very large congregation was connected with the Packard Place Church, and that on Sabbath mornings the large house was well filled. The question which these two young men revolved in their ignorant minds was, What became of all these people on Wednesday evening? A large, elegant room, light and beautiful, and people enough gathered in it to have played two or three games of puss in the corner, and that was all! After fully taking in his surroundings, Robert Parks bestowed such a puzzled look on his companion that she laughed outright.

As the meeting progressed, other developments bewildered the strangers. Deacon Jones, on being appealed to, offered a very long, well-arranged prayer; then there was a pause, until Mr. Smith responded to his invitation in much the same manner, with an increase as to length; and then there was another pause.

The minister had already prayed, and read, and spoken, and done what he could to infuse life into the dry bones by which he seemed surrounded.

But long and solemn pauses marked the hour. Meantime Robert Parks was revolving an idea. How was he to get up in the midst of this ponderous, this awful meeting, and say the few trembling words that he had to offer? It seemed to him an impossibility. He had looked over at young Barrows, and fancied him as turning this strange gathering to account among his friends—Barrows knew how to be both witty and sarcastic on occasion. How would he relish being included in a description such as he felt might be given?

Hester Mason, meantime, was troubled with no anxious thoughts, but found herself yawning behind her new kid gloves, and telling herself that of all the stupid places where

she had ever been in her life, a prayer-meeting was the most so. What could have possessed Robert to want to come? He certainly was not having any fun; the occasional glances toward him showed his face to be as solemn as the minister's. She half imagined that he was trying to punish her for coaxing him to church on the Sabbath.

Then, suddenly, the Packard Place prayer-meeting had a sensation. Joy Saunders had watched, and waited, and prayed, and grown red and white by turns in the intensity of her emotions. Here were two young men, and a young woman, who, so far as she knew, had never been in a prayer-meeting before. What would they think of it? Why had they come? Oh, if somebody would only say or do something! Had God sent these three to that place to be helped? Were they being helped? Were Christians doing right to sit there in that dull way, letting the time run to waste, as though there were nothing to say for Christ?

Joy Saunders belonged to a church which believed in woman's sphere, and desired her to keep strictly within its limits—to give herself with what *abandon* she pleased to its fairs, and festivals, and theatricals, and what not; to circulate its subscription papers, and be instant in season and out of season in planning for its secular interests, but on no account to let her voice be heard in its social religious meetings. Heretofore had Joy, with views of her own, kept carefully within her supposed sphere—living up to the supposed views of St. Paul, when he said that if women would learn anything they were to ask their husbands at home; sometimes troubled, it is true, about that great company of women who had no husbands to ask, and often troubled about the so-called social meeting, because it appeared to her to be a very unsocial place.

Yet, in her wildest moments of longing after reform, it had never occurred to her that she could do so unusual a thing as to let her voice be heard in that particular prayer-meeting.

There had been prayer-meetings in which she felt able to do it, but not in this church. If it were a teachers' meeting, she admitted to herself, the thing might be possible. No matter if the teachers' meetings were held in the same room, and with sometimes as many present as attended the prayer-meeting; it was certainly very different—they all talked then.

Yet, despite this pressure of circumstance and inclination, I have to record an astounding fact. So eager was Joy that the pause which she considered disgraceful should be broken, that she did actually break it herself! So filled was her heart with one Bible verse and the thoughts which had clustered around it, that it seemed almost as though some force outside of herself impelled her to speak the words:—

“And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak.”

Before the last tremulous word had ceased vibrating on the air, Austin Barrows was on his feet.

“I never before thought that I was a coward,” he said; “but that same One has spoken to me. He has said to me, ‘Young man, arise;’ he has brought me to life; and I had almost gone away from here to-night without owning it, though I came here for that purpose. I hope he will forgive me. Now that I am fairly on my feet, I want you to know that my determination is to serve him.”

Apparently this was just the force that Robert Parks needed. Instantly he arose. Just a few broken words; yet have you any idea of how they thrilled through that audience?

At the young man's left sat a silent pillar who had helped to support the church for twenty years, and yet whose voice had never been heard in the prayer-meeting. While the thrill of the young new voices was still upon them he arose.

“Brethren,” he said, “I am condemned. The voice of Christ spoke life to my soul many years ago, and I have



never owned it in words before. It is the eleventh hour with me ; but I want to be a witness for him."

What a wonderful meeting that grew into ! What was there about it that sent Mr. Cady's mind roving through his store, intent on certain reforms which might be carried out there ? What set Mr. Wheeler to thinking of certain men in his employ who ought to be in the prayer-meeting, and determining that before another week his business should be so arranged that they could come if they would ?

If I should try to follow out all the trains of thought that were quickened into being by the quotation of that single Bible verse, and the response to it by those two young men, you would be able to see that it reached farther, and affected more lives and plans and futures, than apparently had all the prayer-meetings of the years gone by since the Packard Place Church had a being.

The truth is, that Joy Saunders had stepped very far out of her apparent sphere—further than she knew, or than others dreamed. She had set in motion forces that are pulsing yet. More than that, the waves of her influence are widening and widening, and will continue to widen and deepen until they are lost in the ocean of eternity. She did not know it. What had she done ? Nothing but repeat a single simple verse from the last Sabbath's lesson. And her cheeks were crimson over the effort that it cost her.

There were those who said it was rather queer in Joy Saunders. Did she think that there were not men enough to do that sort of thing ? Could not the minister read all the Bible verses that were necessary ? Nobody quite understood why the simple act should have had such an effect. Not even Joy remembered that she had used the sword of the Spirit, which the Lord had promised to honour.

"Well," said Austin Barrows, as Robert Park crossed the aisle that separated them, and the two clasped hands. And "Well," said Robert in the same breath. This effort seemed

to exhaust their powers of expression. They wrung each other's hands after the manner of young men who could say a great deal if they could only get started; they looked into each other's astonished, beaming eyes, and were silent. After a moment both laughed. "I was never so amazed in my life," declared Barrows at last.

"You can't equal me in that, at least," answered Parks. "In the first place, I was so astonished to see you here at all that it took half the evening to rally from the effect. You must have a long story to tell me. Suppose I join you in half an hour from now?"

Then they shook hands again, and for want of words they laughed again.

"They don't seem to feel very serious," Miss Hall said, overhearing only the laugh. "I should think young men who had taken the position that they have to-night ought to have some other feeling than amusement. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if this were just one of their jokes, and they didn't mean a word of it."

But Joy Saunders, who understood both young men much better than Miss Hall did, and had no such fears concerning them, answered almost with a gleeful voice,—

"I suppose, if the truth were known, they never had a better reason for laughing or for shouting than they have to-night."

Said Miss Hall, "You extreme people are very queer. Now you are one thing, and in a moment another. I hardly ever understand you."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### NEW GROUND.

THE morning was very bright, and Robert Parks's spirits were attuned to its brightness. He moved about his room with a brisk step, and hummed a strain from the hymn which had closed the prayer-meeting the evening before.

He felt himself to be taking a fresh start in life. The enthusiasm of the new experience was still upon him. He had stepped out from all his previous life and taken a firm stand on solid rock. Everything that had to do with him was changed, with a change that would last for ever.

There was enthusiasm in the thought that he was to mingle with a world of people who must come to know the change in all his views and feelings.

While he dressed he mused upon this phase of the question: How should the news be communicated?

"I can't tell them in so many words," he said, "at least not until the subject comes up in some way; and I don't see how it is to come up, among the clerks in the store, for instance. They are not likely to hear news from the prayer-meeting; their world is miles away from that sort of life. It isn't as though I had been a drunkard or a gambler or a dishonest fellow, or indeed anything else that would be very marked to them. The truth is, I shall have to move in apparently the same track as before. There is really no way of letting people know where I stand."

There were both comfort and discomfort in this thought.

He could think of people to whom it would be very pleasant to say, "I belong to the family now." That is, it would be pleasant if the subject could be brought forward naturally. Perhaps it would be after that prayer-meeting. It had struck him curiously during the week that he had met Dr. Everett and Joy Saunders and Mrs. Saunders many times, that they were all deeply interested in his welfare, and that not one of them knew of the great decision which had been made. Several times he had attempted to tell them; yet the subject had not, as he said, "come in naturally."

Of course, now that Joy had heard his words in the prayer-meeting, there would be opportunity to talk with her; and he thought it probable that she had already told Dr. Everett. It gave him much satisfaction to think that he would at once have a circle of Christian friends, and belong to their world, and become absorbed in their interests.

I am not sure that he realized his intention to live in two worlds—that is, to gradually withdraw from the circle in which he had hitherto found his enjoyments; withdraw quietly, without any apparent rupture, and leave them to themselves, mingling with them, it is true, during the day, but being not of them.

He would have been disgusted had any one told him that he shrank from explaining to the clerks in the store his change of base. He believed that he looked forward with satisfaction to the thought of their knowing it. So he did; but had he understood himself he would have seen that he wanted them to say of him, "Parks has deserted us. He attends the First Church prayer-meetings, and takes part in them. They say he speaks every time, and he is going to lead the young men's meeting, I have heard. He goes with an entirely different set, and has dropped nearly all of his old acquaintances." This he wished to have said gravely, with a little undertone sigh occasionally over his wiser and more favoured lot; but I honestly think he did not know how

entirely he shrank from saying to any of his old acquaintances, "Boys, I have found something which satisfies me, and I want you to come with me and find it too."

I believe he would have been utterly shocked to have discovered that he did not want them to go with him.

At the breakfast-table he found the subject under discussion to be a lecture that some of the boarders had heard the evening before, delivered by a popular preacher. The theme had been, "Elements of Power in Daniel's Character."

The young men who were arguing as to the merits of the lecture were none of them Christians, nor were they theologically wise, except in their own conceits, yet they criticised with unsparing tongues. Dr. Everett was not present; and Joy, who rarely appeared at the first table, sat a silent listener, showing only by an occasional flash of her eyes her dissent from some confidently-made statement. Robert also was silent, although his newly-opened eyes saw the fallacy of some of the criticisms advanced against the truth. It would not be wise, he told himself, to be drawn thus early into argument on the opposite side with young men who had hitherto claimed him as one of their allies. But when the arguers were gone, and there remained at his end of the table only Joy Saunders, he was ready to talk.

"If you had been delivering a lecture on Daniel," he said to her, "would you have chosen the same point that Dr. Peyton did for the strongest one in his character?"

"No," she said. "The point was doubtless a grand one, but not the characteristic in Daniel that I most admire. I should have chosen his firmness or faith or 'pluck,' or whatever is the name to describe what I mean—the ability to stick to his principles despite annoyances or danger."

"Well, but if I remember the story, King Darius exhibited as much of that quality as did Daniel. See how he stuck to his promise about the den of lions."

Joy raised a pair of grave eyes to the young man's face for

a moment, apparently to see how much of this was ignorance and how much was mere talk, and then answered quietly,—

“Don't you think the difference between them is very easy to define? Both kept their word, it is true; and in doing so the one showed splendid firmness, and the other the smallest kind of weakness. The man of all others the most worthy of contempt seems to me to be the man who has not moral courage enough to break a promise after he has discovered it to be a bad one.”

“Isn't that a pretty severe way of putting it?” Robert asked. But he smiled indifferently. He saw nothing personal in the words, and gave but little heed to the argument. At almost the first mention of Daniel his thoughts had gone off into a day-dream, which ran somewhat on this wise:—

“Suppose I had lived in those days when lions' dens and fiery furnaces and all such things were in vogue. What splendid opportunities were afforded for the exercise of Christian courage and true manliness! In these times it doesn't require any courage to be a Christian.”

He did not say this aloud. He was dimly conscious that Joy Saunders had certain peculiar ideas, and that she would be very likely to combat this thought of his. Neither did he say that he almost wished for a return of those days of splendid martyrdom; but as he bade Joy good-morning, and then walked away to the scene of his daily labours, he was conscious of a feeling of semi-contempt for the tame life which he was called to lead, and a vague wish that his lot in life lay where he could show this young woman and all others how strong and brave he was.

Ten steps from the door of his boarding-house came an opportunity to show his colours. He met one of the clerks in the store—a young man who had a more responsible position and a better salary than himself.

“Just the fellow I've been looking for,” he said with a cordial bow and smile. “I am making up a select party for

this evening. My sister Jennie is in town stopping with a friend, and we thought it would be pleasant to go around to the Dey Street Theatre together. Wilson and Brooks will go with their ladies. We need just one more to make our number complete; and the moment your name was mentioned you were unanimously chosen."

This, you must know, was very delicate flattery; for the young men mentioned were all older than he, and had generally chosen to move in a select circle of which he was not one. A few days ago he would have considered himself honoured by such an invitation, and would have accepted unhesitatingly. Why should he blush and stammer now? The fact is, there suddenly confronted him certain keen sarcasms which he had been wont to fling at theatre-going Christians, he having been one of those quick-witted young men of whom every town and city has its share,—who knew perfectly well what a Christian's duty was, and unsparingly levelled his shafts of wit at the inconsistent. It seemed strange that a theatre should be almost the first thing to confront his new life; stranger still that an invitation should come from those whom it was so embarrassing to refuse. Had it been one of his own set, the young man fancied he should have enjoyed declining, and explaining his reasons therefor. The moment he thought of this he found himself asking confusedly what his reasons really were. He was not exceedingly fond of the theatre; yet it had afforded amusement which had consumed a good deal of his leisure time and much money that he could ill spare. Now here was the question confronting him as to what position he should occupy towards theatres in the future. Was it to be presumed that, in order to be consistent, he must ignore them? or was that idea a narrow-minded relic caught from his country mother? Yet that was hardly the question either; for Dr. Everett and Joy Saunders were neither of them from the country; he could not recall hearing either of them ever

mention the theatre, yet he found that he knew their opinions quite as well as though he had heard an exhaustive discussion carried on by them. Still, this did not give him arguments. How would it sound to say to this young man who waited with a show of courtesy, yet with an amused and curious face, "The truth is, I have become a Christian, and I can't attend the theatre hereafter"? Suppose the gentleman should arch his handsome eyebrows and ask, "Why not?" And he should have to reply, "I don't know; only I know it isn't consistent."

