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ESTER RIED

YET SPEAKING.

By Pansy

Author Of "Mrs. Solomon Smith Looking On," "Hall In The Grove," "A New Gift On The Family Tree," "Five Friends," "Mary Burton," "The Pocket Measure," "Ester Ried," Etc., Etc.

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CHAPTER I. — “IT MAY BE THAT SHE IS WORKING STILL.”

It was raining drearily, and but few people were abroad—that is, few, comparatively speaking, though the streets seemed full of hurrying, dripping mortals. In the large dry-goods store business was by no means so brisk as on sunny days, and one of the younger clerks, whose station was near a window looking out upon the thoroughfare, had time to stand gazing at the passers-by. They did not seem to interest him particularly, or else they puzzled him. His young, handsome face wore a thoughtful look, almost a troubled expression about the eyes, which seemed to be gazing beyond the passers-by. Just across the aisle from him, a lady, seated in one of the easy chairs set for the accommodation of shoppers, waited and watched him,—a young and pretty woman, tastefully, even elegantly dressed, yet her costume was quite in keeping with the stormy day. The young man's face seemed to have special interest for her, though he apparently was unaware of her existence. A close observer would have discovered that she was watching him with deeply interested eyes. Whatever served to hold the thoughts of the young man apparently grew in perplexity, for the troubled look continually deepened. At last, forgetting the possible listener, he addressed the dripping clouds, perhaps,—at least, he was looking at them:—

“I don't know how to do it; but something ought to be done. It is worse than folly to expect good from the way that things are now managed. Ester would have known just what, and how; and how interested she would have been! I try to do her work, and to 'redeem the time;' but the simple truth is, I don't know how, and nobody else seems to.”

These sentences were not given all at once, but murmured from time to time at his unsympathetic audience outside.

Patter, patter, patter, drip, drip, drip! steady, uncompromising business. It was all the answer the clouds vouchsafed him.

With the listener inside it was different. The interested look changed to an eager one. She left her seat and moved toward the absorbed young man, breaking in on his reverie with the clearest of voices:—

“I beg your pardon,—but are you thinking of your sister? You are Mr. Ried, I believe? I have heard of your sister's life, and of her beautiful death, through a dear friend of my husband, who loved Ester. I have always wanted to know more about her. I wanted to get acquainted with you, so I might ask you things about her. I am waiting now for my husband to come and introduce us. But perhaps it isn't necessary. Do you know who I am?”

“It is Mrs. Roberts, I believe?” the young man said, struggling with his astonishment and embarrassment.

“Yes, and you are Mr. Alfred Ried. Well, now we know each other without any further ceremony. Will you tell me a little about your sister, Mr. Ried? You were thinking of her just now.”

“I was missing her just now,” said he, trying to smile, “as I very often am. I was a little fellow when she died; but the older I grow the more difficult I find it to see how the world can spare her. She was so full of plans for work, and there are so few like her.”

“It may be that she is working still, in the person of her brother.”

He shook his head energetically, though his face flushed.

“No, I can only blunder vaguely over work that I know she, with her energetic ways and quick wits, could have done, and done well. It happens that she was especially interested in a class of people of whom I know something. They need help, and I don't know how to help them. It seems to me that she could have done it.”

“Will you tell me who the people are?”

“It is a set of boys for whom nobody cares,” he said, speaking sadly; “it hardly seems possible that there could ever have been a time when anybody cared for them, though I suppose their mothers did when they were little fellows.”

Thus spoke the ignorant young man,—ignorant of the depths to which sin will sink human nature, but rich in the memory of mother-love.

“I think of my sister Ester in connection with them,” he said, speaking apologetically, “because she was peculiarly interested in wild young fellows like them; she thought they might be reached,—that there might be ways invented for reaching them, such as had not been yet. She had plans, and they were good ones. I thought so then, little fellow that I was, and I think so now, only nobody is at work carrying them out; and I wonder sometimes if Ester could have been needed in heaven half as much as she is needed on earth. She used to talk to me a great deal about what might be done. I think now that she wanted to put me in the way of taking up some of the work that she would have done; but she mistook her material. I can't do it.”

“Are you sure? You are young yet, and besides, you may be doing more than you think. Couldn't I help? What is there that needs doing for these particular young men?”

“Everything!” he said, excitedly. “If you should see them you would get a faint idea of it. They come occasionally down to the Sabbath-school at the South End; in fact, they come quite frequently, though I'm sure I can't see why. It certainly isn't for any good that they get. Their actions, Mrs. Roberts, surpass anything that I ever imagined.”

“Who is their teacher?”

“That would be a difficult question to answer. They have a different teacher every Sabbath. No one is willing to undertake the class twice. They have tried all the teachers who attend regularly, and several who have volunteered for once, and never would attempt it a second time. Just now, there is no one who will make a venture.”

“Have you tried?”

He shook his head emphatically.

“I know at least so much. Why, Mrs. Roberts, some of them are as old as I, and, indeed, I think one or two are older. No; we have secured the best teachers that we could for them, but each one has been a failure. I suppose they must go.”

“Go where?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“What an awful question! Where *will* they go, Mrs. Roberts, if we let them slip now?”

He was tremendously in earnest. One could not help feeling that he had studied the possibilities, and felt the danger.

“Suppose I try to help! Shall I come and take that class next Sabbath?”

This simple, directly-put question brought the young man suddenly from the heights of his excitement into visible embarrassment. He looked down on the small, fair lady, reaching hardly to his shoulder, attired in that unmistakable way which bespeaks the lady of wealth and culture, and could imagine nothing more incongruous than to have her seated before that class of swearing, spitting, fighting boys. Not that her wealth or her culture was an objection, but she looked so utterly unlike what he had imagined their teacher must be,—she was so small, so frail, so fair and sweet, and ignorant of the ways of the great wicked world, and especially of those great wicked boys! What could he say to her?

He was so manifestly embarrassed that the small lady laughed.

“You think I cannot do it,” she said, almost gayly.

He hastened to answer her.

“Indeed, you have no idea of the sort of class it is. I have given you no conception of it; I cannot. You would think yourself before a set of uncaged animals.”

“Yes, and in case of failure I should only be where the others are, who have tried and failed. If you will introduce me, and your superintendent will let me, I mean to try; and that will relieve you of the dilemma of being entirely without a teacher for them.”

Young Ried had nothing to say. He thought the attempt a piece of folly,—a worse than useless experiment; but how was he to say so to the wife of his employer?

That gentleman appeared just then, making haste.

“I was unavoidably detained,” he explained; “I feared you would grow weary of waiting. Ah, Ried, my wife has introduced herself, I see. Is he the young man you were speaking of, Mrs. Roberts?”

“The very young man,—Ester Ried's brother. He doesn't know how glad I am to have met him. Some day when we are better acquainted, and you trust me more fully, I am going to tell you how I became so deeply

interested in your dear sister. Meantime this little matter should be definitely settled. Mr. Roberts, I have invited myself to take a class to-morrow down at the South End Mission."

"Have you, indeed?"

Mr. Roberts spoke heartily, and seemed by no means dismayed,—only a trifle perplexed as to details.

"How can we manage it, Flossy? My prison class takes me in an opposite direction at the same hour, you know."

"Yes, I thought of that; I propose to ask Mr. Ried to call for me, and show me the way, and vouch for my good intentions after I reach there. Do you suppose he will do it?" She looked smilingly from her husband to young Ried, and both waited for his answer.

"I obey directions," he said, bowing respectfully to Mr. Roberts. "Am I to have the honor of being detailed for that service to-morrow?"

"So Mrs. Roberts says," was the good-humored reply, and then the merchant took his wife away to their waiting carriage that had drawn up before the door, leaving Alfred Ried, if the truth must be told, in a fume.

"Much she knows what she is talking about!" he said, jerking certain boxes out of their places on the shelves, and then banging them back again, seeming to suppose that he was by this process putting his department in order for closing. "Little bit of a dressed-up doll! They will tear her into ribbons, metaphorically, if not literally, before this time to-morrow! She thinks, because she is the wife of Evan Roberts, the great merchant, she can go anywhere and do anything, and that people will respect her. She has never had anything to do with a set of fellows who care less than nothing about money and position, except to be ten times more insolent and outrageous in their conduct than they would if she had less of it! I shall feel like a born idiot in presenting this pretty little doll to teach that class! Mr. Durant will think I have lost what few wits I had! What can possess the woman to want to try? It is just because she has no conception of what she is about! But Mr. Roberts must know—I wonder what he means by permitting it?"

In very much the same state of mind did our young man pilot his new and unsought-for recruit into the crowded mission rooms of the South End on the following Sabbath afternoon. She looked not one whit less able to compete with the terrors which awaited the teacher of the formidable class.

Her dress was simplicity itself, according to Mrs. Roberts' ideas of simplicity; yet, from the row of ostrich tips that bobbed and nodded at each other, all around the front of her velvet hat, to the buttons of her neat-fitting boots, she seemed to bring a new atmosphere into the room.

Yesterday's rain was over, and the pleasant south windows were aglow with sunshine. As Mrs. Roberts sat down the sunbeams came and played about her face, and she seemed in keeping with them, and with nothing else around her.

The superintendent bestowed curious glances on her during the opening exercises. He had seen the shadow on young Ried's face when he seated her, and had found time to question.

"Whom have we here?"

"Mrs. Evan Roberts. She wants to try the vacant class! *I* did not ask her, Mr. Durant; she invited herself."

Mr. Durant looked over at her, and tried to keep his eyes from smiling.

"She looks very diminutive in every way for such an undertaking. They will frighten her out before she commences, will they not?"

"I presume so; but I didn't know what to do. She wanted to come, and I could not tell her she must not."

"No, of course,—the occasion is too rare to lose. Very few people ask the privilege of trying that class. There is no teacher for them to-day; and your Mrs. Roberts must learn by experience that some things are more difficult than others. I will let her try it."

Meantime, "the boys" of the dreaded class were studying the new face. She was the only person not already seated before a class, and they naturally judged that she was to be their next victim. They looked at her and then at one another, and winked and coughed and sneezed and nudged elbows and giggled outright, every one of them,—meantime chewing tobacco with all their might, and expectorating freely wherever he judged it would be most offensive.

Alfred Ried watched them, inwardly groaning. Being used to their faces, he could plainly read that they anticipated a richer time than usual, and rejoiced greatly over the youth and beauty of their victim.

But young Ried was not the only one who watched. Mrs. Roberts, without seeming to be aware of their presence, lost not a wriggle or a nudge. She was studying her material; and it must be confessed that they startled her not a little. They represented a different type of humanity from her Chautauqua boys, or her boys in the old church at home,—rather, an advanced stage of both those types.

When Mr. Durant came toward her, the look on his face was not reassuring, it so plainly said that he expected failure, and was sorry for her as well as for himself. However, with as good grace as he could assume, he led her to the seat prepared for the teacher, and gave her a formal introduction.

"Boys, this is Mrs. Roberts, who is willing to try to teach you to-day. I *wish* you would show her that you know how to behave yourselves."

Mrs. Roberts wished that he had left her to introduce herself, or that he had said almost anything rather than what he did; the mischievous gleam in several pairs of eyes said that they meant to show her something that they considered far more interesting than that.

Many were the sympathetic glances that were bestowed on the young and pretty lady as she went to her task. As for Alfred Ried, there was more than sympathy in his face. He was vexed with the young volunteer and vexed with himself.

He told himself savagely that this was what came of his silly habit of thinking aloud. If only he had kept his anxieties about that class to himself, Mrs. Roberts would never have heard of it, and been tempted to put herself in such a ridiculous position; and if this episode did not break him of the habit, he did not know what would.

He was presently, however, given a class of small boys, with enough of original and acquired depravity about them to keep him intensely employed, and the entire school settled to work.

CHAPTER II. — “WHAT DID IT ALL AMOUNT TO, ANYHOW?”

Settled, that is, so far as the class of boys in the corner would permit the use of that term. *They* had not settled in the least. Two of them indulged in a louder burst of laughter than before, just as Mrs. Roberts took her seat. Yet her face was in no wise ruffled.

“Good afternoon,” she said, with as much courtesy as she would have used in addressing gentlemen. “I wonder if you know that I am a stranger in this great city? You are almost the first acquaintances that I am making among the young people, and I have a fancy that I would like to have you all for my friends. Suppose we enter into a compact to be excellent and faithful friends to one another? What do you say?”

What were they to say? They were slightly taken back, surprised into listening quietly to the close of the strange sentence, and then giving no answer beyond violent nudges and aside-looks. What did she mean? Was she “chaffing” them? This was unlike the opening of any lesson! It certainly could not be the first question on the lesson-paper; nor did it sound like certain well-meant admonitions to “try to improve the opportunity” and “learn all that they could.” With each of these commencements they were entirely familiar; but this was something new.

“Do you agree to the compact?” she asked, while they waited, her face bright with smiles.

“Dunno about that,” said one whom she very soon discovered occupied the position of a ringleader; “as a general thing, we like to be kind of careful about our friendships; we might strike something that wasn't quite the thing with people in our position. You can't be too careful in a big city, you know.”

It is impossible to give you an idea of the impishness with which this impudent answer was jerked out, to the great amusement of the others, who laughed immoderately.

It suited Mrs. Roberts to treat the reply with perfect seriousness and composure.

“That is very true,” she said, courteously; “but at the same time I venture to hope that since you know nothing ill of me as yet, you will receive me into a sort of conditional friendship, with the understanding that I remain your friend until I am guilty of some conduct that ought to justify you in deserting me. I am sure you cannot object to that; and now, if we are to be friends, we should know each other's names. I am Mrs. Evan Roberts, and I live at No. 76 East Fifty-fifth Street. I shall be glad to see you at my house whenever you would like to call on me. Now, will one of you be kind enough to introduce himself and the class? Perhaps you will introduce me to your friends?”

She looked directly at the ringleader.

“Certainly! certainly, mum!” he replied, briskly. “This is Mr. Carrot Pumpkins, at your service, mum—this fellow on my left, I mean; rather a queer name, I dare say you think. It all came of his being fond of sitting astride of a pumpkin when he was a little shaver, and of his hair being exactly the color of carrots as you can see for yourself. And this fellow on my right is Mr. Champion Chawer, so called because he can make the biggest run on tobacco of any of the set, taking him day in and day out. That fellow at your elbow is 'Slippery Jim.' We don't call him 'Mister,' because he doesn't stay long enough in one place to have it tacked on to him. He is such a slippery scamp that an eel is nowhere, compared to him.”

During this rapid flow of words the listeners, who evidently admired their leader, became so convulsed with laughter as to lose all vestige of respectability, and Mr. Durant's disturbed face appeared in view.

“Boys, this is perfectly disgraceful!” he said, speaking in sharp and highly-excited tones,—“perfectly disgraceful! I don't know why you wish to come here to disturb us in this way Sabbath after Sabbath! But we have really endured enough. There is a policeman at the foot of the stairs, and he can easily call others to his help; so now if you wish to remain here you must behave yourselves.”

During the deliverance of this sentence some of the boys gave mimic groans, one of them whistled, and others kept up a running comment:—

“A policeman! oh good! that's little Duffer, I know! We've seen him before! Wouldn't mind giving him a chase to-day, just for exercise, you know, mum.”

“I say, boys, let's cut and run, the whole caboodle of us. We can jump these seats at one bound, and take the little woman along on our shoulders for a ride! Shall we do it?” This from the leader, who in time came to be known as “Nimble Dick.”

“Bah! no!” replied a third; “let's stick it out and see what she's got to say; she's a new party. Besides, we can't give her the slip in that way; we're friends of hers, you know.”

“Mrs. Roberts,” said the distressed Mr. Durant, in a not very good undertone, “I think you will have to give it up. They are worse than usual this morning. We have endured much from them, and I must say that my patience is exhausted. Will you not take the seat at the other end of the room?”

“Not unless they wish me to.”

The people who had known Flossy Shipley well would have detected a curious little quiver in her voice, which meant that she was making a strong effort at self-control; but a stranger would hardly have observed it.

“Do you wish me to go away, young gentlemen?”

The scamps thus appealed to, looked at one another again, as if in doubt what to say. This again was new ground to them. Policemen they were accustomed to. At last Nimble Dick made answer:—

“No, I'm bound if we do; it comes the nearest to looking like a lark of anything that we have had in a long time. I say, Parson, go off about your business and let us alone. We was having a good time getting acquainted till you come and spoiled it. We'll be as sober as nine deacons at a prayer-meetin'. And look out how you insult this young woman; she's a friend of ours, and we're bound to protect her. No asking of her to change her seat; she's going to sit right here to the end of the chapter.”

Mr. Durant looked his willingness to summon the police at once, but Mrs. Roberts' voice, evenly poised now, took up the story:—

“Thank you; then I will stay. And since it is getting late, suppose we lose no more time. There was something about which I wanted to tell you. But a few evenings ago I attended a gathering where I saw some very singular things. A gentleman in the party was tied with a strong rope, hands and feet, as firmly as two men could tie him,—people who knew how to tie knots, and they did their best; yet while we stood looking at him he shook his hand free and held it out to them. How do you think it was done?”

“Sham knots!” said one.

“No, for my husband was one of the gentlemen who tied him, and he assured me that he tied the rope as firmly as he could. Besides, more wonderful things than that were done. I tied my own handkerchief into at least a dozen very hard knots, and gave it to him, and I saw him put it in a glass of water, then seize it and shake it out, and the knots were gone. I saw him take two clean glasses, and pour water from a pitcher into one, and it seemed to turn instantly to wine; then he poured that glass of wine into the other empty glass, and immediately it turned back to water, or seemed to. Dozens of other strange things he did. I should really like to tell you about them all. I will, at some other time; but just now I think you would like to know *how* he did them.”

“*How* he did them!” “As if you could tell!” “*Can* you tell?” “Pitch in, mum; I'd like to hear that part myself!” These were some of the eager answers.

Had the little teacher, under the embarrassments of the occasion, taken leave of her senses? Actually she was bending forward, opened Bible turned face downward on her knee, engaged in describing in somewhat minute detail the explanations of certain slight-of-hand performances which she had recently seen! What idea of the sacredness of the office of teacher, and the solemnity of the truths to be taught, had she?

The boys were listening, their heads bent forward all around her. What of that? They would have listened equally well to a graphically-told story of a Fourth Avenue riot, and been equally benefited, you think? They did not know just when the speaker slipped from the events of last week to the events of more than three thousand years ago. Indeed, so ignorant were they of all past history, that they were not even aware that she went back into the past; for aught they knew, she might have gone, on Wednesday of last week to see the man who could untie knots by magic, and on Thursday to see the men who could drop canes on the ground that would appear to turn into wriggling serpents. But there was one statement that proved too much for their credulity.

“You could not imagine what occurred next,” said the bright-faced teacher. “The cane or rod that the first man had dropped, actually opened its mouth and swallowed the other rods that seemed to be serpents, and was left there alone in its triumph!”

“Oh, bosh!” said Nimble Dick, contempt expressed in the very curve of his nose, “that's too steep; I don't believe a word of it! These fellows can do lots of queer things; I've seen 'em perform, myself; but they never made a live thing yet; I've heard folks that know, say so.”

“Precisely what I wanted to reach,” said Mrs. Roberts, with animation. “You are right, they never did; and you have discovered just the difference between them and the one man of whom I have been telling you. *He* worked by the power of God; he distinctly stated that he did; and that God really turned his rod into a serpent, and allowed it to swallow the imitations of life, and then turned it back again into a rod, to show that nothing was beyond his power.”

“Did you see the thing done?” questioned a young skeptic, running his tongue into his cheek in a skillful way, and distorting his whole face with a disagreeable leer. He began to suspect that he was being cheated into listening to a Bible story.

Mrs. Roberts was prompt with her answer:—

“Oh, no, I did not, neither did I see the great fire that you had in this city about a year ago. At that time I was a thousand miles away; and it so happens that I have never talked with any person who did see it, yet I know there was a great fire, and many buildings were burned, and lives lost. It has been proved to me.”

“Oh, well,” said skeptic number two, while number one retired into silence to speculate over this answer, “fires are common enough things; anybody can know that they happen; but it ain't such a common affair to see a stick turn into a serpent and swallow up other serpents. I've seen them fellows make things that looked like snakes, myself; I could most swear to it that I'd seen them wriggle; but they never did no *swallowing*.”

“That is, they did not give unmistakable signs that they were alive. But do you think it too strange a thing for God to do? Surely he can make life! How is it that you are here, breathing, talking, thinking, if there is no power anywhere to make life?”

“Oh, I came from a tadpole,” said the boastful young scientist, putting his thumbs under his arms, and affecting an air of great wisdom. “I know all about that; I was there, and see the things wriggle.”

Evolution staring her in the face in a corner class in a mission school;—a class that had been gathered from the slums! Mrs. Roberts did not know that these are the very places in which to find it in all its coarseness. Yet she made haste to meet the boy on his own ground.

“Very well, if you choose to take that view of it. Was not the tadpole alive? Where did the *life* come from? You insist that the story I have been telling you is untrue because you know that none of these sleight-of-hand

performers have ever, or *can* ever make actual life! That it is an impossible thing for human beings to do. Yet when I tell you that *God* did it you refuse the statement. How are you going to account for life? If, in its very lowest forms, it cannot be made by men who have given all their time to the study of the marvellous, how is it that it is everywhere about us, unless I am correct, and there is a Power that can produce life?”

Not a boy among them had heard the term “evolution;” knew anything about “the survival of the fittest.” They were entirely ignorant of “protoplasm” or “bioplasm;” yet not one of them but had caught the meaning of some of these terms as they had been translated for them into the vernacular of the city slums; not one in the class but perceived that their champion arguer had been met on his own ground and vanquished. Not with an outburst of horror; he had not even been informed that he was irreverent. Nimble Dick delighted in making each teacher tell him this; he had merely been replied to in the calmest of argumentative tones, and called upon to account for the facts in his own statements, and had been unable to do so. The crowd broke into a derisive laugh, and were noisy, it is true, and brought troubled frowns to the face of their superintendent, and made the flush on Alfred Ried's face deepen; yet if both these anxious watchers had known it, it was worthy of note that the laugh had been at the expense of one of their number, and not at their teacher.

“Well, go on,” interposed the youngest and quietest of the group. “Tell us some more about your old fellow with his serpents. Did they stay swallowed, and what did it all amount to, anyhow?”

Thus challenged, Mrs. Roberts gave her whole heart to the business of giving, in as dramatic a manner as she could, the closing scenes in the act performed in Egypt so long ago, carefully avoiding any reference to time, and mentioning no names, using only modern terms, and an exceedingly simple conversational form of language. She was, however, presently interrupted with a question:—

“When did all this happen? And why don't somebody do something like it nowadays?”

Ignoring the first question, Mrs. Roberts adroitly gave herself to the second.

“Why don't you find your pleasure in tumbling around on the floor, playing with a bright-colored marble or two as you did when a child? The world was in its childhood when God taught the people in this way. He has given them just as wonderful lessons since, but lessons more suited to men and women who have learned to think and reason. We don't like to be always treated as children.”

Whether they really dimly understood the meaning or not is possibly doubtful, yet it appealed to their sense of dignity in so indirect a way, that they did not themselves realize what inclined them to quiet for a moment, while she finished her sentence earnestly. In the midst of the quiet the closing-bell rang, and the seven young scamps seemed at once to take into their hearts seven other spirits worse than themselves, and behaved abominably during the closing exercises, and tumbled out of the door over each other, in the wildest fashion, the moment the signal was given, halting only to say, in the person of their leader:—

“You be on hand next Sunday; we like your yarns first rate.”

Mrs. Roberts, with glowing cheeks, and eyes behind which there were unshed tears, made her way to the desk where Mr. Durant was standing, and spoke quickly:

“There is a difference between others who have tried it and myself, Mr. Durant. The sentence in Mr. Ried's account that gave me courage was, 'Every one has failed, so far; people are unwilling to take the class a second time.' I have failed, but I want to try again.”

CHAPTER III. — “ANYTHING UNCOMMON ABOUT ME?”

Though they rushed out with even more noise than usual, every boy of them knew that the noise was to cover a certain sense of shame-facedness, because they had actually been beguiled into listening quietly for a few minutes to earnest words.

Directly they had reached the privacy of the street they became quieter.

“I say, boys,” said Nimble Dick, “is that an awful green one, or a new kind?”

“New, I should say,” replied one of the younger boys; “she ain't like anything that's been in that room since we got acquainted with it. I don't know her style, myself.”

“What do you take it she meant by that stuff about being friends, and telling us where she lived, and all that?”

“Dunno what she meant; but she ain't *green*, you may bet your head on that. I'll tell you what I think, boys: I b'lieve she knows what she is about, every time.”

What this sage conclusion amounted to, one not acquainted with the dialect of the street might have been at a loss to understand, but the rest of the party received it in grave silence and nods of the head, as though it were a thought that needed careful investigation. In common parlance, Jerry Tompkins had expressed the opinion that Mrs. Roberts had some point to gain in being so uncommonly polite and attentive to them, and they were curious to know what the motive could possibly be.

They considered the important question in silence until they reached the next corner; then Nimble Dick, tossing back his head as one who had thrown off an abstruse problem, and would have none of it, said:—

“Well, what next? We've got through with that fun for to-day. What are you going to do, boys? Say we go around to Poke's, and see what is going on there?”

To this proposition there was eager agreement from all the party save one; he maintained a somewhat moody silence.

“What say, Dirk?” the leader asked, addressing him; “are you ready for Poke's?”

“No; I don't think I'll go around, just now.”

“What, then? If you've got something better on hand, why don't you let a fellow know? We're not dying for Poke's place.”

“I haven't got a thing on hand; only I don't care about going there.”

“Where, then?”

“Nowhere.”

“Nowhere! Mean place. Too cold weather to stop in the streets. There'll be a good fire at Poke's. You come along; don't go to getting the sulks; it ain't becoming, just after you've been to Sunday-school.”

But the young fellow persisted in gloomily refusing to join them, and presently they began to tease, in what they meant to be a good-natured way.

“Dirk's struck,” said one. “That yellow-haired party has got him by the throat; I saw her looking at him most uncommon sharp, when she was telling that biggest story of hers, about the serpent that swallowed. Dirk he thinks he's been swallowed by one of 'em; he feels it choking in his throat.”

“No,” said another, “that ain't it; Dirk's a-going to get pious. That's his last dodge; I've seen the spell coming on, for some time. Didn't you see him pick up that there Bible and lay it on the seat the other Sunday, after Jerry's elbow knocked it off by mistake? I've been scared about Dirk ever since; and now he won't go to Poke's! It's a bad sign. I say, Dirk, maybe there's going to be a prayer-meeting down your way, and you wouldn't mind letting us come?”

They expected him to laugh, but his face grew blacker than before, and at last he said, in very significant tones:—

“You better hold up there, Scrawly, if you don't want to try the depth of that gutter.”

“Leave him be,” said Nimble Dick, quickly; “he's going into one of his tantrums. When he begins like that, there's no end to the fighting that's in him; and I don't want a row now,—it's too early in the day; besides, I know something that's better fun. You fellows come along with me, and let him go.”

As this was said in a sort of undertone as Dirk strode on ahead; and when, at another corner, he dashed down it, leaving them all, there was no call after him. He was free to go where he would, and for reasons that he himself could not have explained he chose that it should be home,—that is, the place which he called home. It might not meet your ideas of what a spot so named should be. The road to it led through one of the meanest portions of the city. Each foot of the way the houses seemed to grow more squalid looking, and the streets filthier. The particular alley down which he dived at last was narrower and blacker than any yet passed, and the cellar door which he pushed open let him into the meanest-looking house in the row,—a long, low, dark room. In one corner there was the remnant of a stove, braced up by bricks and stones, but no fire was burning therein, though the day was cold. Furniture there was none, unless the usual rickety table and two broken chairs could be called by that name. A door was ajar that led into an inner cellar, and a glimpse of piles of offensive looking rags, that were called “bed-clothes” by the family, might have given you an idea of what their home life was, as hardly any other phase of it can. The rags were not all in the further cellar, however; a gay patch-work quilt, or at least one that had once been gay, but from which bits of black cotton now oozed in every direction, seemed to have curled itself in a heap against the one window. However, it moved soon after Dirk opened the door, and showed itself to be more than a quilt. Inside was a young girl, the quilt wrapped around her closely, drawn up about her face and head, as if she would hide all but her eyes within, and try to get rid of shivering.

“You home?” she said, her tones expressing surprise, but at the same time indifference. “What is it for?”

“Because I wanted to come. Hasn't a fellow a right to come home if he wants to?”

“Of course; and it's such a lovely home, and you are so fond of it, no one need wonder at your coming in the middle of the day.”

The sentence was sarcastic enough, but the tones were hardly so; they expressed too much indifference even for sarcasm.

Dirk surveyed her thoughtfully; he seemed to have no answer ready. In fact, his face wore almost a startled air, and really the thought which presented itself for consideration was startling. Something about the face of the girl, done up so grotesquely in her ragged quilt, suggested the lady who had been his teacher at the Mission! Could one find a sharper contrast than existed between these two? Yet Dirk, as he looked, could not get away from it.

“What are you staring at?” the girl asked, presently, growing uneasy over the fixedness of his gaze. “Do you see anything uncommon about me?”

“Where's mother?” he asked, dropping his eyes, and turning from her.

“In there, asleep. You needn't talk quite so loud; it won't hurt her to get a bit of rest. She sat up till morning, poking at your old coat.”

Dirk looked down at it thoughtfully. There had been an attempt to make it decent, although the setting of the patches showed an unpractised hand, and they were of a strikingly different color from the coat itself.

“You might have done it for her, then, in the daytime,” he said, briefly, and added, “Where's father?”

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

“How should I know? Where he is most of the time; you know more about it than I do, or ought to; you live on the street.”

He gave her an answer which seemed to surprise her:—

“I say, Mart, what is the use in being so horrid cross all the time?”

“You are so good-natured,” she said, “and everything is so nice and pleasant around me, it is a wonder that I should ever be cross!”

“That's all lost, Mart, for I never said I was good-natured, nor thought I was; and if I don't know just how hateful things are, I should like to know who does! But, after all, what good does it do to snarl? Why couldn't you and me say a good-natured word once in a while, just for a change?”

“Try it,” she said; “I wish you would! I'm so tired of things as they now are, that most any change would be fine. But I'll risk your doing much in that line; it isn't in you.”

What was there in this cross girl to remind any one in his senses of Mrs. Evan Roberts? Yet even as she spoke that last ungracious sentence, she turned a little, so that a slant beam of sunshine—one of the few that ever found its way into this dreary room—laid a streak of light just across her hair, yellowing it until it was almost the shade that he had noted in the lady at the Mission; and he thought of her again, and wondered curiously whether, if Mart were dressed in the shining black dress, and fur wraps and feather-decked bonnet that the lady had worn, she would really resemble her. How would Mart look dressed up, he wondered; even decently dressed, as the girls were whom he met on the streets. He had never seen her in anything much more becoming than the ragged quilt. He was studying her in a way that Mart did not in the least understand. She broke the spell suddenly again:—

“Have you had any dinner?”

“Dinner? Why, no! of course not! Where would I find that sort of thing? I looked all up and down the streets, and smelled plenty of it, but not a bite did I get.”

“Where have you been?”

“Oh, around in several places; not much of anywhere.”

“I know where you've been,”—a severe light coming into her eyes; “you've been down to the South End, and if I was you I'd be ashamed of myself! I know how you fellows go on down there. Sallie Calkins goes, and she told me all about it. She said that she was ashamed to live on the same street with any of you, and that none of the folks in the Mission knew what to do with you, and the next thing you knew you would all be marched off to the lockup.”

“Let them try it,” muttered Dirk, his face growing darker; “we'd make that street too hot to hold them in short order if they played at any such game as that, and I guess they know it.”

“Well, anyhow, I wouldn't be meaner and lower down than I had to be, Dirk Colson! It is bad enough as it is,—a drunkard for a father, and we nothing more than beggars! But I'd behave myself half-way decent when I went among folks that wanted to be good to me, or else I'd stay away.”

“Look here, you keep your preaching for them that wants to hear it; I don't. A fellow can't come home without having a row; if it isn't of one kind, it's another. I wonder I ever come home at all.”

Dirk was angry now, and his dark, thin face looked fierce with passion. His sister kept the curiously composed tone and manner with which she had said all her exasperating things.

“I wonder you do,” she said. “I suppose you get starved, and can't help it, now and then. There's some dinner I saved for you. If you want it, eat it, and then take yourself to some place that suits you better.”

As she spoke, she jerked open the door of a little cupboard near which she stood, and brought therefrom a much-cracked plate, on which lay a baked potato, with one end broken or bitten off, then carefully replaced, as if the owner might have had a second thought as to its disposal; there was also a bit of corn-bread, somewhat burned, and half of a roasted apple.

Meagre as the fare was for a hungry boy, there was more variety than he had expected, and something in the simple preparation touched him, and quieted his anger.

“Where did this come from?” he asked, taking in the unaccustomed morsel of apple with two eager bites. “I tell you, that is good!”

“Sally Calkins gave it to me last night. She got one give to her somewhere.”

Just as the last bite was gone, it occurred to Dirk, first to wonder, and then to be almost certain, that his sister, having shared the apple, had saved her entire share for him. It was not the first time he had known of such an effort on her part to supply him with food. Had he thought of it sooner he would certainly have left a bit of the dainty for her; but no thought of telling her so, for an instant crossed his mind. Neither had she, on her part, the slightest idea of describing to him with what care and patience she and Sallie had roasted the choice morsel before Sallie's fire, only last night,—Sallie's father being fortunately late in coming, and so giving them a chance; then she had borne hers home in a bit of paper, and carefully guarded it all day, just for this hour. Also, she might have told him that she bit the end from the potato before she remembered that there would be none left for him, and then fitted it on again as best she could, and went without. She would not have told him for worlds. Why? She could not have explained why. Something within her shrank from letting him know, not that she sacrificed for him, but that she *cared* enough for him to want to do it!

Potato and corn-bread were gone, to the last crumb; it seemed to Dirk that there had been only enough of them to show him how hungry he was.

“I suppose there isn't anything more?” he said, wistfully, with the rising inflection, indeed, but not as one who had any idea of receiving an affirmative answer.

“I should think there wasn't!”—defiance in the tone—“there's a piece of bread that I kept for mother's supper, and I mean she shall have it.”

“Well, don't bite me! I'm perfectly willing that she shall. Isn't there anything for a fire?”

“Only some chips that I'm saving till mother has her nap out.”

“You better go to bed yourself, then; it's awful cold here.”

“I ain't going to stir from this corner so long as this streak of light lasts. It isn't so very often I see it that I can afford to lose it.”

Her brother turned and looked at her. She had gathered the folds of the ragged quilt about her again, and

was crouching at the low window, and the very last gleam that the sunshine would vouchsafe them came and glimmered in her hair.

There it was again,—that mysterious, haunting resemblance! What would Mart think if he told her of it? Probably that he was trying to poke fun at her. At least, he should not experiment. Yet he could not help wondering again, how Mart would look if she were dressed like other people.

“I say, Mart,” he began, suddenly, breaking the stillness, “let's you and I get out of this, where it is warmer. Come and take a walk down on the avenue; the sun will shine yet for half an hour, and it is real warm and bright.”

“In this quilt?” she asked, significantly, looking down at it.

The boy's face darkened.

“Hasn't your shawl got out of pawn yet?”

“How should it?”

He flung himself angrily out of the broken chair, picked up his ragged cap, and strode angrily and noisily across the room, out at the door, stumbling up the steps, like one half-blind with disgust or rage, and went on swift feet down the street out of sight. And Mart, poor Mart, left thus to solitude, let the last beam of the sun go without watching, and buried her face in the ragged quilt and cried.

CHAPTER IV. — “I DON'T BLAME THEM.”

It was not a “pet” name. Poor Mart Colson would not have known what to do with a pet name. Her life had not taught her how to use such phrases; how she came to be named Martha, she did not know; but a hollow-eyed, sad-voiced woman could have told her of a country home, long ago, where there were daffodils blowing in the early spring, almost under the snow; where, later, the earth was turned into sky, or the stars came down and gleamed all over her father's fields, so plentiful were the dandelions; and the breath of the clover came in at all the open windows, and the cows—her father's cows—coming home from pasture, and the tinkle of their bells were sights and sounds familiar to her ear. She sat there one summer evening, in the back-door, watching the glory and the peace, and studying, between times, her Sabbath lesson. Often and often the words came back to her in future years. “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” That was one of the verses. Was it a dim memory of the words, and a sort of blind reaching out after their fulfilment, that led her to name her poor little two-days-old baby, Martha? The old home had vanished, the sweet-scented meadows, the tinkling bells, the peace and the plenty, were as utterly things of the past as though they had not been. Mother, and father, and one brother, were gone, lying in grass-grown, neglected graves; and she—why the two-days-old baby's father was *drunk*; and had been for three weeks! A hard, hateful-sounding word,—coarse, almost. Why don't I say intoxicated? Oh, because I can't! I've no desire to find smooth-sounding words with which to cover the sin of that baby's father. But the mother named her Martha. She never told her why, if, indeed, she herself fully knew; it was not a family name. Gradually, after the fashion of the times, she sought to shorten the name; and because they had not sweet, short words, as “Pet,” and “Dear” and “Sweet,”—all such belong to happy homes,—they grew to calling her Mart. And now even she herself hardly realized that she had ever owned to any other call. Poor Mart! I find myself wanting to use the adjective over and over again when I speak of her. Such a desolate, loveless life! Always a drunken father,—she had never known any other; always a sharp-toned, weary-eyed, disheartened mother, who shut her tenderness for the child within herself, as one who could not afford to show it. Then Dirk, the one brother, going astray almost as soon as he was born. What wonder, from such a home? Yet Mart wondered and felt bitter over it. Why could not Dirk be like some others of whom she knew? Like Sallie Calkin's brother, for instance, who worked day and night, and brought home, often and often, an apple, or a herring, or sometimes even a picture paper for Sallie! Mart was sharp-tongued; all her life had taught her to be so. She spoke sharp words out of the bitterness of her heart at Dirk, and of late rarely anything but sharp words, yet—and this was Mart's secret, hidden away as if it were something of which to be ashamed—she *loved* Dirk, loved him fiercely, with all the pent-up wealth of her young heart; and often, *because* she loved him, she was harsh and bitter towards him, though she did not herself understand why this should be.

As for Dirk, he walked rapidly but for a few blocks; his dinner had been too insufficient to give him strength, after the first aimless anger had subsided. Then came the question what to do with himself. Why hadn't he gone with the fellows? More than likely some of them had contrived a way to get a dinner. Why had he persisted in sullenly leaving them all and going home?

He had not the least idea why he had been impelled to go home. Now that he was fairly away from home again, he had no idea what to do with himself. A place where he could warm his feet and his hands, where he could get a bite to eat, possibly,—this last would be an immense attraction, but was not a necessity, and he did not expect it,—but warmth, at least, he felt that he must have. Where would he find it? What place had been provided for such as he? He ought by this time to have been earning his own living, to have had a corner which he could call home, earned by himself, where some of the decencies of life were gathered. Of course he ought; but the painful fact to meet just now, was that he had not done his duty. He had gone astray; not so far but that there were plenty of chances to go farther, greater deeps to which he might yet reach, but far enough to all but break any watchful mother's heart; only that *his* mother's heart was broken before he was born. The simple question waiting to be solved was this: Having done as poorly for himself as under the circumstances he well could, what was Dirk Colson to do next? He had no idea; neither, apparently, had multitudes of Christian people engaged in praying that the Father's will might be done on earth, even as it

was in heaven. The young man walked six blocks down the respectable avenue, lined with pleasant homes, where the people went to church, and read their Bibles, and had family prayers, and kept holy the Sabbath day. Not a door among them all opened and held out a winning signal to arrest his heedless feet. Not so Satan! Is he ever caught idling at his post?

Just around the corner from the respectable avenue (and around the corner Dirk presently turned, still uncertain what to do, where to find the warmth he craved) then the winning invitations for such as he began to present themselves. Saloons, and saloons, and saloons! How many of them were there? Far outnumbering the churches! Pleasant they looked, too; opening doors, ever and anon, revealing brightness and warmth within. They would like to see him inside. Of this Dirk was sure; not that he had money, but he had something that in such places often served him well,—a decided and dangerous talent for imitating any and every peculiarity of voice or manner that had chanced to come under his notice. He could make the fellows in these saloons roar with laughter. If he did particularly well, they were willing to order for him a glass of beer, or a fairly good cigar; in any case he had a chance to get warm. This was actually Dirk's only present source of income! Yet he shrank from it; he could not have told you why, but on this particular Sabbath he was averse to earning his coveted warmth in this way. He walked resolutely by two or three places where he had reason to think he might be welcomed, wondering vaguely whether there wasn't something else a fellow could do to keep himself from freezing. Oddly enough there seemed to be something about the glimmer of sunshine as he saw it in Mart's hair that kept him from halting before any of the places open to him. What if she had come out with him to take a walk; he could not have taken her into one of them! Then, poor fellow, he set himself to wondering where the place was, open and warmed, to which he could take Mart. There were places, several of them, in the large city; but Dirk knew nothing about them, and he was acquainted with the saloons. He thought of another thing; he had been invited to call at a house on East Fifty-fifth Street. Suppose he should walk up there this very afternoon and ring the bell, and say that he had come to call! What would happen then? Whereupon he laughed aloud. The fancy seemed to him so utterly preposterous. The idea of *his* making a call! The utter improbability of his ever seeing the inside of one of the East Fifty-fifth Street mansions!

Still remained that hopeless question: What should he do with himself? The sun was quite gone now, and a cold wind was blowing up freshly from the north. It blew directly through Dirk's threadbare garments. He turned suddenly and slipped inside one of the worst of the many saloons which literally lined this end of the street. He had refused to go with the boys to Poke's, an hour or two before, and this was several grades below Poke's in decency! But it was growing dark, and he was cold.

There was one young man who saw him dash down those cellar stairs, who stood still and looked at him, his face darkening the while with discouragement. This, then, was all the afternoon's Sabbath-school had accomplished for him. To be sure he was not disappointed at the result; it was no more than he had expected; but it was so discouraging to be an eye-witness to the degradation to which these young wretches had fallen! Of course the young man was Alfred Ried, and he went home, and was dreary, over all sorts of failures in Christian work, mission Sabbath-schools especially; and their own, more especially than any other.

Among the early shoppers on Monday morning came Mrs. Evan Roberts. Shopping, however, seemed to be a small part of her business. She came directly to young Ried's counter, and addressed him very much as though she had ceased talking with him but a moment before:—

“Mr. Ried, what can you and I do for those boys during the week?”

But Alfred was at his gloomiest.

“I don't see that we can do anything for them at any time,” he said, dismally. “What is an hour on Sunday, set against all the rest of the time? They go from the school-room to the rum saloons, and dawdle away the rest of the day. Yesterday I met that young Colson going into one of the worst saloons on Dey Street. They are not to blame, either.” This last in a fiercer tone, after a slight pause. “I don't blame them; they have nowhere else to go, and nothing to do; and it is cold on the streets, and warm in the saloons.”

If he expected the small lady, who was regarding him so steadily, to take the other side of this question, he was disappointed. She spoke quietly enough, but with the earnestness of conviction.

“Those are startling facts. I do not see how one could be surprised that the results are they are; and the practical question forces itself upon us, What are we to do under the circumstances? Mr. Ried, you have had your eyes open in regard to this subject for some time; what have you thought out?”

Now was Mr. Alfred Ried embarrassed. It was true that his eyes had been long open to the subject; it was true that he had given it a great deal of what he had called thought. But with those alert eyes fixed on his face, her whole manner indicating intense earnestness, he suddenly realized that all his thought had been to no purpose, had accomplished nothing, unless it had served to give him a feeling almost of irritation against the boys, and their teachers who made failures, and the people who folded their hands and let things go to ruin. Here confronted him one, whose hands were not folded, though they rested quietly enough on the counter before him. He began to feel that there might be latent power in them.

“I have nothing to say,” and he said it at last with flushed face and embarrassed voice; “I have thought out nothing. The whole thing seemed hopeless to me with my utter lack of resources. My sister had schemes, many of them, and they seemed to me good ones, even then; they seem better now, only I cannot carry them out.”

