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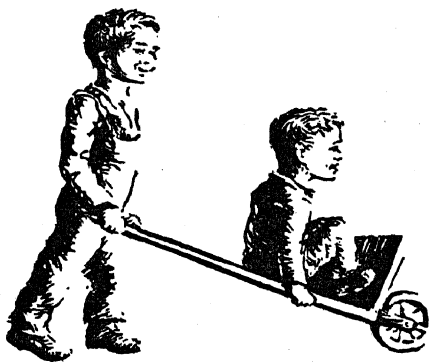


Dedicated to  
*The grandchildren of Sibyl*

# THE Garnered Sheaves

by

Elizabeth H. Emerson



DECORATIONS BY

Joseph W. Hopkins

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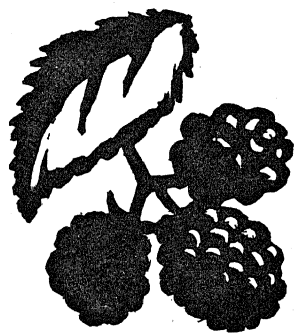
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## PREFACE

IN THE beginning of the long process of gathering material which served as basis for both *The Good Crop* and its companion novel, *The Garnered Sheaves*, Sibyl was able to write long and revealing letters about her childhood, her youth and her family. Distance hindered the person-to-person consultation I should have liked. A relative \* then at hand kindly served as my proxy in questioning and recording. I am greatly indebted to her, to Sibyl and to other Rees descendants, including several of my own generation, who supplemented my first-hand knowledge of a pioneer family marked by closeness of ties, love of poetry and song, deep religious faith, unique manner of speech and a peculiar sense of humor.

When Sibyl had read my first attempt to put into acceptable form material which eventually found place in two books, she

\* Ethel Cook Nevling  
St. Petersburg, Florida

wrote: "Of course writers have the privilege of letting their imaginations have full play sometimes."

By the time *The Good Crop* had reached publication the author had indeed let her imagination have full play. But Sibyl was almost blind. She could only see the bright colors of the jacket. After the story had been read to her, no word of criticism or complaint reached me. Perhaps like her Sister Mary, she thinks that if you tell a thing so big that nobody believes it, there is no harm done.

Specifically for *The Garnered Sheaves*, I have asked no questions. Without Sibyl's knowledge or consent I have answered, in the form of a novel, a question long in my own mind, knowing that if I had inquired of her why she "divided herself" into so many parts she probably would have summed up her reason in three words—"I had to."

While there are truthful incidents in this book, and while the main characters are as real as I know how to make them, the book is fiction. A few characters outside the Rees family, notably Flora, are purely fictional. Certain residents or one-time residents of Vermilion County, Illinois, who meet themselves or their ancestors in these pages can hardly be troubled at mention prompted by such rich memories and warm feelings of regard as those held by

The Third Daughter of Mary



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“Our life is music: fugitive,  
The notes die—that the tune may live.”

*From Tidings of Destiny*

By E. Merrill Root

With consent of the author.

## CHAPTER I

### *IN A BLACKBERRY PATCH*

PEOPLE ARE different, Sibyl thought, even in the way they wake up. She did it all at once. But when Sarah, sleeping beside her, woke, it took a long time. First she turned from side to back. She sighed. She threw one arm over her head. She made narrow slits of her eyes, then closed them. She sighed again and turned facing Sibyl, opening her eyes wider. If Sibyl said, "It's time to wake up, Sarah," she raised on one elbow and looked around in a dazed way, and by the time Sibyl was fully dressed, Sarah had one foot on the floor. That was the way it had been.

But this morning Sibyl slid off the straw-filled tick, careful not to wake her sister. Mother said Sarah needed lots of sleep since she'd had the typhoid fever. She nearly died. There were days and days when the entire family moved on tiptoe, not so much because anybody said it must be that way as because everyone felt the shadow of death hovering around. After three weeks the shadow went away. Father hummed a tune, Mother tended her neglected flowers, Tom whistled, Will began to tease, the married ones went to their homes, and the little boys were noisy. And best of all Sarah smiled, sadly, of course. Her smiles were always sad.

Now there were only two ways anybody could tell that Sarah had been so very sick. First, somebody else had to do the ironing. Sarah wasn't strong enough to stand by the table with the worn-out sheet spread on it, and make the point of her sadiron go in and out on a ruffle while her long, light-brown curls bobbed over her left shoulder. (Come to think of it, why was an iron called "sad"? Was it because Sarah said sad poems while she ironed?) And second, there weren't any curls to bob now. Typhoid fever always did that to people.

Sibyl looked at Sarah's small head covered with kinky fuzz and hoped Mother was right when she said Sarah's hair would probably be prettier than ever when it grew out again. She didn't quite see how that was possible.

The Reeses never talked about loving each other. Sibyl really didn't know a name for the tugging feeling inside of her toward first one and then another of them. Just now the pull was toward Sarah because she wasn't strong. But at any time she felt a kind of protective reaching-out toward this sister eight years older than herself. Sarah had troubles. She had plenty of beaux, but not always the one she liked best. And she wanted more dresses and ribbons for her hair.

Sibyl didn't have to look in a looking glass to know she wasn't pretty like Sarah. She was too large for her nine years — nearly a head taller than her best friend, Flora. Her legs were long and spindling, her shoulders big, and she didn't know what was the matter with her face, but it wasn't like other people's. Martha said that her hair was her redeeming feature. It did look nice

when anybody took the trouble to curl it, but that wasn't often enough and the process was so painful she didn't care much.

Sibyl's appearance didn't bother her at all on this late-June morning. Her waking thought was that the little boys had said they were going out early to see whether the quail eggs in the nest in the pasture had hatched. She wanted to go with them.

So she hurried into her clothes and ran down the stairs, careful to miss the third step from the bottom because it made a terrible squeak and might wake Sarah. She went out through the side door because if she passed through the kitchen, Sister Mary might ask her to do something. She dashed across the big porch where the loose boards rattled, skimmed over the bare yard and climbed the fence, balancing herself on the next to the top rail. She shaded her eyes against the morning sun with one large hand and saw Perry and Omar far across the dew-drenched pasture. She frowned. Of course they had gone and left her. They never let her go with them to gather goose eggs or find the first ripe wild strawberries or do any of the important things. She felt rather sorry for herself. The older ones treated her like a little child and the little boys left her behind. Mother said she was betwixt and between. Whatever that meant she wished she wasn't.

The little boys were still running. Only Perry had bothered to put on pants. Omar's red hair flamed in the sunlight and his shirrtail, too short for decency, Sister Mary said, flapped about his fat body. Sibyl debated in her mind about trying to catch up with her small brothers, but she voted no, out of long experience and because of a sound behind her at an open upstairs window.

The sound bore some resemblance, as it was intended to, to the crowing of a rooster, and came from Bertie, nearly three. Sibyl ran upstairs and rescued him from his precarious position. She hunted until she found his clothing, consisting of a strange combination of hand-me-downs, the sole purpose of which was to cover his nakedness. Bertie squirmed and squealed and resisted the process of being clothed. Sibyl laughed and threatened, "Be still or I'll tell Sister Mary." But Bertie wasn't still and Sibyl didn't tell Sister Mary, for that minute the big bell, swung high on a pole by the kitchen door, called the wandering Reeses to breakfast.

They gathered about the too-short table with chairs too few. The father of the family held his youngest on his lap. Sibyl sat next him on his right. Perry and Omar, pushing and shoving, sat on one chair to his left. Something inside William Rees, more powerful than a spoken word or a lifted hand, quieted every child about the long table and bowed every head in a silence which meant devout thanksgiving for all that made life good on an Illinois farm in the early seventies.

All ate with not quite satisfied appetites the corn-meal mush of which Mary could never fry enough. They covered its crusty brownness with sorghum molasses. They drank milk from handleless cups so long as there was any in the stone pitcher. They talked according to age and interests, of ripening fruit and harvesting grain and the making of a dress and Quaker meetings and newly hatched quails darting from a nest. And when the meal was ended each went to his own work or play.



"Go over to Levi's house and tell him we're ready to get into the cornfield, Sibyl," Father said.

The little house where Sibyl's oldest brother Levi lived with his wife Rebecca was a stone's throw away. Sibyl didn't mind the errand. She knew exactly what to expect. Even that early in the morning Levi would have his nose in a book and would frown when she gave him Father's message. But his Rebecca would be pleasant and hand out something that would help to fill the empty space left in Sibyl when there wasn't any more mush. Rebecca was ten years older than Levi. She took care of him, nearly the same as Sister Mary took care of Sibyl and the little boys. And she was a wonderful cook.

When Sibyl ran home, eating a generous piece of yesterday's cake, she had no idea that this day was to be different from others and of unprophesied importance in her life. Her mother was still at the table. She was a large woman and the full-gathered skirts she always wore subtracted nothing from her ample hips. Gradually worn with childbearing and hard work, she had dropped much of the responsibility of homekeeping and even of child discipline upon the capable shoulders of her daughter Mary. On this morning she rose heavily with the aid of her two full-fleshed hands placed upon the table, walked to the pantry, searched until she found two buckets with handles, took two slat-stiffened sunbonnets off the nail behind the kitchen door and said, "Thee and I'll go a blackberrying, Sibyl."

Sibyl said, "Oh, goody, goody!" and snatching pail and bonnet, she ran ahead of her deliberately moving mother. She knew

the way. Along the fence row toward the creek the blackberry briars grew thick.

“No need to run. Thee’ll be hot soon enough,” her mother called. But Sibyl didn’t heed. By the time her mother reached her, she had covered the bottom of her bucket with the ripe, small fruit. Her mother settled into the slow, careful process of lifting every branch in order, and gathering the berries from it.

“Pick them clean as thee goes, Sibyl,” she admonished. “And don’t mash them. Take each one off carefully.”

But already Sibyl’s fingers were red with the juice of bruised berries. She looked at them. “I don’t see why they’re called ‘blackberries.’ Look how red they make my hands. Anyway they’re no blacker than raspberries.”

Sibyl’s mother looked wise. “Not everything’s named right in the world,” she said. “Not even *everybody*. Thy father says we made a big mistake when we named Martha and Mary. Thee knows the Bible story, about how Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and Martha was cumbered about much serving.”

“What does ‘cumbered’ mean?” Sibyl asked.

“About the same as ‘bothered,’” her mother told her.

Sibyl was still for a time, trying in her thought to exchange Martha and Mary — to make Martha the one who was always cooking and scrubbing and sweeping up after the boys’ “litter,” and Mary the one who loved to sit reading in the crotch of the old apple tree. She couldn’t do it, and gave up. Her sisters simply wouldn’t make the shift.

"It's funny thee and Levi's Rebecca have the same name. I'd think folks would mix you up."

"Most people call her 'Levi's Rebecca.' I've noticed a man often picks a wife with the same name as his mother or a sister."

Sibyl pondered that idea and then for the first time she began to wonder about her own name. She didn't know another Sibyl. She said it aloud: "Sibyl."

Her mother smiled at her.

"Is it in the Bible?" Sibyl asked.

Rebecca studied a minute: "No, I don't think so. Anyway, if it is, that isn't the reason we named thee 'Sibyl.' When thee was very young, thy father heard the woman minister, Sibyl Jones, preach, and we named thee for her."

Rebecca meant to say no more, but Sibyl's next questions had to be answered truthfully. "Did thee and Father think maybe I'd be a preacher, like Sibyl Jones?"

"Yes, we did."

"Did you 'dedicate' me? Like John the Baptist?"

How well this child knew the Bible!

Rebecca's mind went swiftly back to the prayer of dedication uttered by her husband, William, before the birth of their tenth child in those dreadful days of the War of the States. She hesitated. But the truth would not hurt the child.

"Yes, we did dedicate thee to the ministry. Thy father made a prayer I never forget. We've always thought there must be one preacher in our family. We still do."

The berries dropped more slowly into Sibyl's bucket. Sometimes her hands forgot their purpose, so busy were her thoughts. So she was to be a preacher. It was a new and startling idea, but it never occurred to her to doubt the truth of it.

But preachers had to be very very good. Could she be good enough? And what about her face? Could it ever wear that saintly look she associated with women ministers? She would look in the glass when she had a chance. But already she knew how far back her eyes were under their heavy brows; how her nose turned down in the middle and looked as if it had been clipped off at the end. And who ever saw a preacher with curls? She turned from this unsatisfactory analysis of her appearance to thinking of other things about herself.

Until this day, Sibyl had been unaware of the greater part of her life. It simply *was*. Now she began at the most important place — home. It wasn't as nice as Flora's. But even at nine, when she used her mind seriously as she now did, Sibyl had a conception of compensations.

She wouldn't trade her home for Flora's, because of the people that made it. She began with Mother, not ten feet from her, carefully filling her bucket with blackberries. Some mothers bustled about so in their kitchens and said, "Get out from under foot, you children." Mother never hurried. There was a comfortable feeling about going blackberrying or hazelnut hunting with Mother.

She wouldn't exchange her brothers and sisters for anybody's. She called the roll. Levi had an "unusual" mind. Father said so. Emily was wonderful. When she came home on visits, every-

body in the family acted different, they were all so glad. Tom was big and strong, and broke colts, and played the French harp and taught her songs. Will — Will was *Will*, and she had a special feeling for him. The little boys were all different, lots of trouble, of course, but *hers*.

Then there was Martha, married to Seth and living at Hope-well. *Nobody* was nicer than Martha. And Mary — “There’s not a one of them likes me as well as Mary does,” she said to herself. Sarah was sickly and in love, and *needed* Sibyl.

That left Father. Sibyl stopped a long time over him, because there was so much to him. He didn’t look so different from Flora’s father or a good many other fathers she knew. He was not very tall and not very short; not straight like Levi and not stooped like some men she knew; he wore a beard all over his face but it didn’t grow very long. No, the things that made him different weren’t in his body. Sibyl struggled. For one thing he never punished his children. Mother whipped her once, and Mary had spanked her, but Father asked her to sit by him and explained to her why what she had done was wrong. There were a hundred reasons, she guessed, why she wouldn’t trade off Father, and she couldn’t name them at all. It hadn’t been long since she climbed on his lap and felt the warmth of his body against hers. That time was past. “Thee’s a big girl now, Sibyl — big enough to sit on a chair,” he had said on the day she was eight. She wished she dared to sit on his knee now. But it was nice, sitting by him, looking up at his kind face, waiting to see whether he would talk or sing or pick up last week’s paper. Which-

ever he did, he was *there*, and that was the important thing.

It was easy to think about Flora. Sibyl liked to look at her. She was little and had a face as bright as a pansy's. She laughed a great deal, and then her brown eyes went tight shut. If they were in a nice grassy place like Flora's yard when she got tickled, she would fall down and roll over and over, seeming to laugh with her whole small body. Of course you told your best friend everything, *everything*, and you talked in a whisper if there was danger of being overheard. Sibyl was sure Flora didn't have a thought she didn't share. It was nice having her for a best friend.

Sibyl went on to think of other things she liked. There was speaking pieces. And when she said them the schoolroom would be so still . . .

She liked to go to meeting. Father and Mother had some trouble getting Tom and Will to go, because they always wanted to go swimming. But Sibyl didn't mind having her hair combed on First Day morning, even if it was tangled. And there was a special feeling about First Day mornings that kept her from getting mad at Will no matter how much he teased her. From the time she woke there was something quiet and peaceful inside her. On the way to meeting in the big wagon, she never said a word. Father and Mother didn't talk much, either, and they tried to keep all the children quiet. Inside the meeting house she scarcely moved. She sat on the hard bench beside her mother, a small replica of her in the way she folded her hands in her lap and kept her eyes staring straight in front of her.

Then there were other times when Sibyl felt special joy. If

somebody was in trouble and she could do something to help . . . Like the night Sarah said her heart was broken and she let Sibyl put her arm around her until she went to sleep. Or the day she found Mother crying in the old porch rocker. Sibyl never knew why Mother, who almost never cried, was sobbing into her apron that day, but she rather thought it had something to do with Levi. Anyway she sat down by her and pretty soon Mother wiped her eyes and said, "Thee's a comfort, Sibyl." Being a comfort was wonderful. She wished Omar wouldn't push her away when she tried to make him feel better.

ALL day Sibyl practiced a holy feeling inside of her. And all day she wanted more and more to tell somebody about this strange thing she had learned. Flora? It was hard to make up her mind not to tell her, but she was afraid Flora would laugh and Sibyl didn't feel like laughing. There was really only one person to whom she thought she could talk. At last Father sat with his head in his hands in that final meditation of the day that followed the reading of the chapter. The others had gone. It was Sibyl's chance. She stood before him, as unlikely a prospect for the Christian ministry as ever wanted to ask advice. As soon as Father should lift his head . . . She hesitated and was lost. Father raised his body, looked up and said, "Sibyl, will thee bring me my bootjack?"

Sibyl obediently placed it in front of him. He bent and removed first one boot and then the other. Sibyl turned and walked slowly up the stairs, too disappointed to speak. You didn't talk

to a person about a Dedication when he was taking off his boots; not Father, anyway. The action was the sure forerunner of winding the clock and that meant bed.

Next morning Sibyl asked Mother if she might go over to see Flora. Mother curled her hair, and Mary said, "Thee'll have to iron a clean dress for thyself first. Sarah's not able and I don't have time."

Sibyl ironed the dress, too fast, and not very well, put it on and hurried across the pasture. She and Flora took big slices of bread spread with fresh butter and honey-in-the-comb and sat down under the maple tree that stood in the corner of the yard. When there wasn't a crumb left Sibyl said, "Now! I have a secret to tell thee. Promise me thee'll never tell a soul."

Flora promised, cross my heart and hope to die.

"When I grow up I'm going to be a preacher."

"How does thee know?"

"Mother told me so. But it's really Father. He said so before I was ever born. He told the Lord."

Sibyl and Flora had very hazy ideas of life processes. Flora's eyes were wide and she whispered: "How did he know there was going to be any Sibyl?"

"Maybe he could tell by looking at Mother. Or maybe the Lord told him. Anyway, it's so."

Flora was too impressed to laugh.

"Does thee *want* to be a preacher?"

"That doesn't make any difference. I *have* to be one."

"I wouldn't want to be a preacher."



“Thee wasn’t dedicated.”

There! Sibyl had told Flora, and she felt much better. For a time when they played together, Flora often said, “Thee mustn’t do that. Thee’s going to be a preacher.” Flora’s reminders kept the incident coming back to Sibyl in memory by day and in dreams by night, but gradually it became less clear.

The marriage of Sister Mary who had “all but raised her,” and the breaking of the large and close family circle by the death of Sister Em in faraway Kansas with the shadow of sorrow it cast over the Reeses, pushed Sibyl’s early assurance of her future life far below the level of consciousness.

When Sibyl was fourteen and the Great Revival came, sweeping Brother Levi first into the Kingdom and then quickly out into a Quaker pastorate, she did not think of being different from Flora and others of her friends who, like her, wept for their small sins. She was only Sibyl Rees, standing, with eager hope and large and awkward feet where brook and river meet.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE ACADEMY*

VERMILION ACADEMY came into being in 1874. It was located, without question by the Committee responsible, at Vermilion Grove, oldest and largest of Vermilion County's Quaker settlements. The name of the village, from its beginnings in the early twenties to the coming of the railroad in 1872, had been simply "Vermilion."

Into every red brick of the square two-storey structure and the mortar which held all together went the hope and faith of the Quakers for a "guarded education" for their children. The building stood on the south side of a four-acre tract of wooded land which rolled gently away north to a tributary of the Little Vermilion River and the "Lover's Lane" bridge which crossed it. Overshadowing the building on the south stood an immense elm, even then so ancient that its branches were drooping toward the earth. On all sides, maples, oaks and elms flourished by no benefit of man's hand. The pleasant surroundings and the open door of the new Academy gave warm welcome to the forty-eight daughters and sons of ambitious parents who left fruit preserving and fall plowing that autumn to become its first students. Elwood, the country settlement a few miles away, which was the

home of the Reeses, contributed several students. By Christmas the number had swelled to sixty. By March there were eighty. The name and fame of Vermilion Academy were reaching throughout the county and adjoining counties where high schools were as yet not numerous.

Paths soon formed through the thick bluegrass. One led to the meeting house a few rods to the southeast; a second to the foot-bridge on the north; a third to a cluster of houses at the north-west corner; a fourth to the entrance to the Hester acres to the southwest — the tract from which Sibyl's uncle had sliced and donated the plot for the new venture in education. Tom and Will Rees did their share of wearing those paths in the early years.

Sibyl said of these two, "They're thick as thieves since they go to the Academy; they never tell me anything." Now that the time had actually come when she was to join them, she hoped for an improved status for herself, especially with Will who had long been her idol. The whole idea of going to the Academy was exciting, and required a great deal of preparation, much of which centered on her personal appearance. Father, of course, made the arrangements for her to stay with his sisters Deborah and Rachel, consulted with the teachers about her preparation, instructed Tom and Will in the care they were to give her — in short, thought that he took every precaution to make the entrance of his daughter into this school, which he felt was his very own, wholly successful.

But Sibyl, and others of her family, knew that Father left out some things which were very important. For instance, it never

occurred to him that Sibyl needed new clothing. Personal pride had budded in Sibyl's father when he was a young man in love, and had blossomed in the wedding suit of three colors which his younger children knew only by report. After that, his religious beliefs and concerns, his large family, and his enforced economy of living had brought about a speedy death for pride in William.

Mother had made Sibyl's curls. She liked to do it. A comb, a brush, a pan of water, a daughter on a wooden stool at her feet — Rebecca's face took on a new light when she was so equipped. Her hands moved lovingly over the tangled mass, and with less pain than came with the attempts of others, she brought it to order. Dividing it carefully into eight equal parts, she brushed the first around her big forefinger held very close to the head — oh there was a right way and a wrong way! The final result of eight shining curls gave her a feeling of satisfaction akin to the Creator's when he looked upon the finished earth. If Mother could have done so, Sibyl sometimes thought, she would have worn a little color with her drab dresses, and brought a little brightness into the "best room." Between poverty and her struggle against the sin of pride she had no chance. Sibyl had seen her, when buying coarse, dull, cotton cloth for necessary garments in the Danville stores, touch almost reverently fine silks of bright colors displayed upon the counters; touch them, and turn away as if she were bidding Satan stay behind her. Two things, and two only, Rebecca could do to satisfy her craving for beauty: she could fill her yard with plants which under her care came into

gay flowering, and she could make curls for Sibyl and Sarah.

Mother said, "I don't think thy aunts will be much good at curling thy hair." So, under Mother's direction, Sibyl practiced long and sometimes tearfully until she could form the smooth dark curls almost, though not quite, as well as Mother.

There was the matter of clothing. On one of Martha's visits home she ripped and turned old material, and constructed two old-new dresses for Sibyl — one for school and one for best. Martha cared how Sibyl looked.

Sarah sacrificed a few nice undergarments for Sibyl, and taught her how to iron them carefully. In the week before the Academy was to begin, the point of Sibyl's iron went in and out on many ruffles, and the results were nearly as good as Sarah's.

In all this preparation, one thing subtracted from Sibyl's happiness. Flora was not going with her. Flora's father was one who sent his sons to school, but of his daughters said, "They'll marry, I reckon." More enlightened Quakers tried to reason with him about the importance of education for the mothers of the race, but all to no effect. Flora would stay at home and help her mother. "But I won't have any friend," Sibyl worried.

"Not unless you go to the trouble to make some," Will said, unsympathetically.

On the morning of the crisp late-September day to which Sibyl had so long looked forward, she stood before the kitchen mirror until Father said, "It makes far more difference what's in thy heart than on thy body, Sibyl." Then she picked up the bag which held pencil, steel pen, a ruled tablet, the books Tom and

Will had passed on to her, walked out over the boards of the porch which still creaked, and climbed to her place behind Will on sway-backed old Ned. She took plenty of time to arrange her body comfortably for the eight-mile ride. She spread her full skirt carefully to prevent mussing and for purposes of modesty, while Father, Mother, Sarah and the little boys looked on from the porch. Tom, with boxes of provisions and clothing strapped to his saddle, reined in Prince, a much livelier animal than the one to which Sibyl was entrusted.

Will was impatient to be off. After a summer on the farm spent in work little to his liking, he looked forward eagerly toward books and girls — his two great interests at sixteen. "If you've forgotten anything, we'll not come back," Will said as he slapped old Ned with his bridle strap. Sibyl vowed that she had remembered everything, and they rode away with cries of good-bye. She dared not look back. Father would be standing watching, wondering what was in her heart, Mother would have that wide-open stare in her eyes which always came when anything unusual happened, Sarah would be crying because of the loneliness she would feel when she was the only girl at home. Sibyl kept her eyes straight ahead, trying not to think how long it would be until Sixth Day evening.

Of three possible ways they took the Sharon road, which wound through woods beginning to show the results of the first light frost. Sibyl liked that road in fall or spring when there was the color of changing leaves or blooming trees and flowers. After a heavier frost, the hickory nuts would begin to fall and they

would stop under the fullest trees to gather them. It was strange how the boys were always more interested in things to eat than to look at. Now if Sister Mary were riding this way, she would call out to Thomas, "Stop a minute, please, while I gather some of those reddest leaves." Sibyl didn't dare. When a person started to the Academy there was no time for unneeded delays.

Aunt Debbie's house was within a half mile of the destination. The trio stopped to unload Sibyl's bundle of clothing and the box of provisions they had brought in recompense for her board and keep. Tom and Sibyl carried these in, with warnings from Will to hurry. Rachel, tall and gaunt, showing all her seventy years in the lines of her long face, opened the door of the sitting room, which was also the sewing room where she ran an unequal race with progress in the making of men's garments, and earned a scanty living for herself and her sister Deborah.

"A growing girl eats a heap," Rachel had said to her brother William when he raised the subject of finding a Second Day to Sixth Day home for Sibyl with his two maiden sisters. Now Rachel looked wonderingly at the box Tom carried. She hoped that it contained a ham. Debbie was a good hand at a garden, but meat was harder to come by. In fact, Rachel was so busy thinking about the food problem that she failed really to speak to William's children. It was Deborah, shorter and plumper, who, coming up behind her, wiped her flour-covered hands on her apron, smiled and said, "Well, you're early. Come on in. Tom, set thy box on the kitchen table. Sibyl, thee's to have the spare bed in my room. Take thy things in there."

Deborah always bustled about in the presence of younger people. It was her way of trying, unconsciously, to resurrect her own youth left far behind. Rachel was now slowly removing the cloth of her trade from the three chairs in the room, taking time to fold each piece. "Sit down," she said, and the words sounded more like a benevolent order than an invitation.

"Where's Will?" Deborah asked with concern. Of all William's children, Will was the one she liked best. He was the only nephew who ever dared to tease her until the color mounted in her usually pale cheeks. Once to the utter disgust of Rachel and the astonishment of all Reeses present, he had laughingly bent over and kissed her. She had a good idea that afterward his father had taken him to task for such daring, but if only William knew how the warmth of young Will's lips had reached straight to her years-long congealing heart!

"He's had plenty of practice, or I miss my guess," Rachel had said, looking down her Roman nose. But Deborah had only smiled and said, "Will's a caution."

"He'll come to no good end," Rachel affirmed.

"Thee used to say that about Levi," Deborah reminded her. "And see how he's turning out to be a big preacher."

"The Lord took a hand with Levi."

"He wouldn't have so much of a job with Will," Deborah said, for once having the last word. Yes, Will was Deborah's favorite. No doubt of that.

Sibyl now explained: "Will's in a hurry to get there. We can't stay. We don't want to be late the first day."



But Tom was sniffing and wrinkling his nose at the kitchen door. "Seems to me I smell —"

"Oh, my cookies!" Deborah dashed to the kitchen stove and threw open the oven door with a bang. Apron in hand, she snatched out a pan of her masterpieces, just in time. Their fragrance filled the little rooms.

"Go call Will," she said to anyone who would obey. "You all had an early breakfast, I'll be bound. A glass of milk and a cookie'll tide you over."

They stood about the kitchen table making jokes and eating the soft cakes with sugar on the top, drinking milk from Deborah's gold-rimmed cups. Her face was alight.

When they had gone, Deborah broke a cake in half. "They're right good this time," she said, extending the larger piece to Rachel.

But Rachel turned away to her sewing. "Thee knows I never eat between meals. Thee'll ruin thy digestion. And thee's a mighty good hand at spoiling children. It's well thee never had any of thy own."

Deborah was already rolling out more dough, so her back was turned and that was a blessing. Rachel was a great one to cry, especially in meeting, but if ever she saw her sister's eyes grow moist, she said with asperity, "Now what in the world does thee have to cry about?"

SIBYL was very familiar with the exterior of the Academy. Had she not gone to Vermilion Quarterly Meeting with her parents

four times a year all her life? In a few short years the building had gained the appearance of having grown from the soil, with the roots as firmly attached as those of the elm tree by it. By comparison the worn frame meeting house near by, looked as if a good strong wind would demolish it. The large, evenly spaced windows were perfectly matched above and below. The four equilateral triangles of its roof rose to a central apex topped by a modest wooden cupola containing a bell which, even as Tom, Will and Sibyl rode toward the hitch-racks, sounded its first call.

Only on occasions had Sibyl been inside. "What'll I do?" she asked Will as they came to a full stop.

"What do you mean?" Will could be very perverse sometimes; and he had but lately quit using the plain speech of the Quakers. Sibyl wished he still said "thee."

"I don't know where to go, nor where to sit, nor anything!"

"Somebody'll tell you; some girl, maybe. There are lots of girls."

"But I don't know a single one! If only Flora could have come!" Sibyl wailed. "They'll laugh at me!"

"They will if you cry and make your eyes red. You're funny-looking enough without red eyes."

Sibyl could easily have burst into tears, but instead she gave the hollow place between Will's protruding shoulder blades a generous pounding with her free fist, and said, "Shut up, Will," in a very brotherly and un-Quakerly way, which Father wouldn't have approved at all, and felt better.

Big, hearty Tom and slender, handsome Will were warmly

and boisterously greeted by their friends. They knew all the "scholars" except the fall crop. Never had Sibyl felt so completely alone as when she walked up the path with these two. Girls? It seemed to her there were a hundred of them standing about the door; pretty girls, laughing girls, well-dressed girls, and not one of them as tall as she! She wanted to turn and run! Will fell behind with other boys. What if Tom should do that, too? She was in a panic of fear. But at the door, from a group of girls one stepped forward, blushing but brave. "Is this your sister, Tom?" Tom said, "This is Sibyl," and after that Sibyl never could remember much that happened that first day except that she had a friend — a beautiful, soft-voiced, brown-eyed friend. In truth, Florence Elliott showed her where the cloakroom was, on the right of the big hall with its circling stairway, asked her to share her double seat, explained in a whisper there must be no talking above that tone in the big room, and told Sibyl all she needed to know about going to the Academy.

"Does thee know my brothers very well?" Sibyl whispered.

"Oh, yes. They're both nice boys. Everybody thinks so," Florence answered.

"Will is my favorite brother. I have six," Sibyl said.

Florence blushed again. "I like Tom better," she answered honestly.

WITH Tom and Will as brothers and Florence as friend, it was no time at all until teachers and pupils noticed Sibyl's keen blue eyes and perfect curls — she does them herself, the girls mar-

veled — and forgot her big hands and feet, her unusual height and her gait which, as Will said, was a little like Aunt Rachel's. The girls soon found that her heart matched her body in size; the boys liked the quick funny answers she gave to Will's constant teasing and joined him in it. It was usually Will who walked with Sibyl when she had to have an escort from some night "meeting" or gathering of students. There was nothing that made Sibyl more happy than to have Will by her side. He was an inch taller. She could almost look up to him. Usually he talked nonsense. Once in a while he gave her serious and needed advice. Always she loved him.

Sometimes Sibyl didn't go home on Sixth Day evening. In that first year at Vermilion Academy there were nights when friends of her brothers took the dark walk with her out to Aunt Debbie's house. They didn't mind, Sibyl said. They didn't seem to mind at all.

One other fact helped Sibyl to become a part of the Academy, and that was her ability to memorize and speak. Since she was a little child she had enjoyed her power over small audiences in the Elwood schoolhouse. Her thrill was multiplied manifold when she made her new friends and acquaintances laugh and cry. And the greater the response in Sibyl's listeners, the more vibrant and far-reaching became her voice. "She's not so good in algebra," her teachers said, "but in elocution . . ." They left the sentence unfinished as if there were no suitable words.

## CHAPTER III

### *THE CONTEST*

**I**N THE spring of Sibyl's second Academy year, the teachers, in consultation with the members of the board, came slowly and carefully to the decision that the Academy might be permitted to take part in a county declamatory contest. Accordingly, the school had its own contest in which Sibyl Rees and Florence Elliott were chosen as representatives. They were not rated. There were ways in which Florence surpassed. In appearance and grace she left the still-awkward Sibyl far behind. Too, there was the careful, precise way in which Florence pronounced every word. Sibyl often went to Florence to learn just how to say a word, but when she became immersed in the emotion of her speech, she was likely to slide two syllables together in an indistinct way, or even, to the dismay of her teachers, use a wrong pronoun or verb tense. Such a mistake hadn't made a particle of difference at Elwood. Here she knew that just one slip would be fatal. The judges would watch everything, she was told.

But Sibyl was sixteen that spring. Not all the fear of judges, not all the quiet of living with her maiden aunts, not all the weekend warnings of her parents against sinful pride, not all the silences of Fifth Day and First Day meetings, could keep the

spring of youthful eagerness from bubbling up inside her, and overflowing.

Young men no longer walked out to Deborah's as a favor to Tom or Will. They asked Sibyl for the pleasure of her company. Instead of answering in the polite and approved way with a "Yes, thank you," Sibyl made a joke of this welcome attention: "Well, if you're sure you'll get some pleasure out of that long walk." Or, "Well, Will'll be much obliged to you, I'm sure."

Once at home Will warned Sarah: "Better keep thy beaux away when Sibyl's here. She's becoming ir-re-sist-ible." Sibyl noticed that the two small up-and-down lines above Father's nose were deeper after he overheard that remark. She hoped she wasn't to blame. But when Mother looked her over she smiled in a satisfied sort of way.

Sibyl memorized her selection while riding the eight miles from Elwood to Vermilion and back again. When she sat behind Tom she could study her lines or recite the entire poem without interruption. When she was with Will such concentration was impossible. They talked too much.

"Now why does thee always select a *love* poem, Sibyl?"

"I can do better on something that's stirring."

"There's plenty besides love that's stirring. Why not do *The Battle of Waterloo*?"

"I don't like war poems. I don't believe in war."

"It's plain thee does believe in love. Which one has the inside track now?" Sibyl made a face at Will's back and didn't answer.

"Thee gets over them fast, though. Thee even recovered from

that old case of Charlie, and that was certainly a bad attack. Not even any scars left that I can see.”

Will never forgot anything. Nobody else, except maybe Flora, remembered there had ever been a Charlie. She accepted Will's raillery good-naturedly although she thought there really were a few small scars remaining from her first and only love affair two years earlier. She tried to repay Will in kind.

“What about *thy* interest? Thee ought to know enough about love to write an oration on the subject.”

“Maybe I will if anybody ever offers a prize for an oration.”

You couldn't bother Will much.

Now what would Sibyl wear for the contest? The appearance certainly did make a big difference with the audience, and especially with the judges. But the whole process of going to school at the Academy was expensive for her parents, and she knew better than to mention the subject at home. After some almost sleepless nights, she wrote a letter to Sister Martha at Hopewell, asking for advice or help. Martha never failed to have an idea in such a crisis, and sure enough, back came a letter as soon as the slow mail could bring it.

“I'm a little plumper than I was before I had Anna Lou, and I can't wear my infare dress. I think it would make a very nice outfit for thee. The trouble is, I need thee with me when I begin to make it. Now why couldn't thee get a ride this way with some of the students from here next Sixth Day afternoon? Seventh Day I could cut *and* fit the dress, and I could send it to thee when it is finished. Thee may take care of Anna Lou while I sew.”

Sibyl had often gone with her parents to visit Sister Martha for a single day, but the chance to spend two whole days and nights there was a treat. The wheels of Martha's home ran very smoothly. She had lost none of her nice girlhood appearance, and cleanliness and neatness were certainly next door to Godliness in her opinion and practice. When Seth came in from his work, Martha looked up with her sweet smile, and there seemed to be a great peace in the place. Sibyl thought, "When I am married I wish my home could be like this one."

Martha had ripped and pressed the bright-brown material for Sibyl's new dress. With great care she changed her own pattern to suit Sibyl and was ready for the first fitting before dinner.

"If thee'll cook the potatoes and set the table, I'll keep right on with my sewing, Sibyl. Oh, yes, I forgot to tell thee. Zimri is helping Seth today. Put on an extra place for him."

When Sibyl, flushed with her housewifely efforts and her secret wondering about Zimri, brother of Seth, found herself sitting across the table from a ruddy-faced young man of twenty-three, she thought, he's nice looking, but old. And Zimri, his eyes twinkling in amusement at Sibyl's evident embarrassment, said to himself, "She's tall enough to be any age, but she was only a child when Seth and Martha were married. She can't be more than sixteen now."

Before the meal was over, Sibyl had added to her thinking: I remember now. I saw him at Seth's and Martha's wedding. He was an awkward-looking boy then. He's really handsome now. But he must be all of eight years older than me!



Zimri had one more thought: I like her looks better than any of the Hopewell girls. I wish she'd talk more. I like to hear her.

Martha sent a message to Seth across the table by means of half-closing her eyes. It said, "See what's happening?" Seth only bent his head over his plate to hide his smile, but Martha was satisfied. Small Anna Lou did most of the talking at table that day.

Martha's spare bedroom was nicer than any Sibyl had ever slept in. Martha had things tasty all over her house. She just naturally knew how to fix them that way. Sister Mary's house was just as clean, or maybe a little bit more so, but there was a difference. Mary would never think of making a cover for the bed out of pink calico! But it certainly did set the room off. And the box on which stood the lamp with its polished chimney and perfectly trimmed wick — who but Martha would ever cover a box to put below the looking glass with that same bright cloth?

Sibyl took her long-sleeved nightgown from the box she had brought with her and put it on with all the modesty of gradually removing clothing she had been taught. She read her chapter sitting by the covered box, not knowing what she read. Then she lifted the lamp high and gazed at her reflection in the really good mirror.

My face is not so bad as some, she thought consolingly. Kind of square; no, more of a rectangle, I guess. (Geometry had been a great trial to her.) If I wasn't so pale — she paused in her thoughts. Now Florence wouldn't say it that way. I *think* she would use "were" instead of "was." Anyway I need some color

in my cheeks. And if only my eyes didn't go in so far, like Father's. And if my nose turned up instead of down. Now Bert has a nice nose. There's plenty wrong with me.

She lifted the tail of her nightgown and rubbed her cheeks until they burned. She raised the lamp again to see the effect. Yes, with more color she was improved, but her face wouldn't stay that way. She tried pushing up on her nose; down it came. She did it many times, to no avail. She remembered Martha saying that her hair was her redeeming feature. Well, then, she would make it even prettier. Maybe a person would only notice her hair. So she took the clean brush from Martha's box and brushed fifty strokes, a hundred strokes, a hundred and fifty, till her arm ached. Then she tucked every tendril under her all-covering nightcap and crawled into the soft feather bed. At first her body sank into it with a feeling of comfort. But that very comfort made her conscious of the great length of her body. I'm nearly as long as the bed, she thought. I must be as tall as Zimri!

