



A Modern Sacrifice

Isabella Alden

A MODERN SACRIFICE



*The Story of
Kissie Gordon's Experiment*

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Aurora, Colorado

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A MODERN SACRIFICE; THE STORY OF KISSIE GORDON'S EXPERIMENT.

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Chapter 1

Shadows

There were two ladies, both middle-aged, that occupied Mrs. Merchant's morning-room. Both were more or less disturbed. Mrs. Merchant's handsome face was unusually flushed, and those acquainted with her would have known that the lines about her forehead and mouth meant extreme annoyance.

Her sister, Mrs. Gordon, who was smaller and quieter in appearance, and whose face, when she was troubled, was inclined to grow pale instead of flushing, looked pale and worn this morning. Her eyes were on the floor; and she was apparently trying to fit the toe of her shoe to a very small figure on the carpet, while she listened to Mrs. Merchant's voluble tongue.

"The fact is, Dora," that lady began again, after a pause of several minutes, during which her sister had attempted no reply, "the world has moved since you and I were girls. A great many

ideas that we were brought up to consider necessary to our good and regular standing have exploded; and, if you undertake to keep Kissie in a strait-jacket, mark my words, you will have cause to regret it. I tried something of the sort with my Maud, until I felt satisfied that I was actually injuring her. Kissie is young and pretty, and it is the most natural thing in the world that she should want to enjoy herself after the manner of the young people of her time. I beg you, Dora, not to let any old-fashioned and obsolete ideas of yours spoil her girlhood.”

The pale face grew paler, if that were possible; and the reply was low-toned and troubled.

“I am sure you must know that I have no wish to spoil Kissie’s girlhood. What have I to live for now, but my child? I assure you I do not mean to let any ideas of mine stand in the way of her happiness. If the views I have held are merely mine, they are not worth discussing; but you seem to forget her father. He had very decided opinions in regard to the matter we have been considering.”

“Oh, of course. But you should remember that her father was a clergyman. Men in that profession have to be over strict, I presume, about many things; it is expected of them. It would not be at all strange, in view of the cramped lives that they have to live, if they should grow narrow. Not that I mean to breathe a word in censure of Jerome; you know how fond I was of him.” For at that point Mrs. Merchant noticed the flash in her sister’s eyes, which made her pause and choose her words more carefully. “I

simply mean that people with certain environments almost of necessity get peculiar and untenable ideas.”

“I confess that I do not know what you mean. Jerome certainly could not be accused of living a cramped life. He was known and honored by a very wide circle of the most intelligent and cultured people. His opinions were sought on many important subjects outside of theological channels, if you consider those ‘narrow.’” Mrs. Gordon spoke more rapidly than was her habit, and gave one the impression that she had much more in the same line that could be said. Her sister considered it wise to interrupt her.

“Why, Dora, of course I know all that, quite as well as you do. Haven’t I heard my own husband say that he would rather have Jerome’s opinion on certain subjects than that of any business man he knew? You don’t understand me. What I am trying to say is this: You and Kissie have lived all your lives, or at least all her life, in a community as different from this as it is possible to imagine. A very choice community, I freely admit; college towns are noted, I believe, for the cultured people that naturally flock to them; but it was very different from city life; that you must admit. Then your position in this exceptional town was such that your ideas and opinions moulded those of your immediate circle more or less, so that it really did not make much difference to Kissie what your views were; but I assure you that many worn-out notions that she has imbibed will be simply ruinous to her here.

“Take, for illustration, that matter of dancing, about which we

were talking. You and I were brought up to consider it a dreadful thing; but, when one comes to think of it seriously, what sense is there in such a notion? What possible harm can result from allowing young ladies and gentlemen to move around one another's parlors keeping step to music? That is all that the modern parlor dance amounts to in refined circles. To brand such a harmless exercise as that as improper goes far toward making the young people of today feel that we older ones don't know what we are talking about. You must acknowledge that it makes poor Kissie appear very odd and countrified, to say the least, to pose as a wallflower every time she goes out. Parlor dancing has become so universal, that a young lady will either have to stay at home altogether, or sit in a corner and look on, if her friends persist in refusing to allow her to join in an exercise that is as natural and graceful as it is common."

Mrs. Merchant paused for breath, and also to allow her sister opportunity to agree with her. But Mrs. Gordon apparently had no words to say. She sat in the same attitude of serious, perhaps painful, thought, and did not look convinced. Her sister, annoyed by her very silence, began again in a slightly haughty tone.

"I presume you think it no concern of mine, and I assure you that I do not mean to interfere with your affairs. There is a sense in which it will make no difference to us how you decide the matter. It is, of course, rather unpleasant to have one's immediate family dragged into notoriety in any manner, and naturally Maud and Schuyler feel it keenly. Still, we can endure it; and, if you are quite

determined to make a martyr of the poor child, you will, of course, not let our feelings weigh with you for a moment. If I am not utterly mistaken in her father, it would be the last thing he would desire, to have his daughter's happiness sacrificed to ideas of his, which I presume he has out-grown long ago. Still, as I said, if you are bent on sacrificing her, I shall say no more. I felt it my duty to make one last appeal in her behalf."

Mrs. Gordon roused herself to try to reply.

She had been on the eve of doing so several times, and had with difficulty held herself silent. There was that in her sister's words which had undoubtedly roused other feelings than those of anxiety for her daughter; but she had learned in the school of experience to speak carefully chosen words, which could not easily be misunderstood. She sat up at last, and turned her eyes upon Mrs. Merchant, and opened her lips; but it will not be known what she would have said, for at that moment she was interrupted by a clear, sweet laugh, which bubbled up from unmistakably girlish lips, and the voice of Kissie Gordon broke in upon them.

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Louise, but of course you know that I am within hearing all the while, and I cannot help coming to tell you that, while I am grateful for your intention, I don't feel one bit sacrificed. Whatever mamma really wants, I feel confident of being able to do, or rather not to do; and I shall be the jolliest martyr you ever heard of."

Mrs. Merchant smiled indulgently. "Of course, my dear," she said sweetly, "we all realize your devotion to your mother, and I

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assure you, we think it very beautiful; but that state of things only makes us the more anxious that she should not sacrifice you to a set of worn-out whims. Moreover, you would not find martyrdom the delightful thing you imagine. You are just beginning life, remember, society life; of course Maud and Schuyler have been able to shield you from unpleasantness thus far, but they cannot always do so. If your mother persists in putting you into the gazing-stocks, so to speak, I am afraid you will have much to endure.”

It may have been well for all parties concerned that Mrs. Merchant received at that moment an imperative summons to the reception-room, and left mother and daughter to themselves.

The door had barely closed after her when Kissie Gordon made a dash across the room, and proceeded to smother her small mother under an avalanche of kisses and tender words.

“Poor little mother! She thinks her one chicken wants to be a duck, and go and swim, and leave her mother to ruffle her feathers on the bank in despair. It isn’t true. I shall hate Aunt Louise just a little bit, if she makes those dreadful wrinkles come all over your forehead, and puckers up your lips so they won’t kiss well, and puts a look in your eyes that sends you a thousand miles away. Don’t you mind her, not the least little speck. I, a martyr, indeed! Do I look like one? If I am, I shall certainly show them some of the joys of martyrdom. Mother, I don’t want you to think for a moment that I have a wish to do in one least little thing different from what you wish. Wouldn’t I give up anything in the world for

your sake, and papa's memory? And there isn't anything to give up. The idea of Aunt Louise making a fuss over such trifles! She doesn't know what she is talking about."

They were very sweet, the words and the kisses. The pale face smoothed its wrinkles, and the quivering lips smiled fondly on the girl; but the mother's eyes looked troubled still. After a moment she spoke earnestly.

"I know, daughter; mother knows how entirely she can trust you; if I were not sure of it, I think I could not live at all. But some of your aunt's words have set me to thinking in a new channel. Not only what she has said this morning, but at other times. Tell me this, dear, in perfect frankness. Do all these amusements in which your cousins indulge, from which your life has been carefully guarded, seem innocent and pleasant to you? If it were not for your father's views and mine, could you freely enter into them, do you think, and be happy in doing so?"

The young girl hesitated, her face growing serious and thoughtful. Then she spoke in a quiet, grown-up tone.

"Mother, dear, I must tell you the exact truth in this as in all things. I have not thought much about such matters, you know; I mean, I did not in the old home. When I was a little girl, I accepted your ideas and papa's as a matter of course. I think I must have absorbed them unconsciously, for I never remember much talk in these lines. As I grew older, and was busy with books and music, there did not seem to be a great deal of opportunity to think about such questions, nor much occasion for it. Most of the girls in my

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set neither danced nor played cards. Don't you remember, mamma, how it was? We seemed never to have time. I mean, our lives were busy and happy without them. Then, after papa went away, of course I thought less than ever about being simply amused. Aunt Louise is right in one respect; Maud and Schuyler have lived entirely different lives from mine, and I am in a new world. I don't think it is as nice, in some respects, as my own world. And yet—I mean to be entirely frank, and admit that there are many very pleasant things about it. Yes, I should like ... dancing, for instance. I think I should like it very much; occasionally, you know, as one likes any amusement; and I confess that I do not of my own self see the least little mite of harm in it. It really seems quite like the promenades that we girls used to have in the halls between study hours; only there is pleasant music to keep step to, and they are not scattered suddenly by the sound of the study bell. For that matter, I think I should enjoy cards, too, as they play them here at home, and in one another's parlors. Why, they are only bits of pasteboard with certain figures on them, and certain rules for using them, which give opportunity for a half-hour's trial of skill. I have actually puzzled my brains quite a little, of late, to discover why I suppose myself to disapprove of them. Yet, at the same time, these things are all so unimportant to me that the idea of my life being 'sacrificed' by giving them up, or, rather, by not taking them up at all, is utter nonsense. You are not to think of this matter anymore, mother, because I have told you 'the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth,' as I was fond of saying when I was a little girl. I remember I felt that it made my statements much more solemn and important if they were so prefaced. It is time I was taking my music lesson, but I cannot go unless you promise not to let those wrinkles come again. I think I shall tell Aunt Louise that you are in my very special care, and I cannot allow you to be bothered with trifles of any sort."

Mrs. Gordon laughed, and kissed the sweet, bright face bending over her, and promised to keep the wrinkles in subjection, and the "far-away" look out of her eyes as much as possible, yet was not sorry to be left alone to think. The problem of life was before her in new shape.

The story of its past could be told, all that the public needs to know, in few sentences. She had been the happy wife of a busy country clergyman, a man of mark among his brethren, decidedly a leader in the not small circle in which he moved. He had lived long enough to mould a good deal of the thought around him; he had lived to shelter and sweeten and brighten every day of life for wife and daughter; he had left them suddenly in the midst of his honors and usefulness, making life a great blank for both.

It was the daughter that rallied first from the terrible shock, and began to care for, and plan for, and shield her mother, much as the husband's love had shielded her through all their life together. It became Kissie's ambition not only to fill her own large place, but to keep her mother as much as possible from missing the innumerable daily attentions that the thoughtful husband had

bestowed. The first year of loneliness had been spent in the old home, surrounded by friends of a lifetime. While this made some things harder to bear, it took away half of the pain from others, and furnished balm for many wounds.

They had awakened one morning to the fact that certain investments which Dr. Gordon had made with a view to planning for their future had shared the fate of many such, and were probably hopelessly lost. There remained only a few hundreds, the interest of which would be barely sufficient to clothe them in a humble way. Meantime, what should they eat and drink, and under what roof should they perform those weary necessities?

A dozen homes in the dear old parish opened wide to them; but any such arrangement must of necessity be exceedingly temporary. Indeed, in the depths of her sad heart the widow felt at times in haste to get away from all the surroundings that were so like her happy past, and yet so hopelessly unlike it. There were times when she keenly felt that others had been able to smooth the earth over the great gulf of sorrow, and plant flowers upon it, and walk gayly over it, and take the new pastor into their hearts, and interest themselves in his plans, while to her the gulf yawned wide, and even seemed to grow deeper as the days passed. Of course she would not have had it otherwise for the others. Her judgment said so, and her faith sustained it; but her poor heart shrunk and quivered.

