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CLIPPED WINGS

BY

LOTTIE McALISTER

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
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INTRODUCTION.

WE had the pleasure of reading this volume in manuscript, and were profoundly impressed with its character. It is written with brilliant literary skill, with force and vivacity, with wit and humor, and with some touches of tragic pathos. It sketches Canadian country life, life in a hospital, Methodist preachers, Quarterly Boards, and other features of special interest to Methodist readers. It is a tremendous indictment of the liquor traffic, and sets forth the mission and power of woman to ennoble and bless society. It is full of religion as well as of fun, is not a bit preachy, but a heartsome, wholesome book. Some of the character-sketching is as strong as anything we know.

W. H. WITHROW.

TORONTO, May 26, 1899.

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CLIPPED WINGS.

CHAPTER I.

HILLSDALE.

THE great throbbing heart of the city, which generates the initial impulses of progress, sends them on their widening way, until the last faint ripple reaches the shores of remoteness. Though almost imperceptible to the careless eye of the age, which sees nothing but what is tangible, ponderable, visible and gustable, this last gentle undulation of an almost spent force forms a circumference which retransmits reciprocal benefit to its centre. The sociologist in his research for finality in the social compact reaches the husbandman in the last analysis. The whistling ploughboy turns the enriched furrows for the distant multitudes.

There are some populations, however, who regard themselves as absolute and unconditioned, and therefore do not recognize in the

least the claims of the rest of creation. Hillsdale was one of the latter, and on some occasions went so far as to assert, in tones stentorian, that its heathen quite equalled those of the Soudan both in quality and quantity.

Hillsdale, like a thrifty housewife, had awakened early one morning and performed all its duties, active and passive. Houses were built, a school-house was erected, a church built, and, like the rest of Christendom, counterbalanced by building a tavern.

Hillsdale in afternoon dress, spotless apron, knitting in hand, was drowsing through the long afternoon, nestling at the base of a mountain which had stood socketed through dim ages, and therefore, turning a cold shoulder to the friendly advances of modern times, it was in a position to challenge innovation. One bold cliff stood out from the mountain's side, embrowned with time, barren and bleak, with outlines resembling the human face. The seamed lips silently protested against the mutability of the age. A generous-hearted corporation, with commendable and *usual* zeal, offered to ameliorate existing conditions by an electric car service. Hillsdale strenuously and with no uncertain sound objected to this thin edge of the wedge of modernness, and hinted mysteriously that there could

be but one result. This result was well understood to be the heels of a circumventing world kicking up a dust in its face; besides there was the jeopardy to life and property. The roadside pasturage was valuable, and the village cow, as sacred an animal as the ancient Egyptian Apis, must not be disturbed in her leisurely flexuous ruminations. Her lowing was far in advance of the strains of martial music. Hillsdale was beyond a doubt conservative.

It seemed but yesterday that Sally Jenkins' kerosene lamp frightened a whole surprise party into a stampede, which was for Sally a great saving of temper, preserves and sundry victuals. Indeed, there is to this day in some quarters lingering conscientious scruples as to the use of lucifer matches, inasmuch as they savor of the pit.

The genius of the civilization was faithfully portrayed in the wise old doctor who had performed the duties of physician and dentist to three generations. A patient, converted to a spirit of reform by an unscientific extraction of molars, inquired indignantly why he did not introduce "them 'sthetics" into his office "like as how he had read about in *The Progress*."

"Tut! tut! man, all new-fangled humbug and nonsense," replied his eminence the practitioner.

"I would not get the stuff before there would be something else. I am waiting for the permanent, the ultimate. Surely the dusty attic of oblivion is well filled with contrivances. Jonah's gourd has ever been accompanied by a worm." Poor soul! the wheels of progress ever move onward, and make but one revolution in time and eternity.

The mental vision, however, of all the inhabitants of Hillsdale was not bounded by the local horizon. There were those who pressed the eye of the soul against a narrow casement for the widest possible outlook. Underneath the monotony and quiet, subtle touches from the great ongoings of the world registered themselves in the brain and heart, from the flashes which fell on those eyes at that casement.

The mother followed her boy as he struggled honorably and heroically along the crowded road of mediocrity, or perchance, if of stronger pinion, soared to fame; and alas, too, as he fell ignominiously, to shame. In the latter case it was always the wicked city, and not the boy, that bore the opprobrium. The corner tavern with the smiling landlord was rarely if ever counted in as the initiation of this graduation in ignominy. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." No

one save the landlord saw anything but economy in the neighborly proximity of his house to the village school-house. His pump served both. "Ye blind guides which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."

In a year or so the boys took the one step from the pump to the row of armchairs on the veranda. What in the churches is the counter attraction to this seat of the scorner? The law lays its strong hand on the street loafer with a stern "Move on," but why does it tolerate this seat of ease in his primary education? The sty of a respectable pig which is laudably spending its days in the accumulation of adipose tissue for Gentile consumption is classed as a public nuisance when located on the main corner of a thoroughfare. To many citizens the sty is preferable to the sights, sounds and fumes emanating from this enthroned candidate for vagrancy of the hotel frontage. If these seats were seats of honor for the graduates of the bar inside, the privilege of exhibiting the finished work of the liquor traffic should be granted, but the seats are ever full to overflowing with freshmen and sophomores. There is no room except in the gutter and the grave for the sot.

Many boys left Hillsdale with the possibilities of sturdy manhood and honorable old age, but

the seed of probabilities already sown bore the harvest of an untimely and dishonorable death. The end began when the boys sat on the hotel stoop in an armchair tilted back and with hat tilted forward.

Hillsdale was destined to write a new chapter in its history. This was not brought about by steam nor electricity, nor even by a woman in mannish attire on a wheel, but because momentous forces, whose fountains lie at Nazareth and Calvary, in their far-reaching flow, moved the responsive soul of a young Canadian girl.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEEKS' HOMESTEAD.

HALF a mile from the village, at the end of a lane, stood the house of farmer Weeks. It was a very ordinary house that had once been painted. The front door opened directly into the parlor. Some young ladies who have been so unfortunate as to have received a liberal education, including music, art, and literature, in a three months' term at a ladies' college, have emphasized the affectation of an otherwise glorious generation by designating this apartment of venerable age and honored by Cupid, the reception room.

Opening off the parlor was the spare room. In this particular case spare, sure enough—spare in comfort, spare in furniture, spare in guests. Above were the half-story family chambers. In summer these rooms were intensely hot. It is yet a disputed point whether man or necessity arranged that they should be needed so little in

summer. The legitimate hours for sleep in Hiram Weeks' house were from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m., with wakefulness counted in.

The pole star of the man at the wheel was hard work and wormwood tea; the family were on a forced march to a golden Klondike. Hiram accepted the concept of perpetual motion as a delusion in mechanics, but evinced signs of genius by experimentation in this direction on himself and those around him. Two passages of Scripture Hiram regarded as the "most sensiblest" in the Bible. He did not regard the Old Testament as a millstone, and in no sense would he be classed with the higher critics. One passage was from the book of Genesis: "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread;" the other was from the New Testament, and was always quoted without connection: "Not slothful in business." Had he been more familiar with the "Word of Life" he would have found that God had made ample provision for recreation in the social, domestic, and religious life of a nation which had served with rigor, but knew nothing of this experience, except as spectators and as ministers to the luxurious Egyptians.

He who "knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust" made holidays a part of the religious life and ritual, and did not consider

every seventh day sufficient to make up the wear and tear on this triple organization of ours, but enjoined comparative rest every seven years; and to renew the youth of the nation, to this was added the year of Jubilee. God's plan and intention for human life, even outside the charmed gates of Paradise, was change, and not monotony. The penalty, "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread," was tempered, and the Father's hand wiped the beaded face as He bade the human race look up betimes, in anticipation, from the digging, delving and spinning, to a place where rest remaineth.

Doubtless following a law of compensation, these chambers were intensely cold in winter. It was consolation enough to remember there was more money in dry cordwood than in ashes. Behind the main building was an ample kitchen. Here the real business of life was prosecuted with never-ending activity. When tired hands at last dropped their task, the little yeast germs worked their way to the breakfast pancake or the batch of bread. Here, indeed, had been ground out a large portion of the precious golden pile stored so safely in a chartered bank. That pile was a thermometer of Hiram's wife. It had to be read inversely. In the exact proportion it went up, she went down, physically and

mentally. To be shut in, day after day, within four walls, on a treadmill of domestic duties, without a protest of either mind, body, or soul, or a federal rebellion of this trinity, is impossible.

As men go, Hiram was not cruel-hearted. His compassion was clearly seen by the neighbors, in his public and private bemoanings of his wife's weakly condition. He would frequently remark, "She was a likely gal when I married her, and her folks were long livers and good workers, but now it tuckers her out completely to milk ten or twelve cows and feed the calves night and morning. I give her the best time I know how. I take her to all the funerals in the neighborhood and to the county fair, unless it is haying, harvesting, or seeding."

It was very unfortunate that Mrs. Weeks was breaking down, but it was absolutely unavoidable. Acre must be added to acre, and dollar to dollar. Hiram claimed to worship God in his own way, and sometimes in fine weather drove to church. Although ignorant of alliteration he was accustomed to say, "Naturally a man could not be expected to go to church when the rain and roads would take ten dollars out of the horses and harness." He was right. It is an act of grace, not nature. Hiram never thought of walking to church. When a man has worn

himself out walking miles upon miles up and down the furrows during the week, half a mile is more than a Sabbath day's journey. Besides, this was Hiram's day for having the "sciat" in his hips, and other ill-defined aches and pains. A merciful providence sent relief before daylight Monday morning, and the first to draw up triumphantly at the cheese factory door was our hero, smiling and hearty.

Broad acres and oceans of fresh air do not insure immunity from parasitical germs of Sunday disease recurring with exact periodicity. The inhabitants of both city and country suffer alike this epidemic, that is as mysterious in its comings and goings as the plagues of Egypt.

On one of the few Sabbaths when health and weather conspired to entrap Hiram to church, he heard a sermon from the text, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," with the stress laid on the negative. He stigmatized the speaker a fool, and to the slight extent his pocket was concerned made it an impossibility for him to do otherwise than practise his precepts. In this respect Mr. Weeks was a consistent man. The minister knew his flock, and seldom said anything to disturb their peaceful and well-earned Sunday slumber. Hiram's usual programme was to begin his rest by closing one

eye for a few moments, then he would open that one and close the other for about the same space of time, whereupon, with a little shuffle of feet, both would fly open, which was the prelude to shutting both in sleep. This procedure betokened to the minister that all was well.

On this particular occasion, however, it was not after that sort. The minister was enforcing the truth that God regarded us as stewards; that what He had given us was for use, and not for hoarding. The moth and rust do not get in their work on anything in use.

"We thought your sermon was for us, minister," Hiram said at the church door.

"No! no!" the worthy man hastened to reply, with undiscovered irony, "it was for the Hottentots."

All the gospel Hiram wished to hear and practise was the gospel of hard physical toil and the accumulation of wealth thereby. He expected this to be his passport to the land celestial. He viewed, weighed and judged everything from a monetary standpoint. A pastoral call was interpreted to mean that either the oat or potato bin was empty at the parsonage.

His daughter Agnes desired to be a teacher. Her father was a school trustee, and answered her with the authority of personal knowledge:

"You would git only $200 a year, and you are worth more than that on the farm." Agnes had repeatedly heard the stock valued in almost the same words. True to the ruling passion of his life, Hiram had drawn opposite to his daughter's name the sign of equality, and kept mentally in view the figures he had assigned. It would have been wiser to have given Agnes time to work out this problem for herself.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLINGING VINE.

MRS. WEEKS was not a sentimental woman, but she had married Hiram with genuine affection. Love's eyes are the eyes of the miners, which see not the obdurate ore and dross, because they are dazzled by the flecks and veins of yellow gold. To other eyes Hiram's character was as unlovely as a piece of cracked common delf, but his wife's love had wrought in her a merciful optical delusion that rendered invisible a multitude of defects. Standing at the beginning of married life she did not shrink, although the way upwards looked steep and the steps could not all be counted—hope discovered some breathing places. When the children were grown, and the mortgage on the farm paid, she would have time to read a book now and again. A social cup of tea with the neighbors and a jaunt somewhere with her husband out of sight of Hillsdale, these simple things would be recreation in a future time.

She was quite happy in those early struggles. When Hiram made Agnes's cradle, she held the boards while he nailed them together. From some quarter she procured paint, green for the box and red for the rockers. With a little ochre she boldly designed a tree on each side, bearing a striking resemblance to the trees of a miniature Noah's Ark. Hiram suggested painting some red apples on the trees, so that she would be kept in mind of the trouble woman got into by being curious. She had only smiled at Hiram's rare wit, and was as proud of the cradle and its black-eyed occupant as any mother of her darling in a bamboo, silk and lace receptacle.

When her husband was to have a stumping bee, or the threshers, he would kill a sheep before daylight, and his wife never failed to dress it and have it cooked in time for the men's dinner. Then there were hot, breathless days when she stood side by side with Hiram and raked in the hay field, keeping an anxious eye on the two little toddlers in the fence corner, on a bundle of hay, Anticipation had given place to the glance of retrospection, and it saw the trodden path dizzily steep, without the longed-for breathing places, and she was glad that by simple faith she was sure of "the rest that remaineth."

Mrs. Weeks was a type of what is now classed among former things as the ideal old woman. Unfortunately, ideals are generally abstract. It is hard to concrete them. They are somewhat of the nature of a will-o'-the-wisp, —they are now in the future, and then in the past. To childhood manhood is the golden age. The careworn man pays his tribute to light-hearted childhood. So now this ideal dwells fondly in the regretful memory of mankind. It is inexplicable that she was not valued as such until she had spread her hitherto unnoticed wings and was disappearing heavenward.

Mrs. Weeks had been a marvellous compound of baker, seamstress, laundress, tailoress, barber, gardener, nurse, man servant, maid servant, and had found time to be a Sunday-school teacher. She had likewise the executive ability to accomplish the duties of each of those vocations in a working day of eighteen hours. Even modern credulity is somewhat taxed to believe the paradoxical theory that this woman of former days and herculean tasks was a clinging vine. Tradition says she clung, and she would cling to a cold stone wall; she would cling to a rotten stump or stub, and transform them into things of beauty. She clung to the sturdy oak, but alas for her when the oak was manufactured

into a hogshead. It would have been well to have preserved the species by resolving society into a well-regulated hop garden, with a decent, respectable prop for each tender vine.

Every effect has a cause, and an unknown Rip Van Winkle, who mistook himself for an ethnologist, on opening his eyes caught sight of an effect, when, lo! a wiser than Solomon is here. He has discovered something new under the sun. It is a new species of the *genus homo*. Moreover, the creature is not pleasing, and is therefore disparagingly named the "New Woman." The discoverer, preparatory to relegating her to a national depository of specimens and dusty oblivion, is analyzing and classifying. Ere the self-imposed task is finished the species will have become as numerous and aggressive as our familiar American friend, the *doryphora decemlineata*.

No one denies the effect is here. Her arrival was heralded even in Hillsdale. Everyone translates her according to his own standpoint, personal equation and line of vision. The dudelet, who dispensed calico and coal oil, onions and overshoes, nails and needles, behind the counter of Hillsdale's departmental store, and who was the village authority on fashionable cut and exact shade in male attire—in fact, his master

all but cornered the market, stocking his store with just the article—exhausted his vocabulary and ideas on the subject in the sentence, "Ah, Chawley, she thinks she knows, you know."

But who is this "New Woman"? A process of elimination may help to answer the vexing question. She cannot be the woman who has left the privacy of home for a public arena of action. In Christian countries the custom of years has placed its sanction on the brow of the woman who, in *décolleté* dress and ablaze with diamonds, appears on the stage in a crowded theatre, the cynosure of every eye, aided by every available eyeglass, thereby giving the impression that the curves of neck and arm and the poise of the head are of more importance than voice or declamation. No self-constituted guardians of woman's domestic duties have placed themselves along her pathway to greet her with the Cerebus howl of "Home! Home!"

The "New Woman" cannot be the woman who neglects her home for other pursuits. The butterflies of fashion, who detest babies and dote on pugs, have ever turned from home to pursue a bubble.

Half a century ago Mrs. Jellyby wrote and labored for the Africans, while her children, lacking an application of soap and water, assumed their

hue. The pride our nation takes in the Anglo-Saxon word home, and in its concretion in a materialized reality, proves conclusively that our women are homemakers.

Our oldest dictionaries give us the meaning of Amazon and virago. The "New Woman" cannot be any of these classes. They are *old.* She is *new.* It will be conceded that the "New Woman" is the earnest-browed woman, who stands on the public platform to advocate all kinds of moral reforms. She has made her appearance upon school boards. She is a bread winner. She is agitating for the extension of the franchise so that she may be included. She proposes not only to rock the cradle for the world, but to rock the world for the cradle. From whence came this "New Woman"? In natural sequence, even after the vagaries of the most credulous evolutionists; the elephant does not follow the tadpole. Before the daughters were the mothers. The new is not in contradistinction to the old. In the mothers were stored capabilities that the chilling breath of prejudice nipped in the bud. They, nevertheless, dreamed their dreams and thought their thoughts, and realized to the full their limitations, and have bequeathed to their daughters as their birthright an accumulation of possibilities that are now

escaping the bounds that said: "So far and no further."

Every sphere of human action, from the throne of government and achievement to the sick-bed of the lowliest, are enlarging themselves to admit woman. The world is an old and stupid school-boy, learning just now, slowly and awkwardly enough, the meaning of the words: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman." Satan hurled the creature at the Creator, and God sent her back with a threat which has been a pillar of cloud to the enemy, but to the woman a pillar of fire, an ennobling commission.

The seed of divine prophecy, sown in the dawn of creation, is but beginning to expand into a beautiful harvest, as the rosy-hued morning of the twentieth century greets the earth. All these centuries man has worked alone on the solution of public questions, moral and otherwise. Many problems remain unsolved and will continue so until he finds his true helpmeet in woman.

CHAPTER IV.

A HEROINE'S REVERIE.

ONE evening in the early summer Agnes Weeks sat on her father's front door-step looking up into the blue dome which looked down upon landscapes that bore upon their breasts palaces, markets, huts and tombs. Day was dying down.

She knew nothing of Delsartism, yet she was reverie personified. There was a natural grace in the careless attitude of the lithe, strong young figure. The dark hair was parted and rolled back primly in a style that has been in vogue at least seven times in the last fifty years. Her eyes were dark, and just now darkening with thoughts that surged up to her lips for expression; but Agnes was a girl of action rather than words. What do those eyes see as they gaze immovably ?

The grain was waving almost up to the door-step. Hiram Weeks did not believe in any waste land. Here was one of the places where

he saved his wife's strength. He did not see any sense in women wasting their time over flowers, and wearing themselves out for nothing. His daughter preferred the waving grain and, later, the clean stubble, to the wretchedly neglected front yards of the neighbors. The latter reminded her of Hillsdale's graveyard.

To-day was the twenty-first anniversary of her birth. No one but herself noted this fact. Her father constantly reminded his family that in four years Henry would be of age, and they must get his hundred acres out of debt. It may be this objective aim, this zenith of desire and effort by the acknowledged perversity of human nature, had driven Agnes to a subjective nadir. She was not jealous of her brother. He was her idol. In their repressed childhood she had frequently been charged with idleness, wastefulness, and general good-for-nothingness by the surreptitious manufacture of balls, fishhooks and numberless gimcracks for little Harry. Once she succeeded in framing and flying a kite, although it took days to secure enough of the coveted twine to fly it.

