

Choice Literature.

HESTER HARMON'S VOCATION.

BY MRS. L. B. BACON.

"Listen, girls. Here is a story that may be helpful to us. You know we are always wishing we could earn some money, and this tells how one girl made enough picking wild berries and making them up into jellies and preserves for market, to pay off a mortgage on the farm; and, I suppose, afterward pursued the business until she made the family rich, though it does not say so. Why couldn't we three go into some such enterprise, pray?"

"Unfortunately we do not own a farm, with a mortgage and a berry patch on it," said Ellen, the oldest sister.

"But if we had a farm, no doubt there would be a mortgage on it. So much of the story might apply to us, at all events," said Hester, the second, somewhat bitterly.

"Of course I didn't suppose that we could make jelly, or even pick berries, especially as we haven't any to pick," said Nan, the first speaker and the youngest. "I only thought that the success of this girl under difficulties might be an encouragement to us to go and do likewise in some other department of labour."

"What other, for instance?" asked Hester. "Do be specific, Nan."

"I'm sure I can't think of any thing promising at this moment; but there must be plenty of work in the wide world for three maiden sisters as accomplished as we are. Ellen can trim bonnets beautifully. Just look at that exquisite specimen of millinery she is evolving from those old bits of lace and ribbon and velvet. And you and I can do dress-making, Hetty. We can make over our own dresses, just as good as new. Let's set up a shop."

"Yes," said Hester, "we can do our own millinery and dressmaking, because we have to, or go without. But not one of us knows enough about this kind of work, or any other, to earn our salt."

"Except the three B's, Hetty; you know them perfectly."

"Yes, I am thankful that I know how to bake and boil and broil; but unless I go into somebody's kitchen besides our own to exercise these accomplishments, they are not likely to bring in much of an income; and I declare, girls, I am sometimes tempted to do just that thing—hire out to do housework, because it is the only thing I know how to do well."

"Why, Hester Harmon, are you crazy? You know father and mother would never consent to your doing such work," said Nan.

"They would not have to consent, for I am of age, and can do as I please; though it is not very likely that I shall be pleased to do that quite yet. But I am tired of being dependent upon father for every penny I spend. It would be bad enough if he was rich; but knowing how hard it is for him to make the two ends meet, poor man, it makes me wretched. And why should not we girls do something in the world for our own support at least, as well as the boys? There is Tom earning his \$70 per month running a locomotive, with promise of promotion, and John doing almost as well at civil engineering; both of them as independent as princes, because each knows how to do one thing well. I never see Jack shoulder his tripod and march off to his work, without feeling that I have been defrauded of something, because I was not compelled to learn some trade, or business, that would make me as independent as he is. And can anybody tell me why girls should not have the privilege of earning their own living, if they want it, as well as their brothers?"

"Girls are expected to secure husbands before they arrive at the advanced age of twenty-five, you know, Hetty; isn't that reason enough?"

"No, it is not. There are not husbands enough to go around in this country, and many women must live single, whether they choose to or not. And it would not be such a dreadful thing to a sensible girl to be called an old maid, if she had some business or profession with which to occupy her head and hands, and support herself. This forever waiting, Micawber like, for something to turn up, is what makes so many women miserable and useless. And there are many kinds of work for women to do now, if they are only fitted for it, which we are not. We cannot even teach a district school, because we know nothing about methods. If we had been educated at the public school, as the boys were, we might be able to do so much for ourselves at least; but having been finished at Madame La Vergne's fashionable seminary, we have a smattering of many things—a little French and German, a little music and art—while we know nothing, absolutely not one thing, well enough to teach it."

"I wish one of us had studied pharmacy, so as to be able to help father in the drug store," said Nan.

"Why not take it up now, if you would like it, Nan?" said Ellen. "You are young enough, and father could teach you."

"I proposed it once, but he said there were new methods in pharmacy as in other professions, and I must take a course at the university if I wish to make it a business. And that we all know is impossible in the present state of our finances."

"And half what it cost you at Madame La Vergne's would give you a thorough training in pharmacy at the university. Oh, the pity of it!" said Hester.

The mother of these daughters appeared just then with a distressed face, and remarked:

"I think it very ungrateful, Hester, for you to say such things, after your parents have denied themselves so much in order to give their daughters the best advantages. You never can know how we saved and pinched and contrived to pay for every accomplishment! and now to hear one of you talk in this way is too much."

