



## The Family Circle.

### THE BLESSED TASK.

I said, "Sweet Master, hear me pray;  
For love of Thee the boon I ask;  
Give me to do for Thee each day  
Some simple, lowly, blessed task."  
And listening long, with hope elate,  
I only heard Him whisper, "Wait."

The days went by, but nothing brought  
Beyond the wonted round of care,  
And I was vexed with anxious thought,  
And found the waiting hard to bear;  
But when I said, "In vain I pray!"  
I heard Him answer gently "Nay."

So praying still and waiting on,  
And pondering what the waiting meant,  
This knowledge sweet at last I won—  
And oh the depth of my content!  
My blessed task for every day  
Is humbly, gladly to obey.

And though I daily, hourly fail  
To bring my task to Him complete,  
And must with constant tears bewail  
My failures at my Master's feet,  
No other service would I ask  
Than this my blessed, blessed task.  
—Harriet McEwen Kimball, in *Youth's Companion*.

### RACHEL MOORE'S "NEIGHBOR."

BY HELEN PIERSON BARNARD.

It happened when Rachel's needle began to falter,—Rachel Moore, our cheery village seamstress. Although she was sixty and had "used her eyes a sight," she could not understand why it was now such a process for her to thread a needle! She thought "something ailed her glasses," and took quite a journey to change them at a celebrated optician's. There was a shadow on her bright face when she returned, and she never worked by lamplight afterwards. When the villagers called in the evening, she was always sitting in the firelight,—a strange fancy, they thought, for the active woman. Rachel did not tell them that she now knew that her sewing days were nearly over! If she could find nothing else to do, which was unlikely, there would be another old lady "on the parish," and at last another grave in the paupers' lot. Rachel had supported herself from childhood; there was no one that she could turn to for help in her old age. The prospect that she must receive charity was like martyrdom. She tried to rally her courage with Scripture promises and hymns of faith and love. Her song sometimes ended in tears, and faith almost failed when she prayed that the evil days might not come. But oftener she was sustained by her trust in the Saviour; her cottage breathed the very atmosphere of peace, the bird sang gaily, and her plants seemed in perpetual sunshine; children loved to linger there, and many a forlorn wanderer shared her scanty bread.

Rachel was much interested in one of her neighbors,—Mary Porter, whose stately home was just across the way. Like the seamstress she was bereft of friends, and seemed always alone and sad. Rachel would watch the slender figure pacing the garden walks till her eyes grew misty with Christ-like pity, and she longed to comfort her. The gossips told many absurd stories about Miss Porter; Rachel had no patience with them. Jake, the village chronicler, gave her a minute history of the Porter family. "The Squire wasn't above taking tea with anybody in the parish. Wal, he passed on; Mis' Porter followed with gallopin' consumption; the son was drowned in furrin' parts,—Mary's the last o' her family. When she dies, there hain't no heir except a cousin, third remove, an unlucky chap, alluz wantin' to borroy to start life anew! I calc'late Mary Porter's tired of helping him, for she sent back his last letters unopened!" "How do you know that?" queried Rachel, a trifle sharply.

"Wal, it kinder leaked out from the post-office," said Jake. "Nobody didn't hear it from the servants, sure! A man can't ask after her health, or venture a civil question about crops, without getting short answers! Folks says that Miss Porter's walked!" "Walked?" repeated Rachel, "what nonsense's that?" "Kinder floated through the street at midnight, her face sot like a sperrit!" lowering his voice and glancing about.

