

An Unexpected Confession;

Or, The Story of Miss Percival's Early Life.

CHAPTER VI.—(Cont'd)

"Oh, what a fright!" murmured Mrs. Cushman, in a despairing aside to Donald; "can I ever bear to have her around?"

The young man made no response to the observation, but, after assisting her to enter the carriage, he reached over and warmly clasped Esther's hand, for he knew she must have caught the rude remark. "My good little friend," he said, looking kindly into her sad eyes, "I shall not forget you, nor all that you have done for me. I am afraid I shall not see you again, at present, as I have a great deal to do before I leave New York; so I must say good-bye to you now; but I shall surely seek you out upon my return."

"Ah! you are going to flit again?" said Mrs. Cushman, inquiringly. "Yes; I sail the first of April, to join my father and mother."

"Indeed! Cannot you drop in some evening before you go? Madge would be very glad to see you, I am sure," said the wily mother.

"Thanks; I fear it will not be possible, the time is so short, else I should surely come to make a farewell call upon Miss Esther," gravely replied Donald, as, lifting his hat to both ladies, he bowed himself away.

"What a rude, vicious, disagreeable woman," he muttered, as he went his way; "that poor girl will fare hard at her hands, or I am much mistaken."

Meantime, the Cushman carriage went rolling rapidly uptown, while Mrs. Cushman began to question Esther curiously about her life, her journey across the country, and regarding her two recent companions, and the accident that had detained them so long in her home. Esther responded with quiet brevity, telling what she thought best, and withholding what she did not care to divulge. She was very glad, however, when they stopped before the elegant mansion which was to be her future home, and she was released from the inquisition.

But as they were about to alight, a messenger approached and handed Mrs. Cushman a cable message.

Her face blanched with sudden fear. With trembling fingers, she tore it open, devoured its contents with one sweeping glance; then, with a piercing shriek, fainted away among the cushions of her carriage.

CHAPTER VII.

The cable message which had so crushed and unnerved Mrs. John Cushman upon her return from the station conveyed the startling intelligence that her husband had died very suddenly at Rouen, while on his way to Paris.

A business friend chanced to be with him, fortunately. He it was who sent the message, and stated that he would attend to all necessary details in connection with the sad event, and have the body embalmed and forwarded with all possible despatch to New York.

Of course, this dreadful news threw the whole household into confusion and the wildest grief, and thus Esther's introduction to her new home was attended with much that was exceedingly sorrowful and depressing.

Mrs. Cushman was prostrated and confined to her bed for a week, leaving the management of her home to her servants, and the children to their own devices for passing the dreary time away.

Esther wondered if she were never to be free from the shadows of sickness and death; they seemed to pursue her relentlessly wherever she went. But she pitied the forlorn condition of the children, and, therefore, exerted herself to try to brighten these dreary days for them; at least, for the two younger ones—Frank and Daisy.

Madge, the eldest, held herself entirely aloof from her; from the moment of her entrance into the house she had assumed a lofty, supercilious manner toward her that had been very galling to the sensitive girl. She had been petted and indulged to the last degree, and had reached that age of young ladyhood that apex the arts and dignity of forty.

Although she was two or three inches shorter than Esther, the latter seemed like an awkward child beside her, for Madge's dresses were long, and made in the extreme of fashion; she sported a great deal of costly jewelry, wore her hair in a "Psyche knot," and felt her importance accordingly.

Our Western orphan, on the contrary, wore her wealth of midnight hair in a massive braid between her shoulders, and her clothes to the tops of her boots, and these were so plain and simple that they elicited a smile and look of disdain from the fastidious Miss Cushman

whenever her glance rested upon them. Frank, at first, followed his sister's rudeness, openly poking fun at her plain face, "owl's eyes," "elephant's tusks," and "gawky clothes," until one night she found him alone in the library, weeping bitterly over the loss of his father, when—her great heart full of sympathy for him, and ignoring his previous insults—she sat down, and began to talk with him, gradually drawing his thoughts from his grief, ending by letting him beat her six games at Russian backgammon, and sending him to bed inexpressibly comforted, and assuring to himself that she was a "downright jolly girl, in spite of being so awfully homely."

