

Northern Messenger

Lillie Pozer

8338-98

VOLUME XXXIII., No. 1.

MONTREAL AND NEW YORK, JANUARY 7, 1898.

30 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid.

What the Letter Brought.

A STORY OF THE JOHNSTOWN FLOOD.

(By Annie R. Ramsay, in 'Forward'.)

Bertha Taylor and Rega Nichols were putting in order the books and music after the close of a Christian Endeavor meeting, one stormy afternoon.

'Did you ever see such devoted friends?' I asked Miss Fannie, as I glanced across the big Sunday-school room to the corner where the two girls were busy at work.

Miss Fannie smiled at me, and fairly beamed at them, as she answered, softly: 'Well, of course. And I for one, never see them here, leading the singing, playing the accompaniments, nor meet them together everywhere I go, that I am not reminded that "truth is stranger than fiction." Moreover, I always think of them as proofs that, even in the blackest misfortune God does not leave us without signs of his love and care for his children. Yes, even when the misfortune can be traced to man's wilfulness and carelessness.'

What do you mean, Miss Fannie? What misfortune have these girls known?

'Rega—not Bertha—I supposed everyone knew the story. But I remember, you did not live here then. Let me see—where shall I begin—' and, as the young girls had by this time finished their task, and bidden us good-bye, she told me a story which gained its greatest interest from being true. This story I shall endeavor to repeat to you.

Philadelphia was just awakening, with shuddering horror, to the knowledge of the awful disaster at Johnstown. The news of the flood had been published in the morning papers, and people said, with bated breath, 'Three hundred drowned!' In the afternoon vague rumors filled the streets that the three hundred might be multiplied into three thousand. Gloom and anxiety hung over the city like a pall. The next day—Sunday—broke clear and quiet, and people who could do nothing else, felt that the church was the only place meet for men and women whose fellow-beings were enduring so much.

In one of the churches sat Mrs. Taylor and her young daughter, Bertha; the mother's thoughts were occupied with the sorrows of the many Rachels mourning for their children in that far-off town; and she felt selfish, almost wicked, when, as she looked at her own blooming daughter, her heart gave a throb of gratitude that her darling was safe and spared to her.

The minister made his usual announcements, and a thrill ran through the congregation when he read the latest account from Johnstown, in which the number of the dead was estimated at ten thousand! An eloquent appeal for help followed; clothing was especially asked for; and arrangements announced by which a special train was to be sent to the stricken city to carry all donations.

Bertha Taylor heard nothing of the sermon that day; her whole heart was aroused by the picture which her imagination drew of the scenes and sufferings at Johnstown. As soon as the last words of the service had died away, she was pulling her mother out of the church and along the streets in feverish haste.

'O, mother! Let's go right home and make up a bundle; I have my old blue dress and those flannels that I can't get into next winter, if I grow a single mite this summer; and there's that old check suit of brother's, and father's old hat, and some shoes. Why, there's lots of things you're saving for the Bradley family, and more, too, in the trunks in the basement. Come, come, quick! We will make up a bundle at once.'

Mrs. Taylor smiled at the eager girl, 'Gently, my dear. We want to give all we can, but not more than we ought; and above all, we do not want to give things which would be useless to those who receive them. My idea is that each one should think of the people there as sisters, or friends, and try to send just what we would if these relations really existed.'

of really good things, and as soon as dinner is over, you can bring me what you think you can spare, and we will decide about it.'

By this time they had reached home, and Bertha immediately flew to her room to pull out bandbox and bundle, and to empty closets and drawers, in her enthusiasm and energy. The brown dress hung on a peg far back, the pretty silk braid catching gleams of light, and each one of its steel buttons done up in a twist of tissue-paper—so careful was Bertha lest rust should corrupt her glittering treasures, for those buttons were the pride of her heart. In spite of her generous ardor, the girl hesitated a moment; the dress had been her 'best' one last winter, and was to be used for school in the coming season. She had never before had one made by a dressmaker, and had looked for-



'I SHALL WRITE A LETTER, AND PUT IT IN THE POCKET.'

'O, mamma! what a splendid idea; it makes it twice as interesting, if I can pretend I know the people who get my things. Let me see—I should like to send my coat with the red lining to some girl. You will let me, won't you? I'll wear my old one willingly. Cousin Eva Johnson always liked that coat, and it will be like giving it to her. And O, mother! could I give my pretty brown cashmere with the silk braid? I think I could do without it.'

'Dear, generous child,' thought the mother, though she only answered, quietly: 'I am quite sure we can make up a large package

ward with great delight to the time of wearing to school a perfectly-fitting, stylish costume, such as most of her friends wore every day. But selfishness had no real lodging-place in Bertha's heart, and when her mother's suggestion came back to her mind, she added the brown cashmere to her armful of gifts, without further hesitation.

Hurrying to the basement, she flung the things on a table, and turned to help her mother make her selections.

'Mother,' she said, 'how shall we get these things to the station?'

'I never thought of that, Bertha! Per-