

A Mother Who Helped.

(By Ralph Connor, in 'Sunday-School Times'.)

Our best deeds we often do unconsciously. Certain it is that nothing was farther from my mind than pushing my friend's cause with the great man of the railway company for which I flourished my brush. But it is equally certain that, as I turned over my sketches of scenes from camp life with the lumbermen and miners, I found myself talking with full enthusiasm of the two men who filled my imagination as the greatest of all men I had yet met. The railway man kept me talking of Graeme for an hour, and then said, 'Bring your friend to see me to-morrow,' which I did, to the mutual and lasting advantage of them both; for, when Graeme came back to me after his interview with the great man, he greeted me with a thumping whack, and demanded to know with what yarns I had been regaling his chief's ears.

'Chief?' I asked, in delighted surprise.

'So! But how did you do it?' he replied. 'With what material did you pack him?'

'Pack him? Not at all! I simply gave him a few yarns and showed him some sketches.'

'Yarns and sketches! Oh, I know you and your tricks and your ways,' he answered, shaking his head at me. 'All the same, old man, I owe it to you that I sign myself "Confidential Secretary to the Superintendent of Construction, with almost unlimited powers."'

'Good man!' I shouted. 'When you are president, I'll take an annual pass, if you don't mind.'

'You can get a pass out now, if you want to come.'

'Not yet. But when do you go?'

'Next week.'

'Next week?' I cried, in dismay, thinking of the sweet, pale face of the beautiful little lady in the manse in the country.

'Yes,' he said, a little sadly. 'I know what you are thinking of. Seems selfish, but I'm afraid I must go. My particular chief is out there now, over the ears in work, and he must have help at once.'

'It's a long way,' I said.

'Yes,' he answered, 'a long way, and a big work it will be. They say it is a five years job.' He paused, and then added, as if to himself, 'And the mother is not very strong any time.'

'Do you think you really ought to go?' I asked. 'You banish yourself, you know, from civilization and decent society, and your—your people have not seen much of you for the last ten years, and—and life is going on, you know.'

I could not force myself to speak out brutally my fear that, when he said farewell to the sweet-faced little lady he still loved better than all else in the world, it would be to see her face no more. He read me quickly enough.

'Don't, old chap,' he said, with a shake in his voice. 'I know what you mean, and I have gone over all that; but my work is out there, and I must not shirk it. She will say "Go," you'll see.'

And so she did. After a week of hard work getting his outfit together, and learning something of his duties as confidential secretary to the superintendent of construction, Graeme carried me off with him to his home to say good-by. He had written fully of his plans, so that, when his mother greeted him at the little garden gate, I saw by the way she held her arms about him, looking long into his face, that no word of entreaty

would be spoken by her, and that she had given him up.

Those three last days were days of tender sacrament. Graeme talked fully of all his plans and his hopes in regard to the work he meant to do for the men in the mountains.

'Poor chaps!' he would say, 'they mostly go down for lack of a hand to steady them at a critical time, or to give them a lift when they have stumbled; and they have, most of them, mothers at home, and some of them wives.' And the mother would smile at him with a light of divine compassion in her eyes, feeling at such moments that for such work it were easy to have her son go from her. They had long walks together through the woods, and would come back laden with spoils, mosses and grasses and ferns, and they were happy with each other as a boy and girl in their first love. How I envied him, and how I pitied him! Such a love is earth's greatest treasure, the loss of it earth's greatest loss. But the hours of the three days fled with winged feet, as do all happy hours, and we came to that hour of sweet agony we shrink from most, and yet would not miss.

Long before the sun we had all been astir, for we had to catch an early train. Breakfast by lamplight is always a ghastly affair. The food is nauseating, the conversation drags wearily, the whole atmosphere is depressing.

Graeme was making a great effort to adopt a matter-of-fact tone with a little tinge of sharpness in it, except when he spoke to his mother. The father came down half dressed, as we were rising from an almost untasted meal, to have, according to his invariable custom, a word of prayer. It was always an ideal, that prayer of his.