"He would take me for a fool," muttered Robert. Whereupon he began to feel conscious that perhaps he was being taken for that undesirable character at this moment. The street was certainly not the place in which to decide such questions. Of one thing he was certain—he had not the slightest desire to spend this coming evening in a theatre. Such a disposal of himself would not in the least accord with his new feelings and intentions. Why could not he have promptly declined the invitation on the plea of having other plans, and so have avoided such an embarrassing exhibition of himself? Exceedingly vexed with his own blundering, he still stood in doubt how to retreat.

"Well," said the waiting gentleman at last with a laugh that jarred, "my dear fellow, what is the trouble? You look as though I had asked you to take a partner for life, and you were trying to decide whether you could possibly endure her 'for better, for worse.' It is only for one evening, man; and I assure you she is a very charming young lady."

"I am sorry that I cannot go this evening," Robert said, speaking hastily, wishing he could keep his face from flushing, and wondering whether what he was saying was strictly true. "It is quite impossible. You will have to excuse me."

"Oh, certainly," the other replied. "I would not wish to urge you; we only thought it might be pleasant. I believe I'll invite your friend Mr. Hastings in your place."



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### FINDING OUT.

WHAT there was in this last suggestion to add to Robert Parks's annoyance he could hardly have told, unless it lay in the fact that Mr. Hastings was no friend of his, and had been his rival in the store on several occasions. If Mr. Hastings should hear of his refusal and the manner of it, it would afford him material for amusement.

Greatly vexed with himself, and unaccountably irritated with the gentleman who had apparently tried to be so courteous, he moved on as rapidly as possible, his opportunity for witnessing allegiance to his new Master having passed, and only this accomplished.

The young man looked after him with a half-amused, half-bewildered expression, and said to himself, "What has happened to the fellow? I used to think he was genial and gentlemanly in the extreme."

"Pluck!" said Robert Parks, recalling Joy Saunders's word, which had, perhaps, made the more impression because she rarely used words of its class. "She wouldn't have thought I was showing much. Fact is, I don't suppose I am ready for that den of lions yet. But what was I to say? This is no place for an argument. If it had been, I don't know how to argue the question. I certainly don't believe I shall continue to go to the theatre. I don't believe a Christian has any business there. Yet I haven't a single reason why that is expressible. Lovely education that!

What have I been sneering at in others, I wonder? I wish I had asked some of the boys whom I have heard make merry over the sins of others their reasons for thinking they were sins. It seems that I haven't even been sincere with my sneers, for now I don't know what they were about. I'll look into this thing. Dr. Everett, and men of his stamp, have reasons for their opinions, and know how to give them. I'll find out."

So I think, after all, that Satan outwitted himself that morning. When an intelligent and right-intentioned young man resolves to "find out" any question, he is quite apt to succeed.

At the corner he encountered Hester Mason. Her route for a time lay in his direction. He was not averse to joining her. She might belong to the class of people whom he meant gradually to drop, but in the meantime she was very bright and pleasant, and looked well in her new suit. It had been carefully selected with an eye to harmony, and the effect was good.

Busy with the topic that had been suggested to him, the young man gave voice to his thoughts by a question,—

"You are the very one to ask! I want to know why you lavish so much ridicule on your friend Miss Mason when she attends a theatre. What line of reasoning proves to you that she has no business there?"

Hester bestowed a half-amused, half-curious, and wholly searching glance on the questioner before she spoke.

"Are you trying already to hunt up an excuse for going to the theatre to-night?"

How quick-witted she was! Should he be amused, or vexed?

"No," he said. "I am trying to put into words some good reasons why I don't intend to go."

"I'm glad of it. I sort of want to believe in you, Rob; and if you were ready for a theatre to-night, I know I should think you a humbug and nothing else."

"That is just the point. Why would I be? What reason have you for saying so, and thinking so? There must be reasons, you see, and you must know them, else you're a humbug."

Hester laughed. This was bringing her to bay in a manner to which she was unaccustomed. She looked a trifle puzzled.

"You ought not to expect me to argue," she said. "I am not a Christian. It is as much as I can do to sneer at those who pretend to be."

"But I say you have no right to sneer unless you know good reasons why theatre-goers are inconsistent."

"Well, I do. I can think of a dozen. Whether I can tell them off or not is another question. If what you said in meeting last night is true, then you ought to be so much interested in other things that you would have no time to spend at the theatre. That's one reason."

"It isn't a good one—that is, it may be very good for me, because I understand what you mean, and just now, at least, I feel that I have neither time nor inclination; but it would not do to advance as a general argument. It reaches too far. For instance, I might take a walk with you, or a ride, which would take as much time, and have as little Christian work about it, as to go to the theatre; yet you would think it all right to take a ride with me, and would sneer at me for inviting you to the theatre."

Hester laughed. "It is too funny for you to make me argue on that side of the question," she said gayly. "I tell you I belong to the other. However, I can do it. You might possibly take a ride out in the country to rest your body and mine—I'm sure mine needs resting—and you might be able to get home at a respectable hour, instead of being so late that you feel like a sleepy idiot all the next day. That is the way I feel when I go to the theatre. And you might—mind, I don't say you would, but then it is just

possible that you might—say something improving to me while we rode along; something that would be a help to me afterwards. Isn't your imagination equal to such a stretch as that? I only used your name and mine for illustration, because you did, you know."

She was certainly very quick-witted. Robert could not help wishing that he could say something to help her.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "There is truth in that: the theatre is not specially restful to one who has been at work all day. But, after all, how does that prove that Miss Mason's occasional attendance is inconsistent?"

"Seems to me you are very anxious about Miss Mason. I don't care whether she is inconsistent or not; but I know she can't make me believe that her religion is worth much, if she has to brace it up by theatre-going. Rob, do you remember that play last winter, that made fun of a young fellow who was a Christian, and was trying to do right? It just made him appear like a fool. Do you suppose, if some of the boys in the Sunday school had heard it, they would have been more anxious to try to live up to their principles? Can't you think of two or three weak mortals—we won't say you and me this time, because we are both proof against all sorts of temptation—but don't you know some who would have been hindered by that very thing?"

Very gravely Robert admitted that he did.

"Well, then," triumphantly, "what right has a church-member to go to such a place? More than that, how many times did that creature swear in the third scene that same night? I shouldn't think a church-member would like to go for amusement where that sort of thing was going on. Why, I could get up a whole sermon on this question. I believe I'd like to do it. I'll tell you something—it makes such a splendid illustration. One day Miss Mason took it into her head to give me some advice. She did it in a really nice way—said she was my Sabbath-school teacher, and took

an interest in me, and all that trash, you know. It isn't true, not a word of it; but she thinks it is, and so I respect her for it a little. Well, she said I talked too loud on the street—it made her blush sometimes to hear my voice; that people noticed it, and it wasn't the thing for a girl to do—wasn't considered respectable, you know. I didn't get mad at her, because I honestly think she wanted to help me a little, and she wanted to help herself, too; she did not like to have me speak to her so loud when I met her. I told her I was much obliged, and that I would try to remember it the next time I saw her. And then I said I could appreciate her feelings; for when she and I were at the play the other night, some of the scenes were so coarse, and, in short, so far from being what I call respectable, that it made me blush like a peony. You ought to have seen her cheeks then! Peonies were nothing to them. She hasn't said a word to me about loud talking since, and I don't believe she ever will. But then I don't bear her any ill-will. In fact, I'm glad she told me. I've noticed since that I talked louder than other people, on the street and in the cars, and I've about stopped it. I feel as ladylike again. But I'll tell you one person whom I hope never to see at a theatre, and that is little Joy Saunders. I would as soon see a white lily shut up in a coal-bin."

There was the most curious mixture of daring fun and intense earnestness about this girl! Robert did not know whether to laugh or to be shocked and startled. The reference to Joy opened his mouth.

"I don't suppose you will ever see her," he said quickly. "As you say, the two do not match. However, there are theatres and theatres, you know. Some are far less objectionable than others."

"Of course. And there are gamblers and gamblers, I suppose; and loafers and loafers; in fact, there are degrees of everything—of refinement, for instance; and I suppose I am sixth rate or so myself. I ought not to be expected

to be more than that, considering my opportunities. But last night, after you left me, I went to as fine a theatre as there is, I suppose ; and I, with my sixth rate, had to blush two or three times. If I had been first class myself, what would have become of me? That is why I say I don't see how the first-class people can like the position."

Robert winced visibly. "Don't talk so!" he said earnestly. "Why should you speak of yourself as if you were not equal to any?"

"Because I'm not!" She was serious now and fierce. "Don't you suppose I know that even *you* consider it condescension to have anything to do with me? You believe that you have stepped down out of your 'sphere,' and you are thinking now, among other new leaves that you mean to turn over, of cutting me, and getting into respectable society."

"I am not," he said hotly, and it flashed over him just then—rather took hold of him as a conviction—that if such had been his intention it should be so no more. "I consider you my friend. I believe you capable of being much more than you are. I want to help you in any way that I can. I want you to come to Christ and be saved. He can lift you to any place in which he chooses to have you. I believe he has given you brains to use for him. You have helped me this morning. You have made me see things that I did not see before. I am in earnest, and I want to be."

All the flash and the fire had gone out of her face, and also out of her voice. "My father is a miserable drunkard!" She spoke the words low, so low that he could hardly catch them, her lip quivering the while.

"That is your misfortune," he said quickly, "not your blame. You have had a great many misfortunes, I know ; you have not had my advantages, for instance ; and I have not helped you since I knew you. I have not thought of doing so ; but now I want to. I would like to be your friend,

and I would like to see you take a stand for Christ. I am sure he has work for you to do, Hester; perhaps it may be to save your father. Such things have been."

He never forgot the look in her eyes as she turned them toward him, shining with tears. They had reached the corner where their paths separated.

"Whatever I may be," she said, still speaking low, "I believe in you. I was not sure that I did. Now I am. Thank you. I shall think better of the world all day because of this. Good-bye."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A MODERN DEN OF LIONS.

It was not the sort of talk that he had intended to have with her. Little had been said about theatres; yet Robert, as he reverted to the subject, said within himself that he would look it up carefully some time, to be exhaustively prepared. But, after all, a man's duty was plain enough.

Had he met Hester Mason before he did Mr. Herbert, he would have declined his invitation in a different manner. He could not help smiling to think that the girl's flashes of logic had done his arguing for him. "She is clear-headed," he said to himself for the third time that morning. "She ought to have opportunities. I wonder what Miss Joy could do for her."

Then he went to his counter, strongly fortified for the temptations of the day. As though Satan had a hand in the management of nothing but theatres!

Ten o'clock brought a meek-faced searcher after narrow laces. He courteously displayed his variety to her, with skilful arrangement as to patterns and qualities.

The meek-faced woman studied them carefully, critically, and then asked her timid question, —

"Are these real?"

Real lace of those widths, for a shilling a yard! The question was one that had constantly to be answered, and the temptation had proved too much for some of the clerks. Again and again had Robert glibly replied, "Oh yes, certainly,"



exchanging meantime surreptitious winks with some unem-  
ployed looker-on. Since any shopper was so ignorant as to  
expect "real" things at such prices, why should not they have  
their fun out of it? "Real cotton, I meant, of course," had  
Robert gayly explained to a fellow-clerk the first time he had  
occasion to answer the question, and the witticism had been  
received with such favour, and been repeated and laughed  
over so much, that Robert Parks had really begun to consider  
it rather brilliant. It was not a falsehood. Of course, he  
could never stoop to that. There are people, older than he,  
who have soothed their consciences by equally silly subter-  
fuges.

Here was the old question confronting him, but it found  
him changed toward it. That subtle change, invisible to  
human eye, whatever it was, however produced, met him  
even at this point, and made him see that his silly witticism  
shrouded a weak lie. The presence of God's Spirit enlightens  
the mind even about so-called trivial subjects.

He hesitated just a moment; his face flushed slightly. It  
was curious that just then he should think of Daniel. This  
certainly was not a den of lions, and yet he was a little  
humiliated to discover that it required "pluck."

Business was not brisk at this early hour; two idle clerks  
leaned on their respective counters, regarding him with an  
amused air, wondering what was "up."

"No," he said boldly at last. "They are considered a  
good imitation, but they are not real, of course, at that price.  
We have real laces, but they are more than double the  
price of these. Shall I show you some?"

"No," the lady answered, and thanked him; then fingered  
the imitation laces with a thoughtful air for a few moments,  
and moved away.

Amused voices greeted Robert:—

"There, my man, you've done it now! You've gone and  
lost a customer. She would have taken a dozen yards or so.

And she can get 'real' laces in all the stores for that price ; you know she can. She will come back to-morrow and tell you so."

"Parks, what's the matter? Did you have bad dreams last night? Think you are going to die, or anything of that sort?"

Still a third voice, chiming in: "I say, Parks, has that solemn-faced Dr. Everett been telling you stories about the little boy with his hatchet who couldn't tell a lie? Didn't you ever hear of him before? You mustn't be so overcome by his example. He's played out. He wasn't a dry goods merchant, you see, or he would have learned in less than a week that he could."

What was the annoyed young man to say? He was excessively annoyed. It vexed him to think that he could not take this silly banter good-naturedly, that his cheeks would glow under it. Here was an opportunity to state his change of base. Why didn't he do it? It wasn't exactly a lack of moral courage that held him back; it was a doubt as to how best to put what he wanted to say. Would they understand him? How much should he try to tell them?