She caught at the name.

“Your sister? Ester Ried? Good! Let us carry them out, you and I, and as many more as we can get to help us. She is at work yet,—don't you see? What is that prophecy about her?—that voice which the prophet heard, you know, 'And I heard a voice saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.'”

How strangely the words sounded, repeated in her low, clear voice, amid the hum of business on every side! Alfred Ried felt singularly moved. He had been a highly strung, imaginative child. He had been his sister Ester's almost constant companion during those last months in which she was slowly fading out of sight. While Julia held steadily to her mother's side, and learned to do many helpful things, he had been stationed chief nurse in Ester's room, to see that she lacked for no tender care during the hours when others must be

away from her. And those hours she had tenderly improved. He remembered to this day just how she looked, with a pink flush all over her cheeks, and a bright light in her eyes, as she talked to him of the things that she and Dr. Douglass had meant to do for boys,—neglected, homeless, friendless boys. Oh, the plans they had carefully thought out, to reach after these forsaken ones! He remembered that his own cheeks had grown hot while he listened, and the blood had seemed to race like fire through his veins when she said, “God wants *me* for something else, Alfred; but you will do my work when you get to be a man; you will find helpers, and carry it on as I wanted to do.” He had made no audible answer, but he had told himself sturdily again and again that he certainly would. Yet here he was, barely of age, and almost soured by disappointments. Certain well-meant attempts having proved failures, and having not found the helpers whom he had eagerly expected, the magnitude of the work impressed itself upon him more remorselessly each hour. Yet now he seemed to feel again the thrill in his veins, and he felt almost under the power of his sister's eye while those words were in his ears: “They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.” Might it possibly be that this was one of the “helpers” of whom Ester used to talk, sent by God himself to take up her planned work and follow it out? Yet she was so utterly unlike his memory of Ester! She had seemed to him a self-reliant, strong-toned woman; Mrs. Roberts was so small and frail-looking, and so fashionably dressed, and how those boys had acted with her only yesterday! What could she possibly do?

Customers came just then, to change the current of his thoughts. They wanted round collars, and deep collars, and fichus, and edges, and a hundred little irritating things. Young Ried, usually so gracious and patient, had much ado to keep from showing his annoyance over the smallness of all their wishes.

Meantime Mrs. Roberts, who had taken a seat, entered apparently with absorption into the relative merits of round or pointed collars with a young lady acquaintance. She patiently measured to discover whether the turned-down corner of one was a quarter of an inch deeper than the other or not; she gave, with due deliberation, her opinion as to whether the points were more becoming to the young lady's style of beauty than the rolling fronts, and even went to the trouble of unfastening her furs to show still another style that she liked better than either; sending the disgusted Alfred to an entirely different box in search of a like pattern. As he went, his lip curled visibly. What a fool he had been to allow himself to get momentarily excited over this doll! How preposterous in him to mention his dead sister's name to her! She had already forgotten the entire matter, and was deep in the merits of collars! His first estimate of her had been the correct one. Her mind was just about as deep, he believed, as the tiny collar she was measuring. What a farce it was to talk to her about helping those poor fellows! She probably thought a few soup tickets, and a chance for a good Christmas dinner at some of the public charity halls, was the way to reach and reform them. *He* shouldn't help her; she mustn't expect it. Doubtless she did not. Probably she had by this time forgotten that she had suggested it. Why need she putter here about a few collars for a young lady in her own circle to wear with her morning dresses? That was just it, he told himself. It was because she *was* in her circle, and because the collars were to be honored by being worn by such as she, that they became important, and the boys and their desperate needs sunk into insignificance. Well, he wished they would both go, and leave him to himself; give him a chance to rally from his momentary excitement, of which he was now ashamed.

At last the collars were bought,—but not until the counter was strewn with different sorts; and the lady, with many bright little nothings for last words, moved off to another part of the store, and Mrs. Roberts whirled on her seat until her eyes were in full view again, and said:

“What were some of her plans, Mr. Ried?”

CHAPTER V. — “A CHRISTIAN HOME.”

“I don't suppose you can go into detail just now,” she added, noting young Ried's hesitation and embarrassment; “but I was wondering if you could give me some general idea of what she wanted to do, or thought could be done.”

“There were a great many things that she wanted to do, and I believe she thought they could be done; but I don't think she knew the world very well,” said this aged cynic. “She judged everybody from the standpoint of her own unselfishness. I remember she was not in sympathy with soup-houses, and dinner-tickets, and great public charities of that sort. Or, I don't know that I should say she was not in sympathy with them. I mean, rather, that those would not have been her ways of working. She was thinking of young people, and to give them a dinner now and then, she would not have considered a very great step toward elevating them morally and spiritually. Mrs. Roberts, it was just that which she wanted to do,—lift them up. She thought there could be invented ways of reaching them, so that they would want helping, want teaching,—*crave* it, I mean; and she thought that Christian homes of wealth and culture could be opened to them, and they gradually toled in,—made to feel on a level with others, in the social scale; in short, she believed that instead of people going down to them in a condescending spirit, they could be drawn up to the level of others, so that they would realize their manhood, and be led to make earnest efforts to take their rightful places in the world. I know I am bungling dreadfully; I don't know how to tell you her plans, only that they were splendid. But I am afraid the world will have to be made over, before they can be carried out.”

“Perhaps so. Christ is at work making the world over, you know.” The lady before him, whose eyes never for an instant moved from his face, spoke with exceeding sweetness and gravity. Neither by word nor glance did she give him to understand that she thought his schemes wild. “But I find that, after all, I want details. I catch a glimpse of the grandness of your sister's meaning. What were some of the steps,—the little steps, such as you and I could take, toward accomplishing? Yet, even while I ask the question, I see something of what the

answer must be. 'Christian homes opening to receive them!' That is a new thought to me, and in the plural number I do not see how just now, it could be done, but *one* Christian home,—I ought to be able to manage that. Mr. Ried, that is the way to begin it, you may depend. Indeed, I suppose you have tried it? The city is full of boys, and many of them are away down. Since we cannot reach all of them this week, we must try to reach seven; and failing in that, suppose we say one? For which one have you been working? Just who, at this moment, specially interests you? I hope it is one of my boys, because, you see, they appeal to me, just now, as no others can. Which is it, Mr. Ried? and what have you tried to do for him? and to what extent have you succeeded?”

There were never any hotter cheeks than young Ried's just at that moment. This was the most extraordinary person with whom he had ever talked. It was impossible to generalize with her. Not that he wanted to generalize; on the contrary, he at once saw the possibilities growing out of individual effort, and caught at the idea of undertaking something. But the question was, Why had he not thought of it before? One person to reach after, and try for!—surely, he might have attempted it, instead of trying to carry the hundreds that he stumbled against, and so accomplish nothing for any of them. It was humiliating, the confession that he had to make:—

“Indeed, Mrs. Roberts, I have not one in mind. If you asked me what one hundred I was most anxious about, I might possibly be able to answer; but I see that there has been no individuality about it, unless, perhaps, the half-dozen or more boys who compose that class are taking a little stronger hold on me than any of the others; but even for them I have tried to do nothing, unless two or three attempts to secure a permanent teacher for them—which have ended in failure—may count for effort. I don't blame myself as much as I might, because, now that you suggest personal work to me, I realize that there is nothing for one situated as I am to do. I have no Christian home at my command.”

“Ah, but we are to come down to very small numbers, you know,—to fractions, if need be. You have a piece of Christian home at command, I trust?”

But he looked at her inquiringly, and she explained:—

“Why, you have the privacy of your own room, which is, of course, your corner of home just now, and it is a Christian corner. Is there not room in it sometimes for two?”

He smiled faintly over that.

“Mrs. Roberts, there is one thing with which you evidently are not familiar, and that is the corner which a poor clerk in the city has to call home. Mine is the fourth story back of a fourth-rate boarding-house, where the thermometer drops often below the freezing-point, and this place I share with as uncongenial a fellow as ever breathed. What would you think of labelling such accommodations 'home?' and what can I do in it for others?”

“Not much, perhaps,” smiling, “unless for the uncongenial fellow. I should think there might be a chance in this direction.”

“Ah, but,” he said, eagerly, “he is a Christian. My sympathies do not need to be drawn out in that direction.”

The smile was a peculiar one now, but the tone was very quiet in which the little lady said that some time, when they had leisure to talk, she should like to ask him whether his experience with Christians had been so exceptionally bright that he thought there was no work to do in that direction.

“But just now,” she added, earnestly, “I want to know, since you are shut away from home effort, for which of these boys you are praying especially, and which of them do you carry about on your heart, with the hope of a chance meeting, an unexpected, opportunity to speak a word, or do a kindness, or look a kindness that shall give you possible future influence? Don't you have to work in those ways? Two people never equally interest me at the same moment. I find I must be intensely individual, not to the exclusion of others, but in praying. For instance, yesterday I prayed, and this morning I prayed, for my entire class, but there was one all the time who was uppermost. I find myself questioning, What can I do for them all, but especially for him? Do you know, I fancy that most Christians feel the same; individual effort is so necessary that I have thought perhaps the Holy Spirit turns our thoughts most directly toward one person at a time, so that we may concentrate our efforts. Do you think this is so?”

Young Ried did not answer promptly; he had no answer ready that suited him. His strongest feeling just then was one of self-reproach, mingled with humiliation. How had he looked down on this fair and beautiful little woman,—her very beauty being, he had fancied, an element against her when it came to actual effort. How had he allowed himself to sneer over her attempts at teaching that class of boys! How actually irritable he had been over it! How almost angrily he had questioned why it was that a teacher was not found for them fitted to their needs; when he had prayed about it so much; determined not to believe that the prayer had been answered, and the teacher found; yet here she was, the one whose efforts he had despised, talking already about individual prayer for them, while he, who had done a great amount of fretting for them, had not once presented them as individuals to Christ, and asked a definite blessing for each! His answer, when it came, was low and full of feeling:—

“I have concentrated my desires in praying for the coming of such a teacher as might get hold of them; and I begin to think that I have an answer to my prayers.”

But she was absolutely proof against compliments. She wasted not a moment's thought on that, but said:—

“Mr. Ried, who are they? I tried to get their names yesterday, but soon saw that they were not in the mood to help me. I don't think I have one correct name. Can you give me a list?”

No, he could not—which admission did not lessen the glow on his cheek. Possibly he could mention the names of two, and guess at a third, but of the others he knew nothing.

“To whom, then, can I go? Mr. Durant would know, of course. Where shall I find him?”

So much Alfred knew. Mr. Durant was to be found at the Fourth National Bank; but, as for giving information in regard to that class, he was sure it was beyond him. He (Alfred) had asked only last Sabbath who the boy was who behaved so wretchedly, and also who was the fellow next him, but Mr. Durant had not

known.

Well, then, Mrs. Roberts said, nothing daunted, not even a shadow appearing on her quiet face, she must just study it out with his help.

“There is immediate work for you,” she said, “for of course I want to know their names. Who are the two? This Dirk Colson, whom you mentioned,—which was he?”

Alfred described him as well as his bewilderment would allow, and was interrupted—

“Oh, the small dark one. I know,—he interested me. Where does he live?”

But to this question no clear answer could be given. Down in one of the alleys towards the South End; but just which alley, or how far down it, Alfred did not know. He knew it was a disreputable alley, and that there wasn't a decent home anywhere about it, and that was all.

“What does Dirk do for a living?”

This question was quite as difficult to answer as the other. Nothing, young Ried believed; at least nothing regular; odd jobs he doubtless picked up occasionally, but as for regular employment, Alfred was sure he had none.

“Is that his fault? I mean, doesn't he desire work, and make an effort to secure it?”

But this young Ried could not even pretend to answer. Work, for such as he, was scarce; boys with better habits, brought up to be industrious, were at this present time out of work. Possibly the fellow was not to blame for being an idler.

Many other questions were asked, and many attempts were made at answers; but when the shoppers began to press in, to such a degree that their conversation was broken, and the energetic seeker after information felt herself obliged to retire, one thing had been accomplished: Alfred Ried had been made to realize that he knew much less than he had supposed he did about the seven boys who had seemed to be filling his thoughts for several weeks; and also, in his eager, passionate desire that everything should be done for all of them, he had overlooked the chances for doing here and there some little thing for one of them.

“Good morning,” Mrs. Roberts had said, turning cordially to a fashionably-dressed lady. “Collars? Oh, yes, this is the counter for them to be found in endless variety. They have a new pattern that I have been admiring. Mr. Ried, please show Mrs. Emory the curtain collars, with embroidered points.”

Which thing Mr. Ried proceeded to do with alacrity and respect, no trace of the earlier contemptuous feeling shadowing his face. Here was a woman who knew stylish collars when she saw them, and who also knew several other things, and had taught him a lesson this very morning that he would not be likely to forget.

But Mrs. Roberts, as she made her way out from the fast-filling store, felt that she had not made great progress toward getting acquainted with her class.

Still it must be admitted that if young Ried had gotten some new ideas, so also had she. “A Christian home!” She found herself repeating the phrase, lingering over it, wondering if her new home, in every sense of the word, merited that title. “It cannot simply mean a home where Christ is honored,” she said to herself. “I surely have that. It rather means a home where everything pertaining to it serves His cause. The very furniture and the light and the brightness are made to do duty for Him, else they have no place there; and I, labelled Christian, have no right to them. Can they bear the test, I wonder? What is there that I can do with all the beauties of my parlors? There are things that I have not done. I can see some to do; but how can my Christian home serve these boys? When I get them into it, of course it will work for me; but how to get them in! Who are they? I wonder what spring I can touch to give me even this meagre bit of information?”

As if in answer to her mental query, she came just then full upon Policeman Duffer. She recognized him instantly: a man who, though by no means small, was so far from having the majestic presence of most policemen that, in the estimation of the boys, he merited the name “Little Duffer.” Mrs. Roberts carried to her new work one talent not always to be found among even efficient workers,—the ability to remember both names and faces. Especially did a name seem, without any effort on her part, to fasten itself upon her memory; and not only that, but it brought with it a train of memories enabling her to locate when and where, and under what circumstances, she heard the name; and, therefore, generally whom the name fitted. Recognizing the features of the policeman whom she had seen at the door of the South End Mission, she connected him at once with the term “Little Duffer,” heard in her class, and addressed him:—

“Mr. Duffer, I believe.”

It is safe to say that Policeman Duffer, entirely accustomed as he was to hearing himself addressed officially a hundred or a thousand times a day, was yet utterly unaccustomed to the prefix of “Mr.”, and started in surprise.

“Are you not the gentleman whom I saw at the South End last Sabbath?”

The policeman admitted that he probably was. He was detailed for duty there. Then she plunged at once into business. Did he know the boys who attended that school? Some of them he did, better than he wanted to; and a precious set they were, in Policeman Duffer's opinion.

“Might as well go out to the Zoo,” he declared, “and get a set of animals and try to tame 'em.”

Mrs. Roberts was not in the mood to argue; she was bent on information. Did he know, she wondered, the boys who composed her class? She had just taken the class, and was so unfortunate as not to be acquainted with their names. One was Dirk Colson, and another she had heard was Haskell—Timothy Haskell, perhaps, though of that she was not certain. Did that give Mr. Duffer any clue?

“Plenty of clue,” he said, shaking his head. “So you've taken that class, ma'am?”—a curious mixture of amazement and credulity in his voice. “What possessed you, if I may be so bold? They're a hard lot, ma'am. I know them, as I said, altogether too well. I've had enough to do with some of them; and I expect more work from them. They gain in wickedness in a most surprising way. Their names, yes; there's Scrawley and Sneaking Billy, and Black Dirk,—him you know.”

Mrs. Roberts interrupted him. She begged his pardon, but could those really be the boys names? Were they

not rather some unfortunate street names that had been fastened upon them?

Thus brought back to his senses, Policeman Duffer laughed, and admitted that he supposed Sneaking Billy was properly named Sneyder; but he was once caught in a mean trick, from which he tried in so many ways to squirm out, that the boys had themselves named him Sneaking Billy, and the name had stuck.

As for “Scrawley,” his real name was Stephen Crowley. How it became contracted into “Scrawley” the boys could tell better than anybody else. They always called him that, and so did other people; and Policeman Duffer was inclined to doubt whether the fellow remembered that he had any other name.

“You can see yourself, ma'am,” he added, “how Black Dirk came by his name. He is the blackest white fellow as ever I saw, and I've seen crowds of 'em.”

The streets were full, and Policeman Duffer was being interviewed by a great many people in regard to all the questions that policemen are expected to answer. But by dint of patient waiting, one foot poised on a curbstone to keep it out of the mud, making hurried little memoranda while Policeman Duffer was engaged, and earnestly plying her questions when he was at leisure, Mrs. Roberts learned the names of her seven boys, and where several of them lived.

CHAPTER VI. — “SATAN, HE HAS 'EM ALL THE WEEK.”

“That Black Dirk is a case,” said Policeman Duffer, turning hastily away from an unusually stupid man, who could not be made to understand where a certain street was. “He is the worst of the lot, *I* believe. Jerry Tompkins is slyer, and Dick Bolton is quicker than lightning at mischief; Nimble Dick they call him; he's a sort of ringleader; what he does the rest are apt to; but, to my thinking, Dirk is ahead of them all for evil. The rest are kind of jolly; fun seems to be about half that they are after; but Dirk, he's sullen; you never know how to take him, nor when he may burst out on you. He's dangerous. I am always looking out for something awful that he will do.”

Poor Dirk! Yet he was the boy to whom Mrs. Roberts' desires had gone out the most anxiously. It was over his image that she had lingered that morning in her closet. Policeman Duffer would have been greatly astonished had he known there was that in his words which gave her courage. “Perhaps,” she said to herself, with quickening breath, “oh, perhaps the poor boy is the most in danger of them all, and the Saviour, knowing it, sees ways in which I may reach him, and so presses his poor, sullen face on my memory.”

“What does he do for a living?” she hastened to ask.

“Well, to the best of my knowledge, he loafs for a living. That's all I've ever known him guilty of doing. He's got a drunken father,—one of the meanest kind of drunkards. If he would go and stay drunk all the time and leave them alone they might manage; but he has spells of getting half over it, and coming home and tearing around like all possessed. Then they have times! I've been in there when it took all my strength to manage him. If he would get killed in one of his rows I'd have some hope of the rest of 'em; but he won't. That kind of folks never do get killed; it's the decent ones. A fellow was carried by here just with a broken leg,—a nice, decent boy; works hard to help his sister. He's the sort now that gets his leg broken and gets laid up for the rest of the winter. How do you account for that? He lives pretty near Black Dirk's. Of course, he's got a drunken father; they all have in that row; but if I was going in for benevolence I'd twice as soon do something for young Calkins as for any of your set; they're a bad lot. They aren't worth lifting a finger for. Now, that's a fact.”

“And yet,” said Mrs. Roberts, her voice tremulous with a feeling that just then surged over her, “how can I help remembering that if the Lord Jesus had said that of us, and stayed up there in his glory, we should have been utterly without help or hope to-day?”

Very much astonished was Policeman Duffer. Ladies on all sorts of errands had consulted him. He had been presented with many tracts in his day; but rarely had a clear-voiced, earnest-eyed woman quietly confronted him with that name, as if it contained an unanswerable argument. However, he was not embarrassed; it took a great deal to embarrass him.

“I don't take much stock in him,” he said, with a lofty toss of his head, and a careless tone, as though the question were one easy to dispose of. “I don't believe in him myself.”

“Do you know him?”

Earnest eyes, raised to his face, fixed steadily on his face, while the questioner waited quietly for an answer.

Policeman Duffer was embarrassed now; he was not used to being confronted with such matter-of-fact questions.

“Do I know him?” with a confused little laugh. “Why, I reckon not, ma'am; according to the popular notion he is too far away for folks to be well acquainted.”

“Then popular notion is mistaken, for I know him very well indeed; and he is by no means far away. But what I meant was, Have you studied his life and character, and do you fully understand the arguments for believing in him?”

“I study the folks who profess to belong to him, ma'am, and I find that about as much as I can stand.”

This was said with a saucy little laugh, and with the air of a man who believed he had produced an

unanswerable argument. The steady eyes did not move from his face, and the voice which answered him had lost none of its quietness:—

“But do you think it is wise to spend your time in studying the imperfect copies, without looking at the perfect pattern? You would not take the child's careless imitation as a proof that his teacher could not write. I thank you for helping me to-day. I wish you would help my boys when you can; and I wish you would study my Master instead of me. Good morning.”

“That's a queer party!” did Policeman Duffer exclaim, as he watched her far down the street. “I'm blessed if I wouldn't like to know who she is; she ain't like the rest, somehow. *Her* boys! Much she knows about 'em! Her *bears* she might as well call 'em! What does she think she can do with that set in her little hour, Sunday afternoon? Satan, he has 'em all the week, and looks after 'em sharp; and then these Christians come in of a Sunday, and mince a little, and think they can upset his doings by it. Shows their sense! But she's a curious little party; sharp, without knowing it. I'm blessed if I don't keep an eye on her, and save her from scrapes, if I can.”

Meantime, all unconscious of his good intentions, Mrs. Roberts pursued her way down the thronged avenue, and presently turned from it entirely, and moved down one of the side-streets with resolute steps. A daring thought had come into her mind; she would try to find the alley where one at least of her boys lived. It couldn't be worse than some of the alleys at home which she had penetrated. She felt certain that by following the policeman's directions she could find the place, and possibly be able to minister to the boy with a broken limb. At all events, it was necessary for her to know how her boys lived, and where they lived, if she were to reach them. But there are alleys, and *alleys*, as the venturesome lady found to her cost. This one into which she was plunging excelled anything in that line which she had ever imagined,—swarming with life in its most repulsive forms, and growing every moment more terrifying to a well-dressed woman braving its horrors alone.

She stopped in dismay at last, admitting, reluctantly, that the wisest thing she could do was to turn around and go home. Possibly the *wisest*, but not, it appeared, practicable. Where *was* home? Down which of the cross-streets had she come? Did this one where she stood lead to it, or did it lead, as it appeared to her, in an entirely opposite direction? She looked up and down and across for some familiar landmark, and looked in vain, growing momentarily more frightened at the attention she was attracting by standing irresolutely there. Flossy Shipley, in her girlhood days, had been almost a hopeless coward; and Flossy Roberts felt, by the throbbing of her heart, that she had not yet outgrown her girlish character. Suddenly she gave a little exclamation of delight, and with a spring forward laid her hand on the arm of one whom she recognized, none other than “Nimble Dick” himself.

“I am so glad,” she said to the amazed young scamp, a little quiver of satisfaction in her voice, “so glad to have met you. Do you know you are a friend in need? I have lost my way. I cannot decide which way to turn to reach Fifth Avenue again. Will you help me, please?”

When had Nimble Dick lost an opportunity for fun at the expense of another? Here was a chance for a jolly lark! A woman scared to death because she was on Green alley. What would she think of Burk Street! Suppose he should send her there? Only three blocks away, through a lovelier part of the city than she had seen yet, he would venture! If the crowds here showed her too much attention, it would be worth something to see how she got through Burk Street.

“Oh, yes,” he said, briskly, “I can show you the way in a twinkling. You just go down this alley till you come to the big house on the corner, that has the windows all knocked out of it; then you turn and go down that street till you get to the third crossing; then turn again to the right, and you'll be on Fifth Avenue before you know it.”

Had Mrs. Roberts been looking at his face, she would have seen the wicked light dancing in his eyes over the thought that he had thus mapped out for her a walk through the very worst portion of the city, every step, of course, leading her further and further away from Fifth Avenue. The sights that she might see, and the mishaps which might occur to her,—a handsomely-dressed woman alone,—before she made her way through the horrors of these streets were too much even for Nimble Dick's imagination, who knew the locality well. He did not try to calculate them, but gave himself up to the enjoyment of imagining how long it would be before she would reach home if she followed his directions. “She won't see no swallowing serpents that I knows of,” he reflected, gleefully; “but I'll miss my reckoning if she don't see what will scare her worse than they would.”

But Mrs. Roberts was already “scared.” She felt her heart beating hard, and knew that her cheeks were aglow with excitement and vague terror. She was not used to walking such streets alone. She looked ahead at the way pointed out, and could see that the swarming life grew more turbid as far as her eye could reach. She felt that she could not brave its terrors unprotected. Suddenly she turned from looking down the alley, and her hand, a small, delicately-gloved hand, was again laid on Nimble Dick's arm; he could feel it trembling.

“I suppose I shall seem very foolish to you,” she said, gently; “but I am afraid to walk down there alone. Would you mind going along with me to protect me? I am only a woman, you know, and we are apt to be cowards.”

A very curious sensation came over Nimble Dick. He looked up the alley, and down the alley, and was glad that not one of the “fellows” was in sight. What was to become of his lark? But there was that hand still resting on his arm, with a persuasive touch in it; and he had never been appealed to for protection before,—never in his life! Was it possible that with *him* she would not be afraid? He turned and looked at her, searchingly, a scowl on his face,—no, she was not “shamming;” her eyes were full of anxious fear, and also of petition. Nimble Dick was amazed at himself and ashamed of himself; he did not know how to account for his sudden change of intention. But he suddenly turned in an opposite direction from the one which he had pointed out, and said, “Come on, then; I'll show you a shorter way,” and strode forward.

“Oh, thank you!” she said, relief and gratitude in her voice. “I shall be so much obliged to you for coming with me; I am quite bewildered; cannot decide which way I came, or anything about it. I was trying to find the house of a young man who has been hurt. A policeman told me that he lived on this street, and that his name

is Calkins. I was thinking about him, and walked on without noticing, until I did not know where I was. Do you know anything of the young man?”

“You are too far down for him,” said Nimble Dick. “He's quality, and lives at the upper end of the alley. That's his house, away up there. He's hurt bad, they say; but I s'pose he'll get well. He's got a quality doctor,—a regular swell, who never come into these alleys before. He was going along when they brought Mark home, and he followed them in, and he come there again last night and this morning. I dunno what for, I'm sure. Mark Calkins can't pay no doctor's bills, if he does work regular, and pay more rent than the rest of folks.”

There was a curious mixture of complaint and satisfaction in Dick's tone. Mrs. Roberts gathered from it that the young man, Mark Calkins, in whom the policeman had tried to interest her, was superior to the rest of the miserable people in the alley, and that they resented it as an insult to themselves; but that, at the same time, the reflected honor of having a “swell” doctor come into their midst, attendant upon one who really belonged to their class, was very great. Could she possibly get a little influence over them by following up the injured young man, and giving what help was needful? She had hardly meant to call, though trying to find the house. Her method of reasoning had been something like this: “The policeman said he lived about two blocks from my poor Dirk's home. Since there has so recently been an accident, there may be something to mark the house,—a doctor passing in, possibly, or something that shall give me a landmark, and I can have a glimpse of the outside of one of the homes.” In her ignorance of life at that end of the social scale she did not know that a doctor passing in and out, even after an accident, was a sufficiently rare occurrence to make much more of a mark than she was looking for. So absorbed had she been over the boys belonging to her class that she had rather ignored the policeman's manifest hint to add this one to her list. Yet, was it possibly an answer to her prayer, an entering-wedge of some sort, that might open the way to influence?

“Who is the doctor?” she asked her guide, as the possibility of making an entrance through him occurred to her. “Do you know his name?”

Oh yes, Dick knew his name and where he lived, and even the names of some of his “swell” patients;—trust him for gaining information about anything that came into the alley.

“It's Dr. Everett,” he said promptly, that curious touch of pride appearing again in his voice. “He lives away up among the Twenty-thirders, and he goes to Cady's house to doctor, and lots of them places where the big ones lives. I dunno how he happens to come here.”

Mrs. Roberts had never heard the name, but she reflected that she was a new-comer, and wisely desisted from taking from the glory of Dr. Everett by admitting that he was not known to all the world. He might be a good doctor and a philanthropic one; his visits to this region looked like it.

“Do you know where any of the boys in our class live?”

This was her next carefully-worded question. She did not know whether to hint that she had heard of one who lived in that alley, or whether this would be considered an insult.

“Well,” said Nimble Dick, the sly twinkle coming back to his eyes that the strangeness of the situation had driven away for a moment, “I calculate that I know where I live *myself*; sometimes I do, anyhow.”

“To be sure!” she said, laughing at his humor. “I should have said, where any of the others live. Of course you will give me your address, after being so kind as to see me to—some point where I am acquainted.”

She had nearly said a place of safety, but checked herself in time. I am not sure, though, that Dick would have noticed it; he was lost in astonishment over the idea of giving anybody his address!

“This is Dirk Colson's house,” he said, suddenly, “and he is one of our fellows.”

Mrs. Roberts uttered an exclamation. The house was one of the most forlorn in the row, seeming, if the miserable state of the buildings would admit of comparison, to be more out of repair than the others. It came home to her just then, with a sudden, desolating force, that human beings, such as she was trying to reach, and such as she hoped would live in heaven forever, called such earthly habitations as these homes. What possible idea could they ever get of heaven by calling it “home”?

“Do they have the whole of the house?”

She asked the question timidly, for the building looked very large, but she was utterly unused to city tenement life.

“The *whole* of that house?” Dick fairly shouted the sentence, and bent himself double with laughter. “Well, I should say not, mum! As near as I can calculate, about thirty-five different families have that pleasure. The whole of the house! Oh, my! What a greeny!” And he laughed again.

Mrs. Roberts exerted herself to laugh with him, albeit she was horror-stricken. Thirty-five families in one house! How could they be other than awful in their ways of living?

“I know almost nothing about great cities,” she said; “my home was in a much smaller one.”

This was the truth, but not the whole truth. Instinct kept this veritable lady, in the truest sense of the word, from explaining that she knew nothing about the abject poor, when she was speaking to one of their number. Just at this moment occurred a diversion; they had been making swift progress through the alley, Dick's long strides requiring effort on his companion's part to keep by his side, but just ahead the way was obstructed.

CHAPTER VII. — “WHAT A LITTLE SCHEMER IT IS.”

A riot! Not among men, which is sufficiently terrifying; nor yet among women, which is worse; but that most awful of all sights and sounds of sin,—a riot among the children. Swearing, spitting at one another, tearing one another's hair, scratching like tigers, growling like wild beasts, throwing garbage at one another! This was the sort of crowd upon which Mrs. Roberts, in her black silk walking-suit, with her velvet hat and seal furs, presently came. She grasped at Dick's arm in horror, but a feeling that was more than terror was taking her strength away.

“Oh!” she said, and the agony in her voice really suggested more than terror to the young fellow beside her. “And they are little children! They cannot be more than seven or eight! Oh, what can I do?”

“You needn't be scared, mum!” There was a little hint of something like pity in Dick's voice. She clung to him so that he could not help feeling himself her protector. “It ain't an uncommon row at all; they mostly act like this; most likely one of 'em's found a bone and t' other one wants it, and then they're gone in for a row, and all the young ones crowd around and fight, on one side or t' other.”

Did this fearful explanation make the situation less terrible?

There was a lull, however, in the quarrel. The elegantly-dressed lady was seen approaching,—an unusual sight in that alley,—and both parties paused to get a view. Paused in their attentions to each other, that is; but at Mrs. Roberts they hooted and jeered, and one threw a handful of mud.

Then did Nimble Dick rise to his position as protector.

“Shut up, there! Stand aside, Pluck, and let us pass! Look out there, you Smirchy! Don't you throw that over here unless you want your head broke for you when I get back!”

This threat was thrown at a wretched little girl, who had dived her hand deeply into a box or cask of garbage, and brought it forth reeking with rotten apples, pork fat, and any liquid horror which the name suggests to you. She had her hand uplifted ready to throw, and was evidently intending to give the strange lady the benefit of what she had prepared for one of the rioters.

The assured tone in which Nimble Dick spoke had its effect; the combatants were all small, and he was large, and was evidently recognized as a power. There were some defiant glances thrown at him, but the motley crowd gave way, and allowed him to pass uninjured. Still he kept an alert watch of them until quite out of reach, and was not sparing of his admonitions.

“Hold on there, Bill,—I see that! Look out, Sally! You'll be sorry if you throw anything,—mind you that!”

And at last they were through the crowd. Not out of danger, it seemed; for there, directly in their narrow path, was a drunken man, swaying from side to side in the way which is so terrible to one unused to such sights. Dick felt the hold on his arm tighten, and was astonished at the sound of his own voice as he said, soothingly:—

“You needn't be scared at him, mum; that's only old Jock; he's as ugly as old Nick himself, but he knows better than to be very ugly to me. I can throw him in the gutter as easy as I could them young ones, and he knows it. That's Dirk's father, that is! Ain't he a beauty?”

And again Mrs. Roberts uttered an exclamation of dismay, and part of her terror went out in sorrow over the wrongs of a boy who had such a home and such a father. What ought to be expected of him?

That interminable alley was conquered at last, and they emerged into respectability on the broad avenue. Mrs. Roberts released her hold of her protector's arm, and his new character vanished on the instant.

“You're here, mum,” he said, with a saucy twinkle in his eye and a saucy leer on his face. “Can you get yourself home from this spot, or shall I borrow a wheelbarrow and tote you there?”

Much shaken with various emotions though she was, Mrs. Roberts forced herself to laugh. She would not frown on his fun when it was not positively sinful; he might not be aware that it was disrespectful; he might never have heard the word.

“I know the way now, thank you; at least I think I do. Can you tell me whether I take a green car or a yellow one to get to East Fifty-fifth Street?”

“You take a green one,” he said, quietly, his character of protector having returned to him with the question, which still showed her dependence on him.

“Thank you,” she said again, with great heartiness. “I shall never forget your care of me.” Her hand was in her pocket, and a bright coin was between her fingers. She longed to give it to Nimble Dick; he had saved her from so much this morning. And he was so miserably clad, surely he needed help. A moment's reflection, and she resolutely withdrew her hand. He should be paid by a simple hearty, “Thank you!” this morning, for kindness rendered. He might not consider it a current coin, but possibly it would be his first lesson in the courtesies of life.

Later in the day, when Mrs. Roberts was somewhat rested from her morning's campaign, young Ried received a little note:—

Dear Mr. Ried,—I know the names of all the boys, and inclose you a list. It is possible that you may fall in with some one during the day who can impart knowledge concerning them. Anyway, I thought you would like to know their names. Keep me posted, please, as to your success in making their acquaintance. We are allies, remember.

Yours for the Master,

Mrs. E.L. Roberts.

Alfred Ried twisted the delicate note-paper thoughtfully in his hand, a look of perplexity on his face. He felt committed for labor; glad was he, very, yet perplexed. He did not in the least know where to commence. Well, neither had this little lady; yet she had accomplished more in her one day's acquaintance than he after a lapse of weeks. Either she had found opportunities, or had made them. There must be chances; he would be sure to keep his eyes open after this.

In the handsome house on East Fifty-fifth Street, where Mr. Roberts had settled his bride, after a somewhat extended business tour, involving months of absence, matters were in train for a cosy evening in the library. That was the name of the beautiful room where the husband and wife sat down together; but it was quite

unlike the conventional library. Books there were in lavish abundance, but there were also pictures and flowers and a singing-bird or two, and an utter absence of that severe attention to business details which characterizes most rooms so named. Little prettinesses, which Mr. Roberts smilingly admitted did not belong to a library, were yet established there, with an air of having come to stay. “We will call it the library for convenience,” the master of the house said, “and then we will put into it whatever we please. It shall be a conservatory, and a sewing-room and a lounging-room and anything else that you and I choose to make it.” And Mrs. Roberts gleefully assented, and gave free rein to her pretty tastes. Flossy Shipley had been wont to be much trammelled with the ways in which “they” did everything; but Mrs. Evan Roberts was learning that, in unimportant matters at least, they had a right to be a law unto themselves. Perhaps it helped her, to be aware that a large class of people were all ready to quote “Mrs. Evan Roberts” as authority on almost any point of taste.

On the evening in question Mr. Roberts, in dressing-gown and slippers, had drawn his lounging-chair to the drop-light, preparatory to a half-hour of reading aloud. But it transpired that there was something preparatory to that, or at least that must take the precedence. Certain business telegrams followed him home, which required the writing of two or three business letters.

“It will not take me long,” he explained to his wife, “and they are not complicated affairs, so I give you leave to talk right on while I dispatch them.” She laughed at this hint about her fondness for talk, but presently made use of the privilege.

“Evan, what sort of a young man do you consider Mr. Ried?”

“Ried? Who? Oh, my clerk? The very best sort; a most estimable fellow,—one of a thousand. By the way, did you tell him how you became interested in that sister of his?”

“Not yet; I want to get better acquainted. But, Evan, do you know where he boards?”

“Hardly; on Third Avenue somewhere, I believe; or possibly Second. The store register would show. Do you want his address!”

“Oh, I know *where* it is; but I mean what sort of a place is it?”

Mr. Roberts slightly elevated his shapely shoulders.

“It is a boarding-house, where many clerks board; that tells a doleful story to the initiated, I suspect. Poor fare and dismal surroundings; still, it is eminently respectable.”

“Where does he spend his Sabbaths?”

The rapidly-moving pen executed nearly two lines of handsome writing before Mr. Roberts was ready to respond to this question.

“Why, at church, principally, I fancy. He is very regular in his attendance at morning service, and the South End Mission absorbs his afternoons. I suppose he goes to church in the evening; but since we have been giving our attention to that evening mission I have not seen him.”

“Ah, but, Evan, I mean the rest of the time; those little bits of Sabbath time that are sacred to home. The twilight, for instance, or for an hour in the morning. Do you know what sort of a place he has for those times?”

Nearly three more lines added to the paper; then Mr. Roberts raised his head:—

“No, my dear, I don't. Now that you bring me face to face with the question, it seems a surprising thing to say that I should not know where a young man who has been for more than a year in our employ spends his choice bits of time, but I don't.”

“Then I want to tell you something about it. He has a dingy, fourth-story back room; small, I fancy, from the way in which he spoke of it, and not a speck of fire over! In such weather as this, how can a young man read his Bible, or even pray, under such circumstances?”

Mr. Roberts laid down his pen and sat erect, regarding his wife with a thoughtful, far-away air.

“Flossy,” he said at last, “it is an immense question! You open a perfect mine of anxiety and doubt. I have hovered around the edges for some time, but have generally contrived to shut my eyes and refuse to look into it, because I was afraid of what I might see; and because I did not know—what to do with my knowledge. I have not been the working member of the firm very long, you know, and my special field, until lately, has been the other side of the ocean; but I have been at home long enough to know that there are several hundred young men in our employ who are away from their homes; and knowing, as I do, the price of board in respectable houses, and knowing the salaries which the younger ones receive, it does not require a great deal of penetration to discover that they must have rather dreary homes here, to put it mildly. The fact is, Flossy, I haven't wanted to look into this thing very closely, because I do not see the remedy. Look at our house, for instance, with its three hundred clerks, we'll say, who are away from their friends; suppose one-half, or even one-third, of them are miserably situated, what can I do?”

“Are they not sufficiently well paid to have the ordinary comforts of life?”

“Doubtful. The truth is, what you and I call the ordinary comforts of life takes a good deal of money; and in the city, rents are high, and the boarding-house keepers have hard struggles to make their expenditures meet their income, and they carry economy to the very verge of meanness,—some of them fairly over the verge, I presume; and the result is cheap food, badly cooked,—because well-cooked food means high-priced help,—and cold rooms and dreariness and discomfort everywhere. Now what can be done about it? Then our house is only one of hundreds, and in many of these hundreds they employ more help and give less wages than we; in fact, I know that some of our clerks are looked upon with envy by a great many young men. We never have any trouble in supplying vacancies. People swarm around us, because we have the reputation of being liberal. We are not liberal, however; sometimes I am inclined to think we are hardly fair, yet there is nothing I can do. I am a junior partner, with a great deal of the responsibility, and a third of the voting power, and I can't get salaries raised. I've been working at that problem at intervals for a year, and have accomplished very little. Do you wonder that I keep my eyes as closely shut as I can?”

His wife's face wore a thoughtful, not to say perplexed look; she seemed to have no answer ready; and,

after waiting a moment for it, Mr. Roberts bent himself again to the task of getting his business letters answered. Before he had written one more line, her face had cleared. She interrupted him:—

“Evan, when you talk about four hundred clerks, and multiply that by hundreds of houses and more hundreds of clerks, I cannot follow you at all. It is not that I am not impressed with the number,—I am,—it appalls me; but I don't want to be appalled; I want to be helpful. Perhaps just now there is nothing that I can do for the hundreds, so I want to narrow my thoughts down to what, possibly, I can do. What, for instance, can be done towards getting a good young man, like Alfred Ried, into a place that will be just a little bit like a home; that will give him a spot where he can study his Bible in comfort, and invite a friend with whom he wants to pray, or whom he wants to reach and help in any way? That isn't a huge problem. Can't it be solved?”

Her husband smiled.

“He is only one of thousands,” he said.

“Yes, I know; but he is *one* of thousands. Since we cannot reach thousands, shall we fail to reach one? Evan, I am only one of thousands, but, but how would you argue about me?”

Mr. Roberts laughed again.

“You are one out of thousands and thousands!” he said, emphatically.

A line more, and he signed the firm name with an unusually fine flourish.

“There! I've accomplished one letter. What do you want to do, Flossy?”

“I want Mr. Ried to have a room where he can invite one of my boys occasionally, and make him comfortable, and do for him what we cannot with our rooms; do for him what only a young man can do for a young man. I don't clearly know what I want further than that, but I see that one thing as a stepping-stone. Remember, I want all your thousands to have just as pleasant rooms, and I would like to help to bring it about, but I don't just now see the way.”

“Do you see the way to this?”

“No, but doesn't it seem as though we ought to be able to accomplish so much?”

“It does, certainly. What is your desire, Flossy? Do you want him to have a room in our house?”

She shook her head.

“No, that would not further my plan for those boys. I would like to have him here, and it would be a good thing for him,—at least I think it would; but I can see things which he could accomplish for these young men, set by himself, in a different part of the city. Besides, Evan, I have other plans for our rooms, entirely different ones, and some of them I am afraid you will think are very strange.”

He answered the doubt with a smile that said he had no fears of her or her plans.

“What a little schemer it is!” he said, looking down on her with fond, proud eyes. “Who would have imagined that she could plot, and plot so mysteriously? I used to think she was a very open-hearted woman.”

CHAPTER VIII. — “WHAT WOULD YOU DO, DEAR?”

She joined in his laugh albeit, there was a tender look in her eyes. After a moment, she said, gently:—

“It is not scheming, Evan; I am only trying to set about the work for which I have been chosen. I'll tell you how it all came to me. I was reading—my morning reading, you know—after you had gone; taking little dips here and there in the fashion that you think is so unsystematic, and I came upon this verse: 'He is a chosen vessel unto me,' you know, about Paul? Well, it came to me with a sudden sense of awe and beauty, the being chosen of God to do a great work. I stopped reading to think it out; what a grand moment it must have been to Paul when he realized it. And I began to feel almost sorry that we lived in such different times, with no such opportunities! I stopped right in the midst of my folly to remember that I was as certainly chosen of God as ever Paul was; for assuredly I did not come to him of myself, nor begin to love him of myself, and therefore he must indeed have chosen me; and I wondered whether probably each Christian had not a work to do as definite as Paul's—a work that would be given to no other, unless indeed the chosen one failed. I did not want to fail, and I asked God not to let me. Then, of course, I set to wondering what my work, or my part of some other person's work, could be. It was the morning after you had told me that about Ester Ried. You cannot think how that impressed me. I could not get away from the wonderment as to how her work was prospering, and whether there were chosen ones enough, or if there might possibly be a little place for me. I couldn't settle anything, and finally I decided to look at Paul's work a little while. Of course, it was not reasonable to suppose that the duties of the great apostle had anything in common with my bits of effort; still, I said, the directions given him may help me a little. And Evan, what do you think was the first thing I found? Why, this: 'The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou *shouldst know his will*.' Surely, so far, the things for which both he and I were chosen were parallel. I looked further: 'And see that Just One.' That was the very next. Was not I, too, chosen for that? 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty.' I said over the beautiful promise to assure myself that it was true, and went on: 'And shouldst hear the voice of his mouth.' Was it not strange, Evan? Certainly I shall hear my King speak, often and often, when I get home. Only think of it; so far Paul was not ahead of me. I hurried to find another reference to Paul's work, and I found this; let me read it to you.” Her bit of dainty sewing was suddenly pushed one side, and up from the depths of the rose-lined

work-basket came a small, plainly-bound Bible, much marked; a rapid turning of the leaves, and the eager disciple read: “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Now, Evan, you know the veriest child can be a witness if he knows anything about the facts; and I do certainly know some wonderful things about Jesus to which I could witness; and besides, isn't it reasonable to suppose that he will appear to me every day with things for me to witness to? And then I read this; Paul sent to the Gentiles, you know, but for what: 'To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.' Evan, was there ever a more wonderful work to do in the world than that? And yet I cannot tell you how it made me feel to discover, or at least to realize, that a great deal of it was my work! Of course, I naturally began to ask myself, what Gentile was there for me to reach? Whose eyes must I try to open? Do you know, that very afternoon I met Mr. Ried, and heard of those boys? They interested me from the first, and what he told me about his sister increased the interest. Then when I saw them!—Evan, if ever boys were in the power of Satan they are; and to think that they may have an inheritance among them which are sanctified! This morning when I saw where some some of them lived, and imagined how they lived, I fell stunned for a moment. It seemed to me impossible. What means could possibly be found of sufficient power to fit them for such an inheritance? And then directly came the closing words of the commission: 'Through faith that is in me.' Evan, God will save them; and I think he will let me help.”

