

Letitia was not the only cause of his coming to the village. Uncle Barum's health was failing; he had sudden attacks of acute pain, and he wanted to be near the physician who could relieve him; also, he was fond of Mr. Terhune, Sacy's husband, and liked to spend hours of busy idleness in the post-office with him.

The longer Letitia lived with Uncle Barum the better he liked her; she had good executive abilities, was economical and neat, and a most excellent little house-keeper; pretty and pleasing in appearance and manners, very saving in her expenditures, but always guided by good taste in colour and in style of her dress; cheerful and sympathetic, Letitia soon became, even more than her mother had been, the apple of the old man's eye; she was the treasure of his age. When he was gloomy she talked cheerfully, when he was ill she made him comfortable and invented little treats to encourage his appetite. She persuaded him to indulge in the great luxuries of a wadded wrapper, a warm, bright afghan, a pair of quilted slippers. She read his paper to him; and when she came in from school or from doing an errand, she told him all the little incidents of the day: what she had seen, what such and such people had said and done, the bits of news floating about the little town.

The ability thus to bring home to an invalid or elderly person the life that ebbs and flows beyond them is a great gift which young people should cultivate. Some pride themselves on going out and observing and gathering into themselves all that is of interest, and then coming home silent, uncommunicative, sharing nothing, while there may be near them those who could be put in helpful touch with outer life by graphic recital and generous information.

There is a little quoted text which might be made well to apply to many people and many circumstances: "Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." Here we note that Israel is empty; not because he has no fruit, but because his is selfish fruit. That rich man of the parable who had such a large "my" in all his planning, was another of these selfish capitalists.

Letitia, keeping Uncle Barum's house, going to school, comforting the old man's age, and daily becoming dearer to him, found her life full and happy, and was constantly planning some little present or surprise for the family at the cottage. Sacy Terhune and Madge, won by her even disposition and firm, steadfast kindness, soon tolerated her, and were pleasant enough to her when they came over to see Uncle Barum.

Sacy, it is true, never suffered the old man to forget Letitia's paternity.

"Too bad such a nice sort of girl is burdened with a father in the penitentiary." "Never can be anybody, of course, with such a father behind her." "I knew long ago how Thomas Stanhope would turn out, and I warned Mercy, but Mercy was always stubborn." "If Stanhope gets out of prison, I reckon he will come hanging around you on account of Letitia, Cousin Titus." "Of course Mercy will take him back, and things will go to the dogs just as they did before. Mercy is just so foolish."

Sacy Terhune was careful to say these pleasant things out of Letitia's hearing. Uncle Barum never resented them; he would nod his old gray head with a little chuckle. He was thinking how he should outgeneral Cousin Sacy.

After November set in, Cousin Sacy came over one day and said:

"Cousin Titus, I want you should come and take dinner with us on Thanksgiving. We'll have a tip-top dinner."

"And what will Letitia do?" asked Uncle Barum.

"Oh, Letitia!" said Cousin Sacy, taken rather aback, for Madge had strenuously objected even to Uncle Barum himself.

"He will come in his old-fashioned clothes, with that bottle-green faded overcoat, and we are to have village company," Madge had said. How would Madge put up with the added burden of the convict's daughter?

"Letitia! why of course she can come if you want to bring her; but I thought Letitia would prefer to go out home for Thanksgiving."

"So she does; yes, yes, so she does. Cousin Sacy, and I'm going with her," said the old man; "yes, yes."

"And you won't come to us, then? You

are getting very much taken up with Thomas Stanhope's family, seems to me."

"It is Mercy's family, Thomas counts out now," said Uncle Barum crossly; "but it is true I'm fond of Mercy and her children—nice children; still I shan't forget all I promised you, Sacy, so don't fret."

This consoled Cousin Sacy, and after all it was a relief to have Cousin Titus go somewhere else for his Thanksgiving. Madge thought Uncle Barum nodded and chuckled some time after Sacy went away.

In the very midst of his joyful meditations Achilles came in. Achilles was hauling corn to the station for Mr. Canfield; he had stopped for a minute or two. The day was frosty, and he sat down by Uncle Barum's little open fire. The room was sunny, and Letitia had some thrifty plants in the window.

"You look real comfortable here, Uncle Barum," said Achilles.

"Yes, yes; Letitia is a good girl and keeps us very nice. Achilles, we are coming out to spend Thanksgiving with you."

