

The Story Page.

Seven Seminary Girls.

K. F. GLEASON, IN "YOUTH'S COMPANION."

At a small table in the rear of the seminary dining-room, seven Freshmen sat the first evening of the opening term. They gazed pensively at the table, mentally comparing its plain white tea-set and prim little pieces of bread, butter and cold meat with the dainty appointments and tempting food of the tea-tables in their several homes.

"My friends," said Katie Hicks, impressively, "we are gathered about this festal board, which, under the circumstances, I might call 'The Woman's Board,' to celebrate our entrance into this excellent institution. But when you think of it," she dropped her oratorical manner, "are not we ourselves the *bored*? I, for one, wish that I had remained at home, an ignoramus, feasting on whipped cream and angel-cake."

The laugh that greeted this attempt at wit served to break an awkward silence, and soon the group were chatting merrily.

"Girls," proposed Elizabeth Kingsley, "let's us agree to keep together as long as we stay at Lowrie."

"We are seven," said Sallie Rand, solemnly. "Let us never admit an eighth."

"Pup, friendship and frivolity; to these we pledge ourselves," chimed in Molly Reed.

"To the long life of 'The Woman's Board!'" cried Kate; and thus was formed a club which, six months later, was generally recognized as a strong influence in the school. Many a girl longed to join it; but "The Woman's Board" insisted that seven was a perfect number, and refused to add to it.

When these girls were Juniors a new girl appeared at the seminary, and in their class—a tall, shabbily-dressed girl, with a pale, resolute face and a haughty manner.

"Her name is Harriet Fancher," announced Belle Simpson.

"Her father was a missionary in India before he died, and Harriet's going to be one, too, just as soon as she is educated," added Sally Rand.

"Poor thing!" said Bess Kingsley, the class president. "She must be lonely, so far away from her friends. I'm going over to speak to her."

"I'm not going to wait for an introduction," Bess said, cordially, as she reached the stranger, who was bending over a lexicon in the schoolroom, although it was recreation hour. "I'm Elizabeth Kingsley. Don't you want to meet some of the girls? It's too bad to interrupt your Latin, but we are all anxious to know you. Come, please do!"

Harriet Fancher looked at the out-stretched hand, and answered, coldly, "Thank you, but I have no time for social pleasures. I am here for higher things."

Bess flushed to the roots of her pretty hair as she withdrew with a murmur of apology. She walked slowly down the corridor to her room, where Sally and Kate awaited her.

"I got unmercifully scrubbed, that's all," said Bess, quietly, in answer to their questions. "Let's not talk about it."

The girls asked no more, for Bess's word was law with them, but Sally shook her fist at an imaginary Harriet Fancher, muttering, "You mean old Pharisee! You'll wait long for your next invitation from the Board!"

After that few girls ventured to make any friendly advance to the new girl. Trained from babyhood to one great purpose, Harriet could find no room in her life for any other interests. Her dead father was the only person whom she had ever really loved, and now she hugged to her lonely heart the life-work which he had left her, and tried to satisfy with this the hunger of a strong nature.

A course at Lowrie would fit her for her work, and when an aunt offered her the money for this purpose she accepted it, and left her home in India for two years of school life. Absorbed in dreams of self-renunciation, the life of the butterfly girls about her seemed frivolous. She watched Elizabeth Kingsley carelessly throw down a dollar in payment for a bunch of roses, and thought, "What wicked extravagance! What good I could do if I had half that she wastes upon flowers and confectionery!" She did not notice that Bess showered her sweets on such of her friends as had less pocket-money, and by her gifts of rose-buds or fragrant violets lightened many an hour for little lame Polly Harris, and the shabby, beauty-loving French teacher, Mademoiselle Buzet.

"Belle there's a Board meeting to-night in Kate's room," said Bess to Belle Simpson, one day in the hall.

"I'll be there, Queen Bess, you may be sure," said Belle, and walked on. As she passed a door Harriet Fancher came forth, her dark eyes lighted up with pleasure.

