

PALMS

ANNA HANSON DORSEY,
"TAILED PATHS," "MAY
BROOKS," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XV.

NEMESIUS MEETS POPE STEPHEN—VALERIAN'S
DIABOLICAL INFLUENCE, AND
HOW HE WAS RAFFLED.

At the appointed hour, Nemesius, clad in armor, his sword at his belt, and a dark toga thrown around him, passed out of the bronze gates, and, walking rapidly, soon reached the spot where he expected to meet Admetus and found him waiting his arrival.

"We have far to go," whispered the boy.

"Lead on," was the quiet answer.

So much mystery might naturally have awakened distrust, but strange to say, Nemesius felt none, his mind being occupied solely with the object he had in view. Together they walked down the steep road, through many turns and windings of the city, past guards, whose challenge the officer met by the countersign, until they were safely outside the walls, on the wide, shadowy Agro Romano, which looked vaster under the pale starlight.

Nemesius and his guide had walked some distance in an apparently aimless way, when the latter turned to the left, disturbing several flocks of sheep that were slumbering in the grass around the poor huts of their shepherds, and at last stopped before a small, dilapidated building so far gone to ruin as to be unable to hold itself together only by the aid of numerous props. A bunch of grape-vines hung ostentatiously over the doorway, indicating that wine could be here obtained by thirsty travellers. Three quick raps on the door were answered by a woman, who opened it cautiously, and peered out.

The boy Admetus whispered a single word; she threw open the door, and invited them to enter the poor place, which was dimly illuminated by the flickering rays of a lamp suspended by an iron chain from a rafter. There were one or two shelves, which held a few amphorae, drinking-cups, and flagons; a rickety table, some rude seats, and a water-cask—all in keeping with the poverty-stricken exterior.

"Follow me," said the low, sweet voice of Admetus, as he led the way down a steep, dilapidated staircase into a cellar, that gave out an odor of rotten wood and mouldy straw.

Nemesius cast a quick glance around the vault, whose gloom was only intensified by the dull torch borne by his guide, and for the first time his instincts as a soldier suggested a trap. But he did not hesitate; peril or no peril, he would risk everything to secure the object of his hope; and, following the light, he descended another steep, narrow stairway, cut in the rock of some older foundation than that on which the tumble-down wine-shop had been built.

At the bottom his guide turned into a narrow passage, then entered another that ran across the stone in a zig-zag, and, after proceeding a short distance, stopped, and pushing aside some rubbish, picked up a stone and rapped sharply against what appeared to be a solid wall of travertine. Suddenly an aperture opened, caused by the turning of a block of stone, which revolved on a pivot fixed into it at the top and bottom.

"Enter, I will await thee here," said Admetus.

Nemesius saw a long gallery stretching away into the darkness, and two soldiers with a light advancing towards him. They were unarmed, and gave him the military salute, saying "Deo gratias." He entered; the stone door closed, then they courteously but briefly told him that they were sent to conduct him to the presence of the holy Bishop Stephen.

"Lead on," was all he said; but what were his thoughts as, following his unknown guides, he beheld stretching away in interminable lines, as far as the torch cast its light, tier above tier of square blocks of stone, carved in devices unknown to him, which sealed the graves of the Christian martyrs? None might know, nor could he define the strange awe that sat upon his soul as he moved through these ranks of the holy dead. He knew now that he was in the Catacombs; and, although his hand instinctively grasped the hilt of his sword, the faith and hope—devoid of superstition—which had brought him thither, to ask the intercession of a mysterious and divine name, unknown to him, to give sight to his blind child, did not permit him to falter a moment in his purpose, or ask a single question of his companions. His step was firm and steady, his splendid eyes clear and untrembling, his helmeted head erect, while the faint ring of his armour kept time as he moved.

After many sinuous turns along these silent corridors, filled with the columns, whose, like "doves in the clefts of the rocks," the martyred dead reposed, a sweet, solemn sound stole out on the silence, growing more distinct as they advanced; and presently, through an arch near which they were passing, a soft halo of light was shed, and Nemesius heard the words chanted:

"O ye holy and just ones, rejoice in the Lord! God hath chosen you; He Himself for an inheritance He hath chosen you, O Israel!"

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Alleluia!"

"Teopora for Martials."

The sweet, restful strains died away; only a faint echo sounded along the dim galleries of the dead, like the whispered response of angels, as the martyr was laid to rest. Nemesius did not then know the significance of the light he had seen and the words he had heard.

