

The Christmas Stranger.

(Susan Teall Perry in 'American Messenger'.)

"If you come to the city this week you can get a place in one of the stores. They always have to get extra help at Christmas-time," Aunt Augusta wrote to her niece, Helen Thompson.

Helen read the letter in the village post-office, and her face was full of happiness as she hastened to her home at the end of the street.

"Aunt Augusta wishes me to go as soon as I can, mother," she said to the sweet-faced woman who met her at the door. "I will start to-morrow."

The mother looked very sorry, as mothers will when children are going away from them for the first time.

"So soon, dear!" she exclaimed, as she took the open letter in her hand.

"I am sorry to leave you, mother dear," the young girl said, "but after I get started in the city you must come too."

There were a number of preparations to make for Helen's journey, and mother and daughter were very busy the rest of the day.

Early in the morning, just as daylight began to come into the window, Helen's brother Willis was strapping his sister's trunk. She was putting on her ulster, for the stage would be at the door in five minutes.

"Now, Willis," she said, "you will be very thoughtful for mother, and a great comfort to her, I know, and by-and-by I hope we will all get together in the city. But you must keep at school this winter and learn all you can."

"It will be awful lonesome after you go away," said Willis, in a choked voice, "but I will do the very best I can, I promise you."

"If we do the best we can, the Lord will help us. There comes the stage."

With the mother's loving kiss and tender embrace, Helen passed out of the only home she had ever known.

Aunt Augusta was at the Grand Central station to meet her, and a horse-car soon brought them to the place where Aunt Augusta lived. Up one flight of stairs, and then another, and so on, until they came to the top floor. Helen was completely out of breath, and she said, "I do not see how you can stand this climbing, Aunt Augusta."

"Oh, I'm used to it, and you will soon get used to it too, child," and she passed on and unlocked the door at the end of the hall.

It was a small room that Helen followed her aunt into, but it was in perfect order. Aunt Augusta ate and slept in that room, and it seemed close enough quarters for one person, and now there were to be two to live in it. It puzzled Helen to imagine where she should put her things; but Aunt Augusta had learned the art of economy of room, as well as of other things, and it was surprising how soon she had found places for her guest's belongings.

"Wages are small," she explained, "and to live within one's income requires a great deal of invention here in the city."

A situation in one of the stores had been found for Helen; so her aunt took her that very afternoon to the manager's office, who gave her a place at the notion counter. It seemed strange to Helen to be in such a large store, and the noise and confusion were very different from the quiet life she had hitherto led. However, she was very quick at learning new ways, and her mind was soon engrossed in her business. There was no time for thinking.

Two weeks of very busy days and weary nights passed, for Helen's new work, with the responsibility and excitement, affected her nervous system, so that at first she could not sleep as she had done at home. She

was too tired to sleep, Aunt Augusta said; but that was the busy season, and by-and-by it would not be so hard.

The day before Christmas came, and such a rush as there was at Helen's counter! She had no time for luncheon. It was "Cash! cash! cash!" every moment. She was feeling very weary, when two young girls, plainly but richly dressed, came to her counter. They were such pleasant and sweet-faced girls that it was a delight to wait on them; so many people had been cross and trying that afternoon. Christmas shopping is very wearing, especially the last day, when so much must be crowded into so little time.

While Helen was telling the merits of this and that article which the two young customers inquired about, everything seemed to whirl before her eyes, and all at once it was dark. She remembered nothing more until she found herself in one of the small suit-rooms, with the two sweet-faced girls bending over her. One was bathing her face and the other was rubbing her hands.

They had taken off their wraps, and the first things Helen's eyes rested on were the silver crosses, the badge of the 'King's Daughters,' which they wore. Helen had one on also, for she belonged to the 'King's Daughters' in her own village.

"I think I must have fainted," she said. "You are very kind to me. I feel all right, now, and I think I must go back to my counter. I might lose my place, you know."

"Wait a little longer," said one of the young girls. "We will make it all right with the manager, for we know him."

During the few moments of resting Helen told them about herself and the dear home she had left.

"Away from home at Christmas-time and a stranger!" one of the girls exclaimed. "How homesick you must be!"

