

* * * The Story Page. * * *

Neglected Duty.

"Ma wants to know if you'll let me and Clyde stay over here today while she goes over to Niltensburg as delegate to a big convention. She'll be back at bedtime."

It was not the first time that my neighbor, Mrs. Stimperson, had preferred a request of this kind. I was particularly busy that day, and it would be extremely inconvenient to have Clyde and his mischievous little Maggie around from nine in the morning until the same hour at night, but one never likes to offend a neighbor, and I told the children that they might stay.

"Are the other children at home?" I asked.

"Oh, no! Ma was afraid they'd burn the house down or something. Myrtle's gone to stay with Metta Dean at her house, and Harold is at Miss Warfield's. Mrs. Warfield didn't want to keep Helen, but she said she guessed she'd have to when I told her ma had already gone and the house was locked up."

Only two weeks before this, Maggie and Harold Stimperson had arrived at my house bearing the following note from his mother:

"Dear Mrs. Howland: I am going to ask you to allow Marguerite and Harold to be your little guests today, while I attend the annual meeting of the Home Improvement Society, of which I am Secretary."

"It will be an all-day meeting, and I am so interested in all the themes on the programme that I will hardly reach home before night; but I feel quite easy about my darlings while they are in your loving care."

Harold has his nap at half-past two o'clock, and as I dislike any variation from fixed rules regarding my children, I hope, dear Mrs. Howland, that you will insist on his taking his nap, even if you have to use a little gentle force. Kindly disrobe him and put on his night-shirt, as his sleep will be more restful and beneficial."

"Marguerite has brought her books, and will devote at least four hours to study. Will you kindly see that she does this? Thanking you in advance for your kindness, I am sincerely yours,

ADELAIDE STIMPERSOHN."

Mr. Stimperson's business as travelling representative of a large manufactory kept him away from home the greater part of the year.

Mrs. Stimperson's duty as a member of various clubs, having for their object the interests of the home, the spreading abroad of the gospel of progress, the cultivation of the mind, and the general amelioration of the human race, left little time for the care of her own household.

She was, however, surrounded by patient and obliging neighbors, who had never yet said her nay when she asked for the privilege of leaving her children in their care.

There is a limit to even neighborly patience and kindness of this sort, and Miss Susan Ward felt that this limit had been reached when Myrtle and Clyde Stimperson arrived at her home one day when she was in the midst of what she called her "currant jelly work."

"Good morning, Miss Ward," said Myrtle cheerily. "We've come to stay all day."

"You have, hey?"

"Yes," replied Clyde, "and I'm awfully glad you're making jelly, for we can have the skimmings, can't we?"

"What did your mother send you over here for?" demanded Miss Ward.

"She had to go to an all-day meeting of the Woman's Progress Club," replied Myrtle. "It tells all about it in the Herald."

The Herald chanced to be lying on a table near Miss Ward. She rinsed her hands at the kitchen faucet, wiped them on the roller towel at the door, and took up the Herald.

"It's on the first page," said Myrtle.

"I have found it," said Miss Ward, with a little snort of indignation:

"At two o'clock Mrs. Adelaide Stimperson will read one of her delightful and scholarly papers, entitled 'A Neglected Duty.' It will treat on some of the neglected duties of wifehood and motherhood, and is certain to be useful and helpful to all who hear it."

"Miss Ward threw the paper down on the floor in a manner indicative of much suppressed feeling. She looked at the children. Buttons were missing from their shoes, and Clyde's bare little knee peeped through a hole in his stocking. He had on a soiled collar, but no tie. He was only six years old, but he had evidently made his toilet unassisted, and there were indications that he had all of the boy's inborn abhorrence of soap and water."

Myrtle, who was ten, was as unkempt and as much in need of general repairs as her brother.

Miss Ward looked at the little clock on the kitchen mantel.

"It's lucky I didn't pick all my currants," she said.

"I can work up those I have by noon, and then I'll do it!"

She compressed her lips tightly, her black eyes flashed.

"I've a little neglected duty of my own to perform, and I'll perform it," she said to herself. Then she said to Myrtle, "Where are the other children today?"

"Marguerite and Harold are over to Mrs. Little's, and me and Clyde are here."

