



The Family Circle.

INASMUCH.

A LENTEN MEDITATION.

BY MARGARET J. PRESTON.

"If I had dwelt"—so mused a tender woman,
All fine emotions stirred
Through pondering o'er that Life, divine yet
human,
Told in the Sacred Word—

"If I had dwelt of old, a Jewish maiden,
In some Judean street,
Where Jesus walked, and heard his word so laden
With comfort strangely sweet;

"And seen the face where utmost pity blended,
With each rebuke of wrong;
I would have left my lattice and descended,
And followed with the throng.

"If I had been the daughter, jewel-girdled,
Of some rich Rabbi there;
Seeing the sick, blind, halt, my blood had curdled
At sight of such despair,

"And I had wrenched the sapphires from my
illat,
Nor let one spark remain;
Snatched up my gold, amid the crowd to spill it,
For pity of their pain.

"I would have let the palsied fingers hold me;
I would have walked between
The Marys and Salome, while they told me
About the Magdalene.

"Foxes have holes—I think my heart had
broken
To hear the words so said,
While Christ had not—were sadder ever
spoken—
'A place to lay his head!'

"I would have flung abroad my doors before Him,
And in my joy have been
First on the threshold, eager to adore Him,
And crave His entrance in!"

Ah, would you so? Without a recognition
You passed Him yesterday:
Jostled aside, unhelped, His unto petition,
And calmly went your way

With warmth and comfort, garmented and
girdled;
Before your window-sill
Sweep heart-sick crowds—and if your blood is
curdled,
You wear your jewels still.

You catch aside your robes, lest want should
clutch them,
In its implorings wild;
Or lest some woful penitent might touch them,
And you be thus doffed.

Oh, dreamers, dreaming that your faith is keeping
All service free from blot,
Christ daily walks your streets, sick, suffering,
weeping,
And ye perceive Him not!

THE BIG BOATLOAD OF DRIFTWOOD.

BY REV. E. A. RAND.

Maggie sat knitting in the fisherman's kitchen ere the dusk came on. It was a quiet scene, only a little room plainly furnished, a humming tea-kettle on the stove, a table set with cheap crockery for the coming supper, an old-fashioned clock with a tired, drowsy tick on the wall, a cat on a rag mat before the stove.

"I don't see where father is," thought Maggie, looking at the clock. "Generally I see his boat coming up the river before this time. Well, I can have a little more time for knitting and perhaps finish this stocking for Joe before supper." She might have said also, "And have a little more time to think."

So she bent her head over her knitting again, anxious to do all she could before a heavy step outside the door would say plainly as if in words, "Here I am, Maggie, tired and hungry as usual. Supper ready?" Yes, a little leisure now for thought.

Her thoughts were on the previous Sunday, whose teachings emphasized the significance of the resurrection of Jesus, how much it meant to the world, and if accepted and repented by the individual, what beauty, what usefulness it would bring to

the life, this dying unto self, this living unto Christ.

"Only it is pretty hard to do what the sermon said," thought Maggie, "to let the spirit of Christ's self-sacrifice come out in our lives and reign there. Yes, that's the word used in the sermon, 'reign' in our lives."

She ceased her knitting and looked at the fire shining out of the openings in the door of the stove, and each glowing section seemed to be only a transcript of that word in golden letters, that one supreme word, reign. Would it be supreme in Maggie's life? Would this principle of self-giving, self-renouncing, reign in Maggie's life!

"I wish it might be so," she murmured. It certainly, as she sat there in the undisturbed quiet of the room, seemed a very easy matter to give a supreme prominence to the element of self-renunciation. She had had the same feeling in the church on Sunday. So easy to be good when the organ is playing, when the choir is singing! So easy now to be good at home, there in that sheltered kitchen, when all the work was over, supper cooked and waiting in the oven for the father's arrival, a heedless brother Joe out of the way! Maggie had a very complacent feeling. She was almost ready for canonization. Suddenly our saint was aroused out of her reverie by a quick, light step.

"Oh, dear!" she murmured impatiently. "That is Johnnie, I know!"

The door opened and a boy of fifteen burst excitedly into the kitchen.

"O Maggie, can you go now? You know you said—"

"Oh, dear, John Darby! What makes you turn up just at this time?"—She stopped.