From that hour he was her firm friend and ally; while Daisy, intuitively seeing beneath the surface, as little ones sometimes will, had recognized a friend, and began to love her from the very first.

But it is impossible to describe the feeling of desolation and homesickness that surged over the heart of the lonely girl in her new home, during that first trying week after her arrival. She actually moaned herself to sleep night after night, and felt as if life were not worth the living. She felt utterly friendless and wretched. Mrs. Cushman repelled her; she had seemed to realize, from the moment of their meeting, that she was a cold, hard woman, while those heartless words which she had overheard—"Oh, what a fright! Can I ever bear to have her around!" had cut her sensitive nature to the quick.

It is true she had heard Donald Lancaster use almost the same expression regarding her personal appearance and while she had suffered no less acutely in having him criticize her looks, yet his remark had been tempered by a thorough appreciation of her character, while Mrs. Cushman's look and tones had expressed only disgust and intolerance.

After a week spent in solitary grieving over her bereavement, Mrs. Cushman began to awake to the fact that life and its duties must be faced; her husband's business interests looked after, and the future of herself and her children mapped out and entered upon. Accordingly she came forth from her seclusion, and resumed the customary place in her household.

Almost her first act was to dismiss the girl who for several years had been a seamstress in the family, and during the last two had also acted as nurse to Daisy, while she informed Esther that she must take her place.

But in doing so she assumed the philanthropic role. "You understand, I suppose, that your father appointed Mr. Cushman as your guardian until you should become of age," she remarked, during her first interview with her, after resuming her household duties.

"Yes—I suppose the arrangement would be so regarded," Esther thoughtfully replied, although she did not exactly relish the woman's attitude.

"Then, of course, since my husband is not living, his duties, in that respect, will devolve upon me, and I will do the best I can for you," the woman languidly continued, in a magnanimous tone. "I do not know what his intentions were with reference to you, but since it will be necessary for me to curtail my expenses, I trust you will have no objection to making yourself useful, as you have no source of income."

Esther colored a painful crimson at thus being reminded of her poverty, but she answered in a respectful tone:

"Certainly not, Mrs. Cushman, I shall be very glad if I can be a help to you in any way. I suppose, though, that I am to go to school again shortly."

"H'm! how far advanced are you?" inquired Mrs. Cushman evasively.

"I had just entered the second year of the high school when mamma was taken ill."

"Oh, then you have a fairly good education already," the lady observed, in a satisfied tone. "It is so late in the season, I think it would hardly be advisable for you to go to school, now, and the regular year does not begin until next October. Meantime, I think I will let you have the care of Daisy. By that I mean that you will attend to dressing her in the morning; look after her at meal time in the nursery; take her for her daily airing, when she does not drive with me, and put her to bed at night. Can you sew nicely?"

"Yes; I have made nearly all of my own clothes, with mamma's help for three years," returned poor, unwary Esther.

"Well, then, when you are not engaged with Daisy there will be some sewing that I shall want you to do; and now, while we are talking about it, we may as well go to the sewing room to see what there is to be done, and I will give you some work for to-day, or you will be getting homesick sitting around idle."

And, rising, the calculating woman led the way to the seamstress' quarters, where she laid out work enough to keep the girl busy, with her other duties, for a week.

Esther's heart sank within her as she began to realize what was before her; for she at last understood that she was to be made a drudge in the family.

Mechanically she took up a piece of work just assigned to her, and sat down to make a beginning, while Mrs. Cushman swept out of the room, intent upon other interests, but with a feeling of secret satisfaction over having so easily accomplished her purpose regarding her husband's ward.

There were bitter thoughts in the heart of the lonely orphan as her glittering needle flew in and out of the towel she was hemming.

For two years past her life had been a ceaseless round of drudgery, with no opportunities for either study or recreation, and now it seemed as if her bondage was to be continued indefinitely.

She was to have the care of a fractious, pampered child, who was to be dressed and undressed as many times a day as her fastidious mamma might desire. She was to be attended when she went out upon the street, and amused in the house. Even her meals were to be presided over in the nursery by Esther, who was thus indirectly informed that she was no longer to occupy her place at the table with the family. To her this was the most galling of all, for she was both proud and sensitive.

