

The Fireside.

"TRICKY RELIGION."

"Ethel, dear, will you open your heart to me and tell me why the one I thought more serious than any of my scholars at the opening of these glorious meetings has refrained from taking a stand for our Saviour, in spite of all pleadings?"

The hand in that of the teacher trembled, but the child thus addressed made no reply, and so her pleading friend continued:

"Something is keeping you from consecrating your young life to Christ, something which might possibly, be removed if you would tell me where the trouble lies. Do you not feel any inclination to serve the One who died that you might live?"

"Yes, yes, teacher," was the ready response, "I'd love to be a Christian; I would truly, but, but—"

"But what, dear? Tell me frankly, for it breaks my heart to see my best-loved pupil out of the fold."

"I—I don't like to tell, teacher, but it's folks that are keeping me out," was the broken reply.

"Why, child, do you know that you are making the same excuse that has, I verily believe, kept more people out of the kingdom than all others combined? Am I one who, by bad example, is hindering you? Tell me, truly," pleaded the faithful teacher.

"No, no! I'd love to be such a Christian as you are, for you are always so good, but it's other folks who talk so good in meeting, and—and—well, their religion is awful tricky, anyhow."

"You are doubtless thinking of some of the older scholars who profess to serve Christ, but forget to be loyal to him when out of meeting; but you must not look at them, for they are still young and have much to overcome. You do not need to look beyond your own home, Ethel, for examples worthy of imitation—your godly parents, I mean, who are so anxious for the salvation of their only child."

"But—but it's them I mean!" blurted out the child. Then, realizing that her secret was out, which meant seeming disloyalty to her parents, the child tried to stammer some excuse, which ended in a sob.

The teacher drew the weeping child to her, but knew not what to think or say, for the parents of Ethel, though not cultured people, were looked upon, outside of the home at least, as exemplary Christians; and so teacher and scholar walked on in silence, broken only by the sighs of one and sobs of the other, until the latter said, brokenly:

"I didn't ever mean to tell 't was my own folks what was keeping me back, but it was out before I knew it."

"Yes, dear, I understand," said the teacher in a soothing tone; "you did not intend to be disloyal to your good parents."

"No, I didn't truly!" was the emphatic reply, "for they are good, too, most times, and I love them, and if only they didn't have such tricky religion, I'd like they want me to."

"Tricky religion!" exclaimed the puzzled teacher; "why, child I never heard of that kind before, but it is likely your way of saying that they are inconsistent."

"I don't quite know the meaning of that last word, teacher; "why, child, I

never tell, I'll own up what I mean. It is like this: Pa talks real good in meeting, but his religion is awful tricky! Why, just last night 'fore he went to meeting he pounded his finger, and then I heard him use a swear-word. I did, truly, and I just can't forget how mad he gets at every little thing, when he up and asks prayers for his 'little daughter.'"

The latter words were said in a tone so sarcastic that the listener ventured a rebuke, but the child, seemingly determined to make her meaning clear, now that she had told so much, continued:

"And—and ma's religion is tricky, too. Yes, it is, for a fact!" persisted Ethel, as the teacher attempted to hush her. "She talked so sweet in meeting tonight that she made lots of 'em cry; but when she begged sinners to confess Christ, and looked right at me, I wanted to do like some of the rest of them did, for about a minute, and then I thought how she scolded a blue streak this morning 'cause her bread was sour, and boxed my ears, just as if I was to blame, and then I didn't feel one mite like going forward."

The teacher was speechless, but the child voiced her sentiments when in a spirited tone she added:

"If there wasn't so much tricky religion folks wouldn't need to be coaxed to have the right kind."—*Unidentified.*

A NEGLECTED VIRTUE.

BY FRANK E. R. MILLER.

Hospitality is one of the first virtues as well as one of the finest courtesies of life. One can do nothing better for a friend or confer a higher honor upon a stranger than to throw open the doors of his house with a generous invitation to join the family circle for a time. In the construction of a modern house a blunder fully as serious as the omission of a bath-room or a heating plant is the failure to provide one room more than the family will ordinarily need—a guest chamber. As an aid to culture and refinement, as a means to the proper training of children in good manners and self-respect, there is nothing more effective than a wise and liberal hospitality. To the fact that his parents kept open house for the circuit preacher, the occasional sojourner, the visiting friend from the old home in the East, many a young person in the middle and western part of the country owes his early and useful knowledge of the ways of the world, his ease in society, and a fund of information gathered from the conversation to which often he has listened with breathless interest.

