

THE RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS.

BY EMILY HUNTINGTON MILLER.

"Something must be done, ladies," said the president, firmly, though her voice trembled a little; "we have put this matter off from month to month, and we are simply making our work harder by giving ourselves so much less time. Of course we all intend to do our part toward raising the missionary money—" The tremble became a quaver as the good lady settled her glasses, that seemed likely to slide down her nose, and folded the leaflet in her hand into fine creases. She bent a reproachful look upon Mr. Jeremiah Davis, who sowed in serene silence without lifting her eyes from her work. Mrs. Jeremiah Davis was the member who could usually be depended upon to voice the sentiments of the society; and the timid ones who had not quite made up their minds, as well as the bewildered ones who had been sure they held an opposite opinion, generally fell into line, and were entirely unanimous when they found themselves swept into the current of her smooth, authoritative speech. Somebody always must lead, and even great minds have found the relief of letting others make their decisions for them.

"Last year," said the president, taking up the thread of her discourse after a little silence, "we raised, as you know, one hundred dollars less than the year before; and this year, unless we make some special effort, we shall fall still farther behind—"

"Behind what, Madame President," asked Mrs. Jeremiah Davis, in that smooth, gracious, courteous manner which the ladies all recognized as her most dangerous weapon. "Miss Jeremiah's on the war path," whispered Sally Atwell, as she borrowed the scissors of her next neighbor.

"Behind our usual amount," replied the president; "the amount the Board counts upon us to raise."

"I don't see why the Board should consider us under obligations for any special amount," said Mrs. Davis; "we intend to do what we can, but we make no pledges. I had that point in mind when I opposed our binding ourselves for special work; though, of course, even in that case it is understood that we only agree to do it if we can."

"And no one could have foreseen this dreadful financial depression," echoed Mrs. Doubleday.

"No," said the president, who began to rise to the occasion; "no one could have foreseen it, and certainly not the officers of the Board, who were compelled to plan their work and assume financial responsibility beforehand in utter ignorance of what the year might bring forth."

"And if they make mistakes of judgment, no matter how innocently, and assume responsibilities they cannot meet, we certainly are not to blame," said Mrs. Jeremiah, folding her hands and looking across the room as if she had the officers of the Board arraigned for trial.

"But we want to help them out," said Miss Morris, timidly.

"Certainly, we want to, and we will do what we can; but some people talk as if it was our debt and our responsibility."

"Seems to me that is just what it is, ladies," said the president. "The Lord has set his Church to do certain work for him in this world. We have no other business but to spread the knowledge of his gospel and help people to live by its principles. The missionary society is one

of the organizations for doing that, and its officers are our representatives that we have put there to manage a certain part of our business for us. We are not outsiders, giving our money to charity. We are responsible partners, and a part of our duty is to furnish the money. If we have failed to do that it is we that are in debt, and not the officers who administer our business. When we talk vaguely about the debt of the Board and the deficiency in the missionary society, we lose sight of our personal responsibility in the matter, and act as if we might honorably throw the burden of our debts upon others, or leave those who trusted us to suffer."

"The Board certainly takes the responsibility of planning the work, sister Bryce," said Mrs. Merritt, "and they ought to go cautiously."

"Yes, they plan our work for us; and that is part of the duty we have assigned them. They try to expend in the wisest manner the money we furnish them. After they have made their plans, if we fail to provide the money we promised who is to blame? Here is a stock company that employs certain men to plan and carry out improvements for it. But after the work is projected and entered upon, the partners do not furnish the money. One decides he needs all his capital in his business, and another thinks his money will bring more in some other investment, and another just neglects it, or loses interest in it. What can the managers do? Abandon the work already done at the risk of great loss, or go on in hope that the responsible partners will surely come to the rescue of their own interests? Ladies, do let us try to make this a personal matter, and take our share of responsibility."

"Our share wouldn't help much, with such a debt already on hand," said Mrs. Field, despondently. "I declare, when a dollar is so much to me, and so little toward the grand total, I feel like keeping the dollar when I know it'll count."

"I s'pose it's our doing that, makes the whole trouble," said little Miss Morris. "You know how it was the time we planned the surprise party for Jennie Allerton. When it turned out such a bad night everybody thought, 'O well, they won't miss me in such a crowd, and I'll stay home,' and so not a soul went but Malviny Dyer and me. It was the most surprisin' party."

"That is exactly the way," said the president, a good deal relieved by the laughter that seemed to have cleared the air. "All the falling off in the receipts comes in dollars and half dollars kept out by good people who say, 'My small gift cannot matter.' And the whole deficiency might be made up in the same way, by dollars and half dollars and dimes, if we would all take hold together to help."

"Well, I'm ready to take hold," said Sally Atwell, energetically, "though I donno how in creation I'm goin' to git the money, 'less I give up a minstrel show, the way them fash'nable young wimmin down to the city did. 'Twould be kind of appropriate, seein' its for the heathen, don't you think so, Mrs. Bryce?"

"They say those girls got more'n a thousand dollars," remarked Grandma Cook. "All the folks crowded in to see 'em dance and sing. Of course you couldn't tell who was who when they were blacked up, but I should thought their mothers would bated to have 'em do it. Most of 'em think its dreadful indelicate for women to lecture or talk in public, or even to speak in meetin'. I donno just what Saint Paul would a' said 'bout minstrels."