

Choice Literature.

DEACON JONES' GRIEVANCE.

You'll excuse me, Mr. Parson,
If I seem a little sore,
But I've sung the songs of Isr'el
Fur threescore years and more,
An it sort o' hurts my feelin's
Fur to see 'em put away,
Fur these harum scarum ditties
'At is captarin' the day.

There's anuther little happ'nin'
'At I'll mention while I'm here,
Just to show 'at my objections
All is offered sound and clear.
It was one day they was singing,
An was doin well enough—
Singin good as people could sing
Sich an awful mess o' stuff—

When the choir give a holler,
An the organ give a groan,
An they left one weak-voiced feller
A-singin there alone!
But he stuck right to the music,
Though 'twas trying as could be,
An when I tried to help him,
Why, the hull church scowled at me.

You say that's so-low singin,
Well, I praise the Lord that I
Grewed up when folks were willin
To sing their hymns so-high.
Oh, we never had such doin's
In the good ol' Bethel days,
When the folks was all contented,
With the simple songs o' praise.

Now, I may have spoke too open,
But 'twas too hard to keep still,
An I hope you'll tell the singers
'At I bear 'em no ill will,
'At they all may git to glory,
Is my wish an my desire,
But they'll need some extra trainin
'Fore they join the heavenly choir.

—Paul Dunbar.

A QUESTION OF COURAGE.

BY MARGARET SEYMOUR HALL.

The splendour of an African sunset was flooding the dreary Egyptian landscape, and turning to gold the famous old river as the Reverend Elisha Courtney sat at the door of his little house, and watched the long flight of the ibis slowly sailing westward. The tall reeds rustled and bowed towards the west, and his thoughts went wandering likewise beyond the desert hills far over thousands of miles of sand and rolling ocean, back to the elm-bordered streets and white houses of home. The restless shadoof had ceased lifting its buckets, the saki-wheel was resting from the treadmill of the buffalo. Near by, the Arab boatmen sang as they cast the anchors of the white dahbeahs, and the long, wailing notes mingled strangely with his dreamy musings.

The Reverend Elisha Courtney was a missionary to Africa, which fact might not, in itself, have seemed strange, save for the many and excellent reasons why he should have been something entirely different. There was a snug berth prepared for him in the large manufactory of his wealthy and childless Uncle Josiah Webb, and the said uncle had clearly intimated an idea of his adoption as son and heir. Sad and sore, indeed, was the heart of Uncle Josiah upon the subject of Africa, and of Foreign Missions in general, and bitter was the disappointment with which he changed his choice to another nephew, a plain lad, not over quick, but with no inconvenient, unpractical views about the wrongness of the world, and his own duties in the matter, such as had come between Elisha and his earthly futures.

In his native village there were various opinions on the subject. There were those who regarded him in the light of a hero, and felt that, in giving up all for an ideal, he had attained a height of nobility which enlarged their own lower horizons; on the other hand, there were those who looked upon him as a bora fool. Unfortunately, his uncle belonged to this latter class. From boyhood there had been something dreamy and unworldly about him. He was one of those rare souls, to whom the path of self-sacrifice seems also the plainest—one who was content to give much and receive little. His plan of going out to help in the work of converting the heathen, had come to him in the light

of an inspiration. There was the preliminary training at the seminary, where he worked during vacations as farm hand, and so defrayed the modest expenses of his education; then a time of probation; finally, an autumn Sunday, the white meeting-house, packed to suffocation, while they sang "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," and "Go forth, ye Heralds," and the young candidates felt their hearts swell to bursting with religious fervor. That day often came back to Elisha, particularly during his early years, when, indeed, he stood sorely in need of help and inspiration.

His first charge was at Mansurah, in the Delta, where he imbibed a large stock of chills, together with a working knowledge of the Arabic tongue. He then served a term with the wild tribes of the Beni Hassen, and was from them transferred to one of the little towns on the Nile, where the houses were all built of black mud, and where the mercury frequently stood at a hundred and thirty in the shade. The inhabitants had three sources of revenue; the small strip of arable land along the river, the groves of date and doum palms, and, last, and beyond all comparison, richest, the Frank, in which term the native includes the whole vast horde of European tourists who yearly overrun his country—bold, unveiled women, and the men with strange backsheesh-giving propensities.

