



NED TAKING OFF HIS COAT, WAS SOON AT WORK ON THE PEAR TREE.

## The Pruning of the Pear Tree

'I think your pear tree needs nailing up, Mrs. Allen; let me do it for you,' said Edward Howie.

It was a kindly thought. Mrs. Allen was a young widow who had quite recently lost her husband, and now in the early spring the tree, which hitherto had been carefully trained and pruned, looked straggling and in need of attention. And young Howie saw it, and so offered.

But the thing that pleased Mrs. Allen was that she thought she saw in this offer an opportunity of returning some of the kindness she had received from his mother during her sore trouble. Ned Howie had been drifting of late, forming companionships that were not good. He had been associating with a number of young fellows, whose greatest fault at present was thoughtlessness, and being full of life and boisterous strength, were every now and then overstepping the bounds of right. They were, in fact, steadily drifting downwards, and unless stopped might make a wreck of themselves. She meant to stop Ned Howie if she could.

The next evening, when work was over, Ned came in, and taking off his coat, was soon at work on the pear tree. It took some time to prune back the branches and nail them up, and Mrs. Allen, opening a window just above, looked out with her baby, and chatted pleasantly meanwhile.

At last it was done, and the tree looked trim and orderly.

'How well you have done it!' she said. 'It quite looks like old times. And now you will come in and have some supper with me before you go.'

'Oh, no, thank you, Mrs. Allen!' said Ned. 'I must just run over and see how the cricket

has gone, and have a chat afterwards with the men.'

It was that 'afterwards' she was afraid of. It so often ended up at the Red Lion, and that was what she wanted to stop. So, drawing him into the house for his coat, he saw a modest little supper set out, and was at last prevailed on to stop, and a very pleasant evening he spent.

'Do you know, Ned, I want you to help me with my Cousin Jack. He used to be such a nice boy, but there are two or three men who have such an influence over him. He is so weak and easily led. Now, it is not so with you; you have a will of your own and are strong, and might do a great deal.'

Ned flushed. He was pleased that Mrs. Allen should think him strong, but he remembered one or two occasions when he had been as weak as Jack Norris. 'What can I do, Mrs. Allen?' he replied. 'Not much, I'm afraid.'

'Oh, yes you can,' she replied brightly. 'What I want you to do is to stop the going to the Red Lion after the games. Just look at some of the older men, like Tom Martin and Allen Cooke, going home night after night half-drunk, and yet what nice fellows they used to be! If Jack were to become like them, how dreadful it would be! Can't you help him to stop?'

Ned flushed crimson. 'Mrs. Allen,' he exclaimed, 'I can't be a hypocrite! I'm just as bad as Jack. I may be stronger, but not a bit better. How can I help him?'

'By saying "No," and sticking to it,' was her answer. 'You know there are a lot of bad things done that none of you like; it only wants someone with courage to oppose, and the rest will stand by you.'

'But I'm an awful coward, Mrs. Allen, es-

pecially when Tom Martin sneers,' said Ned.

'Oh,' was her reply, 'you must not take that too seriously, but laugh at his sneers and go your own way.'

'Well, I'll try,' he said, as if he were not quite sure of himself.

'And I'll tell you what I'll do,' she continued. 'On Saturday I'll provide a good substantial tea, and I'll ask some of you in—you and Jack, and Tom Wright and Allerton, and we'll have a jolly evening afterwards. It will be the first break, you know.'

'All right, Mrs. Allen, I'll come and bring the others, too,' said Ned Howie.

And he did. That was the beginning of the struggle. Over and over again she feared she had lost them. But she did not—she saved them. Her wise womanly ways prevailed, and they grew up to be noble God-fearing men, who stood foremost in every good work. And there was not one of them but attributed it to Mrs. Allen, and thought her the best and noblest woman on earth. And she deserved it of them.

This is what came of the Pruning of the Pear Tree.—J. Scott James, in 'Friendly Greetings.'

## A Consecrated Year

(By Helena H. Thomas, in 'Presbyterian Banner'.)

'I don't see what she wants to come here for! Our country ways will be sure to shock one who has spent sixty years in London.'

'Of course they will, and I, too, although it doesn't sound very gracious, wish she had taken the next steamer back, after visiting her New York friends.'

The speakers looked very dejected for two robust young men who, several years before, had celebrated their majority; and so thought a younger brother as he came suddenly upon them that autumn day.

'Growling about the failure of crops, boys?' queried the one who was almost twenty-one.

'No,' answered the elder, 'everything else of a doleful nature is lost sight of in view of that dreaded visit, Joe.'

'I don't see what good it does to dread what seems inevitable,' was the cheery answer. 'For my part, I mean to give Aunt Maria a warm welcome.' Saying which the speaker started down the hill, and was soon lost to sight.

After whittling diligently upon the stick in his hand, Jerome, the elder brother, said, abruptly: 'Joe's courage makes me ashamed of my cowardice. Nothing seems to daunt him—that is—lately.'

'That last clause was well put in,' rejoined Frank, looking away from the one addressed, 'for you know as well as I do how chicken-hearted he used to be, but now he seems to have more pluck, the right sort, I mean, than both of us put together.'

'Yes, he has, for a fact, and I don't know what poor mother would do with our worries about crop failures and that mortgage, if that sunbeam wasn't always ready with, "It will all come out right."'

As Jerome said this, he whittled as if much depended upon the result, for a moment, and then flinging away what was left of the stick, said, in a shame-faced way: 'Well, no use trying to get around it, that boy has some propelling power which is lacking in our composition, call it religion or what we may. He used to shirk every duty, while now he would work beyond his strength if we did not stand guard; then, too, a year ago he had such a dread of meeting strangers, but now he seems to be