Our Story.

Polly's Religion.

Continued.

She blushed, laughed and stammered. Oh, that was the most natural thing in the world. You know I was brought up among colored people. I know how to manage them. It was only a ditch cut here and there, a few panes of glass and bushels of lime. They are good affectionate creatures, and so anxious to learn.

The matter was driven out of the squire's mind before he reached the house, for he saw Tom skulking around the stable door. He had returned that day, and a dull weight of misery fell at the sight on his father's heart. Tom did not enter the house until in the evening, when the family were gathered about the lawn. He came into the room with a swagger, unshaven, his boots reeking of the stable. On purpose to mortify us, thought Grace, bitterly.

I came to see Joe's fine lady wife, he said in a loud voice. Unless he's ashamed to introduce his scapegrace brother.

Mary is not here, said Mother Demming. Where is she, Grace?

In Uncle Ben's room. She reads the New York papers to him every day now. They play backgammon together, and they have one of those silly books of Artemus Ward's. I heard him laughing and swearing harder than ever, so he must be pleased. I wonder she can stand it.

It is hard to understand her, said Isabella, dryly. Mary is not careful of her associations as she should be.

Tom had been listening very eagerly. Enough said, he broke out, with a thump of his fist on the table. If Joe's wife can take thought of that lonely old man up there, there's better stuff in her than I expected. I'll go up and make her acquaintance.

For several days afterward Tom's voice was heard joining in the jokes and laughter that came out of Uncle Ben's room.

Mary seems to have enchanted them both, said Grace. Tom is clean and shaved today and looks like a human being.

Perhaps she treats him like a human being, said Joe.

But even he was startled when Mary came down that evening dressed for a walk, and nodding brightly to Tom, asked him to go with her. Finish your book, Joe, Tom will be my escort.

Tom followed her slouching to the gate. He stopped there. Shame, defiance, misery looked out of his eyes. See here Mrs. Demming! I reckon you wouldn't have asked me to go with you!

Polly's tender, steady eyes met his. Yes I know.

D'ye know I'm a thief? I was in Pittsburg for a year.

Polly drew her breath hard. A prayer to God for help went up from her heart in that second of time. She held out both hands.

Yes, Joe told me. But this is all over now—all, all over. You have begun new again, brother Tom, come.

She put her hand in his arm as they walked down the street. He did not speak to her until they came back. Then he stopped her again at the gate. My sisters have never been seen with me in public since I came back. I'll never forget this of you, Mary, never.

A month later the squire said to his wife, Did you know Mary was going over his mathematicians with Tom? Regularly coaching him. This little girl has the clearest head for figuring I ever knew. But what can be her object?

Mrs. Demming cleared her voice before she could speak. She has applied to some of her friends in Kentucky to give him a situation. Father I think there may be a chance for the boy. He wants to begin his life all over again among strangers.

God help him muttered the squire. He surprised Polly when he met her next time by taking her in his arms and kissing her with tears in his eyes.

In the Spring Tom went to Kentucky and began his life anew. He has not broken down in it.

It was in the Spring, too, that Uncle Ben began to fail. The old man was so fond of Polly that she gave up most of her time to him; so much of it, indeed, that Joe complained.

Don't say a word, dear, she said, he has such a little while to stay. Let me do what I can.

I say, Polly, was that the Bible you were reading to him today?

Yes. He asks for it often.

Joe began a whistle and choked down with a sigh. Uncle Ben had been such a godless reprobate in his youth that it had never occurred to any one of the Demmings that there was any way to reach his soul. He lived until late in the Summer. The Sunday before his death he sent for Dr. Floid and talked to him for a long time.

When the young minister came out of the dying man's room he was pale. He had been much moved.

I will give him the sacrament tomorrow, he said to Squire Demming.

You think him worthy of it?

If sincere repentance can make any of us worthy, he is. He asked that little Polly should take it with him. She has done this for me, he said. It's her work.

The girls overheard the conversation. They sat gravely silent after the minister was gone.

I do not understand Polly, said Grace at last. She never seemed to me a religious person.

Perhaps, said the squire, we have not clearly understood what religion is. We took to much for granted.

THE END.

The New Line Fence.

If there ain't them hens again, said Elias Long, setting down the milk-pail on the kitchen porch with a jerk. The stout pleasant-faced woman to whom he spoke paused in her doorway with her bare arms twisted into her calico apron, and regarded the offenders mildly.

They were struggling through one of the numerous gaps in the broken down fence which separated Mr. Long's garden from that of his neighbor, Alvin Talcott—a procession of nine, clucking in a crooning way and stepping high. They came on with composed deliberation, pausing among the cucumbers with a contemplative air, skirting radishes after a dissatisfied survey, and settling down at last among the tomatoes with a chorus of victorious clucks.

It ain't going to do, said Mr. Long, wiping a disturbed face with his old red silk handkerchief. I ain't going to stand it.

It ain't likely he's thought of it, said his wife tranquilly.

He can't think of nothing but that pesky croquet business, rejoined Mr. Long, erking his head toward his neighbor's yard from which the sound of voices and the click of mallets proceeded.

Oh, laws, Elias! Mrs. Long began in easy remonstrance; but her husband had seized an old tin dipper from the porch shelf and was making for the tomato patch as fast as his 60 years would permit. There was a wild cackling and scattering as he threw his dipper in the midst of the scattering flock, pursued them unrelentingly to the fartherest possible point, and leaned exhaustingly against the sunken gate of the dilapidated fence. It was sunken with the weight of the many friendly chats held across it since the long ago period of its erection; chats held at all times of day and upon all subjects—politics, mowing-machines, fertilizers, sewing societies, crochet patterns, raised cake recipes, etc.

Mr. Talcott's croquet ground was before him. Mr. Talcott himself stood near, leaning the weight of his small and wiry person on his mallet; his hat over one ear, his cheerful round face shining with eagerness, his whole attitude expressive of watchful and profound absorption.

Mr. Long surveyed the scene with displeasure. He had originally, strongly disapproved of Mr. Talcott's croquet ground. He had not been sure that croquet was not on a level with a "keerd" playing and gambling, and that a deacon of a church and a member of town council should countenance and encourage such iniquity was a subject for grave reflection.

From this—after frequent glimpses and occasional considerations of the game, the fence—he had softened to the opinion that it was a waste of time and a pack of foolishness; falling gradually into the habit, despite his convictions, of observing it regularly—graduating from the fence to Mr. Talcott's doorsteps, and thus acquiring a tolerable knowledge of its baleful methods. He had even been known to manifest an interest in the game, to tender advice in a crisis, to give his opinions on a disputed point, to join in applause of a good strike.

But he had always considered his presence was something of a reproof and restraint. Just now, as he stood frowning down the long bewicketed ground, nothing could convince him that he had ever retreated in the least from his primal attitude of righteous disapproval.

Mr. Long shifted his position nearer.

You'll have to keep them hens of you'rn to home, he said. They're spoiling my garden just about as fast as they can manage it.

Mr. Talcott's smiling face hardened. It was not the first time his neighbor had mentioned the hens; though never hitherto with so much decision.

I don't really know as its any of my concern, he said you can't expect for me to be chasing hens erlastingly.

I don't know but what you better be chasing hens than wasting time over this here, responded his neighbor, surveying the croquet ground with sternness on his long-featured face.

Mr. Talcott's small bright eyes snapped. You hain't no call, as I know of, to give no opinion whatsoever, he retorted.

(Concluded in our next.)