

Dr. Nelson's House.

BY PARKE WILLIS.

There is, perhaps, no exercise of faith so difficult to the Christian as that required to accept in all its fulness the teaching of Holy Writ that afflictions are proofs of our Father's love, and the very signs and seals of our adoption into the number of his children. It is a faith which we cannot have of ourselves, for it is the gift of God, and he gives it sometimes when heart and flesh fail and there is no help in man.

In 1869, after four years of earnest effort, Dr. Howard Nelson had been forced to the conclusion that justice to his family required that he should give up the home he loved so well, and find some place where the practice of his profession would afford not only a support, but the means of education for his three children, the youngest of whom was now eight years of age.

His plan was to get a tenant to occupy "The Office," a building at a little distance from his dwelling, containing several comfortable apartments besides his office and laboratory. By giving up one or two out-houses which stood near it he thought a tenant could be made comfortable there, and afford his family the requisite protection without infringing upon their privacy.

His widowed sister, Mrs. Thompson, who lived with her only child about ten miles distant, and eked out her diminished resources by teaching a class of girls who boarded with her, consented to transfer herself and her pupils to Fairmount and teach her nieces, while Mrs. Nelson would keep house for all.

With his nearest and dearest thus united and safe, Dr. Nelson thought he could cheerfully toil alone for a year in the rapidly improving town in the Southwest which he had chosen as the scene of his new effort.

An unexpected obstacle arose, however; for when he broke his plans to his wife—usually the most yielding and unargumentative of women—he found her fixed in her opposition to his home scheme with an answer ready for every plea he could bring to bear in its favor.

"Let us go together," she urged; "you will be more successful in your practice because you have a home to rest in, and I am as willing to keep boarders in H—as here."

She even brought Mrs. Thompson to be of her mind, and, after a short delay, the dear old home was sold and the little party turned their faces toward the sunset.

At first the struggle was hard, but Mrs. Nelson's house was always filled with boarders, and the doctor's patients grew more and more numerous, till, at the end of five years, they had accomplished a cherished wish and moved into a house of their own.

Founded, built, and finished, as it was, in uprightness and kindness, they were followed into their long-desired haven by the interest and good wishes of all who knew them.

Here, Howard Nelson thought, his faithful helpmeet would rest from her untiring labors; here, his sweet Lucy, now about to return from school, would bloom like the rose garden with which they were preparing to surprise her.

New as the place was, it looked like a home where taste and cultivation presided for years. The trees and the turf were perfect; vines hid the newness of porch and lattice; and in the rose-garden on the east were blooming and the treasures of their own accumulation and the many witness to the good will of others. The doctor said laughingly that he could never offer a seat to a friend now in the buggy, because it was nearly always occupied by a contribution for "Miss Lucy's garden."

How lovely it all looked that beautiful morning in June when the doctor was starting on his long talked-of visit to Virginia, to see his sister and bring home the absent child.

"Won't Lucy be surprised when she sees the place, papa?" said Annie, while Mary charged him again and again not to say a word of the garden or the flowers, which seemed to be garlanding the house in honor of her return.

"It would be lovely to Lucy even without the flowers," said her mother, smiling; "how glad she will be to be so near the river and the fields she loves so much, and a little out of the noise and the dust of the town."

The farewells had at last been spoken, and the doctor was gone for his two weeks' holiday.

It was the evening of the same day, and Mrs. Nelson sat at the east window, from which she could see the two girls at work among the roses, and beyond, the town in its summer dress of leaves and flowers looking as placid and lovely as if the "trail of the serpent" were not "over it all."

She was writing to her only sister: "I am so eager for you to see the home that God has given us in a strange

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land. We shall miss Howard sadly for the next two weeks, but I am so glad that he could have this little visit and see once more the people and places he loves so dearly that I only wish he could stay longer. When I think of Lucy's coming, and the hope of having you and mother in the fall, I am almost oppressed with my happiness and ask myself: 'What shall I render to my God for all his gifts to me?' Surely mercy and loving-kindness have followed me all the days of my life and I will dwell—"

What was that strange sound, this sudden gloom! She started up to fly for her children, but their white faces flashed by the window, and in a moment they were in her arms. "O mamma, is it the judgment?" faltered Annie. "The church, the church!" shrieked Mary, as the steeple which lifted itself like a sentinel between them and the town swayed for a moment and then sank out of sight. "We are in the Lord's hands, let us look to him," said Mrs. Nelson, and, still clinging together, they sank upon their knees.

The servant who was taken out of the ruins bruised, bleeding, unconscious, but alive, said afterward that as she reached the doorway, she saw Mrs. Nelson kneeling in the centre of the room, her children clasped in her arms, and her face lifted toward heaven. At the same moment she heard a terrible grating sound, saw the walls of the room as it were shiver together, and then whether she fainted or was knocked senseless, she did not know.

When the storm had passed on, and it was known in town that Dr. Nelson's house had fallen, it seemed as if the whole population had poured itself out to the scene of disaster. Women tore, with bleeding hands, at the mass of debris which covered the victims, and wrung them in anguish at the necessary slowness of the work.

"Oh, Mr. Ogden, cried a pale girl to the old minister, 'can I believe that it is God's hand, when I am spared, and dear Mrs. Nelson taken?'"

Tears ran down the old man's furrowed cheeks as he solemnly repeated: "She walked with God and she was not, for God took her."

