



The Family Circle.

LIFE'S KEY.

The hand that fashioned me tuned my ear
To chord with the major key.
In the darkest moments of life I hear
Strains of courage, and hope, and cheer
From choirs that I cannot see;
And the music of life seems so inspired
That it will not let me grow sad or tired.

Yet through and under the magic strain
I hear, with the passing of years,
The mournful minor's measures of pain—
Of souls that struggle and toil in vain
For a goal that never nears;
And the sorrowful cadence of good gone wrong
Breaks more and more into earth's glad song.

And oft, in the dark of the night, I wake,
And think of sorrowing lives;
And I long to comfort the hearts that ache.
To sweeten the cup that is bitter to take,
And to strengthen each soul that strives.
I long to cry to them: "Do not fear!
Help is coming and aid is near."

However desolate, weird, or strange
Life's monody sounds to you,
Before to-morrow the air may change,
And the Great Director of music arrange
A programme perfectly new;
And the dirge in minor may suddenly be
Turned into a jubilant song of glee.
—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

OFF DUTY.

BY ESTHER CONVERSE.

It was Sunday morning at Peconic Point. Breakfast was a half-hour later at the Nonatuck House that morning, else some of the guests would scarcely have remembered the day. At the parsonage across the street, the air seemed charged with the peculiar stillness and sweetness of the Sabbath. The morning hymn, carrying the melody of childish voices, was borne to the merry party gathered in the dining-hall of the hotel. "Oh, it's Sunday, is it?" asked jovial Dr. Jones. "But for these psalm-singers, the world, in this sleepy place, might forget when the day comes around."

A laugh went around the table, followed by several attempts at wit, but the hymn went serenely on at the parsonage. Soon the voice of prayer, unheard at the hotel, filled the little home. The pastor prayed earnestly for the stranger within the gates, that the holy day might be observed, and that the peace that cometh from on high might fill every heart.

Presently the church-bell sent out its cheerful note of invitation. It reached the side piazza of the hotel, where some of the strangers within the gates of Peconic Point sat reading the Sunday papers. It was heard above the sound of the surf that beat against the rock where others sat idly watching the waves. It vibrated through the "cave," the occupants of the "arm-chair" heard it, and even the loiterers in the "lover's retreat" were not entirely oblivious of its earnest call to worship. On the rocks, under the shadow of the bridge, sat jovial Dr. Jones smoking his cigar, as he watched the noisy little stream that added yet another charm to the attractive resort. He saw the staid country people as they wended their way along the dusty street, in response to the invitation. He noticed the footfall on the bridge of old and young, grave and gay, and was amused by the disjointed sentences that reached his ear. The pastor's little daughter, Bessie, clinging to her mother's hand, stopped a moment to watch the sparkling water.

"Mamma," she asked, "where do Christians go to spend the summer?"

"I cannot tell you, my child," answered the mother sadly.

"I wish they would come here," continued Bessie, "but I s'pose they don't like our church, because it's small and white; they want to go to some big church, and hear a beautiful organ, don't they, mamma?"

Dr. Jones was amused. He had no wish to be considered of the number who call themselves followers of Christ; but he

knew there were many who had assumed that title, and his laughter had in it more of scorn than of merriment when he thought of the child's words. He stored the question in his memory, as a topic for general entertainment at the dinner hour. He repeated it with great apparent enjoyment, adding, "I could have told the child where Christians do not go, that is, to the Nonatuck House. I think no one from this house has attended church to-day."

The effect upon the company assembled fully met the doctor's expectations. The laughter that followed was not general, nor was it hilarious. One downcast face distinctly looked its embarrassment and pain. Alice Stover was a favorite at the hotel. The merry company of young people, won by Alice's unaffected enjoyment, and sympathetic interest in their pursuits, had accorded her a place not easily attained by a stranger. It was her first season from home, and the aunt whose kindness enabled her to enjoy the beautiful seaside resort was unlike the Christian mother who had carefully watched over her. None of her "set" attended church, and Alice had carelessly allowed Sabbath after Sabbath to pass in neglect of a duty she would have considered imperative at home. Bessie's arrow went home to her heart; she soon left the table and retired to her room.

Evening found the broad piazza thronged with guests of the Nonatuck. The church-bell again sounded its note of invitation. Just as its last peal rang out, Alice came from the house attired for a walk.

"Where are you going?" asked one.
"May I go with you, my pretty maid?" asked Bob Stoughton.

