

The Inglenook.

A Question of Neighbors.

BY ALICE M. GUERNSEY.

It was a curious group which waited the coming of Lois Masten that hot Sunday in August. Ralph Wenkle, in spotless white suit, sat between Tom and Jerry Saunders—as clean as he, but in gingham blouses and shabby linen knickerbockers. Mike Phinney's face showed his nationality no less plainly than did his name, and the Fatherland was written in every gleam of Fritz Schroeder's blue eyes. A motley, ill-assorted group, one would have said, but a group held together by the loving faithfulness of their teacher.

"She's the best teacher in this school!" cried Mike, at the close of a heated argument with the boys of the next class and Tom added, loyally, "She's the best there is anywhere!"

"Who is your neighbor, boys?" asked Lois, as the lesson study began.

The boys looked puzzled. At last Fritz said a bit slowly, "Carl Hengel's my neighbor—t any rate, he lives 'cross the hall. But I don't like him," he added, as the memory of sundry encounters came to mind.

"And I don't like Tom O'Rary," cried Mike. "I just hate him, and I'll never let on that he's my neighbor at all."

"We have some nice neighbors, I guess," said Ralph; "but we don't know them any. Out in the country, where we used to live, we knew everybody, and it was lots nicer."

"Oh, we've got an uncle," said Tom, eagerly, "an uncle who lives out West—w-a-y out west—and he hasn't got any neighbors nearer 'n ten miles."

"Whew!" whistled Mike, under his breath. Small wonder that the story seemed incredible to the tenement house lad, in whose mind the country was a mixture of playground, sand heaps, recreation-pier breezes and Mulberry Park trees.

Lois smiled, as she said, "Listen, boys, and I'll tell you a story. Once on a time a great crowd of people were standing round Jesus and talking with Him. At last somebody asked a question, and Jesus told the story in answer. He said that there was a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The people He was talking to knew all about that road. Robbers lived along the way, hiding in the rocks, and pouncing on travelers and stealing all they had—their money and clothes and everything."

"Why didn't the police stop 'em?" questioned Mike.

"I'm afraid the police on that road were not good ones," answered Lois.

"P'raps they made the thieves divide up with 'em," concluded Mike, sagely.

Unheeding the interruption, Lois went on. "One day a traveler went along this road, as I said, and the thieves fell upon him, and took his things away, and half killed him, and then ran off. There the poor man lay, almost naked, and bleeding and sore, with nobody to help him. A priest came along and looked at him and then crossed over to the other side of the road and went along down toward Jericho."

"I call that mean," said Tom. "I should think he might have helped a fellow."

"Mebbe he was scared of the robbers himself, and wanted to hurry away," said Jerry.

"Then another man came along," contin-

ued Lois, "a man who went to the same church and belonged to the same country as the traveler. But he just looked at him and turned away."

"That's meaner yet," said Ralph. "You'd think that a man who went to the same church would help him, anyhow."

"What if he didn't have any money," suggested Tom.

"Well, he might ha' told him that he was sorry for him, and tried to help him up. Did he do that, Miss Lois?"

"No," said Lois. "He just went by on the other side. Then there came along another man, but he was of a different nation, and his people and the people of the man who was hurt hated each other. They were always quarreling and injuring one another. When he came and saw the man, what do you suppose he did?"

"Hit him again," said Mike.

"Did he kill him, Miss Lois?" asked Ralph, his eyes growing wide at the thought of the possible tragedy.

"No," when he saw him he was very sorry for him. He forgot all about the old quarrel, and he bound up his wounds, gave him something to drink and to wear, and then he put him on his own horse, and held him there until they reached a place where he could be taken care of. This man came from Samaria, and people called him the Good Samaritan. All night he looked after the man, and the next morning he said to the landlord, 'I must go along to attend to my business, but here's some money. You take care of the poor fellow, and if it costs any more, I'll pay the rest the next time I come this way.'

