



"MY NAME IS JUST PLAIN, OLD-FASHIONED ESTHER." — *Page 1.*

ESTER RIED'S NAMESAKE

BY

PANSY

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ESTER RIED'S NAMESAKE.

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ESTER RIED'S NAMESAKE

CHAPTER I

"WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

"NO, my name is just plain old-fashioned *Esther*. The 'Ester' was a fad of my respected — namesake — was she? No, I'm the namesake — of course. Father tried for it, in fact he struggles at it yet, in writing, but it made life too strenuous, and mother and I gave it up. We *think* it that way, you understand, but for everyday use it simply had to be 'Esther.'"

The speaker was a gray-eyed, plain-featured, plainly dressed girl with nothing especially to distinguish her from a hundred other girls, although there was a look in the gray eyes that suggested reserve force. She sat on the upper step of a side porch, and on either side of her

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were girls of somewhere near her own age. They were in street attire and carried the one a bag and the other a strap, laden with books. The unmistakable student air breathed all about them. They were, in fact, college girls; and, Saturday though it was, had just come from some class function. Esther had reached her stopping-place, and the others had lingered for a friendly visit such as they occasionally of a Saturday treated themselves to. They were continuing a discussion that had been suggested by the name of one of the girls who had left them at the last corner.

“People ought to wait for their names until they have reached years of discretion, and then be allowed to name themselves. There would, at least, be a chance that they would be better pleased with the choice than they are now. Who ever saw a girl that liked her own name? Besides, they are so liable to be misnomers. Do you think, for instance, that I could have been idiot enough to name myself ‘Blanche’ if I had been given the opportunity?”

At this word, her companions turned and deliberately surveyed the dark-haired, dark-

eyed, unusually dark-skinned speaker, then laughed carelessly.

"I am very well satisfied with my name," said the fair-haired girl on Esther's left.

"Oh, that's merely because you are taken with the sound of it," the brunette answered quickly. "'Faith Farnham' pleases your taste for alliteration; but it doesn't fit you a bit better than mine does me. Everybody knows that you are a born sceptic. I'm not absolutely certain that you believe in anything."

"Oh, yes I do. I believe in your frankness, for one thing, and in Professor Sartwell's sarcasm, and—well, several other things."

"I ought never to have been named 'Ester,' I'm sure of that," said the central figure, in gloomy tones. "I have told father so scores of times. It is a continual disappointment to him to have me dropping so far below his ideals, and his idol."

"Was it your father's sister you were named for, Essie?"

"Oh, no! no, indeed. It was a young woman whom my father knew when he was a little boy—the grown-up sister of his boy friend, and she

died while he was still a little boy. But she must have been a very wonderful person, for she left her impress on my father to a degree that is simply astonishing. Mother never saw her, yet she knows volumes about her; she has to, you see, because father has talked of her so much.

“I am honestly sorry for him; it is a terrible pity that he hasn't other children. He lavished all his hopes of rearing a second ‘Ester Ried’ upon poor me, who was born for the purpose of disappointing him. You may laugh, girls, but you have no conception of what a life it is — this being expected to reproduce a character that is as unlike yours as it is possible for two creatures of the same species to be. It has simply worn me out, the working at it, you know, without making a single inch of progress. That is one reason why they sent me away out here to school.”

Her companions laughed. They were used to laughing at Esther Randall's remarks. Even commonplaces had a way of sounding amusing when she gave them voice.

But the girl they called “Blanche” spoke seriously enough in a moment more.

“She must have been a wonderful woman, as you say, to have made so strong an impression on a mere boy. Didn’t you say he was young when she died?”

“Only about thirteen, and he had known her but a few months; yet he has always said that knowing her changed his entire life. I owe her a grudge, by the way. I don’t believe that my father would ever have been a home missionary with a starving salary if it had not been for her.”

Faith Farnham laughed again, but Blanche had still a far-away, serious look in her eyes.

“It must be a lovely thing,” she said wistfully, “to be able to live so that, a quarter of a century after you are gone, some one will be feeling the impress of your life for good. I should like to live such a life as that. Tell us more about her. How was it that she happened to be so wonderful?”

“How should I know? She died ages before I was born, of course. She was an invalid when father knew her. She had a little brother, Alfred, and he and father were inseparable, so

father had opportunity to see a good deal of the sister. She was the sort of sister who had a great deal to do with her little brother and his friends. Father must have been an impressionable boy, and she wove a spell about him that lasts, that's all."

"But that is a great deal," persisted Blanche. "Judging from what you say of your father, his life seems to be well worth living."

"Of course it is. My father is one of the few men who ought to be allowed to live forever, because this world needs him."

"Well, you say yourself that you do not believe he would have been a missionary but for this girl, who died when he was a little boy. I think that is magnificent."

"As to the missionary part," said Esther, with a toss of her head that meant defiance, "I could have found it in my heart to forgive him if he had chosen some other sphere. I think of several that would have suited me quite as well. There, for instance, is his friend Alfred, own brother to the paragon, who is a merchant prince in New York at this minute. I think my father could have adorned that posi-

tion; and I know I could have managed my part.”

Faith Farnham swung her bag of books impatiently.

“Don’t run off the track so; you *will not* get to the root of the matter. How did that woman, or girl, do it? That is what Blanche wants to know. She burns to influence a life, and you won’t show her how to accomplish it.”

“How am I supposed to know? She was a Christian girl, of course.”

“Yes, of course,” said Blanche, still speaking thoughtfully. “But — I know scores of Christians, have known them all my life, and so have you; and yet —”

Faith Farnham’s significant laugh interrupted, and she spoke not ill-naturedly, but with an air of amusement.

“You are even one yourself, aren’t you, Essie?”

Esther Randall flushed to her forehead.

“It isn’t necessary to sneer,” she said coldly. “There are genuine Christians in the world, even though you have been so unfortunate as not to meet any of them. If you knew my

father and mother, you would understand what I mean."

"My blessed child, do you imagine for a moment that I was hinting at anything disparaging to that beloved father and mother? I wouldn't be so horrid, even if I thought it, which of course I don't. I know there are admirable people in the world, and I shouldn't be surprised if I found more of them than you do; I'm no pessimist. But I didn't mean to be personal, dear, though I own that my words sounded so. I was merely thinking of a multitude of people whom I know, all labelled 'Christians,' and trying to decide whether I knew one whose profession of that particular faith was making an impression on either himself or others."

"Oh, nonsense, Faith; I know a good many Christians whose lives match their professions fairly well, and so do you, only you don't understand the subject well enough to know what a Christian really professes."

It was Blanche Halsted who spoke, with a note of reproof in her voice that had been awakened by Esther's glowing cheeks.

“Do you think so?” said Faith, carelessly. “Don’t be too sure of that, my child. Perhaps I read my Bible more than you imagine.”

She had risen as she spoke, gathering her bag of books with a firm hand. “I must get home,” she said. “We have a fearful lesson for our next eleven o’clock hour. Professor Akers is a Christian without a conscience when it comes to assigning lessons for Monday. How can I be expected to go to church on Sunday and look after my soul, with fifty pages of notes staring me in the face to be absorbed for Monday? Come on, Blanche, my fair one; if we stay here any longer, we shall quarrel. You and Esther are both waxing excited over nothing. It is all on account of that exacting name. I would give over trying to live up to it if I were you, my dear; it makes life too strenuous.”

Esther tried to make her laugh sound natural and cordial. She was already ashamed of her quick temper, and had no wish to quarrel with these who were her only intimate friends.

“I am afraid the name does not trouble me much in these days,” she said. “I gave over any attempt to live up to it before I came here.

I couldn't expect to do anything with it among such a set, you know. There, now we are even, and can begin again. Shall I see you both to-morrow at Bible class?"

"Not this child," said Faith Farnham, cheerfully. "Didn't I remind you of the fifty pages? No time for obsolete literature to-morrow. Blanche will go, I presume. That is her one concession to the Sabbath of her childhood."

"Faith, you are simply horrid to-night," said Blanche, in utmost good nature. "I told you you ought to have been named — something else. Why, Esther, I don't believe I can be there to-morrow. I must be out late to-night, you know, and the Bible class meets at such an unearthly hour. Still, I'll see; it is just possible that I may get around. *Reservoir*, my dear. Don't try to be too strenuous to-morrow; it doesn't pay."

They went down the avenue, chatting gayly. They never quarrelled, those two; partly, perhaps, because they had acquired the habit of being perfectly frank, and giving each other credit for meaning just what she said — never more nor less.

Esther Randall looked after them with a half-wistful air. Intimate friends though they were, there were sharp contrasts between them. The two girls represented to Esther the pleasant, comfortable world; a world in which people consulted their tastes and inclinations with reasonable assurance that their pocket-books would be equal to the demands made upon them; and to Esther, who had spent all her life under the dominion of a straitened purse, this state of things meant much — meant more, perhaps, than it should. Her earliest recollections connected with her mother represented a sweet, serious face, and a gentle voice that was saying: “Esther, dear, mother cannot afford to buy it for you. I haven’t as much money as Eva’s mother has; you must not expect the same kind of playthings.”

Then, later, came the attempt to explain. “You know, dear, that father, when he decided to become a home missionary, knew that he must sacrifice many things that he would like to do, and he did it very cheerfully, gladly, indeed, for the sake of the cause. But one of the hardest things for him has always been the sacrifice of

what he would like to do for us — for his little daughter. We must help him all we can, dear, by being brave and satisfied; glad, you know, to join him in sacrifice as well as in work.”

It was high ground for a young girl who wanted bright ribbons and gay dresses; and later, books and pictures and trips, such as others had. She struggled with her unrest and discontent, and did not grumble much; but she had never worn the ornament of a “meek and quiet spirit,” and did not even appreciate its value. Her audible grumblings were chiefly for her father and mother. Why ought they to do all the sacrificing? The work belonged to the whole church; and other people, church-members, seemed to have all the nice things they wanted; at least they didn't save for missions. Some of her questions were hard to answer satisfactorily. Perhaps her straitened life was largely to blame for the fact that the girl, as she grew to young womanhood, was in danger of attaching undue importance to money, or rather to the secondary matters for which it stood, — luxury, and leisure, and opportunity to culti-

vate one's own tastes and desires. She was not consciously selfish. She believed that she thought first and most of her mother and father, and it was true that no young woman ever set her parents on a higher pedestal or bowed lower before them in reverence than did Esther Ried Randall. She loved, nay, she idolized, her missionary father with a passionate fervor that grew with her growth. As for her mother, the chivalrous devotion which she had from her babyhood watched her father give to his wife, had been repeated in the child. When she longed exceedingly for the opportunity of other girls, it was always that she might fit herself to accomplish great things in the world and so be able to give to her father and mother what they ought to have. In truth, a rarely good girl was Esther Randall; the hearts of father and mother could safely trust in her. And yet — the girl would have been shocked, and grieved almost beyond endurance, could she have known that some of their saddest hours were for her.

Mr. Randall had by no means gone blindfold into the life of toil and privation incident to

the work of a home missionary on a western frontier. Instead, he had chosen the work with eyes wide open to its limitations and sacrifices. The choice had been made when he was a mere boy. He remembered vividly the day and the hour when he had said: "I will do it for her."

He was in his fourteenth year, and it was a stormy winter evening outside, but up in Ester Ried's pretty room all was bright and cheerful. He had gone over, as he often did, to spend the evening with his friend, Alfred Ried, and when their lessons were done, Ester had sent for them both, as she often did, to pop corn or roast apples on the glowing coals of her hearth, and to watch the play of the lights and shadows, and tell stories and have good times.

The Rev. Spencer Randall sometimes leaned back in his stout wooden chair, with his gay patchwork quilt wrapped about his limbs in order to supplement the warmth of the feeble fire on his own hearth, and went over in memory that particular evening in Ester Ried's room.

She was lying on her couch, as she nearly always was, when they visited her. She was

wearing a bright red wrapper that was bound at throat and wrists with something soft and white. His girl, Esther, had one as nearly like it as her mother could fashion, and when she wore it he called her the full name, “Ester Ried.”

CHAPTER II

SACRIFICE

HE remembered every detail of that eventful evening. The corn had been popped, and most of it eaten, and it was nearly time for him to race around the square to his own home, when Alfred was directed to go for his sister Sadie, who was at the library.

“Come on, Spencer,” he had said. “You may as well go with me, since you have got to go out in the rain anyhow.” And then Ester had spoken:—

“No, Spencer will stay and take care of me, dear, while you are gone. It will be time for my drops before you can get back, and I know he is willing to wait and give them to me.”

The missionary remembered how his face had flushed with pleasure over the thought that she treated him like a brother, and trusted him for service. Alfred had gone away, whistling cheerily, and he had stayed and counted the drops with exceeding care, and measured just

the right amount of water; and as she lay back among the pillows after taking them, she had laid a soft white hand on his arm and said:—

“Sit down here a minute, Spencer. I like to be where I can look at your strong, young face and think of what you will do by and by. I want you to do some of my work, my boy. I don’t know just how, or where—that part doesn’t matter. I wanted to go among people who did not know God very well, and help them to get acquainted with him: really acquainted, I mean, not simply members of the church as I was for years without knowing why, or caring much about it. I believe that the very lonest people there are in this world are those who think that they know Jesus Christ, and have only a bowing acquaintance with him.”

This had seemed strange talk to the boy who had been reverently trained in his home. It sounded almost improper, he thought, to talk of a “bowing acquaintance” with Jesus Christ; only, of course, Ester Ried would never do anything that was improper.

She had smiled at his wondering look as she said:—

“You will never be that sort of Christian, my boy, I am sure of it. I wonder if you would be willing to promise something? No, on second thought I will not ask you to promise; but you may remember that I want you to spend your life in trying to help people to know the Lord Jesus in the true sense.”

The missionary remembered how his heart beat and how strangely he felt as he tried to stammer out that he did not know how to help anybody; but she had only smiled again, a wonderfully bright, glad smile as she said:—

“You will learn how, my boy; He will teach you. I have His promise that He will direct both you and Alfred. But you will each work in your own way, and I foresee that you can do some things for Christ that Alfred cannot.”

She had not said a great deal more. The boy went home a few minutes afterward, as she advised him to do, without waiting for Alfred's return; but she had made an impression that lasted.

He could seem to feel again the thrills of determination that surged through him as he trudged home in the darkness and rain. He

made himself a solemn promise that he would do work in the world which should be worthy of Ester Ried's trust in him. He did not know what kind of work, he made no plans, and had no thought at the time that the resolves of that night would ever lead him to far western regions as a home missionary; he only knew that he meant to hold himself ready for his call.

And this he had done. All through the years of boyhood, young manhood, and middle age Spencer Randall had carried with him the impulse of that last talk with the sister of his boy friend. Not that he had imagined that it would be the last talk. No one, not even Ester Ried herself, had realized that her opportunities were so swiftly reaching their end; but it was not quite a week afterward that Spencer stood beside the casket and read through blinding tears that, big boy though he called himself, he made no attempt to hide, the simple inscription on the plate: —

“ESTER RIED. AGED NINETEEN.”

He had named his only child “Ester Ried,” and never was a child the subject of more ear-

nest prayer and eager hope. Both mother and father had earnestly desired that the ideal Ester Ried whom they had fashioned, the one out of memories, and the other from the vivid impressions of her husband, should be reproduced in their daughter. Yet both were obliged to realize the sharp contrasts between the ideal and the real.

"She is a dear girl," would the father say, looking fondly after his Esther as she skipped away, intent upon some scheme which for the time being absorbed all her energies.

"A dear girl," but the words nearly always ended in a sigh.

Still, very few of Esther Randall's acquaintances would have understood her father's sigh. The girl was universally admired as well as liked. The little struggling church, situated in a western town that had disappointed the expectations of its founders in almost every respect, had good reasons for admiring the daughter of the faithful home missionary who served them. That vigorous, energetic daughter, who could not only trim the easily irritated church lamps so that they would not smoke, and would

emit a reasonable amount of light, but who could play the wheezy little organ in such manner as to disguise the defects of the keys that were out of tune, and cover the absence of the keys that wouldn't "go." She could also "start" the tunes in prayer meeting, where they had no organ, and carry the soprano in church, and help the tenor, on occasion, over hard places. A girl of versatile gifts was Esther Ried Randall. There were those in the church who believed that she could preach, had necessity compelled, and give them as good a sermon as they cared to hear. In short, the church and the village generally believed in the missionary's daughter.

It is sad to have to admit that it was in her own home that Esther's deficiencies were most distinctly felt. Not that this is mentioned as something unusual; on the contrary, the fact that the home is the crucial test of character is so well understood that it has become an axiom. Yet the pity of it must always press itself upon our attention: that the place we love the most and the place where we are the most needed of any spot on earth should be

the scene of our heaviest failures. Poor Esther Ried, who knew nothing of her namesake's early trials and failures, bemoaned in metaphorical sackcloth and ashes her innumerable falls from the pedestal of her resolutions.

"Poor father," she moaned in the solitude of her own room after one of her descents, "to have such an ideal and then such a dismal reality! It is ever so much worse than if he had expected only an ordinary being in the first place. I'm sure I don't know how he can endure the sight of me. If he were not the best father in the whole world, he would hate me, and I shouldn't blame him, either."

She was very severe upon herself, which was perhaps not strange, since it was only too evident that in the direction where there was most need for improvement the almost daily record was failure.

Her thorn in the flesh, or as she had once expressed it, her "whole thorn bush," was Aunt Sarah, her mother's oldest sister, who had made her home with them since Esther's early childhood. "Poor Aunt Sarah" was the manner in which even her sister spoke oftenest

of her, and without doubt Aunt Sarah was poor in the truest sense of that word. Her life, even in girlhood, had been such that the word "failure" seemed the best one to describe it. She had gone early from home to be the spoiled darling of a grandmother who had had spasms of ordering her about with unreasoning and imperious wilfulness, but for the most part had been governed herself by the girl's lightest whim. Before reaching her eighteenth year the girl had married against the earnest protestations of her parents and the command of her grandmother. A few stormy years of married life, during which she suffered enough at the hands of an intemperate and unprincipled man to subdue some natures, and then he was accidentally killed in a drunken quarrel. The young widow went back to her childhood home as undisciplined by her life of trial as she had been when she went away from it a young girl.

It was when her youngest sister had been for five or six years the wife of a home missionary that financial trouble came to the old home. The father, a wealthy man who had lavished every luxury that money could buy upon his

wife and children, was suddenly stricken with disease at a time when conditions in the business world were such that every atom of strength which his knowledge of business and his singularly well-balanced mind could have offered was needed to tide them over a crisis. And he could not even be asked any questions. One great source of comfort to the stricken family lay in the fact that "father" went home, to the house not made with hands, without ever having heard of financial troubles. They were heavy enough; everybody who knew him was ready to affirm that had Mr. Bradford lived he could have undoubtedly tided them through the breakers; but he did not live, and the storm swept everything available. Out of the wreck were secured only a few hundreds,—barely enough to keep the widow and her one unmarried daughter from want until they could look about them and contrive some way of earning a living.

And the blow fell heavily also on home mission ground. Mr. Bradford had delighted in making a bower of beauty of that little western cottage where his youngest darling lived. To

the plain people by whom it was surrounded, its furnishings seemed wildly extravagant; and they stood in awe before its choice pictures and its wealth of books.

Mr. Bradford had smiled to himself over the talk he had with the earnest young missionary who came to ask him for his daughter. The young man had struggled to be very plain spoken, so that the rich man might understand fully the life of privation and toil that he had been bold enough to ask his daughter to share; there must be no feeling afterward that the father had been deceived in the conditions. "It is a growing town," said Mr. Randall, "bound to grow, I think. The railroad which is now partially built and is being surveyed directly through the village will connect us with the great markets, and there is no better point at which to build up a city than just that one. Property is a third higher this fall all about there than it was in the spring, and is steadily on the increase; so I think we may safely predict that in less than two years the church which I am to serve will become self-supporting. But—" and here the earnest face had flushed a little,

and for an instant he had dropped his eyes, then raised them again and spoke firmly, "I think I ought to tell you, sir, that Helen and I have talked all this over and understand each other. We do not want to boom with the town. We have cast in our lot as home missionaries. At least, I mean —" and his face grew redder, "that such is my intention, and Helen is in sympathy with it. We want to be pioneers in every sense of the word. It is my, our desire, as soon as a church that we are serving becomes self-supporting, to move on to a harder field and struggle up with the people to the self-supporting stage. This is different in some respects from what many home missionaries plan; but it seems to me to be what has been given me to do, and I have consecrated my life to just such service. At first I had no thought, no hope I may say, of finding a wife who would sacrifice herself in that way, and I meant to — but your daughter, sir," and then Mr. Randall felt rather than saw the twinkle in the prosperous business man's eyes, and stopped and laughed.

Mr. Bradford was a good as well as a rich man.

He had gone down into the depths of pain over the marriage of his oldest daughter; but he believed in the young man who had sought the heart of his youngest. Also, he believed in missions.

“So you have made up your mind to sacrifice yourself,” he said cheerfully, “and my Helen has persuaded you that such is also her state of mind, has she? I am not surprised. The child has been sacrificing herself to something or somebody ever since she could walk, and she has high ideals. She will meet you more than half way every time. But I believe in your ideals, and in your theories, so far as I understand them. I shall offer no obstacles large enough to hinder the kind of sacrifice which you propose.”

He spoke that word “sacrifice” with an easy smile. He had no doubt but that they would contrive to make some sacrifices—to bury themselves in their youth and strength in that growing West would be a sort of sacrifice to people of cultured tastes; but such trials as money could avert he himself would take care should never touch his darling’s life. He had

been for years an exceedingly liberal giver to home missions. When the home missionaries were his youngest darling and the husband of her choice, what would he not do for them!

He had been true to his intentions during those first years. In almost every letter that the prosperous business man found time to write to his daughter, a generous check made up for the brevity of the epistle, and the home missionary and his wife, in addition to their regular work in the parish, had had the rare privilege of scattering material comforts with lavish hand in the homes of the poor and sick.

When suddenly, out of a clear sky, the bolt of sorrow and misfortune fell, there were many who could honestly mourn with the missionaries. They, too, had lost a friend who, although he had perhaps never heard their names, had contributed steadily to their needs.

It was when their bereavement and almost bewilderment over the changed state of things was fresh upon them, that Helen Randall thought of and planned another quiet sacrifice. It was days before she mentioned it to her husband, not, indeed, until she had the entire plan

mentally arranged, down to the minute particulars, ready for his approval or disapproval. Then she introduced it quietly enough. They were lingering at the breakfast table, their little girl, Esther, having been excused to run out and play.

“Spencer,” said Mrs. Randall, as she gave him a plump peach she had pared for him, “do you think there is any way in which we could manage it to have Sarah come out to us for a long visit?”

She could have cried over his look of utter astonishment, but instead she laughed. Men were so stupid!

CHAPTER III

THORNS

“**W**HY, my dear,” he said, “I thought it would be Mary that you would want. I have thought about it a good deal and wondered if there was any way to plan it.”

“Mary!” She repeated the name in astonishment. Men were certainly bewildering.

“Why, Spencer, I wouldn’t have Mary leave mother for the world. And there is no need for her to come; in fact, mother simply could not live without her; but Sarah is — different. It is for mother’s and Mary’s sake, not mine, that I want Sarah to come—chiefly I mean. Father used to have a great deal of influence over poor Sarah. We noticed that she was much better able to control her nerves when he was at home; but she always found it hard to be patient with Mary,—she is so many years the younger, you know,—and poor Sarah could never seem to realize that she was anything but

a little girl to be directed and governed. Now that father is gone I can think just what friction there is. Oh, Spencer, it is hard to put it into words, but *don't* you understand?"

"I begin to," said the missionary, with a sympathetic smile, "although I find it difficult to think of friction in connection with your sister Mary."

But it was slowly dawning upon him that his wife wanted her sister Sarah to come out to them, for the sake of the mother and sister in the East, and that she did not want to put such a statement baldly, even to him. The suggestion appalled him at first. It was true, as he had told his wife, that he had been thinking about a visit from Mary; but he had got no farther than an earnest wish that the way might somehow be opened for her to come to them for a little while. To boldly undertake to plan a way for any of them looked much like attempting the impossible. But determined people, especially if they are also self-sacrificing people, often succeed in accomplishing the almost impossible. In the course of time, at the expense of certain comforts and indeed almost

necessities about which the friends in the East would never hear, the eldest sister, Sarah, came out to them, ostensibly for a visit, though even then the missionary and his wife looked steadily at the thought that they might never be able to plan for her return. Not so the guest. She came as one who had condescended, and told certain of the neighbors in the early weeks of her visit that she presumed she should not stay long; she had been sorry for her sister's loneliness and so had consented to the long and tedious journey; but she had always hated the West and been vexed with her sister for allowing her husband to bury himself there. With regard to money matters, Aunt Sarah was as ignorant as a child. She only knew that in the years of her girlhood whatever she wanted could be had for the asking; and if she went down town without sufficient money in her purse, she had only to mention her father's name to find merchants and milliners delighted to accommodate her. During the brief, stormy period of married life her needs, so far as understood, had been supplied from the same source as when she was a girl, and the girl widow had

gone back to her childhood home expecting to be taken care of as she had always been.

When the financial crash came that swept away her father's fortune, she understood the reasons for it less than the average girl of twelve would have done, and was sure of but one thing, — that somebody was to blame for all the discomforts that rolled in upon her.

“They ought to be ashamed of themselves!” was the indignant phrase often on her lips, the “they” being that vague, impersonal force that illogical people are always blaming or expecting to perform. In this case the use of it was so unreasonable as to leave no room for argument; it even called a wan smile to the haggard face of the much younger, much wiser sister Mary, who knew that she was now her mother's and oldest sister's main dependence. When that hearty invitation came for Sarah to go West for a visit of indefinite length, accompanied by a check sufficient to meet her travelling expenses, only Mary knew the magnitude of the burden thus suddenly lifted from her shoulders. The girl had been true to the last pledge she had made to her father, and shielded her mother even

from the knowledge of friction as much as possible.

Aunt Sarah had been willing, even eager, to make the journey; anything being better, she told her younger sister bitterly, than to live as beggars among the people who had known them all their lives as superiors.

“If we have got to live a life of slow starvation, it is much better to do it where we are not known and among people who couldn't appreciate any other style of living. If Spencer had been half a man, he would have sent for you and mother at the same time.”

To her personal friends she explained that “poor Helen” needed her; she had been buried alive out there so many years that she felt as though she must have one of them with her, and of course she was the one to sacrifice her own interests and go.

If the missionary and his wife had fallen unconsciously into the habit of always saying “poor Sarah,” they were only returning the phrase that had been employed for them. The oldest sister had persistently said “poor Helen” ever since the girl had married a home missionary

instead of the young man with brilliant prospects who had struggled bravely to win her to a different decision. She had been loud in her criticism of both her father and mother in permitting such a sacrifice, and she talked volubly of the privations to which she must accustom herself in going out to share "poor Helen's" home. Yet it is certain that she had understood little about them. The first sight of the homely frame house, set in the midst of what seemed to her a vast sandy desert, struck something like terror to her soul. Nor were the scant furnishings, and the general air of what she called shabbiness that characterized the living rooms, calculated to reassure her. There had, of course, been no attempt to deceive her; but the letters home, since the father's death, had been reticent and cheerful from principle; besides, they were so busy with their work and so happy in it that many of what the undisciplined guests named trials and privations had touched them lightly or been overlooked altogether. Still they had been careful to let the coming guest know to a penny the income on which the home missionary had to depend,

believing that people who could reason would have no difficulty in reaching their own conclusions. But Aunt Sarah had never reasoned. She remembered vividly that father seemed to be always sending a box or a package or a check to Helen; yet she could not be made to understand what a difference the cessation of these gifts had made in the missionary's home.

During the earlier months of her visit her questions were often like instruments of torture. Conversations not unlike the following were frequent:—

“Helen, what has become of that elegant carpet father sent you? I remember telling him that it was very foolish to buy a Wilton velvet carpet to send away out here; but he said he wanted one that would do for your grandchildren.”

“Why, that was burned in our big fire. Don't you remember my writing all about it—how Spencer burnt his hands trying to save that carpet and some other things?”

“That dreadful fire! Think of your splendid piano going with the rest, and those elegant curtains, far too elegant for the room. I said

so at the time; father was really ridiculous in his ideas about some things. And now they are all gone. It does seem as though they could have saved something that was worth saving if they had really tried."

That impersonal "they"; yet it hurt Helen Randall. She felt sure that no more heroic effort had ever been made than her husband, and the few friends who were near enough to reach them in time, had made to save their home; and they had saved many things,— the minister's precious books in goodly numbers. Of course no carpets or curtains could compete with these; but Aunt Sarah did not so understand it. In the same breath with which she sighed and said, "It does seem as though they could have saved a few things if they had tried," she added in tones significant, "Rows and rows of great, dull books lugged out, and your piano and your lovely chairs that father sent you, and the curtains and portières, all left here to burn! Isn't that just like men?"

But the most bewildering problem in the missionary home was the daughter, Esther. Aunt Sarah had lived a life that was singularly

out of touch with childhood or young girlhood. There had been no child of her own to soften and sweeten her nature, and she seemed to have forgotten that she herself was ever a child, or at least she had forgotten what manner of child she was.

As for Esther, she was by no means a perfect child, and she undoubtedly rasped the nerves of her Aunt Sarah in a thousand ways that she did not understand, as well as in some that she did. From the very first there had been a sort of antagonism between the two.

"Why don't you make that child's dresses longer?" was the first note of criticism. "She looks like a fright with her bobbed-off skirts and her long, lank legs."

Then, before the mother could make her gentle explanation, Esther's gray eyes would flash, and her tone would express words unsaid as she answered:—

"My mother likes my dresses this way best, and she knows."

"Oh, she does, sauce-box! Who asked you anything about it? What a wild-looking creature you are! I should think you would

be afraid of being mistaken for a squaw, with your straight hair dangling about your face and your skin as brown as a butternut. If you would wear your sunbonnet when you raced around the country like a colt, you wouldn't be quite so black, at least."

All this was as gall and wormwood to Esther, who hated her straight hair and her tawny skin fully as much as she did her too short dresses.

Not for the world would she have told Aunt Sarah that her dresses were short because she had outgrown them, and that she was trying to be a brave girl and wear them and other things without complaint, so as not to worry father. If she could have made a confidante of her aunt and accepted her as one of them, it would doubtless have been better for both; but with the unerring instinct of childhood the little girl had understood that her aunt had no real interest in her, and no sympathy with her childish plans and endeavors. Nor had the friction between them thus early exhibited lessened as the years passed. The young girl made, in spasms at least, what she considered superhuman efforts at self-control; but there were times when she

believed it impossible to keep back the keen sarcasms that flashed through her mind as naturally as a fire of kindlings burns when a match is set to it.

At thirteen, the chief relic of her childhood was a great doll of rare mechanism and beauty that had been the gift of her grandfather in his most prosperous days, and that was a rock of offence to her Aunt Sarah.

"A great girl like you lugging a doll around!" she would sneer, as Esther, with her treasure in her arms, was caught trying to make her escape to a certain tree with wide-spreading branches that she considered her hiding-place. "I wonder what your cousin Lucia would say if she could see you. She is a whole year younger than you, and she packed away her dolls long ago."

"Grandfather sent me this doll," would Esther reply, throwing all the fierceness into her tones that she longed to put into words and knew that she must not.

"Well, what if he did? He sent you a silver rattle once. Why don't you go shaking that through the house because it was a present from

your grandfather? For that matter, about everything you have come from him; but if he were alive, I can assure you he wouldn't feel flattered to hear of your going about with a doll in your arms — a girl almost as tall as her mother!"

Scenes like these often repeated kept the young girl's blood at the boiling-point, and it is easy to guess what would have happened had there not been always the gentle mother to speak softly, with a tender hand laid on the child's arm.

"Never mind, dear, Aunt Sarah isn't used to children, remember; slip away with your doll and enjoy her."

Sometimes Esther wondered, with a kind of terror, just what she would do if mother were not there; but since she was, the quick-tempered child generally managed to keep within the limits of a muttered "I wonder what she is used to," as she sped away. But there were times when her indignation burst all bounds, and then would occur one of those scenes which invariably afterward caused a deep descent into the valley of humiliation.

It was after her doll-playing days were really over that the girl's severest tests came. Aunt Sarah, who besides having no sympathy with young people had no practical knowledge as to their training, chose to accuse poor Esther of being too fond of her boy classmates in the public school.

"I am sure I don't understand what your mother can be thinking about," she would begin the moment Esther appeared in sight. "You are forever with the boys. I don't believe you have any girl friends."

"Oh, indeed I have, Aunt Sarah — hosts of them."

"Then why in the name of decency are you never seen with them? I have watched you coming home, morning and afternoon, for three days in succession, and there has been a boy on each side of you every time, and not a girl in sight."

"Oh, you don't mean that, Aunt Sarah, because you said you watched me, and I'm a girl, you know. But I can explain the reason for that horrible state of things. Dreadful as it may be, it is a fact that not a single girl in our grade

lives down this way. I have to part from them all at the corner, and there are two of those disreputable creatures known as boys who happen to live one on the first corner below us and the other a few steps farther, and instead of having the decency to wait until I get home, or at the very least to cross the road and walk home on the other side, they will persist in coming right along with me. It is terrible, but it makes everything plain, doesn't it?"

"Now, Miss Malapert," would Aunt Sarah respond — "you are fairly started, aren't you? Of course you can find something to be saucy about. I never knew such a girl. Not the least thing can I say without having a piece of your tongue. I suppose you think you are smart; but if you would like my opinion in plain English, I think you are the most disagreeable girl I ever met. I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, talking to your own aunt in that way, just because she wants you to grow up a modest, respectable girl, instead of a hoyden who is always running after the boys."

CHAPTER IV

JORAM PRATT

IT was that phrase, "running after the boys," which made Esther's face flame, and almost before she knew it the angry protest would flow from her lips.

"I don't run after the boys, Aunt Sarah, and you know I don't. Will Watson and Fred Mitchell are both in my class, and they are the only scholars in our grade who live out this way; when they happen to turn the corner at the same time that I do, of course we walk along together. Why shouldn't we? They are nice boys, and if father and mother don't object to our walking down the street together, I don't see why you should."

But by that time Aunt Sarah's nerves would have got quite beyond her control and her high-keyed voice would penetrate to the minister's study.

“Yes, there is some more of your impudence: that is just the same as telling me that it is none of my business what you do. It is a pity your father couldn’t hear you when you get on your high heels and talk saucy to me. Much as he humors and spoils you, he is too thoroughly a gentleman to allow that. And your mother, too, my lady, what do you suppose she will say when I tell her you have as good as told me to mind my own business?”

Then would come a distinct, sorrowful voice from the little study, “Daughter!” even while Esther, angry, ashamed, and penitent all at once, would attempt an explanation.

“I didn’t say that, Aunt Sarah, and you must know that I couldn’t mean any such thing. What I meant was — O dear!” The words would be stopped by a rush of tears, and a hurried exit from the room, her aunt’s last words sounding in her ears.

“Oh, yes, you meant perfection, of course; you always do, or you would like your father to think so.”

If Aunt Sarah could have heard the words poured into that father’s ears two minutes

afterward, it might or might not have modified her opinion of Esther.

“Oh, father, I’ve been talking again, making Aunt Sarah angry and saying horrid things. She says I have; but I didn’t mean to be horrid, father, and I didn’t say what she thinks I did. But she says I run after the boys, and I can’t — oh, *father!*” Then a perfect torrent of tears and sobs would drown further words.

By dint of a good deal of patient waiting, and some soothing and much questioning, Mr. Randall would arrive at very nearly the truth. By that time there would be no need to chide, for Esther would be in the depths of the valley of humiliation, and with bitter self-reproaches would sob out her shame and disappointment. She had meant to be so careful, and never annoy Aunt Sarah again. She had promised mother, and she had promised herself that, no matter what was said to her, she would not answer back, and she would be gentle and patient; and now it was all over, and there was no use in her ever trying again.

It would end in the father’s having to turn comforter. But he was a wise comforter, never

shutting his eyes for a moment to the fault on Esther's side; while he, with equal frankness, admitted that she was sorely tried. Esther was sure to go from the study in a genuinely humble mood, ready, even anxious, to beg Aunt Sarah's pardon, although this function had its trials.

"Of course," would Aunt Sarah say with dignity, "I'll forgive you. I hope I know my duty; but I should think you would grow tired of asking forgiveness. You know you will flame out at me again at the first opportunity. I don't see that you gain a particle in the matter of controlling your temper."

But the trials of the girl of fifteen were as nothing compared with those of the young woman of eighteen. It was about that time that Aunt Sarah's views concerning Esther's friendship with the boys seemed to have undergone a change. At least she chose out one boy and elected him to become Esther's especial property. He was a good-natured, ignorant, awkward country boy, or young man, as he called himself, and as Aunt Sarah was careful to call him.

To Esther's infinite annoyance and embarrassment, young Joram Pratt sympathized most heartily with Aunt Sarah's views, and made strenuous efforts to establish the sort of intimacy between Esther and himself which would be recognized in the parlance of his circle of friends as "keeping company." He lavished whole boxes of peppermint drops and other sweets upon her, and, discovering that she loved flowers, brought her bouquets fearfully and wonderfully made, in which all the colors of the rainbow met and quarrelled. In vain did Esther protest, and beg her mother, in her absence, to protect her from these gifts, which Aunt Sarah, always on the alert, was sure to receive and accept with smiling face. The busy mother would hurry to the door or, more often, the gate, only in time to get a glimpse of Joram's broad, good-natured face in the near distance, and to hear Aunt Sarah's voice calling after him: "I'll tell her all about it, Joram; she'll be sure to like them. She's real fond of tulips."

"Mother," would Esther say, her face aflame, "what am I to do? It is disgraceful! He thinks I am encouraging him, and he talks

about me at the store and the post-office; he calls me his 'best girl'! *Mother*, I simply cannot endure this thing any longer!"

The distressed mother made an effort to comfort her. "Dear child, I know it is very trying, but your aunt doesn't mean to be annoying; and there will not be any real harm done. Joram is not so foolish as to construe the kindness she shows him as coming from you. Of course he understands that we are all his good friends, and that he is on precisely the same footing as the other young people of the church. He doesn't dream of anything more than that, I am sure. I wish you wouldn't distress yourself by imagining that he does."

But Aunt Sarah meant much more than that, and was outspoken, at least to Esther.

"You needn't turn up your nose at Joram Pratt, my lady; there are plenty of worse chances than that in the world. He will have a well-stocked farm of his own one of these days, and will know how to manage it; and he is honest and good-natured, and ready to get down on the floor and let you walk over him, if you like. I don't know what more you want,

or at least expect. I should think you would be grateful to him for choosing you out of all the crowd of girls there are here. There isn't a young man in the neighborhood with better prospects than Joram Pratt has."

"Young man!" would burst from Esther's angry lips. "He is nothing but an ignorant, awkward, red-haired boy." But Aunt Sarah was ready for her.

"He is almost twenty-one, and he has settled down to steady work like the sensible fellow that he is. I don't see that he is any more ignorant than the rest of the people out here. If it comes to that, what are you but an ignorant, brown-haired Westerner? Here you are, away out at the end of civilization one may say, and not the slightest prospect of ever getting anywhere else. It isn't as though you had been brought up in the sphere to which your mother once belonged; you may as well make up your mind to take what chance you can get. If you turn scornfully away from a respectable, well-to-do young man like Joram Pratt, merely because he doesn't match some of your silly, sentimental ideas, mark my words you will live

to regret it. Remember, your father is only a home missionary, poor as a church mouse; it is hard work now for him to feed and clothe you, and there isn't the slightest hope of his ever having a better salary. And there is your mother, who was brought up in luxury without having to lift her finger unless she chose, slaving her life away! If their daughter doesn't plan for them, I wonder who will? If you were the kind of girl you ought to be, you would think of the comforts you could bring into this house simply by marrying Joram Pratt, to say nothing of the comfort it would be to your father to have you well provided for and off his hands. Joram is just as generous as he can be; you can tell that by the way he wastes fruits and candies on you. I have no manner of doubt but that he would do for your folks about what you wanted him to. You prate a great deal about education; but Joram has enough to look after his taxes all right, and his bank account, and I'm sure you haven't a great deal more yourself — nothing but a little Western public school to attend. Your mother graduated from one of the most

expensive young women's colleges in the East."

The girl would make a brave effort to control her fierce anger and speak with outward calm.

"Aunt Sarah, don't you believe that people who marry should love each other?"

"Love!" Aunt Sarah would repeat the word as though it represented a nauseous dose.

"For pity's sake, don't talk such twaddle to me! I've seen enough of it. I suppose you get those sentimental notions from your mother, though. She used to talk in the same strain. She married for love, too, and see what a mess she has made of it."

Then would the long-controlled anger blaze. Esther, who had retreated to the window in the hope that a view of her father hoeing lustily on his potato patch would help to keep her tongue in check, turned from it and spoke with energy.

"Aunt Sarah, you may say anything you please about me, and I'll try to bear it; I ought to be used to it, I am sure; but if you say a single word against my father, you will find that you have gone too far — that, I will not listen to."

“Hoity toity!” sneered Aunt Sarah. “What is the matter with her now? Flare up and strut about like a little rooster, I would! It is a pity Joram couldn’t see you; he would discover that you are not always such an angel of light as he fancies. What did I say, I wonder, to ruffle your feathers? Everybody knows that your father was and is and always will be a poor man, and that your mother went out of her own set to marry him. I thought at the time that it was a piece of folly that father ought not to have allowed; but she wouldn’t listen to reason any better than her daughter will. I’m her own sister, and it is likely I know what I am talking about.”

It was then that Esther said the plainest word she had ever spoken to her aunt.

“I know you are, and nothing about you is a greater mystery than that: how two people so utterly unlike as you and mother can be sisters is a problem. If you did not belong to us at all, we could bear it better.” She closed the door through which she was retreating, with the last word, and did not hear even the beginning of her aunt’s excited reply.

It was two hours afterward that a red-eyed, swollen-faced young woman presented herself at the door of Aunt Sarah's room and spoke low and rapidly:—

“Aunt Sarah, I want to ask your forgiveness for what I said this morning. I was angry, or I would have never spoken so to you; but that is no excuse, and I don't want to make any excuse; I just want to say, forgive me.”

“Ah, ha, my lady!” said Aunt Sarah, “I thought your father would make you eat humble pie for your impudence. Oh, I'll forgive you, of course; I'm used to it, you know; but if I were you I would try to control that awful temper. The first thing you know the people who think now that you are just about on a par with the angels will hear of it—such things leak out. You needn't be afraid of me, I shall keep still; but there are others watching you, and some of them would almost give their eyes for a little attention from Joram Pratt; and if he should find out the kind of girl you are when you are angry, you might not have so much chance to turn the cold shoulder to him. I know what I am talking about, and I warn you as a

friend. There are girls who can appreciate that young man, if you can't."

There was nothing for Esther but silence and retreat. The rage she had thought subdued flamed up afresh, and she dare not trust herself to words. Better to remain under the imputation that she cared what Joram Pratt thought or did, than to run the risk of hurting her father and mother again that day.