After her late beautiful reverie saying this! Her ebullition of impatience surprised her. Had she not forgotten a promise to go with John about this time? The boy saw that she was vexed, and the pleased, eager look of anticipation faded out of his face like the light from the western sky in the evening.

"You needn't go," he muttered. "Only you said—"

"I'll go, Johnnie. Our superintendent at the Sunday-school said he would give a Bible to any boy or girl we might recommend, and I can recommend you. Come."

Her shawl was now thrown over her shoulders, and, taking her hat from its nail, she passed out doors. Johnnie followed her, and as they went up the narrow lane leading from her home by the docks to the main street of the seaport town his vivacity returned and he talked in a delighted fashion of the present he expected to receive.

"It is a pretty good thing for folks to give away Bibles," said Johnnie, "when you don't happen to have any."

"I know it," replied Maggie in a mood of great dissatisfaction with herself. Reluctant to take a promised walk with this boy wanting and eager to obtain a Bible! Significant comment on her sincerity of desire to apply Sunday's teachings to practical life! The Bible was obtained, Johnnie was made happy, and Maggie returned to her home.

"Father ought to be here very soon," she said. "I will step down to the end of the dock and try to get some sign of him. He generally stops to pick up driftwood and that may detain him."

Looking off upon the rapidly darkening surface of the water, she could see nothing of the fisherman's boat. He picked up through the year in the river or on the shore sufficient driftwood to feed the exceedingly good appetite of the kitchen stove. Sometimes the stern and the bow of his boat would be piled high with wood, and between the two heaps the fisherman would sit and stoutly pull for home. No fisherman to-night between two heaps of wood.

What is the matter? wondered Maggie, slowly going from the dock up to the house. She resumed her knitting after lighting the kitchen lamp and tried to fasten her thoughts again on Sunday's teachings. She was soon rising up into an atmosphere of saintly thinking when she heard a heavy step.

"Yes, Maggie."

He sighed. She could see his form indistinctly, there in the darkened entry, and said to herself, "Poor man! He has got his arms full of driftwood, I expect. He must be tired."

He sighed again.

"Yes, Maggie, got a lot of driftwood to-night. A boatload of it. Oh, oh, oh!"

Groaning he staggered into the kitchen, his arms bearing—her brother Joe, stupid, senseless, drunk! He deposited Joe on an old lounge and then sank down beside him, covering his face with his hands, crying out, "Oh, my poor, foolish Joe!"

"Why, father!" said Maggie in her extreme astonishment, "how is this? And yet I haven't felt just easy. That Bill Smith has been hanging round here and I was afraid Joe would go off with him."

"You have guessed it," said the poor father, groaning. "I saw 'em both on Spring's Island, their boat most adrift, and they—drunk. How I got 'em into my boat and rowed 'em home I don't know. Driftwood? Oh, oh, my poor Joe!"

"Where is Bill?"

"His folks were on the wharf and took him home. O Joe!"

Maggie's father had not yet raised his head. Joe's shame was a cruel blow to the fisherman. He was a man of womanly tenderness of feeling, and since the death of Joe's mother the father had watched anxiously over the boy, more impulsive and thoughtless than vicious. The father had shown all of a mother's solicitous tenderness. Maggie was a very resolute character and very exact in her sense of justice. As she stood in the floor, her arms folded, she hardly knew what to say. She saw the bowed form of her father and then she thought of the drunken Joe on his bed to which the fisherman had now taken him. Her feelings were divided between those of indignation and pity. She pitied her father extremely, and to think Joe should bring this burden of suffering upon that parent's sensitive nature! How gray and old and broken he looked!

Maggie flamed forth, "I—I—I am indignant, father! To think you should be made to suffer this way! Driftwood! I tell you how I feel. If I had my way, I'd pack Joe and Bill into that boat and set them adrift! It would be driftwood then, I guess. If I don't give Joe a piece of my mind in the morning!"

"Oh," said her father feebly, "I doubt if that will fetch him, sis."

He always called her "sis" when he had any special appeal to make to her.

"Well, father, come and have some supper."

That was a practical suggestion, and the fisherman in his weakness almost staggered up to the table as if he were in Joe's condition.

"Sit down, father. You've got one person who will stand by you. Have some tea and toast? I fried some potatoes and fish for you."