"No, sir, I thank you," laughed Alice in reply.

"She's probably going to see her washwoman," said Bell Huntly; "she is sick, you know." "Give her my compliments," shouted Bob.

Alice carelessly nodded her thanks as she passed on. She was going to church, and, obeying an impulse she could scarcely define, she concealed her purpose.

"I believe I am a coward," said Alice, drawing a sigh of relief as she found herself beyond the sound of their voices. "Why didn't I tell them I was going to church, and ask them to come with me?" Her self-condemnation prepared her to enjoy the simple service in the unfashionable church. She joined the few worshippers in their songs of praise, and the earnest prayers that were offered found a ready response in her heart. She was strengthened in her decision to stand steadfast among the followers of him whose name she professed to bear. Before she reached the hotel she heard the merry voices of her friends who still lingered on the piazza or in the shaded grounds.

"Where have you been?" asked Bell Huntly, voicing the questioning gaze of her companions, as Alice came among them.

"I have been to the prayer-meeting," answered Alice gravely. "I ought to have told you when you asked where I was going; I fear I was afraid or ashamed to do so."

A silence almost painful fell upon the merry company. Some one, perhaps in mockery, softly hummed a familiar air. Another, as quietly, added the words usually associated with it. A sweet, tenor voice, from the steps below, caught the melody, and soon the familiar words rang out in full harmony:

"Ashamed of Jesus."

The chorus swelled with the closing lines.

"And, oh, may this my glory be,
That Christ is not ashamed of me."

A solemn stillness followed, broken by Dr. Jones' voice.

"Quite like a camp-meeting, or shall we call it an experience-meeting? We might even set up an anxious seat. Is any one ready to testify?"

"I am," replied a gentleman who sat near Alice. "I call myself a Christian at home, though I seem to have left my colors furled there."

"A soldier in undress uniform," laughed the doctor. "Perhaps there are others of your army here on furlough."

"Let us not be ashamed of our company, nor of our Captain," said the gentleman gravely. "Who will join us?"

Out from the shadow into the full moonlight they came, one by one, until nearly one-half of the company were gathered around Alice and her friend. Dr. Jones'

remark about "soldiers off duty" was unheeded. A change had been wrought at the Nonatuck House. When the church-bell again called to worship, there were few soldiers off duty, and a goodly company entered the little church, to listen to the message of the Captain under whose banner they had enlisted.—*Golden Rule.*

THE FALL OF THE SPHINX.

There are in the metropolis so many tobaccoists' where a smoker may go and lounge about for an hour or two, that it is unnecessary to describe the identical shop patronized by Mr. Thomas Tilt. It was situated in a quiet thoroughfare, and was kept by Richard Cavendish, who possessed, in addition to the power of smoking incessantly, the ability to talk freely on many subjects.

Richard, or Dick as he was commonly called by the frequenters of his establishment, distributed his favors very judiciously, addressing his conversation very much in accordance with the relative value of each customer's outlay.

Mr. Thomas Tilt left the city at six o'clock, reached home about half-past, and then did justice to a substantial tea. After that meal, he invariably proceeded to a small cupboard in the corner of his room, and took from thence a tobacco jar, and a darkly-colored pipe. The latter might be regarded as a curiosity, not only from the length of time during which it had been carefully preserved, and the quantity of tobacco which had been reduced to ashes in its odoriferous bowl, but from the singularity of its shape, and the curious hieroglyphics carved on the stem. The bowl itself represented an Egyptian sphinx, and had attracted the attention of Mr. Tilt before he was quite out of his teens. For some little time he contented himself with looking at it in a shop window. Then he resolved to inquire the price, which proved to be exceedingly high. And finally, when he had saved sufficient money, he went boldly in and bought it, and carried it to his rooms in triumph.

Ten years have passed since the sphinx was purchased, and it still occupies the principal place in the thoughts of Mr. Tilt. All-day long it remains still and unmolested on the shelf assigned to it, resting from the fatigues of the previous night; but when seven o'clock strikes, the sphinx is aroused, and being generously supplied with fuel, continues to burn steadily.

Mr. Thomas Tilt then takes up the paper, and reads the political news with an air of great enjoyment, for the sphinx bears him company. When the paper is exhausted, he replenishes his sable friend, and strolls along to have a smoke with Dick.

That worthy has one or two customers, listening to him, who take their departure soon after the appearance of the sphinx, leaving Mr. Thomas Tilt his sole auditor.

"How's the sphinx to-night, Mr. Tilt; drawing well?"

