

## \* \* The Story Page. \* \*

### Me 'n' Dan.

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By being not unmindful to receive strangers courteously, some have entertained angels unawares; likewise missionaries. We did at the branch school of the First Church when we gave greeting one day to "Me 'n' Dan," Mrs. Seymour's latest "finds" in the East End. It is perhaps not amazing that we did not at first recognize their ambassadorial character, or suspect the nature of their destined work among us; for a more unlikely pair of missionaries, so far as appearances went, it would be difficult to find in a long search. Two ragged, dirty, bare-footed boys, about twelve or thirteen years of age, in no especial respect different from scores of street gamins to be found on every hand—that was all that we saw. One was tall for his years, with black hair, and eyes that looked into your own without wavering; that was Rag, or "Rag" Dixon. "Reginald, I suppose," said the teacher, preparing to enter it thus upon her book. "Reginald nawthin!" scornfully replied its owner. "Just chalk it down Rag; that's wot it is." And that's what it is on the roll of the school to this day. The other member of the combination was short, squat, freckled of face, and snubby of nose—just the lad to fit his name, Dan Dally. His chief characteristic was an implicit confidence in, and an enthusiastic loyalty to, his chief, Rag. What Rag said "went" with Dan. On his part, Rag accepted the homage with a hauteur of the prince of the blood, who knew what was due to him. He always spoke of himself and his companion as "Me 'n' Dan;" and so frequently was the term used that it came to be, at least within a limited circle of the officers and teachers of the school, more usual to designate the two thus than to call them by their individual names.

Mrs. Mason, to whose class they were assigned, was one of the most attractive and capable teachers in the school; also one of the most unreliable. The two things are not incompatible. Files get into the ointment, sometimes; and they who by reason of ability and attainments are the superintendent's or pastor's most efficient helpers are not infrequently his chief perplexity also. Mrs. Mason seemed to lack a sense of responsibility for her class and her work. She was in her place or not, just as it happened; and it happened quite often, and for the most trivial pretexts, that she was not. Mr. Magruder thought of all this when he gave the boys into her care, and hesitated; but there seemed no other class so suitable for them, so he concluded to "risk it." Who could have foreseen that these unpromising specimens of humanity were charged with a mission of importance to this charming but vexatious teacher?

It chanced that the third Sunday after their entrance upon school life was excessively warm; one of those Sundays when clothes are a burden, and church-going a sign and proof of supreme sainthood. The boys were on hand in the depleted school, with two or three others of the class, but with no teacher. The opening exercises over, Rag marched up to the superintendent's desk and demanded, "Where's Mrs. Mason?" much in the tone of one that supposed that Mr. Magruder had abducted her, and was holding her for ransom.

"I don't know," replied that gentleman; "Isn't she here? I expected her." (Ah, but did you now, Mr. Magruder?)

"Is she sick?"

"Oh, I guess not; probably she thought it was too warm to come."

"Well, me 'n' Dan's goin' to find out. Come on, Dan;" and out of the room he flung, followed by his faithful henchman.

Mrs. Mason was half dozing in cool attire in the hammock on her shady piazza; when the click of the gate caused her to open her eyes. There were her two "wild Arabs," as she had playfully called them.

"Why, boys, how do you do? I'm glad to see you. Come right up on the piazza," she said, cordially, rising to greet them.

But Rag's eyes held her with cool, uncompromising gaze, and neither he nor Dan gave any sign of hearing her invitation.

"Why wasn't you at Sunday School?" demanded Rag.

"O," she answered, confused, she knew not why, by the simple question, so simply asked, "it was so hot, and it is such a long walk down to the school,—"

"Sick?" was the next query.

"No."

"Any of your folks sick?"

"No."

"And so you didn't come just because it was hot! Huh! Come on, Dan!"

And without another word the self-constituted deputations filed out of the yard and down the sultry street.

"Fine mannered young gentlemen, those; I congratulate you on them," laughed Mr. Mason, from behind the vines.

