The Fireside.

GETTING A VISION.

It was Mrs. Lowell's last day at her summer home and she had risen early to enjoy once more the beauty of the morning. On her dressing table lay her invitation to the September Thank-offering meeting, opened the evening before, and the words, "Come and give thanks with us" met her eye.

"I cannot give thanks this year," said Mrs. Lowell, "but I will give my offering all the same. From henceforth, all the years of my pilgrimage, I must walk in the shadow of my great sorrow," and she quickly tucked three dollars into the envelope lest it should be forgotten in the confusion of flitting back to the city.

Stepping out upon the wide porch the exquisite beauty of the inland lake lay before her in perfect stillness. The harvest fields that formed pictures along its banks were given back in soft reflections. They brought a sense of perfect peace, and, as the pale gray of the sky began to give place to an almost imperceptible pink, the silver mist rose up and lapped the foot of the tiny island near the opposite shore in a snowy billow.

Mrs. Lowell's eye and ear were keenly attuned to beauty; it "stole away her sadness ere she was aware." Her eyes kindled up, her heart swelled; the gnarled oaks between her and the lake gave a sense of protection. As the first bright ray shot upwards the liquid notes of a scarlet tanager voiced her praise.

"Truly 'He leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul,'" she exclaimed. "One joy still remains; I do thank thee, Oh, my Father, for this inexpressible beauty," and, entering the house, she quickly added a dollar to her offering.

The loneliness of her first evening in her city home was relieved by a call from her lifelong and breezy friend, Mary Holding. "You come to the Thank-offering meeting tomorrow, Helen?" she said, before leaving.

"No," said Mrs. Lowell, "I shall not be at the meeting, but I have my offering ready and will send it."

"I'm so glad, Helen! for it is sorely needed. These poor hunted Christians in China have come to the front before the India famine children have had a good square meal, or the Armenian orphans have had time to grow up, and the Board women are well nigh distracted. Mother's illness has diminished my gift this year — I've only made out twenty—and I'm praying that somebody may be moved to make it good."

"But are not the Board women always distracted?" said Mrs. Lowell, with a half smile.

"I should think they would be. Our colored washerwoman says 'It's powerful hard to make fo' pairs of shoes do for the six chillen;' and Mary went on laughing.

Mrs. Lowell stood wondering. "Twenty dollars from Mary Holding, who supports herself and her mother on a teacher's salary! Can it be possible? I wonder how much it would take to 'make it good.'" she said as she turned away.

The morning of the Thank-offering meeting found Mrs. Lowell busy re-arranging her pleasant home, in which her artistic sense found perpetual delight. As she draped a beautiful piece of Chinese embroidery over the piano, she paused to enjoy once more its rich color and delicate stitches.

"I must secure at once that elegant piece I saw yesterday. Thirty dollars seems a good deal to give, but that peculiar knot stitch is growing more and more rare, and I may not be able to match it later. Some quaint Chinese characters caught her eye, she paused to examine them. It had once really been in that "poor, suffering, disordered China" Mary Holding cared so much about. How far it had come to give her pleasure!

"I wonder who made it! She certainly loved beauty. Does she know the truth? Is she suffering for it? Is she now one of the poor, hunted Christians—chilled, hungry, ragged?" These questions passed through her mind in quick succession, and the bit of gorgeous color became a connecting link between Mrs. Lowell, and its unknown maker. As her imagination kindled her conscience stirred uneasily.

"Perhaps I may as well wait a little before getting that other piece. Then I can give twenty-five dollars and make Mary's offering good," she said. "I'll go over to the meeting this afternoon and carry it myself."

"An answer to one prayer is walking in this minute," said Mary Holding to herself, as Mrs. Lowell entered. "I've been praying that Helen Lowell might come to this meeting and get a vision." But Mrs. Lowell has not come for "a vision." As she listened to the opening prayers and hymns, she half wondered why she came at all. "For hard worked Mary Holding's sake," she said. Her mind reverted to her old habit of retrospection until the missionary speaker of the day arose. She was from India.

"If there is a widow here to-day," she began, "she may well give thanks that her widowhood is in a Christian land."

A flash of indignant pain shot through Mrs. Lowell's widowed heart. How could anyone give thanks whose life had been made desolate, whose home was so bereft! Submission, not thanksgiving, is for such the limit of attainment.

But the speaker, all unknowingly, went on with graphic touches to portray the gloomy, windowless room, the bare walls, the mud floor, the close atmosphere of the Hindu widow's home. Without conscious effort on Mrs. Lowell's part, the comfort and beauty of her own home began to stand before her in contrast; her well made, suitable clothing stood over against the shorn head and the one dirty garment of her Hindu sister, her dainty table beside the scant pot of porridge, set, once a day, upon the mud floor. As she listened to the revilings, the reproaches cast upon the other, the tender pity of Christian friends that had soothed and sustained her, seemed anew to fold her in its embrace.