That evening the quiet little woman whom the missionary had brought with him when he came out West sat with him in his study, sewing steadily on the ever present mending. From time to time she glanced at her husband, busy with his pen and his books.

At last he tossed down the pen and pushed the largest books from him, drawing his open Bible nearer with the air of a man who had worked hard and now meant to take a little refreshment; then she spoke:—

"Spencer, if you are through with study for to-night, can you spare a little time to me?"

There was a note in her voice that called for sympathy, and Mr. Randall gave her a very tender smile as he said heartily:—

"Of course I can, dear; there is always time for you. By the way, am I to go for Esther?"

"No, the Webster girls will be there, and the Bentons."

"To say nothing of Joram Pratt," said the father, with an amused smile. But his wife did not smile.

"It is about Esther that I want to talk," she said. "I really don't know what we can do, but it seems as though something ought to be done—that boy simply persecutes the child. At first she felt that she could not go to-night, although she had promised, and she sent over to make sure that the Websters were going, before she would dress. She told me this afternoon that she could not endure this sort of thing any longer, and I don't blame her. If poor Sarah would only —"

"Yes, that is the trouble," said the father, after waiting in vain for his wife to finish her sentence. "I could make things plain to Joram, I believe, without hurting the poor fellow's feelings too much, were it not that her constant kindnesses mislead him."

"It isn't simply her kindnesses, Randall.

She says things to him about Esther in such a way that she seems to be quoting from the child. And it does no good for me to talk to her; in fact, it makes matters worse. She thinks I am working against the best interests of my daughter, and that she must help her in spite of me. Spencer, she actually thinks that Esther ought to be urged to marry that boy."

"Preposterous!" said the father. "If we could only —" then an abrupt pause, after which he laughed with the air of a man who felt that a shamefaced laugh was all that was left to him. Not for the world would he say to this long-suffering woman that if they could contrive a way to separate her sister from their daughter's life for a while, the rest might be managed. There was nothing to be gained by saying anything of the kind. Neither home could raise the necessary funds for Aunt Sarah to take the long journey eastward, even had there been no other obstacle; but there was.

CHAPTER V

A REBEL

MUCH as their guest disliked everything about her Western home, and outspoken as she was concerning her martyrdom in being obliged to remain there, it was nevertheless discovered that she did not wish to return to the straitened home in the East, where the youngest daughter was working strenuously to support her mother in comfort.

Aunt Sarah's way of describing her was:—

“Mary is too selfish to live! She is bound up in mother to the degree that she simply *can't* think of anybody else. She wouldn't care if I half starved, provided mother was comfortable. Mother and Mary are really very much alike; they care very little what becomes of the rest of the world, provided they can be together and have what they want.”

The missionary's wife had been long in the school of patience and had learned to make no

reply even to such remarks as these; but they had helped her to understand that her sister Sarah must by no means return to the Eastern home, so long as it was possible to provide for her in other ways.

The long talk which she and her husband had together, on the evening in question, had no other result than the deepening of their sympathy for each other, unless it also increased their sense of helplessness.

“I don’t see but we are shut up to the situation with nothing to do but make the best of it,” Mr. Randall said, at last, with one of the few sighs that he allowed himself in his wife’s presence. It was she who smiled and said:—

“Never mind, Randall, it has done me good to talk it over with you; perhaps some way will open that we have not thought of.”

And the way was opening even then. The next morning’s mail brought it to them. A college friend and brother minister who had stopped over night in the little Western manse and had learned, more by keen observation than by words, some of the things that lay heavy on the missionary’s heart, remembered him

six months afterwards when there came into his care certain trust moneys to be spent in aiding the sons and daughters of missionaries in their education; said education to be sought in the particular college which was the hobby of the man who left the trust. Thus, all unexpectedly, a marvel had worked its way into her life, and in the space of a few weeks Esther Ried Randall became a college girl, five hundred miles removed from her father's house. In this college a custom obtained by which industrious students could aid substantially in their own support. A regular system of hours, range of employments, and a schedule of prices had been evolved, a member of the student body serving as secretary. To him, the townspeople could at given hours apply for helpers, and the students could register at his office and state their preferences. In this way the needs of employers and those desiring employment were met, and there was a fair degree of mutual satisfaction. Esther Randall had been among the first of the new students to avail herself of this opportunity, and had enrolled herself as willing to help at general housework.

“It is what I am sure I can do, and do well, thanks to my dear mother,” she wrote home, “so I have given my name and mentioned just a very few of my many accomplishments, and am anxiously awaiting a summons. I feel sure there is somewhere in this town an overburdened housekeeper to whom I am to appear as an angel of light, to broil her steaks or wash her dishes in the very best way in the world; namely, the way my mother does. Only think, in this way I can earn my room and board! I am sure that will take a great big load from father’s shoulders, and mine too; for I like to pay as much of my way as I can. And you needn’t be troubled over it, mother dear; it will not be unpleasant to me. There is a very lovely spirit in the college about all such things; there seems to be no caste feeling whatever. The students who help in these ways to meet their expenses are on exactly the same social plane as the others. There are dozens of them who wholly or in part support themselves, and the others take it as a matter of course. So please tell Aunt Sarah not to fear that I shall be lowered socially by my industry.”

The mother was glad that her young daughter could not hear her Aunt Sarah's lugubrious sigh and doleful words:—

“Think of a granddaughter of Benedict Bradford washing dishes and sweeping rooms for a living! If father knows what we have all come to, I don't see how he can rest in his grave.”

“Never mind, Sarah,” was the missionary's cheery rejoinder. “Father isn't ‘resting in his grave,’ remember; I have no doubt but that he is very busy in heaven. And if he knows that our Esther is sweeping rooms, and she sweeps according to the pattern, why then —

‘Who sweeps a room as by thy law
Makes that, and the action, fine,’

you know.” But poor Aunt Sarah did not catch so much as a glimpse of the fine spirit back of the father's cheery words, and only said:—

“Oh, I know, Spencer, you can make sport out of anything. It must be a comfort not to have a sensitive nature; I often wish that I had been made so.”

On the afternoon that Esther Randall sat

on the steps of Mrs. Victor's side porch and exchanged views with her classmates on theological and various other matters, she had been a college girl for nearly seven months, and during five of them she had earned room and board by her work in Mrs. Victor's kitchen. That she did not find life a bed of roses, all who have undertaken to earn their living in such ways will readily understand. It is quite likely that they will understand it better than did the girl herself. She had for so long been accustomed to attributing most of her trials as the direct or indirect result of her Aunt Sarah's influence that it was a matter of surprise as well as disappointment to her that, being several hundred miles removed from the cause of friction, there should still be friction in her life. An earnest purpose to make the most of her opportunities and at the same time save her father every possible penny carried her safely through many troubles, but did not keep her from living on what she called the edge of a volcano with an eruption imminent.

She sat still on the steps for several minutes, watching the two girls until a corner hid them

from view; then, with a long-drawn sigh, went to her duties.

Half unconsciously she was letting her thoughts dwell on the contrast between her friends and herself, as represented by externals. No girls in college were more to be envied, she believed, than those two. They represented fathers who apparently lived for the purpose of catering to their daughters, slightest wishes, and had substantial bank accounts to aid them. Also, both were exceptionally good scholars, standing well with their professors generally, and being reasonably popular with their classmates. To Esther Randall's eyes the contrasts between them and herself were many and strongly marked. Occasionally she tried to analyze the reasons for their having become, almost from the first, her intimate friends. There were not many subjects upon which they thought alike, yet their intimacy was so marked that their classmates had named them the trio.

As Esther exchanged her street dress for one that did duty in the kitchen there was a cloud on her face; she could not get away from the contrasts. The girls were at home by this time;

they had a suite of rooms in one of the most expensive boarding-houses in the city. When Esther felt especially lugubrious, she dwelt on the fact that these rooms were luxuriously furnished and included even a private bath. It was sometimes difficult not to contrast them with the very straitened quarters and meagre accommodations for which she gave daily service. When she was gay, she seized her broken-nosed pitcher, and as she dashed down two flights of stairs to the kitchen hydrant to fill it, told herself that she was going to her private bath! But when she was not gay, she hated even these trivial evidences of her cramped life, and could not help telling herself that the good things of this world were very unevenly divided.

The cloud on her face deepened as she entered the kitchen, and the sight that greeted her was certainly not cheering. Not only the capacious table, but the sink and even the range were piled high with unwashed dishes and cooking utensils. The butler's pantry which separated the kitchen from the dining room was in an equal state of disorder; everywhere was evidence

of a hurriedly cooked meal and then an utter abandonment of the scene of warfare. All this was entirely contrary to the scheduled plan. Esther was supposed to come on duty at five o'clock to assist in the preparation of a six o'clock dinner for seven persons, then to serve at table, smuggling in her own dinner between times as best she could, then "do the dishes," put the kitchen in perfect order, and make the dining table ready for breakfast. It had been presumed that all this could be accomplished between the hours of five and eight, which would cover the three hours of service she had pledged to give at night.

Esther, in considering it, had reasoned with the home kitchen for a base and her mother's methods of work for a guide, and had said unhesitatingly that she believed she could do it. But there were complications undreamed of by her. Continually the dinner was late, not from any fault of Esther's, who had been trained to habits of rigid punctuality, and was to be relied upon to open the kitchen door as the clock was striking five — but Miss Katherine was out with guests, and must be waited for;

or the son of the house had not yet come in, and had said that he might bring friends with him; or the young people were playing tennis, and dinner could not be served until the game was concluded. Or Miss Marian was seized just at six o'clock with a desire for a certain salad dressing which "wouldn't take five minutes to make" and which always did take twenty-five. These, and dozens of other reasons quite as plausible, made the dinner hour perilously uncertain to the two members of the family who were trying to live by rule,—Esther and the fourteen-year-old high-school girl, the youngest daughter of the house.

Moreover, it was continually happening, as on the present occasion, that unexpected guests came to luncheon, and the mother and her two grown-up daughters who had that meal in charge were hurried by some society function and "simply compelled" to leave things in confusion. Of course this state of things must either make a late dinner or give Esther extra labor afterwards, such as could not be crowded into the three hours of service. This, in brief, was one of the problems continually confronting

the girl trained to strict ideas of honor. There had seemed to her, heretofore, to be nothing for her to do but give the extra time needed to accomplish her pledged portion of work, and to borrow from her hours of sleep to make up the deficiency. But on this day she was in no mood to be patient with extra burdens. As she rapidly removed the litter from the range, and with the skill of an engineer brought the fire in subjection to her will, her lips took a firm setting that made her look much older than she was, and the expression on her face was such that had Aunt Sarah been there to comment, she would surely have said:—

“Now she’s mad! she shows it in her eyes.”

Mrs. Victor came into the room before the table had been cleared for action.

“Dear, dear!” she said deprecatingly, “this is dreadful, isn’t it? I didn’t know that Katherine left things in quite so bad a shape. But the poor child couldn’t help it; she simply *had* to be ready for the *matinée* by three o’clock, and we had unexpected company at luncheon as usual. We are the most uncertain family!

“Well, never mind; we’ll make the dinner light

and easy to manage; just a steak and some baked potatoes and canned corn. Did you say there was no corn? Oh, I remember, you told me yesterday, didn't you? Well, just phone for it; call up Streator's, they are always prompt; tell them they must be. And we'll just have sliced tomatoes with lettuce for salad; all easy things to manage, you see. As for dessert, make it cake and fruit, — strawberries, or peaches, it doesn't matter which. Why, dear me! that dinner will almost get itself, won't it?"

But it did not; despite the fact that Mrs. Victor gave what help she could between her calls to the telephone and the side door to chat with a neighbor. Esther fairly flew. Down cellar for potatoes, to the "phone" for corn, to the ice-box for steak, then to the phone again to ask why the corn did not come; then down cellar again for jelly that Mrs. Victor decided must be added to the bill of fare. Despite her utmost effort, and having reached a grim resolution to rebel Esther's sturdy conscience compelled her to make even extraordinary efforts at haste, it was twenty-five minutes past six before that simple dinner, which was almost to

get itself, was ready to be served. But even then Katherine had not arrived, and as two ladies were with her who were guests, she must be waited for, at least for what Mrs. Victor called a "reasonable" length of time.

It was when Esther, who had ignored her own dinner and given every moment of time to her work, was carrying a tray loaded with freshly dried dishes to their places in the dining room that the clock on the college tower tolled eight. She gave a troubled look at the dining-room clock, that was even a few minutes later; she had hoped to be farther along in her work by eight o'clock. There were still many dishes to be washed, and the kitchen table was in wild disorder; in short, there was a full hour of work yet to be done; but Esther had already given her four hours of labor that day, and her resolution held firm. It strengthened it to remember that she had given even more than her full hour of morning service to get the guest chamber ready for company. She assured herself that if this were the first time she had been imposed upon, it might be borne; but it was not the first, nor the dozenth, and justice to her

college work simply demanded that she should make a stand for her rights. She set the heavily laden tray on a corner of the dining table, and, not permitting herself a glance around the disordered kitchen, sped up the backstairs to the little room on the third floor which was for her exclusive use.

What happened next and how she felt, she shall tell, herself.

CHAPTER VI

THE VICTORS

“**D**EARLY BELOVEDS:—

“Oh, mommy, mommy! I have been bad again; so bad that I could almost want you not to tell a word of it to the poor dear father; only of course he must know the whole wicked story to its bitter end, and this letter is, as always, for you both.

“You want to understand though that I had great provocation. (I’ll begin with excuses, as naughty children always do.) They are simply dreadful, these Victors, about piling up the work and having dinner late, and expecting me to crowd it all in, — the work, not the dinner. I’ve done it a good many times, not in my hours though, by any means; but on Saturday I made a solemn resolution not to do it again. It was really a *promise*, father, and you wouldn’t have me break a promise I should hope!

“But I tried with all my might to get the work done; I did, honestly. I took no time even to eat; but there had been company to luncheon, and when I came on duty at five, all the cooking dishes and most of the others stood around in sticky heaps in the way. Dinner was late, of course, but even then they were not ready for it. When the clock struck eight, there was never a worse-looking kitchen and pantry imagined. Mother, if you should put every dish and kettle and pan that we have in the world in the middle of the floor, it wouldn't begin to describe the scene. If these Victors had any more dishes that could be used in getting luncheon, they would use them. Oh, to be sure I had washed some of them, piles and piles indeed, but the stickiest ones and the dried-up-est ones were still waiting. (It never occurs to Miss Katherine to put any dish to soak, and she made an unusually messy mess for a salad, and I think used a fresh dish for each egg and raisin and bread crumb!) Oh, don't let me undertake to describe the scene! words fail! I left it. I did, mommy, and father, your daughter, Ester Ried Randall, in spite of her honored name and the hopes and

aspirations which it inspires, did just that. I went to my books to try to get ready for this morning, there was an unusually hard lesson to prepare, but wickedness as usual met its own reward. Floury bowls and oily plates and dried-on skillets danced before my eyes, and unwashed muffin tins spread themselves over each page; and at last I went to bed in despair. But I dreamed that I tipped over the range and scattered the burning coals all over the dining table!

“Have I told you that I am not, this term, on duty on Sunday morning? Mrs. Victor prefers to have me give the four hours in succession in the afternoon, so I can get the dinner, without help, and do up the work while the family sleep! So I did not have to go down to that awful kitchen, and I hope you understand that I had the grace to go without my breakfast. I waited until all the family were supposed to have gone to church and it was time for me to begin preparations for dinner. But I found Mrs. Victor at work in the kitchen. Mommy, I meant to be meekness itself, but her very first words roiled me.

“‘You didn’t go to church,’ I said civilly. An idiotic thing to say I will admit, because of course she knew it without my telling her. ‘No,’ she said very stiffly. ‘I could hardly venture on that, since I did not know what to expect. From the appearance of things here this morning I supposed that at the very least you had been taken suddenly ill, or been called away at a moment’s warning.’

“Why did that vex me? I don’t think I can explain the why, but it did. Still, I resisted the temptation to compliment her on her humanity in supposing that I might have been taken suddenly ill, and yet leaving me to my own distresses all the morning, and only remarked coldly that I did not understand why she should not have expected me at the appointed hour, as usual, since I believed that I had never yet been five minutes late. Then I added that I had worked up to the full limit of my time the night before, without stopping even to eat my dinner, and got just as much of the extra work done as I possibly could, but that my college duties simply would not admit of my giving any more time to housework.

I thought that would remind her of the number of extra hours that I had already given, and that she would say they ought not to expect that, or some other mollifying thing, and I was prepared to meet her more than halfway. But she wouldn't come a step; she acted precisely as though it was I who had failed in my contract. Then she said a horrid thing. After sighing like an ill-used person, she said resignedly that of course there was no use in talking over such matters; she had probably expected too much. She would admit that, having understood that I was the daughter of a minister, she had fancied that they would not be held by me to hard and fast rules, and that if *once in a while* they needed a few minutes more of service, I would be willing to accommodate them, just as she certainly would try to accommodate me if I needed at any time to be excused. Now, mother, wasn't that exasperating talk? 'Once in a while,' indeed! when she knows perfectly well that nine times out of ten they have dinner so late that I cannot get to my room until nine o'clock at least, and I am often later than that. Then, the idea of

lugging in the fact that I am a minister's daughter! What had that to do with it, pray? And yet — poor father! I know while I write that it does have something to do with it, and if Mrs. Victor knew what a good, *good* minister I have for a father matters would have been worse yet.

“We said a good deal more, both of us. She vexed me so that I told her frankly, what I had made up my mind not to mention, just then, that her work kept me in the kitchen until after nine o'clock five nights out of six. Then she said that I must be terribly slow; she was sure that either of her daughters could do the dinner dishes quicker than that, and they had not been brought up to work in the kitchen, either.

“Then I said that I had been brought up to do whatever I had to do as well and as quickly as I could, and that ever since I had been with her I had tried to do my best. But that, if I did not suit her, she was under no obligation to keep me until the close of the year, and that if she wished it, I would go away at once. Now poor, dear, little mother and my long-suffering, troubled father, don't look too sorrowfully at

each other over that. I know I was mean, I confess it; yes, ma'am, I am dreadfully ashamed of myself and have been all day. Because, you see, I had the advantage of her, and knew it. I am a pretty fair cook, and a reasonably fast worker; you know I am, mommy dear, so what's the use of our trying to hide it? Besides, it is all owing to the training you gave me. And help here is very scarce indeed; there are more people looking for college girls to work in their kitchens than there are girls to go around, a great deal. Mrs. Victor knew and I knew that I had only to announce myself as unemployed, to have dozens of opportunities. Why, mother, I know a lovely home, just such as I would like to be in, that would clap its hands for joy if I should go over there this evening and say that I had come to stay. Yes'm, I know that made it all the meaner; please don't tell me so, for I feel it away down to my shoes. Do let me hurry to say the next thing; I had really no intention, not the slightest, of leaving Mrs. Victor — much as I should like to do so — unless she sent me away, which I knew was extremely improbable. I just felt a mean little desire to remind her that it wasn't

necessary for her to sacrifice herself in order to keep her contract with me. I had my reward, too, such as it was. She looked simply scared over my words, and made all haste to tell me that of course she did not wish me to go; had not thought of my doing such a thing. She always tried to keep her word, and she knew I was a girl who did the same. In fact, she should not think of sending me away even though I did not suit her at all, after I had made all my arrangements to stay with her through the college year; she hoped she understood her duty better than that! Now, mommy dear, could I let her pat herself in that way about doing her duty? I don't think it would have been in human nature to take such a remark in silence; at least it wasn't in my nature. I reminded her that it had been distinctly stipulated when our engagement was made that it was to continue through the year only on the ground that both parties were satisfied to have it so; and that I had no right and no desire to hold her a moment beyond her wishes. That was MEANNESS spelled all in capitals! I know it, father; you needn't say a word. She

was at my mercy. She has neither time nor strength to add my four hours of honest service to all her other work, and her daughters are too much engrossed with music and art and society to help her.

“Mommy, she began to be very nice to me; not because she felt one bit like it, but because she thought she must, in order to keep me; and I never felt so humiliated in my life! Well, we patched up a sort of peace; she made some wild promises about being punctual in future, which she cannot keep, poor thing! it isn't she who is unpunctual — then she went away at last, and left me. And I made the table look beautiful, and got as nice a dinner as I could, and they were every one prompt to the minute, and had only two unexpected guests; and Miss Marian dried all the silver and glass and wanted to help with the other dishes and I wouldn't let her; and all the time I felt small and mean, and they felt indignant. I was the subject of conversation throughout that dinner, despite the guests. They are very much at home here, and family matters are discussed freely before them. I felt it in the air,

and in the sibilant warning hush of Mrs. Victor when she heard me coming; and because they were indignant and talked too loud, I could not help overhearing some things, despite their sudden silences. Things that hurt. For instance, this: —

“‘Ministers’ daughters are no better than other people’s daughters, so far as I can see; Mrs. Gleason says this one’s father is an excellent man; I hope she doesn’t inherit her temper from him.’

“Then Miss Katherine offered a suggestion: —

“‘This girl is a member of the church, and a very regular attendant at Bible class.’ Which remark set the son of the house into a burst of laughter, and he said: —

“‘Kathie, what on earth has that to do with the subject under discussion? Is there any connection between Bible classes and temper in the kitchen?’

“‘Why, I don’t know,’ said Katherine. ‘Don’t people profess that Bible study and all that sort of thing helps them to be unselfish and good-natured?’

“Whether or not the young man was made to

see the connection I shall never know; for at that point my troublesome conscience compelled me to rattle the dishes so that I could hear no more. But oh, how ashamed I felt! My poor father having to be dragged into disrepute again on account of his unworthy daughter. Mommy, I longed, just *longed*, to rush in there and say:—

“‘You are right, ministers’ daughters are not what they should be, — at least not all are, — but it isn’t father’s fault. If I were like him, no amount of selfishness and exaction on your part could swerve me one hair’s-breadth from the straight white line of beautiful living. But the trouble is that though my blessed father and mother did their best for me, I am not one bit like either of them; I am just my miserable, hateful self.’

“‘Seriously, dear mother, — and even more seriously, dear father, — I am bowed to the dust over the thought that has somehow come to me with new force to-day: that people are judging of my father and mother by what they see in me! Isn’t that AWFUL! I, with such exhibits of fallen human nature as I know how to make, to be credited to you! Mother dear,

I shall try harder, — I really think I shall, though at this moment I don't see how flesh and blood could do more trying than I have already done, — but with your reputation at stake it seems as though I *must* learn to control my volcanic temper. Oh, that one little corner of the real Ester Ried's mantle could have fallen upon miserable me!

“At the same time I want to be strictly just, even to myself, and I think you ought to be told that the Victors are, every last one of them, ‘aggrivoking.’ Other people besides me have discovered this. The college girls who are doing the same kind of work in other homes all commiserate me. No, sir, I do not talk over the Victors with the girls; now, father, I am ashamed of you for thinking that a daughter of yours could stoop so low as that! I don't open my lips about the family I live with, of course; but one of the girls, when she heard where I was living, shrugged her shoulders and said, ‘Oh, you poor child!’ and the others laughed significantly. Then occasionally I am asked if I am still with the Victors, and great astonishment is expressed. Now, mommy, don't

think dreadful things. The family is eminently respectable, I assure you; but they think that their rooms and their board are worth a great deal, and they mean to get their money's worth out of any person whom they honor by allowing her to live with them. The deep-down trouble is that they are poor, and want to dress and eat and act as though they were rich; that is what I believe. The more I think of it, the more sure I feel that most of the meannesses of this world can be laid at the door of poverty. Now even I could be angelic most of the time, I think, if I had all the money I wanted to lavish on myself and my best beloveds. Still, you say Ester Ried was poor. Why, her family even kept boarders, didn't they? Ugh!

"Mother dear, I have reformed, really and truly, so far as the Victors are concerned. I shall not rebel again if they don't get ready for dinner until the next morning. Please don't think I am making light of my sins, and please do know that I am sorry and ashamed. I am going to bed now.

"Your loving, horrid, repentant, homesick daughter,

"ESTER RIED RANDALL."

“P.S. Professor Langham has invited me to attend the next recital. That is supposed to be an honor not often attained to by college girls, especially by mere Sophomores. If it were not for the Victors and a few other — well, *things*, I should feel quite ‘sot up.’ How is poor Joram prospering? Is Aunt Sarah reconciled yet? I don’t believe there is a line in this letter that can be read to her! Oh, mommy, mommy! I love you! As for father, I — oh, he knows all about it. Kiss me, both of you, this minute. Now I’m gone to bed.

“ESTER.”

They laughed a little, the father and mother, over this letter as they read it together in the privacy of the study, after Aunt Sarah had retired. Every line of it was so characteristically *Esther* that they could not but laugh. Yet there was room for seriousness and for indignation.

“It really seems too bad,” said the usually patient mother, “that she should have to be so tried by the careless and selfish habits of others. It is hard enough for the child to have

to spend any of her time in doing housework; it seems as though she might at least have gone into a home that could appreciate her."

The father's thoughts ran in another channel.

"She is jealous for the honor of father and mother," he said. "And even for the stranger for whom she was named; but does she remember that other One whose name she also bears and who must be honored or dishonored according as she presents His character to the world?"

It was this thought and the talk that followed it which led her mother in her next letter to Esther to say:—

"If I had another daughter to name, I think I should call her 'Honor.' Wouldn't it help her, perhaps, to keep in mind, not only the honor of the family name, but of that other greater Name? 'Honor Randall'— Should you have liked it, dear?"

CHAPTER VII

SCRUPLES

“WELL,” said Faith Farnham, with a discontented little laugh, “if you simply *won't* do anything that I want, I may as well go; but I must say, my beloved Esther Ried Randall, that for a girl who can persistently — not to say obstinately — stand in her own light I think you will take the prize.”

It was Sunday afternoon, and the two girls were on Mrs. Victor's side porch, which was deserted save for them. The various members of the household were busy with their after-dinner naps, with the exception of Selma, the high school girl, who had, a short time before, gone for what she called “a Sunday tramp” with one of her schoolmates. Esther sat back in one of the large porch rockers in as relaxed a position as her overwrought nerves would permit. Although it was still early in the afternoon, her duties in the Victor kitchen were

done for the day; the presence of guests who must take the two o'clock train having necessitated an early dinner. She looked tired, with the sort of weariness that the easy-chair and the sweet, rose-perfumed air of the porch did not touch. Her friend regarded her with ill-concealed impatience and presently broke forth again.

“Esther, what is the use in being so absurd? You know you need the rest that this would be to you. You look tired to death; and the air up there among the pines and the eucalyptus trees is something to remember. Then we shall have a lovely little spread on the rocks, and you needn't trouble to take a single thing. I had my basket packed before I came out, with luncheon enough for six. Besides, the boys are going to order oysters and coffee for us from the hotel. You will have the comfort once more of eating a repast that you haven't planned and got ready yourself; I should think that alone would be quite a treat. Last summer vacation I had to think up Sunday evening lunches for the whole family and it nearly gave me nervous prostration. And then, Esther, the drive home

by moonlight will be simply entrancing to-night ; it is full moon, you know. You will be all rested up for your next week's work ; come, do go, dear, just to please me."

Esther sat straighter in her chair and ran her fingers through her fluffy hair, lifting it back from her forehead in a way she had when tired, and also when annoyed.

"I wish you wouldn't, Faith," she said, letting a little of her annoyance creep into her tone. "I told you at the first that I never went on Sunday frolics, and I thought you understood me."

Faith made an impatient movement.

"It isn't a frolic," she said. "Why will you be so unreasonable ? It will be as decorous and well-managed a Sunday crowd as was ever planned. Why, there are three, four church-members in it, and two of them are ministers' daughters ; or daughter and son. What more do you want ?"

"I don't want anything of any of them, except to be let alone. If they were all ministers, what difference do you suppose that would make to me ? I tell you I don't believe in such ways of spending Sundays ; and although I live in a

little backwoods town where the people are ignorant enough, goodness knows, I never knew the church-members there to get up Sunday picnics or Sunday rides or anything of the sort. They leave all that to the people who don't pretend to have any religion."

It was then that Faith rose up from her hassock with a determined air.

"Well," she said, "I am sorry you persist in looking at it in that light. I felt like urging, because I thought you really needed the rest that it would give you; and Professor Langham said he was sure you did. He is going, by the way, and so is Mr. Gilman; we shall be a well-guarded crowd, you see. I tell you what, Esther, if I were you, I would give up working at that religion of yours while you are away from home; you take it too hard; it is worse than the name, a great deal! Blanche, now, simply amuses me with her spasmodic efforts at harmonizing her old life with the new; but you, my dear, actually tire me."

Esther's irritation had now passed beyond her control. "I wish you would let my religion alone," she said with energy. "It may

not be of any account to you, but such as it is, it belongs to me, and I do not care to have it dragged out every little while for discussion. I am sure I don't obtrude it on you."

"That is just where you are mistaken, my child, you do; it is what I am complaining of this very minute. Or rather, you do worse than that, you obtrude it upon yourself. It is just that which is keeping you from taking a much-needed drive into the country and getting rest and inspiration for the entire week. I assure you, if I were going to indulge in any religion, which may Heaven forbid, I should take Blanche's kind instead of yours; because hers doesn't do her or anybody else any harm, while yours serves to make you more or less miserable most of the time. Never mind, dear, forgive me, I ought not to have said that. You can't help it, I presume; you were born that way. I must go this minute; I didn't think it was so late. I don't suppose there is any hope that if we should drive around this way in a half hour or less, you might have reconsidered? Oh, poor child! I won't say another word; only good-by."

Esther sat very still after her guest had gone. There were books and papers on the chair beside her that she had brought out to read; but she did not read. Her Bible was among them; she had brought it with the feeling that she might study her lesson for the next Sunday, but she had not opened it. As she looked at it her lip curled contemptuously. The contempt was not for the Bible — she was not quite sure what it was for; only — Professor Langham was the Bible teacher, and it seemed that he had nothing better to do with his Sunday afternoons than to drive to Rock Springs with a company of his students.

She pushed back her chair until the heavy vines shielded her entirely from passers-by, and gave herself up to what she would have called thinking. In reality it was a desultory review of her uneventful, unsatisfactory, and some of the time distinctly unhappy life. Not only that, but she obliged her miserable self to admit that she had made those about her more or less unhappy. She could recall innumerable instances in which the look of perplexity and undoubted anxiety on her father's face had been

called up by some outburst of hers. As for her poor mother, had she not practically spent her life in trying to make life more comfortable, or at least more tolerable, for her one daughter? And how had the daughter repaid her? How she had chafed under the restrictions of poverty, and under all the limitations of her little narrowed life! Above all, how persistently intolerant she had been of Aunt Sarah, her mother's own sister! It was of no use to tell herself that such a state of things had been the necessary outcome of Aunt Sarah's disposition; that thought had ceased to comfort her, when she remembered how patiently her mother and father had borne with that same disposition. Then, when the sudden opportunity had come to her for a broadened life and association with books and students and teachers, how miserable she had made herself over the question of clothes! What heroic sacrifices she had permitted on the part of that dear mother, and then had wept over them in a secrecy that could not be kept secret, partly because the sacrifices had to be made, but more, oh, a great deal more, she was sure, because the result was so pitiful.

It had required courage to come to college with a wardrobe as limited as hers.

For the same reason it required daily courage to stay there, yet the college girl was ashamed that this was so. Her cheeks burned over the memory of certain social functions with which she had declined to be associated and had allowed the girls to think it was because of conscientious scruples; yet the real reason had been, nothing to wear.

And yet conscientious scruples were among her grievances. They were continually cropping out, until it seemed to this discouraged soul that there was no social life left for her. Cards and dancing appeared to be the chief, almost the only entertainments offered at ordinary social functions, it being taken as a matter of course that one or the other would satisfy all tastes. Esther had accepted such invitations a number of times, with the result that she had felt more lonely and out of place than at any other time since she left home. Apparently she was the only girl with scruples, and the anxious efforts of her young hostess to entertain her, together with the surprise of every one

with whom she came in contact that she neither danced nor played cards, so annoyed the girl that she had almost resolved to turn recluse rather than put herself in the way of such embarrassments.

Worse than the astonishment of the many, had been the efforts of the few to aid her.

"It's an awfully easy game," volunteered a good-natured Freshman who had stood near her for some time, evidently pitying her loneliness. "If you like to take a hand, I can show you in five minutes how the thing goes. It really isn't much more complicated than the 'tit-tat-to' of our childhood. Didn't you enjoy 'tit-tat-to' once upon a time?"

"Very much," she had said, smiling. "Still, I think I will not renew my childhood to-night."

"I wish you would, though," he had said heartily. "It's great fun when you once get hold of it, and things seem to be pretty slow here to-night for the people who neither dance nor play cards."

She had resisted his kindness with a positiveness that was almost rudeness; but she had not said anything about scruples. The reason was

that she was ashamed of her scruples; and then she was ashamed of herself for being ashamed of them. She had written home about that evening's experience in a way that caused her mother and father to sit long over the dying coals in the study grate.

"I don't think I shall accept any more social invitations," so the letter ran; "I haven't time for them — nor gowns, for that matter. Sometimes I feel like a queer little nun in my one good dress that has to do duty on all occasions. Still, to be honest, it isn't so much the time — though that is very scarce, nor the gowns — though they are scarcer — as the question what I shall do with myself. How should you feel, mother, to be the only girl in a large company, who neither danced nor played whist, or euchre, or any of the various games that are played with cards? Rather, how did you feel when you were a girl and had such experiences? You have never told me about them. Or, didn't you have them? Perhaps the young people of your day were not limited to one or the other of these amusements, as they seem now to be. I cannot imagine you standing around awkwardly

as I do, your main chance for conversation being, 'No, thank you, I don't play cards.' 'Thank you very much, but I think I will not take a lesson to-night.' 'No, thanks, I don't dance.' 'Oh, no, I have never even made an attempt.' 'You are very kind, but I will not undertake it this time; I am not in a dancing mood.' That is, in all honesty, the situation here; I have not exaggerated one bit; out of the entire company I seem to be marked as the girl with scruples. Occasionally I am forced to the wall and it becomes necessary to attempt an explanation, and that is the most embarrassing of all, for I am ashamed of my scruples. On reflection I find that they are not mine at all, but are second hand. Honestly, mother, father, I find that I do not at this moment know one satisfactory reason why I should not spend an occasional evening playing a game of cards with my friends. As I watch the others, I find that the game looks quite as sensible to me, and as innocent, as the old-fashioned 'What is my thought like?' or any of those games with which we used to try to make Joram Pratt and others of his kind believe that they had any thoughts.

“Dancing, now, is different. I can see for myself how far from true refinement it is, even in its milder exhibitions. Every time I look on, I see girls, good sweet girls, allow in the dance attentions that under any other conditions would be considered insulting; and I have sufficient imagination, as well as sufficient knowledge of the world, to feel sure, even without much thought, that the trend of the amusement is downward. In fact there are girls, a few of them, in this very college whose ways of talking about dances that they have attended is enough to make one who has been brought up by a careful mother blush for them. I have reached the conclusion that the natural instinct of purity which every true girl has, would lead her to shrink instinctively from that amusement as we see it in society to-day, provided her young girlhood had been held from all familiarity with it. But cards are different. When I tried to think out my objections to them for some of the girls who questioned me, I found that my most vivid impression in regard to them was based on the fact that you, father, took from me in haste and in evident dismay that pack

of cards which our summer boarder left in his room and burned them in the grate as fast as the flames could be made to devour them. That was the summer that I was fourteen. I remember I got the impression, from your manner rather than your words, that they were not fit for respectable people to touch. But that of course is rather a slender basis for a logical argument. It is true that I am familiar with the common objections to games of chance, but used in social circles for an hour's entertainment, such objections do not seem to apply.

“Don't be frightened, father, I have not been playing cards. I have too vivid a remembrance of your face as you poked that glowing mass in the grate to make it burn the faster, to care to venture on the amusement, and I have steadily declined to be shown how. But I stand quite alone, and am thought 'peculiar' and 'narrow' and 'ignorant.' Which last I am; and please ma'am, and sir, I should like to be instructed.”

Such was the message that kept father and mother sitting late in the little study. Not that they said much, but they were so consciously thinking the same thoughts, that when Mr.

Randall broke the silence, he spoke the very words that his wife expected.

“To help people to be ‘really acquainted with God,’ Helen. That was to have been my work in the world. Have I signally failed with my own daughter? Our Esther is surely the Lord’s own, but —”

“She is a Christian,” said his wife. “But she is, like too many of us, satisfied with following ‘afar off.’ Sometimes I think if her mother —” her voice broke at that, and the missionary bent downward and kissed the tears from the face of his bride of twenty years as he said:—

“God never gave to any girl a better mother than ours has, Helen. You must be just even to yourself. And you and I must remember that God Himself has to be the teacher of some lessons. All that we can do is to ask Him to reveal Himself to her in His time. I confess that I sometimes fear lest in our anxiety for her mental development we have sent her into a place of peculiar temptation.”

“It seemed a direct answer to our prayer for guidance,” murmured the mother; and the father caught at the comfort in her words.

“So it did, Helen, and so it was; and you and I must trust Him. ‘I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.’ He can do it.”

With a sudden leap of thought of which mothers are capable, Mrs. Randall’s next words were:—

“I am afraid the poor child feels keenly the contrast between herself and others in the matter of clothes. She has nothing really nice.”

“I would not worry about that,” said the father, sturdily. “She knew all the limitations when she went; trials of that sort will not injure her permanently.”

But the mother, being a mother, though she said no more, wished with all her heart that she could contrive one more “good” dress for the child.

CHAPTER VIII

MODELS

BUT the girl who sat alone on the Victors' side porch that Sunday afternoon had descended into depths of misery that were not possible to her father and mother. They were comforted when they thought of God.

“Why not leave all to the Helper
Who never has failed us yet?”

the father had quoted, and then had kissed his wife and smiled cheerfully. But the thought of God did not help Esther. She had never felt farther from Him than on this afternoon when, as she told herself bitterly, she had been trying to honor Him.

The sorrowful truth was that nothing with which Esther Randall had to do satisfied her less and tried her more than did what Faith Farnham called her religion. Faith had spoken plain words to her before that day, all the more stinging because they were true.

“You live in a little narrow space all hedged about with ‘Thou shalt nots’ or ‘I must nots,’ and that seems to be all there is of it.” This was one of her thrusts, and Esther, recalling it, told herself that it was true. What was the trouble with her? What was the trouble with everybody? Where should she look, now that she was away from home, for people whose religion was a central force in their lives?

There, for instance, were the Victors, every one of them, except the high school girl, members of the church. Esther’s lip curled instinctively when she thought of them. Almost across the street from her was the church of their choice. So near that the words of the hymn being at that moment sung in the young people’s meeting floated out distinctly on the quiet air:—

“I know I love Thee better, Lord,
Than any earthly joy.”

How many of those so blithely singing meant that solemn affirmation or realized that their lips were making it? It is true she had no right to judge, she had small acquaintance with the worshippers. But there were the Victor girls, members of that Young People’s Association.

At that moment they were dallying over their piano, two young men who had "dropped in" a short time before keeping them company, and snatches of various tunes were being tried. Most of them might perhaps be classed under the general title of sacred music,— though every now and then a gay little strain from a college song would intrude,— and the talk with which it was all interluded was of the lightest and gayest. What would her father and mother think of such Sunday evening doings as that?— within a stone's throw of the church to which they had pledged their service!

Mrs. Victor came to the side door and looked out, seeing no one, for the twilight had deepened, and Esther had purposely withdrawn into the shadow. Selma followed her mother with a question.

"Going to church to-night, mamma?"

"No, dear, I think not. One sermon a day from Dr. Cheston is as much as I can digest. Besides, I promised Mrs. Severn that I would run in for a while this evening."

"Is Mrs. Severn sick?"

"Oh, no, but she is lonesome. The servants

all go out, and she is in that great house alone. Mr. Severn doesn't get back until the midnight train, you know."

"Why don't you take her with you to church?"

"Why, child, what a question! The Severns never go to church, you know."

The schoolgirl laughed. "That might be a reason for inviting her, one would think," she said. "That is, if people believe in church-going; I don't, myself."

"Selma! How do you suppose it makes your mother feel to hear you talk in that reckless way?"

"Well, mamma, you know what I mean. I don't see the use in so much church-going; honestly, I don't, and I might as well own it. I never noticed that it did anybody any good, and I think sermons are dreadfully pokey things. Still, of course, I don't mean anything dreadful. I know I couldn't go to-night if I wanted to ever so much. I've got a horrid algebra lesson to learn."

At that moment Mr. Victor appeared, and his daughter assailed him.

"Are you going to church, papa?"

"No, daughter, I'm going over to David Warren's. David and I have a little matter of business that we have been trying for several weeks to get time to talk over. Don't wait up for me, mamma, I may be late. Do either of you know where Robert is?"

"I do," said Selma; "he has gone to drive with the Heagle boys. Alice and I met them away out on the Morrystown road; Rob swung his hat at us; they were driving so awfully fast that he had no chance to speak. They had that big bay horse who ran away twice last week. Rob will get his neck broken some day, riding after all sorts of horses."

"I wish Robert wasn't forever running with the Heagle boys," said Mr. Victor, a mixture of anxiety and irritability in his tone. "They are the fastest young fellows in town. I don't know what Rob's sisters are about that they don't try to keep their brother at home on Sunday nights at least."

The irrepressible Selma giggled.

"Papa, they can manage Laura Banks's and Nellie Stuart's brothers better than their own, I guess. At least, they don't have any trouble

in keeping them with them on Sunday' nights. They have been fooling around the piano for over an hour, pretending to sing, but they don't do anything but laugh and talk. I think Jim Stuart is awfully silly."

If Esther had needed illustrations with which to reënforce her pessimistic spirit, this Christian household was certainly furnishing them. She tugged miserably at the undertone thought which would beset her. Were there people, that is, many people, who got more out of their religion than she and the Victors did? Of course there were always her father and mother, but then — they were peculiar, everybody thought so. Even in that little country town where they lived, the people recognized them as unlike others. She seemed to hear at the moment the strong nasal accent of "Uncle Abram Pratt," Joram's father, giving his opinion:—

"I tell you what, if there was ever a man made that was too good for this earth, I think it is Elder Randall; and as for his wife, an angel straight out of heaven couldn't do any better than she does." With both of these statements Esther was in sympathy; there was no use in

trying to compare other people with her father and mother.

There was Dr. Armitage, the man whom she was privileged to hear preach every Sunday. It was a privilege, one could hear that on all sides. People said he was just the man for a college town; so scholarly, so dignified, and withal such a fine speaker. Even President Morse had pronounced his literary style almost beyond criticism. As a rule, Esther enjoyed listening to his highly polished sentences delivered in a rich, orotund voice. If there were times when she was tempted to call his efforts addresses, instead of sermons, and to sigh for her father's earnestness and simple directness of style, she knew enough to set it down to homesickness. Dr. Armitage was of course a great preacher, and any girl of sense ought to esteem it a privilege to listen to him. Yet on that Sunday evening when she was dealing in plain truths she told herself that Dr. Armitage's sermons did not help her spiritually in the least, and she did not see how they could help anybody except in a literary way. And for herself, since she studied Browning and Shake-

speare and Emerson more or less during the week, under competent instructors, why should she need such food on Sunday also? What did she need? The Bible? She had been present in the Bible class that morning; it was one of the experiences that had served to spoil her day, and make her out of accord with life in general.