And when not engaged in the capacity of nurse, she was to act as the family seamstress!

But what was she to receive in return for all this? Ellen Mason, the girl who had just been dismissed, had been paid four dollars a week, and allowed every other Thursday and Sunday afternoon out. But nothing had been said to Esther about wages or privileges, and she was still in the dark upon those points, while her hint that she wanted to attend school had been very cleverly evaded.

She did not rebel against regular duties; indeed, she had so long most accustomed to improve every moment that it had almost become second nature for her to work. But she did resent the coldness, the indifference, almost contempt, which Mrs. Cushman had manifested toward her from the first, and also the idea of being "roped in," to use a slang expression, as a common servant, where she had expected to rank as one of the family.

"Well, I see no way out of it at present," she mused, as she sewed busily on. "I, at least, have a comfortable shelter, plenty to eat, and what clothes I have will last some time yet; so I will try to be patient until it is time to begin to think of school again. Daisy loves me already, and I believe I can make a good little girl of her, if I take the right course; and, as I like to sew, I shall get along very well if I am not crowded too hard."

Having arrived at this philosophical conclusion, she gradually became more cheerful, and worked steadily until Daisy was sent to call her to lunch; then they went down to the nursery together in the most friendly manner.

While they were eating, Madge strolled into the room, and, seating herself by a window, watched the two curiously.

"Well," she observed, after listening for a while to Esther's instructions to Daisy regarding her dressing and her table manners generally, "you've been well taught how to behave at table."

Esther looked around at her, astonished, and flushed vividly at her observation.

"That is not strange, it is?" she finally inquired.

"Why, yes; I think it is—rather," said Madge, with a short laugh; "it could hardly be expected that a girl, brought up in poverty as you have been, should be versed in social etiquette."

Again Esther flushed, and then her great black eyes began to blaze. She was cutting a piece of steak for Daisy, and she finished her work before she made any reply. Then she quietly observed:

"You forget, Madge, that your father and my mother were reared beneath the same roof; that my grandmother taught Mr. Cushman, as well as my mother, the courtesies of life."

It was Madge's turn to flush now, and an angry red flashed over her cheek, neck and brow.

She knew it was true, although she had not stopped to consider the fact before having her fling at Esther, and, for a moment, she had no ready retort to her telling observation.

"Well," she finally snapped, "I do not care to be twitted about things that happened two generations ago; and I do not wish you to be so familiar with me hereafter. Your position is so different from

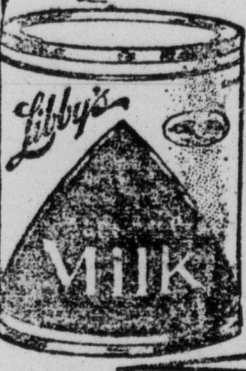


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mine it would be more proper if you addressed me as Miss Madge." Again Esther's midnight eyes flashed with indignation. But she wisely restrained the hot words that involuntarily sprang to her lips, and composedly buttered another piece of bread for Daisy. (To be continued.)

WHAT HUNGER STRIKES ARE.

Prisoners Abstain From Food Until at the Point of Death.

The news received recently from St. Petersburg, that a hunger strike has broken out amongst the political prisoners confined in the terrible Schussenburg Fortress, serves to call attention to what is, perhaps, the most remarkable social manifestation of this or any other age.

Imagine, if you can, a harsh prison governor, given to inflicting upon the convicts merciless floggings and tortures unmentionable entirely on his own responsibility. Then imagine the sufferers collectively abstaining from all food as a protest, even to the point of starving themselves to death. That is the hunger strike, as it is practised in Russia to-day amongst those prisoners who are known as "politicals" or "intellectuals."

Usually, it achieves its object. Not infrequently, too, the prison governor against whom it is directed loses his life as a consequence, being assassinated by friends of the strikers outside.

After this fashion died General Mezentzeff, whose "execution" was undertaken by a young artillery officer, Kravtchinsky, who afterwards resided many years in England, and became known in the political and literary world of London under the name of Sergius Stepaniak.