At length—it seemed as if miles had been traversed—the soldiers stopped before an opening, where a single leather curtain was suspended. One of them passed behind the screen, and quickly returning, invited Nemesius to enter. He did so, and found himself in a lamp-lighted apartment, its only occupant a man past middle-age, clothed in a white woolen robe, whose

aspect was majestic but mild; whose countenance, shining with sweetness and compassion, was full of power; and whose eyes, penetrating yet kind, inspired him with emotions such as he had never before experienced in the presence of any human being.

He knew that this was the Christian Pope, Stephen, and involuntarily knelt before him; while the holy man, impressed by his appearance, and the spontaneity of his homage, laid his hand upon his head and gave him a benediction: then invited him to be seated near the chair from which he had risen to greet him; and, in tones that inspired confidence, asked the object of his visit, and expressed his readiness to serve him.

"I thank thee for granting me audience, I am here as a suppliant, but I will not deceive thee. Know, then, that I worship the Genius of Rome and the gods, and that I have taken part in the persecution of Christians," said Nemesius, with dignity, his voice subdued, yet firm, as he made his frank avowal, not knowing but that it might bring defeat to his hopes; but, as an honorable gentleman and a brave soldier, he could not act otherwise.

"I have heard of thee," was the mild answer, "but know that it is a fundamental law of the Christian life to forgive our enemies, and do good to them who despitefully use us; otherwise we are not true disciples of Jesus Christ. Speak, then, for it must be no light cause that leads thee to seek me in the Catacombs."

"Thou shalt judge," answered Nemesius, refusing by a gesture the seat offered him. "It is for one most dear to me—my only child—for whom I solicit a share in those favors which I am credibly informed thou bestowest on the miserable and unfortunate."

"I but do the holy will of Him whose servant I am," was the gentle response. Then Nemesius, in brief words, unveiled the story of his grief; the most eloquent language could not have increased the pathos of its facts; tears rose unbidden to his eyes, and fell unheeded; the very depths of his strong heart were broken up, and he asked, as a boon more precious than any life could give, that sight might be given to his blind child, Nor—pagan as he was—did he spare lavish offers of treasures and countless gold to the Christian Pontiff; for had he not, from time to time, poured out his riches to the priests of his false gods for the same object? and he did not yet know the difference.

"The gifts of God cannot be bought with silver and gold; they are gratuitous, and of His divine mercy," quickly responded the Pontiff, whose heart was moved with Christlike pity towards the noble pagan. He saw in his simple faith a glorious possibility, and a swift, divine inspiration dictated the words: "With out God all things are possible; take comfort, therefore, for thy desire will be granted."

"Do I hear aright? Oh! sir—" Nemesius was overwhelmed by this calm assurance that his long-delayed hope would be at last confirmed; he could scarcely believe, after all his bitter disappointments, that this was not some illusion of his over-wrought senses; his face paled, and for a few moments his thoughts were confused.

"On the morrow the blind eyes of the innocent one will be opened," continued the Pontiff. "Bring her to me in the morning early—not here, but to the old, walled villa west of the second milestone on the Via Latina."

"I would thank thee, could I find words adequate to express my gratitude; but language fails. I can only say that all I have—aye, my very life—I would lay down, and still think the price too small for that which thou hast promised," said Nemesius, with profound emotion; then, with generous after-thought, quickly added: "but may I not bring my Claudia here? It may be unsafe for thee outside."

The holy Pontiff knew that the time had not yet come for his crowning, and that many others will be no danger. The villa belonged to an officer of the Pretorian Guard, whose wife is a lady of the imperial household; both of them are Christians, but not yet open. Now we must part. May He Whom I serve enlighten thee! Farewell!" And so saying he passed out beyond the leather curtain that covered the doorway.

The Pontiff had scarcely gone, when the two soldiers who had guided Nemesius hither came to conduct him back to the place where the youth Admetus awaited him.

While traversing these dim, silent streets of the dead, he was too deeply absorbed in thought to observe them as at first, when but one idea dominated his faculties; for now, radiating from that many others occupied his mind. He thought of the old, walled villa out near the Via Latina, which had long been deserted as a permanent residence by its owners, who only came there occasionally in the summer, accompanied by numerous friends, to enjoy open-air festivities in the beautiful grounds. Nemesius knew it well, having visited there with Fabian; but he found it difficult to think of the brave, flashing Tertullus, and his gay, pretty wife Camilla, as Christians. Truly did it appear to him that the nets of the Christus were spread far and near, snaring in their meshes not only the ignorant rabble, always ready to follow novelties, but those whom Rome could ill spare from her patrician ranks.

