

The Fireside.

JOHN MORGAN'S CHRISTMAS.

BY ELLA PAGE.

Pretty Louise Morgan washed the supper dishes with a very solemn face, and a tear or two splashed down into the wide pan before which she stood.

As for her brother John, he lay on the rug before the fire in sullen gloom.

"I say, mother, it's a shame!" he broke forth excitedly. "Here's Christmas coming, and every fellow in school excepting myself has skates, and there's not one of them works half as hard as I do. I did ask father to buy a pair for Christmas, and he scolded an hour, saying he never had any skates; if I worked as he did at my age, I wouldn't find any time to be fooling round on the ice! And Lu, too! Here she works like a slave, and wears Aunt Louisa's old duds, and never goes anywhere but to meeting and funerals. It's a shame! I'll run away, see if I don't!" and he rolled over with his face on the rug.

The little invalid mother on the lounge sighed. "I know it is hard, children," she said feebly, "but your father works hard, and he hates to spend his money."

"But, mother," said Louise, with a sudden flirt of her dish cloth, "John has earned enough to pay for his skates, and more too, this summer, doing errands, and father took it to pay for getting his boots mended. And if he had any eyes he could see that my best cloak is only fit for mat rags. Mother, he does see, but he don't care." And she wrung her dishcloth, hung it up, and turned her pan bottom up on the shelf. "Now I want to study, but if he comes he'll tell me I'd better darn his stockings."

John Morgan, senior, was a good man, but oh, so close! Born of a hardy race, he had worked early and late. The only weakness he had ever indulged in was marrying delicate little Annie Leslie. Louisa, his smart, grim sister, had prophesied that he would repent, and told him he would find his wife "a help eat instead of a help-meet." Indeed, she took great satisfaction when her sister-in-law sank into a confirmed invalid. To be sure she had postponed that event until Louise was old enough to take the helm, but none the less did Aunt Louisa groan in spirit and say to a circle of sympathizing friends, she had told John that Ann wasn't cut out for a farmer's wife, but, man-like, he would have his way—and now see!

John Morgan loved his wife and children, but he had never told the latter, at least, of that fact. Yet he was proud of the beauty and good scholarship of Louise and the smart, keen talents of John; and when he overheard (as he did) the greater part of the above recorded conversation, from the outer porch, he felt troubled and almost aghast. Was he such a tyrant that even the gentle Louise wanted to leave home? Perhaps he had been too hard with the children. He would ask Annie, for the little, frail woman had a way of getting at the root of matters; and if she said so it was true.

So, after Louise had retired, he broke the silence by abruptly saying, "Annie, have I been hard on the children?" She hesitated a moment, then, with a half-frightened glance, said slowly, "Yes, John, I'm afraid you have." His head

sank on his breast. After a moment she rose and stood by his chair. "John," said she, softly, "I know you love your children, but you are too busy to tell them so as often as I do, and they see the difference." He sat silent, and she went on: "Suppose you praise John a little. We don't want to lose him as Dick Wallace's brother was lost."

The farmer rose. "It is late, Annie, and I've got to go to town tomorrow. What are you going to do so late at night? You'll be sick tomorrow," and he pointed to the delicate edging in his wife's hand.

"Only a little knit edging for Louise—a Christmas present. She's a good girl, and ought to have something." And like a wise general she said no more.

But long after she was asleep, John Morgan lay thinking, and the effect of that night's vigil influenced his whole life.

He went to town next day, and returned late with several bundles which he took to his room.

Christmas day came clear and cold. Johnny Morgan, rising at his father's call, stumbled sleepily down the stairs, and took up his boots that stood by the stove. "What on earth!" he said, as he tried to force his foot into the first one. "Mother! Louise! see what is in my boots! Who got these skates? Are they mine? Did you buy them, mother?"

"No, I did," broke in his father, half-sheepishly; "you've been a pretty good boy lately. Now hurry up and do the chores, and you may try them; but don't break your neck, for I never can husk all that corn alone. What? Are you so sorry to get them that it makes you cry?"

"Thank you, father," said John, lifting a face about equally divided between smiles and tears. "I'll husk till midnight all winter to pay for these."

"And look here, John," said his father, "don't run away just yet. You're all the boy I've got, and I'm growing old." And he started for the barn in somewhat of a hurry.

"There, I've made a fool of myself," muttered he, as he went down the frosty path to the barn, which he entered, and began to shovel vigorously.

Just as he had finished his task, the door flew open and Louise appeared on the threshold.

"O father!" she began, "look and see what I found in my room. Mother said you bought it for me. It is the handsomest cloak I ever saw in my life. Don't I look nice?" And John Morgan saw in the door way, lit by the first rays of the rising sun, a lovely vision, with its hazel eyes all aglow and with soft, rosy lips and cheeks. For a moment he could only look at the face, without giving any attention to the handsome cloak.

"You look now," he said at last, "just as your mother did the first time I ever saw her; and I hope you'll be just as good a woman as she is, Louise." And as he passed her on his way to the house, he stooped, and for the first time in years kissed his daughter.

