



The Family Circle.

THE IVY POEM.

The ivy in a dungeon grew,
Unfed by rain, uncheered by dew,
Its pallid leaflets only drank
Cave moisture foul, or odors dank.

But through the dungeon grating high
There fell a sunbeam from the sky,
It slept upon the grateful floor
In silent gladness evermore.

The ivy felt a tremor shoot
Through all its fibres to the root,
It felt the light, it saw the ray,
It longed to blossom into day.

It grew, it crept, it pushed, it clomb,
Long had the darkness been its home;
For well it knew, though veiled in night,
The goodness and the joy of light.

It reached the beam, it thrilled, it curled,
It blessed the warmth that cheers the world;
It grew towards the dungeon bars,
It looked upon the moon and stars.

Upon that solitary place
Its verdure threw adorning grace,
The mating birds became its guests,
And sang its praises from their nests.

By rains and dews and sunbeams fed,
Upon the outer wall it spread,
And in the day beam roaming free,
It grew into a stately tree.

Would'st know the moral of the rhyme?
Behold the heavenly light and climb.
To every dungeon comes a ray
Of God's illimitable day.

—Charles Mackay.

MISS MACPHERSON'S WIDOWS.

(Pearlfisher in Word and Work.)

Most readers of the *Messenger* are familiar with the work done by Miss Macpherson in bringing out children to Canada, but her London work is not so well known. The faith of these poor widows is an example for all.

The widows are no new branch of service at the Home of Industry. So far back as 1866—the "cholera year"—Miss Macpherson and Miss C. M. S. Lowe were drawn out on behalf of these lonely and tried ones, hiding their deep penury in little back-rooms and attics.

The weekly sewing class, then commenced, has been maintained ever since. Each Monday afternoon the Upper Room in the Spitalfields Beehive will be found crowded with these "dear old women," as I have heard them called many a time. True, they are poor—utterly, terribly poor—some (by no means the majority) not over-tidy, but their cheerful looks, their bright responses, their warm hearty prayers—the prayers of those who have tested God and know His faithfulness, who have marked "t. p." to many a promise—are such as to stir the hearts of all who meet them.

One dear old dame, bedridden (just over seventy), has two shillings per week from the Union, while her rent is two shillings and threepence. Her son allows her one shilling and sixpence—thus she has in the ordinary way one shilling and threepence for food. The other week, being out of employment, the son could not send his usual remittance; what was she to do? "My angel (Miss Macpherson) tells me she trusts the Lord for everything—so will I." Having told Him about it she left it with Him, and one shilling and threepence was sent just in time for the collector.

Another old lady (sixty) had made up her rent all but one farthing. How was that to be obtained? By prayer. She just prayed for it, and a farthing turned up in an odd corner.

Yet again, an aged one had the rent—all but threepence farthing.

"Lord," she said, "I haven't wasted it; you know I haven't. You will send it me in time. I need it, and I know you will."

Soon after the Biblewoman called, and, after a talk, said:—"I feel I must leave you what I have in my pocket." She pulled out three pennies, as she thought, and left them. After she had gone the old lady found a farthing between the coppers.

"Bless the Lord; He's just sent it."

One of the ladies from the Home of Industry coming in, Mrs. — told the story, and the lady, meeting the Bible-woman, said:—

"Do you know what you gave Mrs. —?"

"Threepence."

"No, threepence farthing."

"I would have been ashamed to give her a farthing."

"But the Lord meant you to give her it; for it was just what she needed."

Do these seem trifles? They are answered prayer, nevertheless; for small are the widow's needs.

Here is another case. Four or five Christian ladies place weekly sums at Miss Macpherson's disposal on behalf of the very aged and infirm, allowing them sometimes one, sometimes two shillings a week. One lady in the country wrote:—

"I feel as if Mrs. — would be the better of a sixpence a week more; do you think so?"

The reply was: "Yes, she would."

The extra sixpence was sent, and when the worker called she found the old dame almost in tears over a letter.

"What is the matter this morning?"

"Read that, ma'am."

It proved to be a letter from her son to say work was slack, and he must reduce his small weekly allowance by a sixpence. God had provided the need, even before the frail old lady knew of it.

These widows are often amongst Miss Macpherson's best helpers—praying for her at all times, and especially in time of need. Said one lately, when told how remarkably the Lord had answered some special prayer in connection with the Home of Industry: "Did He? It's just like Him. He's the Hearer and Answerer of prayer."