“Amen!” said Mr. Roberts, and his voice was husky. When his wife was in one of her exalted moods he always admired her with a sort of reverence. He had been for years an earnest worker. He carried business plans and business principles into the work; he studied cause and effect, and calculated and expected certain results to follow certain causes, like a mathematical problem; not that he by any means forgot the power of faith, or in any sense attempted to do his work alone. He was a Christian who spent much time on his knees; but little Flossy brought so much of the childlike, unquestioning spirit into her work, that sometimes he stood in awe, not knowing whether he could follow her. It was not so much a mathematical problem to be worked out, as it was the faith that can remove mountains.

“As a little child relies
On a strength beyond his own:
Knows he is neither strong nor wise,
Fears to stir a step alone—”

Mr. Roberts often found himself quoting these lines when his wife gave him glimpses of her heart; and at such times he had no hesitancy in deciding that the steps she took were not alone, but the Lord was with her.

The postman's ring broke in on their quiet.

“I hope there are letters from home to-night,” Mrs. Roberts said, “real long ones. It is a week since we have heard.”

“And I ought to hope that they would require a first reading in private,” her husband answered, as he seized his neglected pen. “It is the only way in which these business letters will get answered. I find the temptation to talk to you irresistible.”

One letter! but that was of comfortable dimensions and weight.

“It is from Marion,” Mrs. Roberts said, delight in her voice, after the first glance at the familiar writing. She was presently lost in its many pages, and the business of letter-writing went on uninterruptedly for some time.

Mrs. Marion Dennis had not forgotten her fondness for her pretty little Flossy: nor forgotten that,—softly-innocent little creature though she was, she possessed a wisdom far above those who are credited with having keen insight; even a wisdom so subtle, and withal so tender, that its source could only be Infinite Wisdom. So she, in company with many others, was learning to turn to the friend so much younger than herself, as one in whom she could safely confide.

“Dear little Flossy,” so the letter ran, “I suppose, though you should live to be a white-haired old lady, sitting with placid face and fluted cap and spectacles, in your high-backed arm-chair, in the most treasured corner mayhap of some granddaughter's choicest room, I, writing to you, would still commence 'Dear little Flossy.' That I have to cover it from prying eyes by the dignified and respectable 'Mrs. Evan Roberts,' is almost a matter of amusement to me. I fancy I can see you making a journey through some of the Chautauqua avenues, picking your way daintily towards Palestine, bending lovingly over the small white stones that mark the village of Bethany,—a pink on your cheek, born, as I thought, of the excitement of being among those tiny photographs of the wonderful past, but born in part, I now believe, of the fact that Mr. Evan Roberts joined us in our walk. Oh, little mousie, how quiet you were!

“Well, many things have since transpired. We are old married women, you, and Ruth, and Eurie and I. I suppose the contrast in our lives,—the outward portion of them, I mean,—is still as strongly marked, perhaps more so, than it was when we were in Chautauqua together. We were girls then; we are matrons now, and with the taking on of that title, Ruth and I took special and great responsibilities. To-night it rains. Mr. Dennis has been called to the upper part of the city,—away out to Springdale, in fact,—to see a sick and dying man, and I am alone and almost lonely. If I could summon any one of the three to my aid and comfort I would. I am almost as lonely as I was on some of those evenings in the old boarding-house. Still there are differences; the smoky old stove is not; a summer warmth floats through the house, born of steam; no ill-smelling kerosene lamp offends your aesthetic friend to-night, but the softest of shaded drop-lights sheds a halo around me. Isn't that almost poetic? Moreover, oh blessed thought! I have no examination papers to prepare, no reports to make up; nothing to do but visit with you. Also, I will admit just to you, that this is another and most blessed difference between this and my lonely past. At almost any moment now I may hope for Dr. Dennis' ring, and when he comes all sense of loneliness will instantly depart. Ah! Flossy, dear Flossy, this is such a difference as even you cannot appreciate! You had your mother and father, and all your dear home friends, and I had no one; and besides,—here I hesitate, lest you may be too obtuse to understand the reasoning,—you have only

added Mr. Roberts to your circle of treasures. He is grand and good, I know, and I like him without even a mental reservation; but, my dear, I have added Dr. Dennis! Can human language say more?

"Nonsense aside, sweet little woman, God has been very good to you and me. Yet, Flossy, do you remember how, during those last months in which we were together, I fell into the habit of telling you a great deal about the thorns, and admitted to you once that they pricked less when they had felt your smoothing touch? I want to tell you something. Our Gracie—I am so sorry for her, yet I don't know what to do. She is living a most unhappy life, and of course she shadows our lives also. I told you, dear, about Prof. Ellis. He is still trying to convince poor Gracie, that I, being her step-mother, must be her natural enemy; reminding her that before I came into the family her father was entirely willing to receive his calls, and allowed her to accept his attentions. Don't you see, it isn't strange at all that the poor little girl should believe him, and turn from me? She has many judicious helpers in her father's congregation. There are those who sigh over her almost in my hearing. 'Poor Gracie' they say, 'how changed she is! She used to be so bright and happy. There is something unnatural in these second-mother relations; all high-spirited children rebel.' Imagine such talk helping Gracie! Meantime, what do you suppose can be Prof. Ellis' motive? I cannot think that he cares for her; I almost do not believe that there is enough purity left in him even to admire a pure-hearted young girl; certainly not one with such high ideals and earnest ambitions as Gracie had. 'Why does she admire him?' I fancy I hear you asking. My dear, she doesn't; she thinks she does, and at seventeen such thoughts sometimes work irreparable mischief; but left alone, one of these days she would make the discovery that she was flattered by his attentions, because he is nearly fifteen years older than she, and is brilliant in conversation, and quoted as the finest musician in the city. I wish I knew more things about him; what I do know shows me plainly enough the sort of man he is; but with these guileless young things it seems as though one had to unmask wickedness very thoroughly before they will believe that it is anything but gossip or misrepresentation. He has gone away for a six weeks' vacation; I don't know where, nor does Dr. Dennis. Gracie knows, but does not enlighten me. Flossy, dear, could you give me a little wholesome advice, do you think? I wonder, sometimes, whether I was not too complacent over my proposed duties. Such schemed as I had! I was going to be the blessedest step-mother that girl ever had. That would not be saying much, possibly. Don't we all incline to think that the second mothers must be wrong, and the sons and daughters poor abused darlings? But I loved Gracie, you know, and she seemed to love me, and to be so happy over the thought of our near relationship. There is very little happiness from any such source during these days. Gracie has retired into dignity. She can be the most dignified young woman on occasion that I ever beheld. She is not rude to me, on the contrary she is ceremoniously polite; calls me Mrs. Dennis, and all that sort of thing, when necessity compels her to call me anything; but she speaks as little as possible; sits at table with us three times a day, when she cannot secure an excuse for absence that her father will accept; says 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' obediently to him, and 'No, ma'am, thank you,' to me, and that is the extent of our conversation. Generally her face is pale and her eyes red, and at the first possible moment she begs to be excused, and retires to the privacy of her own room and locks her door. Her father has stopped her music lessons; at least she preferred to have them stopped rather than take lessons of any other person, so she practices no more. She continues her German and French, and secures good reports from the professors, but there is an air of weariness and dreariness about everything she does that makes one alternate between a feeling of deep pity for her, and a desire to box her ears or shut her up in a corner until she can behave herself. As a rule, however, I am sorry for her. I was young once myself. I was undisciplined, I had no mother, and I had a thousand wild fancies, any one of which might have ruined me. What do you think you would do, dear, if Mr. Roberts had a daughter, and you were her mother? You are all in a flush, now, and have lain down this sheet and said aloud: 'What an idea! Marion does say the most absurd things!' Well, then, if you were Marion Dennis, and stood before God in the place of mother to Grace Dennis, what do you imagine you would do? I'll tell you my policy; I am uniformly cheerful in her presence—gay, if I can make gayety out of anything; not toward her father, you understand, because I can fancy that might irritate her. I really try to be gay toward Gracie herself; but can you imagine an attempt to be cheery with a tombstone? I study as much as I can, her tastes, in the ordering of dinner and desserts, and arrange the flowers that I know she likes best, and in short try to do all those little bits of nice things that I feel certain you would do in my place; and just here I may as well own that I learned these small prettinesses, studying you; never should have thought them out for myself. Flossy, Dr. Dennis is one of the most patient and long-suffering of men, but it is very hard for him to be patient with poor Gracie; harder than it is for me; first, because I know by personal experience just what a turbulent young creature a miss of seventeen or eighteen can be, and secondly, because it is upon me her displeasure falls most heavily, and that naturally he resents.

"Why am I writing all this to you? I don't, know, childie, really, save that I remember what a curious way you have of telling Jesus all about your friends and their trials, and I remember with great comfort that you are my friend. Don't imagine me as miserable; I can never be that so long as Christ is the present Helper that he is to me now; and you do not need to be told that I daily thank him for giving me my husband. But I think you will understand better than many would how earnestly I desire to fill the place of mother, to my bright young motherless Gracie, with her dangerous beauty and her dangerous talents and her capacity for being miserable. Oh, I want to do more than my duty; I want to love her with all my heart, and to have her love me. If it were not for that man, who always hated me, and who, I believe in my heart, has sought her out and is pressing his attentions upon her because he sees a possibility of stinging me through her, I might hope to fill the place in her heart that I thought I could."

The letter closed abruptly at this point, and was finished a few days afterwards in a different strain, giving plenty of home news, and being full of the brightness which always sparkled in Marion's letters; but it was the first two or three pages to which Mrs. Roberts turned back, and which she thoughtfully re-read. Then she interrupted the busy pen:—

"Evan, are not the business letters nearly done? I want to read this to you, and then I want to talk to you."

"Delightful prospects, both of them," he said with energy, as he added the last hurried line, signed and delivered to his wife to enclose in its envelope, then pushed aside writing materials and sat back to enjoy.

"It isn't all delightful," his wife said, shaking her head. "I did hope that poor Marion was going to have a

few years of rest. Her life has been such a hard one.”

CHAPTER IX. — “TREMENDOUS FACTS!” HE SAID.

It is well that Mrs. Marion Dennis felt entirely safe in her friend Flossy's hands, for her affairs were very thoroughly talked over that evening, and sundry conclusions arrived at.

One question Mrs. Roberts asked her husband, at the close of the conference, which apparently had nothing to do with Marion Dennis' affairs:—

“Evan, do you know Dr. Everett?”

“Everett? Let me think—yes, I know of him; a young physician, comparatively, who had not been here long, and has made his mark.”

“In what direction?”

“Several, perhaps; but I have heard of him chiefly in the line of his profession. He was accidentally called to attend a young lady belonging to a very wealthy family out in Brookline. I say accidentally—that is a reverent way we have of speaking, you know; of course, I mean providentially. The nursery governess in the family was sick, and this Dr. Everett, who had fallen in with her somewhere, volunteered to cure her. He was calling on her one morning when the sick daughter, who, by the way, had been given up by her physician, was taken suddenly and alarmingly worse; in the emergency Dr. Everett was summoned, and while they waited for the regular physician he succeeded in doing such good service that he inspired the mother with confidence; she became anxious to put the case entirely into his hands, which was done, and the young lady recovered, and Dr. Everett's position, professionally, was assured. Isn't that an interesting little item for you? He is said to have marked success; and, of course, since the Brookline occurrence his practice is largely among the wealthy. How has your attention been called to him?”

“My protector this morning said he was a 'swell' doctor, who was attending that Calkins boy. I wondered if he did it because he loved Christ. He might be a helper. I want to call on that sick boy to-morrow if I can arrange it. I think I must take some one with me.”

“You may take me with you,” her husband said, emphatically.

However much trips through alleys with Nimble Dick might be conducive to that young man's moral development, Mr. Roberts felt that his wife had experimented sufficiently.

Thus it transpired that, dressed in the plainest, quietest garb which her wardrobe would furnish, Mrs. Roberts went to the alley the next morning accompanied by her husband.

In one sense it was a mistake that the first call in the alley should have been made on the Calkins family. It was calculated to give Mrs. Roberts mistaken ideas as to the manner in which poor people lived. A bare enough room, certainly, not even a bit of carpet laid before the bed, but it was a clean room. Floor and window and cupboard-door were as clean as water could make them; and the bed, while it looked hopelessly hard and dreadful to Mrs. Roberts, was really a pattern of neatness and purity to every dweller in that attic. There was a straw tick, covered with a dark calico spread, which did duty as a sheet, and the boy who lay on it was covered by a patched quilt that had been mended, and was clean. Wonderful things these to say of such a locality! Mr. Roberts suspected it, and Dr. Everett knew it. That gentleman was bending over his patient when the two guests arrived, and vouchsafed them not even a glance, while the dark-haired, dark-eyed, homely, decently-dressed girl gave Mrs. Roberts a seat on the one chair which the room contained, and set a stool for her husband that had been made of four old chair legs and a square board.

Sallie Calkins was somewhat flurried by this unexpected call. She had no idea who the people were, nor for what they had come. A vague fear that they might be in some way connected with her brother's “place” at the printing-office, which he was in such fear of losing that his night had been a restless one, made her hasten to say, in a tremulous voice:—

“The doctor thinks he will be well in a little while. It isn't a bad break, he says, and Mark wants to keep his place. He thinks, maybe, some of the alley boys would keep it for him, if you would be so kind.”

She was evidently addressing Mr. Roberts, but she looked at Flossy. The fair, sweet face, that gave her such sympathetic glances, seemed the one to appeal to. Mr. Roberts, however, discerned that he was mistaken for the employer, and immediately dispelled the idea by asking where the boy worked, and how the accident had happened.

“It was the elevator, sir,” she said, eagerly. “The chain broke, and it went down with a bang, and Mark was on it, and he rolled off somehow, he doesn't know how; and he has been that bad that he couldn't tell me if he had. He was kind of wild, sir, all night, and talking about his place.”

“Was there no one but you to be with him during the night?” Mrs. Roberts asked. “Where is the mother?”

“We've got no mother, ma'am; there is only Mark and me—and father,” she added, after a doubtful pause. “But father was not at home last night. Oh, I didn't need no one to take care of Mark. I wouldn't have left him.”

“And he likes to have you take care of him, I am sure. What do you give him to eat? He will need nourishing food, I think; beef teas and broths, and nice little tempting dishes, made with milk, perhaps. Are you his cook, too? I wonder if you wouldn't like to have me show you how to make good things for him? I've learned how to

make some nice dishes that sick people like.”

Before the bewildered girl could answer, the doctor turned abruptly from his long examination of his patient, and gave the guests the first attention he had vouchsafed them. The truth was this man had had some unfortunate experiences with district visitors, and had perhaps an unreasonable prejudice against them as a class. “I can't help it, ma'am,” he said to Mrs. Saunders, when she was taking him to task one day. “There are exceptions, of course, at least we will hope there are; but if you had seen some of my specimens, you would be the first to wish an infusion of common sense could be introduced among them. As a rule, they offer a tract where they should give a loaf of bread or a bowl of broth; and wedge their advice and reproofs in with every helpful movement. It is like so many doses of medicine to the patient; to be endured because he is at their mercy, and can't help himself. They mean well, the most of them; but the trouble is, we have a way of making district visitors out of people who have nothing to do, and who have never learned that 'all the nations of the earth were made of one blood.'”

Something in Mrs. Roberts' tones or words seemed to interest him, and he turned toward her.

“Does this alley belong to you?” he asked, abruptly, his mind still full of the district visitor.

She regarded him with a puzzled air for a moment, then answered naïvely:—

“I don't think it does; if it did I would have some things ever so different.”

Dr. Everett laughed; and Mr. Roberts came forward and introduced himself.

“My wife has hardly answered you fully,” he said. “I am under the impression that she desires to adopt a certain portion of this alley; at least I have heard of little else since last Sabbath afternoon. She is in search of some stray sheep who have been put under her care.”

“Ah,” the doctor said, turning quickly to her, “a Sabbath-school teacher? Is this young man one of your scholars?”

“No,” she explained; “but she had heard of him while inquiring where one of her boys lived, and she had called to see if she could help in any way. Dirk Colson was the boy who, they told her, lived near this place.”

The eyes of the trim sister brightened.

“He lives on the next square,” she said. “Oh, ma'am, are you his teacher, and do you care for him? I'm so glad.”

“He is a favorite of yours, is he?” the doctor asked, looking from one speaking face to another, and seeming immensely interested in the matter.

“No, indeed!” the girl said, quickly. “He's horrid! But I'm sorry for his sister; and she wants Dirk to get on, and he never does get on; but I thought maybe such a kind of a teacher could help him.”

There was such intense and genuine admiration in the girl's voice for the vision of loveliness before her that Dr. Everett could not help smiling.

“It doesn't seem unlikely,” said he, with significance; and added: “Who is this Dirk Colson, who seems to be an object of interest?”

“He is one of the worst boys in the alley, sir; sometimes I think he is the very worst, because he is cross as well as hateful; but Mark is always kind of sorry for him, and says he has such a bad father he can't help it. And Mart—that's his sister—she is a friend of mine, and she feels bad about Dirk, but she can't do nothing; he ain't a bit like Mark there.”

The last words were spoken tenderly, and the sisterly eyes turned toward the boy on the bed, and obeying a sign from his eyes she went over to him. The doctor plied his questions:—

“Have you recently taken a class, madam? and is their general reputation as encouraging as this special scamp of whom we are hearing?”

His words almost jarred on Mrs. Roberts; she had already prayed enough for her boys to have a sort of tender feeling for them—a half desire to cover their faults from the gaze of the indifferent world. Did Dr. Everett represent the indifferent world, or did he love her Master? She wished she knew.

“There is nothing encouraging about them,” she said, with grave earnestness, “save the facts that they are made in the image of God, and that he wants them to 'turn from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified.'”

A rare flash of intelligence and appreciation greeted her now from those fine eyes bent so scrutinizingly on her.

“Tremendous facts!” he said. “Glorious possibilities! 'Himself hath said it.' I claim kinship with you; I am an heir of the same inheritance.”

He held a hand to each, and they were cordially grasped. Then Dr. Everett proceeded to business.

“There is enough to do,” he said; “everything is lacking here; there is severe poverty, united to the most scrupulous tenderness and the most tender love on the part of this brother and sister. I stumbled on the case, and will do professionally all that is needed. And I have a friend who would undoubtedly come to the rescue, but she is crowded just now. I shall be rejoiced to report to her a helper. Do you know Joy Saunders? Well, I wish you did; she is one whom you could appreciate. She is young, though, and without a husband to guard her, and there are some places to which she cannot come.”

“Has she learned that important fact?” asked Mr. Roberts, with a significant smile. Then some explanation seemed necessary. “This lady,” he said, “tried the alley alone yesterday, and lost her way, and went lower down,—quite near to Burk Street, I imagine.”

“And what happened?” The quick question and the doctor's tone suggested possibilities not pleasant.

“Oh, she met one of her new recruits,—as hard a boy, so one of the policemen on this beat tells me, as there is in the row,—and pressed him into service to escort her back to civilization; and strange to say, the fellow did it without placing any tricks.”

The doctor turned on the small lady a curious glance.

“I think you may be able to do something, even for Dirk Colson,” he said.

“Do you know him?”

He laughed over the eagerness of the question.

“Never heard of him before. I was only thinking of our friend's description of his awfulness. Ah, whom have we here?”

For the door had opened abruptly, and a pair of great blue eyes, set in a frame of tawny hair, all in a frizzle, had peered in on them. The vision was clothed in garments so torn the wonder was that they stayed on at all, and there was a general look of abject poverty about her to which Sallie Calkins, with all the bareness of her lot, was a stranger. She stood for just a moment, as if transfixed by astonishment at the unwonted sight in the room, then turned and sped away as swiftly and silently as she had come.

“That is Dirk's sister,” Sallie Calkins said, coming forward, her homely face aglow with shame. “She isn't a bad girl, ma'am, she doesn't mean to be, but she has a dreadful time. Her mother is sickly, and has to go out washing, times when she isn't able to sit up; and there'll be days when she can't hold up her head; and the father is bad, ma'am, and drinks, and swears, and sells things for drink till there ain't nothing left to sell; and Mart hasn't anything to mend her clothes with, and she doesn't know how, anyway; and she hasn't even got a comb to comb her hair with, her father he took it to sell; and everything there is horrid, and Dirk, he's awful.”

It was strange, she could not herself account for it; but with every added word of misery that set poor Dirk Colson lower and lower in the scale of humanity, there seemed to come into this woman's heart, and shine in her face, an assurance that he was to be a “chosen vessel unto God.”

The doctor was watching her again, curious, apparently, to see how this pitiful appeal for forbearance in judging of poor Mart affected her, and something in his face made her say, speaking low, “an inheritance among them which are sanctified.”

“Amen!” he said. And there came to Mrs. Roberts a feeling that this earnest prayer, for the second time repeated by two men who prayed, was a sort of seal from the Master.

She turned away from both gentlemen then; the tears were very near the surface. She must do something to tone down the beating of her heart. Sallie was at hand, and she went with her to another corner of the room, and a low-toned conversation was carried on, scraps of which floated back to the gentlemen in the form of “sheets,” “grape jelly,” “mutton broth,” “a soft pillow,” and the like.

“I feel my patient growing better,” the doctor said, with satisfaction.

“Is there no father here?” Mr. Roberts asked.

The doctor shook his head, but answered:—

“There is the most pitiful apology for a father that I ever saw,—a mere wreck of a man! Spends his time in a sort of weak drinking, if I may coin a phrase to describe him; he actually uses no energy even in that business. Just staggers around and bemoans his lot; a most unfortunate man, in his own estimation, with whom the world, through no fault of his, has gone wrong. He is never downright intoxicated, and never free from the effects of liquor. He is much like a wilted leaf in the hands of this boy and girl. They could pitch him out of the window without much difficulty, and if the fall did not kill him he would shed tears and say it was a hard world. But now, what do we see, when the name of father is so dishonored,—made a wreck, as it were? Why, the order of nature is reversed, and these children take on the protective. They are father and mother, and he is the weak, sinning child. The way that that boy and girl have worked to keep their miserable father from starving or freezing is something to astonish the very angels. They shield him, too; nobody who wants to reach their hearts must blame him. They are a study!—as different from the other inhabitants of the alley as the sky is different from that mud-hole down there. It isn't a good simile, either. There is no religion in their efforts. They are the veriest heathen.”

“How do you account for the development?”

The doctor shook his head:—

“I don't account for it; it is abnormal. There must have been a mother who left her impress. I can't learn anything about the mother—she died when the girl was an infant; but I would like to know her history. I venture to assert that she belonged to Christ, and that a gleam of the divine pity that she saw in him, and loved, left its impress on her children. That is somewhat mystical,” he added, smiling. “I rarely talk in this way; it must have been your wife who set me off.”

“But she is the most practical and energetic of beings!”

“Ay, so are the angels, I fancy; and make us think of heaven directly we hear the rustle of their wings. Has your wife been a Christian long?”

“Barely two years since she began to think of these things.”

“I thought as much. She impresses me as one who is being led; who does not choose to go alone; has not learned how, indeed. A very few Christians never learn how, and with them the Lord does his special work. Well, sir; I must go. I'm glad to have met you, and glad to leave you here. Good morning!”

CHAPTER X. — “AND SHE ALWAYS TRIED.”

Other business was transacted that morning which brought results. A curious habit of Mrs. Roberts',—one which, perhaps, most strongly marked the difference between her ways of working and those of other people,

—was that of appealing to the person at hand for information on any subject which chanced to be the one prominent in her mind at the time.

Where other and more systematic persons would have said, “He is not the one to ask about this matter! there is no reason for supposing that he has any knowledge in this direction!” Mrs. Roberts would say: “I cannot be sure that he may not be able to give just the information which I need. In any case, what harm will it do to try?” And she always tried.

It was on this principle that she arrested Dr. Everett's speedy departure with a question:—

“Dr. Everett, are you familiar with boarding-houses for young men?”

Something like a vision swept instantly before the doctor, in which he saw the long line of young men, and the long line of boarding-houses, in the world, and he laughed with eyes and lips, the question seemed so queerly put.

“With how many of them, madam?” There was amusement in his voice, but there was also curiosity,—he wanted to know what this original little lady was in search of.

“One would do, if it were of just the right stamp. I'll tell you what I want,—a nice, quiet, comfortable *home* sort of place, with a small room, capable of being warmed, a single bedstead, with a passably good bed, and a moderate rate of board. Are not those modest enough requirements?”

“Not at all! They are preposterous! A boarding-house to which one could conveniently apply the word '*home!*' *Fire* in a young man's room! He is expected to enjoy freezing in a city; and if he come from the country, he should be grateful for the privilege! But the idea of calling for a good bed! That is the wildest suggestion of all! Has she ever boarded, Mr. Roberts?”

“Not at a boarding-house, at least,” said that gentleman, enjoying the fun.

But Mrs. Roberts looked grave.

“Are you serious?” she asked, gently. “Is there no chance in this great city for a Christian young man to have the ordinary comforts of common life; just a little quiet room where he can pray, and where he can invite some tempted soul, and try to help him? Doesn't it seem all wrong?”

The laugh was gone from the doctor's face. There was a look of keen interest and genuine respect.

“How many young men are you thinking about? There are many Christians, I believe, among that class,—poor young men, away from home,—and I have reason to fear that their chances for comfortable retirement are very scarce. I have thought about the problem somewhat how to help them. In the concrete, I don't see the way. Of how many are you thinking?”

“I am willing to think about them all,” Mrs. Roberts said,—and now it was her turn to laugh,—“but I am panning for just one. I cannot work in great ways, but I thought I might help one.”

“Exactly! Mr. Roberts, if every Christian in our city would undertake to help *one*, the problem would be solved. Well, there is one boarding-house to which the word 'home' may properly be applied; and there is one small room on the third floor vacated yesterday. I wonder if the Master wants it for your young man? It seems to me if there is any one thing more than another that we need in that house just now it is a Christian young man. Of what type is your friend? Will he help or hinder a gay young scamp much sought after by Satan?”

“He will try hard to help,” said both Mr. and Mrs. Roberts. And before they parted the doctor had taken Mr. Ried's address, and promised to call on him and negotiate the matter.

“That plan will work in two ways,” said Mrs. Roberts, gleefully. “Mr. Ried will be in the same home with, and somewhat under the influence of that grand doctor. Isn't it splendid that we asked just him?”

And her husband smilingly assented, and added that he should not have thought of such a thing as asking him.

On her way down town, Mrs. Roberts had dropped a letter in the mail, which also brought results. It read thus:—

“DEAR MARION,—I have time for but a line, for I want to catch the morning mail. I have such a nice plan. Suppose you let your Gracie come and stay with me for a few weeks. You know she always liked me a little, and Evan and I think we can make it pleasant for her. I will try to get her so much interested in seven boys whom I know that she will forget all about Professor Ellis. Mr. Barnwell a confidential clerk in the store (old and gray-headed), will go to-morrow to transact some business with papa. Evan will give him a letter of introduction to Dr. Dennis. He expects to return on Saturday, and if you will trust Gracie to us, and she is willing to come, she might travel in Mr. Barnwell's care, and we would meet her at the depot. Dear Marion, we should like it ever so much: and I have prayed about it all the morning, and cannot help thinking that Jesus likes it too.”

Thus it came to pass that when Mrs. Roberts took her seat on the next Sabbath afternoon before her seven boys at the South End Mission, a vision of loveliness, such as the mission had not often seen, came in with her, and looked with wide-open eyes on all the new and strange sights and sounds about her. A very pretty creature was Gracie Dennis. Her eyes had lost none of their brightness, although they had shed some tears during her recent experiences. They were fairly sparkling to-day, for the great city into which she had come for the first time was like fairyland to her; albeit, she had passed through scenes that afternoon which bore no resemblance to her idea of fairyland. What the boys thought of her could only be determined from their stares. Let us hope that her presence had nothing to do with their conduct, for never, in all the annals of the South End Mission, had seven boys comported themselves as did those before whom Mrs. Roberts sat that winter afternoon.

Nimble Dick, as if to be revenged for his unintentional courtesy of the Monday before, placed his ill-kept feet on the seat in front of him, in alarming proximity to Mrs. Roberts' shoulders, and chewed his tobacco, and defiled the floor with its juice, and talked aloud, and was in every sense disgusting. Neither was Dirk Colson one whit behind him. The spirit of entertainment was upon him. He mimicked Mr. Durant's somewhat hoarse tones, exaggerating the imitation, of course, until it was ludicrous. He imitated the somewhat shrill tenor, and the nasal tones of Deacon Carter, who was doing good work with a class of meek-looking women.

He even imitated Mrs. Roberts' soft, low voice, as she essayed to interest them in Moses and some of the wonders which he performed.

Vain hope! Struggle as she might to be intensely dramatic in her narrative, she did not for a moment gain the ascendency.

“Moses?” interrupted Nimble Dick in the very midst of one of her most earnest sentences. “Let's see! that was the old fellow who swallowed the serpents, wasn't it? I should have thought he would have been used up.”

“You don't know nothin',” interrupted Stephen Crowley, with a nudge at Dirk that the latter pretended tipped him entirely off the seat, and left him a limp heap at Mrs. Robert' feet.

“He don't know nothin'!” repeated Stephen, addressing Mrs. Roberts in a confidential tone. “'T was the serpents swallowed Moses, wasn't it? Question is, How did he get around again?”

“Quit that!” came at this point from Dirk Colson, in his fiercest tone. “Look here, you Bill Snyder, if you try pinching on me again I'll pitch you over the head of old Durant in less than a second!”

What was the poor, pale little woman to do? With one boy crawling about the floor and two others in a hand-to-hand fight, with the rest in a giggle, of what use to try to talk to them about Moses? You should have seen Gracie Dennis eyes by that time! Horror and disgust were about equally expressed, and rising above them both, a look of actual fear. Mr. Durant came over to attempt a rescue, his face distressed beyond measure.

“Mrs. Roberts, this is too much. I am sure that patience has ceased to be a virtue. They have never gone so far before. I suspected mischief to-day. I have heard from several of them during the week, and never anything but evil. I am prepared for it; there is a full police force on guard in the next room; what I propose is to have every one of these fellows taken to the lock-up. It will be a lesson that they richly deserve, and may do them good.”

Whispering was not one of Mr. Durant's strong points. He meant to convey secret intelligence of carefully-laid plans to Mrs. Roberts alone. In reality not a boy in the class but heard every word. They were startled into silence. “A full police force!” They were not fonder of the lock-up than are most boys who deserve that punishment. They were skilful in escaping the hands of policemen. They had not believed that the South End Mission would resort to any such means. They recognized in the Mission an attempt to do them good; and, without any effort at reasoning it out, they had by tacit consent decided that policemen and lock-ups and Christian effort did not match. They had chuckled much over the stationing of “little Duffer” at the door on guard. Any two of the strong young fellows were a match for him, and in the event of a riot, which they would like no better fun than to help get up, how many choice spirits all about the room would join them if given the word, and in the delightful confusion which would result how easy to escape from sight and hearing while Policeman Duffer was summoning aid! They had felt comparatively safe. But “a full police force” detailed for duty was quite another thing. They felt caught in a trap. Nimble Dick got up in haste from the floor and took his seat, and the boys looked from one to another with ominous frowns. There were reasons why none of them cared to come before the police court just now. What was to be done?

While they waited and considered, Mrs. Roberts did it. Her hand was on Mr. Durant's arm, and directly the loud whispering ceased, she spoke in low, but distinctly emphatic tones:—

“I beg of you, Mr. Durant, do no such thing. I would dismiss every policeman at once, with thanks, if I were you. We shall not need their help. I give you my word of honor that the boys will be quiet during the rest of the session, not because they are afraid of policemen, but because they respect me, and do not want to see me frightened or annoyed. Please don't let a policeman come near us.”

I am not sure which was the more astonished, the superintendent or the boys. He returned to his desk with the bewildered air of one whose deep-laid schemes had come to naught in an unexpected manner without giving him time to rally; and the boys looked at one another in perplexity, and were silent.

Mrs. Roberts turned to them with quiet voice:—

“Boys,” she said, “you have spoiled the story that I was going to tell you. I have lost my place, and there isn't time to go back and find it. I am sorry, for I think you would have liked the story. I spent a good deal of time this week trying to make it interesting. But never mind now, there is something else I want to say. Will you spend the hours from eight to ten with me to-morrow evening at my house? I brought cards with me for each of you, containing my address, that you might have no trouble in finding the place.”

Whereupon she produced the delicate bits of pasteboard, with her name and address handsomely engraved thereon.

Nimble Dick took his between his soiled thumb and finger, turned it over in a pretence of great interest, and finally endeavored to “sight” it with his eye, as a workman does his board.

“What'll you do with us if we come?” Stephen Crowley asked, fixing what was intended as a wise look upon her, the leer in his eye hinting that he was smart enough to see another trap, and meant not to fall into it.

Mrs. Roberts laughed pleasantly.

“It is an unusual question, when one invites company,” she said; “but I don't mind answering it. For one thing I thought we would have an oyster stew and some good coffee together. Then, if any of you like music, I have a friend with me who is a good singer; and I have a few pictures I should like you to see, if you cared to; and—I don't know whether you are fond of flowers, but some of you may have a mother, or sister at home who is, and the greenhouse is all aglow just now. Oh, how can I tell what I should do to entertain guests? Just what seemed to me to be pleasant at the time. That is the way I generally do. May I expect you?”

The boys stared. This was a new departure, indeed! How much of it did she mean? What was she trying to do? Was it a trap? Still she had rescued them from the police force, and they had not expected that, for every boy of them knew that he had treated her shamefully. Timothy Haskell was generally the quietest one of the group, and perhaps the most straightforward. He went directly to the point of the question that he saw in the eyes of the others.

“What do you do it for?”

“Yes, that's the talk,” said Nimble Dick. “What do you want of us?”

“Why, I want you to spend the evening with me. Didn't I tell you? If you really mean to be friends with me of course I must invite you to my home. What *could* I want except to have a nice time? I'm trying to make you like me. Of course I want you to like me. How can we have pleasant times together unless you do?”

CHAPTER XI. — “I HAVE BUT TO TRY AGAIN”

“Pleasant times like we've been having to-day?” said Nimble Dick, with a wicked leer.

If he meant to disconcert her, he missed his point.

“No!” she said, promptly, “we haven't had a bit nice times to-day, and as for liking you, I haven't done so to-day at all. If I had the least idea that you meant often to treat me as you have this afternoon I should know it was of no use. But I cannot think that you will continue to treat a lady in such a manner, particularly when I am really trying to make a pleasant time for you. There is no object, you see, in spoiling it.”

This plain bit of truth, for the time being so commended itself to the judgment of the boys that they regarded the speaker gravely, without attempting a reply. She was not moralizing; at least it was unlike any moralizing that they had ever heard. It seemed to be simply a bit of practical common sense. Not a boy would have owned it, but each felt, just at that moment, a faint hope that she would *not* decide it was of no use, and give them up. Straightforward Tim Haskell had one more question to ask:—

“Why didn't you let them bring in their police and settle us?”

Their teacher hesitated just a moment. Would the “whole truth” do to speak in this case? Could she hope to make them understand that she saw in it a step lower down, and that thus degraded before her eyes, she feared her possible hold on them would be gone forever? No; it wouldn't do! A little, a *very* little piece of the truth was all that she could treat them to. A faint sparkle in her bright eyes, which every one of them saw, and she said:—

“I was afraid you might not be excused in time to keep your engagement with me to-morrow evening.”

They all laughed, not boisterously, actually an appreciative laugh. They were bright; there is hardly a street boy living by his wits who isn't. They recognized the humor hidden in the answer, and enjoyed it.

Then the superintendent's bell rang. That bell always did seem to have an evil influence on those boys. Indeed, Mrs. Roberts was known to remark, a few Sundays afterwards, that if there *were* no opening and closing exercises in the Sabbath-school, her work would be easier; that street boys did not seem to have one element of devotion in them, and needed to be kept at high pressure, in order to be able to control themselves.

The thought is worthy of study, perhaps. It is just possible that our opening and closing exercises are too long drawn out even for those who are not street boys.

Be that as it may, the little spell which Mrs. Roberts had been able for a few minutes to weave around her boys on this particular Sabbath, was broken by the sound of the bell. The boys returned to their memories of insult, as they regarded the police force. They muttered sullenly among themselves about “traps” and “sells,” and “guessed they wouldn't get caught here again;” and Mrs. Roberts, seeming not to hear, heard with a heavy heart.

How angry they looked! Even Nimble Dick's usually merry face was clouded over. What a curious thing it was that even they had their ideas of propriety, and felt themselves insulted! Was it an instinct, she wondered —a reminder that there was in them material for manhood?

Would they ever, any of them, be men—Christian gentlemen? It seemed almost too great a stretch for even her imagination. As she moved in her seat her delicately-embroidered, perfumed handkerchief fell to the floor. Mrs. Roberts was used to young men—mere boys, even—whose instinctive movement would be to instantly restore it to her. Not a boy before her thought of such a thing. She had not expected it, of course. Yet she wondered if the instinct were not dormant, needing but the suggestion. It was a queer little notion, worthy of Flossy Shipley herself, who, from being continually busy about little things, had come to the conclusion that nothing anywhere was little; that the so-called trifles, which make up many lives, had much to do with the happiness of other lives. Was it worth her while to try to teach these street Arabs to pick up fallen handkerchiefs? She differed from many Christian workers, in that, in her simplicity, she really thought it was.

There was a lull just at that moment. A hymn had been announced, but the organist's note-book had been mislaid, and was being sought after. It could disturb no one if Mrs. Roberts tried her little experiment. She looked longingly at Dirk Colson, but his brows were black and his eyes fierce; this was no time to reach him. Nimble Dick looked much more approachable. She determined to venture him:—

“Mr. Bolton,” spoken in her sweetest voice, “I have dropped my handkerchief.”

“Anybody with half an eye could see that, mum; and a mighty dirty spot you picked out for such a nice little rag to lie in.”

This was her only response. Then the discomfited experimenter told herself that she was a blunderer. How could the poor fellow be expected to know what she meant? Why had she not *asked* the service from him? She would try again.

Would he be kind enough to pick it up for her? It was long afterwards before Mrs. Roberts could think of his

answer without a sinking heart. Fixing bold, saucy eyes on her, he spoke in deliberate tones, loud enough to be heard half-way across the room:—

“Why, pick it up yourself, mum! It is as near to you as it is to me, and you don't look weakly.”

She picked it up, her poor cheeks burning, but she did not forget it.

Various after-school conferences told their different stories.

“Well!” Mr. Durant said, stopping in the act of mopping his hot forehead to shake hands with her, “Mrs. Roberts, I honor your courage. Those boys were simply fearful to-day; I really feared some outbreak that would be hard to quell. I'm afraid we shall have to give them up. Yes, I know how you feel: but you haven't been here to see what we have borne from them. All sorts of teachers have been tried. We have given them the best material we had, both men and women, and every one has failed. Then you actually want to try it for another Sabbath! Well, I'm glad of it. Oh, *I* don't want to give them up; it makes my heart ache to think of it; but if we can't keep them in sufficient order to get any benefit, nor find a teacher who is willing to hold on to them, what else is there for us to do? But that last complaint I needn't make so long as you 'hold on,' need I?” This last with a genial smile. “Well, God bless you; I couldn't begin to tell you how much I hope you will succeed.”

But his face said: “However, I know you won't.”

He turned from her and said as much to young Ried:—

“She is in earnest, Ried, and she has resources; but she won't catch them, simply because they don't mean to be caught; they come here to make trouble and for nothing else. Just look at the way they have performed to-day—worse than ever, and they never had a better teacher. I've watched her, and I believe she knows how. I'll tell you what it is, Ried, we must hold on to her, and when she gives up those boys we must secure her for that class of girls down by the door. I really think we have a prize.”

Now, if he had but known it, Mrs. Evan Roberts meant to teach no other class at the South End Mission save those boys.

“Flossy Shipley!” This was Gracie Dennis' exclamation; when she was very much excited, she went back to the old name. “What *are* you trying to do with those horrid boys? and how can you endure their impudence? I never saw anything like their actions in my life, and I thought I had seen bad boys. You look completely worn out, and no wonder. I shouldn't think Mr. Roberts would let you do this. What good can you do such creatures, Flossy?”

“My dear Gracie, don't you think that Jesus Christ died to save them?”

“Well!” said Gracie, hesitatingly. It was a favorite phrase with her, as it is with many people when they don't know what to say next.

“And don't you think he wants them saved? And will he not be pleased with even my little bits of efforts if he knows that my sincere desire is to save these souls for his glory?”

“But what I mean is, what good can you do them so long as they act as they do now? They didn't listen to a word you said, so as to get any good out of it.”

“I don't know that, dear, nor do you. Don't you think the Holy Spirit sometimes presses words on people that they do not seem to be heeding? In any event, that is a part with which I have nothing to do. I tried; and if I failed utterly I have but to try again. It isn't as though there were some good teacher ready to take them. Nobody will make a second effort. Now there is one thing I can certainly do. I can keep on making efforts; who knows but some of them may bear fruit? By the way, Gracie, I want ever so much of your help.”

“Mine?”' said Gracie, with wide-open eyes. “I don't know how to help people; I'm not good.” And her face darkened in a frown,—some unpleasant memories that went far toward proving the truth of that statement coming to mind just then. After a moment she spoke in a somewhat more gentle tone: “Don't count on me, Flossy, for help about those boys. They frighten me; I never saw such fellows. I couldn't help wondering what —papa would have said to them.”

Between the “wondering” and the noun there had been an observable pause. Mrs. Roberts suspected that the thought in Gracie's mind was rather what Mrs. Dennis, who was supposed to have much knowledge of boys, would have thought of them. But since her arrival Gracie had studiously avoided any reference to her stepmother, and Mrs. Roberts had humored her folly.

“Never mind, you can help them; and when you begin to realize that, you will forget your fears.”

“Do you expect to see one of the creatures to-morrow evening? What in the world would you do with them if they did come?”

“I'm not sure that I *expect* them. I only hope for them. As to what to do with them, I trust to you to help answer that question. I want to give them an idea of what a nice time is.”

“I cannot help,” said Gracie again, but she was *interested*, and referred again and again to the subject, cross-questioning Mrs. Roberts as to her plans and hopes, until that lady gave a satisfied smile to the thought that her seven boys had begun their work.

The first part of this conversation was held while they waited in one of the class-rooms for Mr. Ried to give in his report before joining them. The waiting suggested to Gracie another question.

“Who is this Mr. Ried, who seems to have us in charge?”

“He is one of the clerks from the store, which accounts, in part, for his attendance on us. But I am interested in him for other reasons. He had a wonderful sister; that is, she was a wonderful Christian; she died when quite young, but one might be ready to go to heaven early if one had accomplished as much as she did. By one of those strange arrangements, which I should think would go far toward making observing people believe in a special Providence, her life, or I might almost say her death, was the means of changing the current of my husband's life. He says he was a gay young fellow; a member of the church, but giving just as little attention to religion as many do whom you and I know. An accident to one of his family held him for several weeks in the town where this Ester Ried lived; and her physician, with whom he became acquainted, introduced him to her. It seems she was very much interested in young men, in their Christian development.