Chapter 2

Liberty

While they were waiting and planning, or trying to plan, came a letter from Mrs. Merchant, Mrs. Gordon's only sister. She, too, the letter said, was widowed, as they knew; and, with her children, was compelled to make a home for themselves. Would her sister and child come to them and help to make that home less desolate? If such was their pleasure, they would be more than welcome. The dear old homestead was, as they knew, large enough for all; and, while they were by no means wealthy, Mrs. Merchant admitted that they had enough to keep them from need, and would be only too glad to share the extra room with their relatives. She had so long counted her wealth by the thousands that perhaps what they had left did not seem like wealth to her; still, Mrs. Gordon would not have liked to have her young daughter know, after reading that letter, just how many thousands her aunt's bank account now

represented.

They had not been sheltered in the new home for three weeks before Mrs. Gordon would have drawn back from it if she could. She had known her sister very well, years before, and had believed herself prepared to extol her virtues and keep silence concerning her faults. But in the years that had intervened since they had been much together, it proved that one sister had grown Christ-like; the other, worldly.

It was soon discovered that in Mrs. Merchant's home cards and dancing, and kindred amusements, all of which had been eschewed in the parental home, were freely indulged in. Up to a few years before the date at which our story opens, Mrs. Merchant had appeared to respect the teachings of her parents in this regard; it was therefore a surprise to Mrs. Gordon to find that she had plunged her young daughter into the center of a gay and utterly worldly way of living; and that the daughter was in danger of having her young life, if not "sacrificed," at least shadowed by the fact that she had grown up in an entirely different atmosphere.

For the first time in years Mrs. Gordon found herself compelled carefully to reconsider conclusions that she had supposed fixed; to decide whether in the long ago past she had been quite wrong, or whether entirely changed conditions sometimes changed opinions, also.

Much had been taken for granted in their home-life, the life that she and her husband had lived together; they had been so busy and so happy in their own way. Their one daughter had grown up

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in the same atmosphere, busy and happy, scarcely questioning concerning matters that were left outside quite as a matter of course. Now she had come to a home where these very things seemed to have assumed a central place, and what had heretofore been considered most important had apparently retired into the background. No wonder Mrs. Gordon needed to be left alone. If she must reconstruct not only herself but her daughter, it was quite time that she took the matter seriously in hand.

It was all very well for Kissie to laugh, and pat her mother's face, and kiss her lovingly, and assure her that she did not in the least little thing want to do that which was contrary to her ideas, or that would bring reproach to her father's name. Mrs. Gordon knew that her young daughter was made of the material that on occasion could go bravely to the stake, and smile in doing so. She knew that Kissie was ready to give up cheerfully anything that she thought might save one wrinkle on her mother's beloved face. But certain words of Mrs. Merchant's rankled. She did not want her lovely young daughter to be "peculiar," to look "odd" and "countrified," to stand in a corner when others were active. Kissie had been a sweet, bright center always. It seemed to be her place in life. Why, almost from her babyhood the young people had acknowledged her as a leader. If they had indeed come to a place where ideas and customs were totally different from those that had heretofore environed their lives, why was it not right to take those differences into consideration?

Mrs. Gordon went back to her own girlhood; she was anxious

to make no mistake; she must try to discover, if possible, the road by which she had travelled to her present position, in order to see that Kissie's feet were really set right. She had, when of Kissie's age, lived in a town where dancing, for instance, was common; she had not danced, nor had Mrs. Merchant. Why not? They had often enough been invited to do so; what had they said in reply? "My father does not approve of dancing." She could seem to see herself, a slip of a girl, looking not unlike her Kissie, only never so sweet and pretty as she—so the mother thought—making this gentle and invariable reply to young men who seemed to approve of it, or at least to respect it, for they did not urge her. She had not been a "wall-flower," either, or felt neglected.

But then, to be sure, she and Louise had been Judge Headley's daughters; and Kissie was only a sweet-faced girl with an unknown mother. Looking backward, Judge Headley's daughter could not remember that she had ever been given one clearly defined reason why she should not dance nor play quiet home games of cards. She had lived in the age when the words, "My father does not approve," were accepted as sufficient reason; and her daughter did not live in such an age. Had the world gone backward, or forward?

Still, people ought to have reasons for their opinions, and not be mere echoes of others. She admitted this, and looked troubled. Dr. Gordon undoubtedly had had reasons; he was not a man to adopt or imbibe views of any kind carelessly; but it had not appeared to be necessary to define them. His wife, as she went

anxiously over their life together, could not remember that they had ever seriously discussed these questions. They had been busy; with no place in their thoughts, apparently, for such trivialities. Why, of course they knew distinctly what each thought on all these lines, but *why* did they think so? Could she put the reasons into words that would meet, for instance, even Mrs. Merchant's arguments? No, she could not. She admitted it with a sigh.

Such reasons as she had she felt instinctively would be too high for her sister's development to reach. Perhaps that was the trouble. Dr. Gordon had lived in a higher world than did these about her, and had drawn her, his wife, instinctively toward that same plane. Perhaps she was trying to do with Kissie what was unnatural at her age. It was quite possible that her husband would have felt this also, had he lived in other than that one town where the young people with whom he had to do grew up about him, and were more or less moulded by his ideas, and happy in the plans that he made for them.

She smiled faintly as she thought of these things, a pitiful, homesick smile. What a different world they were in, to be sure! She could not conceive of Dr. Thomas Chalmers Westbrook, her sister's pastor, as planning ways and means to interest and develop her niece and nephew. He knew of their existence, certainly, and was cordial enough when he came to their mother's dinner parties; but apparently they had nothing in common.

Yes, things were very different. She must not expect too much, now that heaven had opened for the one that would have led

her and hers. If Kissie did not herself shrink from the life that surrounded her, it spoke well for it. Kissie was a girl of pure instincts and high moral tone. Perhaps she really ought to leave her untrammelled by the ... *ideas* of the past. She hesitated for a word, and would not use that word "prejudices," which fell so glibly from her sister's lips. Dr. Gordon's views should not be called "prejudices," lest haply, although he had been in heaven for much more than a year, he might not have changed them yet.

The mother sat long, and considered, sometimes with a hungry pain at her heart for her precious past, which she knew could return no more. She reverted to the subject often during the long hours of the day that followed; but the outcome of it was that she said to Kissie that evening when they were alone together:

"Daughter, I have been thinking much about you today, and about the talk that we had this morning. It may be that in some respects your Aunt Louise is right, and we have held you too carefully away from this other life that now surrounds you. I have determined to leave you quite free, dear, to do that which your own conscience approves, without regard to any mere traditions that may have governed you in the past. I presume that the conditions of things change more in some directions than I have realized; it may be that some things that were objectionable in the past are proper now. At least, I feel sure that your judgment and instincts can be trusted; so hereafter, whatever your aunt and cousins urge, and you feel that, but for your mother's notions, you would be glad to do, I am going to advise you to try. It will at least

please them; and so long as we are of their household we should try to do that, even to our own inconvenience. It is a great comfort to me to feel sure that you are a girl to be trusted.”

Much talk had followed. Mrs. Gordon had been very earnestly kissed, and probed with questions as to whether she felt perfectly sure that this was what she wanted, as, if it was only a concession to Kissie’s supposed wishes, Kissie would have none of it. The mother had been obliged to express herself very clearly, and even to urge compliance with her suggestions.

Still, it cannot be denied that, when Kissie closed her eyes for sleep that night, it was with a pleasant feeling that life would be at least easier to her in the future than it had been during the past few months. Several important invitations into the gay world were looming up in the near distance, and she had dreaded them because of her cousin Maud’s half-indignant urgings and her cousin Schuyler’s good-natured teasings, as well as on account of her Aunt Louise’s arguments. Now she would enter into this sort of life enough to satisfy them, but not enough to disturb her mother.

To a student of human nature, and one not too deeply interested in the persons involved, it might be an interesting thing to watch the progress of a soul toward unintentional worldliness.

Never was the descent more unintentional than in the case of Kissie Gordon. Reared in an atmosphere of earnestness; surrounded from her very babyhood by people that took life earnestly and cheerfully, who were never even merely “busy with idleness,” but always genuinely busy over matters important

enough to claim the attention of earnest people, it had not happened to her to think very much about the other world lying just outside of hers—the world in which people fluttered and danced and dressed and slept the hours away. She had a charmed circle of her own in which all was utterly different. They had such good times, too, the girls and boys, that she, at least, who was their center, never thought to be envious of the other world.

She was pretty enough, and had life and energy enough, to win the attention of outsiders. Occasionally they longed after her to put vivacity into their wearied set; and they tried to claim her. After awhile, it amused them that she had always some gracefully worded excuse. There was a church sociable, or a missionary gathering, or a young people's frolic at their own home; or her father needed her help about church matters, or it was examination week at school; something always held Kissie Gordon cheerily away from that world which spread its net for her again and again. They received her excuses, of course; they were so confidently advanced that there seemed nothing else to be done. They even kissed her, and called her a "good little girl;" but they said just out of her hearing: "Poor child! How her life is narrowed to one treadmill round, just because she is a clergyman's daughter. It is really a shame!"

Kissie knew nothing of this; she supposed that her life was the one to be envied; and, if she had known, and stopped to consider, she would have believed that theirs was the treadmill, and that her life was free.

But it was all so different after father went to heaven, and she and mother came to Aunt Louise Merchant's to live. She found it an endless source of embarrassment to try to live such an utterly different life from her cousins, right in the same house with them. Not that you are to suppose that they were worldlings. Aunt Louise and Cousin Maud were members of the church; and Schuyler, his mother said, respected religion, and was very careful not to entrench upon his sister's scruples. There were places of amusement where others went, people in the first set, too, to which he did not think of inviting Maud.

Above all things, she deplored, this wise and well-balanced Aunt Louise, the fact that some young people of today were mere butterflies of fashion. "Why, they do not even regard the Sabbath!" she admitted. "Those young Carletons and Van Alstyne have company to dinner nearly every Sunday; invited company, you know. I think it is disgraceful. Maud and Schuyler never think of formally inviting people on Sunday. If a very intimate friend drops in occasionally to take a cup of tea with them, of course, that is another matter; but they know better than to try to keep open house on Sundays. I am very particular about such things; and of course Maud does not approve of them herself."

Kissie meant to be very careful of her new freedom. She had looked on, at first, in wide-eyed wonder at many of the doings of her cousins; but, as she had confessed to her mother, she had already begun to feel that there was really no harm in many of them. Still, she did not mean to go very deeply into even harmless

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things. She meant to show her dear mother how wise was the concession she had made.

“Poor mamma!” she said to her heart.

“It is very hard for her, because it is so different from the dear, sweet life we used to live together, we three. She does not like to think how utterly changed everything must be, now that father is gone. I know how it must seem to her; sometimes it almost breaks my heart to think about it. But I will be very careful of her. I will please Aunt Louise enough so she will not torture poor mother with nonsense about sacrificing me, and almost criticisms of father; but I will not leave my mother any oftener than is necessary.”

She meant it, poor child.

Chapter Three

The Claims of Society

There were some heart-burnings connected with the new life that was presently begun. Kissie Gordon heard one morning in the room next to hers, words like these:

“Mamma, Kissie ought to have a new dress to wear to the Penningtons’. I am positively ashamed to have her appear in that old blue one, which she has worn three times in succession.”

“I know it, dear; but we are not responsible for her dress. People all understand that, of course, and most of them make allowances for the situation. They know that your aunt is a clergyman’s widow, and has, therefore, only a starvation income to depend upon. As a matter-of-fact her mother really cannot afford to get her a new dress at present, and I certainly cannot do it; you and Schuyler have spent money frightfully this quarter. Moreover, I should not wish to establish such a precedent.”

“Well, but mamma, is she to appear as our cousin, and be

actually shabby?”

“Why, she isn’t that, Maud. I am sure she always looks perfectly neat.”

“Oh, ‘neat’! Mamma, you know as well as I do how people dress, and I say it is positively embarrassing. Why, even Schuyler notices it. He asked me whether I couldn’t divide my fineries, and give Kissie some.”

