

Mother Meredith's Call.

BY SARAH AVERY FAUNCE.

The minister was unusually quiet that evening, even taking into account the facts that it was Monday, and that the afternoon had been spent in a round of parish calls.

"Have you had a trying day, dear?" his wife asked, as they sat together in the firelight.

"No, Katharine, but I have had a call."

"What? Where? Who? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because it came only this afternoon. It was from Mother Meredith."

"Russell Armstrong, what are you talking about? This isn't the first of April," said Mrs. Armstrong, rather indignantly, for she lived in constant expectation that some day a flourishing church with a large field and high standing would feel that her husband was the one needed to fill its pulpit.

Mother Meredith was a widow, whose own children had long ago grown up and moved away, while she still kept on in the old place, mothering everything, from lame dogs to young ministers, with a loving impartiality which left nothing to be desired.

"She was at church yesterday morning," Mr. Armstrong continued.

"As usual, the dear old saint," said his wife.

"She wished that she could be a Mormon."

There had been in Westdale within a few weeks two ardent apostles of Brigham Young, distributing leaflets, which set forth the advantages, both here and hereafter, of belonging to the "One great church of God." Awful visions of the good old lady as their proselyte flitted through Mrs. Armstrong's mind as she waited for her husband to tell the rest of his story.

"I dropped in to see her this afternoon for a few minutes' chat and a bit of the tonic that such a talk always gives. We had talked of the good collection for the Church Building Society, and of the large congregation at the morning service, when she exclaimed, suddenly, 'Well, I never wished till yesterday that I was a Mormon woman, but I sha'n't dare to say a word against 'em ever again, for I'd liked to 'a' been one for three minutes.'"

"Why, Mother Meredith," I said, "have those remarkable traits about town corrupted you so soon?"

"No, but after I got home from meetin', I kep' a sayin', I wish I was Mr. Armstrong's wife." To tell the truth, Katharine, I was a little embarrassed for a second, despite the difference in our ages and the pleasing recollection that the law of the land would admit no such possibility, so I rallied my common sense and waited.

"If I had a-been, I'd asked you three questions that might have helped you to be some broader-minded, if you'll forgive me for sayin' so, Mr. Armstrong."

"This was quite a shock to me, for I had prided myself that the morning's discourse showed more than my usual breadth of thought. 'May I ask what you mean?' I said, somewhat on the defensive.

"Oh, yes. Just you wait till I get you some of the maple sugar, with butternuts in it, that Nahum sent down last week, and, while you eat the sweet stuff, maybe you can stan' it easier to hear my old woman's talk." While I settled myself for the double treat, she settled herself to give the advice.

"I guess that first I'd 'a' said, 'Well husband, who of the Lord's children was at church today an' what did they seem to need?' Then I'd let you think about 'em."

"There was Silas Martin first. He ain't been out to meetin' before since his wife died, an' you know he's a trying to let liquor alone an' be a decent sort of a man."

"There was Mary Osgood. She lives with that rascal's aunt of hers, who would put any good, self-respectin' file to shame if it once see how she can do work. Mary's got means, but, dear sakes, she don't have no peace of mind from one week's end to another."

"Mis' Holbrook was out, too. I s'pose her husband's a smart enough man, good provider an' all that, but, when it comes to religion, he ain't any great on sympathy."

"Then up in the singers' seats was that pretty little Nellie Shaw. Somehow she always puts me in mind of a rosy-cheeked apple that was good an' sound till somebody put it in amongst a lot of half-spiled ones. That child needs a little bit of sly-handed warnin' from some where."

"Now you'll want a drink of spring water after that sugar, won't you?" and she hurried out to get it for me, coming back with a hospitable smile that revived me more than the water.

"I suppose you noticed Cap'n Hodge's wife? Queer, ain't it, how quick folks forget how the Lord's led 'em through deep waters an' never failed 'em once? Seems if just as soon as she had that money come, so unexpected, she kind of put her soul into a colander, with all her good feelin's let through, an' only dry, chippy ones left to live on."

