

A Surprise Party.

(Angelina W. Wray, in 'Christian Advocate'.)

'Everybody listen! I have an idea!' exclaimed May Nelson to a group of Epworth League members who had gathered around her after the literary meeting.

'Oh, May, is that possible?' her brother Will asked, mischievously, while the rest of the party called gaily after the more sedate members who were leaving the room, 'Come back, quick! May has an idea, and she's afraid she will lose it.'

The girl in question laughed at their nonsense, but her face was thoughtful as she said:—

'Never mind! I've thought of a lovely plan, so you needn't make fun of it. You remember the last prayer meeting we had at the poor farm? Well, it will soon be time for another, and I was just thinking of poor old Aunt Mary. She told me the last time we were there that she would be eighty-nine years old on the fourth of December, and when I said I hoped she would have a pleasant time she answered, oh, so sadly, "There's nobody left to care about my birthday, child." Now, can't we give her a surprise party? To-morrow will be the fourth. Why can't we go, then, instead of waiting until next week? We could take her a big birthday cake, and have singing, and—oh, don't you think it would be splendid?'

'I do,' said Tom Mitchell, with enthusiasm. 'Hurrah for a poor farm party!'

'Won't they all be surprised?' said Nell Sutton, drawing a long breath of delighted anticipation. 'And won't they be glad? Let's take oranges and other fruit with us. They don't get many luxuries there.'

'I'll take sandwiches,' announced John Searles. 'My mother makes the best ones you ever saw.'

'We'll ask Doris to go, too, and sing. They all like to hear her,' was Bert Cleveland's suggestion.

It was finally decided that the whole party should take the four o'clock trolley the next afternoon, each carrying whatever he or she chose to donate.

Friday morning dawned clear and bright, a beautiful December day with just a hint of snow in the air. At the poor farm it seemed just like any other day. The old people sat by the fire, grumbling a little whenever anyone opened the door and let in a breath of cold. Aunt Mary, who had no relatives living, but who, nevertheless, was 'aunt' to all who knew her, went around singing over her work, as usual, with a cheery word for all her companions, though there was an undercurrent of sadness in her heart.

As the short winter afternoon drew toward a close, the wistfulness deepened and left a shadow on the patient old face.

'Eighty-nine years old, and not a soul to care about it,' she thought. 'It's so different now from what it used to be. My Joe, poor fellow, could never make enough fuss over mother's birthday. Then aloud, 'Yes, Mis' Tomney, I'll find your specs for you in a jiffy.'

As she spoke the last words she started in surprise. The door had been opened softly, and the room was full of bright-faced young people crying merrily, 'Happy birthday, Aunt Mary! Happy birthday!'

'Land sakes!' said the old lady, in a flutter of delight and surprise. 'Dear! dearie me! what does all this mean, anyhow?'

'You're to sit right down in the big

chair now, for it's your birthday,' said May.

'We're a surprise-party,' added John.

And then willing hands pulled out the long table, spread it with a snowy cloth, and the room rang with laughter and jokes as sandwiches, fruit, jelly, and other good things appeared, as if by magic, in their places.

Dorothy Smith and Mrs. Golden made coffee. Bert and Will arranged a big bunch of ferns and scarlet berries in the middle of the board, and then, crowning glory of all, came the birthday cake itself, glistening with frosting and bearing on its snowy surface the legend, 'Happy birthday!'

Aunt Mary was promptly installed in the seat of honor at the head of the table, the other old people gathered around, and the Epworth Leaguers acted as waitresses, enjoying the duties hugely, for the rugged faces beamed with pleasure at the unexpected feast, and Aunt Mary had to parry many humorous references to her youth and sprightliness.

Deaf Mrs. Jones made everyone laugh by her frequent stentorian demands for 'another o' them sandwiches, please.' Tom Farley munched away in silent content. Irish Jane kept murmuring, 'The saints bless ye!' at every mouthful, and altogether it would have been hard to find a gay-er or happier party anywhere.

