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A Vacation Prodigal.

(The Rev. Joseph Kennard Wilson, D.D., in the 'Christian Endeavor World'.)

The Sabbath day dawned fair and bright, one of those glorious June days that somehow slip out of their proper place and get entangled in the warmer weather of late July. Rhoda Ormond sprang out of bed at her first awakening with a sense upon her of something new and strange. What was it?

O, she remembered. This was one of her vacation Sabbaths. There was to be for her no church, no Sunday school, no tiresome Junior meeting, no trudging up the hill after the evening service to leave the Endeavorers' flowers at the hospital, no work or service of any kind—simply a day of positive, uninterrupted enjoyment. O, it should be a Sabbath to be long remembered, a day to look back upon and to think of when it was past.

'The groves were God's first temples,' she quoted, looking up the mountain-side to where the giant pines stood in their majesty like columns in a temple fashioned by the great Architect. She would worship among them to-day; she would take her Bible directly after breakfast, and go away alone, and join in the chorus of adoration rising about the Throne from all created things. She could hardly wait to dress. Her fingers trembled with excitement so that she could hardly button her garments.

'You silly child!' she laughed at her reflection in the mirror. 'You act as though you never went anywhere before, or ever had anything pleasant happen to you. Well, you never had anything like what this day is going to be, my dear. And to think of it! One, two, three, four, five, more just like it—if it doesn't rain, of course, on any of them; six Sundays in all to do just what you please in, without any thought of what you must do or ought to do! O, it's great to be a prodigal!' And she smiled over the last word, remembering her talk with her pastor. 'I shall tell Dadda Black when I go home that the "far country" is not so bad a place, after all, and that "husks" are delicious. But now for my morning verse.'

'We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself.'

Slowly and reverently she read those beautiful words in the epistle to the Romans. Was it that tricky, irresponsible thing that some people call 'chance' that decreed that they should lie in the course of that morning's readings.

'Even Christ pleased not himself.' A pencilled note opposite the verse recalled a sermon by her pastor on the words, and set her musing upon it as she brushed her hair before the mirror.

'Even Christ pleased not—' The brush stopped its work suddenly, though the arm still upraised. Out of the fair young face went all its bright joyousness, to be succeeded by a frown of disappointment and displeasure, just as on a summer's morning you have

seen the blue sky all at once hidden behind gray and dreary rainclouds.

'Pshaw!' she muttered, slowly resuming her task. 'It doesn't mean that at all. I'm not going to let it mean that! I'm going to have this day all to myself, so there! And I don't know what I wanted to think about that horrid old minister for, anyhow, it's just too bad!'

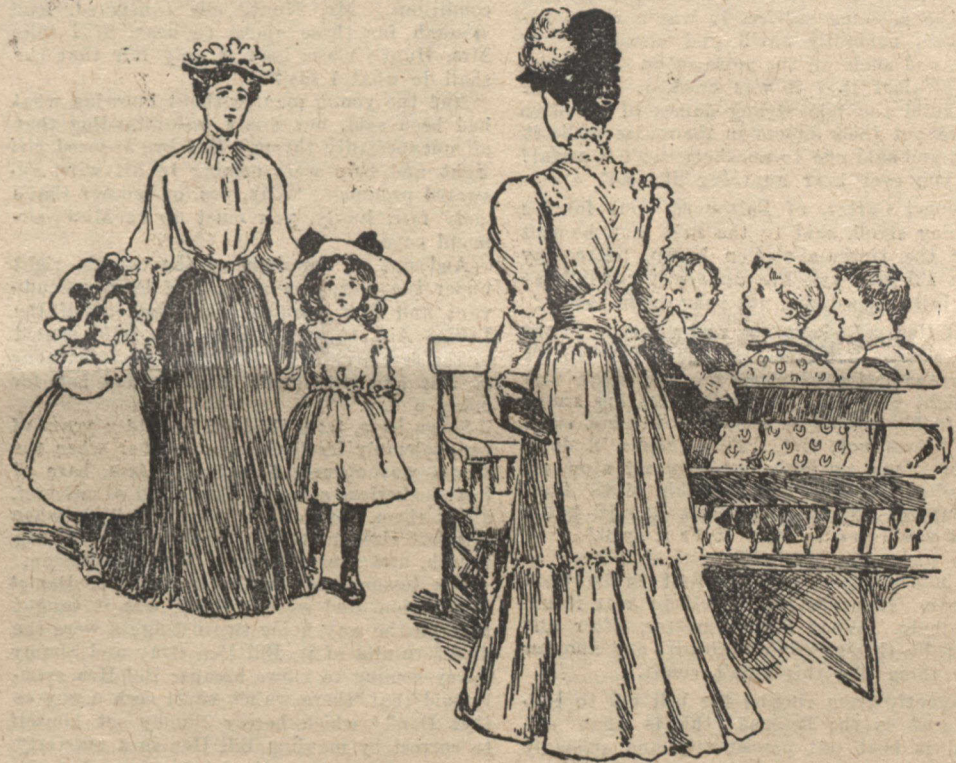
But somehow, try as she might, Rhoda couldn't bring back the joyous light-heartedness of the earliest waking moments, and it was with something of the cloud still upon her face that she answered the breakfast bell, and went to the dining-room.

