FOR THE MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

GOOD WORDS FITLY SPOKEN.

The evening service in the Westford church was over, and the Weston family had just returned and entered the house, as the clock in the sitting-room struck nine. Of course, nine o'clock was an early hour and Mr Weston pushed an easy chair over to the table and settled himself in it to finish an interesting article he had commenced in the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, while Mrs. Weston stood, thoughtfully, folding up her wraps. "I wonder," she said, as she laid aside her bonnet, "why Mr. Martin is not more popular. His sermons are very good indeed and when one listens attentively, are very interesting; but the man does not seem to have the faculty of getting people interested in him. I am afraid he will never be the success that Mr. Smythe was." And the good lady sighed.

"Oh!" said Mr. Weston, glancing up from his paper, "Mr. Martin's all right enough in his way. He is a quiet stay-at-home man, does not get around among the people as much as he ought. Of course Mr. Smythe was a remarkably smart man and it is hardly to be expected that we should get another like him, but, Mr. Martin, to my mind, is lacking in that energy that inspires the enthusiasm of the church." And Mr. Weston resumed his reading with the air of having settled the matter, if not satisfactorily, at least to the point.

Mr. Weston was a capable business man and was in the habit of forming an opinion and of expressing it quickly, concisely and, as a general thing, correctly; and his wife, having all confidence in his opinion of this, as of other matters, and concluding that he had arrived at the root of the matter, said no more upon the subject.

"Lacking in energy." Strangely enough the words struck little curly-headed Dolly as she sat nestled up among the cushions of the sofa. She wondered vaguely what it seemed like to be lacking in energy. And then she fell to wondering if Mr. Martin knew that people didn't like him as well as they had Mr. Smythe. She almost believed he must know it, when she came to think of it, and she was conscious of a little wave of pity pass over her heart, for, "to not have people like you, must be," as Dolly expressed it to herself, "just awful." And if the people were not interested in Mr. Martin, she didn't see how he could be interested in them. "I don't believe I would," she thought. "I 'most know I wouldn't be interested in anybody that didn't like me."

There was old Miss Simpson. Dolly's mother had asked her to tea the other night, because, as she said, Miss Simpson was not invited out very often and she must feel lonesome, and she had told Dolly to try to interest her, while she was getting tea; and Dolly had done her very best, showed her her drawings and her new album and played on the piano for her, and after all that, Miss Simpson had said, "You're a very good little girl, Dorothy;" and then she leaned back in her chair and never said another word, till tea was ready, and Dolly felt that her labor had all been in vain and Miss Simpson was'nt interested at all and she was sure she was not interested in Miss Simpson. "Perhaps," she thought, "Mr. Martin had tried to interest the people, as she had tried to interest Miss Simpson, and had failed as she had." He certainly didn't seem to feel much at home, she thought, as she remembered how the congregation had filed out, that very evening, leaving the minister standing alone by the desk. It seemed as if somebody ought to help him some way she soliloquized as she tripped off to bed.

Now, it was rather a strange thing that little Dolly Weston should have been the first person in all Westford to arrive at this conclusion, for it was not in Dolly's line at all, to bother her head about anybody's affairs. She was the most careless, thoughtless person imaginable; but at the same time a good natured, lovable girl, whose few faults were easily over balanced by her good qualities. She was just fifteen, and went to school; but she had never, there, or elsewhere, learned the meaning of the word care. Life was a very pleasant thing to Dolly and she was not given to worrying about other people; but in some way the conversation of the evening had set her to thinking. She felt that the pastor needed help or encouragement, of some kind, and, as she thought about it, she even came to feel a certain responsibility resting upon herself. If there was only something I could do—and then Dolly smiled at the idea. It seemed so odd to think that she could help in any way. But Dolly, when once she had set her mind on a thing, would not give it up easily, and before her little curly head had rested on her pillow that night, she had resolved to watch for an opportunity to help and to improve it, if it was only the least little bit of a chance.

