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HAWTHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED

Little Jeannie grew daily more feeble. The wasting disease that had found a hiding-place in her delicate frame developed itself, and Marion saw in the distance the plain fulfillment of her mother's words. She would have been cruel indeed, if the sight of this gradual decay had not led her to exert herself for the little sufferer. For many weeks the averted face and faint moan, when she came near, gave her a most distressing headache, but when at last the child was persuaded, in the absence of her mother, to nestle in Marion's lap, and lay her head on her bosom, the look she received from her father brought a sensation of relief, such as she had not felt for a long time.

The busy wheat harvest approached with its scorching sun and troops of laborers. Mr. Benton already worked each day beyond his strength. His sheep, of which he had collected a fine flock from different farms within a range of twenty miles, troubled him by straying back to their old homes, and journey after journey was taken for the sheep in the wilderness, sometimes to find they had been the prey of wolves that infested that region. One morning they were all missing, and Mr. Benton, who had become his inseparable companion and pet since Harold's departure, went forth to search for them. It was a very hot morning in July, and as he came near his home he missed the dog. He gave himself no uneasiness, thinking he would return at his leisure, but poor Turk never came back, the scarcity of water in the past unwatered fields was his death; the hungry wolves fed on his carcass.

Mrs. Benton was almost overwhelmed by the increase of cares consequent on the influx of farm help during wheat harvest, not only the absolute labor troubled her, but the contempt with which they looked upon her eastern cookery was an annoyance. They would as soon eat young kittens as venal, and as to sheep-meat, that must not come into their bill of fare. They compared the light white delicate compound she called bread, with their own carbonated biscuit, and felt only scorn for her performances. Here Mrs. Leighton came in with her motherly ways and experience, and not only initiated Mrs. Benton into the secrets of western "good living," but found an assistant for her, a luxury almost unknown at that time on the prairie of Illinois. The "help" made her appearance under the escort of young Leighton; she leaped from the wagon and ran around the corner of the house when Mrs. Benton appeared at the door. Horatio Leighton captured her, and brought her before her new mistress. She was a girl of thirteen perhaps, her black hair was cropped all over her head, and stood erect, innocent of brush or comb; her face and arms were swarthy as an Indian; she stood with her finger in her mouth, and hung her head when addressed, but there was a glance from the corner of her hawk's eye, as if she meditated an escape the first opportunity.

"What is your name?" inquired Mrs. Benton. "Sobriety Top, mum," was the reply. "Have you parents?" asked the mistress. "Dunno what 'em is," said the girl, in a sharp quick voice. "Have you a father and mother?" continued Mrs. Benton. "Pap and mam's dead," replied the girl, with perfect indifference. Mrs. Benton was shocked with this reply, which young Leighton perceiving, he left Marion, with whom he had been chatting, to relate to her mother the past history of the child. He explained that she had never known her parents, had been raised in Indiana, and brought to Athlaca by her uncle. She had been made to work in the fields, and treated in so severe a manner that the neighbors had interfered, and the town authorities had taken her under their care; "she is very near a heathen, I fear," said Mr. Leighton, in closing, "but if you can make anything of her, it will surely be missionary work; she is right strong and healthy, and those who know her say she is not vicious."

At the commencement of his narrative, Sobriety had escaped to the "outside," as she called it, and as he rose to go, Marion accidentally looked out of the window, near which he had been standing, and there, equaled on the ground with her swarthy face turned upward, was the girl, listening with interest to her biography. After some hesitancy Mrs. Benton determined to make a trial of her, and a letter written about this time will tell us how she prospered in this as well as in other matters.

