

The Fireside.

CLERK NUMBER 20.

BY FLORA C. THOMPSON.

It was a July afternoon and the heat was intense. The clerks in Claibourne's department store looked tired and pale, and clerk No. 20 seemed more tired and pale than any of them. There was a hopeless look on the girl's face as she leaned idly on her counter, lost in thought. She was thinking of a talk she had heard that day at noon. The woman who made it was devoting her life to the working girls of the city. There was not a girl in that great metropolis who did not know her, who had not, in some way, been helped by her. She had talked that day to the girls at Claibourne's, and, in closing, had made a thrilling appeal to them to broaden and beautify their somewhat circumscribed lives, by continually doing little kindnesses. It was of this appeal that clerk No. 20 was thinking.

"I love her dearly," she was saying to herself, "I would do anything for her but she does not understand the situation. I have no time to do anything kind, I must work, work all the time. I would be glad enough to do something lovely every day if I ever had an opportunity. Circumscribed? Indeed I am. There's never the tiniest opportunity to do a kindness in a store, and if there was, I would not have time to do it. Why, I don't get a chance to speak to No. 19 once in two days. Oh, well, a clerk's life is not supposed to be either broad or beautiful, so I shall think no more about it," she ended hopelessly, straightening up as she saw someone approaching.

"It's Madame Moreau's niece, they say Madame is always doing something kind," she said wistfully, under her breath, going back, in spite of her resolution, to her old line of thought.

"Well, she has time to. Wonder where she is to-day, I never saw her shy little niece alone before."

"Can I show you something to-day, Miss Moreau?" she asked aloud, in a mechanically polite voice.

"I want to see some linen collars," said the girl shyly.

"Four counters to your right," the clerk answered briskly, turning to another customer.

Little Miss Moreau looked around in utter bewilderment. She was not used to shopping alone and had not the slightest idea what "four counters to your right" meant. There was a great many people in the room, and the buzz of business was heard on all sides. Several cash boys hustled along in a great hurry, the baskets of packages whizzed by overhead, and the floor-manager tramped up and down. The girl was terribly confused by the incessant hum of voices, her cheeks burned, and her heart beat wildly. There seemed to be no prospect of her gaining the attention of anyone, and she stood as though rooted to the spot; again she appealed to a cash-boy, but he passed on heedlessly. Finally her courage failed and she burst into tears. Clerk No. 20 looked up at this moment. She was surprised to find Miss Moreau still standing there. Seeing her bewilderment, the clerk's lips curled scornfully. What a baby, she thought. Of course she could call a boy to show the girl about

the store, but such a baby did not deserve so much trouble. But just then something flashed across No. 20's mind, her face softened, and her eyes brightened. Could it be—was it possible—yes, this must be an opportunity to do a kindness.

"One minute, Miss Moreau," she said, for Miss Moreau was turning toward the entrance.

"Cash," she called, tapping on the counter with her pencil.

"Cash," repeated the boy who came running toward her with outstretched hand.

"It's not cash this time," the clerk said, "are you busy, David?"

"Not very," he answered.

"Did you want anything but collars, Miss Moreau?"

"No, not to-day," was the answer.

"Well, David, please show this lady to the handkerchief and collar counter, and when she is through with her purchases escort her to the door," said clerk No. 20.

David bowed, and Miss Moreau, with grateful expressions of thanks, turned to go.

The next afternoon, as clerk No. 20 was busy with a group of women, she saw the postman come in with the mail and put it on the big desk at the end of the room. In a few minutes, the floor-manager laid a letter on her counter. She glanced at it suspiciously, she was always afraid of dismissal. It was not an official-looking document the girl thought with a sigh of relief. The address was official enough, however, she noted anxiously at a second glance. It read:

Clerk No. 20,
Claibourne's Department Store,
City.

What could it be? Once, in reaching for some goods, she turned it over with studied carelessness. The other side gave her no clue, however. All she saw was a dainty white envelope bearing the dear, quaint seal, "All's well." There could certainly be no bad news under that dear little seal, the girl thought many times that afternoon, as she patiently served her customers.

