

Was it not enough to irritate a saint—had a saint been the author? The inverted S was forgiven, even the misplaced comma evoked but a frown; but when the author of "The Poor in our Large Cities" found himself calling those same unfortunate people "miserable rascals," he sprang to his feet and sought the publishers—bearding them in their own sumptuous den—and pointed out the hideous blunder with a finger rigid with just indignation.

"Really, this is too bad!" said the firm in one voice. "We'll see who is at fault and have him dismissed at once. We've been annoyed twice this season in this way. We regret this exceedingly, Midsommer! It's a shocking error." Yet, in spite of their regret, the firm covertly laughed in their sleeves. There was something slightly ludicrous about the blunder, which the author's irritation rather enhanced.

"Shocking? It's infamous!" and Midsommer, the author of "Our Poor," etc., cast the copy of the *Times* upon the floor as if it had stung him. "Not even space for an m! Looks thoroughly intentional, you see! And the entire edition gone out, too!"

"My dear fellow, we'll have it 'erated' in to-morrow's earliest issue."

"And have all the more attention called to it? No, let it rest!" and Midsommer hurried himself out into the street with the honey of his philanthropy turned to gall for the moment, and a wild desire in his heart to forswear newspapers and take to Western wilds. Forgive him, for he was comparatively a young author. Besides, without any conceit, he knew his contributions were widely read; and he liked to give to the world the best of his brain, the warmest and truest of his heart. And here was this error—jacking out of his well-meant and eloquent pathos, like a malicious, untimely horse laugh!

Next morning assistant-foreman Jackson was sent for. The error was quickly traced to Erma's door. Why could not it have been traced to the door of busy young Brown, who read the *Market* and *Marine*, and who would not have felt a dismissal in the least? Or, better still, why had it not occurred on the hands of Snobbs, the heavy editor, who read his own proofs because nobody else was worthy to read them? I will tell you why: because destiny had a hand in it.

When Jackson returned he bore with him a concise little note, which he laid on Erma's table with a bow that had in it the profundity of firewalls. Erma seized upon it and read. Some calamities are only stunning at first. Their pain comes gradually. Erma placidly returned the note to its envelope and said "Ah!" to herself as she sometimes did when coming across striking news in the proof.

"With the close of the week we regret to say that your duties will be ended," concluded the note.

"I'll not work another moment under sentence, my dear sir!" exclaimed Erma, bringing her small fist down on the table in italics. She then put a note of instant resignation into the dummy and took her hat. In fifteen minutes she was at home.

"Now, then, Erma Haywood," walking up to the mirror, "here you are on my hands again! I thought I was well rid of you. I've heard nothing about you for five whole months. And here you come—out of work—demanding food, shelter, raiment. O dear! It's a heavy task to take care of you? I wonder if you are worth while? I wonder if you are worth the salt I provide for you? You see, my dear," nodding to herself patronizingly, "work may come and work may go, but board goes on forever! What a humbug your life is, anyway—just keeping your nose above water! Earning ten dollars for the sake of spending nine dollars and ninety-nine cents. Stale, flat and unprofitable! Idiot, you had best go into the country and raise chickens and cauliflower. How about the mission? I'll tell you what your mission is," with a menacing finger, "it is to wear dark blue stockings and quilted petticoats and a shawl tied behind, and have a little cart and some little bunches of vegetables and go trundling about from door to door, supplying your simple wants in that way. That is all the mission that will ever come to you, you miserable failure!"

This indignant self-communion continued much in this vein until the bell summoned her to dinner. As if it were not enough to be dismissed from a situation, the dumplings were depressingly soggy, and the dessert a bland and insipid rice custard—which she hated. Mr. Midsommer, looking down to her from his favored region—he looked at her quite frequently now—noticed the lurking trouble in her face, and wished that he knew more of her, her past, her present, her work, her self in fact.

Erma, looking up to him, wished she were Mr. Midsommer, with a man's work to do, and two children to care for. Life would be something like, then.

In the afternoon she went to look about a little among newspaper and book publishers, with what success may be guessed from the fact that evening found her too disheartened for any tea-drinking, sitting gloomily under her shaded lamp, with a page of note-paper before her—a single word, "Wanted," written at the head, from which unfinished manuscript the pen had evidently faltered.