To-night, as the red globe seemed to rest upon the western landscape and shoot crimson rays slantingly eastward, she had a reason for asking herself why it was that her outlook was so

different from that of her brother's. She remembered reading somewhere that the birth of a daughter was considered a calamity in China. The Chinese are heathen, and Hiram was supposed to be a Christian; yet in bitterness of soul his daughter recollected him saying frequently how disappointed he was when she was born. Just yesterday she overheard Barnes, the farm hand, telling her mother about his wonderful new baby, and he added, using the doctor's exact words: "It's a boy, too. I be better off than master, I be. I've two boys, and he has only one, and a gal." With unusual gaiety, Mrs. Weeks replied she preferred one-sixth of a dozen assorted.

Christian civilization is strongly tainted with the pernicious prejudices of heathendom. All around Agnes lived country girls who were helping to provide, in some instances, half a dozen able-bodied brothers with a hundred-acre farm apiece. Their share in case of marriage is a cow, some quilts and a feather bed. If, however, there has been a drought, or too much rain, they cannot reasonably expect a cow. When father dies he remembers them with fifty or a hundred dollars each. On the division of one such estate the brothers suggested to the sisters that, as the male part of the family had

so many taxes to pay, and the girls' shares being too small to be missed, the best thing the girls could do with their money was to club together and put up a monument in loving remembrance of father.

One of those lucky sons entered the Christian ministry. During a visit to his native village he delivered an eloquent discourse from the text, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me do, and the God of peace shall be with you." The right hand was used in impressive gesticulation. To the lively imagination of Agnes the left one behind him grasped the mammon of unrighteousness. Would not a well-poised personality, with blood rather than ice water coursing through the veins, find itself uneasy in such a foreign environment?

Weaker minds than that of Agnes, in similar surroundings, have assiduously cultivated a substratum of morbidness, and have spent the rest of life eating the bitter fruit that ripens on the trees of envy, revenge and hate.

True greatness grips the hand and looks into the ominous face of adverse circumstances until they become friends.

The seemingly cruel chisel of unkindly influences is at work on Agnes's responsive character. Will the result be a moral muscle of superb fibre and proportion, or will the quality prove to be refractory and unworthy of the sculptor's tool?

CHAPTER V.

A PROPOSAL.

Now what were those saddening reflections that engrossed the mind of Agnes and churned her brain on that summer evening. Nature was already fulfilling the promises of spring. The consciousness of this young girl realized powers lying dormant, powers which she feared would never blossom into summer nor bear an autumnal harvest.

A conversation with her mother, between the washing of the dinner dishes and the preparations for the early tea, had brought her face to face with an altogether new and totally depressing view of life. With the hope of relaxing the tired lines around her mother's mouth and eyes into a smile, Agnes had related to her what she declared to be the only bit of real fun that had ever come into her life.

"Mother, what do you think happened last evening?" Mrs. Weeks was too weary for any display of curiosity further than an expectant

look. Upon this slight encouragement Agnes proceeded: "When I was coming home from the store Billy Watson overtook me and invited me to ride. The basket was heavy, and I was tired with carrying down the butter and eggs, so I thanked him and got into the crazy old hurdy-gurdy of a buggy. Billy seemed to be gazing into the basket to find, if possible, a theme of conversation, and at last remarked: 'I'm thinking you do be thrifty folk at your house. A pound of tea would do you a year, with leavings.' I felt my cheeks burning, and bit my lips to keep from saying, 'You impudent old thing! What is it your business whether we drink one pound or twenty pounds in a year?' However, I never said a word, and in the long, uncertain pause which followed I amused myself by watching the fantastic shadows cast by the pines as they were moving in the wind.

"Presently a cloud crossed the moon. Billy cleared his throat and squeaked out, 'Agnes, I reckon I may drive you home and sit up with you.' At first, mother, I did not realize what he meant, but when his meaning dawned upon me I shrieked with laughter. I just managed to say, 'No, thank you, Mr. Watson, I do not need your services,' and then went off into another fit of laughter. When the moon shone

out again, I caught sight of the old face of the mountain, and whether you believe it or not, mother, it was laughing in the moonlight. When we arrived at his gate he stopped, and there was no choice but to climb out and trudge the rest of the way with my basket."

Mrs. Weeks did not even smile; but, rather, there seemed to be tears gathering in her eyes. Billy Watson, in the vernacular of Hillsdale, had proposed marriage to Agnes. This proposal was not so much of a surprise to Mrs. Weeks as it had been to her daughter. Latterly, her husband had frequently referred to neighbor Watson as being well fixed, as possessing one of the best farms in the township, and from Hiram's point of view, therefore, the chief requisites for a husband were to be found in Billy. Was he not old, and had he not money to leave behind him? The two men had come to a tacit understanding that Agnes was to be Watson's wife. During her absence at the store, Hiram had communicated to his wife the scheme he had in his mind for his daughter's future. He commenced by announcing his intention of making his will. "I think, mother, you ought to be satisfied and would be well done for with a room or two in Henry's house, and fifty dollars a year. As a matter of course it is more than any woman

should spend on herself in a year; but I suppose you will want that much. Then I have been thinking that it would be a pity, an awful pity, to split up the land. Two hundred acres all together will look dreadful pretty in a deed, so I think I shall give the farms to Henry, and give Agnes her share in money. If she gets Watson, a hundred dollars will be all she will need, and more too. Watson has grown into property just wonderful."

Hiram did not entertain for a moment the thought of leaving his earthly possessions, but he wished to clinch Billy's suit, and felt elated over his deep-laid plan to force mother and daughter into a ready compliance with his insatiable greed.

"What are you talking about, Hiram Weeks?" asked his wife, who up to this point had been almost uninterested in the conversation.

"Watson wants Agnes to marry him, and she would be a fool to refuse him."

"What Watson, Hiram?"

"'What Watson, Hiram!' 'What Watson?' Well, I never heard the like! 'What Watson?' Why, Billy Watson, of course; our neighbor, William Watson."

Mrs. Weeks rose. All the motherhood in her nature was aroused. With a searching look

that would have found the hiding place of her husband's heart had there been any such article to hide, she said sadly: "Has it come to this, husband, that you are ready and anxious to sell even Agnes for gold?" She left him with his thoughts.

When the news reached Agnes, it had been translated from the barbarian into the softening idioms of mother language. The sting of injustice and the gnawing of greed might be deadened somewhat, but could not be paralyzed by any such gentle means.

Agnes was face to face with a crisis in her life. She did not consider Watson's proposal a moment, but what was the alternative? Was it to spend her youth in thankless drudgery, and finally to be cast up on the shores of old age among the wreckage of useless spinsterhood? Was her mother, also, to spend her last days beside a cheerless hearth, whose very warmth chilled because her presence was not desired?

"No! no! a thousand times no!" she said aloud, to this menacing survey of the future. "For mother's sake I will attempt, and I will succeed."

Her very ignorance of the world was her saviour. The necessities of life did not haunt her as an empty socketted and bloodless spectre,

seeking to hold her in its fleshless, bony grip. Such visions are bred in the squalid corners of the city attic, the slums, the tenements, where herd the submerged populations of this restless planet. They stalk in dark alleys, and peep through the luxurious curtains of uncertain opulence. The reach of sky and air and field and substance surrounding Agnes prevented any baneful whisperings from the grinning, ghastly jaws of the skeleton Want.

She had, however, looked squarely into the face of that hydra of cruel injustice, which is supposed to lurk only in the Christless nations, and as she looked not a muscle moved. That hideous body rears its multiplied head in every land, seeking its victims amongst the weak and defenceless, who tremble and cower before its hot breath and infernal gaze.

Hiram needed no nicely-adjusted balances to decide what were the righteous claims of his son and daughter upon his love and substance. The specific gravity of those claims was decided by the standard of sex. Alas for Agnes! womanhood in America inherits too often the legacies of fiendish, heathen injustice which is meted out to her sisters in China and India. All these forces, which tended to write this young life in the untranslatable characters of fate, slowly but

surely crystallized in her a resolve to snatch the pen from the hand of destiny, and painfully, bloodily, if necessary, write into that life a purpose to which her efforts would be as constant as the magnetic needle to the pole. She resolved thoughtfully and without undue haste. She acted promptly.

The evening had long ago kissed the flowers, the birds and bees to sleep, and slipped away unnoticed, like a light-footed nurse. Old mother Earth had rolled her tired children over into the kindly shades of night, and was soothing them into forgetfulness by the drowsy hum of her myriad insect chorus.

Agnes arose. There was nothing to indicate that a crucial point in her life had been passed. The old clock ticked away, loud and self-assertive as it always had done, in the silence of the house. It might have been reflecting on Hiram by the unceasing prosecution of its vocation in life. Tabby, the cat, was purring contentedly on her appointed cushion, and the deep, even breathing of the sleeping members of the household could be heard on all sides. All the surroundings were familiar, yet Agnes realized a newness of life that was not unpleasant. Before sleep closed her eyes that night she wrote a letter and addressed it to a distant city.

CHAPTER VI.

BILLY WATSON.

AGNES had taken Watson's attention through many trifling circumstances. This quiet dark-eyed girl had never joined in the general laugh which his appearance always provoked. Hiram declared, for his part, he did not see any sense in the girls everlastingly giggling when Watson was in sight. It was not to be taken as an unfailing sign of great irreverence in the younger portion of the Sabbath congregation because Billy's arrival was too much for the feminine risibility of Hillsdale. His small figure was clad in a suit whose texture had been chosen with an eye to final perseverance. There was a vague suspicion that this suit was of the piece woven for the Israelites ere they departed for their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, in which their garments waxed not old. Many of the particulars in the fashioning of the garments are shrouded in mystery. Jerusha Wells, in the days of her youth, had cut them from a pattern

of her own designing. This pattern was kept under lock and key, except when Jerusha herself used it behind bolted doors. It was a miracle of contraction and expansion, as it served for the long and short, the stout and slight.

Mary Jane Parr had had the audacity to ask for the loan of the pattern when she was transferring her eldest from petticoats into the habiliments of manhood. Jerusha was universally voted hard-hearted and totally devoid of the milk of human kindness because she labelled the trousers coat-sleeve, and the coat-sleeve trousers. Little Jimmy could no more adjust himself comfortably to his new surroundings than a human being could to the trailing garments and palm of an angel. Billy had given Jerusha but one injunction in regard to the suit, but the injunction was absolute. She was to cut the clothes according to the cloth—no more, no less.

Jerusha's versatility supplied her with the shears of economy, for which she atoned by the extravagant volubility with which she attacked the weakness of mankind in general, and Billy's in particular. Jerusha was now in old age and decrepitude. Her hand had lost its cunning, but her tongue did not cleave to the roof of her mouth. Even Hillsdale was too progressive for her. In these times, she said, men are leaving

the sphere allotted to them by nature, and are taking the bread out of the mouths of poor, lone women by their sewing, washing, baking, and ironing. Meanwhile the snow and sunshine of the passing years had faded and shrunk Billy's suit; but Billy had shown great adaptation to such trivial and passing occurrences by fading and shrinking with his clothes.

The antiquated effect of his appearance was further heightened by the historic bowl-cut of his hair. This particular fashion of wearing the hair was not an inspiration of a tonsorial artist, nor is it named after one of earth's great ones. Alas for such travesties on human greatness! Many wore the Garibaldi garment who did not know to what corner of the world or to what age Garibaldi, the patriot, belonged. The bowl cut was the ingenuity of expediency.

The good wife, in order to describe a circle without the aid of compasses on the unshorn locks of her husband, balances on his head a bowl of proper dimensions, and forthwith proceeds to cut, with a vigilant eye for the safety of her household effects rather than the comfort of the quivering human flesh, into which the general purpose shears are alternately sticking or pulling the hair out by the roots.

Many persons had performed this function

for Billy in the most kindly manner. The result resembled the appearance of an object attacked by rodents.

Although Billy was a crochety old bachelor, he had an inseparable companion. It was a snuff-box. One pinch, two pinches and a prolonged inhalation, taken from the palm of his hand, made a comma, colon, or period in his conversation. Billy, withal, mistook himself for a Christian. Snuff-taking was always an accompaniment to the relation of his religious experience. His manner of punctuating and emphasizing it with snuff was truly artistic.

"I am"—this ocular and offensive fact no one disputed, while he took his pinch of snuff—"still enjoying"—two pinches of snuff—"many tribulations." A deep and long inhalation solved one problem of transportation, as a mound of snuff disappeared. "I am still trusting the Lord"—comma, "but He can't trust me"—colon (with a whine)—"He tethers me short." At this point snuff-box and hand are plunged into the pocket to make sure that what he is about to add is true. "If ever I am thankful for anything it is because religion is free. We can get it without money and without price." An expression of supreme satisfaction now stole over his pinched and miserly features, caused partly

by the effects of the snuff, and partly by the knowledge that religion had never cost him one cent.

Billy's religion consisted in "feelin' good in meetin'." Religion, as a principle dominating the life; the main spring of action, controlling every motive and thought, and bringing all into harmony with the Divine purpose, regardless alike of feeling, or time, or place, was a conception and experience foreign to this man. He looked upon religion as a fire-proof safe, rather cumbersome, to be sure, but quite necessary to have near at hand against the hour of danger. This, then, was the man who was to wed Agnes. Think, then, of the self-abnegation necessary in this woman to wed such a man. She had a wing for the tempest and an eye for the sun. She would have had to crawl through life in the slimy trail of an earth-worm.

"Thou art married to a clown,
And the grossness of his nature
Will have weight to drag thee down."

CHAPTER VII.

HENRY WEEKS.

HENRY WEEKS, at the age of seventeen, was a great disappointment to his father. He should have been already a hard-handed, sunburnt, stalwart tiller of the soil; but the stubborn fact that he exhibited all-round weakness could not be concealed.

"Jest like his mother! Jest like his mother! I may have to make a teacher or preacher of that boy yit," Hiram muttered disconsolately many times a day.

Unfortunately, Henry exhibited neither aptitude nor inclination for either of those vocations. He had as strong an aversion to working with his brains as he had to exercising his muscles. His mother excused his general inertia on purely physical grounds, but the real lack was the lack of will power. Many a frail body holds the glowing torch of a strong will to light the way to great achievement.

Henry was a weakling. The world proposes,

by the survival of the fittest, to crush him. The mercy of God and mother's love alone make provision for the weak. If Henry's mother had succeeded in her endeavor to shut out temptation to vice, and to shut in virtue, he would have had a fair chance to overcome his inherent weakness. She did not succeed, because the atmosphere surrounding her home could not be excluded. A sewer without was casting up its noxious gases loaded with deadly poison, and the insidious enemy found an easy victim in Henry.

Christian civilization boasts it has no altars for human sacrifice; no Ganges whose waves engulf the offering of innocency; no Juggernaut splashed with human blood. It is but an idle boast. In every city, village, and at many a cross-road, stand human slaughter-houses, shambles saturated with the gore of sons and fathers. So numerous are they no one is put to the inconvenience of making a pilgrimage to present his offering. The god who demands this frightful sacrifice was once called Bacchus. That ancient time was the time of the barbarians. His modern name is Revenue. His exact name is Greed. Christian citizens have decreed that these temples shall come up to a governmental standard of comfort and attractiveness.

They are, indeed, places of necessity. The traveller must seek his meat and bed in the dens of a monster, and within reach, easy reach, of poisonous fangs which sting like an adder and bite like a serpent.

The god of the heathen, cruel and vindictive, was satisfied with the writhing body; but this divinity demands that to the tortured body be subjoined a soul that has been dipped into the dye vat of dissipation until, blackened and saturated, it may be past redemption. If this sacrifice is necessary for revenue, and this revenue absolutely necessary for the good of the country, then common justice and patriotism demand that, above the now dishonored graves of tens of thousands slain, we raise a shaft of purity pointing to the skies, inscribed in golden words, "Here lie our patriot hosts, who died, souls and bodies, covered with wounds, for the good of this country."

On the shores of a great lake there arose, as if by magic, a city. Embodied in the outlines of its architecture was beauty, harmony, utility. Into this city every civilized nation poured a contribution of its highest achievement. It has vanished, and we ask, regretfully, What was the triumph of that White City? Its triumph consisted in the comparison instituted between the

past, and not only the present, but the promise of the future.

Listening to the echo of the years we hear the uncertain shuffling of feet. We ask, in horror, what it means. History, the reverent chronicler of the grave, answers: "Tramp! tramp! tramp! the boys are marching, thousands strong." Marching where? "Marching down to poverty; marching down to disease; marching down to bestiality; marching down to devildom; marching down to drunkards' graves; marching down and through portals over which is written, 'Who enter here, leave hope behind.'" Let us institute a comparison between the past and the promise of the future. Tramp! tramp! tramp! the boys are marching, steady, strong, in step to the music of the spheres; up to manhood; up to competency; up to sobriety; up to Christian citizenship; up to health; up to the plains of intelligence; up to the white light, where they have no need of the sun; marching up to God.

Henry already sauntered into the corner tavern with a *sang froid* that would have graced a cosmopolitan. He had likewise chosen his ideals for life. They were: no work, large pay, luck, good clothes, jewellery, and white hands. Hiram expressed great disgust at the time his son wasted over the care of his teeth and finger

nails; but this was nothing to be compared with the discovery of the old sorrel team in a fence corner, with nothing more important in hand than stamping their feet, swinging their heads, and switching their tails to keep the flies at a respectable distance. Henry was hard by in the shade of a friendly maple, enjoying a siesta, and dreaming that he was employed in a bank, shovelling gold with a scoop-shovel, for a consideration of a hundred dollars a month.

On being waked out of sleep he was emphatically reminded that the taxes, at least, must be gotten out of the soil. Particular mention was made of the iniquitous school tax for the village.

Summing up Henry's case, the forces against him were inherent weakness, associations tending to make weakness weaker, and the influence of a mercenary father, who was now, in Henry's parlance, "the old man." Against these were arrayed the loving influence of mother and sister. Which will win?

CHAPTER VIII.

VILLAGE GOSSIP.

AFTER consultation with her mother, Agnes started her letter on its journey. It was directed to a cousin of her mother's, a doctor's wife. Through this doctor's influence, Agnes's name was entered in a certain large hospital as one of its future nurses. As the summer wore away, Agnes made quiet preparations for her departure, and for her mother's comfort. Hiram received the announcement of his daughter's plans in glum silence. Long ago he had learned she was not easily turned aside from a purpose on which she had set her heart. He had even gone so far as to consent to the payment to Mary Ann Simpson, a neighbor's daughter, of four dollars a month, to assist Mrs. Weeks in her duties. Hiram had been lastingly impressed by Mary Ann's economy. At her father's barn-raising, Hiram had been at his wits' end to conceal the wry faces he was forced to make between each bite of rhubarb pie. As a conse-

quent effect of his persistent efforts to see the last of the pie, and to what drastic length economy could be carried, his teeth were set on edge for a week.

When the village became apprised of Agnes's intention to leave Hillsdale, there was universal indignation on all sides. That anyone belonging to Hillsdale should take so momentous a step without first consulting the population, singly and collectively, was not only bad form, but a distinct departure from the traditions of the elders. The procedure was not to be tolerated without the sharp rebuke of popular opinion. When Hillsdale expressed its opinion in select circles of twos and threes, it seemed to have a very poor opinion of itself. Sodom was to be desired in comparison, inasmuch as there were none righteous in Hillsdale, no, not one.

Mrs. Blodgett, who had been flying a signal of distress for many years from the back of her bonnet, and still was getting her own bite to eat, stood in some intangible way in the same relation to Hillsdale as a hospital does to a city. It is difficult to account for the diversity of tastes and pursuits distinguishing humanity, but Mrs. Blodgett's particular calling was past comprehension.