He went to see her several times; and, to use his own expression, she first made him realize that there was such a thing as zeal, and then she set it on fire. What she had begun in life she finished in her death. Evan attended her funeral services, and the walls were hung with Bible texts of her selection. The most wonderful texts! All about Christian work, and about being in earnest, because the time was short. Evan says he began to understand, then, that the service of Christ was first, best, and always.

“Wasn't it a singular Providence that led him under the influence of that young girl during the closing weeks of her life? Only think, he has been doing her work ever since,—doing it, possibly, in ways that she could not compass. That is one reason why I am so much interested in those boys. It seems to me as though they were her boys. Did I tell you that her heart went out especially after the neglected? I learned about the boys through Mr. Ried. He was but a child when his sister died, and yet she succeeded in so enthusing him with her ideas that he is all the time trying to carry out her plans. She had some wonderful ones. This idea of inviting the boys, socially, I had from her. Do you see how plainly she is working yet, though she has been in heaven so long?”

“Do you think,” asked Gracie Dennis, a timid, gentle sound to her voice, “that all Christians ought to put religion 'first, best, and always,' as your husband said? I fancied that some were set apart to do a special work.”

“We are all set apart, dear, don't you think? Given to Him to use as He will. The trouble is that so many of us take back the gifts, and use our time and our tongues as though they were our own.”

“Our *tongues*!” repeated Gracie, amazement in her voice.

“Why, yes; didn't you give Him your tongue when you gave Him yourself? And yet you are fortunate if you have not dishonored Him with it many a time.”

Said Gracie, “What a queer way you have of putting things.”

Then came Alfred Ried in haste, and apologizing for the long delay. Gracie Dennis, watched him curiously; listened critically to his words. Was it to be supposed that this young man put religion “first, best, and always”; and considered his tongue as given to the Lord? Alfred bore the scrutiny well. He took very little notice of Miss Gracie, being entirely absorbed with another matter. He had settled opinions about Mrs. Roberts now, from which he would not be likely to waver. He had seen much of her during the week, and he knew she had not been idle. She had given him much valuable information concerning the boys in whom he had been interested all winter; and whom she had known for a week. Also he was aware that Sally and Mark Calkins had seen much of her, to their great benefit. She had made him her messenger on one occasion, and he had seen Sally Calkins take from the basket the clean, sweet-smelling sheets that were to freshen her brother's bed, and bestow on them rapturous kisses, while she murmured, “I'd walk on my knees in broad daylight through the gutter to serve her,—that I would.”

“Sheets aren't much, I suppose,” moralized the young man, as he walked thoughtfully homeward. “People with much less money than she has must have furnished them. It is thinking about things that makes the difference between her and others.”

But he had not quite found the secret. The main difference between her and many other people lay in the fact that she set steadily about doing the things she thought of that would be nice to do.

On the whole, young Ried was fully prepared to sympathize with Mr. Durant's opinion, that the South End Mission had secured a prize. Not that he was very hopeful over those boys. He felt that their conduct, under the circumstances, showed a depth of depravity which was beyond the reach of Mission schools; but it was a comfort to think that good things were arranged for them if they had but chosen to receive. He began at once to talk about them.

“Mrs. Roberts, they are worse than I had supposed. I am afraid that your patience is exhausted.”

Her answer was peculiar.

“Mr. Ried, I want you to spend to-morrow evening with me. I have invited my boys, and I depend on you and Gracie here to help entertain them.”

“Are you equal to such formidable work as that?” asked Gracie, with a mischievous smile.

He did not respond to the smile; he was looking at Mrs. Roberts, studying her face as one bewildered with the rapidity of her moves.

“I want to be,” he said, with feeling; “I want to know how to work, and I'm learning. Mrs. Roberts, I moved to my new boarding-house last evening, and my room is a perfect little gem. There is an illuminated text in it, and all around it is twined an ivy, growing,—don't you think! Hidden, you know, behind the frame in a bottle; and the text is one of my sister's treasures. Isn't that a singular coincidence?”

“It is very nice,” said Mrs. Roberts, with satisfied eyes. She still made much use of that little word.

“And, Mrs. Roberts, I asked one of your boys to come in this evening and see my room.”

CHAPTER XII. — “I WANT THEM TO GET USED TO PARLORS.”

“Those two people can think and talk of nothing but those dreadful boys,” said Gracie to herself, half annoyed and wholly interested. She found herself that very evening turning over the music, with the wonderment in her mind as to what she could sing that they would be likely to care for, provided one of them

appeared, which thing she did not expect.

But I have not told you of all the discussions had that day. The boys went their various ways, their minds also busy with the events of the afternoon. Dirk Colson and Stephen Crowley went off together; not that they were special friends, but their homes lay near together. For the distance of half a block they walked in silence; then Stephen Crowley spoke his mind:—

“Nimble Dick wasn't near as smart to-day as he thinks he was, accordin' to my way of thinkin'.”

“He was meaner than dirt!” burst forth Dirk, fiercely. “To go back on her like that, after she had saved us from a row with the police, ain't what I believe in. Why couldn't he have picked up the rag, seeing she wanted him to? That's what *I* say. I'd a done it myself if she had give me the chance.”

“That there Dick Bolton can be too mean for anything when he sets out,” said Stephen, with a grave air of superiority. “I don't go in for anything of that kind myself. We wasn't none of us much to boast of; but Dick, he went too fur. I say, Dirk, what do you s'pose all that yarn means about to-morrow night? And what be we goin' to do about it? Dick, he said it was all a game to get hold of us somehow, and he wasn't goin' to have nothin' to do with it.”

Had Stephen Crowley desired exceedingly to secure Dirk's vote in favor to the proposed entertainment he could not, at that moment, have chosen a better way. Dirk tossed his thick mat of black hair in a defiant fashion and answered:—

“He needn't have a thing to do with it, so far as I care. I don't know who'll miss him; but if he thinks he's got all the fellows under his thumb, and they're goin' to do as he says, I'll show him a thing or two. *I'm* a goin' to-morrow night. I don't care what it is, nor what it is for. She was nice and friendly to us to-day, and I'm willin' to trust her to-morrow. I shall go up there and see what she does want. It can't kill a fellow to do that much.”

“Then I'm a goin', too,” declared Stephen, with decision. “Dick, he thinks there won't none of us go if he don't; and I'd just like to show him that he must get up early in the mornin' if he wants to keep track of us.”

If Dirk Colson needed anything to strengthen his resolution, there was material in that last sentence which supplied it. He had long chafed under the control of Dick Bolton; here was a chance to assert superiority. He even, just at that moment, conceived the brilliant idea of supplanting Dick—running an opposition party, as it were.

What if he should get every fellow in the class to promise to go, and Dick, the acknowledged leader, should find himself left out alone in the cold. The thought actually made his grim face break into a smile. Thus it came to pass that the most efficient worker for the success of the Monday evening entertainment, so far at least as securing the presence of the guests, was Dirk Colson.

In Mr. Roberts' mansion preparations for receiving and entertaining the hoped-for guests went briskly forward. Preparations which astonished the young guest already arrived.

“Are you really going to let them come in here?” she asked, as she followed Mrs. Roberts through the elegant parlors, and watched her putting delicate touches here and there.

“Certainly; why not? Don't you open your parlors when you receive your friends?”

“I don't think we have such peculiar friends on our list,” Gracie said, with a little laugh; and then, “Flossy, they will spoil your furniture.”

“If one evening in the Master's service will spoil anything it surely ought to be spoiled,” Mrs. Roberts answered, serenely.

“But, Flossy,”—with a touch of impatience in her voice,—“what is the use? Wouldn't the dining-room answer every purpose; be to them the most elegant room they ever beheld, and be less likely to suffer from their contact?”

The busy little mistress of all the beauty around her turned to her guest with a peculiar smile on her face, half mischievous and wholly sweet, as she said:—

“I want them to get used to parlors, my dear; they may have much to do with them, as well as with dining-rooms.”

“They are more likely to have to do with penitentiaries and prisons,” Gracie said; but she abandoned discussion, and gave herself to the pleasure of arranging lonely flowers in their lovely vases.

There was a divided house as to the probability of the guests appearing,—Mr. Roberts inclining to the belief that some of them would come, while Gracie was entirely skeptical. Mrs. Roberts kept her own counsel, neither expressing wish nor fear, but steadily pushing her preparations.

As a matter of fact, the entire seven appeared together, promptly, as the clock struck eight.

At the last moment Dick Bolton, the usual leader, finding himself in a minority of one, not to be outwitted, protested that he had not the least notion of staying away; of course he was going, and good-naturedly joined the group.

I wonder if you have the least conception of how those boys looked? The ideas of some people cannot get below nicely-patched clothes, carefully brushed boots, clean collars, and neatly arranged hair.

Clean collars! Not a boy of them owned a collar. No thought of brushing their worn-out, unmended boots ever entered their minds. Their clothes were much patched, but in many places needed it still.

Stephen Crowley had made a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to put his mass of hair in order. Most of the others had not thought even of that. Why should they? Poor Dirk, you will remember, if he had thought of it, had no comb with which to experiment. It is doubtful if many of the others were any better off in this respect.

Imagine the seven standing, a confused, grinning, heap, in the centre of Mrs. Roberts' large and brilliantly-lighted hall!

She came forward to welcome them, shaking hands, though they made no attempt to offer a hand in greeting. She had to grasp after each. She essayed to introduce Gracie; not one of them attempted a bow.

“Come this way,” Mrs. Roberts said, “and take seats.” Then she led the way into the long, bright, elegantly-furnished, flower-decked room.

They followed her in a row. Midway in the room they made a halt. They caught a view of themselves—full length at that—revealed by the great mirrors. They had never seen themselves set in contrast before. They could not sit in a row, for the easy chairs and sofas, though plentiful, had the air of having been just vacated by people who had left them carelessly just where they had chanced to sit.

It required diplomacy to seat those boys. When at last Stephen Crowley dropped into one of the great pillowy chairs, he instantly sprang up again, and looked at it doubtfully.

Was the thing a trap? How far down would it sink with him? This was too much for Nimble Dick, even under the present overpowering circumstances—he laughed. His hostess blessed him for that laugh. The horrible stiffness was somewhat broken, and all were seated.

Just at that moment came Alfred Ried, hurriedly, like one who had intended promptness and missed it.

“All here ahead of me!” he exclaimed, “Mrs. Roberts, I beg your pardon. At the last moment I went in search of Dr. Everett; there was serious illness in a house next door, and I happened to know just where he was.”

During this address he was shaking hands with his hostess, his manner easy and graceful, as one used to it all. Then he crossed the room, that wonderful room, treading down those flowers on the carpet as though he had no fears of breaking their stems.

“Good evening, Miss Dennis,” he said, and he was bowing in a manner that Dirk Colson was confident he could imitate. Then he turned to the boys, shaking hands:—

“How are you, Haskell? By the way, Crowley, I called on you to-day at the office; sorry not to find you in.”

“Mrs. Roberts, allow me?” And he wheeled one of the easy chairs to the spot where that lady was standing.

“How well he enters into the thing,” said Gracie Dennis to herself, looking on in admiration at this young man, who, still so young, was adapting himself to circumstances that might well have embarrassed older heads than his. He plunged into talk with the boys, making them answer questions. He had come but a few moments before from Mark Calkins', stopped there with a message from Dr. Everett; and these boys knew Mark and Sallie and the worthless father, and all the more or less worthless neighbors who ran in and out, and young Ried had a dozen questions to ask. His quick-wittedness, and the ease with which he made talk to these young men who lived in such an utterly different world from himself, surprised his hostess very much.

Even she did not know to what an exalted pitch his enthusiasm and excitement reached; though he had flashed a pair of most appreciative eyes on her when she gave him her invitation for the evening. Here was actually his sister Ester's darling scheme being worked out before his eyes! Not only that, but he was being called upon to help. Ester had wanted him to grow up to undertake just such efforts as these; and only last week they had seemed to him so altogether good and noble and so impossible to try. Yet here he was helping try them! No wonder Alfred Ried could talk.

It had been determined in family council that Mr. Roberts must absent himself. He was in the house, indeed—no further away than the library, ready for call in event of an emergency; but it was judged that another stranger, and such a formidable one as the head of the house, must be avoided for this one evening. As for Mr. Ried, *would* they remember that he was not much older than some of them, and that he was not a rich young man living on his income, but was earning his living by daily work? and would they note the contrast between themselves and him? This was what their hostess wondered. A few moments and then came a summons to the dining-room. Seated at last, though one of the poor fellows stumbled over a chair, and barely saved himself from falling.

If you could have seen that dining-table, the picture of it would have lingered long in your memory. The whitest and finest of damask table linen; napkins so large that they almost justified Dick Bolton's whisper, “What be you goin' to do with your sheet?” china so delicate that Gracie Dennis could not restrain an inward shiver when any of the clumsy fingers touched a bit of it, and such a glitter of silver as even Gracie had never seen before.

One thing was different from the conventional tea-party. Every servant was banished; none but tender eyes, interested in her experiment, and ready to help it on, should witness the blunders of the boys. So the hostess had decreed, and so instructed Alfred and Gracie. The consequence was that Alfred himself served the steaming oysters with liberal hand, and Gracie presided over jellies and sauces, while Mrs. Roberts sugared and creamed and poured cups of such coffee as those fellows had never even *smelled* before. If you think they were embarrassed to the degree that they could not eat, you are mistaken.

They were street boys; their lives had been spent in a hardening atmosphere. Directly the first sense of novelty passed away, and their poorly-fed stomachs craved the unusual fare served up for them, the fellows grinned at one another, seized their silver spoons, and dived into the stews in a fashion that would have horrified every servant in the house.

How they ate! Oysters and coffee and pickles and cakes and jellies! There seemed no limit to their capacities; neither did they make the slightest attempt to correct their table manners. None of them paid any outward attention to their “sheets,” although Alfred and Gracie spread theirs with elaborate care; they leaned their elbows on the table, they made loud, swooping sounds with their lips, and, in short, transgressed every law known to civilized life. Why not?

What did they know about civilized life?

Nevertheless, not one movement of young Ried escaped the notice of some of them.

He tried still to carry on a conversation; though the business of eating was being too closely attended to on all sides to let him be very successful.

Gracie studied *him*, and was not only interested in his efforts, but roused to make some attempts herself. What could she talk about with such people? School? The Literary Club? The last concert? The course of lectures? The last new book that everybody was reading? No, not everybody; assuredly not these seven.

On what ground *was* she to meet them?

Yet talk she must and would. Mr. Ried should see that she at least *wanted* to help.

CHAPTER XIII. — “LET US BE FASHIONABLE.”

One feature of the hour was not only entirely new to the boys, but gave them a curious feeling, the name of which they did not understand. When the last one sat back in his chair, thereby admitting himself vanquished, Mrs. Roberts, looking at the young man who sat at the foot of the table, said:—

“Will you return thanks?”

What did that mean? To be sure they had heard of thanking people, but even *they* were aware that it was an unusual thing for persons to demand thanks for themselves. They watched; behold, the young man bowed his head, and these were the words he spoke:—

“Dear Saviour, we thank thee for the joys of this evening. We pray thee to teach us so to live that we may all meet some day in our Father's house. Amen.”

The boys looked at one another, then looked down at their plates. Their sole experience of prayer was connected with the South End Mission. To meet it at a supper-table was a revelation. Did the people who lived in grand houses, and had such wonderful things to eat, always pray at their supper-tables? This was the problem which they were turning over in their minds.

Returning to the parlor, Gracie went at once to the piano. She had spent a good deal of Monday, settling the question of what to play, and had chosen the most sparkling music she could find. I am anxious to have it recorded, that, all uncultured as they were, these boys neither talked nor laughed during the music, but appeared at least to listen. It was Dirk Colton who sat nearest to the piano, and who listened in that indescribable way which always flatters a musician.

“Do you like it?” Gracie asked, running off the final notes in a tinkle of melody.

His dark face flushed a deep red.

“I dunno,” he said, with an awkward laugh; “it's queer sounding. I don't see how you make so many tinkles. Do you make all your fingers go at once on those black and white things?”

“Not quite; but sometimes they have to dance about in a very lively fashion. I have to keep my wits at work, I assure you.”

“Is it hard to do?”

“Not very, nowadays. When I first commenced, the practising was horrid; I hated it.”

“What made you do it, then?”

“Oh, the same reason which makes people do a great many things that they don't like,” she said, lightly; “I wanted the results. I knew if I worked at it steadily the time would come when I should not only enjoy it myself, but be able to give pleasure to other people. Why? Don't you ever do things that you don't particularly like?”

He shrugged his shoulders, and bestowed on her a very wise look.

“Often enough,” he said fiercely, and he thought of his drunken father. “But then I wouldn't if I could help it.”

“That would depend on whether you thought the thing would pay in the end, would it not?”

Then, without waiting for an answer, she asked “What is your business?”

“My business?” with a curiously puzzled air.

“Yes; how do you spend your time?”

“Hunting up something to eat,” he said, with a grim smile; visions of his aimless loafing appearing before him as the only occupation he could be said to have. It had not occurred to him to try to mislead her, but she evidently did not understand.

“Oh, yes,” she said, seriously, “so I suppose. Isn't it queer how busy men and women have to be day after day, and year after year, just getting themselves and others something to eat? Do you have other people to help get it for? Mother, for instance, and little brothers and sisters?”

“I've got a mother,” he said, “and a sister.”

“And that makes work easier, does it not? I always thought it would be stupid to work all the time just for one's self. But I meant, What do you work at in order to get the something to eat,—there are so many different ways?”

“How do you know I work at all?”

Dirk's voice was growing sullen; a consciousness that he would appear at a disadvantage in admitting himself an idler in a busy world was dawning upon him as an entirely new idea. At his question, Gracie turned on her music-stool and regarded him with surprise.

“Why, of course you work,” she said; “people all do.”

She was not acting a part. Her experience among poor people was limited to that outwardly respectable class who, however disreputable their conduct might be on Sabbath, had, nevertheless a Monday occupation with which they pretended to earn a living.

Dirk shrugged his shoulders again.

“Do they?” he said.

Her evident ignorance of the world made him good-natured. She was not trying to preach to him, he decided. A thing which Dirk hated, in common with all persons of his class.

But the lull in the music had started conversation in other parts of the room.

Dirk heard young Ried's question:—

“Mrs. Roberts, do you know of any young man looking for work? I heard of a good situation this afternoon. Oh, there are plenty of applicants, but the gentleman is an old friend of my brother-in-law, and I could speak a helpful word for somebody.”

“I have no one in mind,” Mrs. Roberts said, and she glanced eagerly at the boys lounging in various attitudes in her easy chairs. Only three of them she knew made any pretence of earning their living. Did Alfred mean one of them? “Here is a chance for you, young gentlemen,” she said, lightly, “who bids for a situation?”

“What is the place?”

It was Dirk Colson who asked the question. Ever since he could remember he was supposed to have been hunting for work, but I am not sure that he ever felt quite such a desire to find it as at that moment.

“It is at Gray's, on Ninth Street, a good chance; but the one who secures it must have a fair knowledge of figures.”

“Oh, land!” said Dirk, sinking lower in his easy-chair. “No use in *me* asking about it.”

“Are figures your weak point?” Mrs. Roberts asked, smiling on him. “I can sympathize with you; I had to work harder over arithmetic than at any other study; but I learned to like it. Do you know I think it should be a favorite study with you? It is so nice to conquer an obstinate-looking row of figures, and fairly oblige the right result to appear. What did you find hardest about the study, Mr. Colson?”

The others chuckled, but Dirk glowered at them fiercely.

“There's nothin' to laugh about as I see,” he said. “I didn't find nothin' hard, because I never had no chance to try. I never went to no school, nor had books, nor nothin'; now that's the truth, and I'm blamed if I ain't going to own it.”

“What a good thing it is that you are young.” This was her animated answer. “There is a chance to make up for lost time. Mr. Ried, I have such a nice idea. I heard you and Dr. Everett speaking of the Literary Club the other night. Why cannot we have a literary club of our own? A reading circle, or something of that sort? Suppose we should meet once a week and read aloud something interesting, and have talks about it afterwards. Do you ever read aloud?”

If Mrs. Roberts in all sincerity had not been one of the most simple-hearted, and in some respects ignorant little creatures on the face of the globe, she could never, with serious face, have addressed such a question to Nimble Dick.

Young Ried could not have done it, for he realized the folly of supposing that Nimble Dick ever read anything. By just so much was Mrs. Roberts ahead of him. She supposed that these boys had their literature, and read it, and perhaps met somewhere on occasion and read together. This made it possible for her to ask surprising questions with honest face.

“Bless me!” said Nimble Dick, startled into an upright posture; “oh, no, mum, never.”

And even Dirk Colson laughed at the expression on his face.

“Still I think you would enjoy it, after a little practice, and I can't help fancying you would make a good reader.”

The boys were all laughing now, Nimble Dick with the rest.

“You're in for an awful blunder there,” he said, good-naturedly. “I'm like Black Dirk, never had no chances, and didn't do nothin' worth speakin' of with them that I had. Why, bless your body, mum! I can't even read to myself! I make the awfulest work you ever heard of spellin' out the show-bills. I have to get Black Dirk to help me; and him and me is a team.”

By this time Dirk's face had lost its smile, and his fierce eyes were flashing; but the hostess was serene.

“That doesn't prove anything against my statement. I was speaking of what *could* be, not necessarily of what was. Let us have a club. The more I think of the plan the more it pleases me. I'll tell you! The word 'club' doesn't quite suit me. Let us be fashionable. Gracie, don't you know how fashionable it is becoming to have 'evenings' set apart for special occasions? Mr. Ried, you know Mrs. Judson's 'Tuesday evenings,' and Mrs. Symond's 'Friday evenings?' Very well, let us have our 'Monday evenings,' in which we will do all sorts of nice things; sometimes literary, sometimes musical, and sometimes—well, anything that we please. What do you say, gentlemen; shall we organize? Mr. Ried, will you give Monday evenings to us? Gracie, you are my guest, and cannot, of course, refuse.”

It was a novel idea, certainly. Even Alfred, while trying to heartily second her, was in doubt as to what she could hope to accomplish by it. As for the boys, not one of them promised to attend; but neither did they refuse. Mrs. Roberts presently left the subject, seeming to consider her point carried, and proposed a visit to the conservatory.

I think it very doubtful whether the boy lives who does not like flowers. There are those who seem to consider it a mark of manliness to affect indifference to them; but these, as they grow older—become real men—generally lay this bit of folly aside. Then there are those, plenty of them, who really do not know that they care for flowers. The boys, ushered for the first time in their lives into the full bloom of a conservatory, were, most of them, of this latter stamp.

What a scene of beauty it was! Great white callas, bending their graceful cups; great red and yellow roses, making the air rich with their breath; vines and mosses and ferns and small flowers in almost endless variety. Alfred and Gracie moved among the glories; the latter exhausting all her superlatives in honest delight, although she had visited the spot a dozen times that day; and Alfred, who had been less favored, was hardly

less eager and responsive than she. But Mrs. Roberts watched the boys.

It was all very well for those two to enjoy her flowers; of course they would. But what language would the silent, lovely things speak to her untutored boys? They said not a word; not one of them. They made no exclamations; they had no superlatives at command. But Stephen Crowley stooped before a lovely carnation, and smelled, and *smelled*, drawing in long breaths, as though he meant to take its fragrance all away with him; and Nimble Dick picked up the straying end of an ivy, and restored it to its support again, in a way that was not to be lost sight of by one who was looking for hearts; and Dirk Colson brushed back his matted hair and stood long before a great, pure lily, and looked down into its heart with an expression on his face that his teacher never forgot.

She came over to him presently, standing beside him, saying nothing. Then at last she reached forth her hand and broke the lily from its stalk. He started, almost as if something had struck him.

“What did you do that for?” And his voice was fierce.

“I want you to take this for me to your sister—the girl with beautiful golden hair; I saw her one day, and I shall remember her hair and eyes. She will like this flower, and she will like you to bring it to her.

“Gracie”—raising her voice—“gather some flowers will you, and make into bouquets? These young gentlemen will like to carry them to some one. There must be mothers at home who will enjoy bouquets brought by their sons.”

Over this gently-spoken sentence Nimble Dick laughed a hard, derisive laugh. It made the dark blood flow into black Dirk's indignant face. Even Alfred Ried lost self-control for a moment, and flashed a glance at him out of angry eyes. How could there be any hope of a boy who sneered at his mother? Yet you need not judge him too harshly.

He thought of his mother, indeed, when he laughed; but alas! he thought of her as drunk. And he knew her scarcely at all, save as that word described her. How *could* “mother” mean to him what it meant to Alfred Ried? what it meant even to Dirk Colson, whose mother, weak indeed in body and spirit, full of complaining words, oftentimes weakly bitter words to him, yet patched his clothes so long as she could get patches and thread, and would have washed them if she could have got soap, and been able to bring the water, and if her only tub hadn't been in pawn. Oh, yes, there are degrees in mothers.

Mrs. Roberts, meantime, broke off blossoms with lavish hand, and made bouquets for Nimble Dick and for Dirk. He took the bright-hued ones with a smile, but the lily he held by itself, and still looked at it.

They went away at last noisily; growing almost, if not quite, rough towards one another, at least, and directly they were out of the door, Nimble Dick gave a whoop that would have chilled the blood of nervous women. But matron and maiden looked at each other and laughed.

“We have kept them pent up all the evening, and that is the escape-valve being raised to avoid a general explosion.” This was Mrs. Roberts' explanation.

They were quite alone. Alfred, on being invited in low tones to tarry and talk things over, had shaken his head, and replied, significantly:—

“Thank you! no; I am one of them, and must stand on the same level.”

“You are right,” Mrs. Roberts said, smilingly; “you must have been an apt pupil, my friend. That dear sister taught you a great deal.”

He held up the bouquet which she had made for him.

“I am going to put it before Ester's picture,” he said; “her work is going on.”

“Well,” said Gracie, “it is over, and we lived through it. And they *did* all come! I am amazed over that! And how they *did eat*! I suppose the next thing is to open all the windows and air out. Flossy Roberts, I'm afraid you are going insane. The idea of your inviting that horde here every Monday. What a parlor you would have! And they would breed a pestilence! They won't come, to be sure; but just imagine it if they should! I really think Mr. Roberts ought to send you home for Dr. Mitchell to look after. Well, Flossy, what next?”

“Next, dear, you must pray. Pray as you never have done before, for the souls of these boys, and for the success of my 'Monday evenings.' Gracie, we are at work for immortal *souls*. Think of it! they *must* live forever. Shall they, through all eternity, keep dropping lower and lower, or shall they wear crowns?”

CHAPTER XIV. — “SOMETHING'S HAPPENED!”

Sallie Calkins sat in a common little rocking-chair and rocked; and while she rocked she sewed, setting neat stitches in a brown coat which was already patched and darned and was threadbare in many places. There was a look of deep content on Sallie's face. There were many reasons for it.

Dr. Everett had that morning pronounced Mark's broken limb to be healing rapidly. He had also reported that Mark's place was to be held open for him by his employers. At this present moment, Mark, arrayed in a clean shirt, was resting on a very white sheet, his head reposing on a real feather pillow dressed in white and frilled. Over him was carefully spread another of those wonderful sheets, and to make the crowning glory, a white quilt, warm and soft, tucked him in on every side. How could Sallie but rejoice? All about the room there had been changes. A neat little table stood at the bed's side. It was covered with a white cloth, and a china bowl set thereon with a silver spoon beside it; a delicate goblet and china pitcher also, both carefully

covered with a napkin. Did Mrs. Roberts know how homely Sallie gloried in the thinness of that china and the fineness of that napkin? How does it happen that some of the very poor seem born with such aesthetic tastes? Mrs. Roberts had intuitions, and was given to certain acts, concerning which she could not give to others satisfactory explanations. Therefore, she sometimes left china where others would have judged the plainest stoneware more prudent and sensible.

A bit of bright carpet was spread at the side of the bed. A fire glowed in the neatly-brushed stove. A white muslin curtain hung at the window; and the chair in which Sallie rocked and sewed was new and gayly painted.

There were other traces of Mrs. Roberts. You might not have noticed them, but it seemed to Sallie that her fingers had touched everywhere. Yet the lady herself thought that she had done very little. She had held her inclinations in check with severe judgment.

The door opened softly, and a mass of golden hair, from out of which peered great eyes, peeped cautiously in.

“Alone?” it said, nodding first toward the figure on the bed, and intimating that she was aware of Mark's presence, and did not mean him.

“Yes,” said Sallie, “come in; Mark's asleep, but you won't disturb him; he don't disturb easy; he sleeps just like a baby since the doctor stopped that pain in his knee. There's my new chair; just try it and see how nice it is.”

Saying which, she got herself out of the little rocker in haste, and pushed it toward her guest, meantime taking a plain wooden chair, also new, and adding:—

“Did you ever hear of anybody like her before?”

“Something's happened!” said Mart Colson, ignoring the reference to the mysterious pronoun,—her voice so full of a new and strange meaning that had Sallie been acquainted with the word she might have said it was filled with awe.

As it was, she only exclaimed, “What?” in an intensely interested tone.

“Why, look here! I brought it along to show you.”

Whereupon she produced from under her piece of torn shawl a large broken-nosed pitcher, a piece of brown paper carefully tied over the top. She untied the bit of calico string with fingers that shook from excitement.

“Look in there!” she exclaimed at last, triumph in her tone, reaching forward the pitcher.

Sallie looked, and drew in her breath with a long, expressive “O-h!”

There, reposing in stately beauty, lay the great white lily with its golden bell.

“Yes, I should think so!” Mart said, satisfied with the expression. “Did you ever see anything like that before? It ain't made of wax nor anything else that *folks* ever made. It's alive! I felt of it. It looks like velvet and satin and all them lovely store things; but it doesn't feel so; it feels *alive*, and it *grew*. But, Sallie Calkins, if you should live a hundred years, and guess all the time, you never could guess where I got it. Sallie Calkins, if you'll believe it, Dirk gave it to me!”

“Dirk?”

“Yes, he did!”

Who would have supposed Mart Colson's voice capable of such a triumphant ring?

“You see the way of it was: Last night he didn't come for his supper at all, and that always scares me dreadful. I'm expecting something to happen, you know. Father, he didn't come either; for the matter of that, he hasn't come yet; and mother, she was awful tired, and hadn't had no dinner to speak of, and she just broke down and took on awful. Mother don't often cry, and it's good she don't, for she just goes into it with all her might when the time comes. It wasn't about father—she's used to him, you know, and don't expect nothing else; but Dirk drives her wild with what may happen to him. I was worried about him, too, but I was mad at him; it seemed too awful mean in him to stay away and scare mother. At last I got her to go to bed, and she was all tuckered out, and went to sleep.

“Then I wrapped myself in the quilt and sat down to wait; but I got asleep, and I dreamed I saw *her*; she had wings to each side of her, and she flew over the tops of all those houses and made them turn white like the snow looks when it is coming down before it drops into the gutters. Wasn't that queer? Well, some noise woke me up. I was sitting flat on the floor by mother, and I sat up straight all of a tremble. And there was the old stool, and the brown pitcher on it, half-full of water, and this wonderful thing stood in it looking at me. And Dirk, he stood off the other side looking at it.

“'It's for you, and she sent it.' That's what he said to me; and I wasn't real wide awake, you know. I suppose that's what made his voice sound so queer; and what do you think I said? I was thinking of my dream, and says I: 'Did she have her wings on?' Then Dirk made a queer noise; it was a laugh, but it sounded most like a cry. 'I guess so,' says he, and then he turned and went off to bed. And I can't get any more out of him; he is as snarly when I ask any questions as though he was mad about it all. If it hadn't been for this great white thing I might have thought this morning that it all belonged to the dream. But Dirk brought this home from somewhere, and put it in the pitcher, and give it to me his own self; that's sure.”

The story closed in triumph.

“It is beautiful!” said Sallie, the brown jacket slipping to the floor, while she bent over the lily. “It is beautiful, all of it, and it looks just like her, and sounds like her, wings and all; of course she sent it.”

“And Dirk brought it.” That part of the story Mart Colson did not forget.

Sometimes it seems to me a pity that hearts are not laid bare to the gaze of others. What, for instance, might not this little incident have done for Dirk Colson had he known how the starved heart of his sister fed on the thought that he brought her the flower?

Still, on the other hand, I don't know what the effect would have been on Mart had she known what a

tremendous amount of courage it had taken to present the flower to her. A dozen times on the way home had Dirk been on the point of consigning it to the gutter. *He* carry home a flower! If it had been a loaf of bread he thought it would be more consistent. Someway he recognized a fine sarcasm in the thought that he, who had never in his life contributed towards the necessities of the family, should carry to that dreary home a flower! Yet the fair lily did its work well during that long walk from East Fifty-fifth Street to the shadow of the alley. It made Dirk Colson tell it fiercely that he hated himself; that he was a brute and a loafer,—a blot on the earth, and ought not to live. Why didn't he go to work? Why didn't he have things to bring home to Mart every little while, as Mark Calkins did to Sallie? Hadn't he seen Mark, only a few evenings before he was hurt, with a pair of girl's shoes strung over his shoulder, and heard him whistle as he ran, two steps at a time, up the rickety stairs? What would Mart think if he should bring her home a pair of shoes? What would she think of his bringing her a flower? She would sneer, of course: and, in the mood which then possessed him, Dirk said angrily that she had a right to sneer, and would be a fool not to; and yet he hated the thought of it. There was nothing in life that Dirk hated more than sneers; and he had been fed on them ever since he could remember.

He was altogether unprepared for the reception which the lily received. That suggestion about wings, which seemed so apt, had brought the “queer” sound to his voice that Mart had noticed. If only she had understood, and not spoiled, next morning, the effect of her words.

In the prosaic daylight, the illusion of “wings” being banished, she was bent on knowing how Dirk came into possession of the lily.

“Who sent it, Dirk? I don't believe anybody told you to give it to me. Who would care about *my* having a flower? Where did you get it?”

“Where do you s'pose?” Dirk's voice was ominously gruff. It is a painful truth that by daylight he was ashamed of his part of the transaction. “I told you she sent it. It's noways likely that I'd take the trouble to make up a lie about that weed. How do I know what she wanted you to have it for? Maybe she thought it matched your looks.”

There was a bitter sneer in Dirk's voice, yet all the time he heard the sweet, low voice saying, “That girl with the beautiful golden hair.” Suppose he should tell Mart that? Why not? Let me tell you that Dirk Colson would not have repeated that sentence for the world! And yet he did not know why.

Mart's face burned red under his sneer.

“How am I to know who 'she' is?” she said, in bitter scorn. “Some of your bar-room beauties, for whom you dance and whistle, I suppose. You can tell her I would rather have my shawl out of pawn, or some shoes for my feet, enough sight. What do I care for a great flower mocking at me?”

“Pitch it into the fire, then; and it will be many a long day before I bring you anything else,” said Dirk, pushing himself angrily back from the table, where he had been eating bread dipped in a choice bit of pork fat.

“There isn't a bit of danger of my doing that,” she called after him, mockingly. “There isn't a spark of fire, nor likely to be to-day, unless some of your admirers send me a shovel of coal. Mercy knows, I wish they would.”

He mercifully lost part of this sentence, for the reason that before it was concluded he was moving with long, angry strides up the alley.

And then Mart took the broken-nosed pitcher away into the furthermost corner, although she was alone in the room, and laid her face against the cool, pure lily, and wept into it great burning tears. Poor, ignorant soul! She wanted, oh, how she *wanted* Dirk to be brave and good like Mark Calkins—her one type of manhood. Yet she did not know that she was crushing out the germ which might have grown in his heart. True, she knew herself to be very different from Sallie, but the thought, poor soul, that that was because Mark was so different from Dirk.

Isn't it a pity that the sweet-faced lily could not have told its tender story to both these ignorant ones?

CHAPTER XV. — “WHAT MADE HER DIFFERENT?”

“I have heard a good deal about your sister that has interested me. Do you like to talk of her?”

This was the question which Gracie Dennis asked of young Ried as he stood beside her at the piano. She had been playing, and had come to the music alcove for the purpose of turning her music; but now she was touching sweet chords here and there aimlessly, and waiting for his answer.

At the further end of the parlor Mrs. Roberts was entertaining a caller; but the distance between them was so great that, in effect, the young people were alone.

“I like nothing better than to talk of her.” Mr. Ried said, with animation; “but I don't know so much about her as I wish I did. She went away when I was quite young. I used to say 'she died,' but since I have awakened to see her cherished plans being carried on all around me I cannot think of her as dead.”

“That is what I want to talk about,—her work, or her plans for work. What made her so different from other people, Mr. Ried. *Wasn't* she different?”

The young man regarded the question thoughtfully before answering.

“Not from all the people,” he said at last; “but certainly very different from some. I used to think that all

Christians were like her, of course; then, when I saw my mistake, I went to the other extreme, and thought there were none like her on earth. I have discovered that the medium position is the correct one."

"But what I want to know is, what *made* her different? It wasn't her age. Mrs. Roberts thinks she was young?"

"She was hardly nineteen when she died. Oh, no, it wasn't age; she told me that she used to be very different. She was a Christian from childhood, but she said that she was ashamed to claim the name. There was nothing Christlike about her; still she was a member of the Church. As I remember her, and as I look at other people, my judgment is that, in her early Christian life, she was much like most of the Christians with whom you and I are familiar."

"And what made her different? Was it—that is—do you think it was because she was to die so soon that she had a special experience?"

"Not at all," he said, promptly; "it was before she realized anything about her condition that the great change took place in her. My brother-in-law says that she supposed herself to be in perfect health at the time when she was most marked in her Christian life."

"Ah! but you don't understand; I mean more than that. It is difficult to tell what I mean; I mean—but you know, of course, *God* knew that she was soon to go to heaven. I thought, perhaps, he gave her a special experience on that account."

"No; oh, no," he said, speaking with great earnestness. "Ester was particularly anxious that no one should suppose her experience exceptional. Little fellow though I was, it seemed to be her desire that I should fully understand this. Don't let anybody make you think that because you are a little boy you must be a sort of half-way Christian,' she used to say, and her eyes would glow with feeling. 'I tried that way for years,' she said, 'and I want you to understand that it is not only sinful, but there is not a particle of happiness to be gotten out of it—not a particle; and I would give almost nothing for what such a Christian can accomplish. The harm one does, more than overbalances all effort for Christ.' I think, perhaps, she felt more deeply on that than on almost any subject; and it was because she thought she had wasted so many years."

"Then do you think that there is, or rather that there should be, no difference in Christians? Have all the same work to do?"

"Not that, quite, of course,—or, I don't know, either. Isn't it all different forms of the Master's work. The children of the home may have each a different task, but each is needed to make the home what it should be, and each worker needs the same spirit of love and unselfishness to enable him to do his part. It isn't a perfect illustration, Miss Dennis. I'm not skillful in that direction; but *I* know what I mean, and that is a comfort."

"And I know what you mean," Gracie said, not joining in his laugh; "but I am not sure that I believe it. Why, Mr. Ried, that would make a very solemn thing of living."

"Well, did you suppose it was other than solemn? I'm sure it makes a triumphant thing of it, too; and without it we are only a lot of wax figures, dancing to pass the time away."

"But don't you really think that people have a right to have *any* nice times?"

"Miss Dennis, did you ever see any person who had nicer times than your friend, Mrs. Roberts?"

"Well, Flossy is peculiar; her tastes all seem to lie in this direction; though once they did not, I admit. Papa used to think that she had no talent for anything but dancing. Something changed Flossy's entire character. No one who knew her two years ago could possibly deny that."

"She will serve as an illustration, then, to explain my meaning. I believe, Miss Dennis, that religion should have sufficient power over us to change all our tastes and plans in life, fitting them to the Saviour's use."

"But what would such a rule as that do with most of the Christians of your acquaintance?"

"Ah! I am old and experienced enough to warn you not to make shipwreck of your happiness on that shoal. I hovered around it, and vexed my soul over the whole bewildering question until I suddenly discovered that I was held absolutely responsible only for my own soul, and that the Lord would look after his own."

For a time there was no answer to this.

Gracie let her fingers wander with apparent aimlessness over the keys, drawing out soft, sweet strains. Suddenly she said:—

"What do you expect Flossy will accomplish with that last scheme of hers? I ought to beg her pardon for the familiar name, but I have known her ever since I was a child. Don't you think her attempts for those boys rather hopeless?"

Instantly the young man's eyes filled with tears, and when he spoke his voice indicated deep emotion.

"I can hardly tell you how I feel about those boys. I have been anxious for them so long and felt so hopeless. Do you remember how Elijah sat under a juniper tree, discouraged, and said that he was the only one who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and the Lord told him he was mistaken, that there were five thousand others? It sounds ridiculously egotistical, but I have felt at times something like that; as though I was the only one who cared whether the poor fellows went to destruction or not. But since I have met Mrs. Roberts, and seen how intense she is and single-hearted, and since through her I have met Dr. Everett, and seen how they are trying to work at the same problem, and since I have come to know how Mr. Roberts is at work all the time for young men; and, above all, since that wonderful evening here last Monday, when I saw how two gifted ladies understood the art of turning their accomplishments to account, in order to take those poor fellows captive for Christ, I discovered that there were ways of solving this problem about which I had known nothing, and people to carry it through. It was simply glorious in you to give those fellows such music as you did, and to accomplish by it what you did. My life has been narrow, Miss Dennis; I never saw the piano used for Christ before."

Gracie looked down at the keys, her face aglow. It was a new experience, this being classed among the Christian workers of the world; making her music for other purposes than to amuse the gay friends who chanced to gather around her. She made the keys speak loudly for a few minutes, then softening them, said:—

“You must not class me with Flossy, Mr. Ried. I only did what she wanted done. I am not in the least like her, unselfish and gentle and all that.”

But his reply, spoken low, was pleasant to her ears:—

“'By their fruits ye shall know them.'”

He evidently looked upon her as a worker. She could not help feeling that it was pleasant to be so classed. What an intense young man he was! Not in the least like those with whom she had hitherto been most familiar.

There was another voice in the front parlor—a strong, vigorous voice that carried a sense of power with it.

“Ah!” said Ried, his eyes bright, his face eager; “that is Dr. Everett. Just study him if you want another type of the sort of Christian about whom we have been talking; the grandest man!”

Gracie, shielded by the distance, turned on her stool and studied him. Certainly he did not look much as though he were appointed for early death. What a splendid physique it was!

And how thoroughly wide awake and interested he was in the subject under discussion. Bits of the talk floated back to the two at the piano.

“Oh, he is young,” Dr. Everett was saying; “I hope for returned vigor in time; but there must be long weeks of patience before he will be ready for his old employment.”

“Do you know of whom he is speaking?” Gracie asked.

“I fancy it is that Calkins boy, the one with the broken limb. He is deeply interested in the poor fellow, and is trying to plan employment of some less wearing sort for him, I believe. Dr. Everett is always intensely interested in somebody.”

“Is it always the very poor?”

Alfred laughed.

“Not always. I know several quite well-to-do fellows in whom he keeps a careful oversight; but he is grandly interested in the poor. He is taking rank as one of the most successful physicians in the city, and, of course, he is pressed for time; yet he is so continually at the call of the poor that people begin to speak of him as the poor man's doctor. He told me he was proud of that title.”

At this point the musicians were appealed to to come to the front parlor, and Gracie had opportunity for a nearer study of the man whom she could not help but admire. He was not likely to suffer from a nearer view; at least, not while Gracie was in the mood that then possessed her. He greeted her cordially, and at once brought her into the conversation by appealing to her for a decision, seeming to take it for granted that she was of the same spirit with himself.