It was impossible for poor Kissie to avoid hearing this. Never in her life had she been so wrought upon. Her cheeks glowed, and her eyes burned. So they were ashamed of her; and her aunt’s friends looked upon her mother and herself as paupers, and dishonored the memory of the dear father, who had planned so wisely for them. Oh, why must she stay here to be a disgrace to her relatives? If they could only go away, she and mamma, to a home of their own, she would not care how little it was, and she would never want to hear of another party. She would not go to the Penningtons’ party, or to any other. But poor mother should not know anything about all this hateful talk. She would shield her.

But she did not; it is hard to keep things from mothers. Hers noticed the drooping eyelids and the silence and reserve of her usually merry daughter, and grew alarmed, and questioned, and cross-questioned; and Kissie’s heart was sore, and she was not used to holding even small things back from her mother, and by dint of careful effort the whole story was evolved.

Mrs. Gordon did not take time for consideration, else her course might possibly have been different. She shut her lips

together firmly in a way that she had sometimes, and said decidedly:

“No, Kissie, do not decline the invitation. I desire you to go, and you shall be dressed in such a manner that your cousin need not be ashamed of you. No, my daughter, I insist, this time. I can manage the matter of dress; I have been thinking about it for some time.”

It involved volumes of talk. Kissie was alarmed and penitent. If only she had been as brave as some girls can be, and as she had meant to be, and had not cried or been haughty with Aunt Louise and silent toward Maud, her mother need not have known; and now she was, oh, so sorry, and did not care for their parties, and should just hate a new dress, she knew she should.

But Mrs. Gordon was firm. To have the elegant Maud ashamed of her beautiful daughter; to have people commiserating the child because her father had been a clergyman, and could not dress her decently, was more than the mother's nerves could bear.

She managed it, as she said she would; and Aunt Louise and Maud were loud in their praises of the results.

“Dora's taste always was perfect,” Mrs. Merchant said, with a sigh. “If she would only rouse herself and think about these matters a little more, she could give you some very helpful hints.”

But Kissie came very near hating the new dress, as she said she should, because she was sure that the little mother went without what were almost necessities, which else she would have had, in order to array her in it.

Nor did that old vexing problem of dress stay solved, even with this sacrifice laid on its altar. To the young novice in this world's ways it became a bewildering sorrow to discover how soon new things became old ones. The dress that in her world would have served her as very best for all winter, and have been a joy every time she wore it, in this new world became, after the third or fourth appearance, what Maud called "somewhat *passée*." It began to seem necessary to make constant expenditures for ribbons and laces and flowers wherewith to furbish up "old things." Moreover, the furbishing took hours of time and strength, and was such a drain on the nerves as the young burden-bearer did not understand or realize.

At last it came to pass that the methodical Kissie, who had heretofore enjoyed life, waking to each new day with a thrill of satisfaction and a trill of song much as a bird might give; who had found ample time for study and drives and calls, and a fair share of household duties besides, now arose in the morning, not only with a jaded look, and a sense of weariness, but with a fretful consciousness that she had more petty cares and burdens than ever in her life before. The fretfulness showed unmistakably upon her face, and began to be apparent at times in voice and manner.

"I wish I knew how to fix the trimming on my light dress as other people wear it now," she said to her mother on one of the weariest of these mornings. "It isn't fit to wear as it is. I shall have to spend the day at it, I suppose, and then make a miserable failure. I hate to touch it. I wish I could ever—"

At that point she stopped, having just grace enough left to keep from saying, "I wish I could ever have things like other people, without continually twisting and turning them."

Was this the girl that had actually shed some tears because her mother would insist on buying that same dress for her, not many weeks before? In a sense it was, though poor Kissie often wondered what had happened to her to make her *almost* say such hateful things.

During these days the mother often sighed softly and looked at Kissie wistfully. What had become of the sweet, brave daughter who had been her only earthly solace since the pall of sorrow shut heavily down upon her? Was Kissie overdoing? Yet the mother knew in her heart that the child had never done so little before.

Mrs. Merchant had a solution ready.

"Poor Kissie takes life hard just now," she said to her sister with a smile, which possibly was intended to be sympathetic. "It is hard for girls who have been brought up in bandboxes, so to speak, to adjust themselves smoothly to the routine of refined life and the claims of society. I have always taken the greatest pains to cultivate in Maud the feeling that to a certain extent she belonged to society, and had her share of its demands to meet. The consequence is, she takes as a matter of course all these things that fret and worry Kissie."

There was always a note of complacency in this mother's voice when she compared her daughter to any other daughter in the world, and sometimes it jarred on Mrs. Gordon. It did on this

occasion; so she answered coldly:

“I must say, I do not think Maud feels very ‘matter of course’ this morning; unless, indeed, it is a matter of course for her to complain of headache. I think it is late hours that affects them both.”

“Why, they were not late last night. Maud said she had been in bed for some minutes when the clock struck twelve. You really must try to rid yourself of such old-fashioned notions, Dora. We cannot expect young people to retire at eight o’clock. They must have their pleasures, and the best that we older ones can do for them is to remember that we were once young.”

Mrs. Gordon sighed wearily. She realized that she was beginning to feel very old; she seemed to have lost her place in life and her knowledge of the most ordinary customs of this age.

As for the “young people,” she remembered when her daughter Kissie was young. Now she seemed suddenly to have grown old and worn. Had the mother done wrong in yielding to “the claims of society”? That phrase was being forever harped in her ears, and she was conscious of repeating it bitterly; she was tempted to declare that society had no claims, at least upon her fair young daughter. Why should the world insist upon making a woman of fashion of her one sweet flower of a girl? She could have held Kissie to the old ways, if she had so chosen. But the trouble was, they would have been, after all, but a semblance of the old ways, with the heart gone out of them. Could Dr. Gordon be needed so much in heaven as he was here? Sometimes she

almost questioned even that.

Still she simply *could not* have people talking about her child, pointing her out as a girl with "views." Such talk was so hard for girls to bear. Poor mother! The world, unable to catch her with its parties and pleasures, from which her soul turned almost in loathing, was winding its meshes securely around her by means of her pretty daughter, and the horror that she felt at the thought of having her pronounced *peculiar*. So secure were its chains, and yet so subtle were their drawings, that she read, that evening in the solitude of her own room while Kissie was away at the Penningtons', these words, without a thought of their practical application to her fears:

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Meantime, occasional other surprises in the new world into which Kissie had entered sometimes made her look disturbed, and awakened discussions. These were liable to occur at the breakfast-table when all the family were gathered. It was then that the attendant generally appeared with hands full of notes, cards, and invitations.

The morning on which Mrs. Benson Adams sent out cards in honor of her daughter Marian's eighteenth birthday was the

occasion for one of these discussions.

Maud was explaining, with intense satisfaction in her tones, that it would be the affair of the season, without doubt. She added that Mrs. Benson Adams took perfect delight in outshining other people, and had been planning for this occasion for months. Moreover, that immaculate Mr. Macfarlane, about whom the Adams family, old and young, were always talking, was to honor the party with his presence, she had heard.

At this point Kissie interrupted her with an exclamation. "Why, Maud, it is to be on Wednesday evening!"

"Certainly," said Maud, "I told you that, several days ago. You speak as if it were a calamity. What of it?"

"Why, it is prayer-meeting evening, you know. Isn't that too bad? I promised Lena Adams I would certainly be there."

"Of course you will be there," said Maud. "We are too intimate with the Adams family to do otherwise, even if we wished to; and I am sure I do not. I am not an ardent admirer of Mrs. Benson Adams, it is true. She considers herself entirely too superior to please me; I always have an uncomfortable feeling that she is criticizing my dress, and manner, and everything about me, even while she is saying some of her very complimentary nothings to me; but she has every facility for entertaining company delightfully, and draws the best people about her. I wouldn't miss this reception for anything."

"Well, but Maud, we cannot accept an invitation to a party on our regular prayer-meeting evening, can we?"

“Why not, little Puritan? We can go to the prayer-meeting on any Wednesday evening of our lives that finds us so disposed; but invitations to spend the evening with Mrs. Benson Adams are rare. She makes too great a spread to take the trouble to do it often. Really, Kissie, your face is a study. Are we to understand that you consider it a sin not to go to prayer-meeting every time the bell rings? What a thing it is to be brought up as a clergyman’s daughter, to be sure!”

Now, Kissie had heard the changes rung on this latter phrase until it jarred painfully. She could not help having it seem each time like a reflection on her father.

“Are clergymen’s daughters the only ones that are supposed to have any conception of what is consistent?” she asked, face and voice expressing the indignation she felt.

“They are the only ones that live in strait-jackets, my dear. Mamma, do explain. I feel that the subject is too great for me.”

“Kissie, dear,” said Mrs. Merchant in her benevolent and patronizing tone, “you do not understand what Maud means. Of course we appreciate your scruples; with the environment that you have had all your life, they were necessary and becoming. One has need to be careful everywhere, lest the claims of society infringe on other duties. But, of course, occasionally there will come an important engagement for which all others will have to give way. I presume Maud feels this to be such an occasion. An eighteenth birthday is an event in a girl’s life; it comes to her but once: and Marian Adams could not very well postpone her birthday, you

know, even for a prayer-meeting.”

Then came in the voice of the irrepressible small boy, Herbert Merchant, aged nine.

“Oh, mamma! Marian Adams’s birthday was last Sunday. Dick Adams told me so; he gave her a perfectly splendid rose-bowl for a present, all gold and butterflies.”

Mrs. Merchant’s face was a study; but her reply was prompt.

“That is of no consequence, my son. She could not very well have a birthday party on the Sabbath. I presume they chose the next available evening. You should not interrupt your mother, to make entirely irrelevant remarks. As I was saying, my dear, the claims of society must sometimes interfere with our other duties. We must not be unreasonable about our religion, of all things. A great deal of harm can be done by being over-rigid concerning outward forms, and making ourselves offensively conspicuous because of them.”

Chapter 4

“Open Thou Her Eyes”

Mr. Schuyler Merchant was watching his cousin Kissie’s face. He liked his cousin, and the changeful play of expression on her face was one of his studies. It was a very much disturbed face just now, and her eyes were clouded in a way that always made him feel sympathetic. He essayed to produce a crumb of comfort.

“How would it do to go to prayer-meeting first, since Kissie finds it so much in her way? The thing never holds beyond nine o’clock, does it? That would be in ample time for the Adams crush. In fact, the later we reach there, the better it would suit me.”

“Mamma!” said Maud. “Fancy the idea!”

Her mother laughed, but tried to preserve her appearance of good-natured indifference.

“Your brother does not understand the ways of prayer-meetings very well,” was all she said.

“I should think not!” from Maud.

“What do you imagine Deacon Potter would think of us, to say nothing of Dr. Westbrook, if we should sail into the chapel in all our evening finery? I fancy mamma’s horror over being conspicuous would reach its height then, if ever. My dear boy, when your education is completed, you will know that the toilet that people make for a dancing-party is unsuited to a prayer-meeting. Besides, even if it were not, what a ridiculous idea it would be! One’s mind would be likely to be in a proper condition for a prayer-meeting, after one had hurried through one’s toilet as we invariably do, even if we are not going to start until ten o’clock. Kissie must get over her country absurdities, and be content to act like other people. Even Laura Westbrook never thinks of going to prayer-meeting on the evenings when there are large parties at special places, and she is the daughter of a clergyman right here in town. I think it would be positively sacrilegious to attempt it. I don’t believe in mixing sacred things with everyday ones in that sort of way; do you, mamma?”

“There should certainly be propriety in all things,” said Mrs. Merchant in her ambiguous tone; “and a reverent spirit is exceedingly important to cultivate.”

But the irreverent Schuyler laughed. “Since they must not be mixed, the sacred things must make way for the important everyday ones, dancing-parties and the like, eh? It is a curious question. I don’t think I understand its complexities any better than Kissie does.”

“Evidently you do not.” His mother spoke with emphasis, and

there was a heightened color on her face. She was peculiarly sensitive to ridicule coming from this source. "But I wish, my son, that you would not make light of religion, whatever else you do. I may have failed of my duty in many things, but I certainly thought I had brought up my children to speak of religious matters with the gravity that becomes such subjects."