"Wanted—what?" mused Erma. "A place as governess? No, I've no faculty for teaching. Lady's companion? Ha! I want to see the fellow-woman whose whims I could put up with. Seamstress? I know no more about a sewing-machine than I do about a steam-engine. Second girl?" The idea of being second girl

looked so feasible that she took time to consider it.

Then she got thinking of the many pleasant homes she had had peeps at during her afternoon walk; of the plants and birds in this window, and the easy-chair and work-basket in that; the tableaux of happy mothers and happy children parading themselves just for the sake of hurting the feelings of lonely Bohemians like herself; complacent men—never any of them quite as distinguished as Mr. Midsommer—hurrying home with sometimes a dainty paper of fruit or a nosegay (or a magazine—or all three—and being met in the hall by somebody; cheery tea-tables, sparkling with glass and silver, and falling to quite hide themselves behind airy muslin curtains; even a chance cat, sitting "at home" on a door-step, with a blue ribbon tied in a loving bow about her neck—all these hints of home-life Erma had gathered to herself with a sad consciousness of anomie, a sense of being defrauded of what was her own, her birthright. And now as she sat in her room alone and foot-weary, and just a little tired of caring for Erma Haywood, that curious, tender, sad, yet subtly consoling feeling of self-pity, which we are all, under real or fancied wrong, capable of, came over her, and she went deliberately to the narrow white couch, standing in the recess dignified as "bedroom," and flung herself down upon it in a passion of tears, such as she had not enjoyed for many a day. It was good for her. I am not an advocate of tears on ordinary occasions. They are too luxurious for every-day use. If poured forth on trivial vexations and disappointments, they soon degenerate into mere sniveling. Nobody hated a sniveler with more vigor than Erma did. She was not sniveling. Here was a thunder-shower of grief, violent and gusty, not likely to last long, but sweeping things before it while it lasted.

Thus sobbing, with her face buried in the pillow, she did not hear some tiny knuckles rapping at the door. Nor the door when it opened and closed. Nor the light steps that hesitatingly crossed the floor and paused at her side. She heard nothing until a small, still voice, with a wondering tremor in it, said close to her ear: "Miss Haywood—"

Erma turned her head a little savagely—it is seldom pleasant to be caught crying—but the vision of Nannie with wonder and pity in her round eyes, and a great bunch of pansies and moss-roses in her hand, was too touching a vision to be regarded savagely.

"I have brought these for you, if you please," thrusting them in Erma's face and preparing to retreat. A big, "grown-up" woman having a wild crying-spell was an alarming as well as pitiful spectacle.

Erma got up from the bed and tried to command her voice.

"Don't go—o, de—ar!" hastily drying her eyes. "You bring these to me—" with incredulous emphasis.

"Yes, it's for present for you," then adding, confidentially, "Papa and I went away out to a big greenhouse purpose to get them, and papa bought them for me to give to you. And I've got two roses for my vase. Did you hurt you, Miss Haywood?" In Nannie's opinion, bumps and scratches were the only events in life worthy of tears.

Erma blushed at the frank disclosure, and smiled at the abrupt question.

"It is the sweetest present that ever was, and I thank you, dear!" kissing the child's cheek. "No, I haven't hurt myself. I don't feel well, that's all. Don't say anything about it! It is very silly to cry, don't you think so?"

"But sometimes you have to cry, you know," said Nannie. "I'm going to bed now. Good night, Miss Haywood," shutting her adieu into the door as she disappeared, in her abrupt child's way.

Erma put the flowers in water, and sat down by them, an occasional sob still catching at her throat, and a bright red spot burning on either cheek. But she felt suddenly and unaccountably cheerful—unaccountably, because there was no material cause for cheer.

As for the rich, velvety pansies and the sweet roses, were they not the child's gift? And why should she not be delighted with them? What if they were really Midsommer's gift? What then? It need not follow that she should take on prudish airs and decline them with stately thanks, or that she should accept them with a school-girl's simper, thinking that they meant something. Oh! no. It was merely a graceful return for her great kindness in having tied up Nannie's bumped head; for having given little Bernie a buzz-saw, with which he had lacerated every one of his blouses; for having taken them both, one fine Sunday, to a long ramble in the park, from which they had returned with blistered noses and weary legs. Such kindness merited moss-roses, of course. And here they were, and she would keep them, and feel "greatly obliged." Thus resolutely she put away all "nonsense" in regard to the offering.