Mr. Martin had been pastor of the Westford church three months; and during that time had kept every appointment although it had sometimes required an effort, for the large field over which he was pastor, taxed all his energies, and Mr. Martin's health for the past few years had not been as robust as formerly, but he worked faithfully and earnestly and hoped for some time yet to be able to discharge his many duties. Since coming to this field, however, he had begun to feel that something was wrong. The people did not seem to be in touch with their pastor. He had this feeling, particularly, in regard to the Westford church. He came and went regularly, but saw little of the people socially. The many demands on his time prevented him from visiting them. Considering all things, Mr. Martin had come to feel that the people were not pleased with him. The congregation was as large as could be expected but immediately after the benediction was pronounced every one seemed to be in a hurry to reach the door. No one stayed to speak a kindly word to him. Mr. Martin had been used to having the members of his church, especially the deacons, remain and shake hands with him; and often words of encouragement and appreciation of the sermon were spoken. Here it was very different, and he felt the difference. Mr. Martin did not know, how could he be expected to, that this was only a custom of the people, this gathering up of wraps and coats and hastening away, that it did not necessarily imply any lack of sympathy.

But this was only one of many things, which made the pastor feel the church to be cold and unsympathetic. It was not that Mr. Martin wanted men to praise his sermons. He was preaching from a much higher motive than that; (though it is very seldom that a little judicious praise has anything but a good effect upon a minister,) but he would have liked his efforts to be appreciated. Perhaps he did not want that, so much as a sharing in the burden, by his brethren, a helpful co-operation in the work.

Now, the people of Westford would have been very much surprised if anyone had intimated that they were not treating their pastor exactly as they ought. They went to hear him preach and they raised his salary promptly; but as for helping him by their sympathy and encouragement, they had certainly not thought of omitting this duty, for they had never thought of it at all. They never supposed that he would want any help from them. He was there to help them. They needed the help. They liked his sermons. They, the sermons, showed a great amount of preparation and study, and indeed were extraordinary; but as deacon Elsby remarked, "it wouldn't do to tell him so." Deacon Elsby was a generous, kindly disposed old gentleman, but he had a few old fashioned ideas, and a great horror of spoiling anyone by over praise.

As for cultivating the acquaintance of their pastor socially, the people had given him a standing invitation to their homes, and thought it strange that he visited them so seldom. The minister should get around among the people of course and it seemed that Mr. Martin was a trifle lax in this duty. However, they had gotten used to seeing so little of him, and although to their minds he could not compare with his predecessor, the popular Mr. Smythe, still, everyone liked Mr. Martin and no one had any intention of treating him in any but the most kindly way; but these good people were just a little thoughtless.

The next Sabbath evening was unusually fine and clear, and the air fresh and bracing with the touch of early autumn. The congregation that night, was larger than usual.

Little Dolly Weston came very near being late. Her hymn book was not in its accustomed place, and she had spent fifteen minutes searching for it; so her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes bright with the quick walk, as she hurried up the aisle, holding in one hand, the lately missing hymn book, and in the other a huge bunch of autumn flowers and leaves which she deposited on the desk.

As she did so she glanced anxiously at Mr. Martin; but he was busily turning the leaves of the gilt edged hymn book, preparatory to giving out the first hymn, and except for a hurried nod, did not seem to notice either Dolly or the flowers.

Dolly took her seat in the choir feeling a little discouraged.

To be sure a few flowers were not much to "help" with; but she had hoped he would look pleased. The flowers were all she had been able to think of, and she remembered that nobody had brought any, since Mr. Martin came. Maybe he don't like flowers, she thought; but I don't see how anybody can help liking them, they are so beautiful.

Certainly Mr. Martin could not help it.

The bright tints of the autumn leaves glowing under the light of the chandlier and sending out a sweet, woodsy perfume, did really help Mr. Martin in that sermon, if Dolly could only have known it. She didn't; but she was listening. It was not always that Dolly listened so attentively. Sometimes her thoughts would be upon things far from the sermon and her eyes oftener upon the congregation than the preacher; but tonight her attention was riveted, and she could hardly believe an hour had passed when the amen was spoken and the last hymn given out.

Immediately after the benediction had been pronounced the choir filed into the aisle—all but Dolly who was hunting for something. Some way all of Dolly's belongings had a faculty for getting lost. This time it was her handkerchief, and she found it under the seat behind her.

She was about to step down into the aisle, when a sudden thought flashed upon her. She hesitated a moment, and then walked straight up to the desk. Mr. Martin was back too, putting on his coat. While she stood waiting for him to turn around she felt half a mind to slip down the central aisle, before anybody should see her; but, on second thought remained.

When Mr. Martin did turn round, he was surprised to see Dolly Weston standing beside the desk, her cheeks flushed, nervously twisting the corner of her handkerchief.

