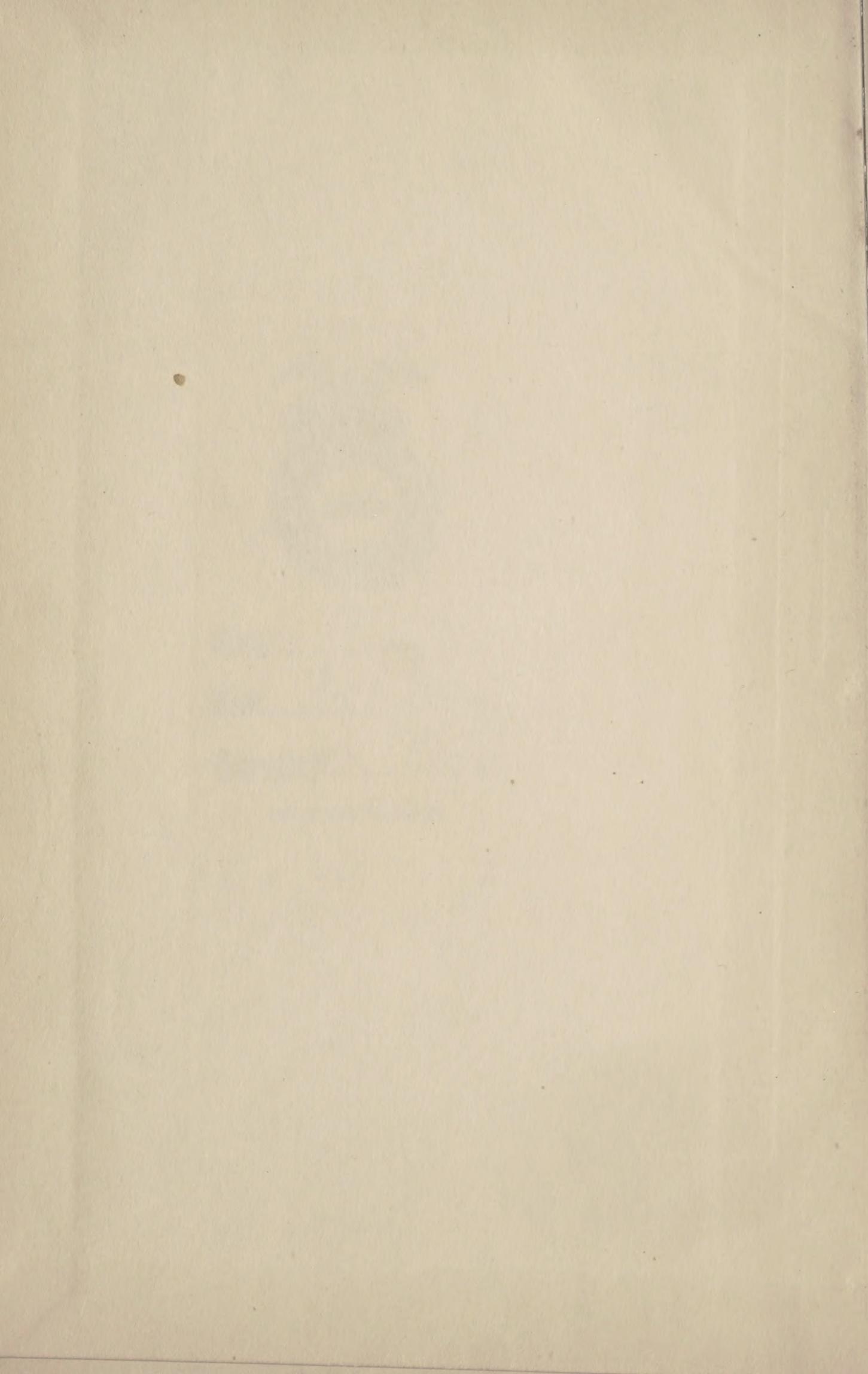


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THE BROWNS AT MT. HERMON

By *Isabella M. Alder*
PANSY

AUTHOR OF "RUTH ERSKINE'S SON"; "RUTH ERSKINE'S
CROSSES", "ESTER RIED'S NAMESAKE"; "ESTER RIED
YET SPEAKING"; "DORIS FARRAND'S VOCATION";
"DAVID RANSOM'S WATCH"; ETC., ETC.

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THE BROWNS AT MT. HERMON



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She held the open letter in her hand, regarding it with a bewildered yet whimsical look. It was unlike any letter that she had ever before read. She took up the envelope and gave it careful scrutiny. "Mary Brown, Circleville, Union Co., Ohio. That was all. It is my name, certainly," she said aloud, "though I am used to a middle letter, at least, and some sort of a prefix. Still, how am I to know that some correspondent has not forgotten both the initials, I am sure, with my present surroundings. She gave a swift, amused glance at the room as she spoke. A large

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I

“ MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE ”

SHE held the open letter in her hand, regarding it with a bewildered yet whimsical look. It was unlike any letter that she had ever before read. She took up the envelope and gave it careful scrutiny. “ Mary Brown, Circleville, Union Co., — ” That was all. “ It is my name, certainly,” she said aloud, “ though I am used to a middle letter, at least, and some sort of a prefix. Still, how am I to know that some correspondent has not forgotten both? It matches, I am sure, with my present surroundings. She gave a swift, amused glance at the room as she spoke. A large

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bare room with a dull ingrain carpet on the floor, whose too pronounced pattern was fading out in spots; green paper shades at the windows, pierced by innumerable tiny holes through which the sunshine filtered, revealing dust-filled corners that told of many slovenly sweepings. The bed was spread with a coarse coverlid that had become yellow with careless washings and had been badly patched near the centre. It was characteristic of the present occupant's instinct for observing small details which she would have been glad not to notice, that she knew the patch was laid on crooked and was frayed around its badly sewed edges.

Taken together, bed, carpet, curtains, and furniture, of which there were the fewest possible pieces, were unlike any that Mary Brown had ever before made use of. She had even not realized that there were such rooms. Yet she was evidently a guest of honor in one of the best rooms of the Circleville Hotel, which name, painted in unnecessarily large letters, swung conspicuously over the central

“ MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE ”

door of this long, low house that was sadly in need of paint. It was the only hotel in the village, and its accommodations, such as they were, had proved to be ample. No strangers save those compelled by circumstances stayed overnight in Circleville. Even its name was a misnomer. Why had the thought of “ circle ” ever been suggested by its one long, straggling street? The entire village had the appearance of having been left behind in the world’s march. If Mary Brown had not been too listless to do so, she could have laughed over the strangeness of her being stranded in such a place as this.

The circumstances connected with her coming had apparently been simple enough. Of course it had been quite unnecessary, as her guardian had taken pains to try to convince her. He had even laughed a little over her folly, and said there was no accounting for a woman’s whims; and she had turned from him a trifle vexed, and certain that she would go then, anyway. And she had

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gone, and come, — a long journey, which involved her being a guest for a few hours, at least, at the Circleville Hotel.

It was now the morning of the second day after her arrival, and, so far as the business that had seemed to bring her was concerned, Mary Brown was ready to start on her return trip. But she was miserably conscious all the while that part of the business which had taken her from home was not yet settled, and she was by no means ready to return. This feeling had increased upon her all the while she was eating the very decent breakfast that the Circleville Hotel furnished; albeit she ate for the first time in her life with a plated fork that had much of its plate washed away, and drank her coffee from a cup so thick that it called her curious attention to itself whenever she touched it. She had gone back to her room and begun in a desultory fashion to repack her bag, all the while asking herself what possible excuse she could frame for remaining longer. And then had come that letter.

“ MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE ”

“ I took the liberty of bringing it right over to you, ma'am,” the man from the freight depot had explained. “ I was there when Jim Baker was sorting the mail, and I told him I knew the one to whom that letter belonged, and I would bring it right over.”

She had thanked him and had checked the temptation to give him a quarter for his trouble, under the feeling that he might be too manly for such return, and had broken the seal of her letter and begun to read before taking time to wonder what correspondent could have written to her direct in this far-away little village. And then the contents of the letter began to hold her astonished and absorbed attention, too much bewildered, at first, to grasp its meaning or realize her mistake.

The letter began abruptly without more ceremony than the envelope had shown, simply “ Mary Brown,” and proceeded at once to business.

“ I have at last made up my mind to try you for the summer, anyway. It is a

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long way to come for just a summer, I know, but if you don't suit me for any longer than that, there are plenty of places where you can try it again. I haven't any fault to find with what my niece says about you, but your inexperience makes it bad for me; of course your mother's kitchen is very different from mine. Still, I'll venture it; you will certainly be better than nobody. Your uncle looking out for your ticket makes it safer for both of us; of course I couldn't risk any money on an entire stranger. My daughter Ailene thinks I am very foolish to have a perfect stranger come so far. She says, for one thing, you will be so dreadfully lonesome without any of your mates that you can't stand it; but I tell her that a girl who is old enough to earn her living, and to have need for doing it, will have sense enough not to let homesickness hinder. There is no need for you to be especially lonesome, either. The cook is Irish, to be sure, but she is a nice, respectable, good-natured girl, and there is no reason why you and she shouldn't get

“ MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE ”

on together. Besides there will be others; the table waiters are college girls, and of course you understand that that is different from working for wages, but you can make friends, no doubt, if you want to. Cook's name is Mary, too, but we can call her Mary Ann, so that won't bother. I have said that I would never try American help again, because they never know their place, but your letter sounds so sensible that I don't believe you will make any trouble; and I must have somebody as soon as possible. You said you could start on the 10th, and that would bring you here on the 12th. I hope nothing will hinder your being on hand at that time. I shall have to send to the station for you a mile away; and besides, it is a bad beginning for a girl not to do as she said she would. If you are going to earn your living by working out, you don't want to begin in any such way; so I shall certainly expect you by the four o'clock train on Friday, the 12th.

“ I don't know that there is anything more need be said. I told you all about

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wages, and the kind of work, in my other letter; though as to that, I need most of anything a handy girl who is willing to do whatever I tell her. I do hope you will be one of that kind.

“ Oh, one thing more. We live in tents out here, mostly; it is a summer encampment, you know. The dining-room girls have a large tent to themselves, and, besides there not being room for any more, they wouldn't care to have a stranger with them; but Mary has a nice little tent all to herself, and I may as well tell you at the outset that you will have to share it with her. She is just as neat as the rest of us, and you can have a cot to yourself, but I can't manage another tent this year. My daughter Ailene says you won't like that; but whether you do or not, I thought I ought to tell you. I try to be honest and above board with everybody. There's no reason in life why you shouldn't be entirely comfortable with Mary; she has lived with me a long time and is thoroughly respectable. I guess you will find everything as comfortable

“MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE”

as a body ought to expect. I'm sure I hope so; and I shall plan to have you met at the station. I guess that is all.

“MRS. HARRIET H. ROBERTS.”

Mechanically Mary Brown, with the thought of the train in mind, looked at her watch. Then she laughed.

“It won't do to miss that train,” she said aloud, “if I am going to earn my living. What an extraordinary letter! The question is, where shall I find the Mary Brown to whom it belongs, and apologize to her for appropriating it? There is need for haste, it is — why, to-day is the ninth! She must start to-morrow without fail! If Mrs. Roberts should send to the station and not find her, I wonder what would happen? I must have a personal interview with her without delay, and explain why I not only opened her letter but was so absorbed with its contents that I read it through without realizing that it did not belong to me. My original idea was that some lunatic had discovered me. Still, Mary Brown.

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I don't think this transaction speaks very well for either your honor or your common sense. If the time were not so short I would shirk the personal interview and leave explanations to that accommodating freight agent, or some one else. Poor Mary Brown! I begin to be sorry for her again, as I have been a thousand times before. I wonder if the girl is used to travelling. She is inexperienced; is she also young? So this is the manner in which help is hired! I have often wondered just how I should set about it, supposing Mrs. Hopkins should ever leave me, which Heaven forbid.

“ There was no waste of ink on ceremony. It is simply ‘ Mary Brown,’ and no more. It seems not to be the proper thing to address one's help as ‘ Miss.’ I wonder why not. And I thought all business letters closed with a ‘ Yours truly.’ This one just stops. Mary Brown, you must not waste another minute of precious time, but you are to set out at once in search of Mrs. Roberts' ‘ help.’ The very least you can do under the cir-

“MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE”

cumstances is to see that she gets off on the Thursday through train, although I am afraid that will involve another night spent in Circleville. Never mind, business is business, I am sure Mrs. Roberts would say. I wonder what sort of a girl Irish Mary is, and whether the other Mary will relish the situation. Is it to be supposed that Irish Mary is Mary Brown? No, that is not probable, or Mrs. Roberts would have mentioned it. It sometimes seems as though all the Marys in the world were either Brown or Smith.”

She had picked up the envelope and was studying the name. After the fashion of people who spend much time alone, she continued to talk to herself, a discontented look on her face the while.

“What a hopeless commonplace it is!” she said. “‘Mary Brown.’ Why couldn’t the first name, at least, have had some character? It might have been Jemima, for instance, or Johanna. I rather like that. What if I had been named Bathsheba after my great-great-great-

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grandmother! That would have been distinctive, at least; but just 'Mary Brown.' There must be thousands of us in circulation. I wonder what kind of a scheme a 'Mary Brown party' would be. I might fill the Euston Square house with them and make it look cheery for once. Probably some of the Mary Browns of the world are cheery. It is not at all likely that they are all orphans without sisters or brothers or even a choice cousin. Nothing in their own right but a fortune that all the frauds and freaks in the world are after, without the least care as to what becomes of her, so that they get her money. One thought about this interesting epistle was that it was one of those dreadful chain-letters that must not be broken and must have five copies made at once to send to five other victims; and I was in haste to get at its contents to destroy them. I have ceased to have even a semblance of a conscience about those chains. I like nothing better than to break them."

She was busy unpacking her bag again,

“MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE”

and searching for things that would be needed for her changed plans. She was almost cheerful over the fact that there was work for her to do that was not without its element of personal interest, and that would involve a delay in her return home. Meantime, she let her thoughts rove on in the whimsical direction they had already taken.

“I am not sure but that house party for the Browns is an interesting idea. I might add the ‘Johns’ to it; they must be fully as numerous as the Marys. Think of the John and Mary Browns of the country summoned to Euston Square for a social function! I wonder how one would set about such an affair. I might make it local and send personal invitations to all who appear in the Directory. Wouldn’t it call out a motley crowd?”

She laughed over her own folly, though there was not much joy in the laughter.