"And now, instead of spending my time in ineffectual blubbering, I think I had best attack those stockings that have been leering at me from my work-basket for a week. Yes, we'll darn our stockings, Erma Haywood, with a heart for any fate!"

Erma had a growing habit of talking to herself—because of being so much alone, and because she was a woman and couldn't avoid talking.

So she sat valiantly darning, when there came another knock at the door. "A cup of wretched but well-meant tea, with Mrs. McAfferty's compliments, I suppose," thought Erma; then she said aloud, "Come!"

Mr. Midsommer stood on the threshold,

abashed and undecided. Nannie—in obedience to Erma's injunction not to "tell"—had straightway given her father a vivid account of how she had found Miss Haywood "crying and crying as hard as she could cry," but conscientiously adding that he "mustn't tell," cause Miss Haywood didn't want anybody to know it. He expected to find a woman in distress. But here was a woman sitting up very erect, with a stocking drawn over one hand and a darning-needle in the other, apparently far removed from distress, and regarding him with astonishment and dismay.

Then both spoke simultaneously. She said, "Come in, Mr. Midsommer," while she hastily put her darning into the background, and he faltered, "May I come in?"

The frank way is the best way. To make weak remarks about the weather was something Midsommer was incapable of. As he accepted Erma's proffered chair, he said:

"I beg pardon for blundering in here after this fashion, but Nannie says—Nannie tells me—Mrs. Haywood, you have some trouble. I came to see if you would—if it is possible for me to be of any service to you."

Erma blushed scarlet. "Nannie has been telling you how she found me behaving like—an idiot!" she said fiercely, as one of those tennacious sobs caught her throat.

Midsommer looked hurt. Erma saw the look and gently added, "You are very kind, Mr. Midsommer."

"You should be kind enough not to make me appear like an idiot!" he answered bluntly, but mollified by her tone and the pathetic sob.

"My conduct—since it has been made public—needs explanation, I suppose," said Erma spitefully. "I will tell you. I don't think anything was the direct cause of my—my—acting in that imbecile way. A storm had been gathering in my sky all day—commencing with a—rather unpleasant circumstance; and all the little clouds of my past and present came floating up and joining that unpleasant circumstance—and—when Nannie came with her beautiful gift for me, the storm had begun and was raging. It is all over now."

"I am greatly enlightened," said Midsommer grimly, coloring with humiliation. "You couldn't well have taken a more graceful way of telling me that—I—have—intruded upon you. Don't despise me! I meant well."

"Despise you, Mr. Midsommer! I'm ashamed to tell you! It's so weak—this crying over one's self! I suspect this is the indirect cause: Yesterday I was an affluent proof-reader in the *Times* office. To-day I am dismissed, and a beggar! Until I get work again. That is all. Tears mend the matter vastly, don't they? Carelessness was the ground. I was careless twice before, but this last time the mistake was too funny!" and Erma hastened to relate the particulars of her fatal negligence.

Midsommer's face, meanwhile, held a variety of expressions. As Erma concluded her little story with a laugh that tried its best to be merry, he asked quietly:

"What do you think of the article, aside from that atrocious blunder? Do you remember anything of it?"

"I have it in my scrap-book here, blunder and all. It is grandly good! The man who wrote it is fit to be adored! I hope God will bless him!"

Midsommer rose and stood before her, looking down upon her with sparkling eyes:

"Mrs. Haywood—child!—do you know I am that author! And I vowed yesterday that if it would only please fate to throw that *Times* proof-reader in my way, I would thrash him within an inch of his life!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Erma, rising to her feet like an emboldened exclamation-point.

"Fate has flung that proof-reader in my way!" continued Midsommer menacingly, something like a smile beginning to pull at his golden moustache.

Erma turned abruptly away. She was in no mood to be laughed at—by the man she loved—and it was suddenly revealed to her that she loved this man.

"You who regard so kindly 'The Poor in our Large Cities,'" she began demurely, "you can surely bestow inexpensive forgiveness on one who—who—has—paid rather dearly for the annoyance she has caused you?"

