



E that places himself neither higher nor lower than he ought to do exercises the trust humility.—
Colton.

Stirring Up Ann

(Farm and Fireside)

By NINA PURDY MACDONALD

I HAD just finished doing my dinner dishes when I looked out of the window and saw the Higginsses' grey horse coming up the road on a good, swift trot. Mandy was driving. She sat well forward on the wagon seat, a rigid figure, with her arms straight out high above her lap, holding the reins tightly. Her hat was a little on one side, and stray rings of hair hung carelessly around her face. I saw from these signs that she must have some mighty important plan in her head.

When I came to live in Gregory Hollow a few years before, I thought I was going to bury myself alive. I had always lived in a large town. Then my aunt died and left my uncle alone in his old age, with a farm to manage. As my husband was dead and my son married, I decided it was my duty to take care of my uncle and to put up with the loneliness and narrowness of a back-country life for his sake. But that was before I knew Mandy Higginss, and before I knew about the Neighborhood Improvement Society.

Gregory Hollow is a little creek valley nestled between two ranges of the Catskills. In it there are some twenty-odd farms with their meadow lands in the valley and their pastures running far back into the hills. The head of the hollow is about six miles from its foot, where there is a little village which is the centre of trade and amusement for all the surrounding hollows.

Mandy Higginss was the wife of a well-to-do farmer. She lived pretty well down to the foot of the hollow. She was the president of the Neighborhood Improvement Society, which she had organized with the purpose of making things better for women. I hadn't lived there long before I decided that life everywhere is the same; its main object is to keep to a higher standard, to set a higher standard for folks, and to help them live up to it. So, instead of sitting back and mourning because I wasn't in the swim and jostle of a large town life, I joined the Neighborhood Improvement Society, and aimed to help Mandy Higginss in her work in that hollow.

My uncle took her horse, which was streaked with perspiration, and Mandy came hurrying into the house, her eyes shining and her manner eager.

"Well," said I, smiling, as I got to a chair for her and sat down with some berries to eat, "whom are you going to improve this time?"

She took one of my aprons from its nail behind the door and began to help me hull.

"I am going to keep Ann Simmons from being an old maid," she said quickly; then she began to laugh as she saw the surprised expression on my face.

Ann Simmons lived two miles far-

ther up the hollow from me. About two years ago her father and mother had died within three weeks of each other. Ann, being the youngest of the family, had spent her forty-odd years of life caring for her parents, mothering them and humoring their whims. And now, since they had gone, she had nothing to do but tend her cats and dogs and chickens, and her home. She lived in a spoolless little house, all white save for its



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dark green blinds. The inside of the house was painted white, too. Ann had her own paint brushes and cans of paint, and as soon as a spot got the least speck dirty she would paint it over. She had always been a careful housekeeper, and since her folks had died she tended her house as if it were a live thing. Since she had a comfortable income she had no financial worries. Her brothers had tried to get her to live around among them for a while. But she decided that everything about the house would go to rack and ruin without her, and that she was better off in her own home. Her trouble had sort of soured her. She wouldn't visit among her neighbors; she stopped going to church; and, what hurt us women most of all, she wouldn't join our Improvement Society.

When Mandy said she was going to keep Ann from being an old maid I snorted.

"Where do you suppose you will find a man for her?" I asked. "You know she has never looked at one, and that she is not the taking kind among them. You had—"

"Wait," Mandy's tone was commanding and I stopped. She went on: "Ann doesn't have to have a man in order not to be an old maid. Lots of women to-day aren't married and never will be, but you can't call them old maids. That's because they have real interests in life and real things

to do. It's because they keep up with the times and what is being done around them. A single woman doesn't have to be an old maid. Lots of married women who haven't much to come trading with and whims get to be the old-maid kind, too."

"Well," I said, "Ann has had enough to do with caring for old folks and running the place. She needs a rest."

"Yes," Mandy agreed, "she has had enough to do; that isn't it. It's what she hasn't got to do now. She keeps herself shut in at home, eats, works, knits, and cleans up her house, all at a set time every day. And look at the difference two years have made in her. She has got into a rut and needs stirring up."

"Do you mean to stir her up by getting her to join our Improvement Society?" I asked.

"No, we aren't designing; but if the plan works she will join."

"Well, what is the plan?" I inquired, getting curious.

Mandy shook her head thoughtfully. "It isn't a sure-working one yet," she admitted, "but I am going to write a letter to my boy, David, and see what can be done. If there anyone around—because it is delicate in its nature, and I am not going to let

read the letter, and I decided that she had hit upon the right plan. I took Ann out of her rut. She left the letter with me to mail, as I had to go to town in the morning to do

After she had gone I sat thinking over what she had written about Ann being a motherless woman and not having anything to mother now except some animals and a little white horse. And one line of her letter stood out, the one where she said that the cause of many of life's troubles is that lots of mothers are not mothering women and lots of mothering women are not mothers. Poor Ann was getting into a narrow way of living just because she didn't have anything worth while to mother. When I thought how Mandy, a mothering woman, was undertaking to help Ann I remembered the old saying that God had made mothers, because He couldn't be everywhere Himself, and I rejoiced in it.

Next morning I took the letter down to the post office when I went to do my trading. Mandy called me up on the telephone before I started, so as to make sure I wouldn't forget to mail it.

I stopped at her place a few minutes on my way home. When I got there I could hear her singing, high and strong and sweet, coming from one song to another as she went from one piece of work to another. She met me at the door. Her face was flushed and there was flour on her arms and nose, and I knew that her mind wasn't on her housework but on improving Ann, and that she was endeavoring to control her excitement until she could hear from David.

"When do you s'pose we shall hear?" she said to me.

"Like as not in two or three days, or it may be a week or two," I answered truthfully; then, as I saw her face fall, I suggested, "Why can't you and I do some sewing or something while we are waiting?"

Her face brightened. "Can you go to town with me this afternoon? We'll pick out some stuff to sew on, and to-morrow we will make something for Ann's improvement," she laughed happily at the thought.

The next day she came up to sew with me. We worked until late in the afternoon. We talked low and quietly when we handled the soft, pretty things, and I felt as I think a man must when he takes off his hat at a Decoration Day service. It seemed there was something sacred in the shade-drawn parlor with the dainty sewing, speaking of improving and loving, and we earnest-working women trying to make things better, and doing that trying, not in a man's way, as so many men do, but in a women's aim is, but in a woman's.

As we came out of the parlor the telephone rang. It was Mandy's ring. Knowing there wasn't anyone in her house, she answered it. It was the station agent, and he had a telegram for her. It read: "All O.K. 10.30 to-night.—D.H."

It happened fortunately that it was lodge night, and both John and my uncle were going. The hired men were going to a dance.

Mandy went home and got supper for the men. Then, after they had all gone, she hitched up the horse and drove up to my house. We took a short cut over the hills to the milk station. David got off the ten-thirty train, and since my house was nearer Ann's we drove back there.

As soon as we got inside and I had shut the door Mandy opened the basket David had been carrying. In it was a fat, red, wrinkled boy, sleeping contentedly in his cotton-lined nest.

David explained that it was only (Continued on page 20)

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