

THE BATTLE

STELLA HAMBLÉN TAPPMAYER

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BY

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TO
EVERY THINKING YOUNG PERSON
OF TODAY WHO IS TEMPTED TO
ACCEPT ANY OF THE MATERIAL-
IST "BELIEFS" TO THE EXCLUSION
OF BIBLICAL TRUTHS, I DEDICATE
THIS LITTLE BOOK.
THE AUTHOR.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

"Often, after having read a story that I especially liked, I have found myself wondering: "What inspired the author to write that book? Is it in some vital way connected with the author's own experiences?" And if I could from some source glean some facts which connected the author's own life up with the facts contained in the story . . . well, somehow that book held special added attraction. And in this, I believe, I'm not unlike any other reader. So for this reason, I would like to lift the veil and give to you, my readers, a few very personal experiences which caused me to undertake the writing of **THE BATTLE**.

For ten years I taught in the public schools of the Mid-west. This was the work I followed for a livelihood; but the work that held me, gripped me and lifted me up into the haven of happiness was the religious and social work that I did outside of school hours. Oh, by this I don't mean that I just "kept school," for I really tried to give my best there for six hours every day. The thought that I was helping to build character in my pupils was seasoning to a monotonous routine which without the seasoning would have become unbearable.

Then I married a young professional man and left the school-room. For three happy years we continued to live in the small city where I had last taught; while I gave more and more time to my church and social activities.

But, alas! Husband's health temporarily failed and we were forced to the farm for him to recuperate. Here we found ourselves in the country, ten miles from church or any active social center.

only way to relieve the tension that often gathered in my heart. I believe that only those who have been through similar experiences will realize just how I felt. One day I was talking to God about this, to me, very personal omission of duty, when a Voice said to me more audibly than any words could have been:

"You can write a book for Me!"

I replied, aghast, "Lord, I can't possibly write a book!" Now really and truly, I had never before dreamed of trying to write a book.

The same Voice said, "I'll help you. Trust Me."

I accepted the challenge immediately; because I believed that it had come in answer to my prayers. I said, "Lord, I'll try. I'll do my best, and every cent that comes to me from this work shall go right back into the work of Thy Kingdom."

And now as my little book goes to press, the dawn of brighter days appear above the horizon. With restored health will come more congenial surroundings and work; and already I dream of a mission or gospel center, in a neglected and needy section, that may be some day possible just because I dared write out my convictions upon the subject that is, more than any other one thing, undermining confidence in the Bible in the youthful minds of America today—Evolution.

I know that such characters as Mary Gray do exist in real life their name is Legion. And I would like to assure all the young people who read the pages of my book that the girls—and young men as well—who have their lives so enriched by the great and worth-while experiences of life do not miss the so-called pleasures, the frivolous experiences for which there can be no recompense except the fleeting moments of a "good time."

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

MARY GRAY, *an earnest Christian*
JOHN NEEDHAM, *a Materialist*
HOMER CLAYTON, *a wealthy Christian*
MOTHER GRAY, *a devoted Christian Mother*
DOCTOR JAMES GRAY, *a rising young Physician*
JUDGE AND MRS ELLIS, *a Christ-like Professional
Man and an Invalid*
LUCILLE ELLIS, *their charming Daughter*
EDITH WARD, *the unfortunate Girl*
LITTLE MARTHA, *a homeless Babe*
REVEREND GEORGE MOORE, *a Good Shepherd*
REVEREND ERNEST WILLIAMS, *an Evangelist*
MRS. LEE
MRS. JONES *Missionary Society Members*
MRS. BOWEN

THE BATTLE

CHAPTER I

DREAMS OF A NORMAL MAN

Blissville, on this particular Sunday afternoon, was unconsciously enjoying the calm before an industrial and social storm. It was late October but unusually cold and invigorating weather for so early in the Mid-west. The sun disappeared behind the variegated outline of trees along the river—trees that only two nights before had been transformed by Jack Frost's magic wand. And with the sun's last rays gone, a biting tenseness of frosty air gripped the city and made the light and sparkle of the home-fires seem most inviting.

John Needham, the superintendent of the city's school system, emerged from his boarding place and leisurely strolled along the street that took him into the business section. He stopped at the post-office and took from his box what mail had arrived since the postman's trip the day before. After a few minutes here he returned to the street and took a direction opposite the one which had brought him downtown. As he passed by the large Gent's Furnishing Store of Bassil & Son, the city lights were switched on and the place stood out in all its beauty amid the cold, gloomy surroundings. He paused a moment to make a closer inspection of the models of perfect form and up-to-the-minute styles with which all passers-by were greeted. His own good-looking image greeted him also. Not that he hadn't seen this same image many times from the seclusion of his own dressing table; but just now he had time and inclination—yes, and maybe purpose—for making some comparisons.

John Needham was by no means egoistical; nor was he unconscious of the fact that he possessed many physical features that would attract admirable attention in any crowd. These

features he now reviewed in the great show-window mirror—tall, athletic body that was as subtle and graceful as it was sound and solid; a face with square chin and firm mouth, the veritable personification of firmness and determination even to the lines about the mouth which happily melted away when he laughed; eyes that were a very dark gray, very firm when the occasion called for firmness but others knew that these same eyes were also capable of being very mild and tender, too; and probably the most marked feature of all was the broad and intellectual forehead, crowned as it was with an abundant supply of black-brown hair.

"Well, I guess you can pass muster," he smiled at the reflection and straightened his young body up to its full six feet, "that is—if the inner man is the equal of that which I now behold."

The image sent a challenging smile back at him and seemed to say, "Old fellow, you turn this corner quite often. For the better part of two years, you've been hitting this trail; and I think it's about time you find out where it's going to lead you! You've had friendship and companionship to be sure; but you've reached the point where you want something a little more definite in its nature. Isn't this so?"

John Needham stopped and stood stock-still, as the full realization of all that his imaginary conversation might imply became clear to him. He knew that several times within the last few months he had had the words all ready on the tip of his tongue to tell Mary Gray some things which seemed of vital importance to him; but just as many times she had in some way tactfully turned the conversation and those sentences had passed out of existence without ever being uttered.

"Correct! You surely are correct," he replied to the image. "And if there is a black mark on my body or soul—or any other reason—why I shouldn't ask her to share my future, I'm sure I don't know about it. It isn't always easy for a young person to stay in the straight road these days; but I'm glad I've kept my body and life clean and pure for this day." A shadow passed over his handsome, frank face as a fear, uninvited but foreboding, sprang into his soul. "Of course, some of my scientific theories she doesn't approve; but the brains of the world have seen fit to smile upon them. So these could

hardly be a barrier in her sight. At any rate—I'll find out where I stand this very night!"

The young man was admitted a few minutes later into the modest Gray home by Mary's mother. For several years her many friends had delighted in referring to her as "Mother Gray." Not because of her advanced age; but rather as a token of love and respect which all felt towards her. There was not a person within the city but who knew of the noble life and good works of this frail woman whose soft brown eyes were abiding fountains of love; and many unfortunate ones, by close contact with her, had found their loads lighter and more easily-borne because of the earnest Christ-like spirit with which she had long met all the issues of life. In the course of his friendship with the daughter, John Needham had given to the mother something of the loyalty and love that he had always showered upon his own mother, now so far from him. In return, Mother Gray accepted the young man into her home upon his many sterling qualities of character.

The door between the living and dining rooms opened as the mother slipped out at the front door. John advanced, with outstretched hands, to meet Mary under the soft light of the reading lamp.

"Why—John—has there been a fire in town, or is it merely a case of hold-up?" she beamed in admiration of the handsome young man in his new black broadcloth. "Of course, we must excuse you for being late," she laughed, "for new things always call for extra little niceties which take time. But my! you wear that style and color beautifully, John."

The young man went through the mock ceremony of making his bow and said, "Thanks! I guess it's merely a case of hold-up. At least, I almost decided that was the appropriate word when I priced it." Glancing at his watch for comparison with the timepiece on the mantel, he went on, "I surely wasn't aware of the fact that I was late; but I see I am. Sorry I kept you waiting."

"Perfectly all right about that," Mary replied, "but if you hadn't come when you did, I'm not so sure that you would have found any supper. That big brother of mine has been out on a call and he insists that he's as hungry as some hibernating thing in spring. Come!" She placed her hand lightly

upon John's proffered arm, and they moved towards the dining room.

The Sunday evening meal was, as usual, a very simple affair; but because of his lack of home-life, John had often been an invited guest at this hour. At the dining table the little group was joined by Doctor James Gray, Mary's only brother. When seated, the young physician bowed his head, and with dignity and reverence that too often is lacking in young people of twenty-six years; asked the blessings of the Heavenly Father upon their simple repast and those partaking of it. John Needham, who was a few years older than Doctor Gray, realized deep down in his heart that the young physician of whom he knew much had some great controlling and directing Power in his life—a power to which he, John Needham, must acknowledge himself a stranger.

During the dinner, the conversation turned largely to local interests in and around the city.

"Quite busy, I suppose, Doctor?" John said. "I know from school reports that there is a lot of sickness."

"Yes," replied Doctor Gray, good-naturedly, "I wish some of them would get well till I could get a little sleep. Been a day-and-night job now for over a week. Just got back from a long trip to the country, as badly as I am opposed to making Sunday a day of business."

"Wonder what's going to happen at the Factory?" John asked, principally addressing his inquiry at the young man across the table. "Some of the students, at school Friday, said they had heard rumors of its closing."

"Yes, I heard this morning that it closed late yesterday afternoon, for an indefinite period," replied the doctor. "And, I fear that this will mean more sickness; because there is a class here—as everywhere else—who have nothing laid-by for a rainy day. Now as winter is here, suffering may easily happen."

"Suppose it is closing to the same old tune: Supply and demand," John suggested.

"Oh—surely!" the young doctor assented. "That is the string that never wears out, you know. They've been running at full-blast, and are now over-stocked. But, I'm afraid while

their surplus is being marketed, the workers are going to feel the need of working."

"Doesn't it seem rather hard-hearted, to you men, for a factory to cause so many men to move here, dependent upon it, and, then for it to cease operations and throw men out of employment at this time of the year?" Mary inquired. "Or, am I just impractical in my way of reasoning?"

John looked at Mary. He knew how her heart went out in sympathy to any one who was ground down into the dust of poverty. He knew how she often went into the homes of the poor, whenever and wherever it was possible for her to render any assistance. He knew that she often made inquiries of her brother in order to find such places; and that whenever it was possible for her to do so, she accompanied him on his errands of service. He didn't like to think of what a period of want and hunger in the Factory District would mean to the girl at his side.

"I can't say that I think your plan impractical; but, of course, they call their plan 'business,'" John replied gently. "I, too, think the most humane way would be to employ just the number of men that they could give steady employment to the year around. At least, this would put the people on a more independent basis, and the city would have more stability."

"I'm sure you are right, children," said Mother Gray. "In the years before the Factory was located here, this place enjoyed the prosperity that came to it alike in winter and summer. It was a trade center for this farming section, and I can't recall a single instance when real need prevailed with many at a time. Of course, it was a small town then to what it is now, though. The place has doubled, then trebled, its size since the Factory came; which would be a real blessing if it were not for such periods as the one we now face."

"While wages here are about on the average with what other places pay, I suppose most of the workers find it rather hard to save anything," said Doctor Gray. "Yet, it seems to me they should make a desperate effort to be prepared for such as this; for when one of these close-ups does come, it comes about this critical time of the year."

Before leaving the table the young doctor told his mother

that he hoped for no further calls that day, and that he would accompany her to church at the evening hour. Mary mildly suggested that it would be John's duty to accompany her, also; and her remarks implied the fact—though tactfully stated—that she feared he hadn't thus far honored any congregation with his choice that day. So, at the church that evening, the mother and son, and the young couple occupied their respective places.

Two hours later, when Mary and her friend were back in the living room of her home, John went through the necessary process of removing the wire screen from before the fireplace and replenishing the coals with some near-by fuel. Then, together, they watched the small flame fan itself into a larger, and still larger one, until it spread between and enveloped the logs that it was converting into heat and light. To John, that gradually growing flame held a double meaning—fire and love. His own love for this girl had started two years ago, when Fate first threw them together, in a little spark of admiration for the pureness and strength of her young womanhood. Associations, both professional and social, had fanned those embers into a flame which had grown and developed until it had become the one absorbing passion of his life.

John turned to look more closely at the girl. He liked to watch her every movement in such tense moments. He knew Mary felt the tenseness of the hour, too. The very air was heavy with importance to both of them. He knew she felt it—the rise and fall of her chest due to rapid breathing, the unnatural color of her fair young face—all told him that she was aware the greatest hour of their lives had come. It was to her an hour of some sensation, he knew, whether she returned his love or not. It might be happiness; it might be sorrow. He couldn't tell. The soft firelight revealed the girl's every charm as she stood outlined in its golden glow . . . deep, laughing blue eyes that were clear windows to her spotless soul; a set of finely-chiseled features, a laughing up-turned mouth; and a wealth of gold-brown hair, pulled low over the ears at the sides and arranged into a picturesque knot on her neck. She was all this—but more. For her young body was slender and lithe and graceful like a young tree that had grown up straight and unblemished in spite of twisting in-

fluences—influences that had given a strength and sturdiness which all things must have to stand the storms of time.

John, as he stood so near and yet so far from the girl—for he was further away than the few feet that lay between them—thought that he had never seen her look quite so beautiful as she did this evening, clad in a dress of old rose that harmonized so beautifully with her rich, colorful complexion.

Mary, as John suspected, was indeed feeling the painful importance of the moment and the intensity of the young man's manner. To avoid meeting his eyes, she seemed to be intently studying the glowing fire. Until presently, what she considered a beautiful thought came to her; and with the intention of starting an impersonal conversation, she said quietly:

“O mysterious fire; O friend of man!
A wonderous gift from God's own hand.”

John's face took on a more whimsical expression as he said, “Beautiful enough to have come from the hills of the gods.”

Mary raised smiling eyes to meet his as she replied, “I was just telling you that fire came from the hand of the one living God.”

“I understood your message perfectly well the first time,” John said rather gravely. “But I can't get through wondering at you seeing the hand of some mighty power, even in the most common-place things.”

“So hard to understand?” Mary asked simply. “Didn't you hear even the minister's text tonight, ‘the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof’. Surely, fire and all the things that it makes possible are a very integral part of the ‘fullness thereof’.”

“I suppose, you are right,” John agreed, indifferently.

He arranged a large arm chair at a comfortable distance from the glowing fire, and said, “Come sit here. I want to tell you about a burning ambition that has lately seized me.”

Mary felt relieved as she took the chair placed for her. He had spoken in a light, almost flippant, manner. Now he was going to discuss some common-place affair with her, as he so often did when he wished her advice upon any question. But the young man placed another chair in a position so he could

force the girl to look at him while speaking, and resolved more firmly than ever before to not be diverted any longer.

"Mary ——" he was now settled in the comfortable depth of the large chair, "I have had many glimpses of your own happy home-life. Has it ever occurred to you, dear girl, that I might be dreaming and longing for such a home? There can be only one woman in the home of my dreams. My father loved only once—and loved well. My love for you is strong—and deep—and pure. My life, to you, has been an open book; you know me for what I am. Can I hope for those dreams to come true?"

The voice Mary heard was low and pleading. She dared not look up and meet those gray eyes. She had long known that this hour must come—sometime. Yet she had hoped and tried to avoid the inevitable! She had known John loved her—just as every woman knows how a man regards her when he feels that he has found his mate. And, as for herself? Well, sentiment must not . . . run away with reason! There was the future with all its opportunities—and disappointments—to be considered first of all. Maybe she had encouraged this friendship. But how could she have helped it? Their work was responsible for their being thrown together. Could she go away—and forget? Other women had loved—separated—and forgot. Could she go on, working with this man and not betray her feelings? A thousand thoughts were surging through her troubled mind; and out of the turmoil rose a prayer to her Heavenly Father for strength to stand firm.

John was leaning nearer now, tense and alert, his very manner pleading. He was so close he could have touched her, yet he didn't. It was so like him—he wanted Mary Gray as he wanted nothing else in this world—he didn't want to play on her emotions. He wanted her after she had thoroughly weighed the matter and decided that she wanted him. The thoughtful young face, flushed and animated, held no answer to his question; nor was there any verbal answer to satisfy. He knew that the girl was fighting conflicting emotions of some kind.

"Mary, dear, please don't tell me that the job of mothering fifty little urchins—who are of every known origin—is a more attractive position to you than helping some man climb hills

of life, and rearing a little brood of your—our—own flesh-and-blood to the state of worthy citizenship."

"No, John, I could not possibly make such a declaration; for I believe any woman reaches the zenith of her power as wife and mother." Mary raised her frank blue eyes to meet his equally frank ones, her emotions now completely under control. "But, I can't make any other declaration that you want to hear, either. For—John, your own lack of religious convictions has built a bridge between us, over which I dare not pass."

"But—Mary—I surely have a right to think as I please, haven't I?" John pleaded. "You don't think I am an infidel, do you?"

"I have not classified you, John," Mary replied seriously. "Your own words, I fear, have already classified you, though."

"But—dear—don't you think, when once under the constant influence of your character, that I could live more nearly up to your standard of right?" he inquired.

"No, John," she answered firmly, "such would not be the case; and as years passed by we would drift farther and farther a-part. And besides, I could not be the helpful church worker I wish to be, if I were constantly under the shadow of some of your beliefs. There are far too many women in the world today who have married men under similar circumstances, and who are now trying to do alone the religious work of their families. No—John, I could not be happy under those conditions."

"But—Mary, don't you know that the scientific principles which I uphold, and which have been substantiated by many scientists, are not incompatible with your Bible?" John argued.

"John, I know well enough that old story," Mary said kindly, "but let's not discuss that topic tonight, please. To me, the Bible is the divine word of God; and as such, I accept it—miracles and all."

The light of hope had passed out of the young man's eyes, and the hopelessness of further discussing the subject was about to seize him, as he asked, "Does this mean an end to our friendship—associations—I mean, Mary? Am I to be expelled from your home and the associations which have meant so much to me during my sojourning here?"

"I suppose—that is the only sensible thing to do," Mary replied, almost incoherently.

John was quick to notice the shadow that passed over her face, and he wasn't unconscious of the hidden sadness in her voice. Then he resolved to put her to one more test.

"Can you look me straight in the eyes and tell me that you want this to happen—that I mean nothing to you?" he challenged.

Mary's eyes were very firmly fixed upon a pair of small well-shod feet in front of her. She made no move, either to raise them or to meet his challenge in words.

"Good!" John's merry laugh rang out. "Then, I shall not stop coming here, either."

"Very well, John," Mary replied, "but please promise me to not press this subject—not while we both think as we do now. And if you come, you must come as a friend, only. I can not hold out to you any hopes. I must be frank."

John winced under her words; but he had half-expected as much. "Surely, if that is your wish, I can only comply."

Instantly, he saw a more humorous vein running through the seriousness of the situation.

"Young lady," he said teasingly, "I am not yet ready to surrender my flag and acknowledge myself defeated. Neither is there any subterfuge in my soul. Therefore, I see the smoke of a lively battle arising above the eastern horizon."

Mary caught the spirit and burst out into a hearty laugh, which was the very thing he wished her to do. Her laughs were not surface affairs; they rose from a depth and brought forth some of the mirth of a soul that abides in the sweet assurance that all is well. Such laughs were a very essential part of the course of their comradeship—a part that he did not wish to miss if he were going to continue his visits in her home.

"A deceiver, you are not!" she laughed. "But, why the smoke?"

Making a pair of imaginary field glasses out of his hands, and using the glowing fire for his field of inspection, he went on in mock seriousness: "The smoke has cleared away; I now behold the soldiers. These soldiers—two in number—are Young Hearts. One is strong and masculine, clothed in the uniform of Pure Love, and he is protected by the breastplate

of Convictions. He is armed with an abundant supply of Determination, handed down to him by pioneer ancestors. The other is more feminine. Her golden robe is Pure Love, too, I hope; and she also wears the breastplate of Convictions. She is armed with an Indomitable Will. They meet on the battlefield of Conflicting Opinions. They charge; first one and then the other takes the offensive. But the end is not visible."

He looked at the girl and met her admiring smile, as he concluded, "So, girlie, as I see it, it is merely living up to the true-blue of one's convictions. And you know," he added teasingly, "the spoils always go to the conqueror!"

"I'm sure you are right," Mary replied.

By and by the hour grew late. As he rose to go, John said, "Mary, why not set an evening to fight out this intellectual battle that we are destined to have? You may have the offensive, and I'll grant you the privilege of bringing as many charges against me and my views as you wish. Better have them all tabulated and get them out of your system. I'll defend myself, if I can. If I can't, I surely have enough manhood about me to say so. It isn't utterly impossible for me to be convinced that you are right. At least, my mind is open to convictions."

"Why certainly, John, if that is your wish," Mary said. "The more force is placed on the front the quicker the battle is over. But, I do not profess to be rich in worldly wisdom, and I do not say that my ideas will convince you, put up against scientific data. There are many theories advanced that are mere suppositions. While some of the things in my Bible can not be explained to the materialist's satisfaction; but must be accepted by faith--the way Christ expected us to accept them."

"At least, such an interview may clear away the fog, and give us a clearer knowledge of the battlefield," he replied.

"Very well. Some time in a few weeks," she agreed. "I'll let you know in time to get ready for battle--your uniform on, breastplate polished, and other things in trim."

"Ah, my uniform is too much a part of me to be discarded very easily," he said, pointedly. "The remainder of my outfit, I may lose. But, the uniform will remain."

A short while later, a thoughtful young man again followed

the street leading to his temporary home. His mind was busy with many perplexing thoughts—some pleasant; some otherwise. Of Mary's love, he was now almost sure, although she hadn't admitted it. But, he was even more certain that she possessed sufficient will power to do whatever she thought to be right. That he was not going to accept her refusal as final, he was also sure. He knew that he would not stoop to any form of deception, and that she would not be very easily influenced by any subterfuges, should he stoop to such. So, just exactly how to proceed to get results was one knotty problem that he had not yet solved as he reached his home.

CHAPTER II

A RIVAL

Blissville was indeed fortunate to have as its citizen Homer Clayton. South Main Church was even more fortunate to have his name on its membership roll. Easily the wealthiest man in the city, he was still only forty. His father, ahead of him, had been a shrewd business man and had by perfectly honorable and upright methods amassed a considerable fortune. This fortune had increased since the parents' untimely deaths under the wise investments of the son. But more commendable than the money in itself, was the method this comparatively young business man had of using both his money and time in doing good in the world; and especially in his own little world—the city in which he lived.

It was Thursday evening and the choir of South Main Church was having its regular weekly practice. Homer Clayton had for the last fifteen years—ever since he returned from college to his home town to become associated with his father's big general store—been the faithful and efficient music instructor. Possessed with a fine voice and an unusual talent in music, he had cultivated his natural ability while in college; and when the time came for him to choose Blissville as his home, he also chose to give to his church, gratis, the service that much money could not have bought from one whose heart and soul was not in the work of the church.

A most enjoyable and profitable rehearsal it had been. The young director, from his position in the front, was at his best. He was a rather handsome and a very likeable person at all times; and tonight he scored high in both attributes. Of medium height only, and slight figure, he was firm and solid and gave one the impression, by his quick, alert movements and ability of turning off work and also of getting others to work, that every inch of his not too-robust body was put to service. As he sang with the care and precision that practice had made

almost second nature to him, one could almost feel that his deep, soft brown eyes were probing to the very deepest thoughts of his audience; and by the set of his ample mouth one could just about read the leader's verdict. Not that Homer Clayton was critical; but, if, he did criticise it was for the good of his friends, and was administered behind a cloak of witty humor. His, "Come on, George, a smothered bass isn't as delicious as a smothered steak."—"Put a little more life into the alto, girls."—"Good!"—"Now for a big sing, everybody. ready. Go!" all carried no sting. Truly, Homer Clayton's ample mouth, manly efficiency and firm manners had been instrumental in helping many people to a better method of living and serving.

The choir and orchestra had both finished; and Mary thought that everybody else had left the church. She had gone to her Sunday-school room for a book that she had left there the Sunday before. The janitor had evidently misplaced it, so she was hurrying in her search for it so as not to keep the good man waiting longer than necessary to lock the door. Finally, with the book in her hand, she started to leave the building by the side entrance door, when Homer Clayton stepped beside her.

"Oh, Mary, didn't scare you, did I?"

"Why, no—not exactly. I thought everybody was gone."

"They are except us, even the janitor," he said turning back to lock the door through which Mary had come out.

"What do you say to a bit of hot supper at Kinney's?" the man asked as he joined Mary. "Surely, we are entitled to some treat after all that superb singing tonight."

"Say, that music tonight was some stuff, wasn't it?" Mary found it easy to drop into the most informal mood with Homer Clayton. She had known and respected and admired him ever since she was a little girl with pig-tails hanging down her back, and he was then considered the most eligible young man by many fond mothers with beautiful daughters. Later, she had stood in awe and admiration as Homer Clayton led to the altar the charming Annabelle Kinder. That wedding, with its flower-filled church, was an event that had always stood out in Mary's collection of events as one worthy of being cherished. Still later, there had been another flower-filled church—but ah!

such a different scene. A snow-white casket was borne down the same aisle, where only three short years before the same young woman had stood—and hoped—and promised. O how everybody had sympathized with the young husband and his three-months-old baby girl.

At Kinney's, Mary herself led the way to a secluded corner. Large palms almost shielded the table from the view of several other couples who were eating and chatting. She didn't hardly know why she had selected this particular spot, except that it was largely from force of habit. It was the place where she and John often came to eat and enjoy their little tete-a-tete, away from the eyes of the curious crowd. Blooming plants and the music from somewhere behind the screen of palms made the place restful and inviting.

As the waiter left after having taken their order, Homer Clayton held out his hand across the table, and said, casually, "Congratulate me, Mary, good news from Oklahoma. Oil on my land. Can you wonder that I felt like everybody should sing tonight?"

"Hom—Mr. Clayton!" Mary exclaimed, placing her right hand in his hand in eager informality. "Great! Oh, I'm so glad for you!"

"Make it 'Homer', please," he smiled. "Not that old; I feel real young tonight, you see. But—Mary—could this mean anything to you, personally?"

Mary withdrew her hand from his, her old informal feeling was suddenly gone. Her cheeks flushed as his meaning became clear to her. She flushed still more when she looked up and saw the waiter standing behind Homer's chair. She knew, beyond a doubt, he had seen her hand in the man's hand and that he knew nothing of her motive.

"Mary, you understand what I mean," the man went on, frankly, as the waiter disappeared. "Claymanor is closed because it has no mistress. Little Laura needs a mother. And you are the only woman who could ever fill Annabelle's place in my life." He was speaking in a low, musical, resonant voice, now, every word audible to the girl sitting with bowed head, toying with the spoon in her embarrassment. "You know that my life has been very much broken up these last five years. But, Mary, I am not offering you the remnant of an

old love. Out of the ruins of my broken life, there has been gradually a little flower pushing up. At last, it burst into full bloom, and I recognized it—Love. My feelings for you are purely and distinctly those that a man feels for the one woman in the world for him.”

“Oh—Mr. Clayton, t-this—is so, so sudden.” Mary found it almost impossible to speak coherently. Her throat was dry and her tongue wouldn’t work. “I n-ever thought—I c-an’t
.....”

The man reached into his inside vest pocket and drew out a yellow slip of paper—a telegram—and laid this before the girl to read:

“CONGRATULATIONS, CLAYTON. MILLION-DOLLAR GUSHER TAPPED TODAY. OTHERS LIKELY!”

The convincing message was signed by a man named Dickson, and had been sent from Oklahoma City.

“Proof—isn’t it?” Clayton said, proudly. “And with all my wealth I’ll endow thee.” He was speaking earnestly, eagerly, now as both studied the yellow slip before them. “I must go out there—leave Monday to be gone two weeks. Then, if you say the word a European honeymoon shall be ours. Why slave your life away in the schoolroom when there are places where money and talent can accomplish so much more? Later, we can leave here if you wish. Do settlement work—anything you wish. Think of the good we can do together. Little Laura shall be no deterrent; there are competent nurses available.”

Mary sat as one amazed. Homer Clayton, the clean, fine man that he was, was offering himself to her! Claymanor, the show-place, a country home with city luxury and almost within the city itself, with its beautiful stone mansion—built by the father and, then later, redecorated and refurbished for the charming young bride—was being offered to her! European honeymoon—travel—wealth—chance to do work that she would love to do. But—where was her love for the man, himself? Respect? Yes, but he was worthy of more. No! No! Friend, counselor—always! Lover, husband—never!

“But—Mr. Clayton, do you think I could sell out my young womanhood for money?” The shyness was gone from Mary now. She was meeting the man’s eyes, frankly. She was fully mistress of the situation, able to assert her rights.

Homer Clayton remained the same considerate gentleman that he always was, but there was a touch of irony in his voice as he replied: "Then, Mary, please don't 'sell out' to that infidel school-teacher, either. I just swell up inside every time I see you with him. O don't you know, Mary," he went on seriously, "that he'll kill all your usefulness when you are his wife! Your life and talents are too sacred to go to an infidel husband of his caliber."

"I resent the way you speak of Mr. Needham," Mary said, spiritedly. "Of course, there might be some truth in what you say; if I had sold out. But I haven't—and I'm not going to."

"Well, that's some relief!" Homer Clayton was trying hard to be his genial self. "And, my offer will remain open till you are some other man's wife. But if you find it possible to love some other fellow, and impossible to love me—then I'll have to say 'Amen' and give you my blessing."

Mary was strangely touched by his last words. As they finished their light supper and arose, she stepped directly in front of the man and held out her hand.

"Homer Clayton," she said, reverently, "whether I ever learn to love you or not, I know of no man whom I could honor and respect more. Let's forget tonight and be friends as before. You are too fine a man to have a wife who doesn't love you for yourself—not your wealth. You think now that it would satisfy—but it wouldn't."

"All right." The man held her hand in his warm clasp for a second and then dropped it. "I wouldn't have it otherwise—unless . . ."

CHAPTER III

THE THREATENING STORM

The Factory had indeed closed in accordance with the rumor discussed by John Needham and Doctor Gray on Sunday evening in the latter's home. And though it had been closed now only five work-days, things were already beginning to be desperate. Winter was here; men's homes were destitute of food and fuel.

On Monday a stranger—Dave Simms—had first made his appearance in Blissville. He was a tall, stooped, robust, dark man of about sixty or thereabout. His keen, piercing black eyes and sleek manners gave, to even the most unobserving person, the impression that the newcomer was one to be watched rather than trusted. He put up at a second-class rooming-house, and immediately was seen making advances toward the groups of idle factory-workers, congregated on the street-corners because they had nothing else to do. He was, so he informed them, a representative of Organized Labor and had been sent to help them solve their labor problems. His words of sympathy; his apparent understanding of their every problem; his ready assurance that he knew a remedy for all this industrial unrest—these all touched the vulnerable hearts of the workers, whose lives had already been so vitally touched by the closing of the Factory; and they failed to see the real character of the man behind his polished veneer, or the ultimate ruin if they followed his plans.

All day Friday the streets were full of idle men, gathered in small groups—talking and muttering. Dave Simms and things he had said were everywhere being discussed. The air was dense with moisture. Heavy clouds hung low and threatening. The wind was cold and biting. These things all reminded the poor fellows of their utter helplessness—no work, no food, no fuel and winter at the door. And though the air was dense with dampness; it was even more poignantly tense with some-

thing not fully understood, and certainly not comprehensible to the men themselves.

By late Friday afternoon, Dave Simms felt the ground under him safe enough to announce a meeting for that evening. Of course, he didn't announce it openly; that wasn't his method and he didn't want everybody to know about it, anyway. But he passed out word to some of his selected leaders that the doors of the Bee Hall would be open till 8 o'clock—to factory-workers only. These trusted leaders were expected to communicate their message to fellow-workers, and they in turn to others of the same fold. But somehow the precious news leaked out, and long before the appointed time many people within the business section of the city knew of the proposed meeting. But about the real nature of the meeting, these outsiders knew little and guessed much.

A mass meeting for men was called at the South Main Church for the same hour. Thirty minutes later a man's form, hat pulled low over ears, head ducked down into overcoat collar, was seen to slip around the corner and try the outside entrance door to the Bee Hall. Finding the door locked to all who didn't have a certain signal, he sought out the janitor of the building. To this worthy personage, a dollar was too much money to be spurned for the simple use of a key for only a few minutes. So, soon the same disguised figure stole down a long inside hall, and passed through a side door into the ante-room in front of the Bee Hall proper.

The Bee Hall has received its name in the days of the open saloon, when the derelicts of society flocked around the fountain of thirst-quenching drinks located here with about the same frequency and fervency that bees swarm around their hive. Since the law had put this out of business, the owner had considered the rent money rather than the purpose for which his property was going to be used. It was a large bare room under a business house, furnished with very cheap chairs and a bare table for the speaker. Consequently, it was used by such organizations, only, as wished the underground secrecy that it offered, and wanted to pay the owner's excessive price for this secrecy.

To the man crouching in the ante-room, lighted only by the lights of the Hall that shone through the open door, the mutter

and murmur of voices were a hum with occasional piercing, louder sounds—everybody trying to talk at once.

Three loud raps of a man's knuckles quieted some, and gave the floor to the speaker of the evening. A great shifting of heavily-shod feet, and then—silence.

"Gentlemen:" Dave Simms' voice roared out loud and shrill, in its nasal accent, "I came here to help you—help you to demand your rights! It's nonsense for any man to slave and nigger for a company for bare livin' wages, and then for them to close down and starve him is criminal! And they'll quit such treatment when a few of their fine plants have been blown sky-high!" Here the angry speaker brought his calloused fist down on the table with a great "bang" as he tried to drive home his suggestion.