Rachel's wrath boiled over here. Jake hobbled off amazed at the change in the usually genial woman. Like "the north wind" of the proverb, so her "angry countenance drove away the back-biting tongue." Thus she al-

ways routed gossips. All such talk ceased when she was near, for it was not in her to "take up" any "reproach against" her "neighbor." When rallied on her championship, she said:—

"She's a stranger to me, I know, but she's grieving for her friends,—always thinking of those who were taken from her!" added she, softly, as the curtain of the years parted on the loss of her own dear ones. It was the memory of this that filled her with sympathy for the morner. And when assured that Miss Porter knew nothing of the peace that God can give, she longed to lead her to the Master's feet. Rachel's eyes held only pity for the sad woman, and no curiosity, when they chanced to meet. Possibly Miss Porter read this in the sweet-faced old lady who was always carrying a bundle of work, or stitching at the window, for at last she sent some sewing to her. It came when Rachel was so depressed by failing sight that she had scarcely thought of her neighbor for days. All her interest revived, and with it a faint hope that she might yet "comfort her a bit." So when she was sent for to sew at the house she was not surprised, but went, believing that it was providential. She found nothing eccentric in her neighbor, only deep sadness, and a dreary, silent house in which the servants moved softly, as if there were still in it the dead she mourned. Rachel sewed in silence too. Some fine tact kept her from roughly assailing this great sorrow. But she prayed for the pallid, restless lady, who wandered fitfully through her spacious house, until at last she took refuge in the sewing-room. Often her troubled eyes would rest upon the serene face of the seamstress, as if strangely attracted. At last, Rachel's thoughts leaped from her lips—

"My child, you will never get comfort until you carry your grief to the Saviour, and try to help others bear their sorrows. You have time and money; what a blessed work you might do! Surely it would rest your heart to relieve the misery of others." Then, as Miss Porter turned upon her with a flash of wounded feeling, "There, I've harrowed you all up, when I wanted to comfort you!"

"You can know nothing of my trouble!" cried Miss Porter.

The seamstress pressed her fingers upon her aching eyes; the shadow crept over her spirit, but she only said, gently:

"I have my griefs, too. But He who sends the storm gives an after-calm; when He took my dear ones He gave me 'peace in believing.' I've longed to tell you this when you seemed so hopeless-like. I thought the way was opening when you sent for me, but perhaps I was mistaken," added she, humbly; "we are apt to think it providential if we get some dear wish."

Afterwards they had many talks. Every night in the dark cottage Rachel prayed earnestly for Miss Porter, and every day in the mansion her words came with greater power, until at last the lady too "found peace in believing." She longed now to devote her fortune to doing Christ's work.

"The Master will give you something to do for Him," said Rachel, "only just be ready to serve Him in the least that offers."

Rachel had forgotten the clouds that threatened her while watching for brightness in her neighbor's sky, but when she returned to every-day life and ill-paid shop-work she had to lift her cross again. Miss Porter often surprised her in tears, but could never get her to tell the cause. It all came out one bitter day when Rachel went again to the mansion to sew. The cold attacked her eyes, and she had to cover them for a long time. Miss Porter drew the whole story from her in a sympathetic way that greatly cheered the old lady. She was just taking up some work despite a protest from Miss Porter, when the maid entered and said:

"Your cousin's wife is here, Miss Porter." It flashed into Rachel's mind that this was the unlucky cousin of whom Jake spoke, just as somebody said, in the doorway:

"I feared you'd refuse to see me, so I've followed your girl. You must be tired of helping us."

"Us" meant the babe she bore, and three children, who clung to her skirt, and peeped forth with bright, eager eyes,—the eldest scarcely five years old. Miss Porter rose in dismay, and Rachel's needle paused; never before had such a group invaded the mansion.

"Where is your husband?" asked Miss Porter, when she found voice.

"Alfred has been unfortunate," the young wife said, with bitter tears. The eldest child now spoke:

"Papa, he's in prison an' we went to see him, but they wouldn't let us stay," adding cheerfully, "Grandpa said we could go to the poor-house."