"What was the use of teasing her?" he said at last. "She really did not know but that they were real, and she doesn't know but that she ought to get the real thing at such prices. I didn't want to cheat her. I've done it, I know; but I don't intend to after this. If Mr. Cady should hear of our management with those people, we should hear from him, I imagine."

This was not a very bold avowal. Any right-minded young man, without a shred of Christian principle to sustain him, might be supposed to have as much honour as this. Robert was simply astonished over the amount of courage that it had taken to speak those words: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It would have been so easy

for him to have taken such a stand when he first entered the store.

“Good boy!” said Fred Briggs; “he shall have a stick of red and white candy and two nuts as soon as ever I get a chance to step out for them.”

Certainly there was nothing particularly brilliant in that reply; yet the clerks within hearing greeted it with bursts of laughter, and Robert’s face flushed to the roots of his hair.

“Talk about a den of lions!” he muttered. “I would rather be in one, I believe.” Which was all very well so long as he was sure there were none waiting for him.

The day which had begun so brightly was in many respects a trying one. The spirit of fun, or of recklessness, seemed to have taken possession of the clerks in Robert’s immediate neighbourhood.

In the course of the day, it became apparent that some rumour in regard to the prayer-meeting of the evening before was in circulation. He found notices pinned to his counter, announcing religious services to be conducted by the Rev. Robert Parks. One, caricatured with bold headlines, announced a sermon on the sin of lying, to be delivered by the once notorious but now famous Robert Parks. In short, there seemed no end to the silly schemes which four clerks devised to render his life disagreeable. Yet they did nothing that was worthy of complaint—at least, I mean nothing that Robert cared to bring to the notice of his chief.

Under ordinary circumstances he could have laughed with them over some of their sallies; but he was continually haunted by a humiliating sense of having failed to stand up squarely for his new principles. Had he boldly avowed his determination henceforth to shape all his actions to one pattern, very much of this annoyance might have been avoided. Evidently he was no Daniel. He began to have a realizing sense of this truth. Viewed in that light the

experience was helpful; for if there was one person whom this young man needed to understand better than he did, it was Robert Parks.

Toward the close of the afternoon, just as he was recalling, with a sense of relief, the fact that his services would not be required during the evening, there came a fresh embarrassment. A party planned for long before must needs perfect its arrangements for that very evening. A ride to Belden's Woods, a supper, a dance, and much that the gay party denominated "fun," were in prospect.

The ringleader looked in on Robert, just to inform him that all arrangements were complete; not to invite him to join them—this was accepted as a matter of course. Had he not been prominent in arranging the programme when the plan was first proposed?

In the midst of his embarrassment he realized, with a little thrill of satisfaction, that there was certainly a change in his feelings. How utterly distasteful the whole affair looked to him now!

"Matters are all in train," the caller said, with a complacent air. "There has been a little trouble about securing horses, but we have succeeded. You will have to notify your lady, you know. Sorry to be so late; but we will not need to start for two hours yet."

He hurried these sentences, without chance for interruption, and was turning in haste to depart.

"Wait!" said Robert, his voice having a sharp, annoyed sound. "Wait a moment, can't you?" And then he paused. What was he to say, how explain, after all the vexations of the day, and with those exasperating clerks still watching him with their silly smiles and winks?

Still, it seemed clear to him that he would not go to Belden's Woods. A moonlight ride, and a merry dance, and plenty of gay company, had been pleasant enough amusements to him in the past. But to-day they offered no temptation

beyond the fact that his word was pledged, and he did not see his way clear to decline.

"The man who seems to me the most worthy of contempt is the one who has not sufficient moral courage to break a promise after he discovers that it ought never to have been made."

Something like this Joy Saunders had said. He had not known that he remembered her words; but they flashed before him now as though they had been photographed.

"The fact is, I can't go."

He spoke abruptly, confusedly — not helped by Fred Briggs's laugh sounding in his ears. The words were spoken; but they seemed weak ones to him, and he did not feel brave at all.

"Can't! Why not? We made sure that you were not detailed here for service before we perfected our plans. I was in this morning before you came down, and Mr. Wheeler told me your department would close at six."

Then did that brave young man wish heartily that he could have replied that different arrangements had been made, and he must remain at the store. How should he explain? If Fred Briggs would only move away and attend to his own affairs! The next question was worse:—

"When can you go, then? We depended on you. In fact, you were the one who suggested the plan, if you remember. I suppose we could wait an hour later, if that would help you."

"Oh no!" said this much-tried young man; "I shouldn't want you to do that. The truth is, I don't think I can go at all. I have made other arrangements that interfere."

"Do they interfere for life?"

The tone was one not of astonishment simply, but of ill-concealed sarcasm.

The question and the blank look on Robert's face were too much for Fred Briggs. He bent himself over his desk, apparently overjoyed, and convulsed with laughter.

"The poor parson is in a fearful mix!" he said, in a loud undertone, to the equally amused clerk at his side. "Clear the counter; let's hoist him up here, and give him a chance to explain."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WORKERS TOGETHER.

BUT the question, "Do they interfere for life?" came with a sudden suggestion of strength to the sorely-trying young man. He held his head erect, and a look born of something outside personal pride came into his face. "Yes," he said steadily, "they do interfere for life. Everything is changed with me, I hope and believe. I cannot at any time take the ride that we had planned. At a more suitable time and place I shall be glad to give you my reasons."

He was frank and dignified at last, and began to recover a feeling of self-respect. But do you suppose that Satan meant to let him slip away from one of his toils so easily?

The caller still tarried, an angry flush rising on his face. "Well," he said, with peculiar emphasis, "isn't that rather a strange way for a gentleman to keep his engagements? The thing was largely of your own planning, and you invited your lady at the time the rest of us did. I should think she deserved some consideration. Perhaps you have forgotten that some of us thought the expense of the trip was an objection, and that you promised to meet a large share of it."

"As to expense," said Robert, still speaking with dignity, "I must keep that part of the engagement. You need not fear any increase because I withdraw from the party. And as regards the lady whom I invited, I will, of course, make the necessary explanations. That part, at least, is my affair."

He was alone at last, and out on the crowded streets; but how utterly discouraged, not to say angry, he felt—angry with himself; angry with the clerks in the store; angry, most of all, with the chains of past engagements with which he seemed to have fettered his new life.

Here was another explanation to make.

Six weeks before, when the ride to Belden's Woods had been gayly planned, on the way home from an evening's entertainment, it had looked a very fascinating thing. He hated it now, but it was by no means likely that Hester did. She was in all respects what she had been on that evening. Her pleasures were not many, her rides were few, and she was fond of dancing, as is any other girl who has come up in the loose way that poor Hester had—without mother or tender Christian friend to wisely shield and guide her.

What was Robert Parks to say to her in explanation of the fact that he had just now refused to fulfil an engagement in which she had been included?

He studied over it gloomily. His sore spirit shrank from any more merriment at his expense; and this, he could not but feel, afforded a good opportunity for the sarcastic and not too thoughtful Hester. Moreover, she was loud-voiced; must the tongues of other clerks be set wagging at his expense? Yet he must see her at once; she had doubtless heard of the ride already. At that instant he remembered with a groan that the young woman whose counter was just below hers was one of the party.

Business was in full tide at the less fashionable store, the class of customers who crowded there not being trammelled by fashionable hours for shopping. He had to wait while Hester showed her different shades of spool silk and tried to match unmatchable goods. She looked bright and pretty; she was good-natured and accommodating; her customers did not hasten. She recognized Robert's presence by a gay



little nod, but gave undivided attention to the ladies until she had satisfied them, and then turned to him.

"Blue, green, or brown shades?" she said with a business-like air and a sparkle in her eyes.

"Blue, I think," he answered gravely, and then plunged at once into the depths of his subject. At least there should be no vacillating here.

"Hester, that long-deferred ride to Belden's Woods is to come off this evening."

"I know it. Kate has been getting ready in imagination all the afternoon. I've given her seven different bits of advice as to her ribbons and things."

"Hester, I cannot go on that ride."

"Of course not. I told Kate I was not going. Indeed, I told Dick Howell this morning that I should be obliged to forego the pleasure supposed to be in store. Rob, did you think that I thought you would go? I told you this morning that I believed in you, and I really do. I hope you haven't been sighing over your promise to me. I made it all right with the boys. They think I have grown good or proud or something, and don't want to go. I kept my own counsel, of course. It's all right."

Her words had been low and rapid. Other shoppers came; more silk was wanted, and braid and buttons.

She dismissed him with another little nod and smile. He had not a chance to say another word, even to thank her for her evident careful shielding of his name from the gossip of the store.

"It is strange," he said to himself as he walked down the street again in a different frame of mind—"it is strange that that girl should be the one to help me twice to-day."

"Whoa!" said a firm voice just above his head, and Dr. Everett's horses were reined in across his pathway. "You would as soon ride the rest of the way as walk, I presume?" the doctor said, in a tone half of inquiry, half of authority.

Robert's answer was to obey the signal of command, and spring to a seat at his side.

Then the doctor, driving on rapidly, according to a fashion of his took up his former line of thought very much as he would have done had it been a conversation between the two interrupted for a moment.

"Did it ever occur to you to notice what the men did to whom the story of redemption was first told?"

Robert hesitated. "I am not sure that I am even acquainted with the men," he said. "You will remember that my knowledge of Bible history is limited."

"Ah, but you know them—the shepherds to whom the angels came down with the news of the Saviour born?"

"I certainly remember that. No, I don't know just what they did. The Bible doesn't tell, does it? I remember nothing about them beyond the fact that they were watching the sheep and were honoured with the tidings."

"Then you didn't read their biography carefully. Their whole after life is foreshadowed—briefly, it is true, but enough is told to show what manner of men they were. I have been struck with the progressive nature of their story."

"I didn't know they had a story," declared Robert frankly. "What was it?"

"Why, directly they heard the news they started in search of the Saviour. Doesn't that show you at once the stamp of men they were? In these days it takes some men half a lifetime to decide to start toward him, though they are as well aware of his existence as they are of their own."

"That is true," Robert said thoughtfully, remembering that it had taken him several years to decide the question.

"Doesn't your present knowledge of the persons in question aid you in giving the next link in their history?" This was asked tenderly, with a significant tone and a penetrative look. Robert flashed back instant sympathy, as one who understood and appreciated.

"They found him," he said briefly.

"Ay, they found him. No other result than that has ever been when he was honestly sought. I have not had opportunity to congratulate you on the personal experience of it until now. You can judge somewhat of my joy over the news which I heard last night from the prayer-meeting."

As he spoke his disengaged hand sought Robert's, and the two met in a hearty grasp.

"Token of brotherhood," the doctor said smiling. Then immediately, "Do you know what they did next? They made known abroad the blessed experience which had come to them."

The tone was significant again; but Robert had no other reply than that shown by a furtive glance at the doctor's quiet face. Then the two rode on in silence.

"Well?" the doctor said at last.

"Well?" repeated Robert; then he laughed. "I know what you mean, doctor; but aren't the times different? For one thing, we don't have the opportunities in these days that the shepherds had. At least I don't."

"Have you had no opportunity to-day, for instance?"

How was a young man who had been through a day like Robert's to answer this question with anything but silence?

As he glanced hurriedly back over the day, it appeared before him like a succession of opportunities.

There was the breakfast-table conversation, where he had chosen to keep silence. There was the invitation which met him almost at the door. There were the clerks, not one of them Christians; he had jostled against them all day; he had chatted with numberless cash-boys. He had been for five minutes alone with the little Riley, who was prepared to believe anything he told him; and the most he had done was to try to be merry with the boy. It was not possible to say that he had had no opportunity. But the doctor waited

for his answer, and the young man could not help feeling a trifle annoyed that he had none ready.

"Do you really mean," he asked at last, "that a Christian ought to be talking of religion all the time—forcing it on the attention whether there seems to be a fitting occasion or not?"

The doctor had so manifestly said nothing of the kind that he did not seem to think it required an answer, but said,—

"Do you really mean that had you received yesterday an inheritance valued at twenty thousand pounds, you would have been likely to let twenty-four hours go by without mentioning it to somebody?"

"That is different," Robert said quickly.

"Yes, that is different. For in that case you alone would be concerned, and in the case of which we are speaking there is an opportunity for each of our acquaintances to secure an equal inheritance; and you know the steps they ought to take, and that there is danger of their losing it. I should say there was an immense difference."

After that, for a little, absolute silence fell between them. Dr. Everett was too wise a worker to hover around his seed after he had dropped it to grow. He presently began a conversation on indifferent matters; and it was not until he neared the boarding-house that he referred to the young men's prayer-meeting, and asked Robert to attend. The acceptance of that invitation was prompt and cordial. It struck Robert most pleasantly that at last he had received an invitation which was in harmony with the new spirit that he felt possessed him. He resolved to take a stand at the prayer-meeting which should be no whit behind that taken by the shepherds. He would show Dr. Everett that he was thoroughly in earnest, and when a proper occasion offered, was ready as a witness. That was a very pleasant supper-table around which the family presently gathered.

I suppose there are higher spheres in life, as we are in the habit of using language ; but perhaps, after all, it might be difficult to find a more useful one than that which Mrs. Saunders occupied.

She was really engaged in trying to make a safe, pleasant home for young men, who were, most of them, far away from home and mother.

Ostensibly she kept a boarding-house for the purpose of supporting herself and daughter ; but this was only the surface. It was the consecration of it, the almost endless opportunities that she saw in it, that dignified, yes, and glorified the labour. Without that aim a woman like Mrs. Saunders could not have been contented with the outward circumstances of her life. She was really a woman of capabilities. She would have felt all cramped and soured, and grown waspish and miserable. As it was, she magnified her office and rejoiced in her opportunities.