Bert Langley from his table near the door watched her curiously. She responded coldly to his greeting in passing, but beyond that

her way to the Great Pines. Foxy Rhoda! She had peered over the balustrades, seen him mounted guard below, divined his intentions, and by roundabout paths had sought her destination.

'No, you don't!' she said decidedly. 'This is Sunday, and it isn't going to be spent in idle talk like other days. I guess one can remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, even if one doesn't go to church.'

And so at last she came to the place which she had had in her mind, a beautiful bit of green sward at the edge of a stretch of woods, known as the 'Great Pines,' and, spreading her shawl on the ground, sank down upon it with a long-drawn sigh of contentment and delight. To the right, out of sight behind intervening rocks, was the hotel with all its



THE MINISTER'S WIFE CAME IN, BRINGING HER TWO LITTLE CHILDREN WITH HER.

gave no sign of seeing him or of being conscious of his presence.

'Now, do you suppose,' he communed with himself under his breath, 'that she's laying up that silly remark of mine last night against me? Thought she had more sense! And she has, too! She isn't worrying over me or what I said; what does she care for that? It's something more important that's giving my lady that down-in-the-mouth look, and I bet I know what it is; it's her conscience squirming on account of that bloomin' Sunday school class, and its dollars to doughnuts that the class wins out, too, and that little Mrs. Minister gets a rest to-day. Just keep your eyes open, Bert, my boy, and see what you'll see!'

But the first sight that came to those wide-open eyes was not particularly pleasing. After lounging about the office and piazzas for half an hour, hoping to intercept Miss Rhoda when she came downstairs, and make his peace with her, and so secure permission to accompany her on her morning walk, he was rewarded by a fleeting glimpse of her blue shawl as she disappeared around the rocks on

frivolities and worldly reminders. Before her the earth sloped suddenly, almost precipitously, away; and she looked out over the village just at her feet, on across the valleys and intervals to where the high hills shouldered up the sky again. 'Beautiful for situation!' she murmured ecstatically. 'O, David, if you could say that about Jerusalem with its tiny hills, I wonder what you would say if you could see this place.'

Long she gazed with eyes that, seeing everything in general, saw nothing in particular. Her Bible lay unopened in her lap. It was the earlier and the larger volume of the Father's revelation that she was reading. But presently there came a vague consciousness of something not quite right, of 'a rift within the lute,' of a discord in the music, of a blur upon the picture. What was it? A puzzled frown stole over her face.

All at once she knew. It was that ugly little white meeting-house in the foreground, with its absurd toothpick-like steeple thrusting itself straight up toward the high-sailing clouds above it. It was not that it was ac-