"I beg your pardon, mamma, I meant to speak of the irreligious ones; and they got mixed. It takes a fellow of greater mental power than I possess to keep them apart, you see." Then, with another outburst of laughter, Mr. Schuyler Merchant excused himself and left the dining-room.

Mrs. Merchant looked her undisguised annoyance.

"I really wish we could get along without having such matters discussed every few days in careless fashion," she said; and her glance of reproach was entirely for Kissie. "Schuyler is unfortunately so constituted that he must turn everything into ridicule; and there are some subjects too sacred, in my judgment, to be exposed unnecessarily to his fire. Kissie, my dear, I hope you see how your peculiar ideas affect him. In order to humor your queer, old-fashioned notions he is ready to enter into all sorts of absurdities. He actually can see no impropriety in our attending a prayer-meeting in evening dress!

Poor Kissie was silenced, perplexed, and angry. What had she said to call out such a reproof from her aunt? What was the reason that they could never in that household discuss anything that had even the remotest reference to religion without making some of

them angry? Was it really because she was "peculiar," as her aunt constantly said? Aunt and cousin were both members of the church; it was certainly as much their duty as hers to attend the prayer-meetings.

Then poor Kissie groaned within herself over that word "duty." She remembered the time when it had been her pleasure to be in the prayer-meeting, when some of the happiest moments of her busy life were connected with the place of prayer. What had happened to her that she wanted now to choose Mrs. Adams's dancing-party in its stead? Was religion all a mistake, a delusion? Or was her conception of it wrong, and her aunt's right?

She could not, or would not, talk the subject over with her mother. That dear lady had been held away from the breakfast-table by a headache; and Kissie, in view of the turn that the table-talk had taken, felt for the first time grateful for the presence of headache. How distressed mamma would have been! She should not be troubled by any account of it, nor be asked to give advice. Therefore Kissie went over the pros and cons alone, again and again. Should she remain away from the Adams party, and vex her aunt and cousin, and break her promise to Lena Adams, who had developed an extravagant fondness for her? What good would a prayer-meeting do her under such circumstances? After all, as Aunt Louise said, the prayer-meeting was a regular thing, and these very specially choice gatherings would not be likely often to fall on prayer-meeting evenings. There might not during the season be another one that she would care to attend, or, at least,

that she would have such special reasons for attending.

There was one special reason, which she kept in the background even of her thoughts. "That Mr. Macfarlane," as Maud designated him, she had heard much about from Lena Adams, who was his cousin, and spoke of him always as a superior being. Kissie had conceived an eager desire to make his acquaintance. It was not that he was so fine-looking, and so wealthy, and so lavish with his money; she had heard the changes rung on these things until she almost wearied of them; but from time to time chance words had been dropped that had roused her interest in the stranger—chance words which indicated that in some things he did belong to another world; and there were times when Kissie Gordon longed exceedingly to see yet another world from any that she had yet known.

"After all," she said suddenly to her mother, long afterward, "perhaps I had better go to the Adams party. It would make a sensation in this house if I didn't. Aunt Louise is more intimate with Mrs. Adams, in a certain way, than she is with any other lady; and Lena has devoted herself so entirely to me that my absence would look peculiar. What do you think, mamma?"

She spoke exactly as if there had been long discussion between them; but in point of fact Mrs. Gordon had heard nothing beyond the announcement that Mrs. Benson Adams's cards were out for Wednesday, and that her daughter thought she should decline the invitation on account of the regular prayer-meeting. She had said so much in the heat of her indignation at her aunt and

cousin; but now it was the next day, and she had gone over the pros and cons a great many times. Her mother could not possibly know what the “after all” covered.

Still, she said, “Perhaps so;” but she said it in a grave tone, and smothered a sigh as she spoke. She knew better than her daughter Kissie did how many circumstances seemed in these days to arise to keep Kissie from being regular at anything that had to do with her old life.

She lay awake long that evening, after Kissie, with her careful assistance, had been carefully dressed, and had gone her way to what Schuyler called “the Adams crush;” and thought over their happy past, their troubled present, their doubtful future. She had not been able to rest her tired heart with the prayer-meeting, because she could not go alone; so she had stayed her fainting spirit with selections from her “Daily Manna.” But some of the verses had troubled her. The verse for that very day had been, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

She stopped long over that word “peculiar.” She had heard so much about it of late, no wonder it arrested her. There were once peculiar people, it seemed, whom the Lord loved. He chose to have them so. Oh, yes, she went to the Revised Version, and read the verse carefully there, “A people for God’s own possession;” the word “peculiar” was not there, it is true, but the thought it conveyed was made even stronger. The One that said, “Whosoever

shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother,” would welcome all that set themselves steadfastly to do his will as a people for his “possession;” and all such must of necessity, in this age of the world, become in a certain sense peculiar. Was not her Kissie one of these? The very question gave her heart a stinging pain. Did the child’s’ life speak for her today as one that was really “set apart”?

She turned the leaves of the little book in search of comfort. She wanted some great pillar of truth to rest her soul upon. She found this:

“Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Again she sought the Revised Version; the thought might be—well, different. It read:

“Be not fashioned according to this world.”

Oh, what had she and Kissie been doing for weeks and months but trying to “fashion” the child in every way according to the world’s model? How much or how little did the verse mean? They must live in this world, and there was a sense in which they must conform to its usages; but had she been all wrong in her advice?

On that same night, as Kissie Gordon tip-toed about the room on velvet-shod feet, the clock tolled one. She looked toward her mother to see whether the sound had disturbed her; not for the world would she have that precious mother awakened. She would have been amazed and frightened had she known that no sleep had

come to the mother as yet, and that the pillow was wet with tears that had been shed for her. Kissie's eyes looked as if no tears had ever touched them. They fairly blazed with excitement, even now.

She had not imagined that she should ever grow so fond of dancing. How constantly she had danced that evening! Even Maud had complained that it was not considered "good form" to be on the floor so continually; at least, not with the same person each time.

But that, Kissie believed, was because Maud was jealous of Mr. Kemper's attentions to her. Certainly he had been very attentive. How many absurd nothings he had contrived to say to her! She laughed softly in memory of some of them. She cared not a feather's weight for Mr. Kemper; but he was a delightful dancer, and all the girls were dying to dance with him; and behold, she, a little country girl, whom her cousin Maud had thought she must patronize, had been manifestly chosen by him!

Maud would be sure to say something spiteful about it in the morning, perhaps something that would trouble poor mamma. That was the worst of it. She paused in her tiptoeing, and stole a glance at her mother, whose face was partly hidden by pillows. In the dim light Kissie fancied that she looked paler than usual. She wanted to kiss her, but forbore; mamma must not be disturbed, even with kisses. Then the child's heart smote her for being so much away from her mother. She really must try not to have so many engagements; it was dreadful not to have spent an entire evening with her for nearly two weeks. When had such a thing

happened before? But this was an unusually gay time, according to Maud. Such a state of things would not last always.

“Just as soon as this special season of fun is over,” said Kissie penitently to herself, “I mean to settle down and spend a great many evenings with mamma.”

There were also other things that she meant to do when that time of leisure arrived. Her eye at that moment caught sight of her Bible lying on her secretary shelf. Actually there was dust on it. Kissie’s secretary was her bit of entire privacy; nobody ever touched it, even to dust. It used to be kept in immaculate order, and a tiny vase with a fresh flower in it used always to stand in front of her father’s picture. There was a flower in the vase now, but alas! It had withered, days ago; and there was dust on the Bible her father had given her.

She reached for the book, and brushed away the dust half angrily. It seemed as if somebody must be to blame for such a state of things. But she had been so very busy of late. When had she last read in her Bible? Surely it must have been yesterday—or no, the day before? Oh, no, she remembered she came home that night too tired for anything; and in the morning she had slept late and had to hurry dreadfully. Why, it must be more than a week since she had opened her Bible! What about that pledge of hers, given to her father before Christian Endeavor pledges were familiar words? She was to read a few verses in that particular Bible every day, when she possibly could.

“Well,” she told herself with an impatient frown on her pretty

face, "I possibly *couldn't* this week, I am sure. It has been a remarkable week. But I must not neglect this book. I will read a few words now, late as it is; the light is so shaded that it will not disturb mamma."

"Clarissa Headley Gordon," read the fly-leaf, "From her father on her tenth birthday." And underneath, in the same handwriting, "Open thou her eyes that she may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

As Kissie's eyes rested on the words, she smiled tenderly. Dear father! The very sight of her quaint old-fashioned name seemed to bring him before her. He was almost the only one that had ever called her "Clarissa;" and he used the name only in sacred moments when he had some tender and earnest word for her ear alone.

"Dear father!" she said again in her heart; how he had loved this book! She must not neglect it ever anymore.

Chapter 5

“Communing with the World”

Where was it that she was last reading?

She could not seem to remember. Never mind; any place would do; it was all good. She would begin here.

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world. It is queer the Westervelt girls were not there. I wonder what has become of them. They are so devoted to the Adams family, especially to Russell Adams. According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Mr. Kemper says some extremely silly things; if he were not such a fine dancer, I don’t think I should care for his society. What was that he said tonight about my eyes? I wonder whether he supposes I am silly enough to believe all that nonsense. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the

mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. I must say I think Carrie Barnes acted like an idiot tonight. I wonder whether she knows how constantly she watches what Mr. Kemper says and does. I should dislike to show my feelings so plainly. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins. I wish I hadn't promised to go to the Snowdons' party. I haven't anything fit to wear. Still, I might fix over my pearl-colored dress like the one Miss Fielding wore tonight. Miss Fielding isn't invited to the Snowdons', so it wouldn't matter if it was just like hers; and my lace is prettier than hers; I mean to do it. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; it is dreadfully frayed around the bottom, but I might trim that with lace, also; a lace flounce would be lovely. It wouldn't need but a few yards more; that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus."

Where did Kissie Gordon find so astounding a chapter as that to read? I declare to you that the printed words and the thought-words flowed along in that same channel through the entire chapter; with the thought-words having such complete ascendancy that the would-be reader never even for a moment saw the incongruity, and closed the effort with complacency after this fashion:

"'In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' There! I have read a whole chapter; let me see, where is it? Oh, Ephesians. I wonder whether my gloves will

do, or whether I shall have to get a new pair?"

An exceptional case, do you think? An experience known to but few? What if we could have photographs, as it were, of our Bible-readings, with the printed words and the thought-words, not arranged in parallel columns, but flowing into each other after the manner of words and thoughts? Would not your yesterday's dressmaking and canning and excursion, and your tomorrow's cake and fancy-dress party intermingle with "Be not conformed to this world," and "Take no thought for the morrow," and "Be not ye like unto them"? How many of us would like to see our Bible-readings printed after this fashion?

Then Kissie knelt to pray. She did not voice her petitions, and only she and the great Listener know how strangely at variance were the two trains of thought surging through her brain. Nay, only he knows fully; for poor Kissie was too excited and too weary to realize how entirely she was communing with herself, while the formula of prayer was floating dimly in the background of her mind.

But there was one that prayed. The wide-awake mother, with her face shaded by a hand that trembled, cried out from the depths of her soul. "Oh, my Father, my Father! If I have made a mistake, let it not be a fatal one. If my Kissie is in danger, if the world is growing too sweet for her, oh, dear Christ, speak in some way to her soul *now*, before she loses herself in the mazes of worldliness that lie thick about her."

A Modern Sacrifice

* * *

In the chapel people were singing:

“One more day’s work for Jesus,
How sweet the work has been!”

Kissie was not singing; her voice was both sweet and powerful; and, when she chose not to sing in prayer-meeting, more people than her mother missed her. But on this evening she was dumb. Her head ached, and she was tired. But for the fact that both her aunt and her cousin had congratulated her at the dinner-table because there was no other engagement, and she could indulge herself in a prayer-meeting, she would not have gone out. Her Aunt Louise said she was hoarse, and could not go; and Maud said frankly that she did not want to go, she was too tired; but Kissie was not hoarse, and did not care to own that she did not want to go.

