

PREACHING WITH A SHOVEL.

I was a dreary winter evening, and Laura was snuggled up in a corner of the sofa with her book in her lap, just in the middle of a most delightful story. The boys were playing in the corner, and now and then she caught a scrap of their talk, but she paid very little attention to it. Rob was putting his locomotive together, and Fred was arranging an orphan asylum with his alphabet blocks. Twenty-seven orphans were ranged about the carpet: some of them in bed, some eating soup out of Laura's china dishes, one desperate fellow in solitary confinement behind the door, and a long row learning to read from bits of newspaper. The only trouble was that they all had such jolly faces; they would grin all the time; and what can you do with a boy that grins even when you whip him.

So presently the orphan asylum was turned into a gymnasium, where twenty-seven little acrobats stood on their heads, walked on their hands, turned somersaults, and performed all manner of wonderful feats. Then they were all convicts in State Prison, and Rob came and preached them a sermon. This was the sermon:

"My brethren,"—

"People in jail aren't *brothren*," said Laura, looking up from her book.

"Oh, yes, they are," said Rob; "brothren is just a kind of preach word and means everybody but the minister. My brethren, folks ought to be good, and not steal things, and quarrel, and get angry. When you begin to be bad, you can't tell how bad you may get to be. The minister knows of a boy that begun by wouldn't let his brother take his skates when he didn't need 'em at all himself, and he grew up so't he set a house afire."

"Is that *true*, Robby?" asked Fred, with very big eyes.

"Course not; that's a 'lustration. Sermons are true, and 'lustrations are just to make you understand 'em. Now, my brethren, you mustn't steal, or do any more bad things, 'cause you can't do it any way, and if you try to get out, they'll shoot you."

The convicts now marched back to their cells under the sofa. Rob lay upon the carpet, with his arms under his head, and said, very slowly, "When I am a man, I shall be a minister."

"I thought you were going to be an engineer," said Laura.

"Well, p'raps I shall. Cars don't run on Sunday, and I could think up my sermons all the week, and then go and preach 'em."

"Oh, you can't make sermons just thinking them up on an engine," said Laura positively; "you have to do 'em in study with books and writing."

"I could," persisted Rob; "I shall say my sermons like Mr. Challis, and I know lots of texts."

Laura looked at papa, who was smiling at them over the top of his paper, and asked, doubtfully, "could he papa?"

"I suppose he could," said papa.

"But I thought ministers had to be just ministers, and not part something else."

"I know of a boy," said papa, "who preaches first-rate sermons, and he does a great many other things—goes to school, brings in wood, takes care of a horse."

"Me, papa," asked Rob.

Papa laughed, and shook his head.

"He preaches them to people on the street; he preached one to me to-night."

"Oh!" said Laura, and Rob sat right up and looked at papa.

"He preaches them with a shovel."

Rob laughed heartily at this, and Laura looked more puzzled than ever. Fred came and leaned his arms on papa's knee.

"Now, papa," he asked, "how could any body preach with a shovel?"

"I'll tell you," said papa. "All through this month of snowy weather there has been one hundred feet on Beech Street of clear, clean sidewalk. No matter how early I go down town, it is always the same—clean to the very edge of the walk. People pick their way through the slush, or wade through the drifts, or follow the narrow, crooked path the rest of the way; but when they come to this place, they stamp their feet, and stand up straight, and draw a long breath. It makes you feel rested just to look at it. The boy that keeps that sidewalk clean preaches with his shovel. It is a sermon on doing your work well, and not shirking; a sermon on doing things promptly without delaying; a sermon on sticking to things day after day without wearying; a sermon on doing your own part without waiting for other people to do theirs."

"Maybe a man does it," said Rob.

"No, it is a boy. I have seen him at it. I saw him one day when it was snowing very fast, and I said, 'Why do you clean your walk now? it will soon be as bad as ever.' 'Yes, sir,' said he, 'but *this* snow will be out of the way. I can brush it off now easily, but when it is tramped down it makes it hard work.' I call that a first-rate sermon, and every one who does his work in his very best way preaches a sermon to all around him."

The bell rang, and somebody called papa away, but Rob kept thinking of the little crooked, uneven path he had made to the barn and well, and what a stingy little pile of kindlings he had split for the kitchen, and he made up his mind that he would try and preach a sermon with the shovel the next day.

Laura saw that her mother had laid aside her own book to show some pictures to little Nell.

"That's what mamma is always doing," she thought, "preaching sermons about loving other people better than yourself; I guess I'll preach one about 'Do unto others,'" and Laura left her story and amused her little sister until her blue eyes were too sleepy even for smiles.

The next day Rob widened his path and shov-