This young lady was taking lessons of life that were designed to be helpful to her if she would but let them. A thoroughly well-educated and cultured gentleman, well fitted to take high rank in society, not in the ministry, and yet thoroughly absorbed in what she had hitherto almost unconsciously set down as ministers' work was a mystery to her. Moreover, for the second time that evening, she felt a curious sense of satisfaction in being classed among the energetic workers of the world. The pretty school-girl, who had lived all her young life in a neighborhood where she was “Gracie Dennis,” looked up to, indeed, by her set, and having a decided influence of her own, yet felt it to be a novel experience to hear herself addressed in a clear, firm voice after this manner:—

“Miss Dennis, what means would you advise for interesting a company of young girls in reading, regularly, books which would be of use to them? Of course, I speak of a class of girls who have done no reading of any account heretofore, and who have no knowledge in the matter.”

“It is something about which I have not thought at all,” said Gracie, her pretty face all in a flush. “But I should suppose the way would be to take one girl at a time, and study her, to find what would be likely to interest and help *her*, and also to get such an influence over her that she would read what I wanted her to.”

“First catch your hare, eh? Good!” said the doctor, with an approving glance towards Mrs. Roberts. “The longer I live the more convinced am I that individual effort is what accomplishes the great things in this world.”

There was more talk about this and kindred matters; and Gracie found herself drawn out, and her interest excited on themes about which she had supposed she knew nothing.

Then occurred an interruption,—a ringing of the door-bell.

“For Miss Dennis,” said the messenger; but she handed the card to Mrs. Roberts.

There was just a moment of hesitation, while that lady apparently studied the name, then she said, composedly:—

“This is Professor Ellis, Gracie. Do you wish to receive him this evening?”

Since I have known Mrs. Roberts well, I have studied her innocently sincere manner, with not a little curiosity as to the probable effect on the world, suppose it were possible for others to adopt her method. The actual practical effect with her is that she succeeds often in wisely deceiving, while intending to be perfectly sincere. For instance, her question to Gracie after a moment of hesitation, during which she asked herself, “What ought I to do?” and immediately answered herself, “There is nothing for me to do, but to be perfectly straight-forward.”

Her question was intended to say to Gracie: “I trust you. What your father has directed you to do, I feel sure you will obey.” But it said different things from that to Gracie. Ever since she had been told that she might make her old acquaintance, Flossy, a visit, this highly-strung young lady had been suspicious that this was a device of her stepmother to get pleasantly rid of her for a few weeks. She surmised that a very carefully elaborate account of her sins had been written out by this same stepmother for the benefit of her young hostess, and that special directions had been given for guarding her from the wolf, Professor Ellis. She would have spoiled the entire scheme by haughtily refusing to leave home had not the innocent delight of a young girl over the thought of visiting a beautiful strange city gotten the better of her pride. The gently-put

question of her hostess disarmed a whole nest of suspicions. It was hardly possible that it had been hinted to Flossy that her guest might attempt to elope with this man, else she would not with serene face be asking whether it was her wish to receive him.

“If you please,” she made haste to answer, her cheeks glowing the while, and Mrs. Roberts gave instant direction that the gentleman be shown to the parlor.

There were several new lessons set for Miss Gracie Dennis to learn that evening. One was that Professor Ellis, with his faultless dress and excessive politeness, his finished bows and smiles, that would have done credit to any ball-room in the land, his accurate knowledge of all the printed rules of etiquette, yet in Mrs. Roberts' parlor, contrasted with Dr. Everett, and even with young Ried, the dry-goods clerk, appeared at a disadvantage.

She was slow in learning the lesson: on that first evening she simply stared at it in bewilderment. What did it mean? There was an attempt to draw the professor into the circle, to continue the conversation that had been so animated and interesting before his entrance. The effect was much like that produced in striking a discordant note in a hitherto faultless piece of music. Young men out of business needing help, needing an encouraging word, an out-stretched hand! Professor Ellis had words, and hands, but he might have been without either for all the help they gave him in responding to efforts like these. Books to help uplift the young, to give them high ideas of life, to enthuse them with desires to live for a purpose! Truly he could only stare blankly at the suggestion. What did he know of books written for such purposes? Yet Gracie had supposed him to be literary in his tastes and pursuits. Certainly he read French? Yes, French novels! He was quite familiar with some of such a character that, had Gracie been a good French scholar and ever likely to come in contact with a copy of them, he would not have dared to mention their names in her presence. More than once of late had the stepmother wished that her young daughter understood the language well enough to be aware that the man whom she admired used frequently smooth-sounding French oaths. But alas for Gracie, when he had so poisoned her mother's influence over this dangerously pretty girl, that she would have believed his word at any time rather than that mother's. Well, he read other than French novels; Charles Reade, for instance, and some of the more recent authors fashionable in certain circles. It is true that Gracie was not acquainted with them, that her father would not allow a copy of their books to come freely into his home, and Gracie was much too honorable to read them in private. But it is also true that while professing to admire this trait in her, as charming in a young daughter, the professor had also, pityingly and gently, told this young daughter that these things were her father's concessions to the narrow age and trammelled profession to which he belonged; that the fact was, free thought was discouraged, because there was that in every church which would not bear its light; that her wise father was one of a hundred in recognizing this, and trying to shield her while she was young.

You are also to remember that she *was* young, and therefore forgive her that she did not detect the contradictory sophistry in the professor's words. He really understood how to sugar-coat poison as well as any man of his stamp could.

CHAPTER XVI. — “HERE WAS HIS OPPORTUNITY.”

But the question which would keep forcing itself on Gracie Dennis was this: “If he really knows of nice books, full of 'the beautiful' and 'the ennobling,' that would enlighten the race, as he has often told me, why doesn't he mention some of them now? There is no minister here 'trammelled by long years of narrowing education.' How does he know but that these people are as 'advanced' in their ideas as he is himself?”

I do not mean that she was conscious of thinking these thoughts, but that they hovered on the edge, as it were, of her mind, making her feel ill at ease. Dr. Everett, on his part, seemed courteously bent on securing an expression of the professor's opinion about matters of which he either could not, or would not, talk. When at last the disturbed gentleman resolved to violate what Gracie was sure was a law of good breeding, and address her in French, what with her embarrassment lest others should understand, and her own marked ignorance of the language, she found great difficulty in making a free translation. “Upon my word, I wish you understood French, or some other tongue, so that we could escape from this boredom. Does the poor little prisoner have much of this to endure? Cannot we escape to the music-room, and talk things over?”

Gracie cast a frightened glance about her to see if there were others who understood better than herself this sentence, which, for aught she knew, might contain something startling. But Alfred was busily engaged in looking up the name of a book which he had vainly tried to recall, and Dr. Everett was apparently serenely oblivious to any language but his mother-tongue. Very soon after this Gracie managed to escape with her caller to the music alcove; thus much of the French she had understood, and at least Professor Ellis could play; which fact she resolved that the people in the front parlor should speedily understand. Ah, but he could play! and herein lay one of his strong fascinations for the music-loving girl. For a time the most ravishing strains rolled through the parlor hushing into rapt attention the group gathered there, who had just been reinforced by the coming of Mr. Roberts. By degrees the strains grew fainter and fainter, and at last ceased altogether, as the professor, still on the music-stool, bent over Gracie, seated in a low chair, and apparently found fluent speech at last.

Mrs. Roberts, meantime, was ill at ease. What would Dr. Dennis and Marion say, could they have a peep at this moment into her back parlor? Was she being faithful to her trust? Yet what was there she could do? She

tried to sustain her part in the conversation, but her troubled gaze, constantly wandering elsewhere, betrayed her. Dr. Everett's keen eyes were upon her.

“Are you particularly interested in that man?” he asked, abruptly.

Mrs. Roberts smiled faintly.

“I am particularly interested in that girl,” she said.

“How do you like her present companionship?”

“Not at all,” she answered, quickly.

Whereupon Mr. Roberts began to question.

“May I know, doctor, whether you have any other reason than that of intuition for asking the question?”

“Possibly not,” said the doctor, guardedly. “It maybe a case of mistaken identity. Mrs. Roberts, would you like to have me investigate something that may be to his disadvantage?”

Mrs. Roberts had a prompt answer ready:—

“There are reasons why it is specially important that such an investigation should be made and reported to me. May I commission you?”

The doctor bowed; and the subject of Professor Ellis was immediately dropped.

During the following week certain innovations took place in Mrs. Roberts well-ordered household. At the end of the conservatory was a long, bright, and hitherto unfurnished room; it had been designed as a sort of second conservatory, whenever the beauties of that department should outgrow their present bounds, but meantime other plants had taken root and blossomed in the mistress' heart. Early in this week the unused room had been opened and cleaned; then began to arrive packages of various shapes and sizes; a roll of carpeting, and two young men from the carpet store; and there followed soon after the sound of hammering. Furniture-wagons halted before the door, leaving their burdens. Men and women flitted to and fro, busy and important.

It was Saturday night before Mr. Roberts and his young clerk were invited in to admire and criticise the new room. Mr. Roberts, at least, was prepared to appreciate its transformation.

The floor was covered with a heavy carpet in lovely shades of mossy green, and easy chairs and couches in tints that either matched or made delightful contrasts with the carpet abounded. The walls were hung with pictures and charts and maps. A study-table occupied the centre of the room—one of those charming tables, full of mysterious drawers and unexpected corners; paper and pens and inks in various colors were disposed about this table in delightful profusion.

Other tables, plenty of them, small and neat, each of a different shape or design, were stationed at intervals, in convenient proximity to comfortable chairs. Nothing could be further removed from one's idea of a school-room than was that long, beautiful parlor; yet when you thought of it, and took a second, deliberate survey, nothing that could have contributed to the enjoyment of pupils was missing. A small cabinet organ occupied an alcove, and music-books of various grades were strewn over it. Toward this spot Mrs. Roberts smiled significantly as her eye caught Alfred Ried's, and she said:—

“I have visions of sacred Sabbath evening half-hours, connected with this corner, one of these days; meantime, is this a pleasant room for our Monday evenings?”

But Alfred could not answer her; his head was turned away, and there was a suspicious lump in his throat, that made him know better than to attempt speech. He was standing at that moment under one of the wall-texts that the gaslight illumined until it glowed, and the words stood out with startling clearness:—

“Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.”

His sister's text; one that, perhaps more than any other, was on her lips when she talked with him; one that hung at her coffin's head when he, a little boy, stood beside the coffin and looked down at her face, and looked up at that text, and took a mental photograph of both to live in his heart forever.

“This is your special chair,” Mrs. Roberts said, smiling up at him; and he understood her,—here was his opportunity to live out that text for his sister. Wouldn't he try!

“Well,” said Gracie, drawing a long breath, “as a study it is certainly a success. One can easily see, Flossy, why you were born with the ability to tell at a glance what colors harmonized, and just where things fitted in. I can't imagine anything prettier than this, and I cannot imagine what you are going to do with it.”

Whereupon they sat down to talk that important question over: what they were going to try to do. Sometimes I have wondered whether Ester, from her beautiful home, could look down on it all, and whether she smiled over the fact that her work was doing so much more than she had planned? She had roused in her little brother an ambition that had grown with his years, and that had helped to hold him away from many temptations: so much, doubtless, she had foreseen; but what a blessed thing it was that she had touched, in those long ago years, influences which had drawn her brother, in his young and perilous manhood, into intimate relations with such people as Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, so that they sat down familiarly to talk over mutual interests! But for Ester's words, spoken long ago, but for her strong desires transmitted to him, he might have sat with a very different circle, and talked over widely different schemes. On the edge of this circle Gracie Dennis hovered. She could not but be interested in their talk, for she was a Christian, and her father was a Christian, and she had, all her life breathed in the atmosphere of a Christian home.

At the same time she could but imagine some of their ideas wild ones, for she had never been associated with people who widely overstepped the conventional ways of doing things; and she had, of late, been much with Professor Ellis who had a sort of gentlemanly sneer for every phase of Christian work, and, so far as could be discovered, believed in nothing. He had not been outspoken, it is true, and herein lay one of the dangers. He was too skillful to be outspoken; but the subtle poison had been working, and although Gracie could not help being interested in those queer boys, she could not help thinking Flossy's whole scheme exceedingly visionary, and expected it to come to grief. The puzzling question was, why did Mr. Roberts, being a keen-sighted man, permit it all! Or was he so much in love with Flossy that he could not bear to thwart even her wildest flights? It was strange, too, to see a young man like Alfred Ried so absorbed; his

sister must have had wonderful power over him, Gracie thought. She went back to his sister's influence, always, in trying to explain the matter, and never gave a thought to Christ's influence. Meantime she listened to the various plans proposed for the first Monday evening, and was sufficiently interested to gather her pretty face in a frown when the distant peal from the door-bell sounded through the house.

“What a pity to be interrupted by a caller!” she exclaimed. “This room is so much nicer than the parlor. Flossy, don't you hope it is some one to see Mr. Roberts on business?”

“No,” said Mrs. Roberts, shaking her head, with a smile, “I feel in special need of Mr. Roberts just now. Evan, I really think we must be excused to callers for this one evening; there are so many things to arrange.”

“Let us wait and see,” answered Mr. Roberts “perhaps the Lord sent the caller here to help us, or to be helped.”

At that moment came the card.

“Oh, it is Dr. Everett!” was Mrs. Roberts' exclamation. “Let us have him come directly here. Evan, please go and escort him. You were right,—the Lord has sent him to help us. I don't know how, I'm sure; but he is just the man to help everywhere.”

And the circle instantly widened itself to receive Dr. Everett.

It took almost no time to speak the commonplace of the occasion, and get back at once to the business of the hour. It was evident that Dr. Everett needed no lengthy explanations, and there was apparently nothing bewildering to his mind in the plan. True, it was new to him, but he seemed to spring at once to the centre of their thoughts. His eyes glowed for a moment, and he said with peculiar emphasis:—

“Ried, when the son of man cometh, he will surely find *some* faith on the earth!”

Then he gave himself to intensest listening and questioning, and presently followed his questions with suggestions which showed that unconventional ways of working were not altogether new to him.

As for Gracie, she had as much as she could do to listen intelligently; she almost caught her breath over the rapidity with which the talkers moved from one scheme to another. All the time there was a curious process of comparison between this man and Professor Ellis going on in her mind. Not that she wished to compare the two! She told herself that it was absurd to do so; none the less she did it. For instance, she reminded herself that she had mentally assented promptly to the suggestion of inviting the doctor to this room to talk this strange scheme over; she had recognized the fitness of the act. But suppose Professor Ellis should call, would it not be simply absurd to think of explaining to him the uses of this unique room? Who would for a moment think of suggesting his name as a helper?

I do not know how to describe to you the appearance of that room on Monday evening when the boys were in it. I do not know whether the sight to you would have been pitiful or ludicrous. How can I tell—not knowing you? There was a dreadful incongruity between the soiled, ragged clothes and matted hair and unwashed hands and the exquisite purity which prevailed around them. Of course you could have seen that, but the all-important question, the answer to which would have stamped your place in the world's workshop, would have been, Do you see any further than that? and seeing further—which way? Do you see the possibilities, or the certainties of failure? Oh, no, I am wrong; it would take more than that to tell where you belong. Dr. Everett saw the possibilities and gloried in them. Gracie Dennis thought she saw the certainty of failure, and was sorry for it. But Professor Ellis would have seen the certainty of failure, and would have met it with a sneer, if he had not been too indifferent even for that. As for Mrs. Roberts, did she, or did she not, represent a different and higher type than any of the others? She thought not much about either success or failure, but pushed steadily forward the plan that she believed she had gotten on her knees, born of the Spirit. If it really were of God, nothing could make it fail; but if she mistook, and the plan was only hers, mere failure in that direction would signify nothing; she would have but to try again. Something of this she felt, but did not reason out, for she was no logician.

What the boys saw was a great, splendid room, the like of which they had never seen before, for they recognized, without being able to explain, the difference between it and the parlors, and felt freer in it. They all came, and they looked not one whit better than on the Monday evening before. Over this fact Gracie Dennis, with all her public scoffing, was, in private, a little disappointed. It is true she had not expected to see them again; but if they came, she thought it possible that they might have been tempted to appear with clean hands and faces. Possibly some were so tempted, and but for the difficulties in the way, might really have tried for this. But Gracie was not sufficiently enlightened to dream of difficulties in the way of simply washing one's face and hands.

During the Saturday evening conference it had been decided that Mr. Roberts must make acquaintance with his guests. It would never do to have them come familiarly to his house, and he not be able to recognize them on the streets. Several plans were suggested for introducing him skilfully to them, but he disapproved of them all.

“No,” he said, “I'll tell you what we'll do. I will introduce myself. You may receive them, Flossy, and then retire for a few minutes, and I'll let myself in by the conservatory passage, and make myself acquainted to the best of my abilities. In ten minutes, Flossy, I'll give you leave to return. As for the rest of you, don't dare to venture in until I have made good my claim as the head of the house. I am jealous of you, perhaps.”

To this plan Mrs. Roberts readily assented, but the young clerk looked doubtful. In common with the rest of his employees, he stood in wholesome awe of the keen-eyed, thorough business man, who seemed to know, as by a sort of instinct, when anything in any department of the great store was not moving according to rule. His knowledge of Mr. Roberts, outside of the store, was limited, and he expected to find the boys, if not frightened, so awed that they would resolve never to be caught inside that room again.

However, he of course only looked his fears. He was too much afraid of the great merchant to express them, and it had been understood, when they separated, that this plan was to be carried out.

CHAPTER XVII. — “I WONDER WHAT THEY'RE ALL AFTER!”

In the library waited Gracie and Mr. Ried, while Mrs. Roberts went merrily to see whether the boys or their host had proved the stronger.

“I don't believe this part of the programme will work,” Alfred said, confidently, the moment the door closed after Mrs. Roberts. “Those fellows will all be afraid of Mr. Roberts, and we shall lose what little hold we have on them.”

“They don't look to me as though it ever occurred to them to be afraid of anything,” Gracie said; but Alfred Ried, who had studied deeper into this problem of the different classes of society, was ready with his answer.

“Yes they are; they can be awed, and made to feel uncomfortable to the degree that they will resolve not to appear in that region again. One cannot judge from their behavior in Sabbath-school. Some way they recognize a mission school as being in a sense their property, and behave accordingly; but in a man's own house, surrounded by things of which they do not even know the name, he has them at a disadvantage, and can easily rouse within them the feeling that they are 'trapped.' Than which there is nothing those fellows dread so much, I believe.”

“But they were not afraid of Flossy last week, even surrounded by the elegances of her parlors and dining-room.”

“Ah!” he said, his eyes alight, “she has a wisdom born of God, I think, for managing these and all other concerns. She is unlike everybody else.”

Whereupon Gracie Dennis laughed; not a disagreeable laugh, but there came to her just then a sense of the strangeness of thinking that pretty Flossy Shipley, whom she had known all her life, and half-scorned from the heights of her childhood because she was a silly little thing, who could not do her problems in class, should have a wisdom unlike any others. Yet, almost immediately her laugh was stayed, because the change in Flossy was so great that she, too, recognized it as born of God. Sometimes it came with force to this proud young girl that if God could do so much for Flossy, what might he not be willing to do with those whom he had made intellectually her superior, if they were but ready to be led?

The young man, who was studying her, watched the grave look deepen on her face, and wondered at its source. What a pretty face it was. Oh, much more than pretty; there was great strength in it and sweetness, too, of a certain sort, but he could not help comparing the sort with that in some other faces, and he wondered over the difference. This young lady was a Christian. Why should her Christian experience stamp her with such a different expression from that which others wore? He always finished this sort of sentence with a blank space first, as though he did not choose to have himself tell himself any names. Yet he spoke a name forcibly enough, still gazing earnestly at Gracie.

“Did you ever meet Miss Joy Saunders?”

Gracie turned toward him a laughing face.

“No, but we are very anxious to, Flossy and I. We have both been told that we ought to know her, and told so earnestly that we really think we ought. Who is she? Is she, too, unlike anybody else?”

“Very,” he said, promptly. “I know her very little; she is the daughter of our landlady; I meet her in the hall on rare occasions, and sometimes catch glimpses of her just vanishing from some room as I enter; but as for being acquainted with her, I suppose I am not. I think—though of that I am by no means sure—that she is engaged to Dr. Everett.

“Oh, then, of course he would think naturally that people ought to know her. What is she like?”

“Like nothing,” said Alfred, with great promptness. “Did you ever know a person named Joy?”

“No;—what a singular name.”

“Well, it fits. She is very far removed from mirth, and she is not what people call gay, and she is not outspoken apparently at any time, though, as I say, I do not know her; but there is something in her face that fits the name; I do not know what it is. Sometimes I think it is the shining of Christ's face reflected in her; but the puzzle is, why do not other faces have it? Faces which belong to him?”

“Perhaps there is a difference in the degree of belonging.”

Gracie spoke the words very gently, wondering meanwhile at the way in which this thought chimed in with hers about Flossy.

“Oh, there is. But why should there be? If I belong to Christ, I *belong*, don't I? There is no half-way service possible. Why do I not so look that others take knowledge of me that I have been with Jesus?”

“How do you know but they do?”

“Ah, I know. I know too well. They are more likely a great deal to take knowledge that I have been with Satan. I feel the frown all over my face a great deal of the time; and the world goes astray a great many times, when I suppose it is just myself that is wrong. But, Miss Dennis, I hunger for the shining of his face in me.”

“That must be the meaning of the beatitude which puzzled my childhood,” she answered trying to speak lightly, to hide feelings that were deeply moved: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

“Thank you,” he said, smiling; “there is actually a promise! I had not thought of it. And yet”—the thoughtful frown gathering almost immediately—“do you suppose that a person who really hungered for a certain thing could be satisfied with anything else? I often have an hour of what at the moment seems to me like hunger for Him, but the hour passes, and I get filled—with business, or with plans, or possibly with annoyances, and feel nothing but a general irritation for everybody. Do you think there can be anything genuine about such desires, so easily turned aside?”

“Oh, I do not know,” said Gracie, hastily. “Why do you ask me such things? Did not I tell you I was not good? Ask those people who are unlike all others. Why don't you ask this Joy? She could tell you, I presume. I can tell you nothing, save that this is a very strange world, not half so nice as I once thought it, and I don't like to think about things.”

How *different* he was from other young men with whom she had spent fifteen minutes many a time in gay banter! This was, after all, the thought uppermost in her mind at the moment. Nice Christian men, of whom her father spoke well, and who, people said, were young men to be proud of. It seemed to her that she knew them by the dozens, yet with which one of them had she ever carried on such a conversation as this? With which one could she have attempted any thing of the kind, without leading him to suppose that she was taking leave of her senses?

She recalled some of the gay words that she had spoken with these others, and tried, hurriedly, to decide why it would sound to her perfectly absurd to talk with Alfred Ried in that way. However, she did not want to talk with him; he was too full of questionings. “And questions,” said poor Gracie, “are all that I can ask myself. I want somebody to talk with who is assured of the ground on which he stands, and can tell me why he stands there.”

There was not time for further talk—they were summoned to the new room. Bursts of laughter greeted their ears as they made their way eagerly across the hall, and Gracie took time to remark that the boys were certainly not awed into silence, before the opening door let them into the brightly-lighted scene. Every boy was laughing, not quietly, but immoderately, and the centre of attraction was evidently Mr. Roberts.

“I have been giving our friends an account of an old army experience,” he said, in explanation to Gracie, “and we have been enjoying a laugh together over the old memory. You are all acquainted with Miss Dennis, I think, young gentlemen?”

Clearly there was no need for any one to introduce Mr. Roberts to the boys; apparently they knew him now better than they did any of the others. Yet as Gracie, after shaking hands with each of the guests, took a vacant seat by Nimble Dick, she was greeted with a confidential whisper:—

“That's a jolly chap as ever I saw; and I never heard anything to beat the yarn he told us, for cuteness. Who is he?”

“Why, he is Mr. Evan Roberts, the owner of this house.”

“My eyes!” said Dick, gazing about him in a startled way. “Look here; he ain't that Roberts from the big store on Fourth Street?”

“Yes, he is; he is one of the partners in that store.”

Then did Nimble Dick give a low whistle,—suddenly cut short, as the other boys looked at him,—and sat up straight in his chair, and for at least a minute was awed; or else was bewildered. If his mind could have been looked into for a moment something like this might have been seen there: “And here I am sittin' in one of his chairs, and been laughin' to kill over his funny story! If this ain't the greatest lark out! I wonder what they're all after, anyhow!”

Then the real business of the evening commenced.

I should like to describe that evening; but it is really worse to describe than the boys. It was designed to be one of those most difficult evenings, where every act and almost every word has been previously arranged, but arranged in such a manner as to appear like an impromptu effort, the result of merely the happenings of the hour.

For instance, Mrs. Roberts aimed at nothing less formidable than the teaching of these boys to read and write; and know as well as ever I know it, that to frankly own that she was ready and willing to give her time and patience in so teaching them would be to outwit herself. They did not belong to the class who can be beguiled into evening schools. There are such; Mark Calkins would have seized such an opportunity and rejoiced over it, but these were lower in the scale; they did not realize their need, and they had what they in ignorance called “independence”; they were not to be “trapped” by evening schools. Therefore it required diplomacy; and no people can be more diplomatic, on occasion, than certain most innocent-looking little women. Mrs. Roberts had studied her way step by step.

Therefore it was, that by the most natural passage possible, she led the way to a discussion of different styles of writing, bringing forth to aid her a certain old autograph album which had been to many places of note, among others Chautauqua, and had the names of distinguished persons, as well as of many who were not distinguished, except for Christian endurance in consenting to write in an autograph album. Good writers were talked about and selected, and poor writers were talked about, and it was said by some one, accidentally of course, that a good hand was really an accomplishment.

“It is more than that!” declared Mr. Roberts. “A man's business life often turns on it. I have myself had to turn away from several otherwise suitable helpers in our business because they really could not write a good, clear hand, that could be read without studying.”

“Are you a good writer, Miss Gracie?”

This remark, coming suddenly to Gracie from her host, almost embarrassed her, for you are not to suppose that the very words by which these themes should be introduced had been planned, and it had not occurred to Gracie that so personal a question might be asked her. But she rallied quickly.

“No, sir; I am sorry to say that I am not. I write what papa calls a mincing hand; all jumbled up together, you know, or running into each other, the letters are, and so difficult to read that papa said when I came away he hoped I would call on his friend, Dr. Stuart, every day, and write a letter on his type-writer.”

“What is that?” interrupted Nimble Dick, his face curious.

“What? A type-writer? Oh, it is a strange little machine used instead of the pen—at least, a very few people use it. It is quite new, I think, and must be very curious. I never saw one, but the writing looks just like print. Dr. Stuart, a pastor in the city, is my papa's friend, and writes to him on his, and papa reads the letter with great satisfaction, saying to me, 'There, daughter, that is something like! People who cannot write well enough for others to read should print.'”

“They are not so very uncommon, Miss Dennis,” explained Dr. Everett, who saw the eagerness on Nimble Dick's face. “It is a comparatively new invention, but is being caught up very promptly. I think nearly all the leading lawyers use them, and those who do not own them are getting their copying done at the rooms. They are very ingenious little instruments.”

“Did you say you never saw one?”

This question from Mr. Roberts to Gracie, and he added:—

“Mrs. Roberts, I believe you have never had other than the first glimpse I showed you in the Parker Building. I have an idea. Suppose I rent one of the little fellows to interest us? It would be pleasant to look into it and see how it works. Did none of you ever see one? Well, now, we'll try for that on next Monday evening. I'll have one sent up to-morrow, and, Miss Gracie, we'll appoint you showman for the following Monday; so it is to be hoped that you will employ your leisure in learning how to manage the creature, and perhaps send your father a readable letter at the same time.”

Now, as may readily be supposed, all this about machinery had not been arranged for beforehand, but was a side issue, born of the fact that the watchful servant of his Master saw an eager look in the eyes of the boy Dick directly there was anything said that suggested machinery. One of the great aims of these evenings was to study character, however developed.

Having turned his company from the regular channel, Mr. Roberts made haste to put them skilfully back where they were before:—

“Still, it would be a pity to resort to machinery simply because one did not know how to write well. I would rather set to work to correct the error. I happen to know one of our number who can write a very enviable hand. Do you know, Ried, that the letter you wrote me was the first thing which attracted me to you? I remember I showed the note to one of our senior partners, who was particularly disturbed by poor writing, and he said: 'Engage him, Roberts, do! A young man who can write like that will be a relief.' Mrs. Roberts, I move you that we resolve ourselves at this moment into a writing-class, to be taught by Mr. Ried. My dear sir, will you take us in hand?”

Something of this kind had been planned—at least, it had been planned that Ried should be asked to do this thing; but he found the actual asking embarrassing, and struggled with it with flushing cheeks. Gracie came to his aid:—

“I don't know whether I'll take lessons or not. Who wants to expose one's ignorance? Will you teach? Must we each give a specimen of our present attainments?”

Instantly Ried divined the reason for the question.

“No,” he said, eagerly; “oh, no; I should begin with those horrors of your childhood, pothooks or something of that sort; lines and curves, you know. There are not many of them after all in our letters, and when once a person has conquered them it is easy to put them together.”

There was more talk, easy and social. Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, the doctor, and Gracie seemed equally interested in the project, and questioned young Ried, until he assured them that he began to feel like a veritable professor. Apparently the boys were forgotten. This very fact put them at their ease, and they listened, interested and amused over the thought that these ladies and gentlemen wanted to go to school!

At first I do not think it occurred to one of them that he was included in the proposal to form an writing-class.

How was it done? I am not sure that any one of the eager group of workers could have told you afterward, so excited did they become over this first scheme. Nobody could remember just what words were said, nor who said them, nor whether the boys all looked equally startled when paper and pen were put into each hand. They remembered that some shook their heads emphatically, and that Nimble Dick spoke plainly: “No you don't! I can't write any more than a duck can, and I never expect to.” Mrs. Roberts knew that Dirk Colson's dark face turned a fierce red, and he snapped the offered pen half-way across the table with his indignant thumb and finger. But of these words and acts nobody apparently took any notice. The writing began, and the first marks given as copies were so simple, looked so easy to do, and the attempts of the ladies and gentlemen fell so far short of what the teacher desired, and were so unmercifully criticised by him, and the criticisms were so merrily received by the writers, that at last the whole thing took the form of a joke to Nimble Dick's mind, and he became possessed with a burning desire to try. One by one the boys stealthily followed his example; Alfred taking care to watch eagerly, to commend both Stephen Crowley and Gracie Dennis in the same breath for some true stroke, and criticise both Mrs. Roberts and Nimble Dick for not holding the pen aright.

The entire party became so interested that only Mrs. Roberts knew just when Dirk Colson stealthily filliped back his pen from the distance to which it had been rolled, and, sitting upright that he might attract the less notice, tried his hand on the curve which was giving even Dr. Everett trouble.

When the young teacher discovered it he made also another discovery, which he proclaimed:—

“Upon my word, I beg the pardon of each of you, but Colson here has made the only respectable *R*-curve there is in the company.”

Then if his sister Mart had seen the glow on Dirk's face, I am not sure that she would have known him.

There was a momentary transformation.

As for Mrs. Roberts, she bowed low over the letter she was carefully forming, but it was to say in soft whisper heard by one ear alone:—

“Thank God!”

CHAPTER XVIII. — “YOURN'S THE WAY!”

You are not to suppose, because this first Monday evening (which, by the way, was concluded with sandwiches and coffee) was a success, pronounced so by all concerned, that therefore the ones which followed were all rose-color.

Fortunately, not one of the workers expected this, and so were brave and cheerful under drawbacks.

These were numerous and varied.

After the first novelty wore off, it took at times only the most trivial excuses to keep the boys away. Sometimes when they called their conduct was anything but encouraging. They lolled in the easy-chairs, smelling strongly of tobacco and other bar-room odors, refused insolently to apply themselves to any work at hand, audibly pronounced the whole thing “slow,” and in numberless ways severely tried the patience of both Alfred and Gracie.

For the others, they had counted the cost,—at least the gentlemen had,—and expected to move slowly, even to appear to go backward some of the time. As for Mrs. Roberts, I have told you that she worked in a peculiar manner, with the motto, “This one thing I do,” apparently ever before her.

Each evening was distinct in itself, with efforts to make and obstacles to overcome; and at its close she had a way of laying it aside, as something with which her part was done, not attempting even to calculate results; then she was ready to turn to a new day, and work steadily for that.

The winter was slipping away and Gracie Dennis lingered. She could hardly have told you why, yet there were many apparent reasons. Mrs. Roberts wanted her, rejoiced in her, and coaxed irresistibly as often as the thought of going home was mentioned. Then Gracie, laugh over the peculiar work going on as she might, was undeniably interested in those boys. She was working for them, therefore of course she was interested.

“I don't see how you can go this week?” would young Ried say to her, with a perplexed air; “you know we have that matter all planned for next Monday evening. How can we carry out the scheme if you are not there to do your part?”

Then would Gracie laugh and demur and admit, to herself only, that it was very pleasant to be needed—as she certainly was—for one night more; and so the nights passed.

Her work was to be “Professor of Elocution,” as Mr. Roberts gaily called her when the workers were alone together. It had been discovered that she could read both prose and poetry with effect. So a reading-class was organized, and they chose for the first evening, not one of Bryant's or Whittier's gems, nor selections from Milton or Shakespeare, which would have suited part of the company, nor yet the “Easy Readings” in some standard spelling-book, which would have fitted the capacity of the others, but with great care and much discussion, one of Will Carleton's descriptive poems, full of homely, yet tender language, full of pathos and of humor, was unanimously selected.

The first evening reading had been commenced with nuts and apples. There are those who can see no connection between this and the intellectual; happily for the characters with whom she had to deal, Mrs. Roberts was not one of them. While the others were still enjoying the refreshments she took the book and read. This was her quiet little sacrifice. It was not pleasant to her to become a public reader. It required courage to get through with one verse, with Dr. Everett sitting opposite, and Gracie Dennis on a low seat at her side, and her husband listening intently. Mrs. Roberts was not a good reader, and was aware of it. She pronounced the words correctly, it is true; but when you had said that, you had said all that there was to offer in praise of her effort. She had some exasperating faults. But she bravely read the two verses, and some of the boys listened, and one of them laughed; he had caught a gleam of the fun in the poem. This, of course, was Nimble Dick.

Then Alfred Ried made the same effort on the same verses; his performance was very little better, and he, too, knew it. He could write, but he was by no means a public reader; this was his offering to the general good. If those fellows, by reason of his mistakes, could be induced to climb, he was willing to offer his pride on the altar. No matter by what petty trials they were caught so that they were really caught.

Then followed Gracie Dennis, and her own father, acceptable preacher though he was, might with credit to himself have taken lessons of her. She was certainly, for one so young and so unprofessional, a magnificent reader. So indeed was Marion Wilbur, and she had enjoyed teaching Gracie.

The poem blossomed in her hand. The crunching of nuts and apples entirely ceased. The boys sat erect and listened and laughed and flushed and swallowed suspiciously over some of the homely pathos. They had never heard anything like that before, and they evidently appreciated it. She read through to the end.

Then were unloosed the tongues! They exclaimed in delight:—

“What an accomplishment it is!” said Mr. Roberts; “and how few possess it. Doctor, how many really fine readers have you heard in your life?”

“About three,” said the doctor, laconically.

“Well,” said Mrs. Roberts, “let us all be exceptions. Gracie, teach us how. I will try again.”

And she did, on the first verse of the poem; with better success than before; but how sharp the contrast between her reading and Gracie's, she knew! It was not easy for her to read.

I don't know, possibly I am mistaken, but it seems to me that I have known people ready for large sacrifices, who yet would shrink painfully from these little ones.

In discussing the programme for the evening, the question had been, when each had done his part, How were they to influence the boys to join? *Could* they join? Was it probable that they knew enough about reading to attempt to speak the words of the poem? With reference to this obstacle a poem had been chosen full of simple, homely words, such as are in common use; especially was the first verse free from what Mr. Roberts called “shoals.” Having heard the verse read several times, it was hoped that some one of the seven might have courage to attempt it, but Gracie did not believe that such would be the case.

“I don't see how we can ask them, and do it naturally,” said Dr. Everett. “It is such an unheard-of thing, you know; and I am afraid, do our best, it will present itself to them as a patronage, and that will be fatal. The people who are low enough to need patronage are the very ones who won't endure it.”

Whereupon various ways of managing the matter were discussed and discarded; suddenly Mrs. Roberts turned to her young lieutenant, who had been silent for some time, and said:—

“What are you thinking of, Mr. Ried? Do you see a way out?”

“No,” he said; “I have neither knowledge nor skill in such matters, but my thoughts just then were far away; I was thinking how curiously, certain apparently trivial instances of one's childhood will stand out with almost startling prominence.”

“What sent you off in that direction?” questioned Dr. Everett. “There must have been an association of ideas.”

“Oh, there was; I was thinking how vividly I remembered a discussion between my mother and my sister, younger than Ester, in regard to some matter which perplexed them; and when they could come to no satisfactory conclusion they appealed to my sister Ester, who was resting as usual on her lounge. I can seem to hear her voice as she said: 'We haven't to do anything about it until to-morrow; perhaps to-morrow will have a light of its own for our direction.”

“Thank you!” Mrs. Roberts said, her eyes lighting with an appreciative smile; “we have not to do anything about this until Monday night, and perhaps Monday night will see us wise.”

I don't know how many thought of this little conversation when Monday evening came, but certainly Alfred Ried and Mrs. Roberts did, for she glanced at him and smiled significantly when Dr. Everett, having apparently forgotten that anything beyond their own pleasure was in contemplation, challenged Gracie to a discussion as to the emphasis on a certain word in the second line; he had never heard it so read, and he called for an analysis that would sustain the reading, and received it, and was not yet prepared to yield the point, but read the verse as he had imagined it should be read, and then Gracie, at Mr. Roberts' call, repeated it with her rendering, and I am not sure but all parties concerned actually forgot their final object in the interest of the discussion until they were suddenly called to it by an interrupting voice:—

“Your'n's the way,” it said, with an emphatic nod of a shock of matted hair, “your'n's the way.”

It was Dirk Colson. He had forgotten for the moment that anybody was listening to him, save the two readers. He was looking directly at Gracie, and the nods were evidently intended for her.

“Of course it is!” she said, eagerly, her face flushing with a triumph that had nothing to do with the right emphasis; “you read it, won't you, and show these people that we are right?”

Afterward Mrs. Roberts confessed that she involuntarily placed her hand on her heart with a dim idea of hushing its beating lest others would hear, so important to her did the moment seem. Dr. Everett looked dismayed. The least hopeful one of the seven seemed Dirk. None of them knew of his dangerous talent for imitation. None of them believed that he would make any attempt at reading, but thought he would shrink into deeper sullenness. All of them were mistaken. He reached for the book, glanced for a moment over the lines, and then read the verse, with so complete an imitation of Gracie Dennis, and yet with a voice and manner that so fitted the homely words and the homely scene described that the effect was actually better than when Gracie read.

Instinctively the cultured portion of his audience greeted the effort with a clapping of hands. The blood, meantime, rolled in dark waves over Dirk's face. He had been cheered before. None of his present applauders could imagine what a set had often clapped their hands over his successful imitations; but Dirk, who liked applause as well as other human beings do, had never, in his wildest stretches of imagination, placed himself before such people as listened now and received their approval.

Great was the excitement and satisfaction. The six companions, far from feeling any emotion of jealousy, seemed greatly elated, believing that one of their number had made a “hit,” and increased their importance.

No one else could be found to attempt the verse. Nimble Dick shook his head good-naturedly, and declared that he would rather “undertake to run an engine to Californy” than try it; and the others were of like mind. Then came Gracie to the front again:—

“I'll tell you what you must all do. I have been experimenting with that type-writer, Mr. Roberts, all the week. You know it will manifold, with the use of carbon paper, and it chances that when I was seized with a desire to try its powers in that direction I choose this very verse to copy; so I have fifteen good copies in print. You must each take a copy and make this verse a study until next Monday; then I shall challenge you all to sustain me in my reading.”

This proposition was hailed with such satisfaction by the older members that it immediately became popular, and each boy received his copy mechanically and gazed at it curiously: but Dirk Colson's thoughts were turned in a new channel.

“Look here!” he said, detaining Gracie by an imperious inclination of his head, as she handed him the copy; “how did you make these? didn't you print them fifteen times? I didn't understand what you said.”

“Why no!” said Gracie, “the machine will *manifold*. I'll show you; come over to the end window; it stands there waiting to be displayed, and it is a little wonder.”

Then they crowded around the type-writer, and Gracie, really proud of the skill she had acquired in a week's time, showed off the little wonder to great advantage.

The fact that the type-writer was new to most of the others, that they were decidedly ignorant as to its working, increased the comfort of the hour by doing away with the embarrassing feeling that any one of them was playing a part. Dr. Everett was no more familiar with the type-writer than was Dirk Colson, and was just as eager to know about it.

Also everybody, apparently, felt an equally strong desire to write his name on the marvellous little creature, and each in turn sat down before it and moved his awkward hands with nearly equal slowness over the keys, picking out the magic letters.

It was this episode that made the workers during their next conference branch out in new lines.

“We need something,” said Dr. Everett, walking up and down the floor in puzzled thought, “we need something that shall be a genuine common interest, of which we are all, or all but one, equally ignorant—something that we can take hold of with zest, on as low a platform as the most ignorant of those seen. I was convinced of that when I saw the abandon with which we all went into the type-writer business, with a naturalness and equality that, in the matter of reading and writing, it is impossible for us to feel. If the machine were complicated, so that it would take us each three months or so to master it, that would do. What can we take up that will place us on a level?”

CHAPTER XIX. — “WE HAVE BEGUN BACKWARDS.”

“Well,” said Mr. Ried, “we should want to have one of our number not 'on a level.' How would it do to appoint you, sir, to give us a few lectures in Hygiene? Popular lectures about air and exercise and ventilation and bathing, and all sorts of every-day topics, about which people are ignorant.”

“That's a capital idea, Ried. Those fellows could certainly be benefited by a little attention to such questions; and I'm sure the rest of us would like to hear of the principles which govern these important laws. Such lectures put into popular form are decidedly interesting, I think. Let us vote for them.” This was Mr. Roberts' hearty seconding.

But the doctor laughed.

“There is a ludicrous side to it which you do not see,” he said. “Imagine me holding forth on the importance of ventilation, for instance, to a poor follow who comes from a region where father and mother, and a horde of children of both sexes and all ages, crowd together in one room, and that a cellar, where the sun never penetrates and the air that crawls in through the one small window is reeking with even more impurities than can be found inside. Or talking about bathing, to the poor wretches who have no clothing to change, and barely water enough, by carrying it long distances, to satisfy their most pressing needs! Still, Ried, I'm not quarrelling with your idea. There is a sensible side to it; there are things that I could tell even those boys which might interest them, and would certainly be to their advantage to know. The subject is one which can be popularized to suit even such an audience. I'll try for it occasionally if it shall seem best: but it doesn't meet my demand. I want us all on a platform where we shall start in equal ignorance and get on together. Of course you are all more or less familiar with all the facts that I should have to present, and the boys would know it. They are sharp fellows; it wouldn't take them an hour to discover that we were fishing for them; and if there is any one thing on which they are at present determined, it is, probably, that they will not be benefited. What is there that one of us knows, of which the others are ignorant? French won't do, for Miss Dennis is acquainted with that language, I think, and so are you, Ried, are you not?”

“Well, I can stammer through a few sentences. I don't speak it like a native as you do.”

At this revelation a vivid blush glowed on Gracie Dennis' cheek. She remembered Professor Ellis' comments in French. Then the doctor had understood, though his face was so imperturbable! What could he have thought of the courtesy of her guest?

Meantime Mr. Ried wore a perplexed face.

“You are right,” he said to the doctor; “we are not enough on a level; I felt our advantage last night when Miss Dennis was explaining the type-writer; but I don't see the way clear. What subject is there on which all but one of us could meet on common ground, and that one could turn professor?”

Here interposed Mr. Roberts, speaking in a meek tone of voice:—

“If I were not a modest man I should venture a suggestion; as it is, I really don't know what to do.”

The doctor turned to him quickly:—

“Out with it, man; if you are master of a profession or a trade or a theory unknown to the rest of us, you are bound on your honor as a member of this unique organization to present it.”

At the same moment Mrs. Roberts came to his aid.

“Oh, Evan, teach us short-hand!”

Whereupon Mr. Roberts heaved what was intended to appear as a relieved sigh, and announced that his modesty was preserved.