How poor many of them are will be understood by two actual cases from Miss Macpherson's book:—

"Listen to this wail. 'I am seventy-nine, and know no one but you who cares for me. I am nearly blind, but stirring to come here daily to make the paper pillows has kept me well this winter, thank God.'"

"I had an accumulation of fancy slippers—very old. Even though mended it would have been mockery to give them to those known to me. A very aged widow, who seemed 'cute, on being asked what she felt she could do to turn a shilling to advantage, thought she could mend these, and, with a few rags, made a little stall in Rag Fair. When this was done, she came and offered payment for the stock in hand, and, with tears, would take no refusal. One shilling and threepence bought three old men's shirts, which, when mended, washed, starched, and ironed, were sold again, and repaid the industrious woman. A shilling was given as a deposit on wood, which the widow chopped, sharpened, tied in bundles and got sixpence per thousand for skewers for cat's meat. Twopence bought scraps of leather, one penny smallest bits of rag; the widow cut, stuffed with bran, and created dolls' arms, selling them at threehalfpence per dozen. Every hour gives new experiences in beholding the strain to find work to buy bread. Day by day many are gradually becoming more weakly. One day, coming round the corner quickly, I found one sinking with want and feebleness six yards from the door. She had tasted neither breakfast nor dinner; the last penny had gone to make up the eightpence for rent."

What, it may be asked, is done for such? They have a good tea, three hours' work and pleasant Gospel talk, and, at the close, a sixpence each. A small sum it may seem to us, to them it is a grateful help. Here, for example, is how some spend their sixpence:—

1 lb. bread, 1½d.; ½ lb. sugar, ¾d.; ½ oz. tea, ¾d.; milk, ½d.; 2 oz. dripping, 1d.; soap ½d.; 7 lbs. coal, 1d.; wood, ½d.;—6d.

Sometimes, when there are little ones, it is spent thus:—cowheel, 3d.; herbs, 1d.; potatoes, 1d.; bread, 1d.—6d. A dinner for six!

Besides the Monday sewing class, at which the Word is never left out, there are large Sunday afternoon Bible classes in which the widows greatly delight, bringing their Bibles with them and searching the Word as it is expounded. They are encouraged to ask questions, which many of them do, very much to the point. In these classes many have been born again, blind eyes opened to see Jesus, the lame taught to walk in His ways, and the sorrowing comforted. This gathering is reckoned amongst the most

spiritually fruitful in the whole service at the Home of Industry.

Here is one with a face bright and sunny, but she is blind.

"How long," I asked her, last Thursday, "have you been blind?"

"Eight years."

"It must have been a sore affliction."

"Ah, sir; the first two years were the darkest any woman could know. With the children round me, and me blind, and no God, I was like to die of despair. But then God saved me, in this room, sir. He opened my eyes to see Jesus for my Saviour; and now, oh, sir, it's all bright, so bright. I'd not have my sight again for all the world, if it were to be without Jesus. God never fails me—if I want anything, I just tell Him. He is a good Father to me, He leads me, He talks to me, He blesses me all the time."

Many of these poor widows are true and consistent followers of Christ; not a few were converted in the Home, others were Christians when discovered. Their faces shine as the love of Christ is unfolded, they are ready quietly to tell what the Lord has done for them, and in the crowded tenements, amongst the careless and unconverted they are "shining for Jesus." Very really so, for they are sneered at yet respected, and, frail as many of them are, they take great pains by prayer and personal testimony to win their neighbors to the Saviour—efforts crowned with success in instances not a few. The texts they learn by heart at the class they find a great help both in testimony and in personal comfort.

They love the class, and again and again, when sick, have left their sick-bed and been almost carried to it. They are constantly visited in their homes by the ladies, and a rare treat it is to do so; the visitor frequently getting more than she gives.

Some time ago I accompanied Miss Macpherson to a little back room, in, I believe, Flower and Dean street, where one of her widows lay sick unto death. Here is the conversation—which struck me much:—

"Well Mrs. —, how are you?"

"Faint, yet pursuing."

"Does the head trouble you much?"

"It does a bit; but He helps me."

"Aren't you tired lying here, all alone?"

"At times; but He talks to me so."

"What does He say?"

"He tells me—once I sinned against Him, but He had mercy on me; and now He's going to take me 'up there.'"

"How long have you been a widow?"

"Nigh thirty-five years, ma'am."

"And how have you got on?"

"Badly before I knew the Lord; since then He's said, 'Let the widows trust in Me.' I have trusted, and He has never (with great emphasis) failed me."

"You'll soon be in His presence; what will you say?"

