

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TOO TRUE.

She could not become a burden to others. She had outlived her usefulness, perhaps, but she had by no means outlived her self-respect, or her desire to be a factor, however unimportant, in the world's wide field of product.

So when her boys—there had been two, and they had become men and had taken to themselves wives—emigrated to the far South-west, and the girls—they were women now—wondering how they were to crowd any more than they were crowding, in order to spare room for mother, who had just been burned out of house and home, and had come first to Julia and then to Jessie, to see if she could find a home with either—when these things came to pass, the old lady, who had never before realized how old she was, began to feel aged and weary, and very lonely, yet as never before determined to make for herself a place in the world, where by her own efforts she could live and maintain herself.

It had grieved her to see her home, with all its earthly treasures, flare up and fade into ashes before her eyes, as she stood alone and helpless on that fatal night. But she had consoled her bereaved heart, saying: "After all, the care of these things, my house, and garden, and cow, and chickens, prevented me from doing much for the girls; now there is an end. I will sell the cow and fowls and replace my lost clothing, and go to Jessie and Julia. I can live by turns with them, and help them out in many ways."

Poor heart. She had been a good mother, and had done a good part by her children. The thought that she could be anything else than a help to those whom she had always helped—ah! with what loving unselfish helpfulness—never occurred to her. Yet as she stood, homeless and destitute, in her daughter's house that bright October morning, and heard Julia's husband remark that there wasn't enough room in the house for those rightly belonging to it, "grandma had better go up to Jessie's," the poor mother felt a strange, unnatural tremor shake her frame. The road between Julia's and Jessie's seemed twice as long as ever before.

"Did you save anything, mother?" Jessie asked. "And how much insurance had you? To think, we never heard a word of it till ten minutes ago. Jule sent up to say she saw you coming over the hill, and as they had no room for you I'd have to manage somehow. I couldn't make out what it meant, till the young one said you'd been burned out. How soon do you suppose the insurance will rebuild you? We can crowd up for a few weeks by letting Andrew give you his cot. He can sleep in the dining-room. Of course you will have to be in the room with little Jim and Isabella. Did you save all your things?"

How weak she grew as she sat and listened to her daughter's half-pensive questions. She scarcely knew her own voice as she answered:

"The insurance expired, and I neglected to renew it. I saved nothing but my clothing and my tin box with my papers, and watch, and a few trinkets in it. There were five gold dollars in the box. It is all the money I have now. The lot, the cow, and the chickens are all that is left to me."

"Why, mother," interrupted the daughter, vexedly, "how could you be so neglectful? You must be in your second childhood. All your nice bedding, and furniture, and the china! Dear me! There must have been at least a thousand dollars' worth of property destroyed."

"And I am homeless and destitute indeed," said her mother quietly, in a sad voice.

"And all through your own culpable carelessness, I declare," said Jessie.

"And what in the world you are going to do, I don't know, I'm sure. We're crowded enough, mercy knows. And I was just thinking of sending little Jim up to you for a month. The air is so much purer over where you lived, the other side of the hill, and he is so cross and troublesome. Dear me! And to think of there being no insurance. You might as well have thrown your home away, and your things, and done with it."

Not a word of sympathy or encouragement from Julia. Reproaches from Jessie.

Were these the babies whom she had borne, and nursed, and fondled, and served so willingly, so gladly? Were these the daughters for whom she had toiled, and striven, and planned? Was it not all a hideous dream?

Her blood seemed turning to ice in her veins. She rose with rigid limbs and turned to the door.

"I will walk over to tell Uncle Dick," she said. "I may not return to-day. Andrew need not give up his cot to grandma, at least to-night. Goodbye, children." And she closed the door slowly and with trembling hand, as she went out from her daughter's house to return no more.

"There is no welcome for me in my children's homes," she said; "their bread would choke me. And, oh, I love them so!"

And as she walked along, gray, ashen shadows settled upon her face, and her look was as one whose death stroke has been felt.

Another mother might have acted differently—even felt differently. Mothers have suffered deep punishment in their children and have borne the pain in one way or another, and veiled it from all eyes; even with loving and forgiving affection endeavouring to hide it from their own. Alas!

Perhaps they were less proud-spirited than this mother. Perhaps they had less self-respect.

When once these mothers realize that the children for whom they lived, and would gladly die, valued them more for what they have than what they are, battle against the unwelcome conviction as they may, the realization works its sorrowful change in their lives. Some may succeed in keeping the hideous spectre down, and may persuade themselves, indeed, that 'twas a phantom only. The difference between these and this mother was that she accepted the truth, and neither tried to deceive herself or others.

As she neared the home of her brother-in-law her resolve was taken. When she entered his house she was perfectly

calm, and could talk of her loss and her intentions with even tone and quiet air.

