

Our Farm Homes

THANK GOD every morning when you get up that you have something to do that day, which must be done whether you like it or not. Being forced to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you a hundred virtues which the idle never know.—Charles Kingsley.

The Trial of Rodney

"I FORGOT," Rachel Seymour drearily repeated the stereotyped little excuse and patiently sighed. Patience was the keystone of the bridge that connected her with the boy who forgot. She was always patient—and the boy always forgot. He stood gazing down at his stubbed little shoes.

Six short months ago Rodney had forgotten with perfect impunity, but since the unlooked-for advent of this clear-eyed woman-person it had been regarded in the light of a sin to forget. He had learned the simple tenets of the new code by heart: To forget to obey was disobedience—those two led the little processional of sins. Rodney had committed them all—unrestrained before, with a certain innocence of sinning; guilty-slowly now because he knew. The patient woman had told him. Her clear eyes were on him now; he could feel them, though he would not look.

"It is the third time to-day," she said slowly. She need not have said it, since he knew already—and three times yesterday and two the day before. Mechanically he reckoned three plus three plus two. Rodney was good at adding things. Eight was considerably many, he realized, suddenly ashamed.

Rachel Seymour opened a door and motioned gravely. Without a word the boy went in. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before in his seven years of experience.

The shame swelling within his little breast was for this now rather than for his eight sins, but he made no resistance at all. He scorned to resist a little, clear-eyed woman-person.

"I've explained so often," he wearily; "now stay here alone and try to remember what I've said—right here alone with your poor little sins. You are to stay until I come and open the door." She went away, but came back: "Your father would approve of what I am doing," she said gently and went away again.

It was dark in the closet and the sins crowded. Rodney was not afraid of the dark, but he was afraid of the Sins. In here all together, like this—he had never been shut up with them all before. Singly and with plenty of room and light no one of them had ever dismayed him.

The Head Sin—now sin of forgetting—seemed to come and sit astride his shoulder and whisper many hissy, prickly things in his ear.

"She told you not to, an' you went an' did!" the Head Sin chanted.

"I forgot!"—Rodney hurried, then stopped. The Head Sin laughed. "That's where I came in," he said, "I always come in."

"I hate you! Get off o' my shoulder!"

"No." Rodney was a little surprised when he heard himself say it. It seemed queer to be saying it here, and, anyway, he had supposed that he did hate Her. But he found himself going on:

"No, I don't hate Her. I only don't love Her. There's a difference between hating an' don't-loving."

"She hates you."

Here was real trouble. From the depths of a rather sore little heart Rodney hesitated to confide in a Sin, even a Head One. She hated him, but he did not want any one else to find it out. He was sure She would never tell any one. They had known each other now for nearly a year. Father had married her so she would bring him up—every one had said so, and she was doing it now, this minute. Rodney appreciated her gentle thoroughness. She had to do it, of course, but it did not make him love Her nor Her love him. Probably just bringing up never did; it was to Rodney's mind rather a dreary, unloving process. Probably She did not like it any better than he did. It would be so much easier for both of them if she would stop bringing him up.

"Morry Pennefather's mother brings him up." It seemed to be the Head Sin who said it, as if he had been listening to Rodney's thoughts.

"She's an own-er," flashed back Rodney. It made so much difference. Owners could do things you didn't like an' you like 'em. Morry's mother was small and gentle like her, but she loved Morry and Morry loved her—it made a difference.

"You're sighing," accused the Sin. "You're breathing—I can breathe, can't I?"

"Morry Pennefather doesn't breathe. He laughs." In here in the dark things kept coming to Rodney. There was really nothing to do but think of things. The new one he thought of now filled him with a strange feeling like being hungry and not expecting anything to eat. It was a secret between Rodney and himself that he wanted to love Her and wanted Her to love him. That was the difference between him and Her, for of course she didn't. Only owners probably did.

She might open closet doors then and say, "Go in." She might tell him how bad forgetting was—She might bring him up then and welcome. Probably Morry Pennefather would be brought up. When his mother opened closet doors—perhaps then there weren't any closet doors! Rachel Seymour went about her

work with a troubled face. This thing that she had done was a very disturbing thing—she had never shut a little child in a closet before. She wished he would kick and beat upon the door with angry fists—would call out angry things. The utter silence almost alarmed and wholly distressed her.

