

Choice Literature.

INASMUCH.

BY AGNES MAULE MACHAR.

"Yes; it's a pleasant home," assented Mrs. Avery, complacently, as she leaned back in her verandah chair, and looked from the wide piazza across the smoothly-shaven lawn and the bright beds of verbenas, asters and geraniums that seemed to bask and glow in the golden September sunshine. "Is s a pleasant home, as I ought to know, for I've been here—wife and widow—well on to forty years."

"Have you really? Well—how time flies," replied her cousin, Mrs. Maynard, a gentle-voiced woman, somewhat younger than her hostess.

"It seems such a little while to look back to the time when you married Cousin Edward, and I used to be so pleased to come and visit you! It made me feel quite grown up. Nobody would believe it was so long ago—to look at you—now!"

"Well, I can't say but what I've always had a very good time, thank God!" As she spoke she brushed a speck off her rich silk dress with a hand on which flashed several fine diamonds, while a diamond pin also fastened the delicate lace about her throat; for Mrs. Avery was always particular about her dress. "And you know," she continued, "that always makes a difference in one's looks."

"Yes, it does," replied Mrs. Maynard, with a little sigh. She, indeed, was by no means young-looking for her age. There were lines of care and anxiety about the mouth and eyes, and the once nut-brown hair was almost grey. But the expression was sweet and loving, though occasionally a little sad. Her dress, too, bore manifest traces of economy—neat and dainty as were the frills and cuffs, and the plain widow's cap she wore.

The two ladies were enjoying the lovely September afternoon on the pretty trellised verandah of Mrs. Avery's handsome, old-fashioned house, standing in dignified seclusion behind spreading maples and horse-chestnuts, while a neighbouring church spire rose suggestively above the trees, completing the picture. The substantial old house bore, in every detail, the impress of most careful preservation. Respectability seemed to glisten in the glossy, well-painted woodwork, and on the smooth, scoured steps which were in such perfect keeping with the neat trellises, the trim lawns and the thrifty flower-beds. Mrs. Avery, indeed, prided herself on the perfection of all her appointments, within and without. Even the snowy Persian cat that basked in the sunshine, and the canary that sang in his gilded cage seemed to repeat the same note of dainty perfection and care. Mrs. Maynard—"Cousin Abbie," as her hostess called her—had laid down the knitting that usually kept her fingers busy, and leaned back in her chair, thoroughly enjoying the restful influence of the pleasant surroundings. Her visits to her cousin were always holiday times for her, who at home had so little leisure. A missionary convention was the occasion of the present visit—giving it a special interest.

The tea-bell at last summoned them into the large, handsome dining-room, where a daintily-appointed tea-table awaited them, and the soft glow of the fire took off the slight evening chill, and sparkled pleasantly on the silver and glass, and china of the tea equipage.

"Delia," said Mrs. Avery to the neat parlour maid, "tell William to have the carriage at the door at half-past seven. I promised to call for Mrs. Perry, our new clergyman's wife, on our way to the church," she added explanatorily to her cousin.

"Yes, some one introduced me to her and to Miss Newton," said Mrs. Maynard as she applied herself to the delicious chicken salad and delicate French roll. "And, what a lovely address that was of Miss Newton's! It really seemed wonderful to me that she could speak so pointedly. She didn't seem one bit afraid."

"Young women don't, nowadays," Mrs. Avery dryly rejoined.

"Well, I only wish I could do it! How she did bring out the sense of the words: 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me.' I declare I could hardly keep from crying—right there. It does seem so wonderful to think that our blessed Lord will really take what we do for His needy brethren as if it were done to Himself."

"Yes," said Mrs. Avery, "it was very instructive, though I was never given to being as soft-hearted as you, Cousin Abbie! But it is well to realize our privileges in that way. It made me glad that I had increased my subscription to the Foreign Mission Society. And then I gave \$5 to our Church poor fund last Sunday. And that reminds me—Abbie, you remember Anne Grayson, who used to make our dresses ages ago?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Maynard. "Didn't we think she was clever? I haven't heard anything of her this long time."

