

The Story Page

The Story of Perry Anderson.

BY HELEN M. MERRILL.

We were driving slowly homeward along the "river road," listening to the murmur of the little stream as it wound its way onward toward the Connecticut, and enjoying the delicious coolness of the road shaded by the trees which lined it on either side.

The birds sang, and occasionally there came a breath of air laden with a delightful mingling of odors, impossible to describe, a breath of country air found only among the evergreen trees and where nature holds full sway.

Suddenly we came into an open space, and I uttered an exclamation of delight when my eyes rested on a tiny cottage, several rods back from the main road and which was surrounded by and covered with vines and flowers.

My friend smiled as she said, "Is not this an ideal spot, a 'love in a cottage' home? We will drive into the yard and have our choice of those lovely flowers, and a drink of delicious water from a boiling spring a few rods away. Miss Anderson will be glad to see us."

As we entered the yard a lady came out upon the veranda to meet us, invited us to alight, led the horse to a shady spot near by, tied him deftly and then bade us enter her home.

"First, Phebe, let us go to the spring for a drink of water."

"I've been longing for some for a week," returned my friend.

"I trust that that alone did not bring you," smiled the lady as she led the way down a little foot-path to where a small spring boiled up its wealth of pure cold water amid the crystal-like sand which completely filled it.

We soon returned to the house and after a delicate lunch of bread and honey, red raspberries and cream, with some of the spring water, we gathered a bouquet of flowers, thanked our kind hostess, and took our departure.

"Isn't there a story connected with that little home?" I asked.

"Yes, a somewhat sad one. But see those lovely ferns! Let us gather some and then I'll tell you the simple story of an old schoolmate's life," answered my friend.

Once more seated in the carriage, having secured the ferns, Mrs. Hayes proceeded to hear the following story, which I give as nearly as possible in her own words.

Perry Anderson was about twenty years of age when she first met Percy Anderson. He came to town on a visit to relatives and the similarity of names attracted them at first, an attraction which ripened into friendship, and later on into something sweeter yet. No, they were not related.

Perry was a carpenter, and he built the little cottage himself, the year before they were married, and a fairer bride never entered a sweeter home than when, on a lovely June day, they returned from their bridal trip.

"I remember how like a bird she used to sing about her work, and she seemed as happy as one."

"The years sped onward, finding them at the end of the fifth prosperous and rejoicing in the birth of a little daughter, to whom they gave the name Priscilla."

"We propose to keep up with the initial P, you observe," said she, when I was making her my first visit after baby's arrival, and it was delightful to witness the fond mother's pride in the little girl.

But she was not to stay with them for long, and when the snow fell it rested on a tiny grave in the cemetery and Persis had known her first sorrow. She was never quite the same after little Priscilla died—that is, her old light heartedness had gone.

Two years later, Phebe and Perry came into the home, and two sweeter children never made glad the hearts of parents, I am sure. Black-eyed, rosy-cheeked, healthy, happy little rogues! I have loved them as if they had been my own.

"When fourteen years of age, they entered the high school, and they were very promising pupils."

"If I have my health the children shall go to college," said Mr. Anderson one day, when I was visiting them. "I shall have to work hard, but it will pay in the end," said he with a fond smile.

"Alas! in one month from that day my husband returned from his store with the sad news that Mr. Anderson had fallen from a building, and was seriously, if not fatally injured."

"I hastened to the cottage to find the rumor only too true, the injury affecting his spine, and rendering him a cripple for the rest of his life."

"Bravely did they bear this great trouble and Persis began at once to take in sewing, succeeding so well that she learned dressmaking and soon had a thriving little business, all she could attend to."

"After a time her husband was able to sit in a chair, and carve odd bits of wood into fancy articles which found a ready sale."

"Thus time passed on until the twins were graduated from the high school."

"Only one of us can go to college, and that must be Perry. I have education enough to teach and help along, and it is my wish to do so," said Phebe.

"It seemed too bad to give the one a better chance than the other, but it really was advisable as Phebe had planned, and after one year spent as clerk in my husband's store, Perry entered college."

"During the year he had boarded with us and we had gotten to know him even better than the close friendship existing between the two families had ever admitted, and there were certain traits of character that made us feel anxious for his future. He was too easily led, and did not have self reliance enough; but his desire to please his parents and sister seemed so great that we tried to think all would be well."

"He worked faithfully the first year, and we had reason to feel pride in him when he returned to his old place in the store during the long summer vacation. Soon after he went back to college, however, vague rumors were circulated concerning his career."

"About this time his father grew worse, and almost before we realized the fact, he had drifted out of life. Perry had been summoned home and reached the bedside only an hour before his father's death."

"Promise me, my son, to do all in your power to make your mother happy. She has worked hard for us all; she will depend so much upon you in the years to come; see to it that you reward her untiring love."

"No suspicion of the truth was in his mind, yet he seemed more anxious for his son than for the rest of his family."

"For a time, grief over the death of his father caused the young man to avoid those who were leading him astray, but not for very long, and the inevitable result followed."

"He was expelled, and the news, reaching his mother and sister, rendered them nearly heartbroken. He wrote his mother, telling her his sorrow and shame. Said he, 'Mother, sister, I will return to you sometime when I am not a disgrace to you.' And the years sped on until ten had passed by, and the waiting mother and sister received no further message; yet so firmly did the mother-heart trust in the prayers she offered up for her son and in his promise to return to them, that she never gave up expecting him."

"Her health had been failing for two or three years, and at length we realized that she must leave us."

