

* * * The Story Page. * * *

Polly's Religion.

There can be little doubt that if the people of Ball's Ferry had been asked to decide which was the most pious family in their midst, they would unanimously have named the Demmings. They had long ago been the nucleus about which the Presbyterian church had gathered. Squire Demming's pew faced that of the pastor, and no matter how stormy the weather, there was his venerable white head in its place, and Mother Demming's placid old face beside it. Grace and Isabella, the unmarried sisters, and Joe, filled the pew. Any visiting clergymen might preach what they chose, the Demmings listened with the same calm, devout pleasure. It never occurred to them to dispute any opinion promulgated by a minister of their Church. It was "all good," like the Bible. There was no room for choice in either.

Life to the Demmings was like a long summer day until Joe brought his wife home. None of the family had ever seen her. They only knew she was one of the Anstruthers of Kentucky.

"There are Anstruthers in the United Presbyterian Church," said Grace. "I hope Mary belongs to our membership."

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Joe eagerly. He was just starting to be married and he was very anxious that they all should love Polly in advance.

"Does she sing in the choir?" asked Isabella.

"I think not. But she has one of the sweetest voices—a low contralto. And you ought to hear her laugh, Belle—the merriest ring! Oh, she'll bring new life into this house!"

"But I hope she is ready to take a leading place in the church," said Grace, after he had gone. "Joe will some day fill father's place, and his description of her does not give me the idea of an energetically religious woman."

"Well, hope for the best," said Isabella. She was very busy making an imitation stained-glass window for the Sunday school room and was anxious to finish it before Mary arrived.

"Uncle Ben must be kept in his own room when she comes, and Tom can be sent to the country for a month's visit," Grace said, her delicate cheek flushing painfully.

For there were two skeletons in the Demming household. The squire's brother Ben, who was a paralytic old soldier and a most cross-grained, profane old fellow, occupied one wing of the mansion. He had a man to nurse and read to him, for his oaths were intolerable to his nieces. Tom was their brother, younger than Joe. Tom Demming had disappeared for three years after he left college, and came back a haggard, dissipated loafer. Nobody in Ball's Ferry knew what he had done in that gap of time, but it was certain that he was under the ban—a marked man. The family treated him with gloomy patience. They had taken up their cross and bore it; but it was heavy, and he knew that they found it heavy. Tom was never seen by visitors at the table or in the parlor. At dusk he would skulk out to join some of his comrades at the village grog-shops, and occasionally, but not often, was brought home intoxicated.

Joe's wife disappointed them all. She was a plump, merry little girl, nothing more. "A very pleasant little heathen!" sighed Grace, after two days had passed. "I named some of the best books of religious fiction, but she had never heard of them; and she did not know much about our Foreign Missions."

Good Mrs. Demming was uneasy at this, and that evening turned the conversation on doctrinal subjects. Polly grew red.

"I'm afraid," she said, "I am not clear in my ideas concerning these difficult points. The truth is, after mother's death, I had the charge of my four brothers, and I had so little time—"

"You will have more time now," said Isabella. "I will mark out a course of doctrinal reading for you."

But Mary made slow progress with the course of reading. As time passed and she settled down into her place in the household, she proved to be a very busy little woman. She had a positive talent for finding work, took her share of the family mending, tossed up dainty little desserts, and helped Joe with his accounts. When Joe had gone to his office, she took tremendous walks, advised Mother Demming about her fancy work, or copied the squire's papers for him.

"What a clerical hand you write!" said Grace one day. "I often wish that mine were not so delicate when father writes over those papers. But as for mother's embroidery, women ought to give up that useless work when their eyes are failing."

"It does not seem useless to me," said Polly, gently. "She thinks you all value it."

"Where can Mary go on those interminable walks?" said Isabella one morning to her father. "You should

warm her about Black Lane. She might wander into it and bring home typhoid fever."

"You ought to report that lane as a nuisance, father," said his wife. "It is a perfect sink of filth and vice."

"It is a disgrace to Ball's Ferry that such wretches can find harbor in it!" added Isabella. "They ought to have been driven beyond the borough limits!"

"Well, well, my dear, it doesn't do to be too energetic," said the squire. "They are poor creatures—runaway slaves before the war. They never had a chance."

He was roused, however, to mention Black Lane at a meeting of the town burgesses that day.

"Something ought to be done or we will have typhus among us," he said.

"Something has been done," said Judge Paule. "I came through the lane this morning and hardly knew it. There has been a general draining and cleaning; the dung-hills are gone; the cabins are white-washed the women—some of them—had actually washed their faces."

"What has happened?" asked the squire.

"I heard the sound of children's voices singing in one of the cabins, and the men told me it was 'Miss Mary's class.' Some good woman has been at work, I suspect."

"Miss Mary?" The squire's face grew red; his eyes flashed; but he said nothing more.

Going home he met Polly coming to meet him. He looked at her with the eye of a judge. "Are you the good Samaritan? Have you been in Black Lane, my dear?"

She blushed, laughed and stammered, "O, that was the most natural thing in the world, father. You know I was brought up among colored people. I know how to manage them. It was only a ditch dug here and there a few panes of glass and bushels of lime. They are good, affectionate creatures, and so anxious to learn." The matter was driven out of the squire's mind before he reached the house, for he saw Tom skulking round the stable door. He had returned that day, and a dull weight of misery fell at the sight on his father's heart. Tom did not enter the house until late in the evening, when the family were gathered about the lamp. He came into the room with a swagger, unshaven, his boots reeking of the stable. "On purpose to mortify us," thought Grace bitterly.