"Why so," cried Achilles, "that is just what I stopped in to talk about. Mother sent me to ask you to come. We have been thinking about it all summer. Patty will contribute the turkey; she found a little half-downed turkey chick in a rain last spring, and brought it to life, and Mrs. Gardiner gave it to her. She has raised it with care, and it is a fine, fat bird; she is going to have that for our dinner. And Samuel has a store of maple sugar of his own cooking, and pop-corn of his own raising, and nuts of his own picking, and dried berries for sauce, which he picked also. Our garden has given us plenty of potatoes, squash, onions, and cabbage; so you see, Uncle Barum, we can invite you to quite a feast. You'll enjoy seeing our poultry and our pigs, and Patty's new sheep."

Uncle Barum observed Achilles closely; he liked the youth's hardy independence, and bluff honesty of bearing; he had not the genial graciousness of Philip Terhune. Achilles had had the world to fight, and with heavy odds against him; there was a spice of defiant self-assertion in the keen glance of his gray eyes, the alertness of his demeanour, the set of his broad shoulders. Evidently he was one able to make a way for himself; steadfast, strong, his aim fixed, the future ever before him, despising all the hardness and roughness of the present for the better days that should be.

In hard labour Achilles had now reached manly size and strength, brown and brawny, looking as if his next birthday might rather be his twenty-fourth, than his nineteenth. "You've pushed yourselves on pretty well since you got rid of your father, Achilles," said Uncle Barum. Achilles frowned. He did not like these references to his parent, although he often said to himself that he had no toleration at all for his father. He replied roughly: "Father had only one fault; let him alone."

"It was such a big fault that it swallowed all his virtues up, and brought in all other faults along with it. I tell you, Achilles, that drunkenness is a fault which makes all other faults seem little alongside of it."

"It's queer to me, then," said Achilles, "that folks that think that way of drinking, don't do all they can against it. I've heard you don't vote for prohibition, or even for local option."

"I don't believe in coercing people. You can't make people right unless they want to be right. The Lord looks on the heart."

"But it is the outward act that does the mischief to their families and neighbours," said Achilles, "and though you can't make them right, you can take away the chance of their being wrong. A man may want to burn my house over me, but if he is shut up so close he can't do it, my roof's safe over my head. In this country it is often only a prison or a lunatic asylum, that can be safe for unlucky men who are born with a craze for strong drink."

"I see," said Uncle Barum, "you're all like your mother, willing to let Thomas Stanhope come back and ruin you all."

"Here's one that isn't," said Achilles. "Well, I'll tell mother that you and Tish will come early on Thanksgiving and stay all day?"

That was a pleasant Thanksgiving at the

cottage on the mountain. Uncle Barum opened his heart and sent out a barrel of flour and half a barrel of sugar as a present to Mercy. Letitia had made a white apron for Patience, and one for her mother, and a necktie each for Achilles and Samuel. Letitia had very little pocket-money; it scarcely ever occurred to Uncle Barum that his niece might like a few pennies for her own. Once in a while he gave her a quarter "for a pocket-piece." It was as much as Letitia could do to find a nickel for the contribution plate. But Letitia had taken a leaf out of her mother's book; she devoted from nine to ten each evening to knitting or crochet-work for Miss Henry's little fancy-goods shop, and so, a dime at a time, she had her small store to give presents to her family. Samuel should not be without his book at Christmas.

Ever since Thomas Stanhope had been in prison he had sent his wife a letter to reach her on Thanksgiving Day. Mr. Gardiner always went for the mail, and saw that Mercy had her letter. Poor Mercy! she knew that only violent hatred for Thomas filled Uncle Barum's soul, and Achilles asserted only suspicion and antagonism. They would have no confidence in Thomas' kind words, repentant moans, promises of future well-doing, assertions of the great goodness the Lord had shown to his soul. But Letitia could sympathize, and she and Mercy went into the little bedroom and read the letter and cried over it, and then comforted each other, and said how much better it was to be penitent, God-fearing, and safe in a prison, than sinning and using liberty only as an injury to one's self and others.

Samuel also came to hear the letter. As for Patty, she had forgotten all about her father. He had passed away with the discomforts and terrors of her sickly infancy, and now the robust, rosy child never gave him a thought. She sat on Uncle Barum's knee and entertained him with accounts of what they did in school and what they played at recess.

It was Samuel who brought a note of discord into the family peace that day. They were having after dinner that final course of nuts, maple sugar, and pop-corn, provided by Samuel's industry, when that nimble-tongued child remarked:

"Thanksgiving is the day when I like to eat my dinner, and don't feel that sort of mean and bad when I have anything good; because, you see, on Thanksgiving they let father have a right good dinner. They give him turkey and potatoes and gravy, and pies."

