

Family Reading.

The Shadow of the Cross.

If all my way on earth were bright
And joyous as could be,
I might forget the home of light
That waits for me;

If earthly riches manifold
Were given unto me,
I might forget the crown of gold,
The crystal sea;

If never earthly ties were riven,
I might not think
That there was friendship known in
heaven

With breakless link;

And so the All-wise Father sends
A shadow o'er life's dreams,
And heaven, because of sainted friends,
More lovely seems.

And as we toil and struggle hard
While in this vale we live,
How soul-inspiring the reward
That heaven shall give.

GEORGE L. HEATH.

New Select Serial.

A DEACON'S DAUGHTER.

BY MISS LILIAN F. WELLS.

CHAPTER XV. (Continued)

'We must try to find out whether she has a home and friends,' Mrs. Haliday said. 'If she has, there will of course be letters from them somewhere. I think the necessity is urgent enough to warrant our finding them, if we can.'

'You shall do it then, mother,' said Jessie, 'and no one else need see them. I feel sure Martha would be willing, if she knew.'

So Mrs. Haliday opened Martha's trunk, and the first thing she saw was a packet of letters. Opening one she found that it had been written from Sherwood, Vermont, and signed, 'Your loving sister, Huldah Parker.' Mrs. Haliday wrote at once to Huldah, telling her where and in what condition Martha was, and assuring her that they were doing all that they could do for the poor child. This letter was sent on Wednesday. On Friday morning, about nine o'clock, the Halidays' door-bell rang. Debby opened the door, and saw a tall, plainly-dressed, pleasant-faced man standing there, with a little, tired-looking woman by his side.

'Does Miss Lucy Haliday live here?' inquired the man.

'Yes, sir,' said Debby, holding the door open just wide enough to allow her face to be seen.

'She writ to my wife that her sister was here sick—Martha Stirling's her name.'

'Oh, then, you're some o' the young lady's relations, ain't you?' cried Debby, throwing the door wide open now.

'Come right in. Miss Haliday'll be glad to see you.'

Mrs. Haliday was glad to see them, indeed. Amos Parker's honest hearty manner, and Huldah's sweet face and gentle voice, won her heart and confidence at once.

'We got your letter yesterday morning,' said Amos, 'an' Huldah, there warn't no use tryin' to put her off. She would start for New York on the next train. So we took the children over to father's an' I let my plowin' go, an' we come right along.'

'Mrs. Haliday, how—how is Martha?' Can't I go right to her, please?' asked Huldah, anxiously.

Mrs. Haliday, realizing the sister's anxiety, rose at once and led the way. 'You must be prepared to see her very ill, indeed,' said she, pausing in the upper hall.

'Will she know me?' Huldah's voice trembled.

'I am afraid not. She is delirious, and talks incessantly.'

Despite this warning, Huldah started and grew pale as they went in. She would not have recognized her—the dark, heavy hair all gone, the glittering eyes and flushed face so full of suffering. Martha was talking rapidly, in low, unnatural tones, to some one she seemed to see beside her.

Huldah assumed her place beside the bed at once, thus greatly relieving Mrs. Haliday and Jessie. Amos started for home again soon after noon, leaving his wife to stay as long as she was needed.

For three long weeks the fever

burned fiercely on, and Martha's nurses scarcely dared to hope for her life. Day or night, there was scarcely a moment's cessation of Martha's delirious talking. It seemed as if there were nothing hard or sad throughout her whole life, even from her early childhood, that did not come back to torture her now.

To those who heard her, however, the saddest raving was the revelation of her soul's wanderings and misapprehensions. Her talk about what she called religion, plainly showed that she had never understood even the alphabet of the truth.

'Poor child!' sighed Mrs. Haliday once, as she and Jessie sat by the bedside, while Huldah rested. 'How strange that one can get so far into darkness when the light is just at hand!'

'I think I know why God sent her here, mother,' said Jessie, softly, her lips trembling and her eyes glistening with tears. 'It must be that he wants us to bring her into the light.'

'If that is his will—and I don't know why it should not be—may he give us grace and wisdom to do it!' returned Mrs. Haliday.

It was very trying for them all; but it ended at last. The crisis came and passed, and Martha's life was spared. But for days she was almost too weak to move or speak, and lay there, white and still, as if she might be one from whom a tormenting spirit had been cast out. When they spoke her name she would look up with a smile; but she paid little heed to what went on about her. She seemed to be taking a long, blessed rest; and they disturbed her as little as possible.

Huldah staid another week, and then went home again, scarcely knowing which was her stronger feeling—reluctance to leave Martha, or longing to get back to Amos and the children. But Martha was pronounced to be out of danger now, and rest and nourishing food were her chief necessities. Mrs. Haliday and Jessie declared that nursing her would be nothing but a pleasure now, and promised to send word of her progress every day or two.

