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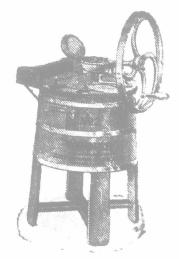
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### A Minister of Grace.

By Alice Brown.

Martha Temple, dressed in her well-preserved best gown, topped by an ancient bonnet and cape, each the shabbier because, sewing by the day for others, she had scant time to remodel her own gear, walked into Aunt Sophronia's diningroom at half past six of the spring morn-

"What if I should set down a minute," she inquired, "whilst you eat your breakfast?

Aunt Sophronia had established herself at a side-table, the great Bible before her, and Martha wondered how she could ever have expected help from such a quarter. Aunt Sophronia was very ample, and buttoned smoothly into a chocolate calico. Her broad collar had been stabbed full or careful œillets, her cameo pin was of the largest, and her black hair was banded smoothly and caught back in little puffs held in place by combs. Her high cheekbones bore a network of red, and imperious black eyes lighted her face. looked like a species of Christian soldier, one who had never broken military regulations nor permitted relaxation to another. She looked up over her glasses at Martha.

"We're readin' it through in course," she volunteered. "We're in the 'Pocrypha weakly." "That's all." now. Certain you can stay. What makes you ask that?"

Martha took off her cape and dropped it on the broad window seat.

"Lay aside your bonnet, too," recommended Aunt Sophronia, bending a frowning glance on the door by which Uncle Len would come

"I guess I'll keep it on," said Martha. 'I've got to be gettin' along pretty

"Where you goin' to work to-day?" "Nowheres. I'm goin' to take the cars an' go down to the old place." She sat clasping her worn hands together and looking eagerly at Aunt Sophronia. Her out lips parted without speech, as if she longed to put into the other woman's mouth the words she hoped for. "The old house!" she wished Aunt Sophronia would say. "My! I'd like to see it myself. I'll eat as quick as ever I can an' then go along with you.

a perfunctory interest

'What you goin' down there for?'' "Brother Nathan's comin' way on from

out West. "What's he doin' that for?"

"He wants to divide the furniture, so's he place can be sold.'

"Well, I must say! Sell the old place your father set his life by! It's bad enough leavin' it closed up not doin' anybody any good."

Martha sat rocking back and forth, like one in grief, though her faded blond face looked pathetically composed.

"He wants to divide the furniture." she repeated, helplessly.

'Well, don't let him git your eye teeth out o' ye," recommended Aunt Sophronia. "He got your half o' the house away from you. Pretty works, I call it." Martha plucked up courage, that justice might be done.

'He paid me for it," she said bravely. Maybe not the wuth of it, but he said at the time 'twas all I could expect from spring, and, though leaves are not yet a forced sale. Seems to me sometimes Nathan done more'n I might ha' thought. I wanted the money, an' I wanted it quick, an' he got it for me.'

Aunt Sophronia was regarding her with ruthless eye.

"Yes," she said, "you wanted the money. What for? You wanted to pay off that old debt of William's, to save nim from bein' took up, meddlin' with other folks' funds the way he did. Why didn't Nathan take half the burden on't himself? Willy was jest as much his her eyes following the slope of Sunset brother as he was yours. There, you Hill. But looking, she did not at first needn't git up out o' your chair. I see the woman, tall and humbly clad. ain't agoin' to say no more. We've who came forward from the elder screen thrashed it all out time an' again, to meet her. In a moment the woman Willy's dead, an' there's the end on't, was shaking both her hands and looking an' Nathan's got his thousands besides down into her face with fond recalling. the old home, an' you go out sewin' by the day, an' you ain't got a place to saying. 'I says to myself, 'She'll lay your head. Leonard, you hurry up walk.'' an' read the chapter. Martha's got to

Uncle Len had sidled in with one of his brisk, oblique movements, a little ing "How'd you know I was cotain" man with a wrinkled face and a hideouswhat ever put it into your head to make ly honest snuff-colored wig. Aunt me here

Sophronia turned the Bible violently upon its stand.

"Here's your spe'tacles," she said. "You read right along. One chapter's enough for now."

It had been said of Uncle Leonard in prayer-meeting, that it was a mercy the Lord knew what was in the hearts of men, because his voice upon sacred subjects sank to an obscure monotone. Martha, little as she expected to hear of it, wished he would read a psalm. It seemed as if the majestic words might sustain her fainting heart. She had forgotten the Apocrypha, and she listened with a vague curiosity, as to the chapter of an unfinished story, learning that Tobit was going on a journey, and that an angel, unrecognized, went with him She resolved to read the whole story when she should be home again, and then her worried thoughts returned to the trial of her coming day. Uncle mumbled through his prayer, and they sat down at the table, where Martha drank a cup of coffee and ate a little bread. Aunt Sophronia, talking irresistibly on, chanced to look at her as Martha speechlessly declined another biscuit.

"The land, Marthy!" said she, "you look as if you's struck o' death! Ain't you feelin' well?"

"I kind o' dread it," said Martha

"Dread what?"

"Goin' down to the old place an" meetin' Nathan an' all. You don't feel to come yourself, do you?"

"Me? Why, I couldn't do no good. You've only got to divide the furniture. I'm goin' to clean house, too. Your uncle's got to turn to 'n' wash winders.' "Well," said Martha, "I guess I'll be

She rose, put on her cape, and Aunt Sophronia, with a clatter of dishes, began to clear the table.

"I guess I'll be goin'," said Martha, again. "I'll let you know how it comes

Holding her cape about her, chiefly to give herself the comfort of her own tense grasp, she hurried along to the little station at the end of the town. Though she was not a very brave woman, she was a good one, and she tried to think, as she went, how kind Aunt Phrony had But Aunt Sophronia only inquired, with always meant to be. Five years ago, when Martha had sold her part of the farm and given the money away, Aunt Phrony had, in her sweeping fashion, planned out the whole course of Martha's life. She should come to Sidmouth and take boarders, but this, Martha, knowing her own lax and generous habits, humbly refused to do, and contented herself with hiring a little room and going out as seamstress by the day. Aunt Phrony scorned her for her scant ambition, and Martha, knowing it, walked softly and asked no favors. But to-day she was in a panic of dread. Old memories pressed upon her, past terrors and plaintive long-She realized, as she had been learning through all her past, that there were rude, incalculable forces to be met in life, and Brother Nathan was of them. It was dreadful to her to encounter him alone.

> When she got out at the familiar station, there was no one to meet her, and she set out upon the road to her old home. It was a sweet day in early green, the birds knew the signs of the time and rejoiced in them and were busy. Nothing changed here, save from season to season. Martha glanced from side to side of the road, and her throat ached with pleasure and with pain at the recognition of landmarks—the great boulder where blackberry vines were tangling, the elders and the barberry. It was like a spirit's return to a beloved spot where it had no longer any human holding. At the crossroad she paused "I knew you'd walk," Mary Blake was

Martha was staring up into the gaunt freckled face as if she saw divinity

"Mary ' Mary !" she heard herself say



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