

## Young People's Column

### PLANTING THORNS

Julia Ferris' sunny kitchen gave forth delicious odors of spices, stewing meat, and fresh fruit into the crisp November air as the door opened to admit her friend and neighbor, Sara Phelps.

"M-m-m! smells like mincemeat!" Mrs. Phelps sniffed the air appreciatively.

"Oh, yes! Thanksgiving, you know!" smiled Mrs. Ferris. "I always make our mincemeat just before Thanksgiving."

A little sigh escaped Sara's lips. "Well, thinking of Thanksgiving is what sent me over here this morning," she confessed. "I have been thinking about our revival which just closed, and of how much you have to be thankful for, now that Kenneth has been saved. That makes your family one hundred per cent. doesn't it? Every one of your children is saved, I believe!"

"Why, you are right, Sara! and I am thankful. But I must admit that I had not thought so much about it. It just seems the most natural thing in the world. We expect it of our children, just as we expect them to be polite, or to graduate from school, or any of the other things which normal children do. Now that you have mentioned it, though," she went on, thoughtfully, "I wonder if we are thankful enough! But what brought you over here this morning? I can see that you have something on your mind—something which is troubling you!"

Sara Phelps' eyes filled with tears as she leaned earnestly toward her friend. "Julia, did it ever occur to you that husband and I have five children, all at the age of accountability, and that only one of the five has given his heart to God? Where have we failed? We have tried to live godly lives before them. We set up our family altar as soon as we were saved—when the children were still small. They have seldom missed Sunday-school or church services. Yet I know we have failed somewhere; but in what way? We love our children—our hearts are burdened for them, but what more can we do?"

Mrs. Ferris took an apple from the basket, slashed the rosy skin with the point of her knife, and began to remove a thin spiral of peel.

"Yes, Sara, I have thought of this, for I love your children and am interested in them. I believe I can point out the cause, too; but I could not do it if I did not love you so well. Let me tell you of an incident which happened in my childhood.

"Father and mother served God zealously since I can remember. They seldom missed a service, and believed in the good old custom of families worshiping together. There were four children in our family, and each Lord's Day found us in our places with mother and father in the church which they attended. We all rose early in those days, breakfasted together, and before father left for his work, knelt together while our parents asked God's guidance for us through the day.

"The two younger children gave their hearts to God when they were about twelve years of age. My older brother had been saved early in his teens, but became discouraged after a time and backslid. I had reached the age of eighteen, however, without even making a start toward serving God. I knew mother's heart was grieved, and I really felt that salvation was worth while; but because of some things which displeased me, my heart grew more rebellious and stubborn.

"One beautiful Indian summer day, about this time of the year, a woman alighted from the train, made her way to our home, and announced that she had come to hold some meetings. Mother and father, it seemed, had been expecting her; but the time of her arrival had been rather indefinite, having been set for 'sometime in the fall.'

"This coming of an evangelist was not heralded then as now. He came when he could, and his arrival was the signal for the setting up of a person-to-person telegraph system, which, judging by results, surpassed the facilities which we have today. The word went around that a revival meeting was about to begin, and there was a fair-sized gathering the first night. By the second night, however, crowds began coming in from the country round about, and from neighboring towns, until the meeting place was crowded and running over.

"Sister Crandel had a rather austere appearance. Her hair was combed smoothly back and arranged neatly at the nape of her neck. Her collar, above the plainest of black gowns, was high and stiff, and gave one the impression of having been placed there for the purpose of keeping her head up, that she might not be tempted to get her eyes on the world. This stern exterior, I soon found, covered the kindest and most understanding of hearts. Her lips, while firm, were given to smiling often, and I soon found myself quite in love with Sister Crandel.

"Many times I caught mother watching me out of the corner of her eyes, hoping, no doubt, that I might come to love the evangelist well enough that she would influence me to be saved. I felt this in mother's attitude, and, with the perversity of youth, carefully concealed my regard for her.

"The meetings were to last but ten days, and I attended each one, but gave no sign of yielding to God. One or two of the older sisters spoke to me at various times, but I fear my flippant answers must soon have given them the impression that I was hopelessly hard-hearted. Sister Crandel herself had not come to talk to me. I was glad; because I felt that my love for her would not be able to withstand the pealding which I was sure to see in her kind eyes, and I was determined not to start something which I could not continue."