A young man as well known to Mr. Ogden for his skeptical views as for his undisputed talents, drew him aside. All his stoical calm was gone. His face quivered with emotion, and, in a broken voice, he said:

"Men call me a scoffer, but I never scoffed at the religion of the woman who lies under this wreck. You know I lived three years under her roof, and I heard her months ago, when she thought I was far away, praying that my eyes might be opened. Her words have been with me night and day. I could not forget them. I was almost persuaded; her life was a sermon which I could not refute, but now, when a wicked town like this has escaped almost unscathed, while the church of God lies in ruins, and the best woman I ever knew has met a horrible death, with her innocent children in her arms, will you tell me still that all things work together for good to those that love God?"

"Yes," cried the old man, lifting his eyes to heaven. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." I weep for myself and those who survive, but she is with Christ, which is far better. Would you pity a toil-worn laborer who was suddenly taken to rest to be honored in the palaces of the King?"

The servant girl had been taken out of the ruins just as the whistle of the midnight train from the East was heard. New relays of men worked unceasingly at the slowly diminishing heaps of bricks and mortar and broken timbers, when the same girl who had spoken to Mr. Ogden gave a piercing shriek and fainted, for she had seen Dr. Nelson, with white, set face and wild eyes, forcing his way through the crowd. He seemed unable to speak, but when he reached Mr. Ogden he gasped, through dry lips, "Where is my wife? Where are my children?"

The workers had stopped, and, for a moment, there was a death-like stillness, and then a sob seemed to go up from the whole crowd as the old man threw his arms around his afflicted friend and cried out: "Oh, my brother, the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away." One moment the unfortunate man seemed to struggle to burst from that friendly hold, and then fell forward in merciful insensibility.

It was on a bright afternoon in October that Dr. Nelson first entered the house which had been rebuilt by his sympathizing fellow-citizens, while he lay on the bed where, for weeks, life and reason both seemed to hang in the balance.

Grass was growing on the grave in which Mrs. Nelson and her children had been laid, with the tears of all classes and creeds in the town, before the bereaved husband and father awoke to the consciousness of his loss and of the presence of the child who looked like the shade of her buried mother, so frail and placid was she under

the burden of grief and anxiety which had fallen so suddenly upon her.

As he sat by the window which looked out upon the garden, so full of sad and sacred associations for them both, Lucy stood behind his chair, smoothing his prematurely gray hair with trembling hands. Her face was bathed in tears, and her eyes, lifted to heaven, seemed asking for strength to perform some painful duty.

At last, with a strong effort to be calm, she said, "Papa, I have the last letter dear mother wrote upon earth; would it comfort you to know—" Her voice broke into uncontrollable sobs, and, coming round, she knelt before him and buried her face in his bosom. When she was a little calmer, he took the paper which had been found among the ruins, and, with trembling and colorless lips, attempted to read the last words traced by the vanished hand of her whose loss made the world seem so empty.

The tearless, silent grief which had alarmed his friends gave way, and a rain of blessed tears bedewed the paper which seemed to bring a message from the unseen world. His daughter had risen, and, in a passion of love and grief, he said, with broken voice, "It is well with her, it is well with the children, and, though they cannot return to us, we shall go to them."

Years have passed, and Lucy's children play around their loving, white-haired grandmother with the looks and voices of his own blessed children.

He is not unhappy, for he finds daily need of his ministry of healing and kindness, and looks forward with confident hope to a reunion with those who have gone before.—New York Observer.

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What Ailed the Bell.

It was the first day of school after a vacation. The children were playing in the yards. The teachers sat at their desks waiting for the bell to strike to call the children to the different rooms. The hands of the different clocks pointed to a quarter before nine.

The bell was a sort of gong fastened to the outside of the building, and the master of the school could ring it by touching a knob in the wall near his desk. It was now time to call the children into school. The master pulled the bell and waited. Still the merry shouts could be heard in the schoolyards. Very strange! The children were so engaged in play that they could not hear the bell, he thought. Then he pulled it more vigorously. Still the shouts and laughter continued.

The master raised his window, clapped his hands and pointed to the bell.

The children rushed into line like little soldiers, and waited for the second signal. The teacher pulled and pulled, but there was no sound. Then he sent a boy to tell each line to file in, and he sent another boy for a carpenter to find out if the bell cord was broken.

What do you think the carpenter found? A little sparrow had built its nest inside the bell, and prevented the hammer striking against the bell. The teacher told the children what the trouble was, and asked if the nest should be taken out. There was a large chorus of "No, sir."

Every day the four hundred children would gather in the yard and look up at the nest. When the little birds were able to fly to the trees in the yard, and no longer needed a nest, one of the boys climbed on a ladder and cleared away the straw and hay, so that the sound of the bell might call the children from play.—Our Little Ones.

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Nerve Enough for Anything.

Dr. McTavish, of Edinburgh, was something of a ventriloquist, and it befell that he wanted a lad to assist in the surgery, who must necessarily be of stronger nerves. He received several applications, and when telling a lad what the duties were, in order to test his nerves he would say, while pointing to a grinning skeleton standing upright in a corner, "Part of your work will be to feed the skeleton there, and while you are here you may as well try to do so."

A few lads would consent to a trial, and received a basin of hot gruel and a spoon. While they were pouring out the hot mess into the skull, the doctor would throw his voice so as to make it appear to proceed from the jaws of the bony customer, and gurgle out, "Brr-r-r-gh-h-h! that's hot!"

This was too much, and, without exception, the lads dropped the basin and bolted. The doctor began to despair of ever getting a suitable helpmate, until a small boy came, and was given the gruel and spoon.

After the first spoonful the skeleton appeared to say, "Gr-r-r-uh-r-br! that's hot!"

Showing in the scalding gruel as fast as ever, the lad rapped the skull and impatiently retorted, "Well, blow it, can't yer, yer ould bony?"

The doctor sat down in his chair and fairly roared, but when he came to, he engaged the lad on the spot.—Ex.