When the feast was over at last, and even fat Mrs. Wall, who resembled a tub in rotundity, had protested her inability to 'swallow another bite,' and the dishes had been washed and wiped 'in a twinkling,' the young people spent a half hour in singing the familiar hymns that will never lose their charm, while many of the old voices joined their quavering tones to the melody.

The room was full of wavering shadows by that time. In the soft dusk, lighted only by the quivering flames from the fire, Doris Holland rose.

'It is almost time to go,' she said, gently. 'I promised to sing for you. What shall it be, Aunt Mary?'

The faded old face smiled at the fresh young countenance as Aunt Mary answered:—

'I don't know the right name, dearie, but you'll know what I mean. Sing, "Never a Trial."'

The room grew very still as the tender words rang out:—

'Never a trial that He is not there,
Never a burden that He doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share;
Moment by moment I'm under His care.'

The firelight lit up the gentle face with beauty. Doris had given her voice to the Lord Jesus, she said, that he might use it for himself. Perhaps that was the reason why it came with such loving comfort to the lonely hearts that listened. Trials, burdens, sorrows, they knew all about those, but the voice of the singer brought before them the pitying face of the Saviour, while to her young friends it came like a message of inspiration, urging them on to fresh efforts for their Leader.

'And now,' said Doris simply, 'I will sing of the days to come.'

'The Home-land! Oh, the Home-land!
The land of the freeborn!
There is no night in the Home-land,
But aye the fadeless morn.
I'm sighing for the Home-land,
My heart is aching here;
There is no pain in the Home-land,
To which I'm drawing near.'

How they listened! how the tears stood in the dim eyes! Stray waifs of humanity, men and women of many creeds, some the victims of sin and some of sorrow, all lonely and weary, all alike homeless in the deepest sense of the world! Even lame Jim, who had never come to any of the meetings before, although he had had many invitations, felt his soul thrilled by the touch of human and divine sympathy as the beautiful voice sang on:

'My loved ones in the Home-land
Are waiting me to come,
Where neither sin nor sorrow
Invades their happy home.
O dear, dear native country!
O rest and peace above!
Christ bring us to the Home-land
Of His redeeming love.'

'We must go now. Have you had a good time?'

'Are you glad we came?'

There was no need to ask. The smiling faces told the story without words.

'Good-bye, all! Good-bye, Aunt Mary.'

'Good-bye, and the saints bless ye!' said Jane, dropping her funniest bob curtsey. 'It's aisy ye'll slape this night.'

'It's been a happy birthday,' said Aunt Mary, proudly. 'I never thought anyone would remember it, let alone my havin' a reg'lar party!'

The young people were a little quiet going home. Someway the gladness had held a touch of pathos that appealed to them.

May was the first to leave the trolley. Every one laughed as Bert called after her:

'I say, May, have another "idea" just as soon as you can.'

Ding! ding! rang the conductor's bell, but May lingered a moment as she answered earnestly:

'Oh, I wish I could. Do you know, everybody, I never went to a nicer party than this one in all my life!'

Follow Me.

(By Julia E. Goodwin.)

When the voices of the world are loudly calling

Mid the tumult of life's sea,
Like the dew of eve upon thy tired heart
falling

Comes a whisper, all thy restlessness en-
thralling,

'Follow Me.'

Does the pathway open rough and wild
before thee?

Feeble though thy footsteps be,
Shouldst thou falter, he stands ready to
restore thee,

And his gentle tones in watchful love im-
plore thee,

'Follow Me.'

When thy soul the night of death is swift-
ly nearing,

And life's fitful day-gleams flee,
Lo! his form amid the doubt and gloom
appearing,

And his loving voice thy fainting spirit
cheering,

'Follow Me.'

Brighter far than all earth's fairest dreams
of splendor,

Heaven's portals thou shalt see;
Dearer far than all the gifts the world can
render,

Is the love that welcomes thee in tones so
tender,

'Follow Me.'

—'The Churchman.'