



### The Family Circle.

#### THE PEONY.

Still shines that Sabbath morn for me,  
Its breeze still whispers low;  
'Twas yesterday; it cannot be  
'Twas thirty years ago,  
A little girl, in broad-brimmed hat,  
In the old meeting-house I sat;  
The southwind through the doorway blew,  
And the old deacon, in the pew  
In front, looked back and gave to me,  
Full blown, a crimson peony.

What sudden sense of wealth was mine!  
To my delighted eyes.  
It seemed a blossom such as might  
Have grown in Paradise;  
So wide its silken petals spread,  
So rich its robe of royal red,  
Pinks, roses, lilies, violets, all  
My garden blossoms, great and small,  
Seemed poor, pale, common things to me,  
By that resplendent peony!

In what serene content I spent  
That oft-times weary hour,  
My little head in rapture bent  
Above that matchless flower!  
The prayer and hymn were both unheard;  
I lost the sermon, every word;  
But, O, what charms, unseem before,  
For me, that gray, old deacon wore!  
The best of men I thought must be  
The giver of that peony.

Time flies with swallow's wings away;  
I count the years, and know  
That Sabbath was not yesterday,  
But thirty years ago;  
The very meeting-house is gone,  
We gathered in that summer morn;  
The preacher's voice is hushed, and wave  
The daisies o'er the deacon's grave;  
But, fresh and fragrant, still for me  
Unfading, blooms that peony—

Still bright, as when, above its breast  
That happy day I smiled;  
O blest, for aye the gift is blest  
Bestowed upon a child!  
It has a worth beyond its own,  
A charm to all things else unknown!  
How perfect is the joy it gives!  
How long in memory it lives!  
And childhood's spell yet makes for me  
A flower of flowers, the peony!

—Sunday Afternoon.

#### ALWAYS BEHINDHAND.

BY M. D. K.

Supper was ready and waiting. Our guest had not arrived, but there was another train an hour later. Should the family wait for my friend, or should I alone, who was the personage especially to be visited? My father paced the floor nervously, as was his wont when he felt disturbed. He had the evening papers to read, and he never opened them until after tea. This was a habit of his. He was very fixed—or, as some express it, "set"—in his little ways. It was Bridget's evening out, and she had begun to show a darkened visage. Bridget was no friend to "company," and it was policy to conciliate her. So the family seated themselves at the table, and I sat near, waiting until brother John should be ready to accompany me a second time to the station.

"What about this young lady friend of yours, Nelly?" asked my father. "Is she one of the unreliable sort—a little addicted to tardiness, that is?"

"I am obliged to confess, papa, that at boarding-school, where I longest knew Jeannette, she was inclined to be dilatory; but that was years ago. It is to be hoped that she has changed since then."

"I should wish to have very little to do with a behindhand person," said my father, shaking his head very gravely.

"Oh, papa!" I remonstrated, "you will not condemn a dear friend for one single fault. Jeannette is beautiful and accomplished, sensible and good-tempered. Everybody thinks she is splendid."

"She may have very pleasant qualities, but I tell you, girls," he added with sudden emphasis, "that a want of punctuality vitiates the whole character. No one is good for much who cannot be depended upon; and what dependence is to be placed on a man who is not up to his engagements? In business, such a man is nowhere; and in social life a dawdling, dilatory man or woman is simply a pest. But mind, my child, I am not char-

acterizing your friend; we cannot tell about her till we see."

The later train brought my friend. She was profuse in her regrets; she had been belated by a mistake in the time; her watch was slow. As she was pouring forth a torrent of regrets and apologies, I observed my father bestowing glances of evident admiration at the fair speaker, while the rich color came and went in her cheeks and her eyes kindled with animation. Truly, beauty covers a multitude of faults. Sister Bell, who was as punctual as my father, was appeased, and promised to take care of the tea-things and let Bridget go out. My father good-naturedly offered to regulate the halting watch by the true time.

To her chamber we went together, to talk as girls do talk when they meet in this way, after a long separation. Folding me in her arms, she told me all about her recent engagement to George Allibone; showed me her engagement ring, and her lover's photograph. It was a noble head finely poised, and a most engaging face, and my ready and cordial admiration was a new bond of sympathy. It took until nearly midnight to say all that we girls, aged twenty, had to say to each other; and this, in addition to the fatigues of travel, was accepted as an excuse for Jenny's tardiness at breakfast. She really had meant to be early.

But this was only the beginning. Throughout the whole three weeks of her visit, she was scarcely punctual in a single case where time was definitely appointed. She was late in rising, late at meals, late at church and for excursions, and, to our profound mortification, late for dinner appointments, even when parties were made especially on her account. She seemed sorry and mortified, but on each occasion she would do the same thing over again.

"What can she be doing?" my mother sometimes asked in perplexity, when my sister and I were ready and waiting.

"Doing her hair, mother," we answered, "and she will do it over until it suits her, be it early or late."

"Oh, these hair works!" sighed my mother. "How much tardiness at church and elsewhere is due to over-fastidious hair-dressing! What is that line of good George Herbert's? 'Stay not for the other pin.' I think he must have meant hair-pins."

