

REQUIREMENT.

We live by faith; but faith is not the slave of text and legend. Reason's voice and God's,

Nature's and duty's, never are at odds. What asks our Father of his children save Justice, and mercy, and humility.

A reasonable service of good deeds, Pure living, tenderness to human needs; Reverence and trust, and prayer for light to see

The Master's footprints in our daily ways? No knotted scourge, nor sacrificial knife, But the calm beauty of an ordered life, Whose very breathing is unworded praise— A life that stands, as all true lives have stood,

Fast rooted in the faith that God is good.—*Christian Union.*

THE PIECE THAT WAS LOST.

BY EMILY HUNTINGTON MILLER.

There was promise of a capital hay-day; so Silas Rogers decided as he stood in the back porch after milking, polishing his face with a coarse towel and noting the weather signs between the rubs. A capital hay-day; but a "spell of weather" might be expected soon; for did not the almanac say "About this time look out for storms?" So all hands were warned to be in readiness to mow the lower intervals in the morning and lose no time in getting at it, for the intervals was swampy after a rain.

The chores were done, the supper was eaten; Silas, with his chair tilted against the wall, was sleeping the sleep of the just, while his good wife pattered about the kitchen setting her sponge, beating up some "riz griddle cakes" for breakfast, grinding the coffee, and, in a dozen provident ways, squeezing out of the tired day a little help for the morrow. Reuben went to the store for a new scythe snath; Abner, the hired man, hung over the barnyard gate with the beloved pipe that tried the housewife's soul, and pretty Mistress Hetty wrinkled her forehead and pricked her fingers over the new dress she was trying to make in the few leisure minutes snatched from house-work. She made a charming picture in the frame of the vine wreathed window, her sleeves still rolled above her plump elbows, the bright hair drawn back from the rosy face which was turned full to the lamp as she threaded her needle, or paused to flirt some poor deluded moth away from the dangerous flame that fascinated him. A charming picture, but no one to look at it, for the great Norway pine held up a screen of solid blackness between the window and the road even if any belated traveller had chanced to pass that way, and only Hetty's white cap crept stealthily along the top of the garden-fence with murderous designs upon an untimely brood of chipping birds in the currant-bushes. Only this—ah, beware, Mistress Hetty: evil eyes are looking at you, eyes from which even a heathen mother would cover your face with her hands, and breathe a prayer to break the unholy spell they might cast upon you—a woman's eyes peeping from the thick jungle of lilacs and syringas so near it seems as if Hetty must feel them. But Hetty feels nothing, sees nothing, but the troublesome dress, and as the perplexing ruffles are conquered one by one her heart grows light, the little frown smooths away, and Hetty begins to sing. What a sweet voice she has! It reaches the tired mother, and lightens her heart too. It wakens her father and then lulls him pleasantly to sleep again. Now Abner hears it and draws his hickory shirt-sleeve across his eyes; and that watcher in the green tangle—who can guess what she thinks or feels as she sinks down with her chin upon her hands, and her face quite in the dark, and listens to the pathetic story of "The Ninety and Nine"? Hetty herself is not half-conscious of the pathos with which she bewails the lost one,

"Away on the mountains bleak and bare, Away from the tender Shepherd's care."

and goes on through the tender story to the final rejoicing, when the Shepherd brings back his own. She is still humming it fitfully over and over when her mother opens the door of the keeping-room and bids her go to bed, and not ruin her eyes with sewing by lamplight.

"Just a minute," says Hetty; "as soon as I finish this sleeve." And the minutes glide on and on, the sleeve is finished, held up and admired, and Mistress Hetty takes off her shoes and slips softly upstairs to bed. She does not even close the window. What should come into the house unbidden, save the cat and the cool night-air? Everything is silent. The mother bird broods her little ones securely, unconscious of the cruel eyes near by, until Reuben comes whistling along the road, and, boy-like, stops to shy a stone at the tempting white mark on the garden fence, the prowler leaps away with long bounds over the wet grass, and a tragedy is averted with nothing to show for it but dirty tracks upon the piece of "factory" spread out to bleach. By and by there is a little stir in the lilac jungle; a woman comes cautiously out of her hiding, and steals away to the barn. The cows are lying here and there under the long shed, sleeping, perhaps, in a cow's uneasy fashion, but with a certain air of motherliness and content about them. They do not even wonder at the late comer as she threads her way among them, enters the barn, mounts the scaffold already well filled with the sweet new hay, and is soon asleep, hearing now and then a broken twitter from the restless swallows under the eaves, or perchance a faint, sweet voice singing, with lingering pity in its tone,

"Sick, and wounded, and ready to die."