Martha's strength returned very slowly; but as soon as her nurses would consent she was moved from her bed to an easy chair. It was then the end of May, and more than usually summer-like.

Just at this time Richard Haliday, Jessie's only brother, came home. He had completed his theological studies two years before, and for the past six months had been preaching for a friend at some distance from New York. This friend had now returned, and Richard, greatly to the joy of his mother and Jessie, came home again.

Minister of eight-and-twenty though he was, and grave and earnest when occasion required, yet he had not lost his boyishness, and kept the house astir with a sense of something pleasant going on.

Jessie had written to him of their first acquaintance with Martha. He knew, too, of Martha's sudden coming into his home, of her long and dangerous illness, of all the hopes and fears his mother and sister had felt for her, and of their deep joy and gratitude when she began to recover. Knowing all their interest in this stranger, it was very natural that he should be interested too, and desirous to see her.

Despite his curiosity, however, he was kept waiting two days after his arrival. Martha was not quite strong enough yet to bear the excitement of meeting a stranger, the careful nurses told him. But on the third morning he was taken in for an introduction, and allowed to stay just ten minutes.

He saw a face woefully white and thin, but full of character, and showing the strong soul that spoke through it—the mouth firm in spite of physical weakness, the eyes dark and beautiful, but with a look of restlessness, of eager questioning in them. What else there might be about her he could not tell. He only saw her face, and it haunted him.

'She is not at peace,' he said to himself. 'I could have seen that without knowing what Jessie had told me about her. I wonder if I can help her? I will try.'

The next day, he was allowed to stay in the room a little longer. As Martha gained strength, he saw her more frequently; by-and-by she was

brought into the sitting-room for the greater part of the day, and came to be looked upon as quite a member of the family.

And how had it been with Martha all through these weeks of convalescence? Had no new thoughts come to her in those days of helplessness dependence upon others? Did life and death look to her now just as they had done? No, that could scarcely be possible.

Thoughts had crowded in upon her which, welcome or not, she could not put aside. There were questions, too, that she asked herself again and again, without being able to answer them. One of them was this: Why had these people, strangers as they were, taken her in and cared for her as tenderly as they could care for one of their own kindred? One thing was certain; they could not have been actuated by motives of self-interest, for they knew she was only a school-teacher, and so could have no reason for expecting to gain anything from her. To be sure, she had a little money laid aside which she should give them as soon as she could get about again; but what did they know of that? And even if they did, what was a little money, or a great deal, either, in comparison with their ceaseless care of her and all their wonderful kindness? She could not understand it. Where now was her determination to 'walk alone and trust no one,' because there was no one worthy to be trusted—no one who was not blind and deaf to everything but his own self-interest and gratification. Had she been making some grand mistake? If so, what was it? She was to know soon.

In the soft twilight of these days of the late spring and early summer, the four—Mrs. Haliday, Richard, Jessie, and Martha—were together in the westward-facing sitting-room. These were hours to be remembered for all of them, but especially for Martha. She would lean back in her cushioned chair, speaking a little, now and then, but preferring to listen to the others while they talked. They talked of many things—this mother and son and daughter who were so much to each other—but no matter whatever might be the subject about which the conversation had begun, it was pretty sure to come round before very long to that which was the hope, the joy, the life of all three—the love and service of their blessed Lord.

And Martha listened, scornfully at first, then enviously, then wonderingly, at last with an eager, hungry craving. Her soul was famishing for such food as this. She saw at last how she had mistaken, misapprehended, misunderstood. It was not the religion of Christ that was at fault, but its poor human representatives. And his religion was not what she had thought at all—a mere binding of one's self to certain creeds and doctrines—it was the loving and serving of him who became our Ransom and is now our King.

Martha had heard of Jesus Christ all her life. But that was all. His name was only a name to her. He had called her, many times, but she had not known his voice, nor heeded the call. He had spoken to her at last through these faithful ones of his, and she was growing humble before him. One Lord's Day evening, early in June, the three were talking of him in low, reverent voices—talking of his death. Martha sat listening a little apart from the rest, her head bowed, her heart throbbing with emotion. As she thus sat earnestly thinking, there came over her a feeling as though he was there, that he was showing her his hands and his feet. She felt that he had died for her. But in an instant came the thought:

'Yes, he died for you, but you have doubted his truth and turned your back on him. Why should he pity you now?'

She rose hastily, for she was able to walk now, and went away into her room, closing the door behind her and turning the key. The three stopped talking, looked after her, and then at each other; and Jessie rose as if to follow.

'I would not go, dear,' said Mrs. Haliday.

