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A Visit From the "Cheering Sisters."

The Cheering Sisters have long since passed the meridian of life—with quiet steps they now descend the hill of life together. They face the setting sun, and the warm glow of promised glory is reflected in their happy faces. With peaceful content they journey on,—bright examples of God's faithfulness in fulfilling his gracious word—"At eventide it shall be light."

We sometimes call these sisters "The girls," and when we speak of their ages we say "Sister Margaret is seventy-eight years young, and Hetty is six years younger. Someway we can never speak of them as old."

I intend to tell you of a visit they paid us not long ago—but first, by way of introducing you to them I will tell you what I know of their history.

They were born of good parentage, and, early in life, found themselves surrounded by many comforts, and even luxuries.

Thus, many years passed swiftly and pleasantly, until, one day the loved Father was stricken and suddenly called away.

After his death it was found that strict economy must be practiced, to make their now limited means, meet the demands for the necessities of life.

The Mother lived on for some years after the death of her husband, and during that time the Cheering Sisters ministered to her comfort, as dutiful and loving daughters, keeping from her, as I have heard, all the sterner facts and realities of life, and often denying themselves much, that the Mother might have the little dainties and comforts for which she expressed any desire.

The only brother had entered upon a business career, about the time of his Father's death, and after a few years of struggle, was independent of the world, and able to give some substantial help to the Mother and Sisters at home.

But his prosperity was not for long, and about the time that the Mother passed peacefully to her rest, John failed in business.

The girls could not have John in trouble and not help him—and he was really in a trying position, with wife and little ones dependent upon him.—So the sisters gathered together all the money they could and sent to John, begging him to accept it as a loan, until he should be able to repay it. They wrote—"You see dear John, we are still young, and have our health, and with the Lord's blessing we hope we shall be able to earn our own way for some years to come, and later, when we are old and you are prosperous, then you may return what we send you now, in any way you think best."

So John took the money on their own terms.

Margaret and Hetty now leave the old home, and go to the great city, where, one as housekeeper, and one as nurse, they earn a very comfortable living.

Years pass on in this way until health begins to fail. "The grasshopper is becoming a burden," and yet they toil on, for, has not John all he can do to maintain his large family?

He has not been prosperous and is still struggling; and so it is that the Sisters resolve to tell John nothing of their troubles and to ask no help from him.

But now "Times" become very hard in the city—many are thrown out of work—employers are cutting down expenses, and the Sisters have not positions, as formerly. For a time they try work at odd jobs, and are willing to do anything to earn their bread and butter; but at length the struggle becomes severe, and they begin to talk about the old home, and to fancy that, once there, all will be well.

They come back to the old home, but everything is changed—old friends have passed away—strangers fill their places,—and they find no one to whom they care to tell their troubles.

With the few dollars they own, a room is rented, and a week's provision laid in, with the hope that they may get a little work of some kind, to keep them along when these are gone. But it is a vain hope. There is not much doing in the village, and "Times" are dull.

Thus it happened, or rather God brought it about, that,—as the approaching Christmas season began its work of "Peace and Goodwill" to all,—these Sisters were found by two Christian ladies. Food was gone—no work had come—actual cold and hunger were staring them in the face; and still they were keeping their trouble as a secret between themselves and God.

When their wants became known other friends came gladly forward to help, and soon Margaret and Hetty were taken to more comfortable rooms, fuel and provisions sent to them, and, before these were gone a regular sum of money—sufficient to meet their needs—was made up, and sent weekly to the sisters.

It was about this time that our acquaintance with them began, and it was while in these circumstances that the "Cheering Sisters" paid us a visit.

It came up the day before to tell us they were "It is Margaret's birthday" she said, "and we thought it was convenient to you, we would come and

spend the day, as we couldn't come when you asked us before"—and she added—"I hope it won't be any trouble to you—I thought, you know, it would be a nice little treat for Margaret on her birthday."

We assured Hetty that it would be a pleasure to have them come, and, after chatting a while, she went away looking very happy.

The next day they arrived early—in the good old-fashioned way—bringing their work. Their greeting was—"How do you do, dear," and a kiss all around, and by the time this was over, our dull faces had already caught something of the glow of genuine happiness from their beaming countenances.

"Now," says Margaret, "Let us come right out in the kitchen where you are working, and we will knit and chat with you a little."

"You see I am knitting socks—they are for poor Joe, he's a good soul, you know him? He often comes and cuts a little wood for us, and makes us beautiful kindlings, and so we told him to bring yarn and we would knit him some socks."

We ventured something to the effect that this "Joe" is a little queer sometimes.

"Oh yes, poor Joe! he is odd, but then he's so kind—he's real good hearted Joe is, you know; yes I guess so, he's been good to us." And by the time they had both commented upon his good qualities, we had forgotten his "queerness," and only saw Joe as they saw him—one of nature's gentlemen.

Dinner was called, and here the "Girls" were delighted with everything.

They were so fond of lamb, and new peas and beets, and, "Wasn't it beautiful to have a garden?"—this, until we forgot that we had often grumbled over having to tend the growing vegetables, and gather them for the table; and somehow we felt as never before, that it was a great blessing to have a garden, and to eat the fruits of our toils.

After dinner Margaret was induced to lie down and take a little nap, but Hetty would keep about and help with the dishes. As she carried them away to the closet she would take a peep at Margaret and return saying, "She's having just a beautiful sleep—ain't it nice—I just know she'll feel better for it all day."

And so it seemed, for when, late in the afternoon, the family paper was brought in, Margaret was so bright that she took it and read aloud.

As her sweet lisping voice stole softly out on the air, I sat, partly listening and partly thinking—"Yes, you dear old soul, how true it is that we find what we look for. You are just revealing your beautiful and ripened Christian character, in the passages you select for reading."