Had she said that aloud? Martha was at the door, calling, "Is thee all right, Sibyl? Isn't thee asleep yet?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all right, Martha. It's only that this bed is softer than Aunt Debbie's."

Martha chuckled. Maybe that was all.

"I'll go to sleep right away," Sibyl added.

But sleep didn't come until Sibyl had honestly confessed to herself that it had been for Zimri she had rubbed her cheeks and tried to change the shape of her nose and brushed her hair a hundred and fifty strokes. It was for Zimri that she wished she

were short and plump like Flora or slender and graceful like Florence. By the time she finally achieved sleep, the last tiny scar, left by the perfidy of Charlie, had vanished. Her heart was as whole and ready for love as if she had never hunted calamus buds two springs earlier with a callow youth named Charlie.

Now what possible reason was there for Zimri to sit down at Seth's table on First Day? His own home was not far away. But there he was, looking much more handsome in his First Day suit. Sibyl bravely lifted her eyes from her plate, not thinking how little her cheeks needed rubbing to make them glow, or how the shining of her eyes made it impossible for Zimri to even notice her overhanging brows. Martha and Seth and Zimri talked of meetings and crops, but Sibyl's tongue was tied. She only knew that the minutes were slipping by and soon she would go back to Aunt Debbie's drab house and the Academy which suddenly seemed filled with mere boys — children, as compared with the grown-up Zimri.

Martha maneuvered Seth into the kitchen, and Zimri improved his first chance to speak to Sibyl alone. "I hope you'll come to visit Martha again real soon," he said. Sibyl blushed deeper. "Oh, I'll come whenever I get the chance. I think it's the *best* place." She was growing more confused every minute. "When I have a home of my own I wish it could be just like this one!"

What had she said? Zimri was standing there in front of her, laughing. She must say something different, something sensible.

"It was a dress that brought me this time. Martha's making me a dress for the contest!"

Sibyl grabbed a pile of dishes and fairly ran to the kitchen. She heard Zimri still laughing. He's like Will, she thought. He never gets the least bit embarrassed.

As Sibyl rode back to Aunt Debbie's that afternoon she bit her tongue until it hurt. Why had she mentioned the contest to Zimri? Suppose he should take it into his head to come? She would die of fright and forget every word of her piece if he should suddenly appear.

THE next week-end when Sibyl went home she told Flora every single thing that had happened. The two girls giggled until Father said to Mother, "I'm afraid Sibyl's becoming a little light."

"Of course it's nothing; absolutely nothing," was the way Sibyl finished. But it was very clear to the discerning Flora that Sibyl wished "it" were something.

A sixteen-year-old girl's mind is limited in capacity, and Sibyl's simply had to be filled with the contest in those last weeks before the great event. She practiced before Aunt Rachel, whose easily provoked tears ran down her lined face. She walked the two miles west to where her sister Mary and Thomas lived. Mary said, "Don't overdo it, Sibbie. Just be natural." She said her piece at home until Perry could prompt her from memory, and Omar and Bert mimicked her. She spoke faster to suit one critic, slower

to please another, louder to make the last person in the last row hear; more softly to please Aunt Debbie who wanted Sibyl to wring from the poem every possible ounce of emotion.

She was fearful that Father might not like the poem. The first time he and Mother heard it through she waited anxiously for what he might say.

But Father made no comment. As if he were talking to himself he echoed the last words, quietly, sadly: "*The mistletoe bough. The mistletoe bough.*"

Finally there was one point on which all agreed; Sibyl could not forget.

ON the night when Sibyl put on the bright-brown dress, the aunts looked her over carefully. "Martha's a good hand with the needle," Deborah said admiringly. Fine wide double-edged lace gathered in the middle stood high about her neck and spread toward the plain tight sleeves which fitted so perfectly that Sibyl's big shoulders looked less broad. Below the neat basque with its row of shining buttons the overskirt draped gracefully to some arrangement suspiciously like a slight bustle.

"I reckon I could have made it," Rachel said, "but I don't know what William would think."

Something went down inside of Sibyl. It seemed to be her heart. Not once had she thought that Rachel, maker of men's wear, might have liked to try her skill on the contest dress! She knew that Aunt Rachel could never have given it all the nice touches, as Martha had done, but for a minute she wished that

dear Aunt Rachel could have had the satisfaction of trying. And the result might have been such as to please Father better. It was too late, alas.

She had known better than to suggest that her parents drive eight miles to hear her speak. They would not think an overnight trip for such a reason possible. But she knew now that it wouldn't have hurt to ask them. And she asked herself whether there was growing in her, manifest in her great care for curls and dress — yes, and for beaux — that plant of pride against which Father had always warned her.

But there was no time now for self-analysis.

“I wish you could go to the contest,” she said wistfully.

The sisters never went farther than the barn at night, and then only a calving cow could take them. For such emergencies Rachel carried a feebly glowing lantern. Will was to come for Sibyl. Possibly she could persuade the two to walk along behind them, though she could well imagine Will's exasperation at the presence of a lantern. Deborah looked from Sibyl's eager face to her sister's, for a minute hopeful.

“No. No, we'll not go. We never go anywhere at night,” Rachel said, and Deborah's face fell. Everybody called the little house Deborah's, for some reason, but it was Rachel who made the decisions that mattered.

WHEN Will came, he looked Sibyl over critically. “You'll do,” he said. Then he daringly lifted the full skirt. “But you ought to have had some new shoes.”

"They won't show much under my long dress," Sibyl protested.

"There couldn't be a dress long enough to hide your feet. Come on."

And because it was Will who said it, Sibyl laughed.

The two sisters watched Sibyl and Will walk up the rough road. They saw Sibyl stumble and Will keep her from falling. "They ought to have had the lantern," Rachel said and turned back. Deborah watched them disappear in the darkening night. "I guess young folks wouldn't want to carry a lantern," she said, and sighed.

THE "final" was to be held in the big room of the Academy. It was packed. Children and young people sat three or four in the double seats, leaving more room for adults. A row of young men formed and stood across the back of the room. The rule of no talking above a whisper held even for a public gathering. Without a rule, the air of tense expectancy would have kept the room quiet.

The six speakers nervously waited in the small library for the drawing of lots to determine the order of speaking. Sibyl's fingers trembled as they touched the slips of paper. Last place was the coveted one. Florence drew it, and Sibyl drew first. Better that than a middle position, everyone agreed.

With the announcement of Speaker Number I, Sibyl smoothed out the folds in her dress and walked rather awkwardly to the platform. She took a moment to look about in hope of spotting

the judges. If only she could discover where they were sitting she might make a more direct appeal. Every eye was upon her, but she was not afraid. It was fun, this speaking to a crowded house of people, many of whom she did not know. She made a good beginning. She hardly needed to think of the words, and she was even yet looking for the well-hidden judges, when her heart stopped! And what was much worse, her words stopped, too! For Zimri was walking in at the door. Yes, Sibyl knew her selection, but not well enough to continue past the arrival of Zimri! She stood, blanched with fright and confusion for, what seemed to her, hours of time.

Out of the sea of faces one cleared for her — a face familiar and good. Brother Tom's interest in the last speaker had brought him to the front row, where he sat, slumped in his seat, his eyes half closed, utterly at ease. Now, in the same quiet way in which he always dealt so effectively with a balking horse on the farm, and as if there were no one else in the room, he said, "Go on, Sibyl."

The lost words came back and Sibyl went on. The tragic story unfolded. The time was Christmas Eve; the setting a festive hall, hung with mistletoe. There was gayety and laughter after a happy pair had said their marriage vows. The bride, thinking to amuse the company, disappeared. All the searching of the distraught groom and his friends could not reveal her hiding place. It was many years later that an old chest with a spring lock was opened and "the bride lay clasped in a living tomb," still wearing her bridal wreath.



*"Oh, the mistletoe bough, the mistletoe bough."*

In the low, vibrating voice of Sibyl the phrase was like a dirge. She held the emotions of that crowded room for a full minute and her voice fell to a whisper.

*"Oh, the mistletoe bough, the mistletoe bough."*

Another minute passed before there was applause, and in it she was thinking, "I have failed!" She stumbled off the stage to her seat. The cheering became a roar. Her heart was pounding and her mind was a jumble of confused thoughts. Maybe she had made the audience forget that first blunder, but the judges would never forget.

The program went on but Sibyl did not hear it. She felt a great tenderness for Tom. Why didn't he let her completely fail, and so increase Florence's chance of winning? She thought of how hard to bear Will's teasing would be. Of all the people in the house Will was the only one who would discover the reason for her failure. Will always found out things. Her feeling about Zimri was a mixture of resentment that he had come late and spoiled her speech and a gladness that he had cared to come. What would he do when the contest had ended? Would he seek her out? How should she treat him if he should?

The judges retired, papers in hand. The stooped, saintly-looking one led the way. The bald-headed thin man and the iron-gray short heavy one followed to some secret chamber. The principal of the Academy, to prove that he was not in conference with them, occupied the time with much speaking. Would the minutes never pass?

A floor board creaked under a heavy step and the iron-gray man was coming to the front with a paper in his hand. He talked deliberately of the value of endeavor, of the price of success, of seeming failures being stepping stones on the upward path. "Every speaker on the program tonight has done well; so well that I wish it were within my power to award the honor of first place to each and every one of you. That is impossible. Only one can have that distinction."

He stopped, adjusted his glasses, looked at his paper, cleared his throat, repeated with slight variation what he had said, and at last arrived at his reason for standing before that impatient audience. "It pleases me to announce that the winner of third place is Henry Craig, the winner of second place is Florence Elliott, the winner of first place —" He paused long enough for Sibyl to experience panic. But he was going on. "The winner of first place is Sibyl J. Rees."

For one moment Sibyl thought she was going to faint, as she used to do when she was a child. But her friends were gathering around her, the principal was bringing the judges to meet her, and she simply could not faint. And then, she felt rather than saw Zimri making his way through the crowd, and long before he reached her all feeling of resentment went out of her.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Zimri to walk out to Aunt Debbie's with Sibyl that night. He didn't even ask her for the privilege; he took it for granted. He held her arm in just the right way — not too close. Not once did he try any of the advances Academy boys had tried. They talked about the

contest. Sibyl was troubled that Florence who had made no mistakes had placed second. "Don't worry about Florence. I saw Tom Rees walk away with her. Anyway, the judges knew what they were doing. Folks listen when *you* talk."

DEBORAH sat straight up in bed when Sibyl went into the room. "Did thee win?" She asked anxiously as Sibyl turned up the burning light.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Debbie, I won."

There was a ring in her voice no amount of practicing and no audience on earth could have brought out of it.

A whispered "I love you" has kept many a girl happily sleepless. But ringing in Sibyl's ears on that wakeful night, long after Aunt Debbie's regular breathing indicated that she was asleep, were Zimri's emphatic words, "Folks listen when *you* talk."

## CHAPTER IV

### *MARRIAGE*

WHEN SARAH married, Sibyl took over the management of the household, and her Academy education was ended. In its place there was Courtship; the time of knowing and becoming known; of being the only daughter to use the best room with the coal-oil lamp and the rag carpet of Mother's own making; of hay rides in summer and sleigh rides in winter; of whisperings in the ear of Flora and of Flora's laughter; of the happiness of looking forward to a home of her own, "something like Martha's."

Sibyl and Flora were much together in the summer and fall before Sibyl's marriage. Now, instead of carrying huge slices of bread and honey out under their favorite tree in Flora's yard, they dragged rockers from the porch and carried spools of thread and crochet hooks. Martha had taught Sibyl how to make lace for her undergarments. The tiny hook and fine thread looked incongruous in Sibyl's big hands, but inch by inch the lace grew in length and she was proud of her accomplishment. Flora, lacking incentive, often dropped her work and sat idle.

September in Illinois under a maple tree ready for the first blush-bringing kiss of frost was a time for dreams. Across the

dusty road a field of browning stubble waited for fall breaking. Winter apples in the orchard to the east of Flora's home grew toward the time of harvesting. To the west, drying pumpkin vines sprawled, their green fruit faintly striped with yellow. Beyond, lay the woods yet green, soon to change to a mosaic of scarlet and wine, ruby and crimson, russet and orange. And over all hung the first blue hint of Indian summer.

"Thee works too hard," Flora said.

"But I *want* to," Sibyl answered with the twist of her mouth which was becoming more frequent as she became a woman.

"That's what comes of being in love — being so energetic."

"Probably. I feel sorry for anybody who isn't, or at least hasn't been."

"Does thee mean me?"

"Present company always excepted. I was thinking of old women who have never married — like my aunts."

"The ones thee lived with when thee went to the Academy?"

"Yes. I rode up to see them with Perry one day last week. They seemed so glad. Even Aunt Rachel couldn't help showing how lonesome they are without me."

"Didn't anybody ever love them?"

"Aunt Debbie had a sweetheart back in Tennessee. But when her family came to Illinois she came, too, instead of staying there with Henry. My sisters knew the story and used to discuss it when I was a child. I remember exactly how Sister Em looked when she declared she would have stayed in Tennessee. Martha said she couldn't imagine leaving Seth even for her kinfolds.

Sister Mary thought Aunt Debbie would have died of lonesomeness back there without any of her people. Sister Mary's a great one for all the Reeses."

"What about Sarah?"

"Oh, Sarah didn't say what she would have done."

"And what did thee say, Sibyl?"

"I was a child. I didn't say anything. But *I know now!*"

Flora's laugh rang out. "Thee would have stayed — away from Will?"

"Yes, away from Will. Will's my brother. Zimri is going to be my husband."

Flora looked away toward the woods. Sibyl wondered what was going on in that pretty head. Flora and Will were certainly provoking. They went together and then they didn't. You never knew. And the time had long passed when Flora told Sibyl every single thing.

"What about the other one — thy Aunt Rachel?"

"Oh, she is too queer ever to have had a beau. At least that's what people always say. Sometimes I wonder."

Sibyl had indeed wondered.

Sometimes she had sat by Aunt Rachel in meeting and, not daring to turn her head, had felt, rather than seen, the tears rain down her face. For what or whom did she cry? For her own misdeeds? They were certainly small. Everybody knew that the crust of her nature was really very thin and that under it lay kindness for all relatives and neighbors. For sinners? For the heathen? Or was it possible that Aunt Rachel cried for herself?

Could she, too, have a love story hidden away by all the years? Had there bloomed in her youth a flower so fragile that the breath of talking of it would have blown it away?

“Why doesn’t thee make a story for thy Aunt Rachel?” Flora asked.

“Me? Make a story? I couldn’t.”

“I don’t see why not. Thee has recited enough love stories.”

Now it was Sibyl who dropped her work in her lap and looked out over fields and woods. She was thinking, I like words. I’ve always said other people’s. Maybe I could put together some of my own. I don’t know how, but I’d like to try. If I had Florence to help me . . .

“I’m afraid it would be a sad story.”

TOM had married Florence and they lived on a farm on the Sharon Road, with Lombardy poplars in front, reaching toward the heavens. “They’re appropriate,” Sibyl said. “It’s a heavenly kind of place.”

Sibyl and Florence worked long at the kitchen table over the story of Rachel. It was like it used to be when they studied together at the Academy. Sibyl said the story and Florence made little corrections in grammar, suggested better-sounding words, and wrote it all down. Sibyl could never have written it, because while she was writing, the words would have become confused in her mind. When Tom came in from work, they put the copy in his hands. He chuckled and squinted and said at the finish, “It’s nearly as good as *The Mistletoe Bough*, Sibyl.”

WHEN Flora and Sibyl sat together again under the maple tree, its leaves were red. Sibyl held in her hand several sheets of closely written paper. "I did it. Well, no, I thought it and Florence wrote it."

"What?" Flora asked, mystified.

"Aunt Rachel's story."

"Oh, read it to me. This minute."

"I don't need the paper, really."

"Then stand up and say it."

So Sibyl stood under the reddening maple leaves, and to her audience of one, with all the emotion born of her own happiness in her voice, recited the story she had made for Aunt Rachel who had no story:

*In the old Tennessee home in the hills, where Father and Mother, my aunts and uncle Fimmie, and some I never knew lived until 1830, Fimmie came in one morning and said, "We've a new neighbor."*

*"What's he like?" Mary asked.*

*"Just a boy, not much older than me."*

*"Where's he from?" Charity wanted to know.*

*"Virginy. He's settlin' in the next holler."*

*"Is he single?" Rachel asked, with her twisted smile.*

*"Sure he's single. Mighty likely chance for the Rees gals." Fimmie laughed aloud. "Trouble is, there's only one of him. I wouldn't set my cap for him if I was thee, Rachel. I have a notion he'd like his woman shorter."*

*Nobody noticed Deborah hadn't asked any questions — only listened.*



Henry of Virginia came first a-borrowing to the Rees' cabin door. He stepped into the kitchen smiling as if he were sure of his welcome. He looked at Mary, peeling potatoes, at Charity bending over a spider on the coals of the fireplace frying salt pork, at Deborah who had stopped snapping green beans to look at this handsome youth, and then his brown eyes came to rest on Rachel. Not that Rachel was nice to look at. Her body was angular, her nose turned down, and she was the tallest of the four grown sisters. It might have been those very peculiarities that made Henry notice her and address her rather than one of the others. "I'm your new neighbor," he said. His whole manner indicated that he thought, you're sure to like me.

"I find I don't have any salt. I wondered if you could spare a bit. Potatoes without salt are like a man without a wife."

Everybody laughed, including Henry.

Rachel had taken the cup he held and was filling it from the stone jar that stood in the drying warmth of the fireplace. But instead of handing it back, she shifted her weight from both feet to one, twisted her mouth more than usual and said, to the astonishment of everyone, "Mary, peel a couple more potatoes." And then she turned to the visitor, and a faint color came into her pasty face: "I guess there's no call for a newcomer to cook his own potatoes. The boys are at the barn. Dinner'll be ready in a half hour or so."

"Now why did thee do that, Rachel?" Charity and Mary asked in the same breath when he had gone toward the barn.

"Well, it's so. There's no need of a stranger like that doing for himself at first. He'll get plenty of batching soon enough."

"It sounded forward," Charity declared.

"I expect he'll go back to Virginia after a wife when he gets settled," Mary said.

*It would never do for Rachel to get ideas in her head. "He's not the kind to stay single long," Mary added.*

*Small, shy Deborah's silence wasn't noticed now, or later when the boys brought Henry to sit with them at the bare pine table.*

*Henry ate many meals with the Reeses of Tennessee and it wasn't long until he was joining the boys in the tormenting of their marriageable but uncourted sisters. Every one of them made a little extra effort to improve her appearance. But Mary and Charity saw with astonishment that Henry seemed partial to Rachel. If he had a nice thing to say about the food he always said it to Rachel, though everybody knew that Charity was the cook. If he wanted a favor, such as a button sewed on, it was Rachel he asked to do it. And Rachel's steps didn't sound so loud on the bare floors. Her face seemed less long. Her nose wasn't quite so prominent. And she laughed more than she had in all her life.*

*One summer night when supper was over and Mary was washing the dishes, she said, "Where in the world is Debbie? This makes the third time lately that child hasn't been around at dish-drying time."*

*Deborah wasn't a child. She was sixteen, but the others thought of her so.*

*"Go see if thee can find her, Rachel."*

*Rachel stepped to the open door. There, walking up the green hill behind the house in the soft southern twilight, she saw Deborah and Henry, hand in hand.*

*Rachel stood motionless until her mind caught up with her sight. She must be very sure. She couldn't say a word until her heart steadied itself. It seemed to have gone down and hit the bottom of her big body with a kerplunk like the heavy bucket striking water in the deep well in the yard.*

*She turned back. "I'll dry the dishes," she said. "Debbie's always off somewhere."*

*Rachel wanted desperately to cry. But in the three-room cabin, what place was there safe from curious eyes? And the hills — always after, Henry and Deborah wandered over them hand in hand.*

*So Rachel laughed the more, and cultivated her talent for making those short, quick replies to the tormenting of her brothers which they liked to hear, and the family and Henry laughed at Rachel, not thinking that tears were dammed up, waiting to be shed.*

*When, a few months later, the Reeses said good-bye to Tennessee and journeyed toward Illinois, all in the family knew that Deborah was leaving her heart behind, but not a single soul guessed that Rachel left hers there, too.*

*Never in all her life did Rachel live in a house where partitions were thick enough to let her have a good cry without arousing curiosity. But in the meeting house, where the light of the sun fell feebly through the few, small-paned windows, where in the sweet silence every man and woman was busy communing with his Maker, a person could let the tears fall quietly without fear of questioning: Tears for want of Henry who never guessed; tears for children she never mothered; tears because Deborah had a love to leave in Tennessee and she had none.*

*"Rachel, weeping for her children  
Rachel, weeping for her children  
because they were not."*

There were tears in Sibyl's eyes when she finished, and Flora was looking for her handkerchief.

"Thee must speak it somewhere, Sibyl."

"I don't get many chances to speak now. And anyway, I couldn't let people know I'd made up a piece about Aunt Rachel."

"Thee could change the names. Nobody need know thee didn't find it in a book."

Sibyl studied over that idea.

"But it's probably not right at all. I made it out of whole cloth. I'm glad I did it, though. I feel different. I think next time I go to their house, I'll put my arms around Aunt Rachel and tell her I love her. She'll be surprised."

Sibyl tore the folded paper to bits.

"Oh, Sibyl, don't do that."

"I won't forget it. I don't suppose I'll ever forget Aunt Rachel's love story."

SIBYL was very conscious of her father's family in the days which she knew were the last she would spend in the old Elwood home. Emily's small motherless son, living in it for a time, had seemed a baby brother and bound her even closer to the place and to those who remained unmarried — Will teaching a school not far away, and the "three little boys."

How unsuitable the words were becoming! Perry, especially, was stretching in height. Father said that he might outstrip Levi. In body or mind? Sibyl wondered. Since no one in the family had confessed that Levi's mental ability could be excelled by a Rees or even by a Folger or a Mills, she supposed that Father thought Perry would tower above Levi's six-feet-two. In her own opinion

Perry was indeed intelligent. (At Florence's suggestion she had substituted the word for the usual one, "smart.") She noticed the depth of Perry's gray eyes and listened to his quiet, clear explanation of a troublesome problem for the younger boys, and marveled.

Will was intelligent too. He was going to be a doctor if he ever earned enough money, but you didn't think much about Will's mind. The things you always remembered about Will were his good looks, his laughing eyes, his never-ending teasing, and something else Aunt Debbie had named once when the two were alone. She had said shyly, almost as if she were speaking of a sweetheart of her own, "There's a sweetness about Will." Afterward, Sibyl heard the remark from older girls: "He's a sweet boy." Flora thought so. When, after several years of alternately "going together" and "playing quits," Flora told Sibyl, "It's all over for good," Sibyl was ready to pour out her great fund of sympathy. But Flora's pansylike face only wrinkled into a pretty smile and she said, "But of course I'll always say Will Rees is a sweet boy."

Perry had had half a year in the Academy in the year Sibyl was to be married. According to his age he should have had more, but somebody had to help Father on the farm. When at last his chance came, he entered into his educational heritage with such zeal, such bending of his sandy head over his books, such absolute lack of notice of the opposite sex, that Will pretended deep concern. "A bad case of brain fever — that's what you'll have, Ped, before the winter's over."

Perry studied on, not even looking up.

But sometimes Will went further: "Ever read Genesis, Ped? When the Lord created the genus homo, 'male and female created he them.' Ever notice there are two kinds of people in the world?"

Then Perry would jump up and there would be one of those impromptu wrestling matches between the two skinny brothers which always ended with Will on top about the time Father intervened with his kind but firm, "Boys, boys . . ."

FEBRUARY in Illinois was a poor time for a wedding, but Zimri wanted to be all set for farming come the first of March.

Sibyl, too, was ready for marriage. Only to Flora, friend of all her life, could she even try to tell her feelings about Zimri and her approaching marriage. For once Flora listened seriously. "There's something inside of me that pulls — hard. Father tried to persuade us to wait till the weather is better, but *I don't want to wait.*"

Sibyl's eyes were burning, and Flora thought, even when she's speaking the most exciting poem, she doesn't look like this. She laughed softly and the tension broke. "Well, Sibyl," she said, "if I ever feel like that about any man on earth, I'll — I'll let thee know," she finished lamely.

Sibyl led Flora into the spare room to show her the wedding dress. It lay spread out upon the bed. "How long it looks; why it's as long as the bed," Flora said. She lifted the fine wine-colored cashmere in her fingers. "The color is beautiful."

“Emily and Martha were married in gray. Mary looked nice in white. Sarah had blue, the color of her eyes. But I need something brighter.”

Flora looked from Sibyl’s pale face to the dress. “Yes, red is right for thee.”

She examined the seams. “Why, Sibyl, I never knew thee could take such fine stitches.”

“I never did, before. I *wanted* to.”

Flora touched the soft white lace at neck and wrists. “Thee will be beautiful, Sibyl — beautiful!”

And suddenly without either knowing how it happened, the two were locked in each other’s arms, crying out the last hours of their intimate girlhood.

“Now wasn’t that silly?” Flora was first to say. “What in the world are we crying about?”

“I’m crying for happiness.” Sibyl laughed. “But thee — I have no idea why thee wants to muss up thy face.”

ON the morning before the wedding day, Sibyl stood at the window of her chilly room, watching the snow fall softly. If it snows enough, maybe the folks can come to the wedding in sleds, she thought. That’ll be nice. One of the boys can meet the train that way, to bring Levi out from town.

Her father came in from his morning chores stamping the snow from his high boots and pulling ice from his beard. “It’s a big snow, and a wet one. No sign of its stopping. Wouldn’t surprise me if it turns out to be something like the one just after we

came up from Tennessee — covered nearly the whole state, even out where Lincoln's folks lived."

"What about Levi? Can he get here?" Sibyl asked fearfully.

There had been a little discussion with Father about the ceremony. Of all his children only Martha had chosen the Quaker manner of being married, without the help of a minister. He had hoped Sibyl might be married that way. But without serious argument he had agreed that it would be fitting for Levi to come for the occasion.

"He'll come if the train runs," her father said, with a comforting smile. "He won't want to miss saying the ceremony for thee."

Bert, at the age when he was mostly legs and grin, added, "In his long-tailed coat."

Sibyl's nerves were a bit raw, with all her work and this new fear: "Bert, I wish thee and Omar would quit making fun of Levi. You're always laughing about his clothes or his big words or his weak stomach. Why shouldn't Levi be different? Why shouldn't he wear coats like other preachers do? And it isn't his fault if he can't gobble down all kinds of food, like you boys can. Something really did happen to him when he was in prison, time of the Civil War."

Bert walked away, still grinning, to find Omar and say to him the rhyme already running in his mind:

*Sibyl thinks her oldest brother  
Better far than any other.  
Long-tailed coat and weak digestion  
Make him holy without question.*



Bert could always make Omar laugh with his silly jingles. But Perry — he couldn't make Perry laugh if he tried to poke fun at any of the Reeses.

Sibyl thought that Levi was handsome and fine-spoken, and she didn't want anybody else in the world to say the words that would make her Zimri's wife. She could see herself in the red dress beside ruddy-cheeked Zimri, tall, dignified Levi standing before them with his Bible in his hand. She could even imagine his voice speaking in that peculiar way he had of making three syllables where there were really only two. Oh, it would be something to tell her children that the ceremony had been said by their uncle Levi.

Sibyl wished that she could have one sister to help in the wedding preparations. Em had come home for Martha's and Mary's weddings. Martha had been at hand for Sarah's. For hers — perish the thought, if the snow didn't stop maybe nobody could come even for the wedding. All morning while she blended flour and eggs and sugar, the snow fell without stopping. By early afternoon there was no question of anyone arriving except by sled or sleigh. Sibyl worked on with drawn face and few words. The cakes turned out well and stood in a row, on the shelf under the window, temptation to hungry brothers.

The men could do no work. They were under foot.

"Reminds me of Whittier's poem," Father said, and went, sock-footed, to find the book that contained *Snow-bound*. By the kitchen fireplace he dried his socks and opened the book and read aloud. Usually Sibyl loved to hear her father read the poems

of the Quaker poet but now as she washed endless pots and pans she could think of nothing except the weather. She broke into his reading:

“Father! Can the trains run?”

Levi was to arrive, four miles away, on the afternoon train.

“I’m afraid it’s doubtful,” he said, and Sibyl’s heart sank.

But when the time came he helped his boys dig out the sled runners, lift the wagon bed onto them, and fill it with straw. He watched them drive away, armed with shovels to dig themselves out of drifts. He shook his head.

The three came back hours later, cold, tired and hungry — and alone. But by that time Sibyl was beyond disappointment. She knew that Levi would not come.

Thawed out and fed, the boys were full of teasing. Omar said, “No use to worry, Sibbie. Zim can’t get here, either.”

Perry was still hungry. “Think of all the cake we’ll get.” And Bert made a rhyme:

*First no preacher, then no groom.*

*Look at Sibyl, picture of gloom.*

*Can’t get married — what a fix.*

*Snow and weddings sure don’t mix.*

Sibyl couldn’t laugh. She watched her mother sit down and knit. It seemed to her that her mother would go on knitting if the world were coming to an end. She washed the supper dishes in silence, took off her apron, and started up the stairway to her cold room. Then she turned on her family and her cheeks needed

no red dress to bring out their color. "Levi won't be here, and maybe Mary and Martha can't bring their children through this snow. I don't even feel sure Flora'll get across the pasture, and I don't know whether Will can ride over horseback from his school, *but Zimri will be here!*"

Hovering about the big fireplace in the kitchen, Sibyl's family wondered whether she had gone to bed without hearing the chapter read. The boys were very still. Twice her father reached for the Bible, but drew back his hand. Others of his children had sometimes missed the reading, but never Sibyl. He would wait a little. Her eyes were red when she came slowly down the stairs and sat in the chair next her father, which seemed to have been reserved for her. He turned without hesitation to the chapter he wanted — the last one of Proverbs. The verses were familiar, but they had never before been read for Sibyl. She listened closely, embarrassed at the great measure in which she fell short. Her price, she was sure, was not above rubies. Never had she planted a vineyard. She had never held spindle or distaff. It was mother who had spun and woven. Her clothing was not silk and purple. When she opened her mouth, something other than wisdom came forth more often than not.

But there were goals toward which she might strive. Surely the heart of her husband could safely trust in her. She would work willingly with her hands. As far as she could, she would stretch forth her hands to the needy. She would try to see that the law of kindness was in her tongue.

But Father had stopped. When he went on, his voice had lowered and his eyes were moist. He had closed the Bible. "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all," he repeated, and stretched out his hand to cover that of his youngest daughter. It was what the first Quakers in England would have called a "tender" moment.

ON the morning of her wedding day Sibyl watched her breath form a white cloud above the warm covers. She jumped from her bed and ran to the window. No snow was falling, but she looked out upon a world of white, studded with the dark tops of fence posts and the spires of the small evergreens in the yard. She dressed and ran down the creaking stairs.

"Mother!" she cried. "Where's Father? What does he say? Are the roads blocked?"

Sibyl's mother was moving slowly about the big kitchen, completely undisturbed by weather or wedding.

"The menfolks haven't come in yet," she said.

But there was a great sound of laughing and stamping at the door and they were falling into the warmth, bringing with them quantities of snow. The boys were enjoying the biggest snow they had ever seen and the lowest temperature. Only Father's frost-covered face showed concern. Sibyl was upon him before he could dispose of the milk pail.

"Father! Are the roads blocked?"

William Rees set the bucket on the table and began to unwind the long woolen scarf from his neck before he said, "A good

team may make it from Hopewell. But it's bitter cold, for man and beast."

SIBYL in her wine-colored dress waited at the window and faithful Flora stood beside her. "He'll come. I *know* he'll come," Sibyl said a dozen times, straining her eyes to see the first sign of flying snow. Will pulled her ear in passing, "Sibyl, remember how red your eyes get when you cry!"

Sibyl didn't cry. She left the window and walked to the fireplace to warm her cold body. Flora called, "I see them," and Sibyl ran to look out. The horses were puffing and straining. The men and women were so completely and similarly wrapped in shawls and blankets that you couldn't tell one from the other. *But among them was Zimri.* Sibyl's faith was justified, and she had never heard music so sweet as the jingling of the sleigh bells ringing in her bridegroom on his wedding day.

An extra man was climbing out of the sled. "Now who in the world is that, Flora?" Sibyl said. "He's no Haworth. Of that I'm sure. And he's not invited."

Nearly everything went wrong at the wedding. The little company, so much smaller than it should have been, shivered in the best room which no number of logs in the fireplace could heat. Will and Flora, who stood up with the bride and groom for old-time's sake, only pretended to be friends, and cast shy glances of accusation at each other. And worst of all, the extra man proved to be a wizened squeaky-voiced justice-of-the-peace whom Zimri had provided, being sure that Sibyl's delicate

brother Levi would never brave such a storm. He stood in front of the pair, the back of his brown coat arched into a perfect semi-circle while he rattled through the words that legally made Sibyl the wife of Zimri.

"If Father hadn't prayed," Sibyl told Zimri as she snuggled under his big shawl in the sled and rode away toward Vermilion, "I don't think I'd feel married to you at all!"

BUT Sibyl felt married. There was no doubt about that. On the farm which had been the home of her Uncle Jimmie Rees, two miles southwest of the village of Vermilion, Zimri and Sibyl began their good life together in the midst of plentifully bearing orchards and rich black corn land. As it had been for Sibyl's father and mother, so for these two, there was soon established the pattern of seed time and harvest, meeting attendance twice weekly, and neighborly living. But unlike his father-in-law, Zimri moved quickly, put his mind on farming, and prospered well.

Sibyl could never be the nice, careful housekeeper that her sisters Martha and Mary were, but she made a home out of the house Uncle Jimmie had built for his bride, now becoming a bit ramshackle. The spirit of contentment filtered in with the sunshine through the crevices which time was widening. Sibyl's people and Zimri's liked to visit there.

In the spring of her marriage, the days were long while Zimri worked in his fields. Sibyl's hands were well occupied, but her mind was free to wander among all the people and into all the

places she knew. It became a kind of game to travel about in space and time. Zimri, being practical by nature, would think it very foolish to make believe in this fashion, but Sibyl could see no harm. Sometimes she went back to her childhood at Elwood. She lived again her youthful friendship with Flora; her Academy days with Florence; her happy time of courtship.

One late June morning when Zimri was plowing his corn for the last time, Sibyl suddenly found herself, a child of nine, in the blackberry vines along the fence row on her father's farm, swinging her bucket and picking the ripe fruit.

She was startled to hear her own childish voice asking, "Did you dedicate me?" And her mother answering, "Yes, we did."

Sibyl sat down, weak from the surprising jump of a dozen years. When had she last thought of that day? Really, she discovered, not since her brother Levi, converted in the big revival at Elwood, had become a preacher and pastor. She remembered saying to herself then, "Well, I guess that lets me out. Levi is the preacher in this family." But now? Now?

On the table by her lay her Bible, where she had left it after reading her morning chapter. She reached for it and turned, with a little hunting, to the account of the birth of John the Baptist. When she closed it, two short vertical lines had formed above her Roman nose.

When Zimri came in to dinner that day, he looked closely at his wife, seeing those two lines. "Anything the matter, Sibyl?"

"No, I'm all right." It was almost true, for Zimri's presence did much to restore her peace of mind.

But next day, Sibyl said, "I feel as if I must go see Father and Mother today."

"Why? Is there anything wrong with them?"

"Oh, no. I just feel I ought to go."

William and Rebecca Rees now lived in the square white house at Vermilion close by Lover's Lane. It was not far, but the visit meant that Zimri must stop his farm work, hitch his team to the spring wagon, and take Sibyl. He had heard it was best to humor the whims of a woman who was to have a child. So he loafed at Vermilion's one little store for an hour or two that afternoon.

Sibyl sat between her parents and they talked of everything except what was on her mind. She meant to ask, "Father, when a person is once dedicated to the Christian Ministry, is there any escape? When I was a child Mother told me thee made a dedicatory prayer, before I was born. But since then I have grown from a child into a woman with never a thought of whether I had an obligation to fulfill. Here I am a married woman, soon to become a mother, and now the question has come to plague me. Tell me, does thee still think I ought to be a preacher?"

But there was a letter from Levi. When it had been read aloud and Mother's face had beamed throughout, and Father had expressed his great satisfaction with the remarkable growth in spiritual stature his eldest son was making, Sibyl's questions seemed to her very foolish. Levi was the preacher in the family. Levi had talent, learning, eloquence, none of which she possessed. He was the fulfillment of the hope of her parents.

"Did you have a good visit?" Zimri asked, as they rode home.



“Oh, yes. They had a letter from Levi. They were full of Levi.”

“I thought you wanted to talk about yourself. Seemed to me you had something on your mind.”

“Well, no, I guess not. Nothing very special.”

THE pattern of life on the old Jimmie Rees farm expanded to include children — a daughter and a son. Their mother looked at them with pride. On both sides they had good heritage; not wealth nor fame but what she had heard her father call, “good Quaker stock.” She dressed them in long-waisted worsted dresses with pleated skirts, and she and Zimri jogged to Danville, the county seat, to have their pictures taken at Campbell’s. Little Mary’s hair was shingled but it waved prettily around her thin face. Nobody would mistake her for a boy. She leaned protectingly toward her curly headed baby brother.

Sibyl and Zimri gazed with satisfaction at the finished glossy cabinet photograph. The different dispositions of the children were very evident. Little Mary was shy and demure; Albert was bold and vivacious. His picture showed clearly the struggle there had been to keep him still for five seconds.

“A pretty fine pair, seems to me,” Sibyl said.

“Not many of ’em, though, compared with your family and mine,” Zimri replied.

Two children plus all the other duties of a farmer’s wife did not leave much spare time. For as Zimri’s granaries filled with grain and his mows with hay, and his hogs turned into money to make

the mortgage payments, Sibyl's work increased, in order to meet the needs of family, hired hands and visitors. Crocks of golden-brown sausage and snowy lard, rows and rows of canned fruit and jellies, cream yellow and rubberlike rising on jars of milk in the trough cooled by water from the deep well, chickens ready for the frying pan, a growing garden — all these represented the work of Sibyl, almost single-handed. And she must clothe her household, not with scarlet as her father had read from Proverbs, but with the best cloth she could buy with money from the sale of chickens and eggs and fruit.

One afternoon Sibyl folded her sewing and put it into the basket which she kept on the ledge of the bay window, where a few straggly geraniums struggled to live. Now why won't my flowers grow and bloom like Sister Mary's? she wondered. She touched the earth in the tin cans with her long forefinger. They're kind of dry, she thought. I ought to water them. But she didn't — then or later. At that minute three-year-old Albert woke up from his nap and came pell-mell out of the bedroom. He climbed up Sibyl's tall body as if she were a tree. He fastened his arms about her neck so tightly that she could hardly speak.