"Prairie Home, July, 184—  
"My Beloved Sister Agnes:  
"It is long since I have written you freely; my time has been so filled with household cares, and the tending of little Jeannie, that I have only been able to keep Rosine and Willie informed of our welfare. We have all worked very hard for the last few weeks, giving up every thing for the waiting on farm help. My husband exerts himself daily beyond

his strength. We all work to disadvantage, from our ignorance of farm labor. For myself, I have just now a little more leisure; Jeannie's disease having assumed a quiet form. She sleeps much and is spared that dreadful nervousness that has hitherto been her greatest suffering. We were obliged to seek 'help.' I wish I could show you 'Sobriety Top,' our assistant. No case of ignorance I ever have met can compare with her utter want of any idea of God, having never heard His name except in oaths. I can realize a little what I never did before in the Indies must have had in reaching the heathen mind. She is bright and intelligent, and now that I have bleached the outside by a few weeks' in-door labor, she is not bad-looking. She has been reared to follow the laborers in the field, and of her manners and morals you can judge. Had Harold or Willie been at home, I should have declined taking her. Mr. Benton has a perfect antipathy to her; you know how sensitive he is to anything unwomanly in the sex; but I feel encouraged to hope, now she begins to understand kindness, that this mind may be snatched from worse than Pagan darkness. Marion has undertaken to teach her to read, the discipline which such an effort will require will be good for her teacher. Marion is doing better. I am most happy to say; one or two severe reprimands from her father having had the effect to arouse her to a sense of her duties. Harold is doing well; I may write you what Father O'Leary says of him, 'He is a noble boy, and does credit to his home training.' He is to learn civil engineering, to which he strongly inclines. My heart yearns for my absent ones; dear Willie sends me messages of love in his grandfather's letters. His eyes are very troublesome. I fear the disease may be permanent. I may say to you what I can say to no other—my dear husband is more fully all I could wish, day by day. His self-abnegation and deep penitence prove, I am sure, that however his fellow-man may regard him, his Father in Heaven will forgive him.

We have as yet no priest, though I heard a rumor that we were soon to have that blessing. We shall all be more peaceful and contented when we can go to our religious duties. The Sunday-school flourishes under the care of a young physician, lately come to this village, though I have been wholly unable to attend to it of late. Marion continues her interest, and has managed to interest some who are not of our faith in its prosperity. But dear sister, such a longing for the Blessed Sacrifice comes over me at times, that I fear my own comfort, more than the glory of God, moves me. But I hear dear Jeannie's feeble wail, and I must close my letter; thanks that you do not always wait for a reply to your comforting messages of love. Write often, and never forget to pray for your friend and sister.

"Lucy."  
"I do not fear for her in the case of Mr. Leighton," replied the wife. "She is very ambitious; I fear her affections will never lead in such a matter. The Leightons seem to be the only family with whom she can enjoy good intercourse, and it would be hard to debar her from their acquaintance from mere suspicion of such a result as we have contemplated. Her desire to go to the village today arose, I am sure, from a good motive, her interest in the Sunday-school; but as you say, this reluctance to be thwarted, her unwillingness to be guided, is a most un-Christian trait, and one which I have battled against in her since she was a child."

"And which she takes direct from me, Lucy. God sends us our sharpest crosses in obliging us to punish in our children faults which we cannot but see are a plain inheritance from ourselves. I must humble my proud heart to tell Marion the origin of these miserable blots on her character, and the dreadful curse they have been to me."

"I think the fog is breaking up," said Mrs. Benton, going to the window, desiring to prevent a morbid recurrence to the past; "it looks brighter. Don't you think Marion might ride to the village in the morning?" "Possibly," replied her husband, "if she is in better mood tomorrow. Albus will carry her safely to Athlaca; he is sure-footed, and is certainly accustomed to the way." Marion's solitary day benefited her, for she was ashamed, and afraid to appear with the family. Her conscience had opportunity to work, and was very busy; her pride, too, had been sorely wounded by the thought that she had not been able to govern herself, and needed the discipline of a child. To have made such a display of temper before Sobriety, whom she was continually lecturing on good behavior, as to have caused her father to rebuke her sternly, was galling to her nature. A little book, given her by Father Roberts the morning of her Confirmation, lay on her dressing-table, and she opened it at this marked passage—marked, as she thought to herself, when it was easy to be good—"Art thou very sure thou knowest what it is indeed and in truth to bear My Cross? For there are many on earth who call themselves My disciples, and profess to carry it within their arms; but the token which they wear, although it hath the shape and form of a cross, is but a mockery of the stern reality. It gives no pain nor weariness, it hath no goading sharpness, arousing them to labor as I labored; it hath no piercing power to cut into their very souls, and drag their pride and self-will from their concealed depths, before their weeping eyes, nor crushing weight to lay them in the dust of penitence."

