

MR. RICHARD STEDMAN AND THE GIRLS.

BY MARY H. FIELD.

Mrs. Bradford sat alone on her broad piazza, in the twilight of a June day, and, looking up, saw her tall, good-looking young nephew approaching. She rose and held out her hand cordially.

'Well, Dick,' she said, in her pleasant, motherly voice, 'you may come and sit beside me, provided you are in a properly repentant frame of mind, and are ready to tell me why you didn't put in an appearance at my five-o'clock tea, Tuesday.'

'Yes, Aunt Eunice,' answered Mr. Richard Stedman, taking the proffered hand and seat, 'I've come on purpose to be scolded.'

'You are doomed to disappointment, then,' she said. 'When did your good-natured old aunt ever treat you to a scolding? I merely asked for an explanation.'

The young man hesitated, striking the toe of his highly polished boot with his walking-stick, and twisting his handsome moustache with his disengaged hand during a few seconds of meditation. Then he said:

'Well, Aunt Eunice, I think I'll continue my boyish custom of making a clean breast of it when you were my confessor. You were always bound to find me out any way. The reason I did not come was this,—I don't get on well with the girls nowadays. They're all so confoundedly clever, and so sharp on all the new books and things, and a man who hasn't a head for that kind of business can't keep up his end of the game. I'm no literary fellow, you know, and I don't like that kind of girl. I knew you'd have the Spauldings and the Clarks, and that Miss Whitney who seems to think in Greek,—all of the college girls,—and I knew they'd trip me up on something or other; so, instead of putting on my dress suit, and making a background for these brilliant young women's pyrotechnics, I stayed in our back office, and made a scheme for booming old Sear's lots; and I'm going to do it, I reckon. Just you wait, and watch the developments.'

Mrs. Bradford smiled indulgently, but she could not help saying, 'Ah, Dick dear, what a pity you did not go to college too!'

'Maybe so,' he answered, a little gloomily; 'but I didn't feel that way at eighteen, and I fancied father needed my help then more than I needed Greek.'

'Yes, I know all about it,' said his aunt; 'and there was a good deal to hinder. Forgive me if my words had a tone of reproach. Business men are needed—of course, they are—just as much as professional men, and if you are not a classical scholar, it doesn't at all follow that you must go through life bemoaning the fact. Let us go back to the girls. The ones of whom you have spoken surely have too much sense to be pedantic and disagreeable; and then there were plenty of girls at my tea who hadn't had such an elaborate education.'

Stedman shook his head forlornly. 'I've had several Waterloos lately,' he said, 'and I can't seem to rally my forces. Now, I went to the Moulton reception last spring,—felt as if I must, because the girls have always been so nice to me; and, good gracious, if they didn't spring some sort of a book game on me! I went round for half an hour with the title of a book pinned on my back,—book I'd never heard of, by some author of whose existence I was only dimly aware,—that old crank that lived by a pond somewhere near Boston, in a hut he built for himself, and worked the cost of his living down to a few mills a day—I've hunted up his history since. Well! I let the girls chaff me nearly to death about the infamous old wretch, and then I pleaded an engagement and went down town and wrote letters to men who aren't occupied weighing the salt in their porridge.'

Mrs. Bradford was now brushing away tears which appeared to result from laughter, but which she declared were purely sympathetic.

Her nephew went on; 'That isn't the worst of it, either, Aunt Eunice. You know how friendly Sue Taylor and I have always been. It only seems a year or two since I was drawing her to school on my sled, and she had half a cookie in her pocket for me. Well, I've been in the habit of falling back on her for some common-place enjoyment at picnics and parties; and now

my last prop has fallen. I overtook her night before last hurrying along the street, and hailed her with "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" "I'm going to the Circle, sir," she said. And if she didn't go on to tell me how she and her mother were both Chautauquans, and reading about art and science and history and literature, and Heaven knows what. She had a Greek book under her arm, and pretended it was interesting,—the little humbug. I just groaned, and then burst into frantic expostulation. Don't, Sue, I begged; "don't. You'll be like all the rest. I sha'n't have a friend left in the world."

'And then,' said Mrs. Bradford, 'she laughed, and called you a ridiculous boy, and, I hope, asked you to join the Circle next fall.'

'Oh, yes! that was about it, I grant.'

'And you said you didn't want to be bothered with any literary nonsense, and hadn't time to go to school if you did.'

'Yes,—what else did we say?'

'Oh, nothing I care to repeat; though, of course, I might, if I chose, give a verbatim report. But I'll tell you what each of you thought afterward.'

'Pray, do.'