"Father did indeed say so. He turned us away because I won't leave Alfred. There isn't a roof to shelter these babies, Miss Porter; won't you let us stay a little while? Alfred expects to be out of trouble soon," she added, with childish simplicity. "If not, I'll

get something to do after I've rested a bit. We'll be thankful for some little unused chamber; all the children want is the plainest food and warmth," shivering in her thin garments; "they'll not be noisy or spoil your nice house. I'd never ask it for myself," she added, cringing with shame as she read no welcome in Miss Porter's face.

The seamstress wondered why the young disciple did not accept this as work for the Master, and end the painful scene with kind words. She whispered to Miss Porter that they might "stay a spell" in her cottage, forgetting as usual her scanty income and the future. Miss Porter gave her a keen glance, and quickly gave the homeless women permission to stay over night, at least.

So these unbidden guests were warmed and fed. The children fairly bubbled over with glee; they sparkled and dimpled and prattled softly, as happy as bobolinks in clover. Rachel fell in love with the merry elves, and Jane, who was to fix them for tea, found her services scorned by the eldest, who had "taken care of 'em since baby came," he said, rapidly crowning the twin-heads with top-knots. Then he seated the wee men upon a rug with the baby between them, telling the round-eyed duet to "mind that she did not bump her nose," while he made his own toilet. The young mother shrank within herself, briefly replying to his artless questions, and finally sank to the floor in a faint.

"Poor lamb!" and Rachel gathered her in her arms while restoratives were applied, "I am sure she will have to leave her Alfred before long. I saw the seal of death upon her when she first spoke."

"What will become of all these children, then?" asked Miss Porter, who was still shocked at this sudden accession to her household.

"We read that He even counts the sparrows," replied Rachel, her grave, sweet glance pointing her little sermon. "Surely He will open some Christian home to these little ones, the 'least' of His children, and reward those who feed and clothe them as if it were done to Himself. If God had given me the means I would do it," added the old lady. "It would be next to motherhood for some childless person to train them for usefulness."

Miss Porter made no reply. Rachel went home greatly depressed. It was Christmas eve; an unwonted stir in the quiet town told of merry-makings, gifts and loving friends. This, and the unwelcome wanderers, made her own future seem dark. She sat in the shadows, too sad to sing or pray. At last somebody knocked, and Miss Porter called softly outside. Rachel opened the door.

"Your voice is full of tears!" cried the lady, entering. She was in high spirits. "My cheery teacher is setting me a poor example! I've come to say that I have decided to keep Alfred's children. How could I hesitate, and almost thrust them out into the cold,—these little ones sent to my desolate home? And since I decided, I really begun to love them." She was glowing like a rose, the former pale lady of the mansion. Suddenly she caught Rachel's hand, saying tremulously: "My friend, you have led me to my Saviour, and shown me my life-work; peace has entered my stormy heart. I cannot get along without you,—will you come and help me with these children? You must sew no more," she added, cheerily, "but keep your eyes to note my short-comings. Will you be a mother to me and the family God has given?"

Thus suddenly did the burden roll from Rachel's tired heart. The patient aged face was too full of emotion for speech.

"We will call it settled, then?" asked Miss Porter. "We must begin our united labors at once, for to-morrow must be a jolly Christmas for the children. Put on your bonnet and help me buy them something. There are the horses now," as sleigh-bells paused before the cottage.

"Bless me! it must be a dream," murmured Rachel, as she found herself starting with her night-cap on under her black bonnet. Such a royal shopping as that was! Rachel could only clasp her hands under her shawl and murmur:

"What will the pretty dears say?"

If you should chance to visit our town, old Jake will doubtless tell you all about it,—he has the number and probable expense of the gifts. But no one could estimate the joy they brought the forlorn wanderers,—aye, and the welcome that beamed in Miss Porter's eyes; and when later, a sunny room was set apart for the nursery, and Rachel was installed therein, the young mother could only say:

"It's too much! It can't be my children are so cared for. If it must be so, I can ease now!"

So Rachel sees a blessed work before her, instead of useless old age, in the home prepared for her when her cry came up before "the God of the righteous," in the house of her "neighbor" of whom she would hear "no reproach."—*Watchman*.

