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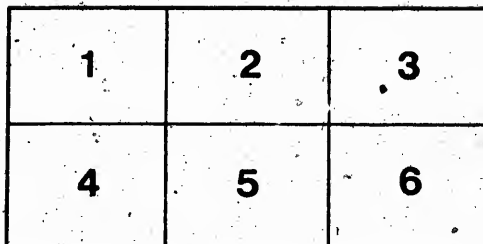
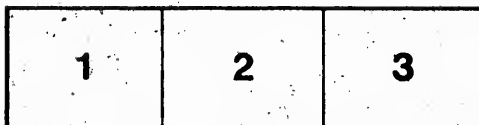
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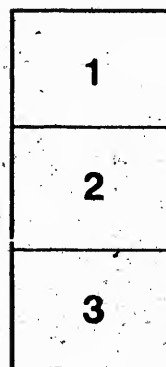
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From
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146

Women's Foreign Missionary Society.

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA.
(WESTERN DIVISION.)

The Box from St. Mark's.

MABEL NELSON THURSTON, in Youth's Companion.

THE ladies of St. Mark's Church were gathered in the Chapel one October day, packing their annual missionary box. From the stained glass windows the lights fell across the pretty, energetic groups, made warm spots of color in the piles of bundles on the floor, and touched softly the hard outlines of the box itself. Merrily chatted the ladies. Some were amused at many of the contributions that had been sent in. Some were laughing at the way they packed and unpacked, and re-packed. Some, who had given until it meant self-denial, touched a happiness deeper than words.

They worked busily all the morning. By noon the box was packed and the janitor had nailed on the

cover, and the ladies with little sighs of satisfaction, were putting on their gloves and saying their thousand last words. They did not notice when the door was pushed timidly open and another woman entered.

She was a pale meagre little thing, dressed in shabby black, who felt her presence to be like a jarring note among these easy, well-to-do women. She faltered a moment, then, seeing the closed box, a sudden fear overcame her hesitation, she touched the lady nearest her. "I—I hope I am not too late," she said, looking up with eager appeal. "I couldn't get here before, but I wanted to bring my bit."

The lady glanced at the little package held out to her and looked embarrassed. "I'm so sorry, Miss Tremont," she said, "but the box is all nailed up!"

For a moment the little woman did not seem to understand. Then her head dropped, and her eyes filled with tears, and without a word she turned away and pushed open the swinging doors.

Out in the vestibule she stopped, she could not go on the street so. She wiped her eyes on her little cotton handkerchief, but it seemed to do no good. "I aint ever had things like other people, and I don't expect to, but I did think I could give," she said tearfully.

The door behind her opened softly and a young girl slipped through. She was the youngest of the workers that day, and felt shy and strange, but as she saw the pitiful little figure she forgot her shyness, and ran for-

ward and put her warm, strong young hands over the trembling ones.

"Don't," she cried, "don't feel so—please! The ladies are opening the box while I ran after you. I'm so glad I caught you! Let me take it back for you—unless you would rather put it in yourself!"

The woman looked up with a quick, quivering breath. "It can go?" she cried.

"Of course it can go," answered the girl eagerly.

The woman gave her the little package. "It was for mother's sake," she said humbly. "I wouldn't have cared so for myself." Then she pushed open the door and went away.

The girl walked slowly back to the chapel where the ladies were waiting. She was very silent. One of the ladies took the package, and tried to slip it in at one side of the box. As she did so the paper tore: she looked up in amazement.

"Of all things to send a missionary!" she exclaimed. "It's a Scripture calendar—a nice one, too; it must have cost a dollar. It seems a pity people are not more sensible? A dollar would mean a good deal to a missionary, while the verses—well, he would naturally know them."

A strange expression crossed the girl's face.

"And yet," she said, "she was crying because she thought it couldn't go. She said it was for her mother's sake."

A hush came over the room. They remembered then that the little figure had not been wearing the shabby black very long.

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Suddenly one of the ladies spoke. "I should never have forgiven myself if we had let her go away," she said, with a little quiver in her voice. "I feel somehow as if that meant more than anything I ever gave in all my life!"

There were hard times that year. The well-to-do pastor of St. Mark's spoke of it often. The poor pastor to whom the missionary box had gone, spoke of it seldom, but as the months passed by, every one cut deeper lines of suffering on his face. It was a terrible year. Sometimes he thought that he could not endure the privations he had to bear, and that he saw about him.

He had not been paid for months, either by his people or by the Missionary Board. Many a Sunday he had gone to his meeting meaning to tell the people that he must have some money, but when he looked into their poor pinched faces, his heart would fail him, and instead he would preach to them of trust in God, or pray for them until, in the agony of his prayer, he utterly forgot his own need.