Upon this suggestion they seized with eagerness; not one of them knew anything about phonetic writing save Mr. Roberts, and he was master of the art.

“It is the very thing!” the doctor said, with heartiness. “I should like exceedingly to learn it, and Ried and the ladies may be able to make it useful in a hundred ways; and as for the seven, if they really master it, it may be the foundation of a fortune for some of them.”

So, without more ado, it was planned that at the very next Monday evening the subject should be skilfully presented, its importance and its fascinations discussed, and the boys be beguiled into taking a first lesson, sandwiched in between the all-important reading and writing lessons.

Alas for plans! On the very next Monday the conspirators, with the exception of young Ried, were together by seven o'clock. The faint aroma of coffee floated through the room. A fruit-basket filled with oranges occupied a conspicuous table, and everything waited for the guests.

While they waited, instead of enjoying themselves as the four were certainly capable of doing, they were noticeably restless; listened for the shuffling of careless feet on the steps, and the sound of uncultured voices in the hall, and waited expectantly whenever the bell pealed, only to be obliged to send word to some caller that “Mr. and Mrs. Roberts were engaged.”

The special occupation of the four seemed to be to look at their watches and to remark that the doctor's was a trifle fast, and to wonder if half-past seven would be a more suitable hour for the boys, and to wonder what could be detaining Ried.

At last it was half-past seven, and then it was fifteen minutes of eight, and then it was ten minutes of eight! And then the door-bell rang again. It was Ried, and he was alone! One glance at his distressed face told the lookers-on that something was amiss, even before he exclaimed:—

“You won't see a boy to-night!”

“Why?” “What is the trouble?” “Where are they?”

These were the various ways of putting the same question.

“One of the McCullum partners has become interested in the boys, it seems, and has concluded that he will try what he can do towards their elevation; so he has commenced by presenting each one of them with a ticket to the Green Street Theatre, and there they are at this moment!”

This startling intelligence was variously received. Dr. Everett exclaimed:—

“Is it possible?”

Gracie Dennis remarked that it was something like what she had expected; Mrs. Roberts said not a word, and Mr. Roberts added to the astonishment of the moment by bursting into a laugh.

Poor Ried seemed to feel the laugh more than anything; his face gathered into heavier clouds than before, he bit his lip to hold back the vexed words that were just ready to burst forth, and strode almost angrily to the further corner of the room.

An embarrassed silence seemed to fall upon the others. At least Gracie felt embarrassed; the doctor looked simply expectant.

At last Mr. Roberts drew himself up from his lounging attitude and broke into the stillness.

“Ah, now, good people, don't let us make serious mistakes! Come back here, my dear young brother, and let us look this thing in the face, and talk it over calmly. Are we children playing at benevolence that at the first discouragement we should cry out, 'All is lost!' and retire vanquished? Come, I laughed because really this does not seem such a serious matter to me as it seems to present to the rest of you.

“What did we expect? Here are seven boys, right from the gutters; somehow we have had them laid on our hearts, and have enlisted to help fight the battle that is going on about them in this world. Christ died to save them, and Satan means that the sacrifice shall be in vain. He is bringing all his powers to bear on them; and he has many and varied powers.

“Here comes into the scene a man benevolently inclined; not a Christian, but in his way a philanthropist. By accident he has come in contact with one of the boys; by accident he learns that something—he does not know quite what—is being attempted to benefit them. Can't you give him the credit of being honest? The only thing he thinks of that he can do to help is to give them an evening's entertainment. At one of the decent theatres there is being presented what seems to be known in their parlance as a 'moral play!' So he presents each boy with a ticket. Now, what did we expect of those boys?

“Last week a lady and two gentleman who have been members of our church for years, left the regular prayer-meeting, and went to the Philharmonic concert.

“Ought we to expect that it would even occur to our seven boys to give up what to them is a rare treat for the pleasure of spending an evening with us? As for the moral obligation, they have probably never so much as heard the words.

“Isn't it time we knew what we were about? What are we after? It is well enough to teach the poor fellows to read and write, and to help lift them up in other ways, but our efforts will amount to very little unless we succeed in bringing them to the great Lever of human society; unless Christ take hold of this thing we shall fail. Now, has He taken hold? Is He, at least, as much interested in them as we are? Is His Holy Spirit preceding and supplementing all our efforts? And, if this is the case, is an evening at a theatre going to ruin His plans?”

Long before these earnest sentences were concluded Ried had returned from his distant corner, and taken a seat near his employer; his eyes were full of tears, and his voice trembled:—

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Roberts; I'm an ignorant blunderer; I did feel for the moment as though everything were lost.”

“We have begun backwards,” said Mr. Roberts; “I was reading to-day that a mistake the missionaries made for years in trying to *civilize* the Greenlanders; and what a perfect failure they made of it until one day almost by accident, a man began to tell them about Christ on the cross, and the story melted them. I don't think I

have thought enough about Him in this matter."

"I stand convicted," Dr. Everett said; "I've made the same mistake, I believe, in all my efforts for people. I have been praying for them, it is true; but, after all, I feel now as though there had been too much relying on human means, and not enough on God. It is a case of 'these ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.'"

"Well," said Mr. Roberts, looking at his watch, "we are in the same condemnation; it is, I believe, the most common, and one of the most fatal, mistakes that Christian workers make. But there is a way out. We expected to spend until ten o'clock with those boys. It is nearly nine now; suppose we spend the next hour with Christ, asking for the power of the Holy Spirit on any and every effort that we may make for them in the future? Our ultimate aim is to bring every one of them to Jesus and He knows it; now if we have gone about in the wrong way, we have only to ask Him forgiveness and look to Him steadily for guidance. What do you say, friends, shall we spend the hour in taking them to the only One who really can afford them lasting help?"

I suppose that He who "maketh the wrath of man to praise Him" is equally able to manage the folly of man. Could the injudicious philanthropist have looked into that room that evening, and heard the prayers that went up to God for those boys, and understood something of the power of prayer, he would have had one illustration of how God manages the foolishness of men.

It was a very earnest prayer-meeting. These workers had each one bowed in secret, and with more or less earnestness, asked for God's blessing on their efforts; but it occurred to them that evening, as a very strange thing, that they had never unitedly prayed for this before. Therefore there was an element of confession in all the prayers that moved Gracie Dennis strangely. Especially was this the case when she heard her old acquaintance, Flossy, pour out her soul's longings. It happened, so strange are the customs of Christians, that though this was the daughter of a minister of the gospel, herself a Christian, she had never before heard a lady pray in the presence of gentlemen. She had heard of their doing so; heard them criticised with sharp sarcasm. Some of the criticisms which had sounded full of keenness and wit when she heard them, recurred to her at this time, and some way, with Flossy's low, earnest voice filling her heart, they dwindled into shallowness and coarseness. All the same, their baneful influence was on her, and helped to hold her back from opening her lips, for the critic had been Professor Ellis.

When the hostess and her young guest were left alone together that evening, the latter had a question to ask:—

"Flossy Shipley!"—the name you will remember which she always went back to when excited—"I didn't know you believed in praying in *public*! Have you changed in *everything*?"

"In public, my dear!" with a quiet smile; "why, I am in my own house!"

"Oh, yes; but you know what I mean—before gentlemen. Do you really think it is necessary?"

"As to that, Gracie, I don't believe I thought anything about it. I wanted to pray for those boys, and so I prayed."

"And didn't you really shrink from it at all? How very queer! Flossy, I do believe nobody was ever so much changed by religion as you have been. I don't see what makes the difference. I'm sure I think I'm a Christian, but I could never do such a thing as that."

"Not if you believed it to be your duty?"

"But I don't believe it," said the fair logician, her face flushing; "I think it is out of place. I beg your pardon, Flossy, I don't mean I think it sounded badly in you; but only that for me it would be horrid, and I couldn't do it."

"Then what are you talking about, my dear? If you should never consider it your duty, you would certainly never be called upon to do it."

CHAPTER XX. — "OH, WHAT A NICE THOUGHT!"

This very calm view of the question gave Gracie time to recover from her excitement, and to laugh at her folly. Then Mrs. Roberts said, still speaking very gently:—

"I don't want to argue with you, dear, and I couldn't if I wished; you know I am a dunce about all such things; but I just want to ask you a little question; you need not answer me unless you choose; not now, that is—perhaps some time we may want to talk about it. I would like to know the reasons that people have for thinking that it is out of place for a lady to kneel down with her Christian friends and speak to Jesus about a thing that they unitedly desire, and that they believe He is able to do for them? If it is not proper to speak before them, why is it proper to speak *to* them on the same subject?"

This question Gracie carried to her room for thought.

Meantime, as Dr. Everett and young Ried went homeward, they had a talk together.

"When I found out that those boys had gone to the theatre to-night I was completely discouraged," declared Ried. "It seemed to me that our work was a failure; I could almost see Satan laughing over the success of his scheme. I never felt so about anything in my life. And now it seems to me that perhaps the Lord will let it result in being the best thing that ever happened to us."

To all of which Dr. Everett made the apparently irrelevant answer:—

“Mr. Roberts and his wife are singularly well mated; how perfectly they fit into each other's thoughts. Ried, you and I have a great deal to learn from them.”

“I have,” said Ried, meekly.

Yet another bit of talk closed this evening:

“McCullum has given me an idea,” Mr. Roberts said to his wife as they sat together reviewing the day. “Not a bad one, I fancy. I wonder when we can act on it and watch results? There are tickets for other places besides theatres. Why couldn't we furnish them for some entertainment, lecture, or concert, or something of the sort, that would be really helpful? The only difficulty is that there are few helpful places as yet within reach of their capacities. It takes an exceptional genius to hold such listeners.”

But his wife, her face aglow, clasped her hands in an ecstasy of delight.

“What a beautiful thought!” she said; “and how nice that it should come to you just now, when there will be such a splendid opportunity to put it in practice. Why, don't you know? Gough, next week, fifty cent tickets; on temperance, too! how grand! And Evan, let us give them each two tickets. I want that Dirk Colson to take his sister; perhaps he will not, but then he may; one can never tell. Oh, Evan, won't it be nice?”

“Ah!” said Mr. Roberts, “as usual you are ahead of me. I had not thought of the two tickets apiece. That is a suggestion for their manliness. Flossy, we'll try it.”

Yet another bit of talk.

They shambled down the stairs, from the second-rate hall at a late hour that evening—those seven boys; quiet for them, though the play had been exciting, and not remarkably moral “viewed” from the standpoint of a Christian.

“After all,” said Nimble Dick, breaking a silence with speech, as though the subject of which he spoke had been under discussion among them, “after all, it was rather sneaking to bolt and say nothing; I kind of wish we hadn't done it.”

“That's what I told you all along,” said Dirk Colson, with even unusual sullenness, “but you would go and do it, and we was fools enough to follow you.”

“And I'll bet she had oysters or something!” This from Jerry Tompkins; you have probably no idea how hungry he was at that moment.

“They was goin' to do somethin' new to-night; that there Dennis girl told me so when I met her on the street yesterday; something that we would like first rate, she said—a brand-new notion.” This was Stephen Crowley's contribution to the general discomfort.

“Well,” said Nimble Dick, and the sigh with which he spoke the word would have gone to Mrs. Roberts' heart, “I s'pose it's all up now; I shouldn't wonder if we never got another bid; I wouldn't if I was them, I know that; and their old theatre wasn't no great shakes, after all. We've been a pack of fools, and I don't mind owning it.”

Whereupon, having reached the corner, they separated and went glumly to their homes. And this is gratitude! What a pity Mr. McCullum—who had been smiling over his benevolence all the evening—could not have heard them!

The weeks that followed this night, were crowded with trifles on which hung important and far-reaching results. This is a very trite saying, I know. All weeks are crowded with eventful trifles; at least, we in our blindness call them trifles, although we are constantly discovering their importance, and being constantly astonished over them.

Among other things, the seven boys became nine,—having taken to their companionship two choice spirits, apparently worse than themselves, and appeared at the South End Mission with all the bravado that boys of their stamp are apt to put on when they feel somewhat ashamed of themselves. The consequence was that the trials which Mrs. Roberts had to endure from them, though a trifle less apparent to others, were not a whit less distressing than usual.

But before the session was concluded they were treated to a sensation that held them in silent astonishment for nearly five minutes. Any person well acquainted with Alfred Ried could have told that he had a plan in view, and was trying to carry it in the face of some opposition. He looked convinced, and Mr. Durant looked astonished and troubled; there was much low-toned talk between them and some shaking of head. Apparently, however, Mr. Ried came off victor, for his brow cleared, and he presently made his way to Mrs. Roberts' side and said a few words, and must have been gratified by the sudden lighting up of her face and her eager:—

“Oh, what a nice thought! Even if it fails, apparently, it will not utterly, for the suggestion will help them.”

In the course of time the new idea came to the front. There was to be a festival, or a social, or an entertainment at the South End in the course of a few weeks,—a sort of anniversary of the starting of the Mission. Among other work that was in progress, the decoration of the room, involving the hanging of pictures, banners, mottoes, wreaths, etc., required some strong arms and willing hands. Committees were to be formed. Two weeks before, teachers had been appointed to prepare a list of committees. It fell to young Ried to appoint the committee on decoration. When he was called upon for his report, he came promptly forward, like a man ready for action, and commenced:—

“A committee of four has been deemed amply sufficient for decoration, and I appoint for the purpose the following: Richard Bolton, Morris Burns, Miss Gracie Dennis, and Miss Annie Powell.”

The teachers, who had been long at the Mission, looked from one to another with a bewildered air. Morris Burns they knew,—a clear-eyed young Scotchman, with willing hands and feet ever ready to run of errands for all workers; a boy of nineteen or so, whom everybody liked; warm-hearted, unselfish, and thoroughly trustworthy. Annie Powell was one of the older girls in Mr. Durant's Bible-class; a sweet-faced, ladylike little factory girl, who would work in with Morris Burns nicely. Miss Gracie Dennis was Mrs. Roberts' beautiful young friend; all the teachers knew her, and all thought it very kind in her to throw her strength and taste into the preparations as heartily as though she were one of them. But who was Richard Bolton? Nobody

knew. Yet their knowledge of business etiquette told them that he was chairman of the Decoration Committee. Where was he? Not a teacher, certainly, for they were intimately acquainted with one another; and they knew no such name in the one Bible-class made up of trustworthy helpers.

Over in Mrs. Roberts' class, with the single exception of the teacher, there was equal ignorance; the nine boys had stopped their restless mischief to listen, because there is a sort of fascination to boys in all the details of well-managed business; they liked to hear the appointments; but who Richard Bolton might be seemed not to occur to one of them. It is true that Jerry Tompkins nudged Nimble Dick in anything but a quiet way with his elbow, and murmured, “You've got a namesake it seem, in this 'ere job.” Yet no light dawned on them.

Mr. Durant, who, it is possible, has not appeared to you in a favorable light, for the reason that he was being much perplexed by the entirely new methods being introduced among the boys who had heretofore driven him to the very verge of desperation, was really a quickwitted man, and having succumbed to what he feared was a wild experiment, knew how to help carry it out properly. He came briskly to the front,—Alfred's committee being the last on the list,—and began his work.

“The chairmen of these different committees will be kind enough to report to me as rapidly as possible the time and place of their first meeting for consultation, and I will make the announcements.” Then he stepped to Mrs. Roberts' class. “Bolton,” he said, bending toward that astonished scamp, and speaking as though this were an every-day affair, “you are chairman, I believe, of the Decoration Committee; where and when will you have them meet?”

Imagine Nimble Dick's eyes! Nay, imagine the eyes and faces of the entire nine! It would have been a study for an artist.

For a moment Nimble Dick was speechless; then he managed to burst forth with:—

“What in thunder are you talking about?”

“Your committee,” said Mr. Durant, politely ignoring the manner of the questioner. “You must call them together, you know, to plan your work. Where shall it be, and when?”

“I ain't got no committee; and I ain't got no place to meet nobody; and I don't know what in thunder you're after.”

Then came Mrs. Roberts to the rescue:—

“Why, Mr. Bolton, you can meet at our society parlor, you know; it is the very place, and will be so convenient for Miss Dennis.”

“What's to meet, and what's to do?” said Dick, defiantly. “I ain't going to meet nobody.”

“Why, it is just to hang mottoes and banners, and trim the room for the Anniversary. Of course you'll help; I would have the meeting arranged there by all means.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Durant, quickly, as though he had received the answer from the chairman himself. “Now as to time; you ought to come together to-morrow evening if you could; there is a good deal to do.”

“Mr. Bolton, couldn't you come up at six o'clock for once? Then you could get your work all done before the time for our social. I can arrange for Annie Powell to be there at that time; and, Mr. Durant, doesn't Morris Burns work for you? Could he be present at six o'clock? Then I don't see but your meeting is nicely planned. You can be there at six, can't you, Mr. Bolton?”

“I tell you I don't know nothin' what you are talking about.”

Nimble Dick, who was rarely anything but good-natured, was surprised by the bewilderments of the situation into being almost as fierce as Dirk Colson was habitually; the gaping amazement of his boon companions seeming to add to his irritation.

“But you will,” said his teacher, cheerily. “It is an easy matter to explain; Miss Dennis knows all about such things; and I'm going to help, though they haven't honored me with an appointment.”

At a sign from the lady, Mr. Durant stepped back to his platform and announced:—

“The chairman of the Committee on Decoration desires me to say that his committee is called together to-morrow evening, at the Young Men's Social Parlors, No. 76 East Fifty-fifth Street, at six o'clock, *sharp*, as the chairman has another engagement at seven.”

“I had to coin a name for the place of meeting,” he said to Mrs. Roberts afterwards. “I beg your pardon if it was wrong; but Ried has been giving me glowing accounts of that room, and you said something about its being a social parlor, didn't you?”

“It is a good name,” said Mrs. Roberts. “We have awkwardly called it the 'new room.' I am glad it is christened. I will have some curtains hung through the centre to-morrow, to make parlors instead of parlor of it; I can see how a second room can be made useful in several ways.”

Thus was the bewildering committee willed into existence; the chairman thereof being still so dumbfounded with his position that he did not rouse until the laughing boys, by whom he was surrounded, began to take in some of the fun of the situation, and to assault him right and left with mock congratulations, ill-suppressed groans, hisses, and the like. Then he turned towards them with new-born dignity that would have fitted Dirk Colson, and said:—

“If you fellows don't shut up, and behave yourselves something like decent for the rest of the time, I'll chaw half a dozen of you into mincemeat as soon as we are out of this!”

CHAPTER XXI. — “HAD HIS EXPERIMENT BEEN TOO SEVERE?”

Dr. Everett was driving rapidly through the city; at least, as rapidly as the crowded character of the street would permit. He was out on professional duty, and had just been congratulating himself that his regular calls were now made for the day, and unless something special intervened he should have a couple of hours free for the alleys.

That meant professional duty, too, and of the very hardest character, one would suppose, as it brought him in contact not only with sickness in some of its most repulsive forms, but with abject poverty as well, and too often with loathsome forms of sin; yet he went about this work with a zest that his regular practice did not furnish. This was something done solely for Jesus' sake, and with an eye that was manifestly single to His glory.

He had already selected his alley, and was planning how, when his horses were safely stabled, he could make a cross-cut to it, when his eyes were held by two persons who were ascending together the stairway that led to one of the public halls. His face darkened as he watched them. Apparently they were engrossed with each other, and took no notice of him; but there were reasons why he specially desired to keep them in view. A network of carriages and wagons such as is common to crowded thoroughfares blocked his path just then, and prolonged his opportunity to watch the two.

They made their way in a very leisurely manner up the long staircase, letting others, more in haste, pass them continually; yet presently they joined the group who were passing up tickets of entrance.

The doctor signalled a policeman, and entered into conversation:—

“What is going on in Seltzer Hall?”

“Well, sir, there's a kind of a concert, I guess. They play on goblets, they say—just common glass goblets—and make fine music.”

“An afternoon entertainment?”

“Yes, sir, as a kind of introduction, you know; they expect to get a crowd for evening by the means.”

“Do you know where tickets are to be had?”

The policeman indicated a bookstore at his left by a gesture from his thumb, and said, “Right here,” and offered to secure some at once. He knew Dr. Everett; many of the policemen did.

His offer was accepted with thanks, and the doctor presently wound his way out from the network with two green tickets in his pocket. His plans for the afternoon had been suddenly changed. Instead of spending the time in Sewell alley, he had decided to attend a musical exhibition, the instruments being goblets!

He must make all speed now, so he left the crowded street and dodged through several byways to the stables.

No use to keep his horses. “She would be afraid to drive through such crowds,” he explained to himself, “and I should be afraid to leave the carriage standing.”

Rushing out from the stables he caught just the right street-car, and in a short space of time was ringing at Mr. Roberts' door.

Gracie Dennis was in the hall, dressed for the street.

“Ah,” said the doctor, “I am either fortunate or unfortunate, I wonder which? I had set my heart on having you for a companion to what I fancy may be a unique entertainment. Is there another engagement in the way? I know this is a most unconventional method, but a doctor is never sure of his time.”

But Gracie Dennis felt too well acquainted with Dr. Everett, and was too young and ready for enjoyment to be disturbed about conventionality. She merrily declared her willingness to be taken to whatever entertainment the doctor had to propose. Mrs. Roberts was out with her husband on business connected with church matters, and she had only intended to walk a square or two for her health.

On the way the doctor was distrait, Gracie having most of the talking to do herself. The truth was, he was trying to recall the faces of the people he had seen crowding into the hall, to make sure that he was not taking Gracie among people whom he would not care to have her meet. Apparently the couple whose movements had changed all his afternoon plans were not a sufficient guarantee of respectability. However, his face cleared as he recalled one and another, as being in the crowd seeking admission; they might not be of the class with whom Gracie was accustomed to mingle, but they were respectable people.

Gracie was in a merry mood. She understood enough of the doctor's busy life to feel sure that this sudden resolve to be entertained was quite out of his ordinary line, and that of itself served to mark the hour as exceptional.

“He feels the need of a little every-day fun,” she told herself, “and I'll help him to have it if I can. Poor man! it must be doleful to go among sick and dying people all the time.”

They were late at the hall; the concert was well under way; but there were plenty of vacant seats. Dr. Everett swept his eye over the room; then indicated to the usher just which seat he would have. It was one which commanded a view of the young man and woman who seemed to have such a mysterious influence over his plans.

He was relieved to find quite early in the entertainment that it really was unique, and, in its way, well worth hearing. Had the surroundings been agreeable he could easily have given himself up to enjoyment. However, they had been seated but a few moments, when he saw by Gracie's startled eyes that she had seen and recognized at least one of the couple at their left. Professor Ellis, in his usual faultless attire, lounged gracefully on the seat in such a manner that his side-face was distinct; he rested a well-shaped arm on the back of the seat next him, and his delicately gloved hand almost, if not quite, touched the shoulder of his companion.

Both he and the lady at his side gave extremely little attention to the entertainment in progress. Apparently

they had come thither for purposes of conversation. They kept up a continuous murmur of talk, interspersed at intervals with rippling laughter, and really seemed so entirely absorbed in each other as to have at times forgotten that the hall was public, and that the attention of many was being turned toward them. The girl was pretty, extremely so, with an entirely different style of beauty from Gracie Dennis; and a certain indescribable something in her face and manner would have told even the most casual observer that she moved in a different circle. It was not her dress, unless that was a little too pronounced for the place and hour; but quite young ladies in good society sometimes make a similar mistake.

Neither was her manner objectionable to the degree that you could have pointed to any one thing as offensive; yet you would have been sure, had you watched her, that she was without the pale of what we call society.

Gracie Dennis watched her with a kind of fascination;—becoming at last so absorbed with the watching, and the apparently troubled thoughts which grew out of it, that she gave but slight attention to Dr. Everett's occasional remarks, nor seemed to observe that at last he lapsed into total silence.

Once, during the hour, the young woman glanced casually in their direction, and the careless nod, and free and easy smile with she acknowledged Dr. Everett's presence, drew a startled glance from Gracie to rest on him for a moment.

“Now I wish I had my horses,” the doctor said, as at last they made their way down the aisle. “I have a mile's drive up town to take, and I think the exercise might be good for you.”

Gracie caught at the suggestion, and begged to be allowed to remain in the bookstore below while he went for the horses.

“I want a ride, and I want to talk with you,” she said, simply.

As this was precisely what he wanted, he went for the horses without more delay.

Meantime, Gracie, in one of the windows of the bookstore, was supposed to be employed in examining a late book, but in reality gave much attention to the couple who were crossing the street, or rather waiting for an opportunity to do so.

They seemed in no haste, but were conspicuous, even in the crowded street, for their interest in each other. More than one policeman regarded them narrowly, as Professor Ellis stood with head bent toward the lady, engaged in eager and animated conversation. It was just the attitude of absorbed interest with which he had so often listened to Gracie; not on the street, it is true, but in some crowded parlor, and it had flattered her. It made her frown to-day. They were starting now to make the disagreeable crossing. He had taken his companion's hand, preparatory to a leap over a muddy curbing; but Gracie could see that there was a pressure of it that was unnecessary, and, for the street, peculiar; his face, too, was distinctly visible, and the expression on it was what Gracie had seen before, but certainly she supposed no other person had.

Altogether it was probably well for Professor Ellis' peace of mind that he did not turn at that moment, and get a glimpse of the young lady in the bookstore. Instead he took his lady away, and they were lost in the crowd.

Dr. Everett, making all haste with his horses, had still time for anxious thought. Had his experiment been too severe on Gracie? Was it possible that her interest in the man was such that the afternoon's experience had been mixed with pain as well as with disgust? He could not believe it possible that the pure-hearted young girl cared for such a man as Professor Ellis! Yet there had been a look on her face when she saw those two which startled and hurt him.

When fairly seated in his carriage he did not speak until they had threaded the maze of wagons and reached clear ground. Even then he only said, “Now for speed,” and gave the horses their desire, until crowds and business were left behind, and they were driving down a broad avenue, lined on either side with stately yet quiet-looking homes. Then he drew rein, and obliged the horses to walk; he had by this time resolved on probing the wound, if there was one.

“I wish I knew just how much of a villain that man is.” These were the somewhat startling words which broke his silence.

“What man?” Yet the very tones of Gracie's voice indicated that she knew of whom he was speaking.

“That man, Ellis! Professor, I think he is called. I have reason to be very suspicious of him. By the way, Miss Gracie, I think he is an acquaintance of yours. Have you confidence in him?”

How promptly and indignantly such a question would have received an affirmative answer two months before! What should she say now?

“In what respect?” she faltered, more for the purpose of gaining time than because she did not understand the question.

“Well, in any respect I am almost prepared to say. I have not the honor of the man's acquaintance; but whatever I hear about him, or see in him, I dislike and distrust. Just at present his ways are specially disturbing. You noticed him this afternoon, I think! The young girl in his company belongs to my Sabbath-school. I have a deep interest in her, partly because she is the sort of girl who is always more or less in danger in this wicked world, and partly because she is capable of strongly influencing another, who is a special *protégé* of mine.”

“Who is the girl?” Gracie's manner was abrupt, and her voice constrained. It was evident that she was making great effort to control herself, and appear indifferent to all parties.

The doctor took no notice of her constraint.

“Her name is Mason. Hester Mason. She attends the Packard Place Sabbath-school, which you know I superintend. She is motherless, and worse than fatherless; is a clerk in one of the Fourth Avenue stores, and is, or was, inclined to be what is called gay. I do not know that that term conveys any special meaning to you; in young men I think they call the same line of conduct 'fast.' I hope and believe that you would not well understand either term; yet, I think, possibly, that watching her this afternoon in a public hall will give you some conception of the stretch that there is between yourself and her.”

CHAPTER XXII. — “SOME PEOPLE ARE HARD TO WARN.”

Had Dr. Everett desired in a few words to show Gracie the gulf between herself and the man who had been the girl's companion for the afternoon, perhaps he could not have formed his sentence better.

She shivered visibly, and the doctor drew the carriage-wraps more carefully about her, while he continued: —

“I would not want to give you a wrong estimate of Hester Mason, nor lead you to imagine for a moment that I believe a girl who serves behind a counter cannot be a true lady. I wanted, rather, to explain to you that her opportunities had been limited. She means to be a good girl, I think: in fact, I may say I have the utmost confidence in her intentions. She is not a Christian, but a few weeks ago I had her name on my note-book as one who was almost persuaded, She has been fighting the question of personal religion for some time,—her special stumbling-block being that she is quick-witted, and has quite a clear idea of how Christians ought to live, and can find very few who seem to her to be living what they profess. However, as I say, I have been very hopeful of her until within a few weeks, when she came in contact with this man, and I tremble for the result. He is constant in his attentions, and she is evidently flattered and dazed.”

“How long has he known her? How did he become acquainted?” Abrupt questions still, asked in that curiously repressed voice.

The doctor's face was growing very grave and stern. He feared that there was a real wound here.

“Inadvertently, Miss Dennis, it seems that both you and I are to blame, or, at least, are involved in the acquaintance. Do you remember a little incident which occurred in a streetcar some six weeks ago? A young woman, in leaving the car, dropped a package, which you noticing, called our attention to, and pointed out the person crossing the street, and Professor Ellis announced his willingness to overtake her and return the package, as he was about to leave the car. Miss Mason was the person in question, and Professor Ellis presumed on that very slight introduction to cultivate an acquaintance. I have learned that he quoted my name in connection with the incident, and since that day has been on terms of exceeding intimacy with Hester.”

Gracie was surprised out of her reserve.

“I remember the incident perfectly: but the girl I saw this afternoon cannot be the one who was on the car.”

“Yes; she was in holiday attire to-day, and in her working garb when you saw her momentarily on the car. I remember a feeling of regret that Professor Ellis should have so promptly volunteered to do your errand: yet I did not know what I dreaded. I simply shrank from the man, and wanted others to do so.”

“Dr. Everett, what is his motive in showing her attention?”

“I wish I knew. I can tell you what I greatly fear: That it is to play with the human heart; to see to what extent he can gain power over it. And in this case certainly it is a most cruel thing. The girl has no friends, no father or mother to advise with or help her. She is bright and pretty, and is being shown glimpses of a world that seems to her like fairyland. She is dazzled, and one cannot blame her, for she has neither carefully-formed judgment nor trustworthy friends to lean upon. Miss Dennis, you can judge from her manner this afternoon what is her knowledge of the customs of polite society. I do not think she has an idea that she was conspicuous, save for her beauty and the fine appearance of her attendant. She is not one to shrink from what she would consider legitimate public admiration, and this you can see but adds to her danger.”

“But, Dr. Everett, you do not think,—you cannot mean that he intends to pay her special attention; that he means anything beyond the desire to give her a little pleasure?”

“Well,” said the doctor, speaking slowly, but with firmness, “you may judge, Miss Dennis, what I think,—what any honorable person thinks,—of a man who bestows in public the sort of attentions which we saw this afternoon, You would have been insulted by them. The only reason that this poor girl was not, is because she does not know any better.

“Did you observe the flashing of a peculiarly set ring on her finger? I have reason to fear that it belongs to him and that she believes herself specially honored in being asked to wear it.”

Poor Gracie's cheeks were flaming now. She had not observed the ring, but she knew it well, and for one brief evening had worn it herself, and then had returned it to the owner with the assurance that she could not bring herself to wear it without her father's consent. She remembered what a wound she had felt herself bestowing when he had looked at her with those expressive, reproachful eyes, and replied that if she felt toward him as he did to her, she would not allow even a *father* to come between them. And he had actually given that ring into the keeping of this girl!

They rode on in silence, the doctor giving a hint to the horses that they might go as fast as they chose. He was in great doubt and pain of heart. Could it be possible that this carefully-shielded young girl was caught in the toils of a man whom he believed to be an unprincipled villain?

If so, had he been unnecessarily cruel in his revelations? Ought he to take her home, or drive further, and give her time to recover herself?

Could he have understood what was passing in her mind he would have known better what next to say. The simple truth was this: Before she came to Mrs. Roberts' the child had believed herself to be a martyr to the unreasonable prejudices of her stepmother. She had been led to feel that her father had turned against her,

solely because of his wife's influence over him, and that the wife was piqued because Professor Ellis had not paid her sufficient attention in the days of her maidenhood. This, the professor had succeeded in teaching Gracie to feel, was the sole charge against him. He was, therefore, an ill-used man, and therefore her heart went out towards him in sympathy.

It had not been at first a stronger feeling than this; but flattered by his attentions, so much more marked and polished than had ever been offered to the young girl before, she had taught herself to believe that, but for her father's bitterness, she could be to Professor Ellis what he delicately and vaguely assured her no one else could, and fill a place that hitherto in his lonely life had been left void. She had not engaged herself to him; indeed, he had never, in actual words, asked her to do so; but to the young and innocent and well-trained there is a language which speaks as clearly as words, and is held as sacred.

Gracie had allowed herself to be looked upon as one who was held by *others* from being more to Professor Ellis than she was; who might always, perhaps, be held back,—for she had resolved in her own sad heart that she would never marry against her father's consent, no, not if she were twice of age.

Of late, strange reflections had come to her. She had measured Professor Ellis with other men, Christian men, and he had appeared at a disadvantage. Also she had measured herself by the side of other Christian workers, and herself had appeared at a disadvantage. A vague unrest and dissatisfaction with her Christian experience were growing on her. Moreover, she was growing interested in those boys, as she had not believed that it would be possible for her to be interested when she first saw them. She began to believe that some of them, at least, would be saved. She wanted to help save them, and to help others. Her martyrdom dwindled rapidly into insignificance, until there would pass entire days in which she did not once remember that she as an unhappy girl.

At last, but a week or two before this afternoon, she had taken her affairs in hand, and tried to look steadily at them. The result of her hours of thought and prayer was that she was bound to Professor Ellis. That is, provided there should come a time in the dim and distant future when her father should give his consent, it would be her duty and her pleasure, because of what had passed between them, to marry him. Still, she began to feel less amazed at her father's opinion of him, less angry about it. She began to say to herself, softly and pitifully: “Poor, lonely man! he has no one to be his friend. He is not a Christian, and that is what makes so great a difference between him and others. It is that which papa misses, but I must not desert him; I must pray for him all the time, and work for his conversion; then he will grow to be the sort of man whom papa can like, and everything will be right.” And while she said it, she was dimly conscious of a feeling of satisfaction over the thought that she was very young, and that it would be a long, *long* time yet before anything could be settled; and that, meantime, it certainly was not right for her to have anything to do with Professor Ellis, only to pray for him; and that perhaps her father would allow her to carry out a project that was under delightful discussion in the Roberts family, namely, to remain in the city as a pupil in the famous Green Lawn School. And she did not know, foolish little thing, that so far even as her heart was concerned everything was wrong.

Perhaps it would be difficult for me to explain to you—that is, if you do not understand without explanation—what a turmoil she was thrown into by this afternoon's experience. She was far from realizing as yet that the uppermost feeling even now was not wounded love, but wounded pride; of what poor stuff she had been making a hero! Nothing had ever opened her eyes like this before. Was it possible that she had spent entire evenings with a man who stooped to set in unpleasant, even suspicious light, not his own character only, but that of an ignorant young girl?

It would not do to plead a lack of knowledge in excuse for him; he might be ignorant of the ways of the Christian world, but no one understood better the rules which governed society. During part of the afternoon she had been very angry with the girl, but after listening to Dr. Everett it began to dawn upon her that her friend had been playing with the ignorance of a girl who probably trusted him fully. You are to understand that Gracie Dennis was the sort of girl who would be made very angry by such a suspicion. The glow on her cheeks was not all caused by the fresh air of the spring day.

“Dr. Everett,” she said at last, breaking the silence, “what do you think he means by asking the girl to wear that ring, or by letting her wear it? Does he—do you suppose that he has engaged himself to her?”

“I wish I knew what he meant!” Dr. Everett said again, a surge of indignation rushing over him. “If he really meant anything so honorable as that, it would be bad enough business for poor Hester; but, as I said, I distrust the man utterly; and from my experience with the world I have reason. From your knowledge of him, Miss Dennis, could you suppose him to be honest and earnest in his attentions to that girl?”

It was a very plain question. It meant more to Dr. Everett than even Gracie saw, but she saw enough to know that she was admitting an intimacy that made her blush; however, she answered steadily,—

“No, I cannot think that he is honest or honorable.”

“So I fear. Witness this afternoon. Gentlemen do not parade their friendships before the public gaze, and that man knows it.”

The doctor's voice was *very* stern. He was sure now that there was a wound, and that it was being probed; he believed in making thorough work, even with wounds; there would be more hope of genuine healing afterward.

Gracie's next question—if her companion had but known it—was a singular one: “Why have not people who are her friends warned her against him, and held her back from making such a false step, if she does it in ignorance?”

Oh, Gracie Dennis! How are warnings sometimes received, even by carefully-trained girls, who have every reason to trust the love that would shield them?

“Some people are very hard to warn,” said the doctor. “I have tried it, and I have a friend who has tried to help her; but the poor girl, you must remember, has not been brought up in a Christian atmosphere—has never had a Christian friend who came with the authority of relationship. If she had a good father the way would be made so plain. As it is, can't you see how naturally she distrusts the rest of us, in favor of the man

who makes special professions of friendship? I am not surprised at Hester, I am only sorry for her.”

Had the doctor been carefully informed as to all the circumstances connected with Gracie's intimacy with the professor, he could not have chosen words which would have touched her conscience more. Had not her good father tenderly and patiently warned her? and had she not chosen to blind her eyes to all his words, and believe rather in Professor Ellis than in him?

CHAPTER XXIII. — “PART OF THE GREAT WELL-TO-DO WORLD.”

“I must call at this house,” the doctor said, suddenly drawing rein before a quiet little house at the foot of a wide lawn. “The gatekeeper of this American castle has a sick child whom I have promised to see. Can you hold the horses, Miss Dennis, or shall I tie them? This is a quiet spot, and they are gentle.”

“I am not afraid of anything,” Gracie said, eyes aglow as well as cheeks. And the doctor went into the house wondering whether Professor Ellis, if he could see her now, would not be afraid of her.

Once inside he gave a start of surprise, almost of dismay, for the face which appeared at the open door of the sick-room belonged to Joy Saunders.

“You here?” he said, trying to control the disturbed element in his voice.

She answered quietly:—

“I came out by street-car. Did you drive?”

“Yes,”' he said, abruptly, “but I am not alone. How is the child?” and he went forward at once to his professional duties, leaving her to wonder over his manner.

It was peculiar, certainly. Joy Saunders was used to abruptness from this man, but there was a quality in it to-day that she did not recognize. She went and looked out of the window, and saw Gracie Dennis holding the horses, saw her red, red cheeks, and flashing eyes, and the peculiar, haughty poise of her head, with which the stepmother at home was well acquainted.

She did not know this Gracie Dennis save by reputation. Once Dr. Everett had asked her to call at Mrs. Roberts', and had made her feel as though she were foolishly conventional in declining to do so. “How is she ever to know you, according to the rules which trammel society? There ought to be some way arranged for Christians to be free from trammels.” This had been his comment; but he had not asked her again, and she had never met Mrs. Roberts, nor yet Gracie Dennis. Yet she knew her very well, and had watched her often as she passed. She knew instantly who she was now, as she sat there in her haughty beauty, checking with determined hand the impatience of those horses. Oh, she knew more than this! It was very apparent now why Dr. Everett was peculiarly abrupt, and—well, yes—embarrassed. She had almost thought that was the name of the feeling, only it had seemed so absurd. And then Joy Saunders held her meek little head high, and told herself that he need not fear her presence; she could go as she had come, in the street-car.

The doctor came towards her now, speaking rapidly, as usual:—

“Joy, the child is very sick. There ought to be an experienced person here to-night. Not you; I am sorry you came up. Do you think your mother would come? Will you ride down with me? I have Miss Dennis in the carriage, but it is quite large enough for three, you know.”

Then Joy had turned away her head, holding it high, and said:—

“No, thank you; I am going down in the street-car.”

And that blundering doctor drew on his gloves, saying to himself, “I don't know but that is best,” and went out, only waiting to say to Joy:—

“Will you ask your mother about it? I will see her as soon as I can get around. I wish you would go directly home from here—will you?”

Then he lifted his hat to her, and sprang into his carriage and rode away with Gracie Dennis; and Joy Saunders waited for the next yellow car, and climbed into it, and told herself all the way down town that she wished she had stayed at the little house and watched all night by the sick child.

The thoughts that Dr. Everett had given to the entire matter were few. They ran somewhat after this fashion:—

“Joy here! and I'm afraid of the fever, from all I have heard. I shall take her home as soon as possible. How will that poor little girl in the carriage manage with a new acquaintance just now, I wonder?

“I am afraid it will be quite a strain. Still, I can do the talking, and let her be quiet. The main point is that I hoped she might have a suggestion to make about Hester. If she could rouse herself to try to save that girl it would be the best thing she could do. If she only knew it, Joy is the one who could help her in that direction or any other.”

As they dashed down the avenue, he was still occupied in wishing that he had urged Joy to ride, and thus forced an acquaintance between her and the pretty girl at his side. He was not very patient with what he called the “trammels” of society. When there were two people so fitted to enjoy and help one another, as were Joy Saunders and Gracie Dennis, he held it to be a waste in Christian economy that they should not know each other.

Too much occupied with his thoughts and his driving to give heed to passers-by, he lost the careful bow

that young Ried had for them as they drew near the city's whirl again. Gracie did not; she returned it, with a slightly-heightened color in her cheeks, and wondered if that young man knew Professor Ellis, and what he thought of him, and what he thought of her for being acquainted with him.

Sometimes it seems to me a real pity that on occasion there could not be some way of looking into one another's thoughts. So many misunderstandings might thus be saved. For instance, there was Ried, who went on his way with a clouded brow. Where had Dr. Everett been? and why was Gracie Dennis with him? Was it probable that he had been riding for pleasure? The bare suggestion astonished the young man. He found that he had never before given room to the thought that Dr. Everett took time for pleasure! Allowing this to be the case, why had he not taken Joy Saunders with him? Such a proceeding would have seemed altogether natural, though the honest-hearted young fellow admitted to himself that, had he been taking a ride for pleasure, the companion of his choice would not have been Joy Saunders. It was certainly a bewildering world. So trying did young Ried find his thoughts on that evening that he actually set himself deliberately to learn whether the ride was the result of chance or design. The consequence was that he learned not only of the ride, but of the afternoon entertainment at Seltzer Hall, with glass goblets for instruments. This increased his astonishment, and did not lessen the gloom on his face.

But the two in the carriage, unconscious of the gloomy young man, or of the sad-hearted young girl riding in a street-car, were almost silent during the homeward ride, until just as they turned into the avenue that led to Mr. Roberts' door. Then Grace said:—

“Dr. Everett, I should like to know that girl. There are some things that I ought to say to her, and if I had a chance I would try to say them in a way to help her.”

“I will manage it,” said Dr. Everett, speaking in a quick, relieved tone. He felt encouraged for Hester now, and greatly relieved about Gracie. She might be wounded, but she was made of the material of which he had hoped. She was not going to die herself, nor fold her hands and see others ruined, merely because she had been deceived.

He bade her a cheery “Good afternoon!” and drove away, feeling that, although he had been obliged to give up Sewell Alley, good work had been accomplished. He believed now that he understood the situation.

He was right about one thing: Gracie Dennis had not the slightest idea of dying. Her mood was better expressed, half an hour later, when she stood at the parlor window, and returned a low, lingering bow from Professor Ellis, with a haughty stare from flashing eyes, looking out from an erect and motionless head.

Dirk Colson's brain was in a whirl. He had an important question to settle. In his pocket were two blue tickets, promising to admit him to the largest and finest hall in the city to hear the great temperance orator. Dirk knew very little about orators, but he had heard of John B. Gough, and everything he had heard made him wish to have a glimpse of him. You will remember that Dirk was an imitator. He had heard that Mr. Gough was also, and down deep in his heart the boy had an ambition to hear the man. Now was his unexpected opportunity. Of course, he was going, but the perplexing thing was, what to do with that other ticket.

There was Mart? Oh, yes, to be sure, he had not forgotten her; but what a strange thing it would be to take her to a lecture! He had never taken her anywhere in his life. She had nothing to wear, though he remembered at that moment that the mother had, by earnest effort, succeeded in getting her shawl out of pawn.