"Well, Albert, don't choke me," she managed to say, and loosened his arms. With a swift slide the child was down and out through the kitchen, racing toward the barn. Little Mary appeared, rubbing her eyes, and Sibyl said, "Come on, Mary. We'll go hunt eggs." Sibyl walked rapidly in the direction of the barn, calling, "Albert! Wait!"

Albert didn't wait. He made a bee line for the muddy lot be-

hind the barn where half a dozen brood sows suckled their pigs. By clumsily running the last of the distance, Sibyl caught her son on the top rail of the fence and rescued him from filth and rending jaws. Albert laughed. Next time he would get into that pig pen!

“LET me never get too busy to be a good neighbor,” Sibyl often prayed. Her definition of neighbor was as broad as the Good Samaritan’s. It included the weary Willie who tramped down the road and asked for a bite to eat. She seated him at her table and gave him a square meal, preceded by a very special grace in his behalf. “Father never turned anybody away from his door,” she explained to Zimri. “Anyway, this man was a little boy once, like Albert.”

“I hope you don’t get yourself into any trouble,” Zimri said, watching the two-hundred-pounder plod down the road and pause furtively by the last post of the fence that enclosed Uncle Jimmie’s windbreak of pines. “He’s marked a post for the next one.”

“We live in such an out-of-the way place — not many tramps come down our road. If they do, I guess they’re really hungry. You don’t *care* if I feed them, do you?”

Zimri said he didn’t care.

AND meetings were most important. Green pastures were fine. Sibyl liked to walk with Zimri and the children through the clover field on First Day afternoons, but there were a good many

things to hinder the restoring of one's soul. Of course she knew God made the clover and gave it that penetrating sweet smell, but Zimri was apt to talk about whether the yield was heavy enough to leave for seed, how much seed he would get or when the crop would be ready to cut and who would help him harvest it. And likely as not Albert would get bee-stung and then what a howl! She didn't know how the Psalmist David managed. Maybe he left all his wives and that troublesome boy Absalom at home and walked by himself. But for the restoring of Sibyl's soul, let her go to meeting. Let her sit, with her children awed into stillness by the intense silence of the cool dimly lighted room, with people around her who, like herself, were reaching, yearning toward Heaven. . . . And as always, words helped; maybe not said aloud, but only running through her mind; the lifting words of the Psalmist or Isaiah or the close-fitting words of Jesus. No, Sibyl didn't miss meetings. She couldn't.

## CHAPTER V

### *THE BRIGHTER CANDLE*

THE FRAME building erected by pioneer hands at Vermilion had been replaced by a large brick meeting house in 1883. It matched the Academy building near it in material, simplicity of design and solidity. For the funeral of William Rees it was well filled. Many old neighbors and friends drove from Elwood through the biting March cold. The Folgers, the Millses, the Hesters, the Haworths, the Canadays, the Newlins, the Ellises, the Mendenhalls, the Lewises, from the various Friends meetings within a radius of ten miles from Vermilion came to look for the last time on the face of one of their number who had passed from works to reward.

The three Reynolds brothers were there. They had married and founded solid Quaker homes and families in Vermilion County in the decade following the Civil War. They were strong men; strong enough in body to wrest good livings from their inherited farms and add to their acres; strong enough in mind each to form his way of thinking and hold firmly to it, strong enough in heart to keep burning the steady fires of affection for each other in spite of differences of opinion.

All were religious men, and before the Great Revival, knew no schisms in their Quaker faith. But when the crest of the revival wave had passed, the three stood on separate points of land.

William, the youngest, saw the noisy new way of the Progressives as irreverent and un-Quakerly.

Linton, the oldest, saw the old ways of the Conservatives as lifeless and hidebound.

These two were not aware that their squarely planted feet rested on upjuttings from the same foundation. But Moses, as gentle and meek as his name indicated, stood between them with quivering chin and a hand held out to each.

Heart and soul with Linton was his wife Lydia, capable and wise.

William's wife Angeline was not a woman for deep thoughts. Her virtues lay in homemaking, easy laughter, quick sympathy, and a spirit of live-and-let-live which made her neither ridicule nor scold at William's strange ways.

And Moses' wife Eunice — small, bright-eyed and sure, held fast with fearless tenacity to the dress, address and silent worship with which she had grown to womanhood.

On this day, Linton's wife Lydia was at home with child; Will's wife Angeline had not protested when Will had proposed that he ride horseback to Vermilion and had remained with her housework. Moses' wife, Eunice, would not set foot in the house of the Fast Quakers even for a funeral. Linton and Moses, as unlike in appearance as in beliefs, sat together near the front to the

right of center. Linton was heavy-set, dark and austere in appearance. Moses was slight and fair and habitually wore an expression of tender concern for all people.

Will, youngest of the three, was the most friendly and jovial except when occasion demanded something different.

With hat on head he sat alone on the first of the long benches on the left of the middle aisle. Will's hat was a successor to the gray wide-brimmed hat of other days. It was black, and followed the mode of the day except for the fact that its tall crown was undented. At the mid point in any meeting Will removed it and carefully put it under the seat on which he was sitting. At the beginning of this meeting he sat as erect as his stooping shoulders would allow. He didn't quite approve of the comfortable shape of the oak benches in the new Vermilion meeting house, factory-made. With his own hands he could have hewn seats more to his liking and less conducive to relaxation. A person didn't relax while worshiping the Lord. But by the time Samuel Mills, first pastor of Vermilion meeting, had told in unexaggerated words of the good life of William Rees and had launched into the doctrinal part of his sermon, Will removed his hat, placed it under the bench, and yielded so far to the unapproved comfort that the stand-up collar of his worn coat rode his heavily lined neck. He wished there were no sermon. He didn't believe in sermons any more than he believed in factory seats and lay-down coat collars. But it was easier to do something about collars. It was simple to say to Angeline, his good-natured wife, on those

rare occasions when he brought home a new suit from Danville, "Cut it down," and Angeline shaped the collar to his Quaker liking. You couldn't cut off a sermon.

Linton liked sermons. As the minister made his strong doctrinal points, Linton nodded his approval. If he had had his way Jimmie Haworth would have sung a verse or two of some good Gospel hymn when the sermon was ended.

Moses didn't mind the sermon, but a song at a funeral would have hurt his sensitive soul. The tears rolled down his cheeks and his chin trembled, not in great grief for the passing of William Rees but in sympathy for the widow. To lose the helpmate of one's life — ah, that was a hard thing to bear. Suppose he should so be parted from Eunice!

As dust returned to dust, the three brothers stood together a little apart in the graveyard. They watched the children of William and Rebecca Rees gather about their mother in a close circle as the clods fell on the coffin.

"Which is Martha?" they asked each other. "Will can be told," one said, "by his fine appearance." The younger boys were easily confused. But all three Reynolds brothers knew the tallest youngest daughter of the Reeses, and all admired her.

"She came with her mother and father to our wedding when she was a child. I hoped then I'd have a daughter like her," Will said. "Even then she liked to go to meeting."

Linton said, "Sometimes she comes to Elwood Meeting on First Day, with her family. She makes a very moving prayer."



Moses was watching her face. His chin quivered. "I expect Sibyl is the most spiritual of William's daughters," he said.

And the other two agreed.

THE icy wind which had brought sickness and death to Sibyl's father in the year 1890 was still blowing on the Illinois prairie as she and her family bounced home from his funeral over the deeply rutted, solidly frozen roads. Yet it seemed to Sibyl that this wind of many days had been but a sudden gust, extinguishing one of the two candles which had lighted all her twenty-seven years. Her sense of loyalty to her mother would not let her quite form the thought that the brighter of those two lights had gone out.

Zimri snuggled deep into his heavy three-yard muffler and great shawl which he wore to afford protection against the gale from the west, squarely facing them for the first one of their three-mile journey. He did not talk much nor expect his wife to do so, although at times he had words enough. Now his job was to drive home in the shortest possible time. Too often a second or third case of pneumonia developed after a family had stood about an open grave in March. "There ought to be a windbreak planted on the northwest of the graveyard," he said. "Maybe I'll bring that subject up next Monthly Meeting."

Sibyl couldn't have talked. She tucked the heavy wool comforter more snugly about Little Mary and Albert on either side of her on the back seat of the spring wagon. Of her father's

seventy-one years she could remember twenty-four. Her memory extended back to the age of three, and the first very definite imprint upon it was the sensation of the pressure of her father's left arm on her small middle as she rode on a broad horse in front of him. When she was older, Sibyl had been told that these expeditions on horseback were usually either to the homes of neighbors, where there was anxiety or grief arising out of the War, or to Quaker meetings. Once when her Uncle Jimmie had said, "William, why did thee always tote Sibyl along with thee when she was a baby?" her father had answered, "Well, it made things easier for Rebecca, and anyway, Sibyl wasn't a trouble to me. It doesn't hurt a child to get an early start."

Uncle Jimmie didn't ask more questions and Sibyl always wondered, "A start in what?"

A long series of pictures of her father now passed before Sibyl, many of which centered about his shapely hands. How many things he did with them! She saw him driving pegs in a shoe; making bullets for his rifle — melting the lead, pouring it into the mold, flipping out a bullet, then another and another; making splints from a long hickory pole, soaking them in water and weaving them into a chair bottom. She saw the careful movements of his hands at his carpenter's bench; the rhythm of his right one as it moved in and out of the seed bag when he sowed a field of oats; the tenderness of both as he handled a newborn babe — his own and later his children's children.

She saw the movement of his broad shoulder muscles as he guided a plow through hard earth; the swing of his arms as he

wielded a scythe; his slow walk home from meeting, head down and hands behind him; his short, stocky form kneeling by his rocking chair; and always his face — the expression of supreme contentment it wore the last time he had all eleven of his children under his roof — that was many years ago — and the look of pain when any child of his own was in danger or suffering or sin.

How could she live, never seeing that face again? Never knowing, by its telling expression, when she had gone the wrong way in word or thought or deed?

As plainly as Sibyl could see her father's form she could hear his voice in conversation, in direction of his children in work, in Bible reading and prayer. *What* prayer? Sibyl straightened her body and lifted her head, as if she were listening to a living voice. She was hearing, not the words of his petition on her marriage day which had fastened itself for all time in her good memory, but that far-off supplication of dedication of which she had learned as a child. Knowing so well his choice of words she built the prayer step by step, even as several years before she had built a story for Aunt Rachel. It was not long. She could not know how well it matched the original.

In her father's dying hour, for the second time in her married life, there had come to Sibyl an overwhelming yearning to hear him say, "Don't worry, Sibyl. Levi is the preacher in our family. Thee has no responsibility now," or, terrifying alternative, "We dedicated thee, Sibyl, before thee was born. Thee is bound."

But Father's whispered words, "Sibyl, Sibyl Jones," had settled nothing for her. And now with even his body gone for-

ever from her, came this reconstructed prayer . . . The wind blowing on her face was not more real or piercing than the facing of life ahead without the help of the one who could have given her most.

ZIMRI drove up in front of the old Jimmie Rees home, climbed stiffly out of the spring wagon, handed the reins to Sibyl and carried the children, one at a time, into the cold house. While he unhitched and fed his horses, Sibyl shoved aside her troublesome thoughts and, shivering with the chill of wind and grief, built fires, put bricks on the kitchen stove, later to be used as bed warmers, and prepared supper for her family. When the children were asleep, she and Zimri sat close to the wood stove while the cold air came in under ill-fitting doors and around loose windows.

“Seems like I can’t ever get warm all through,” Zimri said.

“I wish Uncle Jimmie had built his house tighter,” Sibyl answered, standing, and turning her tall body about in a vain effort to warm all sides alike.

“He was a better hand at orchards than houses. Maybe we can build us a new one in a year or two if crops are good.”

The idea brought Zimri to his feet. He didn’t quite reach Sibyl’s height. In the days of their courtship sometimes he was aware of that half-inch difference. Now, after eight years of married life, he was not conscious of his wife’s height or of any of the peculiarities other people saw in her. He had no more wish to change her than to change the shape of the earth.

"You'd better get to bed," he said practically. "I don't want you takin' lung fever, yourself."

"You got worse chilled than I did, I reckon."

"The Haworths have better lungs than the Reeses, though. Somebody in your family has a siege of lung trouble every winter."

SIBYL had shed all the tears she had. Now there was only a dry numbness, and only two thoughts pierced it as she shivered in her bed, so cold that no bricks could warm it. She resolutely put aside for some later time the question that had consumed her for the last few days. Much more immediate was the thought, "What will become of Mother?" Several of the Rees family were with her now, but soon they would go to their homes, leaving only the three youngest boys, all of whom were teaching in nearby schools. Always there had been Father and Mother together. She had thought of them in the same breath. More than any couple she knew, they had been one in purposes and the carrying out of purposes. Now there was only Mother.

As well as Sibyl knew the woman who bore her, she was surprised at the calmness she found in her on her first visit. Already in the week since her husband's death she had adjusted her life to widowhood. Sibyl quickly saw that her mother was not merely "bearing up" under a heavy load. It seemed, rather, that she had wrapped all her long life with her companion in fragrant, preserving spices and put it away for safekeeping, even as she was

wont to place small, precious material possessions in drawers of the old chest that came out of Tennessee. Sibyl saw that for the remainder of her life she would at times bring forth the package, enjoy its sweetness for a season, wrap it again and put it away. There had been times when Mother's ability to sit and knit through a family minor crisis had provoked Sibyl. "I'd like to see her get excited for once," she had said to Will one day when they were young. She never forgot his answer, "Better not try to improve on Mother." Now she certainly didn't want to try. She only marveled.

"Can thee live on here with the boys?" Sibyl asked. "The boys" meant the three tall sons yet single.

"Why, yes, I hadn't thought of anything else. Perry'll see that I get along."

"Yes, I'm sure he will."

"They're all uncommonly good boys. I'll not lack care. Omar'll go on to learn to be a doctor in another year, I expect."

"And Bert'll get married."

Mother answered without concern, "Perry'll stay with me."

Sibyl, calling up Perry's tall, straight, fine-looking form, his well-shaped head and kind gray eyes, foresaw a day when he might want something quite different from life alone with Mother, but there was no need to speak of that time now. Perry had never really looked at a girl, although plenty of them had turned anxious eyes in his direction.

Rebecca Rees pulled herself out of her chair by placing her

hands on its broad arms and walked heavily into the west room. Sibyl heard her rummaging in drawers. If she herself should step through the open door she would see her father as he had been there last, straight and lifeless in the black suit he had needed so long in life and had only in death. She could not do that. Instead she sat very still, thinking of the various ones of the family, waiting for her mother's return. She came, carrying a roll of wool, punctured by steel needles. She settled herself in her rocker and began knitting the sock where she had left off on the day sickness had struck down her life companion. She spoke as if she knew Sibyl's thoughts. "Your father saw all of you well fixed for life. He was glad when Bert graduated from the Academy; said now all six of his boys had more education than he'd had."

Evidently it was the boys who counted most. Emily was dead. And what about Sarah? All the family secretly wondered whether Sarah wouldn't have been much happier married to the Democrat Father hadn't approved of. And she herself? Had he no concern for Sibyl, bound by his own act to a kind of life she seemed unprepared and powerless to fulfill? Or *was* she bound?

That night Sibyl said to Zimri, "I don't need to worry about Mother. Perry'll take care of her. Anyway, she's strong. She's stronger than I am." After a moment she added, "I suppose I'll have to get used to doing without Father. It's hard. All my life I've asked him things."

ZIMRI didn't say to anyone that he wanted to take his wife's mind off of her father's death, but it was not long until he began to make plans for the new house.

"I didn't suppose we could afford to build this year," Sibyl said when she discovered his intention.

"Crops are lookin' good. Might as well get it over with before winter," Zimri answered.

They drew sketches on wrapping paper. Four rooms below and two above would be a plenty, Sibyl said, even if they had more family. "Could we have a parlor?" she asked wistfully. "I'd like to have a dining room, too. Sister Mary has one." Later she thought a pantry off the kitchen would be a big help.

It was Zimri's idea to move the old house and build the new one in such a way as to include on its back porch the well Uncle Jimmie had provided. "A good pump right by the kitchen door will be handy for you. Albert'll soon be big enough to fill the milk trough."

So the old house, pried up by levers onto short lengths of logs to serve as rollers, groaned and creaked as Zimri's best team, by means of blocks and tackle fastened first to a stump, then a tree, a second stump, a second tree, moved it five, ten, twenty, forty feet to the east. In the process cracks appeared at corners, walls bulged, the roof parted at the gables, and all that summer Sibyl's pans and kettles occupied strange places on rainy days.

Zimri hired a first-class carpenter for the project, but he and his neighbors were assistants. All had to be fed at Sibyl's table. Every night found her too tired to fail to drop asleep after she had



viewed the day's progress. She saw brick rise in small rectangular towers to make foundation, and heavy joists resting upon them. She walked over the false flooring, trying to distinguish between parlor and pantry. She called in a neighbor woman to help prepare the dinner the day eight men heaved and strained to raise the heavy sets of studding and nail them in place to form the framework. That night she and Zimri walked through the "rooms," imagining walls and plaster, doors and windows. Soon the false floor above invited inspection. Sibyl perilously climbed a ladder: "This is Little Mary's room; this is Albert's," she assured herself, though there was as yet only space.

To keep this shell of a house from soaring away like a kite in a possible wind storm, on went the weatherboard siding ahead of the roof. Next, what a job for strong arms and backs the placing of the rafters; what a careful task for the carpenter their fitting and bracing.

Sibyl's own back ached in sympathy as the heaviest of the work was done.

It was a great day when the last of the shingles were nailed down solid and tight over the sheeting. The skeleton had become a house. Sibyl was ready to move in. "I could use my kettles to cook in for a change if I lived here," she said.

But there was the building of chimneys and a stairway, the lathing and plastering, the nice work of placing casings and windows, the fitting and hanging of doors.

"No wonder Solomon's temple was such a big job, when it takes such a lot of work to build a plain six-room house without

anything in it overlaid with gold," Sibyl said. But there wasn't anything about the new home from a door stop to the top brick on the kitchen chimney that Sibyl and Zimri and their children didn't know about and talk over, and rejoice in.

Yet in the midst of all this interesting activity, Sibyl found time to live the other parts of her busy life. She never missed going to meeting; she returned with interest the favors she asked of neighbors; she went often to see her mother.

"I'm going to have a pantry," Sibyl announced proudly, "with lots of shelves too high for Albert to reach."

"I never had a pantry; just the big cupboard William made."

"We're going to have a parlor. It'll be nice for visitors. And Little Mary can entertain her beaux there when she grows up."

"The best room served us very well. We used it when preachers came to see us, and you girls all had your beaux there."

"We're going to have a dining room."

"We ate in the kitchen. It was plenty big. But times change, and ways change."

WHEN in October of that year in which Sibyl lost her father, Zimri and a neighbor carried the heavy pieces of their furniture into the finished house, he watched with great satisfaction as Sibyl and the children placed dishes in the corner cupboard and pots and pans on the pantry shelves. By night when the first meal had been eaten at the table not in the dining room at all but near the door to the stairway in the kitchen, the new home had a lived-in look.

“And to think,” Sibyl said to Zimri as they slept for the first time under the new roof, “Albert is all in one piece after all the times he fell off something in the process of building this house. Sister Mary was so sure he’d kill himself. She’ll feel a little disappointed, maybe, when she knows he didn’t even break a bone!”

In the placing of the new house Zimri had been careful not to spoil the fine old trees of the yard. Even the Bouncing Betty that grew under them was not very much disturbed. Next spring its pale-pink flowers would blossom where the deep shade would hinder the growth of grass.

Driving up from the north, the house was almost hidden from sight by the windbreak of pines until you were at the gate in the picket fence. When Sibyl came from meeting or her mother’s or town, she could hardly believe that this was her home. “It’s a prosperous-looking place. There’s not a board in the whole house that creaks. I’ve always had one or two. I almost feel lonesome,” she told Sister Mary.

All the same, she often stopped at the gate and said a little prayer of thanksgiving.

A few months later, when Sibyl had a second son, she thought to make him more amenable to parental reason by giving him the names of two preachers. The first was that of the great English Gurney who had paid welcome visits to this country in her father’s youth. The second was Levi. The new baby had the kinky hair of his minister uncle and the length that promised likeness to the Rees brothers.

SIBYL'S Aunt Rachel soon followed her father to the cemetery by the meeting house. While few really grieved for her, many missed her. Almost to the last of her life she walked with Deborah to Fifth Day meeting. As they went up the aisle the sound of Deborah's soft, short steps was completely covered by Rachel's heavy ones, with her heels going down first. Her steps, her prayers, her tears were missed.

But Deborah felt the loss sadly. Now she lived entirely alone. And as if grief had some strange power over her physical being, her eyesight suddenly failed. All the relatives were troubled about Aunt Debbie's living alone, unable to see what she was cooking and eating. But which one could live with her or take her into his home?

Zimri was going to a farm sale down Elwood way. Sibyl said, "If you could take Albert with you, I'd like to take the other two and spend the day at Aunt Debbie's."

So she cut two thick slices of a cured ham, and wrapped a pound of fresh butter in a wet cloth and put them in a basket with a loaf of salt-rising bread and rode with Zimri to Aunt Debbie's house.

"Don't get so interested in a hog you forget you have Albert with you," she said at the gate, and called as he drove away, "and we don't need any churn this time." Men did buy the queerest things at sales!

Aunt Debbie's house looked strangely in order without Aunt Rachel's work scattered about. And it felt very strange without her big body and half-sharp speech. Deborah's cheeks were paler

than usual when Sibyl stooped and kissed first one and then the other. That brought a hint of color. She began to hurry about in her old way, but Sibyl gently pushed her back into her rocker. "Now thee let me get the dinner this time, Aunt Debbie. But first let's sit a while."

So while the new baby slept on the bed that used to be Sibyl's in her Academy days, and Little Mary gathered white clovers in the yard, they talked of the recent passing of Rachel, and the earlier one of Sibyl's father.

There's no use to try to cheer her up. Very likely when I'm old I'll enjoy talking about the way Martha or Mary or Levi died, if I outlive them. It's an old person's right to be sad, Sibyl thought.

But suddenly Deborah was changing the subject. "Oh Sibyl, I've been waiting for somebody with good eyes." She was taking a letter from the clock shelf and placing it in Sibyl's hands. "I didn't open it. 'Twasn't any use. I can't even make out the handwriting."

Sibyl didn't recognize it either. It wasn't Sarah's or Martha's or Levi's. It was the shaky but clear hand of age. She found within, a sheet of foolscap, doubled several times. It began, *Dear Debbie*.

But people outside the family said "Deborah" and those inside, "*Aunt Debbie*." Sibyl looked at the bottom of the page to satisfy her curiosity. It was signed, *Your devoted Henry*.

Sibyl caught her breath. "Well!" she said, "I guess this is from somebody I don't know. It's signed Henry."

"No!" Deborah said, as a little child says "no" when he means "yes."

For fifty years Deborah had waited for word of Henry. In that time letters had changed from folded papers sealed with red wax and carried by messenger for a fee, through many forms, to an envelope stamped and sealed, and Deborah had changed from a girl to an old woman. All along the way there had been the secret longings, and they had changed, too. First, Just a line to say he loves me still. Then, By this time he's found a wife. I wonder if she's a bit like me. Later, There must be children now. Did he name a little girl Deborah?

At the beginning of the war Deborah thought; I don't even know for sure which side he's on; with stories of fierce battles in Tennessee, He may be dead; with reports of near-starvation in the South after the war, If he lives I wish I could know how he fares; with William's children growing to be men and women, We might have had a son like Will. I'd have called him so.

In the later years a cold deadness had grown around her heart with only a warm spot kept for Rachel and William and William's children; and of her memory of Henry only his name remained, coming by long habit into her dreams and waking hours. Henry! Henry!

In the short time while Sibyl held the letter, wondering what to do with it, all Deborah's unhappy life of waiting hurried through her mind. No wonder that she hesitated to believe and reach her trembling hand for a message that had come too late.

Sibyl dropped the letter in her aunt's lap, and walked into the

yard. She braided a wreath for Little Mary out of white clovers. She walked down the road a little way, holding Little Mary's hand. When she returned to Deborah she found that she had not moved and the letter lay in her lap. But now her hands were quiet. "I made out a little of it," she said. "It's from a man I used to know. He buried his wife not long ago. I guess he was lonesome and remembered me. At least that's the way I made it out."

Had some power of sight been given to Aunt Debbie in her hour of need? Or had she only read into the lines a message reasonable and not too hard to bear?

"Would thee like for me to read it to thee?" Sibyl asked gently. But she knew the answer. "It's not important." Deborah folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope. She carried it to the mantel and propped it against the clock.

Often during the rest of the day Sibyl saw her aunt's nearly sightless eyes turn toward the clock. I'm glad Aunt Rachel's gone, she thought, and it'll be a good thing when Zimri comes back and takes me home. Love does wonderful things, but it doesn't need an audience. It might make Aunt Debbie really able to read her letter when she has plenty of time to herself.

The next time Sibyl went to visit Deborah there was no letter by the clock. Maybe Sibyl only imagined that she heard a faint rustle of paper under Aunt Debbie's wrapper when she moved fast. The strange thing was the way her sight had definitely improved. Second sight, some said, but Sibyl thought that a love that had lasted for half a century and reached from Tennessee to Illinois must be fully capable of working a little miracle.

THE new baby grew into a beautiful boy with light-brown curls the color Sarah's used to be. "But he won't want ribbons," Sibyl said, remembering that Sarah never had enough.

Such illustrious names as "Gurney" and "Levi" did not make Sibyl's son a whit more easily managed. With his older brother to set him such a shining example in mischief-making, he made less possible for Sibyl the keeping of that promise she had made to herself on the cold March night after her father's funeral to come to a conclusion about fulfilling a parental dedication.

Indeed for nearly three years, the possibility never really reached the surface of Sibyl's consciousness.



## CHAPTER VI

### *MOTHER OF FOUR*

WHEN SIBYL, mother of three, knew that she was to have yet another child, she was tortured by fear. In the nighttime it clutched her like a thing alive and she awoke, shaking. No matter how persistently she said the verse, "What time I am afraid will I trust in Thee," sleep brought the terror — the fear of death. She longed for her father as she had not since Zimri built the new house. When she could no longer endure the pain in her mind she talked to Zimri — practical Zimri who had never had a bad dream in his life. He said, "Maybe you'd better go see your sister Mary. Go down to Elwood and stay a few days. We'll get along. Little Mary can cook some. I'll look out for Albert. You can take Gurney with you."

Sibyl had longed to see her sister Mary, but she knew that an ordinary First Day visit, with all the members of the families about, would do little good. You needed time and quiet for a thing like this. At first she said, "Why, Zimri, I can't do that — go off and leave you in such a busy time." But she was persuaded.

It was strange how, in any time of trouble since her father's death, Sibyl turned to her sister Mary. She might have gone to sweet, patient, trustful Martha. Instead she went to Mary, herself

anxious and afraid, but full of good sense and sympathy.

Out of Zimri's good supply of horses, he could spare the two oldest and gentlest. He hitched them to the spring wagon on an early June morning and sent Sibyl on her way, after she had held each beloved face of the three left behind in her two strong hands, and implanted on it a farewell kiss. Gurney, out of bed earlier than usual, was soon asleep with his curly head on her lap. It was good to sit and to have time to think. At first she suffered qualms of conscience, remembering Little Mary's eyes, always too big for her thin face and showing signs of tears as her mother rode away. She wished Little Mary were stronger — not so spindling. Once when she tried to speak a piece at the last day of school she had fainted dead away. Well, maybe the next few years would make a big difference. And Albert — *he* hadn't cried to see her leave! Albert was strong as an ox! He hadn't ever been sick, even with the measles. He could do a lot of work if Zimri made him; he could play all day and never want to quit. He was what the Reeses called "rambumpitious." Not another one of the Rees family had a rambumpitious child. They were quiet folks. But Sibyl's love for her oldest boy, with his curly dark hair, regular features, strong will and hearty laugh, fairly left her weak when she let it envelop her.

Now, which way should she take to Elwood? She could drive out to the State Road and straight north to Georgetown, then out east to Elwood; or she could take the prairie road which arrived at Elwood by way of the Yankee Point settlement; or she could go by the Sharon Road through the woods. Really, Sibyl

didn't have much debate on the subject. She liked the timber road.

Sibyl liked the way the road wound about past the tiny house where the old, old woman lived who seemed always sitting on its step smoking her pipe; past Sharon Schoolhouse where more than one of her father's family had "got a start" in teaching; past the farm home where brother Tom and his wife Florence had lived when they were first married — yes, sure enough, the cabbage roses were in full bloom, sprawling by the rail fence. She liked the cool heavy greenness of maples, hickories and oaks in full leaf. She liked the smell of the woods even when as now, the spring flowers had faded. I *like* it all, she thought, but I don't *love* it, in the way Sister Mary loves such things. Why, when she was married, all she wanted for a wedding trip was a drive down to the woods!

Sibyl saw the young people all climb in the wagon to go to the woods on that April afternoon. Mary had cast aside her worries and her face was beautiful with happiness. Thomas had shed his bashfulness. Like the animals going into the arc, these who had passed the line between childhood and the grown-up state, went into the wagon two by two. Even Sarah walked away from kitchen and dishes and was paired off with a Mills boy. Sibyl moved toward the wagon, but her father gently pulled her back.

"Thee'd better stay here, Sibyl."

"I've gone to the woods lots of times with Thomas and Mary."

Sibyl's father smiled, "So thee has, but I'm afraid thee hasn't always been needed."

She could still feel the sea of self-pity in which she was immersed as she sat alone in the big old porch rocker. Sister Mary was going away, even as Emily and Martha had gone. But this was different. Who would help her with her arithmetic? Who would make her see the meaning of a complex bit of poetry? Who would keep her from wading snow to her knees in winter or see that she wore her sunbonnet in summer? Who would soak her feet in hot mustard water when she had a cold and lay cool cloths on her head when she burned with fever? Who would tie up her sore throat with fat meat and a woolen stocking, or feed her alum and molasses until her croup days were completely passed? Who would teach her polite manners and correct speech, and try to make a nice woman out of her?

All these lugubrious thoughts had a dire effect on the twelve-year-old Sibyl, and the next thing she knew she was lying on her mother's high bed, opening her eyes and looking at Sister Mary bending over her. Now she was wearing her brown going-away dress and hat, so there was no mistake; she was really going. But her voice sounded just as anxious as if she were not married at all, as she said, "Here, Sibbie, drink this; thee fainted."

Sibyl drank the good, hot tea from the cup in Sister Mary's hand. She could still taste it and see the concerned look on her sister's face as she said, "I guess we'd better go now, if thee's sure thee'll be all right." And Sister Mary started away, with Thomas. But at the door she turned back. "Sarah, remember to keep her quiet till tomorrow and don't let her have anything more to eat today. I expect she had too much cake."

Too much cake! Sister Mary was nearly always right, but that time she was mistaken. It wasn't too much cake but too much heart-hurt that made her sick. The best Sibyl could ever do when she tried to explain her feeling toward Sister Mary was to say, "She *cares* what happens to me. When she wants me to be different it's because she cares so much." She was glad that nearly all Mary's married life they had lived within easy driving distance from each other. Thomas wasn't ever quite satisfied with the place where he lived. His restlessness was one of his two faults, Sister Mary said. The last move had suited Sister Mary. Their home was only a mile from the one in which Sibyl grew from childhood to marriage. Both sisters loved Elwood.

As Sibyl, unheralded, drove up in front of the brown house, set behind walnut and wild-cherry trees, she noticed that the Prairie Queen and Seven Sisters rose bushes were in bloom. Out of a cornfield Thomas and Mary had, in a few short years, made a place which all their relatives felt it a treat to visit in June. Sister Mary was pumping a bucket of water at the well by the kitchen door. She dropped it and flew to the gate in the white picket fence, throwing up her hands in the way in which she always showed happy surprise.

"Oh, Sibyl!" she said, "I'm *so* glad to see thee!"

Sibyl was stiff with the long ride. Mary helped her to climb out of the spring wagon with her familiar warning: "Now do be careful, Sibbie. Thee's so clumsy!"

Sister Mary had just conducted "Children's Day" in the little

white church that had replaced the ugly unpainted one of Sibyl's youth. She had taught the children a new song with a lilting chorus:

*For it's June time, fragrant June time  
Life is new, with promise is sweet,  
Everywhere is gladness complete.*

Mary's girls were making it ring as they bent over the long strawberry bed to the west of the house. They were picking fruit for market. Thomas bent also, but did not sing. His mind was on his berries. "Pick them clean, girls." "Take care where you step." "Be sure you pick on both sides of your row."

These admonitions came at intervals. The rest of the time, Thomas was silent. He whistled, out of tune, while he was doing other farm work, but fruit raising was serious business, from the time he set plants or trees in straight rows to the day he loaded boxes or baskets overfull and took them to Georgetown to deliver to eager customers. And of all the fruit in his thriving orchard Thomas loved best his Haviland strawberries — big scarlet cones with few seeds and the calyx conveniently bent back to meet the hand of the stemmer! And the taste — ah, a Haviland was the *sweetest* berry that ever grew! "Wonder if we could have a pie out of the Haviland culls — pretty sweet?" And at the table he would lift the upper crust and add an extra teaspoon of sugar to his piece. That was Thomas.

INSIDE, the house was in order. Mary's house must be in order, even in busy berry-marketing time, Sibyl looked at it in admira-

tion, and Gurney set about putting it in disorder. Over the stemming of "the culls," which Thomas thought unfit to sell, Sibyl and her sister Mary visited as they had had no chance to do in years. True, their conversation was punctuated by frequent little journeys to rescue Gurney from danger or mischief, but at least he was too young to stand about with open ears, listening to all that was said, as was the way with the older children.

Sibyl lost no time in talking about the purpose of her visit.

"I don't know what's the matter with me. I don't think I'll live through this time."

"Why? Isn't thee well, Sibbie?"

"As well as usual, in my body."

"Then what is the matter?"

"It's just a feeling. I can't get away from it. Oh, Mary, what if I die, and leave Zimri with four little children?"

"Now, Sibbie, that's just a notion of thine. There's no sense in it at all."

"But I'm afraid to die."

"Who says thee's going to die? And what has thee to be afraid of?"

Mary started a new batch of berries cooking. The odors of fresh and cooking fruit blended in the kitchen. When Mary sat down again, Sibyl was ready to talk. "Mary, did thee ever know that before I was born, Father and Mother dedicated me to be a minister?"

"No, I never heard a word about it."

"Mother told me once when we were blackberrying in the

woods. She didn't talk about it, then or ever afterward. Once I tried to ask her and Father, but I think they took it for granted that Levi was the answer. I tried to talk to Levi, once, but something happened. He didn't hear me. I can't get away from the feeling that I ought to be a preacher."

"Thee? A preacher? With four little children to take care of?"

"Elizabeth Fry had more than twice that many, and remember what she did, reforming the prisons in England."

"She had means."

"Does that make a difference when Father set me apart for preaching the gospel?"

"Sibbie, thee's all wrong in thy head. Father wouldn't expect the impossible of thee. He wasn't unreasonable, ever. Anyway, what in the world does this have to do with thee being afraid thee will die?"

"It seems as if a judgment might fall on me, for failing to do what I ought." She stopped, and her voice trembled. "I'm afraid to go down to the valley of the shadow without this thing settled."

"Then settle it! Go home and talk to Zimri about it. He'll know what thy duty is for the next ten years! Zimri's sensible."

Sibyl laughed a little. "Yes, I picked that kind of a man."

"Well, he's in much better condition to think straight than thee is. Women do get such funny notions sometimes."

The subject was closed — for Sister Mary. She had shut the door upon it.

That evening at dusk while the girls did up the supper work



and Gurney was safely asleep, Mary and Sibyl walked around the yard, looking at the flowers. Roses are sweetest when the dew begins to fall. Mary picked a bud and handed it to Sibyl. She put one in her own smooth black hair. They walked toward the strawberry bed.

“Mm!” Mary breathed deeply. “I smell honeysuckle,” she said, and hurried toward the vine that sprawled over the fence. The first creamy-white flowers were opening. She added a spray to the rose in her hair. The two walked down the long berry rows, and in spite of all Thomas’ care, they found fruit which the pickers had missed, as desirable as if they had not stemmed berries all the afternoon.

“I get tired of everything else that grows,” Mary said, “but never of strawberries, especially in the patch. I can’t see why Thomas wants them made into a pie.”

Sibyl laughed. “I’ll take mine any-which-way, but I sort of hope thee’ll make one of thy kind of shortcakes tomorrow.”

Three rounds of deliciously brittle pie crust with crushed berries between and overflowing all — the whole swimming in bright red juice, thick with sugar. Sibyl’s mouth watered.

From the kitchen came the sound of the June song in the clear voice of the oldest daughter. She was eighteen. Sibyl stood erect to listen.

“How that child can sing!”

“Thee ought to hear the whole bunch — the White family and Will Hopkins and Met Lewis. They come here to practice, since we have the organ. Alice plays it and Lizzie sings alto. I never

enjoyed anything so much in all my life, except when the boys play their harps. I just sit and listen.”

Even to tell about such ecstasy brought the look of it to Mary’s face.

“It’s kind of different,” Sibyl said.

“Different from what?”

“Different from the old days when nobody was allowed to strike up a tune in meeting.”

“Well it *ought* to be different!”

But Mary had been thinking. Now she spoke her thoughts.

“Sibbie, berry picking will soon be over. I think we could spare Grace. How would thee like to have her stay with thee through July? She could help thee with threshing dinner and through thy time.”

The little lines of worry in Sibyl’s big strong-featured face almost disappeared.

“Oh, Mary, could thee let me have her? I’d rather have Grace than anybody! Would she mind?”

“She’d jump at the chance. She thinks there’s nobody in the world like her Aunt Sibbie. Anyway, she’s determined to get married. It’ll be good for her to see what things are like at such a time. Cure her, maybe.”

THREE days later when Sibyl left for home she felt almost like her own self, she said. June time, rose time, strawberry time at Thomas Holaday’s place, with Mary scolding a little in the old familiar way and then offering to loan her cheery, capable

daughter through Sibyl's hour of trial, had all but cured Sibyl of her fear.

At the spring wagon with the three girls standing about, Sister Mary remembered something she hadn't said. She perched on the iron step, pulled Sibyl over and whispered in her ear: "Now don't thee fail to have a *girl* baby this time!"

IN Illinois in the 1890's there were two schools of thought on the subject of threshing dinners. The members of one school, to which Sister Mary belonged, planned a dinner that would do. "No use for men to think they have to gorge themselves just because they run a threshing machine," she said. Roast beef and noodles would serve very well for the foundation of such a meal. Sibyl didn't belong to that school. She was a member in good standing of the cult which thought there could not be too many kinds of food of too excellent quality to feed to too many men. Accordingly, on the day before the threshing was to be done, the preparation began.

With the help of shaggy old Shep, the faithful, Sibyl and Grace caught three fat hens, chopped off their heads and in the east orchard scalded them in a big iron kettle full of hot water, plucked their dripping bodies, singed them over a blazing newspaper on the kitchen stove, and dressed them on the kitchen table in dishpans of cold water under three pairs of watchful eyes. Little Mary was learning the process. Albert wanted certain interior parts to play with, and Gurney hoped for a chance to upset a dishpan or possess himself of a kitchen knife. It was fun to

be chased, especially with something so dangerous in his hands.

