

* * The Story Page. * *

Lost and Found.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man may lay down his life for his friends."

George Brunton pondered long over the words. Their meaning baffled him, yet he knew far more about the matter of laying down one's life than most boys of his age. He had risked his life and lost his health and his power of earning for his widowed mother, all for the sake of a lad with whom he had been on almost unfriendly terms.

There seemed but scant comfort for him in the text that his Testament opened at.

"It wasn't love that made me plunge into the river when Tom Perley skated into the air-hole," he mused. "Any fellow with a spark of courage would have done what I did. Strange," he added, bitterly, "that he should go scot free afterwards while I am laid by most likely, for life."

The lad did not realize that Tom Perley's strong physique had been far better calculated to stand the shock of the icy bath than his own ill-nourished body. In addition, he had been suffering with a heavy cold on the very day of the accident.

"I'll always be a burden," he sighed pitifully as he straightened himself painfully for the night; "yet there seems to be nothing ailing me but a horrible weakness."

The tears gathered in his eyes as he buried his face in his pillow.

Just before he fell asleep a new thought struck him: "If I'd done it for love it might have counted," he said to himself; "but I never did like Tom, and maybe if I'd known what it would cost me I might have left him to drown. It couldn't possibly count," he murmured as he fell asleep.

The lad had been very brave, very heroic. His reward was a curious, nameless disease that almost emptied his life of happiness.

Gradually the memory of his deed died away. Those who had been loudest in their praise were quick now to hint that his mysterious disease was only a form of laziness. Their careless words seared the very soul of the sick boy. For the first time he rejoiced in the isolated situation of his poor home.

Dr. Proctor, who was their nearest neighbor, dropped in sometimes, but confessed the powerlessness of his skill in the case. He was a haggard-looking man with gentle, sympathetic ways. The family were well known to him, for Mrs. Brunton was considered the best nurse in the district.

Some day soon Dr. Levison, a great city surgeon, was coming to the village for the purpose of performing an operation upon Dr. Proctor's wife. George guessed that his friend would look less haggard when the operation was safely over. The doctor had promised to bring the great surgeon to the sick-boy. Both felt that it was the one chance for recovery.

Sally and baby Susan slept in the loft above George's bed-room. They were his delight and comfort as they played the livelong day by his bedside. Sally's keen, bright mind and Susan's bobbing golden head and winning smiles were his constant joy. He could remember a time when he thought of them almost indifferently as "the children," but now they have woven the tendrils of affection so closely about his heart that he loved them better than anything else in the world.

One blustery winter night Mrs. Brunton came to his bedside. "I can't tell you how sorry I am, my son," she said, with the glint of a tear in her faded eye, "but Dr. Proctor has just sent word that they will need me for the operation to-night."

The face of the boy lit up with sudden hope. "But, O my son," the woman sobbed, "the great doctor will not be here to see you. He is coming in the late train, and he leaves in the early morning. Dr. Proctor says he will talk over your case with him, but that is all he can promise."

The boy closed his eyes wearily. He was too sick at heart to say a word. His only hope had been shattered.

Mrs. Brunton forebore speaking again, but her tears fell fast as she filled the kitchen stove that the little house might keep warm and cozy for the night. Then she hurried out lest she should keep the doctor's messenger waiting.

A heavy storm was fast rising. Gusts of wind drove handfuls of hail against the window by the lad's bed as he lay in mute misery. The thought of the helpless children in the loft overhead began to torment him. How powerless he was to aid them should danger of any kind arise. The roar of the fire in the kitchen chimney made him unwontedly nervous. At last from sheer exhaustion he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke the room seemed to be full of smoke. A faint crackling sound overhead told the rest of the story. The house

was on fire! The great fire in the poorly-built chimney had done its work.

For a second he lay supinely in his bed. It was weeks since he had set foot to the floor. Then as the realization of the fearful death that awaited the children dawned on him, he made a grim face and threw himself out of the bed.

It seemed as if Sally's bright eyes were looking straight into his, and as if a flame-colored aureole were nearing Susan's golden head. He scrambled over the floor, half walking, half crawling, till he gained the ladder that led to the loft. There was no stir above but the crackle of the fire. A little tongue-like flame licked around the open hatchway!

It was but the work of a second to climb the ladder. All his weakness was leaving him now. He gained the loft and stood upright in the stifling heat. The wooden shelf that served as mantel was already in flames, and the woodwork in floor and furniture was fast catching.

The children had not stirred as yet; the thick smoke had lulled them to unconsciousness.

He shook Sally roughly and bade her waken the baby. Then throwing up the window he peered into the outer world. There was no signs of life in any direction. The night was wilder than before and a great snowbank had drifted close by. The intruding current of cold air made the flames blaze brightly. A yellow gleam danced towards the bed in which the frightened children lay.

Sally pinched herself in order to make sure that she was awake. It did not seem possible that it could really be her sick brother who was moving about the room. She was still more alarmed when he lifted her from the bed, wrapped her in the thick quilt, carried her to the window, and with excellent aim tossed her into the great snowdrift. A moment later, he pressed a kiss on baby Susan's forehead, wound her tightly in a blanket, and threw her to the same place of safety.

Then all his new-born strength deserted him. He fell helpless to the floor. All escape was cut off for him. The flames had met across the hatchway now and were hurrying on to the window where he lay. His work was over, but the little ones were safe.

"Lord, I did love them," he said, reverently, as the text he had read at bed-time seemed to rise questioning-ly before him.