She had made an exhaustive collection of all

the ills whose symptoms are so suggestively advertised by the patent medicine man, and also a job lot of erratic ones whose symptoms are so indefinite as to baffle even his discriminating genius. Her body served as a museum for the collection, and the alacrity with which she moved without injuring or destroying one of them proved it to be a safe repository. Although she was in mourning, she was compelled to deny herself the wearing of black hose, because they did not agree with her constitution. She suffered acutely from "ulsters" in the stomach, and was so delicately sensitive to atmospheric change she never dare remove her adjustable teeth at night, although she awakened more than once to discover them on their way to join the "ulsters." In fact she was so dreadful of an attack of "ammonia" she slept with her spectacles on the bridge of her nose, as a protection of that important feature of her anatomy against draughts. Mrs. Blodgett whispered into the alert ear of Hillsdale that, while Agnes's departure was her own business, yet she believed those new-fangled ways of caring for the sick was a clear case of flying into the face of Providence. It was putting poor human skill up against the will of the Almighty. Although greatly afflicted, she never, for her

part, dared to go further than boneset tea or senna.

"Inscrutable Providence" was Hillsdale's popular name for *bacteria* hiding in a dishcloth, or for the breaking down of an over-worked body.

While nimble tongues were speedily wearing their new theme of conversation shabby and threadbare, both on Sabbath and week day, there were many hearts saddened by the thought of Agnes's absence. There was not a home of poverty in the village into which she had not carried rosy-cheeked apples, or big yellow pumpkins. Every sick child in those homes was surer of her visits than of those of the doctor. Garrulous Jerusha Wells declared that the numerous members of Tim Dooley's inconveniently large family had had their faces washed but twice in their lives, and Agnes had been the all-powerful cause on both occasions: once, when they had buried their faces up to their ears in a water-melon she had given them; and the sight of Agnes driving out of Hillsdale in her father's light wagon, with her trunk behind, caused such a flood of tears their faces were washed tolerably clean. In the meantime, from a thread to a shoe-latchet, in Agnes's small preparations nothing escaped the vigilance of Hillsdale.

Agnes only smiled tolerantly, and a little sadly, over this exhibition of interest, for she loved Hillsdale, in spite of its little idiosyncracies.

CHAPTER IX.

DRAMA IN A RAILROAD COACH.

NUMBER 12 carried Agnes towards a strange city and a new life. Columbus, starting on his great voyage of discovery, had no heavier drain on his imagination, as to his future exploits, than had Agnes, starting out of the narrow circle in which she had been born to join in the great stream flowing cityward. The noise of the train, the strange faces coming and going, the unfamiliar landscapes flying past without any visible means of locomotion, were to this country girl like the tantalizing phantasms of a dream, that snap their fingers in the face of reason.

The constantly changing combinations of the kaleidoscopic scenes passing before her eyes eluded every attempt of her bewildered brain at reconstruction.

Her mother's kiss, the tears in Henry's eyes, and her father's unconcerned handshake, remained with her as the realities. She never

knew why it was she saw so vividly a certain empty nest out of which she had seen the little birds tumbling. She remembered the pathetically funny little attempts at flying. She heard, too, the shrill cries of alarm, and the mother bird's answer of encouragement. Just here she held up a paper as a screen against curious eyes, and made vain efforts to keep back the tears that would well up to her eyes and hang in pearly drops on her downcast lashes.

On the train rushed, and to Agnes's excited imagination the engine stopped but to take breath, and while its heavy panting throbbed through all the train, the passengers took the opportunity to crowd out; and others were still more anxious to get their vacated seats before the engine had filled its mighty lungs and was off again. On and on it rushed. Out of the heterogeneous noises around her, Agnes caught some words as distinctly as if they had been hissed into her ear purposely. Her seat was near the door, and what she heard was the soliloquy of the newsboy: "See them shake their —— heads before I get near them. They might at least wait until I get to them." It was as if the door of hell had swung open suddenly and given her a glimpse of the infernal struggle for existence. The next time he passed

she took out her slender purse and purchased a book. Job's captivity was turned when he prayed for his friends, and Agnes's sympathy for another carried her safely out of the bondage of self pity. Her eyes were opened to see the real drama of life with which she was surrounded.

Right across from her was a couple bearing the unmistakable marks of the newly-wedded, and perfectly dead to observation, comment, or anything else but their own blissful existence.

Behind them sat an elderly woman whose deep mourning was as noonday light compared with the overshadowing grief upon the stricken face. She hardly seemed to be conscious of the presence of the sleeping infant on her knee. Agnes surmised her eyes saw but the dead face of a daughter, framed in the outlines of a casket.

In front of Agnes sat a fretful-looking woman and a timid-acting little boy. His small hands were burdened with a large bouquet. He received oft-repeated injunctions not to vary the upright position of the bouquet a hair's breadth, for fear he might crush the flowers. Agnes saw the tired little muscles were strained to accomplish the task set for them. Presently, a plaintive, almost baby voice, asked for a drink of water. "You are never satisfied; you are always wanting something," the mother petulantly

exclaimed, as she took her precious flowers and sent the child to get a drink. But the weak fingers could not manage the tap, and the mother had to give unwilling assistance. Coming back to their seats, the boy pleaded for a seat next the window; but he was rudely put in his former place, given the flowers, and again reminded that he was never satisfied; that he was always wanting something. After some weary moments, one hand relaxed its hold, sought and found in a pocket a card; then it furtively stole up to his little cap, and imitatively, but unsuccessfully, tried to adjust it in the band. A kindly voice from an adjoining seat asked the little fellow to come over. The mother glanced at the exceedingly pleasant face of the owner of the voice, and said, politely enough now, "He is never satisfied; he is always wanting something." "Just like the rest of us," the lady laughingly rejoined, as she relieved the boy of the flowers and lifted him up next to the window, putting his ticket into his cap.

Another incident, showing a pleasant contrast, was a mother, whose garments bespoke the lower walks of life, holding over her shoulder, in a pose to exhibit to the best advantage, a round-faced baby, with no nose to speak of, and a

prodigious good-natured "goo-gooing" mouth. In the mother's gratified expression could be seen the firm belief that the coach was full of open-mouthed observers, looking with wonder and admiration at the baby's dazzling beauty.

On and on and on the train rushed, as if racing for a goal. Agnes had the uneasy feeling of the occasional traveller, that at any moment it might leap the brink of an awful precipice. She realized a sense of rescue from danger when the train finally halted in seeming pandemonium under the vaulted roof of a large depot. She allowed herself to be carried with a crowd which seemed to have a common aim, and discovered it was concentrating its efforts to squeeze through a large iron gate in an infinitesimal fraction of time, as if success or failure in doing so were a matter of life and death. It was well for Agnes that an experienced eye was watching for the bewildered country girl. A lady, with quiet dignity of face and manner, touched her arm, and asked if she were Miss Weeks, of Hillsdale. It was Mrs. Bruce, Mrs. Weeks' cousin, who, when her surmisal proved correct, imprinted on Agnes's fair cheek a kiss of true kinship. The sickening load of lonesomeness which sat so heavily on Agnes' young heart was lifted.

To Agnes the brilliantly illuminated streets through which the street-car was carrying her were beginning to appear endless. Then the car stopped opposite a street, at the end of which stood a large handsome building. It quite took her breath away when she discovered that this was her destination. As she was carried up three or four stories by a noiseless elevator, she realized that she was indeed in a new world.

The next morning she gratefully received instructions to rest for one day before commencing her duties. She wrote a long letter to her mother, and employed herself the rest of the day in learning the names and observing the uses of many unfamiliar objects. Early in the evening she sank into the light, restful slumber which accompanies strength of body and health of mind.

CHAPTER X.

AGNES'S INITIATION IN A HOSPITAL.

WHEN Agnes had been duly initiated into the hospital routine, she sent the following letter home:

"DEAR MOTHER,—You will be anxiously awaiting some news from your runaway. I am here, and am determined to stay, although I am convinced that life in the country could be made infinitely more enjoyable than life in a city. You will want to know all the particulars, and I will begin with the rising bell, which rings at six; but I am up long before that hour, thanks to my years of apprenticeship.

"Forty minutes after, we leave our dormitory and cross the yard to the hospital, where we have all our meals, and we are not allowed to return to the dormitory until off duty. I always feel as though I had forgotten something when I go out in the morning, because I know I can't come back.

"We repair at once to the diet kitchen, where we have a cup of hot coffee or milk, and a piece of bread and butter, before going to our respec-

tive wards. By the way, mother, do not worry about me not getting enough wholesome food to eat in the city. The food is excellent. For tea last night we had cold roast beef, salmon garnished with lemon, potato salad, brown and white bread, butter, fruit, cake, tea and milk. I drink two glasses of milk for both breakfast and tea —and it is good, too. We have to be on duty at five minutes to seven.

"My first duty upon entering the ward is to fill the pitcher in the doctor's stand; my next is to carry the empty bottles used for holding carbolic acid, bichloride of mercury solutions, distilled water, etc., from the lavatory to the cabinet near the door, so as to be convenient for the office-boy. By this time the patients' breakfast bell has rung, and off I trot to the pantry to assist in filling and carrying trays. When that is over I list the clothes which were used in the ward the day before. They are washed every day by a machine. I have usually about thirty sheets, fifty towels, some pillow-slips, counterpanes, bibs, etc., to take out of a large basket, count, enter on a list and put into a bag.

"We are allowed half an hour for each meal, two hours off duty each day, three on Sunday, and a half day each week. All the nurses, of course, cannot leave the wards at once, so there are two tables for each meal. I get my breakfast at eight. Upon returning to the ward after breakfast, I make beds, wash and carbolize the dishes and rubbers which have been used in the dressings, make the lavatory shine, give baths,

comb hair, or do whatever is required and in my power.

"Of course, there are a great many interruptions by the way of attending to the patients' individual wants. During the day, as I find time, I am expected to dust the ward, which is done with a cloth wet in a solution of carbolic acid. The bedsteads are of iron, and have to be wiped all over, also the window sills, chairs and tables. On Thursday everything has to get, as we girls express it, 'an extra lick,' as on that day the Presidential Committee make a tour of investigation, and put their fingers in all out-of-the-way places, seeking for dust. We are well superintended by officials in authority. There is the superintendent of nursing and her assistant, the afore-mentioned committee, the Executive Committee, the Monthly Visiting Committee, six or seven doctors, the hospital housekeeper, and the matron of the dormitory.

"The Bible says, 'No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.' This is a more perplexing service. Miss Jenby, the superintendent of nursing, is the one who strikes terror into the hearts of 'the probs,' as we are irreverently called. She seems very stern and forbidding at first, but improves upon acquaintance, and I am beginning to think she really may have a heart, although she does not by any means wear it upon her sleeve. I felt as though she might dismiss me at any moment she got her eyes on

me. To be called for a short examination into the august presence of Miss Jenby, the sight of whom makes the chills run down one's spinal column, is, to say the least, very trying.

"Besides officials, patients, nurses, there are in the hospital orderlies, to help care for the male patients, dining-room girls, cooks, laundry men and women to mop floors and wash dishes. The ward floors are swept twice and washed once a day. If I am accepted at the end of the month, I will be provided with two dresses, four aprons, four pairs of sleeves, and two caps; but more are required, and I will have to make a small outlay on my own account. The caps are muslin, and not washable, and I will have to provide myself with the subsequent ones, besides buying my books. I have also discovered that the acceptance at the end of the first month is only provisional, and at the end of three months there will be an accepting or rejecting again. I have had to have the heels of my boots furnished with rubber heels. Many of the girls get foot-sore, but, mother mine, they have not had the training I have had.

"Now, mother, do not forget to remember me to our village celebrities, Sally Jenkins, Jerusha Wells, Mrs. Blodgett, Charles Baxter—for whom I have a tender spot in my heart—the old doctor, and do not forget Billy Watson. Tell the minister's wife not to make herself too popular by helping the folk to paint their kitchen floors, and never again cultivate their grasping spirit by selling the remains of a tea-meeting for chicken feed.

"Be careful of yourself, mother, dear; better times are coming. Give my love to father and Harry, and ask them to think of me sometimes.

"I am, your loving daughter,

"AGNES.

"*P.S.*—We have to be in our dormitory at eight o'clock, and turn out the lights at ten."

CHAPTER XI.

MORE HOSPITAL EXPERIENCE.

HAPPILY for Agnes, she was inured to long hours and physical endurance. Under the most favorable circumstances the position of nurse is no sinecure. A heavy demand is constantly made on one's patience, vigilance, sympathy and physical strength. Frequently a test of these qualities is made simultaneously. In no place in the world can human nature show to greater advantage than in a hospital, and in no other place can humanity, or more properly, inhumanity, show up all its little meannesses more despicably. Masks not only conceal the features of actors on the mimic stage, but masks are worn by actors in the real drama of life. When they fall from actors' faces, how hideous the lineaments of character!

Agnes soon discovered that an hospital annual report might be rosy with consideration for the rights of those in its employ, and in print the

executive are not satisfied with anything short of granting many privileges. But in some cases the practice of the executive is to tread under foot "regulations" which are found inexpedient, to speak euphemistically; while those below are not only bound by a written code, but also by an unwritten code, only discoverable by transgression.

She discovered, too, that the lowest in the rank of authority, as a rule, keeps that authority most on parade. The Lord can forgive his steward ten thousand talents, but that steward plays the *rôle* of cut-throat, and lays violent hands upon his servant, taking him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest," and in default of payment casts him into prison. She found herself the victim sometimes of petty conflict between authority and authority. Her keen eye noted the distinctions between nurses and nurses. Some loved their work for the work's sake; others did not love it, but did it conscientiously, with the motive of compensation; and others, having an eye for the red tape alone, kept the counterpanes clean, and filled in the chart, but cared not one whit how their patients progressed.

When Agnes had been in the hospital some

months she wrote the following letter to her mother:

"DEAREST MOTHER,—Do not get alarmed over this letter, for I intend to endure unto the end. I am on night duty in a ward that keeps four nurses busy during the day. It is nothing but a frantic rush from one end of the ward to the other throughout the livelong night. There is so much schedule and chart work to be done, I really begrudge the time to give a poor sufferer a drink, or to adjust a limb more comfortably. The head nurse has been candid enough to tell me I am incompetent, because I told her no one person on earth could perform, with justice to the patients, the duties devolving on me, in twelve hours.

"I am craving sympathy, and know where and how to provoke it. When I go on duty I take twenty or more temperatures. At twelve I take the temperature of those who are awake, but at four every temperature has to be taken. All this, with the medicines administered, has to be faithfully recorded, and some of the columns totalled, make the rounds with the doctor, and, it may be, give two or three hypodermics, and rub a knee for twenty minutes. The following is a fair sample of the list of dressings done in this ward in one night: Two dressings, three times, taking one-quarter of an hour; one very particular dressing, four times, taking three-quarters of an hour; one dressing, four times, occupying ten minutes, also requiring hot fomen-

tations every hour; three more dressings, taking a longer or shorter time. Solutions have to be heated every time for each of these dressings.

"The above, with dozens of 'incidentals' that I lack time to enumerate, such as filling water-bottles and watching for fresh symptoms, are the duties I am expected to perform faithfully.

"The ward for incurables is a sad sight. Some of the patients have been here for years, waiting for death to foreclose the mortgage.

"In the private wards one cannot help seeing how money is pitted against death; but victory is not always on the side of wealth. I would not mind looking on at operations if I felt sure the result would be relief and restoration to health; but death is so often the outcome, and, as far as my knowledge goes, the patients are never told that the end is near.

"Last week the chief of staff said to a poor fellow, 'A very grave operation must be performed within a week if life is to be saved.' This is the nearest approach I have known to dealing candidly with an all but hopeless case. I am afraid, dear mother, this institution would strike you as a godless one, so little provision is made for the religious welfare of anyone concerned.

"I must tell you, before closing my letter, of an experience I had when on special duty. We had here what was once a woman, but is now known as a cigarette fiend. She became very noisy, so it was decided to put a 'special' to watch her, and, unfortunately for me, I was the one chosen.

"At seven I was brought up out of the ward where I had been working all day, and set to the task of keeping this creature in bed. I had two or three tussles with her during the evening, and I record it to my honor, that if I did not win first place, I came off second best. She seemed to be laboring under the hallucination that she was a cat and I a mouse, and acted accordingly. Repeatedly I had to ring for assistance.

"Then it was decided to allow her to get up and do as she pleased, providing she did not get out of the room. She sought in every conceivable place for cigarettes, and would twist up old rags, or anything she could find, and try to light them at the gas. I could not keep her in the room. Finally, she was given a sleeping draught. When she slept I reconnoitered, and found I was minus buttons and plus bruises. I was tempted to explain that I had not come to go in training for the gladiatorial arena, but this would have exasperated Miss Jenby.

"I have written at such a length I have no time left for the usual commonplaces, but believe me to be ever your happy and loving daughter,

AGNES."

As a rule Agnes's arduous work was but a preparation for her hours of sleep. She found her life not only tolerable, but interesting. Her quick eye noted at once every detail of niceness so grateful to the sick.

If not to the manner born, she possessed an innate appreciation of the beautiful and the eternal fitness of things. Her self-control, unobtrusive manner, glowing health, absolute sincerity, and candid, unaffected sympathy, made her a general favorite with officers and patients.

CHAPTER XII.

SOME OF HILLSDALE'S DECORATIONS.

HENRY WEEKS had set his heart on being a clerk in a bank. He had never for a moment comprehended the profound problems of finance. The meaning of "sinking funds," "liabilities," "reserves" and all the rest of it, which occupies the minds of managers, directors and presidents, Henry had never dreamed of, let alone studied. He saw the outside, like the gilt letters on the windows, and that was all that was necessary.

His cherished ambition might never have been realized had his father opposed him strongly; but Hiram had concluded in secret that Henry would make a sorry farmer. Hiram's estimate of all other vocations was associated with thieving, idleness, pride and a long list of general fraud; yet he saw that many of those soft-fisted fellows managed to get hold of the all-important commodity, money.

If Henry could do likewise he would grant him absolution. Hiram was always on the look-

out to get a little of his money's worth out of the minister and school teacher, and took advice freely from them regarding his son's future. At length, acting on their advice, he sent Henry to a commercial college. Hiram was not given to drawing nice distinctions in the matter of colleges and degrees. In this he was not unique. Many men knowingly trade on ignorant credulity by prefixes and affixes representing, in the main, a ten dollar note. To him colleges were places where people learn a lot of stuff that is of no earthly use, and are as much alike as two peas. He therefore expressed a fervent hope that Henry would not come back gabbling Latin like a native. Henry's education in this particular language was limited to the demonstrative pronoun *hic*! ejaculated in gutteral.

There were other changes in the home, reflecting faintly but truly a life lying beyond the environment of Hillsdale. Agnes never came home without having her head packed fuller of ideas than her trunk was of clothes. As far back as she could remember she had been engaged in a species of civil warfare with Hillsdale's prevailing mode of house furnishing and home ornamentation. Her bed was always put into the parlor when she was discharging one of the obligations of childhood in an attack of

whooping-cough, chicken-pox, measles or other ills in the category of infantile diseases. The pattern of the wall paper haunted her through life. The fevered brain persistently attempted to unravel the mysteries of its complex design, but only succeeded in translating it into huge horned caterpillars and multiplex hideous leering faces.

