

The Inglenook.

NAN'S STORY OF A HOME MISSION BOX.

I wonder if it's wicked for people who decide to be home missionaries to choose places that are comfortable and pleasant. I wonder if home missionaries always live in climates where it is as cold as Greenland in winter, and hot enough to melt you in summer;—if they always had a hard time to get shoes, and clothes, and fuel and food. Because that is the kind of home missionary father is, and he is undoubtedly the best man in the world. Even if he did choose this "field," as he calls it, and even if mother was willing for him to live here, and work and sacrifice with him, it always has seemed to Jack and me a little unfair that we children had to put up with things, when we were not consulted about coming—in fact, we got our first glimpse of the world through the little square window under the eaves in mother's room.

I think we were never meant for missionaries, anyway. We have real wicked thoughts sometimes, and the worst of it is they don't stop with being thoughts, for we talk about them to each other when we are alone—all about how unfair it is for some people, who really don't amount to much, to live in castles and mansions, and go to Europe, and wear silks and velvets and broadcloths (Jack always mentions the broadcloth; I think the silk is more interesting), and have brand new skates that haven't been out grown by somebody else, and sleds that other children haven't broken to smash; while we can't have—or do—or be—or go. Jack's cheeks got red as fire, and his eyes flash, as he makes the chips fly out of the knotty wood Mr. Jenkins always sends on his subscription.

We nearly always have our talks at the woodpile, for Jack is busy there a good deal, and it's far enough from the house so nobody can hear us. It's no fun to grumble before the rest, for father looks solemn, mother grieved and Marion shocked. Marion is like mother—meek as a lamb, and good as gold. It was all right for her to be born here, for she likes to be uncomfortable and make sacrifices, but Jack and I don't. We want to have a warm house and wood enough so we needn't economize—ugh! how I hate that word—and jolly books to read and a general good time. So Marion sits with mother and helps to plan and contrive, and nurse sick people, and give away what little we've got to poor people, while Jack splits wood and I sit on a log and knit, which I hate to do nearly as bad as I hate to be economical. Now you see just how wicked we are. I haven't kept back a thing. I's not that we don't want to be good and useful, but we think that the people who have plenty of money ought to spare a little more instead of making us who have so little divide and divide till there isn't enough to go around.

You see the Board pays father a little, and the church pays him a little, and we get a box almost every fall from some Eastern church. But if the Board gets hard up it thinks "Mr. Thornton's church will supply his needs," and if the church gets hard up—it always does—it thinks, "The Board will take care of Brother Thornton till times are easier with us," so between the two we have

a pretty sorry time of it. As for the boxes—well, it was about one of them I started to tell—if I ever get to it. I will say they are not all like it. Some have been lovely, with warm clothing and bedding, and even money. Others are not so good, and this last one—I'll let it speak for itself.

We knew it was coming, and we had counted on it a lot, for the church salary was away behind, and the Board money, too, and winter was coming, and Deacon Jenkin's knotty wood was almost gone. We had built fine air-castles, Jack and I, and talked about a story we had read of a missionary box where ten dollar bills were rolled up and put in every finger of a nice pair of gloves, and we planned what could be bought if our box was like that one. It was fortunate that we could enjoy the air-castles before-hand.

One morning we sat down to breakfast, and there wasn't a thing on the table but mush and sorghum molasses. Now if there is anything I do hate, it's mush, and that's another sign that I'm not good enough for a home missionary, for mush is about the cheapest thing you can eat. I couldn't help pouting a little, for I'd been out an hour helping Jack drive Mr. Gillespie's stray cow home, and I was hungry. Mother tried to smile at me, but her eyes looked so sorry I just couldn't stand it, and I burst out. "I think it's mean! Mr. Gillespie had ham and biscuit for breakfast, and coffee with cream in it, and he and his crosspatch wife aren't half as good as father and mother, and they only have this horrid stuff!" I pushed back my bowl and choked back my tears. Mother didn't scold—just said as cheerfully as she could, with a lump in her own throat, "Never mind, Nannie dear, maybe the box will come to-day, and bring such treasure that we can afford a royal Thanksgiving dinner."

