

whom he realized he owed it to be such a comfort.

'I'll write. And some day I'll go back and do my best by 'em.'

He did write, his letter carrying all the joy which may be imagined into the old farmhouse. Father and mother had answered, the sight of the their poor, cramped handwriting bringing tears to the eyes of the wandering son. And Susan had written:

'Father says he'll never miss driving in to the post-office on the days that a letter could get here after your mail day. And mother stands at the gate watching for him to get back.'

It had reached his heart, and spurred him up to writing quite regularly for a while. And then the intervals between his letters had had grown longer, and now for weeks he had not written.

Passing, later, again near Caleb's rough library he paused with a half smile. The sun-tanned, freckled face was now in the throes of an effort to accomplish a fine-looking address to his letter, drawn into a series of knots and wrinkles astonishing to behold. All of a sudden they relaxed into a smile of pride and delight as he held up and contemplated the scraggy result of his efforts.

'I'd rather plough all day,' he said, meeting James' gaze with a beaming eye. 'Yes, I would. I always feel as though I'd tackled a big job and got the better of it when I've wrote a letter. I feel as light as a feather. When I used to let it slip, sometimes I felt as though I had a stone to carry. I feel that way now when writin' time's comin'. But I've found the best way to get rid of that feelin's just to get right at it and do it. I think that's the way with most things when you think you ought to, don't you?'

'Yes, I do,' said James, as he went on toward the stables. 'And when you know you ought to, as I do,' he added to himself.

Caleb followed him with a shout, betokening his unburdened condition of mind, and, leading out one of the shaggy ponies used in herding the cattle, was soon galloping the four miles to the point at which the weekly mail was gathered. Scant and irregular it was; and who can tell how many hearts watched for its news of loved ones, or waited in the weariness of hope deferred for tidings which did not come.

The full moon arose over the wide expanse of rolling, mountainous scenery as the rider's form was lost in the distance. James leaned against a rough cart and gazed half mechanically about him.

'I wish I had written, too. I didn't mean to get into loose ways about it again—as sure as I live I didn't. Mother watching at the gate, Susy said. I s'pose it's the same old gate—the one I used to swing on when I was little and got scolded for it. Next Tuesday'll be the day mother'll be watching.'

In the hush of the glorious light his thoughts wandered over years gone by. Far back, almost to infancy, did his memory stray, bringing up scenes vague and misty, incidents only dimly recalled; yet in all his mother's face, gentle and tender, seemed to stand out distinctly. Sometimes it bent over him in sickness, sometime he saw it in church, with the grave expression. Sometimes it bore a smile of sympathy with some of his small delights; again, perhaps, a frown, or a grieved look over his shortcomings.

'Yes, and I remember exactly how she looked when she whipped me, and how she would come to me in ten minutes afterwards, crying and begging me never to make her do it

again. Poor mother,' with a remorseful smile, 'she didn't give it to me half hard enough.'

'I wonder how she looks now.' The very thought came with a sharp pang. It had never before occurred to him to wonder whether his mother had changed in these years in which he had not seen her. The line of thought, once struck, seemed to lead on without his own volition. It must be that the anguish of his abrupt leave-taking, the anxiety for his welfare, and the longing for a sight of him during this weary time had written deep lines upon the patient face.

'There's Caleb back.' James sprang up, as if in glad escape from the heavy thoughts, as the distant beat of hoofs smote upon his ear. 'She is only his stepmother, and yet he walks right up to the business like a soldier, hating it as he does. Caleb has the making of a soldier in him, I believe.'

James was many years older before he fully recognized the fact that there is nothing more heroic than the persistent standing by the duties, small or great, of every-day life.

'Hello, Caleb,' he cried; 'you've made a quick trip.'

'Yes,' said Caleb, still with the beaming face belonging to the finished letter. 'Shag hasn't been at work to-day, and he's as full of jump as if—as if—he'd got a letter off himself.'

James could not help joining in the boy's gleeful laugh.

'I wish I felt as good as you do, Caleb,' he said.

'I'll tell you what,' said Caleb, with the air of one telling a great secret, 'I don't believe there's anything makes you feel half so good as doing something you think you ought to do.'