On and on the agitator rattled, bemauling capital for monopolizing the industries of America; and the next minute pouring out sympathy for his "abused fellow-laborers." Occasionally, a few applauded him when he said something that particularly fitted their own newly-found convictions; but in the main, he didn't receive a great deal of audible support—at least, that was the way the crouching man in the next room interpreted their lack of demonstrated approval. He was sure that he was experiencing more real emotions than any one else, not excepting the speaker. Several times he rose from his squatting posture with clinched fists; as if he were going to land directly upon the man who had thus descended upon the peaceable little city to sow his seed of radicalism. But each time he managed to keep his emotions under subjection. He must hear this thing to a finish—it was his business to do so!

"I understand you have never had a labor organization here," the man had evidently spent his wrath, he was talking calmer now, coming to a close. "I've outlined our principles to you. Now—I want to see how many will organize with me? Let's see your hands!"

Silence—silence. "Good! Now here is a constitution. Come up here and sign it; then march back to your seats for a little more instructions."

Like a thunderbolt out of a clear and promising sky, Homer

facing the hundred or more men. That these represented less than one-fifth of the number of workers in the Factory was a good sign that Clayton readily recognized. Dave Simms turned blue, and then purple. His angry eyes sparkled demons as he fell, rather than dropped, into the chair that happened to be close enough to catch his heavy bulk.

"Mr. Chairman:" Clayton addressed Simms with the politest dignity, "you've had your say; please let me say something now."

But Simms was on his feet now, angrily advancing towards Clayton.

"You'll say nothing!" Simms stormed. He was as an infuriated animal—without power to control himself. With clinched fists, he stood as if ready to spring upon the man who might now foil his cherished plans. "What right have you here?" he bellowed. "How did you get in? Spy? huh!"

"Now that's all right, Mr. Simms," Homer Clayton replied in his usual calm, clear-cut voice—perfectly undaunted by the threatening manner of his enemy. "I'm going to say whatever I have to say. So, you might just as well sit down and make yourself comfortable."

"If you have any help to offer, "the angry agitator sneered, "why haven't you offered it a long time ago? These men have been out of work before, they tell me! Help! Help! Yes, you're just like all the other rich men, Homer Clayton! You are!" he roared in an angry voice, "You're a liar! You're a cheat! You're an oppressor of the poor! You're a greasy oil magnate! You're . . ."

"Now, that's just enough, Mr. Simms," Clayton interrupted the angry man's arraignment. Although he was angry, too, Clayton was, to all outward appearances, master of himself. "These men know me better than you do. I'm perfectly willing for them to judge for themselves if your words are true or not."

Simms, apparently quieted by Clayton's calm manner and convinced, too, that the man was going to have his say anyway, dropped into the chair again, and waited impatiently.

Turning to the men, almost every one of whom he could call by his first name, Homer Clayton went on, "Gentlemen: I am very sorry about several phases of this situation. I am

sorry that I was forced to come to this meeting tonight without an invitation. But, I had to come for your own and the city's good. But my big sorrow is that the Factory is closed and you are out of work. I don't say this from any personal reason; but you all know that from a business standpoint I'll suffer as much as any man in Blissville. I am more sorrowful over your condition than I can tell you in words; but anyway words are not going to help you over this crisis. Nor is this man's plans going to open the Factory; nor feed your hungry families. This gentleman," with a significant glance toward the creature in the chair, "advises you to 'organize to demand your rights'. Organize if you wish; I believe every industry should have its labor organizations. But O men, do be careful with whom you affiliate your organization after you have formed it! I'm here to assure you that this radical propaganda which you have been listening to tonight will never get you anywhere. I repeat this: It will not open the Factory nor feed and warm your families. This man is no fit ad——"

Clayton was stopped by a heavy blow in the face from Simms. The big frame of the agitator would have made two parcels as big as the undaunted Clayton. It is hard to tell what might have happened if Bill Clark, the city night marshal who always took special pride in his ability of keeping law and order, had not squared his massive form in the doorway. Simms again dropped into the chair and slouched down—crushed like an animal caught in the trap he had set for another. And Homer Clayton continued, undisturbed:

"Gentlemen and fellow-citizens: I came here tonight as a representative from South Main Church; and I brought with me the assurance that every one of the seventy-five men, down there in the church now awaiting my return, will stand behind whatever I promise you. So, I promise you now that you and your families shall not suffer through this crisis. I further promise you that we will negotiate with the Factory officials and try to get an early opening of it. And now, my advice to you is: "Don't sign any such agreement as the one offered to you, at least till you've had time to read and study it over."

Homer Clayton didn't have to ask for a show of hands to find out if his proposition had met with the men's approval. But he got a shake of many hands, instead. Every man knew

that the young merchant's word was as good as a bond. And better still, they all knew that he had the money to deliver anything that he would promise. They rushed upon him as a troop of captured soldiers might greet a welcome deliverer.

The midnight train carried Dave Simms back into the unknown world; and he carried his unsigned constitution with him. And the good men of the town, headed by Homer Clayton, were left with their own industrial problems to solve.

CHAPTER IV

TOKENS

The next day was Saturday, and a busy one for Homer Clayton. He would leave Monday for Oklahoma to spend at least two weeks looking over his newly-developed possessions, and probably making further investments there. His first big deed of the morning was to place a big-lettered sign in the front window of his store, conspicuous to all who passed down Main Street. It read:

"FACTORY-WORKERS: COME AND BUY NECESSITIES. PAY WHEN YOU CAN."

Then, there was the installing of necessary clerks and book-keepers to take care of the sure-to-be-enlarged trade. It took the greater part of the morning to get these new employees located—each assigned to, and instructed in the duties of his new job. For everything connected with Homer Clayton's business affairs must be in ship-shape condition before the owner would leave it, even for the short period of two weeks. People called the young merchant "lucky"; but those who knew him best did not attribute his success so much to mere luck as to shrewd business ability and clean, upright living.

It was almost noon when Clayton made his way to the florist's. Here he selected two floral tokens—one for the living; one for the dead. A beautiful spray of pink chrysanthemums and green ferns, he dispatched by special delivery to Mary Gray. A snowy wreath of the same flowers, he carried with his own hands to Elmwood Cemetery and placed it upon a brown mound, now five years old. Tears and flowers were all that he could give to this spot which held his life's dearest treasure; and he couldn't leave the city to rejoice in his new wealth without first visiting the last resting place of the one whom he had chosen to help enjoy whatever pleasures fell to his lot. As he stood with tear-filled eyes and aching, praying heart, Homer Clayton re-affirmed his resolve to devote his

life and money to the good of humanity—just as he and the lovely Annabelle had decided to do in the first days of their brief, happy life together.

“O Annabelle—you don’t know how I miss you!” he sobbed. “There couldn’t possibly be but one other woman for me. She doesn’t love me. And O Annabelle, wealth means so little to a lonely man!”

Then Clayton drove back to town and bought for little Laura the loveliest big doll that he could find. With it was a many-pieced wardrobe, with which any little girl would enjoy bedecking her dolly. Just something, he hoped, to keep the little one happy and content during the days when “Daddy” couldn’t come to see her every day or two. Even if his visits were so short that they usually included only an affectionate greeting, few minutes for a romp or game, and a sack of candy; yet these minutes were bright spots in the child’s long days. And only a father, under such conditions, could ever understand how little Laura’s father longed to be with his child more. How he longed to re-open his beautiful home, and there help to superintend the rearing and education of his little daughter—his child of promise. His and Annabelle’s cherished hopes! It had been a sore disappointment to the bereaved husband when Annabelle’s parents declined his invitation to share with him Claymanor; and instead took the infant daughter of their only child to their country home, to care for her there.

For today only, Homer Clayton was living more with the past than the future. He was sure of the past; he wasn’t so sure of what the future might be. So, little Laura—the most precious part of the past that he had left—was going to have a long afternoon and evening with the father whose coming she watched for so eagerly. As the big blue car sped out through the five miles of beautiful countryside, past patches of brown-clad forest trees—all basking in the glowing rays of an autumn sun—the driver of the big car was doing some deep thinking. This thinking, it is true, ran very much in a circle, and accomplished very little—an unusual occurrence for Homer Clayton’s method of thinking.

“Oh, why must it be?” he asked himself, aloud. “Why must my home be closed, and my child loved and enjoyed by others—even if it be grandparents? Must I go on this way? No,

it can't be; for my baby needs me. She deserved the best I can give her—home, training, and education—but most of all, my love. She must have these; else I'm no true father—certainly, not what Annabelle would have wished me to be to her motherless child!"

Sunday morning, after the services, Mary waited at the church door for a chance to thank Homer Clayton for the floral gift which she had received the day before, without a card; but, which the delivery boy finally admitted after much questioning, was from Mr. Homer Clayton. She had tried to call him by telephone the evening before, only to be told by the hotel that Mr. Clayton was in the country.

She delivered her words of thanks, and then started to walk on.

"Say, why walk? My car could carry a dozen like you." And Clayton was already pushing her towards the big blue sedan that was parked near the side-walk.

As the high-powered car gracefully swung off down the street, several significant glances were exchanged among the crowd of people still tarrying in and around the church. For there wasn't a person within the city who hadn't by now heard the story of Clayton's "good luck" retold several times, with considerable flourish and no little envy. And now, this incident coming as it did upon the heels of the man's newly-found wealth—well, it surely did have significance, so many reasoned. Some few didn't hesitate to express their sentiments on the subject—as people will do about things that do not vitally concern themselves.

"I hope money will have power," a woman remarked to her elbow neighbor, with a glance at the passing car.

"Looks like John Needham is to have a millionaire rival!" a man laughingly remarked to a companion. "But, without a penny, Clayton would be more worthy of her."

"You said it! Needham has been needing the blocks knocked from under him," the companion bluntly expressed himself. Then smoothed it over by adding, "No infidel is ever worthy of a Christian girl—like Mary Gray."

These remarks were not as meddlesome and gossipy as they might have sounded to an outsider. They were only expressions prompted by the protective instinct. Mary, by example of her fine Christian character and willing use of her talents in the work of the church, was considered by all as a power for good. Her probable future with a brilliant infidel husband was a ghostly menace to many of her friends; an end from which many would like to save her.

Meanwhile, John Needham himself was receiving a greater jolt than he would have experienced if he had heard these personal remarks. For John Needham cared very little about what most people thought or said of himself; but he cared very much about what Mary Gray thought and did. And the big car, instead of going straight home with the girl, had gone up the street and around by the post-office, without any apparent reason whatever except to make the drive as long as possible. Clayton was driving along, slowly; and the two were chatting about very common-place affairs concerned with the services that morning. When Mary accidentally—or was it accidentally?—looked out of the window, and right into the face of one of the two men just crossing the street. Her eyes, very squarely, met the startled eyes of John Needham. He waved his greeting, and she smiled; then he was left behind.

It had all been natural enough and unimportant—this seeing Mary Gray in Clayton's big car—but to John Needham it held a bitter, poignant meaning; a significance of which Mary was perfectly ignorant. The young superintendent of the city's schools considered himself no dunce at making deductions; so he went home putting two and two together, and he easily got four out of the combination. Mary had refused his own proposal. Homer Clayton was, without questioning, her Christian ideal. Now money would likely enhance Clayton's power of attraction! Not that Mary would accept any man merely for his money; but maybe he had judged his own standing with the girl too highly. Maybe she would really prefer Clayton's company to his own. Now he knew why she had avoided him ever since the previous Sunday. Of course, he hadn't tried to force a meeting; but one morning, when he had met her on the school playground, she had seemed suddenly in a hurry. Then, he had been to her room almost every day that week,

on his rounds of supervision; and while he knew that she was not unconscious of his presence on each of these visits, not once had she even glanced towards him, in the back of the room. Of course, she had always been busy with class-work. He weighed every item, trying to find evidence to justify what he wanted to believe. But, looking the situation squarely in the face, he couldn't help but see a cloud on the horizon. So, he decided after much thought that he would stay away that afternoon, and let Mary enjoy the time with her millionaire suitor. Of course, his decision might have been different had he known that Homer Clayton had left Mary at her own gate; and that he was, even at that early hour, happily lost between the lids of a new book, and in the safe seclusion of his own hotel room.

CHAPTER V

DUTY AND PLEASURE

Mary, too, had been breasting deep waters during the past week. Probably, it isn't given to many girls to receive proposals of marriage from two different men—both for whom she entertained the greatest regards—in the space of one week. And Mary wasn't flippant enough to enjoy this distinction. Her great, generous womanly nature condemned her for causing men of such soul-fibre to suffer. John Needham with his deep, sensitive nature; a nature that was capable of loving with the same force it put into any work—driving, exacting, but always considerate! Homer Clayton with his fine Christian heart which had already suffered one great life sorrow!

John's declaration of his love and her refusal to accept this love had taxed the girl's power of endurance to the limit. All the past week she had not been forced to meet the man, face to face; for which she was thankful. And she knew, by John's very expression, that the unimportant fact of seeing her in Clayton's car today had not been lacking in significance to him. And as the afternoon past and she still had had no word from him, she realized more fully that the man was hurt again.

And as for Clayton's proposal, it held nothing for Mary but bitter, sweet recollections—bitter that he should ever have thought of wanting her for anything nearer than a very dear friend; sweet that he had agreed to forget the episode and to consider her only as a friend in the future. But always she was forced to remember the man's abrupt ending: "I would not have it otherwise—unless" She feared that "unless" might imply action again on his part, later.

So, Mary was really glad to have Sunday afternoon to herself. A little while so that she might have time to think things over, and get her bearings. But while she was seeking for the grain of consolation which she knew must be hidden somewhere under the regrettable facts of the situation, the Tempter

was ready with his advice. "Many girls have more wealth and beauty than you have," he said challengingly. "One of them will gladly accept John Needham. Don't lose good time."

A still small Voice within her answered, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

Again he came with his temptation, "Homer Clayton has money. Money is power. Love isn't everything. He'll give you fine clothes, a fine home, travel and many things you'll never earn by teaching school. Better not miss this chance."

Temptations always bring strength to those who already have strength enough to not yield. Mary braced her slender shoulders to meet the coming days, as she sent up an earnest prayer for wisdom to know the right thing and strength to do it. With the assurance that she had done what God was directing her to do, she faced about again and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan! All things work together for good to them who love the Lord and do His biddings!"

By late Wednesday afternoon John Needham had passed through several different kinds of moods; and he had finally reached a definite decision—that the barrier which had recently sprung up between Mary and himself must be broken, and that he was the proper one to break it. For John Needham to make a decision meant action. So Mary was about ready to start to prayer meeting when her telephone rang.

"Say, Mary, there's a fine show tonight," John said, his fine rich tone voice thrilling the girl by its nearness. "Want to go?"

Just an instant Mary hesitated, torn between conflicting desires.

Then she replied, firmly, "Sorry—I can't, John. Fear your show will take all our fine young people away from the service tonight."

"Too bad," John said in a small voice. The fact that the show might take the young people meant much less to him than the fact that Mary was criticising the activity he was promoting. "But we couldn't get The Foolish Sage any other night, you know," he offered apologetically. "So we had to take it tonight or not at all; and Mr. Long was kind enough to give us the net proceeds."

“Well, I hope you will enjoy the evening. Good-bye,” Mary said and was gone.

It was a very thoughtful young man who performed his official duties at the ticket window this evening, and later took a seat in the most remote corner of the room. Mary’s challenging words, “Fear your show will take all our fine young people away from the services tonight,” kept ringing in his ears louder than all the noises from the large crowd gathering. His conviction deepened as he saw them coming in, by small groups— young people whom he knew were usually regular attendants at South Main Church. The show had lured them away from their church—he was responsible for it! John Needham wouldn’t have publicly admitted it; but he felt very miserable about the whole situation. He sat for a while and gave a little forced attention to the picture which every one else seemed to be enjoying; then he got up and quietly left the room. In truth, he was gone an hour before any one needed him, and when a call did come from the stage for him at the close of the evening, there wasn’t a person in the building who knew when the superintendent had left, only knew that he had been there at the beginning of the evening.

When John left the Gem this evening, he really had no definite motive for doing so. He only wished to get away from the crowd, out in the open air where he could breathe and think. Without the conscious mind directing his steps, he took the street which led down by the church where Mary was a regular attendant at all its services. He walked on past the brightly-lighted church, then on and on, to the extreme edge of the city. Finally, he turned and retraced his steps. All the while the things most vivid in his mind were these disturbing facts: Mary had been very much displeased with his work in placing this school activity on prayer-meeting night; and that his efforts to bring himself back into his old standing with the girl had only made the gulf that much wider. He could not form any feasible excuse to offer for his conduct. Nor for asking Mary to give this evening to him—he had known without asking where she always spent her Wednesday evenings. Why hadn’t he respected her scruples and not asked for the concession?

As he approached the church now, John glanced at his watch

and saw that it was about time for the services to close. So, he purposely strolled out another street and came back just as the first people came out of the church. When Mary came out a few minutes later, she was surprised to find the young man awaiting her at the vestibule door.

"Why—what's the matter, John," Mary asked in great earnestness. "I thought you had a great show scheduled for to-night?"

"Oh, the show is good!" he replied with forced lightness. "But, for me personally, it held just one attraction—sharing it with you. I saw the real play last summer in the East. So, without you it became unbearable, and I went for a walk. So here I am—that's all"

Mary sensed his state of mind, and she feared that she had been too abrupt in her criticism. Her voice was laden with pity as she replied, "I am very sorry if I spoiled any of your pleasures. I really didn't intend to do so."

"I know you didn't, Mary; and possibly I was a bit foolish," John said humbly. "But in addition to my own disappointment, I didn't have the positive assurance within my own consciousness that I had done right in placing the show on this particular night."

They walked on some time in silence. As they approached Mary's home, John braced himself to discuss a plan he had been cherishing for a day or two, lately.

"Mary, what about one of our picnic suppers Friday evening?" he asked eagerly. "To be same as usual—accompanied by your mother."

"I guess I really am hungry for such a trip," Mary said, simply. "Any one would be who has once tasted our good times, wouldn't he?" Then doubtfully, "But the weather may not be suitable. We must remember winter is at the threshold. That cold wind won't let us forget it, I suppose."

John felt Mary shivering as he laid a hand upon her arm. "Why surely; and you must not stand here another minute," he said gently, as he rushed her up the steps and into the warmth of the small reception room.

"I really must not go any further now; for much work is awaiting to be done tonight," John said lightly. "But, about Friday evening, I believe, we'll try the plan which worked so

well for the Juniors last year. The day for their annual outing had been set and all preparations made for a most wonderful trip. When lo! about dark the night before rain began to come down in torrents. This continued all night. Next morning heavy clouds still hung low and threatening; but they had not yet given up all hopes. So, they held a call meeting to discuss whether or not they should plan further. They decided to go ahead, watch and wish for a clear sky by middle of the morning. Shortly before the hour set for starting, the clouds parted and then faded away; and soon the sun shone out in all its glory. So, they half-earnestly proclaimed that they had wished the clouds away. Let us try their wishing plan; and perhaps the weather man will grant our petitions, also."

The fervency with which John and Mary planned for their picnic supper on the following Friday evening was a manifestation of how very highly they prized such trips belonging to the past. In the schoolroom and around school premises, he was to her "Mr. Needham"—head of the school system of which she was a part, and a man under whose supervision she worked. While to him, she was only one of his thirty teachers, and treated exactly the same as any one of the others. In such places and under such conditions, their conversation took on a very formal tone and confined itself to professional topics. But, it was in the home of the girl, and more especially on such outings as the one now being planned, that the barrier of reserve melted away on the grounds of mutual companionship.

Whether they wished the clouds away or not, no one knew. Maybe some other magical force was responsible for their good fortune. But be that as it may, Friday dawned clear and warm—warmer than for many days past. A rare sweet day, occasionally mixed in with late autumn. The kind of a day that people like to think of as being part of the summer left behind by Mother Nature for them to spend out among rustling leaves and blue star-light skies.

Promptly at the hour agreed upon for starting, John drove up in his smart little car. He was the same jolly, happy young man in whom Mary had long seen much to respect and admire.

They chose a delightful spot on the bank of the river, frequented by many pleasure-seeking crowds because of its nat-

ural scenic beauty and a flowing spring of pure water nearby. Together John and Mary gathered twigs and roots; for in the coolness of the evening they would need a big fire, and later there must be plenty of live coals over which to cook their supper.

Soon the fire was sending out its great rays of heat and light, and then Mother Gray began to prepare for their feast. She selected a large flat rock close by the fire, which some force greater than man's had sometime in the past embedded so deep in the soil that the surface was on a level with the ground. Here she spread the cloth and arranged the "table" for three; while she prepared coffee on an improvised stove of rocks nearby.

Meanwhile, the young folks wandered up the river bank in search of long, slender sticks suitable for skewers to use at supper. It was in all respects a night of enchantment. One by one the stars came out, bedecking the canopy of heavens with a million twinkling lights. A full-faced moon slowly marched to the zenith and proudly proclaimed herself queen of the night; while she wrapped everything in a sheen of silvery light. Soon the young wanderers came to a large bluff of rocks, approachable from the back and with a perpendicular front extending out over the river. The rocky summit was so high that it affords a most wonderful view of the adjacent country for many miles in every direction—a view which all picnic crowds considered worth the climb to the top.

With no reason whatever except the adventure and thrill of the experience—and probably to keep Mary alone with him in the loveliness of the surroundings—John led her on and up, on and up the rocky path. At the top; a top wide enough for only two to stand abreast with ample distance on each side for safety, they stood enjoying the grand scenery which their elevation made visible. The moon-bathed earth, with its wealth and poverty, its goodness and evil, its beauty and horror—all lay at their feet. The lights of their home town shone out as so many beacon lights, calling them back to the realities of the every-day life; but just now they were lost in the enchanted world of youth-and-self. The cool, soft night air fanned their happy faces, and the mighty river below murmured its language of hope and love.

Presently, Mary's practical mind asserted itself. "Oh!" she said with a startled look, "Mother won't know where we are. I told her we would be back presently."

She turned and moved towards the rocky path up which they had come, but a strong arm arrested her progress.

"Must we go so soon?" John pleaded. "Let me go and tell your mother our whereabouts. But you be very cautious while I'm gone. It wouldn't be very romantic for you to start a plunge into the river without a strong masculine arm to perform a rescue, you know."

"Oh! I don't lose my balance that easily," Mary laughed. "I assure you that I'll be here perfectly safe when you return."

Very quietly John approached the rocky precipice on his return. The girl was in a squatting position, and a soft humming melody with the words plainly audible greeted his ears:

"When you come to the end of a perfect day,
And you sit alone with your thoughts,
And the chimes ring out with a carol gay,
For the joy that the day has brought."

"Boo-oo!" John was on his knees behind her, a hand clasping each of her shoulders to safeguard her against the push he was giving, and it all happened before Mary realized his return. "But, say, you lost some of your bravery when left alone, didn't you?" he teased. "Hope you'll always find it as hard to stand alone."

Mary ignored his implied meaning. She turned to look up at the strong, manly face beaming over her right shoulder. Her eyes met his in mutual understanding as she said, simply, "Isn't this truly the end of a perfect day, John?"

"I was just going to offer you, not a penny but a dollar, for your thoughts—prompting the song, I mean. Do I get them?"

"Very common-place thoughts, John," she smiled. "I was just trying to comprehend the blessings and possibilities of our country. I see . . ."

"Golden Oklahoma," John cut in. His words held no sarcasm, but it was a cruel thrust; one he would have given anything to recall even before the words were cold. But, Oklahoma and allied subjects had been unpleasant topics to him

during the last few days, and he had determined to satisfy himself tonight whether or not these subjects held any unusual significance to the girl. Again Mary ignored his implied meaning; and her next few words completely convinced the man that all he could do was to wait and see.

"Surely, Oklahoma is a part of the whole," she said, simply. Then, "Our God-created and man-improved land is just wonderful—when we think of how old are all the other nations in comparison. And as to our own little section here of the Midwest; do you think we could find a spot in all the world which could boast of greater all-round prosperity and wider variation of climate than we have here?"

Here John suggested that they make themselves more comfortable. He spread a heavy Indian blanket upon the rock, placed two cushions, side by side—all promises of comfort which he had brought from the car. When Mary was safely seated upon one of the cushions, he took off his overcoat and placed it carefully around her, in spite of her assurance that she was warm enough without it. As he seated himself upon the other cushion, Mary raised one side of the coat and offered him a share of its protection. John looked whimsically at the radiant young face, now necessarily near his own. In a perfectly matter-of-fact way—and for protection only, he assured himself—John slipped his strong right arm around the girl's shoulders and drew her to him. He felt an involuntary shudder pass over her—a sudden drawing away. "Please—Mary," John pleaded. "I am master of the situation—and myself—tonight."

John breathed a sigh of contentment as he felt the gradual yielding, relaxing of the girl's body. She trusted him—he had scored another high point.

"I like this section, too," John said, taking up the subject that he had interrupted a few minutes before. "Father is wanting me to come home and take over some of his work. I guess I really should; but something seems to hold me here. I like the free and open life; it is great compared with the congested conditions of the East, which became almost unbearable to me after my two years of war service. And, I think, we, young Americans, who were privileged to see the realities of the Old World along with the horrible experiences that at-

tended the World War, received a first-hand glimpse of the differences which characterize the 'Land of the Free and the home of the Brave'. Such comparisons have given us a keener appreciation of our home-land. Why, it was no unusual sight for us to see the French women go out from their homes—homes sheltered by the same roofs that kept the cattle and other animals dry—take their weekly washings of clothes to the creek bank, and rub them clean on flat stones. Not even the convenience of a washboard; and that is only one instance—after centuries of what history calls 'prosperity'. So, I feel that our national pride is justified."

Mary always liked to hear John tell of his oversea experiences. Some of their most intimate conversations had been based upon these, always told in the frank, wholesome manner that was so characteristic of John Needham.

"Could you give me your clear-cut idea of the cause of this superiority?" she asked, with deference.

"I have my opinion; others have theirs," John replied slowly. "I believe the home-life here is the bulwark of this nation; and behind the homes stand the womanhood. As the womanhood of a country rises or falls; so does the nation. Man has it in him to become a superman if the need arises; but behind the man somewhere can be found the love and influence of a good woman."

"I am sure you are right," was all Mary could say.

Such noble thoughts added to the girl's respect and admiration for the man. But just now this subject was so interwoven with her own life that it became dangerous ground. Wisely, she sought a change.

"See that high peak away yonder to the right?" She was pointing towards a great mountainous elevation, silhouetted in the moon-light against the azure sky. "I had the privilege once of ascending that peak on foot—which is certainly the only way of ascending it. It is quite famous, not only for its ruggedness and being one of the loftiest—if not the very loftiest—peaks of the Ozarks; but historically as well. On its summit one of the decisive battles of the Civil War was fought; and the soldiers killed in battle were buried there, in unmarked graves. Evangelist "Billy" Sunday's father sleeps in

one of these graves; a spot his famous son would give much to locate."

"Interesting!" John exclaimed. "Tell me about your trip, please."

"It was a hiking trip; a part of a summer encampment at Arcadia Heights," Mary explained. "The Heights is a summer resort of our denomination for this section of the country. So, one beautiful starlight morning in late summer about fifty of us started out to try our physical strength. We started from camp several hours before daylight, carrying our breakfasts with us; for part of the adventure was to eat breakfast on the summit while we watched the sun appear in the eastern horizon. And believe me, we felt like eating too when we got there! Oh, it sure was some climb! Over bushes and briars; sometimes we found a faint trail, most of the time none. Many places were so awful steep that we could never have made the grade had it not been for our worthy guide, who had been over the road many times before.

"I see," said John. "Then, I suppose about fifty young adventurers marched back to camp, feeling like world conquerors."

"No, I think that day more like defeated soldiers," Mary laughed. "But time repaired all damages, even to bruised heels and scratched hands."

"I sometimes wonder why we mortals can't live on the mountain-top of happiness," philosophized John. He had in mind the valley of depression through which he had been passing. But he had no intention of trying to describe this experience to the girl; nor were words available if he should try.

"Do you think we could possibly enjoy the mountain heights," Mary asked, thoughtfully, "without first knowing the trials and troubles of the valleys?"

"Well—perhaps not," John agreed. "I don't know."

"I do not believe we could," Mary replied, earnestly. "Just as we could not possibly have that wonderful view without first putting forth the effort to climb to the mountain-top; just as true is the fact that nothing great is ever accomplished without first putting forth the efforts to get whatever we desire. And, then sometimes our efforts seem fruitless; but, I can't believe that any noble work, performed in earnestness, is ever

doomed to utter failure. I like to think of some of the many big things which make up the pages of history—things which have been wrought under the most adverse circumstances. Milton wrote 'Paradise Lost' while blind; Bunyan, in prison, wrote 'Pilgrim's Progress'; the Revolutionary Forces fought, though cold and hungry, on to a glorious victory; and Lincoln waded barefoot through the direst poverty to the president's chair. Then, Christ, the greatest example of all—the Man of Sorrow—went from the valley of persecution always up into the mountain-top of prayer, there to bask in the sunshine of the Father's approval. Burbank's successor may sometimes give to this old world a beautiful rose, with all its original beauty and fragrance but entirely thornless. However such is so far only a dream for the future."

Then, they sat for a while chatting about mutual interests—friends, past experiences, and future plans. John was at his best; and Mary was happy. Her dark blue eyes—for they looked dark blue in the moonlight—were emblems of happiness and contentment as she raised them, time after time, to meet the man's frank gray eyes. Mary liked to watch John in his happy moods; liked to watch the merry twinkles gather in those dark gray eyes until they overflowed, wreathing his handsome face in a happy smile and dissolving the firm lines so prominent. Each felt their mutual friendship now fully restored, and was happy because of it. But throughout their conversation, John maintained the impersonal note, such as he knew Mary expected after his promise. And Mary was glad of the promise John had made—she knew now that he would always safeguard himself from taking advantage of her weaker hours. She had told herself a thousand times during the past two weeks that John Needham meant nothing to her; that she would leave his school system at the end of the year, go away and forget him. If only she could maintain mere mutual friendship till the close of the year! Her work demanded that much of her!

But did she believe all she had been trying to cram into her very sensible head? If so, why had she suffered, too, over their estrangement; and why was she so happy to have their friendship restored? Maybe she was playing with fire, and a more cruel burn was to come later; but the fire was warm, cheerful—

and sweet. Well, anyway, impersonal ground was their safe retreat; and Mary's heart sang a glad song with the assurance that they had again found that spot. For Mary knew that in spite of their decidedly different natures, she and the young superintendent had many interests in common; and that they were both happiest when their own lives and their conflicting opinions were lost to sight. And she had always hoped that her friendship with the man might help him to lose some of the objectionable "beliefs" that he entertained, and help him to find Something infinitely greater in return. This hope still lingered; although she had to admit that she could see no sign of its fulfillment.

When Mary thought the time had come for them to return to the camp-fire, she said, "My tummy says it's feed time. What about yours?"

"Hungry is a mild word for my feelings," John exclaimed, enthusiastically. "Why, girlie, since you mentioned them, I smell those eats all the way up here. Only, I fear there's not enough to fill the vacuum!"

Reaching the ground, they secured the straight sticks for which they had started out to search in the beginning; and then went back to camp. Here they found stacks of bread-and-butter sandwiches, wrapped in waxed paper and deliciously-fresh, plenty of pickles and tempting cakes, and steaming beverage ready for them. To these were soon added dozens of richly browned frankfurters and deliciously toasted marshmallows. John spread the Indian blanket on the rock close to their improvised "table," and placed the cushions for Mary and her mother. Then he piled more wood on the glowing coals, for cheer and warmth.

As the little group ate with the gusto of happy, hungry folks, John and Mary vied with each other in the gentle art of telling stories and interesting jokes from their past lives; until Mother Gray, in feigned seriousness, demanded that they wait till she had had her supper—her "store" teeth wouldn't allow successful eating and laughing at the same time. However, her demand didn't sound serious enough to dampen the mirth of the happy young teachers, and, they only found in it another joke to provoke laughter; for laughter was in their hearts and it didn't take much to bring it forth.

THE BATTLE

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When, at last, it was time for all busy young people to be at rest, they broke up camp. While Mother Gray and Mary packed the remnants of the supper away in the basket, John brought water from the spring and put out the last spark of their fire. Then, through the sheer wonders of the glorious moonlight night, they drove back to their homes.

CHAPTER VI

A FRIENDLY BATTLE

When John Needham entered the Gray home this evening; an hour designated by Mary, at his request, when they should discuss their conflicting opinions on some of the vital subjects of the day—subjects which should be of great importance to all young Americans—he didn't feel very much like a soldier of war marching to battle. In the living room he was cognizant of the inviting atmosphere of the soft, luxurious davenport in the shadows of the glowing fire. He silently compared the air, refreshing with love and cheer, to the atmosphere which he had encountered on the battlefields of foreign soil; and reached the mental conclusion that neither the soldiers nor surroundings were in any degree similar to some of the outstanding events of his war days.

It didn't take the young superintendent long to find out that Mary was in a most affable state of mind, and he could vision a very enjoyable evening with her. But closing his eyes to all the pleasures which might have been enjoyed, he very properly seated himself in one of the two chairs which Mary had placed around the library table for the occasion. Then he turned to the subject which he had jokingly referred to as their "battle," with about the same precision that he exercised every day in teaching his sociology class.

"Mary, as you know, I've been in a few great battles," John said, "but, I'll frankly admit that heretofore I've entered my conflicts with more whole-hearted determination to come out victor than I could muster up for this event. So, you may know anything I'll say tonight is extemporaneous—certainly not premediated."

"That's very much my condition, too," Mary replied. "So, we have an even start."