The Reverend Elisha toiled on, patiently and ceaselessly, trying to instil into the minds of his neighbours, some primary ideas of honesty and decency. Like Daniel, at the idolatrous court, he held the high standard of a pure life amid the low surroundings, and even to those darkened lives, brought glimpses of better things. And—for all true work done for a high purpose carries self-sustaining power—there were moments of uplifted joy that were like glances into another world. Perhaps, after all, he had not done so badly for himself when he gave up the button factory.

Theological argument he did not attempt, but he opened a school, in which he taught day after day, to overflowing classes. "Let the children go, let them go," said the old sheikhs, the dervishes, the fakirs, all whose opinion carried weight; "shall they not learn the English tongue that brings gold? And the foolish dog of an infidel takes no backsheesh for his labour." And, at the dangers of conversion, they only laughed, for what Mahometau could ever be shaken from the lovely tenets of the Spider and the Ass? Accordingly, Achmet, Mustafa, little Fatmeh, Zanouba, and the rest came for this strange new teaching, from which not even girls were excluded. Fellaheen from the borderland, Beshareen from between the Cataracts, Bedawin from the black tents in the desert, all were welcome, and the teacher soon grew to love the brown, soft-voiced creatures.

This was during summer. With the first of November came steamers and dahbeahs, and the school emptied with startling promptness. Achmet and Mustafa were needed to drive the donkeys, while Zanouba and Fatmeh must run beside with water-jugs. All their spare moments were claimed by the native school, held in the ruins of a temple, where they sat in a ring and learned to recite the Qu'ran, in a high, sing-song, and all together.

It was rather lonely and dreary in the little mission. Visitors, generally clerical, looked in from time to time, and once in a while some one thought to ask the minister to dinner.

One of the gayest of the parties had come up aboard the Amenartas. They had been carefully selected with a view to congeniality, and with a distinctly avowed purpose of avoiding the blighting influence of the famous "dahbeah devil," that noxious fiend who breaks up friendships, and sets by the ears those who rashly travel upon the Nile together without due forethought. There were Colonel and Mrs. Genet from New York, the original founders, and their niece, Miss Elinor Wright, the beauty; there were

the Pelham-Bronsons from Boston, renowned far and wide as charming companions; there were two young fellows lately graduated from Harvard, and a clever Oxford man of thirty.

It was by the merest whim that some one suggested the mission. They had been for a donkey-ride, and were feeling a trifle languid over afternoon tea, and the idea of a visit was received with favour. "We are all going to sleep," said Jim Williams, one of the Harvard men; "perhaps the sight of the little duffers imbibing the alphabet will rouse us a bit."

"They are great humbugs, these missionaries, you know," added the Oxford man; "I have seen them in Turkey, and know all about them; they come around in winter when there are visitors about, and travel off in summer. And it's such folly. There has never been known a case of a genuine Mohammedan conversion."

"I should not think from the looks of things, that the present incumbent could afford to do much in the travelling line," answered Miss Wright, to whom his speech was, as usual, addressed. "It can't be exactly from a mad thirst for pleasure that he stays here now. Isn't it a little hard for us to criticise so carelessly, when we know so little of his work or life?"

The Englishman looked at her, disagreeing but admiring. It was another instance of her instinct in favour of a good word for all. And what an extraordinary thing was the clear way in which these American women formed opinions of their own and advanced them even in the face of masculine opposition.

So it was the passing fancy, the thought of a moment to them; but to the weary, lonely missionary this sudden inroad was like a glimpse of the ideal glory that tinges the memory of a happy past. Only one who has endured the desolation of a life in a barren, uncivilized land, can appreciate the joy of the exile at the sight of those from home. "My own people," he thought with a quick throb of joy and pride, as he came forward to welcome them. There was little to be seen, but he showed it with simplicity, and then explained the deserted look of the place. "My classes are generally full," he said, "but the season has opened, and they are busy making money."

"I should think you would be glad of the rest after such hard work," said Mrs. Genet, gracefully. "It must be refreshing to have time to yourself for a while."

