

WHAT SHE COULD.

(By Louise Davidson.)

'Yes, Nelly, I'll ask her, but it won't do any good, I know. You see my mamma doesn't believe in Foreign Missions to begin with, and I'm sure she'll say no the very first thing.'

'Well, ask her, Grace, anyway, it won't hurt to try, and she may say yes!'

'I wish she would, Nelly, just this once, and the sober little face suddenly brightened, 'but no, no' (with a most emphatic shake of the head), 'she won't, I know.'

'Oh, dear, Grace Warren! now you're not going to give up without trying? Why, when I want anything I just tease and tease till I get it: I just wish you could hear me once.'

'What, after your mother has said no?'

'Why, yes, of course. Mamma has to give in to me—'

'Oh-h-h,' said Grace, thoughtfully. 'I should think a mother's no meant no—else—what are they here for?'

'Oh, you queer Grace Warren! You do say such funny things. But here we are at my gate, and I must go in to help mamma. You won't forget your promise, will you? And if she says yes, let me know.'

'All right, Nelly, I'll remember—and then two little girls parted, and one little girl with a very sober face went on alone to her own home.'

As Grace Warren entered the little sewing-room where her mother sat bending over a piece of fancy-work, she noticed the forbidding look on her mother's face—('Oh, dear!' she thought, 'mamma's busy, ever so busy, and there's that frown! I never like to ask mamma anything when that wrinkle's there! and yet, I promised Nelly I'd try. I wish she would look up and smile, it would help so—and it's Foreign Missions!—oh, dear! I wish I did know how to begin!') and before she hardly knew it, Grace had begun, twirling her bat in the meanwhile according to the violence of her emotions.

What her mother heard was this:—

'Miss Owen—Mission Band—wants me to join—Nelly Curtis—all the girls—three cents a jug—meet to sew—read aloud—Fair in the Fall—break—jugs—and, oh dear me! its perfectly lovely! may I, please?'

'May you—what?' said Mrs. Warren, thoughtfully regarding a leaf, and wondering if it would 'look better one shade darker'—then looking up.

'I'll tell you what you may not do! Wear out that hat-elastic! I should think a girl your age could remember a few things. It costs money to buy new elastics every now and then, or even missionary jugs!'

'Why, mamma! you can get a whole yard for three cents!'

'Of what? missionary jugs?' and a grim little smile showed itself for a moment on Mrs. Warren's face. She could afford to laugh now, that 'troublesome leaf' was beginning to look beautiful. Grace saw her opportunity and seized it.

'Oh, mamma dear! you know what I mean. Won't you please give me three cents for a jug and allow me to join the Mission Band? Just think of the poor, dear-little children in foreign lands.'

'Well, I'm thinking of them. Do you suppose they're standing around crying for jugs?'

'Now, mamma, you are funny. You know it's the contents, and the money educates them, and then they learn ever so many things.'

'Yes, I dare say—learn some things they need not know. That's the way it always is, Grace—with all the good they learn so much evil, I think they'd be better off in their ignorance. Wait until you've lived as long in the world as I have, and you'll see the folly of giving to Foreign Missions.'

'But, mamma, it makes the one who gives feel happy, there's something in that, and, perhaps by-and-bye, if people keep on giving, the poor heathen will know how to take it, and perhaps they'll be able to teach us something.'

'Heathen teach us something! Grace Warren—you incomprehensible child—there! see what you've done arguing for Missions—made me spoil that leaf! now every stitch must come out!' and back came that ominous frown to Mrs. Warren's brow.

Poor little disappointed Grace! How had she caused that mistake! and why did mamma feel so? and what was a leaf of embroidery, any way? and then the big tears filled

her eyes to overflowing and went rolling down the plump little face.

Perhaps the unreasonableness of the accusation struck Mrs. Warren; perhaps Grace's tears moved her; perhaps conscience suggested something—whatever it was, she said, in a few moments:—

'Grace, I think I will let you have your own way in this matter—by way of experiment if nothing else, but remember! every bit of money put into that jug must be earned! You are not to ask any one for a single penny, no, not a penny! I am no friend to missions, that every one knows, but whatever you can earn you may put in that jug, and I hope you'll have pride enough to prevent its being an empty one when broken at the Fair.'

Then Mrs. Warren opened her pocketbook and handed Grace a three-cent piece, and smiled complacently, as if such munificence were deserving of untold future reward!

Grace took the money gratefully, and her hearty 'oh, thank you, mamma dear!' as she skipped out of the house to 'tell Nelly,' gave Mrs. Warren a peculiar sensation.

'I do believe,' she said, 'that child is as happy over that three-cent piece and the prospect of doing something for some one she never has seen in her life, as if I had given her just so many dollars to spend in some foolishness with her playmates. What an odd child she is, to be sure! and how little we mothers know, after all, what will make a child happy—but as for Foreign Missions, ah, me! what a delusion it all is! There are enough at home needing our help—'

in fact, all our attention without going abroad to help those who are well enough off without it—that's my opinion,' and shielding herself behind that well-worn excuse, Mrs. Warren went calmly on with her work. Calmly?—well, hardly that, for every now and then, it came to her that although in theory she believed in helping those 'at home,' in practice, she was wholly deficient, and had never yet been known to give a dollar to help the needy around her! and there she was now putting the finishing touches to a bit of embroidery that had required so much time and skill—yes; and even money! 'Enough,' as she said with an odd little laugh, 'to buy any number of missionary jugs.' Surely the pattern seemed to stare at her—nothing but leaves, nothing but leaves—ah! if at that moment Mrs. Warren could have heard the two little girls talking!

