

The Inglenook.

Aunt Sarah's Christian Endeavor.

Palmyra Bean untied her bonnet strings and rolled them carefully over her forefinger. She had just been to call on the new minister's wife.

"Well, Palmyra?"

Gentle Aunt Sarah tried to wait patiently, but it always did take Palmyra so long to roll her bonnet strings.

"Well, Palmyra?"

Palmyra finished the second one, and tucked it deftly into the bonnet-lining. Then she put the bonnet away.

"Well, I guess she's slack."

"Why, Palmyra! Why, she looked real neat an' pretty when she went by to meetin'."

"I don't care how she looked goin' by to meetin', Sarah Bean. Slack folks always fix up then. What I care for's how she looks to home. She's a real sweet lookin' woman, an' talks like a book; but she's slack. I guess I know what that means."

"Poor little woman!" murmured Aunt Sarah under her breath. She pitied her instantly with all the strength of her big, warm heart. If Palmyra said she was slack, everybody else would say so, Palmyra set the fashion of saying things.

"Unless I can offsay it," thought Aunt Sarah, making a sudden vow to do her best.

"It's a terrible set back to a new minister's wife to be called slack the first thing. The land knows what excuses she may have, but nobody will apply 'em. It's a terrible fault of human natur'."

"How did you find out, Palmyra?" she asked quietly.

"Find out! I didn't have to find out. The mantelpiece was so dusty I could've wrote my name on it, and the baby's face was stick with molasses. Those are two things. Do you want to know the rest, Sarah?"

"No, I don't. Mebbe she couldn't reach the mantelpiece, an' didn't realize the dust. The parsonage mantelpiece is up dreadful high, an' she's a terrible short minister's wife. And, Palmyra, you know you never had a baby, an' so—"

"Did you ever?"

"No—Oh, no," said Aunt Sarah meekly; "but, if I had've, I'd have known how hard it was to keep its little face clean all the time. Why, I shouldn't be a mite surprised if I'd have had to washed it as many as six times a day. The little things are real magnets for drawin' dirt."

Aunt Sarah's mild, sweet face took on a dreamy look. She was thinking how pleasant it would have been to have a little sticky face looking up into hers, and little sticky hands patting her cheeks lovingly. Dear land, as if she'd have minded the stickiness! But Palmyra would, of course.

In Four Corners parish all the women asserted that the "Bean girls" were as different as two peas in a pod *were not*. They were both real gossips, but Palmyra Bean said "flurrin' things about folks, an' Sarah always was sayin' good things." That was the difference.

"If Palmyra says Mis. Dodge don't get her washin' out till dreadful late Monday's," Ann Ellen Pease affirmed, "then Sarah, she goes right to work to say, 'but it always looks a deal whiter'n most folks' washins', Palmyra.' An' when Palmyra told about Mary

Lois Bennett's not washin' her floor but once a month, Sarah spoke up in her kind voice an' says, 'I guess its because it don't need washin', then, for Mary Lois is a terrible clean little woman.'"

Ann Ellen Pease was next door neighbor to the Beans, and loved Palmyra in spite of her failings and Sarah because she had not any. Everybody loved Aunt Sarah.

The new minister had preached his first sermon at Four Corners, and, as Palmyra said, "passed muster." His earnest, simple sermon had won its way to all their hearts, and his little tired wife's face was radiant with pride.

"Now never mind if the 'baby is teething or Honey Bunch's new boots are toed out!" she thought. "I can work and work to the tune of the dear 'Praise God.' If they only like David, it doesn't matter so much about me. Perhaps when the children are grown up and I can stop and take a long breath, they'll like me!"

So she had gone from church with David, taking three steps to his one, and bobbing up and down beside him happily, content just to be David's wife and the little tired mother of his children. That was all little Mrs. David asked.

Aunt Sarah knitted another round on her stocking and into her seam needle. Then she got up and put on her everyday-bonnet and shawl.

"You ain't goin' out Sarah?"

"Yes, I am—I thought I'd go over to the minister's an' make a little mite of a call, Palmyra."

"Not with that bunnit on, Sarah Bean. Are you crazy demented? You've got your old bunnit on, didn't you know it?"

"Yes, I know it, I want it on," Aunt Sarah said, quietly. "I'm only goin' to run in, I mean. I'm goin' to the side door."