'Not going to turn in?' he asked, returning from the stable after giving his little nag faithful care.

'No, I'm going to write a letter.'

'I'm glad 't isn't me,' with an expressive shake of his head. 'I'm tired enough to sleep for a week.'

Mother was not watching at the gate on the Tuesday on which a letter might be expected from James. Indeed, there sometimes crept over father and Susan a cold chill of fear that she might never stand there or anywhere else again.

For the feet which had taken so many steps in loving ministering, which had so patiently held to the round of small duties laid out by him who orders all our ways, were at last taking a rest. She had been suffering from a slow fever, and the doctor shook his head with a discouraged face as day followed day, to be lengthened into week following week, and still the pulse grew weaker and the faded eyes dimmer.

'If there was anything to rouse her,' the old doctor had said, sorely perplexed at the utter lack of result to all his applied remedies. 'There isn't so much the matter with her; only a lack of vitality. Nothing seems to touch it.'

He sat with a helpless, baffled look. During the latter weeks Susan had stolen out on Tuesday for a little season of wistful watching for the longed-for letter which had never come. But to-day she sat still, weighed down by the burden of dread of what might be, scarcely hearing the slow rumble of the wagon as father drove along the lane. A few moments later he appeared at the door and held up a letter before Susan's eyes. She forgot her caution in a glad spring toward him.

'A letter! A letter from James!'

She controlled her voice in a whisper, but mother had been stirred from her half stupor

and had opened her eyes. The doctor was watching her.

'Read it,' he said, motioning Susan to the seat at her mother's side.

'Dear Mother,—I've been thinking to-night how long it is since I left home. I never thought it would be so long, really I didn't, when I got into a pet and came off. And if I've wondered once why I did it, I've wondered a thousand times, for I haven't in all these three years seen any place that was quite up to home. And if I was to stay three times three, I'd never find anybody like you and father and Susy.'

'There's another thing I've been wondering, and that's whether you want to see such a good-for-nothing as me there again?'

A little sob came from mother, and Susan paused in alarm.

'Go on,' said the doctor.

'But I'm 'most sure you would, and I'm coming home, mother. It won't be so very long before you see me. I've learned a lot of lessons since I left, and the one I've learned the best is that any boy who goes around the world hunting for a better place than home is a simpleton. So I'm coming to be your boy again. And if you don't find that I can be a comfort to you and father and Susy, why, all you can do is to send me away again.'

'Her fever'll be up again,' said Susy, bending over her mother in a flutter of joy and anxiety.

But there was a smile on mother's face, and a light of hope and peace in her eyes which had long been wanting there.

'Thank God,' she whispered, 'my boy's coming home.'

And when James very soon followed his letter, he held his breath at learning how very near he had come to finding a desolate home, and thankfully rejoiced in the blessed privilege of winning his mother back to health and to happiness.

There are many boys who put off the home-letters and the home-coming until too late.—'Young Men's Era.'

The Reason Why.

(Relena R. Thomas, in the 'Michigan Christian Advocate'.)

'You are just in the nick of time!' said my shut-in friend, in reply to my offer to do any service for her. 'I was wishing I had some way of sending this to the letter-box.'

Before the letter had exchanged hands, however, some one boisterously bounded up the steps, and scarcely waiting for the not very cordial 'Come in,' opened the door, exclaiming: 'Say! ain't there something I can do for you 'fore school begins? A letter to mail, or some sort of an errand you'd like done?'

The boy who put these questions had a good face, and such a willing air, that I was surprised to see my friend shake her head, and hear her say: 'Thank you, Charlie, but there is nothing for you to do to-day.'

The boy, on hearing this, looked so disappointed that I was on the point of saying, 'Let him mail your letter,' when my friend seeming to surmise my intention, looked her disapproval, and then I discovered that the letter she was about to hand me when the boy appeared on the scene was not in sight.

With a crestfallen air the would-be errand boy started off, saying ruefully: 'I am sorry! I'd like to do errands for you, but somehow you don't let me any more.'

'I should think it would be nice to have so willing a boy live next door,' said I, as his