

FAMILY CIRCLE.

THE GENERAL.

Time passed; weeks, months had come and gone since Mr. Tilley was finally forgiven. But this absolution had no binding effect on his misdeeds. He sinned again and again, after the old fashion, and the last state of the man was worse than the first. One by one respectable lodgers dropped off, removing themselves and their possessions to more peaceful quarters. Melinda would have no hand in the salvation of her master, though her cares for his children were altogether motherly. For them she would patch and darn and scrape; but as for him, he was one of the hopeless black sheep, not worthy of any attention. Still, with all his sins upon him, Mr. Tilley assumed a strong advocate of customary lodging-house principles. This Melinda would not suffer at all. "You think as you're going to stick on a extra coal scuttle to the Curick's bill and pints of milk which 'e never 'ad. Not if I knows it, Mr. Tilley! Him as is so kind as never was to them children of yours, and gives 'em a meal many a time just for the pleasure of going without a dinner himself." Here Mr. Tilley assumed a war-like attitude. "Oh, I ain't afraid of the likes of you! There's the poker nice and 'andy, and a bit o' crockery on the shelf. 'Adn't you better throw them cups at my 'ed, and me 'ave you up at the perlice court for an assault?" concluded Melinda.

Subsequently, Mr. Tilley calmed down and made an apology. He never afterward ventured to suggest any undue augmentations of trifles in the curate's account. He, however, presented his bills privately to other lodgers as long as they endured.

The General fought an uphill battle on behalf of the family whose cause she had undertaken, but in spite of all her endeavors the children fell away from their former health and plumpness. A descending scale of dietary is not to be recommended for growing girls and boys, and as butter lowered itself to dripping, and dripping to treacle as the daily accompaniment of bread, so there was a corresponding diminution of vigor. The General set herself culinary tasks equivalent to making bricks without straw, but the result was hardly satisfactory.

The only lodger that had not deserted No. 17 was the curate, who still occupied the room on the upper story. The children certainly troubled him less than formerly. Vitality was at the lowest ebb, and there was a greater scarcity of penny whistles and tin trumpets. "Him" never condescended to bestow pennies on his offspring for such frivolous purchases as toys.

One day in midwinter the curate climbed the three flight of stairs after an arduous morning in the slums that had left him sick at heart. He found Melinda crouching over his little grate crooning some melancholy song to the baby, now a pale-faced child of nearly a year old, but yet with no notion of sitting up or taking an interest in surroundings after the customary manner of more fortunate babies.

"You'll please excuse me, sir," said Melinda, with a subdued note of defiance. "Albert Edward 'e were very fractious, and I were that cold, and there weren't no fire."

"No fire!" said the curate, with an involuntary shudder as his glance fell on the snow outside.

"All along of 'im, a course," said Melinda. "'E's been at it wusser than never."

"But, didn't I pay him my rent yesterday a week in advance?"

"Then you was a 'tut," broke from Melinda angrily. "'E's been and drunk himself into the perlice station, and I'd manage a sight better if 'e was to stay there."

Albert Edward set up a whine of remonstrance at this vindictive remark, whereupon Melinda turned him round upon his face, an attitude popularly supposed to be agreeable to the infant anatomy; then she set to churning her knees round with a circular motion as an additional sedative. The curate being by this time familiar with the ways of her kind made no humane remonstrance. "What is to be done?" he said wearily, leaning against the mantelpiece. "The children will starve eventually or go to the workhouse."

"Thee they never shall," said Melinda, pale and vehement. "I'd rather pitch the whole lot over the Bankment first and jump in after."

"Melinda!" said the curate with gentle remonstrance. "Beg pardon, sir; but it ain't Christian-like to talk o' the workhouse." She sat down meekly, and presently resumed: "Couldn't you take of the drying-room floor? It 'ud give the children a extra meal now and then."

"Impossible," said the curate, looking down into her eyes so pitiful in their entreaty. "Why, they're thirty shillings a week."

"I'd see as you 'ad 'em for five-and-twenty," said the General. "Only think of the red velvet sofa and them ornaments. Her voice took a cajoling note."

He only shook his head. Humor had long since gone out of him. "I might perhaps get you a lodger," he said at last; "an American."

"Who'd ever stay along of 'im and the noise 'e kicks up?" "Couldn't you make him up a bed down stairs?" "So I might, if he'd be persuaded to stay there," said Melinda, more cheerfully; "but he's terrible afraid of black beetles and crawling things, and he might set the 'ouse afire."