"I said, you remember, that Jesus told this story in answer to a question. The question was, 'Who is my neighbor?' Do you think Jesus meant that the two men who 'passed by on the other side' were real neighbors to the man who was robbed?"

"What! the fellows who went off and left him? Not much they weren't his neighbors!" said Mike, emphatically.

"Well, did the poor man who was robbed and half murdered live next door to the Good Samaritan?"

"No, ma'am; nowhere near him."

"Were they old friends?"

"No, ma'am; they was folks that didn't like each other."

"I s'pect they really hated each other, like Tim an' me," said Mike.

"Well, if they didn't live near each other, and didn't really like each other, how could the Samaritan and the wounded man be neighbors?"

Five puzzled boy faces looked into the earnest eyes of their teacher.

"I don't see's they could be," said Jerry.

"Who is my neighbor?" Who is your neighbor?" asked Lois, pressing the question home.

"I guess I know," said Tom, at last. "Your really true neighbor's anybody you can help."

"Yes," said Lois. "Our neighbors are the people we can help, and there are a lot of them, as Mike says. This week I want you to find out some of them, to remember every neighborly act you do or see, and Friday night I want you to come to my house to talk it all over. Will you?"

Would they! They had been to Miss

Lois' home before. It was a small flat, and Miss Lois never wore fine dresses; but there was sure to be ice cream or lemonade. Trust the boys to go for the sake of the treat, if for nothing else!

"Will you do it, too, Miss Lois?" asked Ralph.

"Will I do what? Look for my neighbors and tell you about it? Yes, we'll all do it, together."

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There was ice cream for the boys on Friday night, and after the "second helping" all around had disappeared, Mike began the stories:—

"Say, Miss Lois, I don't hate Tim O'Rary so bad's I did. I 'most like him."

"What have you done to help him?" asked Lois.

"Why, how'd you know I done anything? I haven't done much, only he lost his ball, and I let him take mine, and he an' I are 'most friends."

"Why, I did just that way with Carl," said Fritz. "He used to make faces at me, and Monday I said, 'Oh, come on; let's play. I'll let you help me fly my kite!' and he hasn't been ugly one bit since. I think I'm going to like him real well."

"My mother's my neighbor," said Jerry, timidly, and the boys stared at him.

"Course she is, 'cause she's your mother, and you have to be good to her," said Ralph.

"No, you don't—leastways—" and Mike hesitated.

"Do you mean that boys are not always good to their mothers?" prompted Miss Lois.

"Yes, ma'am; that's what I mean. You see, sometimes mothers gets tired an' forgets they're neighbors, too."

"I'm glad my boys are remembering to be good to their mothers," said Miss Lois. "Now tell us where you've found neighbors whom you didn't know of before."

"Why, Tom and me, we're going into the country with the Fresh Air Presence nearer than any of these. Some One was looking into his heart, and he had no power to turn away, or to shut his heart against that searching gaze. All that he had been and thought and felt was laid bare; he was being seen just as he was. But with the shame of it there began to rise within him a wonderful sense of comfort. He looked up and saw the Master whom he had served, and in the Master's look was love and only love. Here was One who knew him as he was, yet here was the greatest love of all. He seemed to hear the question asked of him, as the same tender voice had asked it by the Sea of Galilee, 'Lovest thou me?' At once the shame was gone, as the pride had gone before; no thought of self, of the past, no regret, no self-satisfaction remained; only a great true love which he knew now had been the secret of all that had been good in his poor life; and he cried with humble gladness, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'

Again the voice spoke, "Follow me." Again, though now with no dread, he asked, "Whither, Lord? To the judgment?" But the answer came, "For you the judgment is past; you have been standing before the judgment seat of love."—The Interior.

A cloudless sky soon becomes monotonous. Clouds add much to the beauty of the sunset. Life without trials and cares would soon become wearisome, and we would tire of its sameness. Trials are the clouds which colored by cheerful disposition, take on beauty.