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"I couldn't keep my eyes off Susan Whitmarsh. What a time she does have! Nobody in the family ever got into the habit of dyin', as I know of, but they do make terrible dreary work of livin'. Somehow she never had a real, consolin', upliftin' sorrier that you could feel to sympathize with her for, right to her face, but, if I was in her place, I should feel as if the furniture had all been taken out of my house an' a lot of tombstones moved in by mistake!"

Mr. Armstrong paused in his story to take breath and lose himself in thought.

"Well, was that all she said? What has that to do with a call?" his wife asked, presently.

"No, that was not all. It was only the beginning, but it set me to thinking then as it has now. After she had given me time to see in my own mind who had sat before me, she went on."

"Then I should have asked, 'What kind of help did you give those poor, wantish souls?' Now, as near's I can remember, you told 'em that the President's plannin' was all out o' gear, but I don't seem to recollect that you told 'em how to set him straight. Then you said that England hadn't got any right to set up an' say that she's always goin' to tell those Dutchmen 'shall an' sha'n't.' I did agree with you strong on that p'int, but, all the time you was talkin', I kep' a-sayin' to myself, 'What's that got to do with Silas's fightin' liquor torments an' Susan Whitmarsh gettin' hardened up some against this week's pile o' blues?'"

"Here I plucked up courage," said Mr. Armstrong, "to ask her if she supposed that I could cover in one sermon the troubles of a whole congregation."

"No, I don't," said she, "but I do believe you've got a call to tell folks here in Westdale about a kingdom that's higher than Victoria's, even if they do brag about hers bein' so united."

"Don't you think," I asked, "that a minister should try to lead his people into principles of good government?"

"I guess," she answered, slowly, "if I'd been called to be a shepherd, instead of tellin' the sheep all about a pack o' wolves a-quarrelin' an' fightin' over in the next field, I should have tried, first of all, to lead 'em into a good, fresh pasture of the Lord's love an' got 'em to drink of the water of life. Folks talk a lot about politics, an' they do need fixin' that's a fact, but I've always reckoned that the place to do it warn't the Lord's house. There was a spell, about the middle of your sermon, when I thought you was really goin' to preach,—that time when you said the hymn about

"How shall I follow Him I serve?"

"Jesus didn't say to Peter, 'Now, Peter, when I'm gone, you just go to work an' get this Roman government on a good basis,' though I guess Peter was as capable as some there be now-a-days, an' likely would 'a' been glad o' the job. But he says, 'Peter, there's a lot o' my sheep starvin' right here round home, where there's good pasture land and plenty. See if you can't coax 'em to stop croppin' poor stuff an' eat somethin' sustainin'. An' here's my lambs, Peter, I know you're real tender feelin'; see if you can't cosset 'em up a mite, an' give 'em some good, warm milk o' the Word.'"

"Then she put her trembling old hand on my shoulder, and said, 'Oh, I'm sure the Lord would a deal rather you'd let him do the turnin' and overturnin' of the nations an' put out all your strength to feed those that's in your care, so that they'll get more comfort themselves, and be a credit to him who has branded 'em with his own blessed name.'"

The minister's voice broke in a sob.

"Katharine," he said, when speech came again, "do you, too, hear my call to higher things? With God's help, from this time, I will throw away the husks that I have been giving my people, and give them food."

"George Herbert saw the need when he said,

"Find out men's wants and wills,
And meet them there,"

was her reply.—The Congregationalist.

Beginning at the Bottom.

BY PRISCILLA LEONARD.

Cousin Martha sighed as she poked the fire. Now, my cousin being the cheeriest of cherry women, and having preserved the said cheerfulness steadily through the stress and strain of bread-winning for the family until all her brothers and sisters had been educated and started in the world, (so that now she had only other people's brothers and sisters and sons and daughters to worry herself over), it naturally surprised me to hear such a despondent sound.

"What is the matter?" I ventured to ask. "Are you working too hard? You know I've always told you—"

"Of course you have," said my cousin. "If I had listened to my friends, I would have found any position too hard for me to keep, but, as I use my own judgment, I am in very good health today, thank you, and have always been able to do what I have had to do. There's a

good deal of nonsense talked of about overwork, Maria, in my opinion. But overwork isn't what made me sigh; it was the two callers I've had today. One wouldn't have depressed me so, if the other hadn't come afterward, but the two together were too much even for my usual optimism."

