



PUT away all sarcasm from your speech. Never complain. Do not prophesy evil. Have a good word for everyone, or else keep silent.

—Henry Ward Beecher.



## A NOVEL OF GOOD CHEER BY MARIA THOMPSON-DAVIESS

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(Continued from last week)

ON the other side of the street, only a few hundred yards away, the cool door of the grocery yawned and the top branch of the hackberry beckoned in a friendly little breeze. Miss Selina Lue hurried her steps and as she walked she waved the turkey-tail in vigorous encouragement of the tiny zephyr. She was generous in proportion was Miss Selina Lue, tall, broad and strong, deep-bosomed, and flashing of eyes, though with a spirit of such stateliness that one might almost read as one ran.

At her door she was welcomed with enthusiasm. Miss Cynthia Page stood on the top step, in her arms a baby who was uttering a protest against the world in general, and Miss Cynthia in particular, in such a staccato volume of voice that his size could not be a surprise to the beholder. On the floor his exact counterpart, except in the matter of hair—that of counterpart being of the tone known in some walks of life as red-gold but called on the bluff "carrots"—sat with solemn eyes chewing a string and clutching determinedly at the hem of Miss Cynthia's white linen skirt with grimy hands. Just behind him a pink-clad little bunch had succeeded in squirming between the pickle barrel and a large bushel basket of snap-beans, and only the hind quarters and ten pink toes of the explorer evidenced her whereabouts. From a certain ecstatic wave of one leg it might be suspected that a find had been made and was being secretly and rapidly consumed. In the middle of the floor another infant lay prone, with legs and arms flailing frantically, resembling nothing more than an overturned beetle helpless in its appeal to be righted before the world. And from behind the counter on the left there issued a voice, a voice that rose and wailed an accompaniment to the Flairty and Cynthia's arms that could not but impress the hearer. It was no fretful cry of attention and amusement, but was the howl of a soul in torment, hungry, hot, frightened with a pain all over and in spots.

"Dearie me!" exclaimed Miss Se-

lina Lue. "You all seem to be upset!" And as she spoke she took the wailer from Miss Cynthia and reaching for Carrots on the floor, tucked him under the same arm with which



The Spoon Descended into the Mouth of Blossom

brother while she draw out by one finger the explorer and revealed the treasure, found to be a snap-bean, now partly consumed. The beetle shared the hollow of her arm with the explorer, but the voice from behind the counter wailed unceasingly.

"Miss Cynthia, honey, please pick up Clemmie from behind there and bring her on back here to the boxes," Miss Selina Lue spoke of the boxes as of stalls in a training stable.

"Whatever did you let them out for? I am afraid you was pestered to death with 'em."

"Oh, Miss Selina Lue, they all began to cry at once and I didn't know what to do," apologized Miss Cynthia as she struggled to the back of the

store with the voice in her arms still making itself heard though the sight of Miss Selina Lue had brought it down a note or two.

"Oh, that's all right; crying's good for 'em, the darlings," said Miss Selina Lue as she deposited the wriggling load on the floor.

There was a large south window at the back of the grocery and a morning-glory vine peeped in on one side and clutched with little tender fingers at a group of sides of bacon that hung on the wall. A large yellow cat stretched on the sill in the sun, which poured in over him to the floor.

Ranged back from the heat, but in the cool breeze, were five empty soap-boxes, capacious and clean, with calico cushions stuffed down each back. Miss Selina Lue shok out each cushion and deposited thereon a baby, Carrots came last and was enthroned with care on a "chiny-blue" cushion.

"Ain't he too sweet on that blue kiver?" said Miss Selina Lue as she smoothed the flaming kinks. A tender hand ran over each bobbing head and peace reigned in the River Bluff Grocery, whose back regions were given over to a hospital day nursery conducted on entirely original and also utterly unremunerative lines by its owner. With Miss Selina Lue to love was to minister and she never dreamt that she vocally strong Clementine, and little-practiced philanthropic measure.

"Miss Selina Lue, you are a wonder! How do you ever manage with them all the time?" ventured Cynthia as she stood by dishevelled and panting. Her cheeks were shell-pink and warm, little gold curls clung to her damp forehead. Her violet eyes were wide with admiration at Miss Selina Lue's generalship, but were given a desperate cast by a huge smudge on the side of her nose which had by accident tried conclusions with that of the vocally strong Clementine. Her hat had been pulled to a rakish

she rolled up her sleeves and cleared the deck for action by drawing the boxes into a close semi-circle around a three-legged milking-stool, "you can see how good I've got 'em trained, the darlings. I can put up this bowl of oatmeal outen that as spills outen the packages what bust and I pou on a good dose of Charity's new milk, which is that of real human kindness, if she is just a spotted cow."

As she talked she seated herself on the stool and dipped out a spoonful of the sticky porridge dripping with milk. Instantly five tiny, pink, toothless or partly toothless mouths popped open and five bobbing heads became rigid and five roly-poly necks craned. The moment of suspense was over. Presto! the spoon descended into the mouth of Blossom, the explorer. Her ecstatic gurgle had four anticipatory echoes. Again the pink caverns yawned and again the poised spoon descended, this time into the rosy tips of Clementine, who swallowed her portion with the remnant of her last sob. The echoes gurgled again and represented open mouths at attention.

"Seems like," said Miss Selina Lue, "they all swallow one-another's dinner outen it all. If grown-ups would just chaw one another's good luck they could git a heap of satisfaction from it, I say. Now, ain't they good, and just as patient, a-waiting their own turn?"

"Indeed they are just a cunning nest of baby birds, Miss Selina Lue, and you are the mother bird with the worms, the nicest sort of worms," said Miss Cynthia, hesitating, trying to give coherence to a thought Miss Selina Lue had heard voiced before,—"if you were being mother bird to your own you couldn't."

"Miss Cynthia, honey," said Miss Selina Lue as she scraped the last drop of milk into the spoon and skillfully administered it to the nodding head of Flairty, the brother of Carrots, "I think the good Lord intended that a mother should come into this world with every child, but sometimes she don't git lorned when it does; and sometimes—sometimes the mother is borned afore the child ain't there. The mother job is one that ain't cut out to suit everybody and then it fits have got a duty laid on 'em strong, even if it is jest being a kind soul mother. Don't let Glennie fall and cut her head on the edge of her box! She is nodding so and I have to ease down both the Flairties, who are plumb gone. Thanky, child, they are all safe now and I can git to work. Seems like my heart is at rest when I've got 'em asleep in the soap-boxes. I sometimes wonder if the Lord don't feel the same way about us grown-ups when he sends the night down to deliver us up in our beds. But then when He's got us all safe asleep the folks over in Chiny wakes up and begins their deviltries, so I reckon the Bible is true when it says He neither slumbers or sleeps."

### CHAPTER II.

#### THE NEW SOAP-BOXES.

"Vanity in a man is like a turkey-gobbler a-strutting in November."

—Miss Selina Lue.

"Miss Cynthia, honey, it's a good thing you come down here every morning the first thing. When you are in town on one of them week-end affairs with Miss Evelyn sweet as she is, I don't rest to calm as I might. Seems like, so to speak, I am a little bump turn over your soap-boxes, bump your head or swallow a fly or something, if you are outen my sight."

"You mean you are sure I will have the stroke of mind to refrain from taking in the camel, but are uneasy about seeing the gnat in time, Miss Selina Lue," said Miss Cynthia, as she stood smiling before the grocery door where Miss Selina Lue sat, bus-

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