

HOME CIRCLE.

TOPKNOT.

BY MRS. C. M. LIVINGSTON

(Concluded.)

One warm afternoon Mrs. Lane had gone out on the back porch in quest of a cool place. Busily engaged with her sewing, she was presently startled by a peculiar cluck! cluck! quite near her, and looking up, what should her astonished eyes discover but Topknot, waddling triumphantly along at the head of a long line of downy yellow chicks, as proud and happy a mother as ever was at the head of a family. Mrs. Lane tried to think for a moment that her eyes deceived her. But, no; there was Topknot's gray and white feathers this time, sure enough, and there was no mistaking, either, the bright eyes and pert little head, with its pink tuft.

At any other time Mrs. Lane would have gone into raptures over the small puff balls, and have been quick to congratulate the complacent little mother; but as it was, a humiliating sense of the great injustice she had been guilty of was all the sensation she experienced at the sight of Topknot's thriving family. She did not stop to discover what was the hidden motive that caused her to hastily decoy Topknot to the barn, by means of a dish of corn, and there proceed to tie a string to one of her legs and fasten her securely. To keep this miserable biped out of sight was now most important. To that end her mistress had a coop constructed as soon as possible, and placed behind the barn in the far end of the lot.

If Mrs. Lane had trouble before, she was in whole seas of it now. It had been as gall and wormwood before to live in such a state of alienation—to see Mrs. Butler neighbouring with Mrs. Hale just opposite, making calls and visits together, just as they two used to do; and then what tortures to behold, one fine afternoon, all the ladies of her acquaintance file up Mrs. Butler's walk, dressed in their best! Did she ever think, in those pleasant times that were gone forever, that her neighbour would one day have a tea-party and she would sit at home viewing it from afar? But now conscience applied her whip, and bade her confess how unjust she had been. Ah! there were mountains of difficulty in the way. Ever since childhood it had been the hardest possible thing to say, "I was wrong." Still, she would do it now, if it would be of any use. If it were but some dignified affair that caused the trouble, it would be different; but this shameful thing—one poor little hen! Suppose she should go and confess, what could she say? She should have to admit that she believed her friend to be actually guilty of taking what belonged to another. That was exactly what it amounted to, put into words, and how would that high-spirited woman scorn her and her confession! It seemed now as if she must have been insane to let such a suspicion take possession of her. If only those unfortunate words had not slipped from her! If only that deceitful Mrs. Ketchum had not told it! It will be a lesson to me, she often told herself. "I never shall again say anything about a person that I would not say to their face."

And so, night and day, she had no peace from an accusing conscience. In all her pleasures there was this thorn rankling. She never knelt to pray but the words, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift." She had been a warm-hearted Christian, despite her suspicious nature and her imprudent tongue; and now a great wall seemed to have arisen between her and all divine comfort. She began to absent herself from church and shut herself in from society, and to lose the lively flow of spirits that had brightened all about her. Memory aided conscience to torment her. She wept sorrowful tears as she called to mind the many kindnesses Mrs. Butler had showered upon them when they came, strangers to the village; how, when they were sitting down to a bare tea-table that first night in the new home, the new neighbour made her first call at the back door. She remembered so distinctly just what she brought—delicious home-made bread, cold meat, and stewed pears. Then should she ever forget that awful time when Freddy had the croup, and the doctor was out of town? How Mrs. Butler watched over him all night and saved his life! Surely there was never any one before so monstrously ungrateful as she had been. She called herself a fool and a wretch, and other hard names.

Mrs. Butler was, of course, meanwhile oblivious of this distress of her neighbour. If she could have but known it, the way would have been clearer. However, she was too enlightened a woman not to know that she was living in disregard of one of the plainest commands of the Scriptures, "Be at peace among yourselves." If there was one thing above another that Mrs. Butler had always prided herself upon, it was that her name was without reproach, absolutely above suspicion. In her secret heart she had flattered herself with the thought that, with such a record, it would be all but impossible for gossip to discuss her beyond the petty questions of how many shirts and towels were accustomed to appear on her lines in the weekly wash, or whether she had company two or three times last week. Consequently, this was no small offence she was called upon to overlook. She tried very hard to make herself believe, when conscience kept up uncomfortable whispers, that she had nothing to do in the matter. She was not the aggressor. She could not thrust pardon upon one who did not want it. So she went on her way, and lived her busy life, engaged in all manner of good works; visited the sick and poor, read her daily portion of Scripture, prayed her daily prayers, attended church regularly, and yet—communion Sabbath she went three seats farther back of where she intended to sit, because her enemy, Mrs. Lane, usually sat in that one. Mrs. Lane was not there, though. She sat at home in gloom and sorrow. And who shall say which was the farthest wrong that day? Truly, "the heart is deceitful above all things." It is pitiful to think that Bible-reading Christians think they commit a sin when they absent themselves from the sacrament, and yet feel privileged to come there with hearts full

of ill-will and bitterness, as if the mere partaking of bread and wine was a sort of enchantment that possessed virtue in itself.