"Well, she's poor as poor can be. Her husband was wild about speculation, and ran through all his money, and her savings, too—all but a little she had in the Anaconda Bank—and you know what that amounts to now! and so she's left penniless and helpless, for she's had a slight paralytic attack that disables her from any kind of work. Her case came up lately before our Dorcas Society, and we can't see anything for her except to get to the Infirmary."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, "surely your wealthy Church folks could do better for her than that! It would be dreadful for Hannah Grayson to go there; she that was always so independent and helpful to every one! I am sure it would break her heart! It oughtn't to be!"

"Yes, I know it seems rather hard; but I don't see how it can be helped! Of course she won't like to give up her little place—two rooms are all she had lately. But you know there's a limit to everything! And, with the claims we all have upon us, we can't take a single case and do so much for that without taking it from other things. You've no idea how much there is to do all the time. Now, you see, we're just upholstering the church—all over—and we're going to have a new organ, which is going to cost us quite a fortune!"

"Seems to me St. Paul would have told you to wait for the upholstery and the organ, and to minister to the saints first," remarked Mrs. Maynard gently.

"The poor ye have always with you," quoted Mrs. Avery, oracularly. "If we were to wait until we had no distressing cases among us, we should never have our organ; and I believe good music is a means of grace."

"And taking care of a helpless sister is a better still, I think," rejoined Mrs. Maynard, somewhat warmly for her. "But it seems to me, in a Church like yours, both might be managed, somehow."

"Well, I don't see how! I, for one, could do no more," replied Mrs. Avery complacently. "We must all live in a way becoming our station, I give my tenth faithfully, and if we do that we must leave the rest with the Lord. It is in His mysterious providence that poor Anne has lost her money."

"I don't like to hold God's providence responsible for the ways of speculators and swindlers," remarked Mrs. Maynard. "I would rather think that He only permitted the evil, in order to draw out the sympathy of others and let them have the blessedness of giving."

"Oh, she's had a great deal of kindness shown to her, I assure you! I have not been able to go to see her myself lately, for I have had some of my grandchildren with me since I came back from the seaside, but we've all sent her little things occasionally. Do have one of these pears, Abbie. You'll find them excellent."

"And does she live all alone there?" asked Mrs. Maynard, helping herself somewhat absently to a pear.

"Oh, no; she has never been quite alone. As long as she was able she kept a boarder in one of her little rooms—and this young girl—a Miss Darcy—has got attached to her, and stays on with her now."

"Oh, that is kind of her!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard. "Darcy! that is not a common name. It reminds me of my dear husband's old college chum, who used to come and visit him in old times. Dear me! How long it seems since I heard the name!"

"The girl works all day in Pingold's, I believe, and she manages to do Anne's little chores evenings. They say her wages have mainly kept them both of late; but it isn't much Anne needs, of course. But the girl can't go on doing that always, so it will be best for Anne to make up her mind to go to the Infirmary."

"And what will the poor girl do?"

"Oh, she will just have to get another boarding-house! I'm sorry, for I believe they're great friends. But what can be done? You can't set out to be a Providence to everybody! You'd be poor with a million if you tried that. Let me help you to some of these hot house grapes. William's treasure. He manages these things so well."

Mrs. Maynard ate her grapes in silence, wishing that Anne Grayson had some of them. It did not seem right that they should be enjoying all these luxuries, while poor Anne might be suffering actual want, with the cold charity of an institution as her only prospect! She had seen something of what that was, and the knowledge only strengthened her pity for Anne, accustomed to so different a life. Why, the case might have been her own.

The two ladies sat silent for a while, enjoying their grapes and their fragrant cup of tea, and pursuing their own thoughts. When Mrs. Avery next spoke hers had travelled a long way from the fortunes and misfortunes of Anne Grayson.

