

Tales and Sketches.

THE HOUSE-TOP SAINT.

"Yes, yes, sonny, I's mighty fo'handed, and no ways like poo' white folks, nor yet like any of dese onsanctified col'd folks dat grab deir liberty like a dog grabs a bone—no thanks to nobody!"

Thus the sable, queenly Sibyl McIver ended the long story of her prosperity since she had become her own mistress, to a young teacher, as she was arranging his snowy linen in his trunk.

"I'm truly glad to hear of all this comfort and plenty, Sibyl; but I hope your treasures are not all laid up on earth. I hope you are a Christian?" asked the young stranger.

Sibyl put up her great hands, and straightened and elevated the horns of her gay turban: and then, planting them on her capacious hips, she looked the beardless youth in the eye and exclaimed with a sarcastic smile, "You hope I'm a Christian, do you? Why, sonny, I was a Christian afore your mammy was born, I reckons! But for dese last twenty-five years, I's been one o' de kind dat makes Satan shake in his hoofs—I is one of the house-top saints, sonny!"

"House-top saints? What kind of saints are those?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sibyl; "I thought like's not you never even heer'd tell on 'em, up your way. Dey's mighty scarce anywhere; but de Lor's got one on 'em to any rate, in dis place and on dis plantation!" replied Sibyl, triumphantly.

"And that is you?"

"Yes, sonny, dat is me!"

"Then tell me what you mean by being a house-top saint."

"Well, I means dat I's been t'rough all de stories o' my Father's house on 'arth, from de cellar up; and now I's fairly on de roof—yes, on de very ridge-pole; and dere I sits and sings and shouts and sees heaven—like you never see it t'rough de clouds down yere."

"How did you get there, auntie?"

"How does you get from de cellar to de parlor, and from the parlor to de chamber, and from de chamber to de roof? Why, de builder has put sta'rs thar, and you sees 'em and puts your feet on 'em and mounts, ah!"

"But there are the same stairs in our Father's house for all his children, as for you; and yet you say house-top saints are very scarce."

"Sartin, sonny. Sta'rs don't get people up, 'less dey mounts 'em. If dere was a million o' sta'rs leadin' up to glory, it wouldn't help dem dat sits down at de bottom and howls and mourns 'bout how helpless dey is! Brudder Adam, dere, dat's a blackin' of your boots, he's de husban' of my bussum, and yet he's nothin' but only a poor, down-cellar 'sciple, sittin' in de dark, and sithin' and lamentin' 'cause he ain't up sta'rs! I says to him, says I, 'Brudder'—I's allus called him 'Brudder' since he was born into the kingdom—'why don't you come up into de light?'"

"'Oh?' says he, 'Sibby, I's too onworthy; I doesn't desurve de light dat God has made for de holy ones.'"

"'Phoo,' says I, 'Brudder Adam! Don't you 'member,' says I, 'when our massa done married de gov'ness, arter old missus' death? Miss Alice, she was as poor as an unfeathered chicken; but did she go down cellar and sit 'mong de po'k barr'ls and de trash 'cause she was poor and wasn't worthy to live up sta'rs? Not she! She took her place to de head o' de table, and w'ar all de lacery and jewelry massa gib her, and hold up her head high, like she was sayin', 'I's no more poor gov'ness, teaching Col'n McIvor's chil'n; but I's de Col'n's loved wife, and I stan's for the mother of his chil'n,' as she had a right to say. And de Col'n love her all de more for her not bein' a fool and settin' down cellar 'mong de po'k barr'ls!'"

"Dere, sonny, dat's de way I talk to Brudder Adam! But so far it haint fotched him up! De poor deluded cretur' thinks he's humble, when he's only low-minded and grovelin' like! It's unworthy of a blood-bought soul for to stick to de cold, dark cellar, when he mought live in de light and warmf, up on de house-top!"

"That's very true, Sibyl; but few of us reach the house-top," said the young man thoughtfully.

"Mo' fool you, den!" cried Sibyl. "'De' house-top' is dere, and de sta'rs is dere, and de grand glorious Master is dere, up 'bove all' callin' to you day and night, 'Frien', come up higher!' He reaches down 'is shinin' han' and offers for to draw you up; but you shakes your head and pulls back and says, 'No, no, Lord; I isn't nothin'.' Is dat de way to treat him who has bought light and life for you? Oh! shame on you, sonny, and on all de down-cellar and parlor and chamber Christians!"

"What are parlor Christians auntie?" asked the young man.

"Parlor Christians, honey? Why, dem is de ones dat gets bar'ly out o' de cellar and goes straightway and forgets what kind o' creturs dey was down dere! Dey grow proud and dresses up fine like de worl's folks, and dances, and sings worldly trash o' songs, and has only just 'ligion enough to make a show wid. Our old missus, she used to train 'mong her col'd folks wuss den old King Fario did 'mong de 'Gyptians. But, bless you, de minute de parson or any other good brudder or sister came along, how she did tune up her harp! She was mighty 'ligious in de parlor, but she left her 'ligion dere when she went out."

