



The Family Circle.

HER BIRTHDAY.

BY IDA M. GARDNER.

The years fly fast, Carissima!
May each one bring to thy dear face
Some added charm, some tender grace,
Distinct and not uncertain trace
Of inward growth, and strong embrace
Of truth,—His truth, Carissima!

The years roll on, Carissima!
Roll on forever, sweet and dear,
Because in each there shines so clear,
Unshadowed by our doubt and fear,
Undimmed, though viewed through many a tear
A face,—His face, Carissima!

He does not speak, Carissima!
But on our hearts he bends his gaze,
Waiting to hear the song of praise
That even quivering lips can raise,—
Praise of the wondrous, mystic ways
Of love,—His love, Carissima!

Of love that trusts, Carissima,
Our human hearts that question "Why?"
Knowing that they will not belie,
Nor e'en in sorrow's night decay,
However dark the mystery,
That trust,—His trust, Carissima!

The years grow old, Carissima!
Life's sultry noontide passes on to night,
Heaven's morning stars burst on our raptured
sight,
And on the summit of the earthly height
Shines dawn eternal, in the splendor bright
Of light,—His light, Carissima!
—*Sunday-school Times.*

LADDIE.

CHAPTER IV.

When Dr. Carter opened his door next morning, he found his mother's room empty, and it seemed almost as if the events of the night before had been a bad dream; only the basket of apples, and the bandbox, still tied up in the spotted handkerchief, confirmed his recollections, and when he went down, the patters, still on his writing-table, added their testimony. But where was his mother? All the servants could tell him was that they had found her bedroom door open when they came down in the morning, and the front door unbarred and unbolted, and that was all.

"She has gone back to Sunnybrook," he said to himself, with a very sore heart; "she saw what a miserable, base-hearted cur of a son she had, who grudged a welcome and a shelter to her who would have given her right hand to keep my little finger from aching. God forgive me for wounding the brave old heart! I will go and bring her back; she will be ready to forgive me nearly before I speak."

He looked at the train paper, and found there was an early, slow train by which his mother must have gone, and an express that would start in about an hour, and reach Martel only a quarter of an hour after the slower one. This just gave him time to make arrangements for his engagements, and write a line to Violet, saying he was unexpectedly called away from London, but that he would come to her immediately on his return, for he had much to tell and explain. The cab was at the door to take him to the station, and everything was ready, and he was giving his last directions to Mr. Hyder.

"I shall be back to-morrow, Hyder, without fail, and I shall bring my mother with me." He brought out the word even now with an effort, and hated himself for the flush that came up into his face, but he went on firmly, "that was my mother who was here last night, and no man ever had a better."

"I don't know how it happened, but everything seemed topsy-turvy that morning; for all at once Dr. Carter found himself shaking hands with Hyder before he knew what he was about, and the deferential, polite Hyder, whose respect had always been slightly tinged with contempt, was saying, with tears in his eyes, "In-

deed, sir, I see that all along; and I don't think none the worse of you, but a deal the better for saying it out like a man; and me and cook and the gals will do our best to make the old lady comfortable, that we will!"

Dr. Carter felt a strange, dream-like feeling as he got into the cab. Everyone and everything seemed changed, and he could not make it out; even Hyder seemed something more than an excellent servant. It was quite a relief to his mind, on his return next day, to find Hyder the same imperturbable person as before, and the little episode of hand-shaking and expressed sympathy not become a confirmed habit. It was a trifling relief even in the midst of his anxiety and disappointment, for he did not find his mother at Sunnybrook, nor did she arrive by either of the trains that followed the one he came by, though he waited the arrival of several at Martel. So he came back to London, feeling that he had gone on the wrong tack, but comforting himself with the thought that he would soon be able to trace her out wherever she had gone. But it was not so easy as he expected; the most artful and experienced criminal, escaping from justice, could not have gone to work more skilfully than the old woman did quite unconsciously. All his inquiries were fruitless; she had not been seen or noticed at Paddington, none of the houses or shops about had been open or astir at that early morning hour. Once he thought he had a clue, but it came to nothing, and, tired and dispirited, he was obliged, very unwillingly, to put the matter into the hands of the police, who undertook with great confidence to find the old woman before another day was past.