Poor, deluded heart that does not know, will not see, that the same law-giver who said, "Thou shalt not kill," said also, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." And yet he dares draw near the feast of undying love, and tries to cover the black spots in his heart—the hate and revenge—with the dry leaves of high resolves and long prayers; thinking to cheat God, forgetting that it is written, "The Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." How can it be that some of us will be perfectly happy in heaven, for shame of remembering that we once worried and persecuted and hated "some poor handful of dust," and then, unforgiving and unforgiven, counted ourselves among those who love the Lord?

There came a day, though, when Mrs. Butler's complacent spirit was ruffled, and it was brought about through the Concordance. She had taken it down, one Sabbath afternoon, to look out the meaning of a text that occurred in the Sabbath school lesson. As her eye ran over the page to find what she wanted, it fell on the word "forgive." There was a long list of texts with that word in them. Somehow they attracted her, and she ran them over. Some of them seemed new to her. "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." Was divine forgiveness conditional in that way? She had never thought of it. Here was another—"If ye forgive not men their trespasses"—What then? She took her Bible and searched it out. Sure enough, it read straight and strong—"When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive your trespasses."

Mrs. Butler had read the Scriptures hundreds of times, but it seemed like a new doctrine, for all that. The teaching was plain enough; in order to pray acceptably, she must have a forgiving spirit. More than that, she must actually forgive, otherwise the Father in heaven would not forgive her.

She was not a woman accustomed to have enemies. Her temper, in general, was sweet, and, literally, heretofore, the sun had not gone down upon her wrath. When she put the questions now to herself, as if she had been another person: "Have I forgiven Mrs. Lane? Do I forgive her this minute?" her candid mind was obliged to answer, "No, I have not, I cannot." "But was she not forgiven?" "Was she not a Christian?" "What is a Christian?" "Why, a forgiven sinner." Plainly, according to this word, she was neither one nor the other.

Was this the reason why, of late, God had seemed far off when she prayed?

She entirely forgot the subject she had set out to study, and became fascinated with this one. Running her eye down the long list of "forgives," she came upon—"To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Was this the reason why all selfishness seemed to have gone from the performance of Christian duty, why her heart was cold as stone? Was the reason one of the links of this strange chain! She loved little, because she forgave not.

These were unwelcome thoughts. Mrs. Butler arose, closed the Bible and Concordance, and made ready to go to the mission Sabbath school. That hour, though, with her Bible, had opened her eyes and quickened her conscience; she lost her self-satisfied spirit, and became as ill at ease as Mrs. Lane. She declared repeatedly to herself, as the conflict went on, that it was entirely out of the question for her to be first to offer to be reconciled; that would destroy every shred of self-respect. It was Mrs. Lane's place to take the first step. When she got to this point in the daily battles she carried on, Satan invariably put in a word: "You would look well crawling after her, trying to make up; as if you couldn't live without her." Then the woman whose soul he coveted would grow hot with indignation, and forget for a time the solemn, awful words, "If ye forgive not, neither will your Father forgive you."

Vainly she tried to compromise matters with, "I will forgive her whenever she asks it." The great difficulty in the way of settling the affair in this way was that uncompromising verse, "When thou stand praying, forgive." She must forgive while she prayed. And then it was a dead-lock! She did not, she could not. "How can I pray without forgiving? and how can I forgive when I do not feel in the least like it?"

And this brought her to the last and only conclusion,—"I must forgive her, or lose my soul." Following quick on that came the resolve, "I will forgive her. I will pray that my feelings toward her may be changed. I will keep on asking that one thing, if it is years before it comes." And in the state of heart she then was, she expected the conflict to be long. Day after day she thought to come with her burden and carry away hardness and bitterness; it seemed so impossible for her feelings to be changed. Ah! little faith had not counted upon the royal kindness and unlimited power of one who promised, "I will give you a right spirit."

No sooner, though, had she come, in true poverty of spirit, and with real desire for this one thing, than lo! the wall was broken down; the bitterness, the anger melted away, like mists before the sun. What was her joyful surprise to find her feelings utterly changed. She had expected, in time, to attain to this state after many struggles; but here the thing was done. She felt that she did from her heart forgive. How had it come about so soon? As if the Lord needed time to bestow a blessing on willing souls! And was this new, strange love for Christ that began to steal into her heart—was this a pledge that He had forgiven her? "Her sins are forgiven for she loved much." Oh, that He would one day say that of her, too!

Mrs. Butler had always been a resolute woman. She had promised herself that not another night should pass before doing all in her power to make peace with her neighbour. She was not one to vow and not perform, or put off the performance. With this purpose in her mind, and meditating on the best way of carrying it out, she stood for a moment on the porch. By this time the full summer moon was up, and the two little homes, trekked away in their shrubbery, looked like abodes of peace.