"I do think missus got to heaven wid all her infarmities. But she didn't get very high up till de Bridegroom come and called for her! Den

she said to me, one dead-o'-night, 'Oh! Sibby,' says she—she held tight on to my han'—'Oh! Sibby, if you could only go along o' me, and I could keep hold o' your garments, I'd have hope o' getting t'rough de shinin' gate! your face shines like silver, Sibby!' says she. 'Dear soul,' says I, 'dis light you see isn't mine! It all comes 'flected on to poor black Sibyl from de cross; and dere is heaps more of it to shine on you and every other poor sinner dat will come near enough to catch the rays!'"

"'Oh!' says she, 'Sibby, when I heard you shoutin' Glory to God, and talkin' o' him on de house-top, I thought it was all sup'tition and ignorance. But now, oh! Sibby, I'd like to touch the hem o' your garment, if I could on'y ketch a glimpse o' Christ.'"

"'Do you b'lieve dat you's a sinner, missus?' says I."

"'Yes, de chief o' sinners,' says she, with a groan."

"'Do you b'lieve dat Christ died for sinners, and is able to carry out his plan?' says I."

"'Yes,' says she."

"'Well, den,' says I, 'if you's sinner 'nough, and Christ is Saviour 'nough, what's to hinder your bein' saved? Just you quit lookin' at yourself, and look to him.'"

"Den she kotch sight o' de cross, and she forgot herself; and her face light up like an angel's; and she was a new missus from dat hour till she went up. She died a singing."

"'In my han' no price I bring
Simply to dy cross I cling.'"

"But she mought a sung all de way along, if she hadn't forgot the hoomiliation o' de cellar, and 'bused de privileges o' de parlor. Parlors is fine things; but dey ain't made for folks to spen' deir whole time in."

"What's a chamber saint, auntie?" asked the young man.

"Chamber saints is dem dat's 'scaped de dark and de scare of de cellar, and de honey-traps o' de parlor, and got t'rough many worries, and so feels a-tired, and is glad o' rest. Dey says, 'Well, we's got 'long mighty well, and can now see de way clar up to glory.' And sometimes dey forgets dat dey's on'y half way up, and t'inks dey's come off conqueror a'ready. So dey's very apt to lie down wid deir hands folded, thinkin' dat Satan isn't no-whar, now! But he is close by 'em, and he smoooves deir soft pillows, and sings 'em to sleep and to slumber; and de work o' de kingdom don't get no help from dem—not for one while! De chamber is a sort o' half-way house made for rest and for comfort, but some turns it into a roostin'-place! You know Brudder Bunyan, sonny?"

"No."

"What, never heard tell o' John Bunyan?"

"Oh! yes."

"I thought you couldn't all be so ignorant 'bout 'ligion up in Boston as dat! Well, you know he wrote 'bout a brudder dat got asleep and los' his roll, and dat's what's the matter wid heaps o' Christians in de world. Dey falls asleep and loses deir hope."

"And do you keep in this joyful and wakeful frame all the time auntie?" asked the young learner.

"I does, honey. By de help of de Lord, and a contin'al watch, I keep de head ob de old sarpint mashed under my heel, pretty g'neral. Why, sometimes, when he rises up and thrusts his fangs out, I has such power gi'n me to stamp on him dat I can hear his bones crack—mostly! I tell you, honey, he don't like me, and he's most gi'n me up for los'."

"Now, Sibyl, you are speaking in figures. Tell me plainly how yot get the victory over Satan?"

"Heaps o' ways," she replied. "Sometimes I gets up in de mornin', and sees work enough for two women ahead o' me. Maybe my head done ache and my naves is done rampant; and I hears a voice sayin' in my ears, 'Come or go what likes, Sibby, dat ar work is got to be done! You's sick and tired a'ready! Your lot's a mighty hard one, sister Sibby!—Satan often has de impudence to call me 'sister'—and if Adam was only a pearter man, and if Tom wasn't lame, and if Judy and Cle'patry wasn't dead, you could live mighty easy. But just you look at dat ar pile o' shirts to iron, 'sides cookin' for Adam and Tom, and keepin' your house like a Christian oughter!' Dat's how he 'sails me when I's weak! Den I faces straight about and looks at him, and says, in de words o' Scripiter, 'Clar out and git ahind my back, Satan! Dat ar pile o' shirts ain't high enough to hide Him dat is my strength!' And sometimes I whisks de shirts up and roll 'em into a bundle, and I heaves 'em back into de clothes-bask't, and says to 'em, 'You lay dar till to-morrow, will you? I ain't no slave to work, nor to Satan! for I can 'ford to wait, and sing a hime to cher up my sperits, if I like.' And den Satan drops his tails and slinks off, most g'neral; and I goes 'bout my work singin'!"

"'My Master bruise de sarpint's head,
And bind him wid a chain;
Come brudders, halolujah shout,
Wid all yer might and main!
Halolujah!'"

"Does Satan always assail you through your work?" asked the young stranger.

"No, bless you, honey; sometimes he 'tacks me through my stummick; and dat's de way he 'tacks rich and grand folks, most g'neral. If I eat too hearty o' fat bacon and corn-cake in times gone, I used to get low in 'ligion, and my hope failed, and I den was such a fool I thought my Christ had