The simple fact was that Mary Thornton Brown, only daughter and sole heir of the late Everett Thornton Brown, of Euston Square fame, was in a dreary and

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almost cynical mood a good deal of the time. Her laugh closed with a sigh so desolate that even a stranger would have pitied her. She was not sure that there was a more lonesome and homesick girl in all the world than her weary self.

The task of finding the other Mary Brown was more complicated and involved more time than this one had deemed possible in so small a village. Jim Baker, at the corner grocery, — who also managed the post-office in one corner of his establishment, — was positive in his statements.

“ There ain’t no Mary Brown about here now, only you. That’s your name, ain’t it? John Jackson was here when I came to it, and he said right off that it belonged to you. There used to be a girl living out about two miles from here on the valley road; but they don’t get their mail this way. They have it come through the other office, and her letters, when she had any, — and that wasn’t often I reckon, — had R. F. D. on them, for the rural delivery, you know; and this

“ MARY BROWN, CIRCLEVILLE ”

one didn't have it on. Besides, that Mary Brown ain't there any more; she's gone ten miles away to live, down on the Fern-dale road.”

The Mary Brown to whom he continued to pour out this sort of information looked thoughtfully at him without seeing him, too much absorbed with her own thoughts even to laugh, until afterwards, at the curious bit of advice with which he closed.

“ So I reckon that you jest better make up your mind that the letter's meant for you, all right; that will be the easiest way out.”

Her response was to ask many questions about the valley road and the house two miles out where the other Mary Brown used to live. She had decided that she must seek her out and learn whether or not the letter that she had unwittingly delayed was still important.

II

MARY JANE BROWN

AT last the little story and a half house that was supposed to shelter the other Mary Brown was found. It was not early in the afternoon when the searcher, who had numerous obstacles to overcome, was at last rewarded by its sight, but there was no air of afternoon leisure about the stuffy little place. The small, unswept porch on which the sun beat down fiercely was a litter of home-made playthings and of children. The tiny yard was simply doing duty as a place for rubbish of all sorts. A woman who looked overworked and discouraged seemed to be trying to divide her time between a bubbling mixture on the stove, that was bent on boiling over, and the sorting of a box of tomatoes that stood among the play-

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things, the noisy children about her coming in for their share of attention as necessity demanded.

She owned to being Mrs. Brown, and hastily dusted a chair for her caller with her apron, while she answered questions.

“ ‘ Mary Brown? ’ You mean Mary Jane? No, she ain’t at home, and what’s more she won’t be for a whole month, maybe longer. ”

The sentence closed with a sigh that marked the mother’s opinion of the eternity stretching between her daughter and herself.

“ A letter? For her? You don’t say! And you read it, thinking it was yours? So you are Mary Brown, too! Ain’t that queer now? But I don’t know as it is, either; there’s a sight of Browns in the world, and about half of them seemed to be named Mary. Me and Mary Jane was talking about that only the other day. ‘ Ma,’ says she, ‘ I wisht you had named me Susana or Roxana or anything else in life except Mary Jane! ’ She got so kind of tired of hearing the name over

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and over, you know. Where we used to live there was a dozen of them, I do believe! And so you're another? Stoppin' at the hotel? It was real kind of you to come away out here with that letter. The hotel is a mighty nice place, ain't it? but dreadful expensive. My land! it don't seem as though there could be folks in the world who had money enough to board at a hotel! Set down, do, and rest."

The long-suffering apron was again called into service to make Mrs. Brown's hands fit to grasp the letter, then she went immediately into a struggle with its contents; and her caller, dropping into the dusted chair, studied this new specimen of humanity. So there were people who considered the Circleville Hotel a "mighty nice," and also an expensive, place! Nothing had seemed stranger to her than the ridiculously small amount that had been charged her for room and board. Here was a woman to whom her house party at Euston Square would be a revelation. Heretofore she had given

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almost no thought to the respectable multitude known in general terms as the middle class. Might they not be an interesting class to study? She could begin with the Browns.

She was recalled from her musings by a series of exclamatory phrases.

“ Well, now, ain’t that mean? Well, I do say! If that ain’t for all the world jest Mary Jane’s luck! It does beat all how luck follows some folks! And there ain’t a better girl in the country than my Mary Jane, either. Don’t it seem kind of too bad? ”

There was appeal in the last sentence, and Miss Brown felt a longing desire to be sympathetic.

“ I don’t believe I understand the situation,” she said, gently. “ Is the letter unsatisfactory? ”

“ Why, of course you don’t understand; it’s jest like me to run on without any head or tail to what I’m saying. Look here, you children run out to the pig-pen and play till I get done talking; you make such a racket a body can’t hear-

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herself think. Why, no, there ain't anything unsatisfactory about the letter except the time of getting it. Why, it's this way. This letter's from California, did you notice that? It's a good ways off; you have to travel on the cars pretty nigh two days to get to it. It's down where there's some kind of a camp-meeting right in the woods. An awful pretty place, they say; there's mountains, and water, and big trees and everything, and they have a meeting there all summer long. And this woman is down there running a boarding-house and is terrible short of help. She used to live near here before she went to California, and she's got a real smart niece back in the country that she wrote out to, to get her to come and help her this summer and she'd pay her good wages. But the niece is going to be married before the summer is over; and she is a friend of my Mary Jane, so she came over to get her to go in her place. Now, my Mary Jane is kind of wild to take a trip on the cars, and especially to go to California; she always has

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wanted to go there, ever since she began to study about it in the geography. And she kind of liked the notion of the meetings, too; she ain't never had much chance, Mary Jane hasn't; jest stuck at home and helped her mother. But mostly, she wanted to get away for a spell. She's going to get married sometime, if he ever gets forehanded enough to do it. I dunno when it will be; he's had his mother to take care of, and she's been sickly, and there was doctor's bills and medicine, and then there was the funeral expenses. Yes, she died, along in the spring, and he misses her dreadful. Poor fellow! he was as good a son as ever lived, and got her everything he could think of, and he gave her a real nice funeral. But he had to run in debt, of course, and so they don't know when they can get married. She's been engaged to him now for more than three years, and I guess she kind o' thought a change would do her good. 'Ma,' says she to me, 'how do you suppose it would seem for John and I not to see each other for months? We're so

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kind of used to each other now that we think we couldn't manage it apart, but wouldn't it be a good plan to find out?' That was a queer notion, wasn't it? I dunno as I more than half like it in a girl that's engaged to be married. 'Good land!' I says to her, 'if you think you could stand it apart, why, don't ever get married; that's my way of looking at it. Married life is trying enough anyhow you can fix it, and if you can stan' life apart, it's a first-rate sign that you better keep so.' Ain't that your way of looking at it? And then her uncle he put in and helped. He works for the railroad, and he did some things for them last year that saved them some trouble and some money, and they give him passes on the road, and he fixed it so Mary Jane could go without its costing her much; and that made her bent on going. And she wrote that she would like to come in the other girl's place, and got herself ready and waited and waited, and no answer came. And here, only last Monday, she give up and went off to a family that have been

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kind of coaxing for her all the spring. And now, just as she is fast bound at the other place, comes along this letter. Ain't that luck for you? Serves that Mis' Roberts just right; she needn't have dawdled along that way about writing. And now she thinks my girl can start up at a minute's notice and go. Wants her to start on the tenth, doesn't she? And that's to-morrow, ain't it? Don't it beat all how things work! "

She held out the letter as she spoke, as though it belonged to her caller, who took it mechanically, as she said:

" You mean that you do not think your daughter will go, now? "

Mrs. Brown stared.

" Why, she *can't*," she said. " How could she? The folks where she has gone have been waiting for her for weeks, and they was as pleased as could be when she told them she would come and stay till November; and they sent off the help they had had in her place, and give up the chance they had of another girl; so of course Mary Jane is bound; she's honest,

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my girl is; and help is terrible scarce around here. No, I sha'n't take the trouble to send the letter out to her; it ain't of no use now."

Whereupon Miss Brown realized that she had received a lesson in honor from one of those who were called the common people, and felt a fresh accession of respect for them. She was also sorry for Mary Jane.

"It seems a pity," she said, sympathetically, "that your daughter should be disappointed at last, when the opportunity has come to her."

The mother gave her a penetrative glance, and grew more confidential.

"Well, between you and me, I ain't been laying awake nights wishing for her to go. I wouldn't have put a feather's weight in her way, but seeing I had nothing to do with it, I'm going to own up that I'm mighty glad not to have her go away off there alone among strangers, and no telling how she would be treated. Not but that I wanted her to have an outing, too. The fact is I've been awfully

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mixed in my mind all along. I don't know as she will ever have another chance to go on the cars, or anywhere. He is a nice fellow as ever was, but of course he is far from forehanded; in fact, he's in debt; he couldn't help it, bein' the kind of son he was. And if they can get a place to live in where he can afford to pay the rent, I guess they'll try it together next spring; but land! there'll be no such thing as outings. They'll have to bone down to jest living. You know how it is when folks is poor? I dunno as you do, but my land! I do, and so does Mary Jane. Why, they ain't planning even to go to town on a wedding trip! John was talking about it the last time he was here. 'We'll walk from the church,' says he, 'straight over to our house, if we have the good luck to have a house, and be tickled to death at the chance of going to it together.' That's the way he feels, and I'm glad he does. Well, being things are as they are, I can't help being glad that she's only ten miles away from me this last summer, instead

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of hundreds. I call it her last summer, because, in a way, it is. Mothers lose their girls after they get married, you know. Still, I like John first-rate, and he was awfully good to his mother. I guess maybe you know John. Did you have any luggage down at the station? Well, the man that handled it was likely John; he is kind of at the head of it all down there. Was he a big man with blue eyes and kind of reddish whiskers? That's John; John Jackson his name is. 'Ma,' Mary Jane says to me once, 'if his name had been John Brown, wouldn't it have been dreadful! If it had,' says she, 'I wouldn't have married him! I will have a different name, at least.' That is the way she talked, but it's my belief that she'd marry him if his name was Snooks and hers was too. But I'm unfeeling enough not to be sorry that this letter didn't come in time, since I didn't lift my little finger to hinder it."

And then Miss Brown rose up, her decision made. She had heard the mother's

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family history, while at the same time she carried on her own train of thought.

“ I understand your feeling,” she said, gently. “ My mother has been long gone, but I think if she were here she would keep me close to her as long as she could. Would you like to have me reply to this letter for you, and explain the situation? ”

Mrs. Brown’s face beamed her thanks, and her tongue was once more voluble.

“ Well, now, I call that real kind. I won’t deny that I’d rather do a day’s washing any time than to write a letter; and Mary Jane is dreadful busy out there, even if she had the letter, and I don’t see no use in sending it to her and stirring things up again, now that it’s too late. I’m kind of sorry for the woman, and I don’t mind your telling her so; for my Mary Jane is a big loss. She ain’t ever worked out before, but she knows how, and she works with her conscience as well as with her fingers.”

And then Miss Brown was fairly out on the street, and a remarkable resolve

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in her heart. She would answer that letter, but it should be in person! Why not? She was Mary Brown, certainly. Evidently so far as her correspondence with Mrs. Roberts was concerned, the other Mary Brown had ignored her middle name. She had never in her life "worked out," but neither had the other Mary Brown, and she believed herself to be a "capable girl" and "willing to learn," which seemed to be the chief requisites. She also had heard of summer camp-meetings, and never attended one; and she had as weary a longing for something different as ever this Mary could have.

Although she had given the matter much thought, she had not been able to plan any outing for herself that was not utterly distasteful in prospect; and here was Providence, or fate, opening the way in an extraordinary manner for a new sensation. She smiled over her involuntary use of that word "Providence," and then sighed a little. She knew people who seemed to make use of the word as a sort of charm, and she knew a few, a

MARY JANE BROWN

very few, who seemed to derive comfort from its use. Such she had envied.

There was in the fashionable world to which she belonged a very large circle of acquaintances, each of whom would have stared in wonder over the idea that Mary Brown, of Euston Square, was a subject for pity. She was young, she had perfect health, she was so distinctly fine-looking that many people called her beautiful, she was the sole heiress of the late Everett Thornton Brown, millionaire, she was the sole mistress of as fine a mansion as any of the especially fine ones on Euston Square, — what more could a reasonable being desire?

Yet the sorrowful fact remains that there were days together when it would have been hard to find a more lonely and desolate person, in all the great city which was her home, than this same Mary Brown.

Sometimes her desolateness so preyed upon her that she walked the streets in sheer despair over the thought of going back to the great dreary house which she

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called home. She wanted a real home, with father and mother, and brothers and sisters, and song and laughter and good cheer. Occasionally she had glimpses of such homes in passing, before the selfish curtains were drawn close; they were always seen through a mist of tears. Sometimes there was a glimpse to be had of a baby, one of those laughing, springing creatures, whose perfect limbs seem to be strung on wires. Once or twice, when a sash was raised, she had caught the gurgle of sweet baby laughter, and had been obliged to hastily shield her face from curious eyes because of the tears that were blinding her.

When she was a girl of sixteen there had been such a baby in their home. She was nearly twenty-six now, and had been alone in the world and desolate for five interminable years.

She wanted a friend. Oh, more than anything else in this world the poor young woman told herself that she needed a real friend.

Friends she had, of course, in plenty.

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Why, she was so used to being sought after and quoted and copied, that there were days when she perversely hated it all. But, go over her long list of acquaintances as carefully as she might, not one could be singled out upon whom to bestow the kind of feeling she meant when she used that word "friend."

She had tried. There had been continuous weeks during which she had earnestly cultivated what she afterwards called a "spasm of intimacy," trying to make herself believe that at last she had found a friend indeed, only to be disappointed and to have instead an embarrassing intimacy on her hands. She grew afraid of intimacies, at least of the solitary sort, and her next venture had been the adoption of an entire family.

III

MARY BROWN'S FRIENDS

THE dwellers on Euston Square, where the beautiful homes were ancestral, at least as much so as homes can be in this new country, were one day treated to a sensation. The house and grounds adjoining the Thornton Brown place were actually sold! To be sure, it was a distant cousin who bought it, but he did not bear the family name, and altogether it was an innovation. It ought to have been resented, and there was a general feeling in the Square that the new family should, in a perfectly well-bred manner of course, be let alone. But it chanced that, very early in their coming, Miss Brown quite by accident came in contact with the new family, and found them charming. There was a real mother there, and a father,

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and there were three pleasant daughters, and some delightful boys for brothers, too young to even suggest embarrassing situations. Moreover, there was a home atmosphere which the lonely young woman next door recognized the first time she breathed it. She was fascinated, and, without in the least intending it, fairly tumbled into an intimacy that was delightful to her.

In her secret soul she knew that the mother was more interesting to her than the daughters, and that she should like to have her for her special friend; but that did not seem reasonable. The oldest daughter, just her age, claimed her as a matter of course, but was unselfish and cheerful in letting the others share, and they were all charming people.