In the farther corner of the piazza, sitting among the shadows, she could see her neighbour. Mrs. Butler could easily stroll down her own walk, pass through the gate and along the street; but to pause before Mrs. Lane's gate, step in, and pass up the walk, was another thing, and required not a little courage. But she was strong now, with a strength not her own; and although she hesitated just a moment, as she laid her hand on the gate, she had no thought of retreating, for this was to be done for His sake who had forgiven her. The spirit was willing and glad to do it, but remnants of pride put in a suggestion that it would be so much easier if the one who had offended could come to her.

How strange that Mrs. Lane, too, was in the midst of a crisis! She had tried for a whole week to summon courage to go and confess her wrong. This very night she had started three times, but each time had got no farther than the gate; and now sat trembling like a leaf in the wind, feeling as if she never could do it in this world; for she knew Mrs. Butler would give her a look that would nearly cut her in two, and say something sharp, for Mrs. Butler knew how to do that. Leaning her head on her hand, absorbed in her gloomy thoughts, she saw nothing until a slight rustle caused her to look up, and, behold! there was the person she longed and dreaded to meet before her. She had concocted many proper speeches wherewith she would some time meet Mrs. Butler, but not a word of them did she say now. She took the offered hand, burst into tears, and exclaimed:

"Oh Mrs. Butler! Can you ever forgive me?"

Of course, there followed a long talk and mutual explanations; and, as is usually the case when people really desire to heal a quarrel, the causes on both sides for its existence seemed to dwindle into such insignificance that they could only feel shame and astonishment that it had continued so long.

When Mrs. Butler finally heard the climax of the whole thing, how Topknot was safe in the barn this minute, with a large family of her own, and that her mistress had lived through ages of torture all summer because she knew she ought to come and confess, and how much she wanted to, but she was afraid—it began to grow too ludicrous for serious consideration, and she laughed till the tears came.

"You didn't want to any worse than I wanted you to, I assure you," she said, wiping her eyes; then breaking into uncontrollable laughter again.

"It is just as funny as it can be, anyway. It is little wonder, after all, when I come to think it all over, that you did accuse me of such a dark deed when I put poor Topknot over the fence so savagely, and then made such ugly speeches about you."

When they said "good night," the two women parted as lovingly as young girls; and each thought within herself, as they went down the walk together, that the world was never so beautiful as on that particular night.

And now the back gate was unfastened, the grass springing up in the little path was soon crushed, and the two families returned to their former peaceful relations. To insure the continuance of this state of things, Mrs. Lane had a famous hen-park built, so high that even Topknot could not scale it. And duly as the season came around, a pair of her plumpest, yellowest chickens found their way mysteriously to Mrs. Butler's kitchen table—a fair offering on the shrine of peace!

HOW TO OBTAIN LONG LIFE.

Thousands of people annually ruin their constitutions by simply swallowing too much medicine. It may seem a strange thing for a medical man to say, but it is nevertheless a fact. It is a dangerous thing to fly with every little ailment to the medicine chest. The use of tonics, unless under medical advice, should be discontinued; a tonic is sharper than a two-edged sword—it is a tool that needs to be used with caution. There are now, I am sorry to see, some aerated waters coming into use which contain the strongest mineral tonics, that are apt to accumulate in the system with the most disastrous results. They should therefore not be drunk *ad libitum* as to quantity, or without guidance as to quality. Rest should be taken with great regularity. One day in seven should be set apart for the complete rest of both body and mind. Independent of this, all who can afford it should take an annual holiday. Travelling is cheap, and two weeks' or a month's relaxation from care and business cannot make a big hole in the purse of one who works well all the rest of the year and knows how to economize time. Innocent pleasure and wholesome recreation conduce to longevity. All work and no play sends Jack to an early grave. Recreation is to the mind and nervous system what sunshine is to the blood. As a physician, I must be allowed to say just one word about the quieting, calming effect of religion upon the mind. The truly religious make by far and away the best patients, their chances of recovery from serious sickness are greater, and so is their chance of long life, simply owing to the power they have of submitting themselves quietly, yet humbly and *happily*, to whatsoever may be before them.

EFFECT OF SUNSHINE.

From an acorn, weighing a few grains, a tree will grow for 100 years or more, not only throwing off many pounds of leaves every year, but itself weighing many tons. If an orange twig is put in a large box of earth, and that earth is weighed when the twig becomes a tree, bearing luscious fruit, there will be very nearly the same amount of earth. From careful experiments made by different scientific men, it is an ascertained fact that a very large part of the growth of a tree is derived from the sun, from the air, and from the water, and a very little from the earth; and notably all vegetation becomes sickly unless it is freely exposed to sunshine. Wood and coal are but condensed sunshine, which contains three important elements equally essential to both vegetation and animal life—magnesia, lime, and iron. It is the iron in the blood which gives it its sparkling red colour and strength. It is the lime in the bones which gives them the durability necessary to bodily vigour, while the magnesia is important to all the tissues.