But she could not sing, especially that hymn. She was dimly conscious that none of her work that day had been for Jesus. Yet she had been industrious; all day long she had sewed steadily, and, as the day waned, nervously. There was so much to be done before she could be ready for Mrs. Snowdon’s party. During the last two hours of daylight she had felt herself growing hopelessly irritable. Her silk knotted and broke; her thimble, whenever she laid it down, immediately lost itself in breadths of silk and lace; and her

scissors at last went off on business of their own, and could not be found. She told her mother that she was sure the waist which that tired lady was patiently trimming was uneven on the shoulders, and that the lace was not full enough, anyway.

When the mother said gently, "Don't you think, dear, you had better lay aside your work until tomorrow, and take some rest?" she had answered pettishly that she had no time to rest; that, if she ever went anywhere, she must work herself almost to death to get something decent to wear.

She did not enjoy the prayer-meeting; how could she, poor child, being sleepy, and having a dull headache? She had not been able to keep her thoughts on the subject under consideration; in fact, she did not know what the subject was. It might have been startling had she known that the pastor had been talking about "Things that satisfy." Certainly Kissie was in anything but a satisfied frame of mind. Had her thoughts been truly introspective, she might perhaps have realized what a very great change a few months had made in her. The process had been more rapid in her case than it is in that of some; she belonged to the class of people with whom everything must of necessity be rapid. On the evening before, the excitement of the life she was living had made her eyes bright, and sent the blood racing through her veins; but this evening the heavy reaction was upon her. She looked with dull eyes at the people, and wondered how they could seem to be interested in what was going on, and wondered how long the pastor was going to talk.

Finally she lost even the murmur of Dr. Westbrook's voice, and went off into her own world. How strange it was that she had not yet met the Mr. Macfarlane about whom she had heard so much! It was now many weeks since his coming had been heralded, and he still appeared to be too much engaged with his own affairs to appear among them. Meantime, Kissie's curiosity concerning him had been growing; she could not recall that she had ever before had so eager a desire to meet a person. Only this day she had heard that he was in town at last, and had positively promised Mrs. Snowdon to be present at her party. Had Kissie been satisfied about the progress made with her dress, she would have looked forward to the next evening with unusual pleasure; but she had put the work away at last in a fit of irrepressible petulance, declaring that she did not care whether it was finished or not; she knew she should look like a dowdy in it. She brought it to the front now, while somebody was praying, and tried to plan a way of re-arranging the offending lace.

Suddenly her attention was arrested; a new voice broke the moment's silence. It was a large church, and most of the voices were still strange to Kissie; but this was different from any that she had yet heard, perhaps from any that she had ever heard. Not a loud voice, but exceedingly clear and penetrative. The words it spoke, though reverent in the extreme, were unlike ordinary words of prayer. They made Kissie feel as if the speaker were in the actual presence of the Lord, communing with him. One sentence in particular held her: "If there be one here tonight in bodily presence

whose soul is yet outside, communing with the world, do thou, good and patient Spirit, reach out after that one, and press home the thought that thou art here, waiting to give what the world cannot.”

Instinctively Kissie felt that that prayer was for her. Her soul was outside, communing with the world. After that she tried to listen, tried to join in the closing prayer, and did join, at least with voice, in the closing hymn:

“Holy Spirit, love divine,
Brood upon this heart of mine.”

“Did you enjoy the meeting, dear?” her mother asked as they walked homeward. “I thought it a singularly helpful one. Especially that stranger’s prayer rested me. It seemed to me I could almost feel the everlasting arms close around me. Was it helpful to you, daughter?”

“Oh, mamma, to tell the truth, I was so tired and sleepy that I believe the strongest feeling I had concerning it was satisfaction that it was over and I could go home and go to bed.”

But there was no sense of weariness on the following evening. Kissie Gordon was evidently the light and center of Mrs. Snowdon’s well-filled parlors. The remodeled dress was not in the least “dowdyish”; on the contrary, Kissie and her mother had succeeded beyond the latter’s most sanguine hopes. Mr. Kemper, the man that “danced beautifully and said such silly things,”

seemed to be more conscious than ever of her attractions, and hovered about her, claiming her for dance after dance, until her cousin Maud came to her with angry eyes, and a "Really, Kissie, I shall consider it my duty to tell Aunt Dora, if you persist in making yourself so conspicuous."

Kissie, angered by the angrily given caution, had replied coldly, "Do your duty, my dear, by all means;" and then had immediately yielded to Mr. Kemper's urgings for still another dance, as she had not intended to do. After that she was inexorable; she must rest. Yes, she was quite willing to promise not to dance with any other; not at present, at least; she was tired. Would he take her to a quiet corner and let her rest?

He found the desired corner, hiding her almost from view behind the great foliage plants, and went in search of some refreshments for her. Others were seeking quiet, also. Two young ladies strayed that way, talking incautiously.

"Do you notice how that Miss Gordon dances tonight? She has almost a reckless air. I think she must be rather a fast girl, although I had heard that she was a model of propriety, daughter of a clergyman, you know; and almost a youthful prodigy in his church when he was living. Those precociously pious children always make the worst kind of worldlings, don't you think, when they try that form of excitement?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I haven't much acquaintance with pious people. It is the last word I should apply to Miss Gordon. That word 'reckless' fits her very well tonight, I think. One

wouldn't suppose that she would like to dance so much with Harry Kemper; he is decidedly 'fast,' I have heard. I wonder Schuyler Merchant allows it; he ought to look after his cousin."

"Oh, Schuyler Merchant! What can be expected of him? He thinks of nothing in the world but how he can manage to win the next game of cards. He plays here for practice, you know, and then goes and tries his skill at the club. My brother Edward says if something doesn't bring him to his senses soon, he will ruin his mother; he lost heavily only the other night, and is considerably involved. Isn't it too ridiculous to hear Mrs. Merchant go on about how she and Maud have sacrificed so many evenings to playing with him at home so he will not care to play elsewhere?"

The two laughed at Mrs. Merchant's expense, and the other added: "Oh, dear, yes, I have heard her. Only the other day at the Fieldings' she was lecturing about the Eastmans, who will not allow cards in their house, you know. 'Such fanatical ideas!' she said, and lifted her eyes to heaven, and sighed. 'I do feel thankful that I have been kept from making sacrifices of my children. Poor Schuyler is so fond of a game of cards; and, if his mother and sister will not play with him, who would? As it is, he is entirely satisfied to spend his leisure evenings at home, and he does not care for other companionship at cards; and she looked, oh so pious, while she was saying it! It was as good as a play."

"And now this precious cousin has come to help on his education. I heard that he taught her the first game of cards she ever played. I wonder her father can rest in his grave. I once heard

him hold forth on the subject of cards. Still, that is the least of his daughter's accomplishments, evidently. Do you suppose she is flirting with Mr. Kemper, or really interested in him? I heard that he was so much intoxicated last night that he had to be helped home. The Eastmans, you know, will not invite him to their house."

"Well," said her friend, "I think that is going too far. We cannot help it if he does take a glass too much, on occasion. He belongs to an old and aristocratic family; I don't believe in cutting him entirely; but I shouldn't care to dance with him if all I have heard is true."

Then these amiable ladies readjusted their gloves and departed, leaving behind the foliage plants a young girl whose eyes were ablaze with indignation.

Chapter 6

Knowledge Dearly Bought

Never in all her short experience of life had Kissie Gordon gone through with such an experience of pain and shame as those sheltering plants hid that evening. She sat as one paralyzed with the sound of her own name. No thought of making her presence known so much as occurred to her. All her being was absorbed in an intense personality. What had happened to her? She, Clarissa Headley Gordon, named for her saintly grandmother, and her splendid father's joy and pride, described by that hateful word "fast!" What did they mean? They ought to be made to suffer for such language. Oh, their cruel, hateful tongues! How they had stabbed right and left without seeming to care where or whom they struck! Mr. Kemper was "fast," too. The same dreadful word they had applied to herself, and with perhaps as much reason in the one case as the other. They were wicked, wicked people. They had even dragged her dead father's name into their talk, and sneered at

his views.

Such were some of her thoughts. Perhaps the undertone of pain hurt the worst. Was there possibly a shade, just a shade, of truth in their hateful words? Was she dishonoring her father's memory? Had he felt keenly and understandingly about all these things, instead of being, as she had made herself believe, so absorbed in other and more important matters as to know little about modern ideas and ways? Would he feel disappointed in her, even disgraced by her, if he were here now?

But this was absurd. Did not her mother know? Would her mother have consented for a moment to anything questionable? Was it reasonable to suppose that that girl, a stranger to her father, had heard him "hold forth" as she said, about cards, when she, his daughter, had never heard him mention the subject? Oh, she had heard him talk about gambling, of course; but what connection was there between that and the pleasant little games that she played occasionally with her cousin Schuyler and his friends? The backbiters had spared neither him nor his mother.

While she still sat shielded behind the spreading foliage, trying to still the tumult of her thoughts, and to decide how to get through with the remainder of this evening, which had suddenly become hateful, she was helped to more revelations. Two other ladies stationed themselves just in front of her alcove, and addressed an unseen person.

"Why are you not dancing, Mr. Macfarlane? We are enjoying it more than usual, the music is so fine."

“I do not dance,” said a voice in prompt response, a voice that for a moment turned Kissie’s thoughts into a new channel. She was back in the chapel, and a stranger was praying, and praying a prayer that had lingered with her in undertone, a prayer about people that were “outside, communing with the world.”

“It is the same voice,” said Kissie to herself; “it must be; there is no other voice quite like that one, I am sure; and yet—it cannot be, because a man who prays in that way is not—would not—” and then Kissie came to an abrupt pause in her thoughts, her heart all in a throb of pain.

What was she saying? That a man who prayed as if he were an intimate friend of Jesus Christ would not be here! Then in the name of her professions and intentions, why was *she* here? Oh, of course she meant nothing of the kind. What was the matter with her? Because she was a member of the church must she needs be a fanatic, and think herself too good to mingle with other people? That, it appeared, was what the immaculate Mr. Macfarlane was like. She did not want to know him. She was glad she had not met him. Why should he set himself up as a superior person, and declare in lofty tones that he did not dance? Who wanted him to, unless he chose? She danced, and meant to; it was innocent, healthful amusement. She should dance with Mr. Kemper the very next time he asked her. If cruel, wicked people must needs take them for victims, they would at least stand by each other. This was the next mood.

Then the two that had roused all this contradictory passion of

thought returned from their saunter through the refreshment rooms, and stationed themselves as before, still talking.

“Isn’t it strange that Harry Potter is here tonight?” one said. “You know he isn’t received anymore by particular people. He has really gone too far. But then, Mrs. Snowdon isn’t very particular, is she?”

“I should say not. However, she does not allow her daughter to dance with him. I presume she thinks that is caution enough. Probably she thought Kissie Gordon would be willing to take charge of him!” Then the two laughed.

It is a pity that a laugh cannot be pictured.

It is certain that it can be felt. This one burned into Kissie’s soul. She did not know a person called Harry Potter; this was the largest, and in some respects the most fashionable, gathering she had ever attended; there were many present to whom she had not been introduced. What right had those fearful girls to say that she would take questionable people in charge? Hark! They were talking again, and the name of one she knew floated toward her.

“I hope Tiny will not dance with him.”

Another laugh, this time a light, careless one, and the response, “Oh, she will, you may be sure, if he asks her. She confessed to me the other day that she believed she would dance with the evil one if there were no one else, she was so fond of dancing.”

Kissie Gordon felt a cold shiver quivering through her burning frame. Did people really grow so fond of dancing as that? Therein,

perhaps, lay the harm for some persons. The "Tiny" of whom they spoke was sweet and fair, like a little flower; and young and unsheltered, one of those girls that must always cling to somebody. She had shown a disposition to cling to Kissie, and had been graciously received. Was Kissie leading her in a dangerous way?

Before this thought had time to do other than flash itself upon her Mr. Kemper returned, profuse in apologies for his long delay; there had been so many before him in the refreshment rooms. There was a taint of wine in his breath, which might have accounted for some of the delay, had Kissie not been too pre-occupied to notice it. While she ate her ice, she grew angry again over the memory of some of the hateful words that she had heard; and, when Mr. Kemper presently begged for one more dance, her assent was so prompt that it surprised him. A few moments more, and they were the center of many pairs of eyes. Behold, instead of being one of the dances that were almost promenades, in which Kissie had heretofore indulged, this was a waltz. In her preoccupation she had not even noticed it at first.