Not the least pleasant feature of the intimacy to Mary Brown was the delightful comradeship that sprang into life between her and the high school and grammar school boys, — a friendship that was exceedingly helpful to her, and too much

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could hardly be said as to its influence over the boys.

Before she had realized what was going on, Miss Brown had accomplished that difficult thing on a city street, in an exclusive circle of which she was the unwilling centre, a next-door intimacy sufficiently pronounced for the "running in" stage, and the next-door people, thanks to her influence, were promptly in the centre of things. Perhaps they would have reached there promptly in any case, for they belonged to the class to whom it would have made little difference, and such seem always to make their way.

Just as Mary Brown, who had tried this time to be extremely careful, was beginning to let go all reserve and enjoy to the full the home she had borrowed, a cloud arose. "The doctor" was a name constantly referred to in the family, and Miss Brown, without asking any questions, had gathered that he was very much at home in their circle when he was on this side the water. She learned that

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he was a professor in the medical college of their own city, and that he was abroad for an indefinite time.

One morning she had "run in" to plan a drive for the afternoon, and had found them all in a state of hilarity over a just received letter, with the announcement that the doctor was coming home.

"Just think, Miss Brown!" Alice, the high school girl, had said, "he expects to sail very soon, — perhaps next week! And the last word we had from him was that he had almost decided to stay another year. I can't think what has made him change his mind, unless it was because I told him what we thought about you and —"

She stopped in utter confusion, and a chorus of laughter greeted her from the other sisters, followed by exclamations.

"You're a nice child, Allie!" "I think as much!" "Always cautioning us not to tell, and then doing it yourself!"

"I haven't told a thing!" said the scarlet-faced Alice.

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“ No, but you will have to now, or Miss Brown will think it is something dreadful. I shall tell. It is Alice’s first effort at match-making, Miss Brown, and she has smothered Nettie and me in cautions not to mention it for the world.”

“ Nonsense! ” said the girl. “ Don’t you believe them, Miss Brown; they are just trying to tease me. You can tell her all you want to, girls. I didn’t say a word more than you did, either; I shall tell her myself. It isn’t anything dreadful, Miss Brown; only we all said that you were just the one person in the world that we had ever seen whom we thought Doctor would like, and I told him about you, how dear you were, and how we all loved you and how we wished he would come home and — and — ”

“ Love her, too! ” exploded Nettie in a fresh burst of laughter. “ Oh, Allie! what a goose you are! you’ve spoiled it all now.”

Then Miss Brown had questioned in a puzzled way, letting her impressions come to the surface in doing so. She had

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thought that "the doctor" was at least a middle-aged, gray-haired man with spectacles and a family, and that he lived in "Professors' Row" with the others. There had followed a chorus of exclamations.

"Doctor an old man! the idea!"
"Well, he hasn't a family, by any means, except us; we are his family." "And he doesn't live in any 'Row,' I can assure you; he lives with us."

"Why, Doctor is only thirty; and he is just the same as our brother. His mother died before Nettie was born, when he was a little bit of a fellow; she was mamma's dearest, sweetest sister, and mamma had him come right home to us, and he has lived here ever since."

"He is only thirty, Miss Brown. That is what makes him so remarkable. He has become distinguished for medical research even so early in his career."

"Allie is quoting from the medical journal now," the others said, and laughed. And Miss Brown had gone home presently, more dismayed than she

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would have cared to have her adopted family understand. Dismayed and disheartened; here was the end of all her newly found pleasant homelike times! With the advent of a young doctor all the delightful friendliness expressed by that "run-in-at-any-time" phrase would be over. She would have to be circumspect and dignified and keep constantly in memory not only the friendly neighborhood espionage, but the more careless one of the watching outside world. Even the servants would be on the alert, curious to see what sort of intimacy was established between herself and this other, who, it seemed, was really one of the family. In short, she told herself with a weary sigh, "he has spoiled it all!"

This conviction deepened as the days passed, and the interest in the speedy return of "Doctor" kept his name continually at the front. Especially was that high school girl, Alice, a trial at this time. Having once divulged her eager secret that Doctor and Miss Brown had been created for each other, and that she was

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to be the link in the connecting chain, she worked steadily at her task, ringing his praises until the poor victim for whom they were especially intended grew to fairly hate the sound of his name. She began almost bitterly to resent his connection with this particular family. He had all the world beside, apparently; why could he not have left this one home to her? She laughed, of course, over her own folly, but nevertheless she was miserable.

She spent a wretched night or two trying to plan a satisfactory outing for the summer. It had included a month's sojourn at a very quiet resort in company with the family next door, but that had suddenly lost its charm. She could not include herself in that way, with the new member present, even had she desired to do so.

Matters were in this state when a note from her business agent and former guardian, concerning some of her recently acquired property, suddenly gave her a new suggestion, — she would go and see

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the little six-roomed cottage that had unexpectedly become hers; why not? She could even stay in that vicinity somewhere for a few days, perhaps, and plan what she would do next. At least this would enable her to get away from the disappointments and questionings of that irrepressible Alice, the high school girl. No sooner had the idea occurred to her than she settled upon it at once as a conviction. There was something pathetic about the little possession. A nurse who had served and loved her in childhood, but had been lost sight of through these later years, had recently died, and, being without relatives, had left all her small possession — a tiny furnished cottage — to Mary Brown, sole heiress of the millionaire, Everett Thornton Brown, of Euston Square, and the child of her love and care.

At first the rich man's daughter exclaimed over her legacy in amused dismay. What in the world was she to do with a six-roomed cottage located in a little Western village many hundred

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miles from her home? Later, she had cried over the thought that one whom she had forgotten had remembered her all these years and loved her enough to leave her little all to her. She wished that she could have known about the love and realized it before there was nothing left but a grave. Then came the inspiration. Why should she not visit that grave and see that all outward respect, at least, was paid to the memory of Nurse Borland? Incidentally, she could also visit the six-roomed cottage.

Such was the combination of circumstances that had made Miss Brown a guest at the Circleville House, hundreds of miles away from her usual surroundings, and from all who even knew of her.

No, there was one other phase of the combination; there was something that she must decide. She could not settle it at home; at least it would not stay settled. Perhaps the atmosphere of Circleville, wherever that might be, would help to clear her vision.

There was a certain Richard Wade, a

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friend of her girlhood, of her childhood indeed. He had seemed for years like one of her brothers, and been almost as much at home as they in her father's house. If only he had been content to stay as her brother, how much less lonely her life might be. But Richard, who was just her age and had seemed much younger, had been away for two years and then had returned grown up! Some way he had discovered suddenly that he was not only a man with a man's ideas and feelings, but that those feelings even to his innermost heart were centred on his one-time playmate, Mary Brown. He was very positive and insistent; he not only knew that he loved her with all his soul, but was equally sure that she loved him. Why shouldn't she? Hadn't she always liked him better than any of her friends, — a great deal better? And there was no one else, was there? Well, then, what was the use? No matter if she did not realize that she had the right kind of feeling for him, that was nothing; he was not afraid; he had not realized it

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himself until lately. But he knew now, both for himself and her. Once they were married and the thing was settled for life, she would find out fast enough that he was the only one in the world.

She had felt compelled to laugh at the boyishness of this logic, and had reminded him that once they were married it would be too late to do any finding out. But at that he had shown that he was man enough to suffer, and had convinced her that he, at least, was in solemn earnest. And he had urged a speedy marriage with all the eloquence that he could muster, and had convinced her judgment that, once the decision were made, there would be no reason in delay. She was alone in the world, and so was he, at least comparatively. He had brothers and a sister, but they were married and settled, "and happy without me," he had told her pathetically; and then she had realized that he, too, was lonely.

But she could not decide to marry him. There were nights when she went to sleep at last under the conviction that it was

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settled and she would be married as soon as he wished, — only to awaken in the gray of the very early morning to renew the weary questionings. There were times when she chafed under the restraints of conventionalities. If Richard were her brother they could make home together, and have as much of each other's society as they chose, and live their separate lives at the same time, as they chose. Why could it not be so with friends? She would like very well to pour Richard's coffee for him, and chat with him, whenever he chose to dine at home, and she had no other engagement; she could imagine an ideal life for them both. But to marry him, give up her name and time and individuality almost, as she was sure that people truly married did and were glad to do, she shivered and shrank from it, and was sure that she and Richard were not for each other. And then he would spend an eager evening with her, tingling to his fingers' ends with assurance and determination, and the arguments would be gone over again. She

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must get away from them, and from him. She must reach a decision that would bear daylight, and stay fixed. It was being cruel to Richard to vacillate so. This, after all, had been the real reason why she caught at the tiny cottage in Circleville and took her sudden flight in that direction, not even hinting to Richard that she was going. He was out of town for a few days, and this helped her in getting away.

She had been gloomy during the journey over the loss of her adopted family; for the more she thought about them in connection with "the doctor," the more sure she was that her enjoyment was over. And then she had been gloomy for another reason. It seemed strange, but as the separating miles increased between Richard Wade and herself, her inward vision seemed to clear; before she reached Circleville she had become almost certain once more that she was not the woman whom Richard ought to marry, and that she would not marry him. But with that strange inconsistency which sometimes

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harasses the human heart, the decision saddened her. She should in this way lose her friend, her lifelong friend and comrade and almost brother. Richard, at least, knew his own mind, and had not changed and would not, and they could never be again as they had been. She was sorry for him, and at the same time almost vexed with him. Things might have been so pleasant if he had not been foolish. She, it seemed, was not to have a friend of any kind.

It was this dreary loneliness and sense of separation and loss that she had brought with her to Circleville. It was what had made the look on her face which had caused John Jackson to remark to his associate in the freight depot that he never see a young person before look so kind of lonesome and sad. He guessed she had lost friends lately, her mother, maybe; and then he had sighed. John Jackson was the young man who had lately buried his mother, to whom he had always been good, and who wanted to marry the other Mary Brown as soon as

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he could get "forehanded" enough. He told the other freight man that he was that sorry for the young woman that he had gone over with her to the hotel and carried her bag himself away up to her room, so she wouldn't have to wait for that slow-poke of a Tim to do it. All this Mary Brown did not know. She did not even know that she had arrested the attention of John Jackson, and that he had been especially kind to her. But she knew that she was sad; and she believed that she had lost friends.

IV

A NEW MISS BROWN

BEFORE the arrival of that remarkable letter, Miss Brown had spent a number of hours in the six-roomed cottage at Circleville.

She had found, first of all, a little old-fashioned garden aglow with old-fashioned flowers, — larkspurs and sweet-williams and balm and honeysuckle. She had loved them all the moment her eyes rested on them, and they were associated with Nurse Borland and happy childhood days. There had been a little old garden in the country where she and Nurse Borland spent some happy weeks the summer that father was ill and mother went abroad with him. Some of those very flowers were blooming in this garden! Mary Brown, as she bent over them with a rush

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of tender memories dimming her eyes, told herself that at least she would see to it that Nurse Borland's grave should always glow with the flowers she had loved.

She had gone carefully through the tiny house, examining with growing homesickness and wistfulness every article of furniture. What a complete little house it was! What a cunning dining-room, — old-fashioned braided rugs on the floor, old-fashioned high-backed chairs, an old-fashioned deep-leaved table covered with a heavy linen home-woven spread. A tiny corner closet stocked with old-fashioned blue dishes, willow pattern. Could anything be prettier or more complete?

“ Dishes enough to serve meals for two, and even to have a guest,” she said, gazing wistfully up at them. “ If Nurse Borland could only have understood how much I should have enjoyed sitting with her at this table, drinking tea out of this blue cup! Why must things always come afterwards? ”

She had lingered in the little house,

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unable to get away from the homelike place. She assured herself that, for some reason, it looked and felt more like home to her than any place that she had been in for years; and it was hers. If there were only another, sufficiently a kindred spirit, to be summoned to spend a few weeks with her in this little house, among those lovely rollicking flowers, she knew that she should like it better than any outing that could be planned. "Two people," she had said again wistfully, as, having visited all the rooms, she reached the little dining-room again, and sat down by the two-leaved table to consider. She went over her circle of friends one by one, and dismissed them; none of them quite fitted in with the little house. She had locked the door at last, and pocketed the key. She had changed her mind about returning it to the agent; the house was hers and she had a right to the key, and a perfect right to keep the place untenanted if she chose. She had a foolish little feeling that she should like to choose the tenants, and she smiled at her folly,

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and wondered what her business agent and sometime guardian would think of such an idea. He was not to hear of it, that was some comfort. Her folly had already been sufficiently impressed upon him in taking a long journey for the sole purpose of looking up so insignificant a bit of property as this. Of course the guardian was never to know about Richard Wade and the decision that must be reached. No, that was reached. She had clear vision now. Just why, she could not have told, but as she sat before that little dining-table and mentally set the blue willow patterned dishes in order for two, she became absolutely certain that Richard Wade could never, never be the other one. And if not he, then nobody, of course, in that sense. She must be different from other girls. Well, one thing was certain, she should never marry unless she was sure beyond the shadow of a doubt that she could not live without that other one, and also that she could live with him.

“ Always to have him seated opposite

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to one at table, for instance, three times a day," she said to herself, and thought of Richard and shuddered. Certainly she was not like other girls, and could not help it, but could be honest.

But the fancy to find a tenant for that dear little six-roomed house stayed with her and colored her movements for the remainder of the day. Just how she was to accomplish it was by no means clear. It was of no use to run over her list of even nominal acquaintances for this; no maid servant of her employ or within her knowledge fitted into the place. She smiled at her folly and clung to it.

Having spent a somewhat restless night at the Circleville Hotel, she was surprised to find in the morning that her interest in the little house was as keen as ever, and her desire to people it was even stronger. She would certainly withdraw it from the local agent's hands, but there seemed to be nothing else that she could do. And then had come that interesting letter and the interesting interview connected with it, and now the remarkable decision. She

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would go to Mount Hermon, wherever that was, and become Mrs. Roberts's "handy young person," who was willing to do whatever was wanted.

"What a lovely name!" she said, lingering over the words. "'Mount Hermon,'—it makes one think of heaven. What if I should find a new atmosphere there? I have heard of summer meetings where people thought at least that they found something new. You need something new, Mary Brown, entirely new. I approve of your decision to go in search of it. I wish I could settle the little house first. Wait! Why would not the other Mary Brown and my friend John Jackson be the ones to people it? He would do, I am sure, and it would help him to get 'forehanded,' but I must know the other Mary first, and there is not time now to make her acquaintance. It will not do to be later than the twelfth. When my summer experience is over I will return here and give myself to setting up the Jackson family, perhaps."

