

Father, Mary and Co.

(Adelbert F. Caldwell, in 'Zion's Herald'.)

The rambling, wood-colored house was just in from the hard gravel road, as one turned off at the right, on crossing the Little River bridge. From this out-of-the-way place it was fully a mile down to the grim iron foundry, where for years Lawrence Baker had had charge of one of the company's great, roaring furnaces.

The trees in the wide, unkept front yard stood bare and gaunt. Their brown leaves, exulting in a new-found freedom, were mischievously scurrying about, tumbling over one another in a wild, mad frolic for supremacy.

'I'd be willing to be a leaf—almost,' declared Mary Baker, gloomily, looking aimlessly from the narrow, old-fashioned panes of the sitting room window. 'I wouldn't care then if I had to stay here and toil—if I didn't get a place; wouldn't have ambitions, only to have them, unfulfilled. I'd "be" a leaf—nothing to hope for, nothing to expect,' and she sighed dismally. Could it be patient, faithful Mary Baker?

The silence in the room was broken only by the sharp whistle of the wind without.

'I'm not needed here. The boys are grown now and working with father. And Elizabeth—she's sixteen—could do all that there is to do, with what help they could give her. I'm tired—"tired"—discouraged with it all! Wonder if mother ever felt as I do? "She" was appreciated.'

Mary took a crumpled letter from the window-sill.

'I don't see why I had to be disappointed—why I couldn't have had the place at Cole & Emerson's, only that I never had any luck—never! I suppose that accounts for it.'

She went slowly into the kitchen, where the fire in the shining range was burning low. She hurriedly opened the oven door, whence issued appetizing odors of baking brown bread.

'I'll need more fire than this,' she said, with housewifely instinct, 'if that's to be done for supper,' and she stepped to the shed, bareheaded, for an armful of 'fine' wood.

'It seems as though everybody else in the world, but you, Mary Baker, has a "pull"! And I did so want a place—somewhere! Oh! well,—

'Washing, ironing, making bread—
It must be done; mouths must be fed.'

She was setting the table for supper, and didn't notice the slow, tired step of her father on the kitchen floor. He had come in unexpectedly by the back way.

'I wouldn't mind it—the drudgery. I could wear the finger-ends off if only—but who cares? Nobody!'

An expression of pain passed over her father's worn, anxious face.

'I wonder if she got it—the place! The look of anxiety deepened—the very thought hurt him.

The supper was being eaten in silence—only the monotonous click of the dishes was heard. They were almost through.

'Going?' Ralph looked up abruptly from the table. 'Twas the first reference made regarding the position at Cole & Emerson's, though they all knew Mary was ex-

pecting an answer that day to her application—and Bloomfield was so far away.

'No,' divining her brother's reference, 'I'm not wanted.'

She scarcely glanced up from the coffee she was pouring, yet there was an evident look of relief in Ralph's dark eyes—she couldn't be mistaken.

'Then he cares,' she thought quickly; 'but it's only for my work—it makes it pleasanter for them.'

Yet Ralph's expression gave Mary a feeling—she couldn't describe it—that took away much of the disappointment she had felt since receiving the concise, business-like letter of the morning. She hadn't supposed 'twould make any difference to him—wouldn't Elizabeth do just as well?

'Then you're really going—to "stay,"' and Tom squeezed his sister's hand shyly. He had waited for her in the kitchen, until she brought out an armful of dishes to wash. 'You're a brick! What would we do—Ralph and I—without our—'

He fumbled his cap nervously.

'You know you've taken mother's place, and—'

'Don't, Tom—don't.'

Mary almost let fall the dishes she was holding. 'Twas the first time any one had ever expressed, by a single word, any appreciation of her efforts and struggle in assuming the responsibility of the little family—the sole head since her mother's death. It bewildered her—the suddenness and pleasure of it all.

'I didn't suppose—'

'Let me do them alone to-night, you do looked tired, Mary,' and Elizabeth gently took the dish towel from her sister's hand. 'Come, that's a good girl,' coaxingly.

'Yes, you go in with father, and I will help her. The one who got up such a good supper for us hungry boys to-night ought to be relieved from dish-washing. Bess and I—we "want" to do it,' and Ralph—strong, handsome Ralph—playfully took his bewildered sister in his arms, and set her down in the sitting room beside their father. 'I'm just beginning to realize what—'

He softly closed the door, with his whispered sentence unfinished. But Mary understood.

'I've been thinking, Mary, lately,' and her father's voice was low, 'of forming a partnership, providing I can get somebody I want to consent to the contract.'

'You're—you're not going to leave the foundry?'

'No—I—the voice was unsteady. 'But I've been thinking for a number of days of the necessity of such a step. It should have been done before; but somehow I—we didn't think.'

Mary failed to comprehend the drift of her father's words.

'Unless we form the partnership I refer to, we may lose the most valued member of our home-keeping. We've lived too much to ourselves—been too selfish and forgetful. But now under the partnership of Father, Mary & Co., we shall think to do more for the one who has made the loss of mother, all these years, less deeply felt. We hadn't realized what you've been to us until we thought of your leaving. Will you join the firm—that we may still be kept together?' He took Mary's trembling hand and drew it towards him. 'What this has been to Ralph and Tom—mother knows.'

'I was so selfish—I thought only of my own little soul-centred world.' 'Twas after the rest of the family had retired, just leaving Ralph and Mary alone in the sitting room. 'And I said—only this afternoon—that I had no luck. Oh, Ralph! And who could have greater than to be admitted to father's firm—with you and Tom and Bess?'

'Keep a Stiff Upper Lip.'

There has something gone wrong,

My brave boy, it appears,
For I see your proud struggle
To keep back the tears.

That is right. When you cannot
Give trouble the slip,
Then bear it, still keeping
'A stiff upper lip.'

Though you cannot escape
Disappointment and care,
The next best thing to do
Is to learn how to bear.
If when for life's prizes
You're running, you trip,
Get up, and start again—
'Keep a stiff upper lip!'

Let your hands and your conscience
Be honest and clean;
Scorn to touch or to think of
The thing that is mean;
But hold on to the pure,
And the right with firm grip;
And though hard be the task,
'Keep a stiff upper lip!'

Through childhood, through manhood,
Through life to the end,
Struggle bravely and stand
By your colors, my friend,
Only yield when you must,
Never 'give up the ship,'
But fight to the last,
'Keep a stiff upper lip!'
—Phoebe Cary.

Don't Grumble, But Work.

A dog, hitched to a lawn-mower, stopped pulling to bark at a passer-by. The boy who was guiding the mower said, 'Don't mind the dog; he is just barking for an excuse to rest. It is easier to bark than to pull this machine.' It is easier to be critical than correct; easier to bark than to work; easier to burn a house than to build one; easier to hinder than to help; easier to destroy reputation than construct character. Fault-finding is as dangerous as it is easy. Anybody can grumble, criticise, or censure, like the Pharisees, but it takes a great soul to go on working faithfully and lovingly, and rise superior to it all, as Jesus did.

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