What happened as she was being whirled through its dizzy mazes? At the moment she could not have explained to anyone. She was sure of only one thing, that she must escape then and there from the hateful spot. She came to a sudden halt, having had just enough presence of mind to whirl out from the circle.

"Are you ill? Are you faint? Let me support you," begged Mr. Kemper, with his arm still encircling her waist, though she

struggled for freedom.

“No, I am neither; take your hand away. No, I say; let me alone. I do not wish your help. You knew I did not waltz, Mr. Kemper. What made you ask me? How dare you treat me as you did?”

“But my dear Miss Gordon—”

She interrupted him. “No; I want no explanations. I realize that the fault was in part, at least, mine. Let me pass. I want simply to be let alone.”

There was nothing else to be done. She moved away from him like an indignant queen; she would not be escorted to a seat; she would have nothing at his hands.

It was her cousin Maud’s voice that helped to impress upon poor Kissie, in a moment more, how conspicuous a thing she had done.

“Well, Kissie Gordon, if your aim in life is to make yourself and your relatives conspicuous and ridiculous, you must be succeeding beyond your most sanguine expectations. Pray, what do you intend to do next?”

There was no help to be got from Maud.

Kissie turned from her coldly. “I am going home to my mother,” she said, “where I wish I had stayed. Maud, I did not know, or think—a” Then she made a sudden pause. What had she to say that Maud would understand?

The indignant cousin finished the sentence for her. “Nor did I think that you would prove to be such a consummate idiot; else I

should not have coaxed you out of your shell, you may be sure.”

She tried to tell her mother about it afterward; sitting at her feet on a low hassock, and at intervals burying her face in that tender mother’s lap. The story was disjointed and in some places incoherent.

“Mamma, he *looked* at me so! And he held my hand in such a hateful, hateful way! I cannot tell you how it was; it frightens me to think of it.”

“My daughter,” in a low, constrained tone, “did the man insult you?”

“No, mamma; that is, he did not call it insult; and the girls do not, who are used to such things. Maud says I am a complete idiot; and her friend Carrie Morrison could not speak for laughing when I tried to tell her what I meant. What did I expect in a waltz, they asked. That is just it, mamma. I should have expected such things in their world. It is not my world; and I have been trying to belong to it; and it has caught me almost. Not quite, mamma. I loathe the sort of experience I had last night, and I begin to understand that is not an unusual one. That little Tiny, too young and innocent to know anything about the wickedness of this wicked world, I can see how she will accept such—such attentions as necessities, and give them no thought until sometime she falls into the hands of—mamma, in this same waltz she was dancing with that Harry Potter.” Then Kissie shuddered, and buried her head in her refuge.

Then there were a few minutes during which the mother stroked the brown head, and held herself to rigid silence. She did

not yet dare to speak. When did her child become less pure and innocent than Tiny? Then the child broke forth again, answering her thought.

“Mother, girls do not know; they do not understand; and they ought to be told. It is not safe to be so innocent and ignorant in this wicked world. You think I have suddenly grown very wise; but I have had a different home education from most of these girls, you know. They have grown up in this atmosphere, have seen such sights, and felt something of such experiences, almost from childhood; while I have been shielded until at last it came to me as a shock. I ought to have known before, ought to have understood why father and you held yourselves from this form of the world. I wonder that I never sought to know. Mother, the thought of that little Tiny makes me shudder. She is fatherless and motherless; and she has danced her pretty little way through life, and is so fond of it that they say she declares she would dance with the evil one if there were no other partner; and some of those young men she meets are skillful representatives of the evil one. I have had just one brief experience of what may legitimately belong to the society waltz, and I *know*.”

“My poor little girl!” came from the mother’s tremulous lips. It was all she could trust herself to say.

“Mamma,” with lips that quivered a little, “there is worse still to tell you. This world, in what is called its safe side, has not been safe for me. I ought to have been warned because of that. I was warned, if I would have listened. It is weeks and weeks since I

have read my Bible with anything like enjoyment; and I have forgotten how to pray. Don't start, mamma, and don't be too much shocked; I must tell you the whole story now. Oh, I have regularly knelt and gone through the form of prayer; but it humiliates me to the dust when I think what a mockery it has been. Much of the time—I realize it now, as I did not then—I was living over again the evening's entertainment. It is awful! I do not wonder that you shudder. Mamma, do you remember that man's prayer in the meeting the other night, that stranger's? I knew, after I had heard him, that I had forgotten how to pray. Oh, perhaps some people go through such experiences unharmed, but I feel scorched all over. And then think of poor Schuyler; the world has caught him too; and Aunt Louise does not know, does not *begin* to understand. Don't you know how she begged me to help them play cards with him at home, so he would not, like too many young men, she said, be enticed elsewhere? What folly that is, when one stops to think of it! Cultivate a taste at home, surround it with all sweet home influences, so that, when one meet the same thing elsewhere, it shall remind of home, and be therefore shunned! To think that I, who studied logic with my father, should have been caught with such chaff! I wonder whether all this *had to be*? Do you suppose that if I had learned from my earliest girlhood the apparently inevitable tendency of this form of the world, and had distinctly understood the reason why so many thoughtful men and women hold aloof from it, and advise against it, I should still have insisted upon learning by experience, feeling sure that the wise ones were

all wrong, and I only was right?"

"My poor little girl!" The words came this time almost like a wail from the mother's lips, as she bent forward and encircled the fair form of her treasure in loving, trembling arms. "My poor girl! Your mother has sacrificed you. Your Aunt Louise said I should, and I have; but I did it to her god, not mine."

Of course after that outburst Kissie had to turn comforter. She had tender, soothing words for the crushed mother. She was not to think that irreparable injury had been done. She, Kissie, had been asleep, had been bewitched for a time by that serpent in disguise, the safe, sweet, cultured world. She had not meant to step outside of those safe circles; she had meant to have just an occasional dip into the world, so that she should not be talked about and voted "peculiar."

"But I have been talked about," she broke off, her face flushing again at the thought. "Mamma, I have decided that people must be peculiar, whether they will or not; the difference lies in the lines that they choose. One cannot—at least, I cannot—be half-way anything. I have tried it, and made an utter failure. Mamma, I found this verse this morning and adopted it: 'The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.' I suspect such living would make one peculiar."

It was by no means the last talk on the subject which they held together. Indeed, mother and daughter promptly returned to the old confidential ways that they used to have before that deceitful world glided between them. In truth, they had to be much to each other during these days, for the aunt and cousins did not approve of them. They considered Kissie as acting like a simpleton, and were exercised as to how to explain the peculiarities of their relatives to the watching world.

But it happened that about that time one of the investments supposed to be disastrous, suddenly righted itself; and Mrs. Gordon found herself with sufficient means to set up a home of her own. Never was a girl happier than Kissie when this discovery was made. She had plans innumerable, growing out of those long talks.

“There are other girls in danger,” she said gravely; “and some that have not thought of danger are in the greatest peril of all. There are many innocent little Tinys, mamma; perhaps my garments were allowed to scorch that I might help a few such. I’ll tell you one thing I think is wanted. There is no society for people that do not intend to dance, or play progressive euchre, or join in any of the life that these two forms of amusement represent. Many of them are not fond of music, except to a limited degree; and they have never learned how to converse together and enjoy it. How are such to be entertained, and led gradually into rational and unquestionable ways of social life? There must be ways of helping them; let us try whether there are or not.”

Was it an easy thing to do? You that are at work in the same

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lines, answer for yourselves. Was it an important thing to do? You that have looked on and felt heartaches over certain Schuylers and Tinys, answer for yourselves. Was it accomplished? In part it was. Some of the innumerable plans that Kissie and her mother evolved were undoubted successes. Some of them were apparent failures; but some things that seem to be failures have long-reaching power, and may yet be heard from. There is another world than this.

Chapter 7

“That is Fanaticism and Superstition”

“I can’t think of another thing to be done to make it prettier,” said Kissie Gordon, as she gave a swift, critical survey of the pretty rooms. They were in festive array, evidently ready for some special occasion. A notable occasion, indeed; the Gordons, mother and daughter, were ready in their new home to make their first experiment with the fashionable world.

It was a charming home, with large, old-fashioned rooms of queer shapes; with unexpected alcoves and cozy corners and niches that were the delight of Kissie’s heart. They were not furnished after the approved fashion of modern rooms. Even the parlors were covered only with matting; but the matting was colorless, save for its own soft cream tint, and was fine and closely woven, and padded underneath, to make quiet foot-falls. The curtains at the many windows were of the simplest muslin, and had been ruffled by Kissie’s own busy fingers. The low, wide rockers,

and indeed the chairs generally, were of willow, as was also the pretty table. The aforesaid cozy corners were surrounded by low, wide seats, made, under Kissie's direction, of pine boards, and afterward upholstered luxuriously in cretonnes of soft, cool tints. Mrs. Gordon and Kissie had done the upholstering themselves. There were cushions everywhere; even the wide, low window seats were piled with them; soft, fluffy cushions, not too delicate to use, covered with no more expensive material than silkoline, but in lovely tints, and harmonizing exquisitely with the other bits of coloring. There was not an expensive article in those two rooms, if one excepts the few choice pictures on the walls and a lovely marble that occupied one of the niches. There was also a finely executed picture of her father, which Kissie had wreathed in immortelles and placed in another niche.

To some people the whole effect would have been restful; but Maud Merchant found room only for criticism.

"Do you really like mattings for parlors?" she asked, with dissatisfied face, when her feet first rested on them.

"Yes," said Kissie gayly, "I like to sweep them; and I like the fresh, cool look that they have; and the difference in price between them and carpets, I like best of all. In the winter we shall almost cover them with rugs; we have reveled in rugs. Have you seen those lovely ones in our upstairs rooms?"

"I saw them, of course. Do you call them lovely? They are pretty enough as to colors; but, after all, they are nothing but Brussels."

“That is why we could have so many of them,” said Kissie, “and Brussels in best qualities lasts a long time. I think they make them in such pretty colors now; they are called ‘art squares,’ and really there is a great deal of art displayed in the harmony of color.”

“But, Kissie, what was the use in your furnishing the house in such a very cheap fashion? Common muslin at the windows, and cretonnes for the upholstered work, and even silkoline for cushions! I hate silkoline.”

“I love silkoline,” laughed Kissie, imitating her cousin’s intense tone, and hugging one of the cushions to her velvet cheek; “it is so soft and silky and cheap.”

“Yes, that is it, that last. Why should you have everything so cheap? Aunt Dora told us what your income would be, now that those shares have turned out all right; and I am sure it is as much as, and more than, we have to depend upon. If there were any occasion for cheap muslins and mattings, and all those common things, why, one would have to endure them, of course; but I must say I don’t understand what you mean by it all. In the winter it will look dreadfully cold and ugly.”

“In the winter we shall make it bright with some of the loveliest warm colors in rugs and curtains and throws that you ever saw. I have them all selected, in my mind’s eye. As for what we mean, Maud dear, I may as well confess that it was a choice between pleasures. If we had spent a great deal more money on carpets and curtains, and matters of that kind, we should have

straitened ourselves for this year in other directions where we do not want to economize. We mean to be very gay, and entertain a great deal of company.”

Her cousin’s face did not brighten. “I don’t see how people who have smothered themselves in cretonnes and silkolines and cheap muslin can entertain company very well,” she said in her most dissatisfied tone.

Kissie’s reply was a merry little laugh.

“Is hospitality really a matter of silk instead of silkoline, and damask instead of cretonne?” she asked gayly. “I have had my suspicions that it meant something of the sort to many people, but I did not know that anybody would own it.”

