

"BUT IF NOT."

Tap, tap, tap. Somebody was knocking at Aunt Marget's door. It was not a sufficiently aristocratic door to own a bell; it would have been sadly out of keeping with the rest of the house if it had been aristocratic. Aunt Marget, as she was spoken of by everybody, said she liked to have folks knock at her door, for she could tell who wanted to come in, 'most always, by the sort of a rap they gave. A bell tells little, compared with a knock.

"That's Content Morrison, I'm sure," thought Aunt Marget, hurrying to open the door, turning up her ample apron to make a sort of bag for the rags she was cutting to knit into a rug.

Content was always welcome at Aunt Marget's, but when she came it was often a sign that her mental frame was not in harmony with her name. Content sometimes wished that she had not been called after that far-away aunt of hers, but she comforted herself with the reflection that had the choice of names fallen upon any other of the set of sisters in that family, it might have been worse. She might have been called Mindwell or Freelove or Temperance. Content was preferable, even if she did not always live up to it.

"I couldn't set myself at anything this afternoon, Aunt Marget," said the girl, on coming in, "and so I thought I would run over for a little talk with you."

"Dear heart, I'm glad you came. Sit down by the fire; it's big enough for two, isn't it?" The good woman laughed a contagious laugh. Everything was measured by the strictest economy in the small house. "The wholesome pinch of the just enough" forced its mistress into all sorts of contrivances, but never pinched her good humor out of her.

Content sat down by the cosy fire and answered the unspoken but evident invitation. "Tell me all about it," by beginning:

"It is John I'm troubled about. You know he went to the city ten days ago to get work. He hadn't found anything when he wrote. He promised to write every week, and he's as good as gold about promises. He'll do it. But it isn't time to hear again, and I feel so anxious I can't bear it. I do want John to get on without struggles and hard times. He is such a good brother. I do love him so. Is it wrong to want the best for him?" cried the girl appealing. Content and John were orphans and had lived with an uncle for some years. They were all in all to each other, Aunt Marget knew.

"Have you asked the Lord to give him what you want him to have?"

"Yes, indeed. I couldn't bear to have John away if I couldn't pray for him," said Content, with deepening color.

"I am sure of that, child. And you may tell the Lord exactly what you want for the boy, too. But you must let Him answer as He sees fit. Can you say 'But if not?'"

Content looked bewildered. Aunt Marget explained:

"You remember how the three that were cast into the fiery furnace answered the king, don't you? 'Our God is able to deliver us, and He will deliver us; but if not, we will

not serve thy gods.' I heard a sermon once on 'But if not.' The preacher said it took a deal of faith to say 'God is able to help, and will if it is best; but if not, we'll trust and obey anyhow, and it will be all right.' Anyone who can say that, can go into a fiery furnace if he's called to. Why shouldn't we be able, all of us, and all the time, to trust the Lord enough to say 'He may not take my way; but if not, I take his way on trust?'"

"We ought to," said Content musingly;

"If we ought to, we can," came the quick answer. "Don't worry about John. It isn't necessary that you should know about him to make sure that the Lord is taking care of him in the big city. I had to tell myself something like that only the other night when I got worked up over somebody else's trouble."

"What was it? Tell me, please," asked Content.

"I was out doing some marketing about dusk. I saw some grapes I wanted. I'm fair ashamed to say how I wanted them, but I hadn't got what I expected for some work and I didn't have to have any fruit, so I went on without. As I stopped at my gate, there was a young man leaning on it, looking so downcast I

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pitied him in a minute before he spoke. I knew something was the matter. A nice-looking fellow he was, and he said 'Good-evening,' and then, turning off sort of sudden-like, he asked if I wanted to buy a pretty picture he had to sell. He couldn't have thought it likely I could buy, but it seemed as if he must ask it, somehow. Then he explained that he was stranded here, passing through the place, and he wanted to sell a little painting to get money that he must have. He was a perfect gentleman, I could see, and I could see his trouble too. It went to my heart. I thought how I would feel if he were my boy, among strangers so, and without money. But I couldn't buy his picture. I gave him the names of two or three that I thought might be likely to, and he thanked me and went off in the dark. I couldn't get him out of my mind. It troubled me to think of him. Pretty soon in came my next neighbour, with some grapes, if you'll believe me. She had had some sent her and she wanted to share.

"When she had gone I said to myself, 'If the Lord will send me this fruit that I could get on without, won't he take care of a poor fellow in great need? I'll ask him to care for that young man and give him a chance to earn some money.' I did pray, but I kept worrying too. I said, 'If I could only know that somebody took the painting.' Then I told myself, 'The Lord can take care of the boy without my knowing. I'd like to, but if not, I'll trust the lad in the Father's care.' And after that I could go to sleep."

Content's time was up. "You have helped me ever so much," she said as she rose to go.

It is worth much even to get a glimpse of the lesson of trust in Aunt Marget's "But if not."

DOING GOD'S WILL.

Can God not enable you to do His will from your heart in your surroundings? Are you sorely tried by those surroundings? Are they, in themselves, humiliating to you or

exasperating to you? Are they full of acute heart-pangs, or heavy with a chronic heart-ache? Not one of these things is forgotten before your Lord. Your slightest pain finds response in His sympathy. But let that thought be the stepping-stone to this: that for you as for the slave-saint of Ephesus there lies open in that same Lord the blessed secret of a life which shall move amidst these same unwelcome surroundings as a life free and at leisure, and at peace, full of love and rest, blessed and blessing, a life hid with Christ in God, a life in which everything, from your rising up to your lying down, the smallest cross and the largest, is seen in the light of the holy, the beloved will of God, and so is met not with a sigh, or a murmur, but "from the soul."—Rt. Rev. Dr. Moule.

KNOW THYSELF.

Bear, in the presence of God, to know thyself. Then seek to know for what God has sent thee into the world; how thou hast fulfilled it; art thou yet what God willed thee to be; what yet lacketh unto thee; what is God's will for thee now; what thing thou mayest now do, by His grace, to obtain His favour, and approve thyself unto Him. Say to Him, "Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God," and He will say unto thy soul, "Fear not, I am thy salvation." He will speak peace unto thy soul. He will set thee in the way.

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