

## HOME CIRCLE.

DOT.

A STORY OF THE FRESH AIR FUND.

"It's a harum-scarum idea!" said Miss Reliance Roxbury, as she stood amongst the current bushes at the garden fence. "A most ridiculous idea! I wonder what this gushing American people will do next!" And she gave an emphatic twitch to her purple calico sun-bonnet.

There was a faint murmur of dissent from a little woman on the other side of the moss grown fence.

"No—of course you can't agree with me," continued Miss Reliance, as the clusters of ruby and pearl flow into the six quart pail at her feet. "You're so soft-hearted that your feelings are forever running off with your common sense. You never say a word about the national debt, or the condition of our navy, but let anybody start a subscription for sending blanket shawls to Brazil or putting up a monument to Methuselah on the meeting house green, you'll give your last quarter. And now, you're going to open your house to a lot of little ragamuffins from New York?"

The motherly brown eyes on the other side of the fence were full of tears, and a pleasant voice replied:

"It makes my heart ache to think how the poor things suffer crowded together in dirty streets, with never a breath of clover field or a glass of milk. If you'd just read about it, Reliance, you'd count it a blessed privilege to give them a bit of our sunshine."

"I'd as soon have a tribe of Zulus on the place," said Miss Reliance, "and if you'll take my advice you'll save yourself lots of trouble."

Mrs. Lane stopped her work for a moment and said:

"Liakim and me are all alone now, Reliance. One by one we've laid Kate and Sarah and baby Lizzie over there in the old burying ground; and Jack is in Colorado, and Richard in Boston, and we get hungry sometimes for the sound of little feet. When I began to read about the Fresh Air Fund it kind of sent a thrill all over me, and Liakim he reads about it every day, before he ever looks at the Egyptian war, and he wipes his glasses pretty often too. Then when we heard the parson say that a party would come here if places could be found for 'em, Liakim spoke right off for four, and they'll be here next Tuesday, and I'm going to make it just as much like heaven as I can."

"You'll make yourself sick, that's what you'll do, Amanda Lane," replied Reliance, "but if you want your garden overrun, and your silver spoons stolen, and your house full of flies, and your nerves prostrated, why it's your own fault."

Miss Roxbury went up the path between the sun-flowers and lily-hocks, entered the large sunny, airy kitchen and set down the currants for Hannah, the house maid, to pick over. Then she hung the purple calico sun-bonnet on the nail that for forty years had been dedicated to that purpose, and went into the cool sitting-room to rest in her favourite chintz covered rocker. Miss Reliance Roxbury had been for twenty years, with the exception of a gardener and house maid, the sole occupant of this stone dwelling that had stood for more than a century beneath its elms and maples the pride of the village of Lynford. She was a stern woman who liked but few people, and had a horror of children, dogs and sentiment. The village boys, with a keen perception of her sympathetic nature, called her "Old Ironsides."

She was proud of her birth and the substantial property that had fallen to her at the death of her father, old Judge Roxbury. She was a member of the Presbyterian Church, and paid high rental for the Roxbury pew, but with that considered that her pecuniary obligations to the cause were at an end. As a general thing she had not allowed convictions on the subject of giving to trouble her, but somehow, ever since Sunday, when the pastor stated the work of the Fresh Air Fund, and made a fervent appeal for "these little ones that suffer," she had been subjected to numerous vague but uncomfortable sensations. She rocked back and forth in the spacious sitting room that no fly dared to invade, and noted the perfect order of the apartment. From the china shepherdess on the mantel, to the braided rugs at the doors, everything occupied the same position as in the days of Miss Roxbury's girlhood. There was torture in the thought of having the table cover pulled away, of seeing the shells and prim old daguerrotypes disarranged on the whatnot, of having sand tracked in by small feet over the faded

Brussels carpet, and her pet verbena bed invaded by eager young fingers.

Surely religion and humanity could not demand such sacrifices of her.

"Please, ma'am, the currants is to be put over," said Hannah, at the door.

Miss Roxbury rose at once, glad of another channel for her thoughts, but amid her weighing and measuring, and her careful calculations of pints and pounds, the strange impression did not leave her mind. After the rich crimson syrup had been poured into the row of shining tumblers on the table, she returned to her chintz-covered rocker and took up the Bible to read her daily chapter. Opening it at random, her eyes fell upon these words:

"Then shall He answer them saying, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these ye did it not unto Me.'"

Miss Roxbury read no further on that page, but hurriedly turned back to Chronicles, which she felt was perfectly safe ground. But mingled with the long genealogical tables she saw other words between the lines, so that the Israelitish records read thus:

"The son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah. ('Ye did it not.')

"The son of Tanah, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah. ('Ye did it not.')

Finally the whole page seemed to resolve itself into these four monosyllables.

She closed the Bible and put it in its accustomed place on the table, bounded on the north by a lamp, on the south by the match-box, on the east by Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and on the west by a bunch of worsted roses under a glass case. She was restless, miserable, tormented. She endeavoured to read the "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte," but even the thrilling story of the Russian campaign was lacking in interest, compared with her own inward conflict between duty and the old selfishness of a lifetime.

She did not enjoy her dinner, although the butter-beans were from her garden, and the black raspberries were the first of the season.

She could not take her accustomed afternoon nap, and for the first time in years the *Daily Tribune* lay unopened. She even put it out of the way in the china closet. A wonderful new design in patchwork known as the Rocky Mountain pattern could not fasten her attention.