"Well, I've turned all the charging over to you," John said with one of his most happy smiles—a smile not usually worn

by soldiers in battle. "You see, I came here tonight expecting to be killed, or at least wounded; so the quicker it's over—and I know, or don't know my fate—the better." Again his smile mocked the seriousness of his words.

"Here is a pad and pencil," Mary said with more real seriousness, as she placed these things in John's hands. "I'll give you ten minutes to build up your defense."

During the next few minutes, Mary sat busily studying the similar pad upon which she was jotting down a few topic heads. In spite of John's lack of seriousness and joking manner, she knew that this evening was destined to be an important chapter in the history of their friendship; a chapter which would make or mar the whole fabric of one or other of their lives. And since she had accepted his challenge, she was determined to do her best, with the Biblical truths at her command, to convince the young man of the error of his theories. But, not one item did the young man before her tabulate. Instead, he was studying the earnest young face of his opponent about as intently as he had ever studied one of the scientific text-books, from which he had assimilated all the theories he possessed.

Mary laid her paper and pencil—age-old implements of warfare—on the table at her elbow; and then turned to the warrior, an air of preparedness and expectancy surging through her lithe young body.

"Now," she said earnestly, "the things we shall discuss are not purely individualistic or personal matters; because they will make or blast this nation in which over one hundred million people have to live. Therefore, you will have to admit that it is everybody's concern as to what things are taught in our public-school systems."

"I'll grant that you are right thus far," John said. "Go on with your good reasoning."

Mary was amused at John's eagerness to get the ordeal over with; and more especially at the possible effect her first statement would have upon the proud young man.

"Well, my first charge has a rather personal tone attached to it, I suppose," she said. "But—I must say that when I saw you come marching into this room on two feet instead of four, head erect with pride and self-respect, and the light of intelligence written all over your manly brow, I thought you surely

had advanced several rungs up the ladder above your ape-like ancestors hanging in some forest tree."

It was a thrust and the arrow went home. John wanted to laugh it off, to not show how badly he was hurt; but by doing his very best, not more than a shadow of a smile could he force to the surface—and a very sickly shadow at that. His mind went back to his beautiful eastern home; the happy home of his childhood where still dwelt his highly respected and business-like father and his cultured and refined mother—his own parents whom Mary had never met!

"Well, possibly I have," he said dryly. The firm lines about his mouth took on additional firmness as he continued, "Now proceed! The remainder could not possibly be any more personal."

Mary noticed his embarrassment, so she said, "Only a joke, John! So, please take it as such. But, really and truly, now wasn't that just a very personal application of your theory of evolution?"

"I suppose that is what you would have to call it," he replied curtly.

"Now tell me honestly," Mary queried, "do you believe that you have attained your present pinnacle of intellectual manhood and your perfectly superb physical form purely through the process of natural selection? Is there nothing to convince you that these great attainments are gifts from God's great store-house?"

John took plenty of time to consider the question before he attempted a reply. He realized that the earnest blue eyes of his companion, as well as her words, were probing his soul to the very core. Yes, he must be frank and truthful; he must uphold the thing that years of study had convinced him was truth! But, still, he didn't wish his answer to inflict any superfluous sting.

"I'm not saying anything to distract from the power of your God," he said at last, "but the best scientists of the world have found that natural selection was the power through which man, and other animals, too, have evolved from their original forms."

"I'll admit that some of the factors included in this theory," Mary responded, "have done much—under man's directing—in bringing the animal and plant life up to their present high

state of perfection. But, I positively deny that man has reached his present state by any such a process! And, I challenge you to prove it!"

But John seemed in no hurry about accepting the challenge; so Mary went on, speaking in a straight-forward, alert manner: "Then, too, aren't these factors only tools which God has placed in man's hands for him to work with; and the earth with its animal and plant life the material which God has also given man for him to use these tools upon?"

"Could be possible," John assented.

"Well, if that is the case," Mary queried earnestly, "then is it right for man to place all the honor and glory upon the tools, and leave out of consideration the Giver who made the tools possible?"

John Needham was a graduate of one of the greatest universities of the East; he knew only too well that just such conditions existed. But he was so saturated with scientific theories that he could see no cause for alarm.

"Do you think that is being done?" he asked, casual enough.

"I most assuredly *do*," Mary put special emphasis on "do". "And you know, too, that the teachers, who are teaching these subjects in our schools today, are either leaving the 'Giver of every good and perfect gift' entirely out of the plan of creation, or they are putting Him so far in the background that the young minds could not possibly find Him, even with a microscope! The young minds of today are being taught to disbelieve the Biblical story of creation, and their attention is focalized on the materialistic process. And after faith in the Bible is once broken; then it is the easiest thing in the world to discard it all. So the outcome is: we, as a nation, are fast turning to infidelity! Our best authorities on the meaning and derivation of words agree that 'create' primarily means to make something out of nothing! Now, this implies instantaneous action; for God would not partly create man at one time and go back to finish the job at another time! Think of God doing work in this manner! So between the meanings of the words 'create' and 'evolve' there is such a marked difference that the words could not possibly be correlated."

"Mary, do you believe the Bible as we have it now is true in every respect to the original?" John inquired. "In other

words, don't you think after all the translation through which the Bible has passed that the words and meaning could have been changed to suit the ideas of the translator?"

Mary was amazed at hearing John express his doubts so freely about the Bible; the book she believed in so fully.

"With any other book such might be true," she replied earnestly, "but I could not tolerate such a thought concerning God's word. For the hand of divine protection has been shielding and guarding the Bible ever since it was written; nothing less would have saved it for us through all the efforts which have been made by the evil forces to wipe it out of existence. I believe with all my heart that God inspired men to write the Bible; so that people of all generations could know His will, and He most certainly had power to keep that which had been written. Then, too, those old original manuscripts are still preserved; so our Bible students now have the privilege of studying them in the Greek and Hebrew. If any such discrepancies existed they would have long ago been discovered; for, as a whole, these students are devout men seeking to know the truth. No! No! John, I don't believe that any one can hide his short-comings behind that kind of an excuse; although, I know, many are trying to do so. For Christ, speaking through Matthew, says that the heavens and earth may pass away, but not one jot or one tittle of His word shall pass away."

"Now look here, Mary," John alert, and more aroused than he had been at any time during the discussion, faced his opponent with no air of compromise in his steel gray eyes, "you're not going to try to make me accept it as it is, with a literal interpretation, are you? No reasoning person is going to attach a literal meaning to such miraculous stories as the virgin birth of Christ, the resurrection and atonement—all more hard to understand than the story of creation. Don't you think these are to be taken in a figurative sense?"

"No! Indeed not figuratively instead of literally!" Mary exclaimed, her rich young voice charged with protest; her lithe young body electrified by zeal for the cause she was sponsoring. "When Christ spoke a parable, or any other figure of speech, in order to impress His lesson upon the minds of His hearers, He always told them that it was a parable. We

find no such explanations before or after these supernatural accounts; so, they must be accepted literally or not at all. Then, too, the miraculous and supernatural deeds recorded in the Bible are what place it above all other books. Discard that part and you have a very common-place piece of literature left; and certainly no Saviour to save a lost world. No! No! John, please don't entertain such thoughts about the Bible; the Book of all books!"

"Very well! We will not disagree further on the Bible," John said in a dismissing tone. "But how are you going to account for the fossils? Upon these, one of the proofs for the theory of evolution is based."

"It seems to me that these are a very tiny speck of evidence upon which great structures are built," Mary replied truthfully. "Just think of the vast sums of money which some of our great universities are spending for museums to house and display all the old fossils they can collect. And," she went on pointedly, "I am not unaware of the fact that your own alma mater heads this list! A great big ado about nothing! But the effects are far-reaching and awful; impressing tender minds, even down to school children, that everything in the world today has come by the process of evolution. I have enough faith in God's ability to believe that the animals He created and placed here for man were perfect specimens, and that each class was distinct and brought forth offsprings after its own kind. . But no doubt the people of the first centuries were not wise in the science of animal husbandry and knew very little of the principles of breeding; so it could have been true—and especially so with wild animals—that they devolved instead of evolved; and so became the stunted, dwarfish animals, such as the pre-historic horse that scientists discuss so much."

"However," she went on with a frank, truthful smile, "that is only one of my own suppositions; evolution is Darwin's supposition!" Then more seriously, "But they have never found any relics of man which show that he was ever anything but man. Just recently I read a detailed account of the finding of a petrified skull which was unearthed last year on the shore of Lake Galilee; and it is conceded by the scientists who made careful examination of it to be the oldest human relic ever

found. One of these scientists—and he is accredited as being the greatest anthropologist in the world today, and an evolutionist, too—said that the pre-historic man of whom this skull was a part had had a brain capacity equal to that of the average man of today. Now understand: this was an official statement because it had been officially submitted to him for his opinion! And now, if man's mind had come by the process of evolution wouldn't he have made some advancement in the several thousand years since this 'Man of Galilee' lived?"

"But there are other instances," interrupted John, "where man of less than average brain capacity and ape-like features has been substantiated by means of fossils. For instance, scientists record the fossil man of Java with less than two-thirds the brain capacity of the modern man."

"I know that is what scientists record," Mary replied. "But isn't it also true that we have idiots who, too, fall short of two-thirds brain capacity of the modern man when they are submitted to the test. Isn't it also true that we have many and varied characteristics in the bones of the head and face—features which do not meet the standard of perfection as such features of a typical man should? But, because of these deficiencies, would you be willing or deem it safe to make the statement that man is still in the ape stage of development?"

"No, I suppose it would neither be safe nor wise to make such a statement," John laughingly admitted.

Mary had been speaking with earnestness and power; demonstrating beyond doubt that she had studied both sides of the question. The young superintendent was about convinced that she had done more up-to-the minute reading on the subject than he had; and that what he knew might be largely chewed-and-digested theories obtained from his scientific textbooks.

"Another thing against this supposition," Mary continued, "is this: surgeons have found by experimentation that the bones and muscles of lower animals can't be grafted on to corresponding bones and muscles in man. Seems to me that if man had come from the same original parent stock as monkeys, there would be enough monkey left in man for the bones and muscles to unite!"

John half arose, and leaning across the table gave the brown

head a complimentary pat; while he gave vent to a chuckle which might have been a genuine war-whoop had he not been too civilized to give it full voice.

"I see your score climbing," he commented. "How many points, please?"

"Oh, I had forgotten about score card long time ago," Mary smiled. "The score which I desire above all others is to make you see that this hypothesis is a fallacy. Now I want you to explain something . . ."

John straightened up and gave a startled whistle. "Please remember mine is purely a defensive warfare tonight!"

"I remember," Mary replied, "but to answer my inquiries is part of your defense. Now you will please account for the soul of man; for the origin of sin in man; and more fully for man's intellect—by the process of evolution, of course."

"Good gracious! Don't fire three direct shots so simultaneously at a poor man!" he evaded.

"Very well," Mary agreed. "Then take one at a time."

"Well, sin in man, science tells us, is inherited from his brute ancestors," John feebly attempted to explain.

"Now that can't possibly be true," Mary exclaimed. "Because sin is not sin without law and reason to interpret the law. Therefore, sin does not now, nor ever did, exist in animals no matter how wild, vicious and brutal they seem. A specie of animals, if the laws of Nature would allow them to live a million years, would still be animals without soul, mind, sin or human speech. And man is the only creature of the universe to whom sin is imputed"

"Then, what is your explanation of the origin of sin?" John asked.

"There can be only one explanation given with any degree of satisfaction," Mary responded, "and that is the Biblical account. When God created Adam and Eve, they were perfect specimens and sinless; made in the future likeness of His Son, who was then in spirit one of the members of the Godhead, and who later came to earth and accepted the same physical form while among men. But soon Adam and Eve transgressed God's law and fell from their state of perfection. Thus sin entered into their lives, and all the succeeding generations have been afflicted with it—result of the fall."

"I see," said John. "Logical enough after the first miracle is accepted.

"Well, don't tell me that you can't believe in miraculous happenings," Mary said impressively, "if you can conceive of man arising to his present state of efficient manhood from some primitive form, merely by the process of losing his undesirable characteristics and retaining the desirable. Seems to me, such would have been an impossible miracle—that is, unless God's hand was guiding the process. But it seems like the infidels, with whom evolution originated, tried to make their theory conflict rather than coincide with the Biblical account."

Mary leaned back in her chair; a satisfied smile spreading over her healthy young face, a gleam of victory in her deep blue eyes. "But, what have you to say in accounting for the soul and mind of man?"

"I haven't anything to say," John said curtly. "What I've said hasn't gotten me anywhere!"

"Oh, don't get peeved about it!" Mary laughed. "Your beliefs should stand—or fall—according to the way they stand the test of spotlight examination. But really, you're excusable for not having anything to say on these subjects; for they are some of the gaps over which the adherents of this theory jump in silence. Evolution does not account for such supernatural endowments as the soul and intellect of man; and to prevent criticism or too close inspection, they simply leave some phases of the question untouched."

John thought the "battle" was about over. He knew little—and cared less—about who was going to be acclaimed victor. He thought, he could still see the remnant of an enjoyable evening. So he settled back in the depths of his chair, with a sigh of thanksgiving that all subjects within the boundary of their friendship were not like this one—clashing at every expression!

"Well, doubtless many of us are too ready to accept the hand-me-down opinions of some smart fool; therefore, we don't do enough thinking and reasoning for ourselves," he said in a dismissing manner.

However, Mary was not so sure that the "battle" was over. She was very nearly disgusted with John's, complacency about conditions which were really serious. She felt that the young

superintendent of her own city's schools—the man who was largely responsible for the policies which influenced every child within the city—needed a further reminder of what was going on under cover of the educational system of American schools. And she saw no reason why she should shrink from being the one to administer the medicine! It might do no good; but she would have the satisfaction of knowing that she had done her part. She bravely faced her patient across the few feet of table-space that lay between them, her slender young body alert with the seriousness of the situation, and every muscle tense with righteous indignation as she steeled herself for the final attack.

"I'll tell you, John Needham," Mary said in a voice charged with emotions, "unless so-called Christian America—and you are a part of it—wakes up to the seriousness of this situation, begins to do her own thinking, and faces about in the opposite direction, she will within the next generation write the darkest chapter of her national history! Now, I'm not sounding an unwarranted pessimistic alarm, either! For the universities, and many of our denominational colleges as well, are pregnant with these damnable heresies; and each commencement day, they are being delivered of whole broods of atheists, infidels, agnostics and all other kinds of skeptics! These are charged and surcharged with the same blighting principles; and they, in turn, go out and impregnate our public-school system, carrying their fallacies down even to the very smallest school children! One has only to read the newspapers to be convinced of the way things are going!"

Mary's eyes were bright coals of living fire. Her slender hands, with their emphatic gestures, were trying to rub her words into the heart and mind of John Needham, as she continued:

"We see men like Luther Burbank, Thomas Edison and others of the same caliber; men who have been endowed by the Creator with master minds; men who have used their wonderful intellect and have achieved marvelous results with which to bless the world; but men who after lives of great service and world homage, startle the world by declaring themselves infidels! They look in the face of all the wonders of life and Nature, and say casually, 'There is no God; it's all a material-

istic process'. Of course, the soul of a genius is worth no more in God's sight than the soul of the poorest laborer; but the difference is in the influence exerted, when so many minds are already halting between two opinions."

At this point, Mary paused for John to defend his cause. But, he made no move to do so, and she went on speaking in a pointed, convincing manner:

"You told me a few days ago that the superiority of this nation was vested in the homes and motherhood here; now I want to tell you, that while that part is true, the main strength goes further back and is nothing less than faith anchored in God. And if the time should ever come when this nation becomes top-heavy with materialistic prosperity, and her foundation of faith in God is allowed to crumble and decay, she will suffer the same fate that has befallen Greece, the Roman Empire and all the other fallen nations down to recently crushed Germany! Be assured: God will not long allow any nation to hold first place in the world and deny that He created the universe and forget that His hand is still at the helm! So, I say seriously: let America beware what she does with her power! A few years ago, an educator didn't consider his education was complete until he had gone to Europe and absorbed all he could contain of the poison which has since caused the downfall of those countries over there! As I see it—a large crop of seed has been sown on American soil that will bring a whirlwind at harvest time; but . . ."

John had been listening to a voice tense with emotion and warning, and then finally came the abrupt break. Tears, which refused to be forced back, welled up in the eyes of the speaker. Her head dropped to her folded arms upon the table; and sobs, uncontrollable, shook her slender shoulders.

"What a fool I am—to force this on you!" John groaned, between set teeth. "Please—don't!"

The next instant he was bending over the girl, repentant and ashamed of not having realized before how keenly she felt the seriousness—or what she regarded as seriousness—of the situation. With one hand, he forced her to look up and into his face; with the other hand, he fished a freshly laundered handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped away the tears. Then very emphatically, he laid down his ultimatum.

"Now—right now—this affair stops!" he said tenderly. "Why should you become so wrought up over things which are no fault of yours? Why should tears dim your dear eyes, and sorrow fill your heart—all because some old wizards don't prove true-blue? And as for our school system here, you needn't have any fears; because Harold Cummings, who has charge of the department under which such subjects naturally come, is as conscientious a chap as any one could hope to find. A member of your church, isn't he?"

Mary nodded acquiescence. John, poised upon the arm of her chair, went on: "And as for me, personally, you needn't have any further fears, either. No matter what views I may entertain after this, I'll promise you one thing: the memory of this evening will prevent me from ever, by word or deed, trying to influence any one placed under my supervision to accept any man-made theory or belief, when I know there is a conflict between such theory and the Bible, and that by accepting such, his or her faith in God would be distracted."

Mary smiled up into the kindly face of her companion.

"Thank you, John—it sounds good to hear you say that much," she said with more composure. Then she went on to finish the statement which emotion had cut short: "But in spite of my misgivings at times; I do believe deep down in my heart that God will raise up enough big-souled, whole-hearted, true-blue Christian men and women to fight this battle on to a glorious victory. He always has done so. When the hour of need came, great master leaders and enough able assistants stepped forward, and the work of carrying Truth forward was accomplished. And it must be this time!"

CHAPTER VII

ACTING THE GOOD SAMARITAN

During the days immediately following the "battle", Mary was supremely happy. Her heart was attuned to all the mysteries of Nature and she was basking in the sunshine of God's promises. She knew that no one could, through Biblical knowledge, satisfy all the questions which men of skeptical minds were asking to the promotion of their materialistic ideas; for no one is so blind as the one who does not wish to see. But she also knew that there were missing links in their theories of which nothing was said, if, in their explanations these deficiencies could be covered and made invisible.

After a few days on the mountain-top of happiness, Mary found herself one evening very near the valley of despondency. She had retired early to the seclusion of her own room to think over some knotty problems. Her faith, which was usually anchored at a high point where the breakers of temptation did not disturb its mooring long at a time, was at a critically low point now. For a long while tonight, seated in a small bedroom rocker, a warm coat thrown over her shoulders and feet under the radiator, she sat by the window and gazed out into the black night, and then on and up towards the stars which bedecked the canopy of heaven—seeking to know if she had acted wisely in all she had done.

She had told herself many, many times lately that John Needham was, as far as she was concerned, only a mere friend; that their associations must be a mere friendship! But at ungarded moments her heart asserted itself, and proclaimed the man this—but more. So, all afternoon at every leisure moment, for some unaccountable reason, she had found herself questioning the wisdom of not accepting the young superintendent on his own sterling manhood and devoted love. Then a coincidence happened that only made her temptations greater.

Just a few minutes before her time for dismissal which, with

the tiny pupils, was an hour earlier than the regular time for closing, John came to her room on his daily call of inspection. As usual, he stayed only a very few minutes and passed out. But a short while later, after all her little folks had started home, Mary finished the various duties of getting things in readiness for a new day, passed out into the hall, donned coat, hat and overshoes and started home. She knew, by the superintendent's car being in its accustomed parking place, that he was in the building when she left. John was in the office when he saw Mary pass from the school-yard out into the street. His work was about finished there, so he hastily collected a few business papers he wished to take along, slipped into his overcoat, picked up his hat and rushed for his car. Short way down the street a smart little car drove up to the curbing, a door swung open and John bade Mary enter.

During the few minutes' drive to the girl's home, John did most of the talking. She endeavored to be an attentive listener, although she found it hard at times to concentrate her thoughts upon the ideas her companion was expressing. Instead, her mind resolutely clung to the disturbing temptations which had been harassing her all afternoon. John did not know; nor did he have the least idea, how near to the breaking point was the girl's mental strength, or his conversation during their few minutes together would not have been of the general nature it was. However, he noticed her preoccupied manner and knew something had overshadowed her usually happy life.

After stopping the car in front of Mary's home, and before opening the door for her to get out, John laid a caressing hand on the small hand nearest him as he inquired, "What troubles you, Mary? Don't you feel well? Or has something gone wrong in school today?"

It was not the words which were nothing unusual; but it was the tone of the man's voice, and the look of whole-hearted love and devotion that shone out from the depths of the tender gray eyes, which touched Mary and made her whole being cry out for the life-long love and protection this man who had become such a vital part of her life.

Mary made a desperate effort to be cheerful, and rallied all her reserve strength as she replied, "Oh, no! I am quite well—and everything went lovely in school today."

John seemed satisfied but he knew there was a cloud of some kind in her sky. In a few minutes Mary had disappeared within the walls of her home; and John was speeding towards Central High to attend to some delayed duties there.

Therefore, for the purpose of getting these tempting sentiments out of her system by the replenishment of her faith in God's words, Mary had gone to her room early this evening. In the retrospective review of her months of association with John Needham—a review which persisted in passing in orderly lines before her eyes—the heart of the girl was very susceptible to the numberless acts and deeds of loving devotion that had been hers all these past months. But again a still small Voice within her said, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers."

In the awful blackness of the night and looked at through the gloomy perspective that was hers at this moment, the situation became serious and a fuller realization of its nature seized her soul. She fell upon her knees and cried aloud for God to lift her up and place her faith in Him on such a plane that she would never more falter and turn aside, even in thought. Long and earnestly she prayed; prayed until she was able to feel the nearness and security which comes with close contact to God. Then just as earnestly and fervently, she prayed that God would lead and help her in the work of trying to make her friend know the truth—as it is found only in Christ Jesus.

* * *

It was late afternoon, near the close of one of Mary's busy Saturdays. She sat, for the moment, idly resting before the cheerful fire. It had been an unusually hard day, extra duties and regular routine week-end work had left her very tired. On the arm of her chair was an outlined programme of the Young People's Society meeting, which she was scheduled to lead on the following evening. Her work all finished now, she was looking forward to a quiet evening at home. But the door-bell rang; and opening the door Mary found herself confronted by a young woman, some years her own junior.

"This is Miss Gray, I suppose?" hesitatingly inquired the stranger.

"Yes," replied Mary. "Did you wish to speak to me? Won't

you come into the living room? 'It's quite cold here."

"If you will be so kind, I would like to talk to you a few minutes," the young woman replied as she stepped into the warmth of the small reception room. "One feels the coldness of the late evening, even walking."

Mary noticed that the girl was shivering from cold, and she surmised that her old and well-worn coat was inadequate for the cold afternoon. Her hat, which was pulled as low over the face and ears as its size and softness would permit, also showed signs of other years' wear.

"Sure. Come into the living room," Mary said as she led the way into the cozy warmth of the room and motioned her caller to a seat near the fireplace. As she seated herself in a chair nearby she said, "Are you a stranger in our city?"

"Yes," replied the young woman, "I've only been here about a week now. I knew only one person when I came—Mrs. Pearson, who happens to be a cousin of mine. I believe you have little Olive Pearson in your room at school?"

"Yes, Olive is one of my pupils."

Mary's quick eyes saw a shadow of fear, doubt, or mis-giving of some sort pass over the face of the strange girl; a face which, in spite of her shabby attire, was really an attractive one, and one in which no trace of crime was visible. It was several minutes before the girl had found strength enough to take up the threads of her story, and tell it:

"Well—the child, Olive, I mean—talked so much about how kind you are to everybody in your room, and on the school-grounds as well; so in desperation I came here, hoping that you might be able to help a poor unfortunate girl—like I am."

It was plain to see that the child-woman was striving for self-composure, however miserably she was failing. On her last words she broke down completely, the floodgates of her soul gave way and great choking sobs shook her slender young body.

"Why sure. I'll help you in any way I can," Mary assured the poor girl, as she drew her own chair closer and placed a comforting hand on the bowed head. "Now straighten up and tell me about your troubles. We all do things that we should not do, and we are put here to help one another. Maybe I can

find some way to help you, or find some one who can help, if I can't."

As Mary waited for the storm of emotions to subside so the girl could talk audibly, she wondered even more about what could possibly be the cause of all this sorrow. She remembered the very correct English, spoken in a low mellow voice; and she also noted that the manners and physical characteristics of the stranger were more those of some one who had had some advantages in life than of the class in which her introductory remarks might place her. Then it occurred to her that a girl of the latter class would not be very likely to seek help as this girl was doing; but would resort to methods known to her own vile world.

At last the storm subsided and the girl grew more calm.

"Now you tell me whatever you feel like telling of your troubles," Mary said sympathetically. "You will feel better after having told some one; and we'll see what we can do to relieve the situation."

"I'll try," the girl replied as she dried her eyes and again made a desperate attempt to gain full self-composure. "Mine is just one of the many tales of ignorance and distorted emotions. My father died when I was very small. Mother was not physically strong; but she managed to make a living for herself and me, and to add a little each year to what she called my college fund. All went very well till I was twelve. Then, when I needed her most, Mother's health failed. I suppose she had worked too hard; and for a year she lingered along and finally passed away. Her long illness took all our funds. I was anxious to go on to school—but how? So an uncle—the only close relative on either of my parents' sides, and one who already had all he could care for—offered me a home. I stayed there till I finished my grade-school work. Everything wasn't so pleasant at my uncle's home, and his wife wasn't any too kind, either; so, I decided to go back to my home town and work my way through high school. I did this for two years. I had no intention of doing anything wrong. Oh—believe me—I didn't!"

Here she showed signs of again breaking down. Mary came to the rescue, "No dear, I'm sure you didn't. I do believe in you. So go ahead!"

"All this time," continued the strange girl, "I saw other girls having young men companions; so naturally, I thought it would be nice to have a friend, too. Soon my desires were fulfilled, and happiness seemed complete; for one of the boys in the senior class began to pay me marked attention. He was a son of one of the most respected families of the town—a handsome youngster. I couldn't understand why he preferred me, when there were so many girls in school who could dress better than I could. But—he seemed sincere; so I trusted him—loved him. Oh, I know now that it was only a fairy dream—but I was so happy as we planned for our future home, together! But it was too good to last. Soon school closed; he graduated, and suddenly left town—and me. So, here I am with a ruined life before me, and an infant son who can't ever be anybody. O, if Mother had only lived to direct me—this tale would be—different!"

She broke down again on her last words, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"My dear," Mary said kindly, "we can't always understand why God takes from the world people who are so badly needed here, and leaves the parasites to feed upon society; but we simply have to remember that He knows best and does all things well. However, you and your child can yet be worthy citizens; if you so will it."

The sobbing girl was comforted by the sympathy radiating from her newly-found friend, as she looked up into the kind face opposite hers.

"How?" she anxiously inquired. "Do you think it is yet possible to atone for the past?"

"You surely can," Mary replied emphatically. "Simply by living true-blue in spite of all the obstacles and criticism which will be thrown into your pathway. For instance: I know a young man of education and culture; a success now in the professional world and a gentleman in every sense; a young man that any home, however aristocratic it might be, would be proud now to claim as a son; yet this boy came into the world under similar conditions. The mother later married a worthy man who knew her past mistakes; and she proved ever afterwards to be an ideal wife and mother. So, I know it can be done—but, it takes grit."

"If others have done so; I can, too," she said, alertly bracing up. "But, my trouble is—I came here today to ask if you know of any place where I could get work?"

"What can you do? Cook and do the regular work around a home?"

"Yes, I could do that efficiently," the girl exclaimed. "I've had practical experience, and domestic-science in school, too. And I could do this and care for my baby, too, couldn't I?" Then grim doubt dampened her enthusiasm, "But—maybe no one will try me under these circumstances. No, I can't give up my baby!" The last sentence was almost a wail wrung from a tortured soul.

"Why—no, of course, you must not," Mary comforted. "Let me see!"

Presently Mary continued, "Oh, yes, I remember now! In yesterday's Daily Ledger, I noticed a want ad for a maid sent in by Judge Ellis. He has a nice family—wife and one daughter. Lucille is a senior in high school here; and she has been having to do most of the work at home for Mrs. Ellis is an invalid, confined to a wheelchair."

Then the bright, hopeful look which had so recently come into the face of the poor girl caused Mary to offer further assistance.

"I know Judge and Mrs. Ellis quite well," she said, "as we are co-workers in the same church, and Judge Ellis is a member of the board of education. So, I'll speak to them for you; provided you will promise me to do your best there to give satisfaction, if they accept you."

"I surely will do that!" The tone of her voice confirmed her words.

"I can't tell you, in words, how grateful I feel towards you for all this help and encouragement," the girl said as she arose to go. "But, I shall endeavor to live up to what you have said I can do, and to the trust you have put in me. Now I must go. Baby may be causing Mrs. Pearson trouble."

"I am sure you are going to do your very best—that's all any one can do," Mary said as she conducted the unfortunate girl towards the door. "We have quite a fine class of young women in our Sunday school. Don't you think you would like

to join us. We need you, and it would help you to associate with such girls."

Mary noticed the expression of mingled emotions in the face of the girl—a desire to accept the proffered invitation and hesitation about doing so. Naturally, she dreaded to meet strange people who might look with censure upon her past life. But Mary knew that the poor girl would have to meet such conditions; and that the only way to accomplish anything worth-while was to rise and live above such criticism, struggling to forget past mistakes.

So, she urged further, "Come tomorrow morning, won't you? I'll promise you a cordial reception from the class."

"I fear it will be impossible to come so soon," the girl said. She hesitated a moment and then went on, "Neither baby nor I have clothes suitable. I have a room at Pearson's and am trying to exist on the little money I have till I can earn something. Mrs. Pearson isn't able financially to help any one as her husband is without work since the Factory closed. But really, I don't want any one to support us; I only want a chance to support ourselves."

Mary excused herself a few minutes, and came back with a bundle.

"Here," she said, placing the bundle into the hands of the girl, "is a dress of mine which I'm sure will practically fit you. The material is good as new, and with a little alteration it will meet this year's style perfectly. If you will accept it, you are welcome to it."

The stranger was appreciative and said so in a hearty manner.

"I'll walk to town with you," Mary said, donning coat and hat in the hall.

At the nearest grocery, Mary led the way in and instructed the clerk to fill a market basket with bread, bacon, sugar, milk and potatoes to the limit of what she could carry. As they passed out, she handed the basket to the girl with the instructions that it was for herself and the Pearsons.

"I'll probably let you know about the Ellis position before Monday," Mary said. "But you haven't told me your name yet; so, I wouldn't know to whom to address my message when I wish to send it."

Taking a crumpled, addressed envelope from her pocket, she held it up before Mary for her to read: "Edith Ward." Then with a word of thanks she was gone.

On her way home, Mary walked several blocks north and passed the Ellis home. The cold afternoon had settled down into a cold disagreeable night. Gray clouds hung low—snow-laden clouds which at intervals sifted soft white flakes down upon the city streets. But her heart was as light and feathery as the dancing snowflakes as her light young feet covered the several blocks of extra distance. Just the simple act of helping some one less fortunate than herself had banished all her bodily weariness. For the words of the Master rang in her soul:

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto me!"

Judge Ellis himself opened the door in response to Mary's ring. He was a big man in many ways. His physical frame was big; his influence for good was big; he was a big success in the professional world; his heart was big with a big optimistic outlook on life; his circle of admiring friends was big; his pocketbook was of good size and his methods of using it were big.

"Oh, how great! Simply great to be honored with visits from two members of the same worthy family in the space of one evening," said the good-natured host, as he led Mary through the reception room and on into the sumptuous living room of his beautiful home.

"But I surely didn't know that another member of my family had so recently enjoyed your hospitality, Judge," Mary said, surprised. "Has my brother been here? Any one sick?"

Mary shook hands with the woman in the chair, then took the seat placed for her between the two friends. These friends had known Mary since her childhood days; and knowing the girl meant loving her. While she, who had never known a father's love, had often come to this big-souled friend for the fatherly advice and help she needed.

"Oh, no! He and Lucille have just left with a bunch of young people for the river." The laughing twinkle in his kind blue eyes foretold some teasing jest; and it came, "Say, Super-

intendent Needham was to chaperon the crowd tonight; so I supposed you were included in the official personnel!"

"Well, the truth of the matter is," Mary replied, "I've been very, very busy all afternoon. Didn't even know the party was going as I had company when James came home for supper."

"Oh, I see," said her host. "While we expected you to go; but we are satisfied anyway as long as our girl is under the protecting care of two such fine young men as she is tonight."

"Oh, thanks, Judge!" Mary exclaimed. "Yes, I think she is perfectly safe in their hands."

"You know, Mary," continued the man in a graver tone of voice, "that it makes me shudder to see the way some of our girls, even high-school girls, are permitted to be out every night with any Tom, Dick or Harry who happens to ask them. We may be old-fashioned in our thinking, but we can't help but be glad that our girl is content with the attentions of one young man; and especially glad that this young man is the fibre of manhood of which a certain young doctor is made."

Mary knew that a man like Judge Ellis, who had meted out justice to many offenders of orderly society; a man who could be stern with the sternest when the occasion demanded it, did not hand out undeserving bouquets. So, she smiled her appreciation; for she knew his sincerity.

"That sounds very complimentary, I must say," she replied.