As for the mats on the floor, she had always quarrelled with them outright. Mrs. Weeks had neither time nor opportunity to study anatomy, and had merely glanced at Tabby or Collie as she wrought into those mats a marvellous dissimilar resemblance to them, which was only saved from the conundrum, "What is it?" by glassy eyes that had once served to button a now cast-off garment. With evident satisfaction and a hammer Agnes would pulverize those eyes, while her baby tongue lisped, "Bad pussy, uggie pussy, tooked pussy; uggie, uggie doggie."

In one holiday she covered the walls with paper of a soft neutral tint. Later she succeeded in enlisting Hiram's purse to the extent of a carpet which had the good manners not to intrude itself on one's notice by its loudness. Mrs. Weeks' parlor never had boasted of the motto, "Home, Sweet Home," outlined with pin-transfixed lady bugs, nor of an unaccountable waxen

combination of summer and autumn products, consisting of magenta strawberries, violently green apples, and colicky corn. Her heart, however, had hung over a green parrot worked with Berlin wool on a purple background, balancing itself on a dead bough that, like Aaron's rod, budded and blossomed quite unexpectedly with impossible scarlet flowers.

Mrs. Blodgett once hinted to Mrs. Weeks that it was time Agnes was acquiring some accomplishments, and urged the importance of hair wreaths. "Your family is small, Mrs. Weeks, and there is not much probability of your having many coffin plates to frame, and the next best thing is hair wreaths."

Mrs. Blodgett was easily first in framed coffin plates. No one knew which was provoked most by the sight of her five coffin plates, sympathy for her bereavement or jealousy of her adornments. To this latter feeling, and a back-slidden state in religion, Mrs. Blodgett attributed the ambition of Hillsdale's maidens, exhibited in crude attempts to follow the beaten-brass, crazy-work, china-painting and drawn-work fads, as each, having "*ennuied* past all bearing" the *blasé* denizens of the city, rather than accept the inevitable privacy of a dusty attic, beat a victorious retreat into the less critical atmosphere of Hillsdale.

But Agnes, who believed "a thing of beauty is a joy forever," would not have Hillsdale's decorations, either ancient or medieval, nor yet attempt the modern, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred went to swell the class of mediocrity. Now and again she brought home with her a few choice water color copies, simply framed. She took down a picture of "Uncle Tom," in blue trousers and bright red shirt; also a picture of "The Journey of Life," represented by a babe on the first step of a double set of stairs, developing into manhood with each step upward, until the full stature of manhood is attained at the stair head. Descending on the other side, he at last passes off a decrepit old man.

Another picture of a tree, upon which grew many-hued circular objects, labelled apples, shared the same fate. The artist, with a sublime contempt for perspective and proportion, had painted, with an impartial hand, the apples of equal size and as large in circumference as the trunk of the tree. Beneath the wide spreading branches contended two figures representing Good and Evil.

In the vacated spaces Agnes hung delightful bits of sky and sea and shore. To catch her father's eye was hung a picture of an old

plough-horse with harness on. The outlines, suggestive of patient faithfulness and weariness, but not jadedness, and, withal, rather hopeful expectancy of food, drink and rest, were in evidence. Hiram, not being of a literary turn, nor yet of a reflectively religious nature, had never been favorably impressed by "Uncle Tom" or "The Journey of Life," nor yet by the "Apple Tree." He, however, saw the horse, and would gaze at it with infinite satisfaction, and remark, "It's as nat'ral, as nat'ral as life. Puts me in mine of ole Bill." "Ole Bill" had been the surviving horse of Hiram's first span.

The memory of the day when, perched on the high spring seat of a brand new wagon, glittering with varnish on the freshly-painted wood, and the splendid team in front—he was for the first time owner of such an outfit—had never faded from his memory. Indeed, the event seemed to be ever more important. The time he served on the grand jury at the Quarter Sessions was only chaff in comparison, in his conversation now and again with Billy Watson.

"Ole Bill," in extreme age and decrepitude, had come to the last evening of his life, and was taken out of his stable into a field hard by, that a grave might be dug where he would fall. Next morning Barnes and Hiram looked upon

a pathetic scene, which put lumps into both their throats. The noble animal, with the instinct of dying at home, had dragged himself to the stable, worked at the door until it opened, passed in, and fell just before entering his stall.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHRISTMAS EVE TRAGEDY.

In due time Agnes graduated at the head of her class, receiving with her diploma a gold medal. The secret of her success was hard work and conscientious application. Through the years which followed, she rose gradually until she arrived at the position of matron, with a remuneration that made Hiram open and shut his eyes twice, rapidly in succession, in astonishment. His respect for his daughter had increased in direct ratio with the increases in her salary, and now he was looking upon her as a prodigy.

"It's a caution what people will pay to be took care on. Some on 'em will die awful poor, or I'm mistaken," he remarked to his wife on receiving the news of Agnes's appointment.

Not often are "castles in Spain" reduced to brick and mortar, and if they are, the architecture is generally disappointing; but Agnes

almost revelled in the realization of her fondest dreams. She had raised herself above a humiliating dependence, and experienced a delightful satisfaction in self-reliance.

While Henry, on pretexts as variable as the wind, kept up a constant demand on his father's hoardings, Agnes rejoiced in adding to her mother's comforts. Pleasant changes were to be noted everywhere about the old farm-house. Nothing was attempted which was out of keeping with the homely life of the occupants. There was a modest addition to the house, a commodious fire-place to make winter a joy, and a well-trimmed lawn to make summer desirable.

The world would have gone very well in those days for Hiram Weeks' house but for the little "if" which enters every earthly paradise, as the serpent entered Eden. If only Henry's life had been right.

The anniversaries of the birth and resurrection of the Saviour flood the world with a joy that finds a universal expression in Christendom in the music, painting, gifts and flowers of Christmas-tide and Easter-tide. This joy has found a heart even in transportation companies, a heart whose eyes look toward family reunions. Agnes and Henry at these anniversaries visited the old homestead.

To both of them, and to thousands, the meaning of the word, "Welcome," is wrapped up in the anticipation of seeing a dear familiar face looking out from a wide open door. What a boon is memory, hope and faith, when the door is shut and the face is gone!

Poor, weak-willed Henry! His mother's anxious eye saw the changes for the worse, both physically and morally. If the angelic hosts have interest in the struggle of Right with Wrong, they must have hung over the battlements of Heaven to witness the love of mother and sister in hand-to-hand combat with the embodied demon, Appetite. The little tavern was more than a counter-attraction to all their loving allurements.

There came a Christmas eve when Agnes was making her highest bid for Henry's company. It was a brave, hard-fought contest, both aggressive and defensive. A bright fire blazed on the hearth. Easy chairs extended inviting arms. She spoke reminiscently of memories suggested by the associations of the hour. She reminded Henry of their mother's unfailing devotion. "Don't you remember, Harry, the queer Santa Claus' Noah's Ark made of boxes filled with gingerbread men and bears and elephants? How strange we thought it was

that they should taste so much like mother's gingerbread! Don't you remember how we covered our heads for fear old Santa would detect us in the act of listening to him popping corn in the kitchen?"

Henry looked only half interested at best, and listened with the stealthy glances of one watching to make his escape. Agnes, accustomed to human nature, saw clearly the controlling thought in his mind; but, with heavy heart, determined to use all her resources. She thought of some chestnuts she wished to roast in the coals, and left the room for a moment to get them. When she returned Henry was gone. She saw him disappear down the snowy road in the direction of the village. All the joy created by the Christmas reunion was suddenly extinguished for Agnes and her mother. Hiram, too, sat downcast in the circle of firelight. As the hours slowly passed, Agnes was touched by his worn look and almost feeble attitude.

Midnight had approached and passed on. Inaction at last became impossible. Hiram started for the door, uttering something almost like a groan. He would have gone with the addition of his cap had not Agnes wrapped him tenderly as she prayed silently to be forgiven her sometimes bitter judgment of him. Half

way down the lane Hiram stumbled over the prostrate body of his son. An hour before Henry had staggered out of the village tavern in a helpless state of drunkenness. Two cronies, who had seen him fall just outside the bar-room door, had picked him up and led him along to the lane leading from the road to the farm house. Drunken though they were, they, nevertheless, shrank from encountering the look in the faces of Henry's mother and sister. When Hiram, haggard faced, appeared in the doorway with Henry in his arms, Agnes comprehended at once the situation.

Mrs. Weeks sat as one stunned. It was Agnes's strong white hands that deftly performed all the needed services, without once pausing. The frail life was flickering, and might have gone out if the sister's skill had been lacking. She fought not alone for his physical salvation, but for his eternal well-being.

Mrs. Weeks had taught her children in early childhood that they belonged to Christ, and that nothing could separate them from Him but an act, positive or negative, of their own will. She had always sought to leave the stress on the will, because she believed the efficiency of penitence and faith hinged in there being first "a willing mind." This may have been because

she studied her children. Agnes had a will as stubborn as wrought steel, but she had early learned to obey a voice which spoke to her with loving but supreme authority.

Agnes had felt herself a member on sufferance of Hillsdale's little church, because she could not describe her conversion with the accuracy of a demonstration in geometry. This accuracy of detail was demanded; but in the experiences of the membership the generic fact was really the essential matter, and she had never heard the demand fulfilled by those who insisted strongest. She had once been interviewed by her class-leader, an old but quite recently married man, who charged her to answer his catechising as she would "answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed." She answered his questions as to the place and minute of her repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as to whether she believed in backsliding or the final perseverance of the saints, with the quiet assurance: "Mother says the only true test of conversion is obedience," and followed with one of her mother's favorite promises, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

At one of the leaders' meetings her case came up for special discussion. Mr. Biggs reported her as incorrigible, and thought she ought not to be allowed church membership until she exhibited more feeling.

Charlie Baxter, the jovial blacksmith, who could give the minutiæ of his conversion as correctly as he could give the history of every horse in the country side, won the day for Agnes, and vanquished the troubler of the church, by quoting the Scripture, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Hillsdale, nevertheless, believed in special times and special means, to the degree of looking with a suspicious eye on every conversion outside of special times and special means. As Jerusha Wells had cut all the coats after one pattern, in like manner all conversions must be after one model. Perhaps this came of Hillsdale putting a high premium on wickedness. The further the sheep wandered away on the mountain, the higher his pedestal on his return to the fold, although he unavoidably bears to the end the evidence of his poor fare while on the barren mountain side.

Poor weak-willed Henry! Hillsdale had made a snare, a trap and a stumbling-block for its

weak brother's feet, and then watched anxiously that he might recover sufficiently before the winter was over, to attend the special services. The kingdom of God came to Henry, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

CHAPTER XIV.

WATER INTO WINE.

In the sad days and long nights following that Christmas eve, Agnes and her mother sought unceasingly to convert Henry's soul from the error of his ways, and daily thanked God for their opportunity. Repeated hemorrhages of the lungs betokened, in no uncertain signs, that nature had been a patient nurse, but was now transformed into an avenging angel demanding settlement with accounts compounded, and would not be denied. Poor dissipated Henry! How is he going to face death, from whose outlines he has always looked away? How is he going to become so changed as to be at home in the purity and holy associations of God's secret abiding place?

One February evening, when the days were becoming noticeably longer, Mrs. Weeks sat by his bedside. His bed had been moved into the parlor, and the bright light of the fire, always kept burning on the hearth, showed the glowing

spots on his cheeks, and added another gleam to the already brilliant eyes. Both had been gazing in silence into the fire for some time, when Henry's weak hand reached out for his mother's.

"Mother," he said, "I have some good news for you at last," and then he paused; but his mother did not move, she scarcely breathed. "You remember how you used to talk to Agnes and me about Jesus, His mission, death, the Christian life. One evening, mother, you quoted for us a verse from a conversation Jesus had with His disciples: 'If any man *will* come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.' The same evening, mother, you read another passage from John's Gospel: 'If any man *willeth* to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from myself.' I have dreaded death with unspeakable horror, and more especially because, in my case, it is the wages of sin. Don't cry, precious mother, for I am now willing to live or die, but would rather die than go back to the old life."

At the command of Christ, Mrs. Weeks had filled the water pots with water, and in due time, at His word, the water was turning into wine.

"I have many things to learn and many things to try and undo." He seemed to be bracing his weak will for some supreme effort. "I have something to say to father. Tell him to come now."

Mrs. Weeks called her husband, and, when he came, stole away and left father and son alone with each other. Henry poured into his father's ear a long tale of gambling debts, fraud and defalcation. When he had finished, Hiram sat with his face buried in his hands. The agonizing struggle of conscience against the habit of years passed from the son to the father.

At last he raised his head, and said, in answer to the question in his son's eyes, "Yes, Henry, it shall be done as you desire. Everything will be paid." Through the years Satan had pointed Hiram to the little pile of gold that grew so slowly, while with the other hand he was preparing the wings with which it was to fly away.

Henry was failing visibly, although, when the balmy days of spring came, he was sometimes able to get into the sunshine unassisted. He passed through many hours of great spiritual depression. Agnes was ever at his side as his good angel. He had adopted the pretty conceit of calling her Saint Agnes. She laughingly pressed him for an explanation, but her eyes

were suddenly dimmed when he said, "When I am half awake and half asleep I always see you with a light around your head, like the pictures of Christ in the big Bible you and I used to look at on Sunday afternoons, when we were children, Agnes."

The family spent the evenings together around Henry's bed. Mrs. Weeks and Agnes were at each side and Hiram at the foot, often with his head resting on the bed, listening to the tender exchange of confidences. The lines of avarice and hardness in Hiram's face were softening. Over him had been stealing a great change. The eyes were seemingly larger and often watery. The voice was not so harsh, but deeper and kinder.

One evening they had dropped into what was now their familiar places. Agnes was busy writing to Mrs. Bruce. Henry had been restless and much depressed all day. "Saint Agnes," he called. She laid down her pen and took his hand. "It has been dark all day." He did not speak of physical darkness. The things of this world seem unreal as the realities of another world draw near. "My faith has wavered."

"Your faith in whom? Not in the Christ who prays for you as he prayed for Peter, when Satan desired to have him, that his faith fail

not, and who declares, 'As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.' Faith is a gift from God, and comes through the hearing of His word. Your will and your right arm are also gifts, but He exercises none of these things for you."

Agnes paused. Henry was listening with an anxious, hungry look on his white face. With an involuntary prayer for guidance she proceeded with a cheerfulness that did not fail to make itself felt in the sad soul.

"The exercise of faith underlies every action of our lives. We eat food from the four quarters of the earth. We did not see it prepared. We eat by faith. We drink by faith. We sit by faith. We rise by faith. We stretch out our hands by faith. *We walk by faith* in two senses.

"We have faith in nature that she will not make apples good for food one season, and poisonous the next. Without faith we would not form a plan, nor sleep, nor eat, nor take a journey, nor sow a seed." Here Agnes held up the stamp she was about to put on Mrs. Bruce's letter, and said: "I am not in the secret councils of my country, but I have faith to do this," and she dampened the stamp with her tongue.

"How wonderfully thoughtful and kind it

was of God to take this active principle of our lives, with which we are so familiar, and make it the gateway into His kingdom, and the door of access to Himself." Agnes paused again, and Mrs. Weeks' gentle voice was heard repeating, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Henry turned to her eagerly: "Oh, mother, read to me." The old brown leather Bible was within reach, and fell open of itself at these words: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." When she had finished the passage, Henry folded his hands, and repeated, as was now his wont in the evening hour:

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep;
> If I should die before I wake,
> I pray the Lord my soul to take"

Another voice had joined in the simple childhood prayer. Could it have been Hiram, sitting motionless in the shadows, with bowed head at the foot of the bed? "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH'S HARVEST.

SPRING wept and warmed and blossomed itself into summer, and Agnes had hopes of Henry being with them until the rainbow tints of autumn touched leaf and fruit. She was grieved, however, to notice the change in her father. She would have been glad to have seen him exhibiting some of his old-time interest in money matters, but he was leaving more and more the affairs of the farm to Barnes. He was spending ever more and more of his time in Henry's room. Agnes's experienced eye detected signs and shadows of events which were foretokening their arrival. His physical resistance to the pressure of toil was weakening. He was unable to bear a continual strain of hard work.

Her hands prepared every nourishing dainty the fertile brain could devise. Often her only reward was the assurance that she was a good daughter, better than he deserved. He took

two journeys in that memorable spring. One was to the city where Henry had squandered his strength and substance.

After the last of Henry's debts was paid, he walked up the steps of a large building with Y. M. C. A. over the door, and asked for the secretary. This gentleman knew human nature, but was somewhat puzzled with this caller, through whose unsophisticated manner shone native shrewdness.

In the course of their conversation Hiram said, "It is your business, mister, to look after the young men?"

"That is what we endeavor to do."

"Well, see here, mister, here is one hundred dollars of hard-earned money to help you in your work. Well, I have a boy, but—but—Good-bye! Good-bye!"

The astonished secretary watched the figure, clad in homespun and top-boots, until it disappeared, and then went back to his duties with a heavy heart, feeling that he might not have done all in his power to save others.

The other journey was to the nearest town, where Hiram was closeted with a lawyer for some hours. One sentence will explain his errand: "I have not done the right thing by my wife and daughter; as far as I can, I want to

do so now. Henry has spent his portion. What is left I wish to leave to them. Now, Mr. Longhead, arrange the legal documents. You have the materials and all the necessary information."

The heat of the summer was making heavy draughts on Henry's energy. Agnes proposed to take him to a cooler climate, but he pleaded not to be separated one hour from his mother and father. He had his wish.

The young people of the village vied with each other in their attentions to Henry. His brilliant eyes and glowing cheeks, it appeared to them, defied the pale horse and his rider. They brought flowers in great profusion. Agnes's heart was often rejoiced with the healthy glee of the young people who came to the old home.

One young girl, with a rippling bird-voice, sang sometimes an old love song, sometimes a song of home; but oftener, far oftener, she sang of a country where there is no death—where the leaves are fadeless, where the sun never sets! In that country there is no sorrow, nor crying, neither pain nor groans. She sang of a city like unto pure gold, whose jasper walls are built on a foundation of sapphire, chalcedonyx, emerald, sardonyx, sardius and amethyst, with its twelve gates of twelve pearls, standing

wide open by day and by night to welcome the multitude of the redeemed to the presence of Christ, who is in the midst of it. Glorious country, with its redistributed constituencies! Some in the van of earth's constituencies relegated to the rear, and some in the rear of earth's successes shining with dazzling splendor foremost among the white-robed throngs.

Once Henry whispered, "Saint Agnes, it would have been a great joy, but heaven is sweeter far."

She knew he had seen a vision of earthly joy, of honored manhood, of a home with all its enrapturing associations. It had vanished, and in its place was a vision like unto St. John's.

At the end of June, when flowers and grass and tree and insect-life were revelling in the exuberance of material existence, Henry's spirit cast off its husk, as the quickened life in the seed bursts its bonds and rises above the clods of earth into the beautiful lily life. All day his mind had been wandering. At lucid intervals his eyes reflected the light that tips the eternal hills. Once Agnes asked, wistfully, if he knew her. He smiled and said, "The halo is there." He recognized the touch of his mother's faithful work-worn hand, and whispered:

"The way has been dark, mother, and I feel

the cold rain. The wind chills me, but I see the lights of home! I am just at the door; and I am so tired, so tired!"

Hiram knelt beside the bed with his face buried in the coverlid. Henry's white transparent hand was clasped in the hardened soil-stained hand of his father. The long summer twilight was fading when Henry gave his last look of recognition.

"Father, forgive!" he murmured.

"God forgive *me!*" Hiram answered, in a hollow voice, that came back weirdly to his wife and daughter in the silence of the night for months afterwards.

