

The Home Mission Journal.

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CHAPTER XIII.

Who can measure the influence of a character like that of Diantha Hathaway? His was not a life that dazzled by its brilliance, but rather one that entered into other lives beneficently, softening, refining the most discordant spirits, leading them through love's sweet persuasion to find rest in Him who was so meek and lowly in heart.

The church bell was now pealing loudly and the members of the Sunday school were flocking into the green enclosure, which was pleasantly shaded by a few fine trees, with flowers smiling here and there. Soon all were collected in the chery looking auditorium, the infant class not using the room specially allotted to them till the opening services were over.

To Miss Hathaway's class was assigned one of the pleasantest corners in the audit room, near one of the large stained glass windows.

It wanted yet a few minutes to the opening services, and meantime Miss Hathaway was surrounded by friends eager to clasp her hand and to welcome her back to the church and Sunday school. So great was her pleasure at seeing her again that a stranger might have imagined that she had been absent for months instead of weeks. And their greetings to Elsie were so kind and cordial that she began to feel more and more at home and to realize that there was something specially attractive about these church and Sunday school people she had so dreaded to meet.

The superintendent of the Sabbath school, a dignified but genial-looking man of some fifty years, had been among the first to enter the room. He was delighted to find his faithful teacher in her place again, and gave Elsie a hearty welcome. And now came the pastor, whose benignant face, crowned with snow white hair, might have served a painter for a study of the disciple John in his old age. For years pastor of a church in a large neighboring city, he had been obliged, to resign the position on account of protracted illness. He recovered, but with impaired health and strength, and was told by his physician that he needed to live in a milder atmosphere. Soon after, the church at Berwick invited him to become its pastor; he accepted the call, and had now spent eighteen happy years with a people very congenial to him and his family. Since his coming many had been brought into the Kingdom; he watched over his charge with fatherly tenderness and solicitude, and they looked up to him with mingled love and reverence. Those who were gathered into this church home—and there were many—were drawn by his gospel preaching, full of Christ-like love and solicitude for souls, by his magnetic personality, and by the devoted labors and hospitable spirit of his faithful fellow workers. There were few drones in this hive, and they were likely soon to be shamed and won into activity by the inspiring atmosphere surrounding them, and by the urgent exhortations of their pastor. Dr. Noble's health had improved greatly since he

came to Berwick and now he seldom felt the slightest trace of the rheumatic trouble that had partially crippled him for two long years.

"What a beautiful old man!" thought Elsie, as he pushed near them, a smile of welcome lighting up his face as he saw Miss Hathaway. Who, after exchanging a few words with him, introduced her niece. As the young girl met the gaze of his large black eyes, gently searching, but mellow and benignant, and in the warm clasp of his hand, her heart was thrilled. So great an intense desire to hear him preach, would not his gracious words help to drive away these doubts that had so early filled her mind and heart, and that she now fondly longed to have dispelled?

The sound of the superintendent's bell roused her from her reverie. The services commenced with the singing of a hymn, after which the superintendent, Mr. Discombe, requested the pastor to make the opening prayer.

Thrilled, impressed, yet like one half in a dream amid the new surroundings, Elsie listened to the singing, and then to the pastor's prayer, which, full of reverence, yet full also of the love that casts out fear, stirred up in the deepest yearnings of her heart.

And then the assurance from the tenth chapter of John, how beautifully it was caught by Miss Hathaway. After turning to her young charges about the flock and shepherd, she told each of his sheep that all were thoroughly interested, she turned their thoughts to Jesus, the Good Shepherd who had given his life for the flock and would use his all-merciful power. Then she went on to tell them how, risen and exalted, he is still the faithful Shepherd of his sheep, calling each one by name; how he shields them in his bosom from every danger that assails them; goes in tender search of the wanderers and brings them back; leads his flocks into green pastures, beside the still waters, and finally guides them through the Valley of the Shadow of Death into the heavenly gloryland.

Elsie listened intently, so interested that she soon forgot her shyness and began to ask questions like the rest.