"I have not much longer to stay with you, yet it brings the time when I shall see my boy again so much the nearer. I am expecting him every day now, and I can hardly wait to see him. Come to me as often as you can, Esther. We have had many happy hours together, and your kindness has helped me to bear many unhappy ones," said she one day, as I said good-bye to her after a long call at the cottage."

"Christmas came and passed, and still she lingered. I had promised to spend the last day of the year with her, but guests prevented, however, as they took their departure late in the afternoon, I asked my husband to drive over with me after tea."

"It was a lovely moonlight evening, and the sleighing fine. As we neared the spot where we gathered these ferns a team was driven rapidly past us, taking the turn which led to Mrs. Anderson."

"I believe that Perry was in that sleigh," said my husband.

"I do hope that it may prove so," I answered.

"We stopped at the turn, for the sleigh was coming back, having left one of the two men at the cottage, and the snow was too deep to allow us to turn out after leaving the main road."

"Shall we not go back home?" I asked.

"I think you had better go in, Esther; for all she is expecting him, it will be a shock to her, and Phebe may need your help," said my husband.

"I alighted from the sleigh and hastened up the walk, but before I reached the door Phebe had opened it and came to meet me with out-stretched hands, sobbing like a child."

"He has come, Mrs. Hayes! He has come!" at the same time drawing me inside the door, where a tall, handsome man stood waiting to greet me.

"No traces of depravity in the clear-cut, handsome face, in the piercing black eyes, and the grasp of his hand told me how glad he was to meet me."

"Why have you waited so long?" was my first question after I had assured him of my pleasure in his return.

"I waited until I could come back a man, and one whom my mother and sister would not be ashamed of, and I see my mistake."

"Tell her I have come, and take me to her, Phebe," said he, in a husky voice.

"Tell her please, Mrs. Hayes. I am too greatly agitated to go in now," pleaded Phebe.

"As I entered the room Mrs. Anderson extended both hands, and said in a voice excitement had made strong,

"Perry is coming to-night, and I am glad you are here to meet him."

"I stooped and kissed the wasted cheeks, and then with a voice far less firm than her own, I said, 'Yes, dear, he is coming; he will soon be here.'

"He is here. I want him!" and a minute later she was in his arms."

"She lived about three weeks after he returned—lived to know that her son was what they had wished him to be—a minister of the Gospel. She would never let him speak of the years when he was in the depths, but listened eagerly to the story of his struggle to complete his education, and his final success."

"Phebe has stayed at the cottage since then, with a friend as companion; but she goes away this fall to help make a home for her brother, and to assist him in his work. He has reclaimed many from a drunkard's life, and we rejoice in his power for good. He feels that he has much lost time to make up, and is ever on the alert, lest a chance should pass him by."

A week later I met him. That was one year ago, and after next week, I too, shall help Perry Anderson make a home and also assist him in his life work.—The Leader.

The Missing Five Cents.

Holding out his hand for the change, John's employer said: "Well, my boy, did you get what I sent you for?"

"Yes, sir," said John; "and here is the change, but I don't understand it. The lemons cost twenty-eight cents, and there ought to be twenty-two change, and there's only seventeen according to my count."

"Perhaps I made a mistake in giving you the money?"

"No, sir; I counted it over in the hall, to be sure it was all right."

"Then perhaps the clerk made a mistake in giving you the change?"

But John shook his head. "No, sir; I counted that, too. Father said we must always count our change before leaving a store."

"Then how in the world do you account for the missing five cents? How do you expect me to believe such a queer story as that?"

John's cheeks grew red, but his voice was firm. "I don't account for it, sir; I can't. All I know is that it is so."

"Well, it is worth a good deal in this world to be sure of that. How do you account for that five-cent piece that is hidden inside your coat-sleeve?"

John looked down quickly, and caught the gleaming bit with a cry of pleasure. "Here you are! Now it is all right. I couldn't imagine what had become of that five-cent piece. I was certain I had it when I started from the store to return."

"There are two or three things that I know now," Mr. Brown said, with a satisfied air. "I know you have been taught to count your money in coming and going, and to tell the exact truth, whether it sounds well or not—two important things for an errand boy. I think I'll try you, young man, without looking farther."

At this John's cheeks grew redder than ever. He looked down and up and finally he said, in a low voice, "I think I ought to tell you that I wanted the place so badly I almost made up my mind to say nothing about the change if you didn't ask me."

"Exactly," said Mr. Brown; "and if you would have done it, you would have lost the situation, that's all. I need a boy about me who can be honest over so small a sum as five cents whether he is asked questions or not.—Pansy."

Bray's Enemy.

"Please, Mr. Joynes, there's a little boy at the back gate to see you."

"At the back gate? Bring him in, Peter."

"He won't come in, sir; says he's awful busy, and hasn't got time."

"How big is he?"

"About as big as my fist, sir," said Peter.

The good-natured gentleman went out to the back gate. "Well, countryman," he said, pleasantly, "what can I do for you?"

The small boy—he was a very small boy—took off a soft, dirty hat and held it behind him. "I come to tell you sir, that Bray's got to be killed."

"Bray, my big Newfoundland dog? And who sent you here with that information?" asked the gentleman, losing all his pleasant looks.

"Nobody sent me," answered the boy, stoutly; "I've come by myself. Bray has runned my sheep free days. He's got to be killed."

"Where did you get any sheep?" asked Mr. Joynes.

"My sheep are Mr. Ransom's. He gives me fifteen cents a week for watching 'em."