She laughed at the folly of her own

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thoughts, a more gleeful laugh than was common to her. Already the feeling that she was about to become a new Mary Brown, one with whom she had not even a speaking acquaintance, had awakened her interest and energy.

Visions of the trim "second girl" who did her housekeeper's bidding in her city home, and always looked tastefully dressed in her neatly made, carefully laundered print dresses, roused this new Mary Brown's ambition to emulate her and hastened her departure from Circleville that very afternoon. She determined to take a train at once for the nearest city and spend a few hours in replenishing her wardrobe, with Jessie the table waiter for a pattern.

Moreover, a satisfactory letter must be written to her business agent, remembering always that he had been her guardian and was her father's life-long friend, and that therefore explanations not strictly connected with business were his due. It took time and skill to write a satisfactory letter. How much could she tell without

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really telling anything? When the task was accomplished the letter read as follows:

“MY DEAR GUARDIAN:—I had no trouble in finding the place or the cottage. It is in very good condition and needs no present attention of any kind. There is not, however, much opportunity for renting it at present; this is a very quiet little village where the people, I fancy, rarely move. I should like to find some one who would like to live in it as a caretaker, and keep it in its present order in memory of my dear old nurse. I may be able to do something of that sort later.

“Meantime I have met friends who have changed all my summer plans. Instead of coming home at once, as I had arranged, you will be surprised to hear that I am going to California. I am to be with a Mrs. Roberts, whom I do not think you have met. She summers at a charming place called Mount Hermon, in honor, I suppose, of the place of sacred memory bearing that name. It is said to

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be a delightful place for a summer home, the people chiefly living in tents, which, you will remember, is a hitherto ungratified ambition of mine. I shall be able to tell you in the fall whether or not it is as delightful as I have imagined. Kindly forward my mail to the address which I shall enclose, and have the goodness not to mention my whereabouts too particularly to any of my acquaintances who are planning to cross the continent. Being in camp, I shall not be in condition to entertain them, and it might save my hostess some embarrassment if passing acquaintances do not find me too readily. You will understand the situation, I am sure."

"I am sure you won't!" she told herself gleefully as she signed and addressed the letter. "What I mean is, that you will think you do."

She felt jubilant. The entirely new departure she had planned took hold of her imagination and enthusiasm.

"I am actually running away!" she

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said, gaily. Not one of the people whom she dreaded would be likely to find her after that hint to her guardian. He knew very well that there were some from whom she would not even care to receive letters. As for Richard Wade, business called him to London for the summer, and he had wanted her to go with him! She drew a long, relieved breath over the thought that he could not follow her to California; then she looked serious over the letter she must write him. It was hard that she could not keep him for a friend, but she was afraid that she could not. Still, who could tell what this strange new summer might have in store for her? She might find a real friend.

“If I do,” she told herself, “I will bring her back to Nurse Borland’s cottage for October, and we two will drink tea together from Nurse Borland’s blue teacups.”

The journey started out in an auspicious manner. The young woman who had run away made herself ready for it so as to look as commonplace and uncon-

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spicuous as possible. At least she thought so. She had carried out her proposed programme to the letter, leaving Circleville by the late train and stopping at a little Western city two or three hours distant, where she found the shops brilliantly lighted ready to catch the tourist trade.

This shopper had never realized, and did not at that time, how much her careful street toilet, with every garment of the richest yet most appropriate kind, had to do with the deference shown her by discerning salesmen and women. She did not at first understand the almost persistent determination of the bewildered clerks to show her only the richest and finest of their goods. At last she smiled on a bright-looking girl behind the notion counter and took her into semi-confidence.

“ I am trying to fit out a young woman, a friend of mine who is going to work in a boarding-house this summer. It is at an outing camp in Northern California, and she has nothing whatever that is suitable for such a place. She is just about

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my size, and whatever will fit me would do nicely for her; I wonder if you would help me.”

Yes, indeed, she would; she would like nothing better. After that, work went on swiftly. The young saleswoman brought her keen, well-trained wits to bear upon the subject, and became a most efficient ally. She flitted from counter to counter and from one department to another in eager desire to have this unknown and fortunate girl secure as complete an outfit as possible.

At first she was anxious.

“Oh, dear, yes,” she said. “That dress would be lovely for her for afternoons when she had a chance to dress up; but isn’t it too expensive? It is quite fine, you see. And she could get along without it, of course; because that pale blue one is a good afternoon dress, and it doesn’t cost half so much as this.”

“Oh, I think she will need this, too,” said the shopper, flushing over her ignorance. The price of the dress in question seemed to her ridiculously low. “There

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will be a good many people where she is going, and she will need to look neat all the time. It will take a number of dresses. Besides, she may have opportunity to attend some of the lectures." Then, seeing the puzzled, almost troubled look on her helper's face, she had advanced a step in her confidences.

"I am fitting her out myself; she doesn't have to pay any of the bills, and I want her to be neatly and appropriately dressed all the time. I shall be glad to have you make any suggestions that occur to you."

The troubled face had cleared, and the response had been eager. "Oh, all right, ma'am; I shall just love to help fit her out. Ain't she a lucky girl, though?"

"Forward, Miss Brown," a voice had called from the lower counter, and the helper had made prompt answer:

"Miss Brown can't! She's awfully busy."

The shopper regarded her with added interest. Here was another "Miss Brown." "And still another develop-

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ment of us, I think," she told herself as she watched the movements of the alert, eager girl.

"If I should ever have that house party I am planning, I should like to have her come. I believe she could be made to fit in wherever she might be wanted. I wonder if her name is Mary."

But no, a girl at that moment caught at her dress with a hurried half-whisper: "Say, Jennie, where's the pattern counter? I can't find it." She was Jennie Brown, then, — Jane. "It might be Mary Jane," the shopper told herself, and laughed. The girl laughed, too, in sympathy. She was having a good time.

Later, while Miss Brown was studying over a suitable travelling wrap, the girl gave an undertone account of her unique experience to the girl at the rubber counter.

"I'm having an awfully jolly time! She is fitting out a girl to do summer work in a boarding-house at some swell camp, and the way she is piling on the clothes is a caution! I'd like to have her

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fit me out to get married! There will be an awful bill! but I don't believe she will care; she looks as though she belonged to the kind that is used to them. I just wish I was the girl who was going to get the things, I know that! Do you suppose she is any relation to her, or just some one she is interested in? Say, don't you wish she was interested in us?"

"Where is this camp?" the girl ventured to inquire at last, when she had given wise advice as to shoes and a sun hat and a sun umbrella. On being told, she dimpled with delighted surprise.

"Well, now, isn't that the greatest! I'm going out there myself in September. I'm to have my three weeks' vacation then, and a cousin of mine who is waiting on table up there for her room and board has got me the chance for September, because she is going back to college; my cousin is a college girl. I thought of her when you were talking about fitting out your friend for a summer camp; but land! I never dreamed that it was the same place. Don't things happen queer

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sometimes? Perhaps I shall see your friend out there.”

“Perhaps so,” Miss Brown had said, but she had felt a trifle startled, and had offered no more confidences. The world was smaller than she had realized.

V

FARMER BROWN

ON the morning of her second day of travel there came to occupy the seat beside her a fragile woman with a sweet face that at once awakened interest. She dropped into the seat with a little sigh of relief.

“It is a comfort to me to find a seat with a lady,” she explained. “The cars are crowded this morning, and I am so unaccustomed to taking care of myself that I am almost a coward alone. It makes a woman timid to be always cared for, don’t you think?”

Miss Brown smiled on her and admitted that it must be very pleasant to travel with those whose right and pleasure it was to take care of one.

“Yes, indeed!” the lady said. She

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was almost sure to have husband or son along.

“ My son,” she added, “ has taken care of his mother ever since he could talk; but I am separated from him now for the first time. It is a critical time in a mother’s life when her boy goes to college.”

Miss Brown smiled again, still sympathetically, as she owned she had always supposed that the critical time was for the son. The mother laughed.

“ Yes,” she said. “ That is true; I feel it for him, of course. We both do, his father more than I, I think. It is harder for fathers to trust their boys than it is for mothers. I wonder if that is because they understand the world better than we women do? I find I have the utmost confidence in my Kendall’s ultimate future, even though the intermediate steps are not all that we could wish. You are right in calling it a critical time in a boy’s life. At home, Kendall never gave us an hour’s uneasiness. I beg your pardon for beginning to talk about him; it is a foolish way we mothers have.

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Still, I do not often mention him to a stranger. I could not help having a fancy as soon as I looked at you that you were a good friend to the boys; truly good, I mean. Don't you think that is about as important work as young women can find to do, to be true friends to boys away from home? "

Mary Brown was strangely moved. When a girl of twenty she had had a boy brother to whom she had been "good." He had gone away from her like all the others of her family, and her voice had trembled as she said:

"I am sure of it. I had a dear brother once, and I know."

"And he is gone? Dear friend, forgive me."

"It is five years since he died," Miss Brown said, amazed at herself for her lack of self-control before this stranger. She knew that her eyes had filled with tears, and some explanation seemed necessary. "I am all alone in the world," she said tremulously, "and I am sometimes very lonely."

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“ Poor child! ” it was the mother-tone, soft and tender. Then a delicately gloved hand was laid on her arm.

“ I’ll tell you, dear, it is given to you, perhaps, to help other young brothers. They need the impress of a good woman’s friendship upon their lives. All boys need it, and sensitive, highly organized, manly boys, full of life and fun, need it most of all. If I were a young woman I would try hard to help them to an intimate friendship with the Lord Christ. They are lonely, too, these boys away from home, and often homesick; it is what leads them into all kinds of follies mis-named ‘ fun.’ If they had a special friend always with them, one who was superior to folly and whose respect they coveted, think how it would shield them! And Christian girls could help them to realize that the man Jesus would be just such a friend. If our Kendall could only be led to feel that, his father would be at ease about him.”

Then came the conductor and a conversation about tickets and changes and con-

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nections. When he had passed, the lady laid that delicate hand on Miss Brown's arm again.

“ My dear, strange things happen in this world of ours; we call them chance, but the older we grow, and the more intimately we know our Father, the more sure we are that nothing ever chances. Do you know I had a feeling, from the first moment of seeing you, that you were to be one of the influences to touch my boy's life? I don't know how, but God does. When you gave the conductor your ticket I saw the name, and you are going to within a few miles of Carmen College, where my boy is! If you meet him I know you will be good to him. His name is Browning, Kendall Browning. This next station is mine. Good-by, dear, God bless you.”

In a moment, with a bright little smile and a parting bow, she was gone, leaving Mary Brown with the feeling that she had met and parted from a dear friend; leaving her also with a new and grave sense of responsibility.

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When she stepped, a few hours later, from the platform of the train and looked about her at the station indicated on her ticket, it was with a vivid remembrance that she was now to become a new person in every sense of the word. She was to enter upon an untried life and assume duties that were utterly strange to her. But her interest in the experiment had by no means waned; on the contrary, she courted, rather than shrank from the new experiences. First, she must give herself to the business of finding Mrs. Harriet Roberts.

“Mrs. Roberts,” repeated an elderly man who seemed to be standing about for the purpose of giving information. “Oh, she is up on the hill where the meetings are. You going up on the hill? They mostly do; but it’s pretty all around here.”

The latter part of this sentence was evidently called forth by the look on the young woman’s face as her beauty-loving eyes caught glimpses of wooded hill and

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deep ravine and winding river and flashed her appreciation of them.

“ Is that Mount Hermon? ” she asked, indicating a peak that glowed in the sunlight.

“ Well, it’s all Mount Hermon, ma’am, all about here. That’s the name the new folks gave it. They’ve got a fine place, and no mistake. Four hundred acres of as pretty country as can be found in the State; and if you are acquainted with the State of California, you know that is saying a good deal. The beauty of this place is the water. Spring water, ma’am, everywhere; four of the finest springs to be found anywhere; and that witch of a Zayante River acts as though it was alive! I never saw the beat of the way it scurries around.”

Miss Brown laughed amusedly.

“ You make a very good advertising agent,” she said, pleasantly. “ And you certainly seem to have a good subject; it looks very lovely everywhere.

The man echoed her laugh. “ Well, I ain’t employed to advertise it,” he said,

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good-naturedly, “ and I don’t own a foot of land about here and don’t expect to, — though I should like mighty well to buy a lot for my little girl, while they are cheap; it stands to reason that they won’t stay so long; but I know a good thing when I see it, and I can’t help admiring the folks that have taken hold here, and liking the thing they are trying to do. I live back here a ways on a little farm; I’ve lived there all my life and I’ve seen lots of tourists and things about here, admiring the beauty and drinking the water, and all that, but I never see one of them who cared to take any trouble to do things for other folks, till these came along.”

“ And you think these are really doing it for other folks? ”

“ Looks like it, ma’am. I’ve looked on a good deal since this thing begun, and I drive over here to the meetings every chance I can get, and I don’t know what other motive they could have for the things they are doing; and whether that’s the object or not, they are doing it all

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right. I've got a lot of help from it, already, and so has my wife and my little girl. I've got an extra good little girl; Libby, her name is, Libby Brown. I'm going to bring her over to the meetings all I can. You're waiting for a carriage out to Mrs. Roberts's place, I suppose? It will be along pretty soon, I reckon; they're late this morning. Things are new here, you know, and they ain't as they will be in another year or two. There's the rig now, coming around the curve. It's a mighty nice fellow who is driving it; his name is Brown, too, but he isn't any relation of mine; he is one of Mrs. Roberts's boarders."

The historian paused to gaze meditatively at his audience and mildly wonder what he had said to call forth such an outburst of laughter. In truth, Mary Brown felt almost hysterical over this rapid increase of the Brown family. She tried to check her mirth lest the feelings of the kind old farmer might be hurt; but he was continuing his introductions.

"I dunno as he is exactly a boarder,

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either. I guess he is paying his way doing work. They do that kind of thing a good deal here; students, you know. It's a great place for students; you see it ain't a regular camp-meeting at all, though there are meetings enough, and grand ones, too; but they study a good deal, and have Bible classes, and other kinds of classes, and everything is up to date and scholarly. I heard Doctor Weldon say myself that there were as scholarly a set of men as we have in the country up here at work at Mount Hermon; and he is the president of Carmen College.