"Perhaps it does," said the lawyer, "but I'm not saying these things because the young man in question happens to be your brother; nor because he happens just now to be paying a little extra attention to Lucille; but I'm speaking as one man speaks of another."

Here Judge Ellis took on some of his legal oratory accompanied by enthusiastic gestures as he continued: "The way he responded to his country's call in time of need, when his youthfulness exempted him, and the splendid record he made in the hospital camp where he was retained is enough to make every citizen in this city proud of him!"

"Of course, it is needless for me to say that our family is extremely proud of its one son and brother," Mary replied heartily. "And, as for his associates, we are zealous, too. For however anxious the parents of girls may be about the com-

pany their daughters keep; it seems to me to be equally as important for the young men to have the right kind of girl friends. The girls of today exert a powerful influence in making or marring the morals of the young men; although some do not seem to realize it."

"I agree with you fully," said Judge Ellis. "Say, I've been wondering—you know as president of the school board I have this privilege—just how long we are going to be able to keep one of our primary teachers, in her present position, I mean? Laughter shook the frame of the big man who had spoken.

"Why?" Mary asked lightly, pretending she didn't see the meaning implied. "She wasn't exactly aware of the fact that you wanted to get rid of her. Possibly not long if you wish a change."

"Get rid of her!" exclaimed the judge. "You know what I meant! Seems like there might be a more attractive position open to her for the future."

Mary looked upon the man at her side almost as if he were her own father. Many times she had shared her heart's secrets with him when seeking his advice; but just now this was too touchy a subject to discuss with him, or any one else. She knew that the warmest sort of friendship existed between John Needham and most of his school-board members. She also knew that at times she was compelled to fight in order to keep her balance; and that all favorable remarks about the man with whom she had to work would just make her temptations at those trying times that much greater. How like Judge Ellis to comment upon the good points of his friends! He usually failed to see the weak points or, at least, usually didn't mention them!

Judge Ellis noticed Mary's thoughtful expression; he wondered if he had judged conditions wrongly. He didn't believe he had. Mary sensed his attitude and forced a lightness into her voice, hoping to disguise the situation.

"Really, Judge, I am not prepared to pass along an official report now," she said simply. "But when I know more maybe I can speak more definitely. However, I didn't come here tonight to discuss family romances with you, in spite of how intensely interesting such subjects are. I came on a little sterner mission."

Then Mary told these friends such parts of the unfortunate girl's story as she thought they should know if they were to become her employers, and ended by asking if they thought she could fill their need of a servant.

"Why—I can't exactly say that she would be an ideal maid under the circumstance," said the lawyer, weighing the matter. "But seems like we can't find our ideal." Turning to the woman in the chair, "What do you say, Allie?"

Mrs. Ellis, until the last few years, had been a beautiful and active woman; but a few months of intensive suffering had left marks of pain in her face, and still worse was her crooked and semi-useless body.

"As you said, we have not found exactly what we want in any of the applicants who have been here, and we must have help soon," replied Mrs. Ellis. "Moreover, if we can extend a helping hand to the unfortunate girl, I believe, we should do so. We, who have children, don't always know just what the future holds for them, either. So, I believe, we should do to other young people as we would have others do to our children, if they should be found in like circumstances."

"All right. We will try the girl a couple of weeks," replied the judge in something like his legal fashion. "If she fills the bill we'll keep her; if not, then we can see."

"Thanks, friends," Mary said, happily confident that the girl would make a desperate effort to "fill the bill." "I'll let Miss Ward know as I promised. Suppose you'll be ready for her Monday?"

"Yes," replied Judge Ellis, "the sooner the better as Alice isn't able to do the things she forces herself to do, and it's hard for Lucille to do so much and keep up her school work and music."

Lawyer-like the man, who had just listened to the pitiful tale of one blighted life, proceeded to draw some conclusions from it, applicable to his own town.

"The girl's story," he said spiritedly, "just emphasizes the truth of what we said a few minutes ago. And I'll tell you things are really desperate here since the closing of the Factory. Why, I've had more cases of petty thievery up in the Juvenile Court this last month than I should have had during a whole year. But this city would have really suffered if it

had not been for the generosity of Homer Clayton!

Mary nodded her approval of Homer Clayton.

Judge Ellis went on, "It isn't a little job to care for five-hundred families after the pay check quits coming in. Clayton has kept them from suffering by giving them credit at his store. And then just think of what a labor riot we would have had if he had not nipped it in the bud!"

"Why—what?" Mary asked blankly.

Then, with some flourishes, the lawyer told Mary about the part Clayton, as head of the committee from the men's mass meeting, had played in ousting Dave Simms. In conclusion he said, "I'm glad this is to be the last close-up at this place!"

"How do you know this will be the last?" Mary asked frankly. "We've been having one about every year."

"Why, don't you know that Clayton has bought the controlling interest in the Factory?" the man inquired. "He'll see to it that there are no more affairs like this."

"Really, has he?" Mary, too, felt astonishment beyond words at the young merchant's generosity.

"Sure!" the man went on to explain: "Clayton was in Oklahoma, expecting to make further investments there, when our committee wired him that the Factory officials wouldn't make any promises about when they would ever start work here. So he dropped all negotiations there, came home at once and closed this deal with them."

Still Mary could find no words to express her gratitude concerning Homer Clayton's beneficence. That any one could be so generous, so unselfish seemed almost like a delightful dream. She was afraid to speak lest her words betray more feeling than she wanted this man to detect. The lawyer's words again broke through the maze of her thoughts:

"Some will criticise him—will say that he did it to save his own neck. And, of course, he does hold a lot of debts against the workers; but, I'm fully convinced that a generous heart, more than personal interests, prompted this deal. Anyway, we all should be thankful that the Factory will open its doors by the first of the year."

"That is certainly good news!" Mary's voice, even to herself, sounded far-away and ghostly. She knew it didn't express even the minutest fractional part of the joyous exultation

which was surging through her heart. Nor did she want it to. Her voice was quite casual as she said: "A prophet never has any honor in his own country; and I am very sure that none of us here fully appreciate what Homer Clayton means to this city!"

"I've often wished" But the man never finished his sentence.

"I've often wished that Homer Clayton might be as happy as he truly deserves to be," Mary finished it for him, or rather expressed her own sentiments.

"I suppose that's about what I was trying to say," the man responded. "Along with his financial success, life has dealt Homer some pretty bitter blows."

Turning the conversation again to conditions relative to needs of the city's poor, Mary said, "In school the situation has been, and still is, most pitiful, too. Children come to school without lunches; when we are positive that they have had only the tiniest bit of breakfast. Children, under such conditions, can't do the proper kind of work. So, a few of we teachers have been trying to relieve the situation as best we can; but such measures can't be carried on for a very long period. Unless," she added in a lighter tone, "unless the school board should decide to raise our salaries!"

"Yes, I've heard what some of you teachers are doing, and I must say that it is too much!" the big man exclaimed. "Besides, it can't possibly meet the demand, sufficiently. I've been feeling for several days that the school officials should make some arrangements to relieve the situation." Presently he asked, "Could you suggest any plan?"

"Yes," Mary said quickly, "I already have a plan worked out which I would like to see tried. "But—it would take funds, Judge!"

"Well, it takes funds to move anything in this old world," laughed the lawyer. "Let's have it, though. Maybe we can find a little extra money to begin with—that is, if your plan sounds feasible."

"Now my plan is very simple," Mary explained. "Put in a small kitchen outfit, at each of the grade schools at least, and each day serve free hot lunches to all the pupils who need it and will stay. Of course, the menu should vary from day to

day. For instance, stew would be good one day, but tiresome if served every day. Then each hot dish should be supplemented by some kind of sandwiches to make it a wholesome lunch."

The man of law was thoughtfully weighing Mary's plan as she outlined it; just as he weighed every enterprise before he passed his opinion upon it. His eyes were focalized upon the toe of his black oxfords, outlined against the glowing embers; but Mary knew that it took something mightier than shoe leather to cause such rapt expression. In truth, he was seeing a vacant room in each of the two grade-school buildings, recently fitted up with the necessary cooking-and-serving outfits, competent cooks in charge. He almost heard the dinner gong ring, so real was his vision; as in imagination he stood in the background and saw the hundreds of eager, hungry little children file by the door, and receive their lunches to be eaten in their own rooms.

"Seems to me that your plan might be workable," he said at last. "And I'll call a board meeting soon to discuss some relief measure. I'll also speak to Superintendent Needham about the situation at the first opportunity. Therefore, let us hope that we can relieve the situation soon."

CHAPTER VIII

WORKING CHRISTIANITY

The next morning as Mary walked into the room to which her Sunday-school class had been assigned, she looked into the faces of a great concourse of girls. The class, though small at the time Mary became its teacher, had since then grown by leaps and bounds, comparable only to the growth of the city during the last few years. It was made up of recruits from every walk of life. Daughters of homes of wealth and culture and daughters of haughty society leaders worked and associated with clerks, stenographers, shop girls and factory girls, both in the class and in the social life relative to the Sunday-school work.

These had been drawn to the class by various motives. Some had come from curiosity; some through invitation extended by the teacher or some member of the class; some because of religious zeal; and still others because of friends belonging to the class. But each one never failed to carry away with her two conscious benefits for the coming: an inspiring truth gained from the lecture and discussions of the class period and a desire to come back and bring some one else with her. Therefore, the class had been transferred from one room to another to accommodate its ever-growing size until this Sunday morning it taxed the capacity of the largest room in the building. And better still, it had reached the stage of being really and truly a melting-pot—where all worldly conventionalities were melted into a Christianity which uplifts and makes people of all classes akin through the love of Christ, who became the elder brother of all mankind.

After having the class join her in a short session of personal prayers, Mary plunged into the lesson of the morning; because she wished to have ample time for some other things she wanted to say at the close of the lesson period. A short while later, as she brought the lesson of the morning to a close with

a practical application to every-day life, she wove into it the story of Christ's discussion with the woman of Samaria at the well. She wanted to make these young women to actually see and feel the love and sympathy that Christ felt for poor unfortunate humanity.

In closing, Mary said, "I wonder if we, as a class, have that Great Love in our hearts sufficient to enable us to welcome into our fold one like this woman whom Christ forgave? Can we welcome one here who has been betrayed in confidence; one who now considers herself an outcast? Can we invite her here and make her feel that she is really one of us, that we do not feel ourselves above her? How many feel that we can?"

Mary was touched and sobered by the hearty response with which her class met her challenge. Almost unanimously it pledged itself to open its arms and receive this new girl; this girl whom many would be likely to consider as an outcast of society. Then the teacher told her class just a few points of the story which had been confided to her; so that each girl might be better prepared to welcome the new member in a sympathetic and intelligent manner.

"In view of her financial circumstances," said Lucille Ellis, "I suggest that along with our invitation, we send Miss Ward a little gift of money—or clothes bought with this money. We don't want clothes to be a barrier to keep her from coming here. Nor do we want her to feel embarrassed when she does come."

While yet speaking, Lucille took from her purse a bill, which she had reserved from her weekly allowance for some worthy cause, placed it into the collection basket on the table at her elbow. Then she started the basket on its trip around the room.

When the basket returned to the table and the collection was counted, it was known to contain exactly twenty dollars and five cents.

"Now this is certainly Christianity!" Mary exclaimed. "Working Christianity, after all, is the only kind that is worthwhile and satisfying. Words can't express my feelings, dear girls, but you all know what's in my heart anyway. Giving is sharing. So, you will be just as happy as this gift and your kindness are going to make poor Edith Ward."

Mary was greatly moved by this generous deed of her class. Her voice, while steady and at her command, contained a deep note of pathos, a quality which she made no attempt to conceal. Nor was she the only one touched by the events of the morning. Several were seen slyly making use of their handkerchiefs.

Presently Mary asked, "Do you wish to appoint a special committee to carry your gift and words of welcome to Miss Ward, or shall the regular Visiting Committee of the class have it in charge?"

"I suggest," said one, "that Miss Ellis, chairman of the regular Visiting Committee, and our teacher, Miss Gray, act as a special committee to invite the young woman to class, and also to spend the money as they, with her suggestions, see best."

Another supported the suggestion and so it was unanimously voted.

After class Mary and Lucille made plans to carry out their mission. They decided that at two o'clock this afternoon they would go to see the girl, at which time they would arrange for the purchasing during the following week. In parting, Mary invited Lucille to accompany her home from their trip for the remainder of the afternoon and supper.

At dinner Mary told her mother and brother all about how beautifully her class had this morning responded to her appeal for the strange young girl, and how liberally they had given money for material relief. She was radiantly happy as she finished her story and asked, "So, brother of mine, how would it please you to drive two young ladies to the Factory District this afternoon at two?"

The young doctor looked intently at the happy face opposite him. It was no unusual occurrence for either, the brother or sister, to ask for assistance from the other in his or her respective work—and this often took them into this section of the city. But this occasion seemed shrouded with more ceremony than their trips usually called forth.

"Well, if the other happens to be the equal of the one speaking, I might consent," smilingly replied the young physician in the matter-of-fact way that he usually settled affairs.

"I certainly wouldn't want you to air your comparison in my presence," Mary said with a searching smile at her brother's

face, "because the other one happens to be Lucille Ellis. See! I might feel myself worsted."

"Don't worry. But I'll try to be Jimmy-on-the-spot when the hour arrives!"

After dinner Mary went to the telephone, called John Needham and asked if it would be convenient for him to go with her little party on its missionary trip to the eastern part of the city. When he replied that he would be glad to go, she told him to bring his car. She had two motives for wishing him to be included in the party. First, it took his presence to make the little group complete. But her greater motive was to cause the superintendent of the city's schools to see and realize for himself some of the wretched conditions which existed in this district of the poor; conditions that she knew much about and had been trying in every possible way to relieve.

Before leaving their home for the trip, Mary instructed her brother to take the lead with Lucille in his car as they left the Ellis home, to drive very slowly out the full length of the first street in the factory addition, to pass the imposing factory buildings, and to come back on the last parallel street up to about the middle where the Pearsons lived.

Few minutes later, as they left the business section of the city and passed out into the Factory District, their earnest young minds had ample chance for making some vivid comparisons. They had passed from the heart of a town where there was evidence on every side of peace, plenty and prosperity out into a land of want, cold and hunger. Mary's heart ached as they passed yard after yard where groups of poorly-clad and half-nourished children were playing in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun, trying to supply by exercise the warmth to their little bodies that was not available inside their wretched homes. While men, for the same reason, lounged or stood idly on the sunny side of some building. Most all the homes were very small and of cheap construction; while lack of fire was evident in many of them.

Then the two small cars stopped side by side in front of a small cottage, and Mary and Lucille went in on their errand of love.

The young men waiting in the cars noticed one of the groups of men lounging on benches in the yard across the street. At

first the bits of over-heard talk were unnoticed; but after a while their conversation became more spirited and then full sentences reached the ears of the occupants of the cars with unmistakable clearness.

One said, "Angels! You bet. Homer Clayton's an archangel—believe that's what you call 'em. Miss Gray's a close second."

"You said it, Peter," piped up another. "Several like her here, too. 'Most every member of that South Main Church is helpin' this place. Why, last night I was trying to get my four off to bed, but I was sure they hadn't had enough supper; when all at once I heard a knock on the door. A man stepped 'round the corner as I looked out; but settin' right in front of the door was the biggest basket of eats. Something like that makes a feller want to thank the giver."

"Yes, I've had a few good things stuck under my nose, too," said the third speaker. "But I'm glad we're going to get to work pretty soon; I don't like this thing of bein' fed on credit, or charity either. You fellers don't either; now do you?"

"Of course, we don't!" echoed several, in almost unison.

"We might not take it for ourselves; but we've got our families to think of," replied the voice referred to as Pete.

"Well, what Bill said a while ago about that church bein' our friend is sure so," said one who had not yet spoken. "I told my wife last night that if we all didn't line up and help them push their good work as soon as we have some decent clothes on our backs and good food in our insides; then we wouldn't deserve any help from them after this."

Doctor Gray had been an interested listener to these remarks, and he couldn't have prevented hearing them had he tried. And as their conversation progressed, he was fully convinced, by both their tone of voice and mannerisms, that these men were staging a little dialogue for his own and John's benefit—their own crude way of expressing their thanks.

John Needham, too, had heard it all; and it had nearly proved too much for him. While he managed to remain quietly in his place at the wheel, he boiled and fumed inside at the thought of any bunch of idiotic men calling Homer Clayton an "archangel". And associating Mary Gray's name with Clayton's! He didn't care a bit if some one called her an

angel, or even an archangel—this was his sentiment, too—but she wasn't in the class of angels to which Clayton belonged. Why didn't some people mind their own business?

So, when Doctor Gray purposely looked at John's face, wondering if he had heard, too, it wasn't any difficulty to read the truth in every expression of the young superintendent's tense body. He sat very erect, face cold and drawn, hands fiercely gripping the wheel as if he were ready at that minute to flee to more pleasant surroundings.

Nor did he have to wait long. Soon Mary and Lucille came out of the cottage; came down the small plank walk, through the open gateway to which a delapidated broken gate hung back on one hinge, and joined their companions. They had remained only a short while with Edith Ward, as they didn't wish to cause the men an unpleasant wait. But their stay had been long enough to carry another ray of sunshine into the poor girl's life; and she had promised to be present at Sunday school the following Sunday. She was delighted with the position open to her at the Ellis home, and with tears of joy thanked the girls for the kindness which had been shown her by both families.

Again with Mary, John shook off the spell of rage that had all but conquered him. Her troubled silence brought him back to the tasks of the hour. He told himself bitterly that all angels ought to be happy; but Mary was an angel and she was unhappy, depressed by the pall of misery which hung over this section. He tried to talk, to say something light and airy; but she didn't respond to his mood. Monosyllables from Mary Gray didn't satisfy John Needham. To keep a happy smile on the face of the girl and a carefree song in her heart was his dearest wish; for in his love, he had learned to turn to her for light and warmth very much as a flower turns its face to the sun. But now, for him, the sun wasn't shining.

With a look of grave concern in his gray eyes, he said at last, "Mary, I wish you would stay away from this place. You're doing things beyond reason!"

"Oh, John!" she cried, with a gesture toward a tumbled-down house, "Can't you see the dire need of this section? Can't you even feel it for yourself?"

"I suppose the need is great enough," he replied, almost

lightly. "But why should you have to assume the problems of the universe? You," he went on more soberly, "come here day or night, with never a thought of your own welfare. Why don't you let others try their hands at it for a while?"

"Oh! don't think for one minute that I'm doing it all; others are working, too," Mary replied. "But I can't sit idly by; not when little children are cold and hungry."

Just then their car passed by a yard where ten or twelve children were busily engaged with a game of "Hide and Seek." With an air of skeptical intolerance towards such conditions, and the causes of such conditions, John had taken particular notice of the large number of children visible in this section.

"I judge from the number of urchins visible this afternoon," he said with a cynical smile, "that this class believes in perpetuation of the specie."

"I suppose," Mary said thoughtfully, "that many families here have as many, or even more, children than they can properly feed and clothe; and this, at least partly, accounts for the fact that they have nothing in reserve for an emergency like now. But," she went on pointedly, "the poor little children are not responsible for this; and certainly should not have to suffer because of it. And at any rate they should have the necessities of life now, if they are to grow into useful American citizens—such as you surely want them to become. Every genius is not born with a golden spoon in his mouth; so we don't know what good may come out of this place, some day."

"I'll admit you have the sane and patriotic view of the situation," John said humbly, "but seems to me the burden is falling too heavily on some."

"Yes, maybe so," Mary admitted. "However, Judge Ellis said last night that the school board would probably make some arrangement, by the first of next week, to relieve the situation at school. This will mean much."

"That so?" inquired John with an enlightened look. "May I ask if you were at the Ellis home last night?"

"Yes, for a while in the early evening. Why?"

"Possibly this explains why I couldn't find you," said John. "I tried every way I could think of to locate you."

"I suppose it does," Mary replied, "for Mother was at a neighbor's home when I returned."

"Real late," the superintendent of schools went on to explain," a member of the senior class called and asked that we chaperon his class and a few invited friends on a skating party and picnic supper at the river. After I couldn't get any response from you over the telephone, I drove by the house to find it all dark. Your brother could give me no information about you; so we were forced to go on without you."

"I'm very sorry," Mary said sincerely, "for more than one reason. I would have enjoyed helping you with your official duties; and from a personal standpoint, I am the loser—I've heard about your good time. Brother was describing at breakfast some of the stunts played."

"Oh, yes, we had a very enjoyable evening," John replied. "You probably already know that there is plenty of pep and wit in that bunch to make a jolly, good time out of any occasion."

Then, prompted by some impulse which he couldn't have defined had he tried, he added, "But before the evening was over, I felt the need of an able assistant in that humble capacity; quite as much as in the many other things I'm striving to do successfully."

It amused Mary to hear John speak of needing an "able assistant"—John, so big and strong, so capable in every way, so independent of the opinions of others! She had heard married women say that men were grown-up babies; and she verily believed it.

"It does seem," she said, at last coaxed into a teasing mood, "it does seem that a young man, who happens to be handsome in appearance and a very interesting talker, who happens to have a splendid new car to set him off, and who happens to have thirty other teachers working under his supervision—some of them very attractive young ladies—should be able to find at least one able assistant among that crowd. If not, there are some fine specimens of American girlhood included in the city's population."

"Gosh! You needn't be so obvious about it." He knew Mary was teasing his sensibilities; but it rankled his feelings to see her take him so lightly. Then a happy thought popped into his head, "Why, possibly my vision has been too centralized all this time; and no doubt if I cast my optics over

all the territory you've suggested, I'll find such a person. At any rate, it might be well to experiment a little."

He cast a searching look at the face of his companion. She smiled at his remark, but there was nothing to indicate any mental disturbance over his threat. Then he was more rankled than ever at her complacency; and began conjecturing in his own mind as to just what effect such a course might have. Would it bring her to him? Or would it drive her to Homer Clayton? Would it settle the affair in any way, whatever? Did he wish to try such an experiment, or not?

To these and similar questions—childish questions, to be sure—his answers had only just reached the nebulous stage when the little party drove up in front of Mary's home.

CHAPTER IX

FEEDING FUTURE CITIZENS

Blissville's school system was composed of Central High and two ward grammar schools. Broadview, the one located in the southwestern part of the city's residential section, was touched by the closing of the Factory only in a very indirect way—as the parents' incomes were touched by the depression in general business affairs. But Eastside was directly hit; as most of its children came from the Factory District and sections bordering it—all of the poorer laboring class.

As Mary had told Judge Ellis, she and a few of the other teachers, in whose rooms conditions were worst, had held a counsel among themselves and out of their own salaries had instituted a plan for immediate relief. So, for over two weeks, each of these teachers had been taking a large basketful of some sort of nourishing sandwiches and a gallon-sized thermos jug of hot cocoa to school with her each morning, to be divided between the needy children in her own room.

Early Monday morning Judge Ellis called a meeting of the board of education for the purpose of discussing some means of school relief. John Needham was also present at this meeting. Each one frankly admitted that something should be done—but what? After some discussion, without anything definite decided upon, Judge Ellis outlined the plan which he and Mary had privately decided upon at his home the preceding Saturday evening. He further suggested that they draw upon some incidental funds which were available to start the work; appoint a committee of business men and women to assist with the project; and ask for special cash donations to help carry it on. And thus it was voted in ample time for a full account of the meeting and their call for financial help to come out in the morning edition of *The Daily Ledger*.

In response to this call, and also to the personal work of some individuals, the money fairly flowed in to help the good

cause. Some came with donations which showed material prosperity; some came with a "widow's mite"; some telephoned good wishes and help; some sent theirs by mail; thus all day the personal business of each committee-member was at a stand-still while he or she spent the time answering questions, receiving money and promoting the plans for the school-relief work.

By 4 o'clock the financial support of the project was so secure that workmen were sent to Eastside School to build shelves, put in tables and oil stoves, and other necessary things for a temporary school kitchen. The next forenoon found everything in charge of a competent cook, who was busily washing dishes and getting things in readiness for noon lunch.

To children from homes of plenty and comfort, the school lunch would probably have meant little—or nothing. But to little hungry children from homes where the wolf was constantly knocking at the door, it meant much to know that at the proper time dishfuls of good nourishing soup and plenty of bread-and-butter sandwiches were going to be served them. And free, too! In fact, it meant so much it was hard to wait for the proper time to come.

However, at last, after the morning routine of lessons was completed, the lines formed, beginning with the little folks first and ranging up according to the grade, and passed by the door of the kitchen where each one was served, and then passed on to his or her own room with the tempting morsel. Ample amount had been prepared and the cook instructed to give a second serving to all who came back for it. As they ate, they talked and chattered about how good the soup was. Some knew that the cook was a good cook; and there were many wishes, expressed in childish ways, that mama or baby brother or little sister had some of their good lunch.

Late Wednesday morning, Superintendent Needham was at Eastside School on his tour of inspection. As he left Mary's room, only a few minutes before the noon hour, she managed to be at her desk as he passed by for the purpose of inviting him some time soon to sample the children's bill-of-fare. But before she could say a word, he had his own plans ready.

"Those delicious odors arising from the kitchen have caused

me to linger longer than usual," he said with a smile, "in hopes that I might be classed with the children today."

Mary knew John was jesting, but with all sincerity she replied, "As head of the institution which is promoting this project, you surely ought to know what is being served here. And, in this case, there is no better way of knowing than by exercising your sense of taste."

"I believe you're right," he replied. "I'm on my way to the basement to inspect some plumbing work that is about finished. But I'll be back by the time the little folks have been served."

Thirty minutes later, the superintendent was again on the main floor of the building. He passed quietly and unnoticed through the halls and glanced into several rooms, where small children were busy with their lunches and the chattering which accompanies such an occasion. Finally, his tour of inspection completed, he made his way towards the kitchen.

Mary had been helping serve and was still busy in the kitchen when John appeared at the door. While she cleared a small table of the extra dishes and spoons, John improvised some seats from the boxes which had been left by the grocery deliveryman the day before. Then he stood watching her as she filled two soup plates with the appetizing meat-and-vegetable stew, and placed them on the table with the same number of bread-and-butter sandwiches that had been served to two of the children. Mary made a move to empty the contents of her own lunch-box upon the table to supplement the school lunch, but John stopped her.

"I prefer the stew and sandwiches—only," he said. "This is my opportunity to test out the efficiency of the school menu. I'm quite sure the supreme test will come about middle of the afternoon, and I wish to be accurate."

"Why, of course!" Mary smiled at the young man's sincerity, and then voluntarily placed her own lunch back in the box.

As they ate the tasty wholesome food to the satisfying of healthful young appetites and chatted over topics which were of mutual interest, they found time to express their appreciation and approval of the food. These words of praise and the informal bits of harmless gossip, with which their conversation

was flavored, were a source of delight to the cook, who at this particular moment, was busy with her own lunch at a near-by table.

Long after all teachers and pupils had left Central High, John Needham sat at his desk. At length, after the last item had been painstakingly gone over, he turned in his chair to look out towards the western horizon, bathed in after-glow of a hidden sun. For several minutes he feasted on the wonderful beauties of the red-and-gold wintery sunset; and as he did so, there stole into his consciousness the sublime satisfaction which comes, at the close of a day, to all who know that the day has been filled with noble work, well done.

Some of the last items of business just gone over were statements sent to him, as head of the school system, by grocery and hardware stores. These covered the initial expense of starting the school-lunch work, and the amount was comparatively small to what he had estimated it would be. His mind had been open to convictions upon the value of the work just started; and he had purposely timed his trip to Eastside School today so as to be there at the noon hour. But before leaving the building, he had been convinced that the children both needed and appreciated their lunches. Then after partaking of the same food, he was further convinced that the food, which was being served by the school of which he was the official head and to the children who were under his supervision, was both good and adequate.

When John Needham was once convinced of the merits of any enterprise, he was thoroughly convinced and ready to promote it with his whole being. Consequently, he soon found himself wishing, and then planning, that the school-lunch might extend to the other schools and become a permanent part of his already modern school system. His wishes soon became concrete actions; for he took from his inner coat pocket a check-book, went through the process of filling in the necessary writing, tore the slip from the book and placed it in his outside vest pocket.

Few minutes later, on the way to his boarding-house, John met Judge Ellis. The lawyer showed signs of halting as they met, and as the superintendent shook hands with the older man, he deposited in his hand a check of large enough amount

to pay for many meals, such as he had eaten today at school.

After a few words of thanks and appreciation, Judge Ellis inquired, "How is everything, Needham? School lunch working?"

Judge Ellis knew that the superintendent had not been very enthusiastic about this new work, for he had very frankly expressed his doubts in the meeting Monday morning. He also knew that John Needham didn't change his opinions as easily as he changed his coats. Nevertheless, his quick eye foresaw a change in the younger man's attitude.

The young man at the head of this very efficient school system stood erect, and his strong handsome face shone with pride and satisfaction in himself and the work he was daily accomplishing.

"Do I look starved, even under-nourished?" he asked whimsically. "Not much, I'm sure," answering his own question, "and I never felt more physically fit than I do at this minute; and yet all the food I've had since breakfast was eaten at the school-lunch kitchen. Proof! Isn't it?"

"Good!" exclaimed the lawyer, "but nothing more than I expected. And now I'll tell you the best part of this proposition: Eastside was in immediate need, of course; therefore this experiment is being used to fill an urgent need. But the school-lunch work in Eastside is an experiment, just the same; and if it works satisfactorily there—and there is every indication in its favor—we are going to put the same equipment in at Broadview. Permanent, you understand!"

John didn't know whether he was understanding a-right or not. He stood dazed, speechless at the great news. Until the other man's words again aroused him.

"What do you think of it—Broadview, I mean?"

"Think?" John cried. "Why, I think it would be simply great!"

"Well, your approval is what we've been waiting for," the judge responded. Then went on confidentially, "Last night the committee met with the school board, and together we made estimation of our funds. We found we had plenty to carry on this work for the remainder of this year. The people's hearty response to this work has convinced us that next year will take care of itself. But, of course, we'll work out some method to

finance it not like the one we resorted to this time. And as for Central High, it will be easier sailing there; because the cooking and serving equipment is already a part of the domestic-science department. The need isn't so great there either; but we'll do something—at least as far as the need justifies. What say?"

"I say, I'm your servant; command me!" Which was, after all, a rather big mouthful for John Needham to say. He usually liked to form his own plans; and he was most certain to want others to listen to them after they were once formed.

Then, by a lawyer-like trick—characteristic of him, or his profession—Judge Ellis switched the conversation back to the spirit which was prompting this benevolent work. And while he kept his young friend standing in the cold bracing air of the late wintery afternoon, this man who was such a power for good, both with his money and his influence, painted a most glorious word picture of Christ, the greatest Teacher of all ages; and how He often found it necessary to relieve the pains of the suffering, or feed the hungry, before He could teach the truths which He had come into the world to teach. As a fitting conclusion to his weighty discourse, he paid homage to the American schools which, as well as the churches, are striving to make worthy citizens by inspiring in their hearts the beautiful principles of the Great Teacher.

John Needham walked on home this evening in a very thoughtful state of mind. He was beginning to realize that every honorable and worth-while accomplishment is finally traced back to the workings of the Church; and is, after all, a visible manifestation of the living principles of the Great Teacher; principles which He instituted and exercised during His stay here among men. It seemed to this thoughtful young man that his nearest and dearest friends were using special caution to hold up constantly before his mental vision the miraculous deeds of the Christ; deeds for which his materialistic theories did not—and could not—account.

CHAPTER X

CLAYTON'S REQUEST

As Mary's primary pupils were dismissed at 3 o'clock, she had long availed herself the opportunity of attending the weekly meetings of the Ladies' Missionary Society, even though she missed the preliminary opening each time.

On Thursday afternoon at the Society's meeting, Mary was invited by the president, Mrs. Nelson Lee, to tell about the school-lunch work; as to how it was being carried on, how the children responded to their efforts, the kinds of food being served, and how substantial was the financial end of the work. At the conclusion of her report, all the ladies present were satisfied that this phase of the city's benevolent work was well taken care of, for the present, at least.

Therefore, during the afternoon session it was voted by this worthy organization for its members to turn their attention to the task of supplying warm clothing for the women and children of the most needy families. They set aside the following day for this purpose; to be devoted to making new clothes, gathering from the church members such suitable clothing as the owners would donate, and distributing their offering where, they thought, it would do the most good. The one restriction upon which every one agreed was that everything accepted and sent out by any member of the Missionary Society must be clean and whole—mended, if mending were necessary. But cleanliness and neatness were attributes which should be strongly upheld by every one, and should characterize their charity work as much as anything else they did.

Instead of going home after the meeting, Mary went downtown. It was now the middle of December, and the city was already dressed in its holiday attire. She wanted to do some shopping—window-shopping, at least. The cold air was sweetly poignant with the holiday spirit, as she passed window after window where Santa and a glittering, sparkling tree spoke

worlds of cheer and comfort. Then, all of a sudden, the electric lights were switched on, and the city took on new beauty, new significance, new splendor. Each window vied with its neighbor for beauty, for grace, for symmetry. Each was saying in a language plainer than words, "Come in and buy! Come in and buy!"

A half-hour passed and yet Mary hadn't made a purchase. Not even entered a store to make one; because she couldn't think what she wanted if she should enter. She would be sure to buy something she didn't want, under the lure of the clerk's urging. Pressing duties had several times lately supplanted Christmas planning. Now the great day was almost here and nothing ready!

"That scarf for Mother," she decided, surveying a beautiful creation of lavender and gold in the window. "Just the thing for cool evenings."

"Oh, yes! I'll go by Nash's Jewelry and see about that fraternity watch-fob that James was admiring the other day. It'll be worth half of a month's salary to give the dear boy such a surprise. Mother and I can go together on it, too."

