



The Family Circle.

THE DYING CHRISTIAN.

"My day is dippin' i' the west, 'tis gloomin' w' mo noo;
I hear the sough o' Jordan's wave that I maun travel thro'.
Yet 'tis na' Jordan's wave I fear, nor tremble at the strife,
But oh, this sunderin' o' hearts—this lea'n o' wean and wife.
"What tho' we ken o' better days, a fairer warl' abun
Where lost frien's are awaitin' us, an' a maun follow sune.
This rendin' o' the siller strings that tether heart to heart,
Oh it tries puir human nature sair, an' makes us laith to part.
"Gao rax me by the Bible wife while yet I'm fit to see,
Ere death creep o'er my cauld rife bouk an' flap my failin' e'e.
An' let us sing a parting sang before we sundered be,
For ye canna hae me lang noo, I ha' nao lang ta dree.
"There, put the pillow to my back an' ease me up a wee,
An' bring them a' to my bedside to see their father dee;
Noo raise the Bible up a thocht, its ower laigh on my knee,
An' shift the light a kenneen back, its ower strong for my e'e."
He waill'd, he sang the parting sang, his voice was firm and clear,
And read the fourteenth o' St. John, nor did he shed a tear.
Sae is it w' the man o' God when life's day's darg is done,
Nae futuro fears distrub his mind, nae ruefu' looks behin'.
"Oh, but it gae me great relief, the singin' o' that sang,
My clay is crumblin' fast awa', my spirit noo grows strang;
My wife, my weans, we a' maun part, sae dinna sab sae sair,
But dight the tears frae off your face and let us join in prayer.
"An' let us join in prayer to Him that's wantin' me awa',
That he may be a faithfu' frien' and father to ye a'.
He turned his glazing o' to heaven and raised his withered hand,
Noo safely thro' auld Jordan's wave he's reached the better land.

THE OLD MINISTER'S GIRL.

Selectman Grover was driving slowly along the sandy river road, on his way home from the funeral of the Rev. Joseph Wardwell. He turned partly round on his waggon seat to talk with farmer Harriman, who had been one of the dead minister's bearers, and was now jogging homeward two or three rods behind the selectman.
"I guess it'll be kind o' hard sleddin' for the old minister's fan'ly," Mr. Grover remarked.
"Twill, no mistake," said Harriman. "I never was in a much barer, destituter-lookin' house. Did you know them chairs was brought clear over from John Bird's? Didn't look as if there's much in the way o' victuals round there, either, did there now?"
"No, there didn't," assented the selectman. "I'd no idee before, that was such a poor, cold, little house. Wa'n't room enough to swing a cat; and from where I sot I could see right out-door through the cracks. Don't see how they've ever kept warm these winters!"
"Wal, I don't. Let's see; Jock Melcher owns the place, don't he?"
"Jest the same's owns it. Jock's had a mortgage on it more'n fifteen year. He'd 'n' foreclosed long ago if the place had been wuth the cost o' the proceedin's. Jock don't let anything wuth while slip through his fingers."

"I'll bet he don't. Trust him for keepin' hold o' the dollars. But there's twenty or thirty acres of land goes with the place, aint there?"

"Believe there is; but the more a man had of sech land's that, the wuss off he'd be. Sandy—not a mite o' strength in it. A rabbit couldn't get a livin' on it; nothin' on it but brakes an' old pine stumps."

"Yas. It used ter make me feel bad to see parson Wardwell's garden-patch. Once as I was drivin' by I stopped to talk with him; and he said he was in hopes the blessin' of the year would rest on his efforts. 'Parson,' says I, 'the blessin' needs a little dressin' behind it.' Haw! haw! haw! But I don't see how they lived there so long."

"Wal, he drawed a little something by way of preacher's aid from the conference since he failed up preachin'; fifty dollars a year, I've heard. That helped 'em a little, I s'pose. But his wife is a poor, pale-lookin' old lady, aint she? And that Henry; d'ye ever see such a pindlin'-lookin' boy! What ails him?"

"Heard he got his back hurt, somehow, slidin' downhill over at Wrenham, the last circuit the old minister travelled on. That's some time ago. He must be eighteen or nineteen years old. Never'll come to anything, I guess."

"Likely he won't. That girl, though, is pert and smart enough."

"So she is. Don't know what her name is; the boys and girls round call her 'Stubby,' she's so kind of short and thick. Was always trottin' round out-door with the old minister, ye know."

"Droll thing, aint she?" said the selectman; "kind of a romp?"