“Oh, you can laugh, of course,” said Maud with heightened color; “you seem to have made up your mind to turn everything that I say into ridicule; but I assure you that I am better acquainted with polite society than you are, and that people who really belong to it, and are worth cultivating, are not accustomed to this sort of thing, and will not understand it. You cannot make the world into an Arcadia at your fancy, nor mould it to suit your whims. I know you have some absurd notions to carry out; and I warn you, Kissie Gordon, that you will just make a spectacle of yourself. You have already distinguished yourself, remember, in certain directions. If I were you, I would not begin in this new home in a way which will make you even more conspicuous and ridiculous. I wanted to have a talk with you about that very thing. It was, in fact, what I came in for, this afternoon; but your queer riggings here put everything

else out of mind. Really, Kissie, if you have determined that you must be eccentric, and go contrary to all the customs of society, you must not expect Schuyler and me to stand by you. We have borne a good deal already, as you very well know; but there is a limit. What is the reason that you cannot act like other folks?"

The young girl thus addressed paused in her work of settling the cushions in the south window-seat, and turned toward her cousin a fair, sweet face on which there was a wistful look.

"I wish I knew how to explain it to you, Maud," she said, her voice gentle, almost tender. "Don't you know what my ambition is? I don't want to 'act like other folks,' only so far as they act like my Master, Jesus Christ. I want to belong to him so completely that my home and everything in it shall be consecrated to his service, and be known as a sort of headquarters for him. I see ways, or at least I think I see ways, of using even the cushions and the curtains in his service; and because they are cheap I see ways to use them better than I could otherwise. Of course I do not mean by that that everybody's things should be cheap; I suppose people have to decide these matters, each for himself; but I mean that we, mamma and I, have decided to try this way of doing our work. Don't you understand, dear?"

Maud made an impatient movement. "No, I don't in the least. I don't believe you understand yourself. There is no use in dragging in Aunt Dora; everybody knows that she is a victim to any whim which you catch up for the moment. If you will excuse my saying so, I think you talk like a lunatic. All that about using

cushions and curtains for Christ sounds like sacrilege. I was brought up not to mix sacred things with everyday ones in that sort of way. You have a fad, Kissie; and you are going to work it for all it is worth, while it lasts. Those things are like diseases; they have to run their course; and by the way you talk I should think yours was just at its height. I'm sure I hope you will begin to rally soon. Meantime, it is a pity that Aunt Dora is so much under your influence; for I am just afraid of what you will do next."

She had turned and walked slowly down the room as she talked. She came to a stand-still in front of Dr. Gordon's picture, gazing at it with the same dissatisfied air that had marked every movement. "Look at that now," she said irritably. "Of course you know well enough that it is *country* to the last degree to parade family portraits in parlors; yet here you bring your best picture of Uncle Jerome, which one would suppose you would like in your own room, and parade it in one of the most conspicuous places in your parlor. I don't suppose there is any religion about that, at least. What do you do it for?"

Kissie's eyes had clouded under the power of her cousin's reply to her explanation; she realized the folly of trying to explain efforts of this kind to a girl like her cousin; she felt annoyed with herself for having attempted it; and, had the next criticism been leveled at any other article in the room, it is to be feared that her response might not have been as gentle as it was.

"Father belongs here; I could not put him anywhere else. There is a sense in which he is to preside over these rooms, and

help us to entertain our friends. If he were here in very person, I should take the greatest care not to wound his feelings by doing anything contrary to his wishes, and it helps me to see his strong, grand face pictured there. I am to try in all things to win the approval of those kind, grave eyes. It is a very striking likeness, Maud; sometimes it almost seems to me as if his eyes actually followed me about, and changed their expression in sympathy with my moods.”

Maud turned coldly away. “That is fanaticism,” she said, “and superstition.”

In spite of criticism, mother and daughter had gone steadily on with their preparations, and now were ready for their first “evening at home.” Much study had been spent on the preparations for entertaining their friends. In the pretty alcoves that opened from the back parlor small tables were set, which held popular games of all sorts, Shakesperian, historical, geographical; games of “Celebrated Authors,” Halma boards, Klova boards, even a basket of Tiddledewinks; every grade of taste had been thought of and planned for.

Certain choice books that were then under discussion in the literary world were laid conspicuously on the center-table; certain engravings of noted places lay beside them. Everything calculated to provoke and promote conversation had been considered.

The pretty dining-room was also in festive array. It was the month of roses and honeysuckle, and Kissie had been lavish with them. The refreshments were simple in the extreme; but

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arrangements had been made to serve them so daintily that they would in themselves be a lesson in good taste and refinement.

“I can’t think of another thing to be done,” Kissie had said; and, although there was satisfaction in her voice, she smothered back a little sigh. She had spent so much time and thought upon this effort of hers; and now she was being haunted by that questioning demon that comes in our weary moments, and murmurs: “After all, will it pay? Can you hope to accomplish anything by such simple and commonplace efforts as these?”

Chapter 8

“We Can’t Do It, I’m Afraid”

The eventful evening came and passed.

The guests gathered in Mrs. Gordon’s pleasant rooms, and amused themselves according to their tastes. They wandered through the rooms, and looked at the pictures in a careless, desultory fashion, as young people do; they chattered and laughed a great deal, and tried many games, and admired the roses, and sipped the lemonade or chocolate with zest, and assured Kissie that her new home was “lovely,” “really refreshing in its unlikeness to all other homes.” Then they went away, and accepted invitations, most of them, for every other evening that week, and danced like tops, those of them whose tastes lay in that direction; others played cards as late as was considered “good form” to play in parlors, and adjourned, some of them to club-houses or pool-rooms to complete the excitement; and what good had it all done?

Kissie asked her mother this question in a discouraged tone a

few afternoons later, when they had sat down for a little confidence together.

“Perhaps I’ve been very foolish, mamma; I am inclined to think that I have. I hoped to accomplish a great deal, and I have not accomplished anything. You know how I felt about it. It seemed to me that these young people could never have heard of any form of entertainment save dancing and card-playing. I thought they did not know how pleasant it was to meet socially and have little visits together; and I thought that if I could but show them how we used to do it in Kirkland, they would be interested; but somehow they don’t know how to do it.”

Mrs. Gordon smiled indulgently on her young daughter.

“I am sorry you were disappointed, dear,” she said. “I thought our first evening was a success. I am sure they all seemed very happy, and paid us a great many compliments; even Maud was less bored than she had expected.”

“Oh, they were polite, of course, and enjoyed themselves in a way; at least, some did; but I overheard some remarks that were not complimentary. Owen Pierson told those Gardners that he thought it was a very ‘slow’ affair, whatever that word may mean in such connection; and Minnie Belmont giggled over it with Miss Edgewood, and said I had set out to reform them all. I don’t know what she meant by that; or, at least, I don’t know what suggested such an idea to her. It is true I meant something of that kind, but I didn’t intend to have it appear on the surface. Mamma, I don’t believe, after all, that I am intended for a reformer.” She laughed a

little, but it was evident that she was disappointed.

Mrs. Gordon considered. She had been very careful not to dampen in any way her daughter's ardor, and had entered into all her plans with a zest worthy of a younger woman; but now perhaps the time had come for some words that she had thought must sometime be spoken.

"Kissie, dear, mother did not want to croak, so she kept silence; but now I will tell you that I feared you were expecting too much. You thought to take girls and young men who have been educated on an entirely different plane from yourself, who have views on all sorts of subjects almost directly contrary to your own, who have been brought up, as it were, on excitement, and set them down in the midst of a quiet, social evening, and expect them to enjoy it fully and be charmed. Was that entirely reasonable, my child? Do you imagine, if you had fed a child on cake and candies for her supper every evening for two years, and then suddenly should give her a cup of delicious, creamy milk, and a slice of brown bread, instead, that she would immediately prefer it and delight in it?"

Kissie laughed. "What a humiliating illustration!" she said. "Comparing my roses and my lovely cake and chocolate to plain brown bread and milk! Nevertheless, mamma, I get your meaning; but what are we to do? Is it all a mistake? And must our lovely plan for helping Tiny and the rest be given up? Oh, mamma! You cannot understand, perhaps, how my heart was set on this! I think I may have been an injury to Tiny by my example during the first

half of my dreadful winter, you know. She fancied me, and was much with me, and I could have influenced her; and I wanted so to do it, after my eyes were opened. Do you mean, mamma, that you feel it all to be of no sort of use, and that you only consented to the experiment in order that I might convince myself of its folly?"

"Daughter, my illustration may have been a homely one, but I insist that it is excellent for the purpose. Just return to it for a moment. If a little one came to us, who had been fed on the aforesaid cake and candies until her tastes were utterly vitiated, should we give her up in despair, do you think, and continue to offer the same dainties for her daily food?"

"I fancy I see you!" laughed Kissie. "But then, mamma, after all, where is the parallel? The child would be only one, and would be under our control and direction. Suppose you had the entire street to manage, and they were at liberty to do exactly as they pleased, and they voted your brown bread and milk 'slow,' and went off at once in search of their cake and candies, and found them in abundance. Then what could you do?"

"Nothing, dear, with the entire street at once, but very much indeed with the one little child who would come under our influence and allow herself to be guided by our tastes. Don't you see the point? Be content, daughter, with one at a time—Tiny, perhaps, or someone else whom we can reach and interest and help. It is worthwhile to gather in the street, very often, for the sake of winning the one child to a higher development. People are not reached in masses, whether they be old or young."

The "Monday evenings" were by no means given up. On the contrary, Mrs. Gordon and Kissie redoubled their efforts to make them attractive. Never simply showy in the slightest degree, their arrangements were as pretty as time and thought and a little money judiciously spent could make them. As for entertaining their guests, Kissie left no book unread and no plan unconsidered which might be likely to be helpful in that direction.

There was a sense in which these evenings became popular. Mrs. Gordon's rooms not being very large, and her idea and her daughter's idea of comfort and social effect being to avoid a crowd, there were never at any time more people invited than could be comfortably entertained. The result was that different sets of guests found themselves elected for the different Monday evenings, and without in the least understanding how careful a study had been made of the lists in order to bring together such persons as would be not only agreeable but helpful to one another, it began to be a question of much interest, "Who is invited to the Gordons' this evening?" By degrees it began to be almost the fashion to hold other invitations in abeyance until persons discovered whether they were among the elect for that week.

Mrs. Merchant and her daughter looked on at first with apprehension, then with tolerance, and finally with half-apologetic smiles referred to these evenings, as occasion offered among their friends.

"My niece is nothing if not original," Mrs. Merchant would say. "She has been brought up in a quaint, old-fashioned

atmosphere—never was a child, one might say, but always a wise little woman, companion of her father and mother. The consequence is that she really cannot do things as other people do. I am quite thankful that her originality has taken so mild a form. Maud and Schuyler seem really to enjoy her evenings; something new, you know; young people always like anything that is different from the usual routine.”

So, almost to Kissie’s surprise, she found herself the fashion. But perhaps it would have been difficult to find a more disappointed and discouraged person than that same Kissie. What had she accomplished? This was the question that was forever haunting her waking, sometimes even her sleeping, hours. What mattered it that the young people liked to gather in reasonable numbers for one evening in the week, and talk and sing, and enjoy themselves together in what seemed to her a rational manner, so long as for the other five evenings they went their usual ways, with more zest than before, perhaps, because of the contrast?

“It is simply adding another evening to their list,” she said discontentedly to her mother, “because as a rule people have not had social gatherings much on Monday evenings; and I do not see that we are accomplishing anything. The very persons whom we want most to reach, stay away from us. Did you notice, mamma, that Tiny was not here last night, nor the week before? She went to the Hall dance last night; and last week she was out somewhere with Harry Potter. Oh, mamma, we *can’t* do it, I am afraid! I am tiring you all out, planning and preparing for company each week,

and getting no results which might rest you. The girls all feel very much like Maud, I think—amused at my folly; but so long as I give them nice things to eat, and pretty things to look at, and a chance to rest themselves and make ready thereby for the week's dissipations, they are disposed to tolerate me. It is all so different from what I had expected. I really thought that so soon as they began to realize what nice times they could have in ways which did not wear them out, body and soul, that they would fall into line with my thought. Mother," with a little added color on her fair face as she met her mother's earnest and somewhat searching look, "I know what you are thinking; you want me to remember that, brought up as I was, trained as I have been from my babyhood to find my enjoyment in rational ways, and to make it secondary to more important matters, the moment I was placed in the way of temptation I fell into the stream, and allowed myself to be swept along by the current like the rest. I know I did. But you see, I thought it was because there was nothing else to be done, nowhere else to go; and that, as it was natural for young people to like to meet one another, I simply went where I could meet them. If somebody had opened her house to us for evenings like ours, I honestly think, mamma, that I should have chosen them instead of the other kind."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Gordon.