But his need was pitiful. The long strain had been too much for his wife, and she was sick—dying, the doctor said, from want of nourishing food. The children were growing thin, with languid, unchildlike ways, and Beth, Beth, with her patient care-taking, was at the same time his greatest comfort and also his greatest heartache.

Many a night he had gone home from his service worn and weary with the sorrows of his people, only,

upon meeting the white patience of his wife's face with Beth's little anxious one bending over her, to rush out into the night again and walk back and forth for a time under the stars.

And now he was using his last dollar, and he could get no credit. The storekeeper hated him, and wanted to drive him out of the place. The pastor had written the Board that his family would starve unless money came. Day by day he had looked for the answer and no answer had come. His wife and Beth did not question him any more. They told each other that they must keep bright before papa; they had given up trying to when alone.

It was Monday night, and Sunday had been an unusually trying day. The minister looked at the clock and his breath came hard. It was mail time and it seemed to him that he could not go and meet another disappointment. Then he saw the expression on Beth's face, and he went for his hat and turned up his coat collar. It was September and the nights were cold now.

At the door he stopped. "I may be late home, Beth," he said, "Don't wait supper. Mamma must have her tea but I don't want any to-night."

Beth turned her face away—she understood so well. "Yes, papa," she said in a choked voice.

The door closed, and the minister went out into the darkness. A neighbor had taken the children for the day and Beth and her mother were alone. Beth ran over to the bed and buried her face in the pillow.

Her mother's thin hand touched her lovingly. "Don't dear," she whispered. "It is best—it must be best, though it is so hard for us now."

Beth lifted her face desperately. "It isn't the letter mamma—I guess I don't know how to hope any more. It's—mamma, I gave you the last bit of tea yesterday, and—it almost breaks my heart!"

Her mother gave a little start, but she was not thinking of herself. "Beth," she said, quickly, "we musn't let papa know. I can get along well enough without the tea. Do be brave, dear, for his sake."

"I'll try," sobbed Beth, "but, mamma, sometimes I wonder what God is thinking of!"

"Beth!" cried her mother.

The child sat still and the impression of pain and misery on her pale little face, made it look worn and old far beyond her years. That look was to her mother the hardest thing in all their hard years. She reached out her arm and drew the child passionately to her, and her voice was full of an intensity that Beth had never heard before.

"Beth," she said, "pray—pray, and I'll pray with you, but don't stop for one moment until you believe God is good, that God is love!"

The child knelt beside her in an obedience that was frightened at first, and only the ticking of the clock broke the silence of the room. Ten—fifteen—twenty minutes passed and Beth had not spoken. Twenty-five

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minutes—half an hour—then at last the child looked up with the light of a great peace upon her worn little face.

"It's all right, mamma," she said softly.

Her mother looked at her. "Beth," she said, "you are hoping for something!"

The child lifted her face full of bright confidence. "I can't help it mamma," she answered, "I'm sure it's coming some-how; maybe not to-day, but I know its coming."