She had felt this more and more since she had come to know Dr. Everett intimately, and recognized in him one who had consecrated talent of no small order to the same Master, and who actually worked in the same channels with herself. When she neatly mended the frayed shirt of some gay young fellow, it gave her thrills of joy to realize that she was reaching after the same result as the man who linked his arm in the "young fellow's" and carried him off captive to the prayer-meeting.

It is possible to work in this way. Mrs. Saunders grew daily more conscious of it and more happy in it. On that very evening, as she attended in person to the potatoes, stewed in cream, and had them salted to just the right degree, she was thinking of the prayer-meeting and the "Monday Club" and the new temperance organization, and was hurrying her meal with a view to having all her boarders in good time for these various attractions. She thought too of the fifteen minutes' service in the parlour, to which all the

boarders were invited. There were two new young men. Would they come in to family worship?

She cast a swift thought over her table appointments, and with the thought went up a prayer. She must have as good a representation of a happy and prosperous home as she could, so that the home custom of gathering for prayers might seem a fitting close to the hour.

No, there are not many such boarding-houses, it is true. But could there not be? and ought there not to be?

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### OPPORTUNITIES IN DISGUISE.

OPPOSITE to Robert Parks at the dining-table sat Mr. Brooks, a young man who occupied an important position in a rival mercantile house, was several years older than Robert, and hitherto had ignored him as a younger and inferior being.

On this particular evening he seemed suddenly to have resolved to cultivate the youth's acquaintance, and addressed him in a cordial tone,—

“Parks, go over to the Dey Street Reading Rooms with me to-night, will you? I promised to bring in some new friends if I could, and introduce them to the library. We have just been making some fine additions.”

Poor Robert was beginning to feel that this was the day for invitations; here was a very flattering one. The Dey Street Rooms were rather exclusive; he had never been directly invited to visit them before.

“I am sorry that I cannot, this evening,” he said in a regretful tone. “On almost any other of my evenings which are free from business I should like to join you, but to-night I have an engagement.”

At just that moment he glanced at Dr. Everett. There was a slight smile on his face, and a sort of suggestive look— if I may use the term—that made Robert's face flush. He thought of their conversation in the carriage. Could the

doctor mean that it was his present duty to state the nature of his engagement?

What good could come of that? And it would certainly be embarrassing. Yet here came a troublesome question which insisted on being answered: What was there embarrassing about it? Was a prayer-meeting a questionable place for a young man to attend?

Well, but this young man was almost an unbeliever; he did not even go to church on the Sabbath.

Yes; what of that? Did the Bible direct that before unbelievers we must ignore prayer-meetings? Was he really so ashamed of his new colours that he could not wear them before a man who did not believe in them? Questions somewhat like these hurried rapidly through his mind, and the result was that in answer to Mr. Brooks's questioning look he said,—

“I have promised to attend the Fort Street prayer-meeting this evening.”

“Oh! I beg pardon. I was not aware that you attended a young men's prayer-meeting.”

What was there in this sentence to make it so intensely disagreeable? Mr. Brooks did not sneer. He was too well-bred to do any such thing. But haven't you sometimes heard a sneer in the voice when the face was pleasant enough?

Robert flushed hotly and his courage rose. When his personal pride was touched he could be brave.

“I haven't attended a prayer-meeting since I was a boy of twelve or so,” he said firmly. “This is a new departure; but I propose to be regular in attendance hereafter.”

“Indeed!”

There was that peculiar look and tone again; it was almost a sneer. A decided one would have made Robert feel very bold.

He spoke now in a clear, ringing voice, that could be distinctly heard around the quiet table,—



"Perhaps this is as good a time as any to say to our family that I believe I have taken a new departure in many ways. I desire and hope to be found on the Lord's side in the future."

"Are congratulations in order, Mr. Parks? I am not very well posted as to the proprieties of the occasion. If they are, I am sure I congratulate you."

Whereupon Mr. Brooks arose, and with a bow and a most significant smile immediately left the room. And Robert, somehow, felt that he had "made known the news" in a manner probably very unlike that of the shepherds of old.

Dr. Everett maintained a grave silence, and Robert could almost have imagined that he disapproved of the attempt. Yet was it not in the very line of witnessing which he had counselled?

Half an hour later Robert was waiting in the hall the coming of the doctor, when a note was handed to him. It was hurriedly scrawled, but he recognized Fred Briggs's handwriting, and frowned. That fellow had given him annoyance enough during the day; what could he want now?

"I say, Parks, can't you come around and spend the evening and the night with a fellow? I'm more than two-thirds sick, and a little skittish about staying up here in my den all alone, lest I might get worse. You are the only fellow within reach that I can endure the sight of to-night, or I wouldn't bore you. Some of the others will do to chaff with; but when one's head feels like mine, he wants them to keep their distance. If you've got any compassion in your heart, I hope you'll appear to me soon, for I'm as blue as my mother's indigo bag.—Yours dismally,

"FRED BRIGGS."

It was a very gloomy-faced young man who met the doctor in the hall a few minutes later.

“Read that,” he said solemnly. The path of duty looked by no means so inviting to him as it had but a few moments before. He did want to go to the Fort Street prayer-meeting, and he did not want to spend the evening with Fred Briggs. “It is very strange that he should send for me,” he muttered, as the doctor glanced hurriedly over the note. “I did not suppose I was an intimate friend of his; in fact, I have always thought him a good deal of a nuisance.”

“Yet it is plainly to be seen that you are needed,” the doctor said as he returned the invitation. “Poor fellow! he wants to be petted by his mother, I presume. I hope he has a good one, and that he has not been neglecting her. If anything serious is the matter, and he has no physician on his list of friends, perhaps you would do well to let me know in the morning, or to-night, if it should seem advisable. That is, you understand, I shall be glad to help if my services are needed. Your opportunities are certainly beginning, my friend.”

Notwithstanding that last sentence, Robert went off gloomily, feeling a little as though he had been dismissed, like a boy who was not supposed to have a mind of his own. Why, for instance, should the doctor take it for granted that he was going to throw up his engagement at the call of a fellow who had a fit of the blues? Opportunities indeed! Much Dr. Everett knew about it! The gayest and silliest clerk in the entire store. Seriousness of any sort would be wasted on him. Besides, he had a special desire to go to that young men’s meeting, and identify himself with them. Why did things poke themselves in right athwart a man’s line of duty? That was what he should like to know.

The simple truth is, that this young man had all his lifetime, hitherto, taught himself to do very much as he pleased. It was new business to find himself, within the limits of the time that he had been in the habit of calling his own, pressed into a service that was not in a line with his inclina-

tions. He was honest in his self-surrender, but he did not understand as yet what it was to give up the control of himself to another. Possessed by such feelings, brooding over his disappointment all the way, what do you think about his being a profitable companion for Fred Briggs?

He struggled to control himself, but it seemed almost impossible not to let Fred see that he considered him a nuisance, and had obeyed his summons much against his will. So well, in fact, did he succeed in making this impression, that, fifteen minutes after his arrival, young Briggs would have been glad to see him depart — would have sent him away, could he have thought of an excuse for doing so. As it was, he twisted about on his not very comfortable bed, and grumbled,—

“What in sixty do you suppose is the matter with me, anyhow? Every bone in my body aches as though I had been a race-horse and lost the prize; and my blood has gone to boiling inside of me. I believe it meditates an explosion.”

“Why, I presume you have taken cold,” Robert said, speaking coldly enough almost to give the fellow a fresh supply. “Those symptoms are by no means either strange or very alarming.”

“I suppose not,” Briggs said, drawing a heavy sigh; “but they are confoundedly uncomfortable.”

Thereupon he sprang up, with an effort to be manly and companionable, staggered into an uncomfortable, wooden-backed chair, leaned his head against another, and with a miserable groan closed his eyes to shut back the tears. His head ached, and his bones ached, and his heart ached. He wanted his mother. He could imagine her, having soaked his burning feet, and plumped his pillows in some mysterious way that always seemed to make them large and cool, making gentle passes over his hot forehead with her cool, quiet hand, bending occasionally and touching her lips to his cheek,

with low-murmured words of tenderness. He had just such a mother. She could do all these things. It was almost impossible to keep the tears from showing as he persisted in imagining her. His heart was very tender. A gentle word would have melted him utterly. One who would befriend him now, in his loneliness and need, might count on having almost unlimited influence over him in the future. Yet here sat this newly-enlisted soldier of the King, bound in honour to win other recruits from every possible source, looking gloomily into space—so utterly disappointed because he could not carry out his own cherished plan of going to the prayer-meeting and showing his colours, that his eyes were blind to this opportunity, and he let his colours trail in the dust. It is almost a pity that he could not have been within hearing of Joy Saunders and Dr. Everett as they stood together in the sunset room for a moment, comparing notes as to the day's blessings. Among other things they spoke of him.

"He is going to be an outspoken Christian, isn't he?" Joy said. "I was glad to hear him answer Mr. Brooks so firmly. He desires to honour his Leader, and is not ashamed of his uniform. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps." But the doctor spoke the word with a thoughtful gravity that might have helped to put Robert on his guard. "It is possible that some of his courage was roused by Mr. Brooks's tone. I think that is the form of courage which he has. Downright sneers would make him very bold; but whether it would be the truest kind of boldness is possibly a question. He is sincere; but he wants to do his own leading, I think, like the most of us. We must help him, Joy."

And could the doctor have peeped into Fred Briggs's sick-room, he would have seen that the new soldier needed helping.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### UNWILLING SERVICE.

TAKING all things into consideration, I hardly know which spent the more miserable night—Briggs or his companion.

Poor Briggs grew unmanageable. He would not go to bed and to sleep, and he would sit up and stare at Robert and growl. He was sure he was going to have a fit of sickness—he felt it all over him—and mother could not come. She wasn't able to travel, nor able to bear the strain of sickness, anyway, though she was nicer when a fellow was sick than anything there was on this earth. She would have no money to come with, even if she had the strength. She was poor, of course; everybody was poor who ought to be rich; the mean folks had all the money. For his part, he did not see why so many poor people had to keep living on and on, when it would be a great deal easier to die and be done with it.

Part of this talk was the wildness of fever; but Robert, unused to attending the sick, did not recognize it, and had much ado not to visibly lose patience with him. He could only look upon him as a nervous boy, who had no serious trouble, and perhaps needed a good scolding as much as anything. Not feeling called upon to give that, he considered a judicious letting alone the next best remedy.

When the restless fellow finally tumbled back into bed, matters were not materially improved. He tossed from side to side, turned his pillows frequently, and finally threw them

away, muttering constantly. To be sure he fell asleep ; but this by no means brought quiet. Tossings and mutterings continued, the indistinct murmuring being almost more unendurable than the downright grumblings had been.

When, at a late hour, Robert gloomily resigned himself to the necessities of the case, and lay down on the outermost edge of the narrow bed, he realized for the first time that his companion was burning with fever. He did not in the least know what to do for him ; also, he believed that the necessity for doing was not great. People suffering with severe colds always had more or less fever ; and he had heard his mother say that it was nowise alarming when they were even slightly delirious.

So, feeling that there was nothing better to do, he extinguished the smoky lamp somewhat after midnight, crept as far away from the tossing form as he could, and dropped asleep. A narrow streak of sunshine, slanting athwart his face, awakened him. Fred Briggs was also awake, and if more subdued was certainly not more hopeful than on the preceding evening. Robert, looking at him by the light of the day, could see that his lips were fever-parched, and his eyes unnaturally bright. On the whole, it seemed probable that he would prove a true prophet, and have an experience in the sick-room.

Much to Robert's relief, he was more anxious about the store, and that his employers should know that it was illness and not carelessness or dissipation which kept him away, than he was for anything else. This would make it necessary for Robert to report promptly at the store—which thing he was quite willing to do.

"And what besides that can I do for you ? Anything, before I go ?" he asked, pausing before the disordered bed, and watching the restless twists and turns of its occupant.

"Oh, I'm sure I don't know ; nothing, I suppose. I wouldn't have mother know for a kingdom that I'm sick.

Wasn't it you told me once that your mother couldn't leave your father to come to you? Well, we are in the same fix. My mother can't leave my little sister Nettie. She is sick all the time, and suffering; and she is blind. That was what made me think of you last night. I wanted mother, you see, as a fellow always does, and I knew I couldn't have her. Then it occurred to me that you had been through it, and would know how I felt. No; there's nothing. Nobody else cares whether I'm sick or well."

"Have you nobody who could come and stay with you for awhile?"

Briggs gave an impatient jerk to his small and long-suffering pillow. "I haven't an acquaintance in town that I wouldn't walk a mile to get rid of seeing, nor one who would come to see me, if he knew I was sick, and could help himself. Now go, please."

Whereupon he retired to the farthest corner of the bed, and turned his face to the wall.

Robert gave a little sigh. He was beginning to be sorry for the poor fellow—a little worried about him—but at the same time was a good deal relieved to remember that duty undoubtedly called him to the store. Still, something ought to be done.

"Well," he said irresolutely, "I'll speak to your landlady as I go down. Of course, she will attend to you."

"Of course!" came in muffled tone from behind the pillow. "Do so, by all means; she will be as attentive as a whole regiment of mothers."

The full force of this ironical statement did not impress Robert until he paused at a door below, to meet the uncombed, collarless, partly buttonless, altogether untidy woman who presided over this third-rate boarding-house, peopled by young men with small salaries. Then he wondered whether it would not have been better to have taken the risk of leaving Briggs to himself, rather than to have

exposed him to the possibility of a visit from such a woman as this. Still, her air and tone did not suggest the idea that she would hasten to his aid. Perhaps, after all, he might escape her.

"Sick, is he?" Mr. Cady said, a shade of anxiety in his voice, as later in the day Robert reported at headquarters the cause of the non-appearance of "Number 13." "I've been expecting that. A most careless, reckless young fellow. I don't know his equal in those respects; the wonder is that he is alive."