'You thought you never saw Sue look prettier, nor seem more charming, even if she was turning blue-stocking. And she thought, "Poor Dick; what a pity he will stay out in the cold! I like him vastly better than I do Professor Dana, with his long hair. Dick might know everything, if he only had a mind to. What ails the boys, any way, to let about half their faculties die of atrophy?" The truth is, she thought about you, Dick, all the way to the Circle, and off and on through the whole evening, although Professor Dana had a wonderfully good paper. I know, for I heard it myself. You needn't fancy I'm going to spy on her maiden meditations any more, however—not even for your benefit, sir.'

Dick was tugging at his moustache harder than ever. 'Thank you, Aunt Eunice,' he said. 'I've not the least doubt of the accuracy of your knowledge; but it is a little hard on Sue to be so exposed.' He resumed: 'I tell you, Aunt Eunice, I like old-fashioned girls, girls that just sew and cook and frolic, and the prettier the better.'

'Oh! you do?' inquired Mrs. Bradford. 'You like girls that in a dozen years or so grow into such women as—Mrs. Sears, for instance.'

'Fugh! he answered. 'That stupid old dowager.'

'Well, Mrs. Horten, then. She isn't heavy nor dull, I'm sure.'

'The vixen!' ejaculated the young man. 'Mrs. Driscoll, possibly?'

Dick held up both hands in protest. 'I like a woman who is good and gentle and dignified, and who keeps her charm when she has gray hair. I like you, Aunt Eunice,' he said, quite simply and frankly.

'Ah, you rogue!—do you think I'll let you off now?' she asked, reaching for his hand. 'But you know I fairly revel in books,—always have and always shall.'

'Well, you know how to make everybody have a good time,' he persisted.

'Thank you, Dick. I'm afraid you won't quite enjoy what I'm going to say; but listen now. Your tastes are all right. Every man likes a bright, pleasant, wide-awake woman, who has a foundation of good common-sense, and whose spirit grows more beautiful as her rose-hues fade. Many men, before they are twenty-five, however,—yes, and a good many after that advanced age,—are deceived by mere surface prettiness. They mistake bright eyes for intelligence, giggles for cheerfulness, high color for brilliancy. My memory goes back to the time when each of the ladies whom I have just instanced was considered a remarkably pretty and pleasing girl. I tell you, Dick, a young fellow needs to look ahead a little. He ought to ask a great deal oftener than he does, "What shall I be at fifty? What will she be at fifty?" Now, you do not want to be just a machine for making figures, like poor old Mr. Remington. Neither do you wish your wife to be a dull mass of flesh and blood like that famous cook, Mrs. Sears; nor a nervous, exasperating scold, like that laborious housewife, Mrs. Horton; nor a silly old piece of affectation, like Mrs. Driscoll. I trow not. But, as you very well know, mature men and women are the results of their youth. Habits are like the

old man of the sea on poor Sindbad's back. Start right in now, my boy, to keep all your powers in play. Have a variety of interests. Don't fancy because you were not a bookish boy that you can never like books. Most of us don't mature very young. You are ten times as capable as you were at sixteen in a dozen differing lines. Now, join Sue's Circle. You will be interested in all these studies before you know it; but make a fight for it, if need be. It is tremendously worth while. You need a knowledge of books to make you feel at home in the best society, as you've just acknowledged. You need it to make your own intelligence many-sided and symmetrical. You need it for your own self-respect. You need it to win the respect of those for whom you care. You can never "get on," as you say, without it.

'Now, here is a course of reading all mapped out for you. Here are the very lines of study you need. Here is a circle of pleasant friends, ready to read with you and help you in a hundred ways. Here is a dear girl holding out her hand to you in old schoolmate fashion. Why not go with her? Why let her drift away into this lovely world of art and literature, and have a barrier built up between you—maybe, alas! for all the time?'

It had grown quite dark. Young Stedman bent over his aunt's hand and kissed it. 'You have always been like a mother to me, Aunt Eunice,' he said. 'I am going right over to see Sue, and to join her Chautauqua Circle.'—*Sunday-School Times.*

LITTLE CROSSES.

BY EMMA L. BURNETT.

'You appear to be in low spirits,' remarked Grace Burling to her friend, Agnes McGrath, as they were on their way to make a call one pleasant spring evening. 'What's the matter?'

'I've had bad news to-day,' Agnes replied, gloomily. 'Three of my music pupils have stopped their lessons for the season, when I expected them to go until July. They don't pay much, to be sure, but the loss of just that amount means no summer outing for me.'

'Oh! exclaimed Grace, in profound sympathy. She knew of all the demands on Agnes's slender purse, and how brief and cheap these much-needed outings had to be at any time.

'It is a bitter disappointment,' Agnes pursued. 'I'm perfectly willing to do housework, nurse Grandfather, and give music lessons, between times, all the rest of the year, if I can only get two solid weeks of seashore, or of green fields. But this year I shall have to do without.'