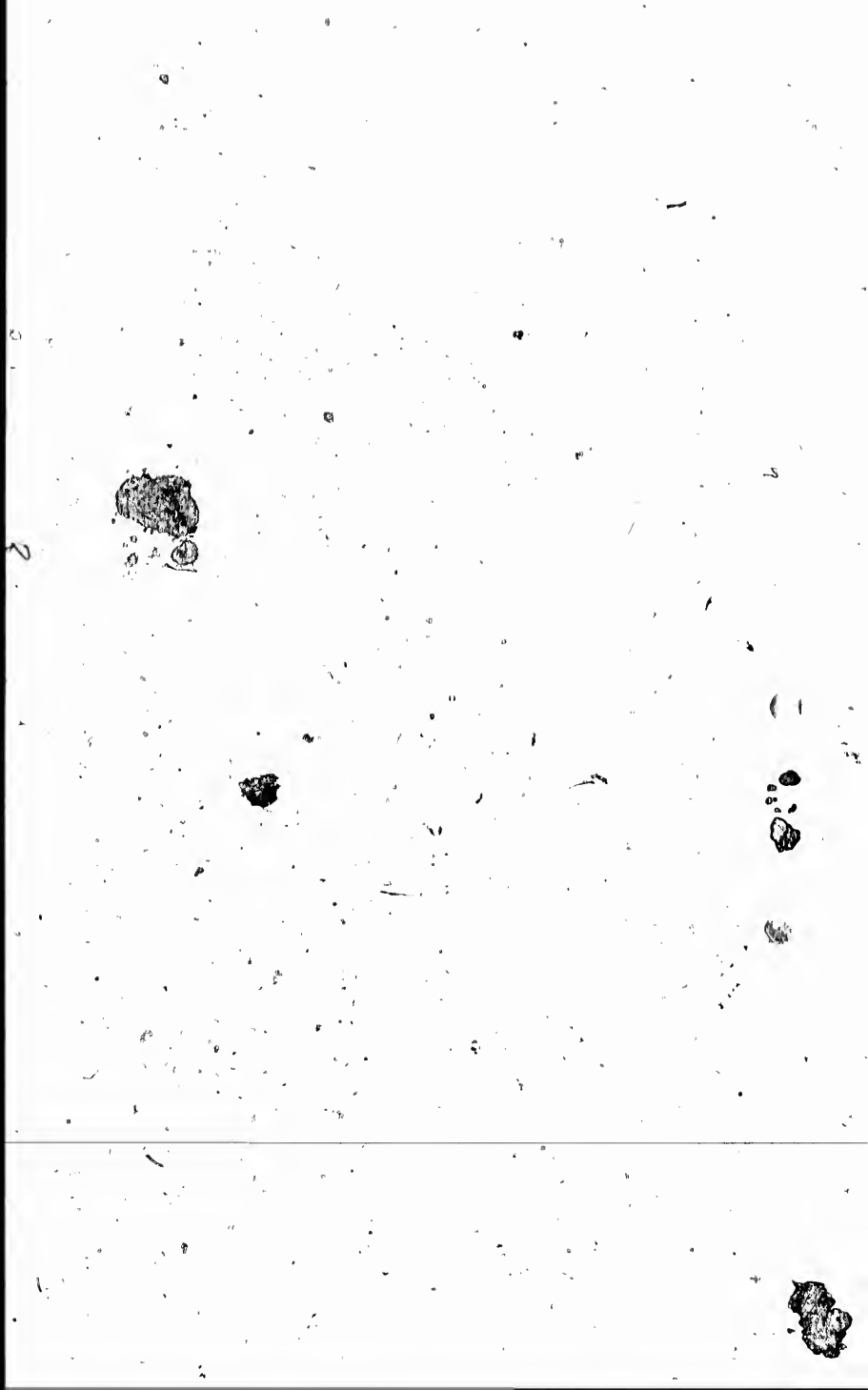
Her mother's voice was low, but she had to ask the question. "And if it doesn't, Beth?"

The child's lips trembled a little, then she answered steadily, "Then it's all right, too," she said.

She kissed her mother and then went and looked out of the door: it was time for her father to come back. She felt, in a keen, unchildish way, what the coming back was to him. If only she had some way of making it easier! But she didn't see him, and there was nothing that she could do.

She shivered a little in the chilly air and turning away went to put the water on the stove. She could make her mother some gruel—that was all. Even in her new confidence that hurt her—she knew how hard it was for her mother to take the gruel.

Suddenly her glance fell upon the calendar that had come in their missionary box nearly a year before. She brushed the tears from her eyes and crossed the room to read it. In their anxiety the leaves had not been torn off for three days. She read the verses softly aloud.



"I am the bread of life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."

Her voice trembled a little over that but she went on to the next one, and as she read it a grave sweetness filled her voice. She did not notice that her father was softly opening the door, his white face drawn with the pain of bringing them another disappointment. The words sounded almost triumphantly through the little room.

"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

She tore off that sheet, too, and then stopped in bewilderment. Instead of the verse for the day she saw a white envelope pinned across the text. She unpinned it and opened it; there was a carefully folded note inside. As she turned she saw her father standing by the door, and running over to him she thrust the note in his hand. She forgot for the moment his hopeless errand.

"What can it be?" she asked, excitedly.

Her father went to the table, and lit the lamp with unsteady fingers. His sorrow-dimmed eyes could not see by the firelight like the child's and his brain was almost numb with the pain of the long struggle. He unfolded the note and looked at it almost blindly for a moment, then suddenly he buried his face in his hands on the table. Beth picked up the paper that fluttered out of it and her face grew white. It was a twenty-dollar bill.

In a few minutes they could read the note. It was a very brief one. The minister sat with his wife's thin hand in his, while Beth knelt with her face beside her mother's, and so they read it.

"Dear unknown friend," it ran, "I am only a plain little dressmaker, but it doesn't make any difference who I am—the money is not from me. It is from my mother. She was all I had in the world, and I had been saving this to take her away and make her well, but God took her away and made her well first. So I have put this money here so that you can find it on her-birthday, and I pray it may bring you a bit of the blessing that my mother gave me all her life."

Beth lifted her face full of the wonder of it.

"And God had heard, and it was waiting all the time!" she said.

Then she leaned down and pressed her face against her mother's with "Mother darling, you shall have your tea."