"But . . . John! What, O what for him?" John was, to Mary, a problem to be reckoned with in many ways. Persistent and lavish in his giving at this season; so he must be remembered, too. And yet it was so hard to think of something suitable which he didn't already possess.

She knew it was getting late, but had paid very little attention to the fact. Going anywhere at any time, day or night, and feeling perfectly safe in doing so was one of Mary's happy faculties. She knew there wasn't a man or boy within the city who wouldn't protect her, if she should find herself in the need of such protection. She maintained at least a speaking acquaintance with everybody; and felt secure behind the bulwark of their respect.

She had just started to go in and have the scarf wrapped up, when a car's "H-o-n-n-n-k!" pierced the din of the city's noises. Turning, she was face to face with Homer Clayton, hanging half-way out of his big blue sedan. Instantly he was on his feet, hat in hand.

"Been to your home," was his genial greeting. "Forgot about the Missionary Society—but you went shopping any-

way." With a significant glance at her empty arms, "Not shopping, either!"

"Don't expect us to stay all night at any meeting, do you?" she bantered.

"Get in." Forgetting all about the interrupted shopping, she obeyed and settled down into the soft depths of the great car. As if he were doing the most natural thing in the world, Homer Clayton took his place at the wheel beside Mary, carefully tucked the soft, warm robe around her, and casually explained, "Christmas plans are heavy upon me; got to get rid of some of them! So you're my victim this time."

"How great!" Mary replied. "Suppose I've been waiting for somebody to do my Christmas planning; couldn't get at it myself."

The big car swung around and headed towards Mary's home. The man was a superb figure in his belted gray overcoat, with hat and gloves matching. His companion was dressed only in her school outfit, brown coat and red felt hat; but in spite of this she would most likely have been the one noticed first. Her soft gold-brown hair was slightly disbevelled under the day's wear; but its richness enhanced the beauty of her face, flushed by walking in the cold air, expectant from Clayton's announcement. They talked and laughed over other things; but not until the big car had ceased its purring in front of the girl's home, did the man mention his mission.

"My request may sound queer—making plans for a teacher to carry out in her own school when I am in no way officially connected with said school," he said, turning slightly around so that he might face the girl at his side, "but I hope you will receive my words as they are intended. The Men's Bible Class and I would like to play Santa Claus to the children of East-side; provided we can get a programme arranged for Christmas Day."

He paused, as if to give his words their proper significance, "But we hardly know how to manage it. A blind man can see that Superintendent Needham wouldn't cooperate with me in anything. I talked it over with Judge Ellis; he sent me to you."

"Judge Ellis approves your plans, does he?"

"He heartily approves, and is, as you know, one of the lead-

ing men in this class," Clayton assured her. "The class and I will go fifty-fifty on the expenses."

Mary's eyes had been studying the lay of the ground through the wind-shield; but she had not missed one iota of the man's story. Now she raised frank blue eyes, filled with inexplicable admiration, and met his quick, dark eyes.

"Homer," she said fervently, "I've not had a chance lately to tell you how grand and noble I think your conduct has been during this industrial crisis." Voluntarily she placed her hand in his right hand lying upon the robe, and thrilled as his warmly-goloved left closed over it. "Please accept my thanks in behalf of the poor of this town. But," hesitatingly, "you've already done so much."

"A man will do a whole lot to save his own neck, figuratively speaking," Clayton said, with a wince of his actively alert body. "But I don't regret one thing I've done," he went on confidentially. "The men have bought nothing which they didn't absolutely need; and while some of them have rather large bills, I know every one of them will pay as fast as he can. The Factory has made money for a few individuals; poverty—and almost anarchy—for the city at times like this. And it isn't surprising, either; but I expect things to be better when we open up after the holidays. The hours will be shortened and wages increased some; and we'll not lose money by this, either. I want to make some improvements, or rather buildings, there; and try to give these fellows and their families a few of the better things of life. There will be an insurance system introduced among the men too, through which they can, by small payments, safeguard their old age, and their families in case of death."

Clayton had been speaking in the easy, fluent manner so natural to him, until came his abrupt pause, "Pardon me, I got entirely off on another phase of this subject. What I want to know now is: Will you help us put on this Christmas programme?"

"Middle of December now and a programme to prepare for Christmas—only ten days away!" The thought almost startled, frightened her. But, in spite of it, she found courage to say, "I could not be true to the Christ whose birthday we will celebrate; nor true to you as a benevolent and helpful

friend; nor true to myself as a Christian if I were to refuse your request. The time is short; but I'll do my best."

"I know this means work to already overflowing hands," Clayton said gratefully, "but you can depend upon me to help in every possible way. "And," with one of his most happy smiles, "we'll turn disappointment to Christmas happiness for many a little youngster, see if we don't! Only keep my own part—if you have to mention it at all—in the background."

How like Homer Clayton! Always doing some great and noble deed; and then wishing to be left in the background, if mentioned at all. Always giving the credit to the Church as Christ's agent in the world, while most people liked to hear their own selves lauded! Mary knew that there had been nothing compulsory about him jeopardizing his fortune in the first place; he could have stayed out of the situation, just as most of the other merchants had done. But his every move had been prompted by a big, generous heart which wanted to live and let live. And now other good things were in store for this poor class, for the man behind all these good things was speaking.

"The Church must do something to reach these people for Christ. I first thought of this programme in connection with our own Sunday-school celebration; but we couldn't get the parents to bring their children and it's too far for them to come alone. Seems like there is nothing else to do but to have it at the school; for it will be their own affair there, and they will go."

Mary accepted his decision as correct, then she said, "I know a little bit about the new bee that is buzzing under your hat. Another fine idea!"

"See," with hat removed, the man bowed his head before Mary's eyes, "Nature's covering is getting rather thin up there! Have to keep something there to fill up space."

Mary smiled at his epigrammatic words, while she, as unreservedly as if it had been her own brother, gave the tiny bald spot, visible in the light from the near-by street-lamp, the blessing of a gentle little pat.

CHAPTER XI

A PRECARIOUS SITUATION

Mary ever afterwards looked back upon this Christmastide as the beginning of her Golden Age of Service. But just now she found herself in a rather precarious situation.

However, early the next morning she walked into her school-room with a bold face, ready to meet whatever might come. She had made a thorough inventory of the situation the night before, and she now had a tabulated record in her mind of every possibility. She had resolved to go straight ahead with her plans, tell Superintendent Needham all he must know as head of the school system—nothing more. For what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him!

To tell him that Homer Clayton was behind the proposed programme would be like touching a lighted match to dynamite; to pass it off as a Sunday-school project—if he asked who was going to finance it, as he would be sure to do—well, it would just strike him differently, he would have to respect it for what it was. And this was really the truth, anyway; for Homer Clayton, as superintendent of the Sunday school and by his years of faithful service, had certainly become a very vital part of the Sunday-school.

And yet her plan was not all she wanted it to be. Subterfuge had held no place in Mary's life. She would much rather tell John Needham all about the proposition, fully emphasizing Clayton's part in it, and climax it all by saying, "That's what a Christian man can do. That's the kind of man I want you to be!"

But she could almost feel the earthquake that such a course would bring on. Mary was often amused in her quieter hours, after the smoke of their conflicts had passed over, at the tiffs which were constantly occurring between herself and her chief. But she knew that if John had found her a rag, which he could wrap around his finger at his will, she would not have

been interesting to him at all—only as a machine is interesting to a mechanic. And if he had not been possessed with such strong, almost immovable convictions, possibly he would not have appealed to her, either. But the dark part of it all was that his convictions often lay in the wrong direction.

Just while she was wondering most how to manage to see John at the earliest moment, in order to ask for his permission to go on with her plans, he stuck his head in at the door with a cheery, "Good morning!"

Mary's invitation brought him inside, and soon that ordeal was over with. He took it about like many people eat carrots—because it was prescribed. No hearty approval; no offer to help! But, knowing him as she did, she hadn't expected either. She breathed a sigh of satisfaction over the fact that he would be gone home when the day arrived.

The other teachers met Mary's plans with hearty response, and soon their preparations were under way.

The teachers heard much childish prattle these days about what each so hoped to find in his or her stocking on Christmas morning. Mary was destined to listen to such a conversation this very morning before school.

Little Lillian, one of Eastside's few children from wealthy homes, looked very proud, self-satisfied in her beautiful little dress of rose, and her long brown curls falling over her shoulders, as she said, "My, I think it would be awful to not have pretty things for Christmas! You see, I'm going to get three big dolls, all dressed just like I am now. Maybe other colors, but pretty; and they are all going to have long curls, too."

Here the little lady, who looked very much like a big doll, too, centered the attention of her envious listeners upon her own pretty apparel and flowing curls with a becoming gesture, as she thought of more things she wanted, "And I'm going to get a buggy to take Dollies riding in, and a set of dishes so we can play housekeeping, and a broom so I can sweep our house. And, oh, just lots of candy and cakes and such things! More than I can think of now!"

"Well, if I could just get one doll I'd be satisfied," said little Ella, a lovable, sweet child from one of the poorer homes. "Mamma says I mustn't be sad if I don't get anything this

Christmas; 'cause Daddy has no work. . . But," brightly, "I do believe I'll get something nice, anyway."

The teacher, too, believed that little Ella would get something nice; and she turned to the little group with happiness in her heart that there was already a plan formed through which this could be achieved.

"Children, would you like to hear a Christmas fairy story?"

The word "story" savored of a treat which no one wished to miss. Therefore, instantly every child in the room was crowded as close to the teacher as he could possibly get, eager, listening, expectant.

"Once upon a time . . . you see, all fairy stories begin this way and mine is really a fairy story"

She went on, weaving her story around just such a programme as she now had outlined for the evening of Christmas Day, even down to the close when the Fairy came to bestow his gifts on good little children.

"That's not a fairy story 'tall," said one little fellow, who was not going to be cajoled into believing anything about fairies. "That's the story of what we're going to have Christmas."

Childish enthusiasm burst out in a storm at his interpretation.

"Will Mr. Needham be our good fairy," asked one small voice, when at last the storm had subsided.

"No, dear, he'll be gone home. Maybe Mr. Ellis, or somebody else will, though."

"Oh! I know about Mr. Ellis," said one small person. "He's the one who's giving us our good lunches."

Now the gong, calling them down to the lessons of a new day, interrupted further discussion of the teacher's fairy story.

CHAPTER XII

AN EVENING OF SURPRISES

"Why—Mary—why all this display of finery? Are we to step out into formal society tonight?"

John looked his disappointment. He had looked forward to a quiet evening, alone with Mary in her own home. He was to leave on an early train tomorrow morning for the East; he wanted to cherish through the holidays the recollections of such an evening as he had already planned. But Mary wouldn't likely make such ado just because he was calling. So his plans must be thwarted again!

Nevertheless, he deposited a long suspicious-looking box on the table by the side of a pile of business-like papers.

"Don't get alarmed; nothing like that in store for you tonight, John," Mary soothed. She stood before him—tall, slender and beautiful. The clinging softness of her exquisite nut-brown dress brought out her own physical perfection; its rich laces enhanced the soft beauty of her face and neck.

"Just a birthday gift," she said in response to John's admiring look at her attire, "from my devoted mother and brother. It's new—delivered about an hour ago. Like a child, I couldn't resist the temptation of wearing it for you tonight."

"I'm certainly glad you couldn't!" he exclaimed fervently. "Stunning! No—'stunning' doesn't adequately describe it, either." He held her off at arm's length, and then slowly turned her all the way around to get the full effect of its beauty.

Presently he had another inspiration, "Open the box. I believe its contents will go very well with that dress. See! I hadn't forgotten, either, that today is somebody's birthday."

Fragrance and flowers are almost inseparable; so, as Mary untied the cord and lifted the lid, she was aware of the contents. Then, as she gently and tenderly lifted a great bunch of long-stemmed, beautiful white roses and held them up to

admire, their wonderful fragrance and beauty filled the room.

"My! Aren't they simply beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Words are inadequate to express my feelings and appreciation; so all I can say is: Thanks! Thanks!! Thanks!!!"

With easy frankness which was so characteristic of her dealings with any one, Mary took a step nearer and held the great bunch of beauties up to John's nose:

"There might have been a snowy emblem for each year," he said with a mischievous smile, "had I known how many years have already passed over your wavy brown head. But, as it's neither safe nor complimentary to guess beyond a woman's age, I stayed on the safe side with twenty."

"Two more and your guess would have been correct," Mary laughingly replied. "But the number doesn't make any difference. Twenty is just as precious as fifty. It's the loving remembrance of a dear friend," she added tenderly, "that's what I hold most sacred."

Mary excused herself and left the room. Presently she returned with a tall hand-painted China vase full of water and placed it on the table. Before placing the flowers into the vase, she held them up again for a long scrutinizing look. At length, she selected the one which seemed to be the most perfect specimen—and it was hard for natural eyes to detect any variation in the twenty models of uniform perfection—and then she carefully drew it out from the bunch.

Placing the other flowers on the table by the side of the waiting vase, the girl now turned her attention to the one in her hand. She shortened the stem to the length which best suited her purpose, and she then went closer to her companion as she held it up for his inspection and approval. Then she very reverently lifted the snowy blossom to her lips, and held it there for one long tender caress before sending it forth on its mission of service. That part of the ceremony fully accomplished, she placed it against the lapel of John's coat, rearranged a leaf here, tucked underneath the stem there, until finally its graceful beauty met her approval. Then, with a pin secured from some of the business-like papers on the table, she fastened it in place.

"Now you're decorated," she smiled up at him. "And will

you kindly promise to do about a half-dozen things for me in memory of this evening?"

John had been intently watching her every movement. He knew all the while that he was being made the recipient of some kind of a decoration. But he had no way of even surmising what she was going to ask him to promise.

"Most likely," he said with a slow drawl, "you couldn't, or at least wouldn't, demand anything too big. Anyway, let's hear your request."

"First, I shall ask that you wear that blossom for me this evening," she said. "Second, after you reach your room to-night, I would like for you to lay it flat on the page of an open book, arrange the leaves and petals so as to bring out its greatest beauty, retain the stem at its present length, close the book upon it, and place sufficient weight on the book to press it flat. By the time you return, it will be ready to fulfill the purpose for which I would have you use it. Somewhere close to your sock on the night before Christmas, I'm sure Santa will leave a handsome Bible. Third—and I am not unaware of the fact that you will consider this one enough to make up for the remainder of the 'half-dozen' I mentioned—will you read at least five verses in that Book each night; and each time after reading these verses, will you place that pressed flower on them to remain there till you remove it to another passage the next night? Will you do all this, John, for my sake?" Her voice was soft and pleading as she finished; her eyes deep and expectant as she waited for his answer.

John did some deep thinking before he attempted an answer. He took plenty of time to consider the proposition from several different angles.

"Dearest girl," his voice was husky, when at last he spoke, "to me—promises are sacred things. I don't make them to break them. And with all the strength of my manhood, I'll strive to fulfill your requests to a letter."

John was standing in a slightly stooped posture, in order that the girl, who was a little less his own height, might work with comfort, and for the personal pleasure of looking squarely into her face as she spoke. Mary had been very conscious of his nearness; but she was hardly prepared for all she saw in his strong, handsome face, as she looked and spoke her words

of thanks after his promise. The masterful, long-denied look of love and longing made her suddenly startle and draw back.

While she busied herself arranging and placing the flowers in the vase of water, John straightened up to his full six feet, and for the immediate shook off his spell of enchantment.

"Now, Mary," he said casually, "in view of all the promises that you've extracted from me; I have one coming from you."

Mary wasn't quite sure of the ground upon which she was venturing, but she took the risk.

"All right What is thy request?"

John walked over to the long flower box, and from it lifted a small oblong parcel, neatly wrapped in holly paper and tied with narrow red ribbon. Its folds were carefully sealed with little Santa Claus seals, which commanded in bright letter that they be not disturbed until several days later. In her surprise and delight over the flowers, Mary had not even noticed the smaller package until John picked it up.

"My request," he said, "is that you wear the contents of this box this evening with that new dress, even though it is marked for a later date."

He untied the ribbon, broke the seals, unwrapped the holly paper and exposed to view a rich morocco box about the size of a book. Mary was watching with almost dumfounded amazement. If some one had demanded of her to guess what was coming next, she would have found herself without words to express an idea. If she had noticed it before John stated his request, she would probably have thought of a box of candy to be enjoyed together later in the evening, or of a book to read during the holidays. But when John raised the lid of the box and displayed the contents, she threw up her hands in utter consternation. For there lay the most exquisite string of pearls she had ever seen; finer than she had ever dreamed of possessing!

"Oh, John! Surely, I'm dreaming!" she cried. "Surely—you don't mean that you expect me to accept such a present as that!"

"I wouldn't hardly buy it for my mother and bring it here to show to you, would I?" he laughed. "No," proudly, "she has enough pearls, already. So, for what other reason could I have bought it, except as gift to you?"

"No, it's absurd," she protested. "I must not; I can not; I will not accept it!" Noticing John's pained expression, she added, "I accepted the flowers with the regards that I know accompanied them; they are enough for both birthday and Christmas."

"Nonsense!" John assumed some of his school-day discipline. "This is merely a little token of appreciation, given in return for all the good things that have come to me through our friendship. Mr. Nash ordered this necklace specially for me; he'll not take it back. I won't carry it away, either; so it's yours, unless you can give a perfectly good reason for not accepting it."

"But—John, any present, that I could possibly give in return for that, would seem insignificant in dollars and cents," Mary argued. "I don't wish to be placed under obligations to any one."

"No, dear, you shall not be, either," John said gently. "You know, I had no thought of any return gift when I chose this necklace. Won't you, for my sake, accept it as it is given—an emblem of friendship. And if the time ever comes when that friendship ceases . . . Well, we can see about the necklace then."

John had spent most of the last three years in school-rooms; there he had learned to read people as few people read books. He now saw signs of yielding in the girl's eyes. So he continued, "Come. Be a good girl and let me place this necklace where it belongs."

With his pocket-knife, John clipped the silk threads which held the pearls in their soft bed, and then carefully lifted them up with the fingers of his right hand, while he placed the box on the table with the other. Then, confident he was going to succeed, he walked over to Mary and held the gems up and around her neck, while he performed the proper manipulations of securely fastening the ends.

"You and my folks will surely make me vain," she protested further. "I'll wear it tonight—seems that I must. But please remember this: I shall always consider this necklace your property!"

John paid no attention to the fact that the pearls were to

remain his own; but he concentrated upon Mary's growing vanity.

"I have a strong conviction that your vanity will never be your downfall," he laughed. "Moreover, I think it's time for you to receive something; think of all you've been passing on to others."

"Maybe you think I don't know about the substantial check that you gave to the school benevolent work," Mary said pointedly.

"I only did my duty, as I saw it," John responded.

"So did I, too."

The adjustment of the fasteners completed, the young man took two steps backward to make his inspection. The girl's face was flushed and colorful from the excitement of the hour, a fitting background for her merry blue eyes, always open and frank; while the mass of rich gold-brown hair crowned her glowing beauty. His critical eye readily admitted that the dress and necklace must have been designed to be worn together; one had seemed so incomplete without the other.

He saw hands which, for this evening, were resting from their labors; hands which worked so unceasingly that others might be relieved of their suffering, be it physical or mental; that others might have the necessities of life; that little children might be educated to worthy citizenships. He saw all these beauties of physique and character; but he saw much more, for his judgment was haloed by a great love. Not knowing whether he was master of himself or not, he stepped back to his former position.

"Mary, you are simply irresistible," John said fervently. "If I were not a man of my word, I would not try to keep a promise I made a few weeks ago. I'd make a lightning trip to a certain officer and return with the necessary papers plus a minister."

With love and tenderness in her own eyes, Mary met John's gaze as she calmly quoted: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

"Really, Mary?"

"Yes, John."

The man realized the utter uselessness of pressing the ques-

tion any further at this time; he suddenly sought a subject of less intimate nature.

"What do all these papers signify, girlie?" turning his attention to the stack of business-like papers on the table. "Going to furnish us with a new mathematical text-book, made to order?"

"No—not guilty," Mary laughed. "When I write something it will be more interesting than a mathematical text-book." Earnestly she went on explaining, "As this is near the close of the year. I've been balancing my financial account with the Lord, and happened to have a few minutes to work just before you came."

John looked the astonishment that he felt.

"Balancing your financial account with the Lord?" he asked in bewilderment.

"Sure," Mary replied. "You know, at least one-tenth of all I earn or possess is rightfully the Lord's; and in order to make my settlements accurate, I must have the exact amount entrusted to me in black on white. Same rule applies to my giving. However, I haven't stopped at one-tenth this year."

"I see," said John. "Only another visible manifestation of a wonderful girl, I suppose."

He walked over to the davenport with the air of one perfectly satisfied with the world at-large and himself in particular, and fully at-home in his present surroundings. There he settled himself down to the enjoyment of the evening.

"Come and sit here with me," he said to the girl, who was still lingering over the flowers on the table. "Believe I've had enough surprises to tide me over the holidays."

"Surprises?" questioned Mary. "It seems to me that I'm the one to whom the surprises have been coming."

"My surprises arise from the supply of self-denial that a certain young woman is constantly displaying," John very pointedly replied.

A short while later the door at their left was pushed open and Doctor Gray stepped into the room, with a loaded service-tray in his hands.

"Well, seems good old Saint Nicholas has beaten me here," he said more to himself than to any one else.

Placing the tray on the table by the side of the other sur-

prises of the evening, Doctor Gray advanced to as proper a place in front of the young couple as the fire in the background would allow, stood very erect and straight, with head high and chest out, and with one swing of his right hand gave a military salute. Such a salute as he had learned to extend to commanding officers during his few months of service; such a salute as John Needham had learned to receive after one memorable morning during the St. Mihiel drive, when a daring act of bravery sent him from the insignificant office of Corporal to the more imposing one of First Lieutenant. John arose and recognized the salute.

"Doctor," John said, "I've often wondered how you, with your present youthfulness and the war now a few years in the past, ever got into service. Of course, I've long known that you were in service, but never heard you mention how you came to go. You must have been very young, I'm sure."

"Yes," replied the young physician, "it was my good fortune to have just completed my medical studies when our country, after a few months of participation in the war, was still in pressing need of medical men. I wasn't yet of age; but I was free and wished to go. Mother was too big-hearted and loyal to refuse her consent, so I enlisted. By the time I got ready for actual service, the wounded men were coming back by shiploads, and the need was becoming greater here than 'Over There'. So I was retained in an eastern hospital to help care for these wounded soldiers. My greatest disappointment was that I didn't get to cross the pond."

"No doubt," replied John, "you will have the opportunity some time in the future to cross it under more favorable circumstances."

Doctor Gray had returned to his waiting tray while yet speaking.

"Prepare to be served," he said now, in about the same matter-of-fact way he had many times demanded would-be patients to prepare for examination.

Meanwhile he passed folded napkins to Mary, who in turn passed one on to John. Then, with fingers skilled in mixing and pouring liquids, he filled the two cups upon the tray with the steaming chocolate from the service-pot, topped each with a mound of frothy whipped cream, placed a generous supply

of wafers on each plate, and then served the plates to his sister and friend.

His errand faithfully performed, Doctor Gray moved towards the door by which he had entered.

"Why leave so soon?" insisted John. "Bring your cup and share some of these 'goodies' with us. There's plenty for all."

"No, thank you. You see Mother is nursing one of her nervous headaches, so I'll share some with her and jolly-up her dear old heart a bit," he replied and was gone.

"Is there any one else fortunate enough to have such a wonderful brother as I have." Mary put it more as a statement than as a question.

"Not very many, I fear," John affirmed. Then, in a voice not audible to other ears, he asked, "Do you know that a certain blonde high school senior thinks he's wonderful, too?"

"Is that so?" Mary feigned more ignorance than she felt on the subject.

"I believe it is so," John said. "At least, I happened to hear a little conversation which led me to think it is so; a conversation that wasn't exactly intended for my ears, and one to which I was not an intentional listener. It would embarrass the girls very much to know that I heard it; but I'm sure the story is perfectly safe in your keeping."

"Perfectly safe," reassured Mary.

"Well, you know the library for the domestic-science department at Central High is a built-in nook in the main sewing room," John said in a low tone as he settled himself comfortably to the two-fold task of relating his adventure and enjoying the eats before him.

Mary acquiesced her knowledge on that point.

John continued: "One morning, a few weeks ago, I went to this library for the purpose of listing some books needed in that department. I knew that at this hour the room should be vacant. Sure enough, there wasn't a teacher or pupil in sight when I went in. But in a very few minutes two girls came tripping into the sewing room and commenced working on some unfinished sewing there. They chatted a while about things in general and nothing in particular, and then their conversation took on a more personal tone. I had recognized

the girls from their voices as Lucille Ellis and Eleanor Smith, both seniors and close friends.

"I had no intention of listening to their talk, as they are both the finest kind of girls and do splendid work; but they were so close to the door and I couldn't possibly get more than a few feet away from it on the other side. I had known all the while about Lucille's associations with James, but I had also noticed that it did not hurt her work in the least. In fact, I believe her efforts this year have been even more concentrated than ever before, if such could be possible. So, as I had to stand still—I couldn't possibly walk out and let them think I'd been spying—I decided I'd just as well do a good job of it. My ears were full and my limbs almost paralyzed before it was over. The last part of their conversation ran something like this:

"Eleanor said, 'you know, Lucille, I'd like to go on with this work in some big school. Wouldn't you?'

"Lucille replied, 'No, I think I hardly care to do so. You see, I know enough about this work to do most anything around a home when I need to do it. I'm sure I could manage a home successfully, too. But I'm planning to begin a course in nursing. Maybe soon as school closes.'

"Eleanor asked, 'Why nursing, Lucille? Isn't that awful hard work?'

"Lucille said, 'Girl! don't you see the reason? After having had a course, I could be of more service to a certain young doctor here.'

"Eleanor exclaimed, 'Oh, why didn't I think! Are you really engaged, Lucille? Please do tell me!'

"Lucille replied, 'Oh, no! Not exactly engaged; for you see, I'm not out of school yet. But I know how he feels towards me, and I'll tell you he means much to me.'

"Just then the bell rang and the girls rushed out to their classes. The prisoner was released from his den, with some very personal confidences which had not been repeated for his benefit."

CHAPTER XIII

EASTSIDE ENTERTAINMENT

The ten days following Mary's fairy story were ten long days filled with childish expectations, hopes and chatter; but even such days must end, and so finally Christmas Day arrived with its desired flare of snow.

Between the day of school closing and this wonderful evening, a large cedar tree grew up as if by magic in the yard in front of the school building. Skillful fingers had attired it in a beautiful holiday robe of tinsel, with red and green ornaments of every known kind. At twilight a thousand little electric lights, of every color and shade, made it a thing of beauty.

Early the parents began arriving, resplendent in their humble raiments, cheered by the good spirit of brotherly love that was fast winning these people. More than one fond parent passed the news on to his elbow neighbor, whom he chanced to meet in the halls or was sitting by in the auditorium, that his own little "Johnny" or "Jane" was going to "speak a piece" tonight. Recently-aroused hope had also kindled patriotic feelings. This was real America, the Land of Promise; and maybe their own children were yet going to have opportunities which they themselves had been denied!

Mary had purposely planned the programme to be of a primary religious nature; to give to these people, under as attractive cover as possible, a taste of the great benefits which always come from religious experiences. Such benefits as very few of them had ever come to the church to receive.

Mary presided this evening in a most pleasing and graceful manner. In a very few remarks, she stated the purpose of the entertainment—to celebrate one Child's birthday by bringing peace and happiness into the lives of others.

Reverend George Moore, Mary's pastor, based his brief devotional on Luke's record of Christ's birth, after which another pastor of the city offered the prayer.

Judge Ellis brought greetings of the season from the board of education in a brief but pleasant talk.

Then came drills, speeches and dialogues by the children of Eastside School—short and simple exercises such as could be prepared in ten days' time.

Ten students, representatives of Central High and in appropriate costumes, gave a short pageant—"A Star in the East." This was possible only through the fact that it had been prepared and given a few days before in one of the school's literary societies; and, at Mary's request, was reproduced here for the benefit of many who would never have seen it under any other circumstances. At the close of the pageant, Lucille Ellis in her rich, mellow soprano sang the appropriate and familiar "Silent Night."

Then came the final number—greetings from South Main Church and its auxiliaries, followed by the main talk of the evening—both by Homer Clayton. For twenty minutes, he held the rapt attention of his audience as he discussed in a straight-forward, business-like way, "What Christ's Birthday means in My Life."

By this time it wasn't hard to get these people to listen whenever Clayton chose to speak. His many generous deeds of late had left their imprints upon hungry hearts; the ground was already broken and harrowed, ready to be planted. And as his clear-cut, forcible voice penetrated every section of the crowded auditorium, there wasn't one person to whom the speaker's life hadn't already spoken louder than his words did now, or ever could speak. So they were not idle words to such listeners, when such a man held Christ up as "the One beautiful and all together lovely." The One whose life and works formed a magnet, around which all the great and worth-while things of the universe revolve.

These listeners were very conscious of another fact—that seven of Blissville's eight churches were seemingly unaware that there had been a close-up at the Factory and that five-hundred workers and their families must either live or starve till work was available. Only South Main Church had concerned itself with their problems; only its members had shown any appreciable interest in their welfare!

A short while later came the part nearest and dearest to

childish hearts, when they marched down to the yard and into the illuminating beauty of the magnificent Christmas tree. Close by was a large picnic stand, built around a mammoth white box over which Santa and his busy helpers presided. As each little one presented him or herself, with the proper slip of paper, at the appointed place, the assistants of the worthy old gent, from somewhere within the depths of the box, obtained a generous parcel to fill each child's hands. While old Santa himself, with wit and pranks, furnished fun for the evening.

Meanwhile all over the big playground the overflow of childish joy found expression in play and frolic. The slight sheet of snow below; a full-faced moon above bathing everything with its silvery light—all contrived to make this an evening of delight for everyone, a time long to be remembered. And many departed for their humble homes realizing more fully than ever before what the angels meant when they sang, "Peace on earth; good will toward men!"

CHAPTER XIV

A CALL TO THE COUNTRY

Today was Friday, near the close of the holiday vacation. Outside it was cold and bleak, with the falling snow fast enveloping the earth in a great white sheet.

All forenoon the snow-laden clouds had hung low, while the north wind had swept over the cold frozen earth with a force that is possible only with the north wind. Many old people of the city had expressed the opinion that there would be no snow as the cold was too intense. But about noon Nature reversed the usual order of procedure and snow began to fall. All afternoon it had been falling, but the amount and velocity with which it descended increased at an alarming rate as the day advanced towards evening. The cold wind continued to blow a gale, and great drifted banks of snow were forming, in many places near to impassible.

Inside the Gray home, it was warm and cozy. Mother Gray had completed the preparations for their evening and had joined Mary, who was busy with some light sewing before the living room fire.

"I suppose," said the mother, "John will be coming back soon, to be ready for work next Monday."

"Yes," Mary replied without looking up from her work, "in his last letter he said he would likely be back tonight."

"Otherwise, he might find himself snow-bound," the mother said with concern. "I see no signs of it abating for some hours yet."

Intuitively Mary laid her work down and looked out of the window upon the snow-covered streets. Just then a small car swung around the corner, sped over the short distance intervening and came to an abrupt stop in front of the house.

"My! James was doing some speeding," Mary commented. "I wonder if something is wrong."

"I surely hope the poor boy doesn't have to go out on a long

call," said the mother anxiously. "This will be the kind of an evening when one can best appreciate his own warm fireside."

At this minute the door opened and Doctor Gray rushed into the room, still in overcoat and boots.

"Say—Sis," he began hurriedly, "do you think you could stand a ten-mile trip to the country this evening?"

"Pooh!" Mary said with a shiver. "I don't believe that is an experience any one could enjoy such a night. But I can go—if you need me."

"I dislike to cause you to undergo exposure unnecessarily," said Doctor Gray, "but because of the nature of the case, I'm sure you could be of service."

Mother Gray had been listening in pained silence. Her fine old face was drawn and troubled, only a hint of the shadows passing over her heart.

"Ah, James this is such an awful night!" She laid her hand on his shoulder as she asked hopelessly, "Really must you go tonight, James?"

"Yes, Mother," his words cut her heart like a knife, she knew a doctor's life, his obligations. "I must go! but Mary may do as she thinks best."

"All right, I'll go," Mary said, already at the door. Instantly she called from the stairs, "Ready to start in ten minutes."

"May God bless you, my son, in doing your duty," Mother Gray replied bravely. "I'll get the supper on the table while Mary dresses warmly. And, James, be sure you have everything about the car in good condition before you start."

"The car is in first-class condition, Mother," reassured the son as he followed her to the kitchen. "Work was slack today, so luckily I had it in the garage for inspection and repairs. We'll take tools for fear of drifts; but don't you worry about us, Mother. We'll make the trip safely, and hope to be back before midnight."

Fifteen minutes later, warmly-clothed and well-fed, Doctor Gray and his sister started forth on their hazardous journey.

Mother Gray stood at the window, watching the car that was carrying her children out into the perilous night until it turned the last visible corner and was lost in the distance. A look of anxiety and fear over-shadowed her kind old face as her mind went back to a sad scene of the long ago. She had

tried very hard to be brave, and had told herself repeatedly that the dear children were only doing their duty toward suffering humanity. And she had succeeded in sending them away with a smile and without betraying her own anxiety.

But now that they were gone and she was alone, the past rose before her like a great black cloud, overwhelming, engulfing her in its shrouded terror. She fell on her knees there in the wintery twilight, and in the arms of faith lifted her dear ones up to the throne of grace; while she pleaded with the Father to place a protecting arm about her only earthly treasures while out in the storms of life, and that they might escape the awful fate which had befallen their father.