"No; I would have your life—I would have your life—in my keeping—if you will give it to me!" in a broken voice.

"I have loved you ever since the day you held Nannie in your arms!" he continued.

The sob in her throat again; but it was such a happy one.

"She said I was worthy to be adored. I wish I were worthy to be loved—a little!" Silence.

"Very tempting things I offer her, I confess: poverty, the care of children, work, the love of a poor old newspaper scribbler—"

Then Erma dashed around upon him, and held out her hands.

"I can't love you—a little!" two great, joyous tears shining in her eyes.

"My darling!"

This story points to but one fact, and that is, our limited knowledge of the Unforeseen.

How little Midsommer had dreamed that he should come to prove, with the "kiss of eternity," the lips of the proof-reader for whose personal chastisement he had thrashed.

How very far had it been from Erma's expectations that her "mission" was so near at hand.

THE GREATEST OF ALL IS CHARITY.

O fine tongues, O lithe tongues, sharp-pointed to kill

The tenderest heart:
O dark words, O low words, shot swiftly, and still

With delicate art!
Whence comes ye? O woman, your guilty cheeks burn—
Against your own sisters the weapons ye turn.
Go ye to the feet of the Master and learn
That the greatest of all is Charity!

O warm faith, O firm faith, sublime canst thou be

In woman made strong!
O blind eyes, O closed eyes, refusing to see
A lover go wrong!
Believing the son, though he lies to your face;
Believing the husband through darkest disgrace;
Why can ye not rise to a still higher place
In the greatest of all, kind Charity?

O star hope, O far hope, low bright canst thou glow

In mother and wife!
O deaf ears, O closed ears, refusing to know
The wreck of a life!
Ye cheer fallen man with the very last breath;
Ye hope against hope to the gateway of death;
Why can ye not list to the message that saith,
Lo! the greatest of all is Charity!

Ye see not, ye dream not, the torturing grief
Of one at your side!

She suffers in silence, and finds no relief—
Her tears she must hide!
All wounded, all bleeding, the poor maiden heart,
Yet swift as the Indian's pitiless dart
Your keen words are sent to the tenderest part—
Though the greatest of all is Charity!

Ye see not, ye feel not, the trials that chill
A wife's death her load.

O'ertasked and o'erburdened, she struggles on still
'Neath duty's sharp goad.

Ye know not the length that her daily round makes;
Ye know not the cares that her feeble hand takes;

Ye add your hard words, and the straining heart breaks—
Though the greatest of all is Charity!

Ye know not, untruffed, the battle for life
A sister must wage;

Ye know not, untempted, in what deadly strife
Her heart must engage.

She reaches the brink, but the chasm appals;
She clings with faint clutch to the slippery walls,

But down come your doubts, like a blow, and she falls—
Though the greatest of all is Charity!

Ye heed not, proud hearts, the hopeless condition
Of one who is lost;

It may be in waves of tears and contrition
Her poor soul is tossed.

Your pitiless scorn keeps her back from your door,
Your pitiless hand keeps her down evermore,

Though the Saviour himself said, "Go sin no more!"
For the greatest of all is Charity!

O woman, O woman, the earth's sweetest flower,
Creation's bright crown!

How can ye, how can ye, still cherish the power
That holds your souls down?

O fairest, for whom all your youthful hearts burn?
O dearest, for whom all our aged eyes yearn!

O ready for Paradise, could ye but learn
That the greatest of all is Charity!

DESMORO;

OR,

THE RED HAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "TWENTY STRAWS," "VOICES FROM THE LUMBER ROOM," "THE HUMMING-BIRD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Why, you have put out the light?" queried the gentleman, as he refastened the casement. "My safety demanded the act—the light would have betrayed me!" Desmoro answered, in an undertone.

"Who are you, and wherefore are you being thus hunted, as you term it?"

"I am sorry that I cannot explain my position, that I cannot return you an honest answer to your straightforward question, but, be assured of this, I am not here to harm you, or to commit any deed of wrong or mischief. I am an outlaw, 'tis true, but unhappy circumstances have made me such—I am not a bushranger at the core."

"A bushranger!" echoed the gentleman. "Hark! they are in the garden! We must not let our voices be heard."

"Give me your hand, and I will conduct you