

TIMOTHY'S QUEST.

BY KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN.

SCENE IX.

A Village Sabbath.

"NOW THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT IS CHARITY, OUT OF A PURE HEART."

It was Sunday morning, and the very peace of God was brooding over Pleasant River. Timothy, Rags, and Gay were playing decorously in the orchard. Maria was hunched to an apple-tree in the side yard, and stood there serenely with her eyes half closed, dreaming of oats past and oats to come. Miss Vilda and Samantha issued from the mosquito-netting door, clad in Sunday best; and the children approached nearer, that they might share in the excitement of the departure for "meeting." Gay clamored to go, but was pacified by the gift of a rag-doll that Samantha had made for her the evening before. It was a monstrosity, but Gay dipped it instantly in the alembic of her imagination, and it became a beautiful, responsive little daughter, which she clasped close in her arms, and on which she showered the tenderest tokens of maternal affection.

Miss Vilda handed Timothy a little green-paper-covered book, before she climbed into the buggy. "That's a catechism," she said; "and if you'll be a good boy and learn the first six pages, and say 'em to me this afternoon, Samantha'll give you a top that you can spin on week days."

"What is a catechism?" asked Timothy, as he took the book.

"It's a Sunday-school lesson."

"Oh, then I can learn it, said Timothy, brightening; 'I learned three for Miss Dora, in the city."

"Well, I'm thankful to hear that you've had some spiritual advantages; now, stay right here in the orchard till Jabe comes; and don't set the house afire," she added, as Samantha took the reins and raised them for the mighty slap on Maria's back which was necessary to wake her from her Sunday slumber.

"Why should I want to set the house afire?" Timothy asked wonderingly.

"Well, I don't know's you would want to, but I thought you might get to playin' with matches, though I've hid 'em all."

"Play with matches!" exclaimed Timothy, in wide-eyed astonishment that a match could appeal to anybody as a desirable plaything. "Oh, no, thank you; I shouldn't have thought of it."

"I don't know as we ought to have left 'em alone," said Miss Vilda, looking back, as Samantha urged the moderate Maria over the road, "though I don't know exactly what they could do."

"Except run away," said Samantha reflectively.

"I wish to the land they would! It would be the easiest way out of a troublesome matter. Every day that goes by will make it harder for us to decide what to do with 'em; for you can't do by those you know the same as if they were strangers."

There was a long main street running through the village north and south. Toward the north it led through a sweet-scented wood, where the grass tufts grew in verdant strips along the little-travelled road. It had been a damp morning, and, though now the sun was shining brilliantly, the spiders' webs still covered the fields; gossamer-laces of moist, spun silver, through which shone the pink and lilac of the meadow grasses. The wood was a quiet place, and more than once, Miss Vilda and Samantha had discussed matters there which they would never have mentioned at the White Farm.

Maria went ambling along serenely through the arcade of trees, where the sun went wandering softly, "as with his hands before his eyes;" overhead, the vast blue canopy of heaven, and under the trees the soft brown leaf carpet, "woven by a thousand autumns."

"I don't know but I could grow to like the baby in time," said Vilda, "though it's my opinion she's goin' to be dreadful troublesome; but I'm more'n half afraid of the boy. Every time he looks at me with those searchin' eyes of his, I mistrust he's goin' to say something about Marthy,—all on account of his giving me such a turn when he came to the door."

"He'd be awful handy round the house, though, Vildy; that is, if he is handy,—

pickin' up chips, 'n' layin' fires, 'n' what not; but 's you say, he ain't so takin' as the baby at first sight. She's got the same winnin' way with her that Marthy hed!"

"Yes," said Miss Vilda grimly; "and I guess it's the devil's own way."

"Well, yes, mebbe; 'n' then again mebbe 't ain't. There ain't no reason why the devil should own all the han'some faces 'n' tunesome laughs, 't I know of. It does seem 's if beauty was turrible misleadin', 'n' I've ben glad sometimes the Lord didn't risk none of it on me; for I was behind the door when good looks was give out, 'n' I'm willin' 't own up to it; but, all the same, I liko to see putty faces roun' me, 'n' I guess when the Lord sets his mind on it He can make goodness 'n' beauty git along comf'tably in the same body. When yer come to that, hombly folks ain't allers as good 's they might be, 'n' no comfort to anybody's eyes, nuther."

"You think the boy's all right in the upper story, do you?" He's a strange kind of a child, to my thinkin'."

