

## The Inglenook.

### The Carpet in the Pulpit.

BY SUSAN HUBBARD MARTIN.

Miss Ann, warm and perspiring, rose stiffly to her feet. In her hand she held a small hammer; a saucer half full of tacks lay at her feet.

"There," she announced triumphantly, "there, Ann Crocker, you can't say now you never accomplished anything. You've got your new carpet at last."

She laughed a little. When she smiled, it was wonderful to see the sweetness of the expression in the wrinkled face. It betokened plainly a soul in which there was no guile.

She stood silent a moment. "I ought to be a happy woman," she added reverently. "Here I've been savin' and a scrimp'in' to get a carpet for this room for nearly seven years. It's lucky it ain't a big one—(her faded eyes brightened into happiness) I've got it."

She stooped and patted it as one might the head of a little child, tenderly and appreciatively. Her hands were withered and toil-worn. You pretty thing," she whispered; then she lifted herself again. "Yes," she went on, "I've always said to myself, 'Ann Crocker, some of these days you're a goin' to get rid of that ugly red carpet. You're a goin' to have a new one, do you hear? A beautiful fresh one with little green vines and leaves and things on it.'" She smiled again. "I never really believed it would come true," "but it did, it did."

Her faded eyes roved over the little room with infinite content. "Don't it look nice?" she added. "Now that I've got it, I hope the Lord'll let me live to enjoy it. Sixty-four next birthday, and this is the first new carpet I ever had. The others were just handed down, and I had to take 'em and be thankful whether I felt it or not. But I always had it in mind the kind of carpet I wanted. Not too bright or too gaudy, but modest and pretty and restful. I don't know yet who I'll give the old one to. I'll think about it. Now I must set the plants back and get the furniture in. I won't get any supper to-night. I won't need any. I'll just sit and look at this carpet and think how rich I am. Things that come easy ain't half appreciated. You have to struggle and pray for 'em. Wrestle for 'em like Jacob did for the blessing. I rather guess this was why I was so long gettin' the carpet. But land sakes, I'll soon forget all about that. Why, this winter I can just imagine I'm in a beautiful garden full of green things growin' when I look down at the leaves and vines and things. The wind may blow and the snow fly for all me, I'll have a summer here in doors."

Perhaps there was nothing in the manner of small things that annoyed the minister quite so much as that frayed and torn carpet up in the pulpit. It had been darned and mended so many times that it could be darned and mended no more. At least the ladies had given it up. Just now an unsightly rent stretched from side to side right where the minister had to see and step over it every time he preached a sermon. He did not speak of it to his wife. With a fine courtesy and feeling, he never added a feather's weight to her already burdened shoulders. Perhaps, too, he had a reluctance to

speak of this little thorn in the flesh even to his own, so he tried to forget it.

The Aid Society had met at the church to-day to finish up some special work.

"That carpet up in the pulpit is really quite disgraceful," said Mrs. Deacon Grant to young Mrs. Shepherd who sat by her. "I'd be in favor of buying another if we didn't have so many expenses. I really don't see how we can better things this year. It would take almost as much carpet to cover it as it would a whole room; quite as much I believe." Mrs. Shepherd nodded. "Yes, it would," she answered. Mrs. Shepherd was small and plump, with beautiful, soft, white hands. "I am sure we do more than we're able to," she added plaintively. "Ah, Miss Ann, thank you for that thread. I was just looking for it. What are you going to inspect the ruins, too?" she added laughingly.

Over Miss Ann's happy old face had crept a queer look. "If the minister wasn't such a good man," she answered slowly, "it wouldn't be so bad to have it there, but as it is, it must humiliate him. I know what it is to be afflicted with poor carpets."

"But you've got a new one now," cried Mrs. Deacon Grant merrily.

"So I have," replied Miss Ann in a strange voice.

The ladies said no more, and Miss Ann, having inspected the carpet, came back to her stitching again. When she went home that afternoon, she went very slowly. She unlocked the door and went in, then she sat down in the old rocker. The little green vines and leaves in the new carpet had never seemed to her so beautiful, or dear.