Nemesius wondered if Tertullus and his wife were at the villa, and whether they were alone, or surrounded as usual by visitors? Their being alone would ensure greater safety for the Christian Pontiff; in either case, his own way would be smoothed for the approaching interview, when, as if for the purpose of an early drive, accompanied by Claudia, he sought admittance at the old iron-ribbed gates, to a sunrise visit to the near country-place of a friend in warm weather being too usual an occurrence to attract attention.

Not the least surprising incident of the night's experience, he thought, was the confidence reposed in him by the Pontiff, who had virtually placed his life in his hands, were he base

enough to betray him; it appealed to Nemesius' best instincts, and, without the least admixture of that shallow gratitude derived from the expectation of favors to come, but moved solely by the magnanimous chivalry of a true, noble heart, he vowed that should any danger, from whatever quarter it might come, assail the holy man in their approaching interview, he would defend him with his very life.

How strange it was that he should, all at once, be mixed up in this secret way with individuals of that despised class which he, loyal to his own traditions and convictions, had persecuted, did not for a moment disturb him; for he had led him into the fires of Tartarus, could he have hoped to find there some potent elixir that would open his blind eyes,—love which, although he did not then understand it, was as a pillar of cloud to his feet, and a voice to his ear, of a ray in the wilderness to make straight the path of Him Who was drawing near.

Nemesius did not question the mysterious influences that were silently operating on his inner life; had he paused to do so, he would have ascribed them to the singular impressions he had received, and the profound joy he felt at the certain prospect that the entrance to the Catacombs—was at hand when the eyes of his beautiful one would be opened. It did not enter into his mind to doubt it—he a worshipper of the god! And, what is more singular, he believed with simple faith that the wonder would be wrought by the power of the God of the Christians, and not by the exercise of Gothic and heathen mind ascribed the miracles by which the divine power was manifested in those days.

Broad and white lay the radiant moonlight, broken by black grotesque shadows, over the Agro Romano, when Nemesius and his youthful guide emerged from the dilapidated wine-shop, which concealed one of the many entrances to the Catacombs; soft winds from the sea, bearing sweetest odors from the numberless flowers over which they swept, filled the air with refreshment; here towered the mountains, draped in purple shadows; far away stretched the aqueducts; and there superb Rome, her marble splendors flooded with silver, as the Christians, queen over her seven hills, with the openness of the world she had conquered at her feet; while silence, like a sacred hush, brooded over all.

Nemesius did not pause to note the entrancing loveliness of the scene; the cool, sweet air, the close atmosphere of the Catacombs, refreshed him; but his mind was too full of his approaching appointment to be diverted by exterior objects, however attractive. Followed by Admetus, and never halting in his progress, the ground seemed to fly from under his feet, and he reached the great bronze gates of the villa without having realized the distance he had traversed.

Here the Roman gentleman remembered his faithful guide, and thanked him for his attendance, and told him that he wished to retain him in his service. There was no one to listen; the porter, who had taken one draught of wine too much, was in a profound sleep; and, not caring to rouse him, Nemesius entered by a narrow, private postern a little farther on, to which he alone had the key; but when he turned to bid his guide follow him, he had disappeared.

Nemesius reached the house; but, before passing in, he stood looking up with yearning heart to the windows of the room where his blind darling reposed in peaceful slumbers, undreaming of the happiness so near at hand—but no! Could that white figure walking on her seven hills, be he? She detected the footsteps for which her ears had been on the alert, although he had walked lightly, fearing to disturb her; and her glad cry answered his thought. A minute later she was in his arms.

"I was waiting, my father, just for this, and began to think thou wouldst never come," she murmured, in loving tones.

But here I am, my little one! but only to kiss thee good-night, and bid thee go to thy couch and sleep; for we are to take an early drive together. And, O my child! something awaits thee, full of happiness for both thee and me," he said, the glad news hovering on his lips; but he refrained, fearing that the excitement would keep her awake, and he wanted her to be all fresh and rested when they started on the morrow's quest; then he would tell her, on their way to the villa of Tertullus.