Agnes saw coming over her brother's face the shadow of the death angel's wing, and motioned to Barnes, who was in the adjoining room. When he reached the foot of the bed Henry was gone. Agnes's hands closed the dark eyes and straightened the limbs. As she drew Henry's hands out of Hiram's she felt her father's hands like her brother's. For a moment her self-possession nearly failed her. Habit, however, asserted itself. She set self aside, and, nerved for the emergency, thought only of her mother.

Mrs. Weeks was so overcome with grief she had not noticed that her husband had not

moved for an hour, and she allowed Agnes to lead her from the room.

Agnes and Barnes then lifted Hiram on the couch, and, pending the doctor's arrival, Agnes used every means at her command to restore him to consciousness.

It was in vain. On his arrival, the doctor pronounced the verdict which Agnes would not allow herself to believe:

"Your father is dead! Heart failure!"

The sentence was brief, and there was a suspicious tremble in his voice. Agnes did not faint; she did not cry. "Mother! Mother!" was all she said.

Mrs. Weeks had been strong so long as Henry's weakness appealed to that strength for support. She was now utterly prostrated by the double blow. The necessity for thought and action carried Agnes through the following days. Ever afterwards to her the things which are seen were temporal, but the things which are not seen were eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

HILLSDALE'S FUNERALS.

In Hillsdale the day of a funeral was high holiday, and a good many points were strained to have the funerals on Sunday. It was defrauding the public of an ancestral and rightful prerogative to have a funeral on another day than Sunday. It was noticeable how expeditiously arrangements could be made if the decease was late in the week. It was equally observable how much time was required for the obsequies if the departure had been earlier in the week. By all means Hillsdale must have the funerals on Sunday. If one had the poor taste or bad manners to die just at a point a little too early or a little too late in the week, Hillsdale would say, "It's too bad!" or "What a pity!"

Hillsdale's rules were after the strictest sect of the Pharisees concerning marriages, deaths, births and funerals. Wednesday was the day for marriages. Thursday was the day for deaths. Saturday evening, after the scrubbing was done and

a bountiful supply of baking was on hand for the delectation of the elderly females, was the nicely-adjusted hour for births. Sunday, by a cast-iron rule, made so by custom, convenience and preference, was the day for a big funeral. Mr. Blodgett in the days of his flesh was wont to comfort Mrs. Blodgett in her most ailing moments with the promise of the largest Sunday funeral the neighborhood had ever seen. He had said to her he would get the best coffin money would buy in their nearest market town.

Whether orthodox or not, Hillsdale was accustomed to say a funeral cannot turn out bad, as a wedding does sometimes, therefore the most was made of each one, and the preparations for it were not second to those for a marriage.

Stern necessity, alike heedless of poverty and grief, demanded that every member of the bereaved family be clothed in the weeds of deepest mourning, with streamers flying in the wind like a frigate under full sail. Night and day, and Sunday, needles and tongues were plied with equal assiduity.

Superstition after its kind reigned supreme. The dire calamity of thirteen sitting down at the table at once was avoided by the neighbors being present in much larger numbers. Ghastly stories of seemingly dead people who had

returned to life, or who had been buried alive, went the rounds.

Speculation, too, was rife as to the time the newly bereaved would stay single, and who was the one likely to step into the vacant shoes. If the bereaved were a widower, an elderly spinster would adjust her beau catchers and declare such things should not be thought of, let alone mentioned, and then fall to musing how lonely the poor dear man would be without a wife, and what was he to do, anyway, with those motherless children.

Sometimes examples from other years would be cited—examples pro and con of second ventures on the sea of matrimony. In the kitchen the stoves were run on the plan of ocean furnaces. Stokers kept them red hot, with rising temperature. The workers, the neighbors, the sympathizers—all hands must be fed, and well fed.

Grief in no way lessened appetite, and appetite surpassed work.

In the neighborhood, preparations were only less elaborate. Earlier rising than usual was observed, to the end that the chores might be gotten out of the way. It was most desirable to get an early start that nothing be lost. Undisguised curiosity was not only permissible but

commendable, and had right of way till the last mourner left the grave. Whispered comments were in order. "She has Selina's coat on and Matilda's veil." "Matilda's veil is not much the worse of wear." "She did not need it long, but she may need it again." "Hear him cough." "There were fifty teams at the last funeral." "I don't believe there will be enough mourners to fill the centre seats." "Oh, bother, I have forgotten my handkerchief!" "You will not need it, Mr. Dadly is not a very affecting speaker. The widow is afraid he will not do justice to his subject."

Presently a long concourse files from the house to the church. Eternal friendship or bitter enmity is to be the natural outcome of the sermon. It is not so much to be food for the reflection of the living as eulogy of the dead that is desired by many interested.

Now it so happens that very few can stand the searching light of canonization immediately upon decease. This slight reflection throws some light on the catalogue of saints. It takes time to disentangle the ignoble and leave the true. After the service the casket lid is removed, and all are invited to view the remains. Familiar friend, warlike neighbor, and passing stranger jostle each other in the procession of morbid

curiosity. Age lifts babyhood to take its first undesired or horrified look into the face of death, marred by disease and the marks of dissolution. When the supreme moments, arrive the spectators are almost breathless with excitement, as the mourners take a public farewell of their dead. The involuntary tears and sobs of strong men and frail women were almost counted, gauged and compared, favorably or otherwise, with other occasions of a similar kind.

CHAPTER XVII.

INNOVATIONS.

HILLSDALE had come to the eve of a new and very unpleasant sensation. Its traditions were to be set aside.

Mrs. Bruce, whose husband had recently died, came to Agnes and her mother in their sore trouble. She arranged everything quietly and perfectly. A great bunch of white lilies tied on the door spoke with lips of purity, not of death but of the fuller life. Christianity has not entirely driven out the emblems of a heathen philosophy which is dead itself.

Christianity has brought in the flowers, and, by a strange contrast, places them on caskets which heathen teaching has taught us to paint black.

The old friends and neighbors, as they came, were taken into the solemn chamber of death, where father and son lay side by side, proclaiming in the silence that the true purpose of this

life cannot be read by the flickering torch of time, but only by the steady light of eternity.

The hands which had toiled early and late lay folded at the busiest time of the year. The one for whom they had toiled needed no longer the things that perish with the using thereof. There had been no watching by the dead. At night Agnes had read to her sorrow stricken mother: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." "Behold, he that keepeth thee shall neither slumber nor sleep." "The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

The Scripture read, they knelt while Mrs. Bruce prayed, and asked amidst her petitions that God would give His beloved sleep. The funeral was a marvel of simplicity. While Agnes and her mother took a long farewell of their dead, Mrs. Bruce guarded the doors lest someone, unwittingly, might intrude on the sacredness of their grief.

The service was comprised of Scripture readings, full of assurances of immortality and promises of the resurrection, followed by a prayer breathing the petition: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, who hath loved us and hath given us everlast-

ing consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work."

No mourner of the first degree followed to the grave. Hillsdale would have recovered from the shock sooner had not Agnes trespassed too far on its prejudices by appearing in church on the following Sunday clad in her usual quiet garb of black, relieved by frills of dainty white lace. Hillsdale was as true in its allegiance to the despot fashion as any centre in the grip of the mad goddess. It was a little slow in receiving and comprehending her dictum. That was the difference between the two. If Hillsdale could have received anything at a moment's notice, it would have followed the notice instantly, in so far as changing its ideas of beauty and fitness; but it might take six months for the scissors and needles to work out its new ideal.

What is is. A thing must either be or not be. If voluminous arm gear is perfectly lovely, it is so when the fashionable world is making the awful mistake of wearing skin-tight sleeves.

Our dress is now a badge of slavery. It will be a happy day when we are gowned in a national costume, even if it does classify and label us like the bottles in an apothecary shop. Jerusha Wells was very emphatic in her

declaration that she would rather have sewn the ends of her fingers off than to have Agnes appear arrayed as she was.

Furthermore, she ventured the assertion that, "After all she was a chip of the old block."

Mrs. Blodgett held a handkerchief, deeply bordered with black, to her eyes during the whole service, to conceal if possible her disapproval.

Agnes's weight of sorrow rendered her totally oblivious to criticism. She realized that her mother's feet were well nigh slipping under her heavy load, and she resolved, as far as possible, to carry her on her own wings of faith. She had gone up to the house of God prompted by the same motive which prompted David when he exclaimed, "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." "Wait on the Lord! be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord."

It cannot be considered extraordinary that Hillsdale employed its time trying to locate the blame of this double visitation. Even the disciples asked the Master: "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

It was clearly a judgment.

Hillsdale forthwith filled up its list of indict-

ments, and cleared its skirts of any blame in the matter, by refusing to grant to Henry and his father any endorsation as a passport to Heaven. It was conceded that a great change was to be observed in both. However, repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was irrevocably tied to a regular protracted meeting, and a tangible penitent bench. There was lack of the perception that God is not thus circumscribed to those honored means, but also has declared: "Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AGNES'S STRANGE VISION.

THE double funeral was followed by strange days at the old farm. To Mrs. Weeks and Agnes it would have been more natural if all the wheels of humdrum human affairs had stood still, than for the sun to rise and run its daily journey and sink into rest, and, with its rising, set those wheels revolving and keep them going until its setting allowed them to run down.

The mainspring of all the old-time activity was broken, and the key which had wound it up was missing.

They could not tell which one they missed the more—the one to whom they had not been allowed to minister so much as a cup of cold water, or the one on whom they had lavished days and nights of loving ministrations.

Mrs. Weeks's presence was almost ghost-like as she moved around the quiet house. Agnes was painfully conscious of the preoccupied look on her face, and the evident effort she made to

concentrate her attention on affairs pertaining to the house and farm.

Agnes did not consider it wise to carry her off among strange faces and to stranger scenes, but endeavored bravely to awaken anew her interest in familiar objects.

When Barnes rented the farm, Agnes retained a Jersey cow. She also built a wonderful poultry house, and insisted on her mother helping in the vegetable and flower gardens. A bed of white lilies in full bloom was superseded by bright geraniums, because Mrs. Weeks said the lilies reminded her of the funeral, and she saw nothing in their purity but a winding sheet for the dead. Agnes herself entered into all the church and social life of the village, and carried her mother with her.

An active mind like hers must find expression outwardly, and Agnes's mind exercised itself in numberless ways and means for the betterment of her native place. Every effort, either directly or indirectly, was aimed at Satan's stronghold, the little corner tavern. Her efforts to found a public library were met by conflicting opposition from ignorant and covetous taxpayers. One man did not want to be taxed for the gentry, who ought to buy their own books if they wanted them. Another did not see what the poor wanted

with books. Billy Watson prognosticated a general stampede of the Hillsdale youth from the work of the farm to idleness and all-round destruction.

It was a proud day for Agnes when her efforts were finally crowned with success, and she saw a dream materialized into a few shelves well filled with good books in bright bindings. Rev. J. W. Long and his wife, in whom Mrs. Blodgett saw signs of partiality for homes possessing organs and sofas, found in Agnes a trained right hand. Mr. Long once used the localism "Saint Agnes" in addressing her. The blinding tears which came to her eyes put him upon his guard ever after. He was a man with sufficient humility to see and appreciate the talents in the members of his flock.

Agnes soon found her little stock of knowledge and experience a note on demand. She stood aghast when he asked her to be a medical missionary; but when he explained that he wished her services wholly for Hillsdale, she consented. As a consequence, she found herself giving talks to the Endeavor Society on the proper care of the sick; what to do in case of accident; antidotes for the different poisons; resuscitation of the apparently drowned. Such subjects at a religious meeting did not meet with universal

approval, inasmuch as many of the instructions ran counter to the traditions of the elders.

Hillsdale had its own pharmacopeia, principles and practice of medicine. Whiskey and brandy for fevers, colds, and all the human ills, was the panacea. External and internal application, and always frequent doses of alcohol, was the sheet anchor.

Billy Watson, tottering on his gnarled stick, hobbled over to the minister to quaver out the opinion that such talk was not the Gospel full and free. Mr. Long read for him the parable of the good Samaritan. Billy, however, having ears heard not, and observed that "Sam Martin had more money to fool away than he had. The Lord helps them that helps themselves. One of the worst things of these evil days is so much talk about the poor and neighbors."

Mrs. Blodgett, for her part, did not believe in these here Christian Devourers' Societies, but as no alarming symptoms of cannibalism came to the surface, the society was allowed to flourish.

The young people were delighted with this practical departure from a mechanical routine, which some of them thought was the sum and substance of religion. Then came a day when they showed their appreciation by electing Agnes president of their society. This position opened

for her a door of Christian usefulness of which she had never dreamed. It began to open when Mrs. Long called one day to enlighten her on the duties and privileges of her office. "You are, Miss Weeks, by virtue of your office, a member of the Business Board of this church. Mr. Long is exceedingly anxious for you to take your place. I will only be too happy to accompany you next Monday if you will consent to go."

After much deliberation, and a little secret enjoyment over the anticipated consternation her appearance would create, Agnes consented.

Hillsdale's Quarterly Meeting was in full swing when the door opened, and in walked Mrs. Long and Agnes. It was a characteristic gathering, and every member was present.

The representatives from each society were alert, and ready for offence or defence, as the occasion might demand. There was not always unanimity as to what was the true interest of the church. Some were of the opinion the best policy was to pay up the last dollar, and leave the minister free to devote his time exclusively to spiritual matters.

The brother representing the greatest shortage rose to affirm that the concensus of opinion in his neighborhood was that the minister did not visit enough. People only gave, of course, when

they felt like it. Naturally enough, the people did not feel like giving unless the minister went around frequently and made himself at home. The minister, for his part, ought to be just as much a minister of finance as he was a minister of the Gospel. They would all remember Uncle Jolly, who in the providence of God had labored with them twenty years ago. As for his appointment, they had never had such times before nor since. Brother and Sister Jolly were great and good visitors. They seemed to have plenty of time to visit. He could remember them coming before breakfast in the morning and spending the day, returning home at midnight.

These remarks received great attention by some of those present. Some lines on Mr. Long's face indicated humor.

Between this speaker and his neighbor there existed an ancient feud about a line fence, hence the neighbor retorted: "As for him, he wanted no minister to earn his salt with his shoe-leather. If omnipresence and omniscience was what was wanted, he would move that the figures be put up to five hundred and fifty dollars."

This generous proposal received no seconder. The bare contemplation of its enormity, extravagance and recklessness produced a quietus,

which gave Mr. Long the opportunity to introduce to them the new member of the Board.

"Miss Weeks," he said, "is now the President of the Christian Endeavor, and awaits your approval to take her place as a member of this Board. Has anyone anything to say?"

Billy Watson, snuffbox in hand, was the first speaker. With the usual intervals devoted to snuff-taking, he proceeded to intimate:

"He did not like these critters called 'new wimmin.' They gallivant the country over to find a board or deestrict meeting, or hoospital or 'wention, or something of that kind, to sit onto. The 'old wimmin'' wern't 'wention wimmin, nor nusses, nor nuthing, and never sot on boards, nor no such things."

"The present Board excepted, Billy!" called out Charlie Baxter, the village joker.

It is almost certain the general laugh provoked by this sally put all in a good humor and saved Agnes's cause.

Billy, not understanding the delicate allusion to his antiquated femininity, would not sit down until he had delivered an awful warning against "the worriting time there would be if wimmin were 'pinted stewards, to plague the life out of men about the minister's salary." He finished his incoherent drivel with an ancient quotation

he had overheard in the relation of some Conference news from a borrowed copy of the *Christian Guardian*: "Who will take care of the babies?"

If Agnes had needed anything to nerve her for the discharge of the disagreeable duty of claiming her present honor, it was the suggestion that she might one day become a steward. Hillsdale never observed any business method whatever in the payment of the minister's salary. The steward, at the last moment, got into his buggy, apologizing for his errand as he went. He was not calling upon them to discharge an obligation for value received, but rather to contribute to an object of charity.

In Agnes's memory was stored a picture of the pale face of a minister's wife, lighted up and shadowed at the same time with smiles and tears at the sight of a well-filled basket. "God has been good, so good," she said. "He has taken away our appetites for three days, and enabled us to live on grace alone."

Charlie Baxter came back to the defence again. Good nature shone from brow and eye and lip.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "I am not speaking with any disrespect of the cloth when I say I remember hearing a ministerial brother, of weight in several ways, almost tear his hair and

burst his white necktie in eloquent advocacy, with sonorous voice and some gesticulation, of what women would do for moral reforms if the State would only grant her a vote. While this great man is calling down the politicians for their hands-off monopoly policy, he himself is saying to these same women, 'Hands off my sacred prerogatives! God made you hewers of wood and drawers of water for me. If you dare to peep, I will hurl at you, with all my might, the epithet, 'New woman!'

"We must not find too much fault with Bro. Watson for following so illustrious an example. The Church should lead the state in this matter. I now move we confer on our sister Agnes Weeks all the privileges in our power, and hide away this little leaven of justice and equality with the prayer that it may help to leaven the whole lump."

This motion was carried; but there was an evident doubting whereunto this thing would grow.

Mr. Long now invited Agnes to address the meeting. She rose, and, with a quiet smile on her lips, said:

"My friends, I do not know whether or not to thank the church in general, and you in particular, for this honor. I will relate a little

incident and allow you to decide this matter for me. Whether I was in the body or out of the body I do not say, but I once had a vision. In this vision I saw a large church, and I attended its public ministrations. The majority in attendance were women. I found my way to its prayer-meeting, and the only man present on this occasion was its leader. I went to the Sunday-school, and found the majority of the teachers were women. I opened the Missionary Report of the General Society and discovered, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, women had tramped through every city, town, village and country road, to gather the paltry mickle which makes up the astounding muckle. I must have been out of the body, for just then a little creature, looking like a demoralized brownie, with a demoniacal, knowing grin, peeped around a church pillar.

"'How is this?' I interrogated. 'Have these women no work in their own homes?'

"'Lots and lots,' he chuckled; 'and they run a Missionary Society of their own, too.'

"'What are the men doing?' I demanded.

"'Oh, they have their hands more than full with business and politics. They can't spend any time at this work except to boss the job,' and he grinned more wickedly than ever.

"I went then to the governmental chambers of this church. I found some women who had strayed, through undesigned legislation, into the lowest court. In none of the higher courts could I find a trace of womankind, but well-brushed broadcloth and spotless linen.

"Again the sprite appeared, but seeing a dangerous look in my eye, dodged, as if to avoid a blow. As he peeped cautiously around the pillar again, I asked, 'How does this happen?'

"'The men won't allow them to vote,' he answered.

"Then added, with another fiendish chuckle, 'The men are few, but the women are a great host.'"

When the routine of the quarterly business was ended in the usual way, and the brethren had separated for their homes, one thought was uppermost in each mind—"Agnes Weeks, only daughter of the late Hiram Weeks, of Hillsdale, was living on the borderland of insanity."

CHAPTER XIX.

AGNES AN ORPHAN.

Two years and a half had passed away since the day death had reaped such a bountiful harvest at the old homestead.

Agnes would have realized a tranquil enjoyment in her everyday duties and the simple diversions within reach, but for the haunting fear that her mother was slipping out of her loving grasp.

Nothing but the most urgent entreaties could induce Mrs. Weeks to leave her home. When she did leave it she pined so visibly to return that Agnes was glad to bring her back. If her daughter had been depending on her strength of purpose or muscle, her hold on life might have tightened, but Agnes's aim in life was to shield her mother from even the approach of anxious thought. Through her utter selflessness, her mother's thoughts were often allowed to linger in her household graves.

Mrs. Weeks, latterly, had striven to prepare

her daughter for what she felt was the inevitable in the near future.

Agnes would not listen.