"They always give him a long sight better than he deserves," said Uncle Barum angrily. "I don't know what the world is coming to, the way they pamper prisoners and paupers. It is just putting a premium on idleness and rascality, and that is all there is about it. If people are too loafing and shiftless to support themselves, they are sent to the almshouse; and the almshouse must be a splendid cut-stone palace, with an army of officers, bath-rooms, fine grounds, where the lazy louts can live in splendour. If a man robs and burns and assaults his neighbours, breaks into their stores or houses at dead of night, fires on 'em with intent to kill, he is sent to a penitentiary where things can't be good enough for him. He must have his swell dinners on Christmas, and Thanksgiving. He must have his library, and his flowers from the flower-mission, and as many fol-de-rols as if he was a saint or a martyr. I don't believe in that. Honest people are taxed to pamper idiots and paupers and criminals. Then they tell how penitent they are, and they behave well because they can't get a chance to behave ill; and people tell how they are reformed, and they are made much of, and are pardoned out—to turn blacklegs as soon as they get out. That is the way with you, Mercy; you are well rid of Thomas Stanhope; if he came back he would riot away all you have scraped together, he would abuse and wreck you all; but you don't consider that. You cry over him, you want to see him. I never saw such a pack of idiots as you all are! What good did he ever do one of you? Not one bit of good. Bah! I don't believe in spoiled prisoners. I think that they should all be kept on bread and water, and hard work eighteen hours in the day, and the sooner it killed them the safer their families and neighbours would be."

Uncle Barum became very much excited as he spoke. He shook his fist, was red in the face, and frightened Patty so that she burst into tears and crouched down under the table. This incident stopped the tide of Uncle Barum's eloquence.

The family were silent. Uncle Barum was aged, Mercy had ill-treated him once. He had been good to her in the old times, and to all of them of late. Samuel presently spoke up, out of the depths of his eleven-year-old scholarship.

"Uncle Barum, you are like the man named Draco, that I read about in my teacher's history book. He thought that everybody ought to have their head cut off that did anything." This lame remark was accepted by Uncle Barum with enthusiasm. "So they ought; so they ought; yes, yes, serve 'em right." But the profound silence about the table did not suit the irate old man. He pushed back his chair and glared at the Stanhope family.

"What would you do? I say what would you do, Mercy, if that Thomas of yours was let loose? Would you let him go to the dogs alone, as fast as he could, as you ought, or would you go to the dogs with him?"

"I should try to keep him from going to the dogs, uncle."

"You tried when you were first married, didn't you? Much you made by it! Try it again, would you? Say, would you?"

"I think I should give him a chance, uncle, to bring forth fruits meet for the repentance which he professes to feel," said Mercy.

"Letitia, what do you say to such nonsense?"

"I think my mother is right, Uncle Barum."

"Samuel, you speak your mind, are you as idiotic?"

"I'd be just as good to him as ever I knew how," cried Samuel. "I ask God every night to bless him, and what sense is in that, if I wouldn't try to bless him myself?"

Patience being still under the table weeping, was not called on for a vote in this family conclave. Uncle Barum turned to Achilles, seated at the head of the table, his brow bowed, his face dark.

"Well, Achilles, you are the head of the house, let us hear from you," said the inquisitor.

"The time has not come for to do anything," said Achilles looking up, "and I don't see the sense in worrying my mother by talking of what may never happen. But I say one thing: mother has had all the beggary, and misery, and misuse that is ever going to come into her life. Forgiving is not forgetting, and if mother is too kind-hearted to protect herself and the children, I'll do it for her. Our home shall not be made a den any more. No drunkard shall cross that door-sill ever again." He straightened himself and held out his arm, manly and muscular, in his suit of gray homespun. "Thank God, I'm a man now, and a strong one, and God has set me to protect this family from themselves and every one else, and so I will!"

He pushed back his chair from the table and went out to the barn. Mercy went to her bedroom to finish her cry, Letitia pulled Patty from under the table, and told her to begin to wash the dishes.

"Samuel," she said, "do your chores and learn not to talk so much."

The Thanksgiving dinner was over. Uncle Barum went out to Achilles. The boy's spirit pleased him. "Achilles," he said, "I see you do not mean to allow your father back here."

"No, I don't. I must protect my mother and the kids, and I have no faith in father's penitence. He can't behave."

"I'll tie to you any day," said the admiring uncle. "You have good horse sense. I say, Achilles, I mean to give you a colt that I have on my farm. You shall have it in the spring."

(To be continued.)

THERE is not a gift so small that it is not wanted to make the work of the Church complete; there is not one so small but that its hiding away leaves some life unblest; there is not one so insignificant that it may not start a wave of influence which shall roll on over the sea of human life until it breaks on the shore of eternity.