"Excuse me, Miss Simpson, but I overheard your words. Is there a branch of the 'Woman's Board' here?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Belle, mischievously. "We meet to-night with Miss Hicks."

"Of course I wish to join it. I'll try to meet with you to-night." Harriet turned back to the school-room while Belle fairly danced away in enjoyment of her joke.

Evening found the seven gathered in the large room which Katie Hicks shared with Molly Reed. In the middle stood a table spread with crackers, olives, jam and cookies, while seven dainty cups awaited with chocolate which Katie was concocting.

"Girls," said Belle, lazily, from her steamer-chair, "would you like to admit a new member?"

"No!" "Never!" rose a chorus.

With provoking deliberation Belle proceeded, "Because we've had—an application."

"Belle, you tease, you are making this all up," said Grace Mitchell.

"Indeed, I'm not. Harriet Fancher spoke to me about it this very afternoon," replied Belle in an injured tone.

The girls faces were a study.

"The impertinent, audacious—" but then came a rap at the door. It opened, and the surprised girls saw Harriet Fancher.

"Excuse my coming," she said, a little confused at the startled hush of the group, "but I know I am welcome at any meeting of the Woman's Board, because of our common sympathy."

She paused, but the girls seemed dumb with amazement, except Bess Kingsley, who came to the rescue.

"Miss Fancher, it is we who should apologize for not letting you know that our Board is just a little social club, and not for missions at all. But we are glad to see you, and—won't you sit down and have a cup of chocolate and a little chat? We are all Juniors, too, so we have a common sympathy after all."

Bess, sorry for Harriet's embarrassment, forgot everything else in her effort to put her at ease, and her cordial words were echoed by the others.

But Harriet, feeling hurt, only replied stiffly, "It is I who should apologize, surely. You must pardon my intrusion," and withdrew.

After she had gone Kate scolded Belle for her practical joke. Belle, while she could not control her laughter at its success, protested that she did not expect that Harriet would come.

As the days went by, Harriet grew more and more reserved, and the girls gave up all attempts to gain her friendship; yet they could not but admire her ability as a student. Elizabeth Kingsley had been for two years without a rival in the class; now she found Harriet a dangerous candidate for the first place.

"It's no use to try for the Junior prize for the best debator, mourned Sallie one day. "Bess Kingsley is sure of it."

"Unless—there's Harriet Fancher, you know," suggested Kate, doubtfully.

"The idea of her beating Bess!" cried Belle, indignantly. But soon the whole class realized that the contest would be close.

Early in April Bess Kingsley went to Professor Raymond's office to consult with him about the Junior reception, the great social event of the year at Lowrie. Professor Raymond, who was the principal, met her with a hurried, "In a few minutes, Miss Kingsley. Please be seated. I'll not detain you long." Saying which, he withdrew into the inner office.

Some one, closeted with him, was talking in low, earnest tones. Bessie seated herself before the fireplace, and fell into a day-dream of reception favors and party gowns, until suddenly she heard a passionate cry: "Then I must give it all up, at least for a long time. Professor Raymond, you will think me childish, but you can't know what this delay means to me!"

Bess wondered if she were dreaming when she recognized the voice of Harriet Fancher. Could that cold, self-contained girl be all but sobbing in the next room?

The Professor made some response in soothing tones, and Bess heard a door open and close, as the visitor withdrew.

The professor himself appeared a minute later, with his usual courteous, controlled manners, but Bess thought he seemed troubled.

"Professor Raymond," she said, impulsively, "I am sorry, but I could not help hearing a little. May I ask—could you tell me, is Miss Fancher in trouble—or oughtn't I to ask?"

"There is no objection, I think," he replied, after a little hesitation. "It will soon be known throughout the seminary. Miss Fancher's aunt has just died, and with her death her payments for Miss Harriet's education end, and she must postpone her cherished plans, and teach for a while before going on with her studies here. Now for the Junior plans, please, Miss Elizabeth."