After the interchange of a few more fond words, she laid her golden head upon her pillow, satisfied to know that he had come, that he had kissed her good-night; while the thought of the promised early drive with him was so entirely delightful that, like a pleasant song, it lulled her to sleep.

When in the silence of his own apartment, Nemesius stood at his casement gazing out at the far distance, and wishing for the dawn, the sunrise, the beautiful day, which the eyes now sealed in darkness would behold for the first time, until strange, wonderful thoughts, that awed his mind by their mystery, began to move the depths of his soul.

Uncomprehensible thoughts of the Christus, before which all finite questions shrank defeated, but he discerned "as in a glass darkly" something of the Truth unobscured, and felt the touch of a power so divine and resistless that he cried out: "Thou art unknown to me, O great Deity, but if Thou give Thou art God, and Thou only will I adore and serve."

His vow was registered in Heaven. It was no longer a pillar of cloud, but one of fire, that was leading him out of the darkness; "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" was no longer an indistinct echo, and the way was being made straight for Him whose footsteps were already heard.

Nemesius dismissed the two drowsy servants whom he found nodding in the anteroom, and passed into his sleeping

apartment. But his impatience for morning and all that it would bring banished even the thought of slumber, and he determined to keep vigil until it dawned.

How slowly the moments seemed to drag, as he stood at the casement straining his eyes towards the dark, distant mountains, to catch the first pale glimmer that would illumine their summits! But what human heart-longing ever quickened the march of Time? It was hard to wait, but how futile to stand idle when things were to be attended to which, if deferred later, would cause delay!

He remembered that no orders had been sent to the stables, and, stealing noiselessly out, he reached them in a few minutes, roused the sleepy and astonished guardian of the stalls, and, in those firm, quiet tones of command that always ensured obedience, directed him to have the low two-seated chariot readied and at the door by sunrise.

Then, refreshing himself with a thermal bath, he went back to his apartment, lit a lamp, and began preparations for the approaching momentous event. His child had never seen him, and he would appear well in her sight; he would don rich garments, and his superb armor of Damascus steel inlaid with arabesques of gold; his jewel-hilted sword, made with such cunning art that it was as keen and flexible as lightning, and wore across his breast the splendid armor of his military grade. He scanned his dark, noble face in a mirror, holding the lamp so that its rays shone full upon his countenance, and wondered if at first sight its strangeness would repel her.

Never before, even in the days of his early love, had this man, self-poised and indifferent to externals, given so much thought to his appearance; for it was not alone the impression he would make on his little daughter, should she receive her sight—which he had not the smallest doubt—that occupied his mind, but he wished to show due respect to that Power by which the wonder would be wrought, by appearing in all the insignia of his military rank, as before an Emperor.

His preparations at length completed, a more noble figure could scarcely be imagined; he looked the ideal of one of his own gods. He extinguished his lamp, and renewed his vigil at the casement, his gaze turned towards the mountains. At last! at last! a filmy, luminous whiteness faintly outlined their grim crests; the moon was beaming low over the sea; hints of palest saffron veiled the morning-star, and the shadows began to be transfigured with flashes of gold and veins of crimson as they drifted away.

Nemesius went to the shrine that stood in a corner of the apartment, and, mixing wine and frankincense together in a gold cup, he offered the morning libation in honor of the gods. Having performed this act of devotion, he walked out into the corridor, walked softly towards Claudia's apartments, and met Zilla, who had just left them, her countenance wearing an anxious and perplexed expression; which vanished in surprise at his appearance. Folding her hands on her bosom, she bowed her head, and waited for him to speak. He asked if the child was still asleep.

"She is awake, and wishes to rise and be dressed for a drive which, she insists, she is to take with thee. She must have dreamed it, sir, as she was asleep before I sought my own couch last night."

"It was no dream; I saw her for a few moments after I came in; she was at the window listening for me. I promised the early drive. We started at sunrise, and will pay a visit to the gods' get back. Make her take a biscuit and a little wine before we go. And Zilla! be ready with thy gladdest smiles to receive her when she returns; for, if I am not mistaken, she will bring thee cause for rejoicing," he answered, scarcely able to hold back his secret.