Jessie sat down; and after a moment they began talking again—about Martha now. They had known her need for weeks now, and all three longed to help her;

but there seemed no way of doing it directly. They were sure, from what they had learned of her, that she would be likely to resent anything like what she would call 'interference' with her beliefs or disbeliefs. Indeed, Mrs. Haliday had ventured to question her a little on one occasion, and was soon made aware that Martha chose to be let alone. These friends of hers had been trying to devise some plan by which they might reach and help her, and all the time they were unconsciously carrying out their wishes by these quiet twilight talks. Martha had suspected a design in them at first, but was soon compelled to confess to herself that she was wrong. Her Saviour, working through these friends of his and hers, had won her gently nearer and nearer to himself, till now she was almost at his feet.

She stood still a moment after she had locked the door, as if waiting for something. In that instant, when she had seemed to see him, there had come, as it were, a great light into her soul. Then the awful word of condemnation had come, and the light went out. It was her soul that stood still, in a horrible darkness, waiting—waiting. 'It was now dark . . . Jesus had not come.'

Would he never come to her again? Was she really beyond his pity? Where was he? Why did he not stretch out his hand and save her? He could do it, if he would!

She dropped upon her knees. But she did not pray. Pray? How could she, with that load upon her soul? She was in the dark now, all alone. He had gone away, and she must wait for him to come back. And if he never came—if he had given her up now, and ceased to pity her, because she had sinned against him so—then—

By-and-by she rose, and lay down upon the bed. She was weak yet, and was afraid of losing what little strength she had. She would not close her eyes to sleep, for fear of letting go what seemed a last opportunity.

It was a night of agony. Not once did she lose her consciousness, but lay hour after hour with wide-opened eyes, hoping, longing to be assured that there was pity and salvation for her yet, but not thinking that she could have them for the asking; looking only at her life-long sin, knowing not that her Saviour was there. He was waiting too—waiting for her to believe and take what he so freely offered.

The light came again, and the radiant sun. Wearily Martha rose. It seemed, somehow, as if this were not the same world in which she had always lived. She was still waiting. Her soul was still in the depths, she unlocked her door, presently, and went through into the sitting-room. There, by the window, stood Richard Haliday. It was too late to go back now. He started, and came toward her, saying anxiously:

'Miss Stirling! what is the matter?' As he spoke he pushed forward a chair for her.

She could not help letting the cry of her soul come out then.

'It is all dark! Christ will not come to me! He will not pity me! Oh, my sins!'

Richard Haliday stood in silence before this that was so near despair. Then there was given him a word for her.

'He was nailed to the cross for your sins. How can you think he will not do what he died to be able to do? He does pity you. Do not look at your sins, but look at him! 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Speak to him and he will hear and answer you.'

The young minister's voice trembled with earnestness, his face glowed, his eyes shone through tears. As soon as he finished speaking, he went out and left her alone with Jesus.

She did speak to him then, and he heard and answered. Her soul came 'out of darkness into his marvelous light,' and 'she fell down at his feet and worshipped him.'

'Whosoever believeth in me shall never die,' is spoken, not of the body but of the soul. A soul charged with the Spirit of God is seasoned with the everlastingness of God.

Elsa's Lesson.

It was the evening for the Sunday school sociable, and Mrs. Duncan's large, brilliantly lighted parlors were filled to overflowing.

The young people were all there, not only the boys and girls, but the more sedate members of the Bible-class. They were gathered here and there in little groups, engaged in animated discussion and conversation or playing games, the hum of their merry voices showing how thoroughly they were enjoying the evening.

A group of five bright, laughing girls gathered around the piano seemed to be having a particularly enjoyable time. One might judge from their animated faces and occasional bursts of merry laughter at some witty remark of one of their number. They had criticised almost everybody in the room, not unkindly, but thoughtlessly and laughingly as girls do, and now they had paused a moment, partly for want of breath and partly because they had exhausted their store of brilliant criticisms.

'There comes May Dennis,' exclaimed one of the girls, as through the hall door she caught a glimpse of a new arrival. 'Girls, did you ever see anything like the way she dresses? It positively distracts my thoughts in church so that I can't think of anything but the horrible incongruity of a bright red bonnet and a blue dress. It only needs to have the dress as bright a blue as the bonnet is red to be the very perfection of ugliness.'

The girls laughed. They did not stop to think that May was the oldest of a large family, and that perhaps it was from necessity rather than choice she had to wear last year's bonnet with this year's dress, instead of getting a tasteful winter suit throughout. These five girls knew nothing about May's daily struggles to make old things look as well as new, not for herself only, but for all the little ones. They were warm-hearted girls, and if they had known, or even stopped to think about it, they would have warmly sympathized with her instead of laughing at her.

'There comes Joe Ellis,' announced Elsa, as the hall door opened to admit another late-comer.

'He's a nice-looking boy, isn't he?' remarked one of her companions. 'If he could only dress better, I don't think you could find a handsomer boy in the whole Sunday school.'

'Handsome is that handsome does,' quoted Elsa. 'I used to think he was nice looking enough until I found out what sort of a boy he was.'

