

## The Fireside.

### THE STRANGER IN THE PEW.

It was a beautiful Sabbath morning in spring-time. The sun was shining warm and golden, and its beams penetrated every nook and corner of the great city. A young girl sat by the window in one of the tenement houses, from whose outlook the green foliage of the trees in the park beyond could be plainly seen. The birds were singing their morning songs, and gaily dressed children, with happy voices, were thronging the streets on their way to Sunday school.

The church bells had begun their sacred calls to the house of God; and as Prue Atkins listened to them, sad memories filled her heart, and the tears gathered in her eyes. She was thinking of the little church on the large green in the New England village where she used to live, and of the pretty cemetery where her dear mother had been laid away to rest two years before. The old days used to be so happy, so full of love and brightness, and now the new days were lonely, dreary ones. Oh, so very different!

The church bells kept up their ceaseless music, and, as Prue listened, the thought came to her, "One whole year since I have been to church. What would dear mother say if she knew it?"

The bells kept on pealing, pealing, pealing. They were heavy sounding bells, and bells whose music came from some far-off section of the city; but they all seemed to blend together and harmonize.

"I believe I will go to church," Prue said, rising from her chair by the window. "But then, my clothes!"

Clothes are a great consideration with everybody; but Prue's had to be considered that morning from a matter-of-fact point of view. She went to the little closer and took down a black dress and hung it over a chair; then she took down a shawl that was sacred, because her mother had worn it so much in the years gone by. Lastly, she took her hat off from the shelf. It was an everyday hat, one she had worn since her mother died. She held the dress and shawl up to the light, and, as she saw the thin places and the nasty shade through that bright sunlight, she threw the garment back on the chair, saying, "They are entirely too shabby for me to wear this bright day!" But Prue Atkins had come to a place in her life where she needed some light and Christian help. She felt that she had gone along her weary way trusting only in her own strength. She wanted the strong arm to lean upon, she wanted kindly words from sympathizing hearts. Again she took up the garments and looked at them. Then she remembered a little incident which she read in one of her Sunday school papers once, about the Duke of Wellington and the poor woman who knelt beside him in the church; and how, when she found she was beside so great a personage and felt afraid and was about to move away, he said, putting his hand upon her shoulder, "Do not move, my good woman; we are all alike in God's house."

The remembrance of this story gave her new courage, and she dressed herself as neatly as she could, and prepared for the morning service. The breakfast table stood in the middle of the floor, there were two empty plates

on it, for her father and brother had not awakened yet. She knew their habit to sleep late on Sunday mornings; so she put the coffee-pot on the back of the stove, and placed the breakfast in the oven, leaving the door open so it would not dry up. Then she wrote on a piece of paper, "Gone to church," and pinned the paper on the door so they would know where she was.

She soon found herself standing in front of a large, handsome church on a fashionable thoroughfare. The Sunday school scholars were just coming out; they all seemed very bright and happy, and Prue sighed as she thought of her happy childhood, and wished she were such a child again. She went up the steps and into the vestibule, and stood there a few moments; then she opened the door of the audience room and looked in. There were only a few persons scattered here and there in the pews. It was quite early. Prue did not know anything about ushers or high-priced pews, or anything of that sort; so she walked down the middle aisle and took a seat in the corner of one of the pews near the pulpit. The people soon began to come in in large numbers, and the pews were fast filling up. Then the minister went into the pulpit and the organist began to play, but Prue sat alone. Just as a sweet soprano voice in the choir began to sing something about "a beautiful city," a gentleman and a lady came into the pew. The gentleman was tall and portly, and Prue thought must be in some high position, like the Duke of Wellington, perhaps. The lady was young, like herself, the gentleman's daughter, probably.

"What a handsome girl she is!" thought Prue; "and such elegant clothes as she has; laces, diamonds, and a lovely silk dress."

As the young lady turned to look at the occupant in the corner of the pew, she seemed to have a reproachable look on her face; which Prue saw in a moment. She felt that she was an intruder.

Shabbier than ever did her dress become, as she compared it with her seat-mate's. "Why did I come? I have no right in the place," were the thoughts that would keep coming into her mind.