Where was the cross, she asked herself, which she had taken up joyfully—even willingly? She had chafed and rebelled, and trampled on the cross which she should have borne gladly for the sake of her dear Lord. The fog was perhaps a shade less dense the following morning, and

Mr. Benton's heart was moved by the deep blush which suffused his daughter's face, as she said to him, "Papa, I am sorry; will you kiss me?" He knew something of the effort those words must have cost, and kissing her affectionately, he whispered a word in her ear, that made the blush deepen and spread, and brought tears into her eyes. "Do you think you may venture, my child?" he said aloud, bringing her towards the outer door. "The fog is still impenetrable, but Albus knows the way; only keep a tight rein."

"Perhaps I had better not," she said, resting her head on his shoulder and now rarely weeping; "I can't be trusted." "You can't trust yourself?" he replied quickly, and sitting down with her under the stoop he had erected before the door, he said most affectionately but gravely, "I have a great deal to say to you, Marion, but this is not the time; I will content myself now with reminding you that you are no longer a child, and ought to practice self-government. If you have no higher motive, self-respect should be sufficient to prevent the recurrence of such scenes as those of yesterday. A girl of eighteen should not require a reprimand from her father for ill-temper. I do not speak of higher motives, your mother can talk of them, for she had always lived upon them; I speak now only of decency and propriety in this world. Pride, ambition, unwillingness to be thwarted, have ruined my life; I have not my child follow in these false steps of her father; but time wears away, I will bring the pony if you wish it."

Marion went to prepare herself; she had no fear of the fog, but she felt that her father's wish, which she saw, though he did not express it, ought to govern her; but then there was poor Alice Leighton whom she had not seen for nearly a week. "Dear creature, so little variety she has in life, and so confined, I right have I to speak?" she said to herself. "He gave me his permission too. How thankful I am for my strength, and health," she added aloud as she shook down the folds of her riding-dress, and arranged the long feather in her hat. Sobriety stood at her elbow as she turned. The tiresome girl! How much had she heard of the soliloquy!

"How poorly we are," said the intruder, grinning from ear to ear, and snapping her coal-black eyes mischievously. "So he really said you might! Wael, I reckon you'll come home pieat' enough."

Bobby was eight years old, the pet of St. Anthony Home for the Blind. Everyone, inmates, Sisters and benefactors, loved the child. Mother Angela looked rested on the status of the St. Anthony, under whose protection the Home was placed. Surely the good saint would hear their prayers for Bobby. He, who held the Child Jesus so lovingly in his arms, must love all children for His sake. She turned again to her task. The quarterly report was always a nightmare to her. As she checked column after column she thought how seldom the balance came out in favor of the Home. Usually there was something to add to the debit already large enough. Still what could one do? Turn away the friendless, sightless ones, who knocked and begged for admittance in the name of Christ? No! Worry and plan: beg from the generous until one more found a Home in St. Anthony's.

Her heart grew tender as she thought of the little ones starting life's journey with such a handicap. Then the anxious thought stole in, and her mind began to wander. "If only Bobby could be cured. She thrilled at the thought! Quick and clever, his wonderful fingers almost uncanny in their deftness, his mind comprehending things hard for a much older child, with eyesight restored he need fear no other handicap. Through the glass door of her office which commanded a view of the corridor, she saw Dr. Sullivan approach with his colleagues. He parted from them at the main door, and at her gentle bidding entered the office and seated himself near her desk. "What is the decision about Bobby?" she asked, striving to conceal her anxiety. "Dr. Reed and Dr. Mulvey confirm my diagnosis," he answered. "They agree with me that with a certain delicate operation performed, Bobby's eyesight can be restored. But," he continued gravely, "they also agree with me that there is just one man capable of undertaking that operation: Dr. John McIvor."

Today he seemed careworn as he said soberly: "I am sorry, Rev. Mother, but I fear you are to be bitterly disappointed. When the possibility arose of there being even a slight chance for Bobby I got in touch with the big specialists along that line and all recommended Dr. McIvor. None care to take the risk. I find that Dr. McIvor is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He has been forbidden to touch an instrument for a year. I am afraid that we can do nothing."