"Which will we make, dressing or dumplings?" Sibyl asked, as the tantalizing odor of stewing chicken began to fill the kitchen.

"Dumplin's!" Albert demanded.

"Dressing!" Grace voted.

"Well, I guess there'll be broth enough for both," Sibyl said. And they cut up great crocks of stale bread for dressing, seasoning it with black pepper and sage.

There were pies to be made. Grace and the children went to the east orchard and came back with a bucket heaped with Maiden's-blush apples. While Grace peeled and Mary quartered and Sibyl made the crust, a new smell mingled with that of the chicken.

"Wonder which kind I'd better make — open or top crust?" Sibyl said, sifting flour into a crock and dipping her big hand into the lard jar. She owned no measuring cup, and needed none.

"Why not railroad?" Grace suggested, and railroad they would be.

"Six is enough, I reckon," Sibyl said. "My pans are big."

Grace was multiplying six by six. "How many men will there be? Not *that* many?"

"Once we had thirty," Sibyl declared, "and I want a piece."

All day Sibyl and Grace had heard the chug-chug of the threshing machine at the home of the nearest neighbor. In late afternoon Zimri came to the house.

"Guess they'll pull the machine in here tonight, Mamma."

"Well!" Sibyl said, "Does that mean we have to sleep the crew?"

"I reckon," Zimri answered. "They got through faster than they thought they would over at Harvey's. I guess we can fix for 'em to sleep in the old house. There'll be five of 'em."

So there was a great scurrying to make down beds in the old house which still stood, in a general state of near collapse. Its floors were solid, if hard.

"The men are hard-looking, too." Grace laughed. "They won't notice."

SIBYL always crawled out of her warm feather bed when Zimri did. In winter that meant at five o'clock. When the time came for spring plowing and planting, the hour was one earlier. Not that it took Sibyl as long to get breakfast as it did Zimri to feed and milk, but she wanted time to look up the chapter she would read to her assembled family and to read it through to herself.

On this July threshing day, Sibyl selected a short chapter. There were six hungry men to be given a hearty breakfast.

The dining room in Zimri's house had proved too unhandy. It had become the family sitting room and the extension table had never moved from its first place by the stair door in the kitchen. Everything was close together, Sibyl said. Even the stairway was conveniently located for calling the children.

Now she stepped to it and called shrilly: "Albert! Gurney!" She waited, but there was no reply, so she repeated the call in reverse. "Gurney! Albert!" She listened for the familiar grunt

which indicated life in the boys' room, but what she heard was her niece Grace, stepping around quickly in the girls' room across the hall. She tried again. "Albert! Gurney! Get up! You forgot what day this is?"

She heard a lone sound from Albert. He was eight and, once awake and up, could be a big help to his father. On this day he was to be water boy for the first time. Gurney, four, had no duties except to show his chubby face at the breakfast table. But threshing crew or no threshing crew, nobody would eat a bite of breakfast until Sibyl had assembled her brood about the board and, as quietly and calmly as if there were no heavy yield of oats on their broad acres, read her portion of scripture and offered prayer.

Sibyl walked to the stove and, having satisfied herself about the efficacy of the fire, began preparations for breakfast. As she worked, she sang. Upstairs her niece Grace, combing her long brown hair, stopped to listen. Little Mary listened too, rubbing her eyes and raising herself on one skinny elbow.

"I like to hear Mamma sing," she said, "especially before breakfast."

"I do, too," Grace said. "I like the song she's singing. We sing it at Elwood, in meeting."

Sibyl's high voice was soaring through the verses of *When the Mists Have Cleared Away*.

Grace dropped her comb and sat on the edge of the bed to pull on black, cotton stockings and high, button shoes. Little Mary watched every movement of her grown-up cousin. Now she noticed something strange. "Thee's sitting on it, Grace," she said.

Grace jumped up. "On what?" Then she knew. "Oh — on my hair? Of course! I can sit on four inches of it." And letting the heavy mass fall straight behind her, she carefully demonstrated the feat. "I thought maybe it was the cat I was sitting on," and she laughed.

Then she braided her hair to the very end, coiled the braid about her head, fastened it securely with large brown-shell pins, donned her calico dress, and went downstairs to help her aunt. That was why she was there.

"We'll put one leaf in the table now," Sibyl said. "That's enough for the crew."

At the two ends they pulled until the table, seemingly glued in the middle, suddenly opened, and sent the two women back with such force that both fell to the floor. Grace always laughed at minor physical disasters and she did now until, as she scrambled to her feet, she saw that Sibyl was having trouble to lift herself. Then the daughter of Mary blanched with fright, for she remembered her mother's words of warning:

"Now don't let Sibyl take any tumbles. She's so awkward, especially when she's this way." (Not "pregnant," not "with child," not even "in a family way," just "this way.")

The very tone of Mary's voice had indicated there might be trouble aplenty for Sibyl if her five-feet-ten of length ever went down.

But after Grace had helped Sibyl to her feet and brushed her off, Sibyl, no worse for the jolt, sat "collecting herself" while her niece fried the bacon and rolled out the biscuits. The commotion

had been more effective than all calling up stairways, and by the time Zimri came in, carrying two buckets of milk, the three children had washed their faces, rather doubtfully, and were awaiting breakfast, while the five men at the bench by the door, one after the other, splashed cold water over their unshaven faces and dried on the three-yard roller towel.

At the table, these good feeders would have "dived in," if they had seen anything to dive into. But the food, plenty of it, was keeping hot in the warming oven of the range at the other side of the room, awaiting the reading of the chapter. Sibyl, recovered from her recent shake-up, read, if possible, more reverently and thankfully than usual, while the crew, hungry and impatient to be at the day's job, found itself listening. When the meal was ended, the men filed quietly out. Out of earshot of Zimri, one said, "I reckon that woman's got religion." It was mid-morning before a single oath escaped the most profane man of the five, and that only when the machine belt broke.

IN preparation for the dinner all the leaves went into the table. It stretched, sagging a little in the middle, the entire length of the kitchen, and required two of Sibyl's Quarterly Meeting tablecloths to cover it.

Back and forth from hot stove to pantry to cupboard to table, moved the heavy feet of Sibyl and the light feet of young Grace. Little Mary ran errands. Gurney was underfoot. At eleven-thirty Albert came in, hot and dirty and happy from his job as water carrier. "They're comin' to dinner," he announced.



Then feet and hands flew faster to put the feast upon the table while thirty men splashed away the perspiration and sticking chaff of the morning, and sat at the Haworth table. This time there was no chapter and no long prayer. Zimri dropped his head over his plate, mumbling briefly into his mustache, and then the fray was on. There was satisfaction for the cooks in the re-filling of emptied dishes, the good humor of the hungry men, the cleared plates.

When the last man went out, picking his teeth, Sibyl took a look at the empty dishes and sank into the nearest chair. "I guess they liked it," she sighed.

From the warming closet Grace produced a good meal. "If I hadn't hid it, we wouldn't have had a bite," she said. The cooks ate slowly, in no particular order, and their great weariness vanished. A feeling of contentment began to steal over them. The job was done, and well done. No more threshing dinners until next year.

"I do wish I'd saved a pickled peach," Grace said.

"In a month now I can make some fresh ones. That tree of clings in the corner by the barn ripens early."

Grace laughed. "In a month thee'll be flat on thy back. I'll make the pickled peaches if thee'll tell me how."

"Well, I can *try*," Sibyl answered, but she had her doubts about being able to tell anybody just how much vinegar and cinnamon and sugar to use. Her hand was bigger than most women's.

It was a chore to wash the great piles of dishes, but Sibyl and Grace, full of good dinner, were a rapid team.

"Thee's as fast as Sister Em used to be," Sibyl said.

"But not as nice. Ma says I take after some of Pa's folks when it comes to splattering dishwater," Grace answered truthfully.

Sibyl laughed. "Thy mother's a little too particular, I think."

Grace was making a great clatter with sticky utensils. Sibyl, nearer the door as she put clean dishes in cupboards, heard the machine whirring to a sudden stop and voices screaming. "Listen!"

Grace dropped a heavy black skillet into the pan of suds where it splashed water halfway across the kitchen, and ran toward the barn. Sibyl waited only to commission Little Mary: "Stay here. If Gurney wakes, don't let him get away," and she, too, was running, speeded by her desperate fears. One fear she cast aside, for Zimri was a careful man. But Albert — venturesome, reckless Albert, inquisitive about every process, always climbing to dizzy heights — Terror rose like a black cloud, fogging her mind. The quick short cries of men and the moans of the injured one became faint in her ears; she dimly saw a boy on a fast horse rushing past her to bring a doctor. She had no real perception of what had happened.

Grace had reached the knot of men surrounding the member of the crew for whom pain had mercifully acted as an anaesthetic. Suddenly she became aware of her neglected responsibility and turned to see Sibyl fall in a faint. She ran for water. Zimri bent over his wife, trying to arouse her. By the time she opened her eyes Albert, too, was by her, asking, "What's the

matter, Mam? What you fall down for?" Seeing her son safe, Sibyl burst into shameless tears of relief.

"But what happened? Some terrible thing . . ."

Zimri answered her: "The bandcutter caught his arm in the machine. He'll lose it, but he's lucky to be alive."

Already Zimri was lifting Sibyl to her feet. "Now let's get you to the house. When the doctor comes he'd better look you over. Think you can walk?"

With Zimri on one side and the pale, penitent Grace on the other, Sibyl walked. But two falls in one day were too much. In the middle of the night the Doctor made his second quick visit to the Haworth place to help Sibyl give birth to her fourth child.

Pain sufficiently terrific sweeps fright before it. Sibyl had no fear of death, only urge to take the last step in the creating of a life.

"WHAT did Haworths have for dinner?" Cynthia Jones remembered to ask John that night after he had told about the accident.

"Oh, chicken and dressing and dumplings and cole slaw and green beans and quince honey, and I don't know what else."

"No potatoes?"

"Why, of course they had Irish and sweet potatoes."

"What kind of pie?"

"Apple. Best apple pie I ever et. Strips of crust across it."

"Don't seem like that's as much of a meal as Haworths generally have."

“Well, I forgot about the cucumber pickles and sliced tomatoes and corn out of the patch and apple preserves and pickled peaches — just the kind of meal they always have.”

“Sibyl Haworth makes the best spiced peaches of anybody.”

“Reckon she’s got good peaches to start with. Old Jimmie Rees set out that orchard and I’ve heard tell there wasn’t much he didn’t know about fruit trees.”

“Peach trees don’t live forever. All Jimmie set out died long ago. It’s not that. It’s something else. She just naturally knows how to fix ’em.”

But John Jones didn’t mention the high loaves of snowy bread the men devoured. That would have started his wife on another paean of praise. Sibyl’s light bread was really a wonder.

SISTER Mary rejoiced that the new baby was a girl. When brother Perry heard the news, he said, “Sibyl’s got her quartette now, if only there’s enough Rees in her children to make them sing.”

“What do you want to call her, Mamma?” Zimri asked on the second day. He had turned the work of the farm over to his hired hand while he nursed Sibyl. This was the fourth time he had done so. He was a nurse by nature. When the children had the measles he was with them day and night.

“Well,” Sibyl said, “she looks like a Haworth, but if there’s no objection I’d like to name her ‘Emily.’ Nobody in my whole family has called a child Emily. Sister Em was a wonderful woman.”

Zimri had pretty, capable sisters, but he didn’t even mention

naming the new daughter for one of them. Whatever Sibyl wanted was what ought to be.

While Zimri cared for his wife, Grace struggled with everything else: the fire in the kitchen range went out while she bathed the baby; the dinner burned while she chased after Gurney who ran away to the neighbors; the washings mounted sky-high ahead of her; the ironing was never done; the hired man was attentive and annoying; the cat lapped the cream off the milk crock she forgot to cover; once young Albert neglected his job of filling the trough with cold water and the milk soured; next day he filled it too full and the crocks upset. She got up at four and fell into bed at eight, exhausted.

One afternoon, before her aunt had left her bed, Grace sank into a chair and said, "Unless the world comes to an end, I'll not get up for an hour."

Sibyl asked, "Has thee decided not to get married? Thy mother hoped all this would cure thee of wanting to."

Grace laughed. "I know. Ma never wants anybody to get married. If she had her way the race would die out."

Sibyl twisted her mouth into its crooked smile, "There's no danger of her having her way."

"Not as far as I'm concerned," Grace answered.

"She thinks thee is too young."

"And she says I oughtn't to have decided on Sam before I knew anybody else. Did thee ever go with anybody besides Uncle Zimri?"

Little Mary was sitting by, listening, all ears. Sibyl looked at

her, wondering whether she should answer truthfully, and decided there could be no harm.

“Oh, yes, several. But nobody ever made any difference — nobody unless it was Charlie.”

They waited for her to go on, afraid she would not.

“Tell me about Charlie, Mamma,” little Mary said.

“Why, there’s nothing much to tell. He was a right nice boy. He liked me and I thought a lot of him, when I was about fourteen. But Zimri came along. He was the one for me.”

Now Sibyl was the mother of four. Fear had gone from her. She wished that Father could see her four beautiful children. Then he would understand how very busy she was. As soon as she could, she would take the new baby on a visit to Mother.

## CHAPTER VII

### *FASTER, FASTER*

AT THE turn of the century Sibyl's life was like a gigantic revolving stage, showing now one sector, now another. Sometimes it moved with such speed that all sectors were blended and seemed only a blur.

"I can't keep up with myself," she said.

The small family that was Sibyl's and Zimri's sometimes pressed in on Sibyl until she felt as thin as paper. "I don't know what I'd do if I'd married the wrong man," she often said. "A woman has enough to keep her pulled to pieces without that worry." From the day of her marriage Zimri had stood like the windbreak of pines to the north of the house, unswayed and protective.

The children were all different. Little Mary was frail, sensitive and shy. Sibyl always had to be a buffer between her and the two boys. I'm glad I'm a big woman, she thought, although of course she knew it was not the size of her body that made her able to put her sons in their places when they teased Little Mary until she cried, or ruined some prized possession. Both boys were noisy and strong-willed and a bit destructive. Only Albert's love of songs and singing marked him as part Rees. Most of him — his

recklessness, his robust health, his trickiness, was something so far back on one side or the other that it was quite unknown to Sibyl. Gurney, born with the Roman nose of the Reeses, very early showed that he was a grand mixture of the particular brand of humor Sibyl claimed for her people with numerous hard-to-manage traits. From the first he had a poor pair of lungs and about every winter he sent terror to the hearts of his parents by developing pneumonia. Sibyl's sister Mary accused her of being careless with Gurney.

"Why doesn't thee see that he wears his overshoes?" she would ask. "If he were my boy I'd wrap up his throat every time he goes out in the cold wind."

"Thee'd have to catch him first," Sibyl would answer, laughing.

Sister Mary was always saying, "If I had a boy —" and Sibyl was always thinking, "She doesn't know the first thing about boys." Sometimes she said nearly that much, and Mary would retort, "I practically raised the three little boys," meaning her youngest brothers. Then Sibyl could only say, "But they were the mild kind."

There the verbal argument stopped. Mary went on thinking that Sibyl did a poor job of raising her sons and Sibyl went on being sure that boys would be boys, especially if they had as much spirit as hers.

At first, Sibyl told Zimri that little Emily was a "relief," but you only had to see her looking at the boys in their moments of better behavior to know that she wanted no relief. And never to



her sister Mary would she admit that the new daughter was less trouble than her brothers had been.

Always, winter and summer, the work of the farm home piled up ahead of Sibyl. Her mending basket overflowed, her house was often in a state of confusion which shocked the orderly sisters, Mary and Martha. Her shoulders which had been straight and fine, bent under the lifting of children and stooping over the washboard. And what prodigious appetites her children had! "Albert's never been full, so far as I know," she often said. "He quits eating when the dishes are empty."

Yet in spite of all, except in moments of great crisis, Sibyl sang before breakfast, and sometimes said, "I notice folks like to come to our house, even Mary Holaday!"

And it was true. Always they came — her relatives, Zimri's relatives, girls as shy as Little Mary, boys as mischievous as her own, preachers, and neighbors.

Vermilion County, Illinois, had spread its prairies in welcome to the Reeses of Tennessee in 1830. It had held the family of William the Elder — James, John, Mary, Charity, Rachel, Deborah, Jane and Young William — held them all close to its rich, earthy heart. But the children of Young William it could not always hold.

The free plains of Kansas had called the adventurous Emily and she had died there.

The Ministry, (Sibyl wrote it with a capital) had carried Levi to various towns and cities of the Middle West to furnish sermons rich in food to hungry Quaker sheep.

The farm lands of the next county to the west had enticed Sarah and Tom.

The study of medicine had taken Will to Indianapolis. Omar had followed him.

Sibyl never visited Levi. "There's no need," she said. "I love him and his wife very dearly, but I reckon there's a good deal of reverence mixed up with my feeling. Anyway, when Rebecca Parker married Levi she tucked him under her wing and she's always kept him there — safe."

On the rare occasions when Sibyl could hear Levi preach she sat almost as in trance, deep in the mysteries of holiness. Levi could do that for Sibyl, but she could do nothing for him.

With Sarah and Tom it was very different. Once a year in the slack work time of late summer Zimri said, "I reckon we could make a trip to Champaign County next week; go about Sixth Day and come back first of the week. That long enough to stay?"

THE Gay Nineties were drawing to a close, although Vermilion County Quakers did not guess that they were gay, least of all Sibyl, who wanted no amusement beyond one of those journeys which she hoped Zimri was about ready to suggest. She knew the signs — an extra twinkle in his bright blue eyes, an added quickness in his never slow step, a more energetic splashing at the washbasin before breakfast.

The chapter read, the prayers offered, Zimri looked the length of the table on that August morning and said, "Well, Mamma . . ."

Ah! There it was, the proposal she was waiting to hear. She could have taken the words from Zimri's mouth, but that would have spoiled things. She could make little propositions and he would never say her nay, but a big undertaking such as driving forty miles out to Champaign County must come from the head of the house.

So there was washing and ironing and mending and packing of the old straw valise, and particularly joyous songs during breakfast preparation, and then one morning they were off. In the spring wagon they rode away to the northwest, the sun mounting behind them until Sibyl raised her black umbrella against its burning heat. They rode across the prairies where the ears hung heavy on giant stalks as far as eye could see.

"I reckon the ground's a little richer out this way," Zimri said, a trifle envious, although his own fields were beautiful to behold. Corn, corn, corn — every row of it testimony to the million footsteps of patient horses taking plow, harrow or drag, planter, and cultivator across the field and back; testimony, too, to the early rising of the farmers and the long hours of walking or riding in the glare of summer suns.

But now at the end of the season, horses grazed in pastures from which came the sweet smells of clover and bluegrass, and men gathered in knots on village corners to talk of markets and profits, and rest a bit before fall plowing. Zimri would have liked to join them.

By a white-painted farmhouse he drew rein, and the children tumbled from the spring wagon. "It's only half-past 'leven, but

I guess we're hungry enough," he said, lifting the heavy basket from beneath the front seat. Sibyl spread a cloth upon the long grass in front of the yard fence, under a maple tree. "Now if Sister Mary were here she'd be looking for a snake. She'd eat standing up, and make her children stand. But I guess we'll all sit down."

This picnic dinner was one of the best parts of the trip, for picnics were rare. Sibyl lifted out a snowy loaf of bread, a pat of golden butter, a hunk of ham baked to russet brown, a berry pie oozing crimson juice, rosy peaches from the "early" trees by the barn. With difficulty she quieted her brood. "I guess we can be as thankful here as at home or maybe a little more so," was her way of making ready for the "blessing."

Even Albert was satisfied with the meal. All gathered about the farmer's well for water. The two men, strangers until now, squatted on the curb and talked like old friends. At the door, Sibyl chatted with the woman in calico and peered through the opening into the orderly parlor. "Well, I declare! If you don't have a rug just exactly like ours!" she exclaimed. And the sameness of the rug pattern made the two women kin. They talked of the kind of chickens they raised, the yield of their cows in butter, schools for their children, and Sibyl said, "We passed a church down the road. You look like church folks."

Quite a time passed while Sibyl and her new acquaintance discussed the differences and similarities of Quakers and Methodists and agreed that it didn't make a lot of difference which church you belonged to just so you went to one. Sibyl's daughters had

clung close. But now Zimri was walking toward the road, calling back, "Let's go. It'll be sundown before we get to Tom's. Where are the boys?"

Sibyl looked around, astonished. "Why I supposed they were with you!"

What a calling! "Albert! Gurney! Gurney! Albert! Come here! Right quick! We're ready to go! Hurry!"

"Who'd think it would take a whole hour to eat a bite of dinner along the way?" Sibyl asked of nobody in particular when the horses were again trotting down the dusty road. "I guess I never count the time it takes to round up the boys, once they get loose."

Oh, it was fine for a woman to eat meals she didn't fix herself! And if ever there was a good place to visit it was Tom's. Sibyl liked to think she had helped a little to bring about that perfect marriage between her brother and the beautiful brown-eyed Florence. Now there were three children, two with eyes as dark as their mother's, all talking with never a slip in grammar, like their mother.

The men looked over the farm from one end to the other, comparing their yields of oats and clover, estimating the bushels per acre the corn would make, discussing the most profitable breeds of hogs. They gave Tom's high-stepping sorrel horses the most thorough currying they had had in weeks. And Tom said, "Maybe this is a good time to put that barn door on its hinges, while I have somebody to talk to," and produced his carpenter's kit. After that there was a fence to mend. Zimri gave a hand with

both jobs. A farmer always had such work waiting in slack time.

The children romped in the haymow, rolled on the green lawn, rode the gentler horses, and ate the prodigious amounts of food their mothers prepared against their enormous appetites.

At night the four adults sat late and talked of the problems of raising children in a day so different from that of their own youth.

"Sometimes I think I do a pretty poor job taking care of ours," Tom said. "One night we all went in the sled to revival meeting. When we got home I discovered we didn't have Willie. I drove back and found him sound asleep on a meeting-house bench where we'd left him."

"That wasn't the worst, Tom," Florence said.

"No, the other piece of carelessness might have ended in tragedy. We had a big snow last winter and the country was overrun with rabbits. Most of the men in the community had a big hunt and bagged a hundred or so. That night I brought the gun in loaded. I ought to have known better. I undertook to unload it with the boys leaning on me, watching, and off it went. The bullet hit the kitchen-door casing."

There was a shudder running through the little group.

"Good thing there wasn't anybody leaning by the door," Zimri said.

"Alice had just come through it," Florence said.

Again there was a shudder. Alice was seven.

"Remember the time Father let thee ride home from Danville in the new wagon hitched behind the old one?" Sibyl asked.

"I sure do. I remember how scared I was when Father whipped up his horses and crossed the tracks in front of the train that suddenly came around the curve. I remember how relieved Father looked when he saw I was alive."

Florence smiled. "I saw Tom count the children after the gun went off."

SARAH needed Sibyl a little more than usual. There was a problem she couldn't talk over with a living soul except Sibyl. It was about "the meeting." There were two factions in it. Sarah cried as she talked, because the people on both sides were her friends, and she wished they wouldn't say such hard things about each other. Sarah couldn't see that the points they disagreed about were very important. She wanted to be a peacemaker between them. She couldn't bear for her beloved meeting to have a division in it. Maybe Sibyl could help her.

Sibyl's mouth twisted. "Why, folks oughtn't to fuss over their *religion*."

"That's the way it seems to me," Sarah said.

Going to Sarah's meeting was about the most important part of a visit to Stanton, and Sibyl had looked forward to it. But to attend a meeting with a rift in it needed some preparation. After breakfast she picked up the Bible from which Sarah had read the morning chapter in her soft voice. She carried it into the little-used parlor and closed the door. Now what would help? She considered the familiar parts. Isaiah? Psalms? Corinthians? She leafed farther, beyond the Gospels, beyond Paul, and stopped

with the first epistle of John. She knew there was another love chapter beside Paul's, less well-known. Was it the fourth of this little book of 1st John? She read it through. Then she read it again to count the number of times the word was used. Twenty-five times in one little chapter! There must have been some pretty bad contentions among the people John was writing this letter to so long ago. He was fairly bearing down on that word *love*. By the time Sibyl had read the chapter the third time she knew it. She was saturated with it.

Stanton meeting house was not very big; neither was the congregation that gathered there on that summer day. There was no pastor. Only the Head sat on the small platform. There was silence, the usual Friendly approach to the Divine presence. But something was wrong. Instead of Peace stealing over the company, it seemed to Sibyl there was an almost touchable barrier. What was it? While she was wondering, a man on the front seat fell on his knees, facing the congregation, and in a loud voice began to pray.

Vocal prayers, Sibyl knew, if they were better than continued silence, must gather wandering thoughts, even those of restless children, into the path that led straight to God. This prayer wasn't doing that. The man was addressing the Holy One in every other breath, but his words were for the people. Thinly veiled allusions to the "worldly ways" of the Head, the elders, and the overseers, talk of the spiritual deadness of the church, bitter thrusts at those who would cry peace when there was no peace, (Could he mean gentle Sarah?) all these added up to a



ten-minute tirade through which Sibyl heard her children squirming, Pleasant coughing, and Zimri definitely sighing.

With the "Amen," the Head was on his feet. His black brows were drawn together. "Friends," he said, but the tone was the same as if he had said "Enemies," "this is a meeting for worship, not for scolding people, even on the knees. Let us continue in silence."

The proverbial pin did not drop. Instead Sibyl stood, and with no word of introduction, began at the seventh verse of her chosen chapter to recite: "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God.*" Slowly her voice moved on, with emphasis on every one of those twenty-five love words. Only once did she pause. When she read, "*Perfect love casteth out fear,*" she almost seemed to forget. She repeated the words, with more force, and went on to the beautiful end: "*And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.*"

Sibyl sat down. The only sound was that of Sarah's soft hand wiping away her tears.

There was "living" silence then, while each examined his own heart. When the hour had ended the Head extended his hand to the man who had prayed to people, and the clasp was warm and friendly.

The barrier had melted away in love.

Sarah didn't talk any more about the division in the meeting. While the two sisters beat the potatoes and stirred the gravy for First Day dinner, she said, "It's strange I never noticed that chapter."

"You have to hunt for the right one. It's always there, somewhere between Genesis and Revelation."

SIBYL's boys and Sarah's boys waded the creek and climbed the tallest trees and had a wonderful time together, without a single accident, strange to say, since Sarah's boys were used to milder kinds of play.

And the men! How they talked! Anybody who thought women had a corner on long conversations had never seen the husbands of Sibyl and Sarah in action.

ON the return journey, even the children were subdued. Long miles passed with no word spoken. Sibyl did most of the talking. Her remarks came forth like sudden gushings from an intermittent geyser, and had no relation to each other.

"I hope our boys didn't corrupt Sarah's while we were there."

"I wish I were as nice a housekeeper as Florence."

"It just occurred to me that Tom's little Willie is the fifth William Rees. There was my great-grandfather that I never saw; and my grandfather who moved out here from Tennessee; then Father; then brother Will; and now little Willie. He's a nice child but there's nothing Reesy about him that I can see."

"Sarah makes mighty good biscuits, but I can beat her getting a meal on the table. She's so slow — I know you all nearly starved waiting for dinner."

And finally, as they covered the last mile of the lane that led to home, "I hope everything went all right while we were away."

Things had not gone very well, but even the report of a sick cow, and the state of her kitchen in which the hired man had "batched," could not dampen Sibyl's satisfaction in the visit. As soon as she could possibly do it, she went to see her mother to report, "Oh, we had the best time! We never did have such a good time. Tom's is the *best* place to make a visit, and Sarah *needed* me."

SIBYL was rather sorry for herself about her brother Will. Now that he was a doctor he seemed remote. From a good-looking boy he had grown into a handsome man. Bones which protruded in strange places in some members of the family were nicely rounded in Will. I nearly wish I were somebody else, so I could have him for a doctor, Sibyl thought. It must be wonderful to see his tall straight form bending over your bed, to have his kind gray eyes looking over and through you, to feel his cool, sure hand on your wrist.

Will's visits home were infrequent. When he wrote to his mother that he was coming home for a few days before being married, all the Reeses living in the Vermilion region thought there should be some sort of celebration in honor of his home-coming. Bert, the youngest, whose brain was fertile with ideas for fun, said, "Let's get up a fishing trip to the Wabash."

Perry was delighted. He carried the word to Sister Mary. She loved Perry better than any other brother and made no bones about it. She smoothed back her dark hair, tied on a clean apron and came out of her kitchen to sit down and have a good talk

with Perry. She seldom disagreed with him violently, but when she had heard the proposition, she made a wry face. "That sounds like something Bert has hatched up — a fishing trip!"

Perry laughed. "It's not wicked to go a-fishing. Peter did it."

But Mary had quickly made up her mind. "Of course we want to see Will, but Thomas won't want to leave home from early morning to late at night. Anyway it's a long hot drive, and I don't want any fish."

This time Perry's laugh was a chuckle. "Now, Mary, when has thee cooked a good mess of fish for Thomas?"

Mary laughed a little, too, but she meant what she said: "Never! And I don't ever intend to smell up my skilletts with fish!"

"Well, then, I guess this is Thomas' time to get a good feed. I think he'll go."

SIBYL was jubilant when she heard of the proposed outing. She took it for granted that the occasion was a "must." She began thinking of the food she would take, remembering the things Will liked when he was a boy. Zimri, too, wanted to go. And just when all was ready for an early start in the morning, the hired man unceremoniously took his leave.

"What'll we do?" Sibyl cried.

"Looks like we stay at home," Zimri said, facing the fact of nobody to do the evening chores.

Sibyl didn't sing that morning before breakfast. She rubbed away the tears with the back of her big hand as she read from

the Bible. Food choked her. "If it was anybody but Will, I guess I could stand it," she said.

Zimri, seeing the tears, swallowed a few bites and got up from the table. "Where you going, Papa?" Sibyl asked.

Zimri didn't answer, but hurried out of the door. When he came back in a half hour he walked faster than ever. "Get yourself and the children dressed. We're late already."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Dick said he could spare his man to do the work."

Dick, the nearest neighbor, lived half a mile away. And Zimri didn't like to ask favors. There were times when Sibyl wished Zimri wouldn't think she was silly if she threw her arms around his neck and cried and said, "Oh, Zimri, you're so good to me!" This was one of the times. But already he had gone to hitch the horses to the spring wagon. She must hurry.

"What are you crying about, Mamma? We're going, aren't we?" Little Mary asked with concern. Her mother almost never cried.

"I don't have time to explain. Put the things in the basket. Get Emily ready. Call the boys and tell them to get ready. They won't wash clean, but they'll have to do. Hurry! Zimri won't want to wait."

FROM the camp on the banks of the Wabash there went up a loud shout, when at twelve o'clock Sibyl arrived, family and baggage. It was good to be so heartily welcomed. Sibyl looked about. There was Thomas Holaday, looking a little guilty at having

taken the day off for nothing more important than a picnic; Sister Mary wearing her anxious look; their three daughters, shining with cleanliness; Brother Tom and his family who had mysteriously appeared from Champaign County; Perry, trying his best to shed his school-teacher manner; Omar who simply couldn't miss this affair and had deserted medical school for three whole days; Bert, always the life of a gathering; and there was Will! Dear Will, more handsome than ever because he was happier. Oh, how wonderful it was to look at Will! She longed to embrace him and say, "Oh, Will, let's go back! Let's be young again! Let's stroll home from literary society at the Academy. Tease me a little, Will, and call me Sibbie, and laugh at my awkwardness!"

Instead, Sibyl couldn't say a word as she watched Will standing a trifle taller than the other boys, absolutely unruffled, smiling in a restrained sort of way with his eyes. This will have to do, she thought, as she held his extended hand, but it's not enough. It's so little in comparison with the way it used to be.

It was a good day. They talked about the absent ones. Rebecca, mother of all, couldn't make such a trip. There were expressions of regret and promises to make it up to her in various ways.

"I guess Levi wouldn't think it was any fun fighting mosquitoes on the banks of the Wabash," Tom said.

"But Levi's a powerful preacher," Perry hurried to say, anxious that the nieces and nephews get no wrong ideas about their preacher uncle.

Sibyl laughed at the picture Tom's remark had called up. She

saw Levi among them looking completely out of place in his long-tailed coat. Suddenly she wondered what she would have been like if she had turned out to be a preacher. Surely she wouldn't have been at all as she was now. In fancy she made herself over into a kind of composite of all the nice-looking, medium-sized, carefully dressed women preachers she knew. "But that wouldn't be me," she almost said aloud.

Since the birth of little Emily, the thought of being a minister had been well submerged. She would not let it come bobbing up now to spoil this day. The others were talking about Sister Martha. What were they saying?

"Martha would enjoy this. It seems a shame she's never with us any more." It was Omar who said what all felt.

"She might be if she'd been content not to marry again." Was there a tinge of bitterness in Mary Holaday's words?

The death of Seth had left Martha a widow. None of the family had wanted her to marry a second time and go away to Kansas to live. Sister Mary had said, "How in the world anybody who had been married to a man like Seth Haworth can marry anybody else, is more than I can see!"

Perry had been more mild, "I'm afraid Martha's making a mistake."

Omar and Bert hadn't said anything. They sulked. The others were too far away to voice objections. It had been Sibyl who had suggested to her mother that Martha be married in the best room of the square house at Vermilion, and had persuaded all the Reeses within reasonable distance to attend the wedding. Her

way of explaining matters to herself and the others was very simple: "I expect when a person's had as good a home as Martha had, she can't ever be satisfied without one."

Oh, yes, the Reeses wanted Martha. They wanted Sarah, too, gentle Sarah, whose eyes always grew misty in the presence of the clan.

They spread their dinner upon the ground. Fish for those who wanted it, chicken for the rest; sweet jams for Thomas Holaday; Mary's gooseberry pies for "the boys" she had "all but raised;" luscious red watermelons for everybody, brought from Sandtown and cut into new-moon pieces to be eaten without benefit of forks. Oh, it was a dinner not even a dash of rain could spoil. "The boys" stretched their long bodies on the ground in utter contentment to be together. They recalled the old home at Elwood with its big kitchen, its fine orchard, its swimming hole. They quoted the loved poems of Riley in concert or one at a time. And when, with a hush in his voice, Will spoke of their father, they saw him — a little stooped, his face beaming with love of his family. They heard him singing the old foolish or tender songs that he had brought with him out of Tennessee.

Perry's hand stole into his coat pocket and brought out something bright. Into the good talk broke the strains of music.

*Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea,  
Dressed in his best Sunday clothes.  
And he must be very wet,  
For they haven't found him yet  
Dressed in his best Sunday clothes.*



It was as if the French harp said the words, so familiar were they to even the youngest child. Tom was secretly fingering his harp. He, too, began to play. Bert produced a Jew's harp, and added its musical twang. Will nudged him: "Let me try."

Will's boyhood skill came back, and his hands, now trained to the handling of delicate, life-saving tools, yet knew how to hold the silly little instrument. Bert slipped away and came striding back from his buggy with a new purchase, until now hidden under the seat.

"I haven't learned how to play this very well yet," he said. All knew that for this moment he had secretly practiced long. Now his hands, which reminded every Rees of Father's, plucked the strings of the new zither that lay in his lap. Together they played the old favorites — *Go Down Moses, Darling Nellie Gray, Annie Laurie*, and many more.

Sibyl listened in rapture only one step below what she felt when she heard a good sermon. The children ceased their noisy running about. Mary Holaday counted them and knew that not one had fallen into the water or strayed into the woods. She relaxed, leaning against a tree, and thought that the music made by these four brothers was better than any other this side of Heaven. In fact, Heaven wouldn't be quite complete if they weren't all there, playing just that way. Omar sat by her, looking off across the water.

"Why didn't thee ever learn to play anything?" she asked him when there was a lull.

When Omar didn't want to talk, Mary said that wild horses

couldn't draw a word out of him. This was one of the times. He pretended that he did not hear. He was a trifle sensitive on this subject of being unmusical.

The songs went on, sad or foolish, soft or loud. Sometimes the men dropped their harps and sang. Above the bass of Tom and Bert and the tenor of Perry sounded the mellow voice of Will, carrying the "tune."

Sibyl sat erect, listening with all of her, her eyes fixed on the brother especially beloved. For a moment she almost experienced the old bond of union between them; but Zimri broke it when he said, "We'd better be starting home, Mamma."

Sibyl began the process of gathering children, dishes and clothing, though she was far from ready to go. Then she stood erect to ask the question she must have answered. Who was the woman who had won Will's heart after all these years?

"What's she like, Will? Thee hasn't told us a thing about her."

Will carried in his mind a very clear picture of Mona whom he was to marry. She was tiny, dainty and cultured. When she stood by him and he looked down—far down—into her pointed face with its sweet smile, he drank in the loveliness which in all his early life with its near-poverty and Quaker plainness he had missed.

"What is she like?" Will repeated the question and took plenty of time to look over this company of his relatives before answering.

Among them he saw not one to whom he could compare his

Mona. They were all good people but they were plain, and plainly dressed. His eyes came to rest on Sibyl, towering high. She stood with her weight on one foot, one shoulder and hip decidedly higher than the other, her white petticoat hanging a little below her dark dress, her head tilted to one side.

The slow smile which had set many a girl's heart beating fast in the days of his youth began in Doctor Will's eyes and spread over his nice face. He looked the whole length of Sibyl before he said three words about his future wife: "She's not gangling."

A roar of laughter went up and out over the water. Sibyl laughed because everyone expected her to, but there was a dull ache inside of her. As she and Zimri and the four children drove home in the twilight, she scarcely noticed the noisy chatter. She was examining herself: Now why in the world should I feel hurt when Will implies that I am gangling? Only a few hours ago I was wishing he would call me awkward, as he used to do.

Ah, but this was different. Will was no boy now. He was a man, educated, refined, moving in another world than that in which she lived. And behind this thought, from the place where it would no longer stay hidden, came forth for the second time that day the question, "What kind of preacher would I be if I were one?"

Will vanished from her mind; the whole day with its happiness and its nearness to her beloved family disappeared. She saw herself mounting a pulpit, and this time she was no composite of fine-looking women. She was only herself. She heard sup-

pressed giggles from young people in the audience who thought that she was gangling. She had gone so far in this distressing line of thought that when Zimri spoke she hardly heard him.

"I reckon next time he comes home he'll bring his wife to show her off to all his kinfolks."

"Who? Who are you talking about, Zimri?"

Sometimes Sibyl seemed queer, even to her husband.

WHEN Sibyl and Sister Mary were together they often talked about the boys; not Sibyl's, but their brothers. Mary summed matters up: "Levi never needed any of us but Em and Father, and they're both gone. Tom's all right. Now Will's fixed, though I'll have to see his wife before I know sure; Omar's as independent as the next one. Bert can laugh his way through most anything. Perry's the one to worry about."

"Perry's the best one of us," Sibyl said.

"He's the most like Father," was Mary's way of agreeing. "Too unselfish for his own good."