The curate knew nothing of Mr. Tilley's tremors. "Is it a man lodger?" said Melinda after a pause. "They gives a deal more trouble with boots and dirty pipes than the females."

"No, a lady, an artist; she goes to the drawing school every morning."

"And she'd pay regular?" said Melinda anxiously. "I'm sure of it. I think I'll go and speak to her at once, before she leaves the college. I know she's looking for lodgings. Hereupon the little man forgot his tired feelings and took up his hat again."

"Not till I've made you a cup o' tea. See, the kettle's on the boil." And with scant ceremony Melinda deposited Albert Edward on the hearth rug and fetched the teapot from the cupboard.

The lady proved amenable to persuasion. Within three days she occupied the drawing-room floor, bringing with her an amount of luggage that afforded Melinda a substantial guarantee of solvency. This agreeable fact was, however, somewhat unpleasantly balanced by the new lodger's outspoken comments on the furniture and decorations. "Mercy now! Roses and lilies and daff-down-dillies growing on the carpet, and the whole rainbow making a display on the wall paper. I reckon I'll have a color nightmare this blessed evening."

But she smiled so pleasantly that Melinda was constrained to carry off the "ornaments" to a cupboard, downstairs without demur. "She 'ave got the coaxingest eyes you ever see," she remarked to Miss Louisa in privacy.

When she brought up the young lady's chop in the evening, Melinda found the drawing-room floor had undergone a singular change of aspect. Eastern rugs effectually diminished the glories of the roses and lilies on the carpet, and the red velvet sofa was swathed in some artistic fabric which rendered this formidable piece of furniture less conspicuous. Photographs, flowers and books graced the mantelpiece and tables, and an easel was already set up near the window. All was dainty, tasteful, homelike, and Melinda opened wide eyes of astonishment.

"Well, I never!" she said, as her glance travelled around the unfamiliar apartment. "Is that how you do it in America?"

"It's just how folks do it everywhere if they mean to call it home," said the lady, tranquilly.

"Have the curick seen of it?"

The young lady glanced keenly at the freckled face. Here was a study, perhaps. The General had honored the occasion with a clean cap, and her crop of red curls was newly released from curl papers and combed in a fringe down to her thick eyebrows.

"Oh, is he a man of taste?"

Melinda was laying the cloth, but kept up a conversation at the same time. "Well, I dunno. He ain't got no time for these sort o' things, nor no money neither." The lady did not check the flow of Melinda's communications. "You see he gives of all his earnings away; he'd give of hisself away, I do believe, if 't would do any one no good."

There was a humorous gleam in the depths of the coaxing eyes. The girl was tall and pretty, and the brightness of her looks was a charming novelty in this dingy house. "Then you venerate the curate?"

"Wot's that?" said Melinda suspiciously, with her nose aloft as if scenting satire. "You admire him, respect him, worship him—from afar."

"I don't worship no person that ever was born, and it ain't in me to respect. The curick, 'e are a bit better than some, I allow."

"Can't you allow more than that? He spends his life in doing good."

Melinda turned and faced the lady with a flash that looked like anger. "How do you know of that?"

"I have seen him visiting."

The General pressed her under-lip up tightly, and changed the subject. "Your chop's gettin' cold, Miss, and there's a rice puddin' and baked apples to follow."

"Why, you are quite a clever cook," said the girl with her charming smile, as the maid removed the cover.

"Well, I ain't 'ad much to do that way of late."

"Not for the curate?"

Melinda lifted her eyebrows till they went out of sight under the fringe. "I don't know what 'e lives on, 'cept 'e's fed unbeknown to hisself by the angels. It's bread and butter—Dorset—and tea mornin' and evenin', and I do believe 'e gets 'is dinner at they airyated bread shops—poor stodgey stuff!"

And with a final sniff Melinda departed with her empty tray, leaving the young lady to reflect on the ways of benevolent curates. She was a reflective young person in the main, and she worked hard, too, at the drawing school. Considering there was no necessity in her life for laborious undertaking, this was unusual.

The children in the house soon found a new friend, and waylaid the pretty lodger with a systematic affection on the stairs. She paid toll usually with buns and packets of sweets, or with their equivalent in pence. Her advent, too, appeared to have some connection with regular dinners, a gain they were not slow to recognize.

The quiet little man up-stairs was perhaps the only person in the house who had not benefitted by her introduction. He went his way as before, taking no advantage of the situation, beyond a quiet "Good morning" or "Good evening" if they met casually on the stairs.