“Wasn’t Professor Langham splendid this morning?” Blanche Halsted had said to her. “When he indulges in that fine sarcasm of his I just adore him. He is so keen; his wits flash like polished steel.” Esther had replied coldly that she did not consider a Bible class a fit place in which to indulge in sarcasm, nor the Bible a suitable book to level it at. Whereupon Blanche had laughed, the sort of laugh that was unpleasant to hear, and had told her that she wanted the Bible wrapped in pink cotton and laid away on a shelf to be handled occasionally with carefully gloved hands; but for her part she liked to see it talked about just like any other book, without being trammelled by the superstitions of the past; and that was just what Professor Langham did with it.

What he had done for Esther was to make her

feel that her father was unscholarly and narrow; altogether too old-fashioned in his views and feelings to rank with educated men of to-day. It was not so much what the professor said as his manner of saying it that annoyed her. He had almost been flippant over statements that she had been taught to receive with reverence. Throughout the entire class hour she had been conscious, not that she herself was being disturbed by his teachings or inferences, but that they would be offensive to her father and mother, and that therefore she wanted none of them. Curiously enough this state of feeling increased her annoyance.

"I am all second-hand," she told herself irritably. "It doesn't appear that I have any opinions of my own; they are merely the reflection of what my father and mother think."

In reality the girl was being much more influenced by the, to her, entirely new method of presenting Bible lessons than she supposed. There were times when it seemed to her that the very foundations on which her childish faith had rested were being overturned. This she resented with a fierceness that she herself only

half understood. She longed to hold to all her ideals, and it not only distressed but angered her that they were being disturbed. Once, in the Bible class, being especially tried, she had boldly challenged the teacher.

“What is gained, Professor Langham, by undermining one’s faith in such statements, since there seems to be nothing better to offer in their place?” He had smiled graciously as he replied that she had apparently reached a conclusion which did not seem to him to be tenable, since truth was always a better foundation than falsehood, however pleasantly the latter might be expressed. And then had asked: “Would not your suggested method be like what Dr. van Dyke calls ‘A claim to solve the problems of the inner life by suppressing them’?”

The words had stung her, chiefly perhaps because she felt their truth, as applied to herself. She had come suddenly into a new atmosphere. A questioning spirit was all about her; before she had been three months in college she realized what she had never before felt—that she lived in a doubting age; and, far worse than that—

something to be resented and combated to the last — was herself almost among the doubters.

Yet it was trivial matters that had helped to bring her, that Sunday afternoon, to such a state of discouragement and gloom. She recognized this, and the very triviality irritated her. It was always so, she told herself. She went around straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Why should she allow herself to be miserable, because, for instance, she had broken a dish? She was not the only one in the world who had ever done such a thing, and certainly she had made reparation that would have satisfied any reasonable mortal. If she had to deal with unreasonable ones, she was not to blame for that. Yet it rankled within her — that broken dish, chiefly because it represented failure on her part. She had been sorely tried that Saturday morning. Saturdays were generally hard days; they represented some degree of holiday to her college friends, but for her they meant two extra hours in Mrs. Victor's employ. She had given an impatient and wholly unnecessary fling with her drying cloth — the only

expression of her extreme disapproval of Mrs. Victor's words and manner that she meant to allow herself — and had thereby knocked a pitcher against a nervous little gravy bowl of unique pattern, which had seized the occasion to roll from the tray and break in a dozen pieces. Then Mrs. Victor, who was in her Saturday condition of trying to do too many things at once, had exclaimed and mourned. Why was that particular gravy boat on the table at all? It should never be used save on special occasions. It was a very choice dish, a family piece that had been her grandmother's. She would rather have had the entire set of modern china broken than that one piece. Oh, "match it," of course not! It was very old and therefore, naturally, the more valuable. She was very, *very* sorry; but there was no use in talking about it; unfortunately regrets would not mend broken china.

Esther, who had been genuinely sorry, grew irritable over what she considered the too voluble regrets, but resisted the temptation to tell Mrs. Victor that she was no lady to make such an ado over an accident. She retired,

however, into gloomy silence and maintained it rigidly all the morning, despite the fact that Mrs. Victor evidently grew ashamed of her excessive regrets and tried by pleasant words and considerate ways to atone. Esther resisted these so effectually that while she waited on table at luncheon she had the pleasure, between the courses, of overhearing Mrs. Victor say, with a long-drawn sigh: "I think sometimes I shall have to get rid of that girl in spite of her efficiency; she is so hopelessly ill-tempered; and of all forms of ill temper I think I dread sullenness the most. I feel as though I had been spending the morning with a tombstone! and I worked with her all the while, too, and tried to make things as easy as I could."

Esther was making as much clatter with the spoons she was rinsing as she could, but the lady's high-pitched voice reached her nevertheless and made her face burn; not the less, because she realized that she was being well described. She had really been sullen. It angered as well as shamed her to have to admit it. No one perhaps, even of those who knew her intimately, would have imagined that Esther

Randall coveted a serene spirit; a mind capable of rising above the pettinesses of life, and showing by its calm that it dwelt in a higher atmosphere. Yet this was precisely what the girl admired in others and longed for in herself. One of Professor Langham's greatest charms in her eyes had been the calmness with which he could deal with petty annoyances and vexations such as would have driven her wild. Nothing seemed able to move him out of that atmosphere of superior calm. His very sarcasms were gilt-edged and graceful. Unconsciously to herself, Esther had been making him her model; and the fact that she made no sort of progress toward that high calm, but seemed instead to grow more irritable, more easily moved by trifles, alternately made her angry, or despairing.

When her duties at Mrs. Victor's were done for that day, instead of treating herself to a half holiday as she had planned, she took a street car to the city near at hand and spent the hours in a weary search for a gravy bowl of peculiar pattern and design.

Just when she had exhausted the great china

stores, wholesale and retail, she found in a little out-of-the-way variety shop what at first view seemed to be the exact pattern, and close examination revealed only slight differences. It did not sweeten her temper to realize afterwards that the shrewd foreign shopkeeper saw her eagerness to buy and put up his price accordingly. The piece suddenly became very rare indeed, and cost much more than she had anticipated; but at any price it must be had, and she bore it home in triumph.

But Mrs. Victor's spirit of propitiation had passed; she had had trials during the afternoon that Esther knew not of, and was not in an appreciative mood toward the girl, who had sulked in her kitchen all the morning. She received the offering coldly and without the slightest idea of the time and money which it represented. She assured Esther that she need not have undertaken anything of the kind. Such things could not be replaced. It was not the intrinsic value of the dish, but its associations handed down from the past. Of course a new dish, however much like the other, could never fill its place. Then she carefully pointed

out the difference in the pattern. It was then that Esther quite lost her temper, and indulged in sarcasms that were neither gilt-edged nor graceful, and was bitterly ashamed of herself afterward.

What wonder that her Sunday was the un-restful day it proved to be!

Yet the evening ended in stern resolve. Under cover of the darkness the girl shed a few miserable tears, then arose to the occasion. She would *never* give up her religion; though all the world should prove hypocritical, or superficial, or calmly indifferent, yet would not she. The belief of her father and mother should be her belief, their practice should be her practice, whether she derived any benefit from it all or not. To that end she went to her room and read five consecutive chapters in her Bible before she went to bed!

CHAPTER IX

HARMONY AND DISCORD

THE day was perfect, at least so far as weather was concerned, and its charms were such that it had been generally discussed, although the dwellers in that part of the world were used to perfect May days. It was Saturday and a gala day; at least for the company who were to spend it on King Mountain. Esther Randall's long-planned Saturday holiday had come to her at last. A select company, not too large for enjoyment yet large enough to escape the charge of exclusiveness, had started in the early morning for the twelve miles' drive, with a view to giving the entire day to the joys and glories of open-air life and mountain scenery. Blanche Halsted and Faith Farnham were of the company, of course; indeed, Faith was the moving spirit of the trip, though she had been ably aided and abetted by Professor Langham. A number of the younger and favorite teachers were included in the company.

“We have a select and congenial and at the same time distinguished crowd,” Faith said complacently to Esther when arrangements were complete. “I congratulate myself on my skill in avoiding the not wanted. The only jarring note in the composition is Laura Welby, and she may be said to have invited herself; at least, I failed in making her understand that she was not intended. However, Laura means to be all right, and she can’t help being stupid, I suppose, any more than the rest of us can help being brilliant.”

“Who are to pose as the distinguished members?” Esther asked.

“Who can tell, my child? The wise ones say that Professor Langham needs only a few years and gray hairs to be set down as distinguished in his department; and our famous graduate, Mr. Harkness, is alarmingly near distinction already, with his scientific discovery. And then, my dear, here are our honorable selves, every one of us looking forward to distinction in some line; mine is in having a good time. I haven’t quite settled it what yours is to be, but if you continue in your present sphere,

before you know it you will be distinguished as having lived a whole year with the Victors without having choked or poisoned any of them."

Esther was in high spirits that day; almost too high, her watchful mother would have said, not to expect a reaction. But in truth the reaction from steady and, for the most part, hard work, was upon her. It was long since she had allowed herself an entire day for rest and recreation. The company was in every way congenial to her. The two girls so unlike her continued to be her special friends and were growing so dear that time spent in their society was counted as pleasure. And Professor Langham, who was always distinguished for his thoughtfulness and courtesy, had about him that day a certain indefinable but distinct something which was more than either courtesy or thoughtfulness. Esther, as she felt it, felt also a strange new glow at her heart, and timidly questioned, "Was this — could it be possible that he —" She left even her thought unfinished, but her heart beat the faster because of it.

Accident, if accident it was, had thrown them much together during the early part of the day. It had been arranged that in the great four-horse mountain wagon two people must occupy the high front seat with the driver. It was a coveted place because of its greater opportunity for unobstructed views. For that reason every one held politely back and waited for others. At last Professor Langham came to the driver's aid.

"See here, friends, we are losing time, we should be on our way. Somebody must sacrifice himself or herself at once, or shall we draft people? Suppose we leave it to the laws of chance? There are, let me see, one, two — seven ladies who have not yet appeared. I decree that the first one who comes through yonder gate shall be appointed to the front seat."

As he spoke a merry shout went up, for at that moment Esther Randall came breathlessly up the college hill and hurried through the gate with the air of one who knew she was late and was being waited for. Amid much laughter and, on her part, bewildered questioning, she was mounted to the high seat.

"How shall the next victim be chosen?" asked the smiling professor. And then the driver interposed.

"There had ought to be some one up here who knows how to drive; for there's places, where the road is winding, that I can do better for you walking than driving; and yet I kind of like to have some one up there who knows how, if anything happens."

At this all eyes were levelled at Professor Langham, who was an acknowledged horseman; but it was Laura Welby who spoke for them.

"Then let's make Professor Langham sit up there; I don't want to risk my neck with anybody else, but I know he can drive anything."

"Even a class in Browning," murmured Faith Farnham, too low to be heard save by her nearest neighbor, who exploded with laughter, for Laura Welby was the acknowledged dunce of the Browning class.

At last the laughing, chattering crowd was seated. Professor Langham on the high seat next the driver, with Esther on his left. She had neither sought for nor expected such an exalted position, but she had reason to be well

pleased with it. Professor Langham knew every foot of the road which she was passing over for the first time, and could not only call attention to points of historic or legendary interest, but tell the stories connected with them. Moreover, his skill as a driver was several times demonstrated as he guided the horses along the narrow and sharply curving road, while the driver ran on ahead to be sure there were no obstructions.

There was also much talk that had not to do with the scenery. Whenever there was something of special local interest, Professor Langham thoughtfully turned his head and raised his voice so as to include as much of the company as possible; but between such points Esther had the full benefit of his conversational powers and admitted to herself that there was excellent ground for the generally received opinion that Professor Langham was a rare talker.

Moreover, there was all the while that subtle something which marked his manner toward her as out of the ordinary. He had laid aside the air of a teacher or mentor, and was meeting

her on some common ground that felt new to her. There was a constant watchfulness for her comfort. A sunshade was raised at just the right moment to relieve her eyes; an obtruding branch of a tree was seized upon and held back so that it could not touch even her hat; a rare combination of color and shadow was quietly pointed out to her as an interlude to the story he was telling for the general benefit. In these and other ways, each in itself insignificant, did Professor Langham keep before her mind the thought that she was the object of his special care; and Esther liked it. Throughout the day these attentions continued. They were unobtrusive, as became a gentleman; he made her in no wise conspicuous, yet so managed it that she could not help seeing that his thought was for her.

When the various duties of the luncheon committee were being assigned, it fell to Esther's lot to make the coffee and chocolate, certain of the girls affirming loudly that she could make them better than anybody else.

"Then we will cast in our lot together," said Professor Langham, gayly, "and establish our fires side by side, as I am to broil the steak;

chiefly because I know I can do it better than anybody else, though no one has been kind enough to say so."

This arrangement proved eminently satisfactory to Esther. Professor Langham not only looked after her fire, but interested himself in the making of the coffee, and proved that he knew as much about that as he did about broiling steak. It was all managed in such fashion that what might have been an onerous task to Esther became one of her pleasures.

There could never have been a more delightful repast than was served on King Mountain that day, nor a merrier company to partake of it. Esther, who had always been of a mercurial temperament, laid aside all care and anxiety, resolutely relegated the Victors and the many annoyances which they represented to the background, and gave herself up to the delights of the hour. For the most part the entire company was in sympathy with her mood. Perhaps they all were. It was what Faith Farnham called constitutional stupidity rather than a wish to be disagreeable that made Laura Welby a discordant note.

It was when the merry dinner of many courses was nearing its conclusion that Blanche Halsted had a happy thought.

“Why don't we have some toasts? No dinner in these days is complete without them. Here is delicious lemonade at their service, or coffee for those whose brains need stimulating. We ought to have planned for it and had a toastmaster.”

Faith Farnham seized upon the idea.

“That is a brilliant thought, my dear, worthy of my own mind. Let us have toasts at once; never mind a toastmaster; the gentlemen shall all be masters and create their own toasts as well as respond to them.”

Then Laura, who sat next to Esther at the improvised table, put in her note of discord.

“Wait! how do you know that we can indulge in toasts? Perhaps they are wrong. Here is Esther with her conscience, you know, and it ought not to be ruffled on this day of all days. How is it, Esther, are they wicked?”

The eyes of all the company instinctively turned toward Esther; not one of them but knew of her as the girl with scruples; and she

who was tried by her own sensitiveness on the subject could not help blushing painfully. She succeeded, however, in controlling her voice and speaking with apparent indifference.

“I should think that might depend on the society in which one moved. I can conceive of sentiments advanced as toasts that might properly be named wicked, as apparently you can. Perhaps you have had experiences of that kind?”

The laugh was decidedly against Laura, but she took it as she did most things—in utmost good nature.

“I? Oh, no, indeed!” she said, “I think toasts are delightful. But that New England conscience of yours has such a peculiar way of pouncing on things that we have all considered innocent, that I find I can never be sure of my ground any more.”

“Poor creature!” said Faith Farnham, in mock sympathy. “Who would have imagined that she was afflicted with a conscience!” And again the merriment was over Laura. Then immediately some one proposed a toast, and Esther, feeling that attention was diverted from

her, was able to give herself to the business of getting her indignation well in hand. She had not given Laura credit for obtuseness, but believed this to be a premeditated attack on what she knew was regarded as her peculiarities. It had been at Laura's home that she was most persistently urged to join in the dance and to try a game of cards, and Esther believed that this was Laura's mean little revenge for the note of discord thus introduced at her party.

The toasts were merry, and many of them were extremely clever; but Esther's turmoil of spirit was such that she could not appreciate them. It added to her indignation to observe that Laura had apparently forgotten her existence and was laughing and enjoying herself with the others.

It was not until she heard from the farther end of the ground the voice of Professor Langham proposing and speaking to his toast, that Esther gave full attention to the proceedings.

“THE NEW ENGLAND CONSCIENCE, the force which, if it made our forefathers Puritanical, made them great, and lies at the bottom of the

best things in our nation. May those who have the old blood in their veins, whether sons and daughters of New England or not, never be ashamed of the old-fashioned conscience because we sometimes laugh at it who owe it all we have."

As soon as his voice had ceased there was a general and very vigorous clapping of hands; but no sooner could she be heard than Laura Welby once more made Esther the centre of observation.

"Dear me! what a tribute to Esther Randall, the only New England conscience in this company. I think she ought to be made to respond, or at least to acknowledge the tribute in some way. I call for a speech from Miss Randall."

But Professor Langham had risen again, and the people who would have gayly helped to carry out what they thought was a joke waited to listen.

"In the interests of morality I feel compelled to call upon Miss Welby to explain why she credits but one of our large and eminently respectable company with a conscience. You will observe that in the general charge she does

not even exempt herself! Let us hear from her."

"Me!" said Laura, only half comprehending and with delicious disregard to grammar. "Oh, mercy! I can't make a speech, or a toast, or whatever it is they want. I am not one of the speech-making kind. They ought to make Esther Randall do it."

"I wonder if people are to blame for being idiots," muttered Faith Farnham, with a savage look for Laura. "Such utter lack of common sense is as bad as intentional malice."

Faith had been almost childishly anxious that this day should be one of unalloyed pleasure to her friend, and realized better than did any other what the sensitive girl was suffering at Laura's hands.

CHAPTER X

WORDS

AFTER it was all over, Esther felt ashamed to think how much she had made of the one discordant note in her holiday. But the incident had tried her as no one but herself could understand, for no one else knew how sore she had become over those scruples.

In reply to her appeal for help her father had written her a long, full letter, but he had not helped her. Indeed, it seemed to her that he had written about other matters altogether. Personal religion, a "life hid with Christ in God," might be said to have been his text. It was not different in any way from what she had heard before, but for reasons that she did not fully comprehend it did not appeal to her as her father's ideas used to do; in truth, it almost repelled her. She muttered to herself that she had not asked father for a sermon, but to give her some common-sense arguments, if there

were any, with regard to a very different matter. Almost, her father had ignored her call; at least, it seemed so to her. Yet near the close of his letter had come this:—

“With regard to ‘scruples,’ daughter, and indeed with regard to all those amusements of which thoughtful Christians are inclined to speak with an interrogation point, I have not much to say at this time. If at some later date you would like to study the entire subject with a view to being helpful to younger persons, I shall be glad to give you in detail my opinions and my reasons for them. There are books, also, that might be read with profit. Bishop Vincent’s ‘Better Not,’ for instance, was helpful to me when I was a young man. Professor Wilkinson’s ‘Dance of Modern Society’ is one of the plainest essays we have on that subject—too plain, some people think, but unanswerable as to its statement of facts and its logical deductions, as is, also, Dr. Herrick Johnson’s ‘Plain Talks about the Theatre.’ You did not mention that form of the question, by the way, but in your battle with scruples it is sure to come to the front, sooner or later. These are

all old books; but the dance, and the drama, and all the others, have not in the meantime changed their character, and as principles never change, they will be helpful. If you were a young man I should suggest Robert Speer's book, 'A Young Man's Questions,' and some of the questions young women would do well to study, if not on their own account for the sake of their brothers. Whenever you decide that you have time and inclination for a careful study of such subjects, I shall be glad to send you these, and a few other books or booklets, together with my own opinions. But first, my beloved Ester Ried Randall, I covet for you another kind of study; another view of life altogether from that included in the 'May I?' 'Must I?' or even the 'Shall I?' mode of living. Believe me, daughter, there is higher, happier ground than this — an atmosphere in which all these and numberless other questions settle themselves and drop into their legitimate places, instead of forever thrusting themselves into a busy life to be thought out again. I hope you will, at some time, give them intelligent, exhaustive study for the sake of being able to give such reasons

for your convictions as will to some extent satisfy, or at least enlighten, such acquaintances as live all the while on that lower plane. I use the words, 'to some extent,' advisedly, for you must not hope to be fully satisfactory to any such. The atmosphere which they of necessity breathe, on that lower plan, does and must make a difference with their mental vision. But there is work for you, my daughter, which should come before this study for others. Your father craves for you, and daily — I might almost say hourly — prays that you may have such steady, conscious fellowship with your Lord that your life will unconsciously breathe out the same aroma that enveloped Him."

And then had followed such a tender and yet close personal application of what she called the sermon, that it started the tears and made her heart ache dully over what she felt must be her father's disappointment in her. It was always the thought of her father's disappointment that hurt; and yet she was half annoyed even while she pitied him. What did he mean by "conscious fellowship"? What did anybody mean by such talk? She did not under-

stand it. What could it be but a sentimental instead of a practical way of talking about religion? Yet her father was the most practical man she knew.

Esther had not been improving under the influence of those five chapters which she had compelled herself to read on that Sunday evening of stern resolve, nor had she been helped in any way by rigid adherence to the forms of a religious life, to which she had ever since held herself. She could not remember that she had ever before done so much systematic Bible reading as during the six weeks which had intervened, and she nightly knelt longer in prayer than for many months had been her custom. At least, she assumed the attitude of prayer; but she was learning what many another has had to learn by bitter experience, that to kneel and repeat forms of prayer is not to pray. In vain did the poor disciple struggle with the thought that she was in the presence of God, and try to hold her thoughts to communion with him. Her prayers seemed to her to be all words. After one of her disappointing experiences she wrote a letter to her father, which it

was a pity that she never sent. It described her effort to satisfy his ambition for her, and her vain struggle to realize something of what it meant to commune with God.

"I have stumbled on a Bible verse," she said, "that just describes me. When I was a little girl mother taught me to pray aloud, and I still continue the habit; the other night, after I had been vainly trying to get any help in this way, I opened my Bible at random and this sentence stared at me, 'A fool's voice is known by multitude of words.' I think if they paid any attention to me in heaven — which is not in the least probable — they must have said, 'There is that fool again on her knees pouring out words, words, WORDS!'"

But that letter she was ashamed to send; she felt that it would not only disappoint but seem positively irreverent to her father and mother; so she tore it into bits, and they thus lost another opportunity for learning what her trouble really was.

In this way she had struggled on; sometimes angry with all forms of religious life, and on the verge of casting them aside and stepping out

boldly beside Faith Farnham the faithless; but more often bitterly angry with and ashamed of herself because she was not and could not be the kind of Christian that her parents would have her.

Dinner on the mountain being finally over and the débris disposed of, the company broke into little groups arranged in accordance with their several tastes or fancies. Some of them wanted to loll about on the grass or make couches of the flat stones and rest, declaring that to sit and breathe the delicious air was all the diversion they needed. A few had brought their treasured books and sought quiet nooks where they could enjoy undisturbed a favorite holiday author. Those who could find no enjoyment in sitting still even to read, on such a glorious day, strolled off in choice companies among the rocks and ravines, bent on exploring.

Among these latter was the "trio," with their arms twined about one another.

"I want to find a fern root like that one Elise had in her window-seat for so long," explained Faith Farnham.

"She found it up here, and it was the most delicate little creature. Don't you remember

it, Blanche? It throve nicely until Elise tipped it over and broke its neck, or its heart. I wonder if they have hearts?"

There were rapid steps approaching from behind, and Professor Langham's voice answered the remark as though it had been addressed to him.

"I am not sure as to that, Miss Farnham, but I am acquainted with every fern that grows in this part of the world; if you are in search of a special one you would do well to invite me to join you, for some of them grow in what might seem to be inaccessible places."

This broad hint was laughingly and cordially responded to, and the four walked along together, chatting gayly, until, as the road narrowed, Faith surreptitiously seized Blanche by the hand and they quietly dropped behind.

"Do let us give him a little chance," she murmured. "I'm awfully sorry for the poor man. I know he has been just longing for a little talk with Esther this great while, and one of us is forever in the way. Now that it happens to be two of us, I believe I can manage it."

"Why!" said the startled Blanche, "do

you really think he wants to see her especially? I never dreamed of such a thing!"

"Of course you didn't, you dear blind bat! and I like you ever so much better for your blindness. If you were always seeing such things long before they happened, or ever meant to happen, as some of the girls are, I know I should hate you. But I really can't help seeing, sometimes, what is right before my eyes. I am as sure as I want to be that Professor Langham is only waiting for vacation, or opportunities. Esther can't keep vacation from coming, but she is a success at blocking opportunities. I honestly cannot make up my mind whether she, too, is as blind as a bat, or whether she really wants to spoil his chances. She has certainly spoiled them a number of times to my knowledge."

The two thus left to themselves kept getting, unconsciously, at least on Esther's part, farther and farther from their companions; for they were walking at a brisk pace, while the two girls dropped into the slowest of saunters, and finally, unnoticed by the others, deliberately sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree to rest.

"There!" said Faith, as she watched the brisk walkers until a bend in the road hid them from view, "we have really done it, at last! I wonder what will happen?"

"Probably nothing," said the unimaginative Blanche.

Doubtless Faith Farnham would have been disappointed could she have overheard the conversation between the two for whose pleasure she believed she had contrived. Esther, when she realized her opportunity, was not sorry for the one chance to speak a grateful word to the man who had seemed to come to her aid that morning. It is true that she did not believe he knew he was speaking for her, but that did not alter her sense of gratitude. She had her lips parted to say:—

"I feel as though a descendant of New England ought to thank you for the toast you gave us," when he forestalled her.

"Are you aware that your friends have further designs on your time, Miss Randall?"

"Have they?" she said gayly. "I didn't know it." And the feeling came to her that

any designs in the making of which Professor Langham had a share must be delightful.

“They are not alarming,” he said, with a pretence of reassurance. “We are making up a little party for a Monday afternoon trip to town. We find that we can take the two o’clock train without cutting anything that is important, and have time for the ‘little shopping’ which I believe all ladies are compelled to do whenever they reach the city before the hour for the *matinée*. A new time-table is to go into effect to-morrow which gives us a five-thirty train, so we can reach home just in time for dinner. Your friends, Miss Farnham and Miss Halsted, have promised to be of the company, I believe, and Mr. and Mrs. Gifford are going, likewise the Barnards. May I hope that you will accept my invitation to be of the company?”

Poor Esther! She wanted to go to the city. There really was a little shopping that had been waiting for such an opportunity. Esther’s trips to town, though it was barely twenty miles distant, were very rare, and to go in such company would be a holiday in itself. But — those scruples! Her face burned at thought

of them. She felt indignant, but at what or whom? Only a few days before, while waiting in a book-store for Blanche, she had picked up a little volume and been immediately interested in it because it was one of the books her father had mentioned, "A Young Man's Questions." She had glanced curiously through it to see what a young man's questions were supposed to be, and whether any of them were like a young woman's. She had lingered over a sentence that caught her eye:—

"So long as the stage is as unclean as it is, and acting involves, as it constantly does, the simulation of the basest passions and emotions, and this, even in 'good plays,' it is almost impossible to support it at all, without in a real sense lending support to it all."

She had copied the sentence as containing a good reply to something that Faith Farnham had said, and when she quoted it, had added:—

"There! you see what an 'up-to-date' young man thinks of your pet amusement. You cannot call Robert Speer an 'old foggy' or a 'fossil,' as you know you are fond of doing when people don't agree with you. He is in every

respect modern and cultured as well as being thoroughly well informed.”

Then Faith had vexed her by calling him a religionist of the Puritanic sort.

The quotation from the book came sharply back to Esther while her companion waited for his answer. It came and stood between her and the delightful afternoon that had been planned for her pleasure. She felt that she hated Mr. Speer. This, of course, was illogical, but — must a girl's ill temper always run in logical lines?

The professor was waiting. Her answer came by instalments, confusedly.

“Oh — thank you. It was ever so kind to include me. I am very sorry that I have — that I — cannot go. It would be a delightful trip, I am sure.”

“I am going to take a teacher's privilege, Miss Randall, and give advice. If you are refusing on the score of lack of time, I feel quite sure that your mind will work all the better for a little rest and recreation. I have been observing you as a student, from the teacher's standpoint, with no little anxiety of late. You

know it is part of a teacher's duties to have due regard to the health of his pupils. It has seemed to me that you have been overtaxing yourself, somewhat, and I sincerely believe that even the little trip which we have arranged will be a means of grace to you if you will let it."

There was to be no escape for Esther; those hated scruples must be owned to once more.

"It is not a question of time," she said nervously. "It is simply that — that — I may as well tell you plainly that I do not attend the theatre."

"Oh, is that all? As a rule I think I may be said not to do so myself. People who have work worth doing have not much time, of course, for such recreations. But isn't it drawing the line rather closely, being in fact what might be called Puritanical, not to go at all?"

There was an amused smile on his face and a note of amused toleration in his voice. Still, Esther might have answered him quietly but for that word "Puritanical." Over that she flamed.

"Then you did not mean what you said, this morning, about the Puritan conscience and the

debt we owed it? I am sorry, for I was really foolish enough to think that you did."

"I meant every word I said; but, if you will pardon the correction, I said nothing about the 'Puritan' conscience; it was the New England conscience of which I was speaking."

"That is a distinction without a difference," said Esther, haughtily.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE TRAIL

“OH, I beg your pardon; I think there is a decided difference. I remember I qualified my first sentence with an admission that our forefathers were inclined to be Puritanical, but were to be admired in spite of that. However, one can respect the Puritans themselves and honor the heritage they left us without admiring their foibles or copying their mistakes.”

“I thought you said that their ideas lay at the bottom of all our greatness?”

“I believe I said something of that kind, and meant every syllable, still I must insist that that does not prevent my smiling at their follies. But are we not getting very wide of the mark? I thought we were discussing the theatre; or rather, I was waiting for an affirmative reply to my invitation to attend one. How did we reach the Puritans? Was it over that unfor-

tunate word, 'Puritanical.' Let me withdraw it."

"You need not on my account," Esther said, coldly. "I am a descendant of the Puritans in direct line, and it is one of the few things I have to be proud of."

"I have the honor of sharing in the same pride," he said quickly. "But I admit my anxiety to get back to the question. You will join us on Monday, will you not? Of course you know what the play is? Indiscriminate theatre-going no one will deplore more than I, but such an opportunity as we have just now is educational as well as delightful. Do you not think that one's judgment should be made use of in these as in other matters?"

"I am not sure what I think," said Esther, and she could not help speaking irritably. "But I know what at least some others think. Is not Mr. Palmer himself on record as saying that the chief themes of the theatre are the acting out of evil passions, just as they have always been?"

"Who is Mr. Palmer, may I ask? I do not think I have the honor of his acquaintance."

Was there a gleam of amusement in his eyes, as well as a note of indulgent tolerance in his voice? Esther felt her face flushing over it.

"Isn't he recognized as one of the leading theatre managers?" she asked.

"I don't know, really. If so, it seems rather mean in him to go back on his business in that way, doesn't it?" His careless manner deepened Esther's indignation. She spoke with increased coldness.

"It is true, I suppose, that the opinions of such persons are of little weight on either side of a question. One does not need to go to them for advice. Possibly you may have heard of Dr. Trumbull. Do you think what he said about play-acting is true?"

"I think I know of Dr. Trumbull; he was a leading Sunday-school worker, was he not? But I do not recall any deliverances of his concerning theatres. What did he say?"

"Several things. A quotation from his book led me to think about the sort of life the average woman must live who earns her bread on the stage. He said it was possible to portray evil in literature, or in painting, without putting one's self into it; but the successful actor must

think, and feel, as well as act, as though he was the person he personified. When one remembers the class of persons they most frequently personify, I should think that would become an important and serious matter; one that people with any sort of consciences, New England or otherwise, would have to consider."

It was clear that Mr. Langham did not want to argue, did not mean to argue. He smiled genially as he said:—

"But I am not urging you to become a play-actor, Miss Randall. If you should ever be seriously considering that question and should honor me by asking my advice, I might have several things to say. To-day, however, I protest against anything so serious as an argument. We are out for a holiday, and we, who are unused to play, must bend all our energies toward really playing. Otherwise half the value of our day's outing will be lost. If I mistake not, you are one who especially needs to study the art of playing; you will surely let me give you a lesson in it on Monday afternoon, will you not? I assure you that the entertainment is exceptionally fine."

Esther was thoroughly annoyed. She felt that she was being treated like a child, and a very stupid child at that. Her companion not only would not argue, but he would not say any word that was honestly calculated to remove her scruples; and no one could desire more earnestly to have them removed than she did. But her ideas were simply being pushed aside as not worth considering.

"Thank you," she said, and her manner was even more haughty than she realized. "Your arguments, exhaustive as they were, have not convinced me, and I must therefore decline your invitation with thanks. A Puritanical conscience is a troublesome thing sometimes, I will admit, but I am not to blame for having one; the fault, such as it is, must rest with my ancestors. Shall we turn back, Mr. Langham? We have evidently outwalked the girls."

She turned as she spoke, and made such good speed that Mr. Langham, who wanted to saunter, had to exert himself to keep pace with her. He was disturbed and puzzled by her manner. It seemed evident that she was offended, yet what had he said to offend her? Whatever

her views of the average theatre might be, it was not possible that she was really disturbed at the thought of witnessing the charming play to which he had invited her. If this were really the case, what extreme narrowness of education and former environment it hinted at! There flitted through his mind the half-formed question whether he could hope ever to have sufficient influence to counteract the evils resulting from generations of such narrowness. But he put that thought away quickly; for Professor Langham, indolent as he was that day, and meant to be, was yet very much in earnest about some things; and Esther Randall, even in her ill-humor and manifest displeasure with himself, was yet far more interesting to him than was any other woman in the world.

All too soon for his plans and hopes they came upon their companions, still hunting ferns, and the professor gave himself to their finding with the zeal of a man bent on an outdoor life. He had not been able, during their rapid walk, to return to a comfortable level again with Esther. His efforts at conversation had been replied to with studied politeness, and with a dignity

that would have disheartened a less resolute man. But as he hunted laboriously for the species of fern desired, he told himself that he had been a fool to jam up against the inherited prejudices of generations. What did he care for the *matinée*? It was only for her sake that he had made it an excuse for the trip. The park or any other inviting place for an hour's outing would have served his purposes quite as well, better indeed, and he had been an idiot not to realize it.

As for Esther, her holiday was spoiled. She was angry with Professor Langham who, she believed, had but half veiled a laugh at her expense, and she was furious against Mr. Speer and Dr. Trumbull and all the rest. What had they done but help her to appear like a fool, and make her shut the door of paradise in her own face? She told herself positively that now she would not go to a *matinée* nor to anything else with Professor Langham, ever, not if he got down on his knees to petition her; and all the while there was a dull pain at her heart and a dreary feeling that she had offended him hopelessly, that he would never get down

on his knees to her for any purpose, nor give her a chance again to say "No" to any petition of his.

For the remainder of the day she made Faith Farnham her victim. No sooner was the troublesome fern found, and at the same time, other members of their party, than she drew Faith aside and spoke hurriedly.

"Let us get away, just you and me. Can't we go for a long tramp? I don't want even Blanche."

Faith, interested and sympathetic, feeling from Esther's manner as though something must have happened at last, and believing that it was the something of her hopes, managed it, as she could most things, and they slipped away.

But the confidence that she had looked for was not forthcoming. Instead, Esther, who found it almost impossible to be reasonable, began to enter complaint.

"Faith Farnham, why couldn't you have told me about that precious Monday scheme? I think you might at least have mentioned that you were invited."

"Monday scheme'?" said Faith. "What is

it? Oh, do you mean the *matinée*? Why, I forgot it; we go so often, you know. Did he ask you to go? How delicious! I supposed he would feel that he must take that tiresome Miss Holbrook who is visiting at his sister's. Oh, Esther, I am so glad you are going!"

"Who said I was going? Of course I am not. I should think that you, at least, might have known that I wasn't. You know very well that I don't go to theatres."

"But this isn't a regular theatre, Esther. It is just an afternoon affair, and perfectly unobjectionable. I do hope you didn't refuse. Why, everybody goes to *matinées*, especially to one of this kind. Even ministers."

But Esther was in no mood for such argument.

"Everybody!" she quoted in infinite scorn. "It seems strange to me that you will harp on such a weak statement as that! What earthly difference can it make who goes or doesn't go, if one has a mind capable of deciding for one's self? I know what I think, and, for that matter, what my father thinks, and I don't need Professor Langham nor even 'everybody' to sustain me. I don't want to talk about it any more,

Faith. Don't let us spoil the entire day, if it is possible to avoid it."

Faith resisted the temptation to say that it was Esther's obstinacy which was spoiling the day. She made one brief sharp utterance, or, rather, began it: "Oh, if you are superior to everybody, of course —" then she was instantly sorry that she had said this, and began to frame excuses for her friend. Esther was really not to blame; that little reference to her father told volumes. He must be a very narrow, bigoted — but here Faith arrested even her thoughts. She had been very intimate with Esther, and certain breezy, happy letters from that father had been read to her. Letters filled, not only with wise suggestions, but with fatherly tenderness, such as, even during their reading, had caused a stricture at the listener's heart and a longing wish that she — but her father was good to her. True, he rarely wrote to her, he was too heavily burdened with business cares for her to expect that, but he sent her splendid checks, with his love; and if some of the people who worked for him called him hard and unjust, and a few of them hated him, it

was no more than business men had to expect at the hands of the lower classes. Faith also meant to be loyal to her father.

After that unfinished fling, she linked her arm in Esther's and spoke cheerily:—

“All right; let us forget controversies of every sort and just have a good time. Which way shall we go? I should like to explore the canyon farther down, shouldn't you? Isn't this air glorious? I feel as though my lungs reached away down to my mountain boots. Esther, my child, you ought to have worn heavier shoes than those; I am afraid they will be in tatters by night.”

They walked rapidly; Esther setting the pace and striding on as though she had an appointment for which she was late. She wanted to walk off her excitement and disappointment.

Faith, being genuinely anxious to help her, tried various topics of conversation, and finally led the way cautiously toward one of their endless philosophical discussions that by no possibility could have a personal element. Such discussions were often begun in class, and carried on afterward by students who

were argumentatively inclined. Esther, being one of these, fell promptly into the trap, and put her other troubles into the background, while she let her indignation burn because Faith could not or would not see a certain point as she saw it.

Meantime, the day was waning. The excursionists had not planned an early return, as the evenings were charming, but they were to go before dark down to the Half-way House for supper. This was a picturesque log cabin set in among dense trees, and the mountaineers who lived there were in the habit of serving light refreshments to tourists. The place had become locally famous, and no day's outing on King Mountain was complete without a fish supper at the Half-way House. The remainder and less difficult portion of the way was to be enjoyed by the light of the glorious moon, which was full that evening.

It was Esther who said, at last: "I suppose we ought to turn back; it must be nearly time to start down the mountain."

And it was Faith who, after they had walked a short distance on the return trip, said: —

"Did you notice that queer tree when we came? I am certain we did not pass it or I should have seen it. I am afraid we made a wrong turn, somewhere, and are off the trail."

"Nonsense!" said Esther. "We haven't made any turns. It is not probable that you noticed every tree we passed. How could we be off the trail?"

But Faith, who was familiar with mountain trails, and knew that one sometimes slipped into another in a bewildering way, and then led the unwary in far different directions from those desired, made no reply, and looked about her with growing anxiety. She knew that she had observing eyes, and there were strange sights appearing before them.

"I don't think we are on the right trail," she said, stopping short. "There is a colony of the very ferns we have been searching for all day; a great deal finer specimens than those Professor Langham found; he said there were much larger and finer ones on another part of the mountain, don't you know? We surely would not have passed these by unnoticed."

"Well," said Esther, moving on slowly,

“what of it? We are in the same general direction, at least, and the path is good. I presume it runs into the other trail, even if we are off.”

But Faith knew mountain trails better than that; two fairly good roads would not be in the least likely to run parallel with each other for many rods. She moved forward, also, because in doubt what else to do, but her anxiety increased with every step.

They came presently to another trail, and stopped.

“There!” said Faith, “now I know we are wrong. We certainly did not pass a distinctly defined path like this.”

No, Esther admitted that they did not. But it might be the path that would lead them to the main trail. Neither knew anything better to do than make trial of it, and they walked rapidly, until it grew less distinct, and made several bewildering curves. They were silent now, each becoming increasingly sure that they were travelling over ground that they had never tried before. After a little, they turned back, becoming convinced by the increasing

obscurity of the trail that it was not a direct path to any well-known point. But in turning back they found themselves bewildered, and stopped several times to argue as to which of the slight openings that looked like trails they had made use of. And they did not reach the clear trail, as they felt certain that it was time for them to do. At last Faith made a full stop and looked her companion steadily in the face.

“Esther,” she said solemnly, “you and I are lost!”

CHAPTER XII

A "CROSS" TRAIL

ESTHER giggled; she was just nervous enough for such expression. "If that is so," she said, "the best thing we can do is to find ourselves."

"But I don't know which way to turn; I have lost the sense of direction." The trouble in Faith's voice sounded strange to Esther; she had never before known Faith to be troubled.

They were reasonably brave for girls who had lived sheltered lives and been steadily taken care of. They walked, because that seemed to be the only thing they could do; but they grew every moment more bewildered, and the path they had chosen grew every moment less like a frequently travelled one.

As the shadows of twilight began to gather thickly, Esther suggested bravely that they give up trying to reach their party on the picnic

ground, and make at once for the Half-way House. She spoke as though that were an easy matter; and Faith turned, as at her bidding, and began a steady tramp in an opposite direction, quite as though she was sure of herself; although, being used to mountain trails and their intricacies, she had no more expectation of reaching the Half-way House than of reaching their party.

“By this time they are out searching for us,” she said suddenly, with the first hopeful note in her voice that she had been able to make.

“Oh! do you think so?” Esther’s voice expressed unqualified mortification. She was not yet sufficiently frightened not to feel that she would rather spend the night in the woods searching for the right trail, than be rescued by any party of which Professor Langham would make one. The idea of their climaxing this ridiculous day by getting lost like two irresponsible children!

But the darkness came rapidly. To add to their bewilderment, the sky suddenly wrapped itself in clouds, and the moon, on which they had so confidently calculated, what with the

clouds and the dense leafage of the forest trees, could do very little for them.

"It is going to rain!" Esther exclaimed, as they reached a stretch of hill where no trees were, and she caught a view of the darkening sky. "I thought it never rained in May, in this part of the world? It needs only the roll of thunder and some flashes of lightning to give us a typical New England storm, such as my mother is always recalling."

"Thank heaven we shall get no thunder and lightning," Faith said. "We have an occasional rain even as late as this, but without any such awful accompaniments. At least I think they must be awful. I have never seen a thunder storm, or heard one. Which should I say?"

This girl who professed no decided belief in even the existence of a place named heaven was given, on occasion, to using the word in an exclamatory way. Esther noticed it, and looked at her friend with a sudden new sense of compassion. Her own religion might not be very satisfactory for everyday use, but, troublesome as it was, there was something

inexpressibly dreary in the thought of being lost in a mountain forest without it.

