

A WORKER'S PRAYER.

If there be good in that I wrought,
Thy hand compelled it, Master, Thine;
Where I have failed to meet Thy thought,
I know, through Thee, the blame is mine.

One instant's toil to Thee denied
Stand'st all eternity's offence;
Of that I did with Thee to guide,
To Thee, through Thee, be excellence.

Who, lest all thought of Eden fade,
Brings Edea to the craftsman's brain,
God-like to muse o'er his own trade
And man-like stand with God again.

The depth and dream of my desire,
The bitter paths wherein I stray,
Thou knowest who has made the fire,
Thou knowest who has made the clay.

One stone the more swings to her place
In that dread temple of Thy worth;
It is enough that through Thy grace
I saw not common on Thy earth.

Take not that vision from my ken;
Oh, whatsoever may spoil or speed,
Help me to need no aid from men
That I may help such men as need.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

THE ABSENCE OF MISS AGATHA.

"It is from Helena." Mrs. Ardell laid down the letter and twirled her pincenez between her taper finger tips. "She wants Agatha to pay her a visit." "Agatha!" exclaimed May in astonishment. "What does she want with Agatha?"

May was the beauty of the family. "She does not speak a word of French or Spanish!" declared Ida, who had gone in for the languages. "Nor sing a note!" cried Grace whose voice was her particular pride. And the three, in quite honest ignorance of the ill-breeding their amazement implied, stared across the table at Agatha. Her mild little mother looked at her, too, but with covert tenderness. Her father lifted his gentle, absent gaze to the countenance of his youngest and least accomplished daughter. And Harry, the son of the house, paused in his eager efforts to dispose of all the buttered toast on the table long enough to remark that Agatha could make crackin' good cake, you bet! But this eulogy passed unheeded.

Miss Ardell re-read the letter of invitation this time aloud. Mme. de Villiers wrote that she had always entertained delightful memories of the visit Agatha had paid her when the latter was quite a little girl. If the young lady was as dear as the child she had been she would love to have her spend a few weeks with her.

"We called, you remember, mamma, since she established herself in Chicago." May, "faultily faultless" of feature, and complacently conscious that her new kimono was becoming, looked languidly toward her mother. "She has a great, gloomy old barracks of a house. I don't believe there's a bit of furniture in it less than a hundred years old. I wouldn't visit there for the world!"

"My sister is trying to make her northern residence as like as possible to the Louisiana home of which she was so fond, until unbearably sad memories caused her to abandon it," put in Dr. Ardell.

"She has even bought lots adjacent to her own that she may have a walled-in garden, I've been told," supplemented Grace.

"Well, I shouldn't have gone had she asked me!" put in Ida with decision. "She has lots of money, but she can't be expected to die for many a year, and—"

"Ida!" interrupted the doctor, sternly. She colored, and became silent. Mrs. Ardell spoke with amicable haste. "We have not allowed Agatha to say a word. Do you wish to go, Agatha?"

"Would I?" glowing with delight at the possibility. "Indeed, yes, I had such a lovely time when I visited Aunt Helena in New Orleans. Of course, that's a long time ago. I was only 10 then. Now, I'm 22—"

Harry snickered. "That's three years younger'n Grace, and five years younger'n Ida, and—"

"Harry, leave the room!" cried May, crimsoning. But Harry only winked at her and helped himself to more toast.

"Agatha shall go if she wishes," said the host of the house rising. "Even if the change is only from a western suburb to the south side, it will do her good."

"Why, she is always well." May lifted her brows slightly. "Aren't you, Aggie?"

"Of course," chimed in Ida. "No studies to tax her mind."

"No long hours of practicing," agreed Grace. "I am going to my lesson now."

"My Spanish conversation class meets at 11," said Ida, rising.

"Oh, I'd almost forgotten my appointment with the dressmaker!" ejaculated May.

Even Harry announced that he was "goin' finish' with a feller," and disappeared.

Agatha, the little brown sparrow of the house, the Martha who "was solicitous about many things," had been gone ten days when old Dr. Ardell brought a young physician home with him to dinner. His name was a familiar one to the household. His fame as

the most promising young surgeon of the city has been exploited. The conservatism of the elder medical man has mellowed into liberal praise when he spoke of the intellectual power and scientific achievements of the younger. His welcome was assured. He was flutteringly received by the three young ladies and their mother. Not one of them, however, was prepared for his dashing presence and personal charm. May rejoiced that her hair was elaborately coiffured, and her gown cut to show her round throat to advantage. Ida kept the conversation scintillating, and rather unintelligible, by her brilliant remarks made in different foreign tongues. And after dinner Grace played her noisiest and sang her loudest for his especial delectation. But throughout the dinner and the social evening that followed Dr. Ryder was frequently perplexed by the reference to Agatha. These began when his host made a little testy remark about the soup.

"You know Agatha is not at home," his wife reminded him. "She always attended to that."