When the end came there was only time for a few broken words. Agnes knelt by the bed and piteously prayed, "Mother! Mother! do not leave me alone. Try and get better for my sake."

A weak voice answered, "I will try." With a great effort she repeated those farewell words of Christ's: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

That day saw Agnes an orphan indeed.

The weary days and weary nights followed each other in meaningless procession. Life spread out a Sahara desert, where the sands drifted drearier than the dead forest leaves in November. Agnes was as

> "An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light,
> And with no language but a cry."

One day she crept upstairs and sat down by the old cradle. She knew its history by heart. In other days she had smiled at its primitiveness; but now it was as the wand of an enchanter, annihilating the cruel present and bringing back the long past, laden with the smiles and healing kisses and lullabies of childhood. She felt

grateful for the generous proportions which had accommodated Henry and herself long after babyhood was over. She remembered with inexpressible tenderness the little tired mother, who never omitted to rock her two romping children into sweet, dreamless slumber.

For the first time she allowed herself to turn to her mother's work-basket to find the bit of sewing which had last employed her fingers. It was to have been a gift for Agnes on her birthday. In her haste one day to hide it from her daughter she had left the needle sticking in the hem. Here it was just as she had dropped it.

To quiet the longings of her heart for a word from across the dreary, silent, and yawning death chasm, Agnes opened a box containing the precious letters her mother had written to her during their years of separation.

They had been written by a hand unused to letter writing. Both character and expression were stiff, and lacking in every essential of good letter writing. But the love prompting the protracted effort shone out in perfect symmetry.

Agnes could not read them. They only reminded her of a land from whose shores no bark would find its trackless way to bring her messages from her loved ones.

With something very like despair in her heart she opened her mother's well worn Bible, and aimlessly turned the leaves.

It may have been because the daughter's lonely heart had been seeking everywhere for mother, that the words, "Who is my mother, or my brother?" caught her eye.

A flashlight of eternal truth showed her another lonely figure traversing the plains of time, and turning his back on the glories of the Godhead, to go forth into a world which provided holes for the foxes and nests for the birds, but did not give in exchange for a life of service and a redemptive death so much as a place for the Son of Man to lay his weary head.

Agnes left her mother's room with a determination to leave the hiding place of selfish grief, and to seek the kinship which the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man implies. Just as surely as Elijah heard and understood the question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" so surely Agnes heard the same question and felt its import. For the first time in her life, she discovered herself with idle hands. She turned from her chosen vocation with a loathing which possesses the skilful physician when he sees relentless death searching for, and victoriously finding, the mysterious link which binds the soul to the body of his best beloved.

As soon as Agnes determined to go forth on the path of duty there was verified to her the divine promise, "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way and to bring thee into the place I have prepared."

That very evening she received a letter from Mrs. Bruce urging her to pay her a protracted visit. She resolved to go and throw herself heartily into all the philanthropic work to which this lady devoted herself as well as her ample means.

The silent old house was put into beautiful order, and a visit was paid to the snow-covered graves.

Then Agnes found herself with her trunk on the front doorstep waiting for faithful Barnes to drive her to the train.

Never had she felt so desolate. Never had she realized to such an extent the uncertainty of human plans and human life. To hide her tears from Barnes, as he drove up to the door, she bent over the trunk as if to see it was properly secured. Her lips were whispering,

"Behold we know not anything,
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last to all;
And every winter change to spring."

CHAPTER XX.

SAINT DIVES.

PHILANTHROPIC activity was the very atmosphere of Mrs. Bruce's home. Agnes found in this environment the change she so much needed from subjective to objective thought. She found, too, a restfulness in simple obedience that was so different from initiating movements and plans, as had been hers to do through those sad years of bereavement. She never could tell afterwards how many organizations she joined, but she found herself impressed in them all with one fact, and it was that the fields which were white unto the harvest had dire need of laborers.

When she began to comprehend the scope of the projects engaging Mrs. Bruce's time and attention, she fell again into Elijah's pessimistic experience. When her spirit fainted within her she felt like voicing the sentiment of the true laborer in his words, "I, even I, only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." "To do the work we are attempting we need to enlist

whole corporations and millions of capital. I feel as if all the Christian workers were but a few mice nibbling around the edge of a cheese as big as the world," she told her friends.

Another day Mrs. Bruce found her holding up a shirt-waist and staring at it fiercely, as if she saw the traces of human blood on its faultlessly laundered surface. "I have been at a bargain counter this morning," she exclaimed. "I displaced a native of the Emerald Isle, who vociferously objected on the ground that she was 'sixty-foive, born in Tipperary on the siventeenth of April, at foive o'clock in the marning, ma'am.' She did not propose to be put out of countenance by the 'loiks' of me."

"I begged her pardon, and explained that I had not known previously its locality, and was under the impression she had given, with the rest of us, her countenance to the present promiscuous tussle.

"The other elbow did similar duty with a lady whose accoutrements at the door might have been those of 'a daughter of a hundred earls.' She parried the sharp encounter by adroitly climbing on the counter, and by this means reached the desired goal first.

"I came away with this shirt-waist, costing just forty cents, and a conviction that getting a

bargain means getting something for which an honest price is not paid. I am determined to know personally the history of this shirt waist."

Agnes entered upon this new enterprise heart and soul, but discovered many obstacles to be overcome before she could obtain employment in the congested labor market known as a shirt waist factory.

In the meantime an experience quite common to the human race, but, if genuine, always unique in each particular case, crossed her path.

Mrs. Bruce's house was a resort for all classes of Christian workers. They came to enlist her sympathies. They came to get the weight of her influence. They came for practical assistance. Among the many attracted there by pleasure and profit was the Rev. Horace Harding.

Harding was a manly fellow, ingrained with the formation of primitive righteousness. Volubility, broke loose, and, flowing in mad torrents, under delicately adjusted eye glasses, irritated the young man. He was the pastor of a city mission, and a man who had started out in life well equipped for his work, if the world could be attracted by the bread of life being served without highly seasoned relishes.

Rev. A. Bompas, Ph.B., pastor of Saint Dives, the hyper-fashionable church on the avenue

under whose wing the mission was supposed to nestle, said: "Well, now, really, Harding is a man quite devoid of imaginative sentiment—just fancy, you know; in fact, he is quite lacking in politeness. Our soprano soloist, Madame Trillini, offered to warble at one of his services as a very great favor. He replied he did not care for favors, and it was not at all necessary that she should put herself to any inconvenience, as his people preferred the old-fashioned hymns." Had the members of the little church known of the uncompromising reply, they would have passed a vote of thanks to the Rev. Horace Harding, who counselled more frequently with God than with flesh. Votes of thanks, and "personals" in the secular dailies, are nauseous to men of the Harding type.

They knew full well that Madame Trillini and the accompanist, Prof. Fidelinski, had delicate nostrils, constructed for the equally delicate odor of ottar of roses rather than odors distilled for manual pursuits.

Some thought the Rev. Horace Harding was too much like John the Baptist, or one of the prophets, who were quite antiquated personages at Saint Dives on the Avenue. Doubtless the Rev. Horace Harding was a trifle too cynical. He thought humanity loved to be deceived, even

in matters pertaining to religion. He was afraid there would come a time when the Church would engage in a neck-to-neck race for mere popularity and crowds and class.

Madame Trillini sneered at the antiquated Rev. Horace Harding. With clasped hands and upturned eyes, she fervently exclaimed, "How thankful one ought to be to have for one's clergyman a man fully up to date and what you could notice a little over, like the Rev. A. Bompas, Ph.B. Mr. Bompas has the good taste to reserve his prayers for prayer-meetings, the dying, and occasions of death."

The Rev. Horace Harding, however, possessed at least one very clear advantage over the Rev. A. Bompas.

The newly rich and vulgar steward at Saint Dives on the Avenue had called up by 'phone one day both Madame and Mr. Bompas, and in cold blood gave them to understand, in no uncertain terms, they were hired to draw, and the tenure of their office depended solely on the efficiency with which they fulfilled their part of the compact.

A church packed with a full pocketed congregation was not all that was required. Success depended largely upon the degree of power exhibited to draw upon the contents of the well-filled pockets of the well-filled church.

The Rev. Horace Harding had the privilege, and in the eyes of many the advantage, of going into the highways and hedges and compelling the poor, the halt, the lame, the blind, to come in to the Gospel spread.

Agnes met the missionary in Mrs. Bruce's parlor. He barely acknowledged their introduction, so deeply was he engaged in conversation with a man whom Agnes at first surmised must be a pupil of the night-school, and who had evidently set his heart on excelling in spelling: "H-A-T-H spells hath, and you cannot make anything else out of it but H-A-T-H, hath. He that believeth on the Son H-A-T-H, hath, eternal life." "My dear sir," said Horace Harding, putting his hand on the fussy little man's arm, to fasten his attention (if such a thing as attention were possible) on another equally important truth, "God's truth, like his universe, is balanced. H-A-T-H is certainly the present tense of the verb to have. Shall have is certainly the future tense of the same verb to have. The doctrine you seek to establish cannot be established by H-A-T-H. You are confused by bringing over the quality of life into the possession of life. You do not mark the distinction between *life* and *possession* of the same life. 'The just shall live by faith' is an equally inspired truth, and implies a continual

exercise of faith. We live by bread, but we continually partake. Paul, continuing, says: 'But we are not of them who draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.' You notice he speaks of two classes of persons. Both set out on the life of faith; but note the sharp distinction he makes. One class draws back. Draws back from what? From a life of faith. Draws back to what? To perdition. The other class believes to the saving of the soul. Not one act of faith, but believes to the final saving of the soul. You, sir, confound everlasting life with everlasting possession. A farm in a limited sense is everlasting, but the possession of it is not everlasting. Everlasting is a quality belonging to spiritual life, but not a quality belonging to the possession of it."

The little man was in nowise to be moved from his one text, and rattled on: "He that believeth on the Son H-A-T-H everlasting life, just the same as if he were inside the pearly gates a million years."

Horace Harding was somewhat ruffled by the imperturbability of his antagonist.

It is an open question whether or not he really was aware that a very attractive, self-possessed young lady had come within the ken

of his vision. He had lived on for thirty odd years without having his dreams haunted by any woman's face, except the kindly face of his mother.

How or when Cupid sped his arrow with certain aim, the saucy sprite would not divulge. To the dismay of this reverend gentleman, he in time found both waking and sleeping hours intruded upon with visions of a dignified young lady, known to him as Miss Weeks.

CHAPTER XXI.

REV. HORACE HARDING.

THEORIES are good in their place. There are theories many, and many are scientific theories; but facts are comparatively few—one fact, many theories. To mistake a theory for a fact may work mischief. A certain salt manufacturer has a theory that his salt will not cake, and warrants it thus, when the fact is it takes Bridget's sinewy right arm and a hammer to reduce the masses to a pulverized condition.

Agnes's intensely practical life had given little place for this immaterial growth, which has so often blossomed and ripened into the tangible harvest of actual discovery and useful invention.

Alas for human hopes, which have far more frequently been nipped in the bud by the chilling winds of "if" and "but"!

Among Agnes's first impressions of the Rev. Horace Harding were the number and diversity of his theories. His theories would have fitted

all the combinations of life, in all their flux, as a well-made glove fits a shapely hand, if there had been nothing wrong with the combinations; but, so far, not one theory had fitted to his satisfaction. He had theories about the Church, and theories about the state, and theories about women, and theories about children especially.

Many of the two latter he had, unknowingly, fashioned after the model of a bachelor's wife and spinster's children. Children, according to his theory, ought to be as well regulated and as well attuned as the notes of a superior musical instrument, from which, under the manipulation of skilful hands, nothing but harmony could be extracted.

He granted that the notes at times might be minor, mournful, plaintive, in short, but yet harmonious. The existence of the natural depravity he so warmly advocated in the pulpit must be proven by the lives of adults alone, as children should always behave like angels; or, like Punch and Judy, jump at the end of a wire in the hand of another, and when the show is over, be quiet in a box.

How the children were to become so submissive and angelical the Rev. Horace Harding never wasted his time to state. A wave of the hand in majestic silence is very often the road

out of difficulty. It cannot be by the power of example, as, unfortunately, natural depravity is such a drug on the market no one seems to see any fortune for himself and posterity in a speculation that would put a corner on this particular article; consequently, everyone has his own share of this commodity on his hands. Yes, the Rev. Horace Harding said, a child by whom a mother has done her duty is amenable to a look, eating when it should eat, sleeping when it should sleep, speaking when it is spoken to; but crying, no, never. An existence of blissful ignorance, "far from the madding crowd's (of children) ignoble strife," left him in full possession of his illusions.

His mission Sunday-school proved to him, conclusively, the need of the leaven of his theories. "Reverence and impudence can never lodge together in one urchin," he muttered to himself, on being asked by one of the unwashed of his school, "if he did not think God laughed when he made a monkey?" "Oh, if mothers would only realize their responsibility!" he exclaimed, after spending half an hour catechising, bribing, threatening a four-year-old with the hope of extracting some scrap of Biblical knowledge imparted by her Sunday-school teacher during the lesson, and receiving the reply, "Old

Sunks told me to sit down on that seat and keep quiet."

Turning to an older sister with hopes of better results, he inquired concerning the Easter lesson, "What are we to have next Sunday?" "Eggs," was the laconic reply.

He multiplied his mental and physical power a hundred fold by sending out tired women all over the city to collect money, to pray with the sick, to hunt out Sunday-school scholars, to teach in night schools, to circulate petitions, and then, by a delightfully inconsistent theory, bound her sphere within the walls of her home.

In childhood we showed the splendor of copper toes arranged along a line of chalk. In womanhood we vex our souls trying to define the numberless restrictive lines drawn for us by many conflicting authorities.

The Rev. Horace Harding thought it was his imperative duty to draw a line defining the length and breadth of that mysterious place, designated "woman's sphere."

Unfortunately, it intersected many of the orbits autocratically described by other eminent authorities, and meandered in and out to fit the exigencies of his particular outlook, like an old shoe cut to accommodate bunions.

He had it drawn somewhere between praying

in the prayer-meeting or singing in the choir, and standing on the platform or going to vote.

He asserted it was impossible for women to distinguish the policies of the parties.

Practice makes perfect, and even woman may come in time to see as a reality that which exists in the imagination alone.

She may come to see that a party calls waste and self-seeking, when out of power, what it calls necessary development of the country, natural expansion, or patriotism, when it gets an innings. Unaccountable, but true is the case, that the Rev. Horace Harding, with a band of faithful women, would hold an evangelistic service in a little hall, filled, through a personal canvass, with the lowest of those who bear God's image; but the next day, when the hall was converted into a poll, it became, by some machination of the devil, politic, polluted.

The responsible taxpayers in the neighborhood were transformed into beings unfit for the pure association of womankind.

Then, by a beneficent magic, the evil was exorcised, and they were retransferred into revered fathers, loved husbands, and respected neighbors.

The Rev. Horace Harding could see the fine line limiting woman's province in all its ramifi-

cations; but his eyes were holden to the startling truth, that the atmosphere through which he looked was hazy with the genius of Islam, which through an emanation, not from a Pauline epistle, but from the pit, mistakes seclusion for modesty.

No original deed gives woman a monopoly of retirement from the arena of public life. As far back as the Israelitish exodus, a precedent was set for the world in the three-fold leadership. God said, "I sent before thee Moses, Aaron *and Miriam.*" History would have left unrecorded one glad pæan if Deborah had been of the opinion that the head of an army was a position of martial publicity not for her. Her answer, "I shall surely go with thee," should voice the universal sentiment of womanhood to all causes which make for righteousness. But custom in China binds the woman's feet; custom in India makes child widows; custom in Christendom says woman shall not vote. Custom is a great gelatinous octopus, but the clutch of its arms is dangerously tenacious. Bowing low, and worshipping at the shrine of custom, was the Rev. Horace Harding.

CHAPTER XXII.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

WHENEVER the Rev. Horace Harding and Mrs. Bruce had a verbal encounter on the subject of the enfranchisement of women, which was frequently the case, Agnes listened attentively. His arguments aroused in her the old antagonistic feeling against the prevalency of counting might as right. Agnes possessed the rare gift of being a good listener, and Horace Harding began to flatter himself with the thought that their opinions coincided with the same exactness as the two triangles of the fourth proposition of Euclid.

He stated to his hostess, in all sincerity, he was open to conviction, and quite willing to devote any number of evenings to the discussion of this important subject, if by his so doing she thought she could convince him of error in his present conclusions.

Calling one evening with this laudable object in view, the maid informed him that both Mrs. Bruce and Miss Weeks were at a certain hall

attending a meeting of a woman's association. He immediately resolved to attend likewise and hear what these women had to say on the weighty questions claiming their attention.

Oddly enough, his thoughts on the way thither were irrelevant to his avowed object. He thought, with a thrill, of the possibility of a return trip with a white womanly hand tucked confidingly on his arm. A further blissful possibility was to sit for an hour under cover of Mrs. Bruce's conversation and watch the flitting expressions of face which Horace Harding firmly believed he could read like an open book.

He was almost sorry to find himself at the hall, so delightful had been his anticipations. He took a chair just inside the door, but quite out of sight of the speakers. He had lazily planned to take a leisurely, disinterested survey of the audience, in hope of catching a glimpse of the owner of the hand. The first sound of the speaker's voice set his heart throbbing so wildly he involuntarily glanced at his nearest neighbor to ascertain if she were cognizant of his agitation. He could scarcely believe this calm, deliberate speaker, whose evident conviction begot conviction, was the reserved Miss Weeks, of whom he knew so little, and yet who had, during the last few weeks, exercised such an

unaccountable influence over him as, sleeping or waking, to be ever present in his thoughts. After another furtive look around, to make sure no one present but himself was in possession of the knowledge that the Rev. Horace Harding was sore hit in the dangerous region of the heart, he settled down to listen.

The speaker was saying, "I know a woman who left a home of luxury for one which proved to be the home of a drunkard. Her husband was a lawyer, and used his position and influence and vote against the cause of prohibition. He died in poverty. His widow wrought as best she could, with untrained hands, to educate her boy and save her little home from the governmental tax hammer. She succeeded. To-day her boy drinks and votes. She pays the taxes and weeps.

"The government, in the press and on the hustings, vociferates, 'I am of the people, for the people, by the people.' It is a false statement. Our government is not as representative as it gives itself credit for being. Man fought for his vantage ground and gained it inch by inch. If by the accident of birth he found himself a son of poverty in days that are gone, he was excluded from privileges he now justly claims are but his due. However, forgetting his past, he now

asserts that 'might is right,' and, actuated by the spirit of the cowardly big boy who tyrannizes over the small boy of weaker muscle, he informs womankind she is of so angelic an order as to be no more of the people in the eyes of the law's franchise than an unfortunate lunatic.

"Woman did not go into the bread-and-butter conflict from choice. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and unskilled hands have no chance in the labor market. The wolf, Hunger, crouches at the door with glassy, relentless eyes fixed on loved ones.

"Neither did womanhood, organized for the defence of home, seek warfare with the liquor traffic. The aggressor is the demon Alcohol, who, bolder than the wolf Hunger, has broken the bolt, planned by God himself for protection, and entering, has taken possession and driven women and helpless children from their shelter. The electorate will neither extend to her the right to protect herself, if she so desires, with a weapon more powerful than a Maxim gun, nor will the same electorate protect her with the ballot from her worst and most insidious enemy. It is now a pitched battle, with an awakened womanhood, against the fearful odds, vested interests, appetite, custom, fossilism, ridicule, intentional misrepresentation, and lack of means

to focalize her efforts. The liquor manufacturer, wholesaler, retailer and consumer votes; she does not.