"I liked the sermon tonight, very much. I wanted—that is, I thought you would like to know," she stammered. The minister looked astonished for a moment and then a great light spread over his face and the suspicion of a tear was in his eyes as he grasped her hand and said solemnly, "the Lord bless you, my child, you are the first person to say as much to me since I came to this church." It so happened that Deacon Elsby had stayed to have a moment's chat with a friend, and was at that moment, unperceived by anybody, but within hearing distance, diligently searching under the seat for his cane when Dolly's few hesitating words and the minister's responses caught his ear.

Deacon Elsby's face had astonishment depicted upon every feature as he glanced toward the desk. He was completely taken back, that a little tot like Dolly Weston, should deliberately walk up to the minister to express her opinion of his sermon. This was something the deacon could not understand; much more surprised was he, that that same opinion should be so evidently appreciated by the minister. If a word or two of appreciation was going to comfort him so much, Deacon Elsby thought he would like to express his opinion of the sermon too. He didn't care to do so just then, however, so he softly tip-toed down the aisle. His face wore a thoughtful look, though, and when he reached the entry he stopped and rubbed his hand meditatively across his forehead several times,—a habit he had when thinking seriously. Evidently the deacon had had an awakening.

A different air seemed to prevade the next meeting in the Westford church. The audience was large and every one seemed to be listening with particular attention.

Even old Uncle John Adams, who with his head tipped gently on one side, generally slept peacefully through the entire sermon, was sitting bolt upright, taking in every word. Deacon Elsby sat with his arms folded, a contented smile upon his face, every once in awhile nodding his head in approval of the sentiments expressed from the pulpit. He had a very pleasant feeling of satisfaction arising no doubt from the fact that he had done, what he considered to be his duty, through the week. The few words he had heard the previous Sabbath, had set him to thinking deeply, until as he expressed it, he got "all stirred up." And then to the best of his ability he had proceeded to stir up his brethren. And the deacon never did things by halves.

Mr. Martin evidently felt the change of atmosphere. The sermon that evening was spoken of afterwards, as the best one he had ever preached. Whether it was or not may not be easily known; as the best sermon is that which does the most good; and the good done by one sermon as compared with that done by another may not be easily reckoned; but certain it was, that the sympathetic appreciation of the congregation had a marked effect on Mr. Martin. Heseemed to stand out from the wall of reserve that had enclosed him, and spoke as only a pastor can who has the encouragement and co-operation of his church.

At the close of the service, invitations were not lacking; but Deacon Elsby had contrived to get ahead of everybody. Everybody wanted to shake hands with the pastor. Many encouraging words were spoken. With others it was only a hearty handshake and a smile; but it encouraged Mr. Martin wonderfully. Standing there with his flock gathered about him in such a pleasant manner, he felt that he had never known so kind a people. All the discouragements of the last few months was forgotten; and it seemed to him that the lines had verily fallen in pleasent places.

Little Dolly Weston stood looking on with wonder and pleasure. She felt that what Mr. Martin needed had arrived; but how it had all happened she could not imagine. However, Deacon Elsby made matters plain; at the next Tuesday evening prayer meeting, when he got up and related all the circumstance in connection with his awakening and gave due credit to Dolly. Dolly's heart was wonderfully light and happy at the thought that she had really and truly "helped," but she felt a little embarrassed when at the close of the service everybody shook hands with her and praised her.

"Why," she said wonderingly, "all I did was to tell Mr. Martin I liked the sermon. Anybody could have done that."

"So they could," said Deacon Elsby, "So they could just as well as not. The only trouble was they didn't think to do it."

A. M. S.

Argyle Head, Feb. 19th.

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MRS. VANEASEN OBTAINS A KITTEN.

BY ANNA PIERPONT SIVITER.

The first thing Elizabeth asked for when she began to recover from the fever was a kitten

"If I only had a kitty, I finks I'd be well now," she said, plaintively.

"Of course you shall have a kitten, dear," I answered, and when Mr. Vanessen came home I asked him where I could get a cat.

"Oh, there are lots of cat's around," he replied. "Indeed, it's no end easier to get than to get rid of one. I'll give Jack a quarter and tell him to bring a kitten in to-morrow. So you may promise Elizabeth her kitten."

I delivered my message to my girlie, but not having just the same confidence in the office boy that Mr. Vanessen had, I next day mentioned our need of a cat to several callers. The first was the doctor.

"Of course I know of a cat," he said "Mrs. Vanbrum, of Lincoln avenue, is going South, and has a beautiful kitten which she offered me. I'm very sure she'd willingly give it to you."