"Well, Ann Crocker," she began with a pathetic little smile, "I guess your good times over this new carpet ain't begun yet quite. You'll have to wait a little while longer."

Two large tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. She untied her bonnet strings fiercely.

"Cryin', Ann Crocker," she added, "cryin' at your age just because you can't have your way? Wouldn't you be willin' to make one little sacrifice for the Lord? It's Ephraim and his idols over again. You, you ain't a goin' to fall short. You've got to live up to your standard, Ann Crocker. It won't kill you to put that old red carpet down for a while again, if it ain't as fresh and pretty as the new one. You've got to do it and you know it. Yes, you do. You've got to give up your beautiful new carpet with its little leaves and vines to the Lord. You're goin' to take it up to-morrow and put it down in the minister's pulpit yourself. You needn't go to cryin' over it either, it's got to be done. The idea of a minister like the one you have bein' obliged to stumble over a ragged carpet every Sunday of his life. It's a wonder it don't creep into his sermons and spoil 'em."

After she had planned everything in her mind she rose and began to put away her things. Her wrinkled face bore the stamp upon it of sacrifice, renunciation and victory.

It did not occasion much surprise when she asked for the key of the church two days afterward. She was in the habit of going there occasionally and seeing after things. Neither did it surprise the sexton when little Jimmy Bates accompanied her with his red

express wagon piled high with something very heavy and cumbersome,

"They entered the church together."

"Now Jimmy," began Miss Ann briskly, "you go to work and take up that old carpet in the pulpit as fast as you can. I'll get the water and we'll soon be ready to scrub. Then—you'll see."

When the minister entered the pulpit on Sunday morning, he started in surprise. There at his feet stretched a new carpet with little tender leaves and graceful vines. The old one with its unsightly rents had disappeared. The minister smiled as he saw it. One burden had rolled off.

He looked over the congregation with pleased eyes. His worn face had brightened.

"This is a very happy surprise," he began. "I wish you'd tell me whom I am to thank for it."

Mrs. Deacon Grant, sitting in her pew, pricked up her ears. What was the minister talking about?

"Last Sunday," went on the pleased voice, "I tripped over an old carpet in this same pulpit. To-day I must have wandered into fairyland, for presto change, I step to greet you over a beautiful new one with trailing vines and tender green leaves. A regular May-day carpet, to make summer for me fifty two Sundays in the year."

His face grew serious. "For this gracious and thankful act I thank you dear friends," he said.

Mrs. Deacon Grant looked across at Mrs. Shepherd with interrogative eyes. "What does he mean?" she whispered.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the mystified answer.

When the sermon was over it wasn't very long till Mrs. Deacon Grant made her way to the minister. Two or three of the ladies accompanied her. Her keen eyes ranged past him, up the pulpit steps to the platform beyond. The carpet, yes there it was stretching before her in all its freshness and beauty.

Mrs. Deacon Grant gasped. She knew it. "Well, I never!" she exclaimed, "if Ann Crocker hasn't gone and given her new carpet to the church."

A number of the members called on Miss Ann the next day. They found her tranquilly stitching in her old rocker. The room was as neat as ever. Flowers bloomed in the windows. On the floor was the ugly old worn carpet.

"Ann Crocker," began Mrs. Deacon Grant solemnly, "how could you—how could you give up that beautiful new carpet you worked so hard for?"

Miss Ann's faded eyes filled with sad tears. "I won't deny but that it was a wrench at first," she admitted, "but after that the Lord made it easy."

The humble room, the old pilgrim in the rocker, was too much for Mrs. Deacon Grant. She looked away through a mist of tears.

"Miss Ann," she said gently, "do you know you've shown us all what selfish Christians we are? To think of you're giving up the carpet you worked so hard for, without a word. Do you know it has given us all an awakening; every one of us wants to be up and doing and you—well the church is going to tender you a vote of thanks, and the ladies, well the ladies are going to give you a little reward. That ain't the only pretty carpet in Pine Valley," she added.

Miss Ann looked at her with a tremulous look of joy.

"You don't need to mind about the reward," she answered gently. "I've had that already."—*LATER.*