"I see that you are," said Miss Ward grimly. "Go out into the yard or barn to play. It's of no use to tell you not to meddle with things, for you will anyhow; but I'm thinking it'll be the last time you'll visit me right away, so you may as well enjoy yourself while you can."

Then she softened a little in her manner and gave each of them a big ginger cookie before they went out.

"Poor little youngsters!" she said, "it isn't their fault, after all."

At a little before two that afternoon, Miss Susan Ward surprised a good many people in the town by appearing on the street with the little Stimpersons. They were exactly in the condition in which Miss Susan found them. There was not a clean face nor a clean pair of hands among them, nor a garment was whole, nor a head of hair was neatly combed, and a more surprising array of misfit and badly made garments were never seen in one respectable family.

"Come along just as you are," Miss Ward had said grimly.

The meeting of the Woman's Progressive Club was public that day, and there was a large attendance. It was two o'clock and the President of the club had said, "The next number on the programme will be given by Mrs. Adelaide Stimperson, who will read a paper on 'A Neglected Duty.'"

"I guess they'll see several neglected duties," murmured Miss Ward, as she marched down the aisle to the front seat, with the little Stimpersons following her in Indian file.

"There's our mamma," cried little Harold, as his mother came forward. "Here we are, mamma, Miss Ward's fetched us to hear you speak your piece."

"I fetched them to help illustrate your paper," said Miss Ward, boldly, as she directed the children to seats directly in front of the platform.

But the paper was not read. Its author turned pale and then crimson before saying, "I—I—beg your pardon, Mrs. President and ladies, but I must ask to be excused. Perhaps I could come in later on the programme. There has evidently been some misunderstanding among my friends. My domestic duties require my immediate presence at home."

Once outside the hall, with her family and Miss Ward around her, she asked indignantly, "What does this mean, Susan Ward?"

"It means," calmly replied Susan Ward, "that some of your other friends and myself have concluded to remind you of a neglected duty or two of your own—a duty that takes precedence of your duty to other mothers and to the world at large. Do you see the point?"

She pointed toward the children as she spoke, as Mrs. Stimperson evidently saw the point, for she gathered her neglected little brood together and walked away in silence and that was the last time that her children were left to the care of other families in the town.—The Household.

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Into the Sunshine.

"I wish father would come home."

The voice that said this had a troubled tone, and the face that looked up was sad.

"Your father will be very angry," said an aunt, who was sitting in the room with a book in her hand. The boy raised himself from the sofa, where he had been lying in tears for half an hour, and with a touch of indignation in his voice, answered,

"He'll be sorry, not angry. Father never gets angry."

For a few moments the aunt looked at the boy half-curiously, and let her eyes fall again upon the book that was in her hand. The boy laid himself down upon the sofa again, and hid his face from sight.

"That's father now!" He started up, after the lapse of nearly ten minutes, as the sound of a bell reached his ears, and went to the room door. He stood there for a little while, and then came slowly back, saying with a disappointed air,

"It isn't father. I wonder what keeps him so late. O, I wish he would come!"

"You seem anxious to get deeper into trouble," remarked the aunt, who had only been in the house for a week, and who was neither very amiable nor very sympathizing towards children. The boy's fault had provoked her, and she considered him a fit subject for punishment.

"I believe, aunt Phebe, that you'd like to see me whipped," said the boy, a little warmly. "But you won't."

"I must confess," replied aunt Phebe, "that I think a little wholesome discipline of the kind you speak of would not be out of place. If you were my child, I am very sure you wouldn't escape."

"I'm not your child; I don't want to be. Father's good, and loves me."

"If your father is so good, and loves you so well, you must be a very ungrateful or a very inconsiderate boy. His goodness don't seem to have helped you much."

"Hush, will you!" ejaculated the boy, excited to anger by this unkindness of speech.

"Phebe!" It was the boy's mother who spoke now, for the first time. In an under tone, she added: "You are wrong. Richard is suffering quite enough, and you are doing him harm rather than good."

Again the bell rang, and again the boy left the sofa, and went to the sitting-room door.

"It's father!" And he went gliding down stairs.