After this encouraging statement, he walked nervously up and down the aisles for a few moments, giving short, sharp orders to the arriving clerks, and then returned to Robert.

"Parks, is any one with young Briggs?"

"No, sir."

"Quite alone, is he? Do you know whether he has any friend among his associates who could be secured to look after him a while, until we learn what is the extent of his trouble?"

"He says not. He told me he would walk a mile to get rid of seeing any of them."

"Sensible friendships for a young man to form!" said the elder gentleman with a curling lip. Another pause, with some more thoughtful walking about the store, and Mr. Cady came again to Robert.

"How came you to be with Briggs last night? You spent the night with him, I think you said. Is he a favourite of yours?"

"Hardly! but he sent for me, and of course I could not refuse."

"Ah! then you are an exception to those whom the poor fellow would walk a mile to avoid? And it is your opinion that he is seriously ill? I'll tell you what I wish you would do: just step around and remain with him for a while, until we can make other arrangements. I should not like to have



him suffer through any neglect. I knew his father in my boyhood, and his mother is an estimable and unfortunate woman. I have a very kind feeling toward him for his parents' sake. Indeed, I am under a sort of half promise to look after the boy. Of course there is very little that I can do in that line; but if he is sick, I want him to be taken care of, though I must say he has probably brought this trouble on himself. I have been annoyed with him for some time. Perhaps you can have a good influence over him now. If you will go around and do what you can for his comfort, and remain with him until some one else appears, or until I can make my plans as to what is best, I shall consider it a favour on your part."

Can I make it clear to you with what reluctance Robert obeyed this request, which had behind it all the authority of a command? He was willing, nay, anxious, to do his best for his employer. But to go back, out of the freshness and sunshine, to the stuffy room where he had passed the night, and watch Fred Briggs toss about on that dreadful bed, and not have the slightest idea what to do for him, and but little inclination to do it if he had—this was a hard lot indeed. He made no haste through the bright and busy streets. He felt sullen and rebellious. He was not a nurse, nor yet a servant; why should he be treated as such? He assuredly did not understand the way in which he was being led. He had enlisted, yes, and was willing to do his duty; but why was this duty? There is many a soldier like him.

"He is not a friend of mine, I am sure," he muttered. "I think I have done my part in staying all night. There are people enough who can be hired for such work. I'm not one of them. Why doesn't he hire a nurse if he is sorry for him, and has such an interest in the family?"

Robert's pronouns, though very carelessly managed, were all clear to himself. He gave a fierce jerk to the asthmatic bell of the boarding-house, and ran against the landlady in the hall.

"I was just going up to your friend," she explained. "I have been that busy that I couldn't get away before; but now you are come back he will be all right. I'll look in when I can; but I do hope he isn't going to be sick long. It adds to the work awful, and is bad for the house besides."

"Professionally installed as head nurse!" muttered Robert in intense disgust; and deigning no reply to the sympathetic words, he rushed up the many flights of stairs.

His patient had fallen into an uneasy sleep. His face was hot with fever, and the rings under his eyes were heavy. The sun glared fiercely at him; and the room seemed black with flies which were buzzing about, with every variety of torturing noise that great and little flies can make. Down sat Robert in the midst of this disorder and misery. So little of a nurse was he—indeed, so little common sense had he where sickness was concerned—that it actually did not occur to him to shut out the sunlight! He looked about the room. It seemed by far the most horrid-looking room that he was ever in.

"Not a comfortable thing in it, nor a neat thing!" he muttered, contrasting it mentally with the one over whose appointments Joy's taste presided. "It's enough to make a fellow sick to be in such a place."

Fred Briggs turned himself over ten times in as many minutes, and at last awoke.

"You here!" he said in surprise, and then occurred question and answer about affairs at the store.

"That was very kind in him, but horrid for you," he said, in answer to Robert's explanation that the senior partner had sent him back. "I wouldn't have come if I had been you."

"Have you had anything to eat?" questioned Robert, and was answered by a gesture of disgust, and a fierce—

"Don't you dare to say that again!"

"Well, in my opinion, you ought to see a doctor, and have something done for you, and somebody to do it."

Poor Briggs groaned.

"A doctor is the most expensive animal that has yet been discovered," he said with grim sarcasm, "and the 'something done' and 'somebody to do it' all take money. Who is to pay the bills, I should like to know?"

With such inspiring conversation as this the morning wore away. Briggs tossed and groaned and dozed, and every minute the fever seemed to grow fiercer.

No one came. People tramped up and down stairs, and rang bells, and slammed doors, and screamed at one another down endless halls; still no knock at his door.

It was nearly noon before Robert bethought himself of Dr. Everett's words:—

"If there is anything serious the matter, let me know."

"He has probably forgotten it by this time," he told himself with curling lip. What had Mr. Cady's promise to "secure help," or the landlady's promise to "look in," amounted to? He grew angry thinking of it. Somebody should do something. The slatternly woman should send a note to Dr. Everett. He would give him a chance to prove whether he meant anything but words.

With some delay and much trouble this plan was carried into effect. By this time the sun was shining fairly on the sick head. Still it did not occur to the watcher to shut it out. His own head began to ache, and the pangs of hunger made themselves felt. Finding himself late in the morning, he had breakfasted at a restaurant, and the contrast between the tables there and those served by Mrs. Saunders had not been appetizing. Now he was evidently expected to get along without any dinner. He rested his head on his hand, and felt ill-used.

Another quick ring of the long-suffering bell, decisive steps on the stairs, and at last a low, firm knock at the door.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### TIME FOR THOUGHT.

“WHAT have we here?” asked Dr. Everett, turning at once toward the bed. However, he gave scarcely a glance at its occupant before he went to shut out the blinding sun, pushing the window up from below and down from above, and closing blinds and slats. Robert felt the instant relief, and secretly wondered at his own stupidity. A few minutes more and the doctor stood before the rickety wash-stand, disposing of the soap-suds that had been left in the sickly-looking, yellowish bowl.

“Just step downstairs and raise a piece of ice for me,” he said to Robert in tones of quiet authority. “Say that I must have some.”

There was no alternative but to obey; but as Robert slowly descended the stairs, he wondered if the doctor knew how much he hated to go. By the time he returned, the new-comer had made a fly-brush of the soiled towel, and was unceremoniously whipping the flies into the hall, whither he presently threw the towel. Then he fumbled among certain suspicious-looking rags that adorned the wash-stand, and presently abandoning them, drew from his pocket and deliberately unfolded a large cambric handkerchief, dipped it into the ice-water, and began to make slow, steady passes with it over the burning head and face of his patient. Presently he laid the handkerchief, ice and all, on the hot head, and gave himself to straightening the disordered draperies of the bed.

Robert, watching him for a few moments, at last stooped down, and gathering up Briggs's clothing, which lay where it had been recklessly kicked by its owner the night before, disposed of it in the recesses of a little closet in the corner.

"If you can find a duster of some sort, that table and shelf will be much the better for its use. There is dust enough in this room to produce a fever almost."

This was the form of the doctor's next order; and Robert, securing one of the discarded rags, meekly proceeded to dust the room. By the time the bed-clothes had submitted to the hand of a master the patient opened his eyes.

"Does it refresh you any?" questioned Dr. Everett, rearranging the ice.

"It feels like a little bit of mother!"

There were relief and gratitude in the tone. The doctor, looking about him, presently drew a chair, and renewing the passes of the cool cloth over head and face, asked a few careful questions. Apparently it was a plain case of some sort, and needed not many words.

"What nourishment have you taken?" This was the next question.

"Nothing."

"Since when?"

"Yesterday morning."

The doctor smothered an exclamation of some sort, and turned to Robert,—

"Parks, please descend to the lower regions and secure a glass of iced milk for me as soon as it can be accomplished; then tell the reigning powers that I want the cook sent to me to get directions about preparing some food for a sick man. And I want it done immediately."

"O doctor!" came in feeble protest from the bed; and Fred tried to raise himself a trifle and prepare to talk.

"Lie still, please, and don't talk any just now; you are too much exhausted. You are in my hands now, and there

is nothing for you but to submit.—Parks, obey my directions, please.”

It really took very little time for all these and several other things to happen. Before Dr. Everett had been in the room half an hour by his watch, it had assumed a sort of cleared-up, freshened air, and was freer from flies than it had been since those pests arrived on the scene. The slovenly landlady had also discovered that it was her duty to “look in,” and had received Dr. Everett’s authoritative orders with such infinite respect in tone and manner as led Robert to conclude that she knew to whom she was speaking. You will remember that Dr. Everett had a peculiar talent for asking questions. Before Robert Parks realized their full meaning, the doctor, by a few well-chosen, leading questions, had possessed himself of all the circumstances connected with the night and the morning thus far. More than that, Robert suddenly felt as though he had himself told the doctor that he had been sullen and selfish and culpably careless of the sufferings of another.

“Somebody must stay here to-night who will forget himself and take excellent care of that young man.” This was the doctor’s pointed sentence, spoken as he stood with Robert in the hall. “He is very sick, and will probably, because of needless delay, grow worse. It becomes necessary to act with promptness. He tells me that he has no physician in the city. So I shall take the case in hand; and I shall expect whoever enters that room to obey my directions in every particular. Since you have been detailed there for service, you must remain until we can do better.”

“I should think a professional nurse ought to be engaged. I have had no practice in that direction; and I have had no dinner at all, and no breakfast to speak of.”

Robert spoke with great *hauteur*. It was not the dinner that he valued so highly, but he felt hurt and ashamed, and wanted Dr. Everett to understand that he had been at

some sacrifice. But the effort was productive of little comfort.

“Your dinner will keep, probably, as mine must,” the doctor said coolly. “I have had none as yet, and expect to make six calls before I shall have an opportunity to get any. Your messenger was fortunate in finding me just as I was leaving Washington Square; but you were extremely unfortunate in not sending for help before. The indications are that he passed a wretched, suffering night. Professional nurses are good when you can get them. It is unfortunate that they are specially scarce just now. I have been on the look-out for one all the morning without success. But the Lord’s nurses are always to be found. On my way down town I will leave a message at the Young Men’s Christian Association, and some Christian young man will report for duty to-night without fail. I will even try to secure somebody to relieve you soon, so that you may eat that dinner; but you certainly must not leave the poor fellow until somebody comes to take your place; and you must follow the directions I have given with the utmost care.”

Was not this hard treatment for the young soldier? He felt such a bitter sense of being misunderstood that he could hardly control his voice to answer; but he did it, haughtily still.

“I have not the slightest intention of leaving him, and of course I will follow your directions.”

Then he saw the doctor depart, and went back to his vigil with great bitterness of heart. What right had Dr. Everett to insinuate that he had been selfish and neglectful? How should he have known that there was serious illness? If there were, why should he be expected to know how to manage? Why should the Young Men’s Christian Association be flaunted in his face? He was not a member, and it was not likely that he ever would be. “A party of fine young men with plenty of money, who have nothing to do but play

at benevolence!" That was the way he characterized them. He did not believe there was one among them who had to earn his own living. What should hinder them from sitting up nights, when they could sleep all day if they chose? They might take care of Fred Briggs, and welcome, and get all the glory they could out of it. He should wash his hands of the whole affair. You will perceive that he was not very well posted as to the Christian Association; but this was not for lack of opportunity to become acquainted. Young men high in position had sought him out and tried to win him, but poor Robert had had an angry sense of being patronized to hold him back from them.

I think the young man will always remember the dinnerless afternoon which he spent in the darkened room, taking what care he could of one who apparently grew worse every moment. It was an afternoon of conflict. At first unreasoning passion had the upper hand. There came a note from Dr. Everett, saying that he had utterly failed in procuring proper help as yet; that he was still trying; but that the bearer of this would relieve him, and remain until further orders. Would he very carefully explain the directions, as it was imperative that they be followed?

The "bearer" was one of the clerks sent there by Mr. Cady, at Dr. Everett's request. This last item added fuel to Robert's anger. Did the doctor think that he wanted him to go to headquarters and complain of ill-treatment? He dismissed the clerk with very few words of explanation beyond the fact that he chose to remain himself, and so Mr. Cady might be told. I do not know whether he ever realized how much he owed the clerk, who had sense enough to clothe his message in respectful language before giving it to his chief.

Left alone, the angry fellow went through several stages of passion, until it somewhat spent itself, and gave him a chance to ask what he was angry about. Carefully considered, it appeared, after all, that he was most angry with himself.



Following closely upon this discovery came a sort of despair. A failure thus early in his Christian course! What could he hope for, if this were the beginning? Was he a Christian at all? Had his solemn experiences only last Sabbath been nothing but a delusion? Should he give it all up? Religion was not for such as he. Life was too full of carping cares and petty annoyances for him ever to make a success of it. Let the young men of the Association, who had leisure to do it well, take upon them the name which he could only disgrace. He was still so angry that he could not think the word "Association" without a curling lip.

All unwittingly, Dr. Everett had dealt him a hard blow. But you are to do him the justice to remember that he did not mean half the things he thought, any more than you do, my friend, when you let anger sway you and pour her thoughts through your brain—thoughts which you do not mean to harbour, but which you give way to and let roll through. There came quieter ones. Indeed it was a quiet afternoon. Briggs had dropped at last into a heavy slumber—too heavy, had the watcher but known it. He did know enough to be solemnized by the movelessness of the purple-faced sleeper, and to wonder anxiously when the doctor would come, and whether he ought to be sent for again. He roused his patient with difficulty to give the medicine, and directly it was swallowed the poor fellow sank away again into that strange, unnatural sleep. Time for thought.

After all, I don't know that Robert Parks ever passed a more profitable hour than that which came to him at last, when the storm of passion had subsided, and he had forgotten his pride, in a sense of humiliation and failure; and in turn forgotten that, even in the sense of bitter sorrow;—he had failed his Captain at almost the first call. That he was sincere you will know when I tell you that this last thought, when it came in force, drove him at once to his knees; and by that you know, also, that he gained a victory.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### KNOW THYSELF.

