

CHOICE LITERATURE.

NEHEMIAH'S PLAN.

(Concluded.)

Sleep could comfortably occupy the night, but what to do with the long hours of the forenoon was a problem that greeted Margaret with the morning sunlight. She tried to solve it at the breakfast table.

"I think I must explore your village while I stay. Are there any places of special interest?"

"Well, I don't know. I've heard they was havin' meetin's every day at the little church across the run," suggested Miss Grey, in evident uncertainty as to what her visitor might consider interesting. "Then there's the hills. Some folks like to wander round over them."

Margaret decided to try the hills; but her pleasant rambling was abruptly terminated by a dash of rain that forced her to seek speedy shelter. An isolated building with an open portico was fortunately not far from her path; but it was only when she had reached it, and was brushing the rain-drops from her clothing, that she discovered it to be the "little church across the run."

"I shall have the satisfaction of doing both places of interest, then—the hills and the 'meetin''," and she laughed softly to herself.

From beyond the half-open door came the sound of a voice raising and falling in a regular sing-song way—a saw style of elocution that had nothing to do with emphasis or expression, but inexorably sent one half of each sentence up, and the other half down. When the voice sank, nothing but a murmur reached the door, but as it rose the words became audible.

"Noble work? Try Nehemiah's plan. . . . Useful work? Build on Nehemiah's plan. . . . Good in the world? Follow Nehemiah's plan."

At first Margaret had only smiled at the tone, but in a moment the words attracted her attention. Of what was he talking? She leaned forward, and caught a glimpse of a thin, sallow faced, long haired man, swaying to and fro with a movement that accorded with his chanting tones.

"Don't wander round. Take Nehemiah's plan."

It was odd that just those words should come to her in such a place and way. She felt a fitting wish that she had tried the meeting earlier, but in a few moments the service and the brief shower ended together, and Margaret left the portico as the people began to come out. One after another nodded or spoke to her as they passed. It seemed to be the fashion to address any one without ceremony, and so, as the sallow-faced minister overtook her, and spoke as his flock had done, Margaret looked up at him with a sudden impulse, and asked,

"What was Nehemiah's plan?"

"He was an Israelitish noble, and the great leader in rebuilding Jerusalem after the captivity," replied the stranger, plunging at once into the subject, and not manifesting the least surprise at the question. "And his way of rebuilding the wall was to set each man to building before his own house. No one spent his time running around, putting in a stone here and a stone there, trying to build a little in every breach, or trying to find an opening that just suited him, and build there; but every man took the work that was straight before him. If you want to do good work in this world, try Nehemiah's plan. If you want to build—"

The preacher had dropped into his chanting tone; but, just as Margaret began to realize that she had called down the whole sermon upon her devoted head, her foot slipped upon a wet stone in the rough steep path, and she fell. It was awkward enough, she assured herself in vexation, but the first effort to rise proved it something far worse. She grew white, and faint with pain, and the voice of her companion asking if she were hurt sounded indistinct and far away. Some of the others turned back. She scarcely noticed who came or how they aided her, but she presently found herself at Miss Grey's, surrounded by a sympathizing group and a strong odour of camphor.

"A bad sprain like that is really worse than a broken bone—at least it takes longer to heal," announced the country practitioner, an hour later, when he had examined and prescribed for the wounded member. "It will be several weeks before you can put that foot to the ground again."

Several weeks' Margaret listened to his retreating steps, looked at her swollen and bandaged ankle, and then at the figure moving busily about the room, picking up bottles and bits of old linen.

"Miss Grey, what will you do with me?"

"I'll have to do the best I can, I s'pose. Here you are, and we can't neither of us help it. What can't be cured 'll have to be endured," answered that lady, without pausing in her work of putting to rights.

Having her presence accepted as an afflictive dispensation was a new experience to Margaret; she thought of home and Tom. She had ample leisure for thinking of many things as the long afternoon wore away, and she began fully to realize the imprisonment upon which she had entered—that all her planning had ended in this. How strangely it had happened!

"The idea of leaving home just to bury myself here!" she sighed, reviewing the situation. "Nehemiah's plan indeed! I shall certainly have to build straight before me for the next two months if I build at all."

Straight before her in the next room sat Miss Grey, bending busily over cloth and pattern with a perplexed wrinkle in her forehead.

"What is it? If I could help you—" questioned Margaret, and hesitated. She had grown interested after watching her a moment.

"Well, you can't," said Miss Grey, dropping her hand meditatively in her lap.

"I'm trying to make over an old dress of my great aunt's into a new one for myself, and there ain't enough of it. It seems as if I ought to be able to do it by this time, for my

whole life has just been a-makin' over, or patchin' up, or turnin' best side out, of what somebody else has used or wasted or spoiled before I got it. It's taken my best days to eke out short-comin's and patch up blunders. I've never had anything fresh and new to start on."