"The curick ain't well," snapped Melinda one evening as she cleared away the dinner things. "'E 'ave got cold shivers and pains in 'is 'ed; I persuaded of 'im to take a drop o' peppermint water, but 'tweren't no good."

"Influenza," said the lady laconically. "Is that peppermint water?" She pointed to a bottle peering out of Melinda's pocket.

"No, pain-killer which I've been and bought. The druggist at the corner says it's a rare cure."

"No good," said the lady. "I'm sure."

Melinda looked at her head and went out, muttering something about some people who thought they knew everything.

When, half an hour later, a tap came at the curate's door, did not turn his sick head; it must be Melinda, of course. In response to his weak "Come in," the door opened in a way that Melinda knew not of, gently and silently, and closed with a final graceful understanding of an aching head. "I've brought you some tea, not Melinda—and I made it. I've put something in it. Let me see," she came round the table smiling, "you don't wear that ridiculous little piece of blue ribbon, do you?"

It was the lady. Her color glowed brightly; perhaps she was conscious that she was acting the part of an emancipated female, and British prejudices might make themselves apparent.

But the curate was guileless, and altogether too far removed from self-consciousness to remember any. He rose from his chair trembling, for he was very weak. No one had ever been to visit him in this attic before. His eyes were dim behind his spectacles. He was suddenly conscious of a dizzy bewilderment and a light little.

The girl stretched out her beautiful helpful hand. "Sit down, please."

"I am not very well," he said, smiling back, but faintly. "Yes, and I came to see, because Melinda told me. Overwork, I reckon." She sat down on the only chair beside his own and looked at him steadily. There was no help for him beneath the scrutiny of those eyes. "I guess you'd better go off for a holiday. 'Tis March, and the daffodils are all on fire down in the country."

He shook his head. She caught his wordless objection with quick intuition. "Oh, yes, I understand; but there's a little farmhouse down Devonshire way I know about where it won't cost you more than living here."

He looked at her with speechless gratitude. He was sick for a breath of pure air, distressed, and troubled with the hopeless labors of his lot. Only a breathing space, a little halt at an oasis in the desert, and why not?

"Mercy, now! They don't want you in Heaven just yet. Why, there's years of work in you if you take proper care of yourself. Say you'll go, and I will see to it all. And the coaxing eyes looked down at him with persuasion that would not be denied; and he, without consciousness, drank of the intoxication of that glance, as he had done before.

The curate came back from his holidays a month later with a suspicion of roundness about him and with more than a hint of rosin.

He found a high festival in his honor. An elaborate tea was spread for him, with muffins and other delicacies. The General herself was attired in a new stuff gown. Perceiving that the curate was unobservant of her splendor, she drew his attention to the matter. "What do yer think o' my gown?"

"Oh, it's beautiful," he said absently, while his glance rested on a graceful vase full of scarlet anemones.

"Who sent the flowers, Melinda?"

"The young lady, a course," answered the General, with uncalculated sharpness.

"Is—she quite well?" he stammered.

"Oh, ever so well; more smiling than never was. She sings over 'er painting all day long, and the picture, it's nigh finished, and there's a young man as comes and looks at it every day."

"A young man?"

"'Er cousin she calls of 'im, just over from America."

But it was evident Melinda had something more on her mind. She made a feint of brushing up the hearth and looking into the kettle, and at last, with one hand on the door, she remarked with assumed carelessness: "Er cousin 'e's a handsome young chap, and 'e's got a kerriage with two horses, and 'e brings 'er bookies every day."

The curate pointed to the scarlet anemones: this hand trembling. "Are these from his bouquets?"

Melinda nodded, looking away. "And it's my belief as 'e's come 'er and she ain't unwilling."

The blow went home. There was a moment's pause and then the curate spoke with more than ordinary gentleness: "That will do, Melinda. I will ring if I require anything more."

The cousin with the carriage continued to call regularly, and the curate could hear the young lady singing blithely to her self as he crept silently up the stairs. She gave him her cheery "good-morning" and called him into her sitting room one day to show him the progress of her picture. She questioned him kindly, too, about his health and the way he had passed his holiday, but her eyes did not read anything unusual behind the spectacles. The glamor of a new happiness was upon her, and she seemed intent on radiating blessings or brightness on others. But the curate held aloof in a measure from any further kindnesses, and she did not understand his coldness.

In due course of time the young lady announced to Melinda that she was engaged, and that in the summer she would re-

move from her lodgings. The General received the announcement in stony silence. "Haven't you anything nice to say to me, Melinda?"