He looked at her with a smile. "Time is not of much value in Egypt. We have to part with a good many of our Western ideas when we come out here. I teach them when I get them, and I am glad to have them. It is not like a New England school, perhaps, but it is interesting in a different way. The girls are as gentle as one could wish, and they are an industrious race, and far from dull. Of course there are certain things which it is impossible to hope they will ever learn."

Mrs. Genet looked around the bare room. "I hope you will give us the pleasure of your company to dinner to-night," she said with a sudden impulse. "We leave to-morrow morning, but we should be glad to have you tell us more about your life here, if you are willing."

But, on returning to the dahbeah, they found that their plan of leaving at sunrise had been frustrated. In some unexplained manner, the Arabs had contrived to run the boat on a mud-flat and to shatter the steering-gear. It was very provoking, as there was an utter absence of remorse or sense of responsibility about the boatmen, who, their heads prostrated to the east, were improving the opportunity to do up their daily orisons all at once.

"I never saw anything like it," said Mrs. Genet, plaintively. "They take matters so calmly, and only say, 'As God wills,' when I try to find out how long we are likely to stay here."

However, as there was no help for it, they made the best of the situation, and,

with many jokes, departed to their state-rooms to dress. Neither the costumes nor the dinner were especially elaborate, but when one has become used to meals consisting of one course, served in a large earthen pot into which everyone dips in common, meals where one blue cotton garment is full dress, then the garb and appurtenances of civilization present themselves in a new and dazzling light. The table itself, with its adornments of blue lilies and the yellow blossoms of the lufa, was beautiful to their guest. And a more critical one than he might have been satisfied with the proximity of Elinor Wright.

She was dressed for coolness, in white, with short sleeves, and slightly open at the neck. There was an embroidered belt clasped about her waist with a fastening of tiger's claws. Some long gold pins were stuck through the coil of her dark hair. Nothing could have been more simple, but the girl's beauty was of the undeniable sort that renders the minor point of dress a trifle. Her soft violet eyes gazed thoughtfully across the table, and her sweet graciousness had never been more apparent. Like most extremely lovely and imposing-looking women, she was very gentle and kind, and the thought of self-denial always touched her deeply.

Her opposite neighbour felt himself stirred by a new and strange exhilaration. Under different circumstances he might have been one of those genial, popular ministers who are always in demand as diners-out. He took his part well in the conversation, and his stories of the natives were remarkably good. After the long fast from congenial company, his wits seemed brightened into remarkable quickness. Elinor Wright found herself wondering more and more.

"It's a dreadful pity," she thought. "He is so nice and clever, and so good-looking, too. How can he bear the life? I suppose it's his idea of duty to bury himself in the Libyan Desert."

(Concluded in next issue.)

UNFINISHED PICTURES.

It has been a rule with great painters never to exhibit unfinished pictures. Children are curious to know what is going on. They all wish to know the whys and wherefors as they go. But this is impossible. They cannot understand the processes, they cannot foresee the results, and so they misunderstand and find fault and criticise, and thus expose their own ignorance and foolishness.

The Lord deals with us as with children. He has His ways, methods and plans, which often seem to us to be delayed, until we grow weary and impatient, and find fault with the providence of God. We say to Him, "Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it." We are exceedingly anxious to understand every secret, solve every mystery, and explain every difficulty. The Lord is pleased to employ other methods and to unfold His purposes gradually, to teach us patience through tribulation, that we may at last come to understand His doings and comprehend His purposes, and to know that He is wise above our wisdom, and is carrying out His plans to the glory of His own name.

The Lord will not be hurried. He will not spoil His work for the sake of showing it to us. He will take His own time, and if we, in our foolishness, refuse to wait His will, we shall have only ourselves to blame if we live a life of weariness and disappointment, when we might rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.—The Christian.

In Nature there is no dirt, everything is in the right condition; the swamp and the worm, as well as the grass and the bird—all is there for itself. Only because we think that all things have a relation to us, do they appear justifiable or otherwise.—Auberbach.

It is no small commendation to manage a little well. He is a good wagoner that can turn in a little room. To live well in abundance, is the praise of the estate, not of the person. I will study more how to give account of my little, than how to make it more.—Bishop Hall.