Things moved in a different channel after that at farmer Morgan's house. In after years he often said, "Those skates I bought for John were the best investment I ever made in my life." From that day the boy worked with a will,

and his father was not sparing of praise either; and Louise, in her new cloak, and a hat that came somewhat mysteriously at New Year's, looked so bewitchingly lovely that the new young rector found out he wanted her to preside over the new house he was thinking of building.

But John Morgan did not sigh for the olden times, having found a more excellent way.

A CONGREGATION OF SIX.

For a sermon it has been said there must be a great preacher, a great subject, and a great congregation.

But sometimes the last item may be modified, for a great preacher may preach a great sermon to a small congregation.

A great sermon was one preached to a congregation of one at Jacob's well. A great sermon was preached to one Jewish ruler, who came by night, and heard the word, "Ye must be born again." If the preacher and the subject are great enough, it is not necessary to be discouraged even if the congregation is small.

It is said that the late Isaac Errett, when speaking in the interest of the American Christian Missionary Society, went to a country church in the Blue Grass region of Kentucky. It was harvest time, and the weather was warm. The "audience" which had assembled consisted of five or six rich farmers—no ladies being present.

"We won't try to have a meeting," said the good brother with whom Dr. Errett had been stopping.

"Ah, but," said Dr. Errett, with general firmness, "I always keep my appointments. I shall hold a meeting."

He held his meeting. He melted those rich farmers to tears as he told of the needs of the missionaries and of the heroic work they were doing, and at the end of the service each one of his hearers contributed five hundred dollars to the cause for which he had pleaded.

The preacher who thinks he can do nothing with a small congregation will generally fulfil his own expectations. The man who is strong and of good courage, will not labor in vain—nor spend his strength for naught.—H. L. H., in *The Christian*.

THE POWER OF A GODLY LIFE.

That well-known trainer of Sunday school teachers, the Rev. Dr. Schauffer, says:

"I had a teacher in our school who used to be a sailor—a godly man. He knew little of history, and nothing of science; but he knew Jesus. He so taught the class that everyone found the Saviour, and made public confession. By and by he came to me and said: 'Take my class away. I am uneducated. I can't lead them any higher, but I have led them to Christ. Give me,' he said, 'a new class that does not know Christ.'"

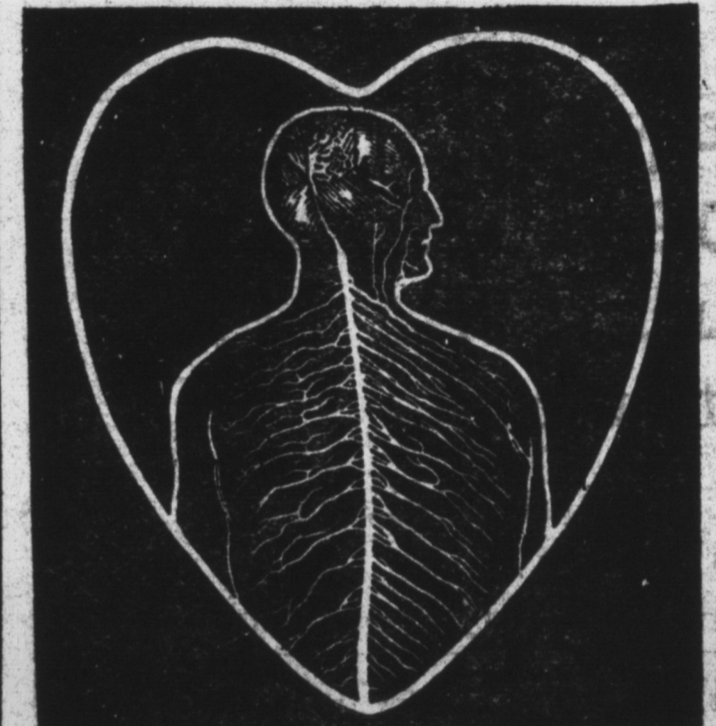
"I gave him a new class, and before he died every one had found the Saviour. What was the potency in that uneducated man? Was it not his humble trust in Him who can sanctify whatever word is spoken?"

LIFE ETERNAL NOW.

I remember one speaking to a friend of mine in Brighton who, giving me his experience of his own childhood, said: "I can remember when my mother cried when she cut the bread for our breakfast, keeping none back for herself, for

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it was the last crust that she was dividing. I, the eldest born, inquired the reason why this was done. It has kept me straight in the world ever since under terrible temptation. She said: 'My lad, your father has been dismissed from his situation because he would not lie, and we have come to the last loaf; but I am proud of your father, and you must grow up like him, too.' And," said my friend, "I have tried to do it. The example of that great sacrifice is before me, that solemn and sad morning when it seemed as if we had come to the last, and God let us go through and remained silent. But it was not the last. Somehow I felt that morning as if I stood higher, I was so proud of my father's manhood, and today, as I look back and remember that we did come through, I would not barter our

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