Between seasons of teaching, Perry was hired man for his farmer relatives. Sometimes he journeyed to the next county and it was Sarah's quiet lads or Tom's beautiful trio that gathered around him, begging for stories or poems or songs.

A few seasons Perry helped Thomas Holaday through harvest, and at night taught Mary's three daughters the songs he had learned from his father.

He liked to stay with Sister Mary. The pace of the farm work suited him well, for Thomas was moderate in all things, and not

given to hurrying. Perry had time to taste the glory of a summer morning and he whistled as he worked. He made friends of all the animals on the place and talked to them as companions. He enjoyed the good food on Mary's table and the cleanliness and order of the house, while he was able to give to her something of his quiet peace of soul. When Perry was near, Mary was less fearful and less troubled about non-essentials.

The summer he worked for Zimri, Perry was not quite so happy, although Sibyl didn't realize the fact. Rising at four o'clock did not suit him. Sometimes he jokingly said to Zimri, "What's the hurry? There's nothing to be seen before daybreak. There's nothing to be heard, for even the birds don't sing until there's a streak of light in the sky."

But Zimri got up at four o'clock; his hired man did, too.

I'm too much like Father ever to be a very successful farmer, Perry thought. Father didn't make a very good living.

It was always late at Zimri's when supper was over, so there wasn't much time for anything except going to bed in order to get up the next morning. But Perry made a jingle out of his early rising:

*My name is Perry but they call me Ped;  
I get up early and at night I go to bed.  
I go to bed early to get up at four —  
Couldn't do with less sleep, might like more.*

The children cheered and begged for more verses. It wasn't hard for Perry to make them. They popped into his head as he

plowed corn or shocked wheat. If he made a new verse in the day, it was sure to come forth at night.

*My name is Perry, but they call me Ped;  
If I don't change my mind I'll never wed.  
My wife might be ambitious and call me at four;  
If I didn't wake up, she'd show me the door.*

"More! More!" Gurney cried, but Perry said, "Trouble with me is I've run out of words that rhyme with Ped. Here, Albert, it's high time you learned to play the French harp."

Small wonder that Sibyl and her family liked to have Perry work for Zimri.

There were always books in Perry's room. Sibyl noticed them when she made his bed. There was a Bible, of course, and a volume of Riley's poems. Perry was always quoting Riley. But he kept there, too, a few books which he evidently studied — a physics text, a history of England, and a book about English authors. She remembered how studious he had been as a boy and thought, he's still that way. He doesn't need to study these books after a hard day's work in the field, because he never teaches anything beyond eighth grade. I reckon he just likes to figure things out. Maybe he's about that like I am about words. I still like words, same as I used to when I was a girl; like to put them together to see how they sound; and I like to *say* them.

She was making a new dress for Little Mary to wear to the last day of school. The days were too short to include sewing, so she had to borrow part of the night, after the others were in bed. She

heard Perry's step on the stairs and thought, We both ought to be asleep; *he* doesn't have any children to sew for! But it'll be nice to have him keep me company.

He sat down in a rocker and contemplated Sibyl's big hands, too rough for such fine work. "Thee needs a better light, Sibyl," he said, and moved the lamp an inch nearer her bent head. "Does thee ever wish thee had stayed single?"

She knew, of course, that he was thinking of all the work being a farmer's wife included. He was always carrying in a bucket of water or building a fire for her or doing some small job others forgot. But she was in no mood for sympathy tonight. The material on which she worked was bright and pretty, and Little Mary would look nice in the dress. What if her shoulders did ache?

"Does thee ever wish thee had a wife?"

They laughed. They didn't need many words for understanding. Then Perry's face sobered. "No, I'd rather have an education."

"Why, Perry, thee graduated from the Academy."

"That's not enough."

"What's thee want? To be a second Barnabas Hobbs?"

If Sibyl had looked up she would have seen Perry wince, as if she had touched a raw sore. But her eyes were on a buttonhole.

WILLIAM Rees believed in education and Perry was a more exact copy of his father than any other of William's six sons. He desperately wanted education for himself. His father bending over the Bible and his red-backed copy of Shakespeare had furnished

the first impetus. His Academy days under college-trained teachers had given him a push. Levi's ever growing library and his rise as a minister were spurs. Will becoming a doctor, Omar headed for the same profession, schoolfellows forging ahead in chosen lines — all these were spurs. He would take care of his mother, but over and over during his years of teaching, he said to himself, "I'm going to college some day."

Sometimes he examined his ambition to see just how selfish it was. He *did* like learning. For him there was an exaltation of spirit that came with working far into the night and finally "getting" a hard problem. It was all he could do to keep from waking up Bert to shout, "I've got it!"

But Bert learned things in a flash; solved a problem in his head while Perry was putting it on paper. Bert didn't know about this feeling.

And then there were other things he had to tussle with, like the meaning of a line of Shakespeare or Milton. He could study for days and then all at once it would come clear, maybe as he rode home from school. "Hallelujah," he'd shout if there wasn't anybody to hear, and his horse would take fright from his sudden leap in the saddle and he would have all he could do to rein him in. But that didn't make any difference. The thought was his — his to keep or maybe in the very simplest words he could find, to pass on to his best pupils next day.

Ah, yes, even in those little country schools he taught, Perry was sure to find one or two to whom he could say, "Don't stop learning. Go right on. Go to Vermilion Academy or to some



high school, and then to college.”

Sometimes he went into the homes of these good students to talk things over with the parents. “But the Academy’s a Quaker school,” they said. “I don’t suppose Johnny’d hardly be welcome there.”

“That makes no difference. They need a sprinkling of folks not Quakers. Keeps things from getting too settled; too much all one way. I hope you send Johnny there. They have good teachers.”

Good teachers! Perry’s father had used the words with reverence next to that with which he spoke of good preachers. All those years when he had been a member of the Board of Trustees of Vermilion Academy, no concern for it had been so great as that they have good teachers—“somebody like Barnabas Hobbs.”

Perry knew he could never reach the pinnacle to which the Hoosier Barnabas Hobbs had climbed, making his great gift to the cause of education in the state of Indiana in a dozen ways and inspiring by personal contact thousands of students as he went. But always the figure of this mental giant stood before Perry, representing the very highest goal.

No, it wasn’t just for the fun of learning that Perry wanted to go to college. If he could become *a real teacher*, touching the young as Barnabas did, sending them on and on . . .

THAT fall after he had finished the harvesting at Zimri’s, there came a letter from Levi, looking on the exterior like any other letter addressed in Levi’s clear bold hand; but as Perry

read, his heart beat faster. Levi was pastor in the Iowa town where a Midwest Quaker college now flourished.

*Penn is an excellent school. Some of the outstanding Friends' teachers of our time are here. A man with a mind such as yours is under obligation to make the best of it.*

Bert's mind is lots keener than mine, Perry thought, as he turned a page.

*Why don't you come and stay with us during your college course? Rebecca seconds this invitation. If she had her way, there would always be a Rees boy about.*

Perry thought of Levi's Rebecca. Never a real mother, but a mother to many, including Levi himself, taking care of him like a baby; and always having room in her heart and home for any brother of Levi's, maybe because they could sort of take the place of the sons she never had. And what a cook Levi's Rebecca was! Her biscuits—nobody could make such biscuits!

There was Levi's library. Why, to be able to go to its shelves and select any book he wished, and sit down undisturbed, and read, read, read — that in itself would be an education.

And to hear Levi preach Sunday after Sunday . . . The boys had long since quit making fun of Levi. Oh, once in a while Bert got off some joke, but every member of the family knew that Levi was one of the biggest preachers among Friends.

For such a time as this Perry had saved money out of his small salary — not a great deal, but enough if the matters of room and

board were taken care of; enough for himself and yet to help Bert in the support of Mother. Did he dare? Bert was to teach the home school this year. He would be with Mother.

Quickly, Perry began to make preparations. Something hindered him from talking about the venture, even to Bert. He made a few necessary purchases. In the unused upstairs room he found a discarded trunk, and in it he packed his clothes and other possessions. That night he would tell his mother and Bert his weighty decision. Could he possibly make them understand the urge which was driving him? No, probably they would see only the fact of his going.

But that night Bert came home from "courting." He stretched out his long legs in perfect relaxation. His blue eyes were very bright, the tuft of hair at the crown of his head stood erect. His right hand, so exactly like his father's, hung limply over the arm of his father's old chair. His mother's eyes rested on her youngest with satisfaction that he had come in early. Perry thought, Bert's turning out to be nearly as fine-looking a man as Will, and waited for the witty remark, the bit of harmless gossip Bert would give.

"I'm going to get married," Bert said, as easily as he might have said, "I'm going to Ridgefarm." His mother dropped her patching of the overalls he wore on Saturdays. She smiled her contented smile.

"Is it Anna?" she asked.

"Who else?" Bert laughed.

Rebecca Rees was pleased. Bert had never been quite so set-

tled as Perry, nor so sure of his future as her other sons. Marriage to the quiet, capable, suitable Anna whom she had always known was just the thing for Bert. He would go on teaching and always live near her. She expressed her satisfaction, and waited for Perry to speak. Bert waited, too.

But something choking had come into Perry's throat. It was a full minute before he swallowed it.

"Fine! Fine!" he said. "You couldn't possibly do better, Bert. Where will you live?"

THAT night by the light of a smoking coal-oil lamp Perry unpacked his appropriated trunk and hung his clothes in the closet. There was nobody to see how much longer than usual was his naturally long face, or to notice the few tears he brushed away from his gray eyes. Bert was sound asleep.

Perry stole downstairs and into the west room where his father had died and Martha had been married. There on the wall hung a picture of his father and mother. He held the light high and looked for a long time into the deep-set eyes of his father.

"I can't make it," he said, "but I tried."

IF Sibyl had lost Will, she had found Perry, she felt, during that summer he worked for Zimri. She missed him sorely. On a late August day she went to see her mother and heard from her the news of Bert's approaching marriage. She climbed the stairs to Perry's room to talk about family matters. He waved a

hand toward a straight-backed chair and continued the sorting of books and papers at the bare pine table. "Sit down, Sibyl."

"Well, Mother tells me Bert's going to get married."

"Yes. I think it's a fine idea. Of course he seems like a mere boy to me, but . . ."

Sibyl broke in. "Why, Ped, he's a grown man! I'm glad. Will was too pokey-slow for any use. I hope thee won't wait as long as he did to find a wife, Perry."

Perry usually had an answer for such good-natured thrusts, but now he only smiled and moved a pile of books from one spot to another on the table. When he did speak, Sibyl felt that he was trying very hard to be pleasant. Perry didn't usually have to make the effort. "Well, Bert's not the only one who can do something new and different. The school board over at Georgetown thinks I can hold a job in the city schools."

All Perry's teaching had been done in little country schools at small salaries. The new appointment was a decided advancement, and Sibyl said that she was proud, and watched for the light in Perry's eyes which she knew should be there. It did not show.

The question Sibyl had to ask was not easy: "What about Mother?"

Since the day of their father's death, Perry had taken care of Mother. When Sibyl read the story of the crucifixion and came to the words spoken to the disciple John, *Behold thy mother*, she always thought, Father might as well have said that to Perry.

All the other sons and daughters came and went, planning and carrying out plans for their own lives first, but Perry planned first for his mother. Now she was becoming old, able only to potter about her housework, cooking for her two boys the food they raised or bought. After Bert should marry there would be only Perry. Seemingly he had thought out everything.

"I'll go back and forth every day on horseback unless they build the interurban they're talking about. Maybe Mary's Alice can stay here and go to the Academy. She'll be company for Mother, and I'll be home nights."

Yes, Perry had everything fixed. Sibyl longed to be able to say, "I'll take care of Mother. Go on over to Georgetown and get a good place to board and do a good job of teaching school. Maybe something really fine will come out of this chance."

But how could she? To take her mother into her noisy, busy home was unthinkable. "The boys would drive her out of her senses," she confessed to herself.

So she said instead, "Well, that sounds all right to me," and wished that she were not bound to say anything more. But she couldn't fail Sister Martha.

"I had a letter from Martha."

"What did she say?"

"I nearly hate to tell thee, Ped."

"What? Not bad news?"

"Oh, no. But she's wanting her Anna Lou to go to Earlham

College next year. She can help her some, but she wondered if one of you boys could loan her some money. Of course Lou could pay it back when she goes to teaching.”

Something like visible pain passed over Perry's long face. It didn't stay long. In the minute before he answered there flashed through his mind his great affection for the early-widowed Martha and her only child. He felt the slight weight of Anna Lou on his knee, begging for Riley's verses. He heard her as she grew older asking for "more, more" of French harp or guitar. He had never been able to deny her. He recalled her beautiful face with the mark of superior intelligence when, within the year, she had won first in the Academy "oratorical."

"I expect Bert'll need what he's saved to set up housekeeping with. Sure, I'll loan her some. Might as well as not. I'll be making more money. It's a mighty fine thing for Anna Lou to go to college. Mighty fine. Maybe she can go straight through and graduate. None of our folks has had more than a year or so of college."

He turned back to his books, and Sibyl started down the steep, narrow stairs. He spoke again, without changing his position. Sibyl thought there were tears in his voice, and she couldn't quite understand why:

"Father *believed* in education."

That night Sibyl said to Zimri, "I spoke to Perry about Martha's letter. He's going to help Anna Lou to go to college. But

Ped had something on his mind. He wasn't like himself."

"Maybe he's in love."

"What? Ped in love? Remember how Levi tried to fix him up with that big fine woman where he was pastor? No, Perry has no notion of getting married. It's something else. I wish I knew what."



## CHAPTER VIII

### ALARM BELLS

**M**OSES REYNOLDS sat Head of Vermilion Meeting. The Head of a meeting was neither appointed nor elected. The office was a mantle which fell from the shoulders of a saint-in-translation to those of another awaiting that happy state. His duties were never assigned, never discussed, but were only felt and carried out in quiet certainty.

The ways of the Quakers were changing, but even yet the prerogatives of the Head had not altered.

When he walked to the large, unrailed platform and took his place at one end of it, dropped his head and folded his hands over his vest, then meeting had begun. With no unnecessary word, others joined him, and the audience gathered under the spell of silence. If a visiting minister appeared, the Head arose, extended his hand, and seated him next himself. He may have whispered, "We want thee to feel free," but the handclasp was really enough. His remaining duty, if all went well, was to bring the meeting to a close at the exact moment when all minds were clear. This he did by turning to his nearest neighbor and shaking hands, thus giving the signal for general Friendly farewells.

Sibyl had gone to meeting in front of her mother when mud splashed knee-deep to a tall horse. She had gone in a wagon which bounced over roads frozen by a sudden temperature drop and cut by travel into miniature valleys and mountain ranges. She had walked along grassy fence rows, holding her father's hand, when roads were impassible. She had ridden in sleds over snows that made a fairyland of her small world. She had waded ankle-deep in dust in summer. Always she had gone to meeting.

Now in Vermilion meeting, all she had to do was to shut her eyes tight and be still, to make the childhood "feel" of the big bare Elwood meeting house possess her. She could breathe in the sweet odor of honey locusts blooming outside the open window on a summer day, and she could hear the quavering voice of some near-saint breaking into the truly awful stillness with prayer or talk. Her memories were good.

But the present was better. Whole families sat together now. Meetings yet "settled into silence" when Moses took his place, and Sibyl liked to be established with her brood around her at that moment. But it seemed that, no matter how much she furtively set up the hands of the kitchen clock, she was always a little late — and always surprised.

"Why, meeting's already begun," she whispered to Zimri in the hallway.

These words were the last indication that Sibyl was in the body. After that she was pure spirit. With her head tilted back she marched up the aisle to the third seat from the front; Zimri

herded the children behind her, as completely in the flesh as she was out of it. Lost in the contemplation of the Almighty, all her care of home and children dropping from her like a superfluous garment, Sibyl's soul, unclothed, speeded by prayer, song, sermon or exhortation, reached up to its Maker.

Sometimes, thankful for the complete freedom which the Great Revival had initiated, she fell upon her knees and, in her peculiarly vibrant voice, poured out adoration and petition, couched in the majestic words of the Old Testament writers who had been her friends since childhood. A hush fell over the assembly when Sibyl prayed.

The rapt expression on her face lasted until she walked in at her home's door.

"Why, Mamma, where's your belt?"

It was Little Mary speaking, but her mother didn't hear.

"Your belt, Mamma? Did you lose it?"

You could almost hear the "plunk" of Sibyl's spirit, returning to earth. "Why — why, I reckon I forgot to put it on!"

"Oh, Mamma!"

Little Mary's tone suggested the disgrace she felt because of her mother's sin of omission. She was at the age when belts and other pieces of wearing apparel were very important.

But Sibyl only laughed.

SIBYL had seen the entire gradual transition from no songs at all in a meeting for worship to the present.

She was very young when an unknown Negro preacher from

the South walked into meeting and was invited to sit on the high platform. Just behind him sat the Head. Into the first prolonged silence broke the sound of song. The strange-looking man was standing, and his big body was sending forth full, rich tones that echoed through the half-filled house. Small Sibyl watched intently. She saw the Head stand, place his hand upon the singer's shoulder, and speak quietly but with unchallenged authority: "We do not do that way here."

A year later a demure little woman, in sincere thanksgiving for recovery from a long illness, burst into a song of rejoicing. This time the Head did not move. A few of the older Friends arose and sorrowfully left the room, unable to bear the desecration of their house of silence. The majority remained.

Still a child, Sibyl had seen the little drama in which Jimmie Haworth was chief actor. The big squeaking partition had been raised for a joint business session between men and women. Two clerks, man and woman, sat at a table facing the congregation. Into the quietness between two items of business came the sound of distant singing. The Quakers, startled, listened. A few cupped hands over ears. There was no mistake. The sound came from the grove of trees where the young, having no part in matters under consideration by their elders, had gathered for a meeting of their own. The words were becoming clear: *"Rescue the perishing, care for the dying."*

The clerk of the men's meeting trembled as he rose and said: "As responsible parents, some of us here assembled have been seriously troubled that our children are turning to the ways of

the Methodists and others who do not observe our ways of quietness and meditation, even to the point of singing together the songs they have learned from them. We are now aware of the lengths to which this tendency has gone. Do Friends wish to speak to this matter?"

They spoke, while in the Grove the song continued: "*Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.*"

Some — Linton Reynolds spoke first — counseled patience and understanding of the young.

Some — Moses Reynolds spoke last — urged the bringing before the meeting of the leader of the singing Quakers.

The clerk weighed the matter carefully. What was the "sense of the meeting?"

The finely balanced scales tipped to the Right — not much, but a trifle.

Jimmie was eighteen. He was short, rotund and red-headed. He was fearless, even when the clerk of men's meeting bent toward him.

"For some time, James Haworth, I have thought that thee might be a leader of a tendency to introduce among young Friends, ways of other denominations, particularly the general use of singing in worship. What hast thou to say? Why dost thou persist in this departure from Friends' practices?"

Jimmie's red head went a notch higher. "It is a great pleasure to me to sing."

The clerk spoke sternly:

"Sin ever seems a pleasure in its beginning. The singing of

songs may seem to thee a very small and insignificant sin, but if indulged in, it will surely open the door to other and more worldly un-Quakerly practices.”

Jimmie had heard only one word of that long speech, and to it he replied:

“Singing the gospel is no sin.”

A stone hurled through one of the plain glass windows which lighted the room could have made no more alarming thud than did that short sentence of Jimmie’s. The clerks were silent for good reason. They didn’t know what to say. Jimmie saw his advantage and continued:

“There are instances of singing in the Bible. Deborah sang a song of victory. The Psalms of David are songs of thanksgiving. David even played an instrument.”

Moses Reynolds did not often “speak to business,” but now he rose slowly, and his words were simple and sincere: “There are many events related in the Old Testament which we as Friends do not take as examples. We live in a new dispensation, and the voice of God does not come to us in the thunder of battle, as it used to do, but in the quietness of each of our hearts. In like manner, our times of rejoicing must not be with singing aloud but with inward melody.”

There was a soft purr of agreement coming from those of the Right. But Linton was not content, and his sympathies were with the young. “I suggest the appointing of a committee to visit James Haworth and report to the next meeting.”

The clerk was relieved, for to take "the sense" of that meeting would have been a hard thing. He dismissed Jimmie and, with an exercise of his usual tender manner, urged that the offender be dealt with in the spirit of charity. Three people should be named from the floor.

"Lydia Reynolds," came from the Left.

"Moses Reynolds," came from the Right.

There was a long pause. The third member — what forbearance, what wisdom, what humility he must possess!

"William Rees."

REMEMBERING that day Sibyl thought her father's name had had the same effect on that troubled group of Quakers as the Master's words on the stormy sea. In that far-off time her childish conviction was that all would be well with Jimmie if her father were on the committee. Her father loved songs, in or out of meeting!

Jimmie had been lovingly dealt with and permitted to sing. He had become a minister. He traveled far, visiting distant Friends, always carrying in his pocket a copy of the *Gospel Hymns*, without music. When he stood and sang alone and unaccompanied, the heads of the Quakers sank to their breasts in reverence, for Jimmie's songs were worship.

Then they began to join Jimmie, and others followed his example, carefully, of course, at first. A song, like a prayer or a sermon, must be a movement of the Spirit.

By the time, a dozen years later, when Sibyl and her family sat in the third seat from the front, there were books on the seats, and when someone "led out," half the congregation joined in. In the lesser "revivals" that every winter changed for a time the order of things, the numbers were announced and a leader was provided.

"We could keep together so much better if we had an organ," the young people began to say.

"We've had an organ at Elwood for a long time," Sister Mary's Grace said, when she was attending the Academy. "It's lots easier to sing and sounds better."

Grace was a singer — no doubt about that. She led the singing at Elwood meeting.

"But Vermilion is different," Sibyl said.

"How is it different?"

"Oh, I don't know; older, I guess. And we have Moses."

THERE came a time when the question of an organ became as important in Vermilion meeting as had been the discarding of plain bonnets in an earlier day. Before that time Linton Reynolds had died, leaving behind a daughter to sing sweetly and a son to be an efficient clerk of meetings. Many of those who had gently objected to innovations had been gathered to their fathers who had more firmly opposed change.

By the end of the century only Moses remained to care greatly that things were different. He still sat head, but the pas-



tor really had the lead. Moses was not and could not be a Progressive.

When Moses went to town, his little wife sat beside him in her fine, silk plain-bonnet and her soft gray cashmere shawl. The children along the way and in the town were always hoping for a glimpse of Eunice, for she was the only "old-fashioned" Quaker they ever saw. But when Moses went to worship he went alone. Through the eighties and the nineties and on into the new century, he said farewell to Eunice and rode or drove his well-fed bay mare over the three miles that separated his comfortable home from his good meeting. His coat had a stand-up collar because Eunice made it so; his speech was Friendly out of life-time habit; but he listened with awe and approval to the "strong doctrinal sermons" his brother Linton had liked so well. Moses wasn't a Conservative, either.

Always Moses occupied middle ground. It was Linton who long ago had led the agitation to remove the partition which separated "men's meeting" from "women's meeting" in the meeting house. Moses gently opposed the change and had few companions in his opposition. The right way for him lay somewhere between the advancing moves of the "fast" Quakers and his wife's and brother William's conservatism.

ONE summer Seventh Day when the corn had been laid by, and the bees droned over white clover in the meeting-house yard, and the bluegrass had grown tall over the graves of the

ancestors across the road, the decision about the organ was to be made. All the Friends knew that it would be so. That morning the members of Sibyl's family had to speak to her on an average of three times to get her attention.

"What's the matter with you, Mamma?" Little Mary asked at last.

"Why, nothing much, I guess. My head doesn't feel too good."

"Didn't you sleep last night?"

"Well some — I did."

"Sometimes it's as hard to get you to talk as it is Uncle Omar!" Little Mary laughed.

MOSES hadn't been very well for a while — some kind of stomach trouble, folks said. Maybe that was why he didn't come to monthly meeting that summer Seventh Day. It was queer without him.

Linton's son was clerk. He always put through the business in better time than most clerks. He knew just what was to come up, and had his "blank minutes" all made out ahead of time. That day there was one like this:

*After prayerful consideration over a period of several months on the part of Vermilion Friends, the decision has been reached that the provision of an organ to be used in our meetings for worship — prove a benefit to all, especially to the young among us.*

He wasn't afraid that he wouldn't use that "minute."

When the subject was brought up, there was no real discussion. It was as if all necessary preparation for a major operation

had been taken, even to the excluding from the room of the nearest of kin. It was quickly over; the clerk's steady hand filled in the one word *will* and read the minute in his crisp voice.

Strange, Sibyl thought, how little rejoicing there seemed to be. In fact some of the Friends were so busy looking at that vacant space where Moses usually sat that they hardly heard the reading of the minute.

"I wonder if he'll ever come to meeting again," Sibyl said to Zimri, as they jogged home. The children hadn't gone to monthly meeting that day.

"I reckon he'll come back."

They rode in silence. Sibyl wiped her eyes. She knew that even if the corn was laid by, Zimri had a hundred farm jobs awaiting him for the afternoon, but she couldn't help that. What had to be had to be. And now there wasn't a horse on the place she could drive.

"I wish you'd take me to see Moses and Eunice this afternoon, Zimri."

"Wouldn't tomorrow do?"

"I think we'd better go today."

If Sibyl hadn't belonged to a family and a sect that gave no approval to any demonstration between the sexes beyond handshaking she would certainly have taken Moses' frail little form in her arms when he met her and Zimri at his door. Quick tears sprang to his eyes. He didn't have to be told why Sibyl Haworth had come. He knew she always went where hearts ached. But he couldn't think what to do or say. It was Eunice,

behind him, who had to invite the callers into the seldom-used parlor with its red carpet and albums and stereoscope and sea shells.

Eunice understood, too. She asked the visitors to be seated. "I think they've come to see *thee*," she said, laying her soft hand on Moses' trembling arm. Then she slipped from the room, leaving no feeling of discourtesy behind her. Not for her ears was talk of singing and organs.

Most Vermilion Friends felt relief when Moses took his customary place next day. By the time the dumpy, innocent-looking little instrument was put in its corner, as nearly out of sight as possible, and its music was certainly helping the congregation keep together on *Bringing in the Sheaves*, only a few noticed that Moses' chin quivered more than usual.

But when the song ended, Sibyl fell on her knees and begged the Almighty in no quotations from the Old Testament but in simple words pouring from her own troubled heart to give to her and to the meeting of which she was a part, the fruits of the Spirit — love, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness.

Oh, yes, Sibyl loved music; but there was that verse that kept running through her head; *Whoso shall offend one of these little ones . . . it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

Sibyl related the entire incident to her mother. Rebecca Rees wasn't troubled. "I remember the first coal-oil lamp William brought home from Danville after I'd dipped the candles we

used all our married lives. I thought sure it would explode and burn the house down. I guess I made quite a fuss. I expect Moses won't hardly notice the organ a year from now."

Sibyl said she hoped her mother was right.

THE people around Vermilion and even in the nearby Quaker communities were wanting Sibyl Haworth whenever there was anything wrong. The calls for her help were becoming varied and frequent.

"Jim Harrington's drunk again. His wife'll be needing Sibyl to get him on the straight and narrow once more."

"The family is worn out. Somebody'll have to sit up tonight."

"Send for Sibyl. She'll come."

"They're simply crushed. How could the child have turned out that way?"

"Sibyl will be a comfort to them."

"He's not prepared to die. If someone could pray with him . . ."

"Sibyl Haworth prays better than anybody I know."

"Such a terrible shock. No wonder the woman's in hysterics. The doctors can't do a thing with her."

"If Sibyl could sit down by her . . ."

“The girl will go down with consumption. She *trusted* him.”

“I think Sibyl could arouse her — help her to see there is something worth living for.”

And once in a long while, some fond mother, wearing a smile, said, “I hate to ask it, you’re such a busy woman, but I’m just no good at baking. We wondered if maybe you’d have time to bake one of your nice white cakes for the wedding.”

Every call was like an alarm bell, ringing in Sibyl’s soul and she arose and answered. Yet often in the night after she had returned from a mission, she would awake with the feeling that she had been carrying on an argument.

“But I’m doing all I can. Isn’t it enough?” she was asking. There was no answer.

CHAPTER IX

*VOICES*

**Y**OUR GRANDPA Rees helped build the Academy," Sibyl said at the breakfast table the morning Little Mary was to enter as a Freshman. She looked around the table at her four children, wishing they had known her father. Even Little Mary's memory of him was dim.

"What did he do—lay brick?" Albert asked.

"Oh, I don't mean that way. He was on The Committee."

"First-named," Zimri added.

"Father was a great believer in education," Sibyl said. "He'd be glad you're starting to the Academy, Mary."

Grandfather Rees seemed very faraway and shadowy to Little Mary, and although her mother and father talked on about the important part he had had in the founding of the school, her mind was on other things. She was fourteen, but she hadn't yet outgrown her childhood shyness. She dreaded going to the Academy; she was afraid—afraid her clothes were not just right, afraid she might seem ignorant as compared with other students; afraid she wouldn't know how to act. She couldn't talk of her fears. Her mother now had such a lack of concern over matters

of her own appearance that Little Mary didn't dream she had once had almost identical feelings.

When Mary was six and so shy that she wanted to hide behind her mother's long full skirts, George Moore, Principal of Vermilion Academy, had taken her thin hand in his hard, bony one, looked searchingly into her frightened blue eyes and said, "Well, Mary, you'll be coming to the Academy one of these days."

Little Mary didn't know that wherever he traveled in search of students for his beloved school, he used the same formula. "Well, George . . ." "Well, Richard . . ." "Well, John . . ." She felt that by addressing her by her own name and speaking with such certainty of the future, this iron-gray, serious-faced man with twinkling eyes, was putting a seal upon her alone, a stamp that could not be removed. Perhaps she was right about the mark of destiny; she was wrong only in thinking that she had been singled out.

Little Mary had seen the Academy building as often as the meeting house by which it stood—which was once or twice each week of her life. Sometimes she had gone with her parents to programs held in its main room. But in her mind it looked different that September morning when she was about to enter it as a student. In spite of her fears, she knew without forming the thought into words, that now the square red-brick building—cloakroom on the right, library on the left, assembly room straight ahead, big room, little room and chemistry laboratory upstairs—all of it would be hers; that after four years of struggle she would become one of that long line of relatives and ac-



quaintances who had graduated from the Academy and did indeed bear a seal whose inscription read, *Prepared for a good life under the guidance of wise teachers chosen by careful Friends*. So she smoothed her dark hair once more, made sure that no button had missed its hole in the back of her pretty blue-gingham dress and, trembling a little, told her mother good-bye.

"Thee'll get along all right, Mary," Sibyl said, sensing, more than she wished to indicate, the timidity of her daughter. Then she turned back to the breakfast dishes. It's strange, she thought, that I have a girl old enough to go to the Academy. It's only been a little while since I went there myself.

Thinking of her Academy days always brought back memories of her maiden aunts. Deborah had gone to rest by Rachel and William in the graveyard. On Sibyl's last visit to her she had for the first and last time referred to her past, and that in a riddle nobody except Sibyl could have begun to solve. "A person can do one thing or another but not both. And I reckon a person does as she *is*. I guess I was just naturally kind of grown fast to my family when I was young. I still am, to what's left of it. Has thee heard from Will lately?"

Dear Aunt Debbie!

Her thoughts went on: and suppose that story I made up about Aunt Rachel were really true, and both loved the same man in their youth!

Dear Aunt Rachel!

Sibyl was half laughing, half crying as she put the last dish in the cupboard. I'm glad there's neither marriage nor giving in

marriage in Heaven because both aunts are certainly there, and I couldn't bear it if I thought they weren't perfectly happy.

THE Academy students went to meeting at eleven o'clock on Fifth Day. George Moore led them along the path, now graveled, that connected one solid red-brick building with the other, looking back from the corner of one eye to see that they marched sedately. He seated them on the right side, in the front seats reserved for them, and went on to the high platform. He was minister as well as teacher. From his elevated position he could see that all was well with his charges.

By the time Little Mary went to the Academy, George Moore had been for eight years trying to keep from fifty to eighty youths in a way as straight and narrow as the gravel path, and it was not surprising that his shoulders were stooped and his face lined. But he was a scholar and a devout man. If his students didn't all love him, most of them showed him the respect due one who had been chosen for his responsible position. The slight adulteration of the group by non-Friends served, as Perry had said, to keep the school from becoming too "settled." But George Moore wanted a settled atmosphere and spent a great amount of energy trying to create it.

One Fifth Day in the spring of Little Mary's first year the Principal crossed and uncrossed his legs, rested a trembling hand on his right knee, transferred it to his heavy gold watch chain, looked from pastor to Head as if asking permission (the presence of a pastor was no indication that he was the one who

would do the preaching) slowly arose and as slowly preached a sermon. When he sat down, there was the silence which usually followed a lengthy talk. Ordinarily, Moses, the Head, would have broken it by the customary shaking of hands. But this time Moses waited. There should be something more. He sensed that someone was not fully "clear."

He was right. Sibyl was not clear. It was easy to talk to the Lord in a meeting. Sometimes she recited or read a few verses from the Bible. Once or twice a verse of song had burst from her full heart. But now there were *words* which she must say to these young people. Too often, she felt, the hay was too high for them to reach, and as much as she herself had enjoyed the sermon today, she believed that it had been so. She wanted to show them the way of Repentance, Forgiveness and Faith; not a road with barred gates, but an open, friendly road with the Master of men leading the way. She could make it simple and plain, she knew she could, if only she were once upon her feet.

Moses moved to the edge of the long bench; his face said sadly, "Who is resisting the Spirit?" One foot went forward; he was extending his hand to his neighbor. But Sibyl was standing, and the words were pouring from her as if they had been dammed up for years and now welcomed release.

The students who had restlessly watched the clock failed to notice when the hands met at twelve. The elder who had slept through the good sermon sat erect. In ten minutes Sibyl had relieved her mind and was again sitting by Zimri, her face flushed and her body trembling.

Moses beamed his satisfaction as he reached out his hand. "It was a good meeting," Friends agreed.

That night at supper Little Mary spoke without warning: "Mamma, you sounded like a preacher when you talked in meeting today."

Zimri looked up from his plate and spoke to his children, not his wife. "Of course Mamma *could* be a preacher if she wanted to."

Sibyl wondered if anybody noticed how fast her heart raised and lowered the folds of her gray calico. She jumped up and replenished the gravy dish from the stove, taking plenty of time to do it. When she sat down again she was able to say with a laugh, "Oh, I guess I'll leave the preaching to folks like George Moore and brother Levi."

In the strangest places and ways this idea leaped out at her like a hungry beast: in the midst of grief; in that sweet loneliness that brides are wont to know; in a dread of death for herself; at a picnic on the banks of the Wabash; and now out of the mouths of those dearest to her. She would have to think, pray . . .

But Albert never let her forget for long how important was food: "Aw, who wants a preacher for a mam? Pass the biscuits!"

THERE was a different feel about First Day morning, especially in spring and summer. Zimri got up later, the boys were harder to rout, Little Mary shared her mother's air of expectancy, if for somewhat different reasons, about going to meeting.

On a First Day in May as Sibyl stirred the oatmeal while her

family gathered about the table, her spoon was suddenly in mid-air. As clearly as she ever heard Zimri speak, a voice said, "Come now and I will send thee to speak unto the people."

The meat was about to burn. Sibyl turned and re-turned it mechanically, but her hand shook.

The folks had to have breakfast. The chapter had to be read. What chapter? She had forgotten to select it. The Bible seemed to open of its own accord to the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Even as her father before her, Sibyl scarcely needed the Bible for the reading of this familiar part. With the sixth verse she paused so long that her family raised its collective head in wonder. "*Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips.*" She stopped, as if this were the end. The children were puzzled. What a short reading!

For once Sibyl didn't know much about meeting that day. All through the hour the Voice came again and again. "Come now and I will send thee to speak unto the people."

The children took company home with them. There were dinner and dishes and neighbors coming to sit away the afternoon, talking of crops and politics and sickness and a thousand subjects a hundred miles from Sibyl's thoughts. There were supper and dishes again and a drive in the twilight to a second meeting, and bed and sleeplessness and dreams and Monday morning and breakfast—twenty-four hours of saying to the Voice, "Wait! Wait till I can send Zimri to the field, Little Mary

to the Academy, the other children to school. Wait until I am alone, alone; then I'll *listen*."

When all were scattered that Monday morning, Sibyl ignored the work in her kitchen. She took her Bible and sat down by the bay window with its drying plants and overfull work basket and read the whole of Isaiah's "call."

"I'm called, too," she said aloud; "called of God."

The wonder of the fact overwhelmed her. When she recovered a little she walked to the mirror by the kitchen door and looked at herself a long while. She saw her face with all its peculiarities, even as she had done at Sister Martha's when she was sixteen.

I wish I had a mirror big enough to see all of me, she thought, though it would have to be right good-sized. My nose is still Roman, my eyes are too far back in my head, and I've no doubt I'm still gangling, like Will said.

She again sat in her chair and re-read Isaiah's call, hunting through every word for some indication that the Lord even knew how Isaiah looked. She didn't find it.

Then Sibyl took a look at her mind. Two years at the Academy — that was all. Levi had gone to Earlham College for a year and had studied all his life. He had a library. The whole family stood in awe of Levi's library. Will and Omar each had had a year of college and then medical school. They were *educated*. Perry and Bert had carried on their own schooling after graduating at the Academy and were teachers of recognized standing. And the only books she had were her old school read-

ers and the Friends Discipline and her Bible. Of course the Bible wasn't to be compared with any other book in the world. But Levi, and other ministers, knew how to explain it. Even if she had money to buy a concordance and Bible dictionary, where could she possibly find time to study them?

That question brought Sibyl to a consideration of her household, and it rose like a high stone wall in front of her. Even at that minute, a dozen duties awaited her all over the place. If the Lord just *had* to have a woman preacher in these parts, she could think of plenty of old maids; or women with no children; or women who lived in easy-to-keep homes in town. *Why me?* She asked. Because I was dedicated?

But somehow the Dedication was receding; the *Call* was the important thing in her mind. She remembered that those in the Bible who were called were wont to give excuses. Isaiah said he had unclean lips. (Was it possible he was a profane man?) Jeremiah thought he was too young; Moses had a stammering tongue.

Sibyl stopped short. *I don't have a stammering tongue. I have words. I love words. All my life I've liked to say words. Now that was something to think about.*

A gangling body, an unprepared mind, a family that had to have her — these three on one side, and on the other a little thing like her love of speaking pieces . . .

But here it was half-past ten. Zimri and two hired men would be in for dinner in an hour. Sibyl made the work fly. It's a good thing I'm not as slow as Sarah, she thought. But she could work

and think at the same time, especially about the more practical side of this subject. She had known a good many women preachers in her life. Some had families. How did they manage? If she could only talk to somebody who had been called and had said yes, that might help.

Leannah! Pastor where Sister Sarah and Brother Tom lived. If she could only talk to Leannah!