My sister and I sometimes agreed between ourselves to compel her to readiness by standing by, to help her in her preparations; but in vain. She must write a letter or finish a story before making her toilet. Why not accomplish the toilet first, to be sure of it—any time remaining, for the other purposes? She didn't like to do so. No philosopher could tell why. It is an unaccountable, mysterious something, rooted deep in some people's natures—this aversion to being beforehand. I have seen it in other people since the time when it so puzzled and troubled me in Jenny. It marred the pleasure of the visit most miserably. I was continually fearing the displeasure of my father and the discomfort of my mother. The whole household were disturbed by what seemed to them downright rudeness.

"Now, Jenny," I would plead, "do be early, dear, when papa comes with the carriage. It annoys him dreadfully to wait."

She would promise to "try."

"But pray, Jenny, why need you have to try. It is easy enough. For my part, I never will make any one wait for me. I go without being ready, if need be, or I stay behind."

I had come to talk very plainly to her, out of love and good-will, as well as, sometimes, from vexation of spirit. For the twentieth time she would tell me how truly she had meant to be punctual in some given case, and that she should have been so but that she was hindered when nearly ready by some unforeseen occurrence.

"But, my dear, unforeseen hindrances will often occur, and you must lay your account with them, and give yourself extra time. You will run the risk of meeting some great calamity by trusting, as you do, to the last minute."

And the calamity did befall her. Mr. Allibone spent a day with us. We were anticipating with great pleasure a second visit, when a telegram arrived requesting Jenny to meet him in Boston on the succeeding morning. A business emergency had summoned him abroad very suddenly, and he was to embark for Liverpool in the evening.

We all sympathized with Jenny in the startling effect of this sudden announcement, and offered her every sort of help when the hour for her departure was at hand. She had only to compose herself and prepare for the journey. Sister Bell would arrange her hair and bring her dress, and she would be spared all effort. She seemed grateful, but was sure she could be ready without troubling any one. She dreamed not how much she was, even then, troubling us, for we were beginning to tremble lest she should somehow manage to be late for this, her only train.

She kissed us all twice over when the hackman arrived at the door; but, suddenly glancing in the mirror and observing how ashen was her usually brilliant complexion, she declared against wearing the gray cashmere in which she was dressed, of a hue so like her face. George must not meet her thus. She seized her black silk, with which, in spite of remonstrances, she proceeded to array herself. There was time enough; the carriage must surely be too early. Alas! for the ripping out of gathers, in the violence of her haste, and for the loopings of her skirt, not to be dispensed with! Horses could not be made to do the work of five minutes in three.

She saw the cars move off without her!  
"It is beyond my comprehension," said my father, when he came home to dinner. "I can understand tardiness," he continued, categorically, "as the result of indolence. Lazy people dread effort and postpone it. There is a man in my employ who continues to work sometimes after hours. The men tell me that he is actually too lazy to leave off work and put away his tools. But Miss Jeannette seems active and energetic."

"She miscalculates, papa," I said. "She always imagines there is plenty of time until the last minute."

"But herein is the mystery," persisted my father. "Whence this uniformity of dereliction? Why not sometimes too early and sometimes just in the right time, instead of always and everywhere late, and making others late?"

"Poor girl!" said my mother, whose compassion was uppermost. "I pity her with all my heart; yet it is not a case of life and death. This trial may be attended with beneficial results. We will hope so."

I am sorry that this hope was apparently not to be realized. The lesson failed to be read aright. Jeannette recovered her serenity, and resumed her tardy ways. A yet severer lesson was needed, and it came.

The steamer in which, after an absence of ten or twelve weeks, George Allibone was to embark for home, was lost, and not a passenger saved.

My father took me at once to my poor stricken friend, in her distant home. Pale and dumb with grief, yet with tearless eyes, she let us take her almost lifeless hand. From her bloodless lips came only the low, anguished cry, "If only I had said farewell!"

What comfort in words? We offered none. My father's eyes brimmed over, and my heart was breaking for my poor Jeannette.

But relief came speedily. The joyful news was received that George was safe, having made a necessary change in his plans, and would arrive in a fortnight. Jeannette came up from the depths. What should her thank-offering be? She made the resolution to become at once faithful to her appointments, prompt and reliable. It was not that she would try—she would speak the commanding words "I will."

She has kept her resolution. Writing to me, after a lapse of years, she said: "You will hardly know your dilatory friend. I remember and practise your advice of former years, to be first ready for my appointments, and to reserve other work for the interval of waiting after I am ready. It is surprising how often I find not a moment left for waiting. Still, I feel the old tendency to procrastinate, and I am obliged steadfastly to resist it. 'Delays are dangerous,' as our old writing-copies used to run; the sentiment is hackneyed, but oh, how true! George says he owes you ten thousand thanks for your faithful counsel, and we shall speak them when you make us the visit of which we feel so sure because your promises, as I well know, are faithfully kept."

—St. Nicholas.

#### WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

BY MRS. ANNIE A. PRESTON.

(From the Standard.)