She knew exactly what he wanted and did not wait for an answer, but with great energy brought forward his supper, slamming the dishes, hastily pouring the tea, and in her fierce action continuing to express her mind.

"Look out, sis!" remonstrated her father gently.

"I will, father, though I should not be surprised if I did something awful. If that Bill Smith comes round to-morrow—"

She did not say whether she would hang, burn, shoot, or poison him, but hastily stopped. She saw it did her father no good, and with tact she changed her course, and paid that silent attention to his personal comfort always so acceptable. She brought him his soft, easy slippers. She held out his old dressing-gown that her own fingers had made. She brushed smoothly down his gray, ruffled locks. Proceeding him with a light, she led him to his chamber and left him there.

She went to bed in a whirlwind of feeling, saying her prayers as usual but not enjoying them. When was Easter Sunday? She had not given it a thought since her father's return. That night she had a dream. She seemed to be down on the bank of the river swathed by a mist. Out of this came a boat, and was it her father that stepped out of the boat bearing Joe?

"I was mistaken," she cried confusedly and in astonishment, for as the bearer drew near her he changed, and lo! the Saviour

went by! He did not seem to see her, for his head was bowed and he was intent on carrying some kind of a heavy burden. At first she thought of the picture she had seen in which the Good Shepherd comes from the wild desert bearing the lost sheep on his broad, patient shoulders. Then there was a change.

"What!" she said in surprise. "That—that Joe on his shoulder?" The Shepherd passed quickly out of sight, his drooping face full of patience and compassion, a strong, while a suffering face, the same visage as that of the Man of Sorrows marred upon the cross for a world's sins. Everything now seemed to be going into a fog, and yet a voice rang out clear and sweet, "For ye were as sheep going astray."

What was it? On Sunday one of the men in the choir sang that sentence. Was Maggie in church again, listening to the strong, sweet singer, or did the Shepherd say this, his beautiful voice making the music? She could not say, for the mist thickened and she sank into its depths and rested there in slumber.

"I will do as I was taught on Sunday," she said to herself in the morning. "I will try what virtue there may be in love when I see Joe."

She prepared the breakfast with unusual care. She made one or two little dishes that Joe liked. She warmed his slippers for him, and placed his favorite rocking-chair near the stove. Joe came out of his room looking shabby, haggard, and miserable. He knew what Maggie could do by way of reprimand, and he was fully aware that he deserved it. Instead, she treated him with special affection. He saw that she was grieved, but she hurled no harsh word at him. Joe was not prepared for this. At the table he broke down entirely, dropped his head on the table, cried, and said,

"Maggie, you and father are too kind. I am just a fool and a wretch. Do help me!"

"We will help you, Joe; and you ask God to help you."

"I—will. Who is that?" he said as he chanced to look at the window. It was Bill Smith lounging on the pavement in readiness to catch up and carry off yesterday's partner, and Joe had previously made up his mind to accompany him, especially if Maggie "pitched into him."

"Can't go now," he said. "Maggie," he added aloud, "that's Bill, and he can't have me."

"No, no, Joe! You stay at home to-day."

But what about the morrow, and the next day and the day after and all the future? What could be done with Joe?

John Darby, that very day, rushed in his impulsive way into the kitchen.

"O Maggie!" he exclaimed, "I—I am going to sea. Up to that place where we went last night I went again to-day, and met a sea-captain, a friend of your superintendent, and he takes me on his voyage next week, and he wants another boy, and can't we have Joe?"

"Thank God!" Maggie thought. "That will keep Joe out of temptation, if he will only go, and he will come back from sea strong."

Joe went to sea. One day the fisherman brought a letter home.

"See, Maggie. Been to the post-office, and this is from Joe."

"Joe, father?"

"Yes. Sent from Europe."

This special message was for Maggie: "Tell Maggie I am trying to lead a new life. She will be glad to know that the Bible she took trouble to get for Johnnie I have been reading, for somehow I forgot to bring mine. I want you two to know that I am going to follow it."

"Thank God!" said the fisherman. "Not just-a-going to read, but follow."

Maggie was silent but grateful. Her joy shone in her eyes. Like Mary of old who met her Lord in the garden on the Easter morning, Maggie has found her Lord in a new joy, a new peace, a new blessing.

She in her life had repeated his example of self-giving. She not only "read of" but followed Him "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes we were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*