While Nemesius and his little daughter were speeding on their way towards the villa of the Agro Romano, a soldier, anticipating their arrival, took a glimpse of the ancient structure. Its thick, extensive walls, which are twelve feet high—the bricks showing dark and mouldy where the plaster has dropped off, or where there are spaces clear of wall, clambering vines—would give it the aspect of a prison, were it not for the great trees waving above; and the roses that toss blushing, wanton sprays over them; and the odorous wall-flowers and vetches that grow out of the crevices of the crumbling mortar. Evidently these ancient walls, with their deep-sunken iron-ribbed gates, were built for protection in lawless times.

The villa itself is a rambling structure, and originally had a tower at the north end, the upper portion of which had yielded to the tooth of Time, and had fallen in a mass of debris around it and upon its second floor, the stout timbers of which had withstood the shock, and still upheld the heap. Vines with pendulous scarlet flowers, ivy and vetches, and blue wisterias, are in possession, draping the ruin in colors and overlapping folds more gorgeous than the rich tapestries with which the Jews were compelled by the imperious edict to decorate the Arch of Titus on each anniversary of the destruction of their holy city. The grounds, interferred with by art only so far as to prevent their becoming a tangled wilderness; the grass, like violet-streaked velvet; the old, mildewed statues looking out here and there from green, shadowy places, and the antique fountains that all glow in the golden splendor of the newly-risen sun.

Tertullus and his wife are not here; two or three old slaves moved about lazily; and several peacocks, trailing their superb plumes over the grass, are the only signs of life apparent. Suddenly the sound of horses' feet, and wheels, is heard outside; the porter came out to the gate, draws back the bolts; the great gates creak slowly open, and Nemesius drives through. Slaves are ready to stand by the horses' heads as he draws up in front of the pillared entrance of the house; and he alights, his toga draped over his armor, and lifts Claudia out of the chariot.

"I will conduct thee," said a low,

sweet voice at his side; and, turning, he sees Admetus, the choragus of the Aventine—his guide of the catacombs! Was the boy ubiquitous? He led the way into the vestibule, through the atrium into a wide corridor, which stretched through the villa, and ended in an apparently dead wall, panelled in wood that was black with age, where, except here and there, a panel of silver studded. One of the dark panels slid slowly upwards, and Nemesius, obeying the signs of his guide, pressed in, holding Claudia's hand in the firm, tender clasp of his own. He had told her on the way thither that she was to live no longer in darkness—that her eyes were to be opened in a little while—and her face was radiant. No more darkness and groping and dread, but light! light! Oh! how she would love the Power, the Hand that gave sight to her blind eyes! She could think of nothing else; her heart was in a tumult of joy.

A short walk through a narrow passage brought them to a door, which Admetus opened, and, having invited them to enter, left them, closing it after them. Looking around, Nemesius saw that he was in an oblong apartment, the windows of which were concealed on the outside by an interwoven mesh of vines. At one end, in the centre, there stood, upon a dais elevated three or four steps above the floor, a large, curiously shaped chest, with two massive iron rings at each end. Three panels formed the front. On the central one, inlaid in gold, was the monogram I. H. S.; on the one to the left was delineated a pelican feeding her young with the blood from her wounded breast; on that to the right, a fish. On the top of the chest stood a narrow, arched cabinet, about two feet high, its doors plated with gold; and a silver framework from the ceiling by a firework chain of the same metal, burned with clear, steady light before it.

On the top of the cabinet stood a crucifix of such realistic art that Nemesius, as he gazed upon it, thought with a sudden thrill of what Fabian had told him of the death of the Christus, that day in the lex groy. Presenced on the wall above the crucifix was the saintly face of a woman, her eyes uplifted, her hands folded in an attitude of supplication, and there was a shadow of sadness and tears on the fair, virginal countenance. Could this mean the Virgin-Mother foretold by sibyls and prophets—the Virgin-Mother who brought forth the cross. Yes, the same—*Advocata nostra* as she was known from the earliest days of Christianity.

There were some rude benches in the apartment, a cross-crowned chair, and about midway a sliding screen, which, when drawn together, concealed the altar—for altar it was; a portable one, as the rings at each end signified; such was its use in the early Christian churches, which were not edifices built separate and apart to themselves, but the private mansions of rich converts, consecrated to the worship of God, and permitted by some of the heathen tyrants to be so used when the fires of persecution were not abroad.