This was not quite the end, perhaps it would be truer to say that that was only the beginning. One morning the pastor of St. Mark's came before his people with a letter. They had had grateful letters from missionaries before, but never one like this. As it told of their bitter need, and the help that came to them from poverty and sorrow, many a careless heart was touched.

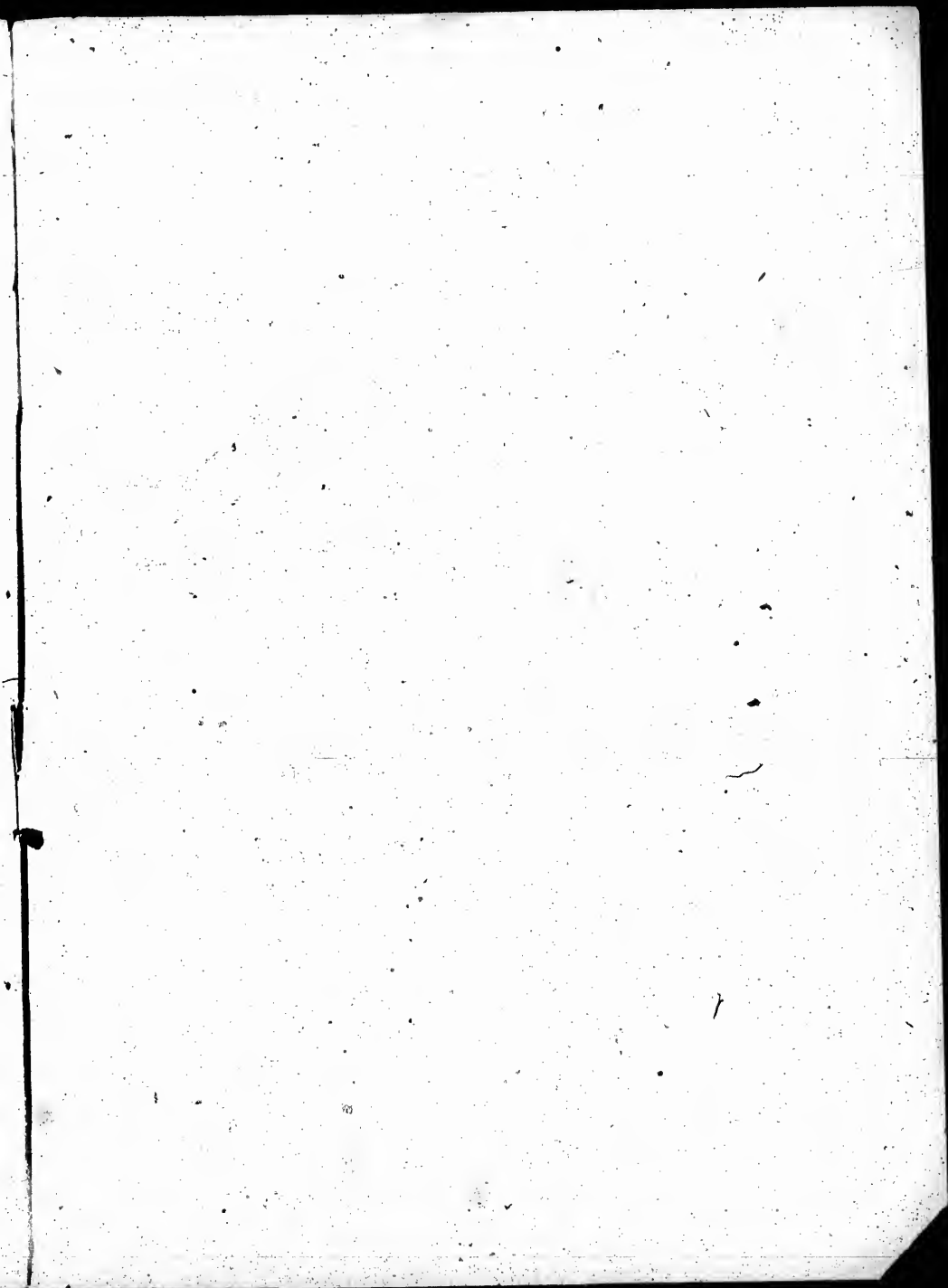
"I do not know who she is," said the pastor, "who has done this beautiful thing, but I am glad she is among

us ; I believe we have many such, whom we do not know as such, and these are they who bless the world. May God speak to our hearts and teach us—each one of us—so to turn our sorrows into the blessings of others.

The little dressmaker in her seat up in the gallery was sobbing behind her rusty veil, but it was from joy, not sorrow. And in her heart she promised that as long as she could work she would send twenty dollars for her mother's sake.

Behold now the church of St. Mark, which had felt the hard times, realized suddenly that it did not know what hard times were.







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