"But he forgot again. His father would say I did right. He can't keep on disobeying," she reasoned; but it did not comfort her. She sat down to the piano and played loud music to drown that little, utter silence upstairs.

Her own boy, if she had one would kick and beat and scream. She smiled a little to herself at the thought. He would be a little forgetter, too, but he would not be self-contained and silent like this little boy that forgot and was not hers. He would not look up at her with that haunting, disturbing look that said things could not understand. Her own little boy she would love, down even to his little sins.

"I want to love Rodney," she said aloud and drowned it in a crash of chords. She had always wanted to. How did people go about loving silent little boys who had to be brought up?



The Boy Went In

Why, when people knotted little ties and brushed little coats, did it not come then? Rachel Seymour would have given much to have felt glorious impulses to kiss the neck and ears and eyes of the child upstairs—the rough hair and the hollow of the little white throat. But, being honest and never having been impelled, she had never kissed. His father would have liked her to—would Rodney?

"He hates me," she thought sadly. "But he needs, I think that I hate him. It's only that I have to punish him and can't love him." As if that were not bad enough!

He must stay a long while. She must do her duty. There was always that she could do. Meanwhile, to get away from the disturbing silence, she put on her hat and coat and went out to a neighbor's house to see a new baby. It was so near she would be gone only about the right time, and when she came back she would release Rodney.

It was a tiny boy-person and they put him into her arms. The puckered little face was a rosy spot among the flannels, and she gazed down at it in a tremor of delight.

That anything could be so small! That it could belong to any one—be flesh of flesh and blood of blood! She did not know Rodney's word, but she knew that the fragment of life in her arms was an owner's. A little sigh escaped her and floated down to stir a wisp of soft hair on the baby's forehead. To ward off sobbing she laughed.

"You'll have to put him in the closet sometime!" she said, and added: "But you'll kiss him all over when he comes out."

Do you think I'll ever punish the little beloved? The new mother protested. "Never! But I'll do the kissing all over!" She reached a languid hand toward the tiny creature in Rachel Seymour's arms. Another caller crossed the room and peered down into the rosy dot of face and prodded the soft flannels. There was about the new admirer a certain definite air of accustomedness that stamped her a mother of rosy dots.

"Isn't he a darling? Where's our little hannie, baby? I always want to get my finger into a baby's hand, and get it squeezed! It's the loveliest feeling isn't it? Mrs. Seymour? Perhaps you'd think the mother of four little screwers would get used to it!" She stopped suddenly and held up her hand. Her vivacious face expressed dawning panic. A fire alarm was hanging out its dire stare.

"One, two, three—one, two, three, four," she counted with a terrible fascination. The panic burst, full-fledged, into her face. "Thirty-four! That's our district. I know our house is on fire and my blessed babies are burning up! I must run—oh, why did I leave them with that terrible, red-headed maid!"

No one thought to smile at the time-worn imputation. The young mother's alarm was too genuine; she was white-faced with it. Rachel Seymour laid the new baby gently down and went to her. "I'll go with you," she said soothingly. All thought of her reason for getting back soon to her own home was swallowed up in this little wave of borrowed excitement. Once out of mind, it took its time to come back to her.

There was no fire, no burned babies. After her exertion to keep up with the impetuous young mother, Rachel Seymour was persuaded to stop and rest a little. Then, finding herself so near the shops, she concluded to go on and do a few neglected errands. The few multiplied. She discovered, besides, that several milliners were having openings, and what normal woman with no apparent reason why she should not stop and feast her eyes on the lovely creations of lace and roses, ribbons and feathers—what woman ever went by? Rachel Seymour was fond of dainty things. She lingered among them joyfully while the afternoon hours drifted by.

(Concluded next week.)

Enjoys her Blessings

I am a busy farmer's wife, but not too busy to enjoy the many pleasures we have about us, books and magazines, included. I will send you several recipes used at our Institute as soon as I get time to write them out properly. Below is a list of the papers we have in our house. Farmers' Advocate, Ladies' Home Journal, New Idea, Mother's Magazine, Toronto Globe, Hamilton Daily Herald, Dundas Banner, The Canadian Dairyman and Farming World, besides several smaller church papers. Mrs. G. L. B. Wentworth Co. Ont.

Try this for one day.—Think as though your thoughts were visible to all about you.