THE first interruption to his vigil was a card, presented by a girl, who, from her appearance and dress, might have been a relative of the landlady. The card was the official one of the Young Men's Christian Association, and merely bore the statement that their messenger was below, prepared to spend the night, and would come up at once if he might. Robert, by this time in a very subdued mood, sent an immediate invitation to him to do so; and a moment thereafter, in answer to the knock, admitted Austin Barrows.

"Well!" he said, stopping before him in amazement. "Is it possible that it is you?"

"Why, yes. But I did not know before that it was you. I fell in with some of the young men on Monday evening and joined the Association, and I happened to be in at noon when there came this urgent call for help. So I volunteered to come as soon as business released me."

So this was the "young man of leisure who could sleep all day"!

"Who called for help?" was Robert's abrupt question.

"The doctor. But I did not see him. The secretary told me. I did not know I was to relieve you. I say, Parks, it is a little strange that you and I should be associated in this way just now. It strikes me pleasantly, as though our new Captain meant to unite us in his service. Now, what's to do? Give me my orders quickly, and be off. You look

tired out. Have you been here all day? What did you do for something to eat?"

"I sent downstairs and got a bite," Robert explained. It did not seem necessary to admit just then that he had sent the Relief Committee away, and gone dinnerless, because he was in a rage. However, he did not go just yet. The doctor was the next comer. He asked many questions, gave very careful orders, promised to call at midnight, and then peremptorily ordered Parks away with him. After a brisk, silent walk of some squares, it was Robert who broke the stillness:—

"Doctor, I've been a fool all my life, and especially so today. I think I know now, for the first time, what I am about. But there are some things that I want to ask you. Professional skill is one thing, and bathing people's faces and washing out bowls and fighting flies are other things. What I want to know is, how you teach yourself to think of such things, or feel that you have time to attend to them. Of course, if I had exercised common sense, I might have thought of some of them myself; but I don't understand how you have taught your mind to spring to them as a matter of course."

"One reason, doubtless, is that they are not always so separated from professional duties as you suppose. All these so-called little matters have very much to do with the progress or the stay of disease. Besides, my friend, I am a fisherman. You should not forget that."

"A fisherman!" repeated Robert, unable to follow him in what seemed a sudden transition.

"Ay, regularly commissioned. 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' That is the order, with the promise attached. When you have lived somewhat longer in this world, you will begin to realize that there are ten thousand little things no more important in themselves than brushing out troublesome flies, or shutting out glaring sun-

light, or tidying a slovenly washstand, or cooling a burning forehead, which can be used as nets wherewith to catch poor, tired, home-sick fish. Possibly you and I are set to catch this young man in our nets, and present him to our Captain as a trophy. You had your opportunity last night; mine comes later. We must do our work well—the trifles as well as the great things—for we know not which shall prosper, this or that.

“By the way, if you are homeward bound, will you ask Mrs. Saunders if she can let me have a small roll of old linen? Tell her to send my boy down there with it, and whatever else she thinks of that ought to be there. These mothers can think of things which seem to occur to nobody else. I doubt my getting home to-night. I have two bad cases. Good-night.”

Robert went on his way, realizing two things—first, that there are no *little* matters connected with this solemn business of living; and secondly, that he had proved a very poor fisher, not worthy to be counted among those who “followed.”

Still his Captain gave him other opportunities in that same sick-room. This was no easy task which they had undertaken. For days and weeks Fred Briggs wrestled with pain and fever. There were days and nights in which it seemed that the disease would conquer. It was a time of unusual sickness in the city, and no professional nurse was to be had. The nearest approach to it was a blundering young fellow, who could not be trusted for much more than to wait on the volunteer watcher for the hour. Young Parks found himself thoroughly roused out of his selfishness, and was so often a volunteer that Dr. Everett had to take him in hand at times and order him home. Still, there were nights when for hours together he was left as sole watcher, with all the responsibilities and anxieties of the position pressing down upon him. Then there were other nights when Mrs. Saun-

ders and Dr. Everett and he stood around helplessly, with apparently nothing to do but realize that they had failed, and await the coming of death. During those weeks it seemed to Robert that he grew old very fast—that indeed he must be years older than he was on that first evening of his vigil. There was one night in particular that stood out in his memory. It was early, not yet nine o'clock; but his night of watching had already commenced, to be relieved later by the doctor, if he could get away from another sick-bed. There was not much to do; but the gloom of a probable failure was upon him in full force, the doctor having frankly told him that he feared the case was hopeless. As for the patient, he was in a state of semi-stupor, wherein he feared nothing and noticed nothing.

There came a tap at the door, and Robert, moving softly to open it, found himself, to his utter amazement, standing face to face with Hester Mason.

“She sent you up a cup of tea,” she explained briefly, setting down her burden, her eyes fixed on the sleeping occupant of the bed. “She thought you looked unusually tired when you came up. Don’t you watch too often? You didn’t expect to see me, did you? There is a girl boarding here who is a sort of a friend of mine. I come to see her once in a while; and to-night I have been in the kitchen helping the landlady. She has a dreadful headache. She isn’t very neat, but she is good-hearted. It was she thought of the tea for you; but I made it myself, and washed the cup and spoon before I served it.—Is he going to get well?”

“I am afraid not. The doctor looks grave to-night, and seems discouraged.”

“Is he ready to die?”

Coming from Hester, this question, at all times a solemn one, seemed peculiarly startling.

“I don’t know,” he said mournfully. “I am afraid not.”

“Does he know it? I mean, does he know that he is

likely to die? I should want to know it. I wouldn't like to lie there sleeping my life away and having everybody stepping softly and keeping still. I should want to have them shout at me and wake me up to get ready."

"What good would it do now, Hester? He does not understand what is said to him; he is quite indifferent to everything concerning himself. I don't think even shouting would rouse him enough to have him understand."

"He ought to have been told before. I mean, he ought to have thought of this possibility and got ready for it. You ought to have settled it before, Rob, and then gone after him, so that he would have been ready for this time. How do you know but it is your fault after all?"

There was not the slightest touch of banter in her voice; instead it was singularly solemn, modulated as it was to suit the stillness of the room. It had a strange effect on Robert. He glanced over at the quiet form, and felt his own pulses beating fast with suppressed feeling.

"I do not know but it is," he said at last, speaking tremulously. "I might have helped him. I had opportunities, and wasted them. I may have to go around for ever after, feeling that I might have introduced him to Christ and did not."

"It must be an ugly feeling." She still spoke in that strangely grave tone, her eyes fixed on the bed. Then she turned away with a little sigh, as if the dreary past were unalterable, and said: "Well, you can't help it now, I suppose. You may as well drink your tea. I hope he won't blame you if he dies, and you and he ever meet again."

"Perhaps he will blame you!" Robert felt himself impelled to say these words, and he turned and looked steadily at her. "You knew him, Hester. He told me once that he met you at the theatre, and had a really gay visit with you. Why may not you be the one to blame when he meets you again?"

"I! Who can blame me? I don't belong to the safe people. I am lost myself, you know."

"But you know exactly how to be safe, and you know how to point the way to others. How will the fact of your not doing what you might have done relieve you from obligation? Hester, if you lay on a dying bed unready, would I have to think that I was, perhaps, to blame for that too?"

"Well, I think you would have to bear some of the blame. I don't suppose that would save me from responsibility; but then there is no telling what you might have coaxed me to do, you know, if you had tried early enough. Still, I don't blame you. Only I do hope I shall not have to be ashamed of you as a Christian. I only know a few people by that name of whom I am not heartily ashamed."

She had dropped into her light, bantering tone; had retreated entirely within the shadow of the hall, instead of occupying the open door; and waiting only to ask if he liked cold tea, vanished downstairs.

But she left a solemn lesson for Robert to study. He could not shut away her words. The awful thought that here he was in the shadow of death, and that this silent soul before him might have been helped by his efforts, and was not, shut down about him like a pall.

That night of prayer for forgiveness, for a chance to try once more, for an opportunity to reach this young man, for power to influence that young woman, he will never forget.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### HAVE ME EXCUSED.

THERE came an evening when Fred Briggs sat, gaunt and hollow-eyed, in the large rocking-chair which Dr. Everett had ordered to be sent to him, propped up with pillows, and looked with curious and unnaturally large eyes at his wan hands and long, skeleton fingers. Robert Parks was with him for the first time in three days.

"Nice-looking fellow I am!" he said at last, seeing that Robert was regarding him thoughtfully.

There seemed no reasonable reply to make to this, and apparently Fred expected none. He left the survey of his hands, and gave attention to the room.

There had been changes—many little comforts added during his sickness; and the utmost neatness prevailed.

"This room has improved more than I have during the last month," the invalid said at last. "I thought I was rather ahead in appearance the last time I gave any attention to these matters; but I seem to have been left awfully in the lurch."

"Your improvement has only commenced with the last few days, remember. I can tell you it has been fast enough. You look better than I ever expected to see you, old fellow."

Fred's answer was a sigh.

"I suppose I'm grateful," he said wearily. "In fact, I know I am. I'm not such a dog as to forget all that's been done for me. But I should like to know how it is all to come



out. I wish I were at home, though mother has enough to bear now. Did she know when I was at the worst?"

"Not fully, until afterwards. The 'worst' came on so suddenly that we hardly knew what we were about. And, you know, you had made it plain to me that she could not come. We thought we would spare her all the anxiety that we could. But she has heard from you daily for the last two weeks."

"No," said Fred, "she could not come. That would have been out of the question, as much as my going home is." And then he sighed again.

Robert was in doubt how to talk with him. He had no plans to communicate; for the people who had shared the care of him for so long a time had been too busy to have other than necessary talk together. But there was something that his attendant wanted to say, if only he knew how, and the earnest desire to say it aright held him silent. He had a consuming sense of responsibility for the young man. He could not get away from the fact that death had so nearly claimed him when he was not ready to go. He had not been able to forget Hester Mason's words, and the keen reproach conveyed through them. If he could but say something now that would turn Fred's thoughts, during these few days of leisure, upon himself and his escape, and the probable reason for his being spared, and urge him to settle the great question now, so that no more risks need be run. After all his thinking his words were at last blunt enough:—

"Fred, what if you had died?"

"Well," said Fred, after a moment's surprised stare out of his sunken eyes, "then I suppose I should have died, and that would have been the end of the trouble."

"Oh no; it would only have been the beginning. It is the part which comes afterwards that I am thinking about."

"That's kind of you, I am sure."

Something in the tone made Robert feel that he was not

progressing. "I wish you would think of these things," he said, speaking with a sort of pleading earnestness. But Fred replied more lightly than he had since his illness.

"My dear fellow, I can't. More weighty matters occupy my thoughts. It requires all the strength I possess to determine whether I will have beef-tea for my breakfast, or tea and toast. On the whole, which do you think would be likely to foot up the largest bill?"

Robert felt himself growing impatient. This seemed such a strangely flippant way to talk, for one who was hardly yet out from under the solemn shadow. A little of his disappointment showed in his words:—

"I don't know how you, of all fellows, can feel like trifling with such matters just now. I don't think you can half realize how near you were to death. There were days together in which the doctor did not have a shadow of hope. He told me afterwards that he should have telegraphed your mother, had he thought that there was a possibility of your living until she could reach you."

If he had not been so young a worker, he would have detected a suspicious quiver in the voice which answered, though the words were gay enough,—

"Oh, well, as to that, I pushed through, you see, and came out right side up with care. It isn't likely that I shall have another such experience very soon. People don't generally. Did you never hear of the old fellow who said he had always noticed that if he lived until the first of April he lived through the year? I'm a nephew of his, I suspect, and inherit the same feeling."

"Well," said Robert, moving restlessly in his chair, "you have had experiences solemn enough to tame you, I should think; but it seems they have not done it." He felt not only discouraged, but disgusted. What hope was there of a person who could talk so heartlessly, after hovering for days on the very verge of the grave?

Fred laughed feebly, his extreme weakness being more apparent when he laughed than at any other time.

"Tame me!" he said. "Why, I'm sure I feel as tame as a sick chicken. My wings are not only clipped, but pulled out altogether, I fancy."

There was no answer made to this. And presently an uncomfortable feeling stole over the sick man that he had hurt one to whom he owed much, and who seemed during these last weeks to have been unfailingly kind and patient with him. He began to fidget a little in his chair, and as Robert came to rearrange the pillow he said,—

"I seem like an ungrateful fellow, I know; but I don't mean it, Parks, upon honour. If there was ever a fellow whom I would like to go down on my knees to thank, it is you. But I am not of the sort to talk much about things. As to these other matters that you want me to think about, I've done some thinking. A stone would have thought if it had lain where I did; but I don't suppose it will amount to much. I'm the same worthless scamp I was before. I wish my sickness had torn Fred Briggs to pieces, and patched him up again, as it is doing to the house I live in. But it didn't. I feel myself to be on hand as much as ever; or would, if I had strength enough to feel anything. You didn't do much thinking in that line when I knew you well. Do you mean to say that your new notions last?"

"They last," said Robert, speaking with firmness. "And, Briggs, I have one great regret: I wish I had settled the question a dozen years ago, when I was a child. I knew the way then as well as I do now; but I shut my eyes to it, just as you are doing now. I wish you wouldn't, Fred. I haven't had the right sort of influence over you in the past. I want to undo some of my work, if I can. You don't know how we prayed for you to get up again; and now that God has answered the prayer, I am sure it is to give you a chance to do some earnest thinking right away."

“Oh, I mean to,” answered Fred quickly. “In fact I must. I’ve enough to think about. If it doesn’t distract me, I shall be glad. How are all these bills to be paid, I should like to know? Think of the doctor’s bill, for instance! And who is going to pay for all the beef-teas, and jellies, and creams, and I don’t know what not, that I have been swallowing all this time? I tell you, I’ve got to get well, and go to work, and work out of hours, and all that, until I see a glimmer of daylight. No danger but I’ll think. There’s a chance for lots of it.”

