

Aunt Sarah's Christian Endeavor

PALMYRA BEAN untied her bonnet-strings and rolled them carefully over her forefinger. She had just been to call on the new minister's wife.

"Well, Palmyre?"

Gentle Aunt Sarah tried to wait patiently, but it always did take Palmyre so long to roll her bonnet-strings.

"Well, Palmyre?"

Palmyra finished the second one, and tucked it deftly into the bonnet-lining. Then she put the bonnet away.

"Well, I guess she's slack."

"Why, Palmyre? Why, she looked real neat an' pretty when she went by to meetin'."

"I don't care how she looked goin' by to meetin', Sarah Bean. Slack folks always fix up

then. What I care for 's how she looks to home. She's a real sweet-lookin' woman, an' talks like a book, but she's slack. I guess I know what that means."

"The poor little woman!" murmured Aunt Sarah under her breath. She pitied her instantly with all the strength of her big, warm heart. If Palmyre said she was slack, everybody else would say so. Palmyre set the fashion of saying things.

"Unless I can off-say it," thought Aunt Sarah, making a sudden vow to do her best. "It's a terrible

setback to a new minister's wife to be called slack the first thing. The land knows what excuses she may have, but nobody will apply 'em. It's a terrible fault of human natur'."

"How did you find out, Palmyre?" she asked quietly.

"Find out! I didn't have to find out. The mantelpiece was so dusty that I could 've wrote my name on it, and the baby's face was sticky with molasses. Those are two things. Do you want to know the rest, Sarah?"

"No, I don't. Mebbe she couldn't reach the mantelpiece, an' didn't realize the dust. The pa'sonage mantelpiece is up dreadful high, an' she's a terrible short minister's wife. And, Palmyre, you know you never had a baby, an' so—"

"Did you ever?"

"No—oh no," said Aunt Sarah meekly; "but if I had 've, I'd have known how hard it was to keep its little face clean all the time. Why, I

shouldn't be a mite surprised if I'd have had to washed it as many as six times a day. The little things are real magnets for drawin' dirt."

Aunt Sarah's mild, sweet face took on a far-away, dreamy look. She was thinking how pleasant it would have been to have a little sticky face looking up into hers, and little sticky hands patting her cheeks lovingly. Dear land, as if she'd have minded the stickiness! But Palmyre would, of course.

In Four Corners parish all the women asserted that the "Bean girls" were as different as two peas in a pod *weren't*. They were both real gossips, but Palmyra Bean said "slurrin' things about folks, an' Sarah always was sayin' good things." That was the difference.

"If Palmyre says Mis' Dodge don't get her washin' out till dreadful late Mondays," Ann Ellen Pease affirmed, "then Sarah, she goes right to work to say, 'But it always looks a good deal whiter'n most folks's washin's, Palmyre.' An' when Palmyre told about Mary Lois Bennett's not washin' her floor but once a month, Sarah spoke up in her kind voice an' says, 'I guess it's because it don't need washin', then, for Mary Lois is a terrible clean little woman.'"

Ann Ellen Pease was next-door neighbor to the Beans, and loved Palmyra in spite of her failings and

Sarah because she had not any. Everybody loved Aunt Sarah.

The new preacher had preached his first sermon at Four Corners, and, as Palmyra said, "passed muster." His earnest, simple sermon had won its way to all their hearts, and his little jered wife's face was radiant with pride.

"Now never mind if the baby is teething or Honey Bunch's new boots are toed cut!" she thought. "I can work and work to the tune of the dear 'Praise God.' If they only like David, it doesn't matter so much about me. Perhaps when the children are grown up and I can stop a minute to take a long breath, they'll like me!"

So she had gone home from church with David, taking three steps to his one, and bobbing up and down beside him happily, content just to be David's wife and the little, tired-out mother of his children. That was all Mrs. David asked.

Aunt Sarah knitted another round on her



"It's only a bump, I guess."