"What did they want?" I asked.

Experience has shown me that cousin Martha's generosity, being known, is always abused.

"Advice," said cousin Martha.

"I rather enjoy giving advice," said I. "It's never taken, you know, so there's no responsibility connected with it."

"Perhaps you can advise me then," replied my cousin, "and I will pass it on, for I felt that I had none of my own that met the emergency."

"Very well. Unfold the case, and I will be consulting physician."

"If you can cure, you'll do wonders," said cousin Martha. "But here are the facts: This morning an old friend of mine, whom I hadn't seen for years, came to consult me. She had heard that I supported myself and made a good income, so she was sure that I could tell her what her second daughter could do to make money. It seems the family have lost money, and there isn't enough to live comfortably, especially as the eldest daughter has just married and the wedding was a heavy expense. Why is it, Maria, that families who are in straits for money always have such expensive weddings and funerals?"

"It belongs to the necessary incongruities of life, apparently," I replied. "But what could the second daughter do? Has she any talents?"

"Do!" echoed my cousin. "That was just it. Eleanor is rather delicate, her mother said, 'nervous and not strong, though the doctor says there is nothing really the matter—doctors are so indifferent, you know, in such cases.' And she went on to say, in answer to my questions, that of course Eleanor couldn't teach, because she could not stand the strain of patience and attention necessary with children, and that she really didn't understand arithmetic very well. She could not go into library work because 'she would be required to be on her feet so much, and the hours were so long, and no vacation to speak of; she could not be a companion because 'her nerves could not stand it,' or a stenographer and typewriter for the same reason. And, beside, what she wanted was not hard work every day, at beginners' wages, but some way of making money. Did I think she could get a place to write for the papers,—not a reporter's place, but just on the staff somewhere? Or what did I think of her taking up burnt wood-work—frames and plaques and things of that kind? Eleanor had some little taste for drawing, and that kind of work seemed to sell in the stores."

"But there are tons of it done," I said, "and by quick, skilled workers, too, who have studied designing. A novice could never make money at that!"

"So I told her," said cousin Martha. "And I told her that I didn't know of any paper that wanted novices on its staff. I told her I really didn't know of any such place as she desired for her daughter, or any occupation that filled the conditions. If I found any, I said I would let her know, and she said that she would drop in again soon to see me, and bring Eleanor with her, so there's a pleasing prospect for you! What is one to do with a girl who doesn't know how to do anything, and doesn't want to do anything, and still insists on being told how to make money?"

"Counterfeiting seems to be the only thing practicable," I suggested, "but then I have always heard that counterfeiting was skilled labor, and hard work at that."

"Certainly," replied my cousin. "A counterfeiter has to know something and do something, which wouldn't suit Eleanor at all. But I was going to tell you about my second caller. She came in this afternoon—a pretty woman, though, I should judge, well past thirty, and with a good manner. She introduced herself as Miss G—. A friend of mine had told her what a success I made of life (oh, she was very flattering indeed,) and she wanted some advice. She was left alone in the world by the death of her parents, and hadn't enough to live on, and she wanted some kind of a position. She was in good health, and she felt that she had executive ability and could run large affairs if opportunity only opened. She could truly say that she was systematic and had an unusual memory."

"I tried to think of something where system, memory, and executive ability were required, and suggested fitting herself for a private secretary. But when she found that typewriting and stenography had to be learned first, she said she could not undertake that drudgery. Then I spoke of photography; but she was not willing to learn the business by going into the lower grades, though she knew she could succeed in doing artistic work in a studio of her own, if somebody else did the developing and retouching and finishing and that sort of thing. As she had never even taken an amateur photograph, I felt that

idea was hard shopping. The someone who her customers buyers, but small for the she could star Maria, I tried ever heard of fish, and she if only it could successful was not in he I can think of "I don't w conviction.

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