“Oh, now, Fred, you know you are begging the question. Not but that I recognize your anxieties and sympathize with them. But you know very well that I am not talking about that sort of thinking. Really this is a practical matter as well as the other, and settling it will help you wonderfully in straightening out all the tangles in your life. It isn’t, after all, so much getting ready to die as it is getting ready to live. I do wish, Fred, that I could prevail on you to settle the question of first importance first, and bring a clear, quiet brain to all the other matters.”

“It is queer what different views different people have, isn’t it? Do you know, I don’t believe I could do anything in life that would disappoint Mattie more than to turn round now and be a good, church-going, prayer-meeting fellow. I hate to disappoint her just now, after scaring her by coming so near dying as I did. It seems as though it would be too hard on her.”

He meant that much of this should be taken as nonsense; but there was a shade of truth underlying it.

Robert was very well aware who “Mattie” was—the girl whose counter was just at Hester’s left, and who was on terms of intimacy with Hester herself; a girl who, apparently, up to the time of this young man’s illness, had given no more thought to the importance of her life than might be expected of a frisky young kitten. Probably she

knew little, if anything, about the "laws of influence," nor did she realize the power she had over human destinies—a power that reached into eternity. Yet here she was springing up before the mind of this young man, holding him back from a possible decision that would have settled all his future for him in this world and the next. The name "Mattie" had been much in the sick man's thoughts, and in his hours of delirium was constantly on his lips. So it was no news to Robert that the girl had a strong hold upon him.

What he thought was something like this: "How strangely intertwined the chain of influence is! This Mattie is Hester's friend. Hester has much influence over her. If Hester were, and had been, an earnest Christian, might she not have drawn Mattie? And if Mattie came, it would be an easy thing to influence Fred. And I am the one who had at least some influence over Hester. Suppose it had all told from the first on the side of Christ? Might she not have been won? As she says herself, there is no telling to what I might have coaxed her had I tried in time. Am I, then, in a sense responsible before God for all these souls?"

Also there was another train of thought shaping itself out in his brain. Somebody at the young men's prayer-meeting the evening before had read and commented on the excuses which were made in answer to the invitation to the feast, dwelling on the fact that with a little change of the phraseology they fitted the present day as well.

"I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." This sentence hovered in his mind as he thought of Fred and Mattie.

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse." He repeated these words aloud.

"Do you know," he said, "that you are the embodied presence of all those excuses? You have run through the entire list. Have you any idea how absurdly they sound when you study them carefully?"

“It is a hundred years since I read the story, though I used to rattle it off like an express train. I’ll venture that I know more about the Bible than you do, old fellow. I was brought up on it. My grandmother looked out for that; she put me through a regular course. Why, no; I’m not a bit like those old worthies, so far as I can see. One of them bought a farm or something, didn’t he? I shall not have money enough, after paying my soup and jelly debts, to buy a hen, let alone a farm. And as for that worthy who married a wife, when do you think I will be able to do that? I look like it, don’t I?” But the light laugh that followed had a tone of restlessness in it.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### ANOTHER LINK.

AND this was the apparent result of the effort which had lain so heavily on Robert Parks's heart! He was bitterly disappointed. It had seemed to him so entirely reasonable that one who had passed through Fred Briggs's experiences should be roused to thought and action. To have his earnest words passed over with a spirit born half of fun and half of listlessness seemed to him more discouraging than even an outspoken rebuff.

"I don't understand how to work," he told himself sadly. "Evidently I don't know how to say the right thing. If I could ever hope to have influence over any person, it might be supposed to be Fred Briggs, after what has passed; and yet my words have been worse than useless."

Two days afterwards he overheard that which confirmed him in the belief that he was a bungler at his Master's work.

A business matter having called him in that direction during the morning, he looked in on Fred to see that all was well. Entering, according to his custom since the invalid had been judged well enough to be left alone some of the time, without knocking and on tiptoe, lest he might disturb a nap, he found Mrs. Saunders beating up pillows and mattress in a way unknown to the best hired servant of them all, and Joy in the act of bringing a fresh handkerchief to the invalid in the large chair. On the handkerchief she

laid a tiny bouquet of freshly-blossomed pansies in all the glory and variety of their wonderful dress.

"If I knew of some way to show my gratitude for all your kindness and thoughtfulness, I would be glad." Fred was speaking in a low, grateful tone. Joy had a ready answer, also spoken low,—

"I know a way ; will you do it ?"

"I surely will, if it is in my power."

Instantly there lay beside the pansies a small open Testament, in clear print, with a heavy line drawn in blue ink around several verses.

"Read those marked verses a good many times to-day, and ask Christ to tell you what they mean."

"I will keep my promise," he said, and his voice was grave and earnest.

All this Robert Parks both saw and heard while he seemed to listen to Mrs. Saunders ; for the talk, though an aside, was not a secret one. Joy had not the air of saying what was not for any to hear who chose.

"And compel them to come in." These were the Bible words which came to the listener. Joy Saunders seemed to him to be that kind of a servant. He could invite those who "with one consent.....made excuse," but she could sweetly compel them in, that the house might be full.

He went away both saddened and gladdened. The subdued tones of Fred Briggs's voice, the look in his eyes, and the positive nature of the promise, made him believe that fruit would come. At that he could rejoice. The sigh was for himself, that he was an unprofitable servant.

I can tell you something that Robert Parks does not know. All night the young man, Fred Briggs, had tossed on an uneasy pillow, his dreams as well as his waking thoughts being busy with the fact that he was poorly requiting such loving care as had been given him. Why should he not give this question attention now, if for no other



reason than to show his gratitude, since this would evidently please them all, even Parks, who he had not supposed cared much? And then his mind went over certain words spoken to him by Robert in the morning, and he could but feel their force. They shone anew in the light of marked verses which had been read often enough to fix them in his memory.

Thus it came to pass that Joy Saunders's marked verses were seeds dropped into prepared ground, and the instrument used of God for preparing the soil was Robert Parks. He may never know it here, but he is part of the chain woven of God for the purpose of saving Fred Briggs; and there will come a time when he will feel the joy of it.

Still, you are not to suppose that the fruit appeared at once. Some seeds take long to grow. Even after the ground has been prepared and they are planted, other influences known to God must be set at work to develop them. He was watching over Fred Briggs, though none as yet saw results. Very slowly, as it seemed to the impatient invalid, he crept back to life and strength. It was a gala day with him when he was established in the "sunset room," making an all-day visit, enjoying all the pretty and thoughtful little attentions which people of refined taste and refined hearts know how to bestow. The home-sick boy leaned back in the easy-chair and revelled in the atmosphere of home from which he had been so long shut out.

Is it wonderful that so many of our city boys go astray? There are no homes for them. Perhaps the fact that it was Sunday added pleasure to the visit. Sundays had long been such unutterably dreary days to Fred Briggs. He had just enough conscience left to hold him away from places where many others went, and to people his loneliness with misery.

The sunset room was not, as a rule, open to outsiders on Sunday; but Fred had been transported bodily from his den to Mrs. Saunders's boarding-house the afternoon before.

Of course Joy was there. Bright as the sunset room was, there would have seemed a shadow resting over the Sabbath afternoon if she had not been present. It was the custom of the house to invite unoccupied boarders to this room for an hour on Sabbath afternoon. It was not a religious meeting, though they sang a hymn or two, and in the course of conversation several Bible verses were apt to be repeated. That is what it really was—a conversation on religious topics, yet intensely practical topics.

“We are practical people,” would Mrs. Saunders say. “Every boarder in the house belongs to the workers; and if we don’t have a religion that will help our every-day lives, what is it good for, since we have nothing but every-day lives?”

She was always present at these afternoon talks. If you knew Mrs. Saunders well, I should not need to tell you that she was quite apt to make one of a circle which included Joy, especially when that circle was largely composed of young men. On one occasion she tried to apologize to the doctor for this peculiarity.

“It isn’t that I cannot trust my Joy with you, doctor; for the matter of that, I can trust her anywhere with herself. But young men of a certain age are so liable to be silly—talking about ‘rosebuds’ and ‘fairies,’ and all that sort of trash. I’ve heard them. Joy can’t stand that kind of stuff. And you know I mustn’t make too much difference between the way I treat you and the way I treat other folks. So you must just excuse me, and let me look after my one chicken in my own fashion.”

She had been much pleased with the doctor’s answer,—

“Mrs. Saunders, I hope you will never consider it your duty to apologize to me for being one of the most sensible mothers in my list of acquaintances. I wish the world were full of mothers who held your ideas. It would be a better world.”

After that, Mrs. Saunders was heard to say that Dr. Everett had more sense in his little finger than most men had in their whole bodies. So mother and doctor went their ways, mutually pleased, and the pretty room gave out more and more of its sunshine to the homeless ones of the house.

On this particular afternoon, Joy came into the room just as Robert Parks had settled himself back with the air which he used when he felt that he was making an unanswerable remark, and said,—

“Well, all I have to say is, that nobody does it.”

“Does what?” said Joy.

A question of this sort is very apt to have a calming effect in certain styles of argument. To be obliged to pause and think over one's position, so as to state it clearly to a newcomer, either tones down the speaker or exasperates him, according to the manner of person he chances to be. Robert modulated his voice, and tried to answer clearly,—

“Why, we are discussing the propriety or the advisability of conversing freely together about religion, just as we would talk of the news of the day, or of business, or of the weather. What I say is, that it isn't done. Religion is kept at one side; nobody hears much about it unless he goes to prayer-meeting or meets a minister. For the matter of that, I have met a dozen of them since I have been in this city, and not one has spoken a word to me about religion. The best people even don't do it.”

“Well, do you mean to join the rank and file?”

It was Dr. Everett who spoke, so quietly, looking meantime at the flowers on the table, in a dreamy, almost an abstracted way, as if nothing was farther from his thoughts or desires than an argument, that Robert felt himself puzzled. Just what did the question mean?

“Sir?” he said inquiringly.

“I say, do you mean to belong to that large class of

people who evidently do not meet your ideas of right in this matter ; or are you going to throw your influence on the other side ? ”

If the doctor had chosen to argue, he would have found Robert somewhat prepared ; but to produce a personality instead of an argument, and sit quietly awaiting an answer, was embarrassing, the more so that Fred Briggs laughed. Not that he had any desire to add to the embarrassment, but simply because a question which seemed to corner any person was sure to afford him amusement.

“ Well,” said Robert after a moment’s thoughtful pause, “ I don’t believe it ought to be expected of me to take the lead in society, among Christians of long experience, on this subject or any other.”

“ I don’t know about that conclusion,” the doctor replied meditatively, apparently still giving part of his attention to the flowers. “ I should say that depended on whether society met the demands of your conscience. If it does not, assuredly the Lord expects you to step out from it, even if by so doing you appear to be taking the lead.”

No one seemed to have a reply to make to this statement ; so the doctor enlarged upon it.

“ The fact is, that to sit in a pleasant room, among one’s friends, and discuss the inconsistencies of Christians, is one thing ; and to go out into the world, in the thick of the fight, and live consistently, is quite another. We all need to remember that. I have heard Fred here, twice this afternoon, make remarks which showed that he considers Mr. Templeton and Judge Bartlett rather—well, we will put it mildly, and say inconsistent. Yet it does not seem to have occurred to him that in condemning them he condemns himself.”

This brought the invalid from the couch, where he had been half-reclining, to a sitting posture, and his manner was full of surprise.

“How in the world do you make that out? I’m sure I make no professions of any sort, and never have!”

“Ah, then I understand your position to be, that because these gentlemen are trying for the mark, and are doing it poorly, they are inconsistent; and because you are not trying at all, and never have been, you are therefore all right?”

This was so manifestly absurd that Fred lay back among the cushions and laughed, and the doctor turned to Robert.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### M O T H E R.

“Isn't it just possible, my friend, that you are not acquainted with every Christian in the city? You must constantly remember that your former standpoint has been a poor one from which to judge. A physician, for instance, does not expect to hear a medical discussion at a prayer-meeting. Neither do I expect to hear the controlling power of religion and its practical effect on individual lives discussed intelligently at a dancing-party. If we want to hear how living, growing Christians talk, we must frequent the places where we shall be likely to find them. It is possible that you have not come in close contact with Christ's intimate friends. There are degrees in friendship, you know.”

Robert was silenced, but apparently not convinced. He was not, after all, so ready to argue as he supposed, but felt much like repeating his former charge with a variation.

“But, Dr. Everett, do you really think that Christian people are acting as though they believed religion to be the most important thing in the world?”

“Some of them are,” said the doctor. “I know a few who are. The question which interests me just now more than anything else is, whether a young man named Robert Parks is going to be one of them, and let the world feel his influence at every point where it touches him; or is he going to be one of the class which he unsparingly condemns? I seriously think that this is the question for each of us. ‘What

manner of communications are these that ye have one to another?' Make it personal. When I am conversing with any person, what is my habitual theme? One mischief with Christians is, that when they sit down to think of these matters they are not personal. I am apt to ask whether people act as though they thought religion the most important matter in life, instead of asking whether I, Dr. Everett, have this day lived as though I thought religion the most important matter with which I had to do."

"Dr. Everett, do you think that folks who profess to be Christians ought to talk about religion all the time?" It was not Robert but young Briggs who asked this question.

The doctor turned to him, smiling:—

"Do you think they ought to talk irreligion part of the time, my dear fellow?"

"Of course not; but then—"

"Where is the middle ground, my friend? What I think is just this: I believe it is your solemn duty to so live and act and talk that Robert here, who comes in frequent contact with you, may be impressed with the fact that to you religion is the great business of life—that Christ is first and always, and all decisions must be subject to his will. Are you doing it?"

