

THE HOME MISSIONARY.

A STORY FOR MOTHERS.

UNTIL his nephew was born, John Meredith had been sauntering down the smooth way. He had started on the road unwittingly before he entered college; he had pursued it from choice. It was the easiest, merriest road, with Folly, who needed only wine to restore her mocking glee when Wisdom confronted her.

When John Meredith realized the black annihilation of the pit—and at times he could see it quite plainly through the bubbling champagne and Folly's fluttering robes—he contrasted the pleasure of the journey thither with the miseries of an uphill struggle to the starting-point, debating the matter without bias. As a conclusion he drank the yellow wine, took Folly's hand in his and continued on the broad smooth way without fear and with much cheerfulness.

He had acquired a conviction of the inevitableness of his end, a sort of fatalism that seems a complement to a life devoted to pleasure. He made the blunder of balancing the ledger of his life long before the business of living was closed, discounting things receivable at usurious interest. In his own mind he accepted himself as a failure and went into moral bankruptcy, thus seeking escape from certain troublous responsibilities in order that he might travel the broad, smooth way steadily, without halt, without haste, and, what was far stranger, without self-pity.

His friends said frankly that he was going to the dogs—"like a gentleman," they added hastily, as if it were something to be proud of in a degenerate time. Now and then John's brother Horace, a young, gray, quiet man absorbed in his financial schemes, would suggest, tentatively, that he marry and settle down. This usually followed a hint from Horace's wife, who thought her brother-in-law should marry Elizabeth Pollock.

"A man has no right to ask a woman to marry him to reform him," answered John on one of these occasions. "Sooner or later the woman always comes to the man's level, if they live together. There is no woman I wish to bring to my level."

He knew that Elizabeth Pollock was in the minds of both of them.



"Good work, Buster, Good work."

Deep in John's heart was the consciousness that he loved her, although he did the best to smother it with bitter facts. It was easier after Ned came into the world.

Between John and his nephew there existed a bond that began when Mrs. Meredith, in a burst of impetuous generosity, placed the baby in his arms. The bundle of things adjusted itself in the most mysterious way. The blue eyes looked into his with the wise, searching gaze that only babies have; presently the wrinkles were smoothed from the tiny forehead, the delicate mouth was opened in a round baby smile, a chubby hand grasped the man's lower lip, and the child gurgled a pact of friendship that was to endure.

Ned grew in fragile beauty and the years brought him and his uncle closer together. Mrs. Meredith viewed this intimacy with apprehension. She liked John—with reservations. She would have been delighted to see Elizabeth Pollock, her best friend, marry him, but to have her boy so closely associated with a man who was "terribly fast" was another matter. So it was with a shabby feeling of relief that she received the opinion of a celebrated specialist that the German water-cures would bene-

fit Ned. He was hurried off to Europe and John drifted back deeper than ever into the old ways. The flush of his face grew darker, the baggy half-moons reappeared under his eyes. Horace went abroad at intervals to see his wife and son, and John crossed the Atlantic twice in the four years, to find that mysterious barriers kept him and Ned apart.

When he heard the news that Ned was coming home to stay, John's heart bounded joyfully. He waited at the pier, eager and fearful; he was carefully prepared for the shock if Ned had forgotten him, but he was not prepared to see his nephew mince down the gangway, a puppet of a boy, dressed like an artist's model, with negligent golden curls, white transparent skin, tired eyes, and gloved hands. John came up and held out his hand.

"Hello, Buster boy," he said, "I'm glad to see you."

Ned started. He looked at John doubtfully for a moment and a flush came into his cheeks.

"Hello, Jack," he returned, a little uncertainly, as if recalling a forgotten word. There was just one little note in the voice that might have escaped John had not his ear been attuned to catch it, and the man muttered a thanksgiving under his

breath as he gripped the boy's hand.

"Oh, you hurt me," complained the child, and there was a whine that made John shake his head sadly.

Often in the next few days Ned made his uncle choke. The delicate beauty of the child, the artistic wealth of his clothes and his satisfaction in them, his perfect self-possession, his bored, blasé air, his supercilious contempt for sturdy, chaffing youngsters with honestly dirty faces—these and other less tangible things made John very miserable.

"Poor old Ned," he said. "He hasn't had a chance. They have taken his boyhood from him. And they don't seem to understand. There isn't anyone to make a man of him but me!"

He smiled grimly at the grotesque notion of his teaching strength of purpose, self-reliance, independence, and manliness to anyone, and then sought consolation in the thought that the best teachers of art are often bad artists. "Anyway, there is no one else," he added, "and I'll have to do my best!"

So he went to Newport with the family, although Mrs. Meredith was not enthusiastic when he proposed his visit, and he studied his nephew closely. He observed that all the natural boyish instincts, the virile roughness, the jubilation over physical prowess, the delight in active games were smothered, or only flickered feebly.

"I'll make a boy of him first," said John sagely. He studied the problem. "By George!" he exclaimed. "I know the trouble; he lacks imagination."

It was a great discovery. Imagination is one of the least appreciated of the great forces in the world. With elaborate cunning John aroused the dormant instincts. He told stories of marvellous deeds in which the hero saved himself by strong limbs, a quick eye and cool judgment. The first triumph came when Ned evinced a concern about his muscle.

From driving a pony with a groom beside him to riding the animal was an easy step. Often they met Miss Pollock and her sister Nan, a year younger than Ned, on their early morning rides, although John avoided them when he could. More than once he caught a wistful look on the young woman's face, a blending of pain and pity; he was sure she was troubled about his association with

HAIL. HAIL. HAIL.

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