When the day's work was over, and she had reached the bare little room she called home, the tired girl opened the mysterious letter. She glanced at the signature first of all. "Justine A. Moreau," she read with a gasp. About what was the great Madame Moreau writing to me, she wondered. The letter was as follows:

My dear young Friend,—

I write to thank you for your kindness to my niece Helene Moreau. The child is very shy and delicate, and I seldom allow her to go out alone. Yesterday, it was necessary for her to do so, however, and most unwillingly I saw her start out. She has told me of her bewilderment at Claibourne's, and of your kindness. It is a pleasure to find a clerk who takes such an interest in customers. I hope you will always do these "little kindnesses which most of us leave undone or despise." Your life will be helped by them. Coming in contact, as you necessarily do, with so many people, you have marvellous opportunities for doing gracious deeds.

Helene wishes me to especially thank

you for lending a helping hand without speaking of her confusion. She is very sensitive, and had you spoken of it she would have been embarrassed.

I shall be delighted to have you dine with us Sunday evening at 7 o'clock. I hope you will find it convenient to do so.

You will pardon me for addressing your letter as I have, as neither Helene nor I have the pleasure of knowing your name.

Very sincerely yours,
JUSTINE A. MOREAU.

"I dine with Madame Moreau! It is too good to be true," cried clerk No. 20 delightedly. "But I don't deserve it, for I came very near not helping the child. I am dreadfully ashamed of myself when I think of all the people I might have helped and did not. I never dreamed that it meant anything to help them, and I never dreamed that I had any opportunities. 'Marvellous opportunities,' says Madame! She wants me to do such things always. Well, I shall, dear Madame Moreau, I shall. And after all our beloved missionary's suggestions can be followed. Look sharp, clerk No. 20, and see how much good you can do."

It was a bright day early in May, and the rooms of the Woman's Club were decked in beauty for the meeting of the afternoon. A group of early comers sat talking quietly. They were discussing ideals, and one woman asked this question: If you could change your character to any you chose, which one of all the people you have ever known or read of would you prefer to be like?

There were various answers, no two alike. The last to reply was the mayor's wife, a proud, haughty woman. The woman looked at her, each wondering what character this old woman of the world admired.

"Well, Mrs. Hildreth, whom do you choose?" asked one.

She turned to them, her face lighted with a rare smile, and replied: "If I could change my life in a moment, I would make it like that of clerk No. 20, at Claibourne's department store. Hers is the sunniest, sweetest character I know, her very name is a synonym for kindness."—*Baptist Argus.*

A SELFISH MAN

He regarded his children as nuisance. He did all his courting before marriage.

He never talked over his affairs with his wife.

He doled out his money to his wife as if to a beggar.

He looked down on his wife as an inferior being.

He never dreamed that there were two sides to marriage.

He had one set of manners for home and another for society.

He never dreamed that his wife needed praise and compliments.

He thought his wife should spend all her time doing housework.

He never made concession to his wife's judgment, even in unimportant matters.

He thought the marriage vow had made him his wife's master, instead of her partner.

He thought he had a right to smoke and chew tobacco and drink liquor and be as boorish and brutal to his family as he chose, regardless of the effect on them. Surely such a man needs regenerating to be fit to live with anybody.—*Word and Work.*

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UNHAPPINESS A HABIT.—Most unhappy people have become so by gradually forming a habit of unhappiness, complaining about the weather, finding fault with their food, with crowded cars, and with disagreeable companions at work. A habit of complaining, of criticising, of fault-finding, or grumbling over trifles, a habit of looking for shadows, is a most unfortunate habit to contract, especially in early life, for, after a while, the victim becomes a slave. All of the impulses become perverted, until the tendency to pessimism, to cynicism, is chronic.—*Success.*

Thinking trouble brings trouble. Thinking good brings good. We can make our life just what the mind thinks. Therefore, how important it is for all of us to think rightly.

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