After arranging with him to dispose of her cow and chickens, she took the cars to the next town, and began to search for employment.

Mamma was visiting friends in that town at the time, and is one who usually follows the leadings of her own instinct, and always regrets when she fails to do so. She was in Mrs. Ludlow's sitting-room when Mrs. Alpen applied to a physician, as general assistant, asking only for kind treatment and small wages.

Mrs. Ludlow had no place for her, but mamma felt assured that here was a treasure for some one, and forthwith proposed that if Mrs. Alpen would go with her to her home, two days' journey by rail, she would give her suitable employment at fair wages.

Mamma shortened her visit in order to bring Aunt Alpen home, and she has remained a most valuable helper ever since.

For years we knew nothing of her personal history beyond the fact that she had married children settled at distant places, from whom, at long and irregular intervals, she received letters.

One day it chanced that, as mamma read a paragraph from a newspaper, she smiled and called Aunt Alpen's attention to it.

"It is your name," said mamma—"Rowena Alpen. I wish it were your land also. It would make you independent indeed."

"It is my land," said Mrs. Alpen, quietly. "But I am independent without it."

And she burst into tears and sank into a chair at mamma's side. We left them alone—mamma and our poor friend in her grief.

It was then that she confided to mamma her story, that she said was too pitifully sorrowful to be told.

She had been with us seven years. In all these years never once had her daughters invited her to their homes. They had been glad she had employment and was satisfied with her position. They had even asked her if it was convenient to have a visit from one or more of the children in their summer vacations. But they had never expressed any regret at the separation, or any desire to have her become a member of their families—until now.

The lot on which her home had stood had suddenly become valuable. A coal vein ran beneath it. The mine was working. The owners of the shaft wished to purchase, and offered a price that astonished those who knew nothing of the real value. Both daughters remembered their filial obligations, and at once each offered a home with her own family.

"God pity me if I am unlike what a mother should be," she said. "I loved my children only for love's sake. I hoped that thus my children would love me. Love, love was all I asked or craved. Land cannot buy love or happiness. All that I have is theirs. They shall have no temptations to become impatient for their mother's death. I will give them all now. For myself, when I can no longer work there remains the poorhouse. I will go thither."

Is her story too strangely sad to have been told? I know of other mothers no less keenly stung by that "sharper than a serpent's tooth," filial ingratitude and neglect.

I have but lately been the confidant of a tale as strangely sad from a grey-haired mother of children in a far higher social scale than Aunt Alpen's, yet not one whit above them in filial duty. I know of another mother this hour, snubbed, grieved her attic room and her poor bite and sup, and forced to do her own laundry work in her daughter's house, where rooms, and food, and servants are plenty.

Why do I tell of such shames?

Why, indeed, unless in the hope that some who have eyes to see may see, and who have ears to hear may hear and understand. For these stung hearts of sorrowing mothers are remembered by One who in the day of His power is mighty to avenge.—*The Guide*.

THE AGED PLANTER, HADRIAN, AND THE FOOL.

The Emperor Hadrian, passing near Tiberias, in Galilee, observed an old man digging a trench, in order to plant some fig trees. "Hast thou properly employed the morning of thy life," said Hadrian, "thou needest not to have worked so hard in the evening of thy days." "I have well employed my early days; nor will I neglect the evening of my life, and let God do what He thinks best," replied the man. "How old mayest thou be, good man?" asked the emperor. "A hundred years," was the reply. "What!" exclaimed Hadrian. "A hundred years old art thou, and still plantest trees? Canst thou, then, hope ever to enjoy the fruits of thy labour?" "Great king," rejoined the hoary-headed man, "yes, I do hope. If God permit, I may even eat the fruit of these very trees; if not, my children will. Have not my forefathers planted trees for me, and shall I not do the same for my children?" Hadrian, pleased with the honest man's reply, said, "Well, old man, if ever thou livest to see the fruit of these trees, let me know it. Dost thou hear, good old man?" And with these words he left him. The old man did live long enough to see the fruits of his industry. The trees flourished and bore excellent fruit. As soon as they were sufficiently ripe, he gathered the most choice figs, put them in a basket, and marched off toward the emperor's residence. Hadrian happened to look out of one of the windows of his palace. Seeing a man, bent with age, with a basket on his shoulders, standing near the gate, he ordered him to be admitted to his presence. "What is thy pleasure, old man?" demanded Hadrian. "May I please your Majesty," replied the man, "to recollect seeing once a very old man planting some trees, when you desired him, if ever he should gather the fruit, to let you know. I am that old man, and this is the fruit of those very trees. May it please you graciously to accept them, as a humble tribute of gratitude for your Majesty's great condescension." Hadrian, gratified to see so extraordinary an instance of longevity, accompanied by

the full use of many faculties and honest exertion, desired the old man to be seated, and, ordering the basket to be emptied of the fruit and to be filled with gold, gave it to him as a present. Some courtiers, who witnessed this uncommon scene, exclaimed, "Is it possible that our great emperor should show so much honour to a miserable Jew?" "Why should I not honour him whom God has honoured?" replied Hadrian. "Look at his age and imitate his example." The emperor then very graciously dismissed the old man, who went home highly pleased and delighted.