"Why, Sarah Bean! An' you ain't ever even spoken to her yet. I don't know what kind of folks she'll think we are at Four Corners."

"She'll find out what kind of folks I am," laughed Aunt Sarah, "an' I'll tell her nobody else takes after me. You see, Palmyra, I thought maybe it was kind of flusterin' to a little woman with heaps o' babies to call all fixed up an' gloves on. So I'm goin' to run in."

In the minister's yard Aunt Sarah ran across little Honey Bunch wailing. She picked her up, and kissed the little tear-soiled face comfortingly. She could not remember ever to have kissed a baby face before, and it thrilled her with joy. Then she carried the child with her to the side door.

"It's only a bump, I guess," she said, holding her out to her mother. "I guess she fell down. I found her down thers by the gate, cryin'. If you've got a little camphire to put on the place—"

The minister's little wife looked up into Aunt Sarah's kind, plain face, across the child's head, and smiled. Then they both laughed, and the child joined in a piping little voice, with the jostle of sobs still in it.

"It's a queer way to introduce myself, I know; but I'm Aunt Sarah," Aunt Sarah cried cheerily. "I thought I'd just run in, mebbe you'd think I was one o' the family."

"Oh, I'm so glad! Come right in, Aunt Sarah," said the minister's little wife, beam-

ing with delight. She had noticed at once that every-day bonnet and Aunt Sarah's bare, wrinkled hands; and a distinct feeling of relief took possession of her. There had been four separate callers that day, in best bonnets and staid black gloves; and they had set up, one after the other dignified and grave, on the same parlor chair.

"If the next one doesn't sit in another chair, David, I know I shall squeal!" she had told the minister nervously after the last caller went away. That had been Palmyra Bean.

Aunt Sarah sat out in the dining room in the sewing chair by the window. She held out her hands to the minister's baby.

"Mayn't I hold it?" she asked a little timidly. "I think I could, though I ain't a mite used to handlin' babies. I've only loved 'em."

"Yes, indeed; he's used to strangers! ministers' babies always are." The minister's little wife's voice had the suggestion of a sigh in it.

"But I'm afraid he'll be cross—Aunt Sarah (you see I don't know any other name to call you, and I don't believe I want to). He's teething, poor little man! I was up 'most all night with him."

"I should say 'poor little mother,' too!" cried Aunt Sarah, pityingly. "Babies are a sight o' trouble—eh, baby?—take 'em first an' last."

"But they're worth a sight of trouble, you know."

"Yes, I know," Aunt Sarah said softly. She cuddled the baby closer in her arms, and by and by it went to sleep. Aunt Sarah's face was radiant with pride. She held herself rigid and motionless for fear of waking it.

"I'm going to call David soon," ran on the little mother's voice sociably, "but it's so nice sitting here talking to somebody, in the family! May I say just what I like, tell all my trials and things?"

"Every one of 'em, my dear. I don't have enough of my own to keep me busy. Sometimes I say to myself, 'Sarah Bean, you hadn't ought to be so fortunate, I'm afraid it's selfish.'"

Aunt Sarah laughed gently, with evident regard for the baby.

"No, you're not selfish, only fortunate. Did you say 'Sarah Bean'? Then maybe you are some relation to the Miss Bean who called here this afternoon."

"I'm her sister," Aunt Sarah said, simply. "I'm glad the Lord let me be, because she's a good woman."

"Oh, I know that; but—but is she near-sighted? I was just wicked enough to hope so—almost. You see, she sat just where she could see the dust on the table and what not. I know, because I went back afterward and sat in the same chair to see. And, dear me, yes, I saw. The dust stood out in bold relief, determined to be looked at. David wrote 'Never mind' in it, when I called his attention to it."

Aunt Sarah sighed inwardly. Then was Palmyra right? Was the minister's little wife slack?

"I dusted the parlor then with the baby in my arms. It was the first chance I've had to day, the very first. If the dust had been thick enough to plant seeds in, I couldn't have helped it! Aunt Sarah—"The weary voice that struggled to be gay paused a moment.

"Yes, my dear."

"Is dust a cardinal sin?"

"No, it ain't—nor any other colored one, either."

"Or—or—stickiness? The children's