"You should 'ave took up with something better than a critchur that wears kid gloves and shiny boots. La! Miss, I never thought you'd make any account o' a man's outside."

The coaxing eyes flashed ominously. "Melinda, you forget yourself."

"Not me! Why, it's yer as forgets o' yerself with encouragin' o' 'im 'great and small. Any one 'ud think as yer meant to be 'ave as pretty as yer look." Melinda's expressive nose took a more pronounced upward curve than ever before as she went out.

And so the young lady, thus rudely awakened, was left to realize that she had done something wrong, something that could not be put right. Why had she not comprehended sooner? A grave, sad look came into her sweet eyes and she sighed. She might not even say she was sorry; the only thing to do was to pass out of his life silently.

Many years went by, and in the course of them Mr. Tilley was gathered to his fathers. Then began a renewed time of prosperity for No. 17 under Melinda's absolute rule. The children grew up satisfactorily and were, one by one, carefully launched on the world under the General's auspices. Many lodgers came again, and some went, but the curate still remained in the attic.

A little legacy had fallen in to him and Melinda occasionally ordered butcher's meat for the evening meal, much to her satisfaction. Preferment to peaceful country rectories had more than once been offered him, but he always declined to make any change in his ways of life. He knew his work, and some, at least, of the people would miss him if he forsook them. He was prematurely old and gray, but yet toiled early and late in that sad harvest field where so many tares abound. And when he took a final chill one winter time and slowly drifted down to the sea of death, Melinda watched day and night by his bedside. And when he had delivered up his brave soul and lay serene in his last sleep, she placed a withered flower in his hand. It had once been a scarlet anemone.

H. M.
—Macmillan's Magazine.

THE QUIET HOUR.

Thou camest not to thy place by accident,
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And shouldst thou there small scope for action see,
Do not for this give room to discontent.
—Archbishop Trench.

What Hath Love Wrought?

Mlle. LEONTINE NICOLL AND HER WORK.

From the arm chair of a tender-hearted French woman there has come across the sea to tired workers a new inspiration. By knowledge of her accomplishment we have received a tonic for our tired souls.

She who has bestowed this invigorating influence lives quite unconscious of her power. She is placidly resting in her home, built in the beautiful surroundings of Chateau de Brearnes. With the happy result of her devoted efforts in close proximity to her private residence, she may now review the past and rejoice in its outcome for others.

Mlle. Leontine Nicoll experiences in her later years, when no longer able to direct helpful measures by her magnetic presence, the fulfillment of the promise, "Her works do follow her," and the unconscious influence of her devoted life and labor is now blessing all who become acquainted with them.

This noble woman of France wrought her beautiful work without any specially advantageous accessories.

Love, alone, has been the motive power of her life. Let us learn what this God-given attribute has accomplished.

Mlle. Nicoll, an only child, was born to luxury. Sorrow and adversity, however, robbed her of protection and ease before she had reached womanhood.

Her father died, and, alone, her mother and herself struggled with hardship.

The two women fought bravely the battle of life, but the delicately-accustomed mother succumbed—mental strain, combined with physical effort, produced sad results. The resolute widow lost her reason.

But Mlle. Leontine believed that love could become almighty in its saving power, and she knew that in her heart its force could never be exhausted. She set herself to winning back the prostrate reason of her dear mother.

Alas! human affection is oftentimes powerless to help those whom we love the best. And the time came when the afflicted one was of necessity placed in the asylum at La Salpêtrière.

Mlle. Leontine resolved to follow her mother, if possible. There could be no happiness for her, separated from her parent.

But how could she secure the yearning desire of her heart?

She must obtain employment in the asylum, in order to live there.

She might become a superintendent or a servant. We are told that for three years Leontine Nicoll "struggled to obtain such a situation, never relaxing her efforts, never accepting a refusal."

Her wonderful steadiness of purpose was rewarded. Love triumphed; and in 1850 she was appointed to the position of *Surveillante*.

This appointment committed to her oversight the epileptic and idiotic children in the asylum. But later the authorities permitted Mlle. Nicoll "to undertake the additional care of her mother."

For thirty years the dear mother continued to live and suffer. But the passionate devotion of her loving daughter never failed.

After Madame Nicoll passed beyond the daughter's sight, we impressively ask, did she quickly leave the asylum, and did her heart react from her tiresome surroundings? Not at all. Her warmth of love displayed itself toward the little children who claimed her care, and for them she has planned and lived during these later years.

Too intelligent to deprive herself of wise companionship; too sympathetic to shut herself away