"But if it doesn't daughter," put in father, "remember that we have as many blessings as for our good—far more than we deserve."

Privately I didn't agree with him, for if it's a question of deserts, it ought to have been father and mother who had the ham and coffee, and Mr. Gillespie the mush. I didn't say any more, though, and Marion began talking briskly about something else; but Jack gave my hand a sympathetic squeeze under the table that helped to make the mush go down.

That was Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, and father had to go away off across the prairie to visit some sick people, and he wanted mother and Marion to go along. Mother's as good as a doctor any day, and Marion's a born nurse. That left Jack and me alone for the day, but we didn't mind that in the least. We watched the creaking old buggy up the road, and wished it had two seats, so the dear occupants wouldn't be so crowded, then turned indoors to do up the morning work. Just as we were finishing up, somebody shouted at the gate, and there stood Mr. Brown's wagon with the box! Oh, joy!—wouldn't Jack and I have fun investigating? Mr. Brown and Jack got it in the house, then Mr. Brown drove away, while my brother went for the hatchet and I executed a pigeon wing on the lid.

"Get off, Nan. Jolly! it's a big one,"

said Jack reappearing. Before we got it open we decided it must be extremely valuable, it was so well nailed up. Jack pinched his finger black and blue and I ran a long splinter into mine before we finally beheld the paper which hid from our sight the interesting contents. Then we began to unpack, and in half an hour our little sitting-room looked like a second-hand clothing store.

There was a black silk dress with holes through the elbows and under the arms, the lace trimming torn to fragments. It was frayed around the bottom and soiled around the top. An overcoat was shinier than the one father was wearing (which is saying a good deal), and moth-eaten into the bargain. Some table linen, sadly in need of mending, and two new towels. A pair of fancy slippers and several pairs of hose which had never made the acquaintance of a darning-needle.

It is not necessary to go on, it is enough to say that not one thing in the whole box except the towels, which I believe got in by mistake, was ready for use till it had been mended, cleaned, pressed, dyed or made over, and some things had no possibilities even for us except as carpet rags or bandages for cuts. Jack and I were alone, so we could be just as mad as we wanted to. We laid those old things down on the floor and walked on them; we rolled them up and played football with them, we tossed them under the couch, then dragged them out again to dance rigs on them—that was after we had examined every pocket (there were no gloves) for the ten-dollar bills. We acted dreadfully—I own it—and right in the midst of the fray somebody rapped.

We were fairly caught; there wasn't time to put things out of sight, so I opened the door with my heart in my mouth. There stood Mrs. Edmunds, the dearest woman in the whole country, with a comfortable-looking basket on her arm. She lives fifteen miles across the prairie, so we don't see her very often, but we all love her. "How do you do, Nannie? and you, Jack? Bless us how you have grown! Where's mother? Not gone—now isn't that too bad when I get to see her so seldom?" By that time she was inside, and the door was shut. "What in this world? My dears, have you gone insane?" she asked as she "viewed the landscape o'er."

"No'm," I answered meekly. "We've had a box."

"It looks more as if you'd had a cyclone. Nannie, child, what does this mean?" And I just told her. I hadn't said a dozen words till I was crying with my head in her lap, and Jack was looking out of the window saying "Ahem!" very hard. When I felt her kind hands smoothing my hair, I poured out the whole torrent of sorrow. The unpaid salary, the empty woodshed, the mush for breakfast, and that dreadful box. She didn't speak till I had finished, then she gathered me up in her arms and kissed me, and held out a hand to Jack who came and sat down beside her trying not to show that his eyes were red. "You dear children—you poor little things!" she said. "I don't blame you one bit. It isn't right for such people as your blessed father and mother to be subjected to such humiliations as this," and she spurned the black silk waist with her foot. "If some of the church pillars don't get a piece of my mind before this day's over it will be because I haven't the ability to give it to them. The idea! Nan, can you keep your mother from finding out about the box tonight?"

"We can if she don't ask us about it,"