Suddenly Faith sat down on a bit of jagged rock.

"We may as well sit as walk, for all I can see!" she said. "We don't get anywhere. I have even a feeling that we are getting more lost every minute."

"Oh, do come on!" said Esther. "We *can't* sit still! How can you be so careless? You are very warm from fast walking, and now you sit on a stone in this chilly air."

"Warm!" said Faith. "That is where you are mistaken. My teeth are chattering with cold, this minute; I have a feeling that I shall never be warm again."

Esther bent over and encircled the girl with strong arms, drawing her almost by force to her feet.

"Come right along," she said bravely, almost cheerfully. "You mustn't have so many creepy feelings. How extraordinary in you of all persons to yield to them! We are sure to get *somewhere*, if we keep at it. Besides, as you reminded me but a moment ago, they are

hunting for us. Let us shout with all the lung power we have; some of them may be within hearing by this time."

Faith considered this a happy thought, and they acted on it at once, making the quiet air ring with their shouts.

"Let us call 'Karl,'" Esther had said. "That is an easy word to shout."

"Karl" was the good-natured driver of the four-horse team. His name was yelled until their throats were lame. Then Esther tried "Blanche," to rest some of her muscles, she said.

"I wish," said Faith, "that we could make Professor's Langham's name into a short enough sound to shout. It is he who will be on the alert to see and hear everything. But 'Mister Langham' seems an impossible shout, doesn't it? And his given name is no better; that's 'Wellington.' It wouldn't do to just yell 'Langham' would it? Goodness! wouldn't that be *awful!*"

Esther laughed nervously, and Faith caught at the sound and echoed it in hysterical fashion, until both girls were screaming with uncontrol-

lable laughter. Esther was the first to call a halt.

"Now, Faith Farnham, stop!" she said firmly.

"I can't!" screamed Faith. "Oh, OH! I *can't* stop!"

"Yes, you can. STOP, this minute! We are too sensible girls to let our emotions get beyond control in this fashion. We are neither idiots nor lunatics. Think, for a moment, what a contempt Professor Langham would have for us if he could hear us."

Faith paid no heed to the hint about idiots and lunatics, but the thought of Professor Langham being a listener to her insane mirth brought instant self-control.

"Let us hunt some brush and build a fire," commanded Esther. "That will warm us, at least; and a rescuing party can see a fire better than they can hear shouts."

"That is so," said Faith, rising at once and beginning the search for material. But after a moment she stopped and asked a pertinent question.

"How can we light a fire? We have no matches."

"O dear!" said Esther, "so we haven't." It seemed to impress her with new terror, this thought that even so commonplace and trifling a thing as a match was utterly beyond them. Her tone of distressed conviction nearly set Faith off into another hysterical outburst.

"Did you think we were smokers?" she giggled. "If we had only learned to smoke cigarettes that night when those horrid Hall girls wanted us to, then we should have matches with us. Or if we had brought Mr. Langham along. He smokes; I've caught him at it. Oh, Esther, Esther! if we *only* had! then we shouldn't be lost. I can't think of that word in connection with him. Can you?"

"Do hush!" said Esther, firmly. "And come on. I am going to walk *very* fast; we can warm ourselves in that way. I think we must be not far from the Half-way House. Haven't you noticed that we have been steadily going down hill for a long time?"

In this way, as they alternately tramped along with feverish haste, or stopped to shout and listen, the time passed. The threatened rain did not come, and from time to time the

clouds lifted enough to let some straggling moonbeams through. During one of these rifts Faith tried to discover the hour from her watch, and made out that it was half past *something*, she could not be sure what.

By degrees the conviction forced itself upon them that they would probably have to spend the night on the mountain; and memories of grewsome stories they had heard of wild creatures who prowled about at midnight in search of prey came to them both, as they afterward confessed; but on that memorable night each was bravely silent about them. Nor did they hint to each other that even with daylight the rescuing parties might not be at once successful, if they had indeed wandered far away from the regular trails. There was a dreadful story of a girl who was lost for days and found only when it was too late. They recalled even the minutest details of this also, each in silence. Only Faith, in a single hopeful remark, let the trend of her thoughts be known.

“They will have the whole college force out by morning, if they do not find us to-night; and it would be difficult to get anywhere

that two or three hundred boys could not find us."

"Don't let us think about ourselves anymore," said Esther, sturdily. "We might as well get ready for Monday's class. What was that question we were discussing this morning? I remember you had some wild ideas about it."

They fell to it with vigor; but suddenly, in the midst of a really brilliant effort to prove herself in the right, Faith stopped with a heavy sigh, and began in a different tone:—

"O dear! how flat it all sounds! If you and I were only safe in our little beds, I shouldn't care which side was right, or whether both were equally wrong, should you? I am awfully tired! It seems as though I could lie right down here and go to sleep." Then her tone changed again to one of eager joy.

"Esther! Esther Randall, look! look there! No, no! not that way! There! up there! Do you see a light? Of course it is a light! I see it plainly. It is some of our party, searching for us. It *must* be, I tell you! Let us make for that light, no matter what the road is."

Suiting her action to her speech, she seized Esther's arm and the two plunged headlong through the tangled underbrush, stumbling, all but falling, and recovering themselves with difficulty, still they pushed on toward the light. Long before they reached it they had decided that, being stationary, it could not belong to a rescue party, unless, indeed, as Faith suggested, one had been detailed to wait and watch while the others moved.

At last the dim outlines of a hut or cabin were discernible.

"It looks like a place for keeping cows!" was Faith's disappointed exclamation. But Esther replied almost cheerfully:—

"Never mind; if the cows are civilized enough to keep a light burning, they may have a fire and a place to drop down on without being afraid of the creatures outside."

After what seemed to them hours of effort, they stood in front of the cabin, which was evidently inhabited by creatures who wore hats, for an old one was doing duty in the single window where once a light of glass had been. The two wanderers gazed at the door and then

at each other. Should they venture? their eyes asked, or flee?

"What may we *not* find inside!" said Esther. At that moment came the wild, yet almost human cry of one of the mountain creatures, sweeping down to them from the hill they had just descended. Faith shuddered and took a step forward.

"What may we not find outside before morning!" she said. "It is a choice between two horrors; let us venture." Whereupon she knocked boldly. The door was opened promptly, and the figure of a stalwart man in shirt sleeves, and with a shock of gray hair falling over into his eyes, framed itself in the doorway and stared. Faith was still the leader.

"Could you let us — or — could you tell us how to find the trail to the Half-way House? We have — we think we are a little out of the way and want the shortest trail."

The big frame shook with soundless laughter.

"A little out of the way," he quoted at last. "I reckon you be! and I don't reckon that you calculate to walk that way to-night? Why, it's a matter of seven mile from here, and on

the kind of trail that women folks don't like any too well by daylight."

"Why!" Faith exclaimed, surprised out of her terror; "that can't be so; the Half-way House is only about five miles from the picnic clearing."

"I reckon that's so, too; but you're out of your way, sure enough, if you are lookin' for either of them places on this side. You are t'other side of the mountain, on a cross trail; and for the matter of that you ain't had no trail to speak of in comin' over here. I reckon you'll have to wait till morning before you can git anywheres. Come in; as good luck would have it we can keep you real slick. Our wimmen folks is both gone over the other side, where they've got sickness, and you can have my girl's bed."

His tone was kindly and hospitable, and he stood back and waved them in with an air of one who was conferring a great kindness. The two, still firmly grasping each other's hands, entered the long low room whose only light was a lantern suspended near the one window. Several bunks were ranged along one side of the wall, the clothes on them hinting at sleeping-places. The other furniture consisted of a kitchen table,

three chairs, a couple of empty nail kegs, which did duty as extra seats, a clothes basket that was evidently serving as clothes closet, and a villanous oil stove, which was at that moment choking the air with its breath.

These things the girls felt rather than saw, for their eyes were busy with another sight; that of three young men, who stood in a row against the wall, as if on exhibition. That they were sons of the old man was evident from the striking likeness they bore to him. They looked, to the frightened girls, exceptionally tall, and they repeated and even exaggerated their father's stalwart frame.

"I reckon you want to git right to bed," said the old man, cheerfully. "It's right smart late; me and the boys had some hard luck to-night and was powerful late gettin' home. Ain't it good luck, though, that Melindy ain't to home? It will make it comfortabler for them; though of course they could have bunked in right along of her if she was here."

This remark was evidently addressed to the "boys," who had no answer ready; and the old man turned again to his guests.

“Maybe, though, you need a little suthin’ to eat first? How’s that, Jed? Could you get ’em a bite, think?”

At this, the tallest of the young giants looked down at the floor and grew red through his sunburnt skin as he began to mutter something which was lost on the girls in their eagerness to disclaim the need for a mouthful of food.

Convinced of this, the father lighted a bit of candle, a close-necked bottle serving as candlestick, and ushered them with evident pride into a tiny room; a sort of “lean to,” which had evidently been an afterthought, long after the cabin was built.

“I reckon there ain’t many gals has a whole room to theirselves,” he volunteered. “But the boys and me, we allowed that Melindy was worth it, and she should have it. We made her bed wide so’t her maw could bunk in with her sometimes if she liked, but she ain’t never liked. I reckon she likes me and the boys too well to leave us.”

This information closed with a hearty laugh as the old man retreated, shutting the door after him.

Even in her dismay Esther took her thoughts from themselves long enough to bestow infinite pity on that other girl who had to call this home! What seemed to her utter desolation reigned. The few pitiful attempts at ornament, like the broken-nosed pitcher on the pine board table and the two or three coarse woodcuts tacked to the logs, served to deepen the sense of poverty and dreariness. To think that any girl must suppose these to be decorations! The bed, a widening out of the bunk style in the other room, was made pitifully gay with a patchwork quilt in many colors, and of impossible design; and although the bed clothing was really decently clean, the whole seemed somehow to accentuate the horrors of the scene.

But Faith was not thinking of the bed nor its furnishings. She braced herself against the little door as if determined to shut out enemies, and turned eyes wide with horror upon Esther as she whispered: "Did you ever see or dream of such villanous faces? They are thieves, or something worse! Oh, Esther, I am frightened to death!"

CHAPTER XIII

MELINDY'S BED

“**N**ONSENSE!” said Esther, whose courage always rose when other people’s failed. “Don’t be foolish, Faith. You imagine that. I don’t think they have very bad faces. They are uncouth and coarse, but they mean kindness, I think. I am sure they have done the best for us that they could; think of ‘Melindy’s bed’ and take courage.”

She tried to laugh, but Faith would not be reassured. She looked at the bed and shuddered.

“Isn’t it *awful!*” she whispered. “Esther, I would a great deal rather be out in the woods with those horrible yelling wolves, or whatever they were, than shut in here with these human beasts.”

“Oh, well,” said Esther, coolly, “that is because you haven’t tried the wolves; if you had, you would probably change your mind—

provided they gave you a chance! Let us be sensible, if we can, and make the best of it. You said you were tired enough to drop; just drop down there and see how comfortable you can be, even on a quilt like that."

"Never!" said Faith, in an energetic whisper. "Do you suppose I am going to lie quietly down and let them have it all their own way? I tell you those men mean to steal our jewelry and our clothes, and kill us! I saw it in their faces. And I saw that tallest one look at my chain and ring. Oh, just think! how easily they could dispose of us and no one ever find them out! That light was a decoy to get us off the trail. Didn't you notice how that old wretch leered when he said we had come over 'no trail to speak of' to get here? They have good reasons for not living on a trail, and we have just stumbled into their trap like two innocent babes. But I won't give them an easy time, I promise you that. Catch me closing my eyes to-night! I'll fight like a tiger. Esther, we mustn't even sit down! we must keep awake at whatever cost. Oh! isn't there *anything* that we can do?"

The last words were a frightened wail.

“Nonsense!” said Esther again; but she said it more faintly. In spite of herself Faith’s fears were beginning to take some hold upon her. How could she be sure that they were groundless? The three young giants might be three villains, even though their father had meant kindness. And they certainly had every opportunity for villany. It was a desolate spot, miles away from direct trails, and these mountains were noted for disastrous accidents. Then, the diamond on Faith’s ring was large and fine, to say nothing of her watch and chain. It might be wiser to stay on guard. Still, if they were bad men, what could two weak defenceless girls do to hinder their designs? She looked at the little hole which was supposed to do duty as a window. It was covered now by a bit of board; would it be possible for them to squeeze through it silently and slip away?

“What are you going to do?” she suddenly asked, for Faith had set the broken-nosed pitcher on the floor and was preparing noiselessly to move the rickety little table.

“Hush!” she whispered, and pointed to a large-sized knot hole just over the door.

“I’m going to climb up and look through that hole. Don’t you hear that old villain talking a steady stream? He is planning some evil for those precious sons of his to carry out. I know it as well as though I heard him. If I can contrive to hear what he says, we shall know better how to plan to defend ourselves. If it is our jewelry that they want, by planning so that they can get it all easily, we might possibly save our lives. Anyway, I’m going to know what they propose. Won’t you hold this horrid table? It is so shaky that I’m almost afraid to mount it.”

Esther gave all her strength to holding the table while she whispered her protest.

“It won’t hold your weight, and if you fall, it will make a dreadful noise! If any of your suspicions are correct, the very best thing we can do is to keep still for a while. It is just possible that we might be able to squeeze out of that little hole meant for a window, if we don’t rouse their suspicions. Still, I don’t believe we could; it is *very* small.”

But Faith’s eyes were by this time at the knot hole, held there, apparently; she appeared like

one fascinated. She waved a hand at Esther which seemed to call for silence, and stood perfectly still. Suddenly the table began to shake, and it was apparent that the girl mounted on it was shaking also, with suppressed laughter. There floated through Esther's excited brain an irritable thought that Faith Farnham would find something to laugh at if she were dying; and then Faith turned.

"Give me your hand," she whispered, and springing to the floor began in a stage whisper:

"Esther Randall, don't you believe they are *praying!*"

"Praying!" echoed Esther's astonished voice.

"Yes, every one of them; kneeling. You never saw anything so funny in your life as their eight long legs sprawling about that cabin floor. Do climb up and look! it is a scene for an artist. I wish Blanche were here, she could sketch it. The old man is doing the praying, but the young athletes mutter 'amen' at every other word. Oh, they are all in it with all their hearts. And, Esther, don't you think he is praying for us! 'Them strange gals,' he called

us. And he prayed that we might 'git a good sleep,' and that our folks wouldn't be too much scared about us. Then he thanked the Lord for sending us to his cabin, and giving him a chance to shelter some of His critters. We are 'His critters,' Esther, do you know it? with a capital 'H' to the pronoun; that was in his voice. It was the strangest voice you ever heard! simple as a child's, and yet reverent. I'd give anything if you could hear it."

Her eyes were brimming with tears, and one or two had escaped; but she brushed them away and laughed.

"It is too ridiculous! those great fellows grunted 'amen' to that sentence about us, as though they had a very special interest in the 'critters.' Esther, I'm going to lie down on that bed this minute! and I shall put a piece of that quilt over me. I was never so tired in my life. It's queer, in fact, it is ridiculous, but I don't feel in the least afraid now. I believe I shall go to sleep. Let us both lie down and rest. We are safe enough."

Esther believed it. She encouraged Faith to try Melindy's bed at once; but instead of

joining her, she softly slipped the piece of board away from the hole in the wall, and knelt before it. It was much too small to crawl out of, but all desire to attempt that had passed. What she wanted was to pray. To thank God, first of all, for four praying men in the wilderness.

She knelt long; and when at last she prepared to lie down beside Faith, was very quiet in her movements so as not to disturb the supposed sleeper. But Faith turned at once, put both arms about her, and kissed her.

“Thank you, dear,” she said. “I find that it is good, when one is lost in the woods, to be surrounded by praying people; it has taken away all my fears. I shall go to sleep and sleep soundly until morning.”

Esther returned her caress, but could not help saying softly:—

“What a consistent little girl it is! her fears have all been swept away by something that she believes is a mere form; a relic of the superstitions of childhood.”

“I thought of that,” whispered Faith, “and wondered at myself; I don’t think I am a hypocrite. I honestly did not know that I

believed at all in prayer. I thought that people like — you will not mind, dear, if I illustrate by you, will you? I fancied that you — that people of intelligence, I mean, and cultivation, who kept up the forms of prayer, did so simply as a form, a habit, which had come up from babyhood with them, and that did no harm, and no more good than the indulgence of any pleasant sentiment might. To be strictly honest, I never could see what I thought was an effect from it; in the lives of its adherents, I mean. But that old man out there is different; he *means* it. He was talking to Somebody who, he believes, heard him! they all believe it. And I believe that the old man, at least, is living as well as he knows how, in exactly the way he thinks that Somebody wants him to live. There was all that in his voice, and in his words. They were the strangest words! so assured, you know, as though he saw the one to whom he was speaking. You couldn't shake his belief in it, I am sure. Esther, you may laugh at me if you want to; I know it is dreadfully inconsistent with my belief, or rather my unbelief, but that old man and his three giants sprawling

over the floor in the attitude of prayer took away all my fears. I know I can go to sleep."

Which she presently did. But Esther lay awake and thought. Faith had given her added food for thought. She could not help having a kind of contempt for herself. What a miserable travesty of religion was hers! not enough of it to make the slightest impression upon the mind or heart of this girl who loved her! A religion that she herself played with, frowned at, on occasion, and at other times ignored!

Yet no sooner was she in trouble and possible peril than, coward that she was, she fled at once to the Friend, who at other times was slighted, and leaned upon Him. For Esther had been conscious that from the moment when the possibility of their being lost in the woods first dawned upon her, down to the present, almost every thought of hers had been a prayer for protection and guidance. Could a meaner spirit be shown than this? she asked herself indignantly. Even the undertone of assurance that, despite her faithlessness, He had not failed her when the stress came, did not comfort her, but served instead to increase her sense of shame.

Faith slept quietly beside her, and in the other room very vigorous sleeping was going forward. The four stalwart men had each his own special snore, and each of them in their several ways seemed to travel over the entire gamut of sound. It awakened Faith, at last, who sat up with a startled "What's that?" and listened; then laughed.

"Four distinct snores!" she giggled. "Listen, Esther! It is a quartette; only each has his own key. But isn't it good? In its way it is as reassuring as the praying; people who snore are certainly not plotting evil deeds. But how can we sleep in such a din? You poor child, I don't believe you have slept a wink! Well, we can visit, can't we? How do you suppose the other members of the picnic party feel by this time? Poor creatures, I am sorry for them! if they only knew how safe and comfortable we are in Melindy's bed!"

In less than five minutes from that time she was again asleep; but Esther could not sleep; her nerves, which had been tense for weeks, gained complete ascendancy and kept her going over all the important and unimportant details

of her life. And never, it is safe to say, was a girl more dissatisfied with her life, so far as her own doings were concerned, than was this one.

It was just as the premonitory symptoms of a new dawn were appearing in the sky that a tremendous knocking, or rather pounding, was heard at the outside door. Faith was wide awake in a moment and on the alert.

“There they are!” she said. “It is our rescue party! I dreamed that they were coming. Isn’t it delicious to be found sleeping comfortably! We must go out to them at once. That is Mr. Langham’s voice; I knew he would be first.”

Esther, too, recognized the voice that was asking eagerly:—

“Have you seen or heard anything of two young women who had lost their way? Can you let us have a lantern?”

“I reckon I can,” — it was the old man’s voice, — “though by the look of the sky you won’t need no lantern for many minutes. There’s a big one will be hung out up there before you know it. Them two gals is safe here, if them is all you’re lookin’ for.”

“Here! Do you mean in this house?” There was no mistaking the eagerness of the tone.

“In this identical cabin, asleep on my Melindy’s bed this minute. I reckon they are; they’re keeping powerful still, and they was pretty well tuckered out when they got here last night after dark. I shouldn’t wonder if they had had a comfortabler night than you, if you are friends of theirs; but of course I dunno whether you be, or not. And if you ain’t, and their dodge was to git away from you, me and my three boys calculate to stan’ by ’em; that’s what we mean, stranger. And my three boys is every one of ’em as big as I be, and Jed is even bigger.”

Every word could be distinctly heard by the girls in “Melindy’s room,” and Faith was by this time convulsed with laughter.

“Did you want to ‘git away from’ him, yesterday, Esther?” she whispered. “Was that your ‘dodge’ when you beguiled me on this tramp and wouldn’t let even Blanche come with us? Listen to that old saint! We must go out there this *minute*, or he will have Mr. Lang-

ham tumbled into the ravine as one of our enemies."

All the while she was hurriedly pulling and patting herself into shape, and making as good a toilet as a girl without combs or brushes or even pins to secure the torn places on her gown could be expected to do.

It was she who first pushed open the narrow little door and hurried forward, but Esther was just behind her.

Less observant eyes than theirs would have noted that, for once in his life, Mr. Langham forgot himself. He looked past Faith, and sprang past her to catch Esther's hand in both of his, and say distinctly, and in a voice full of feeling:

"Thank God you are safe."

"I reckon that's all right then," said the old man, complacently. "I thought likely it was, by his looks; but you can't never be sure till you see 'em together."



"THANK GOD YOU ARE SAFE."—Page 188.

CHAPTER XIV

MELINDY

THEY could not forget the night spent on the mountain. Nor could they forget Melindy's bed and Melindy. Faith, especially, seemed to be singularly attracted to the unknown girl whose poor room had sheltered them on the only night of her life when she had been conscious of need of shelter.

"We ought to know Melindy," she said repeatedly to Esther.

"Can't we do something for her? It is dreadful for a girl — is she young, I wonder? — to live all her days in a room like that! blessed haven of rest though it was for us. Couldn't we fix it up a little, don't you think? I wonder if she likes pictures?"

"I wonder if she ever had any to like?" said Esther, who, by reason of her own straitened life, was able to imagine details of poverty that astonished Faith. She looked her dismay at a

condition of things that obliged one to live without pictures, and said quickly:—

“Then she shall have some at once; and some other things, too. What could they be, Esther, in that room? She likes ribbons, of course, bright ones; all girls do. I *wish* we had some idea how old she is! I wonder what colors become her. Oh, we must go and see her! Wouldn't you like to? I'm just dying to see that place by daylight, and without any of the 'scare' of our night's experience upon us. I should like to see the giants again, too, bless them! They were going to 'stan'' by us, Esther! and they would have done it, every one of them. Wasn't it funny?”

She laughed gayly, but in the next instant sobered and spoke thoughtfully.

“‘*His* critters,’ I can't forget that. Do you suppose there is really something in it? Oh, yes, you do, of course; I am always forgetting; but you can't think of me in such a connection, can you? There are times when I could wish that it might all be true.”

Such words made Esther miserable. It was becoming increasingly evident to her that her

faith was not of a character to touch her friend's heart or conscience. And yet she could be easily impressed, else why should what she had heard of that ignorant old man's prayer have so impressed her.

The desire to see Melindy, and to learn what colored ribbons would best become her, grew upon Faith, and she planned ways and means of accomplishing it without reaching any definite conclusions, until one day she was overheard by Professor Langham who instantly took it up.

"That is a capital thought of yours, Miss Farnham. We should call upon those choice spirits again, by all means. Curiosity and interest aside, common courtesy demands it, I think. I shall not soon forget the dignity with which that old man waved me away when I tried, as a representative of the university, to remunerate him for sheltering two of our pupils."

"Oh, did he?" said Faith, gleefully. "How lovely! But we can do something for the girl, surely. I can't plan though, until I see her. I want to drive up there next Saturday.

I have been trying all the week to get Esther to believe that the earth will still revolve on its axis, and every Victor of the crowd survive, even though she should leave them for another Saturday. For that matter, with a good team we could make the trip in half a day, could we not?"

Mr. Langham believed that they could, and begged to be allowed to make all the arrangements, even to the driving of the horses. He did more than that: he called upon Mrs. Victor and so represented the importance of Esther's going in person to see the women in the home that had succored her, and was so cordial and friendly in all his talk, that Mrs. Victor, who admired university people above all others, was gracious to Esther, and the second holiday was planned, with Faith Farnham and Instructor Vaughn on the back seat, and Esther and Professor Langham in front. It was Mr. Langham who suggested that since there were four seats it might be as well to have another man along, in case of any accident. It is true he was aware that Mr. Vaughn would rather spend the morning on the back

seat beside Faith Farnham, than to be anywhere else in the known world, but of that he, of course, said nothing.

Melindy was a revelation. She was tall, like her father and brothers, but with a singular grace of movement, and a quiet dignity of manner that took them all by surprise, and made them feel, that, despite her short skirts and bare feet and crooked grammar, they were meeting a young woman who could not be patronized, and who commanded respect.

It was Faith who succeeded in penetrating the girl's reserve. She had been instantly attracted to her, having murmured to Esther, after the first glance, that she was "simply superb!" and added, "I am glad I brought *red* ribbons, they are just her color."

It was Faith who begged, presently, to go to Melindy's room to rearrange her hair, while the men talked with the stalwart old man, and Esther tried to draw out the timid little woman whom these tall people called "maw."

Once alone with the girl, Faith seated herself on the patchwork quilt, and said winsomely: "Come and sit on the bed as we girls do in

school and let us have a talk. I don't think you have any idea what a wonderful bed this is! You need to lose yourself on these mountains and wander about for hours and *hours*, until you are in despair, and then come upon it suddenly, a shelter in the wilderness, before you will understand."

The girl smiled proudly.

"I reckon I couldn't git lost in these here mountains," she said. "I know every foot of 'em and love 'em all."

"Have you lived here all your life? And you like it! Don't you really have any neighbors nearer than the other side of the mountain? Dear me! I should think it would be dreadful. Don't you get awfully lonesome?"

The girl's keen eyes seemed to grow softer as she shook her head.

"Naw, I ain't lonesome no more; I used to be, and I was sulky and cross, and all that. Maw could tell you if she wanted to jest how hateful I was; I dunno how she stood me."

"And you are not so any more?"

The girl shook her head again.

"What made the difference?"

A rare smile broke over her expressive face as she said, "I got religion."

Faith looked her bewilderment.

"I don't understand what that means," she said. "Won't you tell me?"

The keen gray eyes seemed to search her face, and then Melindy asked a question.

"Have you got religion?"

"Oh, no, no indeed! I don't even know what you mean."

The girl turned her eyes away toward the mountains for a moment, then said quietly:—

"Then I reckon you wouldn't know anything about it; you see, you've got to get it before you can understand."

"She talked of it precisely as she would of the measles, as though it was something to be caught!" Faith said, with a burst of laughter, when she was trying to repeat the conversation to Esther.

"And yet, do you know, in spite of the ridiculousness of the whole thing, I couldn't help feeling more as though there might be something in it than I ever did in my life before."

With Melindy she persisted in trying to understand.

“But tell me, do you mean that there was a time, a particular day, when you suddenly became a different girl?”

Melindy's expressive head nodded again.

“I got religion, you know,” she said in response to Faith's puzzled look.

“How did you get it?”

And now it was Melindy's turn to look puzzled. She turned her eyes again in the direction of the mountains as though she was accustomed to their help, and was silent for some minutes. At last she said:—

“I dunno how to tell it so you would understand. I reckon it's jest as I said; you've got to git it, and then you'll know. It was Him did it, but I dunno *how*.”

The tone was so reverent that it explained the pronoun; but Faith wanted to probe further.

“Who did it?” she persisted.

“Why, HIM; the Saviour, you know. I couldn't explain what He did, of course, but I know it's so.”

Here was deliberate conviction! Faith regarded the girl with curiously deepening interest, and was resolved to question further. Evidently nothing was to be got from Melindy without constant questioning.

“Your father thinks just as you do, doesn’t he?”

Melindy nodded.

“They all do,” she said. “They’ve all got it.” The tone now was one of exultation. “Jed was the last, and I was awful worried about him. He wouldn’t talk, nor let any of us talk to him, not even me; and him and me has always been great friends. And he wouldn’t stay in when paw prayed, and it made him mad to have paw and maw and me walk to the schoolhouse down in the valley to meetin’s; he said paw oughtn’t to let us, and that it was killin’ maw; but it wasn’t, she got better every day; and at last Jed come around.”

Faith remembered that Jed was the young giant who was “even taller than his father.”

“What made him?” she asked. But that recalled Melindy’s puzzled look.

"I declare to goodness," she said earnestly, "I don't know how to tell it any more than I have. It's jest like it was with me; the Lord got a holt of him and he got religion."

"Was it your father's prayers that made you think about such things at first?"

Melindy shook her head and laughed.

"La! no, it wa'n't. The last thing I ever thought of was hearing paw pray. You see, he was one of them men who didn't believe nothin'; there's a right smart lot of 'em round here. Don't seem as if ever paw could have been such a fool as that, does it? But he was. He went as fur as any of 'em, and didn't even believe there was any God; and had mountains all around him, too! wa'n't that queer? Maw used to cry over it; she was brought up different, maw was. She used to live away back East, and go to Sunday-school when she was a little girl; and she tried lots of times to tell us young ones about it, but la! we wouldn't learn. Every last one of us took after paw. And at last, maw give up talkin', but she didn't ever give up the prayin'; and I s'pose that was what fetched us. My! but maw

was glad! That first night when paw come home from meetin' and got down on his knees and prayed out loud, maw burst right out cryin'! and she says, 'Now I'm ready to go to heaven right away; I'm too happy to live any longer!' And paw, he says, 'Sho, mother! you can't go to heaven yet; you've got three boys to look after.'"

"And a girl," said Faith, gently. "Didn't he count you in?"

"No, he didn't; not that time. Paw gen'ally counts me in, too, but I reckon he knew then that the Lord was lookin' after me all right; but the boys, you see, hadn't none of 'em got it yet."

"What was it that made your father change his mind?"

A beautiful soft light illumined Melindy's entire face, and her voice became exultant.

"Paw told them at the meetin' that when he see the change there was in his girl, he knew that somethin' had got a holt of her that he didn't know nothin' about, and he wanted to find out what it was."

"And it has lasted?"

"Oh, yes, it'll *last*, jest as much as these mountains will."

"What makes you sure? When was it?"

"That I got religion, do you mean? Why, it was five years ago, 'most. I was pretty nigh fifteen; and it took paw two whole years after that; and Jed didn't git it till last winter. We was dreadful troubled over Jed! but now we've all got it! and I know it'll last, because He said so. And we are that happy that it seems as though we couldn't stan' no more."

Never in her most joyful moments had Faith Farnham felt such assurance and exultation as throbbled in Melindy's face and voice at this word. Yet she lived in a mountain forest, a mile from the trail, and in a two-roomed hut without windows!

It was a memorable visit. While they were still in Melindy's room, Faith brought out the pictures that were to adorn the walls. They were choice prints, several of them humorous, but there were two Madonnas, and a copy of "Christ and the Fishermen." Melindy studied each with interest, and said, with a grace that the donor had not expected, that she should

"admire" to pin them up on her walls; that she was fixing up her room a good deal, as she got time, and these would help "amazing."

She glanced proudly at the gay quilt and the broken-nosed pitcher as she spoke. The pitcher was at that moment gay with poppies. Over the Madonnas she laughed with delight, and said that she "jest *loved*" babies. But a look of awe came into her face when she was told who the child was. She stopped talking, and gazed and *gazed* as though she wanted to transfer the picture to her memory.

"Jest to think," she said softly, "that He was willin' to be a little baby and be toted around like other babies. I *wish't* I could 'a' carried Him!" Never was longing for privilege more tenderly expressed. But over the picture of "Christ and the Fishermen" she bent silent and absorbed. She recognized the central figure at the first glance.

"That's *Him!*" she said breathlessly, and then bent her head. When she raised it, her fine gray eyes were dim with tears.

"I never expected to have a picture of Him," she said. "And to think that I've got three!

I'll tell you what I'd love to do, if you don't mind. I'd love to put this and one of them" — nodding her head toward the Madonnas — "out in the other room, so that maw and paw and Jed and all of 'em can see Him. Paw, he will like this one wonderful! and maw will jest dote on the little baby; and we can see Him all the time we are eatin', and when we are readin' about Him, and prayin' to Him! Won't it be beautiful?"

"The girl is simply wonderful!" They were on the homeward drive, and Faith had been eagerly re-picturing for them the scenes in Melindy's room; she broke off suddenly to make this exclamation, and added earnestly:—

"I should like to understand it. Do any of you? What is it that has made the change in her life? Professor Langham, you are a Bible teacher and ought to be able to explain these mysteries. What has happened to these rude people which seems to have transformed them?"

Mr. Langham made smiling answer.

"The girl seems to have explained it in a most expressive phrase; they have all 'got religion.' Does not that account for it?"

“Not to me. What is religion, and how came they to get it? And why are they so exultant over it? I never heard any one else pray like that old man. Is it because they are ignorant and in poverty that it means so much to them? If it is, one could almost wish to share their ignorance in order to share such joy.”

“Ignorance has nothing to do with it,” said Esther, sharply. She was thinking of her father and mother.

“Well, then, I wish somebody could explain it. They certainly talk and feel about religion as no other people do with whom I come in contact; and yet it is much as one would think people would feel and talk, if there was anything in it. That old mother used an old-fashioned word that my nurse did when I was a child. She told me that since her Jed had ‘got converted, it didn’t seem as though she had anything left to wish for.’ Do educated people believe in that word ‘conversion,’ Professor Langham?”

CHAPTER XV

THEORY AND PRACTICE

ESTHER'S face flushed and she waited with an eagerness that would have surprised him for Mr. Langham's answer. That word "conversion" was a very familiar one to her on her educated father's lips.

"Oh, yes," the professor said indulgently. "'Conversion' is a good orthodox word, though we don't hear it tossed about as carelessly as it used to be. It simply means 'getting religion,' Miss Farnham."

"Then what do both of them mean?"

The professor glanced whimsically at Mr. Vaughn; clearly his companion was in earnest, and was not to be turned aside from a theological discussion merely for the sake of a visit with him. Then he gave himself to the business of answering.

"Both of them mean simply an effort of the will; a distinct decision; such a decision as set-

cles the question involved for all time, so that it is not open again for consideration. Is that clear?"

"Not very. Human wills are like all other human things, — unstable affairs. What I will to-day I am as likely as not to *un-will* to-morrow, without anything to justify it except a change of mood. How is one to settle anything for all time?"

If Mr. Langham had been looking at Esther just then he would not have understood the intensity of interest that her face expressed. But he did not see it; he had turned toward the back seat and was regarding Faith with questioning eyes.

"Do you mean that seriously, Miss Farnham? We have a great many vacillating minds to deal with, it is true, but I should be sorry to think that all, or even most human wills were such untrustworthy affairs. Do not you know scores of people who make decisions and can be trusted not to swerve from them by so much as a hair's breadth, unless something occurs to throw new light on the situation?"

"Oh, yes, of course; but I am not now think-

ing of trained minds or of highly cultivated ones. Think of the masses, those whom we are pleased to call the common people: Melindy and her family, for instance, — though I think they are very uncommon people, — but they are ignorant and not, in our sense of the word, trained to think; yet here is some influence or some power which seems to have worked a complete change in their lives; how shall it be accounted for? If it is simply a change of will, that doesn't relieve the situation. How came they to *will* to change? Or, having willed, how is it that they can control their actions, and, above all, their speech, so as never to slip back for an hour to their old selves? That girl's mother says she is as different from what she used to be as though she were two girls."

"Ah!" said Mr. Langham, "now you touch a subject about which we still know so little that we may account it ignorance. Influences so subtle as to be unrecognizable, reaching back for one does not know how many generations, have been working their mysterious wills in conjunction with the wills of those who per-

haps have never heard of them. It is an interesting and complex subject, but I do not believe we can manage it to-day to your satisfaction."

Clearly this was intended for dismissal, but Esther could not forbear one question.

"Do you leave out the supernatural altogether from such changes as Faith has mentioned?"

The professor considered.

"Well, not altogether, of course," he said thoughtfully. "The All-Father looks after his creatures in more minute ways than we shall probably ever fully understand. I have no doubt but that he will do his part in the world's work, whatever it is." Faith made a movement of impatience.

"But — I beg your pardon, Professor Langham — but I can't help feeling that that is simply begging the whole question. What I want to know is: What do you — what do the people who call themselves Christians, in distinction from us outsiders — think has happened to an entire family when each member of it makes, in a given time and not at the same

time, a sudden and radical and lasting change in his life?"

"They call it 'regeneration,'" said Esther, firmly. Faith turned upon her quickly.

"And what, pray, is regeneration?"

Both gentlemen laughed, and Mr. Vaughn spoke gayly.

"Now, Miss Randall, confess yourself nonplussed."

But Esther went back to the Sunday afternoons of her childhood, and repeated quietly: "Regeneration is the radical and permanent moral change wrought in the spiritual nature of a man by the Holy Spirit when he becomes a Christian," and added, "I learned that when I was eight years old."

"Poor little eight-year-old!" said Mr. Vaughn.

"I don't know," said Faith. "I don't suppose that at eight such words were much harder to learn than 'entry mentery cutery corn,' and dozens of others that we rattled off and have forgotten. But Esther's long words seem to have served a good turn in helping her to give an intelligible answer to a question. At least, I suppose it is intelligible to people

who believe such things. Say it again, Esther, please, and let us have a slower movement, until I see if I can grasp it.”

But here Mr. Langham interposed with decision: “Now see here, good people, we are out for a rest of mind and body; and if we persist in carrying text-book and argumentative debate along with us, we might as well have stayed in the laboratory. Let us cease to be learned, or even rational, and go in for what the youngsters call ‘A jolly good time.’”

Had he really begged the question, as Faith had hinted, or was he simply bent on a holiday? Did he hold to those old standard truths, or had he modern views of even the way of salvation?

These questions Esther pondered, though joining outwardly in the gayety that immediately prevailed. At last, annoyed by the constantly recurring questions, she asked herself irritably why she cared what he thought, and did not answer herself. One fact was plain to her, that she did care a great deal.

If Dr. Armitage had been going to preach, on that Sunday morning, he could have felt flattered by the size of his audience. At all times

recognized as the popular preacher of the town, empty or even half-filled pews rarely disturbed his vision. But on this June morning every available seat was filled, even to the aisle chairs which were fastened to the pews, and it was becoming apparent that very soon mere standing room would be denied to late comers.

“What a crowd!” whispered the habitual attendants one to another, distastefully, and they waved their fans vigorously, and wished that the ushers would not jam more people into a seat than could possibly breathe there. It is a sad fact that elegant toilets were much crushed that day.

“The college turned out in full force this morning,” was the comment of one young man who lighted his cigar almost before he cleared the church steps.

“Yes,” said his friend. “A regular crush, and it was all to hear a fellow who can’t hold a candle to Armitage. I can’t imagine why the Prex made such a fuss over his coming. I didn’t see anything remarkable in this morning’s effort, did you?”

“I am sure he was remarkable for persever-

ance," was the reply, accompanied by an expressive shrug of shapely shoulders.

His friend laughed. "Yes, he certainly had the 'gift of continuance' if ever a fellow had. Who is he, Parker, and what is he here for?"

"He is a college professor; comes from New England, I think, or New York — somewhere about there. I didn't hear the Prex's harangue, you know. As nearly as I can make out, the special object of his visit here at this time is to comfort the soul of Professor Welland. Viewed from a religious standpoint, he thinks we are all going to the dogs together, and this McIntyre — was that his name? — is expected to arrest the downward trend."

"Oh, he is? Well, I don't see how. He seemed to me to be serving up a lot of warmed-over platitudes that I have heard ever since I was a small boy, mixed up with a fanatical sensationalism that belongs to the ranter, rather than to the college bred. However, that is a style which I should think would just suit Professor Welland. What an old fossil he is! Look here, Millars, suppose you and I go to town this afternoon by the 5.18 train? We

shall be in time for a stroll in the park and dinner at the Club, and there is to be glorious music at The Allerton to-night. Some oratorio, I forget what; but it is sure to be fine. That will arrest a downward trend much quicker than Professor McIntyre's harangue, I am sure."

The two laughed and sauntered on, planning their evening's amusement.

Just behind them walked Esther Randall, near enough to have heard their words had she been giving them attention. But she had not even noticed their presence. Mind and heart were absorbed in another direction. Whether or not this young woman was on the "downward trend," her thoughts, at least, had been arrested. She could not have explained why every sentence in the address that morning had probed to her very soul, but never in her life had she listened to words that seemed so to search her. If the speaker had known her whole life history, nay, even the very thoughts of her heart, such as were known only to God, he could not have spoken more directly to her. His theme had been, "A Unified Life"; and the thought chiefly emphasized had been the importance of having

a central purpose, a definite aim, a settled conviction strong enough to permeate and rule the life. As he described the wretchedness of those who were forever reconsidering, retesting the same truths, hesitating, arguing, doubting, Esther saw herself held up before herself for consideration. As he spoke briefly and eloquently of that other high road where walked the few who had settled some things and carried about with them a determining principle to act as a test thermometer on matters that came up for decision, Esther felt that he was describing not her, but her father. She lost herself then, for a little, going over once more the old conflict between her religion and her theory of religion. When her attention returned to the speaker, he was quoting from Dr. Watson's "Dynamics of Religion," wherein he shows that love to Christ, supreme, all-pervading, was ever and must ever be the dynamic force in religion.

"Listen," said the speaker, "to Dr. Watson's word about Jesus Christ: 'It was Jesus who summoned Love to meet the severe demands of Faith, and wedded for the first time the ideas of Passion and Righteousness. Jesus identifies

righteousness with Himself, and has brought it to pass that no man can love *Him* without loving righteousness.'” He quoted the entire passage, and then threw all the enthusiasm of his young, strong nature into a description of the kind of living there would be with Jesus enthroned in the heart. “If, in short, one really had a passion for Christ.” Suddenly, as if she were a central figure in the picture he was sketching, appeared to Esther a vision of Melindy! Melindy was an illustration of his subject; Melindy had a passion for Christ! she loved Him with a fervor that kept all other passions in the background: not only that, but if any of them were found to be antagonistic to Christ, Esther felt instinctively that the girl would annihilate them. She had seen her face, one day, when she was studying a copy of Hoffman’s Christ that Faith Farnham had sent her. What there was in Melindy’s face that day, Esther coveted. She saw herself plainly revealed as one who had been trying fitfully and faultily to live righteousness without having been first really wedded to Jesus, with such a passion of self-renouncing love as should absorb all other loves and plans and hopes.

The next question that took hold of her with something like indignation, was: Why should "Melindy," the untrained, illiterate girl, have come suddenly into this rich experience while she, the child of many prayers, with generations behind her of stanch Christians to do for her all that heredity could do, was still, after almost a decade of Christian profession, floundering in the questionings and perplexities of a beginner? Not even like a beginner! Was it to be supposed that Melindy ever questioned? Did she have days when she knew that she had disgraced her profession at almost every turn, and ill-treated her Lord? Esther, who had seen the girl but three times in her life, felt certain that no such days came to her. Why was it?

Could it be that there was something about this matter of conversion that she with all her early education in the catechism and its proof texts did not understand, and Melindy did! "Self-surrender," the speaker had repeated the phrase several times in those sentences which probed. Theoretically, she knew just what it meant; as a personal matter did she understand and accept it?