A telephone system was inaugurated in Vermilion County in 1899. The poles were crooked and the wires sagged, but Sibyl could go to the wall by the kitchen door, take the unwieldy receiver off its hook, listen to her neighbors talk until they hung up, then ring central and ask for Georgetown. If the Elwood folk on the country line were not in a too-talkative mood, maybe it required only half an hour to get through both centrals and make connection with Thomas Holaday's phone. Then if Sister Mary was at home and could be called in from the farthest part of the orchard or from the barn where she was picking geese, they could have a right good visit, even if both did have to shout in order to be heard. Sibyl loved hearing Sister Mary's voice.

That Monday afternoon Sibyl went to the telephone and called Sister Mary. Luck was with her. In five minutes she heard her anxious voice.

"What's the matter, Sibyl? Who's sick now?"

"Does somebody have to be about to die before I can call thee up? I just wanted to talk to thee."

"Well, go ahead, I'll listen."



"I wish we could go on a visit to Champaign County."

"Won't Zimri take thee after threshing's over?"

"Oh, yes, he would then. I want to go *now*."

"I don't see how thee can. Now don't go galavanting off that forty miles all by thyself, Sibbie."

Mary always said she could tell by the sound of Sibyl's voice when she had some wild idea.

"I thought maybe thee'd go with me."

"Me? Two lone women to drive out there by themselves?"

"We could take a child apiece. I'm hungry to see Tom and Florence, and I feel that maybe Sarah needs me."

Mary first said she wouldn't think of such a thing; then she said she'd talk it over with Thomas; then she said maybe they could hitch old Coley and the gentlest old nag Zimri had to the spring wagon. Finally she practically agreed, "Well, if we can get back before strawberries begin to get ripe . . ."

Not a word did Sibyl say of her real reason for wanting to go to Stanton at the last of May. There couldn't be a busier time.

THE spring wagon made its first stop at Tom's home. Like a picture; that's the way Tom's place was, Mary said, as they drove up. The big grassy lawn sloped back to the white house. A few trees, mostly maples, gave just enough shade; nothing cluttered-looking about it. Inside, nothing was cluttered either. Florence's house and children were as orderly as her speech. Tom's cornfields stretched away as far as you could see in

straight rows of six-inch, light-green spears, springing from rich black soil. Where ground quite so rich and black as in Champaign County, Illinois?

And Tom himself! Born farmer, if ever there was one; born stock raiser, too; less hurried than Zimri. Strange how Tom could move so deliberately and accomplish so much; and how relaxed and quiet he sat in the evening; how gladness to have his sisters with him seemed to come from every pore of his big strong body.

Before noon next day they were at Sarah's. She came to the door wiping her hands on her apron, and embraced everyone. "Why! Why! Oh, I'm so glad I don't know what to do! Pleas! Pleas! The folks have come!"

That was the beginning. There were so many questions to be asked and answered; so many incidents of the journey to be told; so much to be laughed over. Later there would be more serious talk. In her soft voice Sarah would recite the community tragedies, perhaps she would even discuss her own problems, but at first there was only laughter and joy at being together. "Now if only Martha could be here!" Mary said.

When Pleas came in to dinner he remarked hopefully there was every prospect of rain. "We need rain mighty bad. The crops ain't hardly goin' to make it, if we don't git some rain mighty soon. How's the crops down your way?" And from that point on the conversation belonged to Pleas.

"Be too wet to plow fer two-three days, I reckon," he said.

The next morning the rain was falling in sheets, and Mary

began to get nervous. The plan of the visit called for leaving Sarah's that afternoon. "How are we going to get away from here, I'd like to know?"

Sibyl laughed. "Well now, Mary, I guess we'll just stay a while. It's a mighty good place to be." And yet, The Voice was calling . . .

They stayed until the water rose to cover the bridge a foot deep and to form a lake in Sarah's front yard, creeping surely toward the porch. They stayed until Pleas had repeated every incident of his youth as well as all the recent events of concern to himself and his neighbors. But somewhere, intermingled with all that Pleas had to say, Sarah talked a great deal about the Stanton meeting and Leannah, its pastor.

STANTON meeting was not very Quakerly in that it usually had a choir and seldom very much silence. Its trim white meeting house with its comfortable-looking parsonage and its well-kept home for the long-sleeping, gave the passer-by an assurance that here, where the black soil grew heavy crops, were men and women who cared about religion.

Leannah was a beautiful woman, tall and slender and fine-featured, with eyes that seemed to be always laughing or crying. Her voice was full of lifting and lowering when she spoke, and strong and clear when she sang the gospel songs which were becoming old and familiar. Tears running down her cheeks when she preached on the crucifixion of Jesus left no red marks. The people of her congregation loved her and in-

vited her into their homes not only when she was needed but because they liked to hear her laugh. So the years of Leannah's pastorate at Stanton were years of happiness, for her, her mischievous boy, her quiet husband, and all to whom she ministered.

WHEN Salt Fork resumed its reasonable meanderings, the sisters were eager to continue their journey. Sister Mary had her visit more than "out."

"Why is thee so determined to go to see Leannah?"

"I *want* to."

"I'd rather go straight home."

"But *I* want to see Leannah."

And they drove to the white parsonage.

Sibyl had dreamed of sitting down in quietness with Leannah to talk over the real concern of her visit, which she had never confided to Mary. But Leannah was making ginger cookies in her spotless kitchen. The best Sibyl could do was to follow her about and watch the swift movements of her hands and listen to her chatter. At last she broke in. "Leannah, does thee like to be a preacher?" It wasn't what she had intended to say.

Leannah threw up both flour-covered hands. "Why, Sibyl, I wouldn't be anything else for anything in the world! I consider it the greatest privilege a human being can have, to preach the gospel." She talked so fast and so enthusiastically that there wasn't much chance for Sibyl to slip in a word, and suddenly they both became aware of the odor of burning cookies. Lean-

nah didn't cry over disasters. She laughed. She ran into the front room where Mary and Leannah's husband were having a quiet conversation, to show the black smoking mass and say, "Now see what Sibyl made me do! She talked so much she made me burn up my cookies!" She called the children from the yard to feed them properly baked cakes, she hurried to put more in the oven. And Mary said they really must be going. It looked like rain.

Sibyl went away with a heavy heart and no help from Leannah. Husband, home and child seemed no problem at all to her. As they rode over the prairie The Voice spoke again and Sibyl almost answered aloud: "But my children! Sister Mary told me long ago that it is my duty to raise my children. And what would Omar say?"

And the Voice seemed to answer, "Who made Mary or Omar a judge over thee?"

THE next morning as she sat with her own family at breakfast the telephone rang — five long piercing rings.

"Answer, Mary, and if it's me they want, say this is my busy day. I don't have time to visit." Sibyl knew well that Little Mary would say no such thing.

"It's Uncle Perry. He wants to talk to you."

"Something about Mother, I'm afraid." Sibyl hurried to answer. The message wasn't about her mother. It was about Levi. Out in California he had preached his last sermon.

He was a great man and a great preacher. He had preached

in season and out, before houses crowded with people who hung on his eloquent words; he had been an honored guest at many yearly meetings; the only reason he had never gone across the water to London and Dublin was that troublesome stomach. His Rebecca said he never could stand such a trip.

And Levi was her brother. He was the one that had fulfilled that prayer of his parents for "one preacher in the family." And Levi was dead. The first of her six tall brothers.

Sibyl sat weakly in the nearest chair. In her heart was grief for her brother. But there was something else, too — something she couldn't quite name. A curious blending of fear and hope; a drawing back, a reaching forward. Since Levi would preach no more . . . "Oh, Father, Father!" she cried from her heart, "I still need thee! Thee could tell me what to do! I know I can't take Levi's place, but there isn't any preacher in the family now . . ."

She jumped from her chair. What's the matter with me? The first thing I must do is to go to see Mother. How would I feel *if I had lost a son?*

So Sibyl left her accumulated work and went to comfort her mother that afternoon.

"His work is done," Mother said, her hands folded quietly in her lap.

"They'll not bring his body back, I reckon."

"It won't matter. He can be buried there. It's the spirit that makes a difference."

"Yes, of course, Mother."

But Sibyl thought, I should think she'd want to see him again. She bore him. He was hers.

As if her mother read her thoughts she answered, "He was the Lord's."

They sat in silence for a while but no tears dampened the failing eyes of Rebecca Rees. As Sibyl rose to go, her mother said, "It's a great privilege to be the mother of a Christian minister."

Mother needed no comforting.

ZIMRI tried to stay awake that night to sit with Sibyl and talk of Levi, but he was tired with the day's work in the cornfield. He nodded in his chair.

"You go on to bed, Zimri. I'll come pretty soon."

Sibyl sat alone.

So Levi was gone. Levi, with his arresting figure, his keen mind, his fine learning, his eloquence, his recognition as a "big" preacher among the Quakers — Levi was gone! And she was "called." To take his place? That could never be. She knew it.

She began where she had left off that Monday morning a few weeks earlier. She had spent most of that time counting her shortcomings, but at the last she had come to her love of words — of speaking. Was that truly something on the other side of the scales? She walked to the bookcase and took from among her children's school books her own old Fourth reader. She turned the familiar pages until she found *The Mistletoe*

*Bough*. She read it from first to last, trying to bring back the thrill she used to feel in it. She could not. For a long time she sat puzzling, and all at once she knew that other people's words were all right for a girl speaking pieces for the entertainment of audiences, but for a woman called of God, if she answered yes, what she would say must be her own — hers and God's, welling up within her and spilling over into the hearts of people as it did that day in Fifth Day meeting when Little Mary said she sounded like a preacher.

Sibyl was very still. The "Call" seemed wonderful. To be dedicated by someone else was one thing. To be called by God himself was another, far greater. Father had never discussed with her that dedication of her for a special work, and now she suddenly knew why. Somewhere along the way he had learned that his prayer couldn't make her what she should be. That couldn't depend on something said before she was born. Thinking back she couldn't remember that she had ever heard her father say to one of his children, "I want thee to prepare to be this or that." Levi wasn't a preacher because his father and mother wanted him to be. He was one because he himself knew that was his calling.

Maybe it was the same with the other boys, doctors, farmer and teachers. The whole subject of "calls" began to appear in a new light. She doubted whether Will and Omar could have heard *The Voice* as clearly as she did, asking them to become doctors, but probably the Lord had many ways of bringing things to pass in people. To Isaiah and Jeremiah and Moses and



Paul and Sibyl, He spoke in an audible voice. Sibyl smiled at her audacity in classifying herself with these great ones. And she was still again, waiting — for what?

She was waiting for The Voice to speak, to tell her what gifts were hers, why she had been singled out. And there was a voice, but this time it had a very human sound, and it came leaping over the years since she was sixteen. "Folks listen when *you* talk."

Zimri had said that, and it had fanned her pride and kept her awake most of one night. Now it had come back to let her know that she had a gift — the gift of making people listen. A great gladness crept into Sibyl. She took the old reader back to its place and found the Friends Discipline. There she read of the gifts needed for the ministry. She knew so well that she lacked the "trained and well-stored mind for instruction and exposition." But through her love of words and her voice she surely had the gift of "appealing to the hearts of men."

Sibyl read on. There was the gift of "shepherding and feeding the flock." She remembered the hurt of Moses Reynolds, and Jim, the drunkard, and the girl with consumption, and the man who got cut up in a fight, and the neighbor's dying baby, and all the rest. The people she had been "shepherding" were not a flock; they were scattered here and there, in all directions; but maybe she had that gift, too. She had been practicing it for a long time, getting ready.

Suddenly all Sibyl's life seemed a preparation for this hour. Her use of words, her far-reaching voice, her easy sight of a

need and the way to put her heart alongside one in any trouble — her three gifts from God.

And there vanished from Sibyl all thought of dedication and even of calls. In their place was a yearning, a consuming Wish to use these gifts to show the Way of Life, not to a little handful of Academy students in Fifth Day meeting, but, again and again, always, the rest of her life, to all people her life might touch. She fell on her knees by her chair and lifted her face and her soul to the Unseen Presence which had so persistently spoken to her. There was no sound in the room. Into the stillness came Doubt, trying to break in upon assurance. "But Levi had so many and such great gifts, so pleasing to the people."

Then The Voice spoke once again, more clearly than before: "*I call thee to be only Sibyl.*"

With great joy Sibyl whispered, "Yes, Lord."

A verse from the New Testament came to her. *I am within you*. Why, The Voice is really inside of me! The real I wants to be a preacher! I *want* to take these small talents of mine and invest them like the man in the parable, and not worry at all about the results. A great peace was beginning to creep over her, still kneeling by her rocker.

And the great need of her father which she had experienced all her life fell from Sibyl like a too-warm garment. There was a look of confidence on her face like the look of a baby suddenly realizing the power of standing alone and taking steps. She could walk alone.

Then, without warning, Zimri was standing by her; not really, for she put out her hand to touch him and he was not there. But he was as real to Sibyl as The Voice had been. He was wearing a blue hickory shirt with a button off one sleeve and his overalls, not too clean, were held up by worn striped suspenders. He was the most ordinary-looking man in the world, except for one fact: he was *Zimri, her man!* The one who had chosen her, loved her, protected her, been the father of her children, humored her every whim. He had gone to meeting with her, rain or shine; he hadn't made a single complaint about her neglected housekeeping or late meals.

I've left Zimri out, she cried. I've fixed this all up between myself and the Lord without consulting Zimri! He wants a *wife*, not a woman preacher to live with! Already he works too hard. Already he leaves his work too often to take me where somebody needs me! I can't ask more of him. I can't! I promised twenty years ago to *care for* him as well as to love him. Oh, it was all right for Sibyl Jones to be a preacher. Eli was one too. Esther Frame can go right along with Nathan on their missions. But Zimri plows corn. Sibyl can't go away to preach while Zimri stays at home and makes the living for the family, without anybody even to sew his buttons on!

And all these years I haven't told him about the Dedication. I haven't told him about the Call. Now I can't tell him that I *want* to be a preacher.

Sibyl's tempestuous thoughts stopped, as a windstorm pauses for a new blast. Why did I ever marry? Why didn't I hold fast

to the Dedication as a child? Why did I fall in love? Why did I marry Zimri? If I was to preach, why wasn't I an old maid, like Aunt Rachel and Aunt Debbie?

The desolation of the child-hungry years of those two whom she had known so well took form before Sibyl. She cried aloud: "No Zimri? No Little Mary? No Albert? No Gurney? No Emily?"

By this time Sibyl was sobbing. There seemed no right way; no right way at all. But no longer could she endure alone the agony of the struggle within her. She stumbled into the next room and stood by the bed.

"Zimri!"

Zimri, asleep, must have perceived the urgency of her need. He was wide awake at once.

"I want to be a preacher, Zimri."

How like a man, how like Sibyl's man, not to be the least bit surprised! He didn't even sit up in bed. He listened to everything his wife told him of Dedication, Call, Voice, Wish — all her recurring unhappiness and struggle. Then he said, "Well, if you *ought* to be a preacher, of course you *will* be one. I don't see why you fooled around about it so long. Soon as I heard you speak that piece in the contest, first time we ever went together, I thought like as not you'd do something in public. Folks listen when you talk."

"And you married me anyway?"

"Of course. Lots of married women preach. What are you cryin' about, Mamma? Here. Get under the cover. You're shak-

ing.” It was so long before Sibyl could answer that she thought maybe Zimri had dropped off to sleep. It was too bad to keep him awake, but she had to talk this thing out. “How’ll we manage?”

“Manage what?”

“How can I leave home when I want to go out to preach?”

“Why, we’ll get along. Little Mary’s grown up. I can take you places not too far away, and you can go on the train when you need to.”

“But the children! They need me. Emily’s such a little girl. Gurney’s always getting sick. Albert’ll be going with the girls. Little Mary’s not very strong. Oh, Zimri, what can I do?”

“You wasn’t planning to go off to *stay*, was you?”

“Well, no . . .”

“Then why don’t you kind of divide yourself up? You’re good-sized.”

As if Sibyl hadn’t been dividing herself up into pieces for twenty years! But maybe she could do it still further . . .

“I’ve heard of women who didn’t seem to care much about their children and went galavanting off to give concerts or lectures all over the country. I’m not that kind of woman.”

“Of course you’re not.”

“I *care* about our children; maybe not quite as much as Sister Mary, but nearly. I want them all to go to the Academy and maybe to college and to be good useful folks. You do, too.”

“They’ve a good start. ’Twon’t hurt ’em any to learn to do things for themselves. Anyway, *I’ll* be here.”

“Oh, Zimri!”

“What?”

Sibyl was sobbing again. “You’ve *always* been here.”

Zimri didn’t know quite what she meant, but he didn’t ask her, and she didn’t explain. If she started in to talk about how he had always been like Uncle Jimmie’s windbreak, reminding him how he had nursed the whole family through sickness, and all the other things that came crowding into her mind, she never would stop her crying.

Anyway Zimri was saying, “Better go to sleep. Be four o’clock first thing you know.”

There was one thing more.

“Zimri.”

He sounded very sleepy. “Huh?”

“You — you don’t think I’m too awkward to be a preacher?”

“I never noticed about you being awkward.”

Zimri was asleep. Sibyl was never wider awake. Everything seemed so clear, so shining clear. She felt as if she had been moving about in a fog and had suddenly walked out into sunlight. She threw one arm over Zimri’s shoulder, but carefully, so as not to wake him. He needed his rest. He would need lots of rest if he was going to live with her the remainder of her life.

CHAPTER X

DEEPER, DEEPER

LITTLE MARY, dressing upstairs, heard a new note in her mother's voice as she sang while preparing breakfast. "Listen," she said to her young sister Emily, still half asleep.

"Listen to what?"

"To Mamma."

"She always sings before breakfast."

"But not *that* way!"

Little Mary dashed down the stairs. On the bottom step she stopped. Her mother's back didn't look any different—the same gray-calico dress, a little too tight over her broad shoulders, her graying hair not too neat—it never was this early—but the song seemed to roll forth from her heart in great joyous waves that filled the kitchen.

"You sound different, Mamma," Little Mary said when her mother turned.

"Do I? I didn't know anybody could *tell*."

"Tell what?"

"That I've finally shoved off the pack that's been on my back all these years!"

When Little Mary knew as much of the truth as Sibyl wanted

to explain to her, she said, "Why of course you can be a preacher, Mamma. You are one already. I've told you you sound like one. We'll get along all right when you go away — if you don't stay too long."

Sibyl set the dish she held on the table and took her young daughter in her arms.

"Thee'll have to help me, Mary — thee and Papa. The rest won't know how, till they're older."

There were weak congregations of the Quakers not far from the strong central ones. Sibyl's first step beyond making little talks in her own meetings was to visit, with "a message" these pastorless mission stations.

"I think I'd better go to Mosher Chapel tomorrow."

"They want me at Carrol next First Day."

Each time before she made one of these journeys she sat in the quietest place she could find, studying her Bible, meditating, praying. Even the boys and little Emily learned to respect this time of preparation.

The service at Carrol was held in the schoolhouse; the one at Mosher Chapel in a tiny building. To "step into the pulpit" in either place was to take one step upward, and sit upon a platform six by nine. There was nothing very alarming about it, yet Sibyl felt a great weight of responsibility. There was a "time of waiting," a song or two, a prayer, and then the people listened, even as Zimri had said they would listen. Often it was not a single Bible text but an entire loved chapter which was the basis of her talk. Those majestic parts which she had heard her



father read and had memorized in childhood were for her a rich storehouse.

Into her interpretation of her Bible reading went all the living that Sibyl had done in her father's family and in her own, all the nearness to sickness and sorrow and joy and happiness among relatives and neighbors. From her went out strong tentacles of understanding, reaching into the hearts of the people to whom she spoke. When she had finished and sat down, trembling with her effort, the heavy feeling of responsibility gradually gave way to the light one of gladness.

Dinner was late on those Sundays when Zimri and Sibyl drove three or five miles after twelve. Little Mary had her hands full, getting the younger children and herself off to Sunday School and having dinner well on the way. Sometimes upon the return of the parents there were reported minor tragedies — lost articles of clothing, buttons missing, quarrels, rebellions, meat burned, a sick horse, cows in the clover — how many disasters can happen to children left alone on a farm! Every child felt entitled to bring home at least one "company" for dinner. Four o'clock might see the great stack of dishes washed. Sunday certainly was not a day of rest.

THERE were meetings in the southern part of the state, and from these came calls for a visiting minister. A call was an opportunity not to be ignored. On the occasion of her first visit Sibyl "had quite a scramble to get off," she said. The train left at four on Saturday afternoon. The house must be cleaned,

chickens dressed for Sunday dinner, pies made, light bread baked.

"Now you must look nice," Little Mary said, and there was the hasty freshening of a collar, the pressing of a dress, the blacking of shoes, and Zimri saying, "We'll have to go if we don't want to miss that train." What a relief it was to Sibyl when she found herself at last sitting in the smoky coach on her way to that part of southern Illinois called Egypt's land!

Sibyl was warmly welcomed and comfortably housed. She was amused at the deference that was shown her. "These people treat me as if I were somebody," she said to herself. But next morning in the strange meeting house, with an unknown congregation before her, she was far from amused. She thought of all the trouble that might be stored up inside these people — of any group of people — sins unrepented, grudges held, loss of loved ones, breaking of faith in those trusted, financial worries, anxieties of parents about children, all the doubts and fears of the young and the old. She prayed that she might say the words that would help.

As the train sped along toward home on Monday morning, a great covering of satisfaction enveloped Sibyl. She must have preached pretty well, for the congregation had asked her to make the journey every other week, offering to pay her train fare and "a little more." With that little more perhaps she could buy a helpful book, and a few articles of clothing. She said to herself, "I'm a kind of pastor now, like Levi."

When the train passed the last station before home, Sibyl began to gather her belongings. Where was her suitcase? It didn't seem to be anywhere. She searched under seats and in racks. The brakeman came to the rescue and looked in exactly the same places. "I guess you don't have no suitcase," he said.

Sibyl's heart sank. No suitcase. If Mary Holaday ever heard of that she would say, "Oh, Sibyl, how careless thee is!" Its contents were not so valuable — to anyone except Sibyl! For her they would be hard to replace, and her precious "little more" would have to be spent in that way.

Zimri's first words were, "Where is your suitcase, Sibyl?"

"I don't have any," she said with a laugh that had a little bitterness in it. By the time she had convinced her husband that she really had sustained a great loss and had no idea which one of several women had walked off with her belongings, Sibyl thought that half of the male population of Vermilion, loafing on the station platform, had overheard enough to make them laugh inside.

Zimri never scolded, and that was a comfort. On the way home behind slow old Nell, she related all her experiences. With their recital she was feeling better until she opened the door at home. What a house! She knew how hard it had been for four children to get off to school on Monday morning. But the evidence of lack of cooperation was everywhere. She knew how Little Mary must have tried to prevent this medley of strewn clothes, unwashed dishes, unstrained milk, and flies, but it really was a disgrace! Before she took off her hat she dropped into a

chair, covered her face with her hands and cried! She thought of Leannah in her clean house with her lack of cares and ability to make everything work out right, and she cried harder. For her, being a preacher was no easy job.

But Sibyl dried her eyes and changed to her calico dress and went to work. She brought order again in the house and began to think of the week ahead, trying earnestly to systematize her many tasks. One thing was sure. She must find time to visit her mother. Was it possible that she was becoming so busy she was neglecting her?

I used to keep things separate, she thought. Now they're all mixed together.

She moved from home, to mother, to a sick neighbor, to meeting and back again, around and around, never stopping. But preaching was first. She had put it on top and there it would stay. Often she could feel the disapproval of some member of her father's family.

"Little Mary's not able for so much at home."

"Zimri neglects his farm, taking her so many places."

"She'd better look after the boys and Emily."

They didn't say these things where she could hear, and she was sure that Perry didn't even think them.

Perry built a little house for himself and his mother in Georgetown. It was a kind of refuge for Sibyl. When Sister Mary went there she cleaned up the kitchen, washed the accumulated soiled clothes and prepared a good meal. When Sibyl went, things were different. Once she took a roll of soft bright yarn and

said, "Knit something pretty out of it, Mother." Always she sat by her and talked to her of experiences and meetings and sermons. She left feeling rested, especially if there had been time for a talk with Perry, too.

On one of her visits on a summer afternoon Sibyl discovered Perry walking on air and trying hard to hide his jubilation.

"Well, what is it, Ped? Might as well tell me first as last."

"Can't a fellow have a secret?"

"Not from me."

"The Georgetown school board met last night."

"And they gave thee a big raise in salary."

"Better than that. I'm to be principal of the high school next year."

"No."

"That's what they tell me. I can't imagine why."

"They know a smart man when they see one."

"Oh, no, that's not it. They've noticed how long my arms are. They think I'll be able to manage the obstreperous boys."

"Oh, Perry, I'm glad! I'm glad all through. I wish our boys could have thee for a teacher."

"They have better at the Academy."

But the light in Perry's eyes was good to see.

PERRY's managing of big boys had little to do with his long arms. In fact he did much more managing of interests and activities than of boys. Subjects sometimes troubled Perry, but young students almost never.

Boys and girls entering Georgetown High School sometimes complained that the Principal's voice was too low; they couldn't hear what he said. They soon learned to be still enough to understand his explanation of a problem. They counted on settling down to work in the second week and found the schedule running smoothly on the second day. They missed the points of the Principal's slow humor until they learned its peculiar flavor. In a few weeks they learned to love the twinkle in his eye and to fear its glint. Until they recognized the warning sign, a few, a very few, learned, somewhere in the nether regions of the building, that his right arm was not only long but strong, and that his word, backed by that of his Board, was final.

For Perry, youth was Possibility. His job and that of the teachers under him, so far as he could make it so, was to guide, pull, push, move forward by any legitimate means, the potentiality easily seen or deeply hidden, in every individual student. Out of his own disappointment and his hard efforts at self-improvements came a rare power of identification of one person with others and as rare a power of directing students. To a "hopeless" boy, too awkward to walk across a room without stumbling, he spoke:

"Why don't you go out for track? I should think you'd make a good runner. Your legs are long, like mine. I wasn't so bad at your age."

To a too-fat lazybones: "Come on out and try for a place on the football team. We need more weight."

To a reader of dime novels stealthily concealed behind an algebra text: "Scott wrote some mighty stirring novels. Go up to the library and pick out one."

To a teacher ready to expel a youth: "Let's give him one more try. He's young. I'll have a visit with him."

To a "round-head," sick with slights and name-calling of his fellow students, ready to give up his aspirations and go into a coal mine like his father: "Stick to it a while longer. You'll win out, if you persevere."

To the entire group in assembly: "I grew up on a farm a few miles from here. I helped my father for a good many years and I learned some things I've never forgotten. I've always been interested in farming. If I didn't like to teach school so well I think I'd be a farmer. But if I were one, I'd want good soil for my crops. I've studied soil some, and it appears that the best you can have for an all-around farm is a *mixture*. You need humus because that furnishes some of the most necessary foods. You need some clay because that has other needed foods. You need sand to make the other two porous so that the air can reach the roots. Any one of these alone won't raise a good crop. Mix them all and there's not much limit to what you can grow."

There was a long pause. "You're excused."

If Harry or Jo or Bob didn't know what Professor Rees meant by that parable, there was some more understanding student to explain, and the Polish students from the mines north of town began to be assimilated.

To Perry Rees, being Principal of Georgetown High meant far more than keeping the wheels turning, counseling with teachers, instructing in mathematics, and directing all forms of athletics. It meant projecting his own life into hundreds of lives.

"I wish I could be a great teacher, like Barnabas Hobbs." The yearning still echoed in his whole being.

SIBYL didn't know exactly what kind of success Perry was making, but she heard complimentary things said about him by Georgetown Friends. He certainly was a fine-looking man now, in his nicely fitted clothes. She looked on him with great pride. Once she tried to put her feeling into words. Perry laughed and blushed. "No, that's all wrong. I still wonder why in the world they ever gave me this job."

"They didn't make any mistake."

"They don't know how hard I have to study to keep ahead of my classes. I get badly mixed up about things, too; especially the spelling of words. Only today I spelled 'few,' 'fiew' on the blackboard where everybody could see!"

Sibyl tried to joke away Perry's embarrassment. "Oh, that's nothing. Martha and Sarah always spell it that way. It's in the blood." But she saw that something was not just right with Perry. She wondered.

"I wish I'd had an education," he said.

"Thee graduated from the Academy, first one in the family."



"That's not enough, these days."

The conversation was an echo of one a few years earlier.

When Sibyl saw Sister Mary she asked, "Is Perry paying attention to some girl?"

"I don't know about Perry paying attention, but there's a girl trying her best to get him," Mary said.

"Well, maybe he wants to be caught." Sibyl laughed. "Thee'll never see the girl good enough for Perry, that's sure."

Across the road from Thomas Holaday's brown house and fruit orchards a stream flowed through hickories, walnuts, maples and oaks toward the Little Vermilion. A picnic on its banks involved no long journey for Thomas—and, alas, no fish. For Mary there was a minimum of fear of accidents. If too many Reeses arrived at once to be comfortably seated around her table it was easy enough to carry baskets of food and buckets of water and spread a cloth in a grassy spot.

True, there was a high rail fence to be manipulated but that wasn't much of a trick for farm folks. Mary climbed slowly and carefully up one side, turned at the top, took time to see that her calico dress was properly "down," and clambered to the ground with nothing above her shoe-tops showing. She taught her daughters to do as well.

But on the summer afternoon when Perry brought the pretty young teacher from the town school to get acquainted with his people, the fence became important. Lucy squealed when she

saw the hurdle. "Perry! I'll never get over that!"

With one joyous leap Perry was on the inside, steadying the top rail and giving directions. The older Reeses saw the light in Perry's gray eyes as he laughingly watched Lucy stand wavering on the top, saw him take her two soft hands in his—and turned away. Who could say how high that filmy gay-flowered dress might fly when Lucy should jump to the ground? They looked back when they heard her laugh bubble up like water from an artesian well, and saw Perry still holding those soft small hands and looking down into Lucy's big brown eyes, and they saw a new Perry; Perry in love at last.

When the meal was done and the dishes in the basket, Sibyl and Sister Mary walked away. Mary was still looking down her emphatically Rees nose. "She'll get him," she said bitterly. Sometimes when Sibyl was a trifle exasperated she drew out her words as Levi did for no reason at all. "We-ell, don't worry so, Mary. Nobody'll catch Ped against his will."

"But she's not suitable at all! Why, she's just a frivolous girl."

"Well, it looks good to me to see Perry happy for once!" Sibyl said, knowing that argument was of no use.

Back at the bank of the clear stream they saw Lucy ready to "speak a piece," although she would have called it "giving a reading." She had thrown aside her big hat, and its gay colors looked like bright spring flowers blooming in the grass. Her brown hair stood in a becoming pompadour. There was something compelling in her dark eyes. Already the little company was very still.

*"Bobby Shaftoe's gone to sea  
Silver buckles on his knee.  
He'll come back and marry me—  
Pretty Bobby Shaftoe."*

I couldn't have said it that way—not with half that much lilt, Sibyl thought.

But the poetry ended there. On through the story in beautiful prose Lucy's musical voice carried her listeners. They forgot high fences and gay dresses. They even forgot to look at Perry who lay on the grass propped on one elbow—his eyes never leaving the beloved face.

It's not a love story after all, Thomas Holaday thought, and was glad; only a tale of a schoolteacher and a little boy and a flood; of fear and trust; of terror and bravery and sacrifice.

"She's not as light as I thought," Mary whispered.

"Not light at all," Sibyl whispered back.

And once more there was the beautiful lilting verse:

*"Bobby Shaftoe's gone to sea  
Silver buckles on his knee.  
Pretty Bobby Shaftoe."*

It was on a day during the summer vacation that Sister Mary called Sibyl and with her voice a-quiver told what had happened to her favorite brother.

"Oh, Sibbie! Perry's been bit by a mad dog."

Through the long conversation, receivers went down on both

lines and by the time Mary had finished, both communities were sharing her anxiety.

On a Saturday morning Perry had walked out to Thomas Holaday's farm. Two miles wasn't far for his long legs. When he saw that Thomas was making hay, nothing would do but he must put on some old clothes and take a hand till noon. Perry couldn't get over being a farmer even if he was Principal of Georgetown High School. Mary said she had baked a green-apple pie and got an extra good dinner, though any dinner at Mary's was good enough, Sibyl thought, and after he'd sat down and had a good visit with her and the girls, he'd walked back to town. When he started across the bridge over the "crick" he noticed a dog running toward him. Perry always liked any living animal, and he didn't notice that foam was dripping from its mouth and that its teeth were bared.

The bite was a deep one on the shin. With the other foot he kicked, striking right under the chin, and the dog rolled over, dead. Very few people ever saw Perry Rees angry, and there wasn't anybody to see him then, but he picked up that dead dog and threw it as hard as he could into the water. He felt better when he saw it float downstream. It was quite a while before he realized what a foolish thing he had done. And here he was, posing as an educated man; didn't know enough to save that dog's head and send it away to be examined. Maybe the beast wasn't mad at all. Nobody would ever know.

Perry was the only person who could joke about what had happened. Sister Mary was in a panic. Sibyl found it hard to

put her mind on the next sermon while Perry was away taking the Pasteur treatment. Both were constantly asking themselves, "What if . . ." and never daring to answer the question. Had they loved Perry too well, that this great calamity had befallen him?

They counted the days — the prescribed time for the development of the disease. They passed and Perry came home. He could still laugh. "I never did like that crick; not since it tried to drown me when I was a boy — the time I went after the doctor for Mother. Now I'm even — giving it that dog's head."

But Perry, when alone, did not laugh. He couldn't put out of his mind the old idea that in seven years the madness might come.

"There's nothing in it," Omar said, and Omar was a doctor. He ought to believe him. He couldn't tell anybody why the idea persisted in haunting him. There was a reason. It was that vulnerable spot Cupid had found in Perry's armor. He wanted Lucy.

He had wanted college. But this was different. No matter what else he had, he would have wanted Lucy.

The problem of marriage had been hard enough before it was complicated by being threatened by a horrible disease. On that very Saturday he had meant to talk to Sister Mary and had lost his nerve.

Now two questions instead of one filled his mind until he really had trouble keeping ahead of his algebra class.

"Suppose I should marry Lucy and then in seven years . . ." He couldn't allow the thought.

Perry had looked out for his mother until it had become a habit of his life. But he couldn't ask the gay and laughing Lucy to come into his small house and live with his slow-moving mother. It wouldn't work. Both would be unhappy. Round and round went the ideas in his head in his waking and sleeping hours. He had missed college and all that it meant. Must he miss wife and children?

It was Sibyl who saw Perry's trouble, written on his good face, and this time she went right to the point.

"What's the matter, Perry?"

Perry blushed, but he spoke the truth. "I'd like to get married if I knew I wouldn't ever have hydrophobia, and if I could answer the question of how to have Mother cared for."

His two problems were out at last and it was a relief to have brought them into the open.

"Thee won't have hydrophobia. Will said so. I wrote him a letter myself, first one in years, and asked him. He said it couldn't be."

"That's what Omar said."

"Why didn't thee believe Omar?"

"I don't know. Maybe because he used to be my little brother. I could sit on him."

Both smiled.

"Thee can believe Will. Thee never sat on him, as I remember."

"Yes, I guess I can believe Will."

"About Mother — I don't know. I wish I could take her and give her a home the rest of her life. Zimri would be perfectly willing. But she'd never stand the racket. Boys about grown up are noisier than little ones. And besides . . ." Sibyl stopped.

"Yes?"

"Besides, I'm trying *so* hard to be a preacher!"

"I know. I understand, Sibyl."

"We're a little alike, I reckon," Sibyl said.

"How does thee mean?"

"Oh, we both want things so bad. Thee wants to be a teacher and I want to be a preacher."

"Thee *is* a preacher."

"I'm the best I can be with all my handicaps. The Lord knows that."

"And I'm the best teacher I can be with all my shortcomings. I hope He knows that, too. I tried once to go to college — thought I was going, in fact."

"Why, I didn't know about it. Why didn't thee get there?"

"Oh it just didn't work out."

Silence, while Perry remembered, and Sibyl understood.

"There'll be a way, Perry, and if Lucy'll have thee, thee must marry her."

Perry dashed away a tear and jumped to his feet. "Now that's an idea! Maybe she won't have me!" They were both laughing.

"But I think I'll ask her! She might!"

It was Sister Mary who made a way for Perry to found a real home. She and Thomas could educate their younger daughters to better advantage if they lived at Vermilion rather than Elwood. And they could build a special room on their house for Mother—a big one where she could have her old chest of drawers and her familiar possessions. It was Mary, too, who made Perry's little house spick-and-span for the young bride.

"I thought thee didn't like her," Sibyl couldn't resist whispering in the kitchen the day of the infare dinner.

"Who? Lucy? Why of course I like her. She's Perry's wife."

"Thee said she wanted him and was determined to have him."

"Well, maybe I did. But any girl with sense would want Perry. No use to hold it against Lucy that she was lucky enough to get him. Anyway, Perry needed somebody who could make him laugh more. Bert's foolish enough so he needed Anna to steady him. The boys' wives don't all have to be alike."

Sibyl laughed till she cried. "There's nobody like thee, Mary Holaday. Nobody in the world!"

THE elders began to say to each other, "Sibyl Haworth seems to have a gift in the ministry. It may be that we should recognize it."

The cautious said, "She is a good exhorter. Time will tell whether she is a minister."

Friends make haste slowly in the "recording" of their min-



isters. A year passed — a year of ministering, and exhorting. Sometimes after Sibyl had given a talk she thought, “Maybe that was a sermon — a *little* sermon.” But she always pushed the thought away as unworthy. “All I have to do is to talk to the people,” she told herself.

It was Little Mary who opened the door the afternoon The Committee came. She found her mother in the kitchen.

“There’s somebody to see you, Mamma — meeting folks.”

“Well! Now what can they want?” Sibyl said as she took off her apron and smoothed her flying hair.

Moses Reynolds and the other good Friends talked with Sibyl about the gifts she possessed, the “call” she felt, and prospects of opportunities to preach. When they went away, leaving behind them cheering and encouraging words which were sure evidence of their faith in her, Sibyl knew that first steps were being taken to record her as a minister. On her next visit to her mother she said, almost shyly, “Mother, I guess maybe they’re going to record me.”

“I’m not surprised; not a bit surprised. We asked for one preacher in the family and got two. The Lord gives good measure.”

Now that she was a real preacher, Sibyl sat on the high platform at all meetings. Little Mary saw to it that she had suitable clothes and made sure that her petticoat didn’t show before she left home. When September came, Little Mary said, “I think you ought to go to Yearly Meeting, Mamma.”

Sibyl had a fleeting memory. "Father always wanted to go to Yearly Meeting but he never could afford to go."

Father! He hadn't been much in her mind of late years. Oh, in a way he was always there of course, but the old tearing cry of need for him hadn't been with her for several years. When had it left her? Was it "that night"? The night when the Wish, with so great travail, had come to time of birth?

She called herself back to her daughter's suggestion.

"I can't leave home that long."

"Oh, yes, you can, Mamma. We'll get along."

"We can't afford it."

Family finance was Zimri's province. "'Twon't cost much for train fare, and maybe you can take along a box of things to eat."

"I wish you could go, too, Zimri."

"I'm not a preacher. It don't matter about me. I think you ought to go."