Not infrequently the hunger strikers are women. Indeed, it was they who originated the idea, the very first hunger strike on record being undertaken by the women convicts confined in the Kara political prison, as a protest against the flogging to death of one of their number, Madam Sigida.

For sixteen days none of them tasted food. They were then at the point of death, and the governor, at his wife's end, was compelled to resign, as, obviously, it would not have done for him to have allowed scores of women, some of whom belonged to the highest families in Russia, to perish of inanition before his eyes.

GENERAL AGE OF TREES

Inquiry as to the general age of trees being put to an authority of the forestry service at Washington, it was said that the pine tree attained 700 years as a maximum length of life; 425 years were the allotted span of the silver fir; the larch lived 275 years; the red beech, 245; the aspen, 210; the birch, 200; the ash, 170; the elder, 145; the elm, 130. The heart of the oak begins to rot at about the age of 300 years. Of the holly, it is said that there is a specimen 410 years lay for weeks at death's door

The Farm

SCIENTIFIC FARMING.

Agriculture is a science. It is a broad and complex subject on which touches vitally the life of each community and the life of the nation. The road to success of the farmer lies, recently spoke Prof. W. H. Brench of Michigan Agricultural college, through education and intelligence. Ignorance is as costly to the farmer as to any other business man.

In order to meet the needs of our rapidly increasing population and conserve the properties of the soil and the interests of the consumer, there must be an ideal diffusion of agriculture. We can reach the great body of our people only through the public schools. The great purpose of educators is to better the work of the school, of the student, that is, his present life and the life which he is to live after he leaves school. It is the desire of every school patron that his child shall receive a real usable education.

Agriculture is a part, and an important part, of the great field of education. The chief work in the introduction of agriculture in the public schools is to change the attitude of our young men and women to farm labor and to farm life or to create ideals of farm labor and farm life. All labor without an ideal is drudgery, and this is the reason why so many farmers look upon their occupation as burdensome and unremunerative.

That school is best which responds most quickly and most effectively to the needs of its patrons. It would seem that the rural school, with its agricultural environment would be the ideal place to teach agriculture but there are special difficulties in the way as follows: The short life of the teacher, one teacher for all children, irregular attendance, meagre equipment and conservative constituency. The rural schools are with us and must be utilized to the best advantage.

It is our labor to vitalize and arouse them. The teacher, however, is the real problem. It is not so much a question of what is taught but how and by whom. The small school has its advantage in simplicity of organization, of directness of presentation. Each subject should be taught in terms of the environment of the school that

is through agriculture we should afford an opportunity for the child to apply his knowledge of arithmetic, geography, language and even history and civics. We can build an addition to the rural schoolhouse and in the room thus provided we may place a bench and tools, the plough and cultivator, and other similar agricultural tools; we can place there also a stove and kitchen utensils, thus affording an opportunity to teach the fundamental principles of household work and home-making. This room will serve also as a place for exhibitions from the school garden and home garden and the field. In other words, such a room will assist in making the entire school a working shop where the pupil can express himself physically, intellectually and industrially.

The work in agriculture must not be presented so as to impose another task, but a part of the existing order. Its great purpose must be to create a rational attitude—a proper ideal of the farm. It is the spirit and not the letter that we desire. It must be taught from the viewpoint of the child, and not from the viewpoint of some grown up farmer. From the first grade to the fifth we may present what is usually called nature study, its purpose being to put the child into sympathy with his environment.

In this work we must present natural objects, trees, flowers, shrubs, etc., as related to the means of living of the people and household affairs, in other words, the human activities of the community as far as natural conditions affect them.

From the fifth grade and upwards we may present what may be termed agriculture, that is a study of the soils, the roads, fences and buildings. Special trips may be made after school and observation of the conditions on the farms of the district made, reports and computations on prices and values on stock, farm property, farm machinery, etc., made. All of this gives an opportunity to apply the so-called schoolroom to the activities of human life and in doing these things we shall vitalize the work of the school and shed a new light upon the pages of the text-book and really enter into the life of the people.

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