All the while she was moving rapidly about Mrs. Victor's kitchen, giving skilled attention to the preparation of an excellent dinner, this undercurrent of thought flowed on. It kept her grave and more silent than usual. Miss Victor, who was helping with the dessert, noticed this and was oppressed by it. At the dinner table she commented:—

“That solemn-faced girl out there has made me so nervous, just in working with her for a half-hour, that I feel as though I should fly! Mother, aren't you glad that it is almost time for college to close, so you can be done with her?”

Mrs. Victor heaved a weary sigh.

“Oh, I don't know. Esther is trying, in some respects, and yet I don't know what I shall do without her. She has some excellent qualities; she is thorough in all that she undertakes and can be relied upon implicitly to do as she is directed.”

“Humph!” said the son of the house, “I should think such qualities would offset any amount of glumness, and even an occasional flash of gunpowder. It would with men.”

“I think as much!” said his father. “You

had better try to hold on to her through the vacation. A college student who is thorough and conscientious about such commonplace affairs as housework is rare, I fancy. Try her with an offer, at least. Her father is bound to be poor, since he is a home missionary, and she can save a good deal simply by staying where she is, to say nothing of paying her wages."

"She won't stay," said Mrs. Victor, gloomily. "She told Selma the other day that she was counting the hours now."

This sentence Esther heard as she came with the coffee. She surmised what the talk had been, and said softly and firmly, quite to herself, "No, indeed, she won't! you may be sure of that."

CHAPTER XVI

“DELIBERATELY, AND FOREVER”

INSTEAD of seeking her accustomed Sunday afternoon nook, a corner of the nearly always deserted side veranda, Esther established herself in front of her one window. The day was warm, and her room was on the third floor, but it had only a northern exposure, and she had persuaded herself that the heat was not too great for endurance; whether it was or not, she felt that she must be alone. Grave interests were at stake. Instinctively she realized that her life had reached a crisis: some questions must be settled now for all time; so that, as Professor Langham had phrased it, “they would not be open again for consideration.” The unhappiness and unfruitfulness of her present way of living were so marked that it needed no argument to convince her of the necessity for a change. Never, since she had realized that,

whether she would or not, she must influence others more or less, had she felt her worthlessness so fully. Making the acquaintance of “Melindy” and watching Faith’s growing interest in the girl had roused her. It became evident that Faith’s interest was not simply due to the fact that here was a girl of about her own age environed by new and strange conditions; it was the mountain girl’s religious experience that had fascinated her. She could not get away from it, but talked about the girl incessantly, and wondered over her.

“I should like to try her,” she said, “in an entirely different atmosphere. School life, for instance, — do you know she wants to study? She told me so, the last time I was there. — What do you think is her chief reason? She comes across verses in her Bible that she doesn’t understand, and if she could ‘study and learn,’ of course she would know what they mean. College life would be a revelation to her, wouldn’t it?”

“Just what do you mean by that?” Esther had asked. “Don’t you think that education helps people to understand the Bible?”

"Why, in a way, yes; it ought to, of course; but if one may judge by lives, what most educated people seem to learn about the Bible is, that the English language doesn't mean what the English language seems to say."

"You have a poor opinion of Christian people, haven't you?"

"Oh, no — no indeed. They are a very good sort of people, those whom I know: delightful to visit with, but not one whit different, so far as I can see, from scores of others who make no professions. And their code of rules, judging from their text-book, seems to require a very different kind of living. Esther, my dear, don't look reproachful. I am not caviling; it is all a mystery to me, and one over which I am curious. Until I met our friend Melindy I never saw any one in my life who seemed to have taken squarely hold of the Bible with a determination to live it."

"You have been unfortunate in your acquaintances," Esther said coldly; and Faith had made haste to reply: —

"I presume that is true, in the sense in which you mean. I don't know many Christians

intimately. We are not a religious family, you know, and of course my observations are all superficial. But, on the surface, there is really a marked difference between Melindy and all the other girls I know, who have ‘got religion.’ What I cannot help wondering about is, whether or not it is her isolation and ignorance that makes the difference. If it is, it would be a pity to educate her, wouldn’t it? For at present she certainly has a superstition, or whatever you call it, about the Bible and the chief character in it, and the unseen world in general, that I cannot help but admire; there are even times when I envy her.”

Such had been Faith’s confession; and her sore-hearted friend, as she recalled it, told herself that if her life were what it should be, she could have influenced Faith, even as Melindy had, with a clearer knowledge of the way. But her life was not what it should be, and her influence, what little she had exerted, had been against, rather than for, the doctrines which she professed.

That word “influence” recalled again the speaker of the morning, and one sentence in

his address that had increased her personal interest. He had spoken at length and with impressive earnestness to the students especially, of the influence that they were without doubt exerting, and the certainty that it would be lasting, and would reach — they could not tell whither. In the way of illustration, he had spoken of himself. He told them that his entire life had been colored, perhaps it was not too much to say changed, from what would in all probability have been its natural current by the influence of one young woman whom he not only never saw, but who died many years before he was born, and was only nineteen when she died. She was beloved by his mother, who was then a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, with a devotion and a passion which had unmistakably become a part of her life, and helped to make of her the woman and the mother that she was.

Naturally this statement had intense interest for Esther Randall. Here were this man's mother and her father influenced for life by a woman who was only nineteen when she died. How could she help wondering whether possibly

his mother's friend had been named Ester Ried? True, she had smiled at the romantic turn her thoughts had taken, and brought them promptly back to the speaker and his theme. But the incident returned to her memory to add another sting to her self-reproachful thoughts. What if she had been such a Christian as that Ester Ried? Then Faith would not have had to wait for that untrained mountain girl to show her what was meant by “getting religion.”

“What is the trouble with me?” she said aloud, dreary discouragement in her voice. “Why is it that I am as I am? I believe in the doctrines in which I have been trained. I have not a shadow of doubt as to Jesus Christ being a Saviour for sin, nor as to my need of a Saviour. More than that, I believe that I am saved. If I should die to-night, I believe and am sure that I should go straight to the presence of Jesus Christ and be covered by His righteousness. Yet my religion does not satisfy me, and I am not living it; I am a daily, hourly disgrace to the One who has saved me. I know this, yet it does not make me miserable.

It does not take even so important a place in my daily thought as the question how I shall get some decent clothes for next year, or what I shall wear during Commencement week, or whether I was foolish in declining Professor Langham's invitation to the *matinée*, or what I shall do if he should invite me again, or a dozen other trivialities! What can it be that makes the difference between that girl in the woods and me?"

Over and over in her troubled mind this train of thought revolved. Gradually the conviction grew upon her that, while she had recognized Jesus Christ as her Saviour, and based on Him her hope of heaven, she had never enthroned Him in her heart, so that to find out His will and do it was the passion of her life. Instead, what had she been doing all her life but trying to compromise? Simple and quiet as her environment had always been, she knew that what the Bible meant by "the world" had taken hold of her in various forms, and held her from that close fellowship with Christ which her father craved for her.

She had known all the while what he meant,

even when she had pushed the thought from her with the petulant cry, “I don’t understand what he wants of me!” On this soul-searching day her heretofore dulled conscience told her plainly that such words had not been true. She was a carefully trained girl and knew intellectually a good deal of theology.

She went to her knees at last, only to find that even prayer seemed to be denied her. Familiar with Bible stories from her childhood, one of them flashed before her now, and the words insisted on repeating themselves in her mind, “There was no voice, nor any that answered.” Was that really to be her experience?

“But that was a false God!” she said desperately.

“Yes,” a voice seemed to say to her; “but here is a false disciple. Can you think that the true God waits always upon the moods and whims of those who profess to be His followers, yet who daily disregard His directions and slight His calls?” Whose voice was this? Could it be that the Lord Christ had cast her off as a worthless branch?

Esther Randall never forgot the two hours that she spent in her room on that warm Sunday afternoon. When not on her knees, she was walking up and down the narrow space in almost a frenzy of terror and dismay. Was it possible that she could never pray any more? Were such experiences possible in these days? Had God, indeed, cast her off forever?

At last, weary of beating against the bars of her own thoughts, all spent with weeping, something like the feeling that must have taken possession of one of the Lord's poor sinners of long ago when he cried out, "Cast me not away from thy presence . . ." swept in upon her, and she knew that she wanted Christ — wanted Him more than all else in the world. Long before this — it seemed to her on that June day that it was hundreds of years ago — there had been given to Esther, by a visiting evangelist, what he called a Consecration Card, part of which read, "Upon my knees in thy presence, I do now give myself to thee, and I do this freely, honestly, deliberately, and forever."

As a child she had read the words again

and again, but dimly comprehending their meaning. They came back to her now, and were understood in their fulness. For the first time in her life they seemed to express her thought, her desire. She said the words aloud, very deliberately; she knew that she meant them. Even though He did not answer her, could not answer, because her unworthiness had built a wall between them, yet she must serve Him. Suddenly, she laid her head on the chair before which she was kneeling, and let the tears that seemed to be choking her have their way. They quieted her, or something quieted her. She felt a great peace “as a river” flowing into her soul. The Lord Christ was no longer a Master, looking down upon her in stern disapproval, from a far-away height. He was near, close at hand; she could almost touch “the hem of His garment.” Grieved, He was, by her treatment of Him, yet forgiving, tender, wonderful in His love. All her soul went out to meet Him, and she knew that He was from henceforth not simply her King to receive loyal service, but her Friend and Companion. Words found on a little leaflet and treasured in her

Bible came to mind to voice her thought; she said the lines exultingly:—

“Out of the hardness of heart and of will,
Out of the longings which nothing could fill;
Out of the bitterness, madness, and strife,
Out of myself and all I called life, —
Into the having of all things with him!
Into an ecstasy full to the brim!
Wonderful lowliness, draining my cup!
Wonderful purpose that ne'er gave me up!
Wonderful patience, enduring and strong!
Wonderful glory to which I belong!”

A mount of transfiguration. Some of us have spent single hours there, and we know that the everyday life flows in full soon. Esther Randall had but scant time with her new joy before the world and a temptation called her.

It was Selma Victor who knocked at her door with a message. “Professor Langham is waiting to see you, Miss Randall. He is in a great hurry. I don't know whether he wants you to elope with him immediately or not, but he looks as though he might be planning something of the kind.”

Ordinarily this flippant address would have

annoyed Esther, but her descent to earth was so sudden that she felt only bewilderment.

“She had been asleep, I guess,” Selma reported to her mother. “And she is only about half awake now; she looked at me as though I was a piece of a dream.”

Esther heard this, and smiled. “She is right,” she told herself softly. “I have been asleep, but I am awake now.”

Professor Langham was undoubtedly in haste.

“I must beg your pardon for abruptness,” he said, “and make known my errand as speedily as possible. The situation is this: I have been trying during the past week to secure seats for the Oratorio this evening, and have failed. But to-night’s mail brought a delayed letter from a friend who had succeeded in getting me two tickets. Now, the question is: Will you waive the ordinary proprieties and make all speed with me to the 7.10 train? We shall be less than fifteen minutes late at The Allerton, even if they are very prompt in opening, and we can return by the midnight train.”

For a moment Esther stood before him as

one dazed; this was so sudden and unexpected a plunge into the world!

"Sunday evening!" she said at last; and her tone made the two words expressive.

"Yes, this evening. It is an Oratorio, you know. One of the finest; and Madame Schryver is the chief soloist. It is a rare occasion, you see."

"But — Mr. Langham, it is a Sunday train!"

He smiled patiently.

"Certainly," he said. "One could hardly go to town on Sunday without taking a Sunday train. My dear Miss Randall, you surely do not object to an hour's ride on the cars — less than an hour, indeed! Not so long a trip as hundreds of Christian people who live in town are compelled to take every Sunday, by trolley, in order to reach their churches. Why should you consider steam so much greater a sinner than electricity?"

"I do not," said Esther, quickly. "I don't ride on trolley cars on Sunday."

He looked his astonishment, tinged with amusement.

“But, my dear friend, you cannot think it wrong to do so. Would not such a position be taken at the expense of setting one’s individual judgment against that of hundreds of our best people?”

If the professor had not been in haste, he would not have ventured so careless an argument. Esther smiled as she answered:—

“I cannot, of course, decide questions for hundreds of people. I find quite enough to do in looking after myself. But just now I am not called upon to consider the matter of the trolley for the purpose of getting to church every Sunday. I believe the question is with regard to going away from my church, by train, to attend a concert. That, at least, is plain to me.”

He almost interrupted her in his eagerness to get in his next word before she committed herself to a positive statement.

“Miss Randall, there isn’t time for a discussion — when there is, I think I can make some things plain to you. Meantime, I am going to ask a favor. Will you defer all further consideration of the matter and go with me

this evening, because I wish it *very much* and would not enjoy the Oratorio without you, and because I want to take this opportunity to tell you something that is of great importance to me?"

His entire manner had changed; that calm superiority with which she had always felt impressed was disturbed. He was intensely in earnest, and he threw a meaning into his words that she could not but understand.

CHAPTER XVII

DISCIPLINE

ESTHER grew very pale as she stood looking at her caller. If she trusted him at all, she could not misunderstand him; and she could not but feel that her decision involved more, much more, than a Sunday evening concert, and that the test of her sincerity had come soon and with force. But there was no hesitation in her thoughts; she had never seen what she believed to be her duty more plainly.

Her manner was very gentle as she replied. She felt that he had been compelled by circumstances to say more to her than at that time he had meant to do, and she was willing to let him see that she suffered with him in his disappointment.

“I cannot do that, Mr. Langham, because I do not think that for me it would be right; and however narrow my sense of right may be, I am sure that you would not ask me to violate it.”

He was deeply hurt; it showed in his eyes. He could not enter into her world just then, even for a moment, and realize that this which seemed so trivial to him was really a matter of conscience to her. What he felt was that, although he had spoken so plainly, she was not willing to put aside a prejudice for his sake. He had no further word that he was willing to speak. Even at that moment a warning whistle in the near distance told them both that there was barely ten minutes left for those who would make the 7.10 train; so with no other farewell than a grave bow Mr. Langham turned and walked rapidly away.

Esther stood for several seconds where he had left her; then she went out to the quiet corner of the porch.

What had she done? Had he meant — what else could he have meant but that which his eyes and voice told her? And she had sent him away grieved, hurt, offended, probably, beyond all recall.

“No!” said her heart. “Not if he really cares for me. So small a matter would not be allowed to come between us. If I thought he

could cast aside a — a friend merely because she could not accept an evening's invitation — he would not be worthy of another thought. If it can be possible that I understood him, he will come back — and surely he meant me to understand. I can make it plain to him what I think, what I mean, and together we —” She broke off to laugh a low, happy laugh. How swiftly she was moving in thought! She heard the train whistle and shriek and pause for a moment, then with another warning shriek rush away. She wondered if he were on it, and if he would find some one in town upon whom to bestow that other ticket. There had not been time to fill her place from the multitudes of college girls who would have been more than willing to go. Was she glad of that? Faith would have gone. Could she possibly be glad that Faith had missed it? How horribly selfish she must be growing! Whoever he found would not hear those words that he had wanted to say; they were for her alone, and at thought of them the happy look deepened in her eyes. Then she had a little sigh for herself. She wished that Sunday trains were right. Per-

haps they were. Perhaps she was "narrow," as so many of her friends thought. Perhaps even though "principles," as her father was fond of saying, "never changed," circumstances and environment did, so as to make acts that in certain conditions were wrong, right enough under others. Of course that was so. Well, then she wished that this act could have seemed right to her. What a wonderful thing it would have been to have closed this wonderful Sunday under the spell of such music! and in such companionship, her heart added softly. It would have been an "uplift" for the week. Then she remembered that she had had her uplift; yes, and she had companionship, even the Lord Christ. The thought throbbed through her frame like some powerful elixir. It was new, *very* new, — this realization that she could have intimate and constant companionship with the Lord. She had never so understood it.

The first ecstasy of her new experience passed, but the assurance and the peace remained. At last Esther had learned how to pray; it did not seem to her that she would be likely to forget it. She tried to write out for her mother and father

the history of that marked Sunday, but it puzzled her to tell it. What was the experience through which she had passed? Had she just been converted? Why, no, — no, indeed! Long ago Jesus Christ accepted her as His child. Then this was — what? Had she wandered? Not outwardly; instead, she had been called “strait-laced.” But she had never been genuinely happy in her religion, nor satisfied because of it; now she was. Would it last? She believed that it would, she felt as sure of it as Melindy had; but what proof had she for others? It was while she was revolving these thoughts that she came upon a scrap of verse copied into a newspaper, that sounded to her like a call to service:—

“Be what thou seemest; *live* thy creed;
 Hold up to earth the torch divine.
Be what thou prayest to be made;
 Let the great Master’s step be thine.”

What wonderful suggestions of possibilities were here! Esther’s whole being thrilled with a new ambition. “Live thy creed.” If she only had! She knew much about creeds; her

own was built on a solid foundation and would have served her well.

“Be what thou prayest to be made.”

Oh, if she *only could!* She was praying a wonderful prayer in these days. She decided that she would not try to write anything about it; there was really nothing that could be told: she was going home, soon, to *live* it. Could she make them understand, simply by watching her life? That would be a life worth while. Poor father! he had been so disappointed in his daughter. But could she be in any sense of the word what she was praying to be made? There was Aunt Sarah still to be borne with; and there was Joram Pratt, and other trials. What was that last line?

“Let the great Master’s step be thine.”

Esther laid down her pen; there was a sudden rush of tears; the possibilities of such living as that for a moment overwhelmed her. If that could be — if her steps could, even in a faint degree, be suggestive of the Master! She would try — oh, she would try so hard! and with infinite strength to lean upon, it might be that —

and besides, she was going home very soon: that, of itself, would help her. Never could there have been a girl more eager for home. Long before this she had calculated to the fraction of a day, now she knew literally the number of hours that intervened.

Then, suddenly, as though swooping down upon her from some outside source, came a horrible question:—

“Why don't you stay where you are? You have some reason to think that Mrs. Victor would be glad of your help, and would even pay you something for extra work; and in this way you could not only save travelling expenses, but really be earning a little toward next year.”

When this suggestion was first made to the homesick girl, as a mere possibility, her strongest feeling was indignation. Then, as it gradually came upon her that perhaps it was her duty to consider it, she grew faint and sick over the possible result. Very soon after this, Mrs. Victor added her drop of misery by pointing out the wisdom of such a course and the folly of any other; then, of her own will, pro-

posed a money equivalent for extra time, which Esther knew would aid considerably in the replenishing of her wardrobe.

For an entire day this problem was carried about, through all the details of college and kitchen work, and by night Esther had reached the conclusion that at least she ought to tell mother and father about it. Of course she would be governed by their decision; but she would be strictly honest, and own that she was fearfully homesick, and hated the very thought of staying. Deep in her heart was a comfortable little feeling that mother would not consent to any such plan, and that by the first mail possible she would be peremptorily ordered home. And then, before she had had time to get all the comfort out of this probability, the whole matter assumed a different aspect. Katherine Victor fell ill. From the first she was seriously ill, and as the days passed and the disease developed into typhoid fever, she grew desperately so. During Commencement week she was tossing in delirium, and Esther who, long before that, had spent many hours in retrimming and otherwise freshening her "good" white dress

for class day, did not leave the house during the entire day. It had been found impossible to secure extra help, and common decency demanded that she should not desert the family in their sore need.

By the following evening both Blanche and Faith were gone, as were most of her acquaintances, and Esther, who had herself expected to take that evening's train for home, stood by the kitchen window watching the smoke roll up from its departing engine.

Crushed in her hand was a very short letter from her father, which she did not need to read again — she knew its contents by heart. It was later by only a day than that one from her mother which, as she had expected, directed her to come home. Her father's read:—

“I am catching the next mail to reply to your letter which came but an hour ago; there is time for only a word. God bless you, dear Ester Ried, you are your mother's own girl, faithful and fearless, and true as steel. Of course you know what it is to us, your mother and me, to give up your home-coming — rather, you don't know, and we are glad that you cannot appre-

ciate it in all its fulness — for of course we understand that you, being the child of your mother, cannot do otherwise than stay. Your mother will write to-morrow, dear, and say all the things that father cannot; but he will talk much about you to the Father in heaven.”

Now she would have to stay, of course. She had known it all the while. It was just like her mother and father. Down deep in her heart the girl knew that it was also like herself. She could not have deserted the Victors in their need. “If I could,” she had told herself sturdily, “it would have proved that I am not my father’s and mother’s daughter.”

Nevertheless it was hard. That swift-moving train, which was even now rounding the curve and in another moment would be out of sight and sound, seemed to be carrying her heart away.

Was it harder for her because the train was also carrying away Mr. Langham? Yes, certainly it was. Why should she deny this to her secret self? Had she not a right to miss her friend? She had not seen him except in class since that Sunday evening now more than two weeks away. In the class room he had been, of course,

as usual. Courteous in manner, careful in explanation, close and unsparing in criticism, critical in his demands for their best efforts. Yet Esther could feel in his manner a change not discernible to others. When she came with a question, he made no effort to detain her for an additional word; and not once during the entire time had he happened to be in the doorway just starting down the avenue as she passed out with her books. It was not that he seemed to be offended — nothing could be kinder than his manner, and he was on the watch to do for her all that a teacher could. But he managed to convey to her the belief that he was deeply hurt. Just how this idea was conveyed, Esther could not have told, but she felt it, and it troubled and disappointed her. If he had understood her position, surely he could not have been hurt. Was it her duty to try to make him understand that she had not been governed by a mere whim, but by a settled conviction of duty, in declining the courtesy he had made such an effort to extend to her? This question she had considered much during those closing days of the college year, but be-

cause she did not see quite how to set about it she hesitated, and he had finally gone without other word of good-by than that spoken in class, and shared by all.

The summer was long and hard. Katherine Victor lay for weeks very ill indeed; there were days together when no one but the mother had a shred of hope. When at last the disease spent itself and immediate danger was over, and then when the long, slow convalescence began, life in the kitchen at least did not grow less strenuous. In some respects it was even harder than when the dignity of a swift-coming sorrow was upon them, thrusting all other troubles into the background of insignificance.

Esther Randall, who had stood at her post during all the strain and stress of the anxious days, had still the endless round of menial and petty duties to look after that serious illness thrusts upon some one; and in addition to that must bear the strain that comes upon overwrought nerves when an awful weight of anxiety has finally lifted. Not Mrs. Victor alone, but Marian, and even the young daughter Selma, helped in this way to discipline the girl who,

before this summer's experience, had been always too ready to yield to the demand of "nerves."

Amid all the trials and perplexities of that hard summer one golden thread of comfort had held steadily: she was not the Esther with whom the season had begun. There was a radical difference. Never mind if only she and the Master knew of this — they knew and were glad. He had been present with her through all the days; it was He who had arrested the quick word, the impatient gesture, even the flash of the expressive gray eyes when they wanted to flash anger or indignation. It had not been easy — on the contrary, it had been *hard*. Sometimes there had been inward turmoil when there was outward calm; but Esther Randall was able to tell herself with an exultant thrill that during these weeks of peculiar and steady trial she had not outwardly disgraced her Lord. His grace had been sufficient: of course it had; He had said that it would be. He had said it long ago, but Esther had never before been able to appropriate it.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOVE

BUT Esther was mistaken in her supposition that no one noticed the change in her life. Mrs. Victor, burdened as she was by a thousand cares, and her heart torn with a cruel anxiety, found time to remark one day that she had never imagined that sickness could have such an effect on a human being as it had had on Esther Randall.

“Not that I ever thought her an especially selfish girl,” she said. “In fact, she has more than once quite altered her plans to accommodate me; but she had a temper that was ready to take fire at a moment’s notice; and now, though she has trials and responsibilities enough to wear out anybody’s nerves, I haven’t heard her speak a sharp word. She has been as good as gold through all our trouble; I am sure I shall never forget it.”

Selma, too, was observant, especially after the danger was past, and her sister was gaining steadily. And Selma had a theory of her own that she imparted to her mother.

“I’ll tell you what, mamma, I believe that girl is in love.”

“Who? Katherine?” said the startled mother, and Selma laughed.

“‘Katherine?’ No, indeed! or, yes, I guess she is in love with life. I should think she would be. I wonder how it feels to come as near the end of one’s life as she did?” and the girl shivered.

“But I wasn’t speaking of Katherine, I mean Esther Randall. I know she is in love, and is perfectly satisfied with it—nothing else will account for the change in her. She isn’t one bit as she used to be. I thought of it this morning at breakfast; I was rather horrid, I guess. I was late, you know, and didn’t want my breakfast, anyway. I didn’t sleep well last night. I got thinking that it was just three weeks ago last night that we thought Katherine was dying, and I went all over it and said, ‘What if she had!’ And then I couldn’t help

thinking: what if she should have another relapse! People do, you know, after as long a time as this. That Ellen Stevens did, you remember. But she was always an invalid, and didn't have the right kind of care, and of course it is very different; but, anyhow, I couldn't help going over and *over* all those things, until I was as nervous as a witch, and didn't get to sleep until daylight. So this morning my head ached, and nothing anywhere was just right. I complained of the muffins, and of the way my egg was cooked, and was horrid generally. Now you know, mamma, the Esther Randall with whom we have been acquainted would have said some sharp little thing and gone off and left me to look after myself. But she was just as kind as she could be. She poached an egg beautifully for me, and made a fresh cup of cocoa, and said she was sorry my head ached, and was cheery and sweet all the time. I just know she is in love."

"Well," said Mrs. Victor, with decision, "if that is it, I hope that all the girls with whom I have to do will proceed to getting 'in love,' as you call it, as soon as possible; for Esther,

in her present frame of mind, is the comfort of my life. I was afraid we would lose the new Esther as soon as Katherine was better and return to the old one, but we don't seem to."

Some of this Esther overheard, and laughed softly. "It is true," she told herself, "I am 'in love,' and am satisfied." Something in the phrase made her think of Aunt Sarah, and she gave an involuntary little sigh. How irreverent, yes, how downright wicked, Aunt Sarah would think her, to say that she was "in love" with Jesus Christ! Poor Aunt Sarah! Could she ever, possibly, be made to understand something of the sweetness and satisfying nature of Christ's love? What was such a religion as hers worth?

"She is keeping it all to die by," Esther told herself, with a wistful little sigh. "If there were only a way to make her realize that He is just as ready to give living as dying grace! I ought to be able to help her; I think her religion and mine were very much alike."

A hope growing out of this thought lingered with Esther, and took from her the faint shadow

there had always been about the thought of the home-going. Perhaps she could help Aunt Sarah.

And now they were in the last week of the vacation. A few days more and the interests and excitements of a new college year would be upon them. Esther, who could hardly be said to have had a vacation, yet looked forward with the keenest zest to the thought of resuming the college routine. How good it would be to see the girls again, and — and the others!

That last phrase was rather vague, but it seemed safe to include Mr. Langham, at least, among the "others."

One feature which marked the change that had come to Esther she smiled over, when she thought of it.

"Whatever else I may be doubtful about for another year, I am sure of one thing," she had said to Faith Farnham, in one of her indignant outbursts, near the close of the year, "and that is, that I shall not stay at the Victors one hour after I am honorably free."

Faith had replied in sympathy, "I think as

much!" and had reminded her that the Kimballs still wanted her.

Yet here she was, at the threshold of a new year, still with the Victors, and seemingly a fixture. Only that morning Mrs. Victor had said: "I am determined on one thing, Esther, about which you will be glad to hear. There is to be a reformation in this family in the matter of promptness. You shall not be troubled this year as you were last. Even dear Katherine has thought of it. She said yesterday that one of the regrets she had when she was lying so ill was that she had thoughtlessly hindered you so many times. But I am sure she was no more thoughtless than the rest of us, and I told her we would all reform."

Then they took it for granted that she was to stay with them? Well, perhaps that was the best way — certainly, she could not leave them now, while Katherine was still the subject of so much solicitude; a stranger would increase their cares very much; and besides — she gave one tiny sigh to the smaller family and presumably lighter duties at the Kimball's, and then dismissed them, and began to plan how

to arrange her furniture so as to make a little more space. The Victors seemed, in a sense, to "*belong*." They had been through a summer of anxiety and responsibility together, and their interests had somehow fused.

In Esther's possession at that moment was a letter from Mr. Langham, the only one that she had received. It was not in the least like the letter that she had imagined might come during those early days of vacation when she reflected that possibly he would write some of those things that he had wanted to say. Its very brevity had surprised and chilled her at first; but after due reflection she felt that she understood why he could not write more or differently.

"My dear Friend," — so the letter ran — "Despite the fact that I hope to see you in a very few days, I am moved to write this line of congratulation that your long, hard summer is nearing its close, and that your sacrificing labor of love has had so cheerful an outcome. You will observe that I have kept in touch with your life, although I have forborne to burden you with a letter. I knew that your hands

were more than full, and that you would have no time for correspondents; besides, to be entirely frank, I found it difficult — I might say impossible — to write to you freely, without first telling you that which you will remember I begged permission to tell and was denied. I am living in the hope that you will be less cruel to me when I see you again. Meantime, the ostensible reason for this note is to ask you to meet with my Bible class, and their teacher, on next Saturday evening, to talk over certain innovations which I would like to introduce.”

Apparently there was nothing in this letter to quicken the pulses of a young woman; yet Esther, who felt that she had a right to read between the lines, had known every moment of that busy day that it was lying in the bosom of her dress where she had suddenly thrust it when she heard Selma's voice, and that it was linked with a great possibility.

She had not permitted herself to question very much why Mr. Langham, if he had really meant what his words seemed to mean, had kept silence during these long weeks of burden-bearing. She had not known, until his letter came, that he had

heard of her whereabouts during the summer, and during the first week or two had watched the daily mails with an interest bordering on pain, in the almost expectation of a letter from him being forwarded by her father. And this, she thought, would open the way for her to tell her mother and father about Mr. Langham. She knew that, since the early weeks of their acquaintance when the name of "Professor Langham" often flowed from her pen as the instructor whom she found the most interesting, she had been silent, because she had not known what to say. Would his letter — if it came — make plain to her what to say?

But the letter had not come; and now that it had, there was connected with it a little questioning pain. Had the writer been purposely silent, although knowing all about her hard summer, to give her time to realize what she had lost, and prepare her to be less particular over what he considered trifles? She put this view of the case away as unfair to him; but it persisted in returning.

That evening Mrs. Kimball, the wife of an instructor who lived near them, ran in with a

plan. Esther had made her informal acquaintance after the close of college, and she had been very "good" to the overtaxed girl. Now she had a plan for the last Saturday of vacation. A few of them were arranging to go to Rocky Point for the day, and there was one vacant seat. Would Esther accept it, as her guest? They were sure it would do her a world of good to get into the country, even for part of a day.

"We must get back early," she explained, "for Mr. Langham is coming on the four o'clock express and with his usual despatch he has arranged a business meeting with his Bible class for the evening. He is to be our guest over Sunday. Mr. Kimball says it exhausts him merely to have such an incorrigible worker for a friend. By the way, you are a member of that Bible class, are you not? Then you have had your summons, I suppose? Fancy his taking time to write to all those girls! Well, we shall be back in ample time to put the library in its best array to receive you. You will go with us, won't you?"

Esther looked more than doubtful. Much

work had been planned for Saturday by Mrs. Victor, as well as herself. But that good woman proved to be an unexpected ally; she was hearty in her approval of the plan, and persistent.

"Of course she must go, Mrs. Kimball; don't be persuaded to let her off. It is a pity if she cannot have one day of vacation after such a summer as she has had! But what we would have done without her it frightens me even to think; she has simply been worth her weight in gold."

So Esther, warmed at heart with what she could not but feel was well-merited gratitude, and remembering that Rocky Point was on Melindy's side of the mountain, made ready with joy for her one day's outing, and managed, as she had meant to do, to have it include an hour's visit with Melindy.

As she appeared at the little cabin another guest was just taking his leave, a low-browed, sullen-looking, powerfully framed young fellow, dressed in the uncouth fashion of the male mountaineers, and with a fierceness in his black eyes as he turned them for a moment on Esther that made her half afraid of him.

Melindy's mother was trying to do the honors, and her words reached the other guest.

"Well, it ain't no use to talk, Jim. Melindy is just as sot in her way as ever her paw was before her. They all took after him, her and the boys, every last one of 'em; sot in their ways. I tell 'em it's a lucky thing for me that their ways is mostly mighty good ones. I give you my word on it, Jim, I didn't say a thing to hinder you; but I didn't coax her, neither. I allowed that it was Melindy's business, and I just let her alone; but I'm real sorry for you, Jim, and that's the truth."

Esther turned and looked curiously after the sullen man as he strode away, making no attempt at reply. Could this be a rejected suitor? Had girls like Melindy such questions to settle? And on what basis did they settle them? What a fearful problem love and marriage might become to one like Melindy! Would the girl confide in her?

Melindy was calm, as usual, and dignified. But she was also frank. It was plain that she felt the need of some one to talk to, and her mother with rare tact went away and left them alone.

"That was Jim Slicer," Melindy explained.

"Yes, him and me has been kind of keeping company ever since we was young ones. He ain't only about a year older than me."

"Are you going to be married to him, Melindy?"

The girl slowly and gravely shook her head.

"Naw, I ain't. I thought I was, for quite a spell, and he thought so, too, though he didn't ask me in so many words; but he says I knew well enough what he meant, and he thinks I'm mean; and he allowed that if there was another fellow in it he'd kill him as quick as he would a wildcat. As if that would do any good!" and there was a gleam of indignation in the honest gray eyes.

Esther asked the question that seemed necessary to start the story again.

"Naw, there ain't any other, and never has been, and I told him so. I didn't go for to be mean. I meant it, along back. I told maw that I meant every single thing he did, whatever that was."

"Then what made you change your mind, Melindy?"

“’Cause I found out that He didn’t like it.”

The reverence of the girl’s tone cannot be described. It marked unmistakably to whom the pronoun referred, and filled Esther with a kind of awe that showed in her voice.

“Melindy, tell me just what you mean. How do you know that He did not like it?”

Melindy regarded her seriously, even anxiously, and for a moment said nothing.

CHAPTER XIX

“WOULDN'T YOU?”

“**H**AVE you got religion?” she asked at last.

“Yes,” said Esther, unhesitatingly. “If you mean by that, do I know the Lord Jesus and serve Him? I do.”

A light broke over Melindy's serious face. “Then you will understand,” she said. “I'll tell you how it was. I like Jim, I guess I like him powerful; or I could if I had a mind to, and I always thought I should; but seven weeks ago last Sunday noon, he got mad at Mose Beakley. Mose has treated him mean, and keeps on doing it; and he's a member of the church, and Jim seems to think that it's along of that that makes him so powerful mean. Jim quarrelled with him all the way home from the mill, and then he come in here, and went on awful about the church, and religion, and

even about paw; he said paw wa’n’t no account since he had got religion. And I stood even that; I thought he was mad, and didn’t sense what he was saying; but then he begun to talk against Him! spoke His name right out, and used awful words. I couldn’t stan’ that, you know, and I got up from the table — we was eatin’ dinner — and I says to him, ‘Jim,’ says I, ‘anybody who talks so about that name ain’t no friend of mine and can’t never be, any more.’ And I walked in here, to my own room, and shut the door. And paw said I did right.”

“And that was the end of it?” said Esther, with a question in her voice.

“Naw; ’pears like the thing won’t never end, though my part is done. He seems to think I don’ mean it, and he keeps coming, an’ worry-ing maw. But it don’t do no good; ’course I wouldn’t give up a thing like that ’less I had to; ’nd if I had to, it couldn’t be changed, could it?”

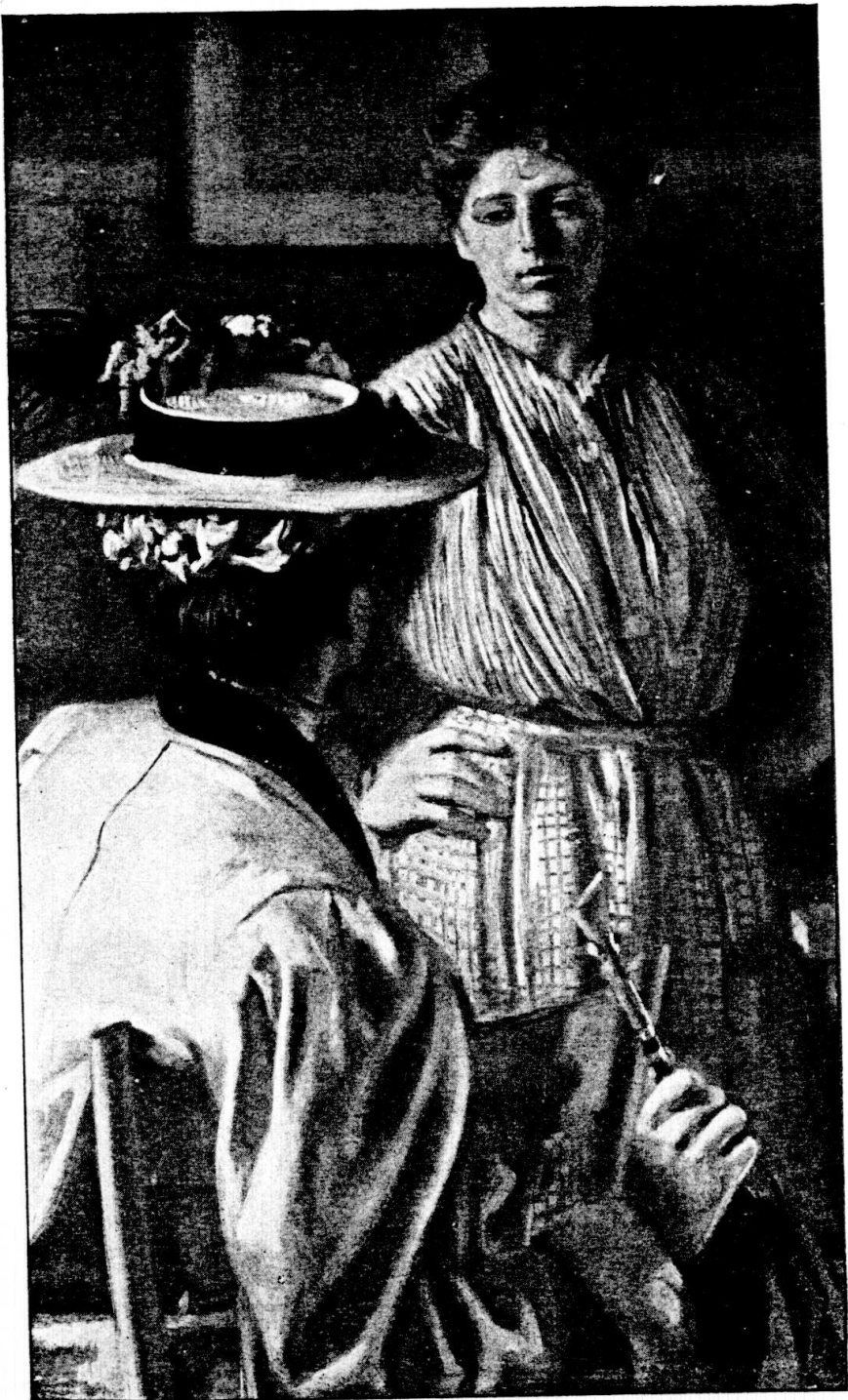
“But you don’t make it plain to me why you had to,” Esther said gently.

“Don’t I? Well, I ain’t much good at

makin' things plain. Maybe the verse that showed me, will explain it to you. I found it one day in my Bible: 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' 'Sure enough!' I says, right out loud, as soon as I read it. 'How can they?' An' it come to me that Jim an' I didn't agree about lots of things. He don' b'lieve much in the Bible; he ain't bad, like some, when he talks about it, but he says there's lots of things in it that ain't true; and he laughed about my talking to God and b'lieving that He heard me, an' — oh, well, all them things that mean the most to me, and that I've *made up my mind* shall get a hold of me and keep it, he don't agree with, and he laughs at 'em, and at me.

"I don' mind his laughing, only it shows, you know, that we don't agree; and when I asked Him all about it, He just made it plain that we couldn't walk together in a way to please Him, and then, of course, I quit."

Esther had not the slightest inclination to explain to the girl what she had learned incidentally in the Bible class during the winter that the famous text just quoted did not mean



“ THEN, OF COURSE, I QUIT.” — Page 262.

what she in her ignorance had supposed, but that, according to the best modern scholarship, it was simply an illustration which the old prophet used, to show to his people the certainty of the laws of cause and effect. “Do two men walk together except they have made an appointment to do so?” asked the prophet, talking about the desert where it would be strange indeed to have two meet by chance. This was, of course, very unlike Melindy’s commentary on it, but, what mattered? Was not the spirit of her thought all through the Bible? And had she not higher authority for it than the prophet? She had been to “*Him*,” and He had taught that she could not please Him, and take her life walk with one who would not have Him for a guide. The matter-of-course result was what impressed the listener, “Then, of course, I quit.” Did cause and effect follow so surely as that, always, in the moral world?

One phase of the subject she felt anxious to bring before this simple literalist.

“But, Melindy, perhaps you might have won him, after a while, to your way of thinking.”

“Naw,” the girl said promptly and gravely. “I thought about that a good while and tried to make it seem sensible; but I had to give it up. You see, *I can't do it now*. Jim lets me go to meetin' alone, an' he tramps over to the saloon and waits there for me till it's out; and he thinks it's awful silly in me to go; an' times when he wants me to go somewheres else instead, he's real kind of cross about it; an' I can see that if we was married, like as not he'd order me not to go at all! 'Course that wouldn't do no good; I sh'd go, all the same, if I thought I ought to; but it would be mighty uncomfortable. Mebbe I see it plainer, havin' maw for a kind of a sample. She ain't had a very happy life, maw ain't; and paw was a good deal better about her goin' to meetin' an' such things, b'fore she was married to him than Jim is now; she allows that herself, though she's kind of sorry for Jim, and tries by spells to take his part; but what's the use in thinking and talking about all them things anyway? If it ain't *right*, that settles it.”

“And you feel sure of that?”

“Why — wouldn't you? You see, I know

just as plain as though some one spoke and told me that to marry a man who didn't b'lieve in the Bible, and thought prayin' was silly, and going to meetin's was all stuff, an' didn't want me to live up to my ideas of what's right, would be putting myself straight into temptation. Now, wouldn't it? An' how could I do that, and keep prayin', 'Lead us not into temptation,' an' that's the prayer the Lord Jesus give me for a sample, ain't it? It seems plain to me.”

Then the carriage came, and Mrs. Kimball was calling to Esther that they must make haste or they would be late for the evening's appointment.

She was sorry to go; there were other questions that she would have liked to ask this girl of few opportunities and much prayer. During the drive home, Mrs. Kimball commented on her gravity, and asked if that red-cheeked mountaineer had given her the blues.

Esther laughed. “If you knew Melindy,” she said, “you would not be able to think of such a word in connection with her. She is a unique character. I don't believe I need

another Bible lesson to-day; she gave me one."