'You ought to have seen mamma when I asked her, Grace! She didn't wait a minute—said right out—"I'm so glad to see you interested in such work, Nelly, it means so much to me," and then she gave me thirteen cents! three for the jug, and ten to put in it—wasn't she just a lovely mamma?'

'Y-e-s,' answered Grace, wondering why mothers were 'so different,' but loyal to her own, added somewhat hesitatingly:—'Mamma didn't give me anything to put in mine—but I suppose she'll tell me how to earn something for it, and then I'll feel it more.'

Dear, trusting little Grace! Has every little girl such confidence in her mother's way? But Mrs. Warren showed no willingness to help, and so, the time rolled on till within a week or two of the Fair. To be sure the jug was not empty, for Grace had earned eleven cents, and shall I tell you how? Brother Ben had dared dear, little, timid Grace to drive Mrs. Wilken's cow down the lane for five cents! and Grace, for the sake of the 'poor little girl in India,' had performed her 'duty.'

What if Ben did say to himself:—'The cow is as mild as a snail—it was an undertaking for Grace, and Ben ought to have been ashamed of himself.'

The rest was earned in this way (Ben again!)—and that boy actually declared himself to his friend, Arthur Delafield, 'one of the pillars of the great work for Foreign Missions'—three cents for picking out and reeling up tangled fishing lines, and three more for filling a can full of worms! Think of that, dear, dainty little girls, who have no lazy, teasing brothers!

'Ben,' said Grace, as she brought him the can. 'I did think, I really did, the cow was terrible, but this was awful! You don't know what hard work it was! If it hadn't been for the little girl in India and Luther, I never could have stood it.'

'Luther!' said Ben.

'Yes, Ben, don't you remember about the diet of worms? Poor man! he must have suffered terribly. I had to keep saying over and over again, every time I put a worm in the can—Luther!—Little girl in India!—Lu-

ther, Little girl!—Oh! but don't ask me to do it again.'

Then that perfectly demoralized brother Ben laughed until the woods echoed! But, suddenly catching sight of the little, tear-stained face, stopped.

'Never mind, Grace,' he said, 'I felt funny just then—you're just as nice as you can be, and a real hero.'

'Thank you, Ben—but won't you tell me why you laughed?'

'Oh don't ask me, Sis,' and then as Ben began to 'look funny again,' Grace took the proffered six cents and walked thoughtfully away.

Now, can any little girl tell why Ben laughed?

It would take too long to tell of all the different ways in which the little girls made money grow in their jugs; not all made it a matter of conscience and put in only what they earned; a great many teased father, mother, aunts, uncles and all friends for pennies and nickels until many of the friends said:—'What does all this amount to? It's only a question of heavy jugs, after all.'

But that's the way with a great many noble undertakings, people will talk and find fault with imperfect workers, when they might better be teaching them how to work, or sharing with them some of the hardships of labor. A few of the girls had done really noble work. They had denied themselves this and that, and could tell of many little battles fought with self for the good of the missionary cause.

Florence Wilson went without a bottle of shoe-polish she very much needed; and placed what it would have cost in her jug, and then blacked her shoes with her father's blacking. 'Pooh!' you say, 'that wasn't much to do, and it's ever so much better for the leather.' True, but Florence didn't know that, and besides, Florence was very particular and very fond of French polish; then, too, Florence went without peanuts one whole week! and for two weeks never ate any butter on her bread. Of course, Florence told of these things, and the girls all thought she was 'too lovely for anything,' and in view of her great trials and the fact that she was 'Judge Wilson's only child,' great things were expected of her.

Nelly Curtis said she'd 'rather go without bread than butter,' and if the heathen children were 'going to give so much trouble, she'd ever so much rather 'drop them altogether.' But Nelly did do something for them after all. She made paper flowers and sold them. Mrs. Curtis said it was a 'very pretty way of helping the heathen,' but they were beautiful flowers and sold readily, and Mrs. Curtis hoped Nelly was thinking of the good the money would do, and not of the fame she was creating—for Nelly's flowers were the admiration of all.

Grace Warren wished she could 'do such things.' She almost thought she could, but where would the money for tissue-paper come from? Besides, 'every girl ought to do something different.' This she told to Ben, and Ben in a sudden spasm of generosity gave her five cents, saying, 'I suppose I'll be ruined in time, but take that, Sis, and do what you want to with it.'

Five cents! And yet Grace could hardly have been happier if it had been just so many dollars!

'Oh, you dear, dear, lovely Ben!' she said, and away she flew out of the house before Ben had time to collect himself, and was soon at Ovington's drug store, where she invested the whole of that precious five cents in a bottle of mucilage! Reckless extravagance! But Grace saw wonderful results ahead. She knew of a certain pile of advertising cards, of certain bits of gold-lace paper carefully saved from raisin boxes, and of three whole sheets of tissue-paper! To be sure, it was folded, and 'wouldn't do for flowers, but it would for dolls,' and it did do grandly.

Her mother saw her working away so patiently and faithfully, and while she thought a very great deal, said nothing, but cheerfully gave her consent to a 'doll's fair,' and actually loaned her work-table for the occasion!

It hardly seemed possible a little girl with only a few pieces of fancy paper, advertising cards, mucilage, and a pair of sharp scissors, could turn out such beautiful work. But such was the case, and Grace felt very proud and happy that Friday afternoon when the girls came in to see what she had done, and nearly all bought a doll.

'How did you do it, Grace?' they asked.