"It would not be modest or wise for woman to claim the ballot because she is better than man; nor, indeed, for any reason other than that it is her right as a responsible citizen. She is amenable to, and pays for, the making of the laws, in the framing of which she has no voice. Here is a deliverance of the *Wine and Spirit News*, and let us accord to it the respect due so high an authority:

"'A new argument is brought forward against giving the ballot to women. Composing the big end of the churches, they would be almost entirely owned by the preachers. The latter would then become the dictators of our politics, and rule the country. Candidates should be closely examined as to their views on suffrage and temperance.'

"It then goes on to say:

"'This is the strongest argument yet adduced against woman suffrage, and the more it is disseminated the less likelihood will there be of the ballot being given to female citizens. With ministerial influence at work at the polls, it would not be long before an undesirable union of Church and state ensues, public appropria-

tions for particular sects would follow, the public school would soon become a proselyting agency, and the boasted liberties of the country be seriously threatened. Woman is naturally religious, and he with whom she worships would soon be the dictator of our national policy were the suffrage extended to her.' "

The speaker paused, and then with a voice deep with emotion said: "Would to God that we could claim the sympathy and support of the Christian ministry; but the church so far has not comprehended the spirit of the Gospel towards woman, and has recorded its voice against the suffrage of women both in Church and state.

"The liquor party should not repudiate so important an ally to their cause of opposition to woman suffrage. Let me repeat: woman not having a voice in the legislative halls of our country, the electorate should either be true to their trust and protect her interests against the insults and injuries of a traffic acknowledged to be the greatest foe to her comfort and happiness, or, in British fair play, grant her a free field and no favors, by throwing the responsibilities of bearing those insults and injuries on her own shoulders. It is scarcely worth the effort and the precious time it would take to answer worn-out arguments against woman suffrage. There

is no physical qualification required, as the paralytic is allowed to vote. There can scarcely be said to be a mental qualification. Many men vote between whom and the inmate of a lunatic asylum it would be hard to differentiate.

"There is no educational qualification. The man who cannot read and cannot define Conservative and Liberal, when they are read to him, votes.

"We could not give credence to the 'trouble at home' argument without reflecting on manhood. This argument presupposes that the average voter is so arbitrary and narrow-minded that he is not willing to grant to his wife a privilege which he is compelled, by the menace of liberty, to grant to his hireling, namely, freedom of thought.

"If women were given to making trouble on this head, now—when she is not allowed to register her convictions—is the time she would be stirring up strife.

"It might, however, be wise to pass in review some of the classes opposing woman's suffrage.

"We have just seen the liquor interests steadily oppose this proposed extension of the franchise. Of course, the men interested in this trade grow pale, and indulge in howls of despair at the mere thought of how the home would suffer if

women spent all their time at the polls, and how little spare time this arrangement of duties would leave the men to patronize the bar.

"Another class, who have been and are and ever will be opposed to woman's enfranchisement, are men whose lives are impure, immoral, vicious.

"There must be an important reason for this startling fact, which can easily be verified by keeping one's ears attentive. Is this reason a fear of there being but one standard of morals, 'A White Life for Two,' so that a stainless life can no longer be demanded for one like the cage of unclean birds?

"There is another class, and it may be I am addressing some of that class to-night—a class of noble-hearted Christian women who, strange as it seems, do not realize they are arraying themselves with all those classes just mentioned in opposition to the franchise being extended to woman; women who honestly think the political arena is not a fit one for women.

"The inference is, politics are impure, unrighteous. Is it true, ye mothers, that there are children in your homes, little white-robed children, who every evening kneel at your knee to pray, 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' whom you calmly contemplate sending forth to engage in

matters, and go into places, not fit for their mothers?

"Let us teach the boy, God has one law, one standard for all. Teach them that what you cannot do at forty neither can they at twenty-one. Teach them politics will be judged by the ten commandments. Swearing, thieving, lying, bearing false witness, are never excusable.

"What are mothers doing to make political life a life fit for a pure son to enter?

"We know no place so unfit for a woman as the home of a drunkard, the home of a blasphemer, the home of a moral leper.

"The swath cut by the centuries into the monopolies of the few broadens and widens with each completed round.

"Whether the result be Utopian or not, it will be a result recognizing individuality rather than class or sex. Deborah said of the cause of righteousness, 'I will surely go with thee,' and God said of the leadership of the Israelites, 'I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, *and Miriam.*'"

As the speaker took her seat the Rev. Horace Harding stole away. His ears were tingling as if that white hand had boxed them vigorously. The smile on his lips might have been taken for the smile of a cynic, had it not deepened into a

laugh, loud enough to attract the suspicious attention of a passing policeman.

His theory of clinging helplessness with which he had clad Agnes had melted away like morning mist, and disclosed a character with purposes and convictions of adamant, on which even the Rev. Horace Harding might lean for support.

Forgetting himself, and dropping back into boyish *patois*, he exclaimed audibly: "Gee-whizz; she is a regular blue stocking!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE.

THE next afternoon the Rev. Horace Harding called at Mrs. Bruce's. He found it necessary to explain to himself why he wished to call. Quite so.

To surprise Miss Weeks by letting her know she had one auditor the previous evening on whom she had not counted, and to congratulate her upon her address, was his mission.

Perhaps to admit also that bachelors, and men with mothers, wives, and sisters of a certain type, might become prejudiced, and therefore warped in their judgment as to the righteous claims of womanhood, proved to be a satisfactory excuse for calling.

If his eyes had been opened he would have discovered Love laughing at his subterfuges; but Horace Harding received not so much as a hint from the mischievous divinity of the *coup d' etat* awaiting him.

For the first time he found Agnes alone. He

felt he had fallen heir to a fortune of some kind, and afterwards discovered it was a golden opportunity. She had put on her hat and gloves. In answer to a look of enquiry rather than words, she replied, "I have an engagement this afternoon, but I have a few moments at my disposal. Won't you sit down?" "Agnes," he said hurriedly, as if he heard approaching footsteps, "I want to make an engagement with you." He paused, and drew himself up slightly at her look of unfeigned surprise. There was something in his eyes that caused her eyelashes to drop until they almost touched her crimson-mantled cheeks, but not too quickly for him to catch a glimpse of her inmost soul. He added softly, "For life."

Steps were now heard in earnest, but he held her hand until she whispered, "Give me time to think."

"Very well," he replied, with quiet dignity, "I shall not come again until you have reached a conclusion and send for me." She had not disappeared up the stairway before he rued his rash statements, and he was tempted to send a message imploring her to allow him to plead his cause.

He did not, however, but returned to his rooms feeling everything would be held in abeyance until he heard her answer.

Sorrow was treading fast on the heels of his fondest anticipations.

A letter lay on his table informing him of his mother's dangerous illness, and of her ardent desire to see him ere she closed her eyes on earthly scenes.

The next day saw Horace Harding standing beside his mother's sick-bed. He had left strict and repeated instructions with his landlady to forward immediately any communications that came to his address. He gave her to understand he was expecting letters of great importance.

He succeeded in arousing that good lady's curiosity to such an extent she carefully examined every epistle, and kept a record of dates and post-marks, to which were appended remarks on the handwriting. 'Looks like a man's.' "Pretty sure it ain't a woman's, anyways, but you never can tell." "Women don't make their m's and w's and n's and v's all alike, as they used to." "I'd give anything to know what this one is about, but then I'm not the least bit curious." "I'll send it on as it is." Finally a very large envelope, tied with blue tape, came to hand, and Mrs. Bidgecomb solved the mystery so much to her own satisfaction that her surmises passed first into the confidence of the neighbors, and then into general circulation in the community.

Mr. Harding had been left a fortune by a dead uncle. Accompanied by so many winks and nods, the inheritance got an excellent send-off with the definite amount of ten thousand pounds; and being in English currency, by the time it had quadrupled, included a title, estate, perquisites, etc.

When Horace Harding relinquished Agnes's hand, she rushed to her room, bolted the door, threw herself on the bed, and held her burning cheeks with her hands. She tried to slacken the quickened pulsations of her heart. Did she love this man? Her heart was sore and hungry for human love. Would she not cling to any one who spoke kindly to her of love?

She concluded at length she was not in a position to know whether she loved Horace Harding supremely or not. How fickle she was proving herself to be!

She had thrown her whole heart into the new life she found in her friend's house. Had she a right to turn her back on it when she realized its vastness, and the pressing need of workers?

Mentally, she had been indulging a censorious spirit. She found fault with the tardiness of so many to deny themselves in the giving of their time to the alleviation of the sufferers.

At the first temptation she was prone to go

into a pleasant home, and deny even the little aid she could afford in the desolation she had found.

She remembered, now that it was too late, she should have confessed how totally she disagreed with many of his theories.

When her usual decision of character asserted itself, she said aloud, "The present duty is all I am responsible for doing; I will live each moment as it comes."

She arose, arranged her hair carefully, and gave unusual attention to all the details of her costume.

There is not the slightest doubt Agnes would have been indignant at an insinuation implying she was consulting an eye she might chance to meet.

It was the eye of the Rev. Horace Harding.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE UBIQUITOUS SHIRT-WAIST.

DURING the following busy days Agnes almost persuaded herself that the interview she had with the Rev. Horace Harding was an hallucination of her own brain. It had been so unexpected and abrupt. He had so completely dropped out of sight and hearing. She wondered if it were possible her heart had played her a trick.

The very evening after his call she was notified that there was now a vacant place for her in the shirt-waist factory. On presenting herself the next morning, she was rather suspiciously eyed by the forewoman. Her life of toil and experience of grief had left no perceptible mark on her appearance of physical vigor. Her personal appearance bespoke a life of wholesome food, pure air, exercise, which is so sadly lacking in many otherwise really attractive-looking girls, whose inhuman lot it is to sit at a table spread for them by the greed and infernality of our

present political economy. They eat of their own flesh, and drink their own life-blood.

As a result of replying in the negative to the question whether she ever worked in a factory before, she was set at the task of sewing on buttons, at one cent a dozen, or ten cents per dozen waists.

The waists on which Agnes worked were of a more fantastic cut than the usual plain waists, and required ten buttons and four studs to fasten them. Therefore, in order to earn ten cents, Agnes sewed on one hundred and twenty buttons, and buttoned them, and also inserted forty-eight studs.

The story is not yet told. Out of this enumeration she was compelled to provide her own thread and needles.

By straining every nerve to the accomplishment of the task, and without raising her head to rest a muscle, Agnes, in health, strength and deftness, with a reservoir of vitality on which to draw, could complete her work on one waist in ten minutes.

Her pay was ten cents for one dozen waists.

At night Agnes analyzed the earning power of her nimble fingers in a shirt-waist factory. The result was as follows: "I can do one waist in ten minutes, twelve waists in one hundred

and twenty minutes, or two hours. In two hours I earn ten cents, in one hour five cents. In a working day of ten hours I can earn fifty cents, minus the needles and thread. If I only had to provide the buttons and studs, the thing might be just," she said, as she sighed quietly.

Then she felt the chilling breath from the mouths of gaunt spectres. The deep shadow of emaciated Want breathed into her veins its icy chill, forebodings of the inevitable rainy days and days when the work was short, as she had learned it often was. The second day the five fellow-laborers in her department recognized in her a leader, and consulted her on the advisability of striking, on the ground that the buttonhole workers, in trying to save time and thread, were making the buttonholes so small it was robbing them, in that it took them so much longer to button the buttons.

So the horrid struggle for existence in God's glorious world goes on. Man is engaged like the wolf, or sometimes like the fox, for sustenance, and Christ is persecuted. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." Although under strict surveillance, Agnes had succeeded in learning that the buttonhole workers received but one cent per dozen for working buttonholes, and, of course, provided their own thread.

She had no faith in the strike availing other than to call down censure on the buttonhole workers, who were more sinned against than sinning. She succeeded in showing the girls how to save time by putting the needle through the cloth and the eye of the button at the same time, and advised the girls not to draw the thread too tight, that by this device the buttoning would be facilitated. One white-faced girl named Jean vainly sighed, and pathetically said, "But that will take more thread."

The equation of existence was so balanced for this poor girl and her comrades in this sweat factory, euphemiously named Shirt-Waist Manufactory, that a hair's-breadth change shot a dagger into the nerves of those white slaves, whose habitat is heralded the world over as "Free America."

Fortunately for Agnes's purpose, she sewed in the pressing-room. This position gave her an opportunity to gather information from those coming in to press that she would not have had in any other department.

On Saturday night Agnes returned to Mrs. Bruce's utterly exhausted. Her fingers were so tired and sore she could not use them.

When the sultry days are with us, and we seek the hammock and the palm-leaf fan, the breezes,

the lapping waves of lake or ocean, and are consoled in that we have a bountiful supply of shirt-waists, equalling every demand of time or place, let the following prosaic figures in Agnes's notebook haunt us with the freshness of each laundried waist:

Front hems, 5c. per dozen.
Back tucked, 7c. per dozen.
Yoke, made and put on, 7c. per dozen.
Collar, first stitching, 1½c. per dozen.
Turned and pressed, 2c. per dozen.
Second stitching, 2½c. per dozen.
Making of bands, 1c. per dozen.
Turning and pressing, 1½c. per dozen.
Second stitching of bands, 2c. per dozen.
Putting garment together and band on, 16c. per dozen.
Making sleeves, including putting on laundried cuff, 14c. per dozen pairs.
Sewing in sleeves, 1½c. per dozen pairs.
Cuffs, first stitching, 1½c. per dozen pairs.
Turned and pressed, 3c. per dozen pairs.
Second stitching, 2½c. per dozen pairs.
Folding and putting on collar, 4c. per doz.
Cost of manufacturing, from 12c. to 15c. apiece.

If we took those garments on which has been set the price of blood, and threw them down at the feet of those from whom we purchased them, we would receive an answer which was

given nineteen hundred years ago: "What is that to us? See thou to that." Before leaving on Saturday evening Agnes informed the forewoman she could not make the work pay. This august personage appeared to deem this excuse paltry and questionable. She said Agnes had not given the work a fair trial, and asked if she were going to another factory. Agnes, on confessing she did not contemplate doing so, was further and urgently interrogated as to her plans for the future. As with burning cheeks she wended her way through the thronged streets, she impatiently asked herself, more than once, what had tempted her to end that embarrassing interview with the statement, "She intended to keep house for a gentleman."

How can the greed lying behind these iniquitous sweating systems be definitely located and devil-exorcised?

Whose is it to bring these systems of modern days, infernal with legions of demons, to the Christ of God, that the swineherds may receive their fiendish incarnations of devildom, and be sent to the sea of oblivion for destruction?

How shall these slaves, shackled and collared, as herds of Africans were driven in their gangs on those dread marches to the coast, to be packed in holds of vessels, galled in spirit, with physical

and mental life sapped, and heart crushed, be delivered?

Turning from the bewildering intricacies of human government to the kindergarten school of Pentateuch, which is the headline for nations, we find simplicity in God's personal government.

"The Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" is a Pauline assertion which is accepted by the orthodox as axiomatic and relating mainly to a futurity of well-being. Undoubtedly this is the primary meaning, but these Scriptures in which Timothy was so well instructed have comparatively little to say of the future state. To speak in modern phraseology, they contain the Creator's political economy. His plans for domestic and social life are contained therein, and also the consequences of man's deviation from God's statutes in those same things, and the inevitable conflict of personal interests thereby.

In God's personal government, irrespective of birth, thrift or laziness, every man was provided for by a tenure of land, accompanied by a condition which prevented vast accumulations in the hands of a few. Everyone had a chance to work out his financial salvation on an unprejudiced basis. The individual lived with hope

beaming on his pathway. The unjust inequalities of later days had no existence. To think that honest men and women, giving out all their strength willingly to their day and generation, have no other future than the almshouse, is most depressing.

Christ understood well the polyhedronal nature of these same Scriptures to make wise unto salvation about all the complications of the life which now is, when He commanded us to search the Scriptures.

Poor humanity, blinded in the blaze of light, going around in mid-day with a lantern, seeking the illusive pot of gold, the philosopher's stone, and turning the whole world into a blackboard on which to try and solve the problems of riches and poverty, the quality of the classes and masses!

How far has it gotten with the solution?

Commencing with greed, it ends with greed. The axiom, "The love of money is the root of all evil," is scarcely taken seriously, or is juggled out of its meaning at the very initiation of the inquiry.

Anarchy, the stealthy blow of the assassin, starvation sweat-shops, where the living are consigned to the dimensions allotted to the dead, but in exceptional instances fresh air and owner-

ship measured by miles—all demonstrate the place for this world's wisdom is the corner adorned with the dunce's cap.

The fading beams of the nineteenth century reveal many schemes of the astute politician, labor leader, single taxer. Each claims in the last analysis to aim at fulfilling the second greatest commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves; and we are taught, too, those in the greatest need are our nearest neighbors. We love ourselves to the degree that we strive to attain the highest possible best, physically and intellectually. We love ourselves too well to go hungry or cold from choice. Has Christendom yet spelled out the title-page of the Gospel? Number One would sit enthroned if he were not unpoetically fighting to get into the trough of self-interest, all fours, lengthwise, and seeking life loses it. May the light of the twentieth century see the corpse of self-idolatry.

"Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

CHAPTER XXV.

HILLSDALE ONCE MORE.

AGNES learned accidentally that Horace Harding was away from home. She never thought of accounting for a feeling of pique because she had not received an intimation of the when and why of his proposed departure.

Horace Harding filled in his little part of the drama by watching anxiously for a certain small note, and cogitated after his usual impulsive habit: "A woman's mind can be likened to the pendulum of a clock. It starts out in a certain direction with a determined tick, but when it reaches a conclusion starts back on its track, and with almost brazen effrontery goes just as far in the opposite direction." It was the first time in his life he had doubted the possession of enough of the attraction of gravitation to bring to a blissful rest the oscillation of a woman's mind hitherto swinging in its arc unattracted.

Agnes had now been away from Hillsdale six months, and found it imperative to return and attend to some matters of business about which Barnes had been writing.

She sought out and carried with her a companion, in the person of Jean Hare, who was her nearest neighbor in the shirt-waist factory, and who was an orphan.

Barnes met them at the station.

As she drove through the village and came within sight of her desolate home, a realization of the utter loneliness of her life would have overcome her had it not been for Jean's exclamation of delight.

Agnes thought gratefully of how satisfactorily and quickly God pays us for any act done in his name.

"I am head over heels in debt to you, Miss Weeks," Jean said, as she gazed around and beheld nature in the freshness of her early summer dress, which was gloriously spangled over with the audacious dandelion.

Agnes looked up at the old face of the mountain, and in its stony eyes thought she caught a glance of recognition, and on its stony lips trembling a greeting of familiarity.

Jean's sentiment so exactly voiced Agnes's

state of mind she adopted it as the form of her own thanksgiving.

In the dusk of the evening she stole away to visit those graves which beckon with shadowy hands to aching hearts far away, but which are so dumb, so deaf, so blind to the tears and caresses lavished on them by the returned wanderer.

Agnes whispered many loving messages, and wept out the soreness of her heart on her mother's grave.

Her grief was not selfish enough to blind her to the carefulness with which faithful Barnes had trimmed the plot. Later she felt something akin to pleasure when she observed this care was not without its influence on the condition of the surrounding graves.

There were many pleasant changes in the village, too. Agnes had inaugurated a crusade against the tavern. She had organized the temperance sentiment, beginning with the few whom the political shepherds could not lead, and with these behind her had personally met importunately the representatives of the law who grant the license.