A man must give up pretenses when he undertakes to address the Almighty. There is no place in prayer for stimulated cheerfulness and courage, and, as the old man prayed the barriers were borne down by the rush of feeling hitherto held in check by force of will. The brave little mother broke down into quiet weeping while the father commended 'the member of the family departing from his home this day to the care and keeping of the great Father from whom distance cannot separate, and to whom no land is strange.' Graeme, too, I could see, was losing his grip of himself; but the prayer rose into a great strain of thanksgiving for 'the love that reached down from heaven to save a world of lost men, and for the noble company who were giving their lives to bring this love near to men's hearts.' Then we all grew quiet, and under the steadying of that prayer the farewells were easier.

'Good-by, Leslie, my son; God be with you, and keep you, and make you a blessing to many,' said the old gentleman. His voice was grave and steady, but he immediately turned aside, and blew his nose like a trumpet, remarking upon the chilly morning air. The mother's farewell was without a word. She reached up, and put her arms about her son's neck, kissed him twice, and then let him go.

But while the trunks were being got on to the waggon, she came and stood outside the gate, looking up at us with a face so white and wan, but with a smile so brave, so trembling, so pitiful, that I did not wonder that Graeme suddenly sprang down from the seat, and ran to her.

'Oh, mother! mother!' he cried, in a choking voice, gathering her to him, 'I can't do it! I can't do it!'

'Oh, yes! we can, my boy,' she answered,

smiling, while her tears flowed down her pale cheeks. 'For his sake we can.'

And while we drove up the hill, the smile never faded from the face that seemed alight with a glory not of the rising sun.

The Dependable Girl.

(By Minna Stanwood, in 'The Wellspring'.)

There was going to be an affair at our church, one night, to which a number of prominent people were invited guests. One of the committee happened to mention that she had asked Louise Reed to sing. Now, Louise sings fairly well, but scarcely well enough for such a 'swell' occasion, it seemed to me. So I said, 'I suppose you have asked Miss Sizer to sing, also?'

Then the committee girl answered, with strength in her tone, 'No, I haven't! Yes, I know Miss Sizer sings beautifully, and if I were to ask her, she would say, "Why, of course, I'll sing. Be glad to." Then when the night came Miss Sizer would in all probability be missing; the committee would boil and fume and stand outside in the cold watching frantically for Miss Sizer, as if that would bring her; and at the last minute one of us would have to go in abject misery to Miss Reed and beg her please to sing "The Maid of Dundee." And she would sing it cheerfully, although she knows we have heard it forty times, more or less, and that the people who don't understand about the scrape we have got into would be thinking, "Why in the world doesn't that girl learn a new song?" Oh, yes; Jessica Sizer sings beautifully, so beautifully that you can forgive her for not being dependable—if you're not on the committee. But if you are, and find out that she has thrown you over simply because somebody else has given her a more attractive invitation, and that she has accepted it without a regret for your predicament, why, then, you think differently!'

The deep feeling in the committee girl's voice spoke more eloquently than her words, and I turned away humbly, strongly impressed with the beauty of the characteristic of dependableness.

'I often wonder,' I said to a friend who keeps a drug store in the most fashionable part of the city, 'that you do not have a young lady for your bookkeeper. You have a delightful store, and elegant, refined women for customers, and I should think it would be an education for some young girl just to be here day after day. Besides, your work can't be so intricate and exhausting that you need an accountant in the shape of a man!'

The gentleman looked at me with a twinkle in those clear-seeing eyes of his, and said: 'I suppose it will be a terrible blow to your pride in young girls when I tell you that I tried ten of them in three months, and then gave it up in disgust. The trouble is, you can't depend on them. The first one never could make her cash balance, and I'm particular about that each night. The second one never could get here until nearly nine o'clock, and about every half hour she was running round to the prescription desk to see the time. Five nights of the week she was here, she went home without putting the stamps and money away, and when she went down to the bank she stopped to do her own shopping. She would begin to put away her books about five o'clock, and then sit cleaning her nails, waiting for six o'clock. Another was too absorbed in our young men clerks to know much about what she was doing. Another wasted an hour or two every day gossiping with girl callers. The last one was really