"I came to see Joe's fine lady wife," he said in a loud voice; unless he's ashamed to introduce his scapegrace brother."

"Mary is not here," said Mother Demming. "Where is she, Grace?"

"In Uncle Ben's room. She reads the New York papers to him every day now. They play backgammon together, and they have one of those silly books of Artemus Ward's. I heard him laughing and swearing harder than ever, so he must be pleased. I wonder she can stand it."

"It is hard to understand her," said Isabella dryly. "Mary is not as careful as to her associations as she should be."

Tom had been listening eagerly. "Enough said," he brought out with a thump of his fist on the table. "If Joe's wife can take thought of that lonely old man up there, there's better stuff in her than I expected. I'll go up and make her acquaintance."

For several days afterwards Tom's voice was heard joining in the jokes and laughter that came out of Uncle Ben's room.

"Mary seems to have enchanted them both," said Grace; "Tom is clean and shaven to-day and looks like a human being."

Perhaps she treats him like a human being," said Joe. But even he was startled when Mary came down that evening dressed for a walk, and nodding brightly to Tom asked him to go with her. "Finish your book, Joe; Brother Tom will be my escort."

Tom followed her slouching to the gate. He stopped there. Shame, defiance, misery looked out of his eyes. "See here, Mrs. Demming, I reckon you don't know who I am or you wouldn't have asked me to go with you."

Polly's tender, steady eyes, met his. "Yes, I know." "D'ye ye know I'm a thief? I was in jail in Pittsburg for a year."

Polly drew her breath hard. A prayer to God for help, help, went up from her heart in that second of time. She held out both her hands. "Yes, Joe told me. But that is all over now—all over. You have begun anew again, Brother Tom, Come!"

She put her hand in his arm as they walked down the street. He did not speak to her until they came back; then he stopped her again at the gate. "My sisters never have been seen with me in public since I came back. I'll never forget this of you, Mary, never!"

A month later the squire said to his wife. "Did you know Mary is going over her mathematics with Tom? Regularly coaching him. That little girl has the clearest head for figures I ever knew. But what can be her object?"

Mrs. Demming cleared her voice before she could speak. "She has applied to some friends of hers in Kentucky to give Tom a situation. Father I think there may be a chance for the boy. He wants to begin his life all over again among strangers."

"God help him!" muttered the squire. He surprised Polly when he met her the next time by taking her into his arms and kissing her with tears in his eyes.

In the spring Tom went to Kentucky and began his new life. He has not broken down in it yet.

It was in the spring too that Uncle Ben began to fail. The old man was so fond of Polly that she gave up most of her time to him, so much of it indeed that Joe complained.

"Don't say a word, dear," she said; "he has such a little while to stay. Let me do what I can."

"I say, Polly, was that the Bible you were reading today?"

"Yes. He asks for it often."

Joe began to whistle and choked it down into a sigh. Uncle Ben had been such a godless reprobate in his youth that it never occurred to any of the Demmings that there was any way to reach his soul. He lived until late in the summer. The Sunday before his death he sent for Mr. Floyd and talked with him for a long time.

When the young minister came out of the the dying room he was pale. He had been much moved.

"I will give him the sacrament tomorrow," he said to Squire Demming.

"You think he is worthy of it?"

"If sincere repentance and trust in Christ can make any of us worthy, he is. He asked that 'little Polly' should take it with him. 'She has done this for me,' he said. 'It's her work.'"

The girls overheard the conversation. They sat gravely silent after the minister was gone.

"I do not understand Polly," said Grace at last. She never seemed to be a religious person."

"Perhaps," said the squire; "we have not clearly understood what religion is, and how it should show itself in our daily life."—[Rebecca Harding Davis, in the Christian Observer.

Prof. Henry Drummond.

BY IRA D. SANKEY.

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend his cause,
Maintain the glory of his Cross
And honor all his laws

Thus sang Henry Drummond as he lay upon his dying bed, the last Sabbath, he was to spend on earth. His life-long friend, Dr. Hugh Barbour, in whose father's home I was entertained in Edinburgh in 1873-4, was staying a few days with him at Tunbridge Wells, England, and with the desire of comforting his friend during the slowly moving hours of that last Sabbath evening, he took his seat at the piano and began to sing softly some of the professor's favorite hymns. Nothing seemed to arouse the attention of the weary sufferer until the doctor struck the chords of the good old Psalm tune, "Martyrdom," and began singing the hymn—doubtless taught Drummond by his godly father and mother in his childhood, at Stirling:

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord.

Then, lifting up his pale and emaciated hand, he began singing the grand old hymn with Dr. Barbour, beating the time through to the end.

When they had finished the last verse he said: "Ah, Hugh, there is nothing to beat that." To my mind this was a splendid confession of his faith in the everlasting verities of the gospel, and a grand doxology with which to close his Christlike life.

It is often the case, that in such an hour as this, when the pomp and glory of this world are fading away from man's mortal vision, and he begins to search diligently for solid footing as he enters the "valley of the shadow," then the real faith that is in him often finds expression in some sweet psalm or hymn, such as

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home,

which Drummond also sang that Sabbath day upon his bed of pain. Happy and blest are they who can thus sing as they near the pearly gates.

It is not generally known that Mr. Moody was the first to discover Henry Drummond. When we began our work in Edinburgh, twenty-three years ago, Drummond was then a young university student there, and soon became greatly interested in the meetings. He was one of the first to suggest the holding of special meetings for young men, and soon became one of Mr. Moody's most efficient helpers in that branch of the work.

Mr. Drummond's young friend, James Stalker, now one the leading ministers of Scotland, was also one of

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