“ This Mr. Brown ain't a student, though, he is a carpenter. I thought he came out here to get work, but he stayed right on after he found that he would have to wait awhile; there will be lots of work for carpenters when the meetings close, but they don't allow hammering and sawing and things of that kind much now, for fear of disturbing the meetings. I guess he is going to wait, and get a chance at some of the new houses that

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will go up this fall; he shows good sense, too, for there's a lot of them. So I guess he is part paying his way by working, and going to the meetings between times. He looks like a real forehanded man, too, and I don't quite make him out. But then, a thrifty man might have ways of spending his money that he liked better than paying his board with it, when he could earn it as well as not. I see him working around at Mrs. Roberts's sometimes, when I go there; and I guess she is mighty glad to have him; help is terrible scarce about here. Anyhow, whatever he is, he is a grand good man, and folks like him first-rate.

“Hello, Mr. Brown! you are late this morning. The train has been gone as much as ten minutes.”

The young man thus addressed brought his horses around the curve with skilful hand, and alighted before he made answer.

“Late, am I? I told Jonas that we should be; he was late with the horses.

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Have you seen any passengers waiting for me, Mr. Brown? ”

The passenger thought that he surveyed her with a doubtful, not to say disappointed, air.

“ Only one? ” he said, looking up and down the road. “ That is very trying. We were expecting a Miss Brown at our house this morning. ”

“ Miss Brown, eh? Relation of yours, Mr. Brown? Not your wife now! ”

“ No, my wife didn't come this summer; but I am very sorry that the young woman didn't, she is needed. Hurst, ” raising his voice and addressing the station agent, “ when is the next through train from the South due? The passenger we are looking for comes through from Circleville. ”

Thus reinforced, the waiting passenger decided to speak. “ I am from Circleville, and I am expected at Mrs. Roberts's to-day. ”

The driver turned and surveyed her in evident bewilderment.

“ I beg your pardon. You are ex-

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pected, did you say? Your name is not — ”

“ My name is Mary Brown,” she said with dignity. “ Can you take my trunk? ”

“ I beg your pardon,” said the driver again; but he did not say for what. Instead, he gave business-like attention to the neat trunk containing the new wardrobe, and in an incredibly short space of time they were making excellent speed around the valley road toward the winding mountain drive. The farmer, left to himself and speechless with surprise, gazed after them in silence until the winding road led them out of sight. Then he found his voice again.

“ I’ll be swamped if she ain’t another Brown! What a lot of us! and how mighty different we all are! ”

The drive was a pleasant one. Miss Brown, after due consideration, decided not to be too dignified. Had she not the old gentleman’s word for it that this was a “ grand good man? ” Besides, wasn’t his name Brown, and wouldn’t he have to be included among the guests when she

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made that house party at Euston Square? She had nearly laughed over the thought of what an acquisition the old farmer would be to the house party; but she remembered in time. A certain amount of dignity was indispensable for Mrs. Roberts's maid. Perhaps she ought not to converse with this man at all, being a maid. She felt that she was not posted as to the rules of etiquette governing the conduct of a housemaid with a carpenter. Still, he ought to know, "and he began it," she assured herself with a little inward laugh.

His manner was entirely respectful and at the same time friendly. He pointed out objects of interest along the way, and told her just what she wanted to know.

"That is the trail to the Sulphur Springs; it is a charming walk on a warm day; winds about in the most romantic fashion possible, and brings up at last in a charming spot for a picnic."

"And the spring, is it really sulphur?"

"Very much so. If you are not absolutely sure of it before tasting, you will

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have no need to question after the first mouthful. Most people are very fond of it, but my tastes do not happen to lie in that direction. Look yonder at the view we get! This is typical California scenery all about here, but the views that spring themselves upon us as we round the curves are what one by no means finds every day."

Miss Brown was gazing at the trees.

"What are those lovely graceful ones sprinkled in among the others?" she asked. "The young lithe one with tender leaves and a look of having been freshly made for us. I know the redwoods, simply from reading of them, but these are new."

"They are the madrones," he said, giving her a look under the cover of her absorption that expressed surprise as well as curiosity. This was not the way in which he had supposed that Mrs. Roberts's maid would express herself.

"They are favorite trees here," he said, "and the management proposes to guard them carefully from vandal hands

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and let them grow in their own wild beauty without too much cultivation. They have a regularly organized Board of Forestry, one object of which, I fancy, is to keep down any rising tendencies toward the artificial. Madame Nature may safely be trusted here, at least, to manage her own affairs.”

He was trying to draw her out; but Mary Brown had already remembered the supposed proprieties. The madrones had caught her off guard, for a moment, but they should not again, let them wave their graceful branches ever so luringly.

VI

MR. BROWN

MRS. ROBERTS was puzzled, and also troubled. She spread her perplexities before Mr. Brown, who shelled peas for her on the back porch, and listened.

She had but a short time before explained to Miss Helen Lawrence, who was not only a summer but a winter boarder of hers, and therefore entitled to confidences, that it was just three weeks to a day since she first laid eyes on Mr. Brown, and yet he seemed like an old and tried friend.

“I don't know why it is,” she said, meditatively. “Seems queer. I'm not one that makes friends so very easy. Why, you know that I've had men with me right through the year that I would no more think of speaking to, except to

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ask what they would have and how they would like it, and things of that kind, than I would of flying! but Mr. Brown has got a way with him, somehow, that makes you feel different. He is just as respectful as he can be, and yet he is so kind of interested in your work and your ways and everything, and so ready to help you out in a perplexity, that before you know it you have told him all about it. I never saw quite such a man in my life. If I had a boy like him, or if Aileen should ever marry a man anything like him I should be tickled to death."

"Which is the very last thing that Aileen will ever do!" the permanent boarder said, but she had the grace to say it to herself, while aloud she admitted that Mr. Brown was certainly very "nice," and for a mechanic really remarkable.

"I don't know what to make of the girl, and that's the truth!" Mrs. Roberts confided to the sheller of peas. "To tell the downright truth I'm half scared over her, and have been from the first minute

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that I laid eyes on her. You see, she doesn't look nor act as I thought she would, not the least mite in the world. Sometimes, instead of telling her to set the table, I feel as though I ought to ask her whether she likes her roast rare, or well done, and if her room is comfortable. She looks like a lady, and that's the truth! and what I needed was a good, capable working girl."

"Doesn't she do her work well, Mrs. Roberts?" The questioner's face was grave, and his tone had almost a note of anxiety.

"Yes, she does." Mrs. Roberts stayed her busy fingers for a moment, and gazed perplexedly at him while she talked.

"She does it first-rate, everything I give her, every identical thing, no matter how dirty the work may be. She is as neat as a pin, too, and quick-motioned and good-natured. She doesn't find a bit of fault, and she doesn't slam around and look like a thunder-cloud as some of the silent ones do; there isn't a single, solitary thing on which I can lay my finger

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and say: 'That isn't right.' And yet, for all that, I'm puzzled and troubled. There is something queer about her.

"There's some things I can't set her at. I can't tell her to wash down the back stairs and scrub up the kitchen floor any more than I could tell the President's wife! and that's the truth."

The sheller of peas laughed appreciatively.

"I shall have to do such things for you, Mrs. Roberts," he said.

"You!" she gave him a swift admiring glance. Then, after a moment, "I'd about as soon ask you as that girl! She ain't used to working out any more than my Aileen is. Well, for that matter, she said she wasn't; she doesn't make any pretence of knowing how to do some things. But what I mean is, she ain't used to working. Her hands — did you ever notice her hands, Mr. Brown? Why, they are as soft as a baby's! and white and plump! As pretty hands as ever I saw. They have never done any hard work in her mother's kitchen, nor any-

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where else. And yet, she doesn't look like the kind of girl that sits in the parlor and thumps on one of those tin-pan-pianos, while her mother does the work; now does she? ”

Mr. Brown seemed to have no reply ready, and after a moment's waiting Mrs. Roberts, with a depressed sigh, closed as she had begun, with: “I don't know what to make of her, and that's the truth.”

There was silence on the back porch for several minutes, and the business of pea-shelling went on briskly. Then Mr. Brown came to the rescue.

“Would you like to hear my theory, Mrs. Roberts? I think your new maid may be one of those young women who are becoming more and more common in our country, who have managed to secure a fair amount of education, owing to our public school system and our excellent normal schools and State colleges, and have become teachers in country schools. My namesake may have wanted to travel a little, and see portions of the country

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she has read of and taught others about. This place affords an unusual opportunity, you know, not only for enjoying California climate and scenery, but for hearing good music and fine lectures. For people interested in Bible study its advantages are peculiarly rich. I fancy that your Miss Brown, being a sensible young woman, decided to enjoy the advantages here and pay for them in part with work that she felt sure she could do, saying nothing about her personal affairs."

Mrs. Roberts's hands paused again for a moment while she regarded her helper with admiration and respect.

"You do beat all for straightening things out!" she said. "That sounds real common sense and probable. She isn't any of the common sort; I knew that as soon as I laid eyes on her; and I told Aileen last night that she had proved already that I was right. She has a real good education, I guess; anyhow the books she has brought with her look

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like it; and your explanation of it all just fits.

“ But still, Mr. Brown, education doesn't always work that way. Don't you think it is apt to set people up above doing housework, or associating with those that do it, out of their own houses? There's my Aileen, as smart as a whip; she was the best scholar in high school and had all the honors when she graduated. And she is as good a girl as ever breathed, and kind-hearted, and all that; but still, when I was puzzling what to do with Mary nights, — I had it all fixed before she came, but as soon as I set eyes on her it seemed kind of too bad, some way, to put her into the same little tent with Irish Mary, and I hinted to Aileen that perhaps she might have a cot in her little tent; you know she has that scrap of a tent next to the big one all to herself. Well, you ought to have heard the child! ‘ Mother!’ she said, ‘ *mother!*’ just like that.” And Mrs. Roberts's voice was the embodiment of astonished expostulation. “ ‘ Our servant girl room

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with me! I don't see how you could bear to say such a thing.' ”

The listener was conscious of a distinct pause in his thoughts, and a general feeling of dismay. This was a phase of the strenuous life he believed the new young woman to be leading, that had not before occurred to him. Miss Brown a roommate of Irish Mary! But when he spoke his voice was the voice of a casual listener.

“ What did you do about it, Mrs. Roberts? ”

“ Oh, there wasn't but one thing I could do; I had to put her in there with Maryann. I gave her a cot to herself, though, and it took a lot of fussing and contriving to do even that. I did it after she got here. But she has been just as nice about the sleeping as she has about everything else. All she asked for was a sheet that she could hang up across the corner and make a little privacy, she said; so I gave her some red curtains that I brought out with me and hadn't needed to use, and she has rigged up the cutest lit-

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tle room behind those curtains! It is a dreadful pity that you can't have a peek at it! She has fastened some pictures to the sides of the tent, and even over the top; and hung up some fancy bags, and pinned up wall-pockets for all sorts of things, and — well, I tell Aileen that it has got an air about it that she couldn't put into her room to save her life. I'm dreadfully sorry for her, though, to think that it's the best I can do. Maryann is real neat, and she's kind, and is tickled to pieces to have the girl there; but still, when I see her starting out to her tent with Maryann, I feel as though I ought to have a parlor bedroom, with lace curtains and things, to offer her. I don't know why I feel that way, either. She doesn't dress a bit nicer than Maryann, in fact she is not so fine when Maryann gets fixed up of an afternoon, but yet there is a dreadful difference between them. I suppose you know what I mean, Mr. Brown, though I can't put it into words. I've often noticed that you didn't seem to need words all the time.

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“ What is it makes the difference in people, anyway? There, for instance, is Silas Potter and you. Both of you are builders, and you both understand your business, I suppose. Silas does; there isn't a better workman in town, they say. But you and Si are about as much alike as Miss Brown and our Maryann, and no more! So it isn't the kind of work people do that makes the difference. I don't know what it is, but I can feel it. You know there are a good many things that you can feel, but you can't explain them. Still, I'll own that you never seem to me just like a builder. Not but what it is splendid business; and master builders, as they call them, almost always get rich. I suppose you are a master builder? ”

His reply was quick and emphatic.

“ Oh, no, no, indeed; I make no claim to be a *master* in anything; I am just a common workman.”

Mrs. Roberts gave him another swift admiring glance.

“ That will do for you to say,” with a sage nod of her head, “ but all the same

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I shouldn't be afraid to set you at a big house, and when my ship comes in and I build the kind of house that my Aileen wants, I shall send for you."

He thanked her merrily, and assured her that he should try to live up to the high opinion she had of him.

"But about this young woman," he broke off from his laugh to say. "I have been wondering if she is not perhaps one of those opportunities of which you and I were speaking a few mornings ago. May it not be that she has come out here to find her Master, and may he not see that you are the one to help her?"

The face of the middle-aged woman changed suddenly, and expressed a yearning wistfulness. This busy, tired woman, who had so little time for her spiritual needs that, while she ministered daily to the physical wants of her boarders, she felt sometimes that her soul was starving; it was so rare a thing to come in contact with a boarder who seemed to know that she had a soul. In truth, this peculiar young carpenter was the only one she

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could remember through the years who spoke to her naturally and simply of the inner life. Yet she knew and loved the Lord Christ; and there were times when she yearned after closer fellowship with and definite service for him. She did not remember how this boarder had found it out; he had seemed to take it for granted.

“ You mean that perhaps she isn’t a Christian? I don’t suppose she is. Help isn’t, generally. I don’t know why, I am sure; but I don’t believe I ever had a girl in the kitchen who was. Do you suppose she would like to go to the day meetings some? I calculate to plan to let her go nights if she wants to, and once in awhile of afternoons, when there are extra doings, but mornings—I don’t know—” The shrewd and somewhat hard look of the professional boarding-house keeper flashed into the expressive face and she spoke quickly.

“ You see, Mr. Brown, it ain’t play-time with me, summers, as it is with the rest of you, not by a long sight! For that matter, I’ve never found out yet when my

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playtime came. I've not only got to earn enough to support three of us and educate Aileen, but there is the interest on my everlasting mortgage to keep up. I couldn't help thinking of it yesterday, when Doctor Brandon was talking so beautifully about the "things that remain," I said to myself: 'I guess I've got one thing that will stick to me to the end of time, *my* time, anyhow, and that's my mortgage.'

Her listener laughed appreciatively, and asked one or two questions about the town house and the mortgage, then drew her back to the subject in hand.

"Of course, Mrs. Roberts, your work must be done; I fully realize that; you may not be able to spare the young woman often, perhaps not at all, in the morning; I am only thinking that if you could, at any time, bring her with you to that morning meeting, it might appear that the Master had planned through such a service to bring a joy into your life that would remain after time is done with."

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The hard look passed, and the wistful one returned and deepened.

“That’s true, Mr. Brown. You have a way of making a body remember that there’s something besides planning breakfasts and dinners and suppers year in and year out. I’ll try for it. There isn’t much that I can plan even to try to do, but I’ll plan for this, see if I don’t. I can’t *bring* her to the morning meetings, because we couldn’t both get away once in an age, but I could spare her to go for an hour ’most every morning, if I tried; because breakfast would be well over, and the rush for dinner wouldn’t be commenced, and so, if she could be got to go, why, there’s the chance. I’ll do it.”