'Why, what do you mean?' exclaimed the girls together.

'Well, I don't think he is much better than a thief,' replied Elsa. 'I will tell you all about it if you will promise not to breathe a word to a living soul. I wouldn't like to give him a bad name even if he does deserve it.'

'We won't ever breathe it; tell us all about it,' exclaimed Edna eagerly.

'Hush! here he comes,' and there was silence in the little group until the boy, a pleasant, manly fellow, had passed them with a bow and 'Good evening, young ladies.'

'Now I'll tell you all about it,' began Elsa, and the five heads were put closely together while she whispered her story.

'You remember that dear little pearl-handled penknife that papa gave me for Christmas? Well, one day last week I was foolish enough to take it to school—I might have known I would lose it—and I left it in my desk. I remember putting it there distinctly, and I was the last girl to leave the school-room, so I knew nobody could have touched it but Joe Ellis. He's a sort of janitor, you know; he sweeps the school-room every day, and dusts, and all that. Wasn't it mean in him?'

'Are you sure he did it?' asked Maude in astonishment.

'Why, of course I'm sure. I left the knife in my desk, and the next morning it was gone, and Joe was the only one who had been in the room. I think that proves it clearly enough.'

'Why I didn't think he was such a boy. I don't think he ought to be allowed to take up the collection in Sunday school, for if he is dishonest about one thing he would be about another.'

'I'm real angry about it,' began Elsa. 'Of course, I don't like to ask him about it.'

'Hush, some one is going to sing,' whispered Edna, and silence fell on the little group.

There was no opportunity for further conversation about Joe Ellis's misdeeds before the gathering of young people dispersed, and Elsa went home little knowing what an injury she had unconsciously done to the boy.

The next morning she overslept herself, and when she hurried down stairs with her hat on, and her coat and school-bag on her arm, all ready for school, the clock struck nine just as she sat down to her solitary breakfast.

'Well, I'm going to be late any way, so I may as well as not take my time over my breakfast,' she thought. 'I wonder who is in the parlor with mamma so early in the morning, she went on, as she heard the sound of voices in the next room.'

'It must be a great disappointment to the boy,' she heard her mother say.

'Yes he had set his heart on going, and it would certainly have been a splendid chance for him. He couldn't have been taken in a better business house. It would have been a great help to his mother too. She feels it more than he does.'

'I wonder whom they are talking about,' thought Elsa as she drank her coffee.

'I always considered Joe Ellis a remarkably honest, reliable boy,' her mother went on. 'I can't help thinking that there was some mistake about it. I wonder who could have told your uncle about his being dishonest. Whoever told him certainly ought to have to prove that the story is true. It is a very serious thing to him to lose his character, and this position isn't the only one he will lose by having a reputation of dishonesty.'

Elsa blushed scarlet, and turning around in her chair listened eagerly for the next words. 'They are talking about Joe Ellis,' she exclaimed to herself. 'I wonder if any one could have heard me telling the girls about the knife. There wasn't any one near enough to hear except that old gentleman who was sitting reading behind the piano, and he is a stranger any way and wouldn't know whom I was talking about.'

'I should think your uncle might overlook that one fault, and give him a trial,' said Elsa's mother.

'Well, Uncle Will is very peculiar, you know. He says he won't have anybody about him that he can't rely on, and though he had almost completed arrangements with Joe, he sent for him this morning, told him he had heard something against him, and would not take him. I was sorry for him,' went on Mrs. Duncan, 'but still I must say I think that uncle was right. A boy who can't be trusted in little things can't be trusted in great things.'

A few moments later Mrs. Duncan went away, and her mother came into the dining-room.

'Why, Elsa, haven't you started for school yet?' she exclaimed. 'How late you will be. Here is your little knife that you were so sure you had lost,' she went on, placing it by Elsa's plate. 'It had slipped through a little hole in your pocket down into the lining of your dress. I found it last night when I was mending your dress.'

'O mamma!' exclaimed Elsa in dismay, 'I was so sure that Joe Ellis had taken it, and I told some of the girls so last night. I wonder if that is the story that Mrs. Duncan was telling about?'

'I am afraid it was,' answered her mother sadly, 'for it was something that he had taken from a school-room. O Elsa, will you never learn to govern that unruly member?'

'Has he really lost a position just through me?' asked Elsa, tears filling her eyes. 'O mamma, I am so sorry. What can I do to make up for it?'

'Perhaps if you go to the gentleman immediately, before he has time to engage any one else, you may be able to undo the mischief you have done.'

'I will go right away,' exclaimed Elsa, her face brighter at the prospect of repairing her mistake, and she hastened on her errand.

Her courage almost failed her when she found herself in Mrs. Duncan's parlor, with the old gentleman looking sharply at her with his keen dark eyes.

'Well, what can I do for you, young lady?'