For a long time after words had ceased, Mother Gray remained in an attitude of prayer. During all her long eventful life, when the storms of time were coming thick and fast, she had taken her troubles and perplexities up to the great loving heart of her Father above, and not once had she ever failed to find a surcease for them there. For such a comforting response, she was now waiting. Finally, there came into her heart the blessed assurance, born of faith, that the Father, who notes even a sparrow's fall, had heard her petition and would care for her dear ones, too. She arose from her knees with a happy heart, turned on the lights and went about her household duties. While she worked the two heavenly angels, Peace and Happiness, came down and ministered unto her; and they in turn rejoiced to hear her merrily sing:

“Just when I need Him, Jesus is near,
Just when I falter, just when I fear,
Ready to help me, ready to cheer,
Just when I need Him most.”

As the young people passed from the town out into the open country-side, where there had been less traveling during the afternoon, they found the snow deeper and the road more unbroken. So, with their best efforts, progress was retarded and driving was an arduous task. For some time neither the brother nor sister seemed inclined to open a conversation. Mary was busy with her own thoughts; while Doctor Gray's whole attention was concentrated upon the two-fold task before him—

selecting the best side of the road and persuading his engine to go forward. At length it occurred to Mary's mind that she didn't even know the name of the people to whom they were going, and absolutely nothing of the nature of the case which was awaiting them.

"James, you spoke before we left about attending these people before," she said. "Tell me something about them."

"Yes," replied the young doctor, "I should have told you more than I did. Randles is their name. Probably you remember it in connection with a case of suicide that happened last summer. It was the husband and father who took his own life."

"How dreadful!" Mary responded. "I do remember something about it; but why did he do such a dreadful deed?"

"Well, it was another case of too much booze," explained the doctor. "He had always used it, I suppose, but in later years he and a few others began making their own home-brew stuff. Of course, he couldn't get the better grade of drinks then, and so he kept himself tanked up with his own rotten, poisoned stuff, until he finally lost his reasoning faculties at times. He had been under the influence of one of his moody, irrational spells several days before he fired the fatal shot. Of course, he expected the shot to do instantaneous work; but it didn't, so I was called. However, the end came soon after I reached him. It's his widow to whom we are going tonight."

"Ah! his poor family," Mary exclaimed. "Such must have been an awful trial to them. How many children did he leave?"

"I understood at that time," said Doctor Gray, "that there were two—a girl of thirteen and a smaller boy. But the vigils of tonight will most likely add the third member to the little brood."

"My!" Mary said soberly, "what a load of shifted responsibility placed upon the poor mother's shoulders—all because of distorted appetite." Presently she asked, "What about their financial condition? Have they the necessities of life?"

"Oh, I think so," the doctor answered. "The evidence brought out at the inquest pointed to the fact that it was not so much financial worries as intemperance which caused his

dementate condition. He was neither the wealthiest nor the poorest farmer in his community."

Here a deep embankment of snow in the road threatened to cause hours of delay and turned their conversation into another channel. However, after several minutes of physical labor behind a shovel handle, followed by a few more minutes of discreet driving, they had passed over the worst place and were again on more elevated ground. Now the young doctor's mind returned to the subject which was the basic cause of the tragedy he had been relating.

"I think it's a very small wonder," he said authoritatively, "since doctors are confronted on every side with all stages of debauchery—results of the social sins which are wrecking so much of our manhood and womanhood—that we turn to one of the two extreme attitudes toward these drink and drug addicts. We either begin the moderate use of liquor or drugs ourselves, in order to deaden our sensitiveness to the awful cases we have to be confronted with; or we become, as I'm fast becoming, embittered against anything that savors of such indulgences. Statistics show that the number of men in the medical profession who are addicts to either drink or drugs is alarming. Most of these men were sincere and conscientious in their desire to be of service to mankind; but through indulgence they, too, have in many cases become victims of debauchery, and are not now capable of assuming the care of any patient's life."

"Seems to me," Mary replied earnestly, "the last extreme will not cause you much suffering; the first might."

When Doctor Gray and Mary arrived at the stricken rural home, they found a kind neighbor woman there trying to relieve the suffering of the poor widowed mother. Mrs. Randles had always been a woman of frail body and limited strength; so the last few months of her life, together with the trouble connected with her husband's tragic end and the work that followed in the wake of her widowed condition, had sapped her bodily vitality and drained to the dregs her supply of endurance. For the next few hours Doctor Gray and Mary battled, as only an efficient physician and an able helper can battle, with Nature that the mother might be saved to rear her chil-

dren; the work to which God had assigned her before sin distorted His original plan.

Several times during the evening, the poor woman looked up at Mary with eyes filled with thanks which she was unable to express any other way. Twice she said just two words, but those two words held a world of love within their narrow bounds "Angel Woman." It was a title partaking of Heaven and home—the two most sacred dreams in any one's life. Heaven would not be what it is without angels; nor is the home a haven of rest without a good woman.

At last another little life was ushered into existence; but it became painfully evident to the young attendants that the mother's was slipping away.

As the end approached the poor woman looked up consciously into the face of Doctor Gray, who was watching the fast weakening pulse. She smiled faintly at him; but her eyes sought something further until she located Mary standing near the foot of the bed. Then she motioned for the girl to draw nearer. Mary came to her brother's side, fell on her knees by the bed and leaned close, for she knew the dying woman wished to speak to her.

"Angel Woman," she whispered, "both of you have done all possible to keep me here—I'm a victim of circumstances. I'm going soon. Will you promise to send my request to my brother in Iowa for him to take the older children? You'll find his name and address in a letter in the Bible there."

A feeble hand pointed to a small table as she paused for breath. "O I wish I could go knowing that hands like yours would care for my baby!" Presently she continued in a weaker, pleading voice, "O Angel Woman won't you please tell me you'll take it—or find it a good home?"

Mary looked up into her brother's face; James looked down into Mary's face, and an understanding sign passed between them. Each of them knew that the poor mother had mistaken them for husband and wife; but each saw no reason now to disturb her dying opinion. They both realized they must act quickly, for she was going fast.

"I'll take your baby," Mary said reassuringly. "And we'll also see that your brother gets your request concerning the other children."

"Thanks," said the weak voice. "Now I want to say good-bye to the children."

"All right," Mary replied. "But will you tell me one thing before I bring the children in? Are you ready and willing to meet the Creator to whom you are going?"

A happy smile lighted up the face of the dying woman as she replied, "Yes, I gave my heart to Him long ago. I've been only a two-talent servant—I've done my best. I see the great white gates now opening for me."

"Amen," Mary said rising. She rushed to another room, where the neighbor was detaining the children, and brought them to their dying mother's bedside.

Mary and Doctor Gray retreated to the other room for two reasons—that the mother's last talk to her children might be privately theirs, and that they might help the neighbor form plans to care for the orphan children.

The sobs and expressions of grief from the older of the children—the girl who was beginning to realize what a mother's love meant to her—became alarming and called Mary back to the death-chamber. Just as she reached the bed, one faint breath was breathed, a happy smile passed over the pale face and the eyes closed to all earthly troubles. The light of two lives had gone out with drink and a blow.

Many in number and varied in nature were the tasks to be performed in the home of the dead by those who were there. While the neighbor woman washed and dressed the baby warmly for its midnight trip, Mary gathered together and wrapped into a bundle the neatly-made, though inexpensive, clothes that had been prepared for the little one. While these and other duties were being performed, Doctor Gray took charge of telephoning the necessary messages. First, he called some of the closest neighbors' homes and informed them of their neighbor's sad death. He then put in a call for the undertaker. The women of the community arranged their several periods of service by conversation among themselves, and soon two arrived on horseback to spend the remainder of the night. It was soon arranged for Doctor Gray and Mary to hasten back to town, as fast as the snow-drifted roads would allow, taking with them the baby and details for the telegram to the woman's brother.

Just one hour before midnight—the time at which James had expressed a hope of returning—he and Mary started on their home-ward trip. The snow continued to fall, but not with the rapidity which had characterized its down-pour in the early part of the evening. But the wind was still cold and biting.

For a long while neither spoke. The understanding that existed between them at times like this was of such a nature that words were not needed to express it. The roads had not been improved much during their few hours at the farmhouse, and driving was still to Doctor Gray an arduous task, to be performed with skill and care. With Mary, the sleeping babe in her arms was an ever-present reminder of the tragedy of the evening. She sat staring out at the side window of the closed car, but her eyes saw none of the beautiful snow dressing with which every tree and shrub was loaded. When at last she did speak, she startled her brother with an agitated voice..

“Oh, James! did we do the right thing tonight?” she asked.

“Just what do you mean by the ‘right thing?’” Doctor Gray inquired.

“I mean about the baby,” Mary replied. “I’ve heard Mother speak often of taking a small child to rear against the time when we both may be away from home. It was with this in view that I agreed to take it. But what if she should feel that she isn’t able to care for such a small baby. However, it should be easy to find a suitable home for such a perfect baby—in case she can’t take it.”

“I believe, Mary,” Doctor Gray said earnestly, “that we did the right thing under the circumstances. It hurts me to the very heart to see a person, for whom I’m in any way responsible, have to die and leave little ones to the mercy of others. But my conscience is perfectly at ease, when I tell you that I did everything in my power to save her life. I could not have done any more, had she been my own dearest relative.”

“I know you couldn’t have done any more,” Mary replied. “We both did our best, and that’s some satisfaction.”

Silence again reigned for several minutes.

“When you go to buoy up some other man’s spirits, to help him over the hard places in life,” Doctor Gray said with a

smile that characterized his lighter moods, "I think I'll have to find another feminine hand to help me. I couldn't for my life have told why I was willing for you to brave such a storm tonight; I only knew I wanted you to go, needed you. It's in the real deep places, found in any profession, when a man best appreciates an efficient and understanding companion—be it mother, sister or wife."

"I suppose you'll be looking for the last of the three," Mary teased, catching his lighter mood.

"I said when you were gone," the brother replied. "But you haven't told me when that's going to be."

"I can't tell you, my dear brother," Mary said soberly, "because I don't know myself." She knew he had referred to John as being the 'other man'. Presently she went on confidentially, "You may or may not know anything about the religious controversy that exists between John and me; and you may not know that he is practically an avowed infidel. Therefore, unless there is a change in his views on some vital things, there will be no 'when' in our case. I can think of only one thing more dreadful than a broken heart, and that would be the Father's denunciation at the close of my earthly pilgrimage. I know positively that He doesn't want me to cast my lot with an infidel."

"I hadn't realized that he was that bad, though," James replied. "Maybe you know more about this than I do. However," doubtfully, "reckon you aren't judging him too critically? Aside from this possible fault, he surely is a prince among men. Don't you suppose in the coming years he'd change?"

"I am only measuring him by his own yard-stick—his words," Mary said firmly. "And if he can wade through my prayers and tears now; he would find it easy to do so if I were his wife."

"I think you will find," went on the young physician, "that the lack of religious scruples is a failing with many of my sex. And, too, I judge from what I know of John Needham, that he had been reared in a home where money and culture, instead of piety, reigns supreme. All young people do not have as constraintive religious parents as the mother who reared us. This accounts for much of the difference that exists. My

greatest wonder about John is that he ever began the work he is doing; when by education and environment he is so eminently fitted for places that the world calls higher. Why, think of it! No school in America is considered greater than where he finished. But it is my guess that he is merely sojourning with his present work, and that the future has bigger jobs for him."

"So it does for me, too," Mary said with finality. "Today I received an urgent call from my alma mater to the chair of Bible and Ancient History. They wished me to come immediately and begin work when school opens in a few days; but stated that if I couldn't come now, they would get a supply teacher for the remainder of the year and thus hold the place for me till next year. I know of no subjects that I would rather teach than those; nor of any place where I feel I could do more good. So I shall accept the position to begin next fall; for the board holds my contract for this year."

She paused to let her words take effect. James offered no comment; so she continued, "I simply can not stay here another year where I have to see John every day and not accept his attentions. And to accept them, I'm surely playing with fire under existing conditions. Mother is much stronger physically now; you're here with her. So I see no reason for not accepting this offer."

"There is none, I suppose," assented Doctor Gray. "Have you told Mother? What did she say?"

"No, I haven't told her yet," Mary replied. "The telegram came late; while she was preparing supper, so I had no chance to talk with her. But you know as well as I do what she'll say. She'll do just as she did when you wanted to go to service. She'll sit down and fight it out with herself; get up and say 'Go'. Mother is the greatest mother in the world, and she wouldn't stand in either of our pathways to success, if she knew she was doing so. And when she once knows about John's skepticism, she'll be glad to get me out from under its influence."

CHAPTER XV

FAMILY REMINISCENCES

At the hour Doctor Gray and his sister started out on their trip to the country, John Needham was on a train slowly carrying him back to his field of labors. He had left home expecting to be in Blissville by noon Friday; instead, the usually fast train was several hours late when it pulled in, due to the large snow-covered areas over which it had passed en route.

As John and one more passenger stepped from the train, and each paused a minute in the light gleaming from the large red station, it seemed to the young superintendent that he had never seen a more beautiful nor a more lonely sight than the little city at this minute presented. It was picturesquely beautiful because of the white blanket that was fast covering it up; it looked lonely to him probably from the fact that for the last two weeks he had been a small part of a large, magnificent and beautiful city, teeming with every class of people from the socially elite down to the beggar on the street corner. Such a contrast, for now the station was deserted except for two or three individuals whose work forced them to stay.

Because Mrs. Reed, the elderly widow at whose home he boarded, had not been notified as to the exact day of his return, John stopped at a hotel downtown and ate supper.

7 o'clock found John again back at the place where for over two years he had been each night bringing home with him the memories—some pleasant, some not so satisfying—of another day's work accomplished. Mrs. Reed proved to be not at home at this hour; so he searched through various pockets and finally found that by mere good luck he had his own latch-key with him. Slowly he climbed the stairs and sought his own room.

"Well, it's at least refreshing to get stationary," he said to himself, "but suppose I'm in for a long, long lonely evening. Everybody else who belongs here seems to be elsewhere."

He found his room as it was usually kept—immaculately clean and tidy. He set about at once unpacking his traveling bag and putting each article in the place allotted to it. At the bottom of the bag he uncovered the beautiful concordance Bible in its rich leather binding. It, and a box of what he called wonderful home-made candies, had been Mary's gift to him. He had carried these, wrappings unbroken, to the East with him two weeks ago. The candy had been too good to last, but the Book had made the trip and returned—a living messenger to help him live up to his sacred promises.

The Bible brought to his mind the vivid recollections of the last evening he had spent with the giver. Still more painfully vivid were the promises she had obtained from him! Tenderly, almost reverently, he picked up the Bible and laid it on his dressing table. Then he walked over to his work table and from beneath an ample supply of weighty matter unearthed a large dictionary. From within its bounds came the sheet of red construction paper that he had used as a background on which to arrange the rose according to Mary's request. The paper removed, he held up the pressed emblem of his promises for a close inspection of its artistic beauty. His mental conclusion was that, in both beauty and graceful arrangement, it was all that even the critical eye of the girl who had planned its mission could wish. Satisfied on this point, he carried it over to his dressing table and dropped into a near-by chair.

With reverence he again picked up the Bible and opened it to fulfill his promise for this evening. Was it mere chance that it fell open where it did? Or had it been opened there several times before? Be that as it may, it fell open on the last part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, and John's eyes fell very squarely upon the words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Then he went back and read a few verses leading up to the passage which had been so indelibly stamped upon his mind by the girl, who had uttered it several days ago. He knew time would never efface the imprint of this passage, even if he should live beyond the century mark. According to instructions, he then placed the pressed flower upon these verses. Then, as he closed the Book and laid it away, he fell to thinking

upon just what "all these things" might bring into his life to make it richer and fuller.

As John raised his eyes they instinctively focused themselves upon a large portrait that adorned his dressing table. It was a perfect likeness of the girl whose eyes at the moment seemed to be sending a challenge down upon him: "I'll stand on my convictions, regardless of the cost! The stronger the fuller, the whiter becomes the linen."

A strong impulsive desire to see the girl personally took possession of him.

"All right, girlie," he said to the almost human likeness on his table. "But I must see you soon—yes, this very night, too."

For John Needham to make such a declaration meant that very soon efforts would be made to bring to pass just the deed implied. So out through the door, up the hall and down the flight of stairs he went to the telephone below, where he put in a call for the Gray home. In a very few minutes a gentle voice at the other end of the wire informed him, in response to his request to speak to Mary, that she was not at home as she had gone with her brother on a long trip to the country.

"But—Mother Gray—you don't mean," he stammered in astonishment, "that either James—or Mary—is out in this storm."

When the mother's voice had reaffirmed his fears, he said, "I'm coming over there. I'd have no rest here anyway—since I know this."

Back up the stairs and into his room he went, and in a manner which betrayed in some degree the storm raging within. If he had been accustomed to stooping to profanity, it is very probable that his feelings would have given rise to some strong expression. As it was, he found what relief there was to be found in the words and actions at his command.

"Confound it all!" he said in a tone not seasoned with mildness. "I wonder if there will ever be a limit to her foolishness? Of all the fool-hardy things I've known her to do, this is the worst!"

Meanwhile, a kick sent the traveling bag, more or less safely, into the closet; after which the door went shut with a bang. It was probably his good fortune that the gentle Mrs. Reed

had not yet returned home; for had she been there, he would surely have suffered a humiliating back-set in her worthy estimation. For in truth, his behavior at this minute resembled that of a high-school boy more than that of a dignified high-school superintendent.

Thirty minutes later John was sitting with Mother Gray in the warm coziness of her fireside.

"We are in for a long evening, John," she said casually, after they had discussed the pros and cons of his trip home, "so suppose, you go back to the beginning and tell me such parts of your family history as you feel like telling. During all my associations with you, I've heard you speak very little about your parents."

While she had spoken in a very passive manner, John knew that a greater motive than mere curiosity had actuated the mother's request.

There were many subjects upon which John Needham could be very conversant when his knowledge of these subjects was sought; and this happened to be one of them. He had always been eminently proud of his own family tree—that had been part of his earliest training—but lack of egotism had caused him to seldom mention his heritage unless there was a worthy motive for doing so. But never before had he been so proud of his own lineage as he was at this moment.

So quite gladly he went back to the beginning of his family history in this country and produced his paternal ancestors, who had been among the first royal colonists in Virginia, while he very modestly mentioned some men of renown who had come from the same parent stock. Then followed a glimpse of the part his people had played in the Revolutionary War and the days of the reconstruction period, and on down to the Civil War struggle and his father's childhood. How his father, while a young man just out of college, had left the devastated Southland a few years after the war and wandered farther north to seek his fortune. How he had become associated soon after locating in the City of Brotherly Love with an older man, and how in a few short years he had married the beautiful and accomplished daughter of his business associate. However, it was with much delicacy that he touched upon the fact that his father was a decided business success, and that the greatest

aim of his mother's life was to attain to high intellectual and social planes for herself and family.

When he was through the mother had received a rather detailed account of the family, with whom, she was aware, her daughter might be some day more closely connected. Knowing the frankness and truthfulness of the young man as she did, she was satisfied that it was a true report. She sat for several minutes thinking deeply, her eyes fixed upon her work-worn hands in her lap. Meanwhile, John wondered as to how his story had been received.

"In return for all that you have told me about your family," she said at last, "perhaps there are some things about our family which I should tell you. It's very probable that you've never heard either James or Mary mention their father."

"No, I have not," John replied. "Of course, I inferred that he has been dead several years."

"Yes, he has," Mother Gray replied in a reminiscent manner, "and the children do not remember him at all, for James was not quite four and Mary was a mere babe when he was killed. For some reason that day of tragedy seems very near to me tonight. Possibly it is because he was a young doctor, too—slightly older than James is now."

The gentle old voice paused, while she wiped an unwelcome tear away. Presently she went on, voice fully at her command:

"One day he was called out on a long trip to the country. It was summer, and the low rumble of thunder foretold a storm when he left town. But a doctor can't stop for things like that; so he went anyway, driving a spirited young horse that he had recently bought. We suppose that the horse became frightened during the severe electric storm and ran from the road down into the bluffs. When he failed to return, a search was started. After several hours' search, he was found at the foot of these bluffs with horse and buggy on top of him."

John had been listening to a sad, terse voice, relating the most trying event of her young womanhood days. He was now beginning to realize that the simplicity with which these friends lived had very probably been forced upon them in former years. Same as he was destined to learn from her lips before she had finished her story.

"O how sad!" John exclaimed in great sympathy.

The sympathy that she felt extending from this young man, who had been reared in the lap of luxury, seemed to give her strength to continue her story of the days which followed the tragedy.

"Ah, yes! those were indeed sad days," she replied slowly. "We had just finished building this little home as it originally was. Then in such a few hours our dreams of a happy life together were blotted out—I was left alone in it with two babies. At first, I didn't think I could possibly carry on; but somehow people always are given strength for the work placed before them, that is, if they are willing to try. So gradually I rallied, and set about trying with all my strength to manage our little business affairs and to rear the children—just as he would have wished me to do. All these years he has been my silent companion—his wish, as I knew he would have expressed it if he had been here, has governed my every action. The children hold him in a sort of silent, holy reverence—I suppose I've taught them to do this—for he was the kind of a man they would have adored."

"I'm sure your efforts have not been in vain," John said, more touched by the mother's story than he liked to show. "The finished product always speaks for the way the work was performed."

A faint smile of satisfaction passed over her face at his words of approval.

"No," she replied, "I can't say that I'm disappointed with my results. But I can tell you that the rearing of a family, even if it is a small one, is a job that two can work at better than one."

John nodded his acquiescence to her statement, and she went on:

"I suppose many a woman, left as young as I was then, would have married again, and I had at least two opportunities that the world would have called good. My husband, whose name was James also, had not been engaged in his profession long enough to have much accumulated; although our little home was practically free of debt. But because he realized that a doctor's life is a hazardous one at best and that I would be utterly helpless with the little ones

in case of his death, he had taken out a rather large life insurance policy.

"My father was a lawyer so he helped me put my money in safe investments. And I set about endeavoring to live from the income; for I was determined that there should be sufficient funds to help the children through college when they were ready to go. Many times it was a hard struggle. Often I've taxed the ingenuity of the cook book, then supplied the deficiency from my own imagination in order to convert some left-over food into a good wholesome meal for the children. Just as often, I've made over my own clothes until they were past making over, and then took the best parts and made things for the children. Such things were necessary if I were to save something for the children's education and for my own old age. Later—after my father's death—I received some from his estate, and then I had an addition built to the house, as the children were getting larger and we needed more room."

Presently she continued, a bit more proudly, "Now James is to the place where he can have better things for himself any day he wishes them. Mary is able to take care of herself, too; and I still have enough left to provide for my simple needs. Therefore, I don't feel that I've made a complete failure of my managing."

"I should say not!" responded the young man with fervency. "Instead, I say that you have made a marked success of it!"

John wanted to talk to the mother frankly, to tell her that he was willing and ready to assume the responsibility of caring for her daughter; that if there were not sufficient funds in his own saving account, there was more than plenty back East in the coffers of his father's bank to provide a home, however luxurious she might wish it to be. But then he thought further on the subject and decided that, if she didn't already know about the gulf which existed between Mary and himself, she would question what stood between them. He almost feared that she knew already; for he hadn't the least doubt about Mary having confided in her mother about him. He soon decided that it was all of too delicate a nature to be discussed just now with the mother who held such strict religious views.

By and by, when the evening was well spent and the time

was drawing near when Mother Gray thought her children should return, she brought some late magazines for John to read, and excused herself to prepare something warm to serve to her dear ones when they had returned.

In a short while a small car again swung around the corner and headed in towards the garage. John threw down the magazine he had been trying to read, stopped in the hall long enough to hastily acquire a pair of overshoes and to throw an overcoat over his shoulders. He was at the garage door, ready to receive Mary when the car stopped and the door opened.

"Ah, you—poor little frozen darling!" he said, almost lifting her out. But he hadn't the least bit of an idea that he was speaking to a real living baby.

"Oh, I'm all right!" Mary replied lightly. "We could have had trouble, but we didn't. We might have become snow-bound ten miles from here, but we didn't. So, 'all's well that ends well,' isn't it?"

John had not noticed the bundle that Mary was carrying, partly because of the darkness. Then, too, it was very much concealed by her own wraps. But as he was assisting her along over the snow-covered walk, it became apparent to him that she was carrying something of which she was particularly careful.

"What in the world have you in your arms?" he queried curiously.

"Come on into the light and see," she smiled.

In the hall he removed the girl's overshoes, and then rushed her wraps and all into the warmth of the living room.

"Here—Mother—I brought you a delayed New Year's gift," Mary said, depositing the bundle of blankets into the arms of her bewildered mother.

"Why Mary—what in the world?"

Without waiting for an explanation, the mother seated herself on the davenport and began the process of removing the several blankets with which the little mite of humanity was wrapped. She had noticed a tiny opening through which she was sure she could distinguish a beak of a nose.

"Oh—it's a real—living baby!" she cried, reaching the last blanket. "Oh, the poor little thing!"

"Yes," Mary explained, "its own mother went to her long

home. She begged us so to take it—I couldn't refuse. If you don't want to keep it, then we'll try to find it a good home. That was her request."

The talking had awakened the sleeping babe, and just then a pair of dark eyes tried to open but blinked because of the light. Mother Gray turned, placing herself between the babe and the light. Doctor Gray had entered the room and was now with Mary near the open fire.

"Do tell us about the family," requested the mother as soon as her children were sufficiently warm to be disturbed.

Then followed an explanation by the young doctor of the suicide of the father; and of the lack of proper care and protection of the frail mother which had resulted in her untimely death.

"Can we keep it with safety?" the mother inquired. "Or, will some one take it from us some day? What do you think, James?"

"It is not very likely that any one will ever bother you, I think," Doctor Gray replied. "Besides, I could take an oath that I heard her beg Mary, not ten minutes before she passed away, to either take the baby herself or to find a good home for it. However, you must do about this matter as you think best."

"Then it's mine," said Mother Gray resolutely. "I've long intended to adopt a small child to be with me when my own nestlings will have outgrown the home nest. Surely God has placed this little one in my pathway for just that very purpose."

All during the conversation, John Needham had stood by the mantel, like a frozen statue. All tenderness had left his dark gray eyes, they were cold steel now. Disgust was surging over him like breakers surge over the shore at high tide. To him, a straight family tree, well grounded in rich ancestral soil, was something very essential. It was hard for him to believe that any one without these prerequisites could ever be or do anything really worth-while. It seemed to him that these people had surely gone insane to talk about adopting a child of such heritage.

"This is your business, folks," he said coldly, "and I'll admit it's certainly none of mine. But don't you think you're running

an awful risk when you adopt a child of such parentage?"

Mary thought her brother would be more capable of answering from a scientific standpoint, but when he didn't seem inclined to offer any answer at all, she replied, "I suppose the father possessed an awful weakness for drink, but the mother certainly did show courage and strength of character, even down to the very last. Don't you think that the child would be likely to inherit more of the mother's good traits than of the father's bad ones?"

Doctor Gray had been leaning forward, warming his almost-frozen hands over the fire. He stood up straight now, his fine young body and rather delicately molded face outlined in the golden light of the fire.

"No doubt, John's question implies scientific truths," he said. "But it seems to me that the discipline Mother will apply, beginning at this early stage, will go a long way towards eradicating any inherited weakness. For believe me," a wink and an affectionate smile at his mother gave emphasis to his words, "Mother knows how to discipline a youngster to get results, without him ever knowing that he's being disciplined at all. I know—I've been there!"

It was meant to be a good-natured thrust, and was accepted by the mother as such. However, it served its purpose—broke the tenseness of the moment and made everybody smile.

Mother Gray smoothed the soft silken hair of the babe with her right hand, then leaned over and implanted her first affectionate kiss on the little forehead.

"Martha Randles Gray, for by that name you shall be known as soon as the legal papers can be secured," she said, addressing the baby in her lap, "I'm not sure now that I'll ever tell you about the father who took his own life; but you shall know all about the mother who died so heroically that you might live. For this reason her name shall be retained in yours. I have often wished that God would have given me a Mary and a Martha. Now it seems that my wish is to be fulfilled. And may you, Martha, be to me in the days to come what I shall try to be to you now—a friend in the time of need."

She raised the little bundle and again kissed the little forehead. Then she wrapped it warmly in one of the blankets,

arranged a comfortable place for it on the davenport and laid it down. She arose and moved toward the kitchen.

"Now little Martha shall have a bit of warm milk to suffice till we can get a nurser in the morning," she said, "and you, my children, shall have some warm refreshments, too."

CHAPTER XVI

CLAYTON'S BUZZING BEE MAKES HONEY

With the beginning of the new year the Factory resumed operations, and the whole city took on new life. Once more the whistle sounded morning and noon, calling willing workers back to the opportunity of earning an independent living. Once more men were released from work at night, to go home with the self-respect that arises from duties and obligations well met. Once more other merchants opened their doors, smiled and said, "Come and buy"—money to settle accounts would soon be forthcoming. Once more the tired, anxious look on the faces of zealous mothers gave way to hopeful and expectant expressions. They, as no others, knew what it meant to have nothing in the house to warm it or to feed hungry children—destitute, with the rock of support entirely gone. Once more children came to school after having had a good nourishing breakfast at home.

But not again did these children bring their lunch-boxes, unless they did so in preference to the school-lunches. For when better days were fully come and the food at home was ample for home needs, still the warm dishes provided at school were just as welcome and wholesome. The hot lunches had come into the school system of Blissville to stay and to help make healthy and efficient American citizens.

And with the beginning of the new year Mary's Golden Age of Service opened, wider and wider, with the passing of each busy day. It revolved around Homer Clayton like a wheel revolves around its axle.

The "new bee buzzing under his hat," to which Mary had so iokingly referred to on that December afternoon, was a new building on the lot adjoining the Factory itself. When Clayton bought his large interest in this enterprise, he insisted on resuming operations at once; this the other members of the

board of directors refused. Rather than get no part of the pie, he forced a compromise with them, to begin immediately after the holidays—the best he could possibly do for the workers. Then he conceived the idea of this new building—to be financed entirely by himself and from a purely altruistic desire.

The ground belonged to the Factory, and therefore, at his disposal if he wished to use it. So he immediately set workers to excavating for the basement; thus affording work for many who otherwise would have had to spend the intervening weeks in idleness.

By Christmas the building was well under way; by the first of February it was completed. It was a compact brick structure, every inch of which was designed for a purpose. The basement was purely a gymnasium, fitted and equipped for indoor games—for both adults and children. One large room occupied most of the floor space of the main story; a small but modern kitchen in the back occupied the rest. It had been built for dual purposes, and designed accordingly.

No one would have thought of calling it a church, and this was good; for many of the workers would not have gone there so freely if it had been associated with anything so refined and sacred as a church building. Homer Clayton, in his planning to reach these people, had considered this proposition from its very known angle. And he had proceeded according to his best judgment.

Therefore, he called it Eastside Hall, which was after all a very suitable name and one that left a wide margin of uses to which the building might be eligible.

A formal opening was planned for early February. By early twilight of this day, the place was a spot of real beauty with its timely decorations of tiny hearts, arrows and other emblems that always seem associated with love and happiness. And before the evening was over, Homer Clayton was thoroughly convinced that these people liked to play as well as they liked to work.

A good supply of potted flowers and ferns had been moved from Claymanor—where they had been a source of trouble and expense for the last few years—they now gave beauty and color to the large glass front, around which the soft chintz

curtains were draped. The rear part of this room was filled with rows of closely-placed folding chairs, which could be easily removed and placed out of the way. The part farther front was fitted with small tables, all with white porcelain tops, suitable for many purposes. These things and two large book-cases, filled with good books and magazines, almost completed the furnishing—but not quite. For, perhaps, its most important attraction was a spirit of friendliness and cheer, kept alive by the guardian angel of the place, Mrs. Hattie Small, an elderly widow with a small orphan grandson, who spread her arms of motherly protection over the place for the privilege of having a home in the small living apartment overhead and of sharing the food she prepared on various occasions for others.

On the very first Sunday afternoon after the building was so far completed that it could be used, Clayton organized a Sunday school for the people of Eastside. He was both delighted and surprised at the way these people responded to his efforts. It wasn't long until every available corner of the building on each Sunday afternoon was filled with a class; and to supply these, Clayton was looking for more competent teachers. Nor was it long until ministers began to offer their assistance, so often a short sermon followed the Sunday school.

Instead of eating their dinners propped upon some piece of machinery, the men who couldn't go home at noon were urged to bring their boxes to the Hall, eat at the tables and enjoy the cup of hot coffee that Mrs. Small would serve to each, gratis—per Clayton's request. Some days a speaker came to talk to the men on some live subject. Some days the radio gave them music or a lecture while they ate. And there was always a good magazine or a daily paper available to each one.

In all this new work, Clayton found in Mary—using his own words—a 'Rock of Gibraltar.' He came to her for consultation and assistance in everything he undertook; and not once did he come in vain. She and Clayton shared, and shared alike, the responsibility and joys of the new religious awakening which was taking place in Eastside.

And each day now Mary was being more and more convinced that her life's work lay here in this place—the helpmate of Clayton in his noble work. John Needham would

likely never be any different, always cynical, skeptical of the things she held most sacred. Without a Saul's conversion he could not ever be anything to her. So why waste her life living for and loving a man of this type?

Not that Mary could love a man one day and forget him the next. But she was now nearing the end of her third year of work with John; all this time she had hoped and prayed and believed in her ability to influence his life. But apparently he was still the same strong-willed, calloused John whom she had known in the early days of their work together. Doubting is a human weakness; and Mary was now fast becoming possessed with human doubts as far as John Needham was concerned.