"It is ungrateful and unfilial in me, mother dear, I know, and I ought to be ashamed but, none the less, every

word of it is true. The three of us together are not worth so much as one would be thoroughly trained in some special department."

"But you ought to be thankful, all of you, that you are not required to earn your own living. If the time comes when your father is unable to do it, I know the boys will provide for you. They will never see their sisters suffer."

"I hope not certainly," said Hester. "But Tom has a wife and baby, and John will marry some time. Why should we ever become dependent upon them? Why should not we, strong and healthy as we are, use our faculties for our own support as well as they!"

"Simply because the Lord made you women and He made them men, and that is reason enough. Your father and I have our own opinions about such things, and we never would consent to have our daughters go out from home and support themselves, never. But it is time we were getting dinner, Hester; do try to fix up something that your father will relish. He does not seem to have so good an appetite this spring as usual. Have you noticed it, dear?"

Yes, Hester had noticed it, but she was convinced that exercise in the fresh air and sunlight would do more than anything else to restore her father's appetite. But she knew, also, that he could not afford to hire a clerk, and that neither of his daughters was competent for the position, so she made it a study to prepare dainty, tempting dishes, different each day, to please him. Pick-up dinners were not infrequent at the Harmon's, from the nature of things, but Hetty knew how to make them agreeable to both eye and palate. So to-day she made an omelette and minced some meat left over from yesterday's roast, and served it in croquettes with potato balls. Canned tomatoes furnished a relish, and dainty cups of boiled custard the dessert.

"Why don't we call it lunch instead of dinner, Hester?" asked Nan.

"Because it is dinner and not lunch. Don't put on airs, Nan."

These sisters had their different adaptations, as they were unlike in disposition. Ellen was a natural nurse. With the training now given by certain schools, her services would have been invaluable in the sick-room, and she could have commanded her \$20 per week the whole year round. And she was not ignorant of this fact, though she hesitated to suggest such a course for herself. She was sure of opposition, and so drifted along without any definite aim, farther than to be a good daughter and sister and a consistent church-member.

Hester was a born cook and housekeeper. Ever since the time when she stood upon a chair to reach the moulding-board and cut out baby biscuits with a thimble, she had taken to this work as naturally as a duck to water. She would have been glad of a servant to do the drudgery, but as it was she took upon herself the hardest and dirtiest work in the kitchen. "Ellen and Nan must save their hands," she said. No matter if hers were black and rough. Her artistic taste was gratified to some extent by the handsome, shapely loaves of bread, as much alike as peas in one pod, that twice a week were drawn from the oven, the fruit of her skill. Her meats were never raw or overdone, her vegetables never watery and insipid. She could put up fruit to perfection, and her cakes and pastries and puddings were sure to be a success, though as she sometimes said, it was a wonder they turned out so well, seeing that she could not afford to make them often enough to keep in practice.

The countless worries familiar to every housekeeper when the kitchen fire has the sulks and needs coaxing to burn, the sponge gets a chill and is slow about rising, when some of the irons in the fire are likely to burn and others get cold—none of these things ever seemed to disturb Hester's serenity. And she knew how to keep the house in order, without a too frequent occurrence of those dreadful cleaning days, which are such a trial to every member of the family, especially to those who never take a hand in the work. Nan said that one wave of Hester's magic wand would bring order and neatness out of the direst confusion that ever reigned in the kitchen and pantry. Why should not a woman thus endowed be permitted to dispose of her time and labour and skill at their market value, without losing caste or self-respect, any more than one who teaches school or gives music-lessons? Hester often thought, but had never spoken, of this, until the day our story opens, and with little encouragement then.

Neither Nan's taste nor talents was quite so pronounced as her sisters. She was fond of music, and practised faithfully every day, but it was not in her to be a teacher. She liked to use a brush, and had sold some little pictures, enough, perhaps, to pay the cost of paints; but she was not an artist, and she knew it. She had considerable skill in needle-work, but not enough to make it profitable. She would have been glad to do more for her father than simply to sit in the store while he was gone to his meals; but he said: "Don't meddle, Nan, and never put up the simplest prescription when I am gone. You would be sure to deal out morphine for quinine, or colchicum for capsicum, or something else as bad, and one such mistake would be as fatal to my business as to my customer." She believed the business might be enlarged, for the town was growing and her father well-liked; but hedged about with such restrictions, what could she do? Nan pondered these things in heart, but nothing tangible had so far come of it, or was likely to.

