



The Family Circle.

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT.

If you're told to do a thing
And mean to do it really,
Never let it be by halves;
Do it fully, freely.

Do not make a poor excuse,
Waiting, weak, unsteady;
All obedience worth the name
Must be prompt and ready.

If you're told to learn a task,
And you should begin it,
Do not tell your teacher: "Yes,
I'm coming in a minute."

Waste not moments nor your works
In telling what you could do
Some other time; the present is
For doing what you should do.

Don't do right unwillingly
And stop to plan and measure;
'Tis working with the heart and soul,
That makes our duty pleasure.

PHOEBE CARY.

TOM'S RESOLUTIONS.

A great many people at the beginning of the year make the best of resolutions. Very few, I am sorry to say, ever keep them. It was upon a certain New Year's Day that Tom Dyer enrolled himself among the many; whether he became one of the few, it is the purpose of this story to unfold. Some people would have put their resolutions down on paper, numbering them 1, 2, 3 and 4, and stuck them up in the frame of the looking-glass, as being the likeliest place to see them frequently. Tom did nothing of the sort. He rarely used a looking-glass, in the first place, and despised anything like expressing his thoughts on paper in the second. He never even wrote a letter unless he was away from home and wanted money. On this occasion he did no more than frame his resolutions in his mind, something after this fashion:

"I won't fire stones at Miss Peppercorn's cat."

"I'll read a chapter in the Bible every day—and say my prayers."

"I shan't make fun of Katie Buchanan's red hair."

Now it must not be supposed that these resolutions were the expression of any penitence on Tom's part. Not at all! It was only that good Mrs. Dyer, Tom's mother, had been laboring with the boy, and pointed out so clearly his shortcomings that to get rid of a disagreeable subject he had promised to make a new departure. He did have some notion of keeping his promise. As a rule Tom meant well. It was in the doing that he usually fell short.

Well, that New Year's morning Tom did say his prayers. They were very brief, and I am afraid he was thinking more about the coasting on Cranberry Mountain than his personal relations to the Lord. He read a chapter in the Bible, too, the 1st chapter of Matthew, and struggled painfully through its genealogies. However, he had so far kept his resolution.

The way to Cranberry Mountain led past Miss Peppercorn's house. As Tom went by dragging his long coasting sled after him, a prolonged mew attracted his attention. Looking up he saw on the ridge-pole of the house, outlined against the sky, Miss Peppercorn's large black cat, "General Butler." Tom instinctively caught up a handful of snow. The cat, apprehending the situation, hastily decamped. When Tom was ready the cat had gone. A look of disappointment crossed the boy's face. He fired the ball toward the house and broke one of the windows. Then starting on a run he did not stop until the next turn in the road had hid him from any chance of detection.

"Came mighty near breaking my resolution that time," he said, moodily.

At that very instant the cat appeared again, trotting peacefully along the other side of the fence. It was more than human nature could resist. Tom had a snow ball

in his hand. He fired it across the fence but it fell just short of the mark. With a howl and a jump the animal disappeared. Tom looked around half scared.

"It didn't hit her, anyhow," he said, resentfully.

A little further on he was joined by Jim Tuckerman, a choice and congenial spirit, also with his sled, and together the two went on toward their coasting ground.

The road over Cranberry Mountain is steep and crooked. On one hand it falls off in a precipice. One-third of the way up stands the widow Buchanan's cottage. Just above this point it takes a sharp turn to the right, cutting off any view of the lower from the upper part. For ordinary travel it is hardly safe. For coasting it is positively perilous. But to the boys this feature makes it all the more eligible.

Katie Buchanan, leaning over the front gate that morning, and looking down the hill, caught sight of the boys as they came out of the wooded hollow below. Their noisy cries floated up on the still air. Even at that distance Katie could recognize the voice of Tom Dyer, and not caring to meet the ridicule which he always freely dealt out, she turned to go in the house. At that instant, though, the door opened and "Bunch" came out. "Bunch" had already seen the boys from the window and insisted upon a nearer view.

"Want to see the boys," he cried, running up to his sister. Katie took him up in her arms.

"You can see them out of the window," she said, moving toward the door. But the child was not at all satisfied.

"No, no!" he cried. "Don't want to go in! want to see the boys! want to swing on the gate!" and there is no telling where his wants would have stopped if Katie, dreading a controversy more than ridicule, had not turned round again and mounted him on the desired resting place.

It was not long before the boys neared the house. Up to this time they had not seen Katie. Now they caught sight of her as she stood, one arm around "Bunch," the other leaning over the gate, her cheeks flushed with the sharp winter air, and her hair, which was undeniably red, blown over her face by the fresh wind. It was a pretty enough picture for an artist. Unhappily, though, the boys had little artistic sense.