"Did she? I wish I could have heard it; they say those mountain people have the strangest ideas about religion! Mr. Hadley went to one of their meetings last winter, and really I could scarcely believe some of the queer things he told us about them. Don't you remember, Horace? The most singular expressions! some of them almost shocking. Yet they undoubtedly meant to be reverent. Tell us some of the things this girl said, Esther."

"Oh, there is nothing that can be told," Esther made haste to say. "She has unique ways of expressing her thoughts, but her ideas are very good, and quite orthodox, although she probably never heard the word."

"Are they? Then, isn't it a pity that you can't have her in your Bible class? She might be able to teach Mr. Langham some lessons."

"Now, Nellie," cautioned her husband, and the young wife shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"I don't care," she said. "I like Mr. Langham, of course — everybody does; but you know

as well as I do, Horace, how he talks, and I confess that I get vexed sometimes over the smooth composure with which he will brush aside some of the beliefs of my childhood, as though they were cobwebs. He has simply spoiled some of the Old Testament stories that were as real to me as the dear grandmother was, who told them. I don't know why people think it necessary to harp continually on such matters, even though they have made, or think they have made, some wonderful discoveries. What harm does it do to believe the Bible just exactly as we did when we were children; and what good has ever come of all the efforts to weaken our faith?”

“Isn't the truth always desirable, Mrs. Kimball?” It was Mr. Spencer who asked the question; he was listening from the back seat.

“Oh, I suppose so,” she said, turning her face toward him with a half-petulant laugh. “At least, you students are always boring for it. I hope you will find it some day, I am sure; and that it will do you half as much good as the things some of you like to call ‘myths’ have done others.”

"My wife wants to go the whole thing," said her husband, gayly. "Jonah swallowing the whale, or the whale swallowing Jonah — which was it, Nellie? — and all the rest of it."

"Oh, 'Jonah'!" said Mrs. Kimball. "Do let him rest. He has had to be the target of shallow critics for so long that he must be tired; I am sure I am, of hearing about him. If the people who are so fond of discussing what they call 'errors' would let them alone, and give their time to what they believe to be truth, I think it would be a sensible way to manage, and much more comfortable for the rest of us. And you are welcome, Horace, to tell our friend Mr. Langham that I think so, whenever you want to."

"Oh, but, I say," broke in Mr. Spencer, "is that being quite fair to Langham? Isn't that precisely what he is doing? I haven't been in his Bible class for two years, but I used to attend it regularly, and I never heard him bring in Jonah or any other disputed point, unless he was squarely asked a question. You wouldn't have a man evade questions, Mrs. Kimball?"

“Yes, I would,” she said stoutly. “If people ask silly questions, it is sometimes the best way in the world to evade them, especially if you can't tell them then and there that they are fools.”

“Langham is a misunderstood man,” persisted Mr. Spencer. “Some of the students, as well as some who are not students, and never will be, have misunderstood him and misquoted his words, and given an entirely wrong impression of him. I don't think there is a better Greek scholar or a more reverent student of the Bible in our college than Mr. Langham.”

“Of course not,” assented Mr. Kimball, cordially. “I know Langham thoroughly. He and I have been intimate friends since we were youngsters. Mrs. Kimball isn't very well acquainted with him yet, and some of the careless remarks that he has made when alone with us, she hasn't exactly understood. Langham is all right from whatever standpoint you look at him.” And he made haste to change the subject.

Esther's face remained grave. She had taken

no part in the conversation, but it had not relieved the stricture that her interview with Melindy had left upon her heart. She knew that it was none of those minor differences of Biblical interpretation that disturbed Mrs. Kimball, nor for that matter herself. For all that she certainly knew, despite what was perhaps merely a careless way of expressing himself on occasion, Mr. Langham was as orthodox as herself. The truth was it was not his opinions but his daily living that troubled both of them. Mrs. Kimball had married a man who respected religion and professed nothing more. Of course she believed that she could win him easily to the Christian faith which she professed, and almost equally of course she had been mistaken.

She found that the young man who went to church regularly through the vacations, and was always ready to walk with her afterward to her father's house, when conditions were changed and they occupied the same house, found a dozen excellent reasons why he should remain cosily with his books and cigars and let his wife do the church-going for both. She

had heard much of Mr. Langham and knew that his influence over her husband was strong. She had rejoiced in the discovery that he was a Christian and a Bible-class teacher. Then, of course, he would influence Horace in just the direction she desired. Alas for her hopes! Mr. Langham was a constant guest in the new little home, and was apparently quite as ready as her husband to spend his Sunday afternoons in the pretty library amid clouds of tobacco smoke, glancing over the Sunday newspapers and chatting about their contents. Or he was ready for a Sunday walk or drive, and a chat over the social functions of the past week and the plans for the coming one. "This is about the only let-up from the grind of the week that Horace and I have," he explained cheerfully to Mrs. Kimball.

He rarely went to his own church on Sunday evenings, but was a frequent visitor in town, for oratorios or other special services, and rejoiced over the fact that the Sunday schedule of trains was so conveniently arranged for suburbans.

In short, Mrs. Kimball, looking on with an

anxious heart, had, long before this, told herself bitterly that for all that she could see Horace had as much religion as Mr. Langham, but he knew better than to make professions and teach Bible classes! But Mrs. Kimball was a sorely disappointed woman and could not help being a trifle severe.

She had never, of course, exchanged confidences with Esther on this subject, and had never before spoken so plainly of Mr. Langham in her presence, yet the girl knew instinctively what the matron thought of him.

She tried to join in the gay talk that was presently floating about her, but her thoughts would hover uncomfortably around the subject they had left. She tried to condemn herself as narrow and prejudiced. What if Mr. Langham never came to the mid-week prayer-meeting, for instance, was a man's religion to be judged in such ways as that? He was a very busy man, a hard student, and one who held an important professorship; probably he had not an evening a week to give to the church. But he always found evenings for the public functions of the college:

debates, concerts, amateur plays, recitals, receptions, what not?

Of course. As a professor in the college he probably considered it his duty to sustain the efforts of the students in all these directions; no doubt the president expected it of him.

Well, as a professing Christian was it not his duty to sustain the functions of his own church? Had not his Chief a right to expect it of him? Besides, he frequently spared an evening for grand opera in town, or for some choice play at The Allerton. But that was in the way of recreation.

Poor Esther found it exceedingly difficult to arrange Professor Langham's duty or his conscience for him, and gave over the effort.

She went to the called meeting, as she had promised Mrs. Kimball that she would, and Mr. Langham was openly glad to see her. She was purposely late and the room was full, but he walked to the farther end of it to speak to her, and held her hand for a moment in a pressure that was unmistakable.

At the close of the conference he stationed himself near the front door, hat in hand, although

he was the guest of the Kimballs for the night. He stepped forward as Esther came from the sitting room whither she had retreated for a moment with Mrs. Kimball. Both Faith and Beatrice were with her.

"I am going home with the girls," she explained to Mrs. Kimball, loud enough for others to hear. "I haven't seen them in three months, you know."

"It is a charming evening for a walk," said Mr. Langham, promptly and cheerfully. "I may take it with you, I hope, young ladies, and see you safely home, Miss Randall, when you are ready?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Professor," Esther said quickly. "It is moonlight, you know, and there are three of us; we are not in the least afraid, and I am going to stay all night with the girls."

"Can you keep me?" she asked breathlessly, when they were on the street. "You must; I *had* to invite myself, because — well, there is a reason."

"The reason is plain enough," said Faith Farnham. "It was to Professor Langham, I

am sure! We are glad to get hold of you on any terms, aren't we, Blanche? But what a horrid child you are! I hadn't the least idea, Esther Randall, that you could be so barefacedly wicked!”

CHAPTER XX

HOME

THE day was warm even for July in that western prairie town, where the sun poured out its zeal untempered by shade trees, and where the residents told one another hopefully that July was generally their warm month, until July was past, then they shifted it to August, sometimes to September.

Breathless weather though it was, Mrs. Randall was ironing. Certain household deficiencies made prompt ironing a necessity whenever there were clothes in the wash, without regard to convenience.

Mrs. Randall was a small, pale woman; at least, she was pale ordinarily, but her present occupation had flushed her face and set beads of perspiration on her forehead. As a rule her face was sweet with a calm that suggested cheer; for, hedged about as her life was and had been for many years with daily burdens, as well as

cares and responsibilities, she had learned long ago Saint Paul's invaluable lesson, in whatsoever state she was "therewith to be content," even happy. This, as a rule; but on this day there was a new look on her face, that made her daughter Esther, who was washing the baking dishes, glance at her mother from time to time with a shadow of anxiety. Once she spoke her thought:—

"Mommie, dear, I do wish you would let that ironing wait for me. I shall be through here in a few minutes, and ironing is such warm work for you. Don't you feel well this morning, mother?"

"Why, yes, dear, I feel much as usual. If I don't look so, you must lay it to this wrapper." As she spoke, she glanced down at herself, and laughed. The wrapper had come in a home mission box and was of an ugly color and several sizes too large for her, besides never having fitted any one well.

"Is it the wrapper, mommie, that made you give such a long-drawn sigh, just now?"

"Did I? That was very foolish. I was probably thinking at the moment of nothing

more serious than this tablecloth which has a real hole in it this time; I am wondering how I can contrive to patch it, with no material in the least like it. Things will wear out so, Esther!"

"I know — but never mind. When I get that school which is waiting for me, and have earned money enough for a mattress and springs for your bed, and a new cook stove, with an oil range for Julys and Augusts, and new shades, or perhaps even blinds for the windows, and a few little matters of that kind, I shall launch out on tablecloths. I shouldn't wonder if I bought two new ones at once, sometime — think of that!"

But the mother did not laugh, as she generally did over Esther's nonsense. Instead, the faint, forced smile on her tired face made one think of tears.

The coming of a wagon with what the driver called a "snag of wood" created a diversion at that moment, for Esther must go and show where it was to be placed and chat a few minutes with the young fellow who was to place it; he was a member of her father's church and liked to receive proper attention from the minister's family.

Esther Randall had now been at home for a little more than a year, and had not only slipped into her former place in the household and the community, but had assumed new duties and responsibilities such as she would once have shrunk from as impossible. Of course among her father's people she was more of a power than ever; and what she had become in the home, neither father nor mother could have put into words.

The years had set lightly upon Esther; although she was now nearly twenty-three, she looked very little older than the girl of eighteen who had suddenly flitted from home mission work to a college five or six hundred miles distant, and had not returned until the four years' course was completed.

Had this arrangement been so much as thought of, at the first, parents and daughter would have drawn back from it as an impossibly long separation. But the years had planned it for them; each time hedging with increasing difficulties the home-going, and making more and more plain the duty of remaining.

And always Esther had remained with the

Victors, growing more attached to them, more apparently one of their number with each passing year; living through with them once and again the duties and anxieties connected with prolonged illness; going down with them in sympathy and service into the depths of sorrow, when the only son of the home went out gayly one morning, for a trial trip with his friend's new horse, and within the hour was brought back a lifeless body.

This was near the close of her second college year, and at a time when strenuous efforts were being made in the home missionary's family to secure the funds for Esther's home-coming.

It was she who wrote to them that Mrs. Victor was much prostrated by their trouble, and the doctor as well as the family seemed to be anxious about her. Then, of course, they were all sad and lonely and shrank peculiarly from having a stranger come among them just now; yet they certainly had never needed help more sorely; Mrs. Victor simply was not able to have any responsibility. Did father think — did they both feel that perhaps — she ought to stay?

The home missionary and his wife had been sad that morning over an anxiety that they could not hide from each other. Sacrifice and contrive as they would and had, they were still eleven dollars short of the sum that Esther's home-coming would need.

"And it might as well be —" said the father, then he stopped. Of what use to say to his wife that it might as well be eleven hundred dollars? He almost mentioned it though at family worship. At least, he laid bare before his Lord their poverty and their longing, and asked, not for money, but that their way might be made plain. And then, just as they arose from their knees, had come Esther's letter, and Mrs. Victor's need.

When he had read the letter aloud for the second time, the father looked at the mother and she brushed away the tears and smiled as she said, "Does that look mean that here is the answer to our prayer?"

But Aunt Sarah had not so considered it. She grumbled distinctly. "Things had come to a pretty pass when a niece of hers and a granddaughter of Benedict Bradford, not only

had to go out to service, but could not afford to come home in vacations, as all the girls she had ever heard of who had homes to come to had always done. But evidently Esther did not care anything about appearances. She was weaned from home, that was plainly to be seen; indeed, Aunt Sarah had foreseen such a result from the first. Esther *wanted* to stay! There were probably plenty of boys who were going to spend their vacations lounging about, having fun, and Esther was uncommonly fond of boys' society, she had always noticed that. What her father and mother were thinking about to allow her to stay on there, all summer, with total strangers, she could not imagine! What did Helen think her parents would have said to her if she had proposed to spend the vacation away from home, when she was at boarding school?"

This question seemed so utterly absurd in view of the contrast between her circumstances and surroundings as a school girl and her daughter's, that the sore-hearted mother, who missed Esther at times almost more than she felt she could endure, and who was at that moment very near to tears, experienced the reaction that comes

sometimes to such natures as hers, and laughed immoderately.

“What on earth are you laughing at?” said the indignant aunt. “I declare, Helen, you grow queer every day of your life! I used to think you had as sensitive feelings as the rest of us, but half a lifetime spent with such a matter-of-fact man as Spencer has had its effect on you, I suppose. But since Esther is an only child, I shouldn’t think you could be so easily weaned from her. It is a blessing that mother can’t see you,” she added in growing indignation, as with every added phrase Mrs. Randall’s half-hysterical laughter increased. “She wouldn’t know you.”

But Esther had stayed for another year, and the modest wages that the Victors had been able to pay for her vacation work had assisted materially in the winter’s expenses; which was peculiarly fortunate, for about that time there had been a “cut” in the salaries of home missionaries, and what had required careful economy before called for pinching.

When the third vacation time loomed in the near distance, Katherine Victor was planning to

be married on the fourth of September, and by that time no member of the Victor family believed it possible to get ready for a wedding without Esther's help. There was also another reason for her staying that appealed to Esther almost as much as her own straitened purse, and that was the straitened circumstances of the Victors. Never other than perplexed as to how the two ends could be made to meet, certain losses, combined with unexpected business changes, had made their problem more difficult this year than ever before. "The truth is, mommie," wrote Esther, "they cannot afford to do without me. That looks horribly egotistical, doesn't it, written out? But what I mean is, that they cannot get any one for the summer who would take my place without paying very high wages, and that they simply cannot do. Besides, though 'I say it as shouldn't', mommie, there is no hired person to be had who could at all take my place. How could it be expected? I have been with them as one of the family for three years, and besides, didn't you bring me up and teach me how to work? It will not be too hard for me, because, when the

special stress comes, I can have my beloved 'Melindy' to help me; think of that!

"Mother and father, dear, I don't tell you what it is to me to think about doing without you some more, and writing as though it were already a settled matter; but, you see, I know you both so well, that I am as sure as though I heard you say it that you will see it to be my duty. Of course I say nothing about the saving of money for us, because I truly don't believe that would count; I think I could almost beg my way home from door to door if that were all that was in the way."

It seemed incredible when they thought of it, but they did without her for another year.

"Esther is right," the mother had said. "We *couldn't* do it simply to save the money; but that poor woman does seem to need her."

This was after they had read the appeal from Mrs. Victor, enclosed in Esther's letter. But Aunt Sarah sniffed.

"They better adopt her," she said. "She seems to belong more to them than to you. I'm going to write and ask her if she will condescend to work for her own family next summer, pro-

vided we can scrape up two dollars a week for wages. I guess if she knew how much you needed help, she would be more eager to work at home."

Mrs. Randall answered only with a patient smile; she understood Aunt Sarah and knew that her tongue was always worse than her acts. There was no fear that she would write to Esther that which would trouble her; she was merely indulging in the habit of a lifetime and saying spiteful sounding words that had little or no meaning.

And then had come the last college year with Commencement week drawing perilously near. "The week for which all these years have been lived," Esther wrote gayly, and said not a word about perplexities. But the mother knew that there were perplexities. The question, which had been a more or less anxious one every year since her daughter emerged from childhood, "Wherewithal shall she be clothed?" took on unusual importance, at least in the mother's eyes, as the intervening weeks lessened. She was even guilty of lying awake nights, after busy and exhausting days, trying to contrive some way of

getting for Esther the graduation robes that she knew were needed.

Missionary boxes, which are alternately the hope and despair of home missionaries, this family with their quarter century of experience knew too much about to build on.

"I don't see, little mother, but you and I are shut up to prayer," the missionary said, when his wife, who had waited for Aunt Sarah to leave the room, asked if he had thought of anything yet.

"Haven't you noticed, Helen, how many times, especially of late years, when we reach an emergency, the way out does not appear until, humanly speaking, there isn't another way to consider?"

It happened so again. That day's mail brought a letter heralding a coming box; not from any church but from their very own.

"Mother has been working at the quilt and the under garments and the socks for Spencer for a long, long time," wrote sister Mary. "And, as for me, it seemed as though I should never get the set embroidered for Esther; I began them when she first went to college; but I have so little time for such work in these days, and my

hand has lost some of its cunning, I am afraid, but I enjoyed making them. Then, last week we had a visitor. I must write you about her as soon as I get time. It was Cousin Celia Westover. Do you remember Cousin Celia? She was a delicate, pretty girl; now she is a stout, gray-haired, rather homely woman with a daughter the age of yours. They are in mourning for the only son, and so unreconciled to his death that it is sad to hear her talk about it. I must tell you what a strange visit we had, just as soon as I can get time. She came only for a day; she said she had a feeling that perhaps 'Aunt Priscilla' could help her; and mother could, you know, if anybody in this world could; I think she went away a little comforted. She saw us at work over the things, and we told her about the box and about Esther. She remembered you as a 'sweet little thing' and thought it was so queer that you had a grown-up daughter. She did not seem to remember that you are a year or two older than she! Then she sighed over her daughter's mourning; said 'Poor Florence hated black and did not look well in it, yet she was so crushed, poor child, that she would not even

wear white dresses.' Well, the week after she reached home came a box to us by express, the contents to be sent to you in memory of 'the nice quarrels we used to have together in the dear old days.' She said when she was here that the week she visited us, you and she differed about everything under the sun, but I don't remember anything about it, do you? The box I rejoice over, because I think there are some things in it that Esther will like. That white dress, for instance. It isn't new, to be sure, but it is very nice looking, and so long that I think Esther can hem it up where it is frayed. If I had her measure, I would fix it for her, as I suppose she gets little time to sew. It ought to be fixed before it is laundered, which is the reason why I didn't do it up; but mother says if you have not lost the skill you had when a girl, you wouldn't thank any of us to attend to that part. She never wearies of telling how beautifully you ironed and mended a flimsy muslin for that wild little second girl we had once. Emma, her name was. Do you remember her? She had cried over not being able to go to a party among her mates, because she had no dress to

wear, and mother said you made her old muslin look as though it was just out of the store. You were a very remarkable girl, my dear Helen, did you know it?"

Over this part of the letter the home missionary and his wife laughed together, and then the husband kissed from his wife's faded face a stray tear. That dear mother! how long it was since she had seen her youngest child! and how sweet it was that she liked to talk about her, and to linger tenderly over the uneventful doings of her girlhood. Was she never in the flesh to rest eyes upon her youngest born again?

CHAPTER XXI

HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONINGS

IF the two home missionaries were jubilant over the coming of that home box and saw in it a direct answer to their prayers, what shall be said of Esther's astonished delight when her portion of it reached her?

She had been very brave, on paper, not once had she even hinted to the dear home people that every girl graduate save herself was to be arrayed, on Commencement Day, in white robes; while she, who had taken the honors, and who occupied because of this the leading place on the programme of the day's doings, must needs appear in that one "good" dress which had already done faithful duty during two seasons. Because of her silence she fondly supposed, silly girl that she was, that her father and mother would know nothing about her embarrassments and be saved anxiety at least on that account. For the girl knew only too well how

impossible a new dress would be this year, when travelling expenses must at last be provided for, and when there had been within the year a second "retrenchment" on the home board.

And then had come, all unheralded to her, that wonderful box with its beautiful white dress remodelled by her mother's skilful hands, and laundered as only she could do it. There it lay, a mound of billowy loveliness smiling up at her, and being trimmed, presently, with ravishing rainbow hues as Esther gazed at it through a mist of tears. Dear mother! dear father! what had they done? *How* had they done it? What more could they possibly have gone without? The letter, with its story of Cousin Celia Westover's daughter Florence in mourning, came as a blessed relief. Esther both laughed and cried over that letter.

"I will own, dear, that I have cried for joy over these garments," the mother wrote; "but don't be troubled, darling, they are not damp; it was before they were washed and ironed. I will confess now that we, your father and I, have lain awake of nights talking it all over, wondering what our girlie would do for suitable

garments in which to carry her honors. We prayed a great deal, and we even hoped that a box would come different from the usual one, but not once did our faith rise to the heights of expecting one from our very own homes. (Have I told you yet that your father's home people heard of the box and sent, each of them, a present to him? I don't believe I have, but I will get to it in my next letter; this must be finished to go in the box.)

“Take it all in all, it was a strange experience. Do you know, dear child, I had to give it all up and be, at least in a measure, reconciled to your old blue dress, before the white one came. The bit of lace, dearest, is what my mother wore on her wedding day and I wore it on mine. I will own that I was saving it for yours, dear heart, but it will be ready for that, and be all the more valuable for having served on such an occasion as is before you. Oh, that we were to be there to see!

“The gloves you are to accept with your father's dear love; he was so glad to be able to get them for you himself.”

It was then that Esther dropped the letter

and let the tears have their way. Those dainty white gloves seemed to have embalmed in them all the toils and sacrifices and cheerful privations of the years. How brave they had been, that father and mother, in doing without her and doing for her with steady, cheerful self-forgetfulness! Could she ever, even in slight degree, make up to them what they had given and borne for her?

But she had been fine on Commencement Day. Three days before that she had written to her mother what she called its prelude. "Everything is ready; I cannot think of another thing except to *do* it, and for that I must wait three days. We are to be so fine, so *very* fine, you cannot imagine it, I am sure. IT lies on the bed at this moment, and the class poem that IT is to read lies close beside IT. I use those capitals advisedly, and truly it seems as though IT and not I was to read the thing. If you could see IT now, mommie, you would notice that IT has a style about IT that I never had. Assure father that the pronoun refers solely to the dress and not for one moment to the poem; which, however, I must frankly own,

is vastly improved by his criticism. O mother! and O father! you both know how full my heart is, don't you? And then — to think that by next week this time I shall be on my way *home!*”

At last the day came when every lounge at the post-office and corner grocery of the straggling little town knew that “Elder Randall's girl” was coming home, on the morning accommodation, and that the minister had already gone to the station to meet her. For by that time the railroad had decided to accommodate them with a station and two trains a day.

It was an interesting home-coming, with features about it that were almost embarrassing. At first the happy parents were all but overwhelmed with the changes that the years had wrought. The girl had gone out from them filled with a certain kind of energy, yet shrinking painfully from the great world about which she knew so little, and with a sense of self-depreciation that was in itself painful. She had returned to them a self-possessed, well-balanced young woman ready to assume her full share of life's responsibilities. That, they had expected. They had not care-

fully watched her mental growth through the years without realizing, at least in a degree, how she had developed. But there was something more—that curious something so quickly felt, so elusive when one attempts to describe it, which we sometimes try to define by the word “culture” and sometimes add “elegance,” and know that neither is quite satisfactory. Whatever it should be named, it was Esther Randall’s almost in perfection. But there was yet more, and this change became more and more marked as the days passed. No miser ever exulted over his gold as Spencer Randall exulted in the evidence of this kind of change in his daughter.

“It is as though she had come into her inheritance,” he told his wife. “She was a daughter of the king when she went away, I had never a doubt of it, but now she recognizes herself as of royal blood and proposes to live up to her name. I mean the great NAME, Helen, that is above every other; but I am more pleased than ever before that we named her ‘Ester Ried.’ I am certain now that it is not a misnomer.”

Perhaps, however, it was Aunt Sarah who was

the most astonished over the changes in Esther. Or was it almost dismay that she felt? There was a sense in which she had lost a favorite occupation, although she did not realize that — Esther could not be nagged!

Aunt Sarah's views on certain questions had not changed, and she boldly presented them, as soon as occasion offered, with an odd feeling that she must show her colors and not allow herself to be "put down" by this college-bred young woman. But although there was no indication that Esther's view had changed, either, the arguments that used to make her eyes blaze with indignation, and call forth keen retorts from a well-equipped tongue, were received now with quiet air and a gentle, "Do you think so, Aunt Sarah?" Then would follow a change of subject, skilfully introduced.

"The girl has lost her spirit," Aunt Sarah told herself, but the explanation did not satisfy her.

"Esther has grown pretty," she said to her sister. "I'll say that much for her. I never expected to see her carry herself with so much elegance and — well, what might be called style.

To be sure, it is no more than one ought to expect, in a granddaughter of Benedict Bradford; still, with such a beginning as she had, I must say I don't understand it. She has been with common enough folks, those Victors, and even with them she occupied the place of a servant. It is really remarkable! I should like to have her cousin Lucia see her. I don't know how she, with all her advantages, can appear any better than Esther does."

This was very great praise, indeed. "Cousin Lucia," the trial of Esther's young girlhood because she was always being held up to point an ugly contrast, was the only daughter of her mother's only brother who had married into a wealthy family, and had tried to keep his wife and children surrounded by the luxuries to which the wife had always been accustomed and which she counted mere necessities. It had required, the home missionaries suspected, shrewd management on the part of their brother to maintain his establishment and lavish upon Lucia all that her mother believed she needed; but it had been done, and the cousin, who was a trifle younger than Esther, had always been the

far-away star in Esther's sky whose brilliance there was no hope of equalling, at least in Aunt Sarah's eyes. And here she was, being favorably compared with her!

"She has certainly made the most of her poor little chances; still —" and her Aunt Sarah would make a distinct pause and bestow a troubled look upon her sister. On one occasion she gave voice to her anxieties.

"Doesn't it ever worry you, Helen, to think what Esther is going to do with all that elegance of hers? It is simply wasted out here; there is no use in talking about Joram Pratt now! though he is as good a boy as ever lived, and is just as completely bound up in her as he was before she went away. I must confess that sometimes it seems to me that it would have been better to have kept her right here at home, and had her marry him. Who is there for her now, out in this forsaken country, and there is no more prospect of her ever getting away from it than there was before she went to college. She doesn't seem to have found any one there. I thought, at one time, that that 'Professor —' what was his name? that her letters were full

of, was keeping company with her, but it seems he wasn't. I don't see, for my part, what you are going to do with her."

As a rule her sister had learned to meet all such remarks with good-humored indifference, pretending to pass them off as mere froth not designed for serious consideration; but on this occasion she had been much tried beforehand, and Aunt Sarah's bald and businesslike way of disposing of her daughter made her shudder, and drew from her lips the exclamation:—

"O Sarah, don't!" and then she was instantly sorry.

"Dear me," said Aunt Sarah, "what did I say, I wonder? You couldn't look more distressed if I had been talking against the child, instead of praising her, as I am sure I was. I wouldn't be so silly about her, if I were you. Of course the girl will marry, sometime, if she gets a chance. I suppose you want her to, don't you? I don't suppose your heart is hopelessly set on her being an old maid, is it?"

"Why, of course, we shall have to wait for such experiences, until they come. Who is proposing to do any other way? All I said was

that there wasn't the ghost of a chance for them to come — out in this backwoods. She won't marry the men who are here, and those she would be willing to marry won't come here; and it's a pretty poor lookout. I don't think there is any occasion, at present, for you to act as though a great calamity had happened to you, just because somebody spoke the word 'marriage.' ”

The poor little mother thus caught and silenced could only be glad that her outspoken sister had not been able to see into her heart and understand the meaning of her exclamation. It was not that she shrank from the thought of her daughter's marriage — she knew that the *mother* in her was capable of unlimited self-sacrifice for that daughter's sake; it was the realization of the life to which the child had returned that unnerved her mother.

Aunt Sarah's words had sounded almost coarse, and utterly hateful; the more so, undoubtedly, because there was in them an element of truth. “Who is there for her out in this forsaken country?” Not, who is there for her to marry? The mother's refined soul

recoiled from such a putting of the serious question which involved a lifetime of happiness or misery; but, putting all such thoughts aside, what was there here for Esther that was worthy of her?

Work for God, plenty of it? Yes, and she rejoiced that her child had come home keenly alive to such needs and opportunities, and had taken hold of the work with power. But — who was there for companionship in work? Where could Esther look for friendship among those of her own age? She, the mother, had spent almost a quarter century here in happy service, but she had had her husband to lean upon. Could she have done it alone? Could Esther do it without one of her own age and condition to work with?

It was problems such as these that came to trouble the mother's leisure moments. Was she willing to own even to herself that the girl's coming back heart-free had in it a shade of disappointment? She, too, had indulged her thoughts with regard to the professor whose name used to appear so frequently in her daughter's letters as to excite the interest of

both father and mother, and then suddenly had almost entirely disappeared. She used to smile, at first, over that disappearance, and believe that she understood it. If the fond mother had owned to the thought of her heart, it would have been that surely no heart-free young man could come into daily, friendly contact with her daughter without loving her. She spent some anxious hours in trying to be sure, without knowing very much about it, whether this professor was just the sort of person she would have chosen for her daughter; then smiled over her folly and admonished herself that it would be the part of wisdom to wait until she had something to worry over. Of course, there was nothing serious, or Esther would have told her.

Yet it had been serious enough; and the only reason that the mother had not heard about it was that she had helped to instil in her daughter such rigid principles that she had not yet decided as to whether it would be quite right to share, even with her mother, a matter that had become, in a sense, Professor Langham's secret.

CHAPTER XXII

WHY SHE "QUIT"

FOR Professor Langham had been in thorough earnest. It had taken him some time to decide this for himself. He had weighed carefully, and with more attention to detail than young men in his frame of mind generally succeed in giving, the disadvantages in the situation. On such a subject it is something to be able to own that there are disadvantages. This man owned to them frankly. Esther Randall, he admitted, had been educated on narrow lines; her father was a home missionary of the radical, or fanatical, sort, and had succeeded to a remarkable degree in permeating his daughter's mind with his ideas. Her work in college, well done though it was, evidently counted for little, so far, as compared with the moulding process that had been going on for years in her home. It was undeniable that he and she differed radically with regard to matters

of some importance. As he came to know her more intimately was it not probable that other points of difference would appear? Was it not altogether possible that these differences would make a difficult problem of life together?

Mr. Langham had taken months to study this matter, and had finally reached the conclusion that, differ though they might and must, Esther Randall was the one woman in the world whom he wanted for himself. He came back from his long vacation fully resolved upon his course of action, and making not the slightest provision for possible decisions that Esther might have reached in the meantime. In truth, Mr. Langham, without being consciously or in the least oppressively conceited, had yet a conviction, or an impression, that he would be able to win any girl on whom he chose to fix his affections. The estimate in which he had heretofore been held in his world justified such an impression.

He was eager to walk home with Esther, on the first evening of the new year, and almost resented her spending the night with her friends. Why could she not have changed a

plan of so little consequence when she saw his evident disappointment? In that case they could have seen the girls safely home and had the long walk back together. As he walked back to Mr. Kimball's alone that evening, he told himself that, as soon as he had the right to criticise Esther on other matters than her studies, he should tell her plainly that such coyness was unworthy of her and savored of the very young girl or the conscious flirt. But he never told her anything of the kind. Her "coyness" increased upon her to such an extent, and she grew so skilful in managing, that the weeks passed without his having secured that interview which he had meant to have at once.

There were times when Mr. Langham was so annoyed by the state of things as to be almost tempted to feel that he had been mistaken in his estimate of this girl. How could any girl of refinement steadily plan to circumvent and annoy a man who had plainly made known his desires and intentions? Did she think to tease him into a more open manifestation of his regard for her, and thereby give the entire college

a chance to gossip about their affairs? But that thought was unworthy of her. She had never shown the slightest tendency toward common coquetry. Nor did she now, he was obliged to own. Nothing could be quieter or more correct than her manner: she was even careful not to shun him conspicuously, and yet, contrive as he might, that strictly private interview could not be arranged in the incidental way that he desired to bring it about, nor indeed in any way unless he risked a definite request to see her alone at a given time — and he shrank from that. Who could tell but, in her present mood, she might decline to make an appointment with him?

Meantime Esther was by no means coquetting, nor did she misunderstand the character of Mr. Langham's interest in her. What she was trying to do was to learn, not her own heart, — there were times when she felt painfully sure of that, — but the right way. Certain homely words of Melindy's persisted in repeating themselves in her brain.

"Then, of course, I quit," Melindy had said. The occasion was when she had discovered that

she and Jim Slicer could not "walk together in a way to please Him." Discovering this, she had "quit," with as much promptness and directness as she would have shown with regard to any other duty.

Evidently Melindy had never learned that love is an exceptional passion, not subject to guidance and control, but must sway the creature whither it will, without regard to duty or even propriety. Esther Randall's problem to the looker-on would not have appeared by any means so simple as Melindy's, from an ethical standpoint; for whereas Jim Slicer "did not believe much in the Bible, and laughed about praying," was not Mr. Langham a professor of religion and a Bible teacher? What more could a reasonable being desire? Yet Esther, mentally quoting Melindy again, knew there were "lots of things" about which they did not agree — things which she believed were vital to her spiritual growth. Moreover, she felt, rather than realized, that if they were much together, it would be she, and not he, who would slowly change.

And yet — a whole volume of possible self-

renunciation and pain were wrapped up in those two short words.

While she still hesitated, sure of but one thing, — that she must not accept Mr. Langham's personal advances while she was still in a doubtful mind, — there came a week that quickened her spiritual nature and placed some things in a clearer light.

By invitation of a number of the leading churches in the town, there came a man of national reputation to lead an eight-days series of Bible meetings, avowedly for the purpose of deepening the Christian life in individuals, and of winning outsiders to Christ. On the part of the pastors an earnest effort was made to have their people set apart these eight days to the service of the church, so far as possible. Even Dr. Armitage, who was not supposed to look favorably on special efforts of any kind, and who had not united in the original call for these meetings, still gave courteous notice of them from his pulpit and urged upon his people the wisdom of attending at least some of them.

After the first day or two, the character of the meetings and the undoubted scholarship

as well as spirituality of the leader, won even the indifferent to interest, and the attendance was excellent. Several of the college professors spoke in unstinted praise of the Bible expositions, and of the methods employed in the meetings, urging upon the students to give to them what time they could spare. To this end they extended the date of an examination and gave out less work than usual.

But Mr. Langham was not numbered among these professors. He said not a word against the meetings, and not a word in their praise; he seemed unable to spare any evenings for them. Not only this, but he gave his personal support to, and was present at, a social function on the evening when it had been announced that the meeting would be in the interest of college students. Some one made bold to ask him why he did this, and it was reported that he said the social function had been planned before the meetings were announced, and also that religious specialization of this sort was not, in his judgment, in very good taste.

Whatever else that series of meetings may have accomplished, they convinced Esther

Randall that she and Melindy were having a like experience. She owned to her own heart that, like Melindy, she "cared a heap," and could care "powerful" if she would let herself; but that, also like Melindy, she must "quit." She knew, at last, that she could not pray, "Lead me not into temptation," and choose for her closest companionship one like Mr. Langham.

"An' that's the prayer the Lord gave us for a sample, ain't it?" Melindy had asked.

After that, Esther made as honest an effort as a young woman could to save Mr. Langham from any open avowal of his feelings, but in this she failed. The matter had gone too far before she discovered her own soul. Mr. Langham reached the hour when he all but demanded an interview as his right, and went away from it a deeply astonished as well as a disappointed man. He was not vain above the average of those born to good fortune, and petted alike by family and circumstances; it simply had never occurred to him that any girl whom he should honor with his preference could refuse so great a gift as himself.

It had been a very painful interview to Esther,

because, compelled by the truth to admit that, but for his religious views — or want of views — she might have answered differently, he tried to argue with her; and she was not ready to argue. What she wanted to do was to *live* Christ, not argue about Him.

Mr. Langham had gone away at last, hurt, disappointed, almost angry, but by no means hopeless. He simply could not conceive of this as being a final decision. He told himself that the girl was under the influence of an unnatural religious excitement; that he ought to have waited until the spasm of fanaticism connected with those special meetings had had time to subside. Esther, by reason of her home environment, was peculiarly susceptible to such emotions; she came of a long line of religionists who seemed every now and then to “awaken to the vital need or imminent peril of some of the Lord’s children, and seemed never to have discovered that the saving of individual souls was a losing game.” Of course he need not wonder that a girl so trained lost her head as soon as there was a special wave of emotional effort; when she had had time to think sanely, she

would surely realize what an absurd barrier of sea foam she had tossed up between them. He, a church member and Bible teacher, being objected to on religious grounds! That would be enough if he were an unbeliever.

Because of this method of reasoning, when the first warmth of his indignation subsided, Mr. Langham commenced a carefully arranged series of daily courtesies and kindnesses that were harder for Esther than aloofness would have been, and bided his time.

But the "religious spasm" did not pass. On the contrary, as the weeks passed, and then the months, and the long vacation came again into view, Mr. Langham went away for the summer with the strange conviction pressing upon him that from a sense of duty, and that solely on religious grounds, this strange girl meant to deliberately and permanently turn away from a position such as could not surely be expected to be offered more than once in a lifetime!

However, something was gained when Mr. Langham began really to understand that he had been refused. It had all been hard for

Esther, harder than, without having lived through the experience, she could have imagined possible. She had been mercifully preserved from that false and foolish idea which some girls indulge — that she must be a lifelong victim to a hopeless love. She knew that the power of Christ over the human heart was supreme. That He was able not only to control and subdue, but also to eradicate, if necessary, any human passion. Yet there were times when the girl shed a few bitter tears and asked herself if she could ever hope to overcome entirely the sense of loss and loneliness. The passing dream had been very sweet. Sometimes she wondered if Melindy still missed Jim Slicer.

Not a word of it all was written to her mother. At first she could not write. There was no question awaiting decision; there had not, even from the first, been much doubt in her mind as to her father's and mother's opinions; why should she burden them with the story of a loss? For, at least, she had lost a friend.

When the months and then the years passed, and Esther, living her full, eager life, grew heart-free again and knew that she was happy, with

a happiness that her young girl days had never known or even imagined, surely there was no occasion, then, to tell the story of that closed volume. Was there not a sense in which it was not her story, but belonged exclusively to Mr. Langham?

It is probable that she was helped to more rapid soundness by the fact that in the middle of Professor Langham's second year of disappointed ambitions he received and accepted a call to an Eastern college, having succeeded in convincing the College Board that there were important reasons why he should make the change at once.

Over his going, Faith Farnham was curious, and questioned as closely as her sense of propriety would admit, and learned nothing. She talked much about him, and by degrees Esther came to understand that her friend's interest in him was deeper than her own had ever been. "Poor Faith!" she said softly to herself when this conviction took full hold upon her.

"And I sent him away! If he could have stayed, perhaps—" Then she remembered that there had been a time when it smote her

like a blow to think of Faith being in his company and she left out. Over that she smiled.

"People change," she told herself. "I shouldn't mind it now; if he were only — well, *different*, I should like it for her; but perhaps even he could help her." She did not intend the fine sarcasm involved in that phrase "even he"; it floated through her mind unawares.

Meantime there came to Esther that indescribable joy like unto no other that this life has for us; she won her first trophy for the cross. Selma Victor took a firm, jubilant, outspoken stand for Christ; and owned, and was glad to own, that it was Esther who had won her. She had been frank, too, in her confession — Selma was always frank.

"It wasn't the kind of religion you had when you first came to our house, that interested me," she told her. "I didn't care two straws for that; I had seen the same kind hundreds of times, and always poked fun at it, on the sly, so as not to trouble mother. But one time, well, it was before Katherine had the fever, all of a sudden it seemed to me you got different. I never have understood what made it, but it

wasn't possible not to notice and think about it. Esther, honestly, your very face looked different. I used to watch you and study you, and think that if I could return to the days when I believed in fairies I should know that the original Esther Randall had been spirited away and another one dropped into her place. I don't hesitate to tell you that I liked the new one a hundred per cent better, but I was always curious over the change. Don't you know yourself, Esther, that you suddenly, why, in a single night it seemed to me, were different?"

"Yes," said Esther, with a sweet solemnity, "I know it, Selma, and I have great joy in explaining it. I was a Christian before that day; but I was never happy in my religion; it was half-hearted; I lived always in an interrogation: 'Ought I to do this? May I do that? Must I deny myself the other?' It was a dreadful life, Selma; don't you ever try to live it. On the day I fully settled it that Jesus Christ was to be the centre around which every act and word and thought of mine were to revolve forever, and opened my heart to the fulness of His promise that His grace was sufficient for every

temptation, why—He simply fulfilled His word, Selma, and came. Look at the verse to-night when you read, and see how plain the promise is: 'If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me.' Think of it—the intimacy of the relation!"

"But," said the young disciple, wondering, curious, "what did you *do*, Esther?"

"Opened the door," said Esther, with a bright, glad smile, "and He came in and took possession. Try it, dear; it can be understood only by experience."

CHAPTER XXIII

SURPRISES

AND now the scattered threads have been taken up, and the time reached when Esther Randall had been at home for more than a year, and was in the kitchen with her mother.

No, wait, there is still another change to be chronicled: one so surprising and bewildering that, although nearly six months had passed since it burst upon them, Esther was not yet able to speak of it without a little catch in her breath that meant astonishment and gratitude and fun.

Uncle Joram Pratt, young Joram's father, had been a character in that frontier town since its first settlement. Ignorant and shrewd and quaint, he had the respect and confidence of every one in the community. To everybody he was "Uncle Joram," and for everybody he had a kind word and a cheery laugh, as well as

something better, when occasion offered. No one could remember a time when Uncle Joram was not ready to supplement his cheerful laugh with kindly deeds. He lived five miles "out," in the parlance of the villagers, with his one treasure, young Joram, his only child and the pride and joy of his life. They had lived alone since the timid and tired little mother laid down her cares and entered into rest, when young Joram was a tow-headed boy of ten. Uncle Joram, sorrowing as men with great unselfish hearts must sorrow for anything small and frail that they have done their best to nourish in an unfriendly soil, yet took brave hold of his burden, determined to be both father and mother to the boy. And he had succeeded nobly, according to his opportunities. Young Joram Pratt, at the age of twenty-five, was as fine a specimen of a clean-souled, honest, earnest, good-natured, shock-headed, country farmer as one could wish to find. As often as Esther looked at him, after her home-coming, she thought of "Melindy," and a great longing arose within her to become a match-maker. What a wonderful contrast to Jim Slicer would

Joram be! The idea clung to her; she had a realizing sense of the probable loneliness of Melindy's life since she and Jim had "quit."

She became intimate friends again with Joram, so intimate that, despite the evident chasm between them, Aunt Sarah actually began to indulge in hopes that simply amused the girl's mother. And always Esther was talking to him about Melindy. She described the two-roomed cabin in which the girl lived, and explained in detail how she, with remarkable energy and skill, had slowly transformed the place until it was really a pretty home. She even told how Melindy had been wooed and almost won by Jim Slicer, and why she had at last refused him. And Joram listened and nodded his appreciation, and asked now and then an intelligent question. Over that last story he pondered, with all his soul in his eyes.