There was one incentive for taking her; it would please Mrs. Roberts. Dirk studied the thing for some time, to try to discover why she should care, and had finally given up the problem as too great for him. Yet he was sure she cared; there had been a wistful light in her eyes when she said, “I thought possibly you might like to take that sister with the golden hair,” that he saw and interpreted. It took him three days to decide what he should say, supposing he made up his mind to ask her.

Several people were at work helping him, though he knew nothing about that. Mrs. Roberts remarked one evening to young Ried that she wished she knew a way to induce Dirk Colson to take his sister, without actually asking him to do so. She fancied that, besides the advantage which might possibly directly follow an evening spent in that way, it would suggest new thoughts to the brother.

The young man caught at the suggestion, and wanted to help carry it out. It was not an easy thing to do. He had not grown intimate with Dirk Colson; in fact, that misguided young fellow rather resented any attempt at intimacy. He was, however, acquainted with Sallie Calkins; the numerous trips he had made to their room during Mark's illness had brought him into such constant and pleasant contact with Sallie and her brother that they looked upon him as a tried friend. Sallie, he knew, was a friend of the shy, golden-haired sister. So one evening he went to call at the Calkins room, with a vague hope of helping indirectly in bringing to pass Mrs. Roberts' desires.

To Sallie he made known the wish that Dirk would take his sister to the lecture, and secured from her a promise to help the scheme along, provided it developed.

After he went away, Sallie sat long at her sewing, making all alone, by a dim light, one of the most heroic little sacrifices that was ever offered “in His name.” To fully understand it, you must know that Mark Calkins had recovered sufficiently to take his place in the office where Dr. Everett had secured him an opening, and an employment that would enable him to sit, most of the time, thereby giving his injured limb a chance to rest. Also, Mark had been admitted to the Monday evening gatherings, and was distinguishing himself there by his skill in reading and writing. Of course, he had received two tickets, and equally of course, being the boy he was, he had planned to take Sallie with him to the lecture. Great was Sallie's prospective pleasure! The event of her lifetime it was to be. To walk with Mark through the crowded streets, both neatly dressed; to walk boldly forward with the throng, and present their tickets of admittance to the great hall; hitherto seen

only from the outside; to move down the long aisles as those who had a right, and select their seats unquestioned by police; in short, to be like other people—part of the great well-to-do world,—this was Sallie's joy!

She had washed and mended her best calico dress; she had sewed buttons on the pretty cape, according to Mrs. Roberts' directions; she had tried on the neat bonnet which had been manufactured for her by Mrs. Roberts' own fingers, and, altogether, Sallie had probably gotten, during these two days, more enjoyment out of Gough's lecture than many others, who had heard him a dozen times, ever secured. I do not think it any wonder that, as she rocked and sewed, and thought out her great thought, there fell tears on the work she was doing.

CHAPTER XXIV. — “FOR YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT MAY COME.”

This was the thought: Suppose Dirk Colson should want to take his sister. Sallie did not believe it in the least probable; she had not that amount of faith in Dirk Colson; but suppose he should, Mart could not go, for the reason that she would have nothing to wear.

And here was Sallie's pretty cape, which would cover the worst of her dress, and her pretty bonnet, which she knew would make a picture of Mart; but if she lent them it meant staying at home to Sallie. *Could* she do it? Could she bear to think of such a thing? What would Mark say? What would he do with his other ticket?

Would she be likely ever to have another chance to go to that wonderful hall, and be like other folks?

But *Mart* had never been anywhere in her life.

“And I,” said poor Sallie, catching her breath with a sob, “have been often for a walk on the brightest streets, and looked in at the shop windows, and everything. I 'most know I will help her to go if I can.”

Young Ried had no conception of the sacrifice for which he had asked.

It is little wonder, surely, that Sallie's voice faltered that same evening, as she explained to Mart, who had slipped in for a bit of talk, that if ever she wanted to go anywhere very bad, she was to let Sallie know, and she should have her cape and bonnet to wear. Then she had anxiously planned for her a way to mend her dress, so that it would look quite well under the cape, and she had even urged:—

“Now do, Mart, if anybody should want you to go don't say you won't; but take your chance, for you don't know what may come.”

Also she bore with patience Mart's scornful laugh, and emphatic statement that no chances ever came to her, and nobody ever wanted her to go anywhere. As she talked she grew interested and eloquent; urged earnestly that Mart should embrace the first opportunity to go somewhere, and wear her new cape and bonnet. At the same time she was silent about the lecture. Suppose no chance should come? Then it would be doubly hard to Mart to have had the possibility suggested. The same delicate reasoning had held her from dwelling on her own prospects. Some people would have been very much astonished over the amount of delicate consideration for the feelings of others which could be found in that little room.

Dirk loitered strangely over his meagre dinner the next afternoon. It was late, for he had secured a position at last in one of the printing offices, and was apt to take his meals at any hour when it happened to be convenient to do without him at the office. He had only been three days at work, and Mart had taken little notice of the new departure, except to remark grimly that it would not last; but to Sallie she had boasted that Dirk had gone to work as hard as anybody. If somebody could only have told Dirk that his sister ever boasted of him it might have helped him much during these days.

“What are you hanging around for? You've got all there will be to eat in this house to-day, and it is time you were off.” This was the ungracious manner in which the sister took note of his lingering. She was painfully afraid that he had already grown weary of regular employment, and the fear made her voice gruffer than usual.

His reply amazed her; in fact, it amazed himself:—

“Mart, I've got tickets to a show,—a nice place,—and I want you to go along.”

“Humph!” said Mart, “that is a likely story!”

Then he grew earnest, displayed his treasures, and urged her acceptance—quite astonished with himself the while. *Did* he really want her to go, he wondered, or did he want to please Mrs. Roberts?

You would have been interested, an hour later, to have seen Mart skip up the rickety stairs leading to the Calkins abode. You would probably have thought that she endangered life or limb by her rapid movements; but Mart was used to such staircases, and the news she had to communicate required haste.

“There's a chance!” she said, breathless with speed and eagerness; “Sallie Calkins, there's a chance, and you'd never guess how. Dirk he wants me to go to a show with him this very night! He's got tickets. It is a big show,—where all the grand folks go. It is in the very biggest hall in this city, and Dirk he says I am to go. Sallie Calkins, do you mean it, truly, that I am to wear your lovely new bonnet and cape? Do you suppose I can really go anywhere? I don't known why Dirk wants me to so bad, but he coaxed and coaxed.”

Poor Sallie! She stooped quickly to pick up a pin from the floor, so that Mart might not get a glimpse of her eyes with the sudden tears in them. Yet, as she stooped, she made her final, grand sacrifice—Mart should go!

Then she entered with entire abandon into the preparations. Not only her bonnet and cape, but her shoes—

new ones that Mark had bought her with his first earnings after his illness—were to attend the lecture.

She rejoiced over the excellent fit of the shoes. She did more than this. As Mart watched the process of buttoning them, and remarked complacently that she shouldn't wonder if Dirk would buy her a pair some day, when he earned money enough, she kept her lip from curling with an incredulous sneer. You will remember that she had not the slightest faith in Dirk.

Neither must I forget that there was another thing to lend—her comb, in order that Mart's wonderful yellow hair might be for once reduced to something like order. And at the risk of leading you to think that Sallie was altogether too “aesthetic” for her position in life, I shall have to confess that this was her hardest bit of sacrifice; her comb was so new and so pretty!

However, it did its duty on Mart's tawny locks, and the transforming effect was marvellous. In fact, when all was ready, the cape adjusted, the hat which Mrs. Roberts had shown her how to wear set on the yellow head, Sallie said not a word, but went to the packing-box in the corner which served as a treasure cupboard, and drew forth the one possession about which she had been utterly silent—a little hand-glass which Mark had brought her one winter evening just before he was hurt. A cheap, little, ugly glass, which you would have turned from in disgust, saying that it made your nose awry, and your chin protrude and your eyes squint, and was altogether horrid; but, held before Mart's glowing face, what a secret did it reveal! Mart looked, and was silent, too; and went home in a hushed frame of mind to wait for Dirk. Home was deserted. The mother had dragged her wearied body out for a day of “light” work. The time had gone by when she was able to do any that people called heavy. Where the father was, none of the family knew, and their chief hope concerning him was that he would stay away as long as possible.

I find myself longing to give you an idea of what that elegant, brilliantly lighted hall, with its brilliant audience, was to this girl, and being unable to do it.

When people live so far below us that our every-day experiences are to them like a day at the World's Fair, it is very hard indeed to describe how our special treats affect them.

It is a treat to everybody to hear Gough. How then can I tell you what it was to this girl and her brother? Dirk listened; he must have listened well, for long afterward he was able to repeat entire paragraphs, and to imitate the manner of the great orator with remarkable skill;—yet at the time he would have seemed to a close watcher to have been absorbed in another way. He looked at Mart somewhat as he had on that Sabbath when his acquaintance with Mrs. Roberts began. But the thought which had dimly haunted him that day blossomed on this evening. Certainly Mart looked like Mrs. Roberts! It might be folly to think so; doubtless the fellows would make no end of fun of him if he should ever tell them so, which he meant to take excellent care not to do; but the fact remained, that in Sallie's bonnet and cape, and, above all, with the waves of hair floating about her, there was a look which instantly and strongly reminded him of that lady.

There was another listener at the lecture who was unexpectedly present. Part of poor Sallie's trial had been to tell her brother, who had been radiant for a week over the prospect of taking her, that she had with her own hand put away the blessing. How would Mark take it? Dirk's forlorn-looking sister was no favorite of his. I think it would have been very difficult to have convinced him that there was a trace of Mrs. Roberts in her face.

But such curious creatures are we that it actually hurt Sallie to see how quietly he took the great sad news of her sacrifice. After the first start of surprise, he seemed preoccupied, and she could almost have thought that he did not hear her explanation. She had much ado to keep back the tears, but she had made a special little feast for him that evening, with a white cloth on the table, and a cup of actual tea, and the cup set in a saucer. She was not going to spoil the scene with tears; so after a little she said, cheerily:—

“Now you have a chance to do something nice for somebody. Who will you take on your ticket?”

“I was thinking,” he answered, slowly. “You know it is a temperance lecture, and it is by a wonderful man. The fellows in the shop have been talking about him all day, and they say you just can't help *thinking* when he gets agoing; and I was just thinking, What if we could get *him* to go, and he would listen, and get to thinking.”

There are no italics that will give you an idea of the peculiar emphasis which the boy put on the pronouns. Sallie understood; that “he” could mean but one person in the world. But her brother must have answered the look on her face, for she spoke no word.

“Sometimes they *do*, Sallie. There was old Pete, you know.”

Oh, yes, Sallie knew old Pete; every body in that alley knew him; a notorious drunkard once, of the sort which people, even good Christian people, are apt to pronounce hopeless; yet now he wore a neat suit of clothes every day, and brought home twenty pounds of flour at one time in a sack, and bought his coal by the barrel. Wonderful things occasionally happened in that alley.

“Yes,” said Sally, “that is true; and old Pete wasn't much like him.”

The tone spoke volumes. It would have almost angered her, even now, to have had it hinted that old Pete was superior to that father, though hardly a person acquainted with the two but would have said that there was more hope for old Pete, even in his miserable past, than for this one.

How they managed it, those two: the difficult task of getting him persuaded to go, find then the more difficult task of keeping him sufficiently sober to get there, would make a story in itself. I fancy there are many such stories in real life which will never get told. The probabilities are, if they were, some wise critic would pronounce them unnatural and sensational.

Suffice it to say that the task was accomplished, and among the most attentive listeners to the great speaker that evening was Sallie's father, while she sat at home and mended a badly torn jacket, and cried now and then, and was glad and sorry and proud and frightened and hopeful by turns all that long evening.

I am not sure but it was better for her that she sat at home. I don't know just what she might have done had she been in the hall to see her father, at the close of the meeting, shamble forward with the crowd, and sign his name to the total abstinence pledge.

She might have screamed out in her excitement, or she might have fainted; for although there were those who said—some with a sneer, and some with a sigh—that “signing the pledge would not amount to anything;

the miserable fellow could not keep a pledge to save his life!” Sally would have thought nothing of the kind. She had faith in her father's word.

It is a wonderful stimulus to have some one who believes in us.

CHAPTER XXV. — “WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?”

“Do you know,” said Mrs. Roberts, addressing Gracie Dennis, who, with young Ried, had waited in the hall for her to join them (they were ready for the lecture, and were to take up Mr. Roberts on the way): “Do you know that I have a desire which I see no way of realizing? If Mr. Colson should bring his sister with him to-night I should like so much to get possession of her and bring her home with me! But I have been planning all day, and see no possible excuse for such an apparently wild proceeding.”

I want you to notice how naturally Mrs. Roberts said “Mr. Colson”; she never talked about Dirk under any other name; she even taught herself to *think* of him as “Mr. Colson.” Consequently, when she spoke the name in his presence, there was not a trace of unnaturalness in tone or manner. The others tried in vain to follow her example. Dr. Everett could not speak of him in this way without slight hesitation and a touch of embarrassment. “The truth is,” said he, “I think *Dirk* all the week, and on the Sabbath I find it impossible to reach up to 'Mr. Colson' without an effort.” There was no touch of “reaching up” or reaching down, about Mrs. Roberts' talk with her pupils. It is possible that this is one link in the chain of influence which she was weaving around them.

Gracie Dennis' face expressed curiosity, and when they were seated in the carriage, she referred to the cause:—

“But Flossy, I cannot imagine why you should want to do such a thing. It will certainly be too late to-night to try to get acquainted with her. I should think some time when you could have an unbroken evening would be the better for experimenting.”

“For some sorts of experimenting it would,” Mrs. Roberts answered, smiling quietly; “my experiment, in part at least, was to see how the pink room might impress her.”

“Flossy Shipley!”

When Gracie took refuge in that name her hostess knew she was not only much excited, but a trifle disapproving; at such times she made haste to change the subject.

It happened that the thing for which she had been planning, shaped itself so naturally as to give not the slightest color or premeditation to the act.

When Dirk and his sister worked their way through the dense crowds to the open air they discovered that it was raining heavily. For almost the first time in her life the fact struck terror to Mart Colson's soul! Ordinarily no duck could have been more indifferent to a rain storm than herself. On this evening she gave vent to her dismay in short, expressive words:

“Sallie's bonnet!” “And cape!” This last, after a moment's thought. “And shoes!” she added, as the magnitude of her troubles grew upon her.

Drawn up close to the sidewalk stood a carriage and a pair of horses that Dirk could not help giving admiring attention to, despite the rain. A fine horse always held his attention. No thought of the occupants of the carriage came to him, not even after a head leaned forward and a hand beckoned; of course it was beckoning to somebody else. Then a clear voice spoke:—

“Mr. Colson!”

He started quickly forward; there was but one person who ever said “Mr. Colson,” and besides, that voice belonged only to one.

“I want your sister to go home with me. It is raining so hard that she ought not to walk, and I should like very much to have her stay with me to-night. Won't you ask her to, please?”

If Mrs. Roberts had been asking a favor, instead of conferring one, her voice could not have been sweeter and more winning.

Dirk went back to his sister, too much bewildered by the state of affairs even to express surprise. “Mart,” he said, “she wants you.”

A quick spring to the sidewalk, and young Ried was standing beside Mart. “It is raining so hard,” he explained, “Mrs. Roberts would be very glad if you would come.”

And Mart, thinking of nothing at all, save Sallie's bonnet and cape and shoes, turned toward the waiting carriage.

Mr. Ried had his umbrella raised, and carefully shielded the bonnet, assisting its wearer to enter the carriage with as much courtesy as he had bestowed on Gracie Dennis but a few moments before. Not a movement was lost on the watching Dirk.

When the door was closed and the goodnights had been said,—Mrs. Roberts leaning from the carriage again for that purpose,—and when the horses had dashed around the corner, he still occupied his position on the curbstone, gazing down the street, gazing at nothing unless he saw a reflection of his own bewildered thoughts.

“Come!” said a policeman who knew him, and was therefore suspicious, “What are you hanging about here for? Move on!”

“Humph!” said Dirk, as he slowly took his hands out of his pockets, eyes still fixed on the corner where the carriage had turned, “what if I should?”

Something in his eye would have told Mrs. Roberts, had she been there, that he meant more than moving down the street; though that he presently did, regardless of wind and rain.

Meantime the bonnet and cape in the carriage stepped somewhat into the background, and the girl who wore them allowed herself once more to think of her individuality, and to wonder at her position. She sat bolt upright on the edge of the soft, gray seat, and gazed about her as well as she could by the glimmer of the street lamps. She in a carriage! Mart Colson sitting on a back seat, beside a grand lady, and rolling down the avenue! Who would have supposed that such a thing could have happened to Sallie Calkins' bonnet? Mrs. Roberts recognized the bonnet and cape with a smile of satisfaction. She had studied much over the possibilities of this girl's costume. Was it probable that she had anything suitable to wear to a lecture? She had passed the cellar where the girl lived but once, and had had but one glimpse of her; yet these glimpses had been enough to render it highly improbable that she had any street costume. Then, had Mrs. Roberts canvassed the possibilities of getting a street-suit for her, there were apparently insurmountable difficulties in the way. She was too utterly unacquainted with the ground to venture. Besides, there were reasons for believing that anything of value would find its way from that cellar to a pawnbroker's in a very short space of time.

Having spent hours over many different schemes, and rejected each one as liable to bring disaster, Mrs. Roberts was obliged to betake herself to prayer. If the watching Saviour wanted her to work through the medium of this lecture on this particular child of His, He could certainly see that she was present; could furnish her with clothes to wear, either through herself or some other of His servants. She would wait and watch.

Not once had she thought of Sallie Calkins and the new bonnet that her own fingers had helped to fashion; yet here it was beside her on the head of this girl, toward whom she was drawn! The fact made Mrs. Roberts radiant.

She said almost nothing to the startled prisoner at her side, beyond a murmured, “So glad you let me carry you home with me!” Then she drew a bright-colored wrap about her, and left her to her amazement, while the eager tongues of the rest of the party talked continuously.

By the way, you are not acquainted with the pink room, I think? You should see it before it is invaded for the night. Large, it is. I think little people sometimes have a peculiar fondness for large rooms; Mrs. Roberts had. The walls were tinted with what might be called a suggestion of pink, with just a touch of sunset gold about the mouldings.

The carpet was soft and rich; it gave back no sound of footfall. It was strewn with pink buds; some just opening into beauty, some half-blown. Accustomed to the sight of elegant carpets as you are, you would almost have stooped to pick one of these buds, they looked so real. The curtains to the windows were white, but lined with rose pink; they were looped back with knots of pink ribbons. The bed was a marvel of pink and white drapery; so was the dressing-bureau. The easy-chairs were upholstered in soft grays with a pinkish tinge; and the tidies, lavishly displayed, were all of pink and white. There was nothing conventional about the room. A professional would have been shocked by some of its appointments. Many a lady of wealth, accustomed to having things as “they” decree, would have been more than doubtful over the pink ribbons and the profusion of white drapery. Aside from the carpet, and a choice picture or two, there was nothing especially expensive about the furnishings. It was simply a room in which Mrs. Roberts had allowed her own sweet little fancies to take her captive.

The gas was lighted; the door was ajar into a toilet-room; a lavish display of great, beautiful towels could be seen as you peeped in, and various touches told of an expected guest. Flowers were blossoming on the mantel, and a tiny vase which stood on a bracket near the toilet-stand held a single rose of a peculiar hue and perfume, which had blossomed for this hour. At least, Mrs. Roberts thought so.

Into this room, in all its purity and beauty, went Sallie Calkins' bonnet and cape and her strong, new, thick shoes; and the wearer thereof pushed the bonnet away from her flushed face, and stood and looked about her.

Down stairs they discussed in curious tones—not her, but the mistress of the mansion.

“Flossy, I do think you are too queer for anything! Why don't you have her go to Katy's room? Katy is away for the night, you know, and I'm sure her room is as neat and pretty as can be. Imagine what a contrast it would be to anything that she has ever seen! Mr. Ried, you ought to see the room into which she has been put. There isn't a more elegant one in the house. Some of its furnishings are so delicate that I hardly like to touch them. What sort of a disease is it that has taken Mrs. Roberts, do you suppose, to send her there? Flossy, she will get no rest to-night; she will be afraid of that immaculate bed.”'

This, of course, was Gracie Dennis.

Mr. Roberts looked from her to his wife,—his face smiling, curious, yet with a sort of at-rest expression.

“What do you hope to accomplish, Flossy?” He asked the question as one who was pleased to watch a new experiment, yet felt sure that the experimenter had an end to attain which would justify any measures that she might take. Mr. Roberts had believed in his wife when he chose her from all others; but he was learning to believe in her in a peculiar sense, as one led by a hand that made no mistakes.

She turned to answer his question; her face bright, yet half puzzled:—

“I am not sure that I can explain to you what I hoped for,” she said; “I caught the idea from Mr. Ried.”

“From me!” and the young man thus mentioned looked so astonished and incredulous that Gracie laughed.

“He is sure he never thought of anything so wild,” she said, gayly. “Flossy, you must find a better excuse than that.”

“Yet it was something that he said. Do you remember telling me, not long ago, about your sister's idea that all the world had lost its place because of sin; that God intended everything here to be beautiful, and all life to be bright with joy, and that Satan had gotten hold of men's lives, and was trying to ruin them, and that every beautiful creation was God's picture to the world of what his intention had been? I'm telling it poorly; but it made a very deep impression. This girl's face, you know, is beautiful. It is what God meant some faces to be; at least, I mean he has given her the frame for a face of beauty. I have a vague, half-understood sort of wish to give her a glimpse of harmony; something that will fit her golden hair and lovely complexion; and see what she will think of God's idea, and whether she will understand that it is sin which has spoiled it, and whether she is willing to serve the author of her ruin. I don't believe I am making myself plain, but I know what I mean, at least.”

“If we do not, I think it must be because you have caught a thought from God, that we are not able to reach up to.”

It was Mr. Roberts who made this reply. Something in his wife's experiment had deeply moved him.

As for Mr. Ried, his face lighted, as it always did, at the mention of his sister's name.

“Sometimes I almost think that it is Ester still at work, and that He lets her work through this woman.”

It was what he said to Gracie Dennis in an aside. Mrs. Roberts had already gone to see in person to the comfort of her guest.

CHAPTER XXVI. — “O LORD, TAKE DIRK, TOO!”

She found her standing before the mirror. By reason of the fact that she understood no pretty trick of braid or curl, her long yellow hair hung just as Nature had made it, with no waves or ripples save those which had grown with its growth. It fell about her now like a sunset cloud. She had taken from the vase near at hand a rose, which she had pushed in among the masses of hair, with no knowledge as to how it should be arranged, or, indeed, thought; yet the effect was something which made Mrs. Roberts give an involuntary start of admiration.

Still it was evident that, though apparently gazing at herself, she was thinking away beyond herself. It is doubtful if at that moment she saw the flower, or her own reflection, or knew that she was looking. Her eyes had the faraway expression which one sometimes sees in great power on faces like hers. She turned as Mrs. Roberts, having softly knocked and received no answer, softly entered, and her first words indicated the intensity of her thought, whatever it was:—

“Dirk has *got* to go there!”

“Go where?” asked Mrs. Roberts, startled out of the words she meant to speak; startled by the hint of power in the voice and manner.

“Of whom are you thinking, my dear girl? and where do you want him to go?”

“I'm thinking about Dirk, ma'am; I thought about him all the evening; the man made me; and I've made up my mind; he's *got* to go to heaven!”

I suppose I cannot give you an idea of the force in her voice. It was as though a resolution, from which there could be no appeal, had been taken, and the person resolving felt her own power to accomplish. It was altogether an unexpected answer to Mrs. Roberts. She did not know whether to be half-frightened or to laugh.

She sat down in one of the easy-chairs to study the girl, and consider what answer to make. Mart, meantime, turned back to the survey of herself in the mirror, or to the survey of whatever she saw there, and continued talking:—

“I never knew much about heaven. You may guess that, if you have ever been in our alley. Only lately, Sallie Calkins she's been telling me what you told her; and I had a kind of notion that you must know what you was talking about, and that it was for rich folks and grand folks like you; but the man told about that Madge, you know, to-night—an awful drunkard and swearer, and all that—how she reformed and went to heaven. Dirk ain't no drunkard; but he will be. Everybody says he will, because father is such an awful one. Mother, she's never had no hope of him. She says father didn't drink till he was most twenty, and then he begun; and she's looking for Dirk to begin, and I haven't thought he could help it either. What if he doesn't care for it much yet? He will, it's likely. I've never told nobody that, not even Sallie, and I've been mad at mother every time she said any such thing; but all the time I've been expecting him to begin; and I know well enough, when once they *begin*, how it goes on. But that man to-night told things that made a difference. He says that God can keep them from wanting to drink, and help them right straight along; and that they can go to heaven as well as the next one. I've wanted nice things for Dirk all my life; but I never saw no way to get them, and it made me mad. To-night I saw a way, but I never had no kind of a notion how heaven looked till I come into this room, and see the light and the flowers and the shine, and another room spread out there in the glass: and now I know, and Dirk shall go!”

Mrs. Roberts was in no mood for laughing, the tears were dropping slowly on the flower she held in her hand. Mart saw in the glass just then a sight which seemed to add to her surprise. She turned wondering eyes on her hostess.

“What are you crying for?” she asked. “Don't spoil the flower; it is like the one Dirk bought me once. He

said you sent it to me. I kept it most a week. I took it over to Sallie's, and she got fresh water for it every day, somehow; and it was then she begun to tell me what you said about heaven, and I thought if God had made such flowers as that for you, it was likely he had made a heaven for you; but I didn't believe it was for Dirk till to-night, and I didn't have no kind of a notion how it looked till just now. Do you *believe* what that man said—that folks like Dirk can go? Of course, if Madge went, why Dirk would have a *right*. He is bad just because he *has* to be. He never had no chance to be anything else; and he ain't very bad, anyhow—nothing to compare with some." Her voice was almost fierce in its earnestness; she was beginning to resent the creeping doubt that Mrs. Roberts' silence suggested.

Careful words must be spoken now. What if this awakening soul should be turned aside! No wonder that the unspoken words were prayers.

"Dirk has a *right* to go to heaven," she said, steadily, sweetly; "there is not the shadow of a doubt as to his right. No one in the world—not Satan himself—can deprive him of it; and it is not only his *right*, but his duty to go."

"Then he shall!"

I wish I could give you an idea of the strength in the girl's voice. It almost carried conviction with it to Mrs. Roberts' heart.

"Come and sit down," she said, and she drew her towards one of the low cushions. If Mart sat on that, her head would be just where a gentle hand could stroke the masses of hair.

"Let me talk with you about this. You are mistaken in one thing. Dirk is very bad. He is bad enough to shut him out of heaven forever."

The girl started, and tried to fling off the caressing hand.

"So are you," said the gentle voice.

"Oh, *me*! Don't talk about me! Whoever said I wasn't bad? Let me go; I want to go home. I don't care how hard it rains."

"And so am I," continued the gentle voice.

The girl on the cushion ceased struggling to free herself from the caressing touch, and remained motionless.

"Let me tell you of something that we have each done a great many times. We have been asked and urged and coaxed day after day, and year after year, to accept an invitation to go to this very heaven, and we have paid no attention at all; and this, after Jesus Christ had given His life to make a way for us to go. Is not that being bad?"

"Dirk he never had no invitation—never heard anything about it."

"Yes, he has," speaking with quiet firmness. "The Lord Jesus Christ told me to invite him, and I have done so a great many times, and he has made no answer; and Sallie Calkins has invited you, and you have treated it in just the same way."

"I didn't believe it."

"Isn't that being bad? What has He ever done that you should refuse to believe His word, when He died an awful death to prove to you that He was in earnest?"

"You said Dirk had a *right* to go."

"So he has. Jesus Christ has given him a right, if he will. I have invited you to my house, and asked you to spend the night in this room, and sleep in this bed. Has any person a right to keep you from doing so?"

"No." An emphatic nod of the head, and a lingering, almost loving look at the white bed behind her.

"Then cannot you truthfully say that you have a *right* to be here? My dear girl, it is so faint an illustration of what Jesus Christ has done to give you a right to heaven, that I almost wonder at your understanding it. But can you imagine something of how I should have felt had I urged you to come to me night after night, for weeks and years, and you had turned from me with no answer, or else with scorn?"

"You wouldn't have kept on asking me." Mart spoke with the assurance of one who had firm faith in her statement.

"No, I presume I should not. I would have said after the third or fourth invitation, 'If she really will not have anything to do with me I cannot help it,' and I should have tried to forget you. This is one of the many differences between Christ and me. He waits, and asks, and *asks*. How long will you keep Him waiting?"

I have given you only the beginning of the conversation. It was long ere it was concluded.

Down stairs Mr. Ried waited as long as he could, curious to know the result of Mart's first impressions. Then he went away, and Gracie went to her room, and the house settled into quiet, and Mr. Roberts, in the library, waited for his wife, while she told over again, with tender words and simple illustrations, the "old, old story," so fitted to the wants of the world.

How many times has there been a like result.

It was midnight when they knelt together, the fair child of luxury and the child of poverty; but the Saviour, who intercedes for both, bent His ear, and heard again the cry of a groping soul, seeking Him out of darkness, and held out His loving, never-failing arms, able to reach down to her depth, and received her to himself. Who can tell that story? Who can describe how heaven seemed to the girl just then?

It was not what Mrs. Roberts had expected. I cannot even say that it was what she had hoped for. Her faith had not reached to such a height at all. She could hardly have put into words what she hoped. When she ventured to try to tell it to the friends in the parlor, and to you, I doubt whether you understood. She thought to get a hold on the girl; to show her something of God's beauty and love, as it shone through herself; to make her long after something her life did not give, and to gradually lead her to seek after satisfaction in Christ. A long process—something that should unfold gradually, with many discouraging drawbacks, and some days that would look like utter failures. She had schooled herself to be prepared for this, but she had not looked for Him to exert His mighty power to save in a moment. How it had touched her to find a soul, hungry, not for

itself, but for a brother, I shall not attempt to tell. The first words she said, after she went back to her waiting husband, a little after midnight, were these:—

“He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. I think that is what is the matter with the world to-day. I wonder if He would not be pleased with one who could throw herself at His feet with a childlike abandon of faith, and expect wonders, yes, and impossibilities, just as a child feels that *anything* can be done by father? God has shamed my faith to-night. It is as though I had asked for a crumb of bread, and he gave me the entire loaf. That girl up-stairs has not heard of Him before as a Saviour for *her*; has never thought of such a thing, or, at least, dreamed of its possibility, and yet she has given herself to Him. And Evan, what do you think were the first words she said? 'O Lord, take Dirk, too!' She is on her knees at this moment praying for him. If you could have seen her face when it first dawned upon her that she could tell God about him, and ask for His mighty power to be exerted in his behalf, it would have been a picture for your lifetime. Oh, Evan, Evan, why can we not expect great things of God?”

CHAPTER XXVII. — “AN AWFUL PROBLEM”

Isn't it strange, the ways the Lord takes to answer prayers?

Much prayer had been made for Dirk Colson, but few had thought of his sister. Sallie Calkins, it is true, had come with trembling steps into the light of Christ's love, and had immediately desired to have Mart enjoy it with her, but was very trembling and doubting as to her ability to reach Mart, or to influence her in the right direction. She sent the bonnet and cape to the lecture with a prayer, but she did not look for the prayer to be answered. Verily, He has to be content with faith “less than a grain of mustard-seed.”

Was the rest of the story an answer to prayer? We are to remember that He has strange ways. Events startling enough in their import followed each other in rapid succession. In the first place, Dirk's father, poor, wrecked man, returned no more. Whether he had wandered among the network of railroads which lined the southern portion of the city, and lost his life there, or whether he had fallen into the river, or just how he had disappeared, could not be discovered. There were three men killed by an accident on the road one night, but their disfigured bodies were buried before Dirk heard of it. There was a man seen struggling in the water off the lower wharf one evening, but he sank before help could reach him, and his body was not recovered. There were half a dozen men killed by a boiler explosion, but that was not heard of in time to look into it. There were so many ways in which the wreck might have gone out of life and left no sign. They were safe in supposing that he was intoxicated, and that was about all they could be perfectly sure of, concerning him; that, and the fact that he came no more. Of course, there was no such search for him as is made for the man of respectability and position. To one who had some idea of the worth of a soul, it was pitiful to see what a tiny ripple this disappearance made on the surface of life.

A moment of startled questioning by those who lived in the immediate neighborhood; a few women with aprons thrown over their heads congregating in groups around the pump, or before the door of the bakery; a crowd of dirty children, stopping their play for a moment, and speaking lower;—then the tide of noisy, fighting, swearing life went on.

One was gone out from it. Whither? None knew, few cared; and there were such crowds and *crowds* left, how could he be missed?

One missed him,—an abused, insulted, downtrodden woman. One whom, years before, he had promised to love and cherish until death parted them, and had broken the vows almost as soon as taken, and never renewed them again. Yet that woman wept bitter tears over his absence; watched for him, listened nightly for his staggering footsteps; rose up from her heap of straw in the corner in the middle of the night, and set wide open the cellar door, and listened to the angry voices floating down to her from some drunken brawl further up the street, if, perchance, she might hear *his*; listened, and held her breath, and quivered all over with hope and fear: then crept back to her miserable bed, covered her head with the ragged quilt, and cried herself into a few hours of forgetfulness.

“She is crying herself to death about him!” Mart said. There was surprise mingled with awe in her voice.

She told it to Dirk, and the two stood thoughtfully for a moment looking out at the one window. They carefully avoided looking at each other. They did not understand. To them there was simply relief in the father's absence. They had no trace of love for him in their hearts. The word “father” meant nothing to them but misery. Still there was that in them which respected the mother's grief; they tried to shield her. Dirk, of his own thoughtfulness, brought home a bit of tea in a paper, and bought half a pint of milk at the corner bakery; and Mart took lessons of Sallie, and made a delicate slice of toast, and borrowed Sallie's one cup and saucer to serve the tea in. She was disappointed that the mother cried, and could hardly drink the tea. She was even almost vexed that the mother said with tears that “poor Jock always did like tea so *much*, and she had always thought that maybe if he could have had it hot and strong he would not have taken to the drink.”

Mart had no faith in this, no belief that anything in her father's past life could have kept him from the drink; but she held herself silent, and let the tears have their way. All the time she had in her heart one great solemn regret. There was one who would have helped her father; would and could have saved him, even from rum. What if she, his daughter, had known the Lord Jesus, and could have taken the miserable father to Him and had him transformed! Mart had no doubt about *His* power to do it. An unanswerable argument had been given her. No infidel need try to assail her now.

But the father! Why had everybody kept silence, and let him sink away?

Awful!

Why had not she known Christ? Why had she not listened to Sallie but a week before? Why had not Dirk learned the way and saved his father? An awful problem! Mart's life must henceforth be shadowed by it.

Meantime what was Mrs. Roberts to do for this new-born soul? How was she to help her, and, through her, to help her brother?

She, in her elegant home, sat down to study this problem.

Life at East Fifty-fifth Street was so far removed from life in the alley that she knew nothing about the missing father. Days passed, and, busy with many claims of society, she had made no movement toward helping the girl, and knew as yet no way to do it; yet she carried her on her heart. Monday evening came and went, and still she had been detained from any effort.

One afternoon her thoughts shaped themselves into action. She would go and see Mart. She would get Dirk to protect her in her journey down the alley; also, in accomplishing this, she would accomplish another thing. She would call on Dirk at his place of business. The chief of the office was a Christian man; yet she had reason to believe that he knew less about Dirk, and cared much less for him, than he did for his little dog, who sat in the window and barked at passers-by.

She had no difficulty in securing attention. Ladies were not often admitted, but a card bearing the name “Mrs. Evan Roberts” was sufficient passport among any of the business men of the city.

Mr. Stone was more than ready, he was eager to serve her. What could he do for the elegantly-dressed lady whose carriage waited at the door, while she came in person among the bales and boxes? Her business must be urgent.

It was. Could she speak with Mr. Colson just for a moment? She would not detain him long; but she wished to make an appointment with him for the next day.

“Mr. Colson!” The chief and his perplexed assistant looked at each other thoughtfully, and shook their heads. There was no such person connected with their establishment. She must have the wrong number.

No; she was positive.

“He told me only three days ago that he was in your employ. He is on the third floor, I believe.”

The gentlemen looked at each other again.

“Colson!” repeated Mr. Stone. “There is certainly a mistake. Briggs is in charge on the third floor front, and Dickson has the back rooms. No, Mrs. Roberts, we have no such name among our men, I am positive.”

But Mrs. Roberts gently held her ground. She was sure she was not mistaken, for she had talked with him about his work and the different men. He was in Mr. Briggs' department, she felt quite sure. He was not a foreman, she explained, but quite a young man; had been there but a few weeks, and Dr. Everett was the one who had interested himself in securing the place.

Light of some sort began to dawn on the perplexed faces of the gentlemen.

“Can she mean black Dirk, do you suppose?” questioned the elder, looking hard at his associate.

Then came the sweet voice of the visitor.

“Oh, no; he is not a colored gentleman. His name is Colson,—Mr. Derrick Colson.”

“That is the one,” said the gentleman, quickly. Should he laugh or be annoyed?

It took but a moment after that to summon “Mr. Derrick Colson.” Black he was, certainly, not only by reason of his naturally dark skin, but because of the grimy work, whatever it was, which fell to his lot. His big apron was soiled with ink and oil, and daubed with bits of dark color which seemed not to be either.

He came forward with his usual shambling gait, and an additional shade of sullenness apparent on his face, but it glowed a swarthy red when he recognized the lady.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Colson,” she said, and she held forth her delicately-gloved hand.

His own went forward to meet it; then drew suddenly back.

“It is not clean enough,” he said; “there's ink or something on it.”'

But the lavender kids were not withdrawn.

“Never mind the ink; a little honest soil never hurt anybody,” and the rough, dark hand was taken in her own.

Then occurred a few moments' chat; at least the lady chatted with easy familiarity. She referred to the “Social Parlors,” to the “Monday Evenings,” to Miss Dennis' “Musicale,” to half a dozen themes about which the bewildered gentlemen within hearing knew nothing.

Could it be that the low-voiced, gentle lady was trying to give *them* a lesson as well as to talk with Dirk? Finally she made an appointment for the next afternoon. Would his employer be so kind as to excuse him for an hour, if convenient? Certainly, it would be convenient to please Mrs. Evan Roberts.

Dirk was very much embarrassed. He blushed and stammered, and did not know how to answer any of the kindnesses; but there were two things during the interview which gave Mrs. Roberts more pleasure than you, perhaps, are able to understand.

One was, that at sight of her he had suddenly snatched off the paper cap which he wore, and the other, that having set it again on his head as he turned from her, he glanced back from the door, and, in answer to her bow and smile, lifted the ugly little cap with an air that was an exact imitation of young Ried, and yet so well done that you would not have thought of it as an imitation.

Mrs. Roberts could have clapped her hands; but she did not. Instead she said, sweetly:—

“I am very glad that Mr. Colson is in the employ of a Christian gentleman. He is greatly in need of help from all Christian sources, and I am sure there is that in him which will respond to judicious effort.”

Then she let the bewildered man attend her to her carriage, and went her way rejoicing.

But there were plans being laid for her at that moment of which she knew nothing.

To-morrow she would go and see the golden-haired girl. In a neatly-packed basket she had certain things, among them a bonnet and a sack that she knew would fit the hair and face, and she believed would give Mart pleasure. If only she could contrive a natural way to give them to her, and there could be planned ways of keeping them safe from the pawnbroker's grasp. All this time she knew nothing of the fact that the hand which had grasped for years to furnish the pawnbroker was stilled forever. It had not once occurred to Dirk to tell her. It is a solemn fact that in this greater excitement he had actually forgotten it! As for the "Christian employer," he did not know of it to tell. He had not so much as known whether black Dirk had a father or not. He was simply a street rough, whom Dr. Everett was trying experiments with; and because there was an unusual pressure on the office, and poor help was better than none, he was helping the experiment.

However, when Dirk went home from the office that night he remembered that the father was gone.

Mart met him at the door, a look of solemn determination on her face.

"Dirk," she said, "*she's* going; as sure as you live, she's going. She's been bad all the afternoon. Sallie says that Mark's doctor will come to see her,—she knows he will, and Mark shall go for him as soon as he comes home; but I don't mean to wait for no doctor. I want *her* to come. *She* knows the way, and I want mother to be told it right, so there won't be no mistake. You go for her, Dirk, right off straight. There ain't any time to lose, for I tell you now she's *going*. She's been failing all along, you know, and she has just cried herself down. Dirk, will you go for *her* as fast as you can?"

The confusion of pronouns might have bewildered you. They did not Dirk. "*Her*" meant to him exactly what it did to Mart. He could not think how it could possibly mean any other person. But this was astounding news about his mother! It was one thing to have a father disappear, whom he had simply feared, until he had learned to hate; it was quite another thing to talk about the going away of the only one who had ever tried to mend his clothes, and who had sat up nights to wash them when she could.

He strode past Mart into the wretched room, and looked at the bed in the corner.

The mother was asleep, but on her face was a strange change—a something that he had never seen there before, worn and sunken as it always was. It made him understand Mart's fears.

"I'll go," he said huskily, and rushed from the house.

"*Her*" carriage was just rolling down the avenue as his swift feet cleared the alley. He knew the horses. He was a little ahead of them; but it was not probable that the driver would stop for him.

"Won't you stop that carriage?" he said in breathless haste to a policeman at the corner; "I've got to speak to the lady that's in it."

"I'll be quite likely to, no doubt!" said the policeman, in quiet irony. "What rascality are you up to now, Dirk? *Can't* you be decent for a few days?"

But Dirk was trying to free himself from the detaining hand, and threw up one arm in a sort of despairing gesture to the coachman. Mr. Roberts caught the signal, recognized the face, and in another moment the horses stood restlessly by the curb-stone, and Dirk, his embarrassment gone, told his brief story rapidly.

"Father went off a spell ago, and never came back; and mother, she is sickly, and it set her crying; and she's *going*, Mart thinks, and I guess it's so; and Mart wants you to come and show her the way. She said you knew how, and you would come."

CHAPTER XXVIII. — "MAY SHE GO WITH ME?"

Of course she went. And, of course, now that the truth was known, much was done. Dr. Everett was summoned. The wretched bed, with its distressing rags, were turned out together, and a comfortable one took its place. Broths and teas and jellies and physical comfort of every kind were furnished, and the doctor did his best to battle with the disease that long years of want and misery had fastened upon their victim. It was all too late, of course. It was true, what Mr. Roberts sadly said, that half of the effort, expended years or even months before, might have saved the poor, tortured life; but now!

How awful those "too lates" are! Isn't it a wonder that we ever take the risk of having one ring in our ears forever? There was one thing over which some of these Christian workers shed tears of joy.

"*I* am too late," said Dr. Everett, "but my Master has as much power to-day as ever. He can save her."

And He did. The poor, tired woman, who years before had remembered an old story well enough to name her one daughter "Martha," in memory of the one who "loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," roused her dull heart at the mention of His name, and listened while the wonderful story was told her that He loved not only Martha and her sister, but her own poor, sinful, wrecked self; loved her enough to reach after her, and call and wait, and prepare for her a home in His glory.

Dear! Why has not some one come with the news before? Surely she would have listened during these long, sad years. Well, they made the way plain. Neither was it a difficult thing to do. The woman was weary and

travel-stained and afraid, and longed for nothing so much as a place of refuge. She knew that she was a sinner; she knew that she was, and had been for many a year, powerless to help herself. Why should she not hail with joy the story of a great and willing Helper?

“Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.” She opened her eyes with a gleam of eagerness to hear the words. “Weary?”' Yes, indeed! “Heavy laden?” Who more so? If the call was not for her, whom *could* it mean? What else? Why, what, but the glorious old story, “I will give you rest?” What wonder that she closed her eyes and smiled! What wonder that the first words after that were: “I'll come; show me how.” And He showed her how.