"I expect quite a large luncheon party to-morrow," she observed. "You know I've asked all the office-bearers of the society and several of the leading delegates—Mrs. Darnley among them. Did you notice her, a tall, dark woman, who sat near Mrs. Wheeler?"

"Yes, I couldn't help noticing her. She has a very striking, thoughtful face. I couldn't keep my eyes off her."

"Queer! decidedly queer," said Mrs. Avery with a slight shake of the head. "I met her one evening lately, and she surprised us all by her views on sanctification. Why, they are quite Methodistical! She thinks we ought to live above sin—even now; and to seek to be like Christ; as if anyone could—in this world of sin and temptation! We are not in heaven yet! And I, for one, am glad that the robe of Christ's righteousness covers all our sins and shortcomings so that we needn't worry over them!"

"But surely we should seek to be cleansed as well as covered?" Mrs. Maynard timidly ventured to suggest. "And you know we are told to 'purify ourselves, even as He is pure!'"

"Well, I like the good, old-fashioned Gospel! Just come to Christ as you are, and He will make it all right! I believe in assurance, and I know I have been converted; so I'm safe, whatever human weakness may do!"

The Gospel of safety was as yet all that Mrs. Avery could receive. Of the Gospel of living, purifying love, springing up within like "fountains of living waters"—joyous and fruitful—her life habits and tendencies had obscured her view. That "love is heaven and heaven is love" was a proposition to which, in a hymn, she would have cheerfully assented, but which she did not in the least realize.

It happened that the text "Inasmuch" was again very deeply impressed upon Mrs. Maynard's mind by Mrs. Darnley, who addressed the meeting that evening, and spoke earnestly, not merely of mission work, but of every form of ministering love as directly done for the gracious Master who has so closely identified Himself with His suffering brethren and sisters, that what is done for them is done for Him. Mrs. Maynard's gentle eyes were wet with tears, though Mrs. Avery maintained her usual calm, composed air, taking in the general, without condescending upon, the particular. But that night Mrs. Maynard could not sleep. She seemed to see before her poor Anne Grayson in her poverty-stricken little home, with even that slipping from her hold. And she could not but contrast this picture with the luxurious house in which she was now resting, on softest pillows and under a satin coverlet. If the Lord Jesus Christ were there in person, would He be left in the poverty-stricken home while His professed followers enjoyed these luxuries? Would He ah! would He be forced to seek shelter from the wholesale charity of an infirmary? Would He not gladly be offered the hospitality of the richest home?

Then she went over, in her own mind, the capabilities of her own little home; not very great, indeed. But there was one room into which a bed could be put—the little serving room. Anne Grayson's presence there would hurt nobody, while the work and talk would amuse and interest her, poor prisoner that she was! As for the extra expense, that, on a farm, would be small, and she had faith to believe that, in blessing others, she would be blessed herself. To be sure,

times were hard, and she had been trying to save enough to pay off an old mortgage and to send Georgie, her third boy, to college, to be educated for the foreign mission field—his own wish—and her great desire. But if she did this thing for Christ He would take care of His own work. She had learned long ago the touching poem, beginning:—

A poor wayfaring man of grief
Hath often crossed me on my way.

And it seemed to ring in her ears, and to float through her dreams; only that, instead of a man, it was a woman's face that haunted her, and it seemed to have the well-remembered features of Anne Grayson. Her resolve was made that night, as it were, in answer to her Lord's call, and at Mrs. Avery's surprise and worldly wisdom could not shake it. And, after the sumptuous luncheon which Mrs. Avery served before her guests had been duly discussed, the two ladies sat out in Mrs. Avery's carriage, with a basket of grapes, jellies and other dainties for the humble abode of their old friend.