"Except Billy?" ventured Margaret, as the child's sunny head appeared at a window.

"Billy! Well—" Miss Grey paused. That little half-brother was dearer to her even than she knew, but he was perplexing also. Something that looked out from his dark eyes and spoke in his wistful tones was more difficult than anything else to fit into her hard homely life; it did not seem to belong there. But she would not say so; she was beginning already to wonder at what she had said. With a quick breath that would have been a sigh on less determined lips, she bent over her work again. Upon those stooped and rounded shoulders life's burdens had fallen early. She had paid the penalty of being considered "smart" and "capable" by having whatever the others of the family were too busy, too indolent, or too selfish to do always "left for Susan." When her discouraged mother slipped away out of the world she found herself alone to plan for and supply what her careless, improvident father never provided—to supplement his love of ease with her self-denial, and economize while he wasted. After hard years he had crowned his extravagances by bringing home a fragile young wife whom he could not support, and that feat accomplished, had comfortably died and left her to Susan's care, as she a little later, left Billy. It never occurred to Susan to shirk the burdens that others dropped. She had taken them up resolutely one by one, and gone on her way, never having had time for a life of her own.

So it happened naturally that having accepted Margaret's stay as one of her "allotments," she gave faithfully the best care in her power.

"A kindness that can never be itemized in the bill, nor repaid in any way," said Margaret, regretfully. "You have so much to do, it seems strange that I should have been thrown on your hands."

"Mebby," suggested Billy, gravely—"mebby you was throwed for me. 'Cause I don't have things like—folks. I'm—" he hesitated, and looked at her foot—"I'm the gladdest kind of sorry."

Her presence seemed indeed a constant pleasure to the child. He hung about her, admired her pretty dresses and ornaments, and listened in delight whenever she spoke of the world of "folks" from which she came. When her trunk arrived, and she took from it one day a portfolio of sketches and drawing materials, he looked from the pictures to her face with a wondering, trembling eagerness.

"That looks like something a little lame boy could play if he knew how," he said, clasping and unclasping his small brown hands in a tremour of excitement.

"He shall try," smiled Margaret, won by the pleading eyes.

That was the beginning of many lessons, in which a new world opened to Billy, and Margaret quite forgot that she had left home to find rest from teaching. There were many things forgotten in those slow, quiet days. Her vague unrest, her feverish ambition, seemed selfish and ignoble in the presence of this strong, brave life before her—such a hard, homely life that she could scarcely understand her own interest in it.

She had written home nothing of the accident that had befallen her, but only indefinitely of a "necessary change of plan." There was no need that any one should be anxious about her or grieve at her disappointment, and there was one who would do both, she remembered, with a little thrill at her heart. Some way she was often reminded of Tom in these days. Now that she was recovering, it was not so great a disappointment, after all, to find that there was no time left to carry out any part of her original purpose.

"I s'pose you'll go away to-morrow," said Miss Grey, slowly, one evening, as she sorted and put aside the meagre daily mail. "Well, we did live before you came—it ain't more'n two months ago, either, though" seems so long—but I can't seem to think beyond to-morrow. It some way seems as if everything ends then."

The touch of sadness so foreign to the voice, and the look in Billy's dark eyes, haunted Margaret's pillow that night. She vainly tried to plan for them beyond the morrow, and even when she slept they followed her in dreams.

"Come! come!" called Miss Grey's excited voice.

Then a hand fell on her shoulder, and she awoke with a start to find the voice a reality.

"Quick! quick! the house is burning! I thought you'd never wake!"

Through the windows came a fiery glare and a rushing, crackling sound, and already the room was filled with smoke. Margaret made her way through the blinding clouds, catching up articles here and there, her bewildered brain aided by Miss Grey's retreating call.

"Gather what you want most. There's no hope for the house; we must save what we can."

"Why does no one come? Can't we give the alarm?" cried Margaret, as she rushed out into the open air with an armful of treasures, and turned a glance of terror at the blazing roof.

"Our voices wouldn't reach. The light 'll spread the story quickest, but no one can get here in time to save the house, or anything in it but what we bring out," answered the owner of the house, resolutely plunging into the stifling smoke again.

Margaret followed her, and they worked with a strength that only desperation could have given, tearing up, lifting, and carrying out through the narrow passage that grew momentarily more suffocating and perilous.

"We must let the rest go," Miss Grey herself announced, with grim resignation, leaning back against a tree and watching the long fiery arms that were crushing the building in a horrible embrace.

"Fire!" shouted a hoarse voice far down the hill-side, then other voices took it up, and the sounds drew nearer. Help was coming, too late. Suddenly Miss Grey started, turning a white face to Margaret as she passed.

"The mail! I forgot it!"

"That little bundle! What madness!"