“Dirk,” the sister said, when the mother had gone the last and only restful journey of her life, “Dirk, *she* went to heaven; and I'm going. I've been wanting to tell you for more than a week, but I didn't know how. *He* asked me to, and I'm going. Now *you* must. 'Cause we never had a good time here, and she'll kind of expect it in heaven, and be looking out for you; she always looked out for you, Dirk.”

Then did Dirk lose his half-sullen self-control, and great tears rolled down his dark cheeks.

But the sister shed no tears. She had serious business to attend to. Dirk must go to heaven now without fail.

One day there was an unusual scene in the alley. It was no uncommon thing to see a coffin carried out from there, but on this day there was a hearse, and a minister in Dr. Everett's carriage, and Dirk and his sister, in neat apparel, came out together and were seated in Mr. Roberts' carriage; and all the boys of the Monday-evening Class walked arm in arm after the slow-moving carriages; and the children of the alley stopped their placing and their fighting, and the women stood silent in doorways, and took, most of them, their very first lesson in the proprieties of life.

“She's got a ride in a carriage at last, poor soul!” said one, thinking of the worn-out body in the coffin; and another said: “I wonder what poor old Jock would think of all this?”

But the scene made its impression, and left its lesson. I think the voices of some of them were lower during the rest of the day because of it.

What next? It was the question that filled Mrs. Roberts' thoughts. Something must be done for Dirk and Mart. That fearful alley was no place for human beings; certainly not for these two. But what to do with them was a question not easily answered.

Various plans were proposed. Sallie Calkins' two rooms were much better than the cellar in which the Colson family had lived; and there was a chance to rent a room next to Sallie's, with a closet opening from it for Dirk. How would it do to have them board with Sallie? The suggestion came first from Gracie Dennis, and sounded reasonable. Mrs. Roberts was almost ashamed to dislike it as much as she did. Sallie's neat rooms were *home* now. The father, for this length of time at least, held to his pledge; and son and daughter were radiant over him. He had gone to work, and already the two rooms were taking on an air of greater comfort because of the little things that he proudly brought home.

Sallie was doing her part wisely. The table was regularly laid now, with a white cloth and knives and forks; and two new cups and plates had been added to the dishes. Would it be wise to invade this home just at this juncture and introduce boarders? Mrs. Roberts did not believe that it would. It was not as though the father had an established character, and stood ready to shield his children; they were still acting the protective, and he had but too recently risen from the depths where Dirk and Mart had laughed and jeered at him. Besides, the rooms were located in that dreadful alley; and, do what she would, Mrs. Roberts could not feel that that dangerously-beautiful face could find a safe abiding-place in that alley. Some other way must be thought of.

Their immediate future was arranged through the intervention of a house agent; for even that dreary and desolate cellar had its agent, who was eager to secure his rent. He was unwise enough to undertake to interview Mrs. Roberts as she descended from her carriage, not long after it had followed Mart's mother to the grave.

He considered this effort of his a special stroke of business energy. He wanted to be patient with the poor, he said; there wasn't an agent in the city who waited for them oftener than he did; but business was business, and it stood to reason that he could not depend on a fellow like Dirk. It had been bad enough when the mother was there, but he couldn't think of such a thing as risking it now. What was he to understand? Did she mean to rent the room for them, and for how long? Because it was his duty to look out for the future.

What would be more natural than for Mrs. Roberts, with those two young things looking on, to say that of course she would be responsible for the rent as long as they lived in the room? Thus reasoned the house agent.

Instead of which, Mrs. Roberts turned toward Dirk, her face flushed over the hardness of a man who could stop a boy and girl on such business on their way from their mother's grave, and said:—

“If I were in your place, Mr. Colson, I should not rent these rooms at all. They are not suited to your sister's needs. I am sure you can do better.”

The agent was disgusted. “*Mr.* Colson,” indeed! The disreputable young scamp whom nobody trusted. He would show this silly woman a fact or two.

“Business is business” he repeated, doggedly. “Either they must take the room, and pay the rent in advance, or else they must hustle out this very night.” He had waited now three days after time for decency's sake, and more than that he couldn't and wouldn't do.

Dirk stood looking from one to the other; the red coming and going on his swarthy face. Here was responsibility! He had not thought of it before. The mother was not there to count out the hoarded rent with trembling fingers, and save the wretched home to them for another month. She would never be there again. He had nothing with which to pay rent; he had nowhere to move. Yet *she* had called him Mr. Colson, and

seemed to expect him to act for himself and Mart.

It was she who answered the agent, but she spoke to Dirk.

“Very well; I suppose you are quite as willing to leave here to-night as at any time? If I were you, I would leave immediately. Let your sister come home with me for the night, and until you have time to make other arrangements.”

Mr. Roberts had been summoned to a bank meeting, and had sent Ried to attend his wife. He came forward now, from the carriage where he had stood waiting, and laid a hand on Dirk's arm.

“And you come home with me to-night, Colson,” he said in a cordial tone, such as he might have used with any young friend; “then we shall have a chance to talk things over and make plans.”

“That is nice,” Mrs. Roberts said, quickly, rejoicing in her heart over Ried's promptness to act. “Then you can get away from this wretched place at once. Mr. Roberts will see to the removal of your goods, whatever you need, and the agent can call on him in the morning. That will be the simplest way to settle it all. May she go with me?”

A slight, caressing movement of a gloved hand on the girl's arm accompanied this question.

Mart was silent with bewilderment. When had Dirk ever before been asked what *she* might do, or might not do? At first she was half inclined to scorn the suggestion. Then, suddenly, it came to her with a sense of relief and protection: she was not alone; it was Dirk's business to think of and care for her. Would he do it?

As for Dirk, no wonder that his face was deeply flushed. New thoughts were struggling in his heart. *He* was to decide for Mart; he was the head of the home now. Mrs. Roberts waited anxiously. She longed exceedingly to rouse in the boy, who was already grown to the stature of a man, a sense of responsibility.

A moment more, and he had shaken himself free from the spell which seemed to bind him.

“We'll do as you say.” He spoke with the air of a man who had assumed his proper place and taken up his duties. “Mart, you go along with her, and I'll see about things to-morrow.”

And Mart, for the first time in her life, received and obeyed in silence a direction from her brother.

Possibly Mrs. Roberts may have been mistaken, but she thought that much had been accomplished that day.

Yet none of them realized whereunto this thing would grow.

Mrs. Roberts, when she ushered Mart that evening into the pink room again, and showed her how to manage the hot and cold water, and which bell to ring if she needed anything, and in every imaginable way treated her as a guest, whom it was pleasant to serve, had really no plans just then—no hobby to ride—but simply acted out the dictates of her heart. You will remember that her Christian life had been always unconventional. The very fact that during her early girlhood she had been painfully trammelled by what “they” would say or think, seemed to have had its influence over her later experiences. Since she had been made free, she would be free, indeed; that is, with the liberty with which Christ makes us free. What would please *Him* she resolved should be the one thought to which she would give careful attention. Now, it is perhaps worthy of mention, that this closely following disciple did not once stop to determine whether it would please Him to give such tender care to this stray child of His, or whether she would be considered doing not just the thing, in *His* eyes, if she entertained her in the pink room.

About what He could have her do next, she gave much thought. And it was not for days, or rather weeks, that she caught the possibility of His meaning that the pink room should really be the girl's own.

It was just this way. The weeks went by, and no plan for settling Mart comfortably elsewhere met Mrs. Roberts' approval. There was constantly some excellent reason why the one mentioned would not do.

Meantime they became, she and Gracie Dennis, more and more deeply interested in Mart. In her wardrobe first. “Wherever she lives she should have respectable clothing; thus much is easily settled.” So the matron decreed, and Gracie did not gainsay it. She became absorbed in preparing it. Such fascinating work! So many things were needed, and her skin was so delicate, and her eyes so blue, and Gracie's choice of shades and textures fitted her so precisely. Then, when dressed, simple though her toilet was, her remarkable beauty shone out so conspicuously as to alarm Mrs. Roberts whenever she thought of her in shop or store.

Several times during the weeks, she visited Sallie Calkins, and looked about her with a thoughtful air, and came away feeling that it would not do. There was Mark, growing into manhood, a good boy, hard-working, respectable, proud of his good, homely sister, and of his reformed father. The two rooms were taking on every sort of homely comfort that Sallie's skill, helped by Mrs. Roberts' suggestions, could devise. It was growing into a model little home in its way, but there was not a corner in it where Mart would fit.

Then, as the days passed, a subtle, fascinating change began to come over Mart. She slipped quietly into certain household duties. She showed marvellous skill with her needle; such skill, indeed, that Gracie Dennis said more than once: “I'll tell you, Flossy, what to do with her: put her in a good establishment, and let her learn the dressmaking trade. She could make her fortune in time.” And Mrs. Roberts smiled, and assented to the statement, but not to the proposition. There was no dressmaking establishment known to her where she was willing to place so young and pretty and ignorant a girl. But she was quite willing that Mart should learn the looping of dresses, and the fitting of sacks and collars and ruffles; and take many a stitch for her, as well as for Gracie. She was willing to have her do a dozen little nameless things, the ways of doing which she had caught up; until at last the touch of her fingers began to be felt about the rooms, and Mrs. Roberts began to notice that she should miss Mart when she went away. Still, from the first time she said this, the thought came afterward with a smile of satisfaction, and it was but a week afterward that she caught herself phrasing it, that she should miss her *if* she went away.

What about Dirk? Young Ried could have told you more of him during these days than anybody else. He still stayed at the boarding-house. Mrs. Saunders, the mistress of it, was one whom, if you had known her, you would feel sure could interest herself heartily in such as he. There was a bit of a room next to Ried's. To be sure, it had been used for a clothes-press, and it took the busy housekeeper half a day to plan how she could get along without it; but she planned, and offered it to Ried for his *protégé*.

“Just for the present, you know, until he sees what he can do, poor fellow,” she said, and Ried accepted the little room joyfully, and helped fit it up.

CHAPTER XXIX. — “WHAT IF I BELONGED?”

You think things are taking very rapid strides? Well, don't you know that there come periods when they do just that thing, or appear to? Why, even the buds on the trees teach us the lesson. How many springtimes have you gone to your bed feeling that the season was late, and the trees were bare, and the fruits would all be backward, and Nature was dawdling along in a very wearisome fashion; and awakened in the morning to find that there had in the night been a gentle rain, and a movement of mysterious power among the buds and the grasses, and that now, in the morning sunshine, the world had burst into bloom? Yet, did you really suppose, after all, that the *work* was done in one night?

There was progress of several sorts in the class at the South End. Even a casual observer could have seen a change in the boys that first Sunday after they had attended Dirk's mother to the grave. The dignity of that hour of sorrow was still upon them. Even the very reckless and world-hardened will offer a certain degree of respect to death. On ordinary occasions, the boys might have been merry at Dirk's expense, for they saw changes in him; but the memory of his mother's coffin kept them silent, and let his changed manner have its effect.

That Sunday was full of small events to Dirk; at least they are small enough when one puts them on paper, though I admit that they looked large to him. Several people interested themselves in his welfare.

“Poor fellow!” said Mrs. Saunders, “I suppose his mother tried to do for him. Just as likely as not she had a clean shirt for him of a Sunday morning.”'

You will perceive that Mrs. Saunders, though all her life a resident of a large city, was not very well-acquainted with the abject poor. In point of fact, Dirk Colson had had no extra clothing for his mother to make clean. But Mrs. Saunders, full of the motherly thought, yet finding no trace of a shirt in the bundle of rags that Dirk had brought with him, went down one day into the depths of an old trunk, and brought to light and mended and washed and ironed a shirt that had long been laid aside.

It lay in its purity on a chair at the foot of Dirk's bed on Sabbath morning. He lay still and looked at it for a while, then arose and gave such careful attention to the soap and water as was new to him, and arrayed himself in the clean linen.

His clothes were whole and clean. Mr. Roberts had seen to it that he went respectably dressed to his mother's funeral.

A tap at his door a little later, and young Ried appeared, shoe-brush and blacking-box in hand.

“Want to borrow?” he said, in the careless tone of one who might have supposed that the blacking of his boots was an every-day matter to this boy. “I always keep my own; it is cheaper than to depend on the street boys.”

Dirk said nothing at all, but reached forth his hand, and took the offered tools, and the hint which came with them. When he went down to breakfast his boots shone, and his fresh paper collar was neatly arranged; altogether he was not the boy to whom I first introduced you. I am not sure that Policeman Duffer would have recognized him. A collar and a necktie make a great difference in some people's personal appearance. Dirk wondered a little as to where the box of paper collars came from. The necktie he had just found lying in the bottom of the box. It was the mate of the one young Ried wore, but that told nothing, for both were simple and plain, and could be bought by the dozens in any furnishing store.

It is small wonder that the boys in the class looked at him. Nimble Dick wore at first a roguish air, but a sudden memory of Dirk's face when he turned away from his mother's grave came in time. Open graves are not easy things to forget.

Dirk went to the church that day; went with young Ried by invitation, and sat in the pew behind Mr. Roberts.

By the way, the seat which he occupied was another of Mr. Roberts' peculiarities. Three seats were rented by him in a central part of the large church. One of these seats he and his wife regularly occupied. The others were almost as regularly occupied by the clerks from the store who chose to make that their church home. Six sittings to a pew. When a young man chose, Mr. Roberts was ready to enter into a business engagement with him, whereby the sitting should be considered his own; Mr. Roberts considering it to be no part of any one's concern that the sum for which he thus sub-let the sittings was not a tenth of what the first rental cost. It was in this way that Mr. Ried owned sittings in the pew just back of that occupied by Mr. Roberts; and brought with him constantly one and another young man. Today the young man was Dirk Colson.

It was all a strange world to him. He had wandered into the gallery of the Mission Chapel, and looked down from his perch on the crowd of worshippers; but this morning he was in the very centre of things, as if he were one of them. Perhaps it is not strange that the startled inquiry came to his heart: What if I belonged? Where did he belong now? He had lost his place; he must make another. What if it should be in this neighborhood, among these surroundings? Such thoughts did not take actual shape to him, so that he could have put them into words; they merely hovered in his atmosphere. Mrs. Roberts sat so that he could look at her, which thing he liked to do. It had long since been settled in his mind that he had one friend, and that one was Mrs. Roberts. He admired Gracie Dennis, too, with a different sort of admiration from that which he gave to the matron. She might be all very well; and she was a splendid reader; and he knew that he could imitate

her on certain sentences, at least. And she had taught him to use the type-writer—an accomplishment which he meant to perfect himself in as soon as he had a chance. In fact, his ambition reached higher than that: one of these days he meant to make one of his own with certain improvements! Who shall say that Dirk was not growing?

On this particular day there sat beside Mrs. Roberts a lady,—a stranger. He could not see her face, but for some reason, which he did not understand, Dirk liked to look at her. She suggested something to him that seemed like a familiar dream. He thought much about her, and resolved to see if in her face she looked like any one he ever saw. As she turned at the close of the service he was looking at her steadily. Lo! it was Mart.

Now the possibility had not once suggested itself to his mind. If you think this doubtful, you merely show that you know nothing about the transforming effect of a becoming dress, no matter how simple it may be. Remember, Dirk had never but twice seen his sister in a bonnet. The first time it was Sallie's, and though the effect was sufficiently startling, yet Sallie's bonnet did not fit her face, as this creation of Gracie Dennis' fingers did. The second time the bonnet had been a hideous black one, proffered by an old woman who lived in the story above them, and whose thoughtfulness Mrs. Roberts would not mar by making any mention of the neat one which she had brought in a box that day. The black bonnet had been like a mask, hiding Mart's beauty.

The bonnet that she wore now was not of that character. It told a wonderful story to Dirk's astonished gaze. Now, indeed, the likeness was plain; without doubt, the girl whose face lighted with a curious smile at sight of him, bore a striking likeness to the woman who had smiled at him whenever she met him!

A curious effect this had on Dirk. There was that in his sister which made it possible for her to be something like the woman who had won his heart; and that sister was in his care: she had said so; he must work for her, and watch over her!

I suppose that Sabbath was really the beginning of the surface changes in Mrs. Roberts' class. Not the beginning to the teacher, but to those people who only have eyes for strongly marked things.

I know that it was but a few weeks afterward that Mrs. Roberts came home with such an unusual light in her eyes, and with her face so full of brightness, that her husband said, inquiringly:—

“What is it, Flossy?”

She turned to him, eagerly, ready to laugh.

“It is what you will understand, but a great many people wouldn't. It is so nice that you understand things! I feel just like saying, 'Thank the Lord.'”

“Do you mean to convey the idea that only a very few favored people feel like that? I don't know of a person who has not great occasion. What is your special one?”

“Evan, the last boy had his boots blacked, and a fresh paper collar on!”

Mr. Roberts threw back his head and laughed,—a genial, hearty laugh. His wife looked on, smiling. There is a great deal of character in a laugh, remember; you would have known that this was a sympathetic one.

Mr. Roberts was entirely capable of realizing what this said to his wife about the future of her boys. It was becoming certain that their self-respect was awakened.

A few days thereafter occurred another of those little things which mark some characters.

Dirk, at Mrs. Saunders' breakfast-table on Sabbath morning, heard talk that on Monday he recalled. By the way, I should have told you of one other way in which the Sabbath became a marked day to him. He slept in the little room which opened from Ried's, but his meals were picked up at a restaurant, as occasion offered,—a much nicer and surer method of living than he had ever known before. Even the commonest restaurant had great respectability to him. Yet you will remember that he had by this time taken several suppers in Mrs. Roberts' dining-room. He knew that there was a difference in things; in fact, his experience now stretched over infinite differences; but the first time he sat down to Mrs. Saunders' breakfast-table, on a Sabbath morning, he discovered another grade: this by no means belonged to the restaurant class? The Sunday breakfasts and dinners were some of Mrs. Saunders' quiet ways of helping along the work of the Christian world. Many a young man appeared at her table as the guest of Ried or of Dr. Everett, or of some other of the boarders, who was unaware that he owed the pleasant experience to the landlady.

Well, Dirk at the Sabbath-table heard talk of one General Burton, famous as a soldier, a scholar, and an orator. General Burton was in the city, the guest of a prominent man; he was to speak on the following evening in one of the great halls, and much eager talk was had concerning him; great desire was expressed to hear him, to get a glimpse of him. Dirk listened in silence, but had his own thoughts about what it must be to have people talking about one, wanting to get a glimpse of one, and next, what it must be to be intimate with such people. Did Mrs. Roberts know the great man? he wondered. And then Dirk smiled as he thought how queer it was that he should know Mrs. Roberts; that he might, in fact, be called intimately acquainted with her!

Remembering this reverie of his, you will better understand how he felt on Monday morning, as he made his way in haste down a quiet part of one of the up-town streets, intent on an errand that required promptness, to hear his name called by Mrs. Roberts.

“Good morning!” she said. “Are you in too great haste to recognize your friends? I want to introduce you to a friend of mine. General Burton, Mr. Colson. General, this is one of my young men, of whom I told you.”

Whereupon the famous general, hero of many battles, held out his honored hand, and took Dirk's in a cordial grasp. I don't suppose I could explain to you what an effect this action had on a boy like Dirk.

There is this comfort: you may be a student of human nature, and therefore may understand it all without explanation.

This is only one of many so-called trifles which occurred during the weeks, to make their indelible impress on the characters of the boys.

Of course, the Monday Evenings prospered. Reading-lessons and writing-lessons, and, as time passed, lessons of all sorts made good progress.

Neatly-blackened boots, carefully-arranged hair, and fresh collars became the rule instead of the exception.

Other avenues for improvement opened. It became noised abroad in Christian circles that great transformations were being worked among a certain set of hard young fellows who had hitherto been best known to the police. Mr. Roberts was interviewed by one and another, and one outgrowth of the talks was that tickets for a course of expensive and valuable and attractive lectures on popular subjects were placed in large numbers in Mr. Roberts' hands for him to use at discretion. Moreover, seats were rented in the church towards which most of the boys gravitated—the one connected with their Mission; seats re-rented after Mr. Roberts' plan, so that as often as there appeared a young man who cared to have a spot in the church which belonged to him, it could be had for a very small sum; in fact, as pews rented in that church, a ridiculously small sum.

These are only hints of the channels which time and patience and thought opened for these young men, on whom, but a short time before, Satan believed himself to have so firm a grip.

One feature of the “Monday Evenings” had, in the course of time, to be changed. The young teacher of elocution went home.

“I want to go,” she said at last, in answer to her hostess' pleading. “I think it quite likely that papa would let me stay and attend school here; but I am in haste to get home. You need not look sober, Flossy. I have had a happier time than I have ever had in my life before; and I have found here a sort of happiness that will last. It almost breaks my heart to think of leaving those boys,—especially my dear Dick Bolton; but really, I need to go home and undo certain things that I left badly done. You don't half know me, Flossy Shipley. When I came here I was a regular goose. If you had known what a simpleton I was, and how hateful I had been about some things at home, you would never have invited me.

“Among other things that were hateful about me, I was a real horror to my mother. I thought I had reason to distrust and dislike her; when the truth is that I have cause to go down on my knees and thank her for keeping me from some things. I'm in a real hurry to get home, and show that young mother of mine what a perfectly angelic daughter I can be.”

And Mrs. Roberts smiled and kept her own counsel; and this was all that she was supposed to know about her young guest. She never knew the whole story about Professor Ellis; though there was a girl, Hester Mason by name, in Dr. Everett's Sabbath-school, who could have told her a good deal about him, and about Gracie Dennis' helping to break the net that Satan had woven for her unwary feet. The fact is, there is a great deal concerning all these people—Hester Mason and Dr. Everett and Joy Saunders and Joy Saunders' mother—which I should have liked to tell you if I could have found room. You may read of them any time, however, if you choose, in a book called “An Endless Chain.” Of course, the story of their lives does not end even *there*, because the chain is, as I said, *endless*; but there are many of the links presented to view.

So Grace Dennis went home. And neither then, nor afterward, did Mrs. Roberts hear in detail the story of Professor Ellis. What matter? She had, however, a short added chapter. It came in a letter from Mrs. Marion Dennis not long after Gracie's return. It read thus.—

Oh, Flossy Shipley Roberts! blessed little scheming saint that you are! What did you do? How did you do it! Ah! I know more about it than those sentences would indicate. The dear Lord did it, working through you, His servant. He has called our Gracie to higher ground, filled her heart with that which has made insignificant things take their true place, and wrong things show for what they are.

You know, of course, that it is all right about Professor Ellis;—or no! I fear it is all wrong about him, but right with our Gracie. I hear that he has permanently located in your city. Perhaps your Christian charity can reach him. He sent Gracie a letter, trying to explain certain affairs about that Mason girl, with which I presume you are familiar. She showed me the letter and her answer. He will not write her another!

“*I* don't know any Mason girl,” said Mrs. Roberts to her husband, “but it doesn't matter. I don't want to know the story if there is nothing to be done through it. There are stories enough that one *must* know.”

CHAPTER XXX. — “IT IS NO MADE-UP AFFAIR”

It was Monday evening, and there was company at Mr. Roberts' home; not the usual Monday evening gathering, but quite a large party of well-dressed men and women, many of them young, yet some were middle-aged. The pretty room opposite the conservatory was thrown open, and aglow with lights and flowers; and groups were continually passing in and out, admiring the paintings and the flowers, and the type-writers of different patterns, and the books and magazines, of which there were many. But interest was not confined to this room. The parlors were thrown open and the music-room beyond; even the cosy little library was public property for this one evening. The company was large, and their tastes were varied; so no pains had been spared to give them variety.

You are acquainted with quite a number of the guests; yet I am by no means sure that you would recognize them all. Even in so short a period of time as three years, great changes may be elicited!

For instance, do you know the young man in unnoticeable, and therefore appropriate, evening dress, who is doing duty at the piano, watching with practiced eye the course of the player, and turning the leaf with skilful hand at just the right moment? It is a somewhat embarrassing position; but his manner leads you to suppose that he has been accustomed to it all his life, and that he reads music well. In the latter belief you are correct;

but as to being accustomed to it—three years ago Nimble Dick could have told you a different story!

You can't believe that it is he? I do not wonder. The change is certainly a great one; but he does not feel it. To tell you the truth, he almost forgets, when he becomes absorbed in his work, that this sort of society was not always open to him. Three years means a long time to the young; and Richard Bolton has so long been accustomed to the freedom of Mrs. Roberts' parlors, and to the sort of people whom one finds there, that none of the refinements of polite life are strange to him; and as to turning music, has he not done it for his hostess numberless times?

If your eyes are now opened, it is possible that you may be trying to spy out other young men. The rooms are full of them, elegantly-dressed, fashionable young men; but a few are noticeable by the air which they have of being in a sense responsible for the comfort of the others. They are on the alert; they are taking care that no young guest shall appear for a moment to be forgotten or neglected. They appear to be entirely familiar with the house and all its appointments. They can be appealed to for a glass of water or an ice, or to know what special scene this landscape hanging over the mantel represents, or whose bust this is in the niche at the left, or in what portion of the library a certain book will be found, or from what part of the foreign world that strangely-shaped shell came, and they are all equally at home. In short, it is like having a dozen or twenty young hosts to look after your comfort and pleasure. In point of fact, there are seventeen of them. The original seven has thus increased. Two months ago there were twenty, but one has secured an appointment as telegraph operator in a distant city, and as Stephen Crowley occupies a similar position in one of the offices in this city, some very interesting conversations are held, and many important items connected with the “Monday Evenings” and the South End School and the “Library Association,” etc., are transmitted when the lines are not otherwise employed. Young Haskell, too, has gone with one of the partners from the store where he was first employed, to set up a branch store in a not distant town; and his old Sabbath-school teacher has already received letters from him, saying that they have started a branch Sunday-school in the south part of the town, and that he has picked seven little wretches out of the streets, from eight to twelve years of age, and gone to work. “And, dear Mrs. Roberts, I wish you would pray for me, that I may be able to bring every one of them to Christ.”

So the letter ran; and that tells volumes to the initiated about young Haskell.

But although the changes among these young men have been great almost to bewilderment, only one of the number has been promoted to a dazzling height. The others are without exception earning good, honest livings for themselves; securing good, substantial educations through the evening classes which have grown out of that first effort; bidding fair to become leading and honored citizens when they actually take their places as men. But Mark Calkins, faithful, plodding, good-hearted, patient Mark, has surpassed them all! The truth is “that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart,” what sort of magnificence surrounds him now. He has gone to court. The chief Ruler of the realm has sent for Mark to be always in his immediate presence in the palace; and with what joy he went I cannot tell you. Nor how often they speak of him, and try to let their hearts conceive of the glory which surrounds him, and dwell on the day when they will be called, one after another, to share the same glory; for this is the ambition of more than half of them.

Now, in that sentence is unveiled the most curious part of my curious story; and that it is curious, I frankly admit. It is no made-up affair. I am not responsible for the strangeness of it. You are to remember that “truth is stranger than fiction,” and then to understand that I am telling you the truth. It is, then, a fact, that these young men have each received conditional appointments to serve in the palace, high in power and splendor and dignity. The conditions are that they are to be willing to be guided in all things by the will of their King, whom they each admit to be wise above all wisdom, and to be kind above all their conceptions of kindness. It is true that nine of the number have accepted their appointments, donned their uniform, assumed their positions as He has directed, and are waiting for the summons to appear in person at court. It is also true that the others are still in a state of indecision; they do not know whether to accept the appointment or not. It is true that they feel themselves honored; that they believe this to be the only path of honorable and safe promotion. It is true that they have full faith in those who will tell with joy, that, having enlisted, they find the service even in this ante-room sweet, and the rewards great. It is true that they severally visited Mark, just as the door was opening to admit him to the palace, and heard him speak of the glimpses of its glory, and heard that his last words before he went away were, “Oh, mine eyes see the King in his beauty!” and that his voice was jubilant as that of a conqueror, and his face radiant as with a reflection of unseen glory; and yet they hesitate, and dally with the call, and mean, some time, to have such an inheritance deeded to them, but not now! Remember, I am not responsible for this. Were I writing fiction I should hesitate to set down such idiotic folly, expecting you to call it unnatural or absurdly overdrawn; but I do solemnly declare to you that this is fact. Account for the folly of their behavior as best you can.

Well, Sallie and her father are left behind. But, mind you, they are not among the doubtful ones. They both as much expect to serve at court as they expect to live through all eternity. But while they wait they are busy. They have moved from the alley; the surroundings were not such as they liked. Did you notice that bit of a house landing modestly back from the road, at the further corner of those ample grounds that surround the South End Church? It is the sexton's house, and that church, and those Sunday-school rooms, and those grounds, and everything pertaining to them, are under his care. The father is the sexton, it is true, and attends the furnace and rings the bell; but it is Sallie's care that keeps seat and desk and window so beautifully free from dust or stain. Oh, they live busy lives, and happy ones. Sallie trusted not in vain in her father's promise that night, when he put his weak will into the pledge; but you are to understand that it was but a few days thereafter when he planted his weak and wavering feet on the Rock of Ages. Then did Satan angle for him in vain.

So, on this Monday evening, there were but seventeen at the gathering. I hesitate over what to name the gathering. I would call it a party, but that in many respects it was so totally different from anything with which you are probably acquainted by that name.

The young man who stands by the door of the conservatory, eagerly describing to Miss Henderson a rare and curious flower, which has been sent to Mrs. Roberts from California, is “black Dirk.” Really, I hope you

are sufficiently astonished; for he looks so utterly unlike the scamp who used to be the special torment of the South End Mission that I should be disappointed if you were not impressed by it. “Mr. Colson” almost everybody calls him now. The name has long since lost its strangeness. He is in the employ of the great firm of Bostwick, Smythe, Roberts & Co., and although Mr. Roberts has never found it convenient to do so before, there were reasons why he thought it would be well to have a clerk within call; so Mr. Colson boards with what was the junior partner of the firm. He is so no more, by the way, for Mr. Ried has been received as a member, and is decidedly a junior partner. Probably Mr. Roberts could tell you, if he chose, why one so young, and without capital, had been elected to partnership; but, as a rule, he keeps his own counsel, only remarking that the young man developed remarkable business faculties which were patent to the whole firm. To his wife he said:—

“I tell you, Flossy, I believe a consecrated life will be honored by the Lord, in whatever channel he gives it talents to develop. 'Whatsoever he doth shall prosper.' That young man is going to have a career in business. I shouldn't be surprised if the Master meant him to show the world how a Christian can use money to his glory.”

It is early yet to prophesy what Mr. Colson will do. Doubtless he will be a merchant; certainly he will be a Christian; possibly he will be an orator, of whom the world will yet hear,—a temperance orator, for instance. I know you would like to hear him read a poem. He is not confined to Will Carleton's style now, though he still reads with power some of those inimitable delineations of life; but Gracie Dennis offers no more criticisms when he reads. In fact, I have heard her defer to him, when a question arose, as one who had probably studied the passage, and caught its best. I am willing to confess that my poor black Dirk was a bit of a genius. The thought I desire you to catch is that so many of those poor fellows, who of necessity live by their wits in the city slums, are diamonds which could be fitted to shine. You take a diamond and throw it down in the dirt and filth, and put your foot on it and grind it in, and leave it there, sinking and soiling, day after day, year after year, and when somebody comes along and picks it out, how much will it gleam for him at first? Yet the diamond is there.

“Thou shalt be a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.” Mrs. Roberts had been at work hunting diamonds for His diadem.

As Mr. Colson stood there chatting freely with Miss Henderson, there was nothing about the association that looked incongruous, neither did it occur to any. There was not a trace of embarrassment about this boy from the slums; he had forgotten the slums, and stood talking with one of the aristocrats of the city.

How came she to talk with him, to allow herself to be entertained by him? Let me tell you: thereby hangs a tale. Some time before this evening—in fact, nearly two years before—Mrs. Roberts had come to a puzzle, and stood and looked at it doubtfully. Then she presented it to the others:—

“They are growing easy in their manners with me, learning to be gentlemanly without embarrassment, and thoughtful over little things without being ashamed of it; but I am afraid that with other ladies they would be sadly frightened and awkward. When Mrs. Delaney came in this evening I could but notice how utterly silent Mr. Colton became; he had been talking well before. It seems as though there was a great gulf between them and social advancement. How can we bridge it?”

Then young Ried ventured his thought:—“My sister Ester had a class in the Center Street Sabbath-school—nice little girls, who wore pretty dresses, and had their hair curled, and came from the best families. After she was taken sick, she told me one of her regrets was that she had not stayed well long enough to try a plan which she had. She meant to take a class of rough little boys in the mission-school, and she meant to ask the mothers of the little girls to let them come, once a month, and play with the little boys from the streets—she to play with them, and watch over them every moment; but to try to interest the girls in teaching the boys gentleness and good manners. I don't know how it would have worked. Ester was never well enough to undertake it; nor could she seem to enlist any one else in such service. It has grave objections, I suppose; but I have always thought that I should like to see something of the kind carefully tried.”

Mrs. Roberts, before this little story was half-concluded, had turned those eager eyes of hers on the speaker—eyes that always had a peculiar light in them whenever her soul took in a new suggestion.

“Thank you,” she said. “I see, oh! a great many things. I ought to have called in that dear sister Ester to help on this phase of the question before. It has always seemed to me as though we were doing her work.”

CHAPTER XXXI. — “THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM”

That was the beginning of a new effort. There were certain young ladies becoming well-known to Mrs. Roberts, by reason of a similarity of tastes which drew them to her.

She sat down one day and wrote out their names with great care on her tablets.

Miss Henderson's name headed the list. She was one of the aristocrats. I use the word in its highest sense. The accidents of wealth and position were hers; at least, that is the way we talk, though I suppose we all believe that the Lord is the giver of both, and will require an account of the same at our hands.

If this be so, Miss Henderson will be more ready than some with her rendering; for she is of royal blood, and guards well the honor of the Christian name she bears.

Without hesitation, Miss Henderson headed the list. The others were chosen more slowly; ten of them,

picked soldiers, to do special duty “in His name.”

It required much explanation, much care to plan wisely.

But the girls caught at the idea.

In the course of weeks they formed a band, with Miss Henderson for president. Ostensibly they were a literary society; really they were diamond polishers.

They met one evening by invitation, with Mrs. Roberts, and made the acquaintance of the “Monday Club.” They sang for them, read for them, heard them read; chatted with them on the various topics of the hour, the last lecture of the course, which all had attended; a certain book carefully read and criticised by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts and Dr. Everett in the Monday Club,—not so carefully read by the young ladies; therefore, it came to pass that they were somewhat worsted in an argument concerning it, which was bad neither for the young ladies nor the Monday Club.

Finally, they were taken out to supper by these young men, who had so far come under Mrs. Robert's' influence that they were willing to endure torture for the sake of pleasing her.

It is a long story. I could write another book about it just as well as not.

The main difficulty would be that the critics would pronounce the story overdrawn. They always do when one revels in facts. It is only when an author keeps within the range of sober fiction that he may feel comparatively safe from this charge.

These young ladies represented other parlors and other dining-rooms. They arranged for little graceful entertainments, to which the Monday Club was invited. Gradually others were invited too—good, solid men, and wise-hearted, motherly women. The invitations were select, the “polishers” were chosen with care; but it was surprising to these workers to find how large the Christian world is, and how many stood ready to help if they were shown love.

“It is one of the best suggestions that that dear Ester has given us.” This Mrs. Roberts said one evening when the Young Ladies' Band and the Monday Club combined their forces and gave an entertainment to some of the best people on the avenue.

I have given you hints of how they did it. They were every one Christians, these young ladies; none others were chosen. They worked with a single aim in view—His glory. They took no step that was not paved with prayer. Do you need to be told that they succeeded?

This was one of the reasons why Mr. Colson chatted with Miss Henderson with perfect freedom, and why his bow was graceful and easy when she introduced him to her friend Miss Fanshawe, of Philadelphia. He was accustomed to being introduced to her friends.

I'm sure I hope you wish I would tell you somewhat of Mart Colson. If you are not deeply interested in her I am disappointed in you. She has been such an object of interest to me since that time when I caught a glimpse of her once through the cellar-window, with a gleam of sunset making her hair into gold.

It is a summer evening of which I tell you, and she is all in white—except her eyes; nothing can be bluer than they are to-night,—and except the flowers about her. She is always among the flowers.

I hesitate, after all, to tell you about Mart. Hers is one of those stories hard to tell. Besides, her friend and patron has suffered much criticism because of her, and though Mrs. Roberts does not care in the least, I find that I am sensitive.

“Has she really kept that Colson girl with her all these years?” Yes, she has. I speak it meekly, but she has! “And never had her learn a trade, or work in a factory, or learn to support herself in any way?” She has never sent her anywhere to learn a trade or to work in a factory or to stand behind a counter. It is too true.

No, I was almost sure you did not approve of it. But, for all that, I don't mean to argue Mrs. Roberts' cause. “To her own Master she standeth or falleth.”

Not but what Mrs. Roberts has argued, on occasion,—with Gracie Dennis, for instance, who paid her a few weeks' visit, less than three months after she first went home.

“Flossy,” she would say, “what are you going to do—with the girl? Do you really mean to keep her here?”

“She has no mother, my child, nor father; and her brother is not able to care for her yet. Where would you have me send her?”

“Why, Flossy, there are places.”

“Yes, my dear, I know it, and this is one of them.”

“Well, but she ought to be learning things. How is she going to support herself?”

“She is studying arithmetic with me, you know, and writing and reading with the dining-room girls; and I am teaching her music, and Mr. Roberts proposes to have her join the history class as soon as she is sufficiently advanced in the more common studies.”

“But, Flossy Shipley, that is great nonsense! You know what I mean. You cannot turn the world upside down in that fashion, or make an orphan asylum of your house or a charity school.”

“My dear, do you really think the house is in danger? Does it look like an orphan asylum or feel like a charity school?”

Then would Gracie Dennis laugh, but look a trifle vexed, nevertheless, and mutter that people couldn't do things that way in this world.

Then would Flossy be ready with her gentle drops of oil to soothe the ruffles.

“Gracie, dear, I am not trying to reform the world. There are a great many girls left destitute I know, and I will do at wholesale all I can for them; but this one is peculiar. You have admitted that it was unusual to see such dangerous beauty, and she is unusual in her mental development. She could be fierce and wicked; she is ignorant and bitter about many things; I am afraid for her. I have not been able to think of a place where the Lord Jesus would have me take her. I must see to it that *He* is pleased, you know, at all hazards. If He does not mean us to keep her in the shelter of our home for the present, we do not know what He means.

“We cannot 'mother' the whole race: He has not even suggested it to our hearts. He has simply said, 'Here, take this one; there is room for her; keep her until I plainly tell you that her place is elsewhere.' Gracie, would you have me tell Him we cannot?”

By this time Gracie would be humble and sweet.

“It is very good of you,” she would say, meekly, “and I was not thinking of such a thing as finding fault. I was only wondering whether—whether—well, you know—whether such a life as she is leading in your house would not unfit her for her proper sphere?”

But a sentence like that was always liable to put little Mrs. Roberts on all the dignity she possessed. Her husband had ideas on that subject, and had imbued her with them. Her voice could even sound almost haughty as she said:—

“As to that, Gracie, we must remember that the 'sphere' of an American woman is the one that she can fill acceptably in God's sight. He may call her to the highest; I don't know. Since she is the daughter of a King, there may be no spot on His footstool too high for His intentions concerning her.”

There was outside criticism, of course. Indeed, Mrs. Roberts was sufficiently peculiar in many respects to call for much criticism from the world. They talked much about “that girl” she had picked up. Gradually they said “that Colson girl”; then one day some daughter asked, “Is she really a sister of that handsome Mr. Colson in the store?” And by-and-by there were some who spoke of her as “Mattie Colson.” That was the name which Mrs. Roberts always called her. It began gradually to be known also that “Mattie Colson” knew a great deal which was worth knowing. Three years of companionship with a lady like Mrs. Roberts, and such as she gathers about her, can do much for a girl who wishes much done for her.

As to “earning her living,” I am not sure but she was learning to do it in several ways. Mrs. Roberts struggled against all false ideas of life, therefore taught her none.

She was not the cook, but she could, and had on occasion, served up a most enjoyable breakfast.

She was not the second-girl, yet her fingers were undeniably skilful in the arrangement of rooms and tables. She was not the sewing-girl, yet constant were the calls on fingers that had become wise in these directions. She was by no means the nurse, yet there was a little golden-haired “Flossy” in the sunny room upstairs whose devoted slave she was, and whose mother felt that Mattie's loving, watchful care over her darling was only second to her own, and was so to be relied upon, by day and night, as to repay tenfold whatever she might have done for the girl.

In fact, it would perhaps be difficult to define “Mart” Colon's position in the house. Yet she was, as I said, becoming known among the young ladies outside as “Mattie Colson, that handsome young Colson's sister; as pretty as a doll, and a *protégé* of that lovely Mrs. Roberts, you know.” As for the Young Ladies' Band,—I do not include them when I talk of the girls “outside,”—what they had done for Mattie Colson she could not have told you though she tried, her eyes shining with tears.

The days had come wherein the very matrons who had said that it was a strange thing for Mrs. Roberts to take a girl from the slums into her family—that it was “tempting Providence to attempt such violent wrenches”—now said one to another, that “it must be a great relief to Mrs. Roberts to have that Mattie Colson always at her elbow to see that everything about the home was just as it should be;” and they added, with a sigh, that “some people were very fortunate.”

Now, dear critic, you stand all ready to say that this is a very nice *paper* story, but that in actual life attempts at doing good do not result so smoothly; that to be “natural,” Mrs. Roberts ought, at least, to have tried in vain to reclaim half of her boys.

It is true, I have said nothing to you about two or three whom she has not as yet reached, though she is still trying. My story was not of them, but of the twenty whom she *did* reach. Concerning your verdict, there are two things that I want to say: First, go into the work, and give the time and patience and faith and prayer that Mrs. Roberts and her fellow-workers gave, before you decide that it is vain.

And secondly, will you kindly remember that, whether this be natural or not, it is true?

I do not think I have told you the immediate occasion of this particular gathering. It was, in fact, a reception given to Mrs. Ried. It is not likely that I need tell you at this late day that her name was *Gracie Dennis* Ried. I could have told you much about it, had I been writing a story of that sort.

In fact, there is a chance for considerable romancing. There are matters of interest that I might tell you, about “Mr. Colson” himself, young as he is; and about Mattie, who wears to-night a rose that she did not pick from the conservatory; but I don't mean to tell it.

I have just one other bit of history to give you. They stood together for a moment—the young bridegroom and the lady with whom he had faithfully worked ever since that rainy afternoon in which he had confided his gloom to her.

Both were looking at the two young men who stood near the piano, waiting to join in the chorus. Both had known these young men as “Nimble Dick” and “Black Dirk.”

Still another of the original seven stood in the immediate vicinity. The glances of the two workers took them all in; then they looked at each other, and smiled meaningly.

“I have been thinking of that first Sunday afternoon,” said Mrs. Roberts. “I asked them to pick up my handkerchief, which had dropped, and 'Nimble Dick' said, 'Pick it up yourself, mum! you're as able to as we be!' I wonder if they would remember it? What if I should tell them!”

As she spoke the bit of cambric in her hand designedly dropped almost at the feet of Dirk Colson. He stooped for it instantly, but “Nimble Dick” was too quick for him, and presented it to the owner with a graceful bow, and a slightly triumphant smile.

But the chorus was commencing, and the bass and tenor were at once absorbed in their work; so Mr. Ried and Mrs. Roberts had the memorial laugh all to themselves. None but they understood what the white handkerchief said.

Despite the laughter there was a suspicious mist in Mr. Ried's eyes.

“How far is mirth removed from tears?” he asked his hostess. And then: “Do you know, when I look at these young men, moving about your rooms at their ease, really ornaments to society, and think of the places in the world that they will be likely to fill, and think of what they were when you first saw them, the overwhelming contrast brings the tears!”

Said Mrs. Roberts:—

“I will tell you something that will do your heart good.

“Did you know that our young lady helpers had reorganized in larger force, and with certain fixed lines of work, which they feel certain they can do?

“The effort has passed out of the realm of mere experiment.

“They have chosen a name. They are henceforth to be known as THE ESTER RIED BAND.

“They came to me for a motto to hang in their rooms, below the name; and I gave them this:—

“'And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me. Write. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors: and their works do follow them.'”

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