

Wilkinson, nervously rubbing his hands together, "I have brought you the Bishop and Mr. Northall to tea!"

The good man spoke as if Mrs. Chittick's delight at the arrangement were a foregone conclusion, and she, poor wretch, tried to act accordingly.

She greeted her guests in very different tones to those devoted to lullaby or admonition and ushered them into the dusty sitting-room, where they were quickly joined by the discreditable contingent from the back yard. Mrs. Chittick thankfully perceived that she was not remembered. Time, care and toothache had wrought an effectual disguise and the Rector's fortunate absent-mindedness, saved her from unmasking. The Bishop, whose nicety of person appeared to have contracted none of the dust and burrs which adorned his companions, was fidgetting with the calf of his leg. Mrs. Chittick's attracted gaze discovered a tattered rent which much marred the grace of his gaiter's outline. Well she recognized Cutty's sign dental, but nervously tried to escape burdening herself with repairing the damage, remembering that both time and black silk were lacking.

She heard the Rev. Northall enquiring of her first-born who it was had been singing Salvation Army hymns as they approached the house. A query provocative of a peculiar glance from the Bishop at his missionary.

Then she rose to the hour's requirements. Excusing herself she withdrew with the two elder children, and made Freddie hold the baby, now awake, for the rest of the evening. Next she scrawled a note and despatched Willy with it to the Rectory, with a few forcible remarks upon the necessity for speed. Then she applied herself anew to the fire, which absorbed the time of Willy's absence. When that youth arrived at the Rectory Mrs. Wilkinson was just stepping out of the clerical vehicle on to her own front gallery. She took the small boy by the hand and facing Margaret's inevitable wrath appropriated all the substantials of the Rector's tea, and packing them up with half-a dozen decent cups, saucers and plates, placed the child and basket in the ancient phaeton. A few parting directions to Margaret and she drove off with her pic-nic.

Her indignant handmaiden hardly had breath left to mutter "the idea of the Bishop takin' tea at that old rat châlet of a Laurie's cottage, and all my good cookin' gone too!"

Deed an if the missus had give me time, I'd a stopt her. But 'twas no use. She licks the wind, Mrs. Wilkinson do."

Passing the Prendergast's place, Mrs. Wilkinson saw quite a large party enjoying afternoon tea on the tennis lawn. They all looked very jolly so she did not spare time to stop and explain, but hurried to the relief of the unfortunate Mrs. Chittick. Her she found ruefully contemplating all her stock, consisting of a mutton bone, Cutty's lawful perquisite, and a scratch lot of muffins, rolls, and Johnny cake which might have done for the children's tea, but under present circumstances were at once not enough and quite too much of a good thing.

Mrs. Chittick felt that a thoughtful angel had entered her back door, and together they succeeded in getting up something which if not festive was at least satisfying.

By the time Mr. Northall returned a long thanks. Mrs. Chittick's spirits rose to the point of conjecturing what he might have found to say had not Mrs. Wilkinson come to the rescue.

The conduct of the children and a few other little matters, however, prevented her from indulging in undue elation. It really seemed as if these sportive cherubs became for the time being as their invisible archetypes, in their ubiquity and plentitude of head, as compared with a total lack of understanding. They got in everyone's way. Each child was a bursting pod of interrogations.

If some guide, philosopher and friend of our race would show how to direct the energies of the budding mind so that one-half of them be directed to a solution of the conundrums propounded by the other half, and the reverse action produce silence, what blossoms would equal the rare perfection of our olive branches! Probably, though, at the expense of fruit. Petals must fall before the seed cup swells to lusciousness.

As it was, the grown folks felt perfectly helpless when the baby, being put on the floor, managed to find the weak spot in the Bishop's attire, and stuck a salt spoon between the graveyards of his harness. Then three-year old slid off her chair and stayed for five minutes quiet as a little angel in the hall, only to reappear dragging in his Lordship's silk hat, coupled with a skipping rope as engine to a train composed of the two berrettas.