The Church of St. Clement, (under the foundation of the present Church of St. Clement), and that of St. Pudens, the friend of St. Peter and St. Paul, are still to be seen and venerated here. And here in the villa of Tertullus was one of the few that had been left un molested, because unsuspected and undiscovered; for who among the heathen, be his zeal ever so ardent-eyed, would suspect such an abomination to exist in the dwelling of an officer of the Pretorian Guard? Even had such a suspicion arisen, Valerian Emperor would have thought twice before he ventured anything aggressive, knowing that the Pretorian Guard sometimes, with a word and a blow, made and unmade, such as he. Still less was it dreamed that under the ruined, ivy-draped tower, there was an opening through one of the old wine-vaults into the Catacombs.

While Nemesius was observing the unfamiliar objects around him, a soldier, of which he required far less time than it has taken to describe them, a door opened, and the Christian Pontiff entered. He wore the same white woolen robe as on the night of their first interview, with the addition of a stole about his neck. Nemesius, who had thrown aside his toga, bared his head with reverent salutation, which was returned by a whispered "Deo gratias!" and the holy Sign of the Cross made by the Pontiff's uplifted hand towards him. The anxious father then led Claudia forward. The lovely child was arrayed in soft white garments; her long, golden hair fell in shining curls over her shoulders; her fair face wore the innocence and purity of an angel's; and as the saintly Pontiff gazed upon her, an expression of benign pity illumined his countenance, and, laying his hand upon her head, he blessed her.

"What wouldst thou have, sweet child?" he asked.

"Oh! sir, I am blind, and would see," was the pathetic answer.

"I will give you my baptism, my child, and He who opens the eyes of the blind will enter thy heart, and teach thee to love and serve Him."

"I will love Him!" she said; and turning to Nemesius, who pressed her hand more closely, she continued: "Oh! my father, will we not both love Him Who gives light to my eyes?"

"And to thy spirit," responded the Pontiff, who had among other supernatural gifts that of being able to distinguish the great gates creak slowly open, and Nemesius drives through. Slaves are ready to stand by the horses' heads as he draws up in front of the pillared entrance of the house; and he alights, his toga draped over his armor, and lifts Claudia out of the chariot.

"I will conduct thee," said a low,

natural desire for her blindness to be removed.

The little girl stood silent, waiting; the sacred rite began; she felt a strange sign made upon her forehead; and at the same moment beheld a beautiful One in shining raiment approach, whose presence was invisible to all except herself; and as the Pontiff poured the waters of generation upon her head, the Apparition touched her eyes, (it is so related) and—she no longer blind! She looked up around, in glad surprise, and uttered a cry of gladness; the darkness had disappeared, and there was light. It was a moment to be more easily imagined than described. She gazed into the saintly face of the Pontiff, Stephen, into her father's, then drew to his embrace, crying: "At last I see thee!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

MICHAEL'S SWEETHEART.

"And did not the last girl we sent suit you?" The keeper of that sadly over-worked institution—the registry office—looked coldly at the tired lady confronting her.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Mrs. Marsden, a faint smile flickered in her eyes. "It is quite certain I did not suit her—or rather her bed-room did not."

"Has it a stove? It is carpeted?" came quickly.

"It is steam heated, like the rest of the flat. It is carpeted and curtained. There is a chest of drawers, an easy chair and a good bed, but there is not room in it for the sewing machine, the two trunks and the numerous life-size crayon portraits of deceased relatives which Ethelinda—that was her name I believe—required for a peaceful and permanent stay amongst us."

The head of the Domestic Elysium Service Company tapped her pencil on the desk.

"Well," she said, meditatively, "if any one comes to-day that I think will suit, I'll send her out to you."

And with that vague promise Agnes Marsden was forced to be content.

"I'm worn out," she said to her neighbor across the hall, who had kept her two children during her absence. "I don't know what we are coming to. Here I've had four servants in three weeks. The only difference between them is that one is worse than the other. Yet we pay well, as you know, and their privileges are never infringed upon. If only the women's clubs would take hold of this subject and let their everlasting isms and economic questions alone until it was settled, they would accomplish the most important reform necessary to-day. Thank you ever so much for keeping Ted and Dora. I hope they were not troublesome."