After Sunday's school came the church service. Elsie sat by her aunt, outwardly calm and quiet, even Miss Hathaway's questions and sympathies could not arouse. Few the young girl's heart was throbbing with interest and repressed emotion.

Dr. Noble's sermon was from the words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." As Elsie listened to the dear old man, whose face grew radiant with joy as he dwelt upon the precious message, a feeling came to her as sweet as it was strange and new. When gentle breathing was thus in his soul, what unseen influences tenderly in lining it to seek refuge from it? tormenting doubts in the redeeming love of Christ? Tears were being now, she was glad when she could bow her head with the rest and silently pray: "Oh, what is this I feel in my heart whose voice is speaking to me? Oh God is this your voice? Thou help me, send me light! I want to believe, to love to be forgiven. I want a heavenly father, a Saviour like Jesus! Oh, God, if this is your voice, in my heart, keep on speaking till all my doubts are gone!"

Few words were spoken by Miss Hathaway and Elsie as they walked kindly home together. The young girl was too absorbed in her thought to open her heart. As for Aunt Diantha she had seen the glimmer of tears in Elsie's eyes as she bent her head with the rest; she judged it best to say nothing as yet.

But that afternoon as they sat together in the garden at the rear of the house, Elsie's lips were opened.

The stillness of the hour, and the gentle sympathy she read in Aunt Diantha's eyes, disposed her to open her heart. Once she began, she found it easy work, for Aunt Diantha encouraged her confidences with the utmost tact and sympathy.

Elsie told her all except that she was loyally still in where her mother was concerned. Miss Hathaway could not but imagine what the girl left unsaid, and loved her all the more for her reticence upon this subject. All else she learned—the growing fear of God that had been instilled into her childish heart, the skeptical doubts, her sceptic's words had brought (though she spoke of the gay, sunny tempered man with a tenderness that showed she loved him), and the change in her feelings that had been taking place during the last three weeks. But when she came to speak of the experiences of this Sunday, she hid her face upon Miss Hathaway's shoulder, as she murmured, sobbingly: "Oh, I can hardly speak of it! What does this feeling mean that seems to draw me toward God in a way I can't describe? Have you ever felt it, Aunt Diantha?"

"My sweetheart, yes!" replied Miss Hathaway, tears of great joy starting to her eyes. "This is the voice of the Holy Spirit, of the Comforter, whom Jesus Christ sends if promised his disciples to send from the Father when he should be taken from them. Feel it, Elsie! I have felt this great presence in my heart ever since I was a child! Oh, how happy, how thankful I am that he is leading me, guiding to give her heart to Christ!"

"I can't understand it, Aunt Diantha," murmured Elsie, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"Nor I, Elsie. It is a beautiful, sacred mystery. Our Saviour himself said: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'"

"But, Aunt Diantha, I don't see how he can want to come into my heart. It is not good and gentle like yours. All my life, since I can remember, it has been full of bad, angry passions. I've had it nearly everybody. Worst of all, I've hated God so that I would not even look into the book that would have taught me how good and loving he is!"

"Let me tell you something else: the Lord Jesus said that will comfort you. 'They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' Ah, my dear, we all need that great Physician. If you could look into your Aunt Diantha's heart you would see what an imperfect, sinful creature she is! But what was the verse Dr. Noble preached from this morning? Don't you remember it and his wonderful, beautiful sermon?"

"Oh yes, Aunt. It was about God's loving the world so much that he gave his only son to die for us, and that every one who believed in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. It all seemed so strange, yet so beautiful to me. I just long to believe in Jesus as Christians do."

"Well, my darling, what is in the way?"

"Oh these doubts that I've had for years; they are hateful to me now, and yet they keep coming into my mind, and torment me even when I'm trying to pray. Have you any books that will help to clear up these doubts, and is it not almost wicked for me to pray to God when they keep coming into my mind?"

"No, no, my Elsie! You are not afraid to tell these doubts to me; why should you be afraid to