Later Rose Lamont stopped on her way to a luncheon.

"I wish I had known you wanted a cat," she cried, regretfully. "Louise St. John has a beauty she wanted me to have—snow-white and such a pet. The doctor's can't be half so sweet."

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted a kiten, dearie?" asked Elizabeth's trained nurse, after Rose left. My aunt's an old maid, and she'd be sure to know of a nice kitten. Old maids always do."

Down at the office Mr. Vanessen was also hearing of eligible cats

"There was no use offering that boy a quarter for a cat," said the sporting editor. "I hate extravagance. I'd have got a dozen for nothing."

"I didn't want a dozen," Mr. Vanessen replied, curtly, "and, besides, I know the kind of a cat you would get."

"What kind ?"

"Oh, a black one."

"Y-a-as."

"Big ?"

"Of course."

"A raiter?"

"Certainly! Goes all over the neighborhood hunting rats."

"A fighter?"

"Just so," exclaimed the sporting editor, enthusiastically. "He's wiped out every cat within ten squares."

"Well," added Mr. Vanessen, wearily, "I think Elizabeth will prefer the office boy's cat. You see, I am planning to raise her."

The sporting editor turned to his desk disgustedly.

"Mr. Van," murmured the little society reporter, "I know of exactly the kitten you want. It's just lovely, so gentle and refined. It belongs to a minister's wife. If Jack doesn't bring you a cat, I'll try to get it for you."

"I wish you would," Mr. Vanessen replied, heartily. "You know Mrs. Vanessen makes a hobby of surrounding Elizabeth with gentle influences."

That night Elizabeth was entertained with a list of the cats awaiting her choice, but as Mr. Vanessen had invested a quarter in the office boy's venture, we finally decided to take his kitten. Great was our disappointment, then, when Mr. Vanessen came home saying that Jack had failed to obtain a cat. We were cheered to hear, however, that the society reporter had promised to ask the minister's wife for hers in the morning. The next day disappointment again awaited us. The minister's wife found the children were not willing to let the kitten go. So I sent a note to Mrs. Vanbrum, telling her what the doctor had said, and in reply learned that Mrs. Vanbrum was very sorry, but her plans for going away had been upset, and she had decided to keep the cat. Then Rose Lamont volunteered to go for Miss St. John's kitten, and came back heart-broken, to tell us that the kitten had just been given away. All other cats having failed, I decided to go myself to see the old maid. She lived on a back street, and as we drove slowly along, so many cats blinked at me from alley and doorway, I felt very much encouraged. I knocked on the door, and was admitted by the lady herself. I told my story rapidly, drawing in vivid colors Elizabeth's very great need of a cat.

"Dear, dear," she said, pitingly, "of course she must have one. You say she had fever? What kind ?"

"Scarlet," I answered. "Have you a kitten?"

"Do tell! Scarlet fever! And did you grease her? Greasin's so good. My sister's daughter had it, an'—— ——"

"Oh, yes, we oiled her," I interposed. "Did you say you had a kitten ?"

"Ollin' ain's so good as pure grease," she went on, evading my question. "May I ask what persuasion of a doctor you had?"

I looked puzzled. "We had an allopathic physician," I said, making a guess at her meaning.

"Oh, I meant was he married or single? My expérience is, married doctors for grow-ups, singles for children. You see singles—that is, bachelor singles—al'ays regards children as awful an' mysterious creatures, and then bein' as it were new to the profession, they're willin' to use more medicines, bein' anxious to see what they will do, while old doctors—well, they've tried everything, an' it stands to reason they ain't nigh so curious, which makes it hard to get your money's worth out of them. Still for grow ups, I——"

"Can I have that cat now?" I interrupted.

"Gracious! Didn't I tell you I hadn't a cat? You see,——"

But I hastily said "Good morning," and going down town, I bought an Angora cat. It took a large amount of courage to do it, but the first of the month, when my bills come in, was quite a long way off, and Elizabeth's need of a cat very near. Elizabeth welcomed the beautiful creature with delight, but she was a thousand times more pleased when papa came home that night with a forlorn little half-starved kitten.

"The minister's wife sent it around to the office today," Mr. Vanessen explained. "She said her little boy had rescued it from some hoodlums, and she had promised her children they might come around in a week or so to see how kind treatment had improved it." Elizabeth's pleasure, I confess, was much greater than mine. Two cats were not in my scheme of life, and beside, Mr. Vanessen's remarks about the probable bill for the Angora were not soothing. We were just going into dinner when the door-bell rang and the doctor entered. He explained.