"Zimri thinks I ought to go to Yearly Meeting," Sibyl told her sister Mary.

"Why, Sibbie, how can thee leave home for a week?"

"Oh, I guess they can manage."

Mary knew that Sibyl would go, and there was no use to object, so she began to help with plans. "Thee'll need a nice new black dress. If thee only wasn't so big, I'd loan thee mine."

"I thought I'd get Kate to make over my old one. She can turn it and fix it so it'll look well enough."

So Kate the seamstress came to sew at Zimri's, that part of

her dress toward the left shoulder full of needles with threads and a tape measure dangling, her mouth full of pins past which she talked, poking fun at herself about the fat widower who wanted her for a wife. Everybody around Vermilion liked to have Kate come to sew. Now she not only turned Sibyl's dress and made it look like new but she refurbished her complete wardrobe, including her hat. Kate was handy that way.

WHEN Sibyl got off the train at Plainfield, Indiana, and walked up the street in company with others going to the same place, she was conscious of the fulfillment of a dream of years. In her first memories, Plainfield had been the name of the place where the beautiful silk bonnets of the women Friends were made. For many years now it had been the home of the yearly gathering of Friends from western Indiana and eastern Illinois. Every September she had longed to come. At last she was walking up the gravel path through the grove of trees to the large meeting house, with a feeling of exaltation which made her want to break forth into song.

Sibyl walked in and sat upon a long hard bench, not too near the back, not too near the front. She looked about her and saw a few familiar faces. She looked to the front where a platform extended across the width of the room, with rows of benches to accommodate all ministers. These seats were almost filled. She looked them over. Among them were a few men and women whom she had known since her youth — people who had grown old in that service she was but entering. She

saw herself, too, growing old, and wondering whether the years would bring to her the repose of facial expression, the poise of spirit these seemed to possess.

But not all the preachers were old. There were the young, some showing by their uneasy attitudes that this was their first experience in sitting on the high platform of the Yearly Meeting house. And Sibyl was glad that some had begun their ministry in the days of their youth, not waiting, waiting until middle age, as she had done.

But there were some who were neither young nor old—middle-aged, like me, she thought. And there, among them, was Leannah, as beautiful in face and form as God had made her, and as neat as her black clothes and her own care could contrive. For a second, Sibyl looked down at her own made-over dress and her big hands. But she raised her head. I'm the way God made me, and Kate did a pretty nice job on my clothes, she thought with satisfaction.

Between the rows of seats in the middle of the high platform was a long table, as solid as the Friends who sat behind it. From her experience in smaller gatherings Sibyl knew their positions: the presiding clerk—a keen-eyed, heavy-set man with full beard; the reading clerks—two plainly dressed, capable-appearing women; the announcing clerk—a young man, less imposing in appearance than the others.

Ah! It was a treat to sit in Yearly Meeting and figure everything out! Sibyl listened to the business. There was great diversity of opinion on the subject under discussion. In Yearly Meet-

ing any Friend might speak; the youngest, the oldest, minister, elder, man, woman, all had equal rights. But how frankly some were expressing themselves! Did she imagine it, or was there a shade of willfulness and bitterness creeping in? Sibyl held her breath. Could such a thing happen in Yearly Meeting, of all places?

The presiding clerk was standing. He was speaking, with no haste and without raising his voice: "Friends" — he paused until there was not a sound in the big room — "Friends, let us pray."

Heads lowered. The minutes passed. Outside on the expansive lawn a child cried but no one seemed to notice. Slowly but surely the tension which had been tightening slackened. Leahnah's clear voice rang out, "*Praise God from whom all blessings flow,*" and the people sang with her.

"Does any Friend wish to speak further on the subject under consideration?" the clerk asked. They spoke calmly and carefully now. One yielded an inch, and another two inches, and there was understanding where there had been impatience. There was silence in which the clerk wrote busily. Again he waited. Was everyone entirely satisfied? He passed his writing to the first reading clerk who could truthfully read, "*It is the sense of this meeting that . . .*" The decision which had been reached was not a decision of majority or minority but a "sense of the meeting." The crisis had been passed.

Sibyl had never heard so much good preaching. She stood before the meeting as one who had been recorded during the

year. Out of meeting hours she made friends. She talked with old ones. She roomed with a woman who had been a stranger but became a life-long friend. She ate cold meals out of her box of provisions. She had a few warm meals in the basement of the church where Plainfield women were serving them. She was invited to picnic lunches on the grounds. She exchanged experiences with other women preachers. She was given an inconspicuous place on a committee. It rained and she ran for shelter into the big tent provided for overflow meetings, and she figuratively touched the hem of the garment of a truly great minister who had likewise sought protection. There was a change of weather and she shivered because she had brought no coat with her in hot September. She went home with a cold, and a determination never to miss a Yearly Meeting unless she was sick in bed or because her going would cause *Zimri* to fail to make a payment on the mortgage.

THERE was more to this business of being a preacher than talking in meetings and sympathizing with folks, *Sibyl* found.

One night there was a knock at the front door. *Albert*, who was fourteen, ran to see who was there while the assembled family plus the hired man, *Zeb*, waited with poised forks. *Albert* came back bursting with excitement. "Mam! You're goin' to tie your first knot!"

*Sibyl* looked so terrified that everybody laughed. She said, "Mercy me!" but she made no move to get up. "What'll I do?"

*Zimri* took matters in hand. "I'd better go see what they

want. Maybe they don't want to get married at all."

They did want to be married, and they had driven all the way from southern Illinois to have Sibyl Haworth marry them. She slipped into her room and put on her Sunday dress. She could not face them in calico. She took her Bible and the Friends Discipline in hand and, feeling as though she were stepping to the gallows, went into her own parlor. She recognized the couple vaguely as coming from Egypt and it was a great embarrassment to ask their names. They giggled nervously. "We thought it would be different to have a woman preacher say the ceremony," the youth explained.

Sibyl tried to examine the necessary papers, and in her excitement could not make head nor tail of them. She asked Zimri to see that all was in order.

"You'll have to have some witnesses," Zimri told her. She looked doubtfully at his soiled overalls. "Well, I guess you'll have to be a witness, Zimri."

"There must be two. That's according to law. Pity Little Mary's not quite old enough."

He opened the parlor door and called, "Albert, tell Zeb we need him in here."

The hired hand was willing to oblige.

Sibyl did her best to make the ceremony sacred and impressive, but she was bothered by the lack of wedding garments on the witnesses and the sure feeling she had that her four children were peering in at a crack in the door. Once she distinctly heard Albert snicker. But when it was over, one

thing was certain. That couple was tied in an entirely original way. The ceremony was a mixture of Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the Friends Discipline and Sibyl's own ideas. Zimri and the hired man hurried out before she gave the parting admonitions. Zeb held his big hand over his mouth until he reached safety. Zimri said he had to turn the horses out to pasture, but usually there wasn't anything about that to make him laugh.

It was Albert who called his mother back to earth after the couple had driven happily away. She entered the living room, her face wearing that exalted look that followed some worthy deed. "How much did they pay you, Mam?"

"Why!" There was dismay in her voice. "I never once thought of that!"

Evidently the groom didn't think, either.

WHILE Little Mary was in the Academy she had a good many chances to use the parlor her parents had provided in building the new house when she was six. When her shyness began to slip from her it uncovered a sweet retirement which the boys liked. Eyes as blue as William Rees', hair dark and cloudy like the Haworths', form slight, unlike any of the relatives — Sibyl looked at her and thought in those unforgotten words of Brother Will, "She's not gangling," and Sibyl was glad.

And now her oldest child was graduating from the Academy. "Our folks most all graduated from the Academy," Sibyl said with a little family pride. "Brother Perry was the first, and



since then there's been nearly a steady stream — Omar and Bert and Martha's Anna Lou and all Sister Mary's girls."

Little Mary wore a long white dress with four flounces on the skirt, each edged with fine lace. Sibyl made the dress herself, and even if she wasn't an expert seamstress it was as pretty as any. Mary wore her hair in a pompadour with a white tulle rosette on one side. That style made her face look a little less thin. They had a speaker that year. It wasn't as nice as when they used to say their own orations. Perry's was fine and Bert's — oh, Bert's oration fairly brought down the house! But that was back before Father died.

Sibyl was thinking all this during the speech, which really wasn't as good as some. So she let herself remember Father, and his determination that his children and all children of Friends should have an education; how he had been one of that first committee who had founded the Academy; of how glad he would be if he were alive, to see his grandchildren graduating. She and Zimri had schemed quite a bit to be able to buy the gold watch for Little Mary, but a child needed some reward. It was shining now, pinned against her dress on the left side. The gift made her very happy.

SOMETHING else was making Little Mary happy that spring. She had had beaux aplenty. But Lon was different. Who'd ever have thought that Mary's first real love affair would be with a hired hand?

But this hired hand was as unlike the usual ones as you could

well imagine. In the first place he hadn't been one for long, and just to look at him you knew Lon wouldn't remain one. He was only a farmer boy having his first adventure away from home in a neighboring state, wanting to earn his own money before he settled down to marry a home girl and work with his father. In fact his father had the girl picked out, and Lon didn't exactly want his father to pick his wife. At least he wasn't ready.

Whatever the summer was for Lon, for Little Mary it was heaven.

Even after a long day's work in the field, when he came in hot and dusty, a thorough splashing at the wash-bench by the kitchen door made Lon look clean and handsome. At the supper table Albert and Gurney often made their sister blush to the roots of her hair, but Lon could laugh everything off.

And on the nights when Papa said they could have the horse and buggy, Mary chose carefully from her not-too-plentiful supply of dresses and matching hair ribbons.

"They make a fine-looking couple," Sibyl remarked, when they walked out to the buggy to ride away. Lon was a big blonde with a light thatch standing straight off his high forehead. Mary's cloud of dark hair and her soft clinging ways contrasted with everything about Lon.

"Living in the house with him, I know him so well," Little Mary boasted to her best friend. From breakfast to dinner wasn't such a long time, because there was always work to do. From dinner to supper one could endure because of those hours

after supper that were coming — hours on the porch or in the parlor or riding out somewhere on the moonlight nights.

Sleeping, Little Mary dreamed of Lon, just across the hall in the boys' room, and soon it was breakfast again, with Mamma reading the chapter, and another day starting off right.

Never had Little Mary had such color in her cheeks or such a light in her eyes.

"What she needed was somebody to make love to her, I guess," Zimri said. "Lon's a good worker. I never have to tell him what to do. He'll always make a good living. I hope he means business."

But Sibyl wasn't quite easy in her mind. "He's a nice boy. Do you s'pose he's really serious or is he just putting in the time? Sometimes I wonder. I'd hate to see Mary get hurt."

Little Mary's heaven lasted for three months. With a few hours' warning, Lon packed up his clothes and went home. He wrote one letter afterward, to tell Little Mary he was going to be married. His father's health had failed and he was going to take over the farm. He said he would always remember the pleasant summer.

Sibyl saw the roses fade from her daughter's cheeks and the light go out of her eyes.

Zimri had nursed the children through their childish diseases, but he couldn't do much now. "He wasn't ever in love with anybody but me, and he never had a doubt but that he'd get me; this is another job for me, I guess," Sibyl said to herself.

She had often enough handed out solace to other lovelorn girls, but the phrases now were empty. Whenever she tried to speak them Little Mary didn't seem to hear. Sibyl's heart ached. And she was really worried. This apathy was worse than measles.

"Mamma, did you really love Charlie?"

Mary had certainly caught her mother unaware.

"Charlie? Charlie who?"

"The one you talked about once, when Emily was a baby."

Sibyl knew she must be truthful. "Why, yes, I did. He was everything to me then."

For a moment Sibyl thought that maybe Mary was seeing how possible it was to throw aside a childish love when an adult one came.

"But you were only fourteen, you said. Of course a person could get over something that happened at fourteen."

Seventeen, it seemed, was next thing to old age. Sibyl turned her back to hide a smile.

The family tried to help. Albert whistled, Gurney sang, Emily played the organ. Nothing worked.

"I guess we'd better send Mary away somewhere. I don't know what to do with her," Sibyl sighed to her patient husband. "This is a real sickness."

So Zimri stretched the family finances and found the money to send his daughter to school where she could forget. There must be new clothes and a trunk, which meant a trip to Danville, the county seat.

Sibyl and Little Mary were in the biggest store, looking at materials for a dress — a best dress. Already that terrible apathy was slipping away.

At the next counter a drummer was displaying piece goods to the head clerk. He was fat, bald and jolly. He leaned far over the counter. His position, together with his loud talk and laughter, put a terrible strain on the buttons of his vest, stretched across his big stomach, and all other buttons involved. His coat went up in the back to reveal a line of white shirt like the stripe around the belly of a Berkshire shoat. For the first time in weeks, Little Mary broke into a subdued laugh.

Sibyl said, "I don't think we've found just what we want here." She, too, was nearly choking. "I know that man," she said on the street. "Well, anyway, I *used* to know him. His name was Charlie, when he was a boy."

"Why, Mamma! Not that awful fellow!"

"Yes, that awful fellow."

"Why you simply couldn't ever have loved a man like that."

"But I did. He didn't look the same."

There was a little silence as they walked along Main Street.

"But you didn't act a bit excited, Mamma!"

"I'm not. We better hurry. Zimri'll be waiting."

They walked very fast, but between breaths Sibyl said confidently, "There's nearly always a Zimri waiting, Mary."

SIBYL'S younger children didn't show proper respect for their minister mother, Thomas Holaday thought. One of his chil-

dren didn't make the mistake more than once of laughing at a preacher — any preacher.

But there was lots of Rees in Gurney — you couldn't suppress it. And the others enjoyed Sibyl's confusion and helped to increase it, whenever Gurney started something.

"Now, Sibbie."

"Sibyl's my name. And I'm your mother."

"Aunt Mary calls you Sibbie."

"Only when she's provoked with me."

"Now, Sibbie, I'm not provoked with thee."

"Zimri, why don't you make him behave?"

"Now, Sibbie."

"Emily, will thee fill the bread plate, please?"

"Now, Sibbie, can thee tell me why you mix up your thee's and thou's, as thou dost?"

That mixture of pronouns sent the family into a roar.

"I didn't know I ever said anything wrong."

"You say 'you' to Papa and Albert and me, and 'thee' to Mary and Emily. Now what's the sense in that?"

"Maybe 'you' is masculine and 'thee' feminine," Albert said.

"She says 'thee' to Uncle Perry. I've heard her," Emily affirmed.

"And 'you' to the rest of her brothers most of the time," Gurney added.

"Well, do I *have* to be consistent?" Sibyl wanted to know. "Can't I be the way I am?"

And Sibyl went right on being the way she was.

ON a Monday afternoon she was riding home from Egypt on the same smoky train that had brought her from her first pastoral journey. The trip was familiar and she had learned never to let her suitcase out of her sight.

Zimri met her at the dingy station. She knew by the sag of his shoulders that something was wrong.

"It's Gurney. Just about lung fever this time, I guess."

"Drive faster, can't you?"

Sibyl leaned forward trying to push horse, buggy and passengers. She didn't love Gurney best, but all the twelve years of his life she had had a fight with his lungs. There's a particular tie to a sickly child.

At home she flew into action with her usual remedies but when the doctor came he said "pneumonia, and an ugly case of it."

"Do you s'pose one of the boys could come?"

Will and Omar had practices that filled their time but they were still the boys.

Omar came, bringing his wife Lydia with him.

NOBODY in the family, except Perry, knew much about how Omar got through medical school. He wanted above all things to go, and he went. He never talked about the hard work and the deprivation it meant. When he finished training he married nurse Lydia, with no fuss about it. Then he brought his wife to see his mother and the other relatives, who wondered what the choice of Omar would be.

Dr. O. H. was distinguished in appearance. His red, kinky hair set him apart. He weighed two hundred plus and his size was an asset. His perfectly tailored clothes helped also. He wore the dignity of his profession with no trouble at all. There was a difference between Omar's dignity and Levi's, for Omar's could be laid aside while he laughed at himself. His family waited for his slow words, expecting them to be funny, and they often were.

Lydia was a tall and self-possessed person — a strange one to come into the Rees family. One thing everybody discovered while Lydia was being weighed in the family balances; she understood Omar well enough to know what he meant by a lifted eyebrow, when to the Reeses his words were riddles.

"Mona was different; Lucy was different; but Lydia is the most different yet," was Sister Mary's verdict. "I wonder if we can ever feel she is one of us."

"Let's hope so," Sibyl said.

When doctor and nurse arrived at Zimri's house things began to happen. With a boy gasping for breath there was no time for jokes or speaking in riddles. Dr. O. H. rolled up his sleeves over his freckled, hairy arms. Lydia slipped into her snowy uniform. Together they changed the parlor into a hospital. Both faced the facts of kerosene lamps and no running water. Sibyl's coal-stove oven must serve for baking bandages and swabs. Her big kettles must be turned into sterilizers for instruments. Her sheets must be sacrificed when needed. The battle for Gurney's life was on. It wasn't a skirmish. It lasted



for days. At times defeat seemed certain, but the two never confessed it. The lung filled, was drained, filled again, yielded quantities of heavy liquid, filled again. Between punctures the child sat breathing from an oxygen tank, brought from afar.

Victory came, and Omar went back to his neglected practice, saying nothing of what he had lost. Lydia stayed to keep all that had been gained. Long before she left she had proved herself for all time.

When Lydia had kissed Sibyl good-bye and Sibyl had tried to thank her, she dried her tears and went to the telephone to call Sister Mary.

“A family’s a great institution.”

The connection wasn’t good.

“I can’t understand a word thee says, Sibbie.”

Sibyl tried again.

“It’s a wonderful thing to have a nurse in the family. Omar didn’t make any mistake when he married Lydia.”

“Did thee just now learn that? I’ve known it a long time.”

“But nobody else could have pulled Gurney through.”

“Thee means nobody else *would*. Lydia’d do anything for Omar’s folks.”

And Mary Holaday had been the main one to think maybe Lydia wouldn’t ever “fit in”!

THROUGH the sicknesses and heartbreaks, the fun and escapades of childhood, Sibyl’s children grew to maturity, and Sibyl was with them.

She went to Academy contests when young Emily, with her mother's compelling voice, won prizes; to field meets where Albert won medals; to community programs of Brother Bert's making; even to football games acting as if she really understood the game, but in truth thinking of how the Quakers had changed in her lifetime.

Sibyl preached here, she preached there. She held "protracted meetings." She brought peace where there was division. She guarded against fanaticism. She warned against the wolf in sheep's clothing and kept him out of the fold. She was a "part-time" pastor. She visited the sick and dying; she went on strange missions to men in prison and to women who led questionable lives. Sometimes a neighbor in need called her in the middle of the night when the entrance of a new life threatened the life of a mother.

She went to the joyous weddings of nieces and nephews. She was with Tom and Florence when all the skill of brothers Will and Omar and nurse Lydia couldn't save little Willie—William Rees the fifth. And always she went to funerals. She preached many of the sermons, but whatever her place during the service, in the graveyard, in storm or rain or glaring sun, she stood by the bereaved, saying the needed word or saying no word at all, as the occasion demanded.

She wished they had asked her to preach Moses Reynolds' funeral. There were things she would like to have said about changes and charity and walking in the middle of the road. But out of respect for Eunice there wasn't any sermon. A few

Friends spoke, very briefly, about the good life of Moses and the way he had lived up to his name. Much of the time there wasn't a word said. Of course there was no singing, and the organ seemed to withdraw farther into its corner during that hour. The pastor made a nice prayer at the last, but he hadn't known Moses long enough. Altogether it was a kind of "betwixt and between" funeral, Sibyl told her children when she went home.

When she heard of the death of William Reynolds who had removed to other parts she took time to sit alone thinking of how as a child she went to his wedding, of his friendship with her father, of his consistent conservative life. She hoped that in his funeral service, the beginning, the middle and the end were all silence, as he would have wished them to be.

Nearly every year Sibyl went to her own Yearly Meeting, and sat upon the high platform among the preachers. There even came a time when she sat with the visiting ministers in a Yearly Meeting not her own, and preached to a crowded house of unknown people. Among them may have been some beginner who reverently touched the hem of her garment.

Just one thing seemed to be denied Sibyl. She was not a full-time pastor, living in a little white parsonage by a meeting house, with a congregation of her very own.

No, Zimri was a farmer, and she was a farmer's wife. She would always be that.

It was easier for Sibyl to visit her mother during the ten

years she lived in Sister Mary's home. Just a stone's throw from the Academy and meeting house was the place that belonged to Thomas and Mary. Nearly every time Sibyl went to Vermilion she could run in to see her mother. And if she couldn't go herself she could send Little Mary. Sometimes she purposely sent her daughter in her place. Little Mary was the favorite grandchild.

Mother's room became a kind of shrine to which all the Reeses journeyed. Mother had presentiments about her children coming to see her. Since she usually spoke of them after the visitors arrived, everybody smiled. But the children did come. Will came least often of the sons, and he brought into Mother's room something related to awe. He could perform such wonderful operations with his long, slender hands! His manners were so refined, so little like those of a "real Rees." But Mother looked closely at his face — Will hadn't changed at heart. His smile was still sweet.

Omar and Lydia brought gifts when they came; not useful, practical shawls or slippers, but a basket of golden fruit or a potted plant. Mother's yet plump hands touched the oranges with more thought of their beauty than flavor. She herself watered the plant and counted the buds, reveling in the color and form of the opening blossoms. No other daughter-in-law knew so well how to satisfy that always-curbed longing for beauty, as the wife of Omar.

Tom and his fine family had come to live at Vermilion now, buying ancestral acres once swamp land, now rich for the rais-

ing of corn. When Mother was sick, Tom's arms were strongest to lift her and his touch gentlest.

Bert came evenings, lounged in a comfortable chair, and kept Sister Mary's family hilarious with his good talk. Mother smiled contentedly even if she didn't hear every word. It was good to look at Bert.

And Perry — ah, Perry was the one most like his Father! He sat close to his mother and hardly had to raise his voice, so accustomed she had become in all their years of living together to his low tones. She loved Perry's visits best.

Sister Mary never had too many Reeses in her sitting room or at her table. She liked to have the family dinners at her house.

One day Thomas came walking fast from the post office. Sister Mary could tell when he had a letter. A few minutes later she was at the telephone talking excitedly.

"Sibyl! Martha's coming! In two weeks! For a good long visit! Let's get all the rest together — Sarah and Will and Omar." Sibyl thought maybe the boys couldn't come. "Well they can just leave their sick folks for *one* day," Mary said.

They sat at the long table — Rebecca Rees, mother of all, at one end, Will at the other because he was the master carver. Did he not know the exact position of every bone, muscle, and tendon? (Omar did also, but Will had seniority rights.) On Rebecca's right sat Martha because she was the oldest and had come the farthest. On her left sat Sarah, because she said softly, "I'd like to sit by Mother."

There was a hush. It was Thomas Holaday's table. He hesitated a second, then said, "Will thee return thanks, Sibyl?"

There could have been silence, as usual; or Thomas himself could have said grace; or he could have asked Tom Rees, being the oldest of the Rees men since Levi was gone. But before the entire company, he had singled out her.

Sibyl waited a little till she could push back that unworthy thought of pride. And the thanks which she gave bore no relation to blessings rattled off to fulfill a religious requirement. There was no doubt about the prayer being her soul's sincere desire.

Perry was the one who had pride. He thought there never were four better women or better cooks than his four sisters, although their sisters-in-law certainly did make them look to their laurels. He was inordinately proud of the two doctors. He mentioned Levi with awe. Bert was hard to beat as a school superintendent. Tom was a number-one farmer. In the next generation some of his nieces and nephews were headed straight for their A.B. degrees in college. And the climax of his pride came when he looked at his Lucy and their two lovely little daughters. Not one of his brothers or sisters had a finer family than he.

Of course Perry said not a word of how proud he was, but it showed in his face, in the tilt of his fine head, the straightness of his shoulders. Omar saw it—Doctor Omar with his flaming hair and not an ounce of family pride.

"Ped," he said, with great seriousness, "did you ever hear

of that ancestor of ours over in Ohio who froze to death in a drunken stupor?"

The door opened and there was one more guest. Sister Emily's Will had come! How could he stay away? The young brother of the Rees boys he seemed—as tall and straight as any, so much like his uncle Bert you couldn't tell them apart from the back. Another chair! Another plate! Move over somebody. There must be room for the son of Sister Em. A flash of sadness. Levi had no children. Levi had left no one to represent him.

Out of a common past one and another drew some remembrance which bore the odor of a pressed flower found in an old book. Perry wound little quotations from Riley into the chain of remembrance. Bert said parts of his own poem about the old home. The dinner was good that day, for who could fix chicken and dumplings like Mary Holaday? But the dinner was as nothing in comparison with the fact of being together and the smile on the face of the mother of them all.

"Was this the last reunion with Mother?" Sibyl wondered, when the good day was done. So many sick spells she had suffered of late. The boys said she was about worn out. "But isn't it remarkable how long she has outlived Father?"

REBECCA'S passing was more like a translation than a death. She had gone once more to Quarterly Meeting. Sibyl led her mother up the aisle and to her place on the platform, where the mother and daughter sat side by side. When "the Spirit moved her"

Rebecca stepped forward and prayed. Something of the old Quaker singsong was in her voice, and all of the old Quaker sincerity and simplicity were there. It was a beautiful prayer by one who in all her life was never more beautiful than on that day. It was Sibyl's custom to offer prayer, but she was silent. Mother had spoken for both.

After Rebecca's funeral, the children gathered at Sister Mary's home. Mother was gone. For weeks Mary was to hear the tap of her cane and try to answer her call for help in the night. Sibyl would think, "I must go to see Mother today."

But after all, Sibyl thought, things were right. What a good long life! Eighty-seven! She glanced at that far-off day in a thicket of blackberries when she learned why she was named Sibyl. She thought much more of those recent hours when Mother had rejoiced in the progress of her youngest daughter's ministry.

Two candles had stood lighting life's path for Sibyl. When the wind had extinguished the first, she thought she could not see her way. Now the second had been blown out. She no longer needed the lights, but the perfume of their dying flames would for all time sweeten her life.



## CHAPTER XI

### *THE OVERFLOWING WATERS*

SIBYL'S ability to perform a marriage ceremony improved with practice. When she did it for Albert not a single amusing thing happened. By the time a few years later, when she said the words for her own Little Mary, she could move with calmness and great solemnity through the ordeal. This was in the autumn of 1914, when the world was thinking of the tearing apart and wrecking of unions of nations, rather than of the making of simple little bindings in family parlors.

But for the Haworths, the war was far away and unreal, while Little Mary's marriage was near and very important. A year before she had met the handsome young Southerner whom she would marry.

"I've found my Zimri, Mamma," she wrote from her position in a girls' school in the South. A little later she came home, engaged, radiant. Now she could laugh about Lon, even as her mother had laughed about Charlie. Between the time she was seventeen and her twenty-eighth year there had been quite a procession of "nice boys." She lumped them all together as "those before Jack."

The wedding was at the end of a hot September day. That

morning in her upstairs room Little Mary was awakened by her brother Gurney singing below her window.

*“’Tis thy wedding morning  
Shining in the skies,  
’Tis thy wedding morning  
Rise, sweet maid arise, arise.”*

Sibyl, fork in hand, went to the kitchen door the better to hear Gurney’s tenor voice, so like her brother Perry’s.

“Now what way could be nicer for a brother to wake his sister on her wedding day?” she asked herself and, choking back the tears, turned to the frying of the thick sweet slices of home-cured ham.

But Little Mary was calling down the stairs, “Why don’t *you* sing, Mamma?”

Sibyl dabbed her eyes with the corner of her apron and swallowed hard. How could she sing? And what would be the song on this morning when her heart was breaking and her face must show no sign of tears? She wanted Mary’s hand to follow her heart, and she liked Jack; she told herself so for the hundredth time. She must sing. Quickly in her mind she called the roll of her best-loved hymns and found the right one. “*I need Thee every hour,*” she sang in her high voice, trying hard to keep it steady.

Above, Little Mary listened, and frowned. “I thought she would sing something happy this morning,” she said to her young sister.

But North Carolina was such a long way from Illinois. The

country was different, the people were different, Sibyl had heard that even the food was different. Jack was fine, with nice manners and winning ways, but he was different. Among all those whom Mary had so easily thrown into the discard when once she had seen Jack, were boys with good Quaker names, whose fathers and mothers she knew well. If it could have been one of them, Mary could have lived near her.

To Sibyl, her older daughter, even at twenty-eight, was still "Little Mary" who had never been very strong. Could she adjust herself to the new life? And when the time should come for the bearing of children, Sibyl knew well that the distance and expense of travel would be unsurmountable barriers between them. Yesterday, the marriage had seemed right. This morning, the beginning of the very day, she wasn't sure.

*"I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain,"* she sang.

This was an hour of pain. In every minute of this busy day she would desperately need something outside of herself.

But Little Mary had slipped down the stairs. Her yet thin arms were tight around her mother's neck, cutting a line of the song in half.

"Oh, Mamma," she was sobbing, "you've always been so good to me!"

No tears? A flood of tears! Almost dropping into the gravy on the stove! And Albert coming in from the barn and finding the two locked in wet, clinging embrace, and saying, "Well, what in Sam Hill's the matter now? I thought this was a wedding day!"

Sibyl was first to laugh. "It is. But this just had to be got over as a kind of preliminary. Now, Mary, wash thy face in cold water and set the table quick. We'll never have everything ready if we don't get breakfast over and start the cakes."

But about one thing there was no hurry. She took time enough for the Bible reading, though it wasn't a complete chapter this time. She turned to the last of Proverbs and slowly read of price above rubies, of a candle that goeth not out, of hands reaching out to the needy, of a household clothed in scarlet, of the laws of kindness in the mouth of a woman whose children rise up and call her blessed and whose husband praises her.

Sibyl closed the Book. She didn't need it for the last verse.

*"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."*

THINGS were not quite as Sibyl wanted them for the wedding, in spite of all the preparations. In mid-afternoon, when for one minute everybody was out of the kitchen, the old cat hopped onto the kitchen table and licked half the icing off the beautiful white wedding cake. Sibyl gave him a kick that landed him well toward the barn. Gurney came in to say, "What's the matter with old Tim? He's turning himself inside out."

"I hope he stays that way!" Sibyl answered, and Gurney hunted for other members of the family to whom he could hilariously report, "Mamma's lost her religion!"

And Zimri couldn't possibly be hurried to do his evening

chores. "The cows won't give down their milk till their regular time," he protested.

"I reckon we could do with a quart less milk for once," Sibyl said, but Zimri didn't even hear her.

The guests were already arriving when Zimri was carrying in two big buckets of milk to be strained and put away.

"Zimri, do hurry. We're all ready but you," his wife coaxed. "There's a tub of water in the pantry, and your good clothes."

"In the pantry? Take a bath in the pantry?"

"Where else? Jack's got the boys' room. Mary's in the girls' room. And you can't get to our room without going through where all the folks are. Don't argue. Shoo!"

At last all was ready. The relatives had come — Zimri's and Sibyl's — as many as the house would hold. They stood about the walls of the small parlor where Little Mary had entertained her beaux and overflowed it into the dining room in which nobody had ever dined. They were careful to leave a path for the happy couple to walk across the rose-flowered rug to the large window with its fine new lace curtains and the big white-paper bell suspended above the place where Jack and Mary would stand.

There was a hush over the little company so accustomed for generations to silence. The couple was coming. The bride was in soft, shimmering white, with a rose fastened in her dark hair. Resting her hand on the arm of her big, fine-looking husband-to-be, glancing trustfully into his face, she seemed to glide rather than walk.

Sibyl stood before the two, her worn Bible in her hand. There was nothing careless in Sibyl's appearance this time. Every one of her graying hairs was in place; her best black dress had been perfectly pressed on the ironing board balanced on two chairs in the kitchen; fresh white ruching had been placed at neck and sleeves; her shoes were shining.

Sibyl's lips parted, but no sound came. She had intended to go at once into the ceremony, which was the best possible combination of old and newer Quaker forms. She had memorized it perfectly. She still had the ability to commit to memory with ease. But there were no words; that terrible "need" was surging up within her and cutting them off. Since early morning she had been busy and tearless. Now in the quiet of this moment, all the people in the room and crowded about the doorway seemed to fade away; even the dear bride and groom before her vanished, and Sibyl stood alone with her terrible necessity of help. She closed her eyes and lifted her face. "O Lord, our help in all the ages . . ."

After Sibyl's unpremeditated supplication, amid subdued sounds of blowing of noses and wiping of eyes, she said her perfectly chosen words. When the two were made one, she offered a prayer not for herself at all but for these who would go out to found a new home in a new-old land. It was a beautiful prayer and it left the company of Quakers quite exalted in spirit. Only Zimri wept. He was thinking of all the times he had brought Little Mary through sicknesses, and wondering whether Jack would prove to be a good nurse.

"You ought to have got your crying over with early in the day," Sibyl said, handing him her lace-edged handkerchief because she knew she had forgotten to put a big one in his coat pocket. "I did."

The next morning with the help of a niece or two, Sibyl gathered up the dishes on which ice cream and white cake with reconstructed icing had been served to the guests. "The dishes are just like the poor," she laughed. "They're always with us."

LITTLE Mary's first child was a boy. He was rosy-cheeked and curly-headed like his uncle Albert for whom he was named. She brought him for a visit and his arms around Sibyl's neck subtracted years. "Talk about feeling old when you're a grandmother — why with every one I feel a heap younger," she told the relatives.

The second child was a girl. Now Little Mary had a son and a daughter.

"That's just the way it ought to be," Zimri said, "or will be, when they get two more, like we have."

Jack wrote the letters. The baby was fine, he said. Mary didn't gain strength very fast and didn't feel equal to writing. She wasn't getting well as she should, another letter said. A third brought the word that she was very, very ill.

Sibyl had long since become well acquainted with Death. Within her family and Zimri's he had made many visits. At Vermilion, at Elwood, at Carrol, in Egypt, she had followed

after him, bringing sympathy and calling forth courage and strength to bear.

But Death wore a darker robe when he came for Sibyl's Little Mary. His black wings hovered about her for endless weeks, until Sibyl's heart cried out, "Now! Now! If it must be!"

Could this suffering, this waiting, be borne? How strong her faith had been for the troubles of others! How weak it was for her own! She knew now that the pain of last farewells to members of her father's family bore no relationship to the loss of one whom her arms had held as a baby, and who had but now reached the place of sharing with her the experience of motherhood.

When the final message came, Zimri and Sibyl did not make the long journey. They sent young Emily who had grown into the strong one. They sat quietly at home, reverently touching, one by one, like the shining beads of a rosary, all Little Mary's precious years. Sibyl reached for her Bible and read, "*Blessed are they that mourn,*" but she did not feel blessed.

When Emily came home, telling of Mary's grave in the beautiful green hills, Sibyl was able to say, "The mountains of North Carolina are as near to Heaven as any other place on earth."

LITTLE Clara was three months old when Sibyl and Zimri bent over her basket and said to each other, "There's something about her that looks a little like her mother."

Sibyl was fifty-six. She had forgotten how to handle a baby,



and the physical task of caring for Mary's child was almost too much. But Zimri was strong, and he had ever had a way with children. Into their torn hearts crept the tiny healing hands of a baby. "*Ye shall be comforted,*" Sibyl had read again and again, with no feeling of reality. One day as she bent over the wash-tub the thought came to her like the sun bursting through clouds: "The Bible doesn't say *how* one is to be comforted!" She realized that the promise was being fulfilled through the child for whom she toiled.

Six years of comforting! Who could have much time to nurse a grief when one must nurse a child? Sibyl had certainly forgotten how many things must be done for an infant in a basket, a baby walking, a tiny girl of three with golden ringlets, a growing girl whose yellow hair could be made into shining curls and tied with a ribbon of blue! And because her own children had been near to each other in years, she had never known how it was to have one child as a constant companion while Zimri worked the farm.

THE second washing of the waves of sorrow was like a sudden storm at sea, but it had been tucked into a short letter from Jack, father of Clara. When it had passed and Zimri and Sibyl were alone with no voice calling, "Grandma, let me help," "Grandpa, let me go with you," Sibyl's Bible lay for a few hours unopened. That didn't really matter, for she knew all the "comfort" passages. They said themselves in her mind, but their very familiarity seemed to dull their meaning for her.

In the night time she said to Zimri, "But Clara is afraid of strangers."

Zimri tried to be reasonable for both. "Her father isn't any stranger to Clara. He's been here to see her every year."

"She doesn't know him — not really. And the woman he married — Clara doesn't know her at all! Oh, Zimri, they can't love her as we do!"

"A father has a right to his own child."

"What about us? Don't we have any rights?"

What a strange question to come from the lips of Sibyl, woman of faith! The storm which had been sudden in its coming was slow in going. Sibyl tried to pray: "Oh, help me that my faith fail not!" and all the time she felt that she was being washed farther and farther out upon the sea of unfaith.

She hadn't preached a great deal during the years that she had had Clara. How could she? But now there was need of a pastor in a meeting not far away. Could she serve? She answered the committee that she would talk the matter over with Zimri and let them know. It was a way of putting off the decision.

To Zimri she confided, "How can I speak to other people when my faith wavers so?"

And Zimri answered, "Why, Mamma, your faith isn't gone. It's just had a little shake-up, that's all."

So Sibyl took her precious grain of faith and planted it in the fertile soil of forgetfulness of self. A full-time pastor at last, but by what a long hard way she had reached the milepost! This was much the best chance she had had. She could read

and study at home without interruption now. (How her heart cried out for the interruption of a small voice!)

Zimri was ready to take her where she needed to go. It didn't matter that she didn't live in a white parsonage by the church. Now she could think, "These people are *my* people. There's no question about my saying wedding ceremonies or conducting funerals. Such things are expected of me." If she was better at entering into sorrows than joys, she couldn't help that.

Gradually Sibyl's tall form that had bent under the weight she carried straightened a little, and when Clara, grown into a big little girl, came for a nice long visit, she smoothed away the wrinkles in her grandmother's face and there was laughter in the house again.

Those were good years when Sibyl was a pastor. The two parts of her work were so much one — the sermons she preached on First Day and the visits she made any other day in the week — now how could those Eastern Friends think there was anything wrong with the pastoral system?

THE third storm was an aftermath of the First World War.

There had always been a mortgage, but it had been an accepted necessity. The paying of it was something toward which to work, and Zimri worked hard. His neighbors did the same. But for many farmers in the Middle West, a mortgage plus a war plus an inflation added up, by the end of the twenties, to a Failure.

Home going? Nothing to call their own? This was no sud-

den squall. It was a great swell, rising from the depths of the ocean, rising steadily to envelop them. The three living children were all married, with struggles enough of their own. Sibyl said, "We're not so far past middle age. We ought to be able to help our children get on their feet. Here we are, in spite of all our hard work, needing to be helped by them. Why does this happen to us?"

Bitterness tried to creep into her heart. Mixed with it was a small feeling of guilt that she, who had always preached that spiritual things were of so much more importance than material ones, should grieve over the loss of a farm.

But Home! How good it was!

