

Stories of the Merricks.

A SPECIALIST IN FLATS.

(Walter Leon Sawyer, in the 'Youth's Companion'.)

When Della Merrick was fifteen years old she graduated from the grammar school, but she did not complete her education. Experience—and her mother—then began to teach her. When Della was seventeen she took a diploma in this special course, and went into business.

It was not altogether the girl's fault that she failed to make her fortune during those two years. She worked hard. She tried faithfully more than one promising plan to earn money. Her brother Kendall, who was a year older and a student at the Latin school, used to say that Della seemed to have as many arms in motion as an octopus—but she never caught anything.

'Then she's all the more free to go in and "joggle the parlor,"' Mrs. Merrick would answer, with that comforting kind of smile that mothers use. 'I'm thankful for that, if Della isn't.'

Della was always willing, at least. Perhaps she felt that, as the inventor of the phrase, she was in honor bound to respond to it. And 'joggling the parlor' meant much to the busy mother, for it involved a thorough sweeping and dusting. The fascinating part of it to the girl was the rearrangement of tables, chairs, everything, the discovery of attractive possibilities in new combination of furniture. But how Mr. Merrick and Kendall laughed at her experiments.

'Well, little daughter,' her father would say sometimes, 'have you been moving the mantel up and down to-day, or measuring to see if the bookcase would fit the fire-escape?'

'Where's my mackintosh, sis?' Kendall used to ask. 'Playing portiere somewhere, or masquerading inside out as an Oriental rug?'

'I'll leave it to mamma if this convenient six-room flat, with all modern improvements, doesn't look better than it did when I began,' was Della's last word when accused of making too radical alterations.

The Merricks lived on the third floor of the Hotel Germania, which was a 'family hotel,' or apartment-house. The building was four stories high, so there were a family over their heads and two families below them, while on the other side of the main stairway were four more families—eight in all.

Each family's six rooms were separated from every other family's six rooms. The Merricks could lock the two doors that opened upon the front and back stairways, and be 'monarchs of all they surveyed.' Steam-heat and 'service' were included in the rent, which meant that the janitor cleaned the halls and stairways, sent up the coal for the kitchen range and removed all ashes and refuse.

Moreover, the rent of the flat was twenty-five dollars a month, whereas the smallest house on the street rented for five hundred dollars a year, not including the cost of heating. Important considerations, all these, to people in moderate circumstances, people who, like the Merricks, were practically compelled to live in a certain neighborhood. Mr. Merrick was the sexton of a church, and had to be always within 'easy reach' of it.

The church paid a salary of a thousand dollars, and the sexton's fees for weddings, funerals, and other special occasions added substantially to his income.

'But suppose there shouldn't be many marriages next year!' said Della, tragically, on the very day she left school. 'Then I should feel

as if I ought to be helping. Why can't I begin to help right away?'

'I can draw, and I'm good at figures, but I couldn't become a scholar, like Kendall, if I studied a thousand years. Perhaps I ought to go to an art school; perhaps I'd do well in a business college; but either one would cost money, and I'm big enough to earn money myself. I want to stay out of school a year and work, and try to find out what I can do. Even if I go to the high school in the end, I'll be no older two or three years from now than lots of girls are when they enter it.'

It was an unusual proposition for so young a girl to make, but Della was an original girl, as well. After stipulating certain things she should not do, her parents gave consent. So Della let out a hem of her dress to make herself look older, and started to take subscriptions for 'Gems of Song and Story.'

This was a hotch-potch of familiar prose and verse, that weighed five pounds and sold for three dollars and a half. Della's commission on each copy was to be a dollar and forty cents.

The publishers assured her that many of their agents earned five thousand dollars a year. Surely she could sell two books a day, the girl thought—and that would be almost seventeen dollars a week! But at the end of the first week she found that she had nearly worn out a pair of shoes and had only three orders.

'I can't even get into the houses,' Della confessed to her mother. 'Do I look like a desperate character, Mamma Merrick?'

'No, dear.' Then the wise mother changed the subject.