She ordered the horse and rockaway and drove four miles after wild cherry bark, for which she had no need as her garret was already a great herbarium.

At least the dreary day came to its close, but was succeeded by an equally uncomfortable night. Amid frequent tossing and waking, Miss Roxbury dreamed of thin little hands stretched out to her in piteous appeal, and a sad wonderful voice that said with infinite reproach:

"Ye did not."

The Rev. Joseph Alder was surprised soon after breakfast the next morning by the appearance of Miss Reliance Roxbury at the parsonage porch. She brought a basket of raspberries, and said:

"I won't come in this time, thank you. I just want to say I'll take one—one of those children."

II.

"Mamma, is it mornin'?"

"No, Dot; go to sleep."

The child turned restlessly on the miserable straw pallet in the corner of the small, hot room. It was after midnight, and in summer, but there was a fire in the stove, for the woman at the pine table was ironing by the light of a glimmering tallow candle.

There was no breeze, but in at the open window came stifling, poisonous odours.

Pale and faint, the mother bent over her work, and smoothed the dark calico dress as carefully as if it were the finest muslin and lace. She had worked from early dawn until dark at her daily task—button holes at four cents a dozen. A cup of tea and crust of bread had been her sustenance. For Dot there was a bun and an orange.

The dress was finished and hung on the only chair in the room, with several other small articles. A hat of coarse white straw, with a blue ribbon twisted around it, a pair of bright stockings, a tiny handkerchief with a bit of colour in the border. All were pitifully cheap in texture, but dear in patient toil and loving sacrifice. Dot was going to the country for two long, blissful weeks, and the mother could cover the expense of the meagre outfit by some extra depriva-

tion during the child's absence. She turned toward the pallet. Dot's violet eyes had opened. Her golden curls were tangled by the tossing of the little head on the pillow. Her thin, pinched features were flushed with feverish excitement.

"Mamma, is it mornin'?"

"No, darling."

The woman blew out the light and threw herself on the pallet. Tiny fingers crept eagerly into her palm.

"Mamma; tell me more about it," pleaded Dot.

"Darling, it is years and years since mamma saw the country, but it was just as I've told you. Wide, clean streets, with big trees and blue sky and flowers."

"Oh, oh!" murmured Dot, "Does you 'spose they'll give me one f'ower, mamma? I found one on the street once—a 'tittle w'ite f'ower. A lady dropped it."

"Yes, dear, you'll have all the flowers you'll want, don't talk any more to-night."

The sky was already white with the dawn. The mother did not sleep. As the light of another day of misery crept into the room, she raised herself on one elbow and looked long at her child, resisting an impulse to snatch it to her heart, then softly rose, and after bathing her face and hands and kneeling in prayer for endurance, took her work and sat down by the narrow window. A few hours later she stood amid the bustle of the Grand Central depot with Dot clinging to her dress. A crowd of wondering, expectant children were being marshalled into line to take their places on the eastward-bound train.

"Come," said the kind gentleman in charge, to Dot.

Dot kissed her mother "good-bye," and laughed even while the tears ran down her face, as she entered the ranks of the odd procession.

"Oh, sir!" said the mother, as she turned away, "take good care of my baby. I've nothing else in the world."

III.

There was an unusual stir in the village of Lynford. The railway station was thronged with people, and surrounded with vehicles awaiting the afternoon train.

The Rev. Joseph Alder and the ministers of sister churches conversed together on the platform.

"A glorious charity!" said the Baptist minister, raising his hat to wipe the perspiration from his brow.

"I expect that these poor children will be a great blessing to our people," said the Methodist minister, "in broadening the sympathies and warming the hearts of some who have been oblivious to all interests save their own."

"Yes," replied the Rev. Mr. Alder, "I have a practical illustration of that, not a stone's throw from where we are standing."

The "practical illustration" consisted of the Rockbury rockaway drawn up amid the other conveyances, with Miss Reliance on the back seat, in a state of mind in which newly-fledged philanthropy struggled with a terror of ragamuffins. She had come to the conclusion that her visit to the parsonage had been made during an attack of mental aberration; but the word of a Roxbury was as immovable as the historic granite on which Zephaniah Roxbury stepped from the *Mayflower* in 1620, and the last representative of the race would not falter now, although seized with dire apprehension whenever her eyes rested on the verbena bed.

It was with a grim determination to brave the worst, that she awaited the train that afternoon, but when the locomotive appeared on the bridge below the village, the thought of the dreadful boy who was coming to invade her peaceful domain nearly overcame her, and her impulse was to order the hired man to drive home as quickly as possible. She could appreciate the emotions of a Roman dame at the approach of the Vandal.

As the train stopped at the station the people crowded forward to welcome their guests. Miss Roxbury peered anxiously from the rockaway. It was not a very appalling sight. A group of pale little children, tired, dusty and bewildered. Many eyes overflowed as the train moved on, and left these wistful faces, pinched by want and misfortune, in the midst of the kindly villagers.

"Here, Miss Roxbury, here is a wee lamb for you," said Mr. Alder.

Miss Roxbury had not observed his approach in the crowd, and gave a start of surprise as he stood before her. As she looked there was a curious sensation under the left side of her crape shawl, and her cold eyes grew misty.

The "dreadful boy" had changed into a tiny girl of