Mrs. Roberts had not only tried to plan, but had planned. But the wistful look deepened and the tone melted into tender anxiety.

“Mr. Brown, I was thinking if we could, if anybody could manage to coax my Aileen to go to some of those meetings — ”

“Yes,” said Mr. Brown, heartily. “I

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understand; we must try for that, Mrs. Roberts, and keep trying.”

But as he dropped the last popped pod into its basket and went his way, he gave a sympathetic sigh over the mother's plea.

The butterflies, at that moment flitting gaily among the vines, seemed to him almost as likely to elect to attend those morning meetings for Bible study and prayer as was the pretty eighteen-year-old daughter of his hostess, whose bright head was crowded with aims and hopes that were utterly foreign to such environment. He had said that they must try, and keep trying, and it had been no idle word. This man was no idler in his Master's vineyard; he felt that he had made the mother a pledge, he would be sure to keep it; and though no way opened to his mind toward accomplishment, it might be that the Master had ways that would be made clear to him.

Of one thing he was sure; Mrs. Roberts would try to help Mary Brown.

VII

MARY BROWN AS A PROBLEM

MEANTIME Mary Brown was having what, in its earlier stages, she had named the frolic of her life. Even her small tent-room shared with Irish Mary had not seriously troubled her. It was to be for such a very little while, she told herself, and thought of the suite of rooms waiting for her at Euston Square. After a day or two she became wonderfully interested in that tent-room. The red curtains sacrificed by Mrs. Roberts served for purposes of decoration, as well as walls, and the possibilities of a few empty cracker boxes, a roll of fancy paper, and some bright cord were revelations, and fascinated the city-bred girl accustomed to having all the modern conveniences at hand without giving them a thought. She

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became skilful in contriving ways and means by which she could live comfortably in her contracted quarters. She even found herself lying awake at night planning some new form of towel-rack or clothes closet, and gave all her leisure to the business of getting settled, with such success as to astonish and delight not only her roommate, Maryann, but Mrs. Roberts as well.

The roommate herself proved not to be such an impossibility as she had at first seemed. To be sure, she was hardly a roommate, with those ample red curtains dividing them, but of course she was always within hearing, and one had a sense of never being utterly alone. Still, she was cleanly and good-natured and, what was better, genuinely good-hearted. She was even disposed to be respectful toward this "regular hired help," as Miss Brown overheard her explaining to the errand boy that the newcomer was. From the first she had recognized a certain something in the new help which made her say instinctively "Miss Mary"

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as readily as she said "Miss Aileen." So even Irish Mary became a subject for study and steadily increasing interest.

As for the life about her, outside her tent, each day's experience was fraught with new surprises and interests. The company of pretty girls, gathered to serve, was as unique, she told herself, as were everything and everybody connected with this new world. Were they an entirely different class of beings from any that she had before known, or was it simply the point of view?

She had not for a long time held intimate relations with college girls. She had been graduated five years before, and since that time had only hovered around the outside edges of college life, being pointed out to the freshmen as "Everett Thornton Brown's daughter." "She lives on Euston Square, you know, where the swellest people in town are," was the bit of slang used to describe and dismiss her from their world.

Oh, she was called upon for "advice," for suggestions, for subscriptions. She

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was constantly being referred to as one of the "patrons" of this and that function, and she was used to being deferred to as one whose lightest hints were freighted with power; but she understood only too well that this was because she was the sole representative now of her father's wealth; and the inner circle of college life, when the girls sat on the sides of their beds and couches, and curled in the window-seats, and dropped in carelessly graceful heaps of bloom and color about the floor, and chatted and laughed, and threw couch pillows at one another on occasion for emphasis, and sometimes, as the shadows deepened, grew tender and confidential,—from all such circles she had been long shut out.

At first the situation in Mrs. Roberts's dining-room puzzled the newcomer. They were a bright, merry, winsome set, those college or high school girls who were serving as table waiters; her heart went out to them at once, but their attitude toward her she distinctly recognized as peculiar.

She was older than they, yet not so

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much older that it defined a marked difference between them, but she felt, rather than saw, that they realized a difference. Not that one of them was rude to her, — they were very far from that, — they distinctly welcomed her. When they gathered at the rustic bridge, or under one of the great trees, or on the beautifully shaded dining-room porch for a few minutes' chat before their table duties began, if she chanced to appear, they carefully made a place for her, not only in the circle but the conversation. Setting aside college, or at least school themes which in one form or other were often on their tongues, they made haste to introduce some topic in which human beings in general might be supposed to take interest.

This was certainly kind, but it was very unlike any attention that she had ever before received. Veiled under all the kindness, which was steady and uniform, there was a touch, or just a hint, rather, of condescension, of patronage, and Thornton Everett Brown's daughter had never in her life before been patronized.

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It was not that they meant to patronize, or realized that they were doing so, it was rather that they distinctly made the effort to place her, instead of taking her, as they did the others, as a matter of course.

When the explanation of all this dawned upon Mary Brown, she was alone on her couch at night, and she caught her breath with a little exclamatory sound, and then laughed so hard that she shook the couch; and Maryann on the other side of the red curtains laughed softly in sympathy, and wondered what the fun was. She would not for the world have laughed aloud, because of a certain delicacy of heart that Irish Mary possessed, which kept her from intruding on the other woman's privacy even by laughter.

“They are being good to me!” said Mary Brown to her astonished self. “Those *dear* girls! they are trying to make me feel at home among them; they will not talk about the social functions of college life, or even about class work and study, lest I feel left out! And by

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the same token they cease talking about the parties they have attended, or the great singers and speakers they have heard or hope to hear, whenever I appear in sight! I understand them now, the darlings! That explains the whole matter, and it is too good! Did we girls at Wells ever think of such things, I wonder? such delicate and delicious bits of unselfishness, ever in our lives? Would we have done it if we had? To the utmost of their ability, or, rather, what they suppose to be my ability, they have taken me in! They are darlings, every one of them! Oh, Mary Brown, are you sure that you deserve such friendship as this? How many people that environment seemed to have arranged should be your inferiors have you gone out of your way to make feel at home and happy?

“What an extraordinary world it is! What really makes society distinctions, after all? Not money, certainly. It is hardly presumable that girls who give faithful and really hard service for certain hours each day of their vacation, in

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return for board and lodging, have much money to spare. Moreover, their pretty things, though really pretty and in excellent taste, are very inexpensive and show marks of home talent. Oh, no, it isn't money. Let us be thankful for so much; that would really be too humiliating! And yet, after all, in a dim, not understood way, isn't money at the root of it, I wonder? These schoolgirls on vacation, helping for a few weeks to meet expenses by the labor of their hands, and I, supposedly, a girl who has to earn her living all the time in these ways. I give more hours than they, and have wages counted out to me in hard silver dollars such as they use in this country, with perhaps a gleam of gold, if I stay long enough, — I wonder how it will feel in my hand, the first money I ever earned! But the fact that I receive it, and expect to do so, and am supposed to continue doing so, settles my society status, apparently. What a remarkable distinction! Is it presumably caused because it is not conceivable by the average person that hired help can

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be other than uncultured and ignorant? I wonder how it is with carpenters; do they also belong to the masses?" And she thought of Mr. Brown; but this time she did not laugh. The strange unfairness of social distinctions was just beginning to dawn upon her. True, she had read and studied them before, but it chanced that they had never in any way touched her so that she stopped to apply them to individual cases. In this democratic country, where work was universally recognized as a blessing, why should foolish distinctions be made between work and *work*? Some employments must of necessity be more interesting and more important than others. A teacher, for instance, ought perhaps to be more carefully selected than a cook; though one must eat in order to teach, and it was becoming increasingly understood that what both teacher and pupil ate was very important; still, making all the concessions necessary to the relative importance of the two occupations, why should that have anything whatever to do with one's

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social positions? Were not present distinctions false and degrading?

“Perhaps it is a question of brains versus hands,” she told herself, and laughed. “But that will not do, either; for since I came here to make use of my hands I am sure that I have exercised the gray matter of my brain more continuously than I have for years!”

Although in her thought she was being half-whimsical, there was a complacent side to it; she knew that she had conquered.

When she had first undertaken the setting of those innocent little tables scattered over Mrs. Roberts’s large dining-room, it had seemed to her that, so far as learning the art was concerned, it would be mere child’s play; any one could set a table. But she soon learned that the marshalling into place of knives and forks and spoons and salts and salads and salad plates and bread-and-butter plates and soup plates and dessert plates and all the other kinds of plates, and the whole bewildering array that went to make

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the sum total of a single well-appointed dinner-table, required not only deft fingers but well-disciplined brains, trained not only to rapid thinking in consecutive lines, but in multitudinous cross-lines.

After the second day's effort she was almost in despair. Try as she would to make a single table perfect, there were either table mats or salad forks or individual butters or some other equally important trifles that were missing.

But following swiftly on the heels of despair came a firm resolve to conquer; and bringing the same resolute will to bear upon it that had carried the college girl triumphantly through difficult problems in Euclid, of course she succeeded. The day came when those confusing little tables were solved problems to her. She could not only set her own number swiftly and faultlessly, but she could detect with one swift glance the defects in those next to hers and offer a friendly hint to the hurried and puzzled fellow worker. Mrs. Roberts looked on well pleased, but even more puzzled than she had been at first.

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This new girl, without other experience in housework than her mother's kitchen had afforded, was becoming practically her head waiter, the one of all others to be depended upon; and the college girls had discovered it and asked her advice and deferred to her judgment. Indeed Mrs. Roberts discovered in herself, with her forty years of experience, a tendency toward finding out what Mary thought of a new plan before adopting it.

She confided her perplexities to her one confidential boarder, Mr. Brown, while he hulled berries for her on the side porch.

“ That new girl of mine does beat all! I'm more and more puzzled to make her out every day of my life, and that's the truth.

“ She's got more conveniences and contrivances behind those red curtains of mine than I could think of in a lifetime. If I can only hang on to her for next winter I'll get her to fix up some of my rooms in town. I 'most believe I should like to have her kind of go in with me and take hold and look after things generally. I

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believe I could pay off that everlasting mortgage, if she would. I mean to make her a real good offer in the fall, if she holds out, and I know she will."

Mr. Brown dropped his berries into the dish with a thoughtful air. "Have you said anything to her about her winter plans?" he asked, at last.

"No, I haven't; and to tell the truth I'm kind of scared to begin it. I feel in my bones, somehow, that she will say she can't stay; and yet I don't know why. I could do better by her than teaching, I believe. You see she works with her brains, and so I could afford to pay her more than I could any other help. And she likely has to pay her board. She told me her father and mother were dead and she was alone in the world; and so I should think she would rather go in with me than not. She seems to like me real well, and Aileen is growing fond of her in spite of herself. She didn't mean to have anything to do with her because she was a servant; but I guess she can't help it, there can't any of us. So I believe I

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will try it as soon as I can get my courage up. But there! if she was to tell me that she had made up her mind to go over to London and spend the winter with her friend the queen, I don't know as I would be astonished. She's got such an air about her, somehow, that—I can't describe it, and I can't account for it."

Mr. Brown had no answer ready. He perfectly understood the good woman, and had puzzled over the very problems which were bewildering her.

VIII

MISS BROWN'S BEWILDERMENTS

ON the second morning after this conversation, Mr. Brown, who was watching for late comers, to provide them with seats and hymn-books, handed an open book to Mary Brown and indicated a vacant chair. When his duties were over he took the chair next to hers.

She sat beside him during the hour, dignified and decorous. She found the hymns announced and followed the words with her eyes, and bowed her head at prayer time, and apparently listened intently to the Bible lesson. Neither by word nor glance did she betray the fact that she was in a new world.

To people not familiar with society life in great cities it might seem almost incredible that this young woman of twenty-

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six, belonging to a nominally Christian family, had never in her life before attended a social prayer-meeting that was conducted somewhat after the manner of a family gathering. The truth was that Mary Brown had rarely been to a religious meeting of any kind on a week day. The Lenten services had never appealed to her when the gay and worldly family were together, and since she had been alone no force of early habit had drawn her there.

Once a day on pleasant Sabbaths, when nothing occurred to prevent, it had been her custom to attend the church service; and certain solemn words and phrases were as familiar to her as the roll of the great organ, and meant about the same thing.

As she sat outwardly quiet in that strange Mount Hermon meeting, she recollected that the words: "Have mercy on us miserable sinners," had been often on her lips, but it had never occurred to her that she was praying. The people about her seemed to be having an interview

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with God! As for the singing, she had never given heed to the words that the vested choir poured forth in a volume of exquisite harmony. They said words, of course, but they might have been in an unknown tongue for all that she had heard or tried to hear of them. But the hymn that these people were singing as she entered the room sounded almost irreverent in its directness and plain-spokenness. Was it quite right, she wondered, to be so familiar with the Deity? She turned to the page and read again the refrain that had first met her ears:

“ Saved and kept, O the glorious word!
Saved and kept by a wonderful Lord!
He who was dead, and is risen from the grave,
Lives, and is able to keep and to save.”

These people rang out the words exultantly; it was not possible to believe that they did not feel what they were singing, and yet — what extraordinary claims they made!

“ Saved and kept by the power divine,
Saved to the uttermost, Jesus is mine!
He is redemption and righteousness too,
Trusting in him all my life is made new.”

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She stole curious glances now and again at the people about her; they had sung as though they were sure of its truth. "Life made new," Mary Brown in the loneliness of her room had used those very words. "I need to have my life made all over new!" she had said aloud to herself in dreariness. "This life I am living is worn threadbare." Yet she had not for a moment thought that such making over could ever be.

"It was good to be there, was it not?"

It was Mr. Brown who said these words, simply, as though they expressed a commonplace with which she would of course agree. They were going from the meeting; he had glanced back to see who was coming, and had waited for her. She regarded him curiously and made an unexpected reply:

"I don't know. Was it?"

"To me, yes," he said, smiling. "I hoped it was to every one present."

She had not meant to talk to him, but a desire to understand became imperative.

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“What was there about it that was good?” she asked, almost brusquely.

“Everything; the Lord was there.”

She made an impatient movement. “I don't know what you mean,” she said. “Isn't he everywhere?”

“Ah, but I mean in the sense of fellowship, of course, and communion. ‘Where two or three are gathered,’ is the promise, you know.”