So gradually John Needham slipped, farther and farther, into the background of her life, and Homer Clayton came to the front—into the limelight. Of course, she couldn't make any decision till school closed and she didn't have to see John every day; but then she would give John back his pearls—to Mary, the necklace was entirely his own—and ere he returned she would be in the safe shelter of Clayton's beautiful home.

Not that Clayton was pressing his suit these days; they both had seemingly forgotten that anything lover-like had ever existed between them. But Mary knew—as every woman instinctively knows when she holds the reins of a man's life in her small hands—that the heavy doors of Claymanor would swing open for her any time she showed the least signs of being willing to enter. And if she couldn't give its owner all the ardent love she would like to; both would find a world of joy and happiness in their mutual desires and work. And money would cover up a lot of deficiencies—it always did! And maybe love would grow and blossom in time, too. Under such favorable circumstances, it seemed impossible to believe that it wouldn't.

Mary would settle these questions to her satisfaction one hour; the next hour her college position would loom before her like an enchanted mountain, with all its opportunities for personal freedom, with its broad life of service in this fine old college town. Thus she forever found herself halting between decisions.

John wasn't slipping back because he wanted to slip; nor

because he wasn't trying with all his might to hold his place in Mary's life. He was exasperated beyond measure these days at Mary's "doings." Sunday mornings she was at her own church; each Sunday afternoon, she told him, she was duty-bound to teach her class of girls at Eastside Hall. Homer Clayton drove up to the Gray home every Sunday afternoon to take Mary to this class with the methodical regularity that he used in attending to business at the store or the Factory. But it was this regularity that pricked John to the core . . . Mary had made no attempt to conceal anything from him. And then came Young People's Society and the church hour—no place where he could fit in. Wednesday nights were made for prayer meeting, so Mary informed him. And other times when he wanted to call, she was too busy with duties, incident to either her school work or the Eastside work which she had voluntarily assumed.

Nevertheless, he felt hurt and chagrined at Mary's continual placing her new duties in the hours that he had previously called his own. And proud as he was, it was very hard to be pushed back by the plans of any one; it was a thousand times harder when that "any one" was Homer Clayton—a man molded after Mary's own heart. Besides, he knew, as well as Mary herself knew, that a radical change of some kind had come over the girl of late; and he got a small amount of satisfaction by heaping all the blame upon the slender shoulders of his rival.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE LAND CALLED HEAVEN

It was a Friday in late March, a day of cold dampness. A heavy fog hung low, making the air dense and oppressive. A severe "cold" had sapped Mary's own vitality and left her incapacitated for the work she was forcing herself to do. In addition to all this, many little events of a distracting nature were slipping into the day, upsetting the routine of work.

Early in the afternoon Superintendent Needham was at the school. He noticed Mary's depleted condition at once and urged her to go home and let him send a teacher-training pupil to finish her day's work. But his manner, more than his words, was chiding and showed that he attributed her condition to what he very pointedly referred to as her "foolish trips." So she felt piqued at his remarks and resolutely refused to accept any concession at his hands. She went forward with her work, using all the strength at her command. When the hour of dismissal came, she was completely exhausted. So she rushed home and tried to rest a while before the evening meal.

After dinner she felt too utterly miserable, both in body and mind, to do anything efficiently. She tried to read over some material that she was supposed to report on at the next Teachers' Meeting; but her mind was so unretentive it was impossible to do it with any degree of success. She avoided the nursery, from fear of leaving a germ in little Martha's quarters. Ordinarily she spent an hour there every evening, giving the babe its bottle and doing many little things for its welfare and comfort. But not so tonight.

Finally she gave up all attempts to do anything constructive, took plenty of pillows to make herself comfortable and lay down on the davenport. As she lay there aimlessly watching the flickering fire, she was waiting till her brother came home to give her some medicine which might help nature shake off the "cold." Despite her efforts to prevent it doing so, her mind

went back to the unpleasant events of the day; but every one of these faded into insignificance by the side of the fact that her chief had found fault with her temporary inefficiency, and that he had insinuated that it had been caused by events which she should have prevented. She knew that he didn't believe any such a thing; he was only trying to be ugly about her outside work—work of which he didn't approve!

Presently she heard a car stop at the front gate. She aroused up—sure that her brother had come. But a ring at the door announced some one else. When she opened the door John stood there, every feature of his handsome figure outlined in the light of the street-lamp. He said that he was on his way to Central High to look over some plans which he had forgotten to take home with him in the afternoon, and that he had merely stopped in to see how she was feeling. He didn't say in words that he had suffered bitter remorse in his soul for his chiding rebuke of the afternoon, and that he had purposely made it a point to stop and try to erase the sting which he knew his words had left. In actions he said much more than he would give utterance to in words.

He had already tabulated in his mind many little interesting and humorous bits of news, ready to relate. This he did, and he knew well how to be an interesting and entertaining companion. Mary had at first divined his purpose in coming, and in response to his efforts to be affable, she had in her mind forgiven him and met him on half-way ground. So during his short visit he succeeded in lifting the girl's mind above the unpleasantness of the day, and entirely obliterated his part in this unpleasantness.

At the door as he bade her good-night, he was more like the John of former day, kind and solicitous of her welfare. In one long tender clasp he held her hand encased in both his own, as he urged her to retire immediately for much-needed rest, and to endeavor to get herself restored to her usual health.

In a very few minutes Doctor Gray came in and prepared the medicine for Mary. Then together they went to their mother's room for family worship, and Mary retired to her own room immediately afterwards.

Perhaps it was due to recent events that Mary's last wakeful thoughts centered around John Needham. But she was tired

and soon fell into a troubled sleep—sleep that carried her over into the land of dreams:

She was very sick. The kind doctor and nurse had done all they could, but they were powerless. The end was near. So she straightened her lithe young body out to its full length, crossed her hands on her breast, closed her eyes and resigned her spirit to the angels that were already in the room, waiting to receive her. They gently picked her up and carried her along. Soon they were passing over the Dark River. She noticed that the waters below were swift and turbid, and that many small boats were capsizing in the current. She noticed this in a very passive manner and did not feel grieved at seeing so many perish. Soon they had passed over the river; she now stood amid the beauties of Heaven. Oh, it was such a wondrously beautiful place! Mind had not visioned its beauty! Eye had never seen its wonders! Nor had pen ever described the wealth and beauty she now beheld in this home of the redeemed! Now she was being conducted along a beautiful street, leading towards the great white throne. She noticed that many people were arriving every minute; and she also noticed that they were all coming from the direction of the Dark River and were all headed to pass the throne first.

She had first thought the land was flooded with sunshine; but she now realized that all this great, beautiful light was coming from the throne, making the whole land a thousand times brighter than any earthly sunshine ever could. Now she was passing the throne, everything richly radiant in this great splendor. And oh, the rapture of the smile of approval with which she was greeted! Approval from the throne's two occupants! For it was a two-compartment throne. God the Father sat in the main throne-seat; but at His right was the only approach to the throne. Here a white-clothed figure sat, wearing a thorny crown upon His head—the head from which the wonderful light radiated. And all who passed the Father had first passed the Son and received His approval. The throng was often forced to halt, for many were speaking to Christ as they passed. She supposed they were asking Him about things they didn't yet understand in this new land.

So they passed on from the throne directly up a beautiful avenue, along which many lovely homes had been built. Pres-

ently the angel on her right touched her arm and motioned her towards a magnificent mansion. So together they climbed the marble steps and entered the spacious halls. Then her guides conducted her up the broad stairs and through the grandeur of the second floor. All the while she was speechless with surprise and admiration over the beauty found everywhere, and in the house particularly. After they had finished their rounds of the house and were again in the large front hall, the angel at her right spoke for the first time:

"Now that you have seen your future home, we must leave you to go after some more new residents."

She found voice now to protest: "O-h, this can't be my home! What did I do to earn so much? I wouldn't know how to act amid such splendor!"

"My dear lady, this house was built out of the material you sent up. It's yours!" The angels were gone before she could make any further protest.

For a while she wandered about through the mansion, enjoying the delightful paintings that adorned the walls and the costly furnishings visible on every side, and trying to accustom herself to the enrapturing thought that such a wonderful home was to be hers throughout eternity.

Then she left the house and started out to see some of the city. She had had only a glimpse of its wonders as the angels were rushing her along. She wanted to meet and know again some of the great multitude of white-robed saints. She wanted to get real close to and enjoy the wonderful trees and flowers that perfumed the air. She wanted to get up real close and watch the choir that was furnishing such wonderful music.

As she passed along the streets she remembered that while on earth she had heard the streets were to be marble inlaid with gold and precious jewels. Now she decided that must be what they were, for they gleamed and sparkled in the light that shone from the throne. The most beautiful and uniform trees that she had ever seen lined the avenues, giving shade and perfume to the city, for they were covered with white blossoms as well as leaves.

Then she left the streets and wandered out into a magnificent garden. Here were numerous beds of rich-colored and fragrant flowers. Each bed seemed a spot of perfect beauty; but the

next instant she had found another which she considered even more beautiful. A flowing fountain sent its spray into the air, giving picturesqueness and beauty to the scene. She paused to sit a while on a seat under one of the trees, enjoying the delights of the garden. The air was fragrant with the perfume of flowers and vibrant with the songs of the many sweet-toned birds, always flitting through the treetops. Over and above it all was the sweet music that floated to her from somewhere in the distance.

The music reminded her that she had not yet seen all the wonders of this new place, so she arose and moved on. Soon she was greeted by her own family, who seemed to be looking for her. Her mother was here with the father whom she had never known. Her brother was here, too. And Homer Clayton; he only paused to greet her—seemed to be very, very busy. After he was gone, her mother remarked that Clayton lived in a most wonderful mansion, one of the finest in the city and that he was always busy. That didn't seem strange; for, of course, Homer Clayton would have to be busy to be happy—even in Heaven. Soon many friends came around to bid her welcome and to ask about their loved ones whom she had recently seen on earth.

Then she and her loved ones moved on through the crowd up towards the throne, from whence came the glorious music. The great angel choir, she now discovered, was located just above and behind the throne. It was always singing, singing most beautiful songs; and any one could join in and sing who felt like it. And many did. Especially did they join on the chorus of, "Glory, Glory Hallelujah!" Now angels and white-robed saints alike were circling through the air and around the throne; and always their chorus was: "Glory, Glory Hallelujah! Jesus reigns! Jesus reigns!"

As she stood in the presence of all this splendor, she knew that she was happy in a supernatural way. Yet there was something lacking—for nowhere in the vast crowd could she find John Needham! Then she remembered having seen others talking in a confidential way to the Christ, so she decided she was going to ask Him about John. She excused herself to her family and moved on with the throng up towards the throne.

Finally she saw an opening at the side, so she pushed around

in that direction and soon reached the small flight of steps at His right. Quietly she climbed them and kneeled in reverence at His side. Then, as He was about to finish giving instructions to one in front of her, she laid a hand on His arm. In response, He turned and looked at her with the most kind, deep and loving eyes—eyes that were kind and deep and loving enough to carry the pardon of a lost word in their depths. In His presence she found herself unable to utter a word. He seemed to know her feelings, so He laid a gentle hand upon her head. She noticed that the hand had nail-scars plainly visible!

“What troubles you, Mary?” He asked in a voice kind and gentle.

She now found courage to ask if John Needham had been admitted into the land called Heaven.

His manner had been kind and compassionate all the while; but now He seemed to feel anew the weight of a lost soul. She thought, as she looked upon His white brow where rested the thorny crown, that she could see the blood still trickling down His cheeks.

“No, Mary,” He said in a voice charge with sympathy and compassion, “John Needham is not here; and he will not be here unless he changes his method of travel. He is trying to cross the Dark River in his materialistic skiff, but it can’t be done. All who try it go under in the current. I am the Light and the Way; besides Me there is none other.”

He removed the hand from her head. She arose and turned away, sick at heart. She remembered that she had always heard there could be no sorrow come into this land of bliss; but now even Heaven didn’t seem complete without John Needham. He had become a too vital part of her life to be successfully left out.

She wandered on through the crowd of happy, singing people; but she didn’t enjoy their music now. She past again rows of trees and bright flowers; but she saw none of their beauty now. A soft zephyr breeze fanned her hot cheeks; this felt good. She had purposely followed the street by which she had entered the city, so she soon reached the bank of the Dark River.

She saw many busy people on the other side. Some were just beginning the construction of small boats; others had

theirs almost completed. But nowhere could she see any one who looked like John. So she moved farther down the river and scanned the crowd there, busy the same as above. Finally she located him. He had his canoe already finished and was with it down real close to the water's edge, apparently ready to launch it into the river.

She called, "O John! John, don't do that! Look to Christ! He is the Light and the Way!"

John looked up and saw her. He waved and was, oh, so anxious to come to her! But he couldn't understand her words, nor her gestures. Every time she called, he understood just enough to increase his anxiety to cross the river and to get to her.

Finally, in spite of all her protestations and warnings, he cast his canoe into the river and got into it. At first, in the shallow water, it went along all right; but soon it struck the swifter water. All the while she was calling her words of advice, wringing her hands in anxiety, and pointing to the light that shone about the Christ. But everything was of no avail. Soon the little boat struck the current and capsized. She saw its occupant thrown out into the swift, rushing water. She heard him call in a distressing voice: "Help! Help!! Help!!!"

The dream had been so vivid, the call for help so real and penetrating that Mary awakened crying. For a long while she lay thinking over the things which she had seen so beautifully revealed in the land of her dream; but she shuddered as she faced the possibility that John might really some day be shut out of this land of bliss. Then and there she resolved to work, harder than she had ever worked, to bring him to know her Christ before it was forever too late.

Then and there she resolved to make it a point some day and in some way to tell him her dream. It might do no good—likely it wouldn't. But she would sound her words of warning just the same; she would do her duty. But she must wait her chance and use tact in doing this; else it would defeat its purpose! So before she slept again she sent up an earnest prayer, asking for divine guidance in the task of trying to bring the man, who was such a vital part of her life, to know from personal contact the One who is the Light and the Way to the land called Heaven.

CHAPTER XVIII

OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS

One Thursday afternoon Mary was unusually late in getting started to the Ladies' Missionary Society meeting. A little hat had been misplaced and the little owner positively refused to go home without it; so a lengthy search was engaged in by the teacher and several little helpers before the missing article was replaced.

When at last Mary was ready to start, she stopped, wondering if it were really worth-while to go at all—it was so late and the principal part of the meeting would surely be over. But she walked on towards the church anyway, as it was not much out of her way to do so. As she entered the side-room, where their meetings were held when the attendance was too small to justify using the main auditorium, she was quite sure that there was a disagreeable tenseness about the group which she had never seen manifested there before. For just as she entered the room, she heard Mrs. Jones say in a very irritated voice: "Well, I tell you positively, Mrs. Lee, she has told falsehoods on me and I'll not sit in another meeting with her!"

Mrs. Charles Jones was a stout middle-aged woman whose deep nature usually lay in subjection to her judgment; but when once aroused—as she now showed evidence of being—it became very hard for her to control her temper. She had long been one of the most loyal and willing workers in the Society; while she and a few others had helped it through the original Ladies' Aid stage and had watched it expand out to perform more and bigger things. It was plain to Mary—judging from the non-conformity to any disciplinary rules with which she had spoken—that the main meeting was over, and that this was an after-session to discuss some trouble that was brewing.

Mrs. Nelson Lee, the president, was one of those fine char-

acters who would endure much personally before she would say or do anything that might cause trouble. She had tried with all her might to keep peace and harmony within the church and its organizations. It was because of her unselfish, sacrificing nature that she had been long before placed at the helm of the Society.

"Mrs. Jones, I surely do believe that there is some mistake about this," the elderly president was greatly grieved about this threatened split in her beloved organization. "I can't believe that Mrs. Bowen intentionally said anything wrong about one of her sisters and co-workers."

"Yes, but, Mrs. Lee," the offended one continued, "Mrs. Jenkin's little boy told my little girl that Mrs. Bowen told his mother that I owed bills at every store in town, and that I hadn't paid my Society dues for months! Since she is treasurer, who else would start such a report? And if she didn't say it, why isn't she here now to settle it? And as for my debts, I don't owe one cent in this or any other town!"

"Why, of course, you don't," the president consoled the angry member. "But, Mrs. Jones, don't you suppose there might be a little jealousy on the part of Mrs. Jenkin, who, I understand, is a new neighbor, recently moved between you and Mrs. Bowen? She is, I also understand, no church person. Possibly she is envious of the friendship between you two ladies and would like to break it up. So I would go slow until I found out something more definite, if I were you. And too, don't forget that you are repeating only children's prattle!"

As Mary sat listening to all this, it became plain to her that there was about to be raised a church feud over trivial things, repeated by some of her own little pupils. What could these women be thinking about to let such as this happen when the revival—God's harvest season—was so near? And the success of the revival depended entirely upon harmony and united efforts!

"Ladies," Mary said, addressing her words principally to the president and Mrs. Jones, "I thoroughly agree with the statement that this is childish prattle. And I, too, would not make much of it, if I were you, Mrs. Jones; because the little Jenkin boy is deficient in hearing, and I find in school that he is constantly repeating things incorrectly. Not that he means

to tell falsehoods, but he really talks too much and doesn't always understand all he tries to tell. Therefore, I suggest that the president appoints a committee of one to call on Mrs. Bowen and get her side of the story before next week's meeting."

Every one approved of the suggestion.

"I know of no one," said Mrs. Lee. "who can do such errands with more real Christ-like grace than Miss Gray can. So I appoint her."

"I certainly wasn't soliciting the job," Mary responded. "However, I'll try to perform my duty."

At this instant the door was pushed abruptly open and the slight figure of Mrs. Bowen stepped into the room. She was clad in a light house dress, with a thin sweater thrown around her shoulders. Her face was red and flushed from hurry and excitement. Every one looked at some one else, expectantly. The president tried to look at everybody at once. And yet no one wanted to seem curious.

"May I speak?" the new-comer asked curtly, addressing her request to the president.

"Mrs. Bowen, surely you may," replied the president, happy in the prospects of a possible settlement.

"Ladies," Mrs. Bowen went on, more calmly, "I heard just enough as I paused at the door to know that you were discussing me; and I'm ready now to explain to Mrs. Jones all I know about what I've been accused of saying. I had not planned to come to the meeting this afternoon, because I was so nearly sick. I went up to my room to lie down a while. Soon George, my little boy, came running in from school. He was excited and crying, because he thought he couldn't ever play with Lena Jones again. I finally found out that little Bobby Jenkin was his informant, and also that Bobby had told Lena what I had been accused of telling his mother about Mrs. Jones—and her debts—"

The excited speaker paused for breath. Then she went on, "Now ladies, really and truly, such things had never been discussed by Mrs. Jenkin and me; but I had told her something about how we, as a society, had worked, trying to relieve the awful need among the poor while so many were without work. And I said—without mentioning any names whatever—that

we had some members who were not financially able to carry their part of the load, so others had to work harder. I saw at once how trouble might arise without any grounds for it; so I got up and started out just as I was. I first ran over to see Mrs. Jones, but found her gone. I feared she had believed the report and would think I stayed away from the meeting this afternoon because of it, so I came on. I don't know anything about what Mrs. Jenkin talked of before her child; but I've told you what I said—and all I said!"

As Mrs. Bowen finished speaking Mrs. Jones, with a very few steps, closed the distance between them and fairly raised the slight form of her friend in two strong arms. Between sobs of happy emotion she said, "Why—in the world—did I ever—believe such a thing—of you? Next time—I hear such a report—about one of my—friends, I'll go—to her first of all!"

Mrs. Lee began it, everybody joined in singing:

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

Just a few words of explanation had cleared away a little misunderstanding which might soon have grown into a wicked monster. Now the little band of Christian workers were happy and in an attitude in which God could use them. As they sang they did so with the Spirit in their hearts, and in a way they never could have sung without it.

"Does any one know of anything else which should be done before we adjourn?" asked the president happily. "Anything for the good of the Society or the church?"

"Madame President," Mary stood like a stately young pine, superb in the fine strength of her young womanhood, her face a-glow with zealous expectation, "I'm hardly qualified to speak, because I don't know just what business you had transacted when I came. But if our organization has not done so already, it seems to me we should now make some plans through which to concentrate our prayers and efforts for the success of the campaign which is soon to begin here. I heard a little true story that illustrates so well what concentrated

prayer can do that I want to tell it to you now. I have a very dear friend, a missionary now in China. I often visited Alice in her home and during those visits I learned to know and love her mother. Alice has been on the foreign field about a year now, and last summer I spent two days visiting the mother. She told me the story of her own experience, and I shall repeat it as nearly as possible in her own words.

"She said: 'Of course, I had always prayed for Alice's work, but I never had been really burdened by it till a few weeks ago. One night after our family worship I felt that I could not retire until I had gone to a certain closet in our home—a place where I always go to fight out my battles with God—there to pray for Alice and her work. So I let my husband go on upstairs and I slipped into this closet. There I fell on my knees—praying, praying. Hours passed but no relief came. It seemed to me that the weight of all the lost souls of China was hanging on my soul. All night long I stayed there on my knees, praying; and when I heard my husband coming down the stairs next morning I still had the burden upon my heart. I arose and went about my household duties and rested none that day. The next night after worship I again went to my closet and began to wrestle anew with God for the salvation of lost souls in China. Next morning, just as the sun appeared in the eastern horizon, God opened the windows of Heaven and flooded my soul with the sunshine of His smile. I knew my prayers were to be answered. Even though my body was well-worn with the strain of two sleepless nights, I went to my desk and wrote a long letter to Alice, telling her that when she received my letter she would be in the midst of a great revival. Sure enough, her next letter—one written before she had received mine—was filled with news of one of the greatest revivals that China has ever experienced. The Holy Spirit was hovering over that section of the land, sweeping lost souls into the Kingdom of God by the hundreds.'

"This is a true story," Mary said in conclusion. "I can vouch for anything the mother would tell. And if such marvelous things can come as result of one woman's prayers thousands of miles away from the scene of action, how much greater things might be experienced here if our church would get itself burdened for the salvation of this city!"

As Mary resumed her seat she was conscious that the twenty women, who had been eagerly listening to her story, were greatly moved. Every eye was wet with the overflow of emotion.

"I'm sure every one of us feels the need of an organized, united plan of service for the coming campaign," the president heartily responded. "So I'm going to ask Miss Gray to outline any plan that she may have in mind."

"Ladies," Mary responded, "this matter has become a real live burden to me; otherwise I could not possibly have proposed any plan. Earnestness is contagious, and if we can get the spirit of it to working well within our own organization, it will spread throughout the city—influencing everybody whom we meet. And if we, as a church, can get ourselves into the right attitude for God to use us, the revival will begin even before the evangelist reaches here, and its purpose—the reaching of lost souls—will be an assured fact.

"So, it seems to me, we might organize something like a Prayer Circle, open to all women who will come and help us. Our purpose—work and pray! I believe, we might meet each evening until the campaign begins at the end of next week. Then we might hold our meeting—not more than fifteen minutes at most—just before the evening service. This would put us in a good spirit for the service. Furthermore, it would give the evangelist the assurance that we are at his side—willing and ready for any service. To some, this may seem like too great a sacrifice of themselves; but we must be willing to make personal sacrifices if we want results. We will get out of the coming campaign just what we put into it!"

Mary sat down without the least shadow of a doubt as to how her proposition had been received. Silent nods of approval had greeted many of her statements. The mind of her audience was ready for some great action!

"You have heard a splendid plan outlined," the president announced. "How many of you will enter into this compact, assuming the solemn obligation to work and to pray with all your ability for the success of the coming campaign?"

The right hand of every one present went up in hearty response. Thus began a move that was to mean much to South Main Church in the coming days—and years. Then the little

band of faithful workers kneeled there in the gathering darkness and held their first season of organized, concentrated prayers.

Fifteen minutes later, as each walked homeward through the crisp air of the lovely spring evening, it made little difference to her that her way was lighted by street-lamps instead of the sun. For the sunshine of God's promises was filling each heart, making all earthly obstacles seem very insignificant now.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REVIVAL BEGINS

The revival and spring descended almost simultaneously upon the city. Nature was bursting forth again after months of sleep, touching every living thing with new life, new interests, new zeal; just as she was being touched by the magic wand of God's sunshine. South Main Church has long been sowing seeds of love and kindness. Now many were looking forward to the harvest season, prayerfully and expectantly.

For several days now the entire congregation has been united in prayer and efforts for the success of this revival. The women had begun the movement; soon the men had caught the spirit and followed their example. So during the past week the men have been holding prayer meetings at two places in opposite parts of the city. The use of a large suite of office rooms downtown had been donated by one member and had become the place where men gathered every noon to plan and pray. The other meeting was held during the same hour and in Eastside Hall. To this last place some of the most earnest and consecrated men of the church had been sent each day to conduct the services.

The first Sunday dawned delightfully warm and pleasant, and at the morning service the evangelist, Reverend Ernest Williams, was greeted by a large and appreciative audience. As he closed the services, he was thrilled and gripped by a condition which is very seldom met with by an evangelist on the first morning of a campaign. The crowd resembled a great smoldering mass, ready at any instant to burst out into a flame of action! Pastor and evangelist alike felt the great mysterious power that was hovering over the crowded church, only to them it didn't seem mysterious at all—but the inevitable result of work and prayer!

At the evening service the evangelist used for his text: "Belshazzar's handwriting on the wall," and made present-day

applications of the danger signals. The sermon was forcible, both from illustrations given and manner of delivery. Again the speaker, as well as many others in the audience, felt the Divine Presence hovering over the vast crowd; and because of this he waived his usual custom and called for converts on this, the first day of his campaign. Homer Clayton led the choir in softly singing "Almost Persuaded," as the evangelist made his appeal.

Without any admonition from either their pastor or the evangelist to do so, the women began to move out from the section which had been reserved for them at the left of the altar—out into the crowd ready for any bit of personal work which the Spirit might direct them to do. The evangelist had hardly gotten his proposition stated, when men and women, old and young, began to move towards the altar . . . either to confess Christ or to seek Him.

Close to the side aisle and half-way down the room sat a young woman. Her head was bowed low over a small child that rested in her lap. Tears welled up in her eyes; her breast rose and fell in choking emotion. Edith Ward was passing through the depths of personal conviction before God for her sins. A desire to avoid public notice with her illegitimate child in her arms held her back; a longing desire to know personally the Christ for whom these good friends lived and worked urged her forward. A few months before, a homeless outcast, she had found refuge with rank strangers who were actuated by the love of the Christ; One to whom the speaker tonight had directed his hearers to go to escape the results of these danger signals. These strangers had become in a few short months the only friends on earth that she could claim. As she sat thus torn by conflicting desires, she saw nothing in her present pathway but a worthless life and a hopeless eternity. Presently a friendly hand was placed upon her arm and a gentle voice said, "Edith, we are praying for you."

The unhappy girl seemed to find courage and strength in this assurance; she arose and joined the others in the march to the altar. In a short while she had committed all her past short-comings unto the great loving heart of Christ, who will forgive even the lowest, if they come to Him in the right attitude. She arose, and as she moved about through the crowds

of penitent seekers, giving a word of advice here, breathing a prayer there, her face lighted up with a halo of divine love and carrying in her arms her sinless babe, she bore little resemblance to the Edith Ward of former days. New life and new interests were hers now! And regardless of what life might or might not have in store for her; she had found a new Friend—One whose friendship meant life, abundant life!

Every morning the pastor, the evangelist and many of the loyal and consecrated members of the church arose to face the routine of a busy day. Some mornings it was Reverend Moore who greeted the children of Eastside School, as they marched into the auditorium for the opening exercises; some times it was Evangelist Williams. In either case, the other minister was sure to be at Broadview School, performing like service—helping to form childish ideals through appropriate stories and songs, and to further promote the work of the campaign through interest aroused in childish hearts.

From the grammar schools, the speakers met at Central High to be present at chapel hour. They had received no urgent request for this service from the superintendent, you may be sure; but at their request he had granted them fifteen minutes each morning. While he met all their advances with cold indifference, John Needham wouldn't have refused this request at the cost of his right arm; for tucked away somewhere underneath his work-day serge coat was a heart, and a conscience, too.

And it was here at Central High, here among young people who were just now nearing life's diverging pathways that these men of God gave their best. They came not as long-faced ex-postulators; but rather they came full of hope, cheer and comradeship—leading, guiding; condemning never. Soon they had won their way into the very innermost lives of these young people; and soon the results began to be marvelous.

Homer Clayton very wisely stayed out of all the services at the schools. The first day he was asked to go along to conduct the music part, but he declined. Not that he wished to do so; nor that he liked to shirk duty—and this really was duty because he was in charge of the campaign's music—but he was quite sure his assistance in any school activity with

which John Needham was officially connected would be looked upon with censure, by one man at least.

But, if Clayton failed to do his duty in this respect, he more than made up for it in his work at Eastside Hall. Here daily noon-hour services were being conducted; and the promoter of this enterprise was the unquestionable power behind everything. He spoke in the meetings if it were necessary; he sang; he did personal work among employees who would have lain down their lives for him; he visited the sick and carried the message of Christ to many who could not go to the services for it; he fed the hungry and cheered the despondent. He worked from early morning till late at night, doing everything that was humanly possible for him to do. For many months now, his work among these people has been as bread cast upon the waters, to be gathered some day in a golden harvest—not in dollars and cents for himself, but in enriched lives of his neighbors. And now no one was getting more joy and happiness out of this bounteous harvest than he.

The downtown prayer meeting soon outgrew its quarters; for as the interest in the campaign spread the people from this section of the city came, more and still more, to attend this meeting. Not only men, as in the beginning, but women also who worked downtown and had a while off at noon, or those who happened to be interested enough to walk a few blocks. So it became necessary to change this meeting to a larger place, and only the church auditorium was soon large enough.

Each evening the Prayer Circle met in the church basement, for a short service. This organization, too, was experiencing a most rapid growth. Each evening new members were added, and new zeal manifested by those present. And every evening as this group of earnest Christian workers, their hearts burning for the success of the campaign, entered the auditorium and took their places in the section reserved for them, they were delightfully surprised with the ever-increasing crowd, and with the display of interest which was continually being manifested by the new recruits.

As Mary left the others each evening and took her place in the choir loft, her eyes longingly scanned the sea of faces, looking for one man. Only one time during the first week, that on Wednesday evening, had she failed to locate, some-

where in the back part of the church, the handsome figure of John Needham. She supposed he always came late, for he was always with the crowd who sat on chairs after the pews were filled. Why he had come each night she didn't know. Whether he felt the least bit of interest in the services—he had never shown any—or whether he had come because of curiosity, or that he might drive her home after the meeting? She could not divine his motive; but it had been some consolation each evening just to know that he was in the same building, breathing the same air she was breathing, and ready to listen to the same sermon and music that she would hear. And, each evening, after she had these facts settled in the back of her brown head, she had found it easy to dismiss all thoughts of the man entirely from her mind and to devote her undivided interests and talents to the services of the hour.

And when she had reached her room a while later and had time to think things over—but with mind so filled with memories of the man that she couldn't hardly think—she had to admit that it was a very queer condition, considering the fact that she had already made up her mind to accept Clayton during the summer vacation. And if not that; then her college position would surely come next. She knew there were only a few more weeks left for her to be with John, and sometimes she longed for the time to come when these would be over. For he couldn't ever be anything nearer to her than he now was—not without a change in him! And being compelled to see him every day, knowing this, was awful.

And yet—and in spite of all odds being against it ever happening—Mary was constantly praying and hoping, hoping and praying that God in His great loving kindness would give her the man she loved. For she was miserably conscious of the fact that it wasn't Homer Clayton, with all his congenial qualities, with his broad smile and busy life, with all his money and promises of luxury, that her heart was calling for with all its asserted love. She might marry the choice of her head; she might even fool everybody else but herself, but could the void place in her heart ever be filled—even by a devoted husband, and children? Or would a successful career ever fill it? These were far from pleasant facts which Mary was called upon to face, constantly; but they made her pray

with more fervor, work with more earnestness, and live closer to God than any other thing possibly could have done.

CHAPTER XX

MARY'S CUTTING CHALLENGE

On Saturday afternoon John finished his day's routine of work earlier than usual. This, as usual, consisted of the odds and ends and things of lesser importance, left over from the school affairs of the week and pushed up until the holiday to be attended to. Then he rested a while, took a bath and dressed with painstaking care before the supper hour. After supper he started out in his car, spirits soaring high with the delightful spring evening.

It seemed so good to get entirely away from one's work, to get out amid the beauties of living things. So, going at the slowest rate possible, John let his car purr along over the smooth highway. The windows were wide open and he was drinking deep at Spring's glorious fountains. Presently the moon appeared over the treetops, adding another touch of charm to the gathering twilight. Soon he came to a small creek, over which a concrete bridge had been built when the highway was constructed two years before. Plainly visible, and a short distance up the creek, was a lovely sea of blue. This promised to be too tempting a find to be easily ignored, at least by any one who liked flowers as John liked them. Therefore, the car was soon parked by the creek-bank and the young man was gathering a great bunch of Nature's wild blooms.

Flowers reminded him somehow of Mary. He had never tried to analyze the resemblance—maybe he couldn't have analyzed it if he had tried—but anyway Mary and any lovely flowers just naturally fitted together. And again, blue flowers in this spot of freshly poignant countryside reminded him of the outing he had been planning. It must be away out in the wide open spaces, and he must have at least a full half-day to enjoy it; so he couldn't go now. And, besides, he certainly didn't want to go alone! But he was going, and he was going

soon. This taste only made him real hungry for such a trip. He would speak to Mary soon, maybe tonight.

Thus planning, he finished gathering all the flowers he could easily carry, found an empty bucket in the back cover of the car, filled this with water and arranged the flowers in it. His next precaution was to get the bucket in such a position within the car as to carry it safely without turning over, spilling the water and spoiling the flowers.