"O what a lovely bunch of pansies! Is it possible they are for me?" I exclaimed to a tiny, brown-eyed girl who placed a fragrant bouquet of the gold and purple dewy blooms in my hammock in which I was idly swinging under the big maple.

"Aunt Lee sent them," said the wee child, "and she hopes the mountain air will soon make you well, and she's your neighbor, down under the hill."

"Who is this neighborly Aunt Lee?" I asked the woman with whom I boarded when next she came within hearing of my voice.

"O, then she's sent you some posies," replied talkative Mrs. Evans, coming briskly from the garden and sitting down on the steps of the little porch. "I was a wonderin' tew myself not tew minutes ago how long 'twould be afore she'd find out about ye an' send ye suthin. I can't see, for my part, how she can afford to do as she does."

"Why, what does she do?" I enquired. "Oh, she says she aims to be neighborly, and if anybody happens to besickanywheresaround

she sends 'em little things to eat an' flowers to cheer 'em up, as she says; and she always has her knittin' work in her pocket and her 'odd job o' knittin'' as she calls it, grows out like magic into gloves and mittens and wristlets an' stockings that she gives away."

"To her friends, people fully able to buy them, I suppose."

"Oh dear, no. To poor children an' tew ole men an' women that, I'spose, are real needy, an' that set great store to her warm and handsome presents, for her yarns are as bright as her flowers, an' I've told my man a good many times that the color went half toward makin' her little gift so welcome. An' then she has so much comp'ny."

"Rich people from the city, whose visits she returns?"

"Oh, land sakes, no; poor folks that are tickled most to death to get a invitation to her pleasant little home. Yis, her home is an amazin' pleasant one, though her man is only a poor mechanic. She's always a sayin' that she'd rather dew a little good every day as she goes along, than tew be a waiting to dew some great thing when she gets able, and then, p'raps, lose her opportunity and never do nothin'. I told her one day last year, says I, Mis' Lee, says I, I should a ruther be a puttin' by a little sumthin' in the bank for a rainy day, than to be a givin' away all the time. And, says she, Mrs. Evings, says she, 'That's your way an' it's a good way. I don't find no fault with it, but all these little things that I give away would never git into the bank, an' so you see, they'd be lost, an' I should pass away without ever doin' anything for my Master. An' I don't want to go to bed a night without thinkin' that I have that day tried tew lighten some fellow mortal's burden, brought a smile to some face, or a streak o' sunshine to some heart, if it's only givin' a bunch of posies in the right speret."

"And these flowers cost her a good deal, first and last, I suppose?" said I, caressing my pansies.

"Oh, 'twould cost me a good deal to run sich a flower-garden as she does, but Mis' Lee says she's not strong, so she gits fresh air, sun-baths and exercise in her garden, and spends her time workin' in there, instead of visitin'. She returns all her calls by sendin' her compliments with a bunch o' posies."

"She hires some one to carry them about, I presume?"

"Massy, no. There isn't a child in the village but what would run its legs off for Aunt Lee, and having finished shelling her mess of peas, my talkative little hostess trotted off about her work again, saying, as she disappeared through the door-way, "It's well enough to be neighborly, of course, but Mis' Lee may see the time when she'd a wishe' she had a leetle sumthin' eout at interest."

The Vermont mountain air agreed with me, my health gradually improving, and I stayed on and on, week after week, spending a great part of my time, when the weather did not positively forbid, in my hammock under the maples. As yet I had not once seen my neighbor, Aunt Lee, but grew to love her on account of the pretty nosegays that daily found their way from her hand to mine by one and another child messenger.

One night, late in August, there was a heavy thunder shower. The sudden downfall of rain swelled the little river that skirted our village to a veritable mountain torrent. A mill-dam some miles up the stream had broken away and the angry flood came rushing down, sweeping all before it.

"Aunt Lee's husband's shop has gone," shouted my hostess, Mrs. Evans, as she knocked at my door in the early morning after the storm; "and that's not the worst on't, for her garden is all washed eout and undermined, so that it'll take a purty pile o' money tew fix it up again, if ever 'tis fixed. I wonder now if Mis' Lee don't wish she hadn't been quite so neighborly, and so had a little sumthin' eout at interest," and it really seemed to me as if the brisk little woman chucked to herself as she patted down the stairs.

In less than half an hour she came back to my room with as doleful looking a visage as I ever saw. "Whatever is agoin' to become o' me and my man," cried she; "an' we a gittin' to be old folk, tew. Our savins' were all in the stock comp'ny up to Minotsville, because they paid more interest than the bank, we only tuk it eout o' the bank a little while ago, and now their old mill has gone clean off, an' they'll all go tew ginerel smash and we along with 'em," and this time she went slowly groaning down the stairs. I could not help pitying the poor woman from the bottom of my heart.

There was great excitement in the little village as a matter of course, but Aunt Lee was reported to be as "chipper" as ever. The nosegay came to me every day as usual, not quite so many, nor so great a variety as formerly, for a part of the garden had been washed away, but enough to give me an increased admiration for the sweet old lady who was so persistent and unwearying in her neighborly acts of kindness.

The next Monday's local newspapers had