"Wal, she's a go-ahead, good-natured thing, always on the grin and up to somethin' or 'nother. Come to my house to see my girls one day last summer. Had a basket with a salt codfish in it. She'd been down to the village with a dozen eggs. Walked all the way, five miles. But she wa'n't so tired but that she went flyin' around to play with my girls."

"They rumpused round out to the barn and found a hen's nest with ten or a dozen eggs in it. Stubby come bringin' 'em to the house in her hat. I'd come in from the field, hooin', a few minutes before, and set down on the door-step to drink a dipper of sweetened water; 'twas an awful hot afternoon."

"As she went by me, Stubby grinned and held up one of the eggs and shook it at me and said, 'What'll you bet, Mr. Harriman, I can't makethat egg stand up straight on the end, alone, on that bare table, with nothing touchin' it?'"

"I didn't know ministers' girls ever bet," says I to her.

"Did I say I was going to bet?" says Stubby. "I asked you what you'd bet."

"I guess you can't do it," said I to her; for I liked to hear her talk. "If you'll make that egg stand up alone," says I, "I'll give you all you've got in your hat."

"Wal, she down with her hat of eggs in a jiffy, and then begun to shake that egg; she shook it and shook it and struck it into the palm of her hand till she mixed the yelk and the white all together. But when she set it big end down on the table, that egg stood as straight as a major."

"Yum, yum!" says Stubby, twinkling her eye to me; and then she whopped that salt fish out of her basket and packed in the eggs."

"Jest let me leave my fish here till I come back along," said she, and put for the village again with them eggs, though 'twus getting towards night then."

"Jest at dark she come streakin' it back along, and called to get her fish. She had bought three pounds of rice with the last eggs."

"Let me know when you want to see another egg stand alone, mister," she said to me, as she left with the fish. Haw! haw! haw!"

"Most a doubt if they get the conference aid any longer; now the old minister is dead, aint it?" remarked the selectman.

"S'pose so. They may send the widder a little something. But she can't get through this next winter alone there, I'm sartin on't. Have to call on the town, I s'pose."

"I s'pose so," remarked the selectman. "But it does seem 's if we'd got about all the paupers we can handle now."

Mr. Grover knit his brows and wrinkled

up his nose after a manner he had when he was not well pleased. He touched up his mare, and the two farmers went on a little faster for some moments. Then he turned on his waggon seat again.

"Sometimes it seems to me, Harriman," said he, "that the Lord don't take very good care of his old sarvants."

"Praps he's holdin' back a little to see if them that they've sarved won't do somethin'," replied Harriman, with a hard, brown grin on his weathered visage.

"Um! Mebbe!" grumbled the selectman, and whipped up again.

The old minister's family was, indeed, in "hard sledding"—harder even than their immediate neighbors knew. Scarcely a fortnight had gone by after the funeral before actual hunger began to pinch the occupants of the poor little cottage on the sandy lot by the river. They had a little corn-meal in store, and got an occasional egg from their small flock of fowls, which picked up their own living out of doors.

The widow was both ill and despondent; and from morning till evening the weak-backed Henry sat in his chair by the window.

"Stubby" did almost all that was done. She might even have earned wages, away from home,—for she was now thirteen,—but that her presence and services were really needed there by the two invalids.

"Folks never do really starve to death in this free and glorious country, do they, Marmy Sarah?" she asked, meditatively, one morning about this time. It was one of her odd ways to address half-playfully, half-affectionately, her brother as "Poor Henry boy," and her mother as "Marmy Sarah." She had called her father "Papa Joe" in the same affectionate fashion.

Mrs. Wardwell had no reply to make to this inquiry.

"Still," continued Stubby, "the hens didn't lay an egg yesterday; and all we've got to eat this morning is a corn-cake."

For fuel with which to bake the corn-cake that morning Stubby had gathered up all the chips in the yard, and broken up with an old axe what stray sticks and remains of fence-poles she could find in the vicinity. After their scanty breakfast she went out and looked around in the frosty morning sunshine.

"Something's got to be done for a wood-pile," she soliloquized. "It's quite a responsibility to have a family on one's hands. I didn't used to realize it when father was alive."

She got the old axe and looked at its battered edge.

"Awful dull," she said. "But it won't be so likely to cut my feet. There isn't any wood-lot, but there's some old pine stumps out there. I suppose I've got to tackle one of them this morning."

"O Papa Joe," she continued, after a half-plaintive, half-whimsical manner peculiar to her, "do you really look down now and see what a fix we are in? I most hope you don't," she added, as she went through the dry, frosty brakes toward a large stump, "cause it would only make you feel bad. But if you are looking down on us, Papa Joe, just you see Stubby tackle this stump now!"