As he reached town again, John looked at his watch and saw that it was yet a few minutes before Mary would have to leave for the church. All during the week he had refrained from accompanying her to the meetings. He knew she had gone early each evening, and that she would not have neglected her duties at the church even for his sake, and he had not cared to go as early as she had had to, in order to be there for the Prayer Circle meeting.

Before he hardly knew it, the car was headed for the Gray home. Of course, he would have fifteen miserable minutes to spend somewhere alone; but he guessed the short drive with the girl through this wonderful moonshiny night would be worth it! Of course, he should have called her up and told her he was coming by; but it would likely be all right, anyway! Thus he took too many things for granted.

As he stopped the car in front of the house he was greeted by music. His first thought was to start it again and drive on; he knew who was here—singing with Mary. He had heard that masculine soprano too many times now for his own peace of mind. The next moment he decided such an act would never do; the windows were open and some one had most certainly seen or heard him. He might get his neck broken—but he wouldn't act like a coward before it had happened! And anyway, didn't he have as much right here as Homer Clayton?

So John sauntered around the car for a few minutes, seeing after the flowers and other things which didn't need any seeing after at all, until he had himself sufficiently in hand to make his appearance at the house. His bold aggressive manner, when at last he came up the walk, belied the misgivings of his heart. Before he had time to ring the door-bell, the door was opened from within. Doctor Gray stood before him, hat in hand, ready to leave for the Ellis home to accompany Lucille

to church. This savored of a rather queer situation for Mary, so reasoned the young doctor, but he didn't know all the causes, perhaps. So he forgot his first impression; and assuming the role of affable host, he led John to the door of the living room. Here the young superintendent stopped.

Mary, at the piano, was supplying both the accompaniment and the contralto of a duet. Clayton was lost to everything except the sheet of music on the piano; for when he sang he did it with every bit of his ability, both mental and physical.

Doctor Gray took one good look at John Needham's face, as it now showed up under the stronger light, and decided that he had more promising entertainment awaiting him elsewhere. So, quietly, he slipped through the front door and began a forward march towards another section of the city.

Meanwhile the young people at the piano were happily unaware that there was any one closer than the nursery. But John stood very near, indeed—a miserably dejected young man upon whom music worked no charms. It would take many hours of driving under moonlight skies to compensate for the mortification he was experiencing in just a few minutes! He only wished a hole in the floor would swallow him up before he was discovered. Anything, anything would be preferable to this torture! But nothing happened—nothing save that Clayton and Mary continued to sing with all their given talents. And it did little good now for him to wish himself somewhere else! And to wish Homer Clayton on the other side of the continent didn't get him there; for John was playing this wishing game with all his might. And yet Clayton didn't move, except as his body swayed to and fro, rose and relaxed to the rhythm of his own music!

After what seemed to John ages of eternity the song ended. Mary and Clayton turned, almost simultaneously, to see the young man standing in the doorway. It would be hard to imagine a more difficult situation than the one in which Mary now found herself. Standing, in her own home, between two suitors; neither of whom she had invited here at this time! Both men polished by several generations of cultured ancestors; each, beneath this polished veneer, possessed with the primary instinct which every man feels towards his rival! Neither wishing to show his real feelings!

Wisely, Mary rose to the occasion, meeting the situation as if it were merely an accident. Which, in truth, was what it was; for Clayton had dropped in unannounced to practice some special music which he and Mary had agreed on Friday evening to have ready for the Sunday services; and John had dropped in unannounced from force of habit. Neither had ever thought of encountering the other at the girl's home at this early hour! So, as Mary decided, there was only one thing for her to do—be natural. Act as though each were a brother, forgetting that she knew how either felt about the other. But, oh, how she wished that these men, her own two friends, could be real friends, each loving the other! So, with simple grace, Mary made John welcome and extended all the nice little courtesies that a receiving hostess is supposed to extend.

Clayton met the situation with a philosophical mind; thinking, of course, that John had come to fill a prearranged engagement. If he felt any embarrassment, he didn't show it; and after a few words of genial greeting, he walked into the hall and picked up his hat.

At this opportune moment Evangelist Williams appeared in the hall. He had been talking with Mother Gray in the nursery. After a few jovial remarks, he reminded his singer that if they were to follow their custom of spending a few minutes in meditation and prayer before the services, they must go to their hotel at once.

Mary closed the door after seeing the evangelist and Clayton out, and returned to the living room to find a disconsolate young man there. Very soon she excused herself and went to her room for some necessary articles. Soon the little car was headed towards the church, and again John gave way to his feelings. More than ever, Mary was trying to be her unaffected, happy self. But John seemed preoccupied and often answered in monosyllables, in spite of her sprightly chatter. If Mary could have known how bright and happy had been his mood a while before, she would have marvelled even more than she now did at his conduct.

At length, Mary became thoroughly disgusted with the dejected behavior of the man at the wheel. She thought a mental explosion might do him good; for without doubt the dynamite was ready. Therefore, she decided to apply the match.

"John, what in the world ails you? If you're angry, speak your piece; if you're sick, let's drive by a doctor's office!"

"Sick, Mary," John replied lightly, without even glancing at the puzzled girl, "but I don't think a doctor would do me any good." Then he shifted his gaze and gave her a meaningful smile, "However, one doctor's sister might restore heart action by giving a few words of explanation about this evening!"

"I think you and Homer both took a big lot for granted this evening," Mary replied, "if that's what you want me to explain." Then, at his blank look, she continued, "I mean about dropping in on a girl unannounced like you did; although he said last night that he might run by sometime today to practice that song."

"Then, you didn't know he was coming, either?" somehow, John found that he could breathe easier now.

"I certainly didn't! He very seldom calls at my home, except in interest of our social or religious work. That brings him often, however."

"Yes, that's the cloak he's hiding his intentions behind, and he wears it often," John responded curtly. "I know his smooth, easy type. You do, too!"

Mary was thoroughly aroused now, ready to defend Clayton just as she had tried to defend John against Clayton's just criticism on that never-to-be-forgotten evening at Kinney's. All the protective instinct within her—and this was a strong characteristic of hers—asserted itself, urging her to protect this friend.

So, it was comparatively easy for Mary to retaliate, "John, you know positively well that those things are not true. Homer Clayton is just what he is; he uses no pretexts, whatever. You're poisoned by jealousy—that's the whole trouble!"

"Can you blame me, Mary?" John asked more humbly. "He's been trying to undermine our friendship now for months; and it looks like he has about succeeded!"

"John, please don't forget that our associations have hardly progressed beyond the friendship stage," Mary met John's troubled eyes with a smile, which she hoped would take the keen edge off of her words. "And, under such conditions, a girl may have as many friends as she wishes. And, too, it

might be well to remember this fact, John:" with a note of finality, "a girl always hopes to find her ideal in the man she loves. But if he can't meet her standard—well, maybe another man can!"

John had no chance to offer any further argument, for the car had now stopped in front of the church and Mary was hurrying towards the basement door, already late. He sat for a while, trying in his bewildered mind to digest some of the things he had just heard. He didn't like what she had said; he didn't like her independence. But what could he do about either? Well, one thing was in his favor—mutual work gave him a cause to see her daily! He'd assert his rights!

The first song had begun when John started towards the church. He didn't feel at all like going to church services, and in his own mind he gave himself several complimentary pats on the back for doing so. However, he reached the audience in ample time to notice the inspiration with which the choir leader had begun his service. This, added to Mary's statements, convinced the miserable young man, more than he had ever been convinced before, that there was already some sort of an agreement between the girl he loved and this man. The next instant he knew this wasn't true at all; because, if it were, Mary would not be accepting attentions from some one else—no one could call her untrue to anything she had promised! So, far away behind the clouds, he could yet glimpse a ray of hopeful sunshine.

After three or four songs—revival songs filled with the spirit of inspiration and work—and a prayer, the evangelist took his place in the pulpit. Then for the next thirty minutes, the unhappy young man in the corner was forced to listen to a most convincing discourse on: "Man—weighed and found wanting!"

CHAPTER XXI

TRUTH PREVAILS

By Sunday morning John had fully recovered from his mood of the evening before. He had thought things over far into the night, and out of the turmoil had come one decision: Mary had just as well say such things as she had said on the evening before as to think them. One thing he had always admired about the girl was her frankness; and he knew she exercised this frankness with every one with whom she associated. A less determined man would likely have cleared the field long ago and let her exercise this frankness upon some other. But mixed with this frankness was a winsomeness which undaunted John, who always went after whatever he wanted, found hard to resist.

He remembered this morning that he never mentioned his hoped-for outing to Mary last evening. Perhaps the beautiful morning called this so forcibly to his mind, for this afternoon would be an ideal time for such a trip. The air would be warm and balmy; flowers were sprinkling the hillsides with their early colors; birds, that had recently returned to their summer homes, were rejoicing over their achievement. The robin outside his window now was bursting his little throat with samples of his mirth. Everything promised a most glorious day! And it was announced last night that there would be two "men only" meetings this afternoon—one at Eastside Hall, conducted by Clayton; one at the church, by the ministers. So, Mary couldn't go to either; she'd be free to go with him!

He started to the telephone to call. No, that wouldn't hardly do, either! She might feel scrupulous about going on such a trip on Sunday; he couldn't put up any argument over the telephone.

Well, he'd go to church—he'd be sure to see her there. Then the thought of her singing with Clayton at the morning services chilled him. But maybe he could think about something pleas-

ant while they were singing, maybe the trip. And, too, maybe the whole dose wouldn't be as bitter as the sample had been, not now since he knew the truth of the situation!

Doctor Gray and Mary left the church together after the services. They had walked this morning because they both wanted to walk in the crisp spring air of the lovely morning. They were strolling along now, enjoying the beauties of the day and being passed by many who were in a greater hurry than they were, when a brisk step sounded behind—then John fell in line. Mary was surprised to learn that he had been at the services; she hadn't seen him, but in fact, she hadn't looked for him—for she had never known him to attend any morning church services before.

They walked on a short distance, three abreast, chatting about things in general. Then suddenly the young doctor remembered that he had intended to go by his office, so he left the others and started for the business section.

As John and Mary reached her home the young man proposed his plans for the afternoon, describing in most fluent terms the pleasures and benefits of such an outing to two busy people. The picture he painted was indeed tempting enough to the girl, for she liked such affairs quite as much as he did. And such trips were occasions of great happiness when shared with such a companion as the young man who was now talking.

But Mary knew such pleasures were not for her today; for she had firmly resolved to let no unnecessary social affair distract her efforts while the campaign was in progress. And she, too, had plans for the afternoon—plans of a far different nature. So, she firmly refused to make plans for any such a trip this afternoon; but admitted she would like to go later—some Saturday, perhaps. But, if, John wished to go with some one else, then she wouldn't mention her plans.

However, when John insisted that he would not go either unless she went and asked her to tell about whatever she wanted to do, then she stated the part she hoped he would perform in her plans—attend the men's meeting at the church and come home with her brother for supper. There were other parts included in her plans—her own parts—and she thought it best to leave these in the background until their time had come.

It wouldn't be easy to talk to John on the subject of his own eternal welfare; she knew of several people who had tried it during the past week, and they had received open rebuffs for their efforts. He would likely be more considerate of her feelings; but she wasn't expecting him to meet her on half-way ground. However hard it might be, she must try for God had placed it so heavily upon her heart! She hoped for a real heart-to-heart talk with him on the subject, and this could be best achieved in the seclusion of her own home.

John was reluctant to see his cherished plans topple, even if they might be built up again later; but it wasn't easy to refuse a few hours in the girl's home, either. So, if he couldn't get what he wanted, he'd take what he could get and keep on trying until he got what he wanted! This had long been his motto! It had worked many times; it might work in this case yet.

After dinner Mary spent a while with her mother, telling her interesting little incidents which had occurred at the meetings. Often Mother Gray had been unable to attend the services because of the additional work caused by little Martha. Then she prepared things for supper, so that there would be only the finishing touches to be added when the time had come.

These duties performed, Mary went to her own room. She felt the great need of a few hours alone with God and her own self. She first made herself comfortable by undressing and slipping on a loose robe. Then she drew a comfortable rocker up close to the open window. From here she could look out over the southern part of the city, even to the place in the distance where it merged into the adjacent countryside. By moving her chair real close to the wall on one side she obtained a very good view of her church building. Looking between obstructing houses, she could see men going towards the church, great lines of men, all going in one direction. Of course, they might not all be going to the services, but most of them were. And John might be one of the group just going in now. No, this was most too early for him; he usually was one of the last to come. But he would attend the meeting; he had promised her he would!

Slowly the hands crawled around the face of the clock in the church belfry until they announced the hour of 3, hour for

the services to begin. To the girl at the window, it was a clarion call to prayer!

She arose and went to her bedside. A place already so fortified with prayers and tears spent over the man she loved, and it was very easy to pray here again. Many a night she had poured out her heart in prayer and supplication for the salvation of her chief; and she believed that God was going to answer those prayers sometime. She fell on her knees and began to plead with God that the time of His answering might be right now, tonight at the latest.

It was some assurance to know that John was right now in the house of God, listening to the Word as it fell from the mouth of God's messenger. On and on she prayed that this message might be burnt into the heart of at least one of the audience gathered in the church; and that the Holy Spirit might wound with the arrow of conviction that same young heart. Her heart was heavy, heavy as lead in her breast; and she knew from personal experience what it meant to be burdened for the salvation of another. It seemed that her own soul was experiencing some of the agony which Christ felt for lost sinners while He was hanging on Calvary.

By and by there came into her heart the assurance that her petitions were going to be answered very soon, provided she did her duty. She had been feeling for several days that she must talk to John; but she had been searching for the best method of approach. Now she cried out with all her soul as did Samuel of old, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!"

The Voice within her answered, "Now is the time to use your dream. Do it well!"

The burden had melted away now, and her heart was as light and happy as the spring sunshine outside. She saw her path of duty plainly now; and at the end lay wonderful results, her reward!

She felt so happy now, happy enough to want to look her best for the evening! This was her opportune time and she must make the most of it; and looking and feeling self-confident would help her to work efficiently.

Mary went to the bathroom and bathed her happy, tear-stained face . . . the first act of her well-planned schedule. Back at her dressing table, she added a dash of powder and a

tinge of color to cheeks already beautiful with the colors of health. Soon the mass of gold-brown hair was being arranged in her most becoming manner, for she was working swiftly and carefully now.

Then came the selection of a dress from her limited supply. She came back the second time to the brown costume before she could make up her mind to wear it this evening. She had never worn it since that evening just previous to the holidays, and John had admired it so then. Yes, she would wear it again this evening, wear it for his sake again!

After she was fully arrayed in its soft clinging folds, she hesitatingly turned to look at the box on the dressing table which contained the necklace. This, too, had not been worn since that eventful evening, although John had several times reminded her that it had been made for service. She lifted the pearls up and placed them around her neck and fastened the ends. Oh, how the necklace added to the beauty of the costume! But she felt almost stunned at her own appearance as she stood before the tall mirror; but all vanity was submerged in an earnest prayer for help to use her personal charms to the best purpose. Just as she pronounced her dressing operations completed, she heard the door below open and masculine voices speaking.

During supper Mary was the happiest one of the group. She talked and laughed, radiating peace and happiness with every word, or every twinkle of her blue eyes; for her actions were not forced affairs. She had cast her all upon God's altar; she was now experiencing the exultation of victory. John's eyes dwelt whimsically upon her face much of the time. He wondered if she could possibly be the same person who had hurled thunderbolts at his heart the evening before?

But Mary's quick eye soon discovered that everything wasn't all right with John. He assumed a forced lightness, but there was no jest or spirit to it; and during lapses in the conversation she found him constantly falling into a thoughtful mood. This mood was not the kind which she had often seen seize John, not the kind that he had been mastered by on last evening. Somehow, it was very, very different. And Mary's heart went out in sympathetic understanding; for she felt sure she knew

the cause, and from the depths of her happy heart she was praying that she did.

After supper Doctor Gray and John returned to the living room. Here the young host kindled a fire in the grate—more for the cheerfulness it produced than the heat; and, perhaps, from force of habit acquired during the winter months. For a while they sat in the soft firelight and discussed recent events; while Mary, covered by a large apron, cleared away the dishes and helped her mother with little details around the nursery. Then Doctor Gray excused himself and slipped out.

When Mary reached the living-room door she found John alone, sitting near one end of the davenport, his left elbow resting on its arm and supporting the hand in which his head reclined. His other hand lay on his knee. His dark eyes were fixedly gazing at the glowing fire; his expression was rapt and troubled. He sat as motionless as a statue, not the blinking of an eye to break the inertness of his position.

Mary had stolen into the room so quietly that she stood beside John before he discovered her. He jerked himself up alertly and started to rise; but she motioned him back with a sign that she wanted to sit with him. As she sat down real close to him, a small hand voluntarily stole over and into the warm embrace of the man's hand. This point of contact with his strong character seemed to give her strength to go on with her duty.

"John," Mary said, in a voice so soft it harmonized with the firelight's soft glow, "I had a dream not long ago. While it was only a dream and of no special significance, I would like to tell it to you. Will you listen to it?"

John's left hand closed over the small one in his right with a little caress, as he replied, "I certainly will, Mary, and with pleasure."

"You remember the evening you called to see how I was—the day I was sick at school?"

"I do!"

"Well, it was that night," Mary said. "I retired early—sick and exhausted; and the really awful part of my dream centered around you."

Mary felt the feigned shudder which passed over the strong figure of her companion; but paying no attention to it, she

went on solemnly relating her vivid dream. She told him about dying in her dream and being carried by angels across the Dark River. She described in vivid terms the many beautiful and wonderful things which she found in her new home. She dwelt upon the fact that she could have been very, very happy if he had been there. She tried to describe the grief she felt when Jesus told her that John Needham could never enter Heaven unless he changed his method of travel. Then came the awful part at the banks of the Dark River, and how she saw him go down as he called in great desperation for help, help which no one could give.

In closing, Mary asked, "John, do you still believe that if you were called on to cross the Dark River—and this could happen this very night—do you still believe your materialistic skin could carry you safely across?"

During the latter part of her story, Mary realized that the man was strangely touched. His breath was coming out in choking gasps. She felt the unnatural tremors which were passing through his hands. With her last question, she looked up into his face and saw tears in those deep gray eyes—where she had never seen tears before.

"No, Mary, I'm thoroughly convinced that it would not," he replied in an uneven voice.

"If that be true," Mary said sympathetically, "then why not change that skiff for something more safe and reliable? Why not secure passage on the Ship of Zion, which always anchors safely in the harbor of Heaven; because its pilot is Jesus Himself?"

"Mary, I wish I could settle it—right now," John said humbly. "For weeks your prayers have been following me—a shadow by day; a ghost by night! But I met my poor sinful, wretched self face-to-face this afternoon. I've been miserable ever since. Won't you help me, Mary?"

The hour for which Mary had hoped and prayed was here. The golden hour when John felt the need of her Christ! The front door opened; Doctor Gray and his mother passed out. They were alone.

"Certainly, John, I'll help all I can; but you must pray for yourself, too." Mary fell on her knees at his feet. The next

instant he was on his knees at her side, pleading, praying, pleading.

During the next few minutes one of the most earnest prayer meetings that Mary ever attended was being held here; when her prayers flowed as the water of a river and merged into John's pleadings for mercy—all going up to the Father above by the way of the Cross. Neither knew how long they had remained in such an attitude, when John raised a face illuminated with joy and peace.

"Mary," he said with a happy smile, "I'm ready and willing now to start with you to Heaven! The scales have fallen from the eyes of another Saul; from this time henceforth I'll walk in the Light!"

Mary couldn't speak, she tried to; but words seemed so inadequate to express her joy! And her heart was so full of praise and thanksgiving, she didn't know what to do with herself. She felt more like she wanted to fly through the air than anything else, proclaiming God's goodness as she went. Something unusual, something that would cause people to listen to her words! And yet she didn't care whether she got up off her knees or not. She had won her greatest victory here on her knees; so why get up from this sacred place? All she seemed able to do was turn to John a face which spoke volumes.

But soon John was on his feet, ready for service; for the clock on the mantel was announcing the church hour. The next moment he had lifted her up, too, and was clasping her to his happy heart for just one grand second.

"Mine is a double portion of Heaven tonight," said the new John, fervently. "But, dear, we haven't time now to discuss our own happiness. Let's hurry to the services. Maybe our blessed experience will enable us to lead some other lost souls to a loving Saviour!"

CHAPTER XXII

END OF THE BATTLE

It was another beautiful Sunday, one to be classed by Mary during all her future life as a memorable day. A week, brimful of happiness and work, had just passed by to both herself and John Needham. Each day had brought forth professional work to be performed together; while every minute of their spare time had been spent in the work which was now so dear to both of their hearts.

Mary, even without the stimulus of John's enthusiasm, would have done everything she knew or felt directed to do to promote the work of the campaign and to lead souls to Christ; but with the whole-hearted enthusiasm which he had manifested since the hour of his conversion, it was easy for her to go to the very limit of her strength and ability with this work.

At the high-school chapel services during the past week the young superintendent had taken a most active part in the work; and because of the love and respect which the student-body felt for him, he had been instrumental in leading many more of these young people to the meetings—and ultimately to Christ.

The spirit of enthusiasm had reached a climax on Friday evening, when the students from the high school and upper grades had gone in a body to the church. The sermon by the evangelist had been well-chosen and inspiring from the text: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The vast audience had been held spell-bound by the speaker's portrayal of the disastrous life of the king's son in the paths of sin, and the reviewing of what he might have been with God's blessings and guidance. At the close, while Homer Clayton had led the choir in singing, "Lord, I'm coming Home," many of these young people had gone to the altar, surrendering their lives to Christ and His leadership.

And during the past week John had found another way to

work for the Master, a way which had never appealed to him until Christ's work had become his work—the use of his talents in sacred music. Now his quickened eyes let no opportunity pass unnoticed; so his rich tenor had become a valuable addition to the choir. Thus had passed the week leading up to this red-letter day in their lives.

It had been previously announced that this evening the church would administer the ordinance of baptism to a great number of its new members. John Needham was among this number.

At the close of the service which had added several new recruits to the number, the altar was immediately cleared and made ready for the occasion. A hush of solemnity spread over the great audience, as, one by one the new converts were passed through the ordinance which symbolized the burial of Christ and His resurrection to a new life of service.

As John's turn came, there was an unusual wave of significance felt sweeping over the expectant crowd. Everybody within the city was, either directly or indirectly, concerned about what the head of such an important institution as the school system believed. And many here were very vitally concerned, because they had children under his instruction. Therefore, many hearts were warm and happy over the prominent young man's recent stand for righteousness; and many eyes were damp with tears of joy as his rich, mellow voice rose over the baptismal water in song:

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Naked, poor, blind and forsaken,
Thine henceforth fore'er to be."

A while later, again back in the girl's home, John faced Mary across the living-room table. The soft light of the reading lamp played upon her happy young face, bringing out its pure loveliness. Each evening during the past week, he had driven or walked home with the girl; but during those short periods their own future happiness had not been discussed. But, in spite of this silence, each of them had known that the time would come when this vital subject would be settled, once

for all time. A bigger question than even his future with Mary had held John speechless since the evening of his conversion. This, too, was settled now; he was in a position to tell Mary just what she might expect if she cast her future with him.

And as Mary saw John hesitating now, she knew that the momentous hour had come—and that she was ready.

“Mary, how would you like to be a minister’s wife?” he asked softly, hesitatingly.

Mary raised a smiling face to look at him. Her happy young heart went thump-thumping out its exultation under the crisp green of her new spring frock. She folded and then unfolded the small paper she held in her hands in mechanical activity.

“I can’t think of anything at this minute,” she replied, “that would please me quite so well, provided the man I love and the minister were one and the same person.”

“I’ve been trying for a long time to fill the first part of your equation,” John replied, “but you alone know how well I’ve succeeded, or how miserably I’ve failed. But for the other part, it is settled; for I’ve fully given and dedicated my future life to the ministry. With my collegiate education, I can soon finish a theological course. Then I shall be ready for service wheresoever God sees best to place me. So, dear, it may be the rocky road of a missionary’s life that I’m asking you to share with me.”

Mary sent a searching look into the man’s happy face, as she plied her next question. “What about some of the materialistic theories you have always upheld?” she queried. “Will they agree with your idea of what a minister—or missionary—should believe and teach?”

A merry twinkle gathered volume in the depths of John’s dark eyes until it burst forth into a hearty laugh. “Nothing but an unconditional surrender, I suppose?” he put it in the tone of a question.

The next instant he was speaking in a more solemn tone, “Dear, you have a perfect right to know it all; and I’m glad to be able to tell you truthfully that these theories, with many more of my worldly beliefs and ideas, were left at the foot of the Cross and thoroughly washed away by the Blood of the Lamb. I am resolved to understand as much of God’s Word

as He gives me wisdom to interpret; but the parts that are not intended for me to fathom will be accepted by faith."

"Amen!" Mary said trustingly. "I thought so, but I just wanted the assurance from your own dear lips."

Mary had been edging her way around the table; she now stood at the end. John stood still and raised inviting arms towards her. She, of her own volition, closed the distance between them, dispelling forever John's fancied doubts of her love for himself.

"Dearest," John said, when at last he had landed on earth again, "I don't want to have to wait for you another three years. I am planning to leave the school system at the close of this year. And I could easily stay over for a June wedding; but, of course, you're the one to set the date for the Great Event."

Mary raised a brown head and looked frankly into eyes that were soft and tender with love and hope.

"You won't have to wait many days in June," she said softly. "I'll be ready."

"But, dear, what about your college position?" John inquired.

"Don't you worry about that," she replied happily. "I know a young woman whom I can safely recommend for that position. I am perfectly willing for her to teach Bible and Ancient History in my place; but I am not willing now for any one else but 'yours truly' to be your wife."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN CONCLUSION

The three years since the days of this story have brought some really noteworthy changes which probably should be recorded here before our narrative is closed.

John Needham, D. D., and his wife, Mary, have been on the foreign field several months now. In the letters that come back home to both relatives and friends, the young missionary often relates very satisfactory results from their efforts, even though their period of service has been brief thus far. So one can judge from this fact that the young missionaries have been highly successful from the first, and be very sure that, barring sickness or death, a long and useful life of service lies before them. But in these accounts of their work, John has often said that whatever success they have met already, and whatever good may yet come as a result of years of consecrated work, will all be in a large measure due to the loyal and loving help of the woman who is ever at his side, if not personally, with her prayers and inspiration.

For while her heart is ever in the work out among the little missions of their territory, she also has many important duties in the home. This missionary home, as many of its class, holds much interest for the natives; and truly a wonderful influence radiates from it out into their dark lives. It is to this haven of relief that they come with the ailments of the body, and the troubles of the mind, as well as the sins of the soul. So the missionary's wife must be nurse, instructor, welfare worker, comforter and many times help perform the work of a doctor when such a person is not available—all in addition to her religious teaching. And yet greater work has centered around her little mission home of late; for a few months ago a little son, John Needham, Junior, made his advent under the sunny tropical sky, and even with the best

native nurse that could be obtained, his health and welfare were largely under the mother's supervision.

John's parents have visited Mary's mother and brother twice since the trip they made to Blissville for the wedding. Here they have made some warm friends; friends who often speak of the transformation which has taken place in the young missionary's parents since they met them so short a while ago. The parents speak frankly of a greater inner transformation—of how they were crushed when they learned that their only child, the son upon whom they had lavished everything, had decided to spend his life among the natives of far-off India; of how their tears and words failed to move John from the course that he felt God's hand had mapped out for him; of how at last, when convinced that it was useless to do otherwise, they ceased protesting and decided to make the most of the situation.

But that which seemed to the parents a blow, was really a blessing in disguise—it has brought them to know by spiritual contact the Father for whom their son labors so earnestly. While now they are rightfully proud of the great part that their son is playing in helping to make this old world a better place in which to live; and their long letters to him and Mary are real inspiring ones, full of assurance that their interest and prayers are ever with the dear children in their work.

With Mother Gray the parting from her daughter was different. While it was a bitter fact that eight or ten years would elapse before she would see them again; yet not one word of protest escaped her lips. Instead, she lifted her poor broken heart up to the Great Physician and asked Him to heal it as He had done many times in the past, and then to give her strength and courage to send the young missionaries away with a smile and a "God bless you."

Doctor James Gray is now one of the leading physicians of the city, and enjoys a large and remunerative practice. He bought the property joining the Gray home, wrecked the building, and now a beautiful and modern home graces the site.

In this home he dwells with his lovely wife, Lucille. She, too, maintains a lively interest in her husband's work, and often a sick or sorrowing person finds his or her suffering allayed, or the room made more cheerful by the little acts of

kindness which she knows so well how to perform. And often it's an operation or some bits of special nursing—an art which she mastered in the time intervening between high-school days and marriage—that calls her away from home duties. Only a few weeks ago when a little daughter arrived, it seemed to this happy young couple that their happiness could not possibly be any greater. Little Mary Lucille, a darling with sky-blue eyes and golden curly hair, is an exact replica of her mother's babyhood days.

Although Mother Gray takes little Martha and goes each day to spend a while in the big house next door, she still lives in her own little home. While she loves to be near her son and his family, she says that she maintains her independence and self-respect best by keeping her own home; and it is in this retreat that she finds her greatest happiness. It is exactly as it was when James and Mary kept its old halls ringing with their mirth, except a new coat of paint and some repairs that were necessary to preserve its existence. After the big house was completed and beautifully furnished, both Doctor Gray and Lucille urgently insisted that the mother sell her house and come to live with them. This she gently but firmly refused to do.

"No," she said with finality the last time James mentioned the subject, "I must keep my own home for both my own and little Martha's sakes. It is too sacred to be sold; for around it clusters the sad-happy memories of other years. In it I will live with the memories of the past and the blessings of the present, until I pass over into the realities of the Future."

Often on beautiful evenings the frail figure of this woman, whose lifetime has been one series of service, can be seen with her little adopted charge going through the little white gate that separates the two homes, there to keep her small granddaughter while the young parents have the privilege of attending a concert or some social affair. She dearly loves the little mite of humanity whose name is dear as well as her wee self, because it reminds her of the dear one so far away. Then, many evenings when it is cold and gloomy outside, she loves to kindle a bright fire in the fireplace—same as in the days when Mary kept the home fires burning—and in this blaze vision again the good times she has spent there with her own

children. On such evenings she finds pleasure in taking from its place of honor the large photograph of the little family across the seas, while with mind's eye she sees the little one performing some of the cute acts which his proud mother writes about.

Little Martha has grown into a real lovable child. If Mother Gray has ever had uneasy moments about the future of her adopted daughter, she forgets them as the child climbs upon her lap, twines chubby arms around her motherly neck and says, "Mam-ma me lubs you. You lubs me, don't you?" Then the mother takes the small form in her arms and stills all its doubts with words of love. She is more than confident that her teachings and prayers will prevail over any possible inherited weakness. So she lives each day, happy in the belief that her little adopted daughter will in the days to come bring to her the pride and joy that her own dear ones are now bringing.

No, certainly we would not forget Homer Clayton; because the world, behind its applause for the winner, should have a warm spot for a good loser. And Clayton is both. He lives with his little daughter in Claymanor now, pursuing the same busy, happy life that has always been his, in spite of all the hard knocks that Fate has dealt out to him. For he finally succeeded in convincing Grandmother Kinder that he never—or at least not for a long time, if ever—intended to bring a young mistress to reign over his big home, and that he needed little Laura quite as much as they both needed the grandparents' presence, just to supervise the management of the household and to care for the little one. Thus the child became the link, binding together this oddly mixed group, because each one was working for her well-being.

If Clayton was ever heart-broken over Mary's marriage to another, no one ever knew about it. He probably missed her assistance in the church and benevolent work more than he mourned for a lost love; because Mary had certainly never given him any grounds to hope for anything but sisterly affection from her. And it's doubtful that he ever felt anything stronger for her, though, in the hour when he considered she was in danger of marrying an infidel, he gallantly offered himself—and money.

But, perhaps, the thing which helped Clayton pass over it so easily was John's and Mary's own frankness; for one evening just before her marriage, Mary entertained both men again in her home. This time they were both invited there, each knowing that the other would be present; and this time there was no unfriendly feelings which had characterized their previous meeting there. For Mary had told John all about Clayton's seemingly impromptu proposal, and had expressed a wish that together they might talk over the plans of their future work with this friend who had been such a source of inspiration to her life. To this, John readily agreed; for by him, all things were viewed through a clear glass now. Therefore, his feelings about Clayton had undergone a change, comparable only to his changed view-point on many other topics. And before the evening was over, Clayton was as thoroughly convinced that John's conversion was really genuine as he was that it was the young minister-to-be, and not he himself, who held Mary's undivided love.

So Clayton, being the man that he was, could do no less than he had promised—he could do no less than give them his congratulations and best wishes. This he did, not only in words—for the church officials know that Clayton's contributions have doubled and trebled since he is helping to support real personal friends on the mission field.

Words are positively inadequate to describe the power that South Main Church has acquired in the community. Its membership has grown to the extent that a large addition to the church building was necessary in order to seat the ever-growing attendance; for many are being drawn to its services who would never have been touched by a cold indifferent church, and all who come once are held by the deep spiritual power which permeates its members, in their every-day work, in their business relations with others, in their home life as well as in their worship on Sundays. And besides all these great and worthwhile accomplishments, it is the mother of a thriving young church in Eastside, built next door to and working hand-in-hand with Eastside Hall for the salvation and advancement of the laboring class who live thereabout.

And yet this church is no more than what every one of Christ's Churches should, and can, be—a great institution

always being re-enforced by the many new recruits drawn by its shining light, and happy in this great work—a Bride adorned and ready, but ever-working, until Christ, the Bridegroom, shall appear to claim her.

END.