They both thought of their own beautiful homes, of the protection that was thrown around them, of the love that supplied all their daily needs and made life happy.

That night these two 'King's Daughters' planned a happy surprise for the 'Christmas stranger,' as they called Helen. At ten o'clock Christmas morning they came with a carriage and invited Helen to take a drive through Central Park. It was a bright, mild morning, and as Helen had never been in Central Park, it was a great treat to her. Then they drove to the home of one of the girls, where Helen received a sweet welcome from one of the loveliest mothers she had ever seen. A fine luncheon had been prepared, and Helen had a treat such as she had never before enjoyed.

When they took her to her aunt's room again, she said to them as she bade good-by, "You have made me very happy to-day, my good friends. I had often thought how hard it must be to be cold and hungry, but I never knew what a hard thing it was to be a stranger, especially a stranger at Christmas-time, when everybody ought to be at home and happy with loved ones. 'I was a stranger, and ye took me in.' The Lord will bless you both."

You may be sure these city 'King's Daughters,' to whom the King had given so bountifully, did not lose sight of that child of his who was deprived of so many necessary things in life. They went to the store to see her every week or two, and bought something at her counter. After a few months of trial she was found so faithful and capable that she was promoted to a more responsible position with an increase of wages, which enabled her to send some money every week home to her mother. As soon as Willis finishes his school they hope to be a reunited family again.

The Travelling Clock-Mender's Story.

"At one time," said Frederick Knight, the travelling English clock-maker with whose remarkable conversion many who read this sketch may be familiar, speaking in a vernacular that I shall not attempt to imitate, and talking rapidly, as if almost living the incidents over in the repetition: "I noticed at a handsome mansion in the country an elegant French clock standing silent, opposite the grand entrance in the front hall."

"After I had repaired an old-fashioned tall corner clock, an heirloom, and set it running, I asked if I might look at the French clock."

"Yes, of course," said the lady, in a hesitating manner; "but there is no use in your trying to make it run, for it cannot be done. It is a clock with a history. It has been in our family a good many years, having been brought from Paris by my grandfather; but it has never told us the time for an hour since its arrival in this country."

"It is out of temper," I said, "or homesick, perhaps. I fancy I can coax it to go."

"That is what they all say," said the lady, "but I will not refuse to let you look it over, it will simply add one more to the list of baffled mechanics."

"Thank you," I said, lifting the clock from its pedestal, and setting it upon the table as if it were eggs, and proceeding to take off the face, the lady standing by me and regarding me attentively, until I exclaimed,

"What ails the thing? It seems all right?"

"That is what they all say," laughed the lady; "and not one can put mechanical life into the complicated arrangement."

"If I can't fix it, I won't ask you anything for my time," I said. "But my fingers just itch to get hold of it and take it to pieces."

"Very well," said the lady, "if you can make that clock run we shall think it little less than a miracle; although," she added slowly, "none of us believe in miracles, or in God either, for that matter."

"That is a great loss to you, madam—a great loss," I said, and as I took the clock to pieces, I told her what the Lord had done for me, of my wayward life, of my conversion, and of all the wonderful way the Lord had led me since.

"She stood or sat by in her soft silk gown, listening quietly and bringing no argument to combat me."

"There," I said at length, "I have looked it all over and cleaned and oiled every part. Now, as I put it together I will sing you a hymn. I always like to sing a hymn as I set up a piece of work. Now when it begins to go the bell in the church steeple will play a chime, and then all the other wonderful things will follow on hour by hour; for a great many things can this clock do."

"Yes," she said, "that is what the clock doctors always say. I have seen this clock taken to pieces and put together so many times that I think I could do it myself, but none of the men have sung a hymn, so I shall be glad to have you sing."

"Nice in her to say that wasn't it? Oh, she was a real lady, and a fine voice had I at that time of my life, so I worked and sang: "When the roll is called in heaven, I'll be there, I'll be there."

I sang it over and over until the last pin was put in place, and then I said, "Now we shall see what we shall see," and I pushed back the pendulum; but the old clock would not tick and would not go.

I was astonished, and the dear lady could not help smiling; but she said at once, for