

The S. P. C. M.

(Amelia H. Botsford, in the 'Presbyterian Banner.')

The girls were comfortably established in one of their favorite meeting places, the wide porch of Laura Thompson's home. Isabel Gooding sat in a porch chair in the midst of blue ruffles she was basting on a dainty skirt. Minnie Lee and Laura Thompson had embroidery and Anna Scott held a book. Suddenly she laid it down and remarked:

'Girls, I have a thought. Do stop chattering and listen. You know the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has been very active in this town lately. I think it is very useful, but I want to start another society which is as much needed. Let's organize a S. P. C. M.'

'S. P. C. M.?' queried the girls in a bewildered chorus. 'What can that be?'

'I should think you could guess it from the initials,' returned Anna.

'S. P. C. are plain enough. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to something, I suppose. I don't see what the M. stands for unless it is Me. It is too warm to guess riddles. Tell us right out, Anna, dear.'

'If it is warm on this shady porch, I wonder what it is in a kitchen,' said Anna. 'I left my mother canning berries over a coal fire. To be sure, I worked all the morning, and she said I might come, but my conscience isn't clear that I am doing right to enjoy myself while she is still over the hot stove. Isn't your mother at the sewing-machine, Isabel?'

'Yes,' returned Isabel, remorsefully. 'Of course, she is stitching on this dress.'

'It is no wonder Mrs. Gooding is always sewing,' remarked Laura. 'Six children and an orphan niece! I don't see how she ever keeps them all dressed so nicely. But my mother is resting in her room, and you need not try to harrow up my feelings on her account.'

'I know,' returned Anna, 'that your mother, Laura, can take life easier than many women do. Money means comfort and leisure. When it is scarce it is the mothers who do the drudgery that comes from its absence. I am afraid the mothers are imposed on. I really think a society to prevent cruelty to them would find plenty to do right here in Spencerport. I move we organize.'

'But what would you do?' queried Minnie. 'Arrest every girl found on a porch or in a hammock while her mother was in the kitchen? Or would you enter a complaint against a daughter if her mother has backache from housework or dark circles under her eyes from sewing late at night?'

'Don't make fun of my plan, girls,' remonstrated Anna. 'I think we might do more to make life easy for our mothers. As Laura has no field of labor at home, she might help some other girl's mother.'

'I know my mother is overworked,' confessed Isabel. 'She is ambitious to have her girls look well, and with father's small salary it would not be possible if mamma was not a perfect genius with the needle. I want to help her, and if Anna's society will make it easier I'll gladly join.'

'Let's see what we can do,' chimed in Minnie. 'Having a society will make it some run. I second Anna's motion.'

'It is moved and seconded,' said Anna, rising, 'that we organize a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Mothers. Those in favor will manifest it by the usual sign.'

A unanimous wave of handkerchiefs responded.

'The motion is carried. Now, do we want a president and secretary?'

'I don't think it is necessary,' returned Minnie, 'and it's so formal.'

'If the rest of you agree, let's just resolve ourselves into a committee of the whole, and report at our next meeting.'

'Come over to my house on Wednesday,' said Minnie, rising and putting on her hat.

'Why, you are not going now,' remonstrated the other girls. 'It is early yet, and no one will expect you back till after supper.'

'I am going home to see what that mother of mine is doing,' returned Minnie, firmly. 'She may be resting, but I am not sure of it, and my first duty is to see that she is not suffering some cruelty.'

Minnie's sudden move broke up the gathering. Isabel folded her work and started also. Anna chatted a few moments longer and then she, too, slipped away.

On reaching home she went into the kitchen. A long row of bottles filled with fruit showed how Mrs. Scott had passed the afternoon. Anna passed through the sitting-room, but her mother was not there. She found her on the bed in her own room.

'Why, Anna, is it you?' said her mother, looking up at the sound of a footstep. 'I did not expect you yet. The hot kitchen made my head ache so I could not do the mending until I rested a little.'

'Lie still,' returned Anna, 'and perhaps the headache will pass off. I have the mending basket. Don't get up till I call you to supper.'

Isabel hurried Minnie as they walked on together. 'I am sure,' she said, in excuse, 'that mother must be waiting for these ruffles. I know she does too much, but I do not like to sew, and what I do doesn't look right. It seems as if I would be more bother than help in that direction. See how can I lift her burden? Do you see, Minnie?'