At dinner that day Miss Fancher was in her place, paler

than usual, but controlled, though there was a suspicious redness about her eyes.

When the Board came to Bess's room in the evening, to discuss the reception, she made no response to their knocks, but continued to lie on her bed in the darkness, engaged "in a good think."

"There ought to be some way to help her," she thought. "But how?" Then, "But she is so disagreeable! And the girls won't want to help. And—and—if she leaves now, I am sure of the prize for debate."

She flushed with shame at this thought; she felt the hot color mount as she lay in the dark, and she said to herself, "Elizabeth Kingsley, you contemptible creature, are you so mean as that?" But a moment later she added, "Why need I trouble myself about the girl who has snubbed me so systematically?"

The next morning her mind was made up. A hastily summoned meeting of the Board found her pale and tired, but with a new light in her eyes. And with a little tremble of sympathy she told what she had heard about Harriet Fancher.

"Oh Bess, do you think that we can help her?" cried the girls unanimously.

"I felt sure you would say this," replied Bess, gratefully. "I have a plan but I'm afraid you may not like it."

"Go on, Bess," cried Kate. "Your plans are not usually half-bad."

Bess made a mock courtesy to this compliment.

"Well, you know the reception comes next month, and we are planning for some pretty gowns and gloves and fine feathers, and most of us all will spend seventy-five or a hundred dollars before we get through with it. Papa will count himself lucky if my bills come within that for I've been preparing his mind for two years. Well, my dears, I shall ask him for this money, but there will be no new gown for this child."

Bess paused, and the girls were silent for a minute. "Elizabeth Kingsley, do you mean that you, the Junior's president, intend to stay away from the reception?" Belle asked, tragically.

"Why, no; I shall go in the simple muslin gown which the heroine always wears in novels."

"Bessie you are an old jewel!" cried Sallie, while Kate went up to Bess and kissed her softly.

"No, girls, I came near being very mean and cowardly about this," said Bess; and Belle placed her small hand over Bess's lips, and the Board set up three vigorous cheers for the Junior's president.

"What my president does, I shall do," said Belle.

"And I!" "Me, too," chimed in the others.

Bessie's blue eyes glistened. "Girls, you make me proud of my class," she said.

What an odd whim of the Woman's Board to wear those plain white gowns," remarked many a student at the reception. But the Board kept their old counsel, and gave to Professor Raymond a roll of bank-notes labelled, "For Miss Fancher, from her friends."

It took all the professor's tact to persuade Harriet to take the money, but she finally consented, and her pale face was radiant as she went about her work. The girls forgot their old prejudices as they felt her softened manner, and greeted her with their first cordiality.

When the prize debate took place the subject chanced to be the relative importance of home and foreign missions. Bess spoke with ease and natural grace in her defence of home missions, but the dark-eyed girl, who had lived and worked, suffered and buried her dead in a foreign field, spoke with burning eloquence, and carried her audience with her. And Bess was the first to congratulate the victor, and graciously took second place.

It was many years before Harriet knew why the seven had appeared in simple muslin dresses at the Junior's reception, but long before this she had learned to appreciate these girls, who seemed so gay and easy-living, but were at heart so kind. It was a good lesson for them, too, to see a girl no older than themselves bravely entering upon a life of hardship and danger, with simple, womanly courage. They soon forgot Harriet's stiff little ways, and admired her strength of character.

"The Heathen Woman's Friend" is getting quite popular," said a student one day, with a sneer on her pretty lips.

"Miss Fancher is my friend," responded Miss Kingsley, warmly, and the speaker never repeated the epithet.

So it came about that the Woman's Board of Lowrie Seminary really sent a missionary to India, although their avowed aim was "fun," and not missionary work.

The barn and outbuildings of T. H. Forrest, a Spearville, near Benton, Carleton county, were totally destroyed by fire Tuesday. All of his hay, grain, farm implements, etc., went up in smoke and twelve head of cattle were burned to death. Loss over \$1,000; uninsured.