### WHAT WOULD HE LEARN?

Suppose that boy of yours had free access to the issues of the sensational press—by the way, are you sure that he does not read them occasionally or frequently?—what would he learn?

We will suppose that he reads the best, or to put it more truly, the least bad of these sheets, for there is some choice among them, though the best, as we shall see, are bad enough. But your boy reads pretty constantly the sensational story papers designed to attract just such young readers. Papers of the class to which we now refer are filled with stories; two or three serials, with startling titles, are always running in them, cunningly devised to leave the reader at some thrilling juncture to wait for the next instalment. Besides these stories there is almost nothing else. Some doggerel and vulgar verses, now and then a fact of history or natural science, for the rest wildly sensational story upon story, and that is all.

These stories deal, moreover, almost exclusively with adventures. They are not stories of the quiet, if you will, monotonous life that most boys, and men too, have to live. These adventures are often of the most utterly improbable, if not impossible character. The young heroes (?) in them perform the most astounding feats. There is nothing too difficult for them to attempt; there is no position of responsibility which they are not competent to fill.

A boy whose principal diet was this sort of reading would learn then, first of all, that the chief thing in life was to be a great adventurer, and to this end to cultivate physical courage. The rough, hard, true side of these adventures is not shown. A bewildering glamor is thrown over them, and the boy who feeds on them would learn to despise the comforts of his home, the amenities of polite life, the wise but kind restraint of parents, the opportunities for acquiring an education and growing up a civilized man. He would come to think that life meant scouring after wild cattle on the plains, or fighting Indians, or roving over the seas, not as commerce goes, but in some adventurous fashion which success always crowns.

The very least evil then that a boy would learn from these stories would be to dream of and long for a life that is utterly different from the real life that men have to live and ought to live in this world, and for which boys should be preparing. To one brought up on such a diet, the real life when it came, would be indeed distasteful, and he would be but ill-prepared to meet its trials and to bear its burdens. In real life the substance of our occupation is not galloping on a fine horse over breezy uplands, nor encountering wild animals where we always come off best. In real life we have to work for what money we get, work as a rule doggedly, day in and day out, from morning till night. We cannot depend on the decess of some wealthy uncle. In real life the villains we meet are quite as often as not as well dressed as ourselves, and injure us under forms of law, and we are not at liberty to redress real or fancied grievances with pistol or knife. In real life the laws of nature have some sway, and we cannot achieve, nor is there use of attempting impossibilities.

But this evil, grievous though it be, is the least that would be inculcated in the mind of the youthful reader of these stories. A large part of right education consists in the implanting of high moral purpose and principle. But nothing tending in this direction will be found in these publications. We have examined carefully this literature, and there is in it no appeal to the nobler nature, no stigma put upon real baseness, no picture of life as consisting of what one is more than of what he has. The very least that can be said of it is, that it pictures that which, judged by the truest standards, is ignoble, and from that ranges downward, through the vulgar to the utterly debasing. If we are to have noble men, we must begin by teaching our boys what is real nobility of character, and what it is worth. But these stories teach precisely the contrary.

The great safeguard of human society is reverence for law. This has its beginnings in obedience to parental authority. The lovingly obedient boy will be the law-abiding and law-honoring citizen. But in these stories, quite a staple subject is the tyranny of parents and teachers, and the would-be hero is the youth who despises and resists the authority of his natural guardians. If your boy makes this literature the material of his mental diet, he will learn to despise, to chafe under, perhaps to resist your rightful and just authority. He is likely to grow up, as unhappily so many have, to chafe under and resist civil authority, perhaps to his utter undoing. He will certainly cast off the divine authority, to his everlasting ruin. Do you want your boy to learn such lessons as these?

Besides these fundamental evils, the persistent reader of this sort of literature would learn some other things that are bad enough to stamp all these periodicals with the reprobation