"Oh, doctor there must be some way. We cannot see little Bobby's chance slip away. Can you think of any way we might reach him for this urgent case?" Money? Mentally she was figuring how they could raise the money. They must get it somehow if needed. But Dr. Sullivan smiled gravely. "Money means nothing to him. The child of the richest man and the blind orphan from St. Anthony's would receive the same treatment from him."

"A personal appeal?" she ventured timidly. The doctor shook his head. "You could not reach him; those who have his welfare at heart reason that it is better to lose a few cases, by death even, than that the doctor be sacrificed and the world lose the benefit of his wonderful skill."

She sat thoughtful for a while then asked quietly: "At the end of a year, when the doctor is able to once more handle cases, would Bobby's chance be just as good?" Dr. Sullivan shook his head. "At the end of the year there will be very little chance for Bobby recovering his sight. It is almost too late even now."

Mother Angela arose. "Then doctor," she said resolutely, "we shall storm heaven with our prayers until this good doctor comes to help our Bobby. St. Anthony, our protector, will stand a novena for him." Dr. Sullivan looked at her in astonishment. "Rev. Mother, do you really think you can do what the richest man in this country was unable to do; get Dr. McIvor to perform an operation?" "Of myself, I can do nothing. God willing, everything can be done. So we shall beseech our powerful patron, St. Anthony, to hear our petition to him."

"But, Rev. Mother, it's impossible! It is madness to think you can get the doctor to come. It would be a miracle." "Even so," she answered, softly: "there are miracles happening about us always. But if we pray and our prayers not answered then we shall be resigned to the will of God, for then we know the favor we asked were better not granted." A few days later as Dr. Sullivan was leaving on a sudden fancy seized him to enter the little chapel. Solemnly and sweetly he heard prayers for the special intention, the gentle voice of the Superior explaining the importance of it and urging every one to pray that it be granted. There was something so pathetic in the sweet, fresh voices of these blind children that it stirred him deeply. All day he had tried to drive the thought of blind Bobby from his mind. He was going away in a few days on a long vacation and did not wish to be troubled about anything, but something persistently called this case to his mind. He was injured to suffering of all kinds, in a way hardened to it, but the thought had never come home to him as it did today, what a terrible affliction it was to be blind. These little ones, unconsciously praying, could not even realize the greatness of their terrible losses. Here and there among their charges he saw the plainly robed Sisters. Some with fresh young faces, others grown old and wrinkled in service. He comprehended as never before the consecration of their work. Unable to stand more, he passed out into the street and lighted a cigar for comfort, striving to shake off the blue feeling which had come over him, but the sorrowfully sweet prayers still rang in his ears and with them a steady refrain which chanted, "Blind! blind!"

"I am hoping to get away in two weeks' time for a long and, I assure you, a much needed rest," he replied. "But how about Bobby?" Has St. Anthony helped any yet?" "Not yet," Rev. Mother answered soberly, "but we hope and pray. Perhaps unexpectedly a way will be shown."

The doctor fumbled with his medicine case and did not look up as he said rather awkwardly: "Do you suppose you could put in a little prayer for me with the others? You might ask him to help me decide something right, right for every one concerned. It's too big a proposition for me to decide myself. I guess he will understand."

Mother Angela's eyes brightened with sympathy. "We shall consider it a favor to be allowed to help you in any way, doctor." "That night was a more restful one for the doctor. Once or twice the refrain "Blind! blind!" sounded in his ears, but he turned over and went to sleep. The burden of decision had been placed with One wiser than he.

Long after the other prayers were finished in the convent, Rev. Mother Angela knelt in prayer before the statue of St. Anthony. A candle she lighted burned brightly, burned slowly down, flickered and went out, and still she prayed—prayed that Dr. Sullivan would make a wise decision, for intuitively she knew that on that decision rested Bobby's chances.

A week later a telegram came which sent the Home into a tremendous bustle of preparation: "Arrive Wednesday a. m. with McIvor, incognito. Prepare Bobby." "SULLIVAN."