'Speaking of the looks of things,' she said, gaily, 'I want you to take a holiday Monday, and hunt up new wall-paper for our hall. That paper quarrels with the parlor and darkens the hall itself.'

'It'll have to be something in red,' Della promptly responded. But her mind was on her recent experiences. 'And at one house where I called,' she added, 'the woman said, "No, run along, little girl; we don't want to buy anything to-day." Do I look as small as that, mamma?'

'No, dear. That was only her way of putting you off. Don't fret about it. Think about something pleasanter.'

'Think about how to fit up a dark room for me!' Kendall cried. He had entered just in time to catch the last sentence. 'You always say there's space enough for anything in a flat, if one is clever about contriving. I stump you to contrive a place where I can develop my negatives.'

These problems of paper and dark room kept Della busy and happy for a day or more. Then again she took her 'specimen book,' and with fortune that varied, but was mainly bad, she canvassed many city streets and the most promising section of a suburb.

At the end of a month she had sold sixteen books, and she borrowed the wholesale price from her father and ordered the volumes from the publishers. All that remained to be done, she thought, was to deliver the books and collect three dollars and a half from each subscriber.

But that was not so easy. Two of her patrons were reported to have 'moved away,' and nobody seemed to know whether they had gone. One woman smilingly explained that she did not want the book, anyway; that she only gave her name 'for encouragement.' Another woman 'hadn't expected her so soon,' and volubly promised to pay for the book 'day after to-morrow.' But when that day and Della arrived, the woman and the book had both vanished.

On twelve books paid for Della's profits amounted to sixteen dollars and eighty cents; but the four books for which she could not collect payment had cost her half that amount. That left eight dollars and forty cents as the net return for her month's work—not reckoning freight charges or car fares or shoe leather.

'It's not the fault of the business,' Della admitted, bravely. 'Lots of people make money canvassing. But my book wasn't attractive enough to make people want it, and I wasn't smart enough to make them think that they wanted it.'

'Never mind, dear,' said her mother. 'Rest your nerves by joggling the parlor, and then I'll set you to work out a problem for me—the question of furnishing a dining-room for fifty dollars. I believe that could be done, and I have a reason for wishing to know just what one could provide. You may "shop" for a few days,—without spending any money,—and then make a list describing each article and naming its cost.'

(To be continued.)

Read These Letters!

Carroll, Man., June 6, 1905.

Dear Sir,—Our flag was duly received and floated on the twenty-fourth for the first time, though the day was a showery one.

The pupils and citizens of our village are well pleased with it, and we had no coaxing to get the trustees to put up a flag-pole.

Your library offer is certainly very attractive, but for the present we can do nothing. Perhaps in the autumn we may make the attempt, as we need and would appreciate a library very much.

Thanking you for your courtesy,

I am, yours truly,

RAY H. HALL.

Sintaluta, May 26, 1905.

Dear Sir,—Just a line to state we received your flag as premium for securing twelve subscribers to 'Witness.' The flag is a good one, and highly satisfactory to us. You might forward some books for the school library with the balance of the funds. Use your own judgment.

Yours truly,

E. W. JERVIS, Teacher.

Arcola, Assa., May 13, 1905.

Dear Sirs,—The flag sent by your firm arrived last week, and I am pleased to state that the pupils and staff are delighted with it.

We will be pleased to send you a picture of the school as soon as it is finished. As there are over a hundred pupils we cannot promise you the picture of pupils with the school, but will send building with flag flying.

Thanking you for the flag, and assuring you that it has even exceeded our expectations, I remain, sincerely yours,

M. M. CAMPBELL, Principal.

Saskatoon, June 12, 1905.

Dear Sirs,—Your flag is a flag. No one thought it would be half as good, as generally speaking premiums are made of the cheapest material; but not so this time. The people in this section (Diova) are now satisfied at having obtained their flag so easily, and wonder why more of the neighboring schools did not take up the grand offer. Thanking you for your prompt attention to our subscription. Yours truly,

E. E. COUPLAND.

Sample Copies.

Any subscriber who would like to have specimen copies of the 'Northern Messenger' sent to friends can send the names with addresses and we will be pleased to supply them, free of cost.