But, try as she might, Mrs. Mason couldn't make it a laughing matter. In the first place, she was really

touched by the fact that any of her boys cared enough to come and inquire why she was absent. That had never before occurred in her experience as a teacher. Then she couldn't put from her mind Rag's scornful "Huh!" It haunted her; it said many things to her; it suggested some pretty pointed questions. The following Wednesday night it was raining, and she concluded that she would not go to prayer meeting. But she heard Rag's "Huh!"—and went. The next Sunday was the hottest of the season. Ordinarily, Mrs. Mason wouldn't have thought of going to church or Sunday school; but today she was in her place, and Mr. Magruder almost gasped in astonishment. But "Me 'n' Dan" were not there. Nor the next Sunday. Then Mrs. Mason hunted them up and made her peace with them. How she did it I don't know. But from that time on there was no teacher in all the school more regular and punctual in attendance than Mrs. Mason. Good Mr. Magruder rejoiced in the change, but he will be very much surprised if he ever chances to read this story to find by what agency it was brought to pass.

It was not long after this that the boys entered upon a second stage of their missionary work. The lesson was one that had to do with the sufferings of Jesus for the sins of men. Very tenderly and sympathetically Mrs. Mason told of his patience under persecutions, and his quiet yielding of himself to the power of his enemies who were plotting to kill him.

"Don't believe it!" came suddenly from Rag.

The class was shocked into immediate and absorbed attention. They were all boys of more or less religious training, and the story was old and well known to them. They had never pretended to question it. A delicious thrill of excitement ran through their veins to find among them not merely doubters, but actual unbelievers, infidels. Mrs. Mason was grieved, as well as shocked. Until that moment she had not comprehended the depth of spiritual destitution and ignorance in which these two young lives were sunk.

"I think that you could hardly have understood me," she said gently. "Let me tell the story again; perhaps I can make it plainer."

And very slowly and carefully she told it over once more—the matchless story of divine love and compassion, the matchless story of divine service and self-sacrifice.

But there came no sign of assent into the eyes that looked steadily into her own; and when she was done there was the same defiant challenge in the voice that answered her:

"Now look-a-here! Me 'n' Dan don't believe no such thing as that. It's a fake, that's wot it is. 'Tain't accordin' to reason for anybody to act that way. You go down on Fourth street, and you hit a feller over the head, and he'll give you one back, he will for sure, if he's big enough. But you say this Man you're talkin' about could do anything he wanted to; and yet he let them galoots around him get him in a corner, and do him up! Well, I guess not!" and the worldly-wise young cynic smiled a knowing smile—the smile of one who isn't taken in by children's stories; while his pal nodded his head in acquiescence, and echoed, "Not much!"

That day marked an era in the experience of both class and teacher. It was given to Mrs. Mason to see with clear vision the opportunity and responsibility which were hers, and nobly her whole being responded to both. She realized now that she was dealing with those who were utterly ignorant of the most elementary truths of the Christian faith and story—those things that can usually be taken for granted; and that she must put these into the simplest possible settings, if they were to win acceptance in these darkened minds. And that drove her back to the study of the story for herself again. The challenging question, "How do you know?" sprang out at her from many unsuspecting lurking places, and forced her to prove her reasoning, and to verify her conclusions before she ventured to place them before her boys. And all this was to her own spiritual profit and blessing. It was a case of teacher taught. Poor ignorant Rag and Dan were all unwittingly the instructors in that school in which this cultured woman was finding a truer knowledge of and a deeper experience in the things of God. Gradually the class work felt and manifested the changed life in her, the teaching grew in vitality and power, more thoughtful grew the scholars, less confident became the voices of doubt and denial, until one blessed day—Mrs. Mason will never forget it as long as she lives—Rag said, looking her steadily in the eye:

"Is this all straight, teacher? Are you sure that you ain't givin' us no bluff?"

And looking him as steadily in the face she answered, in his own dialect:

"Yes, Rag, I'm sure. It's no bluff, it's straight."

For a moment the boy sat in thoughtful silence. Then he said:

"Wot'd you think of it, Dan?"