Anne Grayson had been sitting up in her fireless room all night, watching the feverish disturbed sleep of the poor girl who had seemed to be her only real friend, and who had now been ill for some days from over-fatigue and deficient nourishment. A kind neighbour had been in and brought some tea for both; which, however, poor Miss Darcy could scarcely touch, and, moaning a little, had fallen back in an exhausted sleep. There was nothing in the house for dinner. The little extra expense and loss of Miss Darcy's illness had exhausted the common purse; and, in the engrossing presence of the Missionary Convention, the ladies who often remembered Anne had forgotten her in her sorest need. Even the old cat mewed in vain for its usual breakfast. And poor Anne bowed her head on her clasped hands, and the tears dropped fast through her fingers on the cat, which had jumped on her lap. She groaned, half-aloud:—

"Oh, Lord, I don't want to murmur against Thy blessed will, but it does seem as if Thou hadst forgotten me."

And the cat, as if in reply to the mournful tone, rubbed its soft head against her face, even patting her poor, thin cheek with one velvet paw till Anne felt as if the unconscious animal were a divine messenger bearing an answer of love and pity. And why not? Have not humbler animals than cats been indeed ministering angels to poor sufferers bearing a token of love from the centre and source of all life and being?

Some hours later there was the unaccustomed sound of a carriage stopping outside, followed by a knock at the humble door. Then, carrying the basket of dainties in her hand, came Mrs. Maynard, her loving eyes filling with compassionate tears as she took in the state of affairs at a glance, while Mrs. Avery, composed as ever, brought up the rear.

When Mrs. Maynard returned to her country home, which was not till a week or two later, she took with her not only Anne Grayson, but also Miss Darcy, who proved to be the orphan daughter of her husband's old friend, and whom she took at once into her own motherly heart, glad to receive a girl who had shown so noble a spirit among her own sons and daughters. She had quickly revived under Mrs. Maynard's nursing and nourishing, and the fresh country air and free, happy life of the farm would soon completely restore her, Mrs. Maynard predicted. Nor was even the cat left behind. Carefully huddled up in a basket, poor puss accompanied her mistress to her new home.

"Abbie Maynard! You'll go on till you've ruined yourself, trying to be a Providence to everyone you meet!" said Mrs. Avery as her parting salutation.

But Mrs. Maynard only smiled a happy smile, and certainly the first meal taken in the farm-house on her return was "manna to her taste," whatever it may have been to her scarcely less happy and grateful guests.

It was like new life to Anne Grayson to go back to her native hills and to enjoy the warm atmosphere of a home once more. And many a time her happy simple faith proved a blessing not only to Mrs. Maynard, but to her children also. As for Miss Darcy, she soon grew fresh and blooming again, was an eager and active helper in all that was to be done, and finally became so indispensable to all that Mrs. Maynard's farmer-son told his mother one day that he felt it to be a duty to her to give her such a daughter for good and all!

A year or two later another paralytic shock took Anne Grayson quietly away. She left to her hostess all her little possessions, including the old Bible, nearly worn out by constant use. She had left in it as a book-mark opposite Matt. xxi. an old receipt for railway stock, which had been one of her husband's rash and losing speculations. One day Mrs. Maynard's second son, at home for a visit from his New York counting-house, happened to be looking through the old Bible, and came upon the faded yellow receipt.

"Why, mother," he said, "this old thing ought to be worth something now. These shares have taken a start and are looking up! Let me see what I can do with it. Perhaps it will carry George through college!"

"You can try," said Mrs. Maynard, incredulously.

But it proved even as he said. The old shares realized a handsome sum, which was duly devoted to Mrs. Maynard's cherished purpose. And when her boy was at last duly consecrated to the work to which she had long ago prayerfully dedicated him, it was not the least part of her joy that she had this token from her Master that her act of love had not been forgotten.

"Well, I'm glad you've had your reward after all, Cousin Abbie," said Mrs. Avery, as they sat together again on the verandah after the dedication service. "You deserved it after all you did for Anne Grayson."

"But I should have felt rewarded enough, Cousin Jane," she replied, "if I had never had anything more than the pleasure it gave me of feeling that I was doing it for Him who had done so much for me!"—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*

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