But the sweet-voiced singer kept on with her singing. Such a beautiful song it was, about "the golden city," and "redeemed ones," and walking in white robes.

"Dear mother is there," thought Prue, as she listened, "and I am so glad. How I wish I were there with her. But father and brother Dick, what would they do without me?"

The young lady who sat next to Prue was the daughter of Judge Brownlee, and the gentleman was her father. She was an idolized daughter. Everything she wanted that was within her father's power to procure for her, she had. Like a hot-house plant of rare species, she was watched and tended and shielded from the slightest adverse wind or chilling breeze of the outside world. It seemed very strange to her that the usher should have placed so shabbily attired a person in her father's pew. What would people think? How little she knew that the young girl who sat next her might have been much better dressed, had it not been for certain circumstances in her life which compelled her to make great sacrifices. The pittance

she earned from week to week (at least it would be called a pittance by such monied people as Judge Brownlee's family were), enabled her to provide for a worthless father, who, instead of shielding his child from the cold winds of the world, forced her into them. How patiently she took up the burden of life, how she kept the weight of it in her own heart, and toiled on from day today! Many, an unkind word she received from that very father, when he was under the influence of that accursed thing that destroys so many souls, and brings so much unhappiness and misery into the world. The brother was learning a trade. It was only a little he could earn at that time to help his sister, but by-and-by he could do more, and then it would be easier. But of late the brother was beginning to lose his former footing, he was stumbling about in paths of temptation, and many a night during the past few weeks he had come home very late. Prue had sat up for him, for his mother's sake, to be careful what companions he chose.

The prayers, the hymns, and the sermon had a great many helpful, comforting things in them for Prue's poor, weary heart. But her clothes! She felt that they were very much too shabby for such surroundings. She was out of place, she knew. If she went to church again, she would go to some little "meeting-house" like their own in her old home.

When the services were over, the gentleman and his daughter passed into the aisle without bestowing another look on the poor stranger in their pew. Prue waited until the crowd passed out and then she passed into the aisle. There were so many other young girls like herself all about her! But they were so differently cared for. Perhaps there was a weary look in her face, and a despairing one, as she passed on toward the door, for just as she was going out, a sweet, cheery voice said, "Good morning. Are you a stranger here?"

Prue turned and looked in the direction whence the voice came, and met the interesting look and pleasant smile of a girl about her own age. She was very neatly and prettily attired in a new, fresh spring suit. "Yes, thank you," replied Prue.

"I thought you looked as if you were," the young girl replied. "I hope you will come to our church again."

The words touched Prue's heart in its tenderest place, and she burst into tears. There are some people in the world who seem to be Christ's particular messengers on earth. They seem to be inspired of him, and know how to do things in his way and with a loving spirit, and this new friend was certainly one of them. She found the way to the young stranger's heart; she walked home with her and spoke kindly, comforting words. She always did good as she found opportunity, and here, indeed, was opportunity. As she asked herself, "Who has made us to differ?"

In a fortnight's time, Prue and her brother were both members of the Sunday school and the young folks' meeting. Prue had a talent for doing beautiful work in embroidery and making fancy articles, and her deft fingers soon had all they could do in that line, through the efforts of the new friend. Her burden was so much easier to carry after she had the sympathy of Christian friends.

A year passed by. At the "Woman's Exchange," some beautiful specimens of work were on exhibition at Christmas time. Judge Brownlee's elegantly dressed daughter stood looking at the beau-

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tiful array. There was one piece of exquisite work of which she asked the price.

"It is not for sale," the lady in charge replied. "It is a Christmas gift, and is only here on exhibition."

Miss Brownlee took it in her hand to examine it more fully, and a little paper fell out from the bunch of ribbon, and these were the words she read on it: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in." It was addressed to Miss Brownlee's friend, and Prue's ministering angel, as Prue called her.

"Could you give me the address of the person who did this work," she inquired.

The lady turned to the list of contributors, and found Prue's address. Miss Brownlee ordered the driver to take her to Prue's home. When she arrived and Prue answered her ring at the door, she instantly recognized the pew occupant of the year before, and the young lady

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