Mr. Tilt replied by puffing two enormous volumes of smoke from his mouth.

"Couldn't be better, I see," said Dick. "You did well when you bought that pipe. I haven't seen one colored like it anywhere."

The sphinx emitted two short puffs to betoken its approval. This form having been gone through, Dick opened the subject of politics, giving his opinion very strongly on some points, and using plenty of action to enforce his ideas, keeping his eye at the same time steadily fixed on the pipe to watch the effect of his words. When he began his subject the puffs came slowly and regularly, increasing in deliberation as his arguments followed—and Dick could argue most profoundly on such matters—till the main question was reached. Then, if they came in quick succession, he as rapidly changed his ground, but if, on the contrary, the smoke poured out in long continuous streams, he held on in the same strain until his customer took his departure.

Such had been the habits of Mr. Tilt for upwards of ten years. Every night he leaned on the same particular portion of Dick's counter, preserving the same remarkable silence. Every night he purchased the same quantity of tobacco, to replenish the jar at home; and serve for his present need.

And during the many years that he had frequented the shop, he was only known

to have spoken on two occasions; once when he entered the shop for the first time accompanied by the sphinx, and again when some person presumed to handle that eminent effigy.

The third occasion on which any distinct words were uttered by Mr. Thomas Tilt in the hearing of Dick Cavendish, was on a memorable night in the history of the former gentleman. He was leaning in his accustomed place, listening, we presume, to the more or less able address of his entertainer, and discharging those long continuous streams of smoke before referred to. Dick had been battling with the sphinx for fully half an hour, watching in vain for these signs of approval, and had at last got in the right groove. The smoke gathered thickly around him as he warmed with his subject, rendering the effigy almost invisible; and full of virtuous indignation against the government, he struck the counter so violently that the sphinx started from between the teeth that knew it so well, and smashed in pieces on the floor.

There was a pause, the smoke cleared and presented Mr. Tilt to Dick Cavendish minus his pipe. There lay the fragments of it past all hope of repair, and above all things Mr. Tilt spoke.

"You scoundrel, you did that on purpose! Sorry! what's the good of being sorry, why it's all in pieces," and Mr. Tilt marched out of the shop in a very unenviable frame of mind, leaving the fragments of the sphinx behind.

Two years had nearly elapsed when Dick Cavendish was very much surprised to see his old customer enter the shop once more. He seemed to be in excellent spirits, as though the loss he had sustained on the memorable night when the sphinx fell had quite passed out of his mind. His personal appearance was much improved, and he smiled good-humoredly as he recalled the circumstances of his last visit.

"Do you know, Dick, that was the best thing that ever happened to me in my life. All the time I had the sphinx, and for some time before it came into my possession, I was only about half alive. Whether the smoke got into my brain, and rendered it cloudy, I can't say, but since its fall I have been a different creature. For some time I lamented the loss of it, and wished to supply its place, but I could not make up my mind in the selection. Then other things came to divert my attention, and before they were fairly disposed of, I was on the high road to matrimony. I have not smoked a single pipe of tobacco since I left you that evening. Many have told me that I look better, my conscience tells me I work harder, and my pocket tells me it isn't lighter. So that, taking all things into consideration, I've made up my mind to a total separation from that which I used to prize so much, and which, but for your startling thump on this counter, I might still be indulging in, in the same dreamy, lifeless way."

"Therefore, Dick, I consider myself indebted to you in no small way for the improvement in my condition, prospects, and so forth. I have saved ten pounds by tobacco alone, without counting all the extra work I've done since I've recovered some energy. I give you the credit of this, and hope you may awake many more as thoroughly as you awoke me."—*Ernest Ockenden in British Workman.*

THE QUEEN AND CARLYLE.

A hitherto unpublished letter of Carlyle gives an interesting account of a conversation between the Queen and the philosopher in Westminster Deanery. Carlyle was telling Her Majesty, whose interest he keenly excited, about Nithsdale and Anandale, and of old ways of human life there in the days of his youth. Among other things, he told her that his father had occasion once to go to Glasgow on some urgent business, and that, arriving about eight in the morning, he found every door shut. Neither himself nor his horse could have entrance anywhere, "for 'twas the hour of family worship, your Majesty, and every family was at morning prayer." The Queen had never heard anything so astonishing. "But it was the case," went on Carlyle, "and that explains why your Scottish subjects have the place and trust and honor they occupy to-day in every portion of your Majesty's dominions."