"Not much!" declared Fred, with peculiar emphasis. And he looked like one who had resolved to have nothing more to do with this dangerous conversation.

"I don't know how one is to live in this way always," Robert said. "Why, I know people before whom you could not converse on religious matters at all. You would simply be laughed at."

"Miss Joy," said Dr. Everett, turning to where she sat, an interested listener, "I am curious to know what you would do if you came in contact with people who were inclined to laugh when you said anything about your Saviour?"

Joy's cheeks were glowing, but her answer was ready:

"Somehow, I think, as I should if they laughed at my mother. I should not come in contact with them any oftener than seemed to be my duty; but I would, if possible, convey to them the impression that they were the persons of whom I was ashamed—not my mother."

Perhaps the one who thought most deeply over this conversation was Fred Briggs. His friend Mattie knew how to make things in which she was not interested appear in a ridiculous light. She had mingled with most of his serious thoughts; she had stood in the way of any decision. During his illness he had not been, of course, under her immediate influence; but now he was getting well, and would be thrown constantly with her again. He could imagine her laughing at his "sober notions," ridiculing his resolves, turning into sparkling nonsense any attempts at seriousness. And he shrank from the ordeal. He was too weak, he told himself, to think of any such thing now. He must wait, at least, until he became physically stronger.

This matter of strength, or the absence of it, was giving Dr. Everett no little anxiety. It was more apparent to him than to others that the gain in this direction was not what it should be. The young man's constitution had received a severe shock, and the rallying was alarmingly slow. There were things that worked against him. Among others, he was home-sick. Two years since he had seen his mother, and he had been looking forward to spending his two weeks' summer vacation at home. Now it was impossible. No salary to look forward to for some time to come, a burden of debt resting heavily on him—there was nothing for it but to stay here all through the long summer, and struggle with poverty and home-sickness. He admitted to himself, when the night was dark and he was alone in his room, that it did not seem as though he could live without seeing his mother. His eyes were always red after one of these hours alone, and he was not so strong the next day.



The senior partner, Mr. Cady, came in for some share of the blame which seemed at times to Fred to attach to every human being. "Much he cares about me!" would Fred grumble. "Charming Christian he is!

"He has done a wonderful thing, I suppose he thinks, in holding my situation for me, so I can dig away at my work when I get back. It is more than some would do, and I'm sure I am obliged to him; but I don't think it is anything so very wonderful. It wouldn't hurt him a bit to just pay over the salary that I might have earned while I lay flat on my back. A rich man like him! I don't see why these rich men can't do a nice thing now and then, just for a change. Seems to me I couldn't help doing something of that sort occasionally, if I had his money. But he will help it easy enough.

"Dr. Everett is very fond of talking about 'Christian brotherhood.' I would like to see a little of it myself. To be sure, the doctor practises what he preaches; and as for Parks, just now he practises better than he preaches—I shouldn't wonder if he would come out one of that sort when he gets full fledged. Oh, there is now and then one; but if it belongs to the profession, why don't we see more of it? A fellow wouldn't be long in deciding what road he ought to travel if there were a few more practisers as well as preachers. Mr. Cady can preach. Didn't he tell me last night that the Lord had been very good to me, and he hoped that I would decide to serve him hereafter?

"The Lord has been good to me, I don't doubt it, and so have some of his folks; but I don't see that Mr. Cady has had much to do with it. If he would give me a chance to earn a little more money, and not dock me on my vacation, I might be able to realize his share in the business. Beautiful Christian rule that is—when a fellow gets sick and loses two weeks' time, it must count just the same as though he had his two weeks' vacation! I suppose Mr. Cady would think

he had taken a delightful rest if he had lain in one room and broiled with fever for a month. Yet I'm his 'neighbour,' and according to his belief he is bound to think as much of me as he does of himself. That's bosh !”

With which elegant expletive Fred was in the habit of concluding his solitary grumblings. By that he understood himself to say that there were no words with which to express his contempt for such a state of things.

I have often wondered what Mr. Cady would have thought could he have known what an imperfect link he was in the chain of influences which were surrounding Fred Briggs. The weak and home-sick young fellow could brood by the hour over certain nice things which he felt were in his employer's power to do for him, and which he did not in the least expect to have done, until all the softening influences connected with his long sickness, and the unexpected and tender care bestowed on him, would, for the time being, retire into the background, and he would feel himself an ill-used fellow, and savagely assert that religion was like everything else, a humbug. He was not very logical, it is true — few grumblers are. He did not believe what he asserted ; yet the assertion had its effect, and helped him to stifle the voice of conscience. Neither do I think he was capable of believing in the power of Christ over human lives to the extent that he would have been had Mr. Cady's profession matched his daily life as it might. That man's influence was, like that of most other people, far wider than he supposed, and touched those of whose very existence he was ignorant. For instance, imagine him hearing Hester Mason say,—

“I don't see that most of your Christians amount to much. Suppose I was that Mr. Cady. How long would it take me to send Fred Briggs a receipt for some of the bills which are bothering the life out of him? And I'm nothing but a heathen.”

That was, in substance, what she said to Robert Parks one evening. And yet Mr. Cady did not dream that he was on the witness-stand.

No such wild hope as this had entered Fred's heart; but he had longed to hear the great man say, "We will try to spare you in October, perhaps, after the others get back." On this hope he felt that he could have gained strength and done extra work, and managed in some way to get money enough to go to his mother. But all these grumblings he kept largely to himself. Dr. Everett should not know how he longed for home and mother. The people who had already done everything for him should never know that the great thing was left undone.

It was while he sat brooding in this very way, and making these same resolves as to silence, that Dr. Everett said to Joy, "There is one thing that must be done. Briggs must go home and be nursed by his mother for a while. He won't get well if he doesn't. I wonder how we can help to bring it about?"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### DISCOVERED LINKS.

It was several weeks afterwards. Joy Saunders, standing in the door of a Vale Street store, had just signalled her car, when Dr. Everett's horses came to a sudden halt.

"Will not this do as well as the car?" the doctor asked. And Joy, satisfied, was soon seated at his side.

"I did not expect to see you in this vicinity," she said. "It must be later than I thought. Has the train gone, and is everything right?"

"It is gone, and everything is right—more right than that poor fellow had any idea things with him would ever be. I am glad he is alone, with time to rest and think matters over calmly. It has been a wonderful afternoon, Joy—a succession of surprises to all parties concerned. I said not a word to Briggs about the plans until this morning. I decided that he needed a night's rest, and would not get it if he went to planning about home. So Robert packed his trunk after he was asleep. Then I called this morning, according to appointment, to take him around to the store. While we were away Robert had his trunk sent to the station. On the drive down I asked him about the different bills—his landlady's, and the meat bill, and so forth. Cheery conversation, wasn't it, for a sick young fellow? But I wanted to see if he really knew where he stood, and I found that he had every penny carefully added. It was considerably less than we had supposed. At the store Mr. Cady

was waiting for him in the office. Then began my surprise. The plan was, you know, that Mr. Cady should pay him the salary which he supposed he lost through sickness, and give him a month's leave of absence; and I should assume his debts—he to pay me when he could. But what did Mr. Cady do but present him with a check which covered the whole amount, and more too! Then he told him of the plan of going home. Fred bore up bravely until then. But when he took in the fact that his salary was continued, his debts were paid, and he was actually to start for home to-day, he gave up and cried outright. I was really afraid that it would be too much excitement for him. I couldn't half enjoy the thing, because of my anxiety as to how he would bear it. Mr. Cady was a good deal melted too—very much astonished to discover that so small a sum of money could produce such abounding gratitude. I believe one reason why rich men treat themselves to so few luxuries of this kind is that they have no idea what fruit they produce. 'I do it for your father's sake, young man,' he said to Fred; and then I was afraid that he was going to take that inopportune time to read the poor fellow a lecture about not having deserved things for his own sake; but he didn't. After a moment's pause he added, 'And for my Father's sake, because I want to honour him with my money, and he has put it into my heart to spend a little of it in this way.' That melted Fred right down. It is really the most unanswerable argument that could have been presented. A year of talking could not have done for him what that one sentence did, with the practical object-lesson accompanying lying open in Fred's hand.

"On the whole we had an interesting time. I took Briggs back home and made him lie down. And the landlady was paid, and really served a nice dinner for him, and hoped he would have a good visit and come back to her—which he never will. By the way, young Reid is interested

in working up a boarding-house down town, somewhat after the pattern of your mother's, on a simpler scale. I hope all those young men can be gotten into it.

"Well, at the appointed time we went to the train, and, behold, there was Mr. Cady. He led the way into a palace-car, and after the bewildered fellow was seated he handed him an envelope containing a through ticket—sleeping-car, palace-car, everything complete. I must say that Cady has exceeded my expectations. He waited for me outside, and rode up town with me, and I told him that he had done more to-day for Fred Briggs's salvation than he ever had before. He was all melted down. 'That is saying nothing at all, doctor,' said he. 'I never did anything for him, nor for any of them; but I mean to. I'm waking up to my privileges. I never knew until to-day that it was more blessed to give than to receive.' How things are intertwined, Joy! Mr. Cady's clerks are really educating him. And Fred, as he shook my hand for good-bye, said, 'Doctor, I want to take back what I said about him the other night' (meaning Mr. Cady): 'I do believe in his religion.' And now, Joy, here comes your part: 'Tell Miss Joy I have the marked verses, and I will put my trust in them.'"

"Thank the Lord," said Joy softly.

When they had calmed down a little from the excitement of this story, Joy said,—

"I have had a wonderful afternoon, too, and made some discoveries. I have been talking with Hester Mason. Do you know, doctor, I think she is a Christian? I believe the question was decided several weeks ago. She is a strange girl, you know—never does anything like anybody else—and she seemed to have an idea that she must test her experience, to find whether it was genuine, before she owned to it. Now I'm going to surprise you about another thing. I think she has been a real help to Robert Parks."

"No," said the doctor, "that doesn't surprise me. I have

surmised the same thing, from what he has told me. In fact, at the very time when I was trying to break her influence over him, she was the only one who had exerted any, successfully, for good. I am beginning to see that the Lord has ways we know not of."

"He has led Hester by strange ways, certainly. Do you know anything of a Professor Ellis, who teaches music in the city?"

"A little," the doctor said quietly.

"Is he a bad man?"

"I have every reason to think that he is."

"Well, I should think so, from Hester's story. He has been paying her special attention; and while I don't think she really cared for him, his attentions were marked and flattering. He led her on, insensibly, I think, until that pretty Grace Dennis, who was Mrs. Roberts's guest for so long, came to the rescue. Hester's rendering of their interview is this:—'She proved to me three things—that he was a villain, and I was a fool, and she was a grand Christian girl. I've thought better of religion ever since. There were some things about her which made me feel that I really wanted to be a Christian woman myself, and do things for others that I knew I could do.' She doesn't know how Grace Dennis came to know anything about her—hasn't the least idea. But she believes, she says, that the Lord sent her just at that time, and in that way, because there were reasons why no other time and way would have done any good."

"I don't doubt it in the least," Dr. Everett said heartily. "The Lord knows the end from the beginning, and nothing is surer than that he uses his children to carry out his plans."

He kept his own counsel as to his being one of the "means used." To a man of Dr. Everett's refined nature this was too much a part of another's secret to be revealed, even to Joy Saunders, when there was no need.

"I'll tell you now what I really wish," said Joy, speaking

with a deliberate impressiveness, calculated to make one feel that the subject was weighty and her decision surprising: "I wish Robert was deeply interested in Hester, and that he would marry her. I do believe that they are intended for each other. She has just the qualities that he needs, and he can mould her in just the lines along which she needs helping."

The doctor laughed gaily. "I shall not differ from you in the tremendous way that you evidently expect," he said. "And, moreover, I have to confess that I believe just that result will be accomplished, even whether we approve or not. Of course the wisest thing for us is to approve; and although once I did not think I should, I find I do."

After that he drove very rapidly, until they had left the noisy city in the distance, and the twilight was falling. Then he reined in his horses, obliging them to walk when they wanted to run, and again opened conversation.

"Joy, I have made another discovery to-day."

"What is it?" asked Joy, with the delightfully eager air of one who is sure she is going to sympathize heartily, and is ready to help in whatever direction needed.

"Perhaps I ought not to say that I made the discovery to-day. In point of fact I made it long ago. But it presses on me to-day with such a firm conviction that I am right, and that the question should be settled, that I want to submit it to you. I discover that you and I, at work for the same Master, in almost the same channels, can do better, happier, stronger work together than apart, and that he intends us to join hands, as I believe, and be one in life. I shall have to own that so far as heart is concerned I have felt one with you so long that I should not know how to think, apart from you."

To all of which Joy Saunders, usually so prompt to respond, made not the slightest answer; whereat the doctor seemed in no sense discomfited.



“Mrs. Saunders,” he said, arresting that good woman with prompt speech. It was an hour later, and she was on her way up the stairs. She had always to be waylaid on her way to somewhere, for her life knew little rest. She was burdened with an armful of clean linen. She was apt to make all her steps tell toward the accomplishment of the hundreds of little things that were always doing and never done. “Mrs. Saunders, just a moment. I have something to tell you. This is a day of discoveries. I have made one which directly concerns you. I discover that I cannot get along any longer without your Joy. You have shared with me for many a day ; but I want the right to claim her.”

I should so like to give you a picture of Mrs. Saunders’s face as she stood there, with her pile of clean towels on her arm.

“Dear !” she said, after a moment of not exactly bewildered silence. The expression of her face was rather that of one who had been expecting a calamity that now had come. “Dear ! I suppose it has got to be somebody ; and if it has, I would rather it would be you, doctor, than anybody else in the world.”

“So would I,” said Dr. Everett, with great heartiness.

THE END.

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