But the unfinished sentence and detaining hand were put swiftly aside.

"They belong to others folks; they were trusted to me," Miss Grey explained, hurriedly, as she sprang forward and vanished in the lurid smoke.

It seemed hours that Margaret watched for her with straining eyes, and she did not come; ages before that shouting crowd drew near enough to be directed to the spot where she had disappeared. Then moving figures swept in between the burning mass and the place where Margaret stood with Billy's little hand tightly clasped in hers, and partially intercepted her view. Loud voices shouted contradictory orders, dark groups swayed rapidly to and fro. There was a crash of burning timbers, the flames leaped up for a moment and sank again, and the crowd, which had fallen back, parted and let two smoke blackened men pass through, bearing a prostrate form.

Margaret could never clearly recall all the incidents of that night. Her recollection was a confused mingling of terror, haste, stifling air, and horrible flame and sound. But the gray morning found the old house a charred and smouldering ruin, while in a little cabin down the hill-side lay its mistress, with her last work for "other folks" done. Every aid that could be given was rendered, but the physician shook his head as he turned away. Margaret sat beside her, sad-eyed and still. This was the to-morrow beyond which they could not see.

"Don't fret about it," said the steady, practical voice, in nearly its usual tone. "'Twould be queer to be here, anyhow, with the old house gone." Then, after a pause, "Everything up yonder is to be 'made new'; don't it say so? I think I'd be glad to go—but for Billy."

"Leave him to me," said Margaret, earnestly. "I love the child. He shall have all the care that I can give him."

The sufferer's eyes flashed wide open with a quick glad look. "Why," she said, rightly, "I'd have been willin' to die any time to gain that for the child."

Then the tired lids fell, and with the brightness still on her face she was away.

Two days later Margaret reached home. The evening lamps gleamed a welcome, and the fire, lighted because of the chill rain, threw a cheery glow over the pretty room, where with Billy tucked away for the night, Margaret and good Meggins lingered, woman-like, over the beauty of the golden curls and the long lashes, and even of the little lame foot, concerning which Meggins declared herself "moral certain that it might be cured, or leastways made a good deal straighter and stronger."

Tom, attracted by the bright windows, came with eager greeting. "And you are really home again, Margie. Did you carry out your plan?"

"Not exactly mine; it was—Nehemiah's, I think."

"Nehemiah's?" repeated Tom, bewildered, and scarcely liking the name. "And did you find your noble lives?"

"I found one—yes," Margaret answered reverently.

"And your work?"

"Yes; I brought that home with me. Come and see," and she led him to the sleeping child.

"But after all, Margie," said Tom, when the talk had grown an hour long, "if you only wanted some one to take care of, you know—"

"Yes, I know," she laughed. "I don't much mind if I do take you too, Tom. I don't like to flatter your vanity, but familiar objects sometimes appear to wonderful advantage when we go far enough away to take a bird's-eye view of them."

THE SCOTTISH UNIVERSITY BILL.

The Bill provides for the appointment of Commissioners, who are to be invested with nearly plenary powers of review and reform. The entire University system, in regard to professors and students, finances and teachings, buildings and prospects, are to be submitted to those to do with them apparently as may seem right in their own eyes. They are to have power to call before them principals, professors, masters and others, whether holding office or not, and to examine them in reference to anything connected with the Universities about which they may wish reformation. They are to be empowered to revise the respective foundations, modifications and bursaries; and, in any way, consistent with the intention of the donors, to alter or modify the conditions upon which those endowments, which have been in operation for more than twenty years, are henceforth to be conferred. They may combine small bursaries into bursaries of larger amount, and transfer, "with or without compensation," the patronage of bursaries from private persons to the Senatus Academicus. They are likewise to have power granted them to transfer to the University Court the patronage of professorships now vested in private patrons; to regulate the powers, jurisdictions and privileges of the various University office-bearers, from the Chancellor downwards, and of the Senatus Academicus, the General Council, the University Court, and the Court of Curators in the University of Edinburgh, to make regulations as to the time, place and manner of electing all University officers, and in particular to substitute election by a majority of students for election by Nations of the Rectors of the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen; to make rules for the management of the Universities; to regulate the manner and conditions in which students shall be admitted to the Universities, the course of study and the manner of teaching, the length of the academical curriculum and the manner of examination and the granting of degrees, whether in arts, divinity, law or medicine, or science. They are empowered to do a great many other things, but those we have indicated are sufficient to show the thorough-going nature of the changes which it is intended to make in the Scottish Universities.

The provisions with respect to St. Andrew's the oldest of the Scottish Universities, are in harmony with the common-sense requirements in reference to it. The Commissioners are to be empowered to unite the University and Colleges of the ancient city into one corporation, lop off imperfect or unnecessary Faculties, give other colleges an opportunity of