Who can tell when the summer day begins? One instant a dusky silence, cool, moist, and fragrant, hanging over the hills, the next a burst of song from some tree-top, caught up from a hundred green coverts, swelled and repeated and prolonged in a mad chorus that presently settles again into silence. Then the slow stir of life awakening, the hustle among the poultry, the lowing of some impatient cow, or the steady sound of her companions nipping the short juicy grass, the unwilling creak of a rheumatic pump-handle, and here and there the dull thud of an improvident ax preparing the kindlings for the kitchen fire.

The day was well under way in Silas Roger's household before the majority of his neighbours had reached this point. The cows were milked and turned into the green lane to make their own way to the pasture, the steady "crrr" of the grindstone and the sharp ring of steel told that the moments before breakfast were being made the most of, and even at table there were few words spoken, and no useless lingering. But after breakfast Silas Rogers took down the leather covered Bible that had been his old mother's daily companion for eighty years, and all the family sat reverently down to worship. The golden moments might speed as they would, but no day in that household began without its portion from the Bible. It might have been a lingering recollection of Hetty's song, it might have been one of those celestial providences which we call chance, which led him to read from the gospels the story of the wandering sheep and the lost piece of silver. It is doubtful if any of them were very deeply touched by it. It was a familiar story to the good wife, and she could not keep her thoughts from straying anxiously to the loaves rising perilously in the pans, while Hetty glanced at the clock and secretly hoped her father had not chanced upon a long chapter. The reading came abruptly to an end with the heavenly rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth, and with an earnest though homely prayer the service was ended. Abner and Reuben almost stumbled over a woman sitting absorbed

in the doorway. Silas looked at her but did not stop to question, and when they were gone she rose and said abruptly, "Will you give me some breakfast?"

Mrs. Rogers looked at her. She saw a tall and not uncomely woman of about thirty, but with something indefinably evil about her face. The hard mouth, the bold defiant eyes repelled her, yet seemed as if any instant they might break into scornful tears.

"Who are you?" asked the good wife, coming nearer with her pan of bread in her hand. Again the face lightened and darkened, grew hard, and then yielding, with the sudden declaration:

"I am the piece that was lost."

Martha Rogers had not a particle of poetry in her nature, but she had the most profound reverence for the Scripture, therefore the words both puzzled and shocked her. But she was not a woman to refuse bread to the hungry, so she placed food upon the table and motioned the woman to a chair, with a brief "Set up and eat."

All the time that the woman was eating, and she did not hasten, her eyes followed the mistress and Hetty, until Martha Rogers grew nervous, and sent Hetty to "red up the chambers."

As soon as she was gone the woman turned abruptly from her breakfast.

"Will you give me work to do?" she demanded rather than asked.

"Who are you?" asked Mrs. Rogers again, simply to gain time.

"I thought you knew. I am Moll Pritchett: they have turned me out of my house, burned it over my head," and the eyes grew lurid with evil.

"What can you do?" asked Mrs. Rogers feebly.

"Anything that a woman can do, or a man. I can work in the field with the best of them; I have done it many a time; but I should like to do what—to be like other women."

"Are you a good woman?"

The question came straight and strong, without any faltering. She had heard of this Moll Pritchett, a woman who lived alone in an old tumble-down hut below the saw-mill, and won a meagre living by weaving rag-carpets, picking berries for sale, and it was suspected in less reputable ways; but Martha Rogers took no stock in idle rumours. If she had not divine compassion she had something very like divine justice, which is altogether a sweeter thing in its remembering of our frame than the tender mercies of the wicked.