When the old man came home and exhibited the present he had received, the people were all astonished. Among the neighbours whom curiosity had brought to the house, there was a silly, covetous woman, who, seeing so much treasure obtained for a few figs, imagined that the emperor must be very fond of that fruit. She, therefore, hastily ran home, and, addressing her husband, said to him: "Thou silly man, why tarriest thou here? Hastest thou not that Cæsar is very fond of figs? Go, take some to him, and thou mayest be as rich as thy neighbour." The foolish husband, unable to bear the reproaches of his wife, took a large sack filled with the figs on his shoulder, and, after much fatigue, arrived at the palace-gate and demanded admittance to the emperor. Being asked what he wanted, he answered that, understanding his Majesty was very fond of figs, he had brought a whole sackful, for which he expected a great reward. The officer on duty reported it to the emperor. Hadrian could not help smiling at the man's folly and impertinence. "Yes," said he to the officer, "the fool shall have his reward. Let him remain where he is, and let every one who enters the gate take one of the figs, and throw it at his face, till they are all gone. Then let him depart." The order was punctually executed. The wretched man, abused, pelted, and derided, instead of wishing for gold, wished only to see the bottom of his bag. After much patience and still more pain, he had his wish. The bag being empty, the poor fellow was dismissed. Dejected and sorrowful, he hastened toward his home. His wife, who was all the while considering how to dispose of the expected treasure—calculating how many fine caps, gowns, and cloaks she would purchase, and contemplating with inward delight how fine she would look, how her neighbours would stare to see her dressed in silk and gold—most impatiently expected her husband's return. He came at last, and, though she saw the bag empty, she imagined that his pockets at least were full. Without giving him the usual salutation, and hardly allowing him to take breath, she hastily asked him what good luck he had. "Have patience, base, and wretched woman," replied the enraged husband. "Have patience, and I will tell thee. I have had both great and good luck. My great luck was that I took to the emperor figs, and not peaches, else I should have been stoned to death. And my good luck was that the figs were ripe. Had they been unripe, I must have left my brains behind me."—*Midrash Yayakra Rabah*.

THE MOTHER'S NEEDS.

The lawyer needs to get away from his briefs, the merchant from his ledgers, the mechanic from his shop. A man would soon go crazy who could not turn the key upon these things, however much his mind may revert to them from a distance. The men who have combined great power of work with great power of endurance, have been those who could enter heartily into something else when the working day was done. But a mother with young children cannot get away from her work. It wakes up in the morning with her (generally before she does), and goes to bed beside her at night. If she leaves the children, it is only for a short time; and that with an uneasy sense of direful accidents to clothes, if not of life or limb. But she can sit, with her cares and comforts asleep upstairs, or may be at her feet, and

"Gloriously forgot herself, to plunge

Soul forward, headlong into a book's profound,
Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truths."

As much as she needs to read for the sake of her children, she sometimes also needs to read that she may forget for the time being that she has any children.

For the children's sake we must make the most of ourselves. Many an unselfish mother has said: "Oh, I cannot take all this time; there are so many things to do for the children." She does not realize that she may do more for them in the end by cultivating herself, than if she spends all her time on clothes and cooking. A generosity which makes the recipient weak or selfish is not a blessing, but a curse. Have you not seen grown-up sons who snubbed their mother's opinions in the same breath with which they called her to bring their slippers? The meek little woman has "trotted around" to wait on them so long, that they have come to think that that is all she is good for. Their sisters keep "Ma" in the background because she "hasn't a bit of style," and is "so uncultivated," forgetting that she has always worn shabby clothes that they might wear the ones; that her hands have become horny with hard work that theirs might be kept soft and white for the piano; and that she has denied herself books and leisure that they might have them both. And there are other children, too noble for such base ingratitude, who feel a keen though secret loss, as they kiss the dear withered cheek, and think how much more of a woman "mother" might have been if she had not shut herself away from the culture and sweet companionship of books.

The love even of husband and children, to be permanent and valuable, must be founded on genuine respect for character. Every mother has a right to time for mental and spiritual development, as really as she has a right to sunshine and air, and to food and sleep. She cannot do physically without the one; she cannot do mentally and spiritually without the other. If she throws herself so energetically into her duties as seamstress and nursery-maid that she has no time nor strength for anything else, ought she to be disappointed if in the end she receives only seamstress' and nursery-maid's wages? Is there a more beautiful sight