"Surely I'll fall down before Him and say, 'You died for me.'"

"Will you tell Him you've tried to serve Him?"

"Nay; I'll tell Him He kept me serving Him. It's a poor service it's been; but He'll forgive and bless—I know He will."

There are many amongst the widows, ready at any moment to bear just such testimony bright and trustful. One very sweet old lady (87) says, as she lies in her lonely room:—

"The Lord hasn't forgotten me, but I think He won't trust an angel to fetch me, and He's coming Himself for me. He said, 'I will come again,' and I think He's keeping me for it."

One who passed away last Wednesday was never heard to murmur, yet was often in sore straits. One day the visitor, calling, said:

"What have you had this morning?"

"I've had a rare feed; such comfort."

"But I don't mean that; what have you had for breakfast?"

"I've just put the kettle on, and I'm going to have it."

"What have you got?" And, almost against the old lady's wishes, the visitor pulled open the cupboard and found—a plate of crusts, given her by a poor neighbor. She was going to boil them in the kettle to soften them. She did not have "crusts" that morning; but the incident was typical of her ordinary practice, and the practice of many—they hide their poverty, will not complain, and it has to be discovered.

But really such incidents are so abundant, I might go on *ad infinitum*; and must pause not for lack of matter, but want of space. The widows are not all perfection by any

means, but many of them are leading beautifully consistent lives. It would amuse many to find the care and discrimination exercised by the ladies before enrolling their names. Every new member has to give full proof of and bear close scrutiny into her poverty, respectability, and real need.

YOUNG MEN AND TOBACCO.

The use of tobacco puts a serious obstacle in the way of the success of a young man. There is no employment to which it recommends him; there are many employments in connection with which it is a formidable or a fatal difficulty. The use of tobacco is rarely, indeed, a predisposing term in favor of a young man with anybody, while, in many cases, even with those who themselves use it, its use is a decisive objection when any position of delicate trust is under consideration. It lowers, both directly and by association, in very many minds, the sense of soundness and strength which they wish to connect with a young man whom they are to encounter constantly in important relations.

Rarely, indeed, would any man, himself addicted to a temperate use of tobacco, recommend the habit as a wise and grateful one to a young man in whom he was interested. How many fathers would give counsel to sons? How very many, on the other hand, out of their own experience, would give with great urgency the opposite advice? A man of good judgment, having reached mature years without the habit, very rarely takes it up. It is fastened on boys and young men in that period of crudeness and greenness in which they are mistaking the voice of their elders for their virtues, their errors for their excellencies. A boy once gotten beyond this unripe age, so succulent of moral malaria, without the habit finds nothing in it to appeal to his growing judgment and experience.

The expense of this habit is an important and uncompensated burden on any young man. A wise economy is a universal condition of success. Here is an economy large enough to be of itself of considerable importance; one which in no way interferes with progress and self-improvement; and one which tends to remove the temptations to indolence and wastefulness in many directions.

The funds which a young man addicted to the use of tobacco devotes to this end, are quite sufficient, if he is without wealth, to reduce seriously his chances of success in business; while this form of expenditure will often anticipate for him very desirable outlays for social and intellectual improvement. He often chooses between this one habit, with its unfavorable associations, and a large variety of truly valuable attainments to be won at a much higher rate.—President John Bascom.

LIVING WITH A DRUNKARD.

Speaking at a service in connection with the Hull Wesleyan Methodist Band of Hope Union, the Rev. C. Garrett said that if the drink-shops, which monopolized the principal corners of our streets, were done away with, the mills and factories would soon be working full time, and there would be no complaining in our streets. We should have no crowded workhouses, no prisons to enlarge, and need but very few lunatic asylums. We might then turn our prisons into art galleries, our asylums into gymnasiums, and our workhouses into board schools. There were known to the police twice as many habitual drunkards as there were Methodists. They could not know the meaning of the word "drunkard" without living with one. He then related a case which came under his notice a few days before, when administering the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. A man who, he knew, earned £2 a week, and often more, came up to the table in his rough working clothes. As soon as he had knelt down at the rails, he wailed out in the agony of his soul:—"Oh, God; have pity on me! have pity on me!" The speaker found out the secret afterward. "The man had a drunken wife. Five times he had furnished the house from top to bottom, and as many times had she emptied it to satisfy her craving for drink, and this time she had also pawned his Sunday clothes. When he went into the house in the dark he stumbled over her as she lay across the floor in a state of helpless intoxication, and his poor children were huddled together in one corner of the room, crying bitterly with hunger and cold."