It was with a very haggard, anxious face that he came into the pretty drawing-room in Harley Street, where Violet sprang up from her low chair by the fire, to meet him. How pretty she was! how sweet! how elegant and graceful every movement and look, every detail of her dress! His eyes took in every beauty lovingly, as one who looks his last on something dearer than life, and then lost all consciousness of any other beauty, in the surpassing beauty of the love for him in her eyes. She stretched out both her soft hands to him, with the ring he had given her, the only ornament on them, and said, "Tell me about it?"

Do not you know some voices that have a caress in every word and a comfort in every tone? Violet Meredith's was such a voice.

"I have come for that," he said, and he would not trust himself to take those hands in his, or to look any longer into her face, but he went to the fire and looked into the red caves among the glowing coals. "I have come to tell you about my mother. I have deceived you shamefully."

And then he told her of his mother, describing her as plainly and carefully as he could, trying to set aside everything fanciful and picturesque, and yet do justice to the kind, simple, old heart, trying to make Violet see the great difference between the old countrywoman and herself. And then he told her of her having come to him, to end her days under her son's roof. "I could not ask you to live with her," he ended sadly.

She had clasped her hands round his arm shyly, for it was only a few days since she had had to hide away her love, like a stolen treasure, out of sight.

"It is too late to think of that," she said, with a little coaxing laugh; "too late, for you asked me to be your wife a week ago. Yes, John,"—the name came still with a little hesitation,—"a whole week ago, and I will not let you off. And then I have no mother of my own; she died before I can remember, and it will be so nice to have one, for she will like me for your sake, won't she? And what does it matter what she is like, you silly, old John?—she is your mother, and that is quite enough for me. And don't you think I love you more ridiculously than ever because you are so good and noble and true to your old mother, and are not ashamed of her because she is not just exactly like other people?" And she hid her soft cheek against his sleeve, by her clasped hands, as she spoke.

But he drew away with almost a shudder.

"Love me less, then, Violet; hate me, for I was ashamed of her; I was base and cowardly and untrue, and I wanted to get her out of the way so that no one should know, not even you, and I hurt and wounded her—her who would have done anything for her 'Laddie,' as she calls me—and she went away disappointed and sad and sorry, and I cannot find her."

He had sunk down into Violet's low chair, and covered up his face with his hands, and through the fingers forced their way the hot, burning tears, while he told of his ineffectual efforts to find her, and his shame and regret.

She stood listening, too pitiful and sorry for words, longing to comfort him; and at last she knelt down and pulled his hands gently away from his face, and whispered very softly, as if he might not like to hear her use his mother's name for him. "We will find her, never fear; your mother and mine, Laddie." And so she comforted him.

What an awful place London is! I do not mean awful in the sense in which the word is used by fashionable young ladies, or schoolboys, by whom it is applied indiscriminately to a "lark" or a "bore," into which two classes most events in life may, according to them, be divided, and considered equally descriptive of sudden death or a new bonnet. I use it in its real meaning, full of awe, inspiring fear and reverence, as Jacob said, "How dreadful is this place," this great London, with its millions of souls, with its strange contrasts of riches and poverty, business and pleasure, learning and ignorance, and the sin everywhere. Awful indeed! and the thought would be overwhelming in its awfulness if we could not say also as Jacob did, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not," if we did not know that there is the ladder set up, reaching to heaven, and the angels of God ever ascending and descending, if we did not believe that the Lord stands above it. It seemed a very terrible place to the old countrywoman as she wandered about its streets and squares, its parks and alleys, that November day, too dazed and stupefied to form any plan for herself, only longing to get out of sight, that she might not shame her boy. She felt no bitterness against him, for was it not natural when he was a gentleman, and she a poor, homely old body?