A little sigh of despair fluttered from her lips when she entered her pretty flat, with all its evidences of a home-loving and cultured occupancy. How untidy it looked! And dust! Would they ever be quite immaculate and daintily surrounded again? But in the morning, with the breakfast to get, and the attention to her husband not to be neglected, she had no time to fuss and fuss and the innumerable steps to take in the interests of the household one had scant time for the capable and conscientious care which makes and keeps a home pleasant and orderly. Besides, Agnes Marsden was not strong. She could accomplish much in her own bright and fastidious way if the heavier burdens did not crush and incapacitate her. Even now as she went around the dining-room, straightening a cover here and putting by a newspaper there, she was conscious of a fagged nervousness which presaged a headache.

"Pickin' up, ma'am?" asked a deep kindly voice. "No girl yet, ma'am? I knocked, but you did not hear me. I was wanting to know if it's double cream you'll have to-day, ma'am?"

She looked up at the young girl, a giant in the kitchen, who was a handsome fellow, with a red and white skin, fair moustache and blue, friendly eyes like those of a child. He had served her with milk for a year and had come to be interested in her efforts to get a competent maid. The children had a great liking for him.

"Yes, Michael—yes. I'm always trying to get the house to look as it used to. Oh, yes, ma'am. It's five months since the beat she came over from Cork on got into Liverpool. When she didn't get off the train here. I went to the depot every day for a good while. The police did what they could, too. But they—they—he hesitated in confused indignation—"they didn't understand you, see. They seemed to think she had never come—or that she had given me the slip on purpose—for some one else, ma'am. But they—they the quiet pride and confidence in his voice were good to hear—"they didn't know her, ma'am. They didn't know Maggie. If they did, they would never think like that—never!"

"It may come right yet, Michael."

"Thank you, ma'am. You're very good to let me talk to you. It helps somehow."

The master of the house swung home to supper, cheerful and breezy.

"Maybe I'm a bit selfish, Aggie," he said, "but I never enjoy supper so well as when you cook it yourself."

"Oh, the cooking doesn't matter. It's the dishes afterwards."

"I'll do the dishes promptly."

"And make it necessary to do them over after?"

"No, thank you!"

"Aggie, why don't those other regular cooks have such much luck as not to be sent to the depot?"

"But the grumpy, dingy-looking place in which I sell the following day, insure hope of finding a maid there. The present was of a disagreeable nature. The person in dressing a mob of women in the same manner in which I dominated the raw rags was given to lick into of physiognomy would many ignorant, vicious types. The girl a lot of cattle, looking those who came this help. Agnes Marsden forward to make an attempt to get into the place. She thought of and her white clad turned toward the door had just entered a threshold. She was a ley group ahead of the harness usual voice charge. She looked frightened. Instantly spoke to her.

"Are you looking asked. The girl looked at She was neatly dressed a little satchel. Her brown hair growing patient, hazel eyes expression which attracted.

"I was, ma'am, but I think I will friends."

"Come outside with me. I will speak with you. After that it was, you went home. Her maid, who had been with her, had shown her to her room, and she had her head of the house in tion.

"Oh, Jack! She isn't a doubt of it. That dreadful place, question when I came other. Wait till you see my dear," he exclaimed. Jack, from her, to her well-brother. You've only to look it is good. She's been all her life."

"References?"

"Letters from her to the one of our club. He smiled, and said, 'I'll send her out to you.'"

"Oh, she'll be cooking doesn't look all the rest. Now could get into a take an evening of magazines. I know what's that?"

She was on her questioning—alarming Jack Marsden's laughter.

"That sounds crashing glass," he treasure is giving exhibition of her. There goes some more. A second clatter reached them.

Both started for "Oh, mamma!" in. "Oh, mamma, kissing the new smashed all the ce. Then the scene them. Michael's girl. There was He was hugging her, sim little girl in clinging to him a light. His basket did the glass with shape of cream but their feet was a teal lake.

"It's Maggie, Michael." "Oh, no—recall den."

She turned to caught him by the "Jack—just 'It's Maggie!' " "No!" cried. And would you mind telling me her? Why I must know."

Mr. Marsden I don't know. Michael's sweet we'd better rest. He went back and his easy eden, her cheeks terest, heard Maggie had come. She had tried in had moved. His companion of her to the new place tant farm, and a hearty and his city which hel him. But she that day gone ment. Yes, his name was. He always been calm home. "Well, I'm Marsden, obliv' toes of her slip merged. 'It's should have I what an I to do. There was a Then Michael want to be r ma'am. And her friend of hers. Never fear, ma'am!"

"Well," la "see that you more cream!" "Cream!" too, and blin like if you'd