"I am in too great a hurry to stop, but I was called in to see Mrs. Vanbrum today. She is going away, after all. So I just picked up her kitten and brought it along. I really think it will do Elizabeth more good than medicine. Mrs. Vanbrum told to tell you she would call and see the cat as soon as she returned." And the doctor was gone.

I looked at Mr. Vanessen, and lifted a lovely little Maltese cat of purest blood from its softly-padded basket.

"We shall have to keep this one." I said, "for Mrs. Vanbrum would never forgive us if we didn't, and you know Mrs. Vanbrum."

"Yes," Mr. Vanessen groaned; "I know Mrs. Vanbrum."

Dinner was a rather depressed meal, but we brightened up a little before the coffee. Three cats weren't so bad after all. They could play with one another, we said, and we really grew almost merry over them. An hour later we just starting for the opera when Rose Lamont ran in. Rose looked a dream in her long white opera cloak and furs. I didn't wonder Ed adored her. I was startled to see him holding a snow-white kitten in his arms, while Rose rapidly explained:

"We were at Louise's for dinner, you know, and are all going to the opera. Don't you think Louise happened to mention the kitten's new owner had a pug dog, who fought it as here did. So we went directly over and got it, and I told Mr. Wellington we might just as well bring it down in the carriage tonight. Then Elizabeth could have it the first thing in the morning. Louise and I will drop in tomorrow to see how it comes on. No, don't say a word! You are perfectly welcome. Good-by!" and the beaming pair vanished. She needn't have told me not to say a word. I couldn't.

It was midnight when we returned, and as John opened the door his usually solemn and reproachful look was replaced by an unmistakable grin.

"There's some more cat's come, madam," he began. "A young lady who said she was a society reporter brought one. She said it was a great pet, and must be fed on nothing but milk, and its mistress would call to see it soon. It's in the nursery. And there is another one boxed up in the library. It's kept up such a yowlin' I didn't dare let it out. Here's the note came with it."

Mr. Nanessen groaned. "It's from the sporting editor," he said. "Just read this, will you ?"

And I read:—"Dear Van:—I had a chance to get this splendid cat to night. Tom Jones paid five dollars for him, but Tom's been sent up for fighting, and by great good luck I got the cat. You never saw anything catch a rat as he can. It will set Elizabeth wild. I am sure, to let him loose in her room with a rat or two. You'd think it was a cyclone with lightning after it. I'll try to get a couple of rats to-morrow, of Dave Perry, and come around."

"Margaret," Mr. Vanessen said, "how many cats are there in the house now?"

"Six," I answered, solemnly, "and all must be taken care of, for their donors are coming to see them."

"I beg pardon," John interrupted, "a boy that said he was Mr. Vanessen's office boy was here to-night, and left a reasonable sized cat. He said as how Mr. Vanessen gave a quarter for it. And a woman called and left a cat and three kittens. She said Mrs. Vanessen wanted 'em for a sick child, and she 'owed the kittens would amuse her more than just a cat, and, anyway, they were too young to leave their mother."

"Where are they?" I asked.

"They are shut up in the kitchen," John answered. "The office boy's cat is in the bath-room. Two's in your dressing-room. The Angora and the other cat's in the nursery. The others are distributed 'round. Some of 'em got in a fight soon after you left and we thought it was best to separate them. If you listen you can hear them."

We could hear them without listening. Mr. Vanessen and I spent the rest of the night endeavoring to soothe the wailings of the different pets, and at the same time trying to devise some means of disposing of them.

"We can give the Angora away," I said.

"Yes."

"And drown the office boy's?"

"Yes."

"And shoot the sporting editor's?"

"He'd never forgive me, Margaret. I have to live with him. And I do hate to hurt the society editor's feelings."

"Yes, and Ed will never get over it if we dispose of the one Rose brought, nor will doctor or the nurse."

"Margaret," exclaimed Mr. Vanessen, suddenly, "let's go South. We've wanted to go to Florida for years. "Let's go !"

"Lovely!" I replied, the first ray of peace stealing into my soul it had known since the cats began to arrive. And so next morning dainty notes were written, heartfelt thanks and ten wailing cats were expressed back to their owners Shortly after, the Vanessen family departed to Florida.—Interior.

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