"Ah, Richard!" was the kindly greeting, as Mr. Gordon took the hand of his boy. "But what's the matter, my son? You don't look happy."

"Won't you come in here? And Richard drew his father into the library. Mr. Gordon sat down, still holding Richard's hand.

"You are in trouble, my son. What has happened?"

The eyes of Richard filled with tears as he looked into his father's face. He tried to answer, but his lips quivered. Then he turned away, and opened the door of the cabinet, brought out the fragments of a broken statuette, which had been sent home only the day before, and set them on a table before his father, over whose countenance came instantly a shadow of regret.

"Who did this, my son?" was asked in an even voice.

"I did it."

"How?"

"I threw my ball in there, once—only once, in forgetfulness."

Then the poor boys tones were husky and tremulous.

A little while Mr. Gordon sat, controlling himself, and collecting the disturbed thoughts. Then he said cheerfully—

"What is done, Richard, can't be helped. Put the broken pieces away. You have had trouble enough for your thoughtlessness—so I shall not add a word to increase your pain."

"O, father!" And the boy threw his arms about his father's neck. "You are so kind—so good!"

Five minutes later, and Richard entered the sitting room with his father. Aunt Phebe looked up to see two shadowed faces; but did not see them. She was puzzled.

"That was very unfortunate," she said, a little while after Mr. Gordon came in. "It was such an exquisite work of art. It is hopelessly ruined."

Richard was leaning against his father when his aunt said this. Mr. Gordon only smiled and drew his arms closely around his boy. Mrs. Gordon threw upon her sister a look of warning; but it was unheeded.

"I think Richard was a very naughty boy."

"We have settled all that, Phebe," was the mild but firm answer of Mr. Gordon; and it is one of our rules to get into the sunshine as quick as possible."

Phebe was rebuked; while Richard looked grateful, and it may be a little triumphant; for his aunt had borne down upon him rather too hard for a boy's patience to endure.

Into the sunshine as quick as possible! O, is not that the better philosophy? It is selfishness that grows angry and repels, because a fault has been committed. Let us get the offender into the sunshine as quickly as possible, so that true thoughts and right feeling may grow vigorous in its warmth. We retain anger, not that anger may act as a wholesome discipline, but because we are unwilling to forgive. Ah, if we were always right with ourselves, we would oftener be right with our children.

* * * *

Joe.

Everybody said he was the worst boy they ever saw. His father said so, too. His mother has gone to rest before he could remember, and perhaps his father didn't know how to manage boys.

Joe—that was the boy's name—had long ago ceased to follow his father to the barnyard to help feed the horses and cows, although it had been his chief delight. But his father had told him he hindered more than he helped. As nobody seemed to want to be bothered with him—everybody was always busy—he had given his affection and attention to his dog, and had taught him many wonderful tricks. But one day Joe's father told him he was getting lazier every day; he didn't do a thing from morning until night but follow that dog around, and so he sold the dog.

It was after Joe was. He peeped in at was ordered seeing what

If there was a neighbor's If anything had could go packed off on nothing, but had destroyed would have

But one day shop window was accused o took hold of b a young girl, "Why, boy, y say you didn't Joe was so s "I'll warrant 'There's noth in it but Joe is "Well, he d saw the boy wh she said to Joe "Would you that stone get s "No," said J "Well, if it i to defend your earnestly.

There was a grinned.

"'T wouldn't when everybody He looked sober

The grocer ha waiting for, and "Would you i she said.

Joe took the p might have carri "What makes town, Joe?" she ing.

"You're a stra "Yes, I am t plied, "but you I "I don't kno somebody, and I somebody, and I keep quiet when are acting untruth

The boy whis most likely telling "How does you meanest boy in to "Got no mother The tears came here," she said sof You must come in the gate.

And before Joe ing in the minister was telling her fa things home, and Joe forgot that was talking to th boy himself.

And before he k promised to go to S ter that he was a ve and told Joe a gre when he was a boy, was the beginning, Joe spent at the par learned there. O Christian, and ther than Joe.

He rejoices in hel the good in them recalls this sentence minister preach: "I faults of people thro eyes to their goodne

To have patience a bit and dinna worr

Every man's chara a man thinketh so is

We miss many an c for chances to do som