He knew the meaning now. He understood the all-compelling love that had prompted the Saviour of the world to lay down his life. The fire was creeping very close, yet a feeling of unspeakable peace was stealing over him.

A fretful wail from baby Susan roused him.

"Susan will freeze out here," Sally cried, pitifully. She had come under the window. Her blue eyes were wild with terror.

"Jump, quick, brother?" she shouted. "Susan will freeze to death unless you save us again," she entreated.

The boy nerved himself for a last effort and leaped from the sill. Wonder of wonders, he reached the ground unhurt!

The children crept close to him and hugged him tenderly. The flames were shooting from the window now, and Sally guessed how near he had been to a horrible death. The lad looked about him wildly. His work was by no means over. Where should he find shelter for these helpless little ones?

It was a good quarter of a mile across the fields to the doctor's house, and he knew they could never face the howling storm. They would assuredly perish miserably by the way.

A strange exhilaration seemed to possess him. He would fight all the elements, if need be, to preserve these lives that God had given him. Already a plan unfolded itself. He began to burrow a great hole in the snow.

Sally was quick to aid him. "Are you going to put us there?" she asked, shrewdly.

In a few minutes both children were placed securely in the very heart of the drift. Their heads alone arose above the surface. The flaming house was so close at hand that the air seemed tempered to almost summer mildness.

Then over the fields, across lots, fences, sped the sick boy until he reached the doctor's house, where fitting figures behind the blinds told of life within. The great surgeon was partaking of a midnight repast, and Dr. Proctor, his face radiant with happiness, was ministering to his needs. The operation was safely over.

As they chatted quietly the bare-footed, night-shirted lad burst in upon them with his wild story. Mrs. Brunton, who came to the head of the stairway to ask the cause of disturbance, blanched as if she had seen a ghost as her son staggered into the room below. His incoherent words conveyed but little meaning, but the doctor was easily persuaded to drive down the road and look after the children. It was a happiness to him to serve any one that night.

Dr. Levison meanwhile was studying the boy intently. He led him gently to a great arm chair and made him sup a cup of hot cocoa while he busied himself with his burnt and frost-bitten feet. When, presently, the lad drowsed, he spread an afghan over him with tender care. He was already familiar with the particulars of the case, and had keenly regretted his inability to make a personal call on the sufferer.

Even the arrival of the excited children did not disturb George's slumber. Mrs. Brunton gathered the little ones passionately to her breast and drew the story from them.

When they had finished she knelt by her son's side and hid her face. The great surgeon who had been listening attentively to their tale turned sharply aside to the window.

At a sound from the sick-room the mother ran quickly upstairs, and Dr. Proctor, who had been tucking up the children in buffalo robes on the sofa, turned curiously to his friend.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"I think the last shock has counteracted the effect of the first," answered the great physician. "Good food and nursing are all he needs now, and with your permission I will take him to my private hospital. A lad who can lay down his life for others as he has twice done must be saved for the world."

"For all these mercies may the Lord make us truly, thankful!" said Dr. Proctor, unconsciously repeating the grace before meals of his childhood. He felt that the surgeon's visit was having blessed results.

In the weeks of hospital life that followed, George Brunton won his way back to health and strength. One day as he walked out with his new-found friend a thought occurred to him. Perhaps, after all, he had not been deemed worthy to make the great sacrifice. So forcibly did this thought appeal to him that he repeated half aloud the words of the puzzling text: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Surely this greater love had been his, and yet—

Dr. Levison heard his half-uttered words, and easily divined his thought. "My boy," he said, "you have learned all the lesson that those words hold, and for you, as for few of us on earth, there rings a new meaning in another verse of Holy Writ;" and very gently he repeated: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it again."—Zion's Herald.

Helen's Waking Up.

BY CHARLOTTE WHITCOMB.

"Helen seems to be more ornamental than useful."

The words were spoken in the sewing-room, and Helen, who was toasting her slippered feet by the library fire-side while she lay comfortably back in an easy chair, overheard them. She knew the speaker; it was Mrs. Wills, a neighbor and old friend of the family who had a way of expressing her opinions very freely. She was speaking to the seamstress now long resident in Helen's home. Helen wondered what Miss Green would say in reply; Miss Green said:

"Helen is very capable. She, herself, doesn't yet know how capable. She will wake up one of these days."

The maid here entered to tidy the room and Helen took a magazine and strolled into the sitting-room. Seating herself on a couch she was soon lost in a story when she heard her two aunts, who had just descended the stairs from a morning call on her mother, speaking of her.

"Where is Helen? Why doesn't she take hold and help now that her mother is laid up? I believe, Agnes, I never saw a girl of her age so utterly indifferent to the affairs of life as she is. Why at her age you were quite womanly and I was bearing a good deal of responsibility."

"Be patient, Lois. Helen is only sixteen, hardly more than a child in years and certainly a child in her unconsciousness. She will wake up and find herself before very long, I am sure."

"Thank you, Aunt Agnes," said Helen to herself as the aunts let themselves out at the front door. At this moment, Ralph, Helen's twelve-year-old brother, came in, crying.

"Helen! Where are you and what are you doing? Come I look at my new tools and tell me what to make with them."

"O Ralph, you can make less noise the easiest of anything, and I wish you'd do it. Go away and don't bother me, that's a good boy."

"No, Miss, you've just got to wake up and tell me what mamma would like made—"

But Helen did not wait to hear any more. She rose and ascended to her own room and closing the door lay down on a couch and prepared to read undisturbed. In a few minutes, however, she heard her father's step on