"I ain't so sure but he's smarter 'n we be, but he talks queer, 'n' no mistake. This mornin' he was pullin' the husks off a baby ear o' corn that Jabe brought in, 'n' s' 'o 'Smanthy, I think the corn must be the happiest of all the veg'tables.' How you talk! 's I; 'what makes you think that way? 'Why because, 's 'e, 'God has hidden it away so safe, with all that shinin' silk round it first, 'n' then the soft leaves wrapped outside o' the silk. I guess it's God's fav'rite veg'table; don't you, 'Smanthy?' 's 'e. And when I was showin' him pictures last night, 'n' he see the crosses on top some o' the city meetin'-houses, 's 'e, 'They have two sticks on 'most all the churches, don't they, 'Smanthy? 'I s'pose that's one stick for God, and the other for the peoples.' Well, now, don't you remember Seth Pennell, o' Butternut, how queer he was when he was a boy? We thought he'd never be wuth his salt. He used to stan' in the front winder 'n' twirl the curtain tassel for hours to a time. And don't you know it come out last year that he'd wrote a reg'lar book, with covers on it 'n' all, 'n' that he got five dollars a colume for writin' poetry verses for the papers?"

"Oh, well, if you mean that," said Vilda argumentatively, "I don't call writin' poetry any great test of smartness. There ain't been big a fool in this village for years but could do somethin' in the writin' line. I guess it ain't any great trick, if you have a mind to put yourself down to it. For my part, I've always despised to see a great, hulkin' man, that could handle a hoe or a pitchfork, sit down and twirl a pen-stalk."

"Well, I ain't so sure. I guess the Lord has his own way o' managin' things. We ain't all call'ated to hoe pertaters nor yet to write poetry verses. There's as much difference in folks 's there is in anybody. Now I can take care of a dairy as well as the next one, 'n' nobody was ever hearn to complain o' my butter; but there was that lady in New York State that used to make flowers 'n' fruit 'n' graven images out o' her churnin's. You've hearn tell o' that piece she carried to the Centennial? Now, no sech doin's 's that ever come into my head. I've went on makin' round balls for twenty years; 'n' massy on us, don't I remember when my old butter stamp cracked, 'n' I couldn't get another with an ear o' corn on it 'n' hed to take one with a beehive, why, I was that homesick I couldn't bear to look my butter 'n the eye! But that woman would have had a new picter on her balls every day, I shouldn't wonder! (For massy's sake, Maria, don't stan' stock still 'n' let the flies eat yer up!) No, I tell yer, it takes all kinds o' folks to make a world. Now, I couldn't never read poetry. It's so dull, it makes me feel 's if I'd been trottin' all day in the sun! But there's folks that can stan' it, or they wouldn't keep on turnin' of it out. The children are nice children enough, but have they got any folks anywhere, 'n' what kind of folks, 'n' where'd they come from, anyhow; that's what we've got to find out, 'n' I guess it'll be consid'able of a chore!"

"I don't know but you're right. I thought some of sendin' Jabe to the city to-morrow."

"Jabe? Well, I s'pose he'd be back by nother spring; but who'd we get ter shovel us out this winter, seein' as there ain't more 'n three men in the whole village? Aunt Hitty says twenty-year engagements 's

goin' out o' fashion in the big cities, 'n' I'm glad if they be. They'd 'n' never come in, I told her, if there'd ever been an extr'y man in these parts, but there never was. If you got holt o' one by good luck, you had ter keep holt, if 't was two years or twenty-two, or go without. I used ter be too proud ter go without; now I've got more sence, thanks be! Why don't you go to the city yourself, Vildy? Jabe Slocum ain't got sprawl enough to find out anythin' wuth knowin'."

"I suppose I could go, though I don't like the prospect of it very much. I haven't been there for years, but I'd ought to look after my property there once in a while. Deary me! it seems as if we weren't ever going to have any more peace."

"Mebbe we ain't," said Samantha, as they wound up the meeting-house hill; "but ain't we had 'bout enough peace for one spell? If peace was the best thing we could get in this world, we might as well be them old cows by the side o' the road there. There ain't nothin' so peaceful as a cow, when you come to that!"

The two women went into the church more perplexed in mind than they would have cared to confess. During the long prayer (the minister could talk to God at much greater length than he could talk about Him), Miss Vilda prayed that the Lord would provide the two little wanderers with some more suitable abiding-place than the White Farm; and that, failing this, he would inform his servant whether there was anything unchristian in sending them to a comfortable public asylum. She then reminded Heaven that she had made the Foreign Missionary Society her residuary legatee (a deed that established her claim to being a zealous member of the fold), so that she could scarcely be blamed for not wishing to take two orphan children into her peaceful home.