Sibyl had an August day alone before the sale of farm, machinery and animals. She would spend it exactly as she pleased. She could cry if she wanted to; she could talk to herself; she could stand in one place and look for half an hour and nobody would think she was out of her mind.

Every inch of the house Zimri had built for her was hallowed by all the living there had been in it—the unfailing devotion of Zimri, births, courtships, marriages, griefs, the great decision of her life and her struggle to fulfill it. She walked from one room to another upstairs and down, saying to herself, "Here this, here that," seeing the face of Zimri as it was when he was young and untroubled, of the children when they were babies and as they grew up, of relatives come for visits, of servants of God who had blessed her table, of neighbors helping with

meals for haying and threshing. Even the endless work of all the years seemed sacred.

She stepped outside and drank from the water of Uncle Jimmie's well — never was such clear, cold water. She went down the steps — a board creaked now — and opened the door of the cellar in the yard, half underground and half above. The bins around its walls were nearly empty now, and the odor of decaying apples came to her. Zimri would not fill it again. She walked past the vegetable garden; around the edges, perennials had persisted through all the years and now bloomed in spite of lack of care. She walked down the lane under the limbs of trees bending to the ground and opened the barn door. She stood gazing into the haymow. If Albert had fallen once he had tumbled fifty times down that opening, and always bounced! He seemed to prefer that to the ladder. Sister Mary wouldn't let her girls play there because she thought it was dangerous. Well, none of Sibyl's children had ever suffered a broken bone.

There was the pigpen behind the barn, as bad-smelling as ever. But think of the meat that had come out of that pen! And the mortgage payments! But they were not enough!

Sibyl walked in the south orchard and then in the east orchard. She supposed she'd made a million pies out of the fruits of Uncle Jimmie's trees! She made a bag of her lifted apron and filled it with Early Harvests and Maiden's-blushes — not because she needed them but because she liked to smell them. She stood gazing out over the cornfields Zimri had planted

and would not harvest — straight, tall rows as far as eye could see, the ears beginning to fall of their weight.

“Now this won’t do, Shep,” she said to Shep-the-third who trotted by her. She couldn’t see if her eyes were filled with tears, and she wanted to see everything, everything for always.

Sibyl slowly walked back to the house, put her collection of apples and sugar pears in a bucket on a pantry shelf — a low shelf. No children now whose arms she must out-reach. She sat down by the bay window and opened her Bible. It was high time she should think about next First Day’s sermon. It was going to be hard to preach. All of the little community knew about the great loss that had befallen her and Zimri. She’d better steer clear of anything that would make people feel sorry for her.

She leafed through her most beloved passages in Psalms and Isaiah, but somehow just now their writers seemed far away. Something in the New Testament would be better. . . .

*The birds of the air have nests . . . but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.*

PEOPLE said there wasn’t a dry eye in the house that day when Sibyl preached her farewell sermon. She hadn’t really wanted to use that text lest it seem she was making a bid for sympathy, but she couldn’t find any other! After all, maybe a preacher was entitled to preach a sermon to herself just once. It certainly did Sibyl good; and other people were losing their farm homes, too. It didn’t hurt anybody to realize that Jesus was no pastor

with a fixed salary and a good home, but a wanderer, going about among people, a little while here, a little while there, then moving on. This homelessness could make a closer bond between all homeless ones and the One who had not where to lay his head.

How fully the Love of God and His people dwelt in Friends across the line in Indiana! Thanks to these and generous relatives there was a home for Zimri and Sibyl — not a place of their own, but one in which they could arrange their belongings, including the rose-flowered rug. There was farmwork for Zimri, without which he would have been lost. In the kitchen Sibyl could yet make a nice white cake for a birthday or the visits of children or grandchildren.

“How thankful I am,” she said, “that folks still like to come to see us, even Mary Holaday.”

OF course Sibyl hadn't loved Albert better than the other children, but caught unaware with her eyes fixed on him during the years when he was becoming a man she looked as if she did. His face was ruddy-under-dark, like his father's. His hair was so brown it looked black and so kinky it looked newly combed when he came, helmetless and grinning, out of a tough football game. He was taller than his father, shorter than the Reeses; strong in body, never sick like the others, able for the hardest jobs on the farm. He sang bass in glee clubs and quartettes; joined his Rees uncles with French harps and played as well

as any, and bent entranced with real music over young Emily at the piano. Girls called him a "sweet" boy, and when he slipped up behind his mother and held her tight, kissing her cheek, although Sibyl said, "Albert! You're choking me! Let me go! Don't be so foolish," she really meant, "I wouldn't trade this minute for any price you could name."

One special time Sibyl often remembered when love for her older son swept over her.

Albert had an important part in the Academy Field Meet with Georgetown High on a Saturday afternoon at the end of the second week in May. The air was intoxicating with spring odors. Johnny-jump-ups and Spring beauties were as thick as thatch over the Academy yard. Young oak leaves, always tardy, glistened in the sun. Maples had changed from their first pale-lime color to a rich, satisfying green. The giant, centuries-old elm, with wine-glass-grace long ago surrendering to equal beauty of canopy-forming weight of limbs, was once more ready to shelter lovers whispering at twilight. Between this patriarch of the Academy grounds and the red-brick building, stakes had been driven to mark the starting point of the quarter, the half, the mile, the hurdles. Around the building ran the course in an oval shape, dodging trees. For nature, centuries earlier, had not counted on a track race under the majestic harvest of her prodigal planting. Without Bert Rees, faithful alumnus, with his good head for mathematics, there might have been a mistake of a yard or two.

By one-thirty horses drew top-buggies, surreys, and a few out-



of-date spring wagons up to the hitch-racks belonging to the nearby meeting house. A few cars drove down the road to places under the overhanging elm and furnished ringside seats for their owners — the envy of the less fortunate. Beside the loyal supporters of Georgetown High, Quakers and non-Quakers gathered from all Friends' communities within reach. What a crowd! Bigger than Quarterly Meeting; bigger than Commencement. Over the slightly swaying bridge through Lovers Lane came the Vermilion Friends in twos and threes. From the northwest corner sauntered the village bachelor, Elmer. Without him there could hardly have been a field meet. From the white house at the southwest corner came Mary Holaday, and a daughter. (Not that she much believed in athletics but Sibyl wouldn't like it if she didn't come to see Albert perform.)

The company milled about, waiting for the first event. Bleachers? Who would even propose such desecration of the Academy yard? No, the Quakers would take their amusement standing, moving from place to place to miss nothing. The parents of the contestants pressed into advantageous positions. Zimri was there in a good place, but where was Sibyl? As the pistol shot sounded for the quarter-mile race, Thomas Holaday sheepishly joined his wife.

"I thought thee wasn't coming," Mary said.

"I decided maybe the trustees ought to be on hand. There was trouble one year, I remember."

Everybody remembered. An ardent Academy alumnus had

knocked flat a too-noisy supporter of the opposing school. What a scandalous thing to happen among the Quakers!

Sibyl came panting up the gravel path, stepping fast to cross the track of the runners in the quarter mile barely ahead of them. "Have I missed anything?" she asked of Sister Mary, squeezing into a place by her.

"Where's thee been?" Mary asked in her accusing voice.

"Josephus is right sick. I stepped over to pray with him. Has Albert done anything yet?"

"No, but thy hat is on crooked," Mary said.

It was no trick at all for Albert's muscular right arm to "put the shot" beyond the reach of any lighter contestant. When Brother Bert set up the high hurdles and Albert lost by a yard, Sibyl wailed: "If only he could have gone *on* as far as he did *up!*"

But the climax toward which all events moved was the pole vault. Even the initial height agreed upon by Albert and his fellow contestant looked too high. "They've put it as high as a house to start with," Sister Mary said.

Thomas was standing by: "Thee exaggerates, Mary."

"It's no harm to exaggerate if you tell it so big nobody believes you," Mary answered.

But there wasn't time to settle that point of morals. Both boys easily cleared the pole. One notch, two, three, and the opponent missed on first try, succeeded on second. Up again went the bar. The crowd moved in, pressing against the rope. Now the boys were really trying. Both failed at first and second, but

went over on third, and the crowd cheered both. The whisper went around, "They've reached last year's record."

Albert's mother stood on one foot leaning forward enrapt. "Shut thy mouth, Sibbie," Mary said. "Thee looks like thee used to when Levi was preaching."

The Georgetown youth was light and swift. His body went in a beautiful arc as he soared into air. By a hair's breadth it missed the bar; or did it? For the bar trembled, the crowd held its breath, it fell to the ground.

Two officials replaced the bar with nice precision.

Albert was on his feet, grabbing the pole, spitting on his hands, running, leaping. The muscles in his big shoulders rippled as he put the whole of his hundred and seventy pounds well above the height. He came over easily, threw down the pole, dashed the sweat from his dripping face and grinned at the applauding, squealing crowd. Somebody wrapped him in a blanket which trailed in the dust as he walked away. Cries of "Ab! Ab!" reached Sibyl's ears, and Sister Mary was saying, "I don't know how thee stands it, Sibyl."

"Stand what, Mary?"

"Why the *danger*. If he was *my* boy . . ."

"But he isn't. He's mine and Zimri's. And I'm glad. I'm glad all through."

ALBERT had a year in college with distinction in football and hurrahs for "Big Ab" resounding over the Earlham campus. But when he came home he wasn't long in settling on one

girl. Albert took his various girls — all pretty and lively — to the farm, not to meet the family, but to have fun. There was good eating there, and the “old folks” weren’t easily shocked.

“Sister Mary thinks I ought to worry more over Albert, I guess; lie awake nights when he’s out late, like Mother and Father did over Levi. But Albert’s all right. And I get sleepy by nine o’clock.”

Blanche was the prettiest and liveliest of all Albert’s girls. Nobody could resist her dimples. It wasn’t long after he began to bring her home till she was like one of the family. And pretty soon she quit saying “Mrs. Haworth” and began saying “Mamma,” just as Albert did. That was the way the family knew when things were getting serious, if you could call a relationship serious that had so much laughter in it.

So Albert married Blanche and she became a loving and beloved third daughter. And after that there were Albert’s children.

AND one day, in the year 1929, Blanche was calling, all the gayety gone from her voice. “Mamma, Albert is sick. I wish you folks would come over.”

The long hovering of dark wings over Little Mary had seemed not to be borne. The sudden snatching of Albert left the parents scarcely able to speak of him.

There was hardly time even to grieve. A young widow with a family of children to care for — children of their own blood. Sibyl and Zimri must help her. They must find ways.

As this fourth wall of water, stronger than any other, beat against Sibyl, she pressed her head against Zimri's breast. "This is our Gethsemane. We must cling to *The Cross*, or we'll be swept away."

BUT Sibyl was still a pastor, with duties to perform. She missed one First Day, and on the next she was in her place. Her hair was white now. Her eyes seemed to have receded farther under her heavy brows, as her father's did in his later years, and like his, they seemed to look deeper into the meaning of life. As she stood before her people, her soul was shaking itself out of its near paralysis. In her sermon she quoted the singer David. "*If it had not been the Lord who was on my side — then the waters had overwhelmed me, the stream had gone over my soul.*"

## CHAPTER XII

### *FRUIT BETTER THAN GOLD*

FIFTY YEARS is a long time, and some couples grow tired of each other in a tenth of it. Some develop toward each other an apathetic tolerance and are "as happy as most." Some go hand in hand while their original differences slowly vanish and their likenesses grow until their passing years have finished the union which their own words or those of a minister at an altar or even the mumblings of a homely, hurrying justice of the peace began long before. They have become one.

Zimri and Sibyl had been married fifty years. Gurney and Emily, with families of their own, said, "There must be a celebration."

Sibyl objected. "Nobody would get there in the depths of winter. Most of the folks I wanted fifty years ago couldn't come."

"Oh, Mamma," Emily protested, "there weren't any automobiles in your day. Now people go wherever they want to, even in February."

"They wouldn't if the snow was as deep as it was fifty years ago. Even the trains stopped running so Brother Levi couldn't come to say the ceremony."

"Well, it's not the day that matters. It's the year. We can celebrate some other time — Thanksgiving, maybe. And we'll have it at our house, so you won't have any of the work of getting ready."

Nobody ever called Sibyl's Emily, "Em," as they did the aunt she never knew. Sometimes, as she grew older, her mother forgot and called her, "Mary."

Emily was a small child when Sibyl became a minister. "We made it awfully hard for you, Mamma," she sometimes said.

But now Emily was always trying to make it easy for her mother. She, her farmer husband and their three small children welcomed the guests as many cars drove into their Indiana barn-lot that Thanksgiving morning. This was a two-sides-of-the-house affair, but even so, the company could be contained in Emily's home. How the families had diminished! Four Reeses and fewer Haworths! If the children and grandchildren of the missing ones hadn't come, Sibyl thought, there wouldn't have been enough to do any good at all! Men carried bounteous baskets into Emily's kitchen. Women carried special dishes not to be trusted to men. Brother Tom with both hands full, wrinkled his nose, squinted his eyes, sniffed, and said, "If my nose don't tell me lies, 'Pears to me I smell pumpkin pies."

Tom had never missed saying that old rhyme when he came to a reunion. The Reeses had waited for it.

The brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, sat at table together, and Sibyl was the queen. In her soft gray dress with white at neck and wrists, her white hair piled high, the day's

happiness softening the lines made by time and sorrow upon her strong face — “Oh, Aunt Sibyl was beautiful,” the young ones said. Who had ever thought she was awkward?

No question this time as to who would say grace, and Sibyl didn't wait to be asked. She only hesitated for fun-loving youth to grow still, to share in whatever measure it could that moment of stepping softly and reverently into the presence of the Divine before words should be uttered. Words! Words of thanksgiving for fifty years of companionship rich with a blending of the joys and sorrows that make life. Words quoted from the Psalmist poured forth like water from a high and hidden spring; *“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth or the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.”*

From this majestic height Sibyl's own words cascaded over the great rocks of her own exaltation of spirit, their fall broken in places by the level spots of choking emotions, and dropped at length into an evenly flowing stream which murmured peace.

Nobody cared that the food on the loaded table cooled a little while Sibyl, the minister among them, prayed.

Appetites were not what they once were among these not far on one side or the other of three-score years and ten — not even for turkey and chicken and salads and golden cake and persimmon pudding and biscuits as good as Levi's Rebecca or Sister Sarah used to make. But the younger generation, eating



all over the house, fared well indeed. Hawthorns and Reeses were so mixed that you couldn't tell one from the other — at least not unless you knew the marks. Of course Gurney, towering to Rees height, with hair as kinky as Levi's, looked all Rees. And Emily, bustling about, serving everyone — all you needed to do was to see the back of her neck to spot her for a Hawthorn.

In the next generation too many new factors had been introduced into the blood for identification, but the differences and likenesses made good subjects for talk at the long table.

“Well, you'd know that girl was one of Albert's, wouldn't you?”

“But she's not. She's Emily's!”

“Who's the one with red hair? Omar could claim her in his line, maybe, but he doesn't have any children.”

“That's Mary Holaday's granddaughter. She gets that hair from her father. No Rees about her, unless it's inside. You can't always tell by the looks.”

Better to wonder about the young ones than to think too much about Levi, Emily, Martha, Mary, Sarah, Will and Bert. Seven out of eleven gone, to say nothing of half of Sibyl's own children.

THERE had never been a program at a Rees gathering without Bert. The hurt of his going was still fresh — Bert with hands like Father's; Bert, the baby; the life of every gathering; always with a rhyme on his lips; Bert, first of the three “little boys”

to break the special bond of brotherhood which held them a little closer than the others.

Perry and Omar and Bert! Sibyl could still see them sitting on the stairsteps of the old Elwood home, with their eyes fixed on Sister Mary's wedding cake while her marriage ceremony went on; now for many years three little boys grown into men — Perry walking with a spring in his step, never opening a gate but always jumping over it; Omar moving with a firm dignified tread; Bert swinging along with a hearty stride — Bert still a boy in the fifties.

Bert was great on programs. He could get one up on an hour's notice. But Bert was gone and there must be a program at a Golden Wedding. So Perry read the history of the Reeses, waxing eloquent over the great height, the length of life, the sturdiness of the tall old Welch forebear named Thomas, who lived to be a hundred and five; over the long hard journey of his father's family out of Tennessee into Illinois; over the hardships of that first winter of the deep deep snow; and finally over the marriage of their father, William Rees, to their mother, Rebecca Hester, the union from which they had sprung.

Sibyl knew every word of that history, for it had been read at other times, but she listened as if it were new. Her face said plainly, "Blood will tell. We're pretty good folks — not rich or famous, but the kind Lincoln said the Lord must have loved or he wouldn't have made so many of them."

Tom's Florence was a good speaker back in the old Academy days, and now half a century later, she read Bert's poem about

his mother, so that the third generation wished they might have known her.

*"Thankfully now her children remember  
Many a time of turmoil and strife,  
When with her touch and great loving-kindness  
Mother smoothed out the tangles of life.*

*"Swift to perform every mission of duty  
Prompt to respond wherever a need  
Ready to go on errands of mercy —  
These were a part of herself and her creed."*

The third generation helped with the program. The little company grew very still, for Mary's granddaughter was singing — nothing new or fancy — old songs every Rees knew well: *Silver Threads Among the Gold* and *Believe Me if All Those Endearing Young Charms*.

"Did somebody say there wasn't any Rees about her? Why how else could she sing like that? We've always sung, but she's the first one ever to learn how," Sibyl said to nobody in particular.

There must be something from Riley, and let it be *The Airly Days* with Gurney half-chanting, half-singing the nostalgic words.

*"Oh tell me a tale of the airy days —  
Of the times as they ust to be;"*

Gurney's mellow voice ran through two verses and then he went to the last:

*"Blow and blow tel the sound draps low  
As the moan of the whipperwill,  
And wake up Mother, and Ruth and Jo  
All sleepin' at Bethel Hill;*

*Blow and call tel the faces all  
Shine out in the back-log's blaze,  
And the shadders dance on the old hewed wall  
As they did in the airly days."*

Was this the end? What a hunt for handkerchiefs and what a drying of eyes!

But Perry was not quite satisfied. He laughed a little apologetically as his hand reached into his pocket. "Mostly we left it to Bert to write the poems," he said.

"Let's have it! Read it! What is it?" the Reeses cried in a chorus. And Perry read, *The Span of Life*, written for Sibyl and Zimri. The poem began with youth:

*"Slowly, slowly flow the sands  
Through the hourglass in our hands.  
Youth is eager for the race  
Eager just to set the pace.  
Youth and maiden strong and fair  
At the altar waiting there,  
Pledge their hearts and hand to be  
One unto eternity."*

Perry passed on to the home these two had founded:

*"Hearth and home and altar all,  
Labor, love and worship call  
All our fortitude and power  
Everyday and every hour."*

Now how did Perry know how mixed up all these things had been in Sibyl's life? How often she hadn't had time for this because she must do that!

But Perry did know, and had put the thought into words for her. Dear Perry! And those last lines about looking forward! How she loved them!

*"Forward, too, we scan the skies  
For the promised paradise.  
Swiftly, swiftly flow the sands  
Through the hourglass in our hands."*

Not for another one of the family had Perry written a poem! There was no powder or rouge on Sibyl's face to be disturbed by the tears that rained down her cheeks.

"I never saw a bunch of people who liked so well to laugh and cry," Mary's granddaughter said, "or could do both so close together." Then sure enough, the minute the program had ended somebody was saying, "Remember how Zimri froze his nose on the way to his wedding?" And there was laughter again.

"I EXPECT anybody who's been married fifty years is a little too old to be a pastor," Sibyl told the committee when she was consulted about taking care of the flock for another year. "Not that I want to quit preaching. I'll never want to do that. It's a *privilege* to preach. I'll preach here and there, like I used to. Zimri's always been good to take me places, and it's quicker now that we have the Ford, even if it does balk sometimes."

The committee argued some with Sibyl. She suited the little Indiana community. "Thee's just one of us," they said. "Some preachers are kind of stand-offish."

Sibyl laughed at the very thought. "Well, I've never been noted for my stand-offishness," she said, going the committee one better in the coining of words. But she had already talked the subject over with Zimri and made her decision. "They need a young man in that pulpit. They're too used to me."

THE women of the meeting gathered on a summer afternoon in the green yard of one of the members. They seated Sibyl in a chair wound with wreaths made of white clover and roses, fashioned by their children.

"It's nearly like being a May queen," Sibyl said.

One spoke of the help she had given in her simply-worded sermons First Day after First Day; another told of how she had come into their homes whenever they had needed her. Some of the young ones sang songs that they knew she loved.

And then they gave her gifts — a pretty dish, snowy kerchiefs,

a bright scarf "most too gay for me." Sibyl laughed. But she touched them all lovingly.

"It's not the gifts so much as it's what I know is behind them," she said, "though I'll treasure them always."

"If they hadn't brought on the refreshments just then, I'd have cried good and spoiled everything," she told Emily afterward. "But I didn't want to spill tears in a great big dish of homemade ice cream, so I wiped my eyes with the prettiest handkerchief, and we had a real good time together. They certainly are the best folks!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### *ONLY SIBYL*

**I**T WAS October, with the familiar, calm, blue haze hanging over fields and hills. Sibyl stood on the porch gazing into the distance and remembering many precious Octobers. She thought, You'd never know there was a trouble in the world if you saw only Indiana; but that's not the way it is by a long shot. There's plenty of trouble. Won't folks ever learn there's a better way to get peace than to fight for it? It's silly, besides being wrong.

The third war of Sibyl's life had sobered a too-thoughtless world.

THE time had come for a gathering of the Quakers.

Sibyl had hardly expected to go to the Five Years Meeting being held at the far edge of Indiana, but a kind neighbor offered to take her in his comfortable car. It would be a real treat, especially since it gave her a chance to stop at Brother Omar's for a night on the way. He and his wife Lydia had lived in the same Indiana town for more than thirty years, and how few times Sibyl had visited him. She was proud of Omar. She knew how half of the county came into his office at one time or another, and went out feeling better; how he entered the



homes of his townsmen and the people of the surrounding country, poked here and there, smiled his slow Rees smile and asked, "Where does it hurt?"

"But in a real crisis," people said, "he moves fast. His two hundred pounds don't bother him a bit."

Sibyl enjoyed her visit. The order and cleanliness and completeness of Lydia's house were a pleasure to see. After dinner in the evening Omar sank into a big comfortable chair and fell into the mood of talking about his family — a rare thing for Omar.

He touched the small walnut table by him, as if caressing the smooth, shining surface with his big hand. "Father made this, you know, out of a walnut tree that grew on the old farm at Elwood. Remember how he used to make things on the bench in the big kitchen?"

Sibyl remembered — but nothing that looked like this. Their father had never known that walnut wood could take a polish in which you could fairly see yourself. "Yes, I had it fixed," Omar said simply. "It may be the table the Bible and the Shakespeare and Whittier's poems used to lie on."

Tears were not far away from both, and Omar hated tears. He laughed off the gathering emotion of sadness. "I was pretty mad about father spending money for that red-backed Shakespeare. I thought he ought to have got something we needed."

Oh, it was nice to sit with Omar, so relaxed and quiet! When had it ever happened before?

The telephone rang, but Omar talked quietly on through the

one-sided conversation in the next room. Sibyl caught a few words: "Pains." "Right away?" "I'll tell the Doctor."

Lydia came to the door. "Omar, Mrs. Winters thinks she needs you. Her sister says you'd better come right over. The pains are about five minutes apart now." She spoke exactly as if she had said, "Omar, the grass needs cutting," or "There's a new rose on the back trellis this morning." Excitement was foreign to Nurse Lydia.

Omar listened with his better ear and did not acknowledge the information by so much as a nod. "It seems to me," he said, "that Father's influence over all of us was much greater than Mother's."

"I don't know," Sibyl answered, thoughtfully, "maybe so."

Doctor O. H. pulled himself out of his comfortable chair, away from his rare visit with his only sister, away from the little excursion into their past on which they had started together, and was gone with only, "I'll probably be late, Sibyl. 'Bye, Lyd."

That night when Sibyl went to bed in Lydia's beautiful guest room, stretching her tired body on an innerspring mattress and pulling up a down comforter, she thought, "Even before Omar was old enough to drop corn in a row he learned that he must not leave duty for pleasure. Father taught him that."

GATHERED at the Five Years Meeting were the beloved of American Quakerdom, young, old, distinguished, unknown, educated, simple, conservative, liberal, from East, West, North, South,

Canada, Cuba, with two visitors from England, even in wartime. Many of these people Sibyl knew only by name or picture, some not at all.

A serious matter, Sibyl thought, this meeting of Friends in wartime. We are a peace body, a small group that has kept its testimony clear through three hundred years of peace and war. What will it do this time?

There was difference of opinion, just as always among Friends. Rufus M. Jones stood before those fifteen hundred people and solemnly warned against "hearts that are hard and spirits that are stern in judgment against our brothers and our neighbors and our fellow-Christians and our fellow-Quakers."

Friends listen when Rufus Jones speaks. His learned writings make hard reading for many Friends, but his spoken words are simple and plain. "The God who is Himself love cannot dwell in hearts that brood with hate or criticism or hard judgment upon others."

Sibyl could almost feel people (herself among them) thinking, Well, I guess he's saying we can't tackle this problem of the war till we are at peace inside ourselves.

Then Sibyl fell to wondering. What would Father think about this war if he were alive? In vain she tried to fit her father into modern life. There was no place for him. She could only go back to the stories she had heard of that war at whose beginning she was born. She remembered her father's stooped figure and heard the sorrow and fear for his country in his voice as he said, "Lincoln has been shot."

She recalled the words of Lincoln to Friends: "Your people . . . on principle and faith opposed to both war and oppression . . ." Oppression! Ah, the whole world now seemed in danger of oppression.

Snatches from Whittier's utterances were in her mind. "We have no right to ask or expect an exemption from the chastisement of war . . . steadily and faithfully maintaining our testimony against war . . . our mission is at this time to mitigate suffering . . ." Suffering now was beyond all that Whittier could have conceived.

She remembered what she had heard of Friends far, far back of her own birth. She heard George Fox, the founder, saying to William Penn, "Wear thy sword as long as thou canst, William." She saw Penn founding an American colony among warlike Indians without that sword.

She thought of John Woolman who couldn't eat sugar because it was made by unpaid slaves who were his brothers, and who, when required to quarter soldiers, would take no pay.

She recalled the exodus from the South in the early 1800's of families that could not be party to slavery, and of others who remained to show the kindness of considerate masters, confident that their way was right.

Yes, there had always been diversity of opinion, but there had always been conscience and strong conviction of right and wrong. Even in her own father's family that had been true. Levi tried hard to be a good soldier. Her father had stayed home, miti-

gating suffering as Whittier had advised. One grandson of William Rees lay in a grave in France. Another, with service in Uncle Sam's navy behind him, was now a minister, proclaiming the way of peace on earth. Each one had been himself — different, but himself as God, and his raising had made him.

She looked forward. She knew that among her grandsons there would be those who would put on the uniform and try to save the world by fighting. And there might be one, no less courageous, who would say to the government, "Send me to drive an ambulance out of shelled and burning cities, or to fight a plague anywhere on the earth, but do not ask me to take human life, for that I cannot do."

Sibyl's head ached with close listening and much thinking. She was tired of being shut within the four walls of the Five Years Meeting house. Maybe she could get someone to drive her over to Earlham when the session ended.

EARLHAM is never more beautiful than in October when the trees of its big campus are a medley of color.

To the south lay the football field where Albert used to go down again and again, people said, and always came up grinning and helmetless. She had never seen one of those Earlham games — a good thing, maybe.

In the center was the first-built hall of the college, the one whose door Levi stooped to enter in '66, and on whose fourth-floor stone window ledge Brother Will carved a crooked *W. R.* Quite

a procession of Reeses had gone there. The last was Tom's oldest granddaughter. She tried to count them, but couldn't quite remember — what difference? What really mattered was that now, in the time of the world's need, youth should have its chance. *She* didn't have much education — two years at the Academy. She hadn't even tried to go to college, as Perry had done.

She looked to the west edge of the campus where the sun was a ball of fire over the thick row of evergreens whose tapering tops pointed to the heavens. A man and a girl strolled in that direction. How many generations of youths had walked on evenings such as this toward the evergreens, their thoughts and hopes being pointed up, up, whether they knew it or not, by the towering spires! Oh, she wished that she were young again! She wished that she and Zimri were walking hand in hand on a college campus as they used to walk out to Aunt Debbie's house, with a chance at real education, like Father wanted his children to have. If only she were at the beginning instead of the end, she might do something to help this crushed and bleeding world. But Sibyl was old — old in body and mind. The healing of the nations would have to be done by younger and wiser people. The thought bore down upon her with a weight that bowed her head. Then from a day nearly forty years earlier there came words, indistinct at first, but after a little, ringing as clear and sweet as the bell that was calling the Earlham students to supper: "I call thee to be only Sibyl."

She lifted her head. She had been Sibyl.

IN the next Junetime Sibyl said to Zimri, "I'd like to go to Vermilion to meeting next First Day. I get hungry to go back sometimes."

It was a drive of thirty miles across the Wabash. Sibyl never went over this road without thinking about the way her mother had held her in front of her when she was a little girl, as she rode a horse to Bloomingdale Quarterly Meeting. Back of that were stories she had heard of men from Illinois walking over on the ice when they couldn't come any other way. "My! Going to Quarterly Meeting was important in those days," she said to Zimri. And of course that family picnic came into her mind, too — the one when Will called her "gangling."

"What you chuckling about, Mamma?"

"I was just thinking about what a good thing it is to put on flesh as you get older, especially for a woman preacher."

But when meeting began, a great wave of lonesomeness swept over her. There was a fair-sized congregation in front of her, but she saw that it would take study to figure out in which of the old families the younger ones belonged. Strangers had moved into the neighborhood, too.

Zimri knew as soon as his wife mentioned going to Vermilion that what she wanted most was a chance to preach. Now he hoped the pastor had asked her. He didn't like to see Sibyl disappointed, and anyway, he liked to hear her better than most preachers.

Sometimes it was easy, sometimes it was hard for Sibyl to preach. On this day there were too many ghosts crowding about

her — not the spirits of the Reeses, for their absence had become a part of her life. She was missing those who had made Vermilion the good community in which to live. Some had encouraged her in her preaching and others had kept her humble with their sincere “eldering.”

And now they had gone.

No, Sibyl didn't have great freedom in preaching that day. She only did the best she could.

Afterward a woman came to her. “I don't suppose you remember me. I've been away a long time, but I was converted in a meeting you held at Carroll once. I'm glad I happened to be here today.”

Sibyl looked at her and a faint memory stirred; a memory of a girl who might have been this woman. With her appreciative words she scattered the ghosts and started instead, in Sibyl's mind, a little procession of the young whom Sibyl knew she had helped to a fuller living. Their faces became clear. They were middle-aged people now, scattered here and there. With this procession marching past her, she wished that she could preach another sermon. It would be a better one.

Zimri and Sibyl went to Tom's for dinner. Florence's brown eyes had not lost their gleam. Sibyl loved all her sisters-in-law, but Florence was the Academy companion of her youth. No other could have become so completely her sister.

At dinner, Zimri, seeing the old-fashioned glass dish piled high with the biggest fruit of the patch, said, “I guess Mamma smelled the strawberries all the way over in Indiana.”



Sibyl didn't deny the charge.

"I smelled the roses, too. I used to make it a point to go visiting to Thomas Holaday's early in June. Now for several years I've not missed coming to Thomas Rees'. It's a good place to be any time, but especially in June — knee-deep in June, as Perry would say."

Perry! A little hush fell over the group.

Florence was a hand to save old papers that contained items about the relatives — hers or Tom's, it made no difference. She had nearly forgotten which family she was born in. Now she brought out the ones that told about Perry.

One clipping told of his retirement from the high-school principalship. It praised his long service, his untiring devotion to duty, the growth and progress in standards which the school had made under his administration. It told of the high esteem in which the alumni of Georgetown High held him. No reason for his retirement was given.

Those who loved Perry knew all that was omitted. The Board, made up of people who were his friends, kept him employed for a long time after a high school *must* have a college graduate for its head. They kept him because as a person who knew his subjects and his pupils, who somehow made the mind of youth stretch toward knowledge, who sent a high percentage of his graduates on and on, to colleges, to the state university, to professional schools, always on — nobody could excell O. P. Rees.

But one fall morning when the air was beginning to be crisp — the kind of morning that made Perry pop out of bed in a

hurry, rouse his whole family with a "*Hic, haec, hoc, huius, huius, huius,*" and dress quickly with a little extra care because after a good long vacation September had come — the bells rang and Perry listened, and turned and walked slowly into his garden. He picked up a spade and began to dig his potato crop. Lucy joined him and chattered brightly as she threw the potatoes in a basket, pretending not to see the tears that splashed on the broken earth.

*The new principal was a college graduate.*

THE item Florence had saved for last was the account of the almost sudden death of O. P. Rees, including the obituary which she herself had written. It bore a date within the year and was familiar to all. It was all that a man could wish to have said of him when he was dead.

Dear Perry! The best of William's sons, some said. Certainly the one who had carried to his grave a disappointment too keen to be spoken, and the memory of an unpacked trunk.

RIDING home after a good day, Sibyl's thoughts were like beads on a string, with tight knots of silence between.

"Florence let me read a letter they had from Sister Em's Will."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he was sort of reminiscent — remembering what a good time he had when he was a little boy and stayed at Father's for a while one time. Said he learned things there he'd never forgot."

"BERT's boy has done mighty well. He has more of the alphabet after his name than any other Rees. His mother said in a letter to Florence he has something to do with the water supply over in Champaign — keeping it fit to drink, maybe. She said he had seven people working under him.

"I don't s'pose the water's any better than what used to come from Uncle Jimmie's well. It couldn't be."

"TOM's RUSSELL is getting to be a big preacher like Levi."

"He don't look anything like him," Zimri said.

"Oh, no, and he don't say the same things. Did you see that piece in last week's *American Friend*?"

Zimri hadn't seen it. He had been reading *The Indiana Farmer*.

"He writes well, kind of eloquent, like Levi talked."

"It's a good thing there's a preacher coming on in the family."

"Oh, yes, there must always be one."

"OMAR's not very well, Florence said. I'll miss him if he goes before I do."

"You hardly ever see him."

"No, but I know he's there."

"I used to worry a little because he's not much of a church man. But I've quit, late years. He's just himself. A woman at Yearly Meeting told me that all she has to do when her children get sick is to send for Dr. Rees. They get well when he walks in at the door. She told me about once when he couldn't save a child in a poor family and he came and asked her if she could help him

fix up some clothes for a decent burial. Omar's as good as Father at heart."

"You must have kind of caught up on the Rees news while Tom took me out to see his hogs," Zimri said.

"I did."

There was a long silence while they rode toward the Wabash. Zimri broke it.

"You've always thought a lot of your folks."

"Some are more that way than others. The Reeses are more so. Maybe Sister Mary carried it a little too far, but everyone of us was glad she cared so much what happened to us. Of course Aunt Debbie went to extremes. At least *I* wouldn't have left my man in Tennessee to stay with any Rees ever born."

Zimri could still laugh like a boy.

"But Aunt Debbie couldn't help the way she was. She said so one time. At least that's what I thought she meant."

Behind the old Ford the sun sank. Why talk? All had been said; nearly all.

"Zimri."

"Yes."

"Do you s'pose they'll ask me to preach up there?"

"Where?"

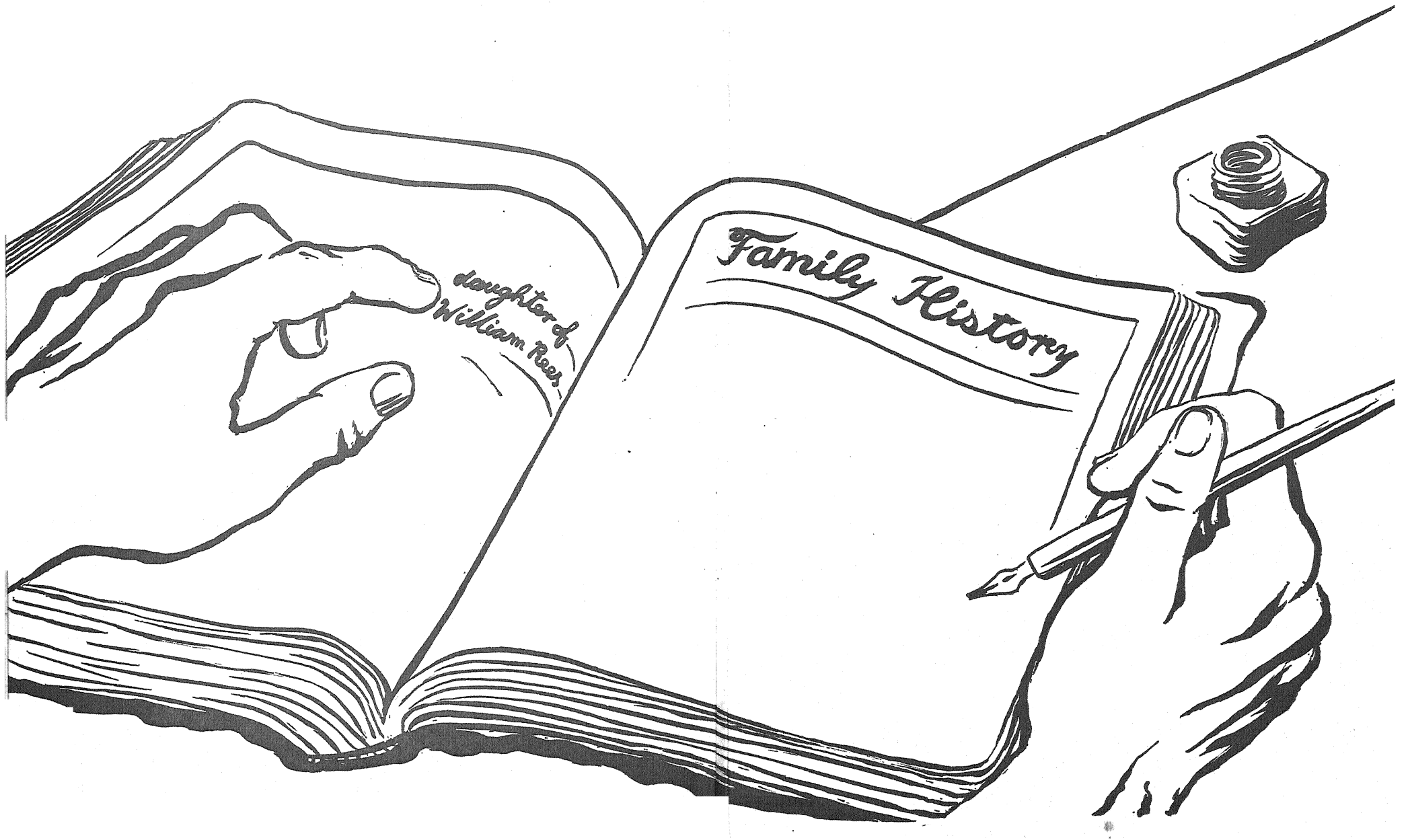
"Up there."

"I wouldn't think anybody'd need to be preached to."

"But *I'll need to preach.*"

"If you do, folk'll listen. I will, myself."





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