The determination to shut up the nefarious tavern grew. Agnes was gratified to see pasted on the door the notice "To Let." Literally

translated this meant, Let there be food, clothing, plenty of dry wood finely split, turkey, roast beef, and plum pudding for Christmas, with toys for the children. Let there be lilies at Easter. Let there be happy homes. Let there be a good hope of heaven.

Among other changes, the church was being made resplendent with a fresh coat of paint.

Smiles and tears, provoked by the memories of the bygone years, struggled unsuccessfully to reach Agnes's lips and eyes when Billy Watson's ears as usual were cocked towards the close of the Sunday service, waiting for the historic signal of trouble in the shed.

The starting of the collection plate had always been the beginning of calamity in the horse shed, whether the service was long or short.

Billy, deaf as an adder, heard the inaudible, and hobbled out with surprising alacrity to save whatever might be left of ruin at the heels of his old white horse.

It goes without saying, Billy's horse must have had a very penetrating vision or keen scent for the battle between his master's greed and the demand of the collection plate. Perhaps the venerable horse had so imbibed of Billy's spirit that he could find nothing so

offensive in the world to kick at as a contribution plate. One thing was sure, it was never known to kick through any other provocation.

The village was in the state of excitement always attending the ministerial comings and goings of the itinerant system.

Agnes was sincerely sorry to lose Mr. and Mrs. Long. They had done much to help her through the dark days of bereavement. Their influence had been very helpful to the life of the village in every good word and work.

Just before their departure she called to bid them farewell. Mr. Long incidentally mentioned that the incoming minister was a bachelor. He added laughingly, "From his reputation I think his case will be a chronic one unless, Miss Weeks, you can be induced to take him in hand."

That evening she received a letter from Mrs. Bruce containing the interesting news of the Rev. Horace Harding's appointment to the Hillsdale circuit.

Mrs. Bruce had not been blind to Horace Harding's infatuation, and sincerely hoped Agnes would reciprocate the love of a true manly heart. Her letter contained the follow-

ing lines: "He called to inform me of his mother's death, and of his new appointment. He also inquired very anxiously for Miss Weeks, and upon learning of your absence asked for your address. As he had been telling me he had been informed from a reliable source, his new circuit was under the tutelar protection of some kind of a saint, known as Saint Agnes, whom he did not propose to allow to interfere with his work, whether saint or sinner. I thought it best to withhold your address on a slight pretext, and left him in complete ignorance of the personality of his saint."

Agnes thought over the contents of her letter, and came to the conclusion to write the Rev. Horace Harding. The tenor of her letter was to the effect that as he was coming to a circuit where the people were somewhat finicky in their ideas of what a minister and his wife should be, and he would be none the worse for a little advice as to how to conduct himself and what to preach, the writer desired the Rev. Horace Harding to call upon her immediately on his arrival to receive his instructions.

She closed with minute direction as to the location of her farm from the village.

The signature could not possibly have been

deciphered by anyone but a Philadelphia lawyer whose imagination was of the same elastic nature as his perception of truth.

Horace Harding's first impulse was to write an indignant protest. After studying the address carefully, he finally changed his mind, and resolved to beard the lioness in her den.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VILLAGE JOKER.

CHARLIE BAXTER, the village practical joker, boasted, and not without foundation, he could arouse the curiosity and temper of the collective female portion of Hillsdale at his pleasure. At every success he scored, his victims vowed anew not to be entangled again in his wiles. They were still smarting over their last encounter. Mrs. Jamieson's boy was trundling an old waggon tire gleefully down the road. Charlie called to him to bring the tire to his shop, as the tire was off his waggon.

Tommy indignantly protested that his father had given him the tire. "That makes no difference," said Baxter, as he took it from the boy and leaned it up against the wall of his shop; "the tire's off my waggon." Whereupon young Tommy, knuckling his eyes and howling, sought the haven of home and the comfortings of mother.

Charlie Baxter kept as keen an eye on the

doings of the street as an engineer does on the lines of steel and signals of danger.

He saw Mrs. Jamieson's lilac sunbonnet hurrying on its way to Mrs. Blodgett's.

Then the lilac sunbonnet and a pink sunbonnet sought and found a blue sunbonnet. As the sunbonnets increased in numbers, colors, sizes, fashions, and proximity, the irrepressible Charlie called the attention of the neighbors and shop-loafers to what he described as a rainbow on a cloud. "'A rainbow in the morning is a sailor's warning,' so look out for a squall, for I am certain something is brewing," he added, wonderingly.

The sunbonnets moved towards and concentrated upon Charlie Baxter's shop.

He determined to put a cheerful courage on, and show a bold front to the wild charge sweeping down headlong upon him. As it came nearer, out of a confusion of tongues he distinguished the word Tommy. Presently he learned Tommy was a boy who never told a lie. Tommy was a poor lovely, injured, innocent lamb. In short, Tommy was, by common consent, the living embodiment of all those qualities which are so thinly diffused, in general observation, and unconcentrated like the ether, but in Tommy shining out in all the brilliancy of concentrated

youthful virtues. He deigned to dwell on this restless planet for the sole reason that he lacked the wings to soar away.

The first salutation was, "Good day, Mr. Baxter."

To be addressed in Hillsdale by this superfluous title was as serious a matter as to be sued for murder and lose the case.

"Good day!" Charlie replied, simulating cheerfulness, but discreetly drawing within easy reach of the door.

"How did you dare to tell Tommy his father was a liar and a thief?" gasped Mrs. Jamieson.

"I told him the tire was off my waggon," Charlie stoutly affirmed.

"It's not off your waggon," chimed a chorus of voices.

"There is my waggon and there is the tire; I leave you to judge if the tire is not off my waggon."

He dodged into his shop and bolted the door.

"Well, I never!" the crowd ejaculated, and dispersed wondering what Charlie would be up to next.

What he did next gave Agnes a heartache she never forgot.

Learning the new minister was a bachelor, Charlie conceived a plan by which he hoped to

assemble the village, to a woman, as a reception committee.

The day before Horace Harding's expected arrival he procured a blank telegraphic form, and wrote out a message purporting to be from the Rev. Horace Harding, to the effect that, accompanied by his wife, he would (D.V.) arrive at Hillsdale the next evening. Charlie put the supposed telegram into an envelope, and addressed it to the President of the Ladies' Aid, Hillsdale. He then got into his buggy, drove to the nearest town, and dropped it into the post-office. An hour later the mail-carrier was carrying the message back to Hillsdale.

A thunderbolt out of a clear sky could not have produced a greater consternation than this message. A new minister bringing his bride, and no kind of adequate preparation made for a proper reception! The village instantly determined to show itself equal to the occasion, and was astir at daybreak.

Fowl were beheaded without any preliminary examination of character. A keen competition was aroused as to who could cook the greatest number and variety of pies and cakes on so short a notice.

The exhorter was appointed to give the address of welcome. By a misnomer this brother

was commonly known as the exhauster. The suitability of the title was self-evident, and in common parlance was retained. He had the peculiar gift of exhausting in one sermon Hillsdale's Job-like stock of patience.

He often said his text would be from Genesis to Revelation somewhere, more or less. He made exception of texts which involved hard pronunciations, it was observed as a rule, after the famous occasion when he had gone astray on the beggars' skins, which he had freely used to denote the cruelty of a bygone age. He was not really one of the higher critics, but had missed the term badgers, freely rendering it beggars.

Brother Rogers the exhorter then spent the day looking over his collection of sermons, and at length settled down on the theme of the "Prodigal Son." The reference to the killing of the fatted calf he considered very appropriate for the occasion.

Everyone was so busy with his or her part in the programme, no one thought of sending Agnes word until late in the afternoon. Mrs. Rogers sent her girl Sally to ask for the loan of some table linen to grace the august occasion.

Sally was breathless with excitement and importance when she reached her destination.

Little by little Agnes learned the story of the minister's coming with his bride. Agnes, remembering Sally's natural propensity to enlarge upon what she saw and heard, was helped to overcome a faintness she felt for the first time in her life.

She went into an adjoining room, kneeled down before an old-fashioned dresser, pulled out the lowest drawer, turned over with ice-cold, trembling fingers the beautiful linen which had been among her gifts to her mother, until she came to the finest. She sent Jean with it to Sally, and went to her room to face this new experience. How it could be she did not stop to ask. but that it was so was beyond doubt.

Neither did she ask herself if she loved Horace Harding. Her heart was breaking. "Oh! that unfortunate letter If only I had not written it!" she moaned. "I can never stay here and see him" It was quite dusk when she stole down stairs and told the wondering Jean they must start for the city the next day.

Jean could not help shedding tears of disappointment, but she bravely hid them from her friend.

In the village disappointment also reigned.

During the afternoon a long line of rigs filed out of the village to the nearest railway station.

At the head was a waggon on which was a small organ to take the place of a brass band. Next in order came a single rig decked with white wedding favors for Horace Harding and his bride.

Many curious eyes watched the train when it halted. Some wondered if "she" would be "tall" or "short," "stuck up" or "just ordinary." "Black or white," said Charlie Baxter, the most interested spectator of them all.

As Horace Harding swung off the train, grip-sack in hand, the sight of the people warmed his heart and quickened his pulsations. His great warm heart appreciated the kindly motive prompting this reception. He remembered the Roman Christians who came out on the famous Appian Way to meet Paul, and was glad to think the spirit of fellowship and brotherhood had not left the world.

His greeting was even more cordial than theirs, yet his keen perception detected a feeling of disappointment which at first puzzled him. When Sister Rogers, who was very anxious to introduce her husband on the stage of action as soon as possible, ventured to inquire where Sister Harding was, Rev. Horace Harding understood in a measure the situation.

With a careless laugh he assured them she was coming.

"She can receive herself then," said Mrs. Rogers in a bitter undertone.

Brother Rogers was so unnerved by the absence of the blushing bride he made more than the usual number of blunders. Much to the merriment of Charlie Baxter, he referred in one place to the reverend gentleman as the fatted calf, whom they would like to have killed years and years ago had they known in time.

The proposed reference to the bride, as she was absent, had to be changed on the spur of the moment, and the result, through Bro. Rogers's palpitation, was an introduction of the swine in a far country, on whose neck they fain would fall and kiss them. This reference was for Mrs. Harding, and of course, as things were going, both metaphorical and ludierous, it made a great memory for Baxter.

Bro. Rogers closed by expressing the hope that the truth Bro. Harding might preach to them would not be like water on a duck's back, running in one ear and out the other.

All the way back Horace Harding, as he flicked the white favors on the horse's head, mused on which one of the crowd was "she." He had picked on Mrs. Blodgett, whom Billy Watson had considerately driven over to the station, and who was badly twisted with the

"roomatics," caused, she explained, by thoughtless men trying to open up the North Pole.

It was a beautiful evening in June.

When the feast was over and the men had departed to do their chores, Horace Harding slipped away from the clatter of tongues and dishes to enjoy, in contrast to the closeness of the city, the wideness of sky and field.

He revelled again in the memories of his boyhood.

He had not gone far when he observed the road he was following must be the one leading to the home of the Saint. He had satisfied himself she was not at the supper, and his curiosity was aroused. "Why not see this ogress at once?" he said aloud as he hastened his steps for fear the thrifty custom of early hours might prevent the interview he wished over as quickly as possible.

The lingering twilight soon revealed to him a vine-clad house and a trim lawn, the atmosphere of which was redolent with the gratifying perfume of flowers. In the shadow of a wide porch he could discern the outlines of a woman's figure. A moment later he had grasped a soft firm hand, and was greatly puzzled by the low-spoken salutation.

"You have sent for me," he said, when for an

instant Jean's light fell from a wide open window full on Agnes's tear-stained face. "Agnes!" Both her hands were in his possession. "You are not a saint, you are the spirit of mischief!"

She tried to release her hands, and forced her trembling lips to ask, "Where is your bride?"

"Here, I hope," replied the Rev. Horace Harding, joyfully kissing her lips.

No one was near to supply the missing explanations, but the two happy lovers "knew some one had blundered."

Before leaving, Horace Harding ingeniously proposed to bring his wife to Hillsdale in a day or two.

"Marry in haste so as to have plenty of time to repent," Agnes gaily answered.

Within a month the old stage, with every spoke in the wheels making an independent clatter, rolled up to the parsonage door.

When Horace Harding handed Agnes out and introduced her as his wife, Charlie Baxter, after one moment of dismay, mentally resolved to pack up his tools and go out of the business of practical joker.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEORIES EXPLODED.

SOME years after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, in a well-appointed study sat the Rev. Horace Harding writing an address headed "Woman Suffrage." It was evident his enthusiasm grew with his advocacy. He would rise, walk the floor, thrust his fingers through his hair, and as a good thought took to itself a definite form, smile and resume his writing.

Without warning, the door was rudely thrown open, and curly-headed, black-eyed six-year-old Harry came in as if he had been projected from the mouth of a cannon. "Papa, what is a bench-show?" he shouted, with the full tones of a healthy pair of lungs.

The boy held in his hand a dilapidated newspaper, and was eyeing with great interest pictures of prize dogs.

His scholastic attainments were just sufficient to enable him to spell b-e-n-c-h bench, s-h-o-w show.

"Bench-show, Harry?" interrogated Horace Harding, suspiciously.

New ideas with Harry meant new escapades. Harry's innocency of expression would have deceived a Pinkerton detective.

His father furnished him with a brief explanation.

Harry's violent slamming of the door as he retired drew from the fond parent the comment: "A perfect boy!" Harry further proved his perfection by resolving to have a bench-show. Many were the animated and whispered consultations held with juvenile owners of dogs in the immediate neighborhood. Out of these consultations grew the definite plan of having a dog-show in what was known as the "double decker," a summer house built on the side of the terrace behind the parsonage. It had two apartments, one above and one below. "You see, we will have plenty of benches," Harry explained to the boys.

Each boy was to bring his dog.

"Twelve dogs would not make a show; we must make a show of the dogs," Harry said, in a tone of superiority.

It was decided furthermore that each boy was to bring along as many of his personal effects as maternal vigilance would allow.

"Papa said Mrs. Outings made a perfect show of herself in her new spring bonnet," Harry added suggestively. Jack Jenkins remembered his father remarking one Sunday morning, the tall thing on his mother's hat was too showy for a church member.

These suggestions bore fruit, inasmuch as each exhibitor privately formed the determination not to be outdone in the matter of head-gear for his dog.

The completed plan included a band to enliven the proceedings of the show. Tin pans were to be improvised into drums and clanging cymbals. Survivals of Christmas-day wreckage, in the form of horns and whistles, took on a new interest, and were valuable to the degree of noise they made. The combination of medley and chaos was melodious in the extreme to the juvenile ear.

The following Saturday afternoon a miscellaneous collection of boys and dogs were gathered in the parsonage garden.

To accomplish his object each boy had wriggled, dodged, and squeezed through difficulties which would have daunted older heads. Various strange bundles bespoke a triumph of intrigue.

As Sammy Wellman slipped out of the back gate, his mother observed, self-complacently,

"Sammy was thriving better than any other child of her acquaintance. Some people do not know how to care for children;" and she sighed over the ignorance which would have been universal but for one precious exception. Now the truth was, Sammy had put on his entire outfit of trousers. His Sunday best, his seconds, and his every-day's were all on.

Johnny Shaw had been baffled in securing the spring millinery, but was master of the occasion in the retreat with his grandfather's plug hat in an old musty tin pail. With commendable forethought he had appropriated one of his sister Jennie's hat-pins, with which he hoped to fasten the hat on the head of his Spitz dog. Safely out of sight, he stopped to experiment for effect. The striking resemblance between Gyp so attired and the owner of the hat made Johnny chuckle immoderately.

To array the dogs was no small undertaking. The dogs of the luckiest boys were attired in two pairs of trousers. Where no convenient rent accommodated the tail, one was made, without a thought of future reckoning.

The variety of head-gear outshone the splendor of Easter Sunday. When fully attired, the dogs were coaxed or driven into the lower apartment of the summer-house.

A small contingent of boys were detailed to keep order among the now excited dogs. The rest were all members of the band, and with their musical instruments repaired to the upper apartment. The music was struck up with youthful vigor, and the hideous din was answered by a more hideous howl from below.

The show had commenced in earnest, and the boys' delight was boundless. Another crescendo run produced another prolonged howl. Crash! crash! went the band.

Every dog fell upon his neighbor, and was worrying him for an explanation.

The boys shrieked, pounded, whistled.

Harry happened to spy, through a crevice in the floor, his little black-and-tan getting the worst of a fray with Sammy's skye-terrier.

Each boy now championed the cause of his own dog. In the melee one dog, with a leap and a bound, cleared the terrace; the lawn and the low fence were soon behind him.

Another and another followed.

Each dog, maddened by his unusual trappings, ran as for life from its pursuer. Behind the dogs panted a dozen hooting urchins.

In the height of the confusion Agnes, who had been down town, rushed into her husband's study to demand an explanation of the noisy

proceedings, and found the dignified Horace Harding rolling on the floor in a fit of uncontrolled laughter. He had been watching the whole programme from his study window.

Agnes's protesting words and looks of unmitigated horror but added fuel to the flame of his merriment.

"That boy was born to be a leader," he managed to gasp. "To see the head-gear resolving into original chaos was comedy such as I have never seen."

"Oh, Horace! Horace!" Agnes exclaimed, as she ran upstairs to quiet little Agnes's cries of fright.

As we take our last glimpse of this happy family, we see Agnes tenderly caring for her little ones. She does look, however, with troubled eyes at the dangerous road, trap set as it is, over which their young feet will have to travel.

She well understands how tempting the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them are. The kingdoms of pleasure, of wealth, of fame, may be legitimate when in their proper proportion in relation to those things which are running parallel with eternity. If Satan had the temerity to tempt Christ to their possession by the short cut across corners,—"All these will

I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me"—so surely will he tempt the little ones.

When Mother Nature, forgetting for awhile her sternest moods, arrays herself in her gayest dress, and puts on her smiling face, Agnes and the children go to the old Hillsdale home. It has become a house beautiful indeed, because they care for someone who is in need and who is a brother or sister for Christ's sake.

Horace Harding we leave busily engaged in problems set him by the boy, the father of the man. To satisfy the oft repeated and urgent request, "What is the largest number in the world?" he had one day, in a fit of desperation, made on the boy's slate the sign of infinity. Just as the curtain falls the boy is back, holding out the slate and saying, "Just one thing more, papa. Please write the next lowest figure to the greatest one in the world."

But it is thoughts of greater moment than these which have put the marks on this man's brow and the silver threads in his hair. He has heard the questionings which have shown the movement of the spiritual nature of his children. "Is there a floor in heaven, papa?" "No, my child." "What does God stand on, then, papa?"

He knows that as Œdipus sought to solve the

riddle of the Sphinx, in like manner will the boy, according to his standards in life, seek to solve the world's riddle of success. He is striving to set the small feet into the prints left on the shores of time by the God-man.

He is warning him, as years are added to his life, that to seek the approval of man in preference to the approbation of God, is to bring ever-increasing sacrifices to the maw of a voracious monster who, when satiated and gorged, sleeps a digesting sleep, and wakes to hunger—a monster's hunger—and issues a monster's edict.

Perchance the deliverance may be favorable, and the boy will have won his cause through the utterance of public sentiment, public opinion, popular opinion. But let there be untiring vigilance in tickling the palate of this deity, with the face of a man and grimalk in body, lest some unsavory morsel offend his fickle appetite and he turn again to rend his former favorite.

We bring our little book to a close, caring only to have it true to the standards of righteousness, rather than the utterance of public opinion, which can only consign it to one of two deaths. It may be that a death from a painless oblivion is to be preferred to the throes of the dual death of criticism and praise.