"I swan!" he said at last. "That was a big thing for a girl to do, now, wasn't it? I should have thought that would have fetched him round."

Esther shook her head and spoke positively: "It didn't, Joram; he wasn't man enough

for that. He grew meaner and uglier all the time, and let her see, very plainly, that he wasn't worthy of even being remembered as a friend."

Suddenly, into the midst of Esther's delicious plans, while she was even discussing with her mother the possibility of getting Melindy out in some way to visit her, came the astounding surprise. Aunt Sarah exploded it upon them one evening just as, lamp in hand, she was starting for her room.

"I've got something to tell you all, and I guess I may as well do it now as any time. I shall not be here with you much longer."

Her sister turned quickly toward her with a sudden stricture at her heart. Sarah had been a trial in some ways, — that could not in the interests of honesty be denied, — but she was her very own sister, and was beloved. Could she be feeling ill? No, surely! She had never looked better than at that moment. There was a becoming flush on her usually pale face, which deepened under her sister's anxious gaze, and she hurried her words: —

"I meant to tell you before, but I couldn't manage it, somehow. Joram Pratt and I have

decided to be married. We thought of asking you to have it here, and then we decided that it would make less trouble all around to have it done quietly at the church next Wednesday night after prayer meeting. We aren't going to make any fuss. Just stand up there, as we are, with whoever happens to come to prayer meeting for witnesses, and after it is done, young Joram will be there waiting, with the new carriage, and he will drive his father and me home, and that is all there will be of it. Good night, all of you." And she shot out of the room. The blood in Esther's body, which had seemed to her to stand suddenly still with the shame and pain of it, made a great leap just then, and she felt like shouting. For a single terrible moment she had believed that her aunt was talking about young Joram. When she said, "He will drive his father and me home," light broke in upon her and she could have laughed for joy.

Mrs. Randall dashed after her sister, leaving the father and daughter to enjoy their surprise together.

When the mother returned an hour later, she

had been crying a little, but her face was bright, and the first words she said were:—

“Spencer, she really loves him!”

“The ways of the human heart are past finding out!” said the home missionary, cheerfully. “But there isn’t another big fellow on this big earth more worthy of being heartily loved than that same Joram Pratt, senior;— unless it is his son. Shall we sing the long-metre doxology, daughter?”

But a more wonderful experience was to follow. Despite certain grave, not to say anxious, talks between Mr. Randall and his wife, and occasionally Esther, when, the first excitement having subsided, they voiced their fears that their relative had carried trouble and sorrow to a heretofore singularly peaceful home, Joram Pratt’s round, good-natured face did not change unless it took on, if possible, an added twinkle of content. It was Aunt Sarah who changed; a marvellous change it was for her, for she grew content. She tended her poultry and counted her eggs and cared for her young chickens, and skimmed her brimming pans of milk, and brought fresh eggs and rich cream and golden

butter for the home missionaries' table, and boasted over everything, taking not the least of her satisfaction in the fact that "their Joram" was the best boy that ever lived, as she had always told Esther.

When some months had passed, the missionary with a feeling that was almost akin to awe told his wife of another change.

"Sarah wants to come into the church. And she doesn't want to use her church letter; she wouldn't present it, you know, always making the excuse that she might soon go back East; but now she says she doesn't want to have anything to do with it, that it doesn't represent Joram's kind of religion, and she doesn't care for any other. So she is coming in on profession. Helen, he has won her for the Lord!"

"I wanted so much to help Aunt Sarah," Esther confessed to her mother, laughing, while the tears brimmed her eyes. "And to think that it was meant that Joram Pratt should do it!"

Mrs. Randall had not laughed over her daughter's nonsense, and when Esther returned from her excursion to the woodshed the look

on her mother's face had deepened and there was a hint of tears in her voice as she spoke, not with her usual calm, but with a kind of repressed excitement.

"I may as well speak truth to you, Esther. It isn't the tablecloths, simply, though they are worn enough; but they stand for a great many things. Your father and I can endure this sort of life,—we expected it when we began,—and we are willing to go on in this way until the end; but I confess that sometimes it seems to me too great a sacrifice to bury you alive out here in the backwoods of civilization with no chance to associate with people of kindred tastes or ambitions, and with no prospect of its ever being any better. You ought to be where there were at least a few who could appreciate you."

Esther, who was used to a halo of peace on her mother's face and serenity in her voice, was almost alarmed. She spoke quickly and gayly: " 'Appreciate' ! mother dear, I am ashamed of you. If you could have heard Deacon Bascom this morning when he stopped at the gate with a bunch of roses and told me I was as pretty as

the biggest piny in their garden! What do you want in the way of appreciation, pray? you unreasonable mother! If you try me in this way, I may have to consider young Joram myself, instead of puzzling my brains day and night about ways of getting Melindy out here for him. Moreover, I'm inclined to think there might be other chances. Deacon Bascom had a very significant tone this morning when he reminded me that his Jed had as 'purty a piece of land to set a house on as you could find in four counties, and it would be set, too, before long, if he could make things work to his mind.' Who knows, mother, what might happen?"

Mrs. Randall laughed, then, as the girl's vivid mimicry brought Deacon Bascom's withered face and broad nasal before her mental vision, and Esther made haste to follow up her advantage.

"Don't you ever worry one least little speck about me, mommie. If I could begin to tell you how good it is to be at home with you and father, why, when I think of that and — and of all the blessings that have come to us lately, my heart just sings for joy, and I feel like a

bird escaped from his cage to an evergreen tree. Mother, won't it be a shame if father doesn't get home to-day, when I have dug the first of those splendid baking potatoes? I planned for two apiece and one over for luck, and counted him in. I know they will be delicious. Now I'm ready for that ironing, and I'll make every napkin there look like real damask if you will go into the other room and sit down in the big chair by the window and fold your hands and rest. How do you think you would feel, doing just that, for once?"

Even while she spoke, the gate clicked, and Esther, glancing from the side window, exclaimed: "There he is, this minute! It's father." Then she vanished in the direction of the door.

It must be good for a man who has been five days away from his home to receive such a greeting as Mr. Randall did. In truth, it was an unusual experience for that little family to have its head away for even five days. The need for closest economy had been so great that Spencer Randall had, years before this time, given up regular attendance at even the semiannual gatherings of the official body to which he be-

longed. As chief remaining representative of a very important committee of three, it had this year become his duty to make the sacrifices necessary to his going. Even so, he could not have accomplished it had it not been for Aunt Sarah. It had seemed strange, indeed, to be indebted to her. The minister told his wife good-humoredly that it was still a question with him which would ultimately get the most good out of that five-dollar gold piece,—himself in receiving or Aunt Sarah in bestowing. And when she flushed over the significance of his tone, he had added cheerfully:—

“Really, Helen, it was a fine thing; we must appreciate it, and them. Uncle Joram Pratt is ‘well to do,’ as they say here; that is, he has meat and milk and butter and eggs and wood, and everything that grows, in abundance; but ready money is something that he doesn’t handle much, and a five-dollar gold piece is as large for him as a hundred dollars would be for some.”

“I’ve got great news for you,” he told his wife and daughter that day, as soon as the first greetings and questionings were over.

"What do you think? I was elected to represent us at the great missionary rally in October."

"Oh, Spencer!" and "Oh, father!" in the same breath.

"Fact, I was! Isn't it great? I was never so surprised in my life as when my name was proposed, except when, fifteen minutes afterward, I was unanimously elected. It's Dr. Wheeler's doings. I knew he was trying to accomplish something; he kept slipping around among the brethren, whispering to this and that one. I wondered that he didn't come to me, but it never entered my head what he was about. And he asked me the night before when we were all having a chat together how many years it was since I had been East, and then it happened to come out that the place of the rally wasn't far from my old home; but I never once dreamed that —"

"And it's near mother's home, too," interrupted Esther, eagerly. "Oh, father! you can visit them both, can't you? And go around to all the places where you and mother used to take walks and drives. What fun it will be!"

“Yes,” said her father. “The two homes are within a half day’s ride of each other. I thought of that the first thing. And they have arranged it all nicely for me: I am to travel all through that part of the state and give a series of missionary talks. I shall have a chance to look up all the old landmarks; and besides, I thought that — Why, Esther, where’s your mother?”

He had been diving into his valise as he talked, in search of something that he wanted to show them, and he looked up to discover that Esther had become his only listener.

“Mother ran away a minute ago,” said Esther. “She may have smelled something burning; I do, anyway. You will have to hurry, father, and change your clothes. Dinner is almost ready, and I’ve got the first of our bakers in the oven; don’t you smell them? You can finish telling mother about it upstairs while I finish the dinner, and then you will have to tell it all over again, to me. You’ll hurry now, won’t you? I’m getting up a special dinner in honor of your home-coming, and I can’t have it spoiled. You have had no

such dinner since you have been gone as I shall dish up for you, sir, I venture to say."

"I have had no young woman of your sort to serve my dinners, at least," said the happy father, stopping in the doorway to bestow a parting look of fond admiration on the fair face of his daughter.

She made him a low mock courtesy as she said: "If that is intended as a compliment, my dear sir, allow me to say that Deacon Bascom is ahead. He was here this morning, and I am blushing yet under the weight of his efforts. Father, please hurry! I am afraid those potatoes are done, this minute."

"Why, Helen!" said Mr. Randall, stopping midway in his room, consternation in his voice and dismay on his face. "Why, Helen, what is it? What has happened?"

CHAPTER XXIV

HOMeward BOUND

MRS. RANDALL was at her toilet stand in the act of pouring water into the basin. She turned quickly from her husband as he entered, but not quickly enough to prevent his catching the glitter of tears on her face, and the sight of one or two plashing into the water. This was the explanation of his dismayed "Why, Helen!" To see his wife in tears was a sight for Spencer Randall to remember.

He went over to her, speaking gently, touching with tender fingers the little rings of hair that had escaped from their confining pins. "Helen, dear wife, what is it? What has happened to hurt you? Esther was so merry that I thought everything was well."

"Everything is." She dashed the water over her flushed face and tried to speak in her usual tone. "Nothing has happened, Spencer,

really. I was warm and tired and a little bit foolish; that is all."

He searched her face in perplexed sympathy, and then, slowly, as men take in such things, came a gleam of intelligence; he drew the face all dripping with water close to his and kissed it again and again — half-whimsical, wholly tender kisses.

"Did she think," he said, between the kisses, "that her husband had turned into a thoughtless, selfish clod who meant to go off and 'flock by himself,' leaving his wife and child to brave it out alone? That isn't true, dear; I'm not going a step — not a single step."

"Spencer, let me go!" His wife was struggling to free herself from his hold; she was laughing, yet her eyes were still suspiciously veiled.

"I am a complete idiot this morning; I don't know what to make of myself, only it is warm, warmer than usual, and I got overtired at the ironing.

"It isn't because you are to go, Spencer; you don't think so meanly of me as that! I know you don't. It was just because it came to me

suddenly how long it was since I had seen mother, and how many times she had planned and planned and been disappointed; it just broke me down for a minute; but I'm all over it now, and you needn't ever think of it again."

"I'm a brute!" said the Rev. Spencer Randall, penitently, "that is just what I am. I don't know how I came to yield to the thought even for an hour; I must have got carried off my balance for a little while, over mother and the girls; but I won't go, of course I won't. I'll write to Dr. Wheeler this very evening and tell him so; it won't make any trouble, there's an alternate who is just suffering to be in my shoes, and he can have them. It wouldn't be any pleasure to me to go East and leave you and Esther out here alone; it seems ridiculous that I entertained the idea for a moment."

"Spencer Randall, you will kill me if you don't stop talking in that way. I wouldn't have you give it up for anything in this world! Why, it is the next best thing to going myself, to think of you seeing mother and Mary face to face and telling them all about Esther, and — and everything. I am just as glad as I can be over

the thought of it. Why, to have mother come so near to a visit from you as that, and then have to give it up, after all she has borne, would be too cruel; you couldn't do it. Oh, Spencer! I forgot; you mustn't put on your garden clothes; you will have to go out to the Johnson place right after dinner. Poor old Mrs. Johnson is almost home. They sent for you twice yesterday; and this morning John said it seemed as though she was just waiting to tell you good-by."

At that moment the voice of Esther sounded from the foot of the stairs.

"Father! Are you sure you are hurrying? I do believe you are wasting your time making love to mother, and those potatoes are done!"

All through the dinner, and until he was fairly started for his eight-mile ride to the Johnson place, Mr. Randall protested that he could not think of filling his appointment. The more he considered it, the more he was sure that he did not want to go — not until he could take them both with him; that might happen in another year, who could tell? Anyway, he simply could not go without them. He had been dazed; it had seemed to him all the

time that of course they were going too; and when it suddenly came over him that this thing was to be done alone, leaving the best two-thirds of him behind, why — it was preposterous!

He went away reiterating this, and all the way to the Johnson place, while his stout pony picked out carefully the least objectionable portions of the ugly road, his rider kept assuring himself that it had been cruel even to mention it, — he ought to have spared Helen that, — and as for going — no, indeed! Nothing that Helen or Esther could say should make him change his mind.

When he rode home from the Johnson place in the dusk of the fast-gathering night, even the journey to the East had slipped into the background. He had been waiting at the place where two worlds meet. He had gone with the worn-out mother to the very verge of this one, and held her hand and offered a prayer just as the door had opened and her soul had slipped away to God. It was true that she seemed to have waited only to bid her faithful minister good-by.

Her last words to him had been pleasant ones to remember. "Good-by, pastor, good-by; I shall tell them all in heaven, and Him first of all, that I wouldn't have got there if it hadn't been for you."

Poor old mother Johnson! She was one of those who all through the earlier years had been planning each season to go "home" to Vermont, and the plans had miscarried, and the way grown heavier and more doubtful with each passing year; and the woman had grown discouraged and hard and bitter, and given up her hope not only of the earthly home but of the heavenly. And then, one day, Pastor Randall had found her, away off in another township, unknown to his church or people. He had found her and reached her and won her for his Master; and her later years had been bright with His presence; and on her rugged old face had glowed at last the anticipation of her sure home-going, that no blighted harvests could arrest.

As the missionary trotted through the bridle path between the wide stretches of fields, he told himself that heaven was as near to them

there as it was in the old Eastern homes, and that after all it was the home to think about and look forward to. And there were compensations along the way. Suppose he had been East when the summons came for Mother Johnson? He wouldn't have missed her good-by for a great deal.

But his wife and daughter meant that he should go East and visit the two mothers. Given two such women as Mrs. Randall and her daughter Esther, it seems hardly necessary to add that they accomplished their purpose, though not, it is true, without many perplexities and some misgivings.

All the while the father was waiting in the Johnson cabin to close the doors of this world after the departing mother, his wife and daughter were holding a council of ways and means.

"His best suit looks pretty well," said the mother. "That coat in the spring box came just in time; and it fits him better than they do generally. I can never feel thankful enough that it didn't fit the man for whom it was made, and that he was moved to put it into our box."

"I don't think it fits any too well," Esther

said. "If the man for whom it was made had been content with a cheaper one, and put the difference into the collection for home missions, he and father might both have had coats that fitted them. That would be the truest economy, Mother, as well as the pleasantest way for missionaries."

"It does very well," said her mother, who had returned to her usual state of calm energy.

"I wish I could say the same for his shirts. I confess that I don't know how to manage about them. I was hoping that Sarah — well, never mind that; I had set my heart on two new shirts in that last box, and you know there wasn't one. The old ones are too much worn to patch any longer, the cloth has got so that it will not hold the stitches."

Esther laughed absently as she said, "It will not do to set your heart on anything that comes in boxes, mother." She was leaning forward with her elbow resting on her knee and her chin in her hand, gazing meditatively into the pasteboard box that held the disabled shirts. Suddenly she came to an upright position and clasped her shapely hands.

“Mother, I have an idea! Why can’t we make father a shirt out of my white petticoat? Two, indeed; if shirts didn’t need to have sleeves I am sure it could be done; and even as it is, we may be able to do it, with piecing. Aren’t the sleeves of the old shirts pretty good? It is a very wide skirt, and long. As for the bosoms, do you remember that queer, old-fashioned white linen cape that came in the box you had just before I came home, and we wondered what could ever be done with it? Why wouldn’t that make bosoms? Mommie! Why don’t you go into raptures over the thought?”

“What a child you are!” said her mother, gazing fondly at her treasure. “But I believe it could be done. I could ~~rip~~ rip up the oldest of these for a pattern; I am sure it will not stand another washing. But Esther, dear, what do you think your father would say? You know he will not have your one white petticoat sacrificed for him.”

“Sacrificed!” repeated the girl, in her gayest tone. “Who thinks of such a thing? Am I not planning for the petticoat to take a trip East and visit all the folks? What better

experience than that could it hope for? Mommie, I am ashamed of you! If you don't enter into the spirit of great opportunities any better than that, I may have to marry Deacon Bascom's Jed just to teach you a lesson."

It was plain to Esther that she must indulge in a little nonsense, for her mother's lip had quivered over that word "sacrificed."

She had her way; her mother reflected tenderly that night, and many times through the following busy days, how sure the child was, sooner or later, to sway them both. What a blessed thing it was that her ways were always sweet and unselfish and pure, for certainly it would be hard to withstand her.

The Rev. Spencer Randall thought it all over as he sat in the East-bound express moving at the rate of thirty miles an hour. In the worn valise at his feet reposed two new shirts, as carefully made and laundered as skill and love could accomplish. Undoubtedly they were a credit to their makers, and the home missionary knew their history.

Esther had earnestly instructed her mother that the source of the material from which they

were made must forever remain a secret to her father, and Mrs. Randall had tried to obey. But the father had keen eyes and quick wits, and knew all about his frayed shirt bosoms and the poverty of the family purse. His questions grew too close for truth-loving lips, and the story of the shirts evolved little by little.

The father's eyes grew misty and his expression tender and wistful as he looked down at the valise and thought not only of the new shirts but of many things connected with the getting ready for this wonderful trip. Almost to the last he had steadily persisted that he was not going "home" until he could take wife and daughter with him. But the wife and daughter had known how to manage him. Much talk was made before him about the joy his coming would make in Mrs. Randall's own home. She explained, to Esther of course, how fully she had written to mother and Mary about the plans, and she knew how to bring in at just the right moment the eager hope that nothing would occur to disappoint mother again. "It seems as though I could not bear it if she had to give this up, too," she said.

As for Esther, with each new morning she had thought of some new way in which this trip of father's was to be of immense advantage to those who stayed behind. Gradually the meshes of the loving spell they were weaving gathered close about him and made him feel that somehow it was becoming his duty to sacrifice himself and take that long-deferred journey for the sake of his family. There had been no tears visible on his wife's face since that first day; instead, she had lived apparently for the sole purpose of getting him well started.

They watched him away, mother and daughter, with brave, smile-wreathed faces, and kisses blown after him as far down the road as his straining, backward-looking eyes could see; and so, at last — at last he was going *home*.

Thought was very busy that morning. It was not possible to keep from reverting to the times without number in which plans for this very journey had been made, and lived on for months, and relinquished. Nor had the Eastern homes been without their plans. Mrs. Randall, besides her sister Mary, had two brothers, older than herself, who had struggled all their lives

against the disadvantages of having passed their youth and early manhood in luxury, and in the belief that there would be always a wealthy father to back them. They had never been financial successes, and now, in middle life, had large families and small salaries. On Mr. Randall's side there were two maiden sisters living with his widowed mother. He always spoke of them as "the girls," never being able to realize that during the quarter century of separation they had grown into more than middle-aged women. All these people had remembered their missionary brother and sister with frequent letters and such Christmas and birthday tokens as they could afford; and at their family reunions had told one another hopefully that by "next year" they thought they could make up a purse between them, and send for "Helen and Spencer and the child" to make a long visit. The two mothers, in particular, had been long fed on these hopes that blossomed each Christmas and were blighted by necessities before the new year reached its springtime.

Later had come somewhat anxious plans for

“the child,” which was the way in which they had always spoken of Esther Randall. None of them had travelled much, and “out West” was to them a vast, howling wilderness, peopled chiefly by Indians and half-breeds; no place, certainly, in which to bring up a child, especially a girl; and they met and planned and were perplexed over difficulties, and made their various sacrifices, and at last arranged that “the child” should be sent to them for a term of years to be educated, they to assume all responsibility for her maintenance while she was with them; and they were wholly astonished and half-offended when Helen with singular blindness refused to give the child up for even a year.

They had ceased to urge this after a while; but their anxieties had not lessened, and they hinted in their letters so much about the contrast that there must some day be between their favored children and the unfortunate Esther, that the mother, half-amused and half-vexed, ceased telling in her letters about Esther’s accomplishments or virtues.

“They think she is half a savage,” she said

to her husband; and that we, apparently, have also become uncivilized. I presume they think we eat with our fingers and have forgotten the use of napkins. Let them think so; I shall not try to enlighten them any more. Some day, when we take Esther home, they will make discoveries."

CHAPTER XXV

A WOMAN OF HER WORD

IT was of all these matters, great and trivial, that the father thought as the train sped on, — Helen, Esther, home, and the years that piled themselves between.

“Once in a quarter of a century,” he said to himself, drawing a long breath, “and then to go without them! If we were foreign missionaries, we would have been sent home twice by this time, for a year of rest each time; and Helen needs rest if ever a woman did. How is she ever to get it? And the child — to think of sacrificing such a child as that! It isn’t as though she had chosen the work, as we did.”

Mr. Randall did not often indulge in thoughts that hinted of any more desirable lot in life than the home-mission field, but this prospect of long absence from his treasures was giving him a new perspective. He knew that his

wife, despite her cheerful, hopeful nature, had hours of regret for Esther's sake. Their beautiful, peerless Esther, fitted to grace any society, stranded in a little poverty-hedged Western village where few people of culture came even for a visit, and where most of those who would have been glad for opportunities of culture were too poor to seek them. It was certainly a lonesome prospect for a girl like their Esther. Was Aunt Sarah half right in her solemn conviction that the child would have been better off without those four years of college life? Oh, no, no indeed! It was only the very superficial who could seriously entertain such a thought as that. Esther was undoubtedly better fitted for her work in this world and the next because of her four years of training. But — some things were hard. For the hundredth time he told himself that if he had not felt that somehow good would come to her, to them, out of this trip of his, he could not have taken it. But he added truthfully:—

“To be sure, I don't see how.” Then his perplexed face cleared into its usual calm as his next thought was:—

“It may not be my place to ‘see’; they are both of them children of a King; we have trusted Him all these years, and we may surely be depended on to continue to do so. He knows all about it.”

And long before that, one good woman, Mrs. John Potter by name, all unknown to herself, was engaged in helping to work out the plan by which many of the home missionary’s perplexities were to be answered.

Mrs. John Potter was a power in the 10th Street Church, which was a little church in a big Eastern city.

On a blustering March day, nearly seven months before the Rev. Spencer Randall started on his memorable trip to the great missionary rally, the women of the 10th Street Church were in commotion. Within the large plain room where they worshipped, pails, brooms, dust-cloths, and soap were in evidence. One woman, mounted on a step-ladder, was wrestling with the accumulation of dust and soot on the gas globes, and expressing her mind after this fashion:—

“If St. John could visit this church, he would

have another proof that men love darkness rather than light. The idea of allowing dust to gather on globes in this way! No wonder the church isn't half lighted; there ought to be women janitors."

"Where is the long-handled brush?" called a voice from the back room. "I have hunted everywhere for it."

"Mrs. Potter can tell you," said the woman on the step-ladder. "She took care of all those things. Where is Mrs. Potter?"

"Here," answered a voice from behind a half-open door; but it was a discouraged, apathetic voice, qualities so unusual in its owner that they brought the woman in search of the long-handled brush to the door to look, and the woman on the step-ladder turned herself about in dismay.

"Pity's sake!" she said, "what is the matter with Mrs. Potter? You didn't have a tumble, did you?"

"My body didn't; but I must say my heart has tumbled into my shoes. I'm downright discouraged."

"What about?" — "What's the matter?"

— "What has happened now?" Three or four women were speaking at once. One came from the little store closet with a cake of soap in one hand and a box of tacks in the other, and the woman who was draping curtains and had her mouth full of pins showered them about as she tried to ask a question.

It was painfully unusual for Mrs. Potter to be discouraged or to take a seat when work was waiting to be done. Her arms were at that moment bare to the elbow, and she was clasping in her hands a cake of sapolio; but her wet cloth lay in an abandoned heap at her feet.

"Then you haven't seen Mrs. Evans?" she said languidly.

"Mrs. Evans? No. She hasn't come over yet, I guess."

"Yes, she has, and I hear her in the hall this minute; she is trying to pacify the Gardner girls, but she will find it hard work. I know just how they feel. They have given all they can afford, to help pay the debt; and now to have it pattered away in this fashion is too much for flesh and blood."

"Do for pity's sake tell us what is the matter,

and don't keep us on tenter-hooks in this way!" said the step-ladder woman, rapidly descending, a globe in each hand and one under her arm.

"Why, the men are upstairs having a business meeting, I suppose you know, and what have they done but voted, every man of them, to pay fifty dollars toward that meeting that's to be here in October, and to request the Ladies' Circle to give it out of their fund."

A general murmur of indignant protest ensued, and the woman with pins took several of them out of her mouth to ask, "What meeting?"

"Why, the Missionary Rally, they call it, I believe. You must have heard of it; the men and the papers have talked of nothing else all the spring. It seems it is considered a great honor to a city to have the meeting. All the world is coming, and the delegates are to have their travelling expenses paid and be entertained besides. And we, who have worked our fingers to the bone to pay off our church debt, have got to help do it all. I should like to see one woman helping! I don't see what use these great meetings are anyway! Look at the money it takes, for one thing, to

say nothing of the trouble. And why should even the travelling expenses of missionaries be paid, I wonder? Nobody pays my expenses when I take a journey; for that matter, I generally stay at home because I cannot afford to go; and I don't see why missionaries shouldn't do the same. We can get along without missionary meetings."

"Oh, I believe in missionary meetings and in having them come and tell us about their work," said the step-ladder woman. "But I must say it seems kind of mean to make our poor little church pay fifty dollars toward it. Who told you?"

"Mrs. Evans. Her husband is upstairs with the committee. When he heard her in the hall, he came out and told her, and asked her to explain to the ladies. I wish her joy of her undertaking. I think it will take a good deal of explaining. It seems the First Church has the planning of it all, and they assess the other churches their proportion of expense. Shouldn't you think that great rich church would have felt rather mean assessing us fifty dollars?"

The Gardner girls, as they were always called,

though they were middle-aged women, had come in from the hall, and joined the session of indignant women; one of them now spoke her mind:—

“Why don’t the men pay the fifty dollars, if they think it ought to be paid?”

This question started Mrs. John Potter afresh.

“I think as much!” she said indignantly. “What is the use of our slaving here to earn money towards paying the church debt that has been a shame and a disgrace to us for years, and then have the men meet upstairs and coolly vote it away before it is earned! I made up my mind that if we had a good night for this supper, we should clear an even fifty for the debt. I didn’t mean to be satisfied with a penny less than that; and I could see myself going to the bank to deposit it, a real beginning on our last thousand; and here we are called upon to throw it away! My opinion is that the time has come for us to rebel. Don’t let’s give one cent to the Missionary Rally. The church fathers have had things all their own way for so long that they think all they have

to do is to vote that we women shall pay the bills, and we'll meekly do it. I say, let's refuse. I vote that we send Mrs. Evans to tell them that we think charity begins at home, and that we can't help in any outside expenses until we have wiped out our disgraceful debt."

Discussion ran high. Other women left their dusting and regulating to join in it; and Mrs. John Potter, who had recovered her usual energies sufficiently to talk briskly, held court, brandishing her cake of sapolio by way of emphasis.

There was found to be a decided difference of opinion about leaving the payment of the assessment to the church fathers. Most of the ladies present were wives of the said fathers, and understood perfectly that in the matter of giving, the family was a unit. A few of those who had small incomes of their own, as, for instance, the Gardner girls and Mrs. John Potter, who was a widow, were for leaving the bill to the men; but the others were unanimous that this would not do.

"There is no use in saying that the men don't help earn our money," said Mrs. Eastman.

“We could not get along very well without their help, and besides, it is their money that furnishes the hams and turkeys and things.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Adams; “and then we expect them to come and eat the supper, which their money has provided, and pay a good price for it, too. I don’t see but the men help.”

“There doesn’t any man help pay for the turkeys and hams that I bring,” said Mrs. Potter, with emphasis. “And I must say I don’t consider it wonderful liberality on their part to come and eat fifty cents’ worth of supper after it has been got ready for them. I never saw a man who wasn’t willing to eat a first-rate supper when he could get it, and he eats his money’s worth every time, too.

“I call this whole business mean; that is my name for it, and I may as well own it. More than that, I believe in being honest and above board, and I’ll just say now and here that if you vote to throw away the money that we make to-night, by paying that assessment, why, the church can pay its own debt without any more help from me. You all know as well

as I do how hard I have been slaving for years to get us out of debt, and now that we were beginning to see the end —” Words failed her for a moment, and her indignation had increased as she talked.

“I’ll see this thing through, now that I am in it,” and she bent to get hold of the wet cloth at her feet; “but you can mark what I say, and if you know me at all, you know that I am a woman of my word: if our money is voted for the Rally, this is the last time that I shall lift my finger toward that church debt — the very last time.”

They all went back to their appointed tasks, subdued and troubled. Mrs. John Potter — as she was always called to distinguish her from her sister-in-law, Mrs. James Potter — was a recognized power among them, and without her they knew they should feel like a little ship in a storm at sea without a captain.

There was need for work, as the day was waning and the most elaborate church supper they had ever undertaken was set for that evening.

The talk went on, much of it in gloomy or

half-irritable tones; the keys seemed to have all been set at that pitch.

“Look at this turkey,” said Mrs. Adams, as she flopped a monster bird on his side preparatory to slicing him. “This is from the McIntyres; done to a turn, and the biggest fellow I ever saw. Well, why not? If I had as much money as the McIntyres, I would do more than furnish fine turkeys. How easily she could pay this assessment out of her own pocket and never know it! What is fifty dollars to her?”

“I wish she would get us a new stove,” said Alvira Mills, as she gave a vicious slam to the oven door; “this old thing won’t stand many more church suppers.”

“We won’t have many more I am afraid,” said Mrs. Eastman, with a sigh. “It would scare me to death to think of getting up one without Mrs. John Potter; besides, there are others who will draw off if she does. I must say I don’t think it is very good missionary work to divide a church in this way!”

“Still,” said the woman who had finally put most of her pins into her curtain and so had

her mouth free for its ordinary service, "I don't see what we can do; it would be real disgraceful in us not to pay our assessment. The 10th Street Church has always done its share, and the men have all they can stagger under now. Mrs. John Potter ought not to be so set in her way."

Which was just what that good woman was. She prided herself on being a woman of her word, and was not always as careful as she might have been as to whether the word she had spoken was worthy of such zealous guard.

The supper was prepared at last, and eaten, and pronounced the most delicious of any of the notable suppers in the history of that church, and they had been numerous. After all bills were settled it was found that the effort had netted to them the sum of fifty-three dollars and sixty-five cents. This passed beyond their most sanguine hopes, as their expenses had been unusually heavy, and only Mrs. Potter had had courage to mention more than forty dollars as their aim.

But for the shadow that the church fathers had thrown across their path the ladies would

have been jubilant. As it was, they were miserable.

Nevertheless, they called a special meeting on the day following the supper, and solemnly voted fifty dollars to be sent to Deacon Thorn-dyke in payment of the assessment.

There were gloomy faces among the voters, but Mrs. John Potter, and her sister-in-law, Mrs. James Potter, and the Gardner girls and their niece, and little Mrs. Jones, who was a cousin of the Potters, cast the only dissenting votes. The church mothers had been at home, over night, talking this matter over with the church fathers, and they felt sure that there was no other way.

"Very well," said Mrs. John Potter, when the vote was announced, sitting upright in her chair with a bright spot glowing on either cheek, and speaking with portentous calmness.

"Very well, I haven't a word to say; the majority rules in this country. The only thing I am anxious about is that my position in the matter shall be thoroughly understood. I suppose you all remember what I said yesterday, and it will save a great deal of trouble if you

understand from the first that I meant exactly what I said. I shall not lift so much as a finger again toward the payment of that church debt—not a finger! I think I have done fully my share, both in working and giving. Some of you know that I haven't been afraid of a little sacrifice for the cause; but that's neither here nor there. It pleases you to let the work and all the rest of it go for nothing, it seems. So be it. Only just remember that I am done."

They knew they could trust her, and many of the ladies went home from that meeting with troubled hearts.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE "NEST-EGG"

NOR did the trouble in the 10th-Street Church quiet down as the days passed. Mrs. John Potter being a woman of her word, and being anxious that all her friends should so understand, could not help talking about it; and as she talked she made allies. Not intentionally, that is, she did not mean to make trouble; but it is so natural to enter into detail with one's friends, and to expend some effort in making one's own side exhibit its perfect reasonableness, that Mrs. Potter could not help making converts. There were some, of course, who cared about neither missionary rallies nor church debts, but who scented trouble, and being by nature eager for stimulants of this kind contributed what they could to keep it brewing. Before that summer was over, Pastor Evans, whose wife kept him posted as to the unrest in his parish, told her privately that it would have

been better for him to have paid the fifty dollars out of his own meagre salary than to have such a state of things, and no one could tell whereunto it would end.

To the uninitiated this will seem an almost incredible story; they will find it hard to believe that for so slight a cause an entire church was being made more or less uncomfortable, and was even in danger of an actual schism. Only those who have tried for years to bake and boil and broil and fry and *eat* a church debt out of existence are capable of entering into the feelings of the aggrieved persons. Mrs. Potter had not exaggerated her share in the effort; she had toiled early and late, in season and — in the opinion of some — out of season to get rid of that debt. The original debt was three thousand dollars, and by dint of really heroic efforts in the shape of fairs, festivals, sales, suppers, what not? by dint, also, of the sacrifice of something more precious than time or strength; namely, feelings, two thousand dollars and interest had been earned and paid. This, through the years, remember. With the closing supper of the season Mrs. Potter, the time-

honored treasurer of the Ladies' Aid, had confidently resolved upon placing fifty dollars in the bank for what she called a "nest-egg" for the last thousand.

"One-twentieth of the whole," she told herself gleefully when she awakened at daylight to count the gains before they had been made. She had set her heart upon fifty dollars, and her judgment had verified her heart's desire. Fifty-three dollars and sixty-five cents clear gain. But, alas! only the miserable little sum of three dollars and sixty-five cents for the nest-egg. After all, is it any wonder that the poor woman's temper, as well as her courage, failed? She had been through many trying scenes, and borne fairly well many burns and stings. She knew, wise woman that she was, that these were almost inevitable accompaniments to their methods of getting money, and had set her will to endure; but the assessment had been the historic "last straw" which made trouble.

It was on a pleasant afternoon in spring, just a month after the church supper, that Mrs. John Potter sat in her willow rocking-

chair beside her open south window and grimly surveyed three silver dollars, two twenty-five-cent pieces, a ten-cent piece, and a nickel. At her feet lay an open letter that she had but a short time before received. It was from the secretary of the Ladies' Aid. The annual meeting of that august body had been held the day before, and for the first time since the 10th Street Church had an existence its time-honored treasurer, Mrs. John Potter, had failed to be present. They had reelected her as treasurer, despite her resignation, which had been sent in an hour after the assessment was voted. They had also written her a humble letter, expressing their sorrow that trouble had occurred and that they had, for the first time, felt compelled to go contrary to her advice. They begged her to overlook this inability to see the matter as she saw it, and not to desert them in what was without doubt a crucial period in the history of their church.

Believing that after prayerful consideration she would see her way clear to withdraw her resignation and give them, as heretofore, the benefit of her splendid business abilities, they

took the liberty of enclosing the surplus funds of the organization, feeling certain that they would be managed with the care and wisdom that had always characterized her work.

Mrs. Potter had met her postman at the corner, and had opened and read this letter on the way home. Her first impulse had been to throw the money into the river, on the bank of which she was walking; but she had been a conscientiously careful woman with money all her life. Every penny that helped to constitute the snug sum payable to her signature she had helped to earn and to save. The impulse to save, met and checked that other momentary impulse, and her second thought was that the money was not her own: she had not even that degree of right to throw it away. At first it vexed her unreasonably to think that she must take care of it for a time.

"They think," she said aloud, still with contemptuous eyes on the three dollars and sixty-five cents, "that I can be coaxed and complimented into going at it again, and will break my back and burn my fingers a few years more for the sake of raising money for the church

fathers to assess! If they really haven't found it out yet, I think, in time, they will understand me to be a woman of my word. I'll have to keep this money, though, until they elect a successor."

After much thought Mrs. Potter, who was not often called upon to write other than friendly letters, concocted and sent the following terse epistle:—

"To the Ladies' Aid of the 10th Street Church:

"I am sorry to learn that you wasted your time yesterday, and so have no treasurer. I supposed you knew that when I said I resigned the office, I meant that I *resigned the office*, and that no more words need be wasted on the subject. But since receiving your letter I have been reflecting that perhaps no woman can be found in your organization who is willing to handle so heavy and important a sum of money as you enclosed, and I have therefore decided to deposit it in the bank where I do business, in a separate account, of course. More than that, since you kindly urge me to reconsider, I am willing to meet you halfway, and I will

therefore give you my word of honor that at such time as that sum, namely, three dollars and sixty-five cents, shall have reached the sum of one thousand dollars, the face of the debt, *payable to my order*, I will have pleasure in drawing a check for the same and bringing it to you. Moreover, if you at that time desire it, and I am not too aged for active service, I will then resume my duties as treasurer of the Ladies' Aid. Until that day comes, however, I must be distinctly understood as having nothing whatever to do with the organization. I decline to help in the earning of any moneys for debts or assessments, or in the care of any moneys earned by it — always excepting the aforesaid munificent sum of three dollars and sixty-five cents.

“Respectfully submitted,

“MARY POTTER (MRS. JOHN POTTER),

“Former treasurer of the 10th
Street Ladies' Aid.”

And that good woman, who was in the mood to be grimly pleased with her letter, had no more conception of the fact that her Father in heaven was at that very time arranging

to turn her sore-hearted obstinacy into account in the interests of some of His dear servants, than you and I realize that in His goodness and greatness He sometimes allows even our waspish tempers to work out, for others, some blessed result, so verifying His promise to make "the wrath of man praise Him."

But it needs to be remembered that Mrs. Potter would have been a better and happier, as well as more useful, woman if she had been willing to let the Master use her virtues, instead of her faults, to accomplish His ends.

The long, warm summer passed and the first week in October, the date set for the great Missionary Rally, came, and found the First Church in festive array and crowded, even in the mornings, to its utmost capacity. In the evenings the committee of arrangements was compelled to open other churches and have simultaneous meetings.

The enthusiastic were loud in their enjoyment of these gatherings, assuring one another that nothing so helpful to the cause of missions as this mammoth convention had ever before

occurred. It was a wonderfully inspiring thing to see and hear for themselves some of those grand field officers who had given their lives for the cause.

Still, there were some who refused to hear for themselves, and persistently held aloof from all the activities connected with the Rally.

Most prominent among these was that woman of her word, Mrs. John Potter. She had declined to open her house to guests, assuring the committee that she had plenty of friends to entertain, and did not need to take in strangers. When she set out to be benevolent, she preferred to give to those who needed, instead of to people who had homes of their own where they could stay if they had not means enough to travel. She did not suppose she should attend any of the meetings; she could read in her *Missionary Review* all that she needed to know about missions, and a good deal more than she was able to put into practice. She believed in being practical.

It was therefore the fourth day of the convention before Mrs. Potter found herself so situated that she could not escape the meeting.

One of the friends whom she had professed herself as always ready to entertain came from her home, twenty miles distant, to spend the day and attend the convention. She was not acquainted with the city, and had come in the expectation of being attended by her friend. She explained that she was "a master hand at getting lost," and that the last words her son had said to her had been a caution about venturing out alone.

Mrs. Potter, who had other plans for the morning, saw no way but to sacrifice herself, at least in part.

"I'll take you in and see that you get a good seat," she explained, as they reached the First Church, "and then, while they are singing a hymn, I'll slip out and attend to my errands; some of them are quite important. I can get back, though, in time to take you home with me. You wait at the front door if I'm not there the minute the meeting is out; but I shall be. They have very long meetings—hardly ever close on time."

But for the fact that a woman in front of the seat she chose, immediately waylaid Mrs.

Potter and kept her whispering about the Library Association during the singing of the entire hymn, that good woman would have carried out this programme and slipped away on her errands. As it was, she was caught. A vote had been taken at the Library, and she herself had been assigned some work in connection with it that she did not wholly approve, and while she was intent on explaining this, the hymn was concluded and the speaker for the morning announced.

It embarrassed even Mrs. Potter to think of marching down that long aisle in the face of the great audience, while some one was speaking, and with the mental hope that he would make his story short, she resigned herself to wait for another break in the programme.

But the speaker for the hour was the Rev. Spencer Randall, and there was one man on the programme committee who knew him, and had arranged that he should have as much time as he wanted.

"He has a story to tell," he said, "and he knows how to tell it. I heard him last winter when I was West."

Mr. Randall made good this statement. Before he had been speaking for ten minutes his audience all over the great building had settled back with that look on their faces which says as plainly as words, "Go on, brother, by all means, talk just as long as you choose; you couldn't please us better."

There were those in the audience who had known the home missionary through the years, and they said one to another, when the service was over: "Did you ever hear anything finer than that? I have heard him before, and I knew he would be fine; but he was at his best this morning, without doubt."

As for Mr. Randall, he was never able to give a very clear account of that morning's work, beyond the fact that he said a good many things which he had not dreamed of saying when he began.

He had sat up late the night before, talking with the kind of man whose species should be obsolete but unfortunately is not — a man who contended that home missions were in these days unnecessary burdens; that the men and women who lived out West and up North and down

South, at the expense of the Boards, could teach their churches to be self-supporting instead of everlastingly appealing for help, if they chose to do so, and were willing to economize as most of those had to who sent their money to them. Then in the morning had come a long letter, a joint production from wife and child, and Mr. Randall's heart being fired with zeal for the honor of his Master's cause, and tender with memories of home and his treasures and their environments, what wonder that he could talk?

He had been East long enough to realize the stupendous ignorance that prevailed in some localities with regard to the present condition and present needs of home-mission fields, and he had determined that, if it lay in his power to make it plain to them, at least one audience should understand.