And for once little Dan spoke out for himself, without waiting for his cue from his leader:

"I tell you, Rag, it's straight goods, just as she says. She's never went back on us yet, an' you bet she ain't going back on us now. I believe it."

And Rag said slowly, with the look of one who sees the dawning of light:

"Yes, I guess it must be straight. But, say, if he done all that for a fellow, how a fellow ought to love him!"

And the woman who had helped him, and who he had no less helped, placed her hand on his, and said through her falling tears:

"Yes, Rag; and O, I do so want you to love him!"

And, still thoughtfully, the lad replied:

"I don't see how I'm goin' to help it."

The loyal Dan echoed, "Neither do I."—The Class-mate.

### Mary Ann and Marian.

Mary Ann and Marian are two little girls, just the same age, but oh, so different in every other way.

I will tell you about Mary Ann first, because I admire her so greatly, she is the twelve-year-old daughter of my washerwoman, and as her mother takes in fine washing and ironing and has six children, Mary Ann has a great deal to do when out of school, helping her mother about the house and tending to the babies.

I was in Mrs. O'Brien's house one afternoon to get a shirtwaist that I needed before the clothes would come home and, while waiting for it to be ironed, I sat watching Mary Ann, who, singing cheerily, was "doing up" the dinner dishes and keeping one eye upon the two-year-old Terrence playing in the little back yard.

"Do you always feel so happy while at work?" I asked her.

"Wabash, far-r-away," Mary Ann stopped at the end of the line and setting the frying-pan to "dry off" on the back of the stove said:

"No, mum, not always, but I tries to be, it helps the work along, that's what mother says."

She now put her pans, pots and tins away, put a little pearline in her dishpan, poured hot water over it and singing, "Oh, the moon is fair tonight along the Wabash," beat it to a foam with the dish-mop, keeping perfect time.

"But what makes you wipe off the stove and do the pots and pans first?" I asked during the next pause.

Mary Ann's mouth, a generous one, broadened into a rich smile, "Because, mem, I hate to do 'em so bad."

"That's just the reason some folks do the last, Mary Ann."

"Yes, mem, I useter, but since I begun to do 'em first the dishes don't seem half so—" here she dropped her dish-mop and ran out the back door to pick up little Terrence who had come to grief, she kissed the bump and started him playing in the sand with a shovel and a pail, "as I was sayin', mem, I like ter do the glass and plates, knives and forks, so when I get down to them, mem, it's sorter play like, with the horrid part all gone."

She polished the tumbler until it glistened, set it down very carefully and continued: "It must be fine to eat off'n real chiny and have real solid silver knives and forks and spoons for every day, but mother says it ain't always the rich folks that's the happiest, that's what mother says."

Mrs. O'Brien now came into the kitchen with the shirtwaist neatly tied up. "She a good gurrel, mem, shure I couldn't kepe house without her, mem," she said as she opened the gate for me to pass through.

A good girl that she is and all unknown to herself a young philosopher, having learned three important truths, that a cheerful heart lightens labor, that a disagreeable duty should be done and out of the way as soon as possible, that what "mother says" counts; following these Mary Ann O'Brien will make a grand woman one of these days, if she is only the daughter of a washerwoman and the daughter of a hodcarrier.

Now let me tell you of Marian; she has so little to do, to wipe, not wash and wipe the breakfast and supper dishes and put them in their places, to make up her own pretty brass bed and mend her one pair of stockings each week; besides this, she is expected to practice one hour a day and once in a great while when mamma is very much rushed with her work to take baby sister out in her go-cart. She thinks herself dreadfully abused, would you believe it? She thinks dishes are drudgery scales "just horrid," and as for taking sister to ride, all the sister she has, she just pouts and pouts and "don't like kids anyway."

I can imagine Mary Ann's pride if the O'Brien's had such a pretty baby carriage for Terrence and the other baby; the only way Terrence gets a ride is by trudging along beside the squeaky little express wagon, and after it has discharged its burdens of washings, Mary Ann puts him in the now empty cart and wheels him home! and a piano!—it would seem like heaven itself if a piano