

'Suppose you run over and ask Mrs. Bean. She has had a good deal of experience with children.'

She waited so long without replying that he thought she had not heard, and repeated: 'I said, why don't you ask Mrs. Bean what to do?'

'Because,' her voice was scarcely audible, 'I cannot ask her nor any one else to help me. I have not one friend in Greenboro.' Then, giving way to some of her pent-up feeling, 'Oh, James, don't you know that not one woman in this town has ever set foot in our house since we moved into it! They shun us as if we had the plague.'

His face flushed hot. 'We can get along without them, I guess.'

'No, I can't, if you can,' she burst out; 'I would rather die than go on living as I have lived these six months. They drop into each other's houses and take little dainties and fruits. They take their sewing and sit for an hour or two in the afternoon. I see them chattering in the streets and at their gates, but they do not even look at me. I alone of all the women in this town have no friends, no neighbors. Why, even the children shun us! The other day little Bessie Ross stopped a minute to play with the baby and I asked her to come in. She looked frightened and said, "My mama told me I was to have nothing at all to do with you."'

'The snobs! As if we were not every bit as good as they!'

'It is not that, James,' his wife went on. 'Any honest work is respected here. The blacksmith moved here when we did, and his wife is invited out with the minister's and the doctor's wife.'

'What do you think it is, then?' her husband asked, with feigned curiosity.

'Think!' The fire had dried her eyes. 'Think! I do not think, I know. We are outcasts because we get the very bread we eat with these women's hearts' blood. I have not told you the worst. I had no milk left for Jamie last night, so I went to Mrs. Norton's to see if I could buy a pint, and—she almost choked with the word—she asked me why I did not give my child the same drink I did hers, and shut the door in my face.'

'She said that to you! I'll—'

She put her hand on his arm. 'Can you blame her? Harry Norton is her only son. He has been here dead drunk half the time since we came. Oh, Jamie, Oh, my husband!' Her voice broke and her eyes filled with tears. 'Let us stop this hateful business.'

'But I have to earn a living. I can't let you and little Jamie starve,' he answered doggedly.

A hoarse cough from the baby cut short the discussion and the mother undressed him and put him to bed, tucking him in his little white crib with more than usual care. In a few moments he was fast asleep and the mother's anxiety slumbered too.

It was perhaps three in the morning when Alice Long was awakened by the terrible hoarse cry that strikes such terror to a mother's heart. In a moment she was by the crib, and the father had made a light. The poor little face was drawn and discolored with the terrible struggle, and every breath came half groan, half gasp.

What should she do? What did they do for croup? She tried to think, but only one thought came: 'He is dying! My baby is dying!' No time now to balance social niceties. She put little Jamie into his father's arms, and in her bare feet, without so much as a shawl over her white gown, sped up the silent street to Mrs. Bean's door.

Was it hours or days before a window was

raised over her head and a woman's sleepy voice said, 'Who's there and what do you want?'

'It's I, Mrs. Bean, Alice Long, and baby is choking to death, and oh, please, won't you come?'

'Of course I will' came the voice, punctuated by the closing window, and in a moment a figure in a wrapper and slippers was running down the street. Into the boycotted tavern door she went, straight up stairs, where a wild-eyed young thing was rocking back and forth with a panting baby in her arms and a grief-stricken man kneeling beside her.

Esther Bean took in the situation while she held out her hands for the baby, and, with a tact born of long experience, gave her first attention to the distracted young mother. When she had dispatched her to the kitchen to start a fire and heat some water she turned to the father.

'Don't be so frightened,' she said. 'I'll just run home and get some medicine; I always keep it on hand. The Bean children are all croupy, you know.'

She was backed before the mother had finished her mercifully imposed task. In a few moments the home remedies began to take effect and two hours afterward the baby had dropped asleep.

When Mrs. Bean arose to go James Long and his wife both held out their hands, while he said:

'You were so good to come. How can we ever thank you?'

'Could anyone refuse at such a time?' she answered.

'No, indeed,' broke in Alice. 'You have children of your own; you know our feelings.'

Mrs. Bean held a hand of each and looked at the young couple long and earnestly.

'My children,' she said—'for you are young enough to be my children—you did not hesitate to ask help when in danger. You knew that no one would refuse you. You learned in one brief moment the awful agony of fearing for its precious little life. You do not know—God grant you may never know—what it would really be to lose him. What would you think of me if, instead of helping your darling, I had given him some deadly drug to increase his suffering, or perhaps to end his life? You said just now that I had children of my own—I have; that I understood your feelings—I do. Can you not understand mine? You believe I love my little ones. They are in danger, too—in danger body and soul. I come begging you for help for my dear ones. I am afraid of the awful temptation a licensed bar offers in a town like this. What answer do you make me and my neighbors? With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.'

She dropped their hands and clasping her own to her breast stood waiting his reply. Alice began to sob and buried her face on her husband's shoulder.

It was the great crisis in James Long's life. For months his baser passions had had possession of him; but the silent influence brought to bear had not been without effect, the talk of the evening before had prepared the way and the incident of the night had cleared his vision and brought his better nature to the surface; and now, in the first flush of the new dawn, he was called upon to decide. The call came to him as to the prophets of old, 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.' He flushed, then grew pale as the fight went on, but as the first clear flash of the rising sun fell upon his face it was transfigured with a higher light, as he said:

'God helping me, from this day on, I will do unto others as I would have them do unto me and mine.'

A Single Idle Word.

'I was not a bad young man,' said an elderly gentleman lately, 'but was given to fun, enjoyed a good time, and while not usually vulgar or low in my conversation, had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and could not always resist the temptation to make an apt rejoinder, even when it involved some coarseness.'

'A party of us were camping, mostly young fellows, but one or two were middle-aged men. We had a good time, and there was only one thing to regret, and that I have regretted all my life. We sat around the fire the first evening, telling stories, and a story which one of the older men told suggested an obscene comment, which I uttered before I thought twice.'

'I could have bitten my tongue off the next instant. The man simply looked straight at me for a moment across the fire, and I knew that he had judged me by that remark. I knew that I did not deserve the opinion which in that instant he formed of me; but I also knew that I had given him just cause to estimate me as he did. That one careless word did not fairly represent me, but I could not deny that it was my own.'

All that night I lay looking up at the stars and thinking of what I had said. I could almost have counted on my fingers all the other sentences of like character that I had ever spoken. I was not habitually vulgar, but for that one word, and all like words and thoughts, I despised myself.

'I determined to be so careful during the remainder of the week as to redeem myself in the sight of that man; the others knew me better. But a telegram called him back to the city next morning and I saw him infrequently after that.'

'He always treated me civilly when we met, but I never saw him without feeling that he measured me by that word. I had opportunities to show him that I was not wholly bad, but they were too few to give a comprehensive view of my character, or really to influence his opinion of me.'

'In a strange way, after a year or two had passed, my name was mentioned for a position which was desirable, and which I seemed likely to secure, but this man was one of three to decide the matter. Without positively knowing how it came about, I could never doubt that a quiet intimation that he considered me unfit was what defeated me.'

'Later I found a situation which, although a good one, was in a very different line of work from what I had chosen, and I have never doubted that my whole life was changed by that idle word.'

'Did I learn the lesson? Yes, I did! My habit, now almost lifelong, has made impurity, even in its milder forms, repulsive. The memory of that incident has stopped many a hasty utterance, and in the years that followed it the warning of the Divine Teacher has added a sense of responsibility to the sense of shame. I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give good account thereof in the day of judgment.'—'Youth's Companion.'

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