Hospitality is only one degree less valuable as an educational measure than travel. Next to seeing all lands and peoples and customs is to meet those who have traveled in distant parts and brought back in their conversation specimens of what their faculty of observation picked up, understood and retained. If it is true that "as iron sharpens iron so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend," the parent who denies himself and his family of growing children the benefit and pleasure of an occasional guest must be regarded as stupid and stingy and selfish.

But this virtue should find its spring not only in the fact that a guest in the house is a source of inspiration, that he

leaves behind him the influences of his individuality, that the Scripture enjoins hospitality on the ground that we may be entertaining angles unawares, but also in the truth and obligation of brotherhood.

Emerson, in his essay on "Friendship," says: "We are holden to men by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by admiration, by every circumstance and badge and trifle, but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed and we so pure that we can offer him tenderness?"

Yet this is the very thing men need. When they come on voyages of discovery in our neighborhood they do not relish a flight of poisoned arrows, but they seek the gold and silver of our hearts. In some directions mankind is not slow to recognize and act upon the fact. The sick are visited, the dead are buried, the orphan is housed. In these matters benevolence lies in actions, not in feelings and sentiments. Are we aware that the possession of the capacity of hospitality carries with it an obligation of use? Many are not unlike Rebecca's Aunt Miranda. The child had been sent to represent the family at a missionary meeting in the church. During the session the speaker offered to remain in town for two days and tell more of the Lord's work if entertainment could be provided. "A pall of silence," says the evidently observant and well-informed author of "Rebecca," "settled over the assembly. There was some cogent reason why every sister there was disinclined for company." The little girl could not withstand the insult of that silence and therefore invited the missionary with his wife and children to the "brick house." But when she got home and imparted the news that company would be at the house within two hours, to stay all night and the next day, she met this rebuke from Aunt Miranda: "Explain if you can, who gave you any authority to invite a passel of strangers to stop here over night, when you know we ain't had any company for twenty years, and don't intend to have any for another twenty—or at any rate, while I'm the head of the house."

I say that there are a good many people who belong to the same hard-shell club as Aunt Miranda, whose motto seems to be: "Don't do anything for anybody unless you can't help yourself; and when you can't help yourself, do just as little as you can."

It is a sad commentary upon the deficiency of the Christian people in our Baptist churches in respect to hospitality to know that a commercial traveler who visits a given circuit of towns, each town on an average of two Sundays in a year and a half, and makes himself known to his brethren, teaching in Sunday school, leading an occasional young people's meeting, never in the course of twelve years has had an invitation to step into a Baptist home. Look in the direction of the transient young people in the school and business life of almost any community and it will be found that the same outrageous neglect obtains.

Who is not acquainted with a substantial two-storey dwelling, planted firmly and attractively on a little natural terrace that fronts a fine residence street in his town? Neatly kept, its out-buildings screened from view by a stone wall or a painted fence, it meets the approval of one's eye and inflames his pride in the town of which it is an ornament. But one day when a sight-seeing

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stranger asks, "Whose house is that?" the resident is astonished to find that he has little more to say than, "Why, that—that house over yonder?—that's old Scroogeley's place." For he remembers that he has never been invited to step within its doors, that he has never seen its curtains up at night and a cheerful light within, that he has never heard of a generous feast being spread upon its board or a visitor being conducted to its guest chamber from one year's end to another. Somehow he is sorry that the stranger ever saw that house at all. Turning to the sight-seer he says: "But, have you seen Mr. Greenheart's cottage? It isn't much of a house architecturally; but it's a fine place to visit."

Is the reader sure that Scroogeley is a non-professor of religion and that Greenheart is a deacon in the Baptist church? Where is the pastor who does not sigh for householders who are given to the cultivation of the neglected virtue of hospitality?—*The Standard.*

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