Ida spoke of having been allowed to take a rare reference book home from the public library on payment of a deposit. "I might as well take it back at once," she concluded, with a rueful laugh. "I had forgotten Agatha was not here to copy out the pages I wish to study." Grace, turning her music upside down to find a particular piece, apologized for its untidy condition by saying that when Aggie was absent they did not know where to find things. When Dr. Ryder asked about the internal management of a certain city hospital it was his host who replied: "If my youngest girl was here she could tell you about that. She visits there." Mrs. Ardell smilingly protested her ignorance of a certain book. "My sight," she said, "will not permit me to read much. Agatha always reads aloud to me." Harry added his unconsidered tribute to his sister when Dr. Ryder had helped him to unravel a snarl of fishing tackle over which he was floundering. "Jimminy!" he exclaimed. "You're most as smart as Ag! I ain't had a real easy time since she went away."

"Where is she?" asked Ryder, his curiosity aroused.

"Over to Aunt Helena's, on the South Side—De Villiers her last name is."

"Not from New Orleans?" quickly.

"That's it. Do you know her?"

"I used to know her well, indeed, once. I was only a boy then. I'm a southerner myself, you know. She was good to me."

"She an' Ag pull it off together. The other girls ain't got much use for her, no more'n I," here he choked over his joke, "have got any use for the other girls, see?"

"Good night," said the host, shaking hands heartily when the hour for farewells came. "Hope Agatha will be back when you come next!"

But she was not there on his subsequent visits, and he called frequently. So frequently, in truth, that May had two new gowns in process of creation, that Ida admitted to her own heart she had always admired the Saxon style of beauty, and that Grace was practicing the precise amount of tenderness advisable to bestow in a single glance when she sang a melting song.

The truth of the matter was that Mme. de Villiers was ill, and Agatha could not leave her.

"Of course, if you need me more, mother dear," she wrote, "I'll come home. But she is rather dependent on me, although there are so many servants here. The old house is delightful, and the garden will be a miracle of beauty one of these days."

No one went over to see her except Harry. In triangular Chicago friends who live south, west or north may meet seldom, if ever. Harry's information concerning his visit was meagre and unsatisfactory.

"She's livin' in a rummy old palace. She's lookin' fine—gettin' to beat you slick, May. The lunch was a buster—that's so. I had a boss time! Say, I told her about the new feller you girls had got!"

"Who? No? What did she say?"

"Didn't say nothin'. Jest got redder'n alls out, an' laughed—an' laughed!"

But there came a day when Mrs. Ardell was left long to her own companionship, and in her loneliness a sense of maternal jealousy smote her with cruel pain. Agatha might grow to care more for this aunt of hers—she must come home at once!

Agatha came promptly.

"Well, you've improved!" May looked critically at the little face which was not pretty except for its fine teeth, clear, happy eyes, and shining brown hair. Grace and Ida instantly besieged her with selfish demands. They told her, too, about their new and distinguished acquaintance.

"Do fix up to-night," May said. She felt passe beside her youngest sister. The consciousness made her irritable. "Don't be dowdy. He is coming. Look as well as you can."

"I will," promised Agatha, cheerfully.

And she did. It was not only the charming gown of cerise foulard and chiffon which her aunt had given her that brought out her best points. Her father had missed her and inferred it. Her mother was happy to have her back and said so. Harry had given her


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his latest slang—with a bear hug thrown in—which was delightfully reassuring. And even the selfish appeals of the girls had testified their satisfaction in her return. Then—there was a remembrance away back in a corner of her heart which would in itself have lent her demure distinction.

So not even May could find fault with her appearance when Dr. Ryder was announced. It was really with a reflected sense of gratification that she duly presented him.

"I have met Dr. Ryder before," said Agatha. But she was a poor actor. She turned rosy red.

"Where?" asked Dr. Ardell.

"In New Orleans, twelve years ago." It was the young physician who answered. "My father's garden joined that of Mme. de Villiers. I was eighteen then—Miss Agatha much younger. We had some beautiful times didn't we?"

"And this," asked Mrs. Ardell in gentle surprise, "is your first meeting since?"

"Not exactly. Tell them the truth, Agatha!"

Agatha looked up at him imploringly. "You do!" she entreated.

"Well, when Harry told me my old friend lived in Chicago, and when I learned the little girl I used to know—whom you all missed so much—was visiting there, I went over. Since Mme. de Villiers has been ill I've been attending her. Now, dear."

Agatha lifted her hand. She turned shyly the little golden circlet on the third finger until a blazing diamond was revealed.

"Engaged!" gasped the beauty of the family.

The mother was kissing Agatha—her father shaking Ryder's hand.

"And she only speaks English!" panted Ida to Grace.

"And does not sing or play!" came a horrified whisper in return. Harry's ecstatic convulsions would have earned him the title of "The Human Jack-knife."

"Bully!" he cried. "I'll go live with you, Ag. Gee—whizz!"

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