The speaker went on: "With no knowledge of her Heavenly Father's care, nor of her Saviour's love and sacrifice, this abused drudge, this overworked, ill-fed child is often even not allowed to retain the flower of a blameless life," were the closing words. She was getting her "vision."

Among the ladies who spoke while the offering was being counted, a mother said: "I give thanks for my children, I shall never forget the words of Mrs. Howard Taylor, of the China Inland Mission. 'The woman who came to be with me,' she said, 'impressed me much, She was tall, handsome, intelligent—a woman about fifty, but her hair was perfectly white, and there was a hardness about her as if she had no heart. But she was fine material, fine native power. She had been married when about eighteen years of age, and had eight little girls in succession. She had been allowed to keep only two out of the eight. No wonder her hair was white and her heart seemed cold!"

"I," said another, rising, "give thanks for the unspeakable gift, my Saviour, my Redeemer. He not only forgives my sins; he sets my feet in the upward path, quickens me by his ennobling Spirit, inspires me to follow him to the higher levels, where the soul gets glimpses of the meaning of his sacrifice. To take him and the hopes he inspires out of my life would be to take the sun out of my sky."

"I am grateful," said a third, "that we understand through the Chinese martyrs, as never before, what Paul meant when he gave thanks to God 'who almays maketh us triumph in Christ.' Both missionaries and Chinese Christians for weeks were in death oft; yet they not only endured, but triumphed! Think of that Shansi Bible woman putting on her best and sitting quietly in the front court waiting for the blow of the Boxer to send her to her Lord!"

"And I rejoice," said Mary Holding, "in my partnership with Christ. He has lent me a little bit of the capital and lets me do my best with it, and by and by I am to share in the dividends.

"I haven't very much, but it never depreciates, and the final result is immense. One of the promissory notes says to the Son, 'I will give Thee the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession,' and we are partners with him!"

She came back to her house, but the picture of the sorrowful child widow came with her. She returned to her work; it had lost its charm. How rich her outward life in freedom, in sunshine, in beauty, in comfort, in friends! And the inner life! What heights of intelligence, of culture, of purity lay between her and the little bowed figure on the mud floor!

And then the life hid with Christ in God! How much it meant! How unspeakably precious her Saviour was! And the "partnership" that Mary had expressed in her own peculiar way—the fellowship, the co-working! It was a partnership in the kingdom of God, a fellowship and fellowheirship with its Leader, a co-working for its final triumph. Why had she never seen it all before? Why had she never followed Christ to those uplands of sacrifice, where she could look away to the the ultimate outcome.

"Wherewithal shall I come before him? What, oh, what shall I render?" was the cry of her awakened soul. Mary Holding's prayer was answered. Mrs. Lowell had her "vision."

"I am awakened out of my sleep. I cannot rest until I have made some offering as a token of my gratitude."

Hithertofore Mrs. Lowell had given for the uplifting of the women of the world the fragments of her funds, the loose change of her comfortable income. Now, for the first time she seized her book and wrote eagerly a check for a sum that would have rejoiced the heart of Mary Holding, and it was truly a Thank-offering.—*Presbyterian Record.*

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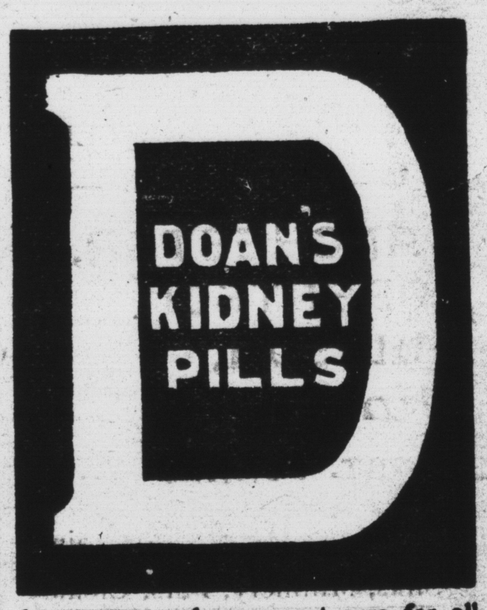

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FORMAL INVITATION.

It was high noon on a Monday, when a knock was heard at the kitchen door. The Chinese servant opened the door, says the New York *Times*, and found a tramp of long and varied experience.

"I've been travelling," he said, "and am in mighty hard luck. I've lost all my money and I'm hungry; very, very hungry. Can't you please give me a little bite of something to eat?"

The Chinaman comprehended the situation at once. A benevolent, placid smile spread itself over his entire countenance.

"You likee flish?" he asked of the tramp.

"Yes, I like fish first-rate. That will do as well as anything."

"Come, Fliday," said the hospitable heathen, as he quietly closed the door.

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