CHAPTER XXVII

CHILDREN OF ONE FATHER

IT is one thing to know certain facts, it is quite another to have a genuine heart realization of them. It is safe to say that to half of his large audience Spencer Randall's home-mission story was a revelation. It was something more than a story. Almost it was what might be called a materialization. With a few masterly touches he described Helen, the wife of his youth, and the beautiful and cultured home from which he had taken her. Then they journeyed with him and his bride to the little straggling Western town that had expected to boom and been disappointed. He introduced them to the unpainted house set in the midst of a treeless stretch of ground—the house, still unfinished, that had been her home for a quarter century. He gave them a view of the garden after the caterpillars had

visited it *en masse*; he showed them the rose-bushes and honeysuckles after a drought, and the country generally after the locusts passed that way. He let them stand beside him and watch with sinking heart the tearing up of the ties of a mile of railroad that was to have brought them prosperity, and that changed its mind and went the other way. He gave them a vivid picture of the little spireless church with its awful two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar debt hanging like a millstone about its neck. He described a few, a very few, of the heroic efforts, the surprising sacrifices, some of them so singular that they would have been ludicrous had they not been pathetic, which the people had made toward the lifting of that debt, and yet, because of their poverty, had failed.

Then he took them out to the Johnson cabin, eight desolate miles from anywhere, and described the patient, hollow-eyed, hard-worked, poorly fed woman who had lived there for years, hungering for her Eastern home until the picture had dimmed and faded, and there had finally moved into view a vision of the eternal

home, the "house not made with hands," waiting for her in her Father's country. It was then that he let them realize that God had not forgotten the poor little town which had never boomed, but had ordered the gates of heaven thrown wide one day and sent his angels to convoy Mother Johnson home.

But he told them more than that: he could never explain why; he had not meant to be personal. It is certain that if "Helen" had been there he would not have done it. He told them about Helen and "the child": how they had stood in the sunlight of that early morning and watched him down the road, waving good-byes after him, until they became but specks in the distance. And he told of the waiting mother who had not seen her youngest born in twenty-five years and had never seen her grandchild, and now, after all these years of hope deferred, she must be content with "nobody but him," while the others bravely worked and waited at home.

And he told of the patient efforts those two women had made, against almost impassable obstacles, to get him decently ready for his

journey. And he told, yes, he actually *told* of the one white petticoat that had evolved into two shirts, with sleeves! Oh, he knew all about it; and once launched, could not keep himself from telling the whole story. He could feel, of course, how completely he carried his great audience with him so that they laughed, or cried, according as he willed that they should; yet the *willing* was not oratory, it was simply an honest, earnest man bent on making that representative audience understand things as they were. Of course he was eloquent and convincing, for he was master of the theme about which he was talking, and his whole soul was in it.

But he did not pose as a martyr, not he! not for Helen, nor even for Esther, who had not "chosen her lot" as they two had. Given the same choice again, with all the knowledge of the weary way added thereto, and he believed in his soul that they would, all three of them, yes, the child too, have chosen the same service, and looked ahead to the same reward. But it was right for the church to know what it was about; it should be able to think and

talk understandingly of the road that its representatives in the home, as well as the foreign field were called upon to tread. For two full hours he poured the power of his knowledge and his heart upon them. Once or twice he attempted to stop, and the calls came from all over the church. "Go on!" "Go on!" "Never mind the time!" "Give us the rest of that story!" When at last he sat down, the row of ministers on the platform were rubbing their spectacles and their eyes and looking at one another. Finally the oldest one among them with the tears still shining on his face arose and said:—

"Brethren, the only word that we can speak to you after that is, Receive the benediction."

Prominent in the throngs that pushed and elbowed their way out from that memorable service was Mrs. John Potter. Long before that, she had forgotten her errands and her belated dinner. Even the claims of hospitality were almost forgotten; she had something else on her mind. She turned back once to give peremptory orders to her guest:—

"You make your way to the middle door

and stand there. I'll come just as soon as I can. I've got to see two or three people first."

She made her way, with the expedition of one accustomed to looking out for herself, to the side entrance, and reached there just in time; Mrs. Warren McIntyre was about to step into her carriage. She had very slight acquaintance with that lady, who was only a summer resident, and so wealthy that women like Mrs. John Potter supposed that she must of course feel exclusive. Mrs. Potter's usual manner was to stand at one side, at so great a distance that the lady could not be friendly if she desired; but all that was now forgotten. Mrs. Warren McIntyre was her present objective point, and she plucked at her sleeve with decision and spoke rapidly:—

"Don't you think, Mrs. McIntyre, that it would be possible for me to slip around among a few of the people who heard him, and raise the money to send for his wife and daughter, and let them come to this meeting and go on and see her mother, and surprise them all? It seems a shame that that old mother had

to be disappointed again, and she ought to see her grandchild. Couldn't it be done?"

Mrs. McIntyre withdrew her foot from her carriage step and spoke with exceeding cordiality:—

"Why, my dear friend, what a lovely idea! I should never have thought of it. I don't see why it couldn't be carried out. They telegraph money-orders. Do you mean you will see at once what you can raise? If you will, report to me this afternoon. Of course you can count on my help. I will make up whatever is needed."

"I'll do it," said Mrs. John Potter, energy written on every line of her strong, handsome face. "There's Mrs. Armitage; I'll ask her this minute."

She accomplished her object, of course. She was a woman who was used to accomplishing what she undertook. Besides, she had a tower of strength to fall back on. Had not Mrs. Warren McIntyre promised to make up whatever was lacking? She spent a busy and not unpleasant afternoon. Being a shrewd woman, with a fair knowledge of human nature and a

wide acquaintance in the city, she chose her subjects with care, and met not a dissenting voice. It was dinner time when she presented herself at the McIntyre home, well pleased with her success. And her fine face fairly glowed with pride and satisfaction when Mrs. McIntyre promptly doubled the amount. Then, being a business woman herself, she entered at once into details.

“I am afraid that we cannot manage the ‘surprise’ part, my dear Mrs. Potter; that is, so far as Mr. Randall is concerned. Mr. McIntyre thinks it will have to be explained to him and that he must send the telegram. He says that any other arrangement would frighten the ladies; they would be sure to think that he was very ill, or had met with some accident.”

“That is so,” said Mrs. Potter, a slight shadow on her face. “It seems too bad, doesn’t it? I had counted on giving that man a nice surprise. Well, it’s common sense, and I’ve always noticed that common sense has to come in, sooner or later, if a thing gets done right. How shall we manage it?”

It required some management. Mr. Randall was the guest of the McIntyres, and that lady undertook to make plain to him the desire of their hearts. He was bewildered and grateful and doubtful all at once. At first it was evident that the doubts predominated. It was kind, it was wonderfully kind, and — oh, he was grateful. Could anything but a stone fail of gratitude for such service, but —

And then the gracious woman who had been explaining laid a gentle hand on his arm and spoke quietly:—

“Dear friend, there is nothing strange nor strained about this. We are all the children of one Father, and these, our sisters, are at the front bearing some of our burdens for us, and we want to meet and clasp hands with them on the way. Will you not let us?”

He looked in her kind, earnest eyes and smiled. She and Helen would be kindred spirits. And there was the child, and — what was that prayer he had prayed for her but this morning? Was this the answer? “While they are yet speaking, I will hear,” was the promise. And the Rev. Spencer Randall laid down

his doubts and his pride and set himself to the making of that telegram.

It was a work of art. He grew appalled as he struggled over its necessary length; amid the chaos of astonishment and delight into which he had been thrown, one thought stood out clearly,—Helen and Esther *must not* be frightened.

“Never mind the length of the telegram,” said the merchant prince, who was as used to telegrams as he was to air. “The operator won’t mind its length.”

“But it will cost a fortune,” said the home missionary. And while he struggled with it, trying to strike out a word here and there, and being dismayed afresh by his inability to make it brief, the rich man stood marvelling over the limitations of such a life, and the constant, petty sacrifices which it suggested, and got a clearer view of the name home missionary than ever before.

“The idea,” he said to himself, “that the number of words in an important telegram should actually trouble him!”

That particular day away out in the little

Western home had been a trying one. The fierce heats of summer were supposed to be over, yet there had come sweeping across the trackless sand a sudden and unexpected hot wave, fiercer, apparently, at least harder to cope with, than the August heats had been; and, October though it was, Esther Randall had watched the effect of the heat upon her mother all that day.

“She is kind of beat out,” a friendly neighbor had said, who lingered to sympathize with the anxious daughter. “It ain’t the heat so much as it is a long spell of overdoing, and no rest nor change. If she could only have gone with the Elder now, what a good thing it would have been! Seems like a body has got to have a change once in a while — ’specially a woman. When I went out to Alviry’s last spring, I was all done over, you may say. I hadn’t the strength of one of our old cats, and they’re about the laziest things I know of. But land! when I got home I felt jest like a colt! And it wa’n’t anything but a change. You don’t know no way for your mother to git away somewhere for a spell, I s’pose? No, I reckon

not; it's a pity we ain't some of us forehanded. Your Uncle Joram comes the nighest to it, I guess; but I s'pose he couldn't —"

"Oh, no!" said Esther, quickly. "He couldn't."

"No, I s'pose not. Well, you'll jest have to git married, Esther, to a rich man, so't you can give your ma a change, though the land knows where you will find him in these parts. You feed her up good on that chicken broth I brought; it's nice and rich, and it's real strengthening, you know."

She called back this last item as she was disappearing around the turn in the road, leaving Esther with a heightened color, not over the advice about getting married. The woman was sympathetic and well intentioned, and Esther was used to her; but she could not keep her face in good order over a hint of help from that new uncle of hers. She laughed a little, though, in another minute, as she recalled that never forgotten trip "out to Alviry's" and the "change" that a journey of thirty-five miles overland had given. But almost immediately she sighed. When had her mother

enjoyed even so much change as that? She peeped in on her anxiously as she lay on the wide, old-fashioned lounge in the living room. The dusk was falling rapidly, yet the breathless day had not freshened as according to all reasonable precedent an October day should have done at nightfall. Esther, as she stood there in the doorway, having returned from seeing her visitor to the gate, wondered if her father's letter received that morning, giving an account of all the wonders and glories of his trip thus far, had rested and helped her mother, or made her feel her weakness and weariness more sensibly.

Then, suddenly, all her pulses seemed to stop for a single definite moment, and then give a sudden bound into quickened action. Down the long, dusty road there loitered a boy who served as general messenger for all sorts and manners of errands having to do with the post-office, the station, or the corner store. In his hand he held a yellow envelope, of that peculiar kind that could mean only a telegram, and some instinct told the girl it was for them, and must be from, or about, her father. Who

else was there to convey news to them in such manner? And if from father, then it meant evil tidings of some kind: father had no money to waste on commonplaces. She turned and swiftly and noiselessly closed the door; then set her brave young heart to bear the first shock, whatever it was, and shield her mother as long as she could. Yes, it was for them. The boy stopped whistling, when he saw her, and handed up the envelope in respectful silence. It was addressed to her mother; never mind, she and her mother were too entirely one to make hesitation on that score necessary, and she must see it first and break its message carefully.

She read it once, twice, three times, all the blood in her body seeming to surge into her face as she read. What did that remarkable message mean? Then she bethought herself to pay the messenger and dismiss him, no wiser than when he came, though respectful curiosity spoke on every line of his freckled face.

Then she went slowly, thoughtfully, in to her mother. How was she to prepare her for such a message as that?

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN EMINENTLY SENSIBLE PERSON

“O MOTHER!” said Esther, speaking in nervous haste, as though she had but that moment succeeded in getting courage for her utterance. “O mother, *must* I go? Couldn’t I stay with Aunt Sarah or somewhere and let you go on, without me?”

Mrs. Randall was bending over a large box that did duty as a closet, selecting therefrom certain articles to be packed in the worn little trunk that had waited many years for its packing. She straightened herself at sound of these surprising words and looked wonderingly at her daughter.

“Why, Esther!” she said. And the tone was more nearly a rebuke than Esther had heard for years. The girl’s face flushed to her forehead, but she said no word. She was sure that her mother understood. After a moment’s silence the mother spoke with gentle dignity:—

“We will both stay, daughter, if you think so; if that is the right way. Have you thought it over very carefully from that viewpoint, dear? Don’t you think we might safely trust your father? We have done it these twenty years, and he has never brought humiliation to us, nor given us cause to feel other than proud of him. He is a man of refined feeling, dear. And when one thinks calmly of it, what is there that should be offensive? We are kinsfolk; the Elder Brother is theirs, you know, as well as ours.”

The blood that had receded rolled again in rich waves over the girl’s face. How thoroughly her mother had understood her, although she had not put her reluctance plainly even to herself.

She came swiftly over to her mother and kissed her.

“Mommie dear,” she said humbly, “you will have to forgive me; you are a better woman than I shall ever be. I have always suspected it. Of course I can trust my father, and we will do exactly as he says.”

Nevertheless it had been hard for Esther

Randall, this planning to take a journey at the expense of others—people whom not only she had never seen but who were strangers to her father and mother, with no claim to kinship, and no excuse for their extraordinary scheme but that of pity.

“Subjects of their benevolence!” she told herself, and she could not keep her eyes from flashing, and confessed to herself that she hated it. Yet her mother needed change; even the commonplace, sluggish country folk perceived that, and would openly rejoice over the “charity” that had enabled them to seek it. The telegram that had wrought such mischief, and that it had troubled Mr. Randall to word, read as follows:—

“Two hundred dollars at express office to your order. You and Esther take first convenient through express for this city. Wire me date of starting. Nothing the matter anywhere. Just a happy surprise from good women.

“SPENCER DIXON RANDALL.”

Mrs. McIntyre had argued with the good man over the unnecessary character of the last three

words; but even at the expense of the brevity his soul longed for, he stood out sturdily for them. He was sure that they would help Helen to understand. And she had, and was happy after the manner of a woman who had had long experience in putting aside all phases of self, and entering into the joy of others.

The two women who stood, the next evening, on the platform of a city railroad station, waiting for the East-bound express train, would not have suggested to even a close observer that they had a close acquaintance with poverty, or that they had spent the entire previous night in planning and carrying out ways to make a decent appearance before the travelling public. Both women had about them that unmistakable and indescribable something which marks the lady, irrespective of the clothes she wears; which is able, indeed, to dignify every article of clothing she puts on. Moreover, Esther Randall had always possessed, in large measure, that which, for want of a better word, may be called knack. Her friends at school used to say of her in half-complaining tones, "Give Esther Randall a bit of ribbon and an inch of

lace that the rest of us would think was good for nothing but the ragbag, and she will come out well dressed."

There was an element of truth in this. Esther had not served for years under the guidance of a capable mother, in helping to make the two ends meet respectably, not to have developed all the skill that she possessed. Of course the one "good" dress that each lady always contrived to have, would be called upon this year to do extra duty, and of course they would hardly outlast the winter; but Mrs. Randall, when reminded of this by her sister Sarah, had quoted cheerfully, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and had added: "Moreover, Sarah, I have always found that the *blessings* 'thereof' were also sufficient. Isn't it good that we have a Father whom we can trust?"

As this good woman, waiting at the station, found time to survey her daughter, she had a comfortable and grateful feeling that the "good women" to whom her husband's telegram had referred, would have no reason to be ashamed of her.

On the morning of the day in which the ladies were expected, Mr. Earle McIntyre lingered in the dining room to keep his mother company while she finished her breakfast. He had risen from the table to signal a car for their guest, Mr. Spencer Randall, who had an early appointment at the church, and remained standing idly by the window, watching the passers-by and chatting with his mother. Mr. McIntyre, Senior, had been called by an early train to his business house in the greater city some fifty miles away; but his son was enjoying the closing days of his vacation, and had announced that for the next few days he meant to take no early trains, nor any other kind of trains, and to do nothing methodical or systematic, or even sensible if he could help it: he proposed to give himself a few days of complete relaxation before University work began.

“Langham isn’t coming, after all,” he said, as he glanced again at a letter he held in his hand. “A friend of his is ill and has sent for him to go to Bayville for the week.”

“I am not very sorry to miss him just now,” his mother said, smiling. “I think our other

guests will be more comfortable with fewer strangers to meet."

But if the Professor Langham whom these two were so lightly putting aside could have known what "stranger" was coming as a guest to that house that day, not all the Bayvilles and sick friends in the world would have kept him from being there to meet her. Ours is a small world, after all, and it is not so easy to divide interests as on the surface it appears.

Mrs. McIntyre broke in upon her son's musings with a question:—

"Earle, are you going to the meeting this morning?"

He turned from the window to give her a comical grimace. "My dear mother, have you forgotten already my stern resolutions? I make concessions in favor of Sunday, but no week-day meetings for me at present."

"Then can you go with the carriage to meet our guests? I find that I must be detained at home this morning."

"Guests? By train? Who is coming? Ah, I remember; this is the fateful day on which the Amazons are to arrive, is it not? How are

they expected to distinguish themselves from five hundred other females? Am I supposed to walk up to all the dowdily dressed women in disordered collars and frowzy head-gear and ask if their name is Randall?"

"Mr. Randall will be there, my son. He rushed off to this committee meeting before the appointed hour, that he might hurry the work through in time for the train. But I thought it would be pleasant to have a member of the family there; still, if you don't wish to do it, Earle, never mind. Perhaps your father will get home in time, or, if not, I can plan to go myself."

At this her son moved toward her, and, bending, kissed her whimsically on her nose as he said: —

"My beloved mother, you do me injustice; I am entirely willing to be sacrificed in your behalf on the altar of benevolence. I will meet the pioneers with alacrity, and literally overwhelm them I have no doubt with attentions such as they never even dreamed of."

"Earle, Mr. Randall is a gentleman."

"So he is, my precious mother, and I respect

and honor him. I am also in fullest sympathy with your heroic efforts to make his trip East forever memorable. I am intending to aid and abet you in all possible ways to the best of my poor abilities. At the same time, my beloved mother," — another kiss, this time on her ear, — "I consider it but kindness to remind you that all heroisms have crosses, and that you should be prepared for the worst. The husband, it is true, is a gentleman; but we must remember that his profession has kept him more or less in touch with the civilized world, and with men of education and culture. Moreover, men do not, for some reason, lose the effect of their early polish so soon as women. I haven't the slightest doubt that his idolized 'Helen' is a good and true woman worthy of all honor. But we must be prepared nevertheless to have her wear gowns that never approached the thought of what you ladies call 'tailored,' and cotton gloves frayed at the fingers, and an impossible arrangement for her head; also, she will have forgotten what ladies in society do with either feet or hands. Now if such is the condition of the mother, and I ask you, beloved, if what I

have said is not in accordance with my usual excellent sense — what shall we say of the daughter, who has probably never in her life been away from Western wilds? Be reasonable, dearest, and don't expect miracles."

His mother laughed, and looked after her son with complacent pride, as he prepared to depart. Everything about him satisfied her; and in truth he was all that a wise as well as a fond mother could have desired. She knew and rejoiced in the fact that she was still his "dearest"; and she knew also that she could rely upon him to give not only proper but kindly and gracious attention to her guests, no matter how "dowdy" or otherwise objectionable the Western young woman might be.

Two hours later young McIntyre was pacing the platform of the railway station, keeping Argus eyes on the motley crowd that pushed and elbowed its way through the gates, eager to get as far as possible from the through express that had held them prisoners.

Somewhat anxious eyes they were, also; the Rev. Spencer Randall had not appeared, and neither, so far as he could learn, had the

expected guests. It was very annoying; there seemed nothing for him to do but wait, and stare. Several times he had selected two whom he mentally called "females" as answering fairly well his conception of those for whom he was watching, only to see them pounced upon by an eager husband or lover, and carried off in triumph.

Meantime, two women had been for several minutes attracting his attention. He believed that they were mother and daughter, and they must have been on the through train, although there was no trace of night travel about them. If they were travellers, they were evidently cultivated ones, thoroughly accustomed to looking out for themselves, and being able to meet the little inconveniences and annoyances of the way without losing their self-poise. He decided that they were ladies from one of the neighboring cities who had come to attend the great missionary meeting, and had expected a friend to meet them; they stood quietly at one side like persons who were waiting. They were not disconcerted, but seemed to be considering what step to take next. Having nothing bet-

ter to do while he still waited for the possible appearance of Mr. Randall, he continued to study them. He confessed to being somewhat fastidious about a lady's costume, especially for the street, and he decided that these women were faultlessly dressed. With exceeding simplicity, as good taste required, but with such faultless regard to color and shape and such exquisite neatness that they might have come from a reception, instead of a railway train.

The face of the younger one, he told himself, was peculiar; he felt that the memory of it would stay with him; he felt a strange regret over the fact that they were total strangers, and there was no possible likelihood that he should ever see them again. Wait! was it possible that they might be in need of a little information with regard to routes and distances? He would like to show them a courtesy if there was opportunity.

He looked about him, annoyed that there were no officials of any kind in sight, and said to himself that there ought to be a different state of things. How were strangers expected to find their way? Perhaps these two were

really embarrassed by failing to meet their friends.

At that moment Mr. Randall touched his arm, and spoke anxiously.

“I didn't see you before; I don't understand it; they seem not to have come, after all. Yet this was the train, and my wife would surely have telegraphed if —” and then he was interrupted.

“Father!” called a voice that even then Earle McIntyre told himself was peculiarly clear and pure, and fitted the girl's face.

For Mr. Randall turned quickly and made a rush for the strangers, and tried then and there to take them both into his hungry arms.

It was the last week of his vacation, and Earle McIntyre had resolved not to do anything that was even sensible if he could help it; yet his conduct during the next few days, however surprising it may have been to others, always seemed to himself eminently sensible.

CHAPTER XXIX

“THE SAME PERSON”

AMONG other eminently sensible movements upon his part, Mr. Earle McIntyre showed the most surprising interest in the missionary convocation. He had not heard Mr. Randall's great speech, and before the coming of that gentleman's family had been heard to say that he was glad he had not, because he had been called upon already to hear as much about it as mortal man could endure. Nevertheless he heard, or at least he was present where he could have heard if he chose to listen, every other missionary, home or foreign, who spoke at that gathering during the next five days. To be sure, there were reasons for this which he believed must be apparent to people of common sense. His father had a heavy business on his mind, the details of which must receive more or less

attention, and a new maid in his mother's department demanded some of her time; he was the only member of the family who chanced just then to be quite at leisure to entertain their guests. So, mindful of his promise to his mother to aid and abet her hospitable designs, he gave the most careful attention to Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Randall, surprising even his mother with the thoughtfulness of his courtesies. In going to and from the evening meetings, when both his father and mother were of the party, the family carriage seemed quite full, and with marked solicitude for the comfort of his elders, he decreed that Miss Randall should take a seat in his own single carriage and make more room for the others. Moreover, there was a river, and there were row boats—in fact, he had one of his own, and Miss Randall had lived all her life far inland; it seemed no more than attending to the demands of courtesy to plan that she should have opportunities now for such enjoyments, especially as neither her father nor mother were fond of rowing. So, in the early evenings before the church services began, he seized the opportunity



ERNEST FOSBERG

THERE WERE ROW-BOATS—IN FACT, HE HAD ONE OF HIS OWN.
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to show the inland-bred girl the beauties of their river scenery, and if sometimes they rowed farther than they had meant, and were late in reaching the crowded church, neither of them seemed to be deeply grieved thereat. Nor had these two any lack of topics for conversation when they were left dependent on each other's society. In truth, the number and variety of subjects for which they seemed to have an equal affinity might have astonished an unsympathetic outsider.

On the first evening of their acquaintance, Miss Randall had made a surprising remark. They were together in his mother's garden, whither she had bade her son take their guest to see her chrysanthemums that were in their glory; and all the while Esther exulted in them he was conscious that she was bestowing curious glances on him as one trying to place a half-forgotten scene. At last she spoke, half aloud, as one who did not realize that she had a listener.

“It is certainly the same person.”

“Is it?” he asked. “Shall I be glad or sorry?”

Then she looked directly at him and laughed.

"I think you have a right to be glad," she said. "But you don't know anything about it. I wanted to ask you, then, but I never expected to have the opportunity, if possibly the name of your mother's friend was Ester Ried—the friend who died when she was nineteen? Was it?"

He looked exceedingly surprised.

"My mother had a friend named Ester Ried," he said, "and she died when she was nineteen; but how you know of it or what you mean I am at a loss to understand."

"Isn't it wonderful," she said, "that her name was Ester Ried, my father's friend? Yet it seemed to me at the time that it must be. I was named for her. I am Esther Ried Randall."

"So was I," he said, smiling. "I am Earle Ried McIntyre; but what does all this mean? When and where did you hear about my mother's friend?"

And that took them back to the college town and the Sunday morning service in Dr. Armitage's church, that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday

in which Esther Randall found her soul and its Master. But she did not tell him then what cause he had to be glad for the utterances of that hour. They began to feel, however, like old acquaintances; and presently Mr. McIntyre, still lingering over that Sabbath memory, said:—

“Why, perhaps you know my friend Langham? He is from that college.”

“Professor Langham?” said Esther. “Is he your friend?”

Her tone expressed astonishment, and he laughed a little as he answered:—

“Yes, in a way. We meet each other daily in term time and always exchange friendly greetings, and take an occasional walk together, and often have to serve on the same committees; isn’t that friendship? Will you tell me why you are so astonished?”

“There is no reason,” said Esther, flushing deeply and feeling glad that the dusk was falling rapidly. “Only I, he,” she was vexed with herself over her confusion.

“All I mean is,” she began again, speaking rapidly, “it did not seem to me you were sufficiently alike to be friends.”

“Do people have to be alike to be friends, Miss Randall?” Then, seeing that for some reason the topic embarrassed her, he added quietly, “Mr. Langham and I are new friends. I did not meet him when I was West,” and at once changed the subject. They did not refer to it again until they had become old friends.

Missionary rallies, though as long drawn out as that memorable one, will come to an end. The last day and hour came; and the Randalls, although held for the Sabbath after the close, so that Mr. Randall might preach for Pastor Evans in the Tenth Street Church, reached the hour and moment when they said good-by and departed for the old home and the waiting mothers, Helen's mother first. Mr. Earle McIntyre had made every conceivable arrangement for the journey, and been at great pains to explain that it would be necessary for them to leave the through train at the junction forty miles distant and wait two hours for the accommodation. Then, at the last moment, he had discovered some business which should be attended to in that direction, so he went down

with them, agreeing to see that they boarded the right train.

“What possible business can Earle have at the junction?” questioned his bewildered father after the guests had departed. “I never knew of his having any acquaintances or interests there.”

“I think,” said the hesitating mother, “that perhaps the chief part of his business is to see that our guests get safely away from the junction and have as comfortable accommodations as possible for the remainder of their journey.”

“Humph!” said the father, who wished to have a quiet evening with his son before the world’s work rushed in on them again, and who resented the junction as an interloper. “I should call that courtesy gone mad! That would be enough if the ladies were travelling alone. Mr. Randall knows what he is about, and is entirely capable of taking care of his family. I never knew Earle to be so overcome with politeness as to plan to wait unnecessarily at a stupid junction for two whole hours, with not an interesting thing to take his attention.”

Mrs. McIntyre looked at the merchant prince about whom she had heard for years that he had one of the keenest, most-trusted brains in the business world, and said to her inner self: —

“How stupid great men can be on occasion! Ah, well, let it be. He will learn, in time, what there was at the junction that was interesting.”

But the mother knew then, and knew that she was not “dearest” any more.

All these people went their ways and lived their lives, and a whole year passed, and it was the ninth day of October, and wonderful things were happening to the ladies of the Tenth Street Church.

The Ladies' Aid was gathered in full force for its important fall meeting, which was to initiate the winter's campaign of work. Financially the year had been discouraging to the Tenth Street women; they had worked valiantly, but without the leader to whom they had been accustomed it seemed to them that they had accomplished very little. Not once had they ventured on a church supper, or fair, or festival. It had been found that with one consent they

shrank from any aggressive movements unless they could have the help of Mrs. John Potter; and that good woman, sorely tried though she was by her inactivity, and with her opposition to any and everything missionary in its character utterly annihilated ever since she listened to Missionary Randall's two hours' plea, was still engaged in being a woman of her word. She had kept herself carefully posted on the efforts of the women, and knew that they had not been able to pay one penny of the original debt; that indeed the prompt payment of the interest had, together with their other obligations, taxed them sorely. She felt deeply for them, and longed in every fibre of her being to be at work in their behalf, yet she told herself grimly that business was business, and set her lips firmly and wondered drearily how it would all end. If she could only afford to quietly transfer a thousand dollars of her own money to that ridiculous bank account of three dollars and sixty-five cents, that would settle the whole matter and she could go to work again. But this the good woman knew that she could not afford to do; so she sighed and waited.

And yet on this ninth day of October all the members of the Ladies' Aid, and a large number who were not members, were gathered by special invitation read by Pastor Evans from the pulpit in Mrs. John Potter's pleasant rooms, busy with needles and tongues; while Mrs. John Potter herself bustled about her dining room, adding last touches to the table where she meant to spread a bountiful thanksgiving feast, and desired to have everything ready before the business meeting — which was always held at exactly five o'clock — should be called to order. To understand the situation it will be necessary to go back a few weeks to an August evening in the McIntyre home. A rainy evening which the McIntyres, mother and son, were spending in what they called the "small house," under circumstances that were rather depressing. They had spent most of the summer at a quiet seaside resort, and being in town for a few days, preparatory to a Western trip, they had come down to the "small house" that had been closed all summer, to look after certain matters demanding attention. Their plan had been to return to town by the evening train, but they

discovered it to be necessary to spend the night, and wait for daylight to complete some of their tasks.

The rooms in which they were thus compelled to spend the evening were not inspiring. Much of the furniture was shrouded in pale gray dresses, and looked in the dim light like ghosts of pleasant hours that were gone, standing solemnly about in the great quiet rooms. The rain beat steadily against the windows, making it necessary to keep them closed, and so adding to the general sense of discomfort. Mr. Earle McIntyre wandered listlessly about, trying to find something to interest him. He knew there was a letter from the West awaiting him at home and he wanted it. The knowledge that he could not have it until the next day increased his sense of dreariness and general discomfort.

"It is strange," he said to his mother, "what a difference little things make in a home. This room hasn't been changed much since last fall, and yet it doesn't look like the same place."

His mother smiled sympathetically; she understood better than he did what he missed

from the room. She began to talk to him about the people and the church, their interest in which dated back to his childhood.

"Mrs. Evans is rather troubled about the church debt," she told him. "They haven't been able to reduce it at all this year, and now the holder of the mortgage wants his money. They are almost afraid of a foreclosure, though of course that will not be allowed."

"I thought they ate and drank that debt up long ago," said her son, listlessly.

"Oh, no, they only ate at it. But they haven't even done that, this year; they are afraid to launch out without Mrs. John Potter's help."

"Mrs. Potter!" with a start and a sudden accession of interest. "Is she *dead*?"

"Oh, no indeed, she is very much alive, and is engaged in being —, 'a woman of her word.'"

She laughed over the remembrance of the curious trouble, as it had been detailed to her that afternoon, and gave her son a graphic account of the assessment and its results.

"I don't know when I have laughed so heartily," she said, "as I did when Mrs. Evans was

telling me about the letter Mrs. Potter wrote to the ladies; it sounded so exactly like her. She is a very bright, capable woman; it seems a pity that she should spoil her usefulness and happiness by this dreadful streak of obstinacy, doesn't it?"

The young man laughed in an absent-minded way.

"Shows spirit," he said. "Is the face of the debt just a thousand?" Then, after a few minutes of silence, "Mother, wasn't Mrs. Potter the moving spirit in that plan to send for Esther and her mother?"

"Indeed she was; she tramped the entire afternoon to accomplish it. Think how thoroughly interested she was in missions then; and yet she will not give up the stand she took about that fifty dollars, even to help the missionary society."

"That is principle, I suppose she thinks," her son said, with an amused laugh. After that he relapsed into a silence so thoughtful that his mother forebore to disturb it.

CHAPTER XXX

“SOMETHING PORTENTOUS WAS ABOUT TO
HAPPEN”

ON the morning following Mr. McIntyre's visit with his mother, during which he learned certain interesting particulars about the Tenth Street Church debt, Mrs. John Potter had a caller. No less a personage than “Professor McIntyre,” as she was always careful to call him. He came before her breakfast dishes were well out of the way, and flurried that excellent woman not a little. She had a very slight acquaintance with this great man, and stood fully as much in awe of him as she did of anybody; which, however, is not saying a great deal. She found him very genial and friendly, interested in her fall flowers which he compared favorably with his mother's, and he offered to send her from town a new variety of dahlia. In less than five minutes she was quite at her ease and enjoying the call.

"By the way," he said, with a sudden change of subject, "I wonder if you can keep a secret? Isn't it generally supposed that ladies cannot?"

"I don't know about other people," said Mrs. Potter, "but I know that I can do what I say I will. I am a woman of my word."

"So I have understood." At this point Mr. McIntyre passed his hand skilfully over his mustache to suppress a smile, and hurried on.

"The fact is, I want to secure your help in a little matter, and I must first tell you that I am about to be married."

Mrs. Potter gave a little start of surprise, and her face expressed the keenest interest. This was a very rare secret indeed to be intrusted to her keeping. More than one member of the Ladies' Aid had been heard to say that she did not believe Earle McIntyre would ever marry.

"And it happens," continued her caller, "that the lady I am to marry is especially interested in you."

"Mercy me!" said Mrs. John Potter, in a flutter of excitement. "Is it somebody I know?" To herself she was saying: "Good land! I hope it isn't that yellow-haired girl

who was with them a year ago last June — she might have a reason for remembering me. I know I turned around to her one night in meeting, and asked her if she didn't think she could keep from whispering just through prayer time, and we wouldn't mind about the sermon. I do hope she isn't the one."

Meantime, she was hearing every word that Mr. McIntyre said.

"And because of this interest, not only in you but in the church which you represent, she would like to offer through you, in honor of our marriage day, a little gift toward the paying of that church debt, in which we know you are peculiarly interested. The day is set for the ninth of October, which is a sort of anniversary day with us."

Mrs. Potter carried on her mental comments, "It's the very day the Randall girl and her mother came to the missionary meeting. I remember it because it was John's birthday."

"Now, Mrs. Potter, may I ask you to receive the gift for me and hold it until the ninth of October, presenting it to your Ladies' Aid on that day as a souvenir of the occasion?"

What a delightful commission! But Mrs. Potter must be honest, though the opportunity of her life was lost.

“I am not their treasurer any more,” she said sadly.

“So I have understood; but I do not care to ask any other person to serve us, and as I am compelled to leave town this morning, I thought if I might put this little matter in your hands to attend to at the right moment, it would be an accommodation.”

Mrs. Potter thought swiftly.

“I guess I can pass on a little money to them, even if I’m not their secretary,” she told herself sternly. “Any honest woman could do that, without affecting her word.”

“I’ll do it,” she said briefly, in the tone that one might have used if he were saying, “I’ll do it, though my life should be the forfeit.”

Mr. McIntyre drew out his pocketbook. “I have made it in the form of a check, Mrs. Potter, payable to your order. If you will kindly hold it and the secret I mentioned, until the ninth day of October, and then arrange its payment in any manner that best suits you, Mrs.

McIntyre elect and myself will be most grateful to you."

"My goodness!" said Mrs. John Potter, as she stood, check in hand, at the front window and watched her caller making rapid strides toward the station, "I was that flurried and bewildered that I never asked him who the lady was, nor why she had any interest in me. Well, well! I wouldn't have thought that I could be such a goose. It can't be that yellow-haired girl—she wouldn't want me to handle any of her money.

"I wonder what this check is? They're rich, those McIntyres. I shouldn't wonder a bit if it was a good fifty dollars, same as we made at the supper. Wouldn't that be great, now, if it should be the exact sum? I guess those ladies that voted it would feel cheap then." As she thought these excited thoughts she opened with eager hands the folded check.

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," was her description of it when, on the ninth day of October, soon after five o'clock, she was able to tell the story. But at the moment all she said in almost frightened gasps was —

“My goodness — gracious!”

And now it is time to return to Mrs. John Potter’s large, old-fashioned parlor and watch the busy needles and listen to the busy tongues.

“I wonder if Mrs. Potter isn’t about ready to come in?” said the president; “it is almost five o’clock.”

“What do you suppose is going to happen?” asked another, pausing in her work to make her words more impressive. “I never was so surprised in my life as when I heard Mr. Evans read that notice from the pulpit asking us here. I didn’t believe she would ever do it.”

“Well,” said one of the Gardner girls, “I was never so surprised in my life as I was when we received Professor McIntyre’s wedding cards. Mary and I noticed last year that he was very polite to that girl; but they were his mother’s guests, and he is polite to everybody. I never saw a more polite young man in all my life than Professor McIntyre, never!”

“I guess nobody else ever did,” said little Mrs. Hunt. “I couldn’t help but notice him one day last spring when that Sarah Barnes was sewing there—a plain, homely girl without

any style of any kind, and as freckled as she can be in the bargain, and if he didn't hold open the gate for her and lift his hat as she walked out of it as though she was a queen."

Although the wedding which they all knew was in progress that day had been discussed in all its bearings until one would have supposed that there was nothing left to be said, no matter what subject was under discussion, they presently returned to it with renewed vigor.

"I suppose the ceremony is over by this time," said Mrs. Stillman, glancing at the clock, "and she's Mrs. Earle McIntyre forever and always. I wonder how she feels? I'm glad they have such a nice day for the wedding; but then, land! it may rain cats and dogs out there. They say it is more than a thousand miles from here."

"I guess it is nearer two thousand," said one of the Gardner girls. "Doesn't it seem just like a story book? Her coming away out here, in search of him, as one may say, though of course she didn't think of such a thing; she was a sweet, pretty, modest girl. I liked her looks the first time I set eyes on her, and I saw her that first evening when Professor McIntyre

brought her into church. It's my belief that he was struck with her from the first minute. If you think of it, he always had her with him.

“He is downright in love with her, I'm sure of that. Mrs. Baker says we ought to see the suite of rooms he has had furnished all new for her in the big house. She said if two or three of us wanted to come in before the folks get back, she'd show them to us. And that reminds me how nice she is going to have it all around. Do you remember that Professor Langham who was down here with the McIntyres last spring? It seems he's married a college friend of hers.”

“Of Mrs. Baker, do you mean?” interposed one of the good women, who liked to have pronouns and antecedents in their places.

The Gardner girl gave her an annoyed glance and said:—

“Of course not! Professor Langham, as I was saying, has married a college friend of Miss Randall's — or else he's going to, I don't know which; the most intimate friend she had in college, Mrs. Baker said, and she used to know Professor Langham, too. He is from that college

where she graduated, you know, so I suppose that will make it pleasanter yet — and he is fixing up rooms just around the corner from the McIntyres; they aren't much like the McIntyres' rooms, Mrs. Baker said, but real nice and cosey; so she won't be altogether among strangers, as one may say. Though of course when her husband is at home she won't feel any call to be lonesome. I do think he is the very nicest young man that was ever made, and I must say I'm real glad she has got him. She seemed to think the world of her father and mother, and now she can do for them."

"*He'll* do for them," said the member who was an intimate friend of the housekeeper at the McIntyres' 'big house.' She had bided her time, knowing that she had a delicious budget of news for them. "I don't suppose you have heard what a surprise he gave them, did you? Well, I have. I was in town yesterday, and I got an hour to run in and see Mrs. Baker and she told me all about it. He got it up for her father and mother. The girl knew about it and helped keep it secret. I tell you he did it up in fine style."

“But what *was* it?” said two voices at once, and nearly all the needles waited.

“Why, he took the two grandmothers and the three aunts along with his folks out to the wedding! Paid all the bills, and took the sunset limited vestibule parlor car buffet and-all-the-other-things train. Wasn’t that a thing worth doing? It seems none of them have ever been out there, and he made up his mind they should all have a good time together. It must be nice to be able to do things like that.”

“Well, they can afford it,” said Mrs. Jacob Smith, beginning to sew. “Mr. Smith was saying last night that Mr. Warren McIntyre was one of the richest men in the city, and growing richer every day; and the Professor is his only child. That girl has certainly done well for herself, and all her folks, probably. She’ll never have to cut up her petticoat again to make shirts for anybody, I guess; and I for one am real glad that —”

“Ladies,” interrupted the president of the Ladies’ Aid, “it is exactly five o’clock, and we must come to order at once for business.”

It was at that moment that Mrs. John Potter entered the room, and those who glanced at her face felt a kind of delicious awe steal over them; something portentous was about to happen.

The first formalities were passed over with commendable speed, and the president announced that their "former beloved and honored treasurer," Mrs. John Potter, had a communication to make. Then Mrs. Potter arose, shook out the folds of her handsome black dress, and began:—

"Ladies of the Tenth Street Church, I need not say that I am glad to see you all here to-day, and I am sure no one but myself can know how glad I am to be counted once more among you. You have been so good as to tell me a number of times that you missed me, but I know you can't have missed me as much as I have you. I need not go over in detail the circumstances that have served to keep us apart; you all understand them. You remember that I said I could not meet with you as a worker again until the sum of three dollars and sixty-five cents placed in the bank subject to my call had

increased to the sum of one thousand dollars. I suppose you thought that was a wild and foolish statement, and it was. I am free to confess that it would have been more sensible in me a good deal to have worked right along with you and done my best instead of fixing myself so that, being a woman of my word, I couldn't ever expect the chance of being counted with you again. But the Lord is often better to us than we deserve, — to me, anyhow, — and I'm about ready to believe that the age of miracles isn't past at all. Ladies, something a good deal like a miracle has taken place. That lonesome little three dollars and sixty-five cents that I've taken care of so long has sprouted and spread itself beyond all bounds. In this tin box which I hold in my hand there are some gold pieces, each one of them worth twenty dollars. Look, there is one of them. Do you take it in? Twenty dollars in gold. And it belongs to the Ladies' Aid of the Tenth Street Church to be used toward paying off the debt. Well, how many of them are there, do you say. Two? five? ten? How large is your faith? Ladies, *there are fifty twenty-dollar*

gold pieces in this box! ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS IN GOLD! Ladies, I have the great pleasure of telling you that this wonderful gift is from Mrs. Earle McIntyre, in honor of her wedding and anniversary day. It is just a year to-day, you remember, since we had the pleasure of looking at her for the first time, and she has chosen to mark the event in this blessed way and give me a chance to share in the joy."

Mrs. Potter stopped abruptly, for her voice grew too husky to proceed, and the president of the Ladies' Aid had at that moment an inspiration. "Now," she said gleefully, "we can have our treasurer once more. All in favor of electing Mrs. John Potter treasurer of the Ladies' Aid, please rise."

In a twinkling every woman was on her feet, some were laughing and exclaiming, one or two were wiping away the tears. They loved their church, these women, and the debt had hung like a millstone about their necks for years and years.

And they all liked Mrs. John Potter and had missed and mourned her. They gathered about her and shook hands and congratulated them-

selves and her, and were all but overwhelmed with joy.

It was the president again who kept a cool head and called them to order.

“Ladies,” she said, tapping with her silver thimble on the table, “we have almost lost our wits for joy, and no wonder. With Mrs. Potter’s permission we will in a few minutes adjourn to the dining room for supper, and wait until we are calmer before we transact any more business. But before that, let us all join hands and bow our heads and say, as a prayer, ‘Thank God for Mrs. Earle McIntyre and Mrs. John Potter.’”

And this they did; while down the cheeks of the strong-minded woman of her word rolled unmolested great shining tears of joy.

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