The woman looked at her curiously. At first with a mocking smile, then with a sullen, and at last with a defiant expression.

"Is it likely?" she said fiercely. "A good woman! How should I be a good woman? I tell you I'm 'the piece that was lost,' and nobody ever looked for me. If I was a good woman do you suppose I should be where I be—only twenty-eight years old, well and hearty, and every door in the world shet in my face? I tell ye the man that wrote that story didn't know women; they don't hunt for the piece that's lost; they just let it go. There's enough on 'em that don't get lost."

Poor Martha Rogers was sorely perplexed, all the more that her way had lain so smooth and plain before her that she might have walked in it blindfolded. If this was a lost piece of silver it was not she who lost it; but what if it were the Master's, precious to His heart, and a careless hand had dropped it, and left it to lie in the dust? And what if He bade her seek it, and find it, for Him? Should she dare refuse? On this very day, when she needed so sorely the help which she had looked for in vain, had not this woman been sent to her very door, and was it not a plain leading of Providence? It is a blessed thing for us that we are usually driven to act first and

theorize afterwards, even though the after-thought sometimes brings repentance. The bread was ready for the oven and the wood-box was empty.

"You may fetch in some wood," said Martha Rogers, and the woman promptly obeyed, filling the box with one load of her sinewy arms, and then stood dumbly waiting. Hetty came into the kitchen and began to clear the table, but her mother took the dishes from her hands.

"Go up-stairs and fetch a big apron and one of your sweeping caps, and then you may get at your sewing and see if you can finish up your dress."

Away went Hetty, her light heart bounding with the unexpected release, and her mother turned again to the woman, furnished her with a coarse towel and sent her to the wash-house for a thorough purification. Half an hour afterwards, with her hair hidden in the muslin cap, her whole figure enveloped in the clean calico apron, a comely woman was silently engaged in household tasks, doing her work with such rapid skill that the critical housewife drew a sigh of relief.

"There's a han'ful of towels and coarse clothes left from the ironing; you might put the irons on, Mary, and smooth 'em out."

The woman turned a startled face upon her, and then went quickly for the clothes, but something—was it a tear?—rolled down the swarthy cheek, and mingled with the bright drops she sprinkled over them. When had she ever been called Mary? When had she heard any name but Moll? Not since away among New Hampshire hills a pale woman had laid her hand upon the tangled curls of her little daughter, and prayed that from the strange world to which she was speeding she might be allowed to watch over these wayward feet lest they should go astray. Had she watched? Did she know? Moll hoped not; it made her shudder to think of it. What would heaven be worth if she could see and know? and yet, what did she hear about joy in heaven over one sinner that repented? If there was joy it must be that they knew, or perhaps only good news was carried there.

That night Hetty sang again at her sewing by the lamp, and from the attic window, far above her head, the wanderer leaned out into the dark to listen. The little chamber was bare of ornament, there was not a picture on the cleanly-whitewashed walls, and the straight curtain was for decency, not drapery; but it seemed to this lost one a very chamber of peace. The great Norway pine almost brushed her cheek with its resinous plumes, balmy with the moist night air, and a bird, hidden somewhere among its branches, sent out a startled, half-awake cry, and then dropped off to sleep again. There was a pale young moon low in the western sky, with black clouds scudding across it, and the dull, steady sound of the river, pouring over the great dam in the valley, seemed to come nearer and nearer, like the tramp of feet. Martha Rogers went out to the milk-room and stood for a moment in the door, shading the flickering candle in her hand. She was only taking a housewifely observation upon the gathering storm, but it seemed to the wanderer that she might well be the woman who had lighted a candle to search for the lost piece of silver, and with a dim comprehension of love on earth and joy in heaven she tried to pray and fell asleep.

Silas Rogers listened to the day's story as he sat mending a bit of harness with clumsy fingers. He may be forgiven if his thoughts sometimes wandered to the hay so fortunately secured from the storm, or ran over the grist to be sent to the mill in the morning, if it proved a wet day, or speculated curiously on the superhuman knowledge of alman-