She did not know; Bible promises, even such frequently quoted ones as these, were not familiar to her. But she made no reply. She had already told this man that she did not know what he meant; if he chose to insist that she did, there was nothing more to be said. She turned at the intersecting street, and made her way to the little department store, intent on Mrs. Roberts's errands. But as she hurried over the trail, for once her eyes were blind to the beauties of fern and lichen and dainty wild flowers spread with lavish hand. She was making the trying discovery that by taking a leap from her known world, she had by no means left

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behind her dissatisfaction and unrest. Never had she been more thoroughly dissatisfied with herself than at this moment. The morning meeting which she had attended solely to please Mrs. Roberts, who wanted to be kind to her, had emphasized the thought which had been growing on her for several days that these people among whom she had come spoke and prayed a language that she did not understand. They referred in an entirely matter-of-course way to experiences that she had not supposed sane people in these days believed in as possible. They seemed also to have a motive for living and a companionship in living that was not only altogether unknown to her, but seemed to her almost like sacrilege! yet it gave them glad, quiet faces and they were living strong, glad lives. Mary Thornton Brown of Euston Square knew no such living and was jealous over it. Take that morning meeting, of which Mr. Brown thought so highly, as an example. She felt almost impatient over the praying; it had given her a feeling more akin to homesickness

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than any she had felt since she left the great Eastern city. Not homesick for Euston Square and the conventional life she lived there, oh, no, indeed! but that deep and desolate unrest which had haunted her ever since graves had closed over all that meant home to her, had seemed to be accentuated by the atmosphere of prayer she had breathed that morning. She would not go again, she told herself impatiently, not if Mrs. Roberts went down on her knees to her; she could not afford to have this experiment of hers spoiled by the strange talk of a company of visionary enthusiasts. She would send Mrs. Roberts in her place, perhaps she was one of them and could understand their flights. She laughed at her own folly as she made this decision. Mrs. Roberts visionary! the most practical and matter-of-fact business woman with whom she had ever come in contact! Still, it was Mrs. Roberts who had assured her that those morning meetings gave her a "lift, somehow," for all day.

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Very well, then, she should get her "lift," Mary Brown had no use for it.

Yet the next morning she was in her seat near the door, open hymn-book in hand. Mrs. Roberts had been so earnest in her appeal that the young woman could not get the consent of herself to disappoint her.

But she was sorry that she came. It was even worse than it had been the day before. The hymn they were singing offended her; the refrain seemed impertinent.

"No one can help you but Jesus,
For no one but Jesus knows how;
He sees all the past, and the future,
And just what the trouble is now."

"Mere doggerel!" she told herself angrily; both words and tune calculated to put poetry and harmony to the blush. It was incredible that such stuff could move people! Then what was moving her? For as the refrain was repeated softly, tenderly:

"He sees all the past, and the future,
And just what is troubling you now,"

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there came such a sense of desolation, of longing as almost overwhelmed her. Oh, to be for a single hour with One who knew "all the past and the future," and could tell her how to order her life! Did they have such fellowship, these people? Why should they? It was absurd to suppose it; had she not been with religious people all her life? yet she had never heard anything like this. It must be the familiarity of ignorance. But that was folly. Men and women about her by the score were of the class that to think of as ignorant or uncultured was not only an impertinence but arrant nonsense. And the leaders among them were men upon whom the stamp of scholarship was unmistakable.

She went home in a turmoil and told herself that Mrs. Roberts need do no more sacrificing for her. To this resolution she held stoutly for a week, and then, touched by the unmistakable earnestness of the plea that she would go just once more and see how it would hearten her up.

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“ Did you ever hear Mr. Brown pray? ” the good woman said, beaming on her unwilling maid as she slowly removed the great work-apron that had completely covered her neat dress. “ If you haven’t you’ve missed a good deal. I just hope he will pray this morning. There is something kind of strange about that man’s prayers. I don’t know as I can describe them; it isn’t the words, exactly,—it isn’t anything that can be described, but—well, you just wait till you hear him and you will understand.”

And Mr. Brown prayed, but Mrs. Roberts’s maid had not understood and had felt more bewildered than before.

“ You spoke just as though you were a son having an interview with his father! ”

This was the sentence which greeted his ears as he joined her at the door. There was disapproval in her tones, and Mr. Brown, taken by surprise, did not at first understand.

“ When? ” he asked.

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“ Just now, a moment ago, when you spoke.”

“ Oh, when I prayed, do you mean? Well, wasn't that precisely the situation? ”

“ No,” she could not help speaking almost irritably. “ That is sentiment, of course, or poetry; I don't know what you name it. I like real things.”

“ I beg your pardon, my friend. I have no thought of being poetical. There is nothing more real in life to me than personal communion with my Father in heaven. If I could not be certain of this, prayer, to me, would degenerate into mere form, and phrases in common use would be only solemn mockery.”

“ That is what they seemed to me to be much of the time.”

“ But that is because you do not know your Father in the way that it is your privilege to know him. At least — am I wrong in inferring that you are not a Christian? ”

“ I am a church-member, if that is what you mean.”

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“It is not precisely. It is true the terms ought to be synonymous, but I fear they are not. I have known church-members who seemed to have no more idea of what communion with God as a Father, or companionship with Jesus Christ as a present Saviour, meant than if they had never heard the terms; but a religion of that kind would not satisfy me.”

Nor had it ever satisfied Mary Brown. She discovered that she had a feeling of almost resentment toward those who seemed to have found something satisfying which she had not. She told herself that she was glad of an interruption, as some one came up just then to claim Mr. Brown for a business matter. She wished she had not said what she did. It would give him an excuse to talk some more of his bewildering fanaticism. That is just what these people were, fanatics. But, oh, was not fanaticism worth while if it satisfied?

All her life, or at least all her grown-up life, Mary Brown knew that she had been dissatisfied with life as it shaped itself

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for her. Its frivolities and parades and insincerities had repelled her from the first. Although her mother had been a fashionable woman, she had also been home-loving, and mother and daughter together had escaped from the fashionable whirl as often as they could, and hid themselves in the family circle. When that circle was broken suddenly, ruthlessly, and one after another of its members were snatched away with appalling swiftness, leaving her, presently, alone, the desolation that at first seemed to engulf her like a flood had been fearful.

When at last she struggled back to something like a shore, and took up life again, naturally it had a greater distaste for her than ever before, and the aversion grew with her years. She knew that one strong, pushing motive in suddenly planning this strange holiday had been the hope that in simpler surroundings, among quiet people who lived for something besides society, she might find relief.

But she resented the air of mystery about her. These people, the plainest as

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well as the most cultivated, seemed to breathe an atmosphere which she did not understand and could not assimilate. Even Mrs. Roberts, that hard-worked woman, who had evidently spent her life in a daily struggle with ways and means, and who had a spectre of pecuniary failure ever at her elbow, had nevertheless hours when she closed her eyes to the spectre, laid aside her perplexities, forgot her annoyances and breathed in peace of soul and strength for future effort from these very meetings which so bewildered her maid servant.

Still, she need not have said: "even Mrs. Roberts." The truth was that that good woman was one of her daily puzzles. She had never before come in contact with a character like hers. A woman shrewd by nature and by education; quick to see a bargain and eager to take advantage of any turn in market values. Her keen brain penetrated through disguises and shams of ever kind, and her vigilant eyes and ready tongue were the terror of all crooked tradesmen, whether they dealt

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in large ripe berries on top and half-grown ones underneath, or tried to sell her fresh vegetables three or four days old. She was herself scrupulously honest and just, and she required honesty and justice from those with whom she dealt. But she was much more than that. She had daily petty frets and annoyances. What with delays and broken promises and careless workers and troublesome boarders, and the inevitable breakages and spillings and forgettings that belong especially to a country boarding-house, where many of the ordinary conveniences have to be represented by clumsy substitutes or done without altogether, she had enough on any single day, in the language of Irish Mary, to "provoke the tongue of the blissed Virgin herself."

Yet this woman, with whose quick brain and ready tongue went naturally a quick temper and sharp, stabbing words, controlled herself even under strong provocation and spoke not only without sharpness but with actual pity for the culprits; and made constant patient effort to order

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her house so that life would be pleasanter for them.

Clearly there was no ordinary solution to the mystery which surrounded her.

IX

MISS BROWN AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION

LIDA BROWNSON was standing on the porch steps of the dining-hall, waiting for Mary Brown to appear from her tent.

Lida was a leading spirit among the dining-room girls, and one who had made very cordial advances toward the outsider.

She ran down the steps to meet her, calling out merrily:

“Are you all prinked, ready for the fray?” Then, as she gave a swift glance at the trim figure in a fresh white apron and with hair and hands in exquisite order, she added:

“You look as though you might be going to a party instead. How do you contrive to make a white apron so effective? Yours isn’t a bit more furbelowed

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than mine, but the air it takes on is something to envy. I've been waiting for you," she added, linking her arm in Mary's and sauntering with her down the long piazza with an air of comradeship.

"We are going to have a meeting all our own this afternoon, we girls, right here on the porch. Won't that be unique? And we want you to come. We are planning for a lovely time."

"What kind of a meeting?" Mary Brown asked in an interested tone, trying not to show that she was also amused. Nothing connected with her very unique experiences interested this young woman more than the hearty way in which these girls worked at making her one with themselves. They were being continually handicapped, she knew, because of her supposed ignorance of all things connected with their world, yet they struggled bravely.

"Oh, just a talking meeting; very informal, of course, being here on the porch it would have to be informal. After it is over we are going to serve refresh-

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ments. Won't that be an original conclusion to a religious meeting? "

" Oh, is it a religious meeting? "

" Well, I suppose it might be called so. At least I hope we shall not be irreligious! " with a winsome little laugh. " You know we girls don't get a chance to attend the eleven o'clock meetings, nor the earlier ones very often, and we thought we would like one of our very own. Some of the older ladies are coming to help us. Mrs. Rhyse, for one. Have you met her? She is charming; just home from Japan and other interesting places where she went to visit mission fields; she is a delightful talker; knows all about those far-away places, and a good many other matters. I am sure you will enjoy her. Then there are to be several others, and our own Faye Willis, of course, who is always a host in herself. Don't you think she is lovely? You will come, won't you? "

Mary Brown's first impulse was to plead letters to write; she was disposed to shrink from any more religious meet-

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ings; but the evident anxiety in Lida Brownson's eyes made her hesitate. After all, why should she stay in her tent to write a letter to Richard Wade, a trying letter, which would exhaust all her nervous energy, instead of meeting half-way this interesting girl's evident effort to do her good? She gave the coveted promise, and laughed over it in her tent that afternoon, while she exchanged her plain collar for a more dressy one, and made one or two little additions to her toilet.

“This is only a semi-religious meeting,” she told herself, “sandwiched with refreshments! I ought to go to discover how they manage things of this sort.”

The scene was new and strange to her. The bright-faced young women in pretty summer attire fluttering about on the long leaf-shaded porch with the ever-present sunshine filtering in among the branches. It was a very cheerful — she had almost said merry — company, with nothing about them in voice or speech to suggest what Mary Brown had been in

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the habit of calling reverence; yet they certainly did not suggest irreverence; they were simply glad, with a gladness that ever and anon bubbled over into laughter.

“Is this a good time, or a religious meeting?” queried one of the younger girls, just after having indulged in an appreciative giggle over some bright retort. Lida Brownson answered her quickly: “It is a good time *and* a religious meeting, my dear; I object to the ‘or’ in your question. Don’t disconnect good times and religion, please; neither is worth much if they are of such a nature that they can’t be put together.”

Over this remark Mary Brown pondered; it, also, was new to her.

Yet it undoubtedly was a religious meeting, though not of the stereotyped kind; the young people talked as informally and with as little embarrassment as though it were simply a social function. But the topics which they introduced were as surprising to her as all the rest.

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“ Mrs. Rhyse,” said one, turning to the missionary traveller, “ Alice Upton accuses you of saying that Japanese Christians are more satisfactory than those at home. Did you say so? And if you did, tell us why, please. Isn’t it a reflection upon our great and glorious country? ”

“ Perhaps it is, dear,” said the genial and much-travelled lady, “ but the truth has to be spoken sometimes, you know, even though it jars. As to the ‘ Why,’ I think one reason is because they have a way of taking things for granted that we puzzled over. They believe, you see, just what the Bible says, and act accordingly.”

“ Oh, Mrs. Rhyse! Don’t we? ”

“ Not always, I am afraid. We fuss a great deal over matters that with them are foregone conclusions, because, as they read the Bible, it has left no room for discussion.”

“ Perhaps,” said one of the girl with a sigh, “ it is because we have so many unsettling things to think about that do not disturb them. I don’t suppose, for

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instance, that the amusement question is forever popping up there to be considered, as it is with us. I'm sure I think it is the most perplexing of all our questions."

This remark caused Mary Brown's mental vision to be more distinctly on the alert. What had the amusement question — if it had a question — to do with religion? What did the next speaker mean?

She was a tall fair girl with soft full eyes that had possibilities of trouble hidden behind their depths.

"Why need we keep questioning?" she asked. "Why can't we just float along with the current and let things go?"

Lida Brownson was sitting beside her, and at this word she laid a cool, firm hand over the girl's as she said gently:

"You know, Allie dear, what the boats do when they float with the current; they keep going down-stream all the while. Would you like that, in your Christian life?"

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The girl sitting opposite answered for her, speaking with energy:

“ I don't, I know; but it exactly expresses my experience. I am floating down-stream. Mrs. Rhyse, what is the matter when one is distinctly conscious of losing ground and doesn't want to do it? ”

“ A general diagnosis hardly answers for this disease, my dear; individual cases have to be studied. Suppose we see how many present can give us hints, either from experience or observation? Who will give the first word? ”

It was Lida Brownson again.

“ I think we float down-stream rather fast when we keep doing something that we more than half believe is doubtful, but we don't want to take time to settle it once for all.”

“ So do I,” said another with emphasis. “ I have done just that thing, and I know.”

“ Well, but, — there are so many sides to a subject to be considered.” It was the tall fair girl again. “ There, for in-

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stance, is one's influence over others. Suppose one had a brother or a friend," — the flush on her cheek deepened as she hesitatingly spoke the word, — "who was fond of the theatre, and wanted you to go with him to perfectly unobjectionable plays, and felt that you were narrow and selfish and all that if you wouldn't go, and you knew that you were likely to lose what influence you had by refusing him. Isn't that a difficult side to consider?"

Mrs. Rhyse smiled. "At least it is a side that is always being considered," she said. "I am wondering how many there are here who have already been called upon to give it more or less thought and experiment."

To Mary Brown's surprise more than a score of hands answered her.

"May I ask two more questions?" she said. "First, who has a word of encouragement for us in a story of one who seemed to have been helped by the sort of compromise which Miss Alice's question suggests?"