In the early morning, when the streets were empty, except for policemen or late revellers hurrying home, or market-carts coming in from the country, with frosty moisture on the heaps of cabbages, she got on pretty well. She had a cup of coffee at an early coffee-stall, and no one took any notice of her; some of those that passed were country people too, and at that early hour people are used to see odd, out-of-the-way figures, that would be stared at in the height of noon. But as the day went on, the streets filled with hurrying people, and the shops opened, and omnibuses and cabs began to run, and she got into more bustling, noisy thoroughfares, and was hustled and pushed about and looked at, the terrors of the situation came heavily upon her. She tried to encourage herself with the thought that before long she should get out of London and reach the country, little knowing, poor old soul, how many miles of streets, and houses, and pavements, lay between her and the moorland pretence to real country. And then, too, in that maze of streets where one seemed exactly like another, her course was of a most devious character, often describing a circle and bringing her back through the same streets without the old woman knowing that she was retracing her steps; sometimes a difficult crossing, with an apparently endless succession of omnibuses and cabs, turned her from her way—sometimes a quieter looking street with the trees of a square showing at the end enticed her aside. Once she actually went up North Crediton Street, unconsciously and unnoticed. She reached one of the parks at last, and sat down very thankfully on a seat, though it was clammy and damp, and the fog was lurking under the gaunt, black trees, and hanging over the thin coarse grass, which was being nibbled by dirty desolate sheep, who looked to the old woman's eyes like some new kind of London animal, not to be recognized as

belonging to the same species as the soft fleecy white flocks on the hill-sides and meadows of Sunnybrook. She sat here a long time resting, dozing, and trying to think. "I don't want to trouble no one, or shame no one, I only want just to get out of the way." She was faint and tired, and she thought perhaps she might be going to die. "It's a bit unkind to die all alone, and I'd liefer have died in my bed comfortable-like; but there! it don't much matter, it'll soon be all over and an end to it all." But no! that would not do either; and the old woman roused herself and shook off the faintness. "Whatever would folks say if Laddie's mother was found dead like any tramp in the road? He'd die of shame, pretty near, to hear it in everyone's mouth." Poor old soul! she little knew how people can starve, and break their hearts, and die for want of food or love in London, and no one be the wiser or the sadder. It was just then she found out that her pocket had been picked, or rather that her purse was gone; for she did not wonder where or how it went, and, indeed, she did not feel the loss very acutely, though, at home in the old days, she had turned the house upside down and hunted high and low and spared no pains to find a missing halfpenny. It did not contain all her money, for with good, old-fashioned caution, she had some notes sewed up in her stays; but still it was a serious loss, and one she would have made a great moan over in old times. She did not know that the sight of her worn old netted purse, with the rusty steel rings, had touched a soft spot in a heart that for years had seemed too dry and hard for any feeling. It had lain in the hand of an expert London pick-pocket, it was mere child's-play taking it, it did not require any skill. There was a bit of lavender stuck into the rings, and he smelt and looked at it, and then the old woman turned and looked at him with her country eyes; and then all at once, almost in spite of himself, he held out the purse to her. "Don't you see as you've dropped your purse?" he said, in a surly, angry tone, and finished with an oath that made the old woman tremble and turn pale; and he flung away, setting his teeth and calling himself a fool. That man was not all bad,—who is? and his poor act of restitution is surely put to his credit in the ledger of his life, and will stand there when the books shall be opened. The old woman got little good from it, however, for the purse was soon taken by a less scrupulous thief.

How cold it was! The old woman shivered and drew her damp shawl round her, and longed, oh! how bitterly, for the old fireside, and the settle, worn and polished by generations of shoulders, for the arm-chair with its patchwork cushion—longed, ah! how wearily, for the grave by the churchyard wall, where the master rests free of all his troubles, and where "there's plenty of room for I,"—and longed, too, quite as simply and pathetically, for a cup of tea out of the cracked brown teapot. But why should I dwell on the feelings of a foolish, insignificant, old woman? There are hundreds and thousands about us, whose lives are more interesting, whose thoughts are more worth recording. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" and yet, "Doth not God take thought for sparrows?" then, surely so may we. Does he indeed despise not the desires of such as be sorrowful? even though the sorrowful one be only an old, country woman, and her desire, a cup of tea! Then why should we call that common and uninteresting which he pitifully beholds? And we shall find no life that is not full of interest, tender feeling, noble poetry, deep tragedy, just as there is nobody without the elaborate system of nerves, and muscles, and veins, with which we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

(To be Continued.)

GRACIOUS HEARTS.

Gracious hearts are like stars in the heavens, which shine not by their own splendor. He that takes the brick must give the straw to make it. There is no water, except he smite the rock, nor fire, except he strike the flint.—*Secker.*