It was over at last. Dr. McIvor declaring himself none the worse for his journey and his task, received the grateful thanks of the Sisters, and departed. Bobby lay with bandaged eyes in a darkened room to be a prisoner for weeks, requiring skillful care, but practically cured. It was pathetic to see his eagerness to do just what was told him, trying to repay even in a small way, the great gift he had received. Dr. Sullivan was to have the care of his convalescence, which meant daily care. It was wonderful to see the new expression which swept into the doctor's eyes. Mother Angela, wise from years of experience at reading character, read something there which foreshadowed greatness of skill as well as of character. She prophesied that one day Dr. Sullivan would be as skillful as Dr. McIvor. But what had caused the change, what had accomplished the thing that Dr. Sullivan had declared impossible? She could only turn to St. Anthony for answer. It might have remained unanswered for all time but for a visitor, who called to see the Home. He introduced himself as "Mr. Thomas Martin." He asked for the Rev. Mother, and presented himself as an intimate friend of Dr. Sullivan.

No honor was too great for a friend of Dr. Sullivan and Mother Angela herself showed him about the Home. He listened attentively to all her remarks concerning each department of the institution but with a peculiar seriousness. Mother Angela had a feeling that he was studying her rather than listening to what she was saying. The feeling grew upon her so much that she was hardly surprised when he said: "I came here for an answer to a question that has been in my mind for some time."

Mother Angela said kindly: "And have you found an answer?" "Mr. Martin shook his head: "Not as yet," he replied. "Perhaps I can help you," she said sympathetically. "Perhaps you can," he answered. "What I wish to find out is, why Dr. Sullivan gave up a trip abroad, which he had planned for months, and which had been the dream of years, to chase over the country after an eye specialist, and then settle down to take care of a pauper child?"

Mother Angela, stunned with surprise at his bluntness, could only stare at him in amazement. Unheeding he went on: "Dr. Sullivan—Jim—and I have been chums since we were boys. We went to school and college together. Jim worked his way, but my folks being wealthy, things were always easy for me. As youngsters we had a great desire to visit Egypt and the Libyan Desert. The fancy grew until it became a sort of ideal. In college we planned it, resolving to go surely when Jim got established. I have made several trips abroad, but always reserved that trip—our trip—as we called it—for Jim and myself. This year, after many disappointments, we laid our plans. Dr. Sullivan needed the rest and change badly and like two boys we planned our long vacation. Two weeks before he was about to take a trip West to look up Dr. McIvor. It seems that in his student days Jim saved the doctor's life and he was going to use that plea to bring the doctor to this Home to perform an operation. He said that if the operation was successful there would be no trip, as the child would need treatment for weeks."

Mother Angela had recovered herself by this time and was listening carefully. As he finished, she said: "You were bitterly disappointed, were you not?" He gave her a keen look. "Yes, of course, I was. We had made our plans and they were the fulfillment of an idea—the dream of a boy and the longing of a man realized. Just think, pals as we were, to travel Egypt and the wonderful Libyan

St. Anthony's Assistant  
Mother Angela's eyes wandered unseeing from the columns of figures on the page before her. Though the debt loomed up threateningly as usual, it was not the cause of the wrinkle between her eyes. Over in the hospital wing, Dr. Sullivan and two specialists he had called into consultation, were even now making the examination which would tell whether Bobby Stafford could be cured of the blindness which had come to him when a baby. Bobby was eight years old, the pet of St. Anthony Home for the Blind. Everyone, inmates, Sisters and benefactors, loved the child. Mother Angela looked rested on the status of the St. Anthony, under whose protection the Home was placed. Surely the good saint would hear their prayers for Bobby. He, who held the Child Jesus so lovingly in his arms, must love all children for His sake. She turned again to her task. The quarterly report was always a nightmare to her. As she checked column after column she thought how seldom the balance came out in favor of the Home. Usually there was something to add to the debit already large enough. Still what could one do? Turn away the friendless, sightless ones, who knocked and begged for admittance in the name of Christ? No! Worry and plan: beg from the generous until one more found a Home in St. Anthony's.

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