Both girls sighed. Then Grace said: 'I'm not looking forward to a very pleasant summer either. Aunt Jane has come to spend several months with us.'

'Your Aunt Jane! What in the world brought her back again?' Agnes demanded in consternation, being fully aware of Aunt Jane's disagreeable peculiarities.

'That's what I'd like to know. I can't imagine why she should leave Uncle John's, where there is plenty of room, and wedge herself in our small house, where there are so many of us we can scarcely turn around. Of course I have to share my room with her, and she has so many old traps sitting around, to be handy, that it is never fit to be seen.'

'Too bad!' murmured Agnes, who could easily imagine what martyrdom this would be to a person of Grace's neat, dainty ways.

'Then she is in and out of the room fifty times a day, so that I can't have it to myself five minutes at a time,' said Grace, going on with her complaints, 'and in a big, bustling family like ours, one needs a quiet place to retire to occasionally. Well,' she added half humorously, and not meaning any irreverence, 'if I ever get to heaven I hope I shall have a little mansion all to myself, where I can go when I get tired of the other saints, and the angels.'

'No tiredness there,' said Agnes. 'No botherations or disappointments either. But what's going on at Immanuel?' she asked, as turning a corner, they came in view of a large, handsome, brilliantly-lighted church, into which groups of people were going.

'Oh, I forgot to tell you. The choir and some other good singers, are giving a concert this evening; something in the way

of an oratorio, I believe. It is free to the public, too.'

'Do let us go in,' urged Agnes, an ardent music-lover. 'We can go to see Kate some other evening.'

'Just as you say,' Grace agreed. 'I should like to go in, for though I sha'n't be able to enjoy the music as you will, the form and coloring of this church are a feast to the eyes.'

However, if she did not fully appreciate the musical setting, the subject was one that appealed just as forcibly to her as to any in the audience, the work given being Dudley Buck's 'Story of the Cross.' The hundreds gathered there, for the church was speedily filled to its utmost capacity, listened with intense interest to the fine rendition of the beautiful, touching oratorio. There were wet eyes here and there long before the final song was reached, and, no doubt many thought what a lady, near our girls, softly breathed:

'I never felt so near heaven before!'

That all present longed for some vent for their pent up feelings, was shown when, by a happy inspiration, the pastor of the church, at the close of the concert, asked the assembly to rise and join in singing 'Nearer my God to Thee.' Probably that favorite hymn, the prayer of so many hearts, has seldom been sung with greater unction. In all that throng apparently no voice was silent. So great was the volume of sound that the organist, to guide it, was obliged to put on almost the full organ.

'E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me,'

Agnes softly sang, on their homeward way, through that quiet part of the town. 'While we sang,' she said, 'I could not help looking at some people whom I know are carrying heavy crosses. There was Mrs. Taylor, whose darling baby died in the winter; and Mr. Suder, whose wife died so suddenly about the same time, and that made me think of others who have living troubles. Old Mr. Stevens, whose sons are such scapegraces, and the Courroys, with their deformed and imbecile daughter—their only child, and—Oh! lots of other people. Poor sufferers!'

'Still, don't you think those great crosses are better for people than the innumerable little ones that we have a share of? Because great sorrows often do lead persons nearer to God—'

'Out of my stony grief,
Bethel I'll rise,
Still in my woes to be
Nearer to Thee,'

quoted Agnes. 'Yes; but these little troubles and trials, are such insignificant things, one hardly likes to dignify them by the name of crosses; I don't see how they do us any good. They only irritate us.'

There was silence a few moments, and then Agnes broke out with:

'But we ought to allow them to do us good—these little crosses; that's what they are sent for. They may be "made steps up to heaven." Seems to me the whole drift of that hymn is, that every thing should lead us nearer to God. Joys as well as sorrows. Little crosses as well as great ones—'

'Aunt Jane's visitations, and no summer trips,' interrupted Grace.

'Yes, all that Thou sendest me
In mercy given.'

'That just reminds me of something I saw in a paper the other day,' Grace exclaimed. 'It was a prayer of Phillips Brooks. If I can find it I'll send it round to you. I remember one expression was, "May all that Thou sendest us bring us to Thee."'

The next day one of the numerous little Burlings brought Agnes a newspaper with the following passage marked:

'Oh, Lord, by all Thy dealings with us, whether of joy or pain, of light or darkness, let us be brought to Thee. Let us value no treatment of Thy grace simply because it makes us happy, or because it makes us sad, because it gives us or denies us what we want, but may all that Thou sendest us bring us to Thee, that, knowing Thy perfectness, we may be sure in every disappointment that Thou art still loving us, and in every darkness that Thou art still enlightening us, and in every enforced idleness that Thou art still using us—yea, in every death that Thou art giving us life, as in His death Thou didst give life to Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.'—*Presbyterian Observer.*