



Vanessa: Two Days In Her Life

By Marjorie MacMurchy : Illustrated by T. V. McCarthy

I.—THE WATER PICNIC

THE NEVER-to-be-sufficiently-belauded picnic of the Sunday School which the Browns attended was to take place immediately and Vanessa was to inherit at last the advantage of belonging to a church-going family. To Vanessa's mind there was nothing doubtful about the outward forms of religion. No intellectual slur was cast on her character by going to church every Sunday morning. What people described as a church was to her a thoroughly satisfactory condition, opening straightway on a golden heaven, swept by angels' wings and melodious with the very hymns they sang in Sunday School. In the meantime she could attend a picnic once a year, to her the natural accompaniment of religious privileges. Her presence at the picnic was all the greater blessing, since this was the first time she had been allowed to go.

For other reasons Vanessa's picnic created a swirl of feeling in the Brown family. M. Mark Brown, Esq., had reached a climacteric of his own. He had been deputed by a responsible church court, called a diaconate, to attend to the conduct and well-being of the Sunday School at the picnic, when they were likely to bring the least credit on any one connected with them. M. Mark Brown had every appearance of being a man of iron; but he, and his wife, knew better. The reputation had been thrust on him without any desire for it on his part, but he would have been considered a failure if he had not lived up to it. Mrs. Brown, who was equal to any number of Church Courts, provided as soon as their children could be taught anything, that they should all believe in the emotional elevation of their parental relative. Other fathers might be affected by the minor catas-

trophies of life, but the Brown father was superior to them—in the opinion of his children. He had an abstracted mind that soared in the untroubled altitudes of Hebraic literature. He ate and drank, but not as one who needed nutriment; the ambitions, cares and petty annoyances of other men passed him by. This was the opinion that the world had formed of Mr. Brown; but Mrs. Brown alone knew and loved him. Under the circumstances she considered it providential that he should have an isolated occupation; Vanessa's father was the editor of a weekly religious paper.

To be Mr. Brown's wife was, generally speaking, its own reward; he was an unusual man and deserved Mrs. Brown's attachment as far as any mere human being could be said to be worthy of it. But Vanessa, all at once, now that she was old enough to take her position in the world as a member of the family, did not feel sure of him. He seemed to be more grown up in some ways than her mother was. But was he infallible? Or was he more like one of themselves? A person who might sometimes have to cry a little on account of injured feelings and be forgiven by a more complete human being.

In the evening, when everyone had been hushed into stillness so that Mr. Brown might read, during the short interval before Vanessa had to go to bed, and after the announcement with regard to the picnic had become familiar, Vanessa, in order to make the best use of her time, stood in front of her father and gazed at him with undisguised, but doubtful, attention.

Mrs. Brown perceived this attitude

on the part of her baby with an unaccustomed feeling of helplessness.

"Vanessa, you mustn't stare at your father in that troublesome way. Take a book and look at the pictures; or Hector will read to you."

Hector was understood to murmur an objection. Mr. Brown stirred, roused by the sound of voices, although he had been unconscious of Vanessa's absorbed, and to be frank, somewhat unfilial scrutiny.

"Oh, let her alone, my love. She doesn't disturb me. Dear little child. 'Not in entire forgetfulness, and not in utter nakedness'—"



She had been projected violently into a trance by the contemplation of his virtue as described by Mrs. Brown.

II.—THE TOY ROMANCE

VANESSA was being converted into a needle at her mother's knee. This was what happened on Saturdays when a feminine view of life seemed more important to Mrs. Brown than it did the rest of the week. But just as Vanessa was being lulled into an entire acceptance of the world as a seam with a pricked finger under it, a group of excited voices, each one making the same remark, began to travel up the Brown stairs. What they said was, "George Pride." Vanessa reflected that the front door bell had rung a short time before. But she had been a needle then, she had not noticed it. Priscilla, Maud and Hector, each of whom took the warmest interest in anyone who came to the front door, evidently had. Hector reached the door of the room in which they were sitting, first; but Priscilla interposed an elderly sisterly hand in the region of his knees and swept him away, as conclusively as Hector ever could be swept away. Hadn't Priscilla opened the front door? By dint of much rehearsing on the stairs, the George Pride chorus arrived in a concentrated thud.

"George Pride wants to know if Vanessa can go out sleighing with him. He's come to take her. With his hand sleigh. George Pride wants to know if Vanessa can go out on his sleigh. It's George Pride and he wants Vanessa. He says can she go?"

Mrs. Brown turned solemn, pathetic even, when she heard of George Pride, while Vanessa gazed at her with a swelling conviction that she was an unworthy little girl. She wasn't quite sure that she remembered who George Pride was, probably a brother of Benny's, now that she came to think of it. But evidently his coming had reminded her mother of Vanessa's inherent wickedness. She knew her mother felt very sorry about it, and so did she.

"It is very kind of George Pride," said Mrs. Brown with profound impressiveness, "very, very kind to offer to take out anyone who is so much younger than he is himself, Vanessa must remember that she is a very little girl."

"I am not going, am I, mother? George Pride doesn't need to take me, does he, mother?" Vanessa gasped at the idea of George's inflicting so much pain on himself.

"Oh, yes, I think you had better go," Mrs. Brown replied, with a slight return of cheerfulness, "since George has been so very kind as to come for you."

Priscilla and Maud and Hector individually helped to get her ready. She wore all the clothes that Mrs. Brown considered suitable for a hand sleigh and felt tight. It was very kind of George, Vanessa reflected, that had been buttoned inside her coat; it might be uncomfortable to go with George; but she would try to be good. Why Priscilla, Maud and Hector should be so pressing in their attentions, and in general had lowered her spirits just as it had depressed Mrs. Brown's.

"It is very kind of George Pride, isn't it, mother?" Vanessa repeated automatically as her united family hurried her away, "very, very kind." She felt get downstairs; she would have spared George if she could.

George Pride, unlike Benny, was a large boy of a cheerful disposition. He might have had any kind of disposition as far as Vanessa was concerned.

She had been projected violently into a trance by the contemplation of his virtue as described by Mrs. Brown; and she remained on his hand sleigh, gazing sternly in front of her, a mere package for George to exhibit his kindness on. Presently something began to strike her as being peculiarly agreeable in her surroundings. It had nothing to do with George, neither had she. But she proposed to find out what it was that made her feel, in a word, so magnificent.

It was a mania of the neighbouring youth at that time to form a procession of hand sleighs and gallop madly round several squares on Saturday afternoons. Anyone who was really in the society of the district belonged to the procession. There were those who weren't allowed when they were young enough to want to go; and didn't care for it as soon as they were old enough to know better, like the Browns. The Grahams were in a class by themselves, and looked thoughtfully from their windows at the procession as it swept by. No one knew whether the Grahams weren't allowed, or whether they didn't care for it; they didn't belong to the procession anyway. But all those who had a vital grasp of existence as it flourished in that neighbourhood did. George Pride did, not always, but when he felt like it; and he had introduced Vanessa.

If there was one thing that the earliest young ladies of that neighbourhood desired it was to be on the front sleigh of the front boy of the procession. But Vanessa didn't know this. The rotation of the front sleigh was arranged with (Continued on page 56)