"Say, Dyer," whispered Jim, "here's Red-head."

Tom was reckless. His adventure with the cat and the companionship of his friend had blown away all remembrance of the resolutions. Or if there was a lingering remembrance he had got to that point where he didn't care. He grinned derisively.

"Hello, Lighthouse!" he shouted rudely; "don't need any candles where you are, do you?"

Now there was nothing bright or witty in the remark. It wasn't even sarcastic. The idea was trite and the expression stupid. But Katie, foolish little girl, thought it must be very smart, because the boys laughed. She thought, too, that the color of her hair, which was a rich dark Egyptian red—not at all a common brick-dust color—must be something very atrocious; and felt for a moment that she would like to pull it out, or dye it, or wear a wig, or in some other way disguise its real character. She could not help looking hurt, and blushed so that the contrast between her hair and face was very slight indeed. By this time her tormentors had passed the house and were disappearing around the turn.

"Good-bye, Red-head!" they shouted; and the echo caught up the words, until Katie seemed to hear a hundred voices reproaching her with her imperfection. The child burst into tears. Her life was hard enough at best, and it seemed mean and cruel to add this burden to it. She turned away with a heavy heart, and having put down little "Bunch" walked slowly up the path. The noise of the boys came down the hill, growing fainter and fainter in the distance. Katie wiped away the tears, opened the door and went in. Her sister Nellie, two years younger than herself, was standing by the window drumming absently upon the pane.

"If I'd been you," said Nellie, turning around and speaking with emphasis, "I'd have gone out in the road and pulled his hair! What a nasty boy he is!"

Katie smiled faintly. "What's the use, Nellie?" she asked. "Let's stand here and see them come down."

But Nellie flounced away.

"I'm sure I don't want to see them," she

said, "I'm going to read;" and she settled herself down in the rocking chair, while Katie occupied her place by the window. The window took in the road down as far as the hollow. Katie's thoughts, though, ran the other way. It would take the boys, she concluded, a good ten minutes to get to the top of the hill; but once having reached the top they could come down all the way in a minute and a half. And there being for once nothing else to do—Mrs. Buchanan had gone to the village, and "Bunch" was happy with the dog—Katie waited for their coming with some expectancy.

The old clock in the corner had ticked out four, five, six, seven minutes. The boys must be very near the top. Four, or at the most five minutes more would bring them flying like the wind past the house. Katie pressed her face against the pane, as though it would bring them the sooner.

What is it, though, that Katie sees? Why does the child's face all at once grow white as she turns to Nellie, and grasping her with one hand points with the other down the road? Nellie, for her part, seems to see no occasion for alarm, for with a single glance she turns again to her book, saying in an indifferent way,

"It's only Mr. Beamish, hauling his wood over the mountain."

But Katie, wringing her hands, cries, "Oh, Nellie! Nellie! can't you see?"

Nellie looked again. Out of the hollow had come a team of horses. Already they were toiling up the road, dragging after them on the surface of the snow a load of timber. The horses took up a good share of the road—the timber quite filled it, and, more than that, slanted a little, so that in the rear it sometimes overhung the edge. Mr. Beamish, as it seemed, had taken the chance of not meeting anybody coming down the mountain. It was a pretty safe chance. Most people would choose the easier road around its base, even though it were three miles longer. As Nellie looked it began to dawn upon her what Katie meant.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you mean the boys?"

Katie did not even answer. She was still gazing down the hill, with a dazed, frightened look.

"They'll meet just here," she said, half to herself; "the boys can't see around the turn and they'll have the outside of the road. The very minute they hit those logs—"

"Can't you stop them?" asked Nellie, eagerly, "or stop Mr. Beamish?"

"How can I stop them?" excitedly. "They'll be going like the wind. Ashes might do it, but it would take a cart-load. And how can Mr. Beamish get out of the way? Oh, Nellie!"—and burying her face in her apron as though to hide the picture from her mind, as she might in a few minutes from her eyes, she shook with excitement and terror.

"I don't see what you feel so bad for," said Nellie. "You can't do anything; and, besides, they were awfully rude to you. I believe it's a sort of judgment."

"Nellie Buchanan!" hotly. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

The old clock was ticking away the minutes. Only two were left. As Katie turned her glance away from the clock it fell upon the half-opened door of her mother's room. With all her anxiety and alarm she was conscious of a little unpleasant feeling of a different nature. Her mother had told her to make up the bed, and it was still unmade. But in another instant the unmade bed had given Katie an inspiration. Fairly taking Nellie by the shoulders she pushed her out of the door.

