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CHURCH OF ENGLAND
WOMAN'S AUXILIARY

A HOLE IN THE WOODS.

BY MRS. E. LEIGH,
TORONTO DIOCESE.



TORONTO :
*Published, for the Woman's Auxiliary of the
Diocese of Toronto, by*

ROWSSELL & HUTCHISON, PRINTERS.
1895.

A HOLE IN THE WOODS.

IT was a bright afternoon in the latter end of August that Arthur Stanley stood in his mother's dining-room, reading a telegram which he had just received, containing the information that he had secured the position for which he was anxiously waiting ; it told him that he was to be the Station Master on the Northern Railway, at Woodhurst, which was the terminus, for the time being. He had been away from home before, and had enough experience for the work, and he was very glad to go to it, although the place seemed a little out-of-the-way, still it would be something different from the city, in which he had been brought up. A few days later saw him at his destination, and to say that it was rather desolate-looking, was only the truth. A small clearing had been made in the backwoods, where the railroad met the river, along the banks of which a settlement of

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the most meagre proportions existed. It was the crudest form of a village, only the most urgently needed of buildings were scattered about in it; and in vain one looked for a church of any description. The station-house was of wood, painted the usual brown, to protect it from the weather, and in it he had a room, in which he lived the solitary life of a bachelor, taking his meals at one of the nearest houses. There was not much to be done, travellers were few and far between, occasionally a man looking for cattle to buy, or a lumberman passing to the lakes beyond, in search of timber. The beauty of the lakes was as yet almost unknown, and the summer tourist had not penetrated so far inland, owing to the recent date of the building of the railroad.

At first his time was occupied in making himself thoroughly familiar with his work, and in arranging his simple things in the most home-like way, endeavouring to take the bare look from the walls with a few pictures and other little things, which he

had brought with him, not forgetting to fill the empty boxes with ferns, which grew plentifully in a swamp, at a short distance away. The life was quiet almost to loneliness, and but for the the papers and letters from his mother, would have been far worse, as they kept him in touch with the outer world.

Sunday came with a peculiar quiet, as even the train did not come in. So to beguile the time and break the stillness, he took his Prayer-book and read the service, through to the end. The next week he did the same, and while engaged in doing so, raised his head and saw a man gazing intently upon him. He appeared to be a pedlar, judging from the pack he carried, and the small box in his hand.

As he was quite close to the open door of the Station before Arthur saw him, he looked up, and closing his book, spoke to him. The man laid aside his things and sat down on the step leading up to the place, and asked Arthur not to stop but to go on reading, saying he would like to listen.

Accordingly, he went on, with one part after another, the same as when alone, the Psalms, the Gospel, the Collects, while the swift rushing of the water in the river formed a distant and melodious symphony.

PART II.

The owner of the lumber mill on that same Sunday, sat in his house thinking, *not* of the sacred influences of the day, but of saw-logs; nearly everyone there was interested in the subject and *logs* formed the chief topic of conversation and thought. He was a widower with two children, a daughter of eighteen and son of twelve, two others lay beside their mother in the little churchyard. Mary Morrow was the redeeming point of Woodhurst, so gentle, so womanly in all her ways, making the house a home of comfort for her father and brother by her industry and good management. The few people in the village thought that her equal was not to be found,

but they seldom saw her, as she had a busy life, working about the house, making bread and butter or sewing ; her chief recreation being to take her work down to the bank and watch the river.

Books were not much in her way, she had too little time for reading, excepting her Bible, which her mother had taught her to prize. In it she had read about the wise woman who "worketh willingly with her hands," and in her humble way she tried to follow the good example. Her brother Martin obeyed her implicitly, for she was firm, as well as gentle. He learned his verses and said them to her, as there was no Sunday-school to attend. It was drawing towards dusk that evening when the mill owner saw some one approaching, and went down the road to meet him ; the pedlar was an old acquaintance, having been there before.

"It's a fine evening for the end of September, Mr. Morrow," said the man, in answer to his salutation. "Yes, the weather looks pretty well settled now, for a while, it

promises to be a steady winter and good for getting out logs;" and once on his favourite subject it was turned over and over, with the satisfaction of a talker glad to get a fresh listener.

"You've got a new hand, down at the Station, I see. I can tell you, if any of you want to go to church, they cannot do better than go to the Station on Sunday, and hear him read: he beats the parson, at least *some* I've heard: he's *good*, and no mistake." Mary, who had come up while he was speaking joined in and asked many questions, making him tell her all he knew about the Station Master. He stayed there that night and the next day, while going on his rounds, told the people about the prayers and reading he had heard, and advised them not to miss it.

Judge of the surprise of Arthur Stanley, on the following Sunday, when several people arrived about the usual Church time. He felt a little diffident about taking upon himself the duties of a clergyman, but as they seemed so anxious to

hear, he could not refuse and read the Morning Service, from the Prayer-book, in as devout and reverent a manner as he could.

All through the Autumn, and even when the heavy snow storms made the roads almost impassable, the scattered farmers and villagers crowded to the Station, anxious to hear the Word of Life: it was the beginning of a Parish, and later, when after much self-communing and study, Arthur was duly authorized as a lay reader, and finally ordained, relinquishing his duties at the Station to Martin Morrow, who had grown old enough to undertake them, he had the pleasure of receiving from the mill owner, not only a site for a church and parsonage, but also a promise that the Flower of Woodhurst, the gentle Mary, should be the brightness of his home, causing him to forever rejoice that his lot had been cast in a "hole in the woods."

DAUGHTER OF THE DOMINION.