One of these bits was the following:

Just to be tender, just to be true;
Just to be glad the whole day through;
Just to be merciful, just to be mild;
Just to be trustful as a child;
Just to be gentle and kind and sweet;
Just to be helpful with willing feet;
Just to be cheery when things go wrong;
Just to drive sadness away with a song;
Whether the way be dark or bright,
Just to be loyal to God and right;
Just to believe that God knows best,
Just in his promises ever to rest;
Just to let love be our daily Key;
This is God's will for you and me.

And then in even sweeter, tenderer tones, these lines,

Sometimes when the skies are trembling
In a golden afterglow,
I seem to hear over whispering waves
Dear voices of long ago;
And to catch through the fragrant gloaming
A glimpse of that far-off shore,
And the boats that ride on the homeward tide
To wander never more.

Sometimes through the mists and darkness
When the wind-swept billows roll,
The boom of the surf on some hidden reef
Strikes terror to the soul;
Yet alone with the night and the storm's mad rush
And the swirl of an angry sea,
I still may dream of the harbor's gleam
And the peace that there may be.

And whether the sunshine floods the skies
And dear hands clasp our own,
Or whether the clouds bend low in wrath
And the way grows dark and lone,
My Pilot guides through storm and stress,
Past rocks and o'er treacherous shoal,
And with fathering sail, in calm or gale
We make for the sunset goal.

What matter, then, though tempests rave,
And waves break fierce and high?
Why fret, my soul, that the way oft leads
Where sudden dangers lie?
Each wind that blows, each tide that flows
Drives doubt and fear afar,
And the sea's sad night wakes to endless light
Inside of the harbor bar."

The comments between the lines, and at the close of the verses, were quite as characteristic as the reading: "Yes, ain't it beautiful now? How lovely it is? That's just what you know—that's just the way it is. How good the dear Lord is to us all," etc., etc.

Tea was partaken of in the same happy manner as dinner. Everything was so lovely, and in our hearts we were all impressed with feelings of gratitude for our comfortable home, and fair share of the good things of this life.

A few birthday tokens of remembrance were given to Margaret by members of our family. Of course the neck-tie was "just what she wanted," the piece of money "would help them out a good deal," while the bon-bons would be "such a treat."

All too soon came the time for the Cheering Sisters to leave our home.

After they had taken an affectionate farewell, and we had seen the last of their happy faces, so evidently shining with good cheer and content, we stood around the door and looked in each others faces.

"Well," said the Mother, "what do you think about it girls?"

"I think they are the Lord's own," said Nina. "They are just so sweetly sincere that they think everyone else as much so as themselves. I cannot help thinking of the passage which says, 'They did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.'"

"I don't think I shall want to complain any more," said Beth, "I know they have done me good," and the Mother added, "We have entertained 'Angels unawares.'"

"Well," said little Grace, "I have named them the 'Cheering Sisters.' You know you told me about the 'Fearing family,' Mamma, but these ladies belong to the Cheering family, and I just wish we all did, Mamma."

ANNIE E. FITCH.

Ruth's Dog, Towzer.

BY HARRIET T. COMSTOCK.

A very funny thing happened at Ruth's house the other day, and brought her into ill-repute with at least one member of the police force.

She is a very serious little girl of five, with great solemn, truthful eyes. No one would ever dream of her telling what was not exactly true, and she never made a joke in her life.

She was sitting on the bottom step of her stoop on this special morning when Mr. Smith, the big policeman came along. He interested Ruth very much by going to the door of every house, a little open book and pencil in his hand. After talking for a moment with whoever came to the door, he turned away, sometimes writing in the little book, but oftener not.

At the minister's door he wrote something, and at Dr. Blake's. Ruth particularly noticed that.

Mr. Smith was a tremendous power in the neighborhood. Not a boy dared to shout a shout or fling a ball when he was in sight; and as for the little girls,—well, they always breathed freer when Mr. Smith turned the corner.

Ruth watched the big man until he reached her house. Then, with a quaking heart, she saw him mount the steps. Mamma opened the door.

"Do ye kape a dog, mum?" asked Mr. Smith.

"No," replied mamma, and to Ruth the dear voice seemed to shake with fear.

Mr. Smith bowed sternly, and turned to come down. It was perfectly clear to Ruth now. Mr. Smith was putting the entire neighborhood under arrest, except those who kept dogs!

The minister had one, and so did Dr. Blake. She meant to save mamma if she could. So she tremblingly faced Mr. Smith on the bottom step, and said, gently, "Mamma forgot Towzer, sir."

Mr. Smith was all attention.

"Is this your house?" he questioned.

"Yes, sir."

Ruth's great, honest eyes gazed frankly into the grim face, looking down.

"And you have a dog, eh?"

"Yes, sir; Towser is our dog."

Up the steps again went Mr. Smith, and sharply rang the bell.

Mamma replied.

"Where's your dog, mum?"

"I told you that we had no dog. We have never had a dog," mamma answered.

"Oh, this is an old trick, mum, though we don't meet it often in these neighborhoods! However, you've got a truthful little girl, and she isn't so sure that ye have no dog. I insist upon seeing him, mum!"

A funny little gleam came in mamma's eyes.

"Ruth," she called, "you may as well bring Towzer. The officer insists upon seeing him."

Mr. Smith's face grew very red, as Ruth ran upstairs. Presently she came back.

"Here's Towzer, sir, she said, with a quiver; here's our dog!" and she held up to the astonished eyes of the big policeman a dirty Canton-flannel dog, one shoe-button eye quite gone, his tail in shreds, and his detached ears pinned to his head with safety-pins!