She "tackled" it valiantly; and good hard blows resounded across the barren field for some time.

"Smells good," she said to herself, stopping to rest. "I like the smell of pine. How dry it is, and what fat, red pitch-wood there is in these big side roots."

Again she belabored the old stump, resting at intervals and smelling the fresh split chips and slivers. Then she carried two armfuls to the house. It was hard work, and Stubby perspired.

"If I wasn't such a homely little fright, I don't know but I should have to marry a millionaire," she soliloquized, going to the stump for the last armful. "Supporting a family is hard work; but I've got enough wood to last till to-morrow, I guess; and now I'm going fishing."

Stubby was already a practised fisherman, and owned a hook, line and pole of her own "rigging." She caught a few dormant grasshoppers which the morning sun was beginning to thaw to a feeble semblance of crawling life, and went to the river bank. It was a poor fishing-ground, as the girl well knew, and all her efforts yielded but three small perch.

"If I could only haul out a big bass, or a pickerel, what a meal it would make us!"

she sighed. "But somehow a girl never can catch big fish."

With pole on her shoulder she climbed the bank and started toward home, avoiding a bend of the river and crossing first the pasture and then the fields of their nearest neighbor, Mr. Bird. The farmer had lately harvested his potatoes; and as Stubby crossed the field with her small string of fish she espied a potato half-hidden in one of the little mounds of fresh earth which the hoes of the diggers had drawn from the "hills."

She picked it up, and then looking about more carefully, discovered another.

"Now this couldn't be called stealing, could it?" she said to herself. "Mr. Bird's folks have dug the potatoes, and left the field to itself. These would rot and freeze. It's just like Ruth gleaming Boaz's fields, isn't it? There's pretty near a famine in the land, too, I kind of guess!"

(To be Continued.)

HOW THE DIKE WAS SAVED

On the northernmost part of the mainland of Holland there is a point extending nine miles, unprotected by any natural barrier from the sea. More than three hundred years ago the Hollanders undertook the gigantic task of raising dikes of clay, earth and stone; and now behind the shelter of the embankment numerous villages and towns are safe from their powerful enemy the sea. The spire of Alkmaar, a town of ten thousand inhabitants, is on a level with the top of the dike. A master is appointed to oversee the workmen constantly employed in watching the dikes. A century ago, one November night, a fierce gale was blowing from the north-west, and was increasing in fury every minute. The dike-master had planned to go to Amsterdam. It was the time of spring-tide. He thought of the dike. Shall he give up his pleasant trip to Amsterdam? The dike! The urgency of his visit is great. But the dike! Inclination against duty. It is six o'clock. The tide turns and rises. But at seven o'clock the stage starts for Amsterdam. Shall he go? A struggle; his inclination is to go; his duty is to remain. He looked up at the wild and fast increasing storm, and he decided to go with all speed to his post.

When he reached the dike the men, two hundred in number, were in utter and almost hopeless confusion. The storm had risen to a hurricane. They had used up their store of hurdles and canvas in striving to check the inroads of their relentless foe. Then they shouted: "Here's the master! Thanks be to God! All right now." The master placed every man at his post; and then a glorious battle commenced—the battle of men against the furious ocean. About half-past eleven the cry was heard from the centre, "Help! help!" "What's the matter?" "Four stones out at once." "Where?" "Here."

The master flung a rope around his waist, four men did the same. Forty hands held the ends of the ropes as the five glided down the sloping side of the dike. The waves buffeted them and tossed them, bruising their limbs and faces; but they closed the breach and were then drawn up. Cries for help were issuing from all quarters. "Is there any more canvas?" "All gone." "Any more hurdles?" "All gone." "Off with your coats, men, and use them for canvas!" shouted the master, throwing off his own. There they stood, half-naked, in the rage of the November storm.

It is now a quarter to twelve o'clock. Only half an inch higher and the sea will rush over the dike, and not a living soul will be left in all North Holland. The coats are all used up. The tide has yet to rise till midnight. "Now, my men," said the master, "we can do no more. Down on your knees, every one of you, and wrestle with God." Two hundred men knelt down on the trembling dike, amid the roar of the storm and the thunder of the waves, and lifted up their hands and hearts to him who could say to the waves: "Be still." And as of old he heard them, and saved them out of their trouble. The people of Alkmaar were eating and drinking, dancing and singing, and knew not that there was but a quarter of an inch between them and death. A country was saved by one man's decision for duty.—*Children's Record.*