'You might lessen the number of your own gowns,' replied plain-spoken Minnie. 'Don't you know you have more dresses in a year than even Laura? Her clothes are more expensive, of course, but she has fewer and they would not require half the stitches. If you only had two or three dresses in a season and your little sisters followed the example it would lessen the sewing, wouldn't it?'

'But, Minnie,' expostulated Isabel, 'my dresses are old ones made over, and they do not last long. I have to have more than the rest of the girls. I really do not think I can help mamma's being burdened with dress-making.'

Isabel hurried into the house and went at once to the sewing-room where Mrs. Gooding bent over the machine.

'Oh, Isabel, is that you?' Have you the ruffles ready?'

'Yes, and I can stitch them on, I think, if you will trust me with them.'

'I will be glad to have you do it. There are a good many little things you can help about. I am sure you sew neatly, Isabel, and you might be a great help if you would not allow yourself to hate the work so.'

Isabel sighed. She began to perceive that the path of duty stretched before her, thick set with needle-points. But she stitched on and on, and as she grew tired of the whirr of the machine and the ache of her unaccustomed muscles she thought of days when her mother had sat for hours at the machine to finish some dress on which her daughter had set her heart for a particular occasion, and several resolves formed in her mind. One was that she would never again set a time at which she must have a certain garment. No, if there were a picnic or party in prospect,

she would wear her old gown rather than let her mother work late into the night that the vanity of her daughter might be gratified.

Another was that she would follow Minnie's suggestion and limit her wardrobe. When a different gown could be procured by making something over she had felt justified in having it. She had not realized that the expenditure of her mother's health and strength was of more consequence than money.

Minnie's home was but a few blocks beyond Isabel's. She found her mother tending the baby, who, in baby fashion, had chosen the summer to cut teeth, or rather to have teeth cut him. Mrs. Lee looked as if she had not slept for several nights.

'Mother,' said Minnie, 'I believe the baby would be better off out-doors. There is a nice breeze, and he would enjoy a ride. Perhaps he will go to sleep, and if you lie down while we are gone you may get a nap, too.'

'It will be a great relief to have you take baby,' sighed Mrs. Lee. 'I am worn out for the loss of sleep. I am sure I could go to sleep standing up if I had the chance.'

In a few minutes baby was being wheeled slowly along a pleasant shady street, and in the fresh air he forgot his aches, while his mother still more speedily lost hers in a profound sleep.

'I believe I am serving in a society for the prevention of cruelty to children, too,' thought Minnie, as she saw with satisfaction the look of pain vanish from the wan little face. 'And when I take baby home I will get supper and let mamma finish her nap. I do not see why I could not have the baby with me for one night. I think I could care for him, though I suppose I would have to be up a good deal. It would do mamma a world of good to sleep through a night without waking. I suppose she hasn't done it for weeks.'

After her friends had gone Laura lounged in the hammock a while, but Anna's idea disturbed her. She went into the house. Her mother had come downstairs looking fresh and bright.

'Why, Laura, are the girls gone so soon?' she asked in surprise.

'Yes, mamma,' she answered, and then suddenly asked: 'Are you and papa going to drive out this evening?'

'No,' replied Mrs. Thompson. 'He will not be back till late.'

'Then can I have the carriage and take someone for a drive?'

'There is nothing to prevent,' said her mother. 'The evening will be cool and pleasant and I'll order the carriage early for you.'

'Thank you, mother,' returned Laura.

When the carriage came she gave the coachman unexpected directions. He was to drive out Brown street and stop at Mrs. Clinton's. It was a new thing for her to call there, as she only knew her slightly. The two families attended the same church. Mrs. Clinton had four young children, the eldest not yet eight. A blessed inspiration had come to Laura to take the busy mother out in the evening while the father was home and could care for the children.

When she explained her errand she was surprised at the flush of pleasure and eagerness on the mother's face. The father was gratified, too, and quite willing to mind the babies. The hastiest of toilets and then the rest and refreshment of the drive in the cool moonlight.

'You can't imagine what this has done for me,' said the grateful mother when she alighted at her own gate. 'I do get so tired, and sometimes almost go crazy with the care of the children. They are not bad children,