Well, it is no great wonder that so faulty a prayer did not bring the wished-for light at once; but the ministering angels, who had the fatherless little ones in their care, did not allow Miss Vilda's mind "o rest quietly. Just as the congregation settled itself after the hymn, and the palm-leaf fans began to sway in the air, a swallow flew in through the open window; and, after fluttering to and fro over the pulpit, hid itself in a dark corner, unnoticed by all save the small boys of the congregation, to whom it was, of course, a priceless boon. But Miss Vilda could not keep her wandering thoughts on the sermon any more than if she had been a small boy. She was anything but superstitious; but she had seen that swallow, or some of its ancestors, before. . . . It had flown into the church on the very Sunday of her mother's death. . . . They had left her sitting in the high-backed rocker by the window, the great family Bible and her spectacles on the little light-stand beside her. . . . When they returned from church, they had found their mother sitting as they left her, with a smile on her face, but silent and lifeless. . . . And through the glass of the spectacles, as they lay on the printed page, Vilda read the words, "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter;" had read them wonderingly, and marked the place with reverent fingers. . . . The swallow flew in again, years afterward. . . . She could not remember the day or the month, but she could never forget the summer, for it was the last bright one of her life, the last that pretty Martha ever spent at the White Farm. . . . And now here was the swallow again. . . . "For a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." Miss Vilda looked on the book and tried to follow the hymn; but passages of Scripture flocked into her head in place of good Dr. Watts's verses, and when the little melodeon played the interludes she could only hear:—

"Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young, even Thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God."

"As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place."

"The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

And then the text fell on her bewildered ears, and roused her from one reverie to plunge her in another. It was chosen, as it chanced, from the First Epistle of Tim-

othy, chapter first, verse fifth: "Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart."

That means the Missionary Society," said Miss Vilda to her conscience, doggedly; but she knew better. The parson, the text—or was it the bird?—had brought the message; but for the moment she did not lend the hearing ear or the understanding heart.

(To be Continued.)

A PEANUT HUNT.

A pleasant and easily arranged evening entertainment, suitable for winter or summer, is prepared in this way:

First, put in order the room in which you intend to entertain your guests, as any change in the position of the furniture is undesirable after "the party" is ready. It is a good plan to remove any fragile articles of bric-a-brac or furniture that may be within easy reach of the "hunters." Get a good supply of peanuts, according to the size of the room and the number of your guests.

Count the peanuts and record the number. Then let them be hidden in every imaginable, but particularly in every unimaginable, place. Exercise all your ingenuity, and remember that wits just as bright as yours are to find what you have concealed. Sometimes, however, it happens that a very conspicuous place is the last to be searched.

Now prepare as many little baskets, or receptacles of some sort, as you are to have guests. The little "cat baskets" are very good for this purpose, but boxes or larger baskets will serve as well. A little decoration of some sort enhances the pleasure of the seekers, and at the close of the evening the baskets may be given as souvenirs. The small baskets may be prettily grouped in a large basket, and both may be tied with ribbons.

If the company is large, the players may be asked to "hunt in couples," and the baskets may be arranged to match each other.

When the hunt begins, those who have placed the nuts are to act as umpires, in case there should be any question as to the first finders, and they must also notice whether all the nuts have been found, and so determine the end of the game.

Sometimes a single nut is dipped in ink or dyed red, and hidden away very securely and the person who finds this particular red or black nut is the winner of the game. But generally the prize is given to the person or the couple whose basket shows the greatest number of nuts.

The game is usually prolonged until the hostess finds by actual count that all the nuts have been brought in; but there is a record of one game that might never have ended if the company had waited until the red nut was found. That same red nut, by the way, has been perched in a conspicuous place in the parlor for several weeks, and no one has yet discovered its resting-place.

Prizes may be arranged for this as for any other game.—*Youth's Companion.*

DROPPED STITCHES.

With the dimples all playing at hide and at seek. In the little round chin, and each soft little cheek,

A bonny, wee maiden sat knitting away, Forgetful of dolly, of books, and of play.

"Do you ever drop stitches, my girlie?" asked I. "Oh, lots of 'em!" was the confiding reply.

"But grandma takes up all my stitches for me, And so I don't worry about 'em, you see!"

I wonder when we who are busy each day With the hundreds of duties that fall in our way, Will cease to grow anxious, and worry and fret O'er the stitches we drop! and try to forget That One who is wiser and stronger than we, Our every hard struggle and error can see, And for love of his children, with patience so rare

Takes up the dropped stitches, and lightens each care.

Dear Father, the work we are bidden to do Is oftentimes hard, and ill-done, it is true; And try as we will, there are faults every day, And troubles and cares we can not put away.

Take up the dropped stitches, dear Father, and so

To work with new courage again we can go.

MARY D. BRUNE.