(To be continued.)

THE JEWISH AND THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH.

A weighty charge, persistently reiterated, and violently resented, was made against Christ—a charge of distinctly violating the express laws of Moses by non-observance of the Sabbath. This it was which caused a surprise, an exacerbation, a madness, a thirst for sanguinary vengeance, which pursued Him to the very cross. For the Sabbath was a Mosaic, nay, even a primeval institution, and it had become the most distinctive and the most passionately revered of all the ordinances which separated the Jews from the Gen-

tiles as a peculiar people. It was at once the sign of their exclusive privileges, and the centre of their barren formalism. Their traditions, their patriotism, even their obstinacy, were all enlisted in its scrupulous maintenance. Not only had it been observed in heaven before man was, but they declared that the people of Israel had been chosen for the sole purpose of keeping. Was it not even miraculously kept by the Sabbatical river of the Holy City? Their devotion to it was only deepened by the universal ridicule, inconvenience and loss which it entailed upon them in the heathen world. They were even proud that, from having observed it with a stolid literalism, they had suffered themselves on that day to lose battles, to be cut to pieces by their enemies, to see Jerusalem itself imperilled and captured. Its observance had been fenced round by the minutest, the most painfully precise, the most ludicrously insignificant restrictions. The Prophet had called it "a delight," and therefore it was a duty even for the poor to eat three times on that day. They were to feast on it, though no fire was to be lighted and no food cooked. According to the stiff and narrow school of Shammai, no one on the Sabbath might even comfort the sick or enliven the sorrowful. Even the preservation of life was a breaking of the Sabbath; and, on the other hand, even to kill a flea was as bad as to kill a camel. Had not the command to "do no manner of work upon the Sabbath Day" been most absolute and most emphatic? Had not Moses himself and all the congregation caused the son of Shelomith to be stoned to death for merely gathering sticks upon it? Had not the Great Synagogue itself drawn up the thirty-nine *abhoth* and quite innumerable *toldoth*, or prohibitions of labours which violated it in the first or in the second degree? Yet here was One, claiming to be a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet, deliberately setting aside, as it seemed to them, the traditional sanctity of that day of days! An attentive reader of the Gospels will be surprised to find how large a portion of the enmity and opposition which our Lord excited, not only in Jerusalem, but even in Galilee and in Peræa, turned upon this point alone.—*Farrar's Life of Christ.*

SONG OF NATURE.

The harp at Nature's advent strung
Has never ceased to play;
The song the stars of morning sung
Has never died away.

And prayer is made and prayer is given,
By all things near and far;
The ocean looketh up to heaven
And mirrors every star.

Its waves are kneeling on the strand
As kneels the human knee,
Their white locks bowing to the sand,
The priesthood of the sea!

They pour their glittering treasures forth
Their gifts of pearl they bring,
And all the listening hills on earth
Take up the song they sing.

The green earth sends her incense up
From many a mountain shrine;
From folded leaf and dewy cup
She pours her sacred wine.

The mists above the morning rills
Rise white as wings of prayer,
The altar curtains of the hills
Are sunset's purple air.

The winds with hymns of praise are loud,
Or low with sobs of pain;
The thunder-organ of the cloud,
The dropping tears of rain.

With drooping head and branches crossed,
The twilight forest grieves,
Or speak with tongues of Pentecost
From all its sunlight leaves.

The blue sky is the temple's arch,
Its transept earth and air,
The music of its starry march,
The chorus of a prayer.

So Nature keeps the reverent frame
With which her years began,
And all her sighs and voices shame
The prayerless heart of man.

—John Greenleaf Whittier.

BYRON AND BURNS.

But not denying the genius nor the charm, the explanation of the carelessness of Byron's centenary is plain. The fact is its own interpreter. It is his personality which counts for the indifference. We do not mean his loose life. Burns was as loose as a liver, but no famous personality in English literature is so beloved as Burns. Nelson was as immoral, but England bore him upon her heart to St. Paul's, and with his name she conjures English valour still. But Byron personally kindles no emotion save one of half-contempt. He had every opportunity, every splendid advantage, every gift that men desire, but the personal life that they all helped him to achieve was simply pitiful. His genius asserted itself in passionate and powerful poetry. That was in despite of himself. But all that belongs to character, to pure, generous, ennobling and helpful life, that depended upon himself was wantonly squandered. He did he apparently even care or try to do differently, except at the last when he went to Greece.