"The ninth service passed. Only one more! I wished that I need not attend that one, but I knew that father would insist. Besides, it was Sunday evening and no excuse would be accepted, I was sure.

"After dinner on Sunday, mother, father, Sister Crandel, my brother John, and I went into our comfortable sitting-room. Father never allowed us to 'run around,' as he expressed it, on Sunday. John retired to a corner with a book, and while the others drew their chairs about the fireplace, I seated myself at the organ, and began to play softly some old hymns. I think that mother and father would have been shocked if I had attempted to play even 'The Maiden's Prayer' on Sunday. They seemed to feel that anything but hymns were a sacrilege.

"I had drifted into 'Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior,' and the tender, pleading words seemed to express the innermost thoughts and longing of heart. I knew I needed Jesus. I knew that I had rejected Him many, many times, and I had a sudden fear that He might pass me by. Yet the thing which had kept me so long from yielding to Him welled up in my heart, and I brushed the tears furtively from my eyes with my left hand, while I kept the melody going with my right, and hoped fervently that Sister Crandel would not notice any difference. I had played it through

once, and had reached the chorus the second time, when I felt a presence at my side. I did not need to look. I knew who stood there! The organ sang on—'Hear my humble cry! While on others—' My head went down on my arms and I began to cry quietly.

"The evangelist put her arms about me and began to talk to me about Christ. She knew, she told me, that He had been calling me a long time. Would I not set my heart at rest, and find a sweet peace by yielding my heart and life to Him right there? I thought that I should surely have been won in that moment; but the old feeling flamed anew and I raised my head, looked defiantly at her and said, 'No.'

"A look of pain crossed her face. I realized that I had wounded one whom I had learned to love dearly. Will you not tell me why, Julia?" she asked at last. I am sure that it is not merely stubbornness that is holding you back. There must be a deeper reason. Shall we go to your room, dear?" I looked at the tears running down mother's cheeks, at the look of concern on Father's face. 'Well,' I said, 'I want to tell you. But I want to say right here. I want to tell mother and father, too.'

"I used to long to be a Christian, but I wanted to be a good one, like the Bible says, you know, 'Be ye perfect even as your Father is perfect.' But I do not believe, now, that any one can be like that. Preachers are not; and if they can not be good Christians, who can? If Sister Goodwin, who works hard and gives a good part of all she has to helping—if she can not be a perfect Christian, how can I expect to please Christ? 'No,' I repeated, 'if I can not be a real Christian, and live pleasing to God, I will not even try or pretend to be anything but what I am.'

"Mother gasped and father looked shocked. 'Julia,' exclaimed mother in a low tone, 'what makes you say such things? Where did you get those ideas?' Over Sister Crandel's face came a look of understanding, I thought, and it made me bold to go on.

"Ever since I can remember I have heard you and father talk about people we knew,' I went on, turning to mother. 'Oh, not in any mean way,' as she opened her lips to speak, 'just discussing them! But when I had about decided that a certain one was as near perfect as a mortal could be, I would hear you and father discussing his or her faults and shortcomings, and each time left me more disillusioned and disappointed.

"You remember old Brother Monroe who was pastor here when I was about ten years old? I used to think he must be like God, he was so kind, always smiling, and was such an encouragement to the poor and to any who were sick. I thought that if God were like Brother Monroe I should be willing to do anything for Him.

"Then one day I heard father tell you that nothing but his stubbornness kept Brother Monroe here as pastor. He knew, father said, that he was too old to do the things which ought to be done but he was just bound to have his way, and would no doubt stay until they had to put him out.

"Well, I had never thought of the old pastor as stubborn, or anything else which was not Christlike, so it was quite a shock to me. I had almost recovered, though, when Brother and Sister Hallet, the young minister and his wife who just left to do missionary work, came here. I grew to love Sister Hallet dearly, because she seemed to understand that we young folk needed a little pleasure, though nobody else ever seemed to think so. She was kind to every one as far as I could see, and never tired of helping others. Her husband always seemed so sincere, was al-