Not a hand responded; instead, there

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were grave shakings of one or two heads, and several of the girls exchanged meaning smiles.

“ This is significant,” said Mrs. Rhyse. “ Think what it tells us. There are at least twenty-five young women here who reported that they had given thought to this matter, and it is fair to infer that they have experimented more or less, yet no one has a triumph to record, nor, apparently, an encouraging word. Now for the other question: How many of you have conversed with young men and young women who were not Christians themselves, but who were very sure that Christians who indulge in the popular amusements of the day are inconsistent with their religious professions? ”

“ Oh! ” said Faye Willis, “ shall we put up both hands to stand for a multitude of experiences? It is simply startling to find out how sure they all are of that, — when one gets down to real opinions, — even those who at first try to make you change your base and not allow yourself to be ‘ narrow.’ ” As she spoke,

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she lifted both hands, and a number of others, half laughing, followed her lead.

“It is a very unanimous vote,” said Faye, looking down the line. “I wonder if it answers your question, Allie?”

“At least I cannot bring any testimony against the verdict,” the girl said, trying to smile, but she looked troubled, and her admission seemed to be made reluctantly.

And then, to Mary Brown's disappointment, the talk flowed into other channels. She had been more than interested; her astonishment was great. These girls with their extraordinary experiences were bewildering. Why should they not attend the theatre as often as they chose? Of course there were plays that no self-respecting woman wanted to hear or see, — and being an honest young woman, she frankly admitted to herself that there were many such, — she even, on thinking further, added that among most of the favourites there were portions that might well be omitted, but such wholesale condemnation as these people were giving was ridiculous.

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When she again gave attention to the circle, the topic was the social dance. But here Miss Brown was in sympathy with the most advanced "narrowness." She had not lived in the fashionable world for a dozen years or more, without discovering the offensive side of this popular amusement, and without having to do with young girls, the bloom of whose maidenhood had been sullied by its influence. "If this can be said of girls," she had asked herself early in her experience, "what must one familiar with fashionable society admit with regard to men?" It is true that she had never thought of this subject in connection with religion, and she told herself now that she did not understand what that word had to do with it; there was certainly enough to be said on the score of refinement and morality.

"But the square dances are only promenades," one girl was saying, defensively, when she began again to give heed.

"But the waltzes are something more," added Lida Brownson, quickly.

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“ Oh, I don't waltz,” said the girl, “ and I think a certain kind of dancing tolerated in our set is simply disgusting, but still, to condemn them all — ”

“ We were speaking of our influence, my dear,” said Mrs. Rhyse, gently. “ If you confine yourself to the unexceptionable dances, and to the perfectly unexceptionable persons for your associates, where will your influence be quoted when the subject is up for discussion in other circles than yours? Is the line between the kinds so distinctly drawn and so well understood that even the young and thoughtless will make no mistake as to your position? ”

“ Oh, dear! ” said the girl in a serio-comic tone. “ I know what you think, and I almost know that I am wrong; but isn't it a dreadful bore to have to be always thinking about those silly weak-minded other people, who cannot stand on their own principles, but are always toppling over, to be propped up by mine? ”

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She was only half in earnest, but the reply was tender and grave.

“ Shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died? ”

The question had an instant, and to the one who realized herself as an outsider, an amazing effect.

“ No,” said the girl who had been only half serious, with an earnestness that carried conviction with it. “ Not if any word or act or influence of mine can help prevent it.” Her voice broke with the last word. And some of the girls were brushing away tears.

Faye Willis spoke impulsively:

“ Oh, girls! if we could only remember that. When I think of Jesus Christ, of who he is, and what he sacrificed, and how he lived, and how he *died* for the sake of others, my own life seems so small and selfish and mean that I hate myself! What we need, after all, is the constant companionship of Christ; it would settle these, and all other questions, to be so near to him all the while that we should not have to stop and re-

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call the fact that he is here because we dwelt in the same atmosphere. I am just beginning to get a hint, a faint glimpse, of the meaning of that verse: 'He that *dwelleth* in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' Don't we content ourselves with visiting the Lord Jesus at stated intervals, instead of dwelling with him? I do so want to *abide*."

And Lida Brownson said quickly:

"I know what you mean. I was wondering last night if I could not almost claim the 'blessed' of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. I think I never wanted abiding fellowship with the Master so much as I have since I came on these grounds."

Then a girl who had not heretofore spoken said simply:

"I want to pray," and bowed her head on her hand.

The words she spoke were simplicity itself, as were the words of others who followed in quick succession. Yet one, listening, who understood the analysis of

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prayer, would have been sure that the Lord was once more verifying his promise that where two or three were gathered because of him, he would be in their midst.

X

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IT was all very bewildering and yet strangely fascinating. Mary Brown was conscious that she had come to that afternoon gathering partly as a critic, but the spirit which had been roused in her was not one of criticism. She had watched in vain for the incongruities; when the more distinctly social part of the hour was reached, the girls made the transition easily and quite as a matter of course.

As they ate cake and cream together, they chatted pleasantly on any topic that happened to be mentioned, and expressed their opinions of the latest fad in sleeves, or the last college function, or the Bible lesson that some of them had heard that morning, without any thought of incongruity.

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The outsider, as she walked quickly back to her tent to make ready for dining-room duties, went carefully over the enigma which the scene had suggested.

“ They do not patch the religious and the secular together; instead of that, religion seems to be their life, and the secular, whether represented by work or pleasure, merely incidental, a means to an end. Yet they are just plain American girls like hundreds of others that I have known, and at the same time as unlike them as possible. Can this strange thing that they name religion make the difference? I don't think I am in a critical mood, but I wonder if I am not envious? That last prayer was unlike any that it would be possible for me to offer in sincerity, and the girl was sincere; they all are; and they have something that I have not. What is it? Mrs. Roberts calls it ‘ being converted; ’ one would like to know just what she means by that. I know it is what she covets for Aileen. Aileen and I are the ones who are not getting from this summer's outing what

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the others are. In her case it seems to be chiefly clothes that hinder. What can it be with me? ”

Her half-whimsical, half-tender thought lingered for a few minutes about Aileen, the pretty, winsome girl who was at once her mother's pride and anxiety. For the mother's sake, if not for her own, Mary Brown felt that she would like to help the child if she could. She needed help. Her ambitions for herself were almost as great as her mother's for her; yet she had utterly false ideas of values and absurdly erroneous notions of the great outside world in which she longed to find a place. But Mary Brown felt her limitations as never before. There were many ways in which Miss Brown of Euston Square could have helped her. That interesting question of dress, for instance, could have been disposed of so easily. She had smiled and sighed over the situation on the afternoon when Aileen was making ready to join some of her mates for a birthday drive and picnic, and her only available white dress was found to

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be disfigured with a zigzag tear. Her mother had darned it skilfully and dampened and pressed with such care that the result was surprising to Mary Brown, but Aileen had been disdainful and had shed some tears over the poverty of her wardrobe, and Mary Brown had thought of a tray full of unused pretty white things in her suit-case, any one of which would have covered blemishes and filled Aileen's heart with joy. But she had also discovered that, because she was Mrs. Roberts's "help," she must not offer to lend. And there were others ways in which she had shut herself off from helpfulness by this adventure of hers. Miss Brown was used to having girls of seventeen look up to her, and delight in following her advice. Mary Brown, who daily set tables and waited on them in Mrs. Roberts's dining-room, knew that Aileen would esteem it an impertinence to be advised by her.

But the dining-room girl, as she put off her lace collar and put on her large white apron, admitted to herself that the

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was sane and scholarly, for the sake of refreshing her knowledge of Bible history. She had heard some talk among the boarders of this teacher; he was evidently a man of note, and not emotional in his style she felt certain, for she had heard him speak for a few minutes on two occasions. Perhaps the best thing she could do for herself to recover her mental poise would be to join this class and give really hard study to the lessons.

“ I will take it instead of those devotional meetings,” she told herself. “ They are so peculiar, so unlike any other meetings that I ever heard of, that they demoralize me. I never was intended for a fanatic; but a sane and reasonable study of Old Testament history I should really enjoy.”

Mrs. Roberts received her decision with joy, but objected to the giving up of the devotional hour.

“ You can have them both as well as not,” she urged. “ The fact is, you do so much more work, while you are at it, than I expected you could, that you are

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always ahead; and then I've got my work so planned, anyway, that it doesn't hurry me as it used to. I guess you are at the bottom of that, too; you've got a head for business and management, I can see that. I do hope you will make up your mind to stay with me this winter. But you go to the prayer-meeting, too; it will hearten you up for the day as nothing else will. I'll go sometimes; Aileen will help with the work and give me a chance; she says she would rather than not, and I'd like you to enjoy the meetings as much as you can. Maybe you don't have just such where you live."

That was true, and Miss Brown had to admit it; but for two days she was firm. She worked steadily through the devotional hour, and went Bible in hand to the later class.

And the class was, in its way, as much of an astonishment as the prayer-meeting had been. It was scholarly, her studies in college had prepared her to appreciate this. It was critical in a very close and unanswerable way; and there were mem-

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bers of the class who saw to it that there should be abundant opportunity for criticism. They boldly challenged the leader's opinions and demanded the differing ones and his reasons for pressing his. In every instance he was prepared for them, being able to give author and book and page, and to reply to his statements with the statements of other scholars who differed. But it was much more than that; the teacher succeeded from the first in making it plain that the object of the class was not to tear down the views of others, but to learn as much truth as could be packed into a given time. History, biography, prophecy were carefully mapped out to be gone over, not in detail, but so as to get a large view of the whole and to get it for a purpose. Miss Brown, listening with the critical attention that her student habits had cultivated, discovered, and discovered it to her intense surprise, that from the first chapter of Genesis on through the last prophetic book, the theme was redemption for a fallen world. Nor did she by any means in this

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critical study of history get away for an hour from what she had chosen to call an emotional view of the historic person named Jesus. The first words she had heard from the teacher as she came, a few minutes late, into the class had been a quotation which for some reason had taken strange hold of her.

“Thirty years alone I trod
Galilee’s sequestered sod,
Yet I was the Son of God.”

These were the lines, and they continued echoing as a refrain to her thoughts while the lesson progressed. The thought of Christ’s sacrifice for a sinful world was being emphasized, as a rapid review was given of the wonderful life that began in the helplessness of babyhood and moved unflinchingly through the sorrows, the trials, the indignities, the humiliations, the awful sufferings that were thrust upon him, down to the very end. Unknown by those who should have been watching for him, disowned by those who should have been ready to die for him, doubted by those who had every reason

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to trust him, what had his thirty years of life to show but self-abnegation of the most startling kind? " Yet he was the Son of God! "

The wonder of it, the awe of it, the unutterable anguish of it took hold of this young learner's heart as never before. And when the teacher, rising suddenly to one of those pregnant phrases with which he sometimes emphasized his lesson, said in a ringing voice, " Jesus Christ is a walking, living, breathing expression of God, her intellect took hold of the thought and held it before her conscience in a way that almost overwhelmed her. Clearly, if she was to avoid the emotional in religion, the study of Jesus Christ was not for her.

Yet to be at Mount Hermon and not study him grew daily more of an impossibility. She made strenuous efforts in this very direction, eager to get away from what she told herself was evidently a local fad, but what she afterwards came to recognize as an awakened conscience. She studied the programme with a view to finding intellectual treats. She se-

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lected a name well-known to her in the East, a celebrated scholar, and one whom she was quite sure would be clear and calm and unbiassed. She made known her wish to go and hear him, and Mrs. Roberts, who grew every day more eager to give her pleasure, was prompt and cordial in her response.

The man's theme, "What is Christianity?" was interesting to this supposed seeker after truth. She wanted to have a clear and unprejudiced answer to that question, such an answer as she felt sure the speaker could give.

His first full paragraph gave her a curious twinge. "The question," he said, "that an unprejudiced and sincere seeker after truth would ask himself in relation to this study: 'How far does what that book or that man teaches accord — not with me — but with Christianity?'" Judged by this definition, had she been unprejudiced and sincere? Had she not been annoyed with the atmosphere of the place because it did not accord with her

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ideas? She gave some thought to that, then listened again and heard:

“ I am not called upon to create Christianity, it is here. It has a history. I ought to be able to describe it as completely as I would be able, after study, to describe any definite historic fact so that students could recognize it. I need not necessarily describe it as I would like to have it, or as I might have had it if I had made it; or as I personally live with regard to it, but simply as it is, as a historical fact, a well-known fact.”

After that, she listened for his description, trying, meantime, to formulate one for herself. How would she describe religion, and how far would her view agree with his?

“ Christianity as a historical religion,” said the speaker, “ is a life of conscious reconciliation with God, through faith in the historic person known as Jesus Christ.”

And then there was no more real listening for Mary Brown. She found that her intellect not only accepted this definition,

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so far as it went, but added to it and believed in the logical conclusions that followed. What she was confronted with, curiously enough for the first time in her life, was the fact that her daily habit of living did not accord with these definitions. With her intellect, then, she subscribed to certain well-defined and exceedingly important beliefs, and then let them pass for the merest trivialities so far as practical application of them was concerned! But this was not a sane, calm way of living, it was the action of a fool!

“ I am a church-member,” said Mary Brown, “ and have been for years, but I do not live ‘ a life of conscious reconciliation with God.’ It might more properly be said of me that I do not think of God at all.” Her thoughts reverted to Mr. Brown and the plain words he had spoken: “ I have known church-members who had no more knowledge, apparently, of what it was to have companionship with Jesus Christ than though they had never heard his name.” And that description, she told herself, fitted her.

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She went away from the lecture more out of harmony with life than ever before. Religion, it seemed, was not only something that she had not, but could not get. How was one to get into "conscious reconciliation with God?" How could she expect him ever to be satisfied with her? She was utterly dissatisfied with herself. She stayed away from one Bible class, but on the third morning she went again; simply to gratify Mrs. Roberts, she assured herself. She went late, and the leader was telling the class an incident in his life.

"It was years and years ago," he said. "I had known the Lord, theoretically, for a long time, and was satisfied enough, because I thought little or nothing about him. I had no theory of the atonement, and had I been questioned, should have said that one theory was as good as another. But there came a time when I was distinctly conscious of sin. I was in extremity; nothing in myself or out of myself brought relief until I thought of Christ as a substitute. 'O Lord,' my

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soul cried out in its agony, 'let me see the blood!' And friends, I found that the cross is a necessity to the awakened conscience. There is a righteousness before God in the personal work of Christ which satisfies."

The poor, soul-hungry girl had to hastily cover her face for a moment with a sheltering hand because of a sudden rush of tears, and her heart cried out with a great longing: "Oh, to be *satisfied!*"

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