"Run," she cried; "run quick, down to Mr. Beamish and tell him to stop. You stand on the inside—behind the logs. Mind now," and she fairly stamped her little foot as Nellie flew down the path and along the slippery road.

With equal haste Katie rushed to the bed. The sheets, blankets and coverlet lay on the chair as Mrs. Buchanan had left them that morning. If ever Katie was glad of her own forgetfulness, it was now. The feather bed rose in a billowy mountain. She grasped it with both hands and tugged at its flabby undulations. As it began to move she turned round facing the door, and dragged it very slowly and laboriously after her. With some pushing and crowding she got it into the next room, then with less difficulty out of the house. Going down the path, she tumbled one part over another. Then with the strength and energy of terror she fairly dumped the mass over the fence. Far up

the hill she thought she heard a cry. It only remained to spread the bed in some sort of shape across the road. While doing this a side glance down the mountain showed her that Mr. Beamish had already stopped and was vainly trying to shift his logs from the edge of the cliff. Nearer and nearer came the shouts. Katie sprang back to the gate; it was none too soon.

Around the turn like a shot came the first sled. It was Tom Dyer's. Katie's terror of the boy, the hate which sometimes she almost felt for him, had all gone. She hid her face against the gate post, and trembling like a leaf waited for it to be over.

There was a dull thud—an exclamation of disgust—a cry of fright. Instinctively the girl looked up. Close by the fence, almost immersed in feathers, was the sled. A little further on, seated on the ground, his face blanched to the whiteness of the snow, and his eyes staring down the road to where his death, but for this interruption, had awaited him, was Tom Dyer. Katie's voice broke his dream.

"Get up," she said sternly, "and come over here. Isn't the other one coming after you?"

Tom looked up mechanically and did as he was told. Side by side with Katie he leaned against the fence and waited in a scared, bewildered way for Jim's coming. A shout and a hurrah came around the turn. It was Jim Tuckerman's voice. Tom shivered and put out his hand in a helpless fashion, and felt a sense of protection and support as Katie took it in her own trembling grasp. But there was little need for apprehension. Around the bend came Jim as Tom had done before him, plunging into the bed as though he would drive it down the mountain, but finding instead that it brought him to a sudden stop—so sudden, indeed, that the sled remained where it was, while Jim, clearing the bed, landed in a heap further down the road. With Katie the reaction came at once. Only waiting to be satisfied of the boy's entire safety, she gave a little glad cry and burst into tears. Tom dropped her hand and turned round toward the house, pretending to examine it. But little "Bunch" exposed the subterfuge. Toddling out of the door, he looked from one to the other, then to Jim, who was leaning soberly upon the fence, and called out impatiently,

"What you all cwyng for?"

Then he seemed to recognize Tom.

"Naughty man!" he shouted, "what you make Katie cwy for?" and having discovered as he thought the cause of their grief he proceeded to belabor Tom's legs, crying loudly himself meanwhile.

The attack was a welcome diversion and turned their tears into laughter. By this time Nellie and Mr. Beamish had come up. The latter was uncompromising and severe, as people always are who put other people's lives in danger.

"I tell you what, young men," he said emphatically, "you've had a mighty close shave. And you've nobody to thank for your lives but this girl. The idea," he added, "of anybody coasting on this road when I'm hauling my timber over!"

But the boys were in a weak and humble frame of mind, and didn't even resent this reflection upon their judgment and personal independence. They waited in silence until Mr. Beamish had gone back for his team and then turned toward the girls. Their faces were red and voices very low.

"I made a resolution this morning," stammered Tom, "but I broke it—"

"I made him," put in Jim.

"Didn't neither," said Tom. "No fellow can make me do nothin' I don't want to. I made a resolution this morning that I wouldn't say nothin' about your red hair—"

Here Jim nudged him, and he stopped, blushing furiously. In an instant, though, he went on,

"Well, it is red, anyhow," he insisted. "Only I don't mean to make fun of it. And Jim don't neither. If he does, you just let me know, and I'll punch his head. And we're awfully obliged to you. It was mighty smart in you to think of the feather bed. There ain't another thing on earth that would have stopped us. Oh, say, wouldn't you like to come up to the top, when old Beamish gets out of the way, and coast down on my sled? It'll hold two; it's a regular ripper, mine is. And Jim'll take your sister."

Katie thought she wouldn't do it for a million dollars. But she said very politely, "No I thank you, I should be afraid. And