Her daughter regarded her with an air of almost impatience, and repeated the single monosyllable in surprised dismay.

"Why? Oh, mamma, please do not say that you too are going

to desert me. Why should I not? Do you really think that all my training has gone for naught?"

"No, daughter, I do not. Mother believes in you, dear, more than you believe in yourself; but I want you to answer my question carefully. Think, dear, why should you have chosen such evenings as ours for your recreation instead of the other kind? If it is merely because they please your taste and your sense of refinement better than the others do, you should have no quarrel with those who find the usual gatherings more to their taste. There is a sense in which people have a right to follow their individual tastes and desires, you know."

This idea seemed to be suggestive to Kissie. "No," she said thoughtfully; "it would not have been merely because my tastes were better pleased, but because—Why, mamma, I believe our ways of managing the social gatherings are right, and the common ways are in some things distinctly wrong."

"Yes; that is the sort of reply which I thought I should get when you stopped to think it over. Daughter, when you find one intelligent person who agrees with you in that belief, will you not have an ally? And until that time, is it reasonable to expect the average young person to like our ways better than the ordinary ones?"

Kissie regarded her mother with thoughtful face. "I think you are right," she said at last. "You are so quiet a little mother that I sometimes forget to come to you for advice, and yet I believe you are always right in your conclusions. But, oh, mamma, in that case

what can we do?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling at the doleful face and tone, "nothing but what we are doing every day. We cannot force our ideas upon people; the utmost that we can do is to try in all right ways to win them, not simply to ourselves, but to an altogether higher plane of life."

Chapter 9

“I Want to Know What You are Trying to Do”

It was that, after all, which the people who surrounded Kissie Gordon most needed—“a higher plane of life.” But it is the thing above all others that cannot be forced upon people; they must choose it, like salvation, for themselves, or it will be the merest shoddy. Of course the question of questions is how to get them to make the choice.

On Kissie’s very next Monday evening she had an unexpected encounter with one of her guests.

They were having a “conversation sociable,” on which she had spent an unusual amount of time and thought. Small square cards had been cut into all manner of shapes, and given out to her guests on their entrance. Each piece of card contained a portion of a question; and the holder of each was to hunt among the guests for the triangle, or diamond, or octagonal, or whatever shape it might be, that fitted into his or her card. When success crowned

these efforts, the complete question would appear on the united card; and on that question the two thus brought together were expected to converse for ten consecutive minutes, arriving at some conclusion if they could, and giving that conclusion to the public afterwards if they chose.

Of course much care had been given to the questions to make them bright, witty, earnest, helpful, suggestive, and the like. As wide a range of subjects as possible had been chosen, and as much variety had been introduced into the questions as could well be secured. Of course, also, the hostess had exercised some care in giving out the cards; they had served as her opportunity for bringing together the couples that she felt she should like to see conversing on given topics.

The plan had been more successful for developing conversation than any that she had heretofore tried; she was standing a little apart from the eager groups, looking on and enjoying the picture for a moment, when Miss Benson crossed to her side.

“I beg your pardon,” she said; “I know that my card does not match yours, but I have sent the gentleman who holds the other part of mine in search of a book, that we may look at a quotation about which we have quarreled. While he is gone, I want to talk with you; that is, if you ought not to be talking to somebody else.”

“No,” said Kissie, laughing; “nobody gave me a card. I confess that I like to look on and see other people talk.”

“I have a card for you; at least, I have a question; and I should

like a very frank answer, if you do not mind. I want to know what you are trying to do.”

Kissie’s face flushed a little under the question; and she turned inquiring, somewhat timid, eyes on Miss Benson. She had very slight acquaintance with the lady, and had hesitated not a little about including her among her list of guests. That she was a society leader was unquestioned. As she was older than Kissie by several years, and quite at home in all the details of society life, and making no pretence whatever to a higher motive for living than to have as gay and thoughtless a life as she could, it had not seemed probable to Kissie that she would even care to come to her simple little gatherings. Yet circumstances had so arranged themselves that to omit her at this time would have seemed like a slight; so she was invited, and Kissie had expected a polite regret; instead, she had been among the earliest arrivals.

All things considered, her question embarrassed the young girl who had stepped aside from conventional ways. What she was trying to do she believed was in line with matters that Miss Benson not only did not understand, but would have not a shadow of interest in. How could her work be explained to such a one? Yet the keen, bright eyes of the lady were fixed upon her, and she waited with apparent eagerness for a reply.

“Just what do you mean by your question?” Kissie asked, trying to speak lightly. “I am trying, as you see, to make people talk about the topics that have been given them; and I think I have succeeded, at least, in making them talk. Did you ever hear such a

babel of tongues?"

"No," said Miss Benson frankly. "I never did. We are not given, as a rule, to what one might call conversation, are we? But that doesn't answer my question. I want to know what the motive for it all is. This is the first time I have had the pleasure of being one of your guests; but I have heard about the gatherings, and am interested in them. Of course I see that they are unique; and studying you, as I have been for some time, I know there must be a purpose in them; I cannot decide what it is. Won't you tell me frankly?"

"I do not know that I can," said Kissie, her cheeks growing a shade pinker. "Why, of course the general object is to meet my friends, and help them to enjoy themselves; that is the object of all hostesses, is it not?"

"No, indeed. I am sure you know that some hostesses have no such motives. They want to pay their debts. 'I am *indebted* to Mrs. So-and-so,' I have heard them say—I hate the word—and, 'I must ask the Smiths, I suppose, though I don't like them; but we were at their last tiresome party.' Oh, the motives are various; but I am quite willing to believe that yours is an honest desire to give your friends a pleasant evening. Still, my question remains unanswered. Why do you do it in this way? Why, for instance, do you take a great deal of trouble and spend much time and thought, I am sure, in preparing unique ways of entertainment, instead of falling into line with the rest of the world? It is so easy to set people to dancing and to playing cards; there are only two classes of persons

to be entertained, as a rule. If people do not dance, it is because they are so passionately fond of cards that they do not like to spare the time; when they are started at one or the other of these enjoyments, they are happy, and are off the conscience of the hostess. Why don't you do it in that way?"

The question was fairly before her; on the lips of the last person, perhaps, from whom she would have expected it, and the one among her guests to whom she was least willing to explain. She was tempted to put the whole matter aside with a light response that would show only that she did not choose to discuss it, and the next instant she was ashamed of the temptation. Was she, then, ashamed of her colors? But who had expected challenge from such a source? If Miss Benson were a Christian, one who could understand her deep, underlying motive, why, then ...

"If I should tell you," she began slowly, choosing her words with care, "that I had views which prevented me from being able conscientiously to offer either cards or dancing as an entertainment to my friends, would your question be answered?"

Miss Benson regarded her with an amused air, only partly veiled by politeness.

"I don't believe it would," she said, "because, you see, I cannot conceive of such a state of things; and such a reply, instead of satisfying me, as a real answer ought to be able to do, would only bring a dozen other questions in its train. Oh, of course I do not mean that I cannot conceive of a person who does not choose to dance, for instance, or even of one who for some reason best

understood by herself has conscientious scruples against it. I know one little woman who thinks it is the sin of sins; she cannot tell why; she does not suppose that anybody knows why. It is some scruple which she has imbibed unconsciously from a pious grandmother; and that same woman is as censorious and bitter and uncharitable toward all womankind as she can be, and thinks she is doing God service thereby; but you are not of her stamp. What I meant to say was that, while I can conceive of personal reasons for holding aloof from these amusements, I confess I am unable to see why you should not be entirely willing to let those who choose to dance have the pleasure of doing so, and thereby save yourself ever so much trouble in planning other ways of entertainment. The world is full of people who cannot, to save their lives, entertain themselves or be entertained by others in any other way. They have been educated only in their feet. Why not give them an opportunity to exercise their only talent, and so rid yourself of the bore of looking after them?"

"Your logic is wrong," said Kissie, smiling gravely. "If my personal reasons for holding aloof from such amusements are such as I think ought to govern other persons also, of course as a safe member of society I am bound to do what is in my power to promulgate my views; at least, I must be consistent in my life, and not hold out to others what I do not approve for myself. I have always been ashamed of the girl who decided that the wearing of jewelry dragged people down to ruin, so took hers off, and gave it to her sister. If she really felt that, she ought to have been

considerate of her sister, ought she not?"

"And do you really think it is wicked to dance?"

There was no mistaking the twinkle of amusement in Miss Benson's eyes. The idea was to her, manifestly, an absurd one. "I wish you would tell me why. I am really curious. Is it a religious scruple?"

"No," said Kissie, taking a sudden resolution. "Of course, it is a question which might, and I think does, have to do with a religious life; but the phase of objection of which I am thinking now appeals as strongly to people who have put aside the claims of religion as it does to Christians."

"You arouse my curiosity. I wish you would tell me frankly what you mean. I have no religion to speak of, Miss Gordon; therefore, I am the very person who ought to hear that phase of the question, and I assure you I never have heard it."

"The ten minutes allotted to conversation have more than passed," said Kissie. "I wonder if you would be willing to give a quiet evening to me sometime, in which we can have a frank talk. I should be glad to explain to you just what my position is, if you care to hear."

"When shall I come?" asked Miss Benson promptly. "I am more than curious. Nothing that has happened in our set for an age has interested me so much as this departure of yours."

"Mamma," said Kissie, the next morning, "I have found the 'little child' who is to be influenced to leave her cake and candy, and take to plain brown bread and milk. But it isn't Tiny. Instead,

it is the very last person I could have expected. What do you say about my trying to help Miss Benson?"

"I confess I should have guessed almost any other young lady of your acquaintance sooner," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling; "but we cannot tell, dear, what the result may be. Sometimes the people of whom we have the least hope are the soonest influenced."

It must be confessed that it was with a somewhat anxious heart that Kissie Gordon made ready on the following Thursday evening for her bewildering guest.

Miss Benson made not the slightest pretence to being interested in religious matters. She frankly confessed that she considered Sunday a bore, and that every sermon she had ever heard was dreadfully stupid. If she was conscious of a conscience, she kept it carefully in the background, and apparently managed all her affairs in accordance with the whim of the moment. Yet she was popular, and with many people a favorite. She was wealthy, and full of life and plans, and by nature accommodating. Of course she had a large following.

Kissie puzzled over the question why she had interested herself in her own simple plans, even to the extent of accepting her invitations.

Yet she had not only been present, but had seemed to take a lively interest in all the proceedings, and finally had all but forced upon Kissie an explanation of her position.

Much thought and prayer had been involved in getting ready for this special interview.

A Modern Sacrifice

Promptly at the appointed hour Miss Benson came, being attended to the door by a gay cousin, who was much amused with her disposal of herself for the evening. The back parlor had a very cozy look. The curtains were dropped between it and the larger room; and the easiest of the easy-chairs was drawn up before a small reading-table, on which burned a shaded drop-light. On a little table at one side was arranged Kissie's tiny tea-set, with her bright tea-kettle near at hand, ready for duty; the whole was a perfect picture of hospitality.

"You are ever so cozy here," said Miss Benson, looking about her with admiring eyes. "You and your mother have nice times together, do you not? I half envy you. I cannot think what it might do for me to have a bit of home life of my very own. I have no mother, you know; and papa is a business man. That means sleeping at home and living down town. Well, what are you going to do with me? I have been full of curiosity ever since I made this appointment. Are you going to lecture, or ask questions, or what?"

Chapter 10

That Horrid Book!

“Are not you the one who asks questions?” Kissie said, smiling. “I suppose I am to try to answer them. But perhaps it is my turn just now to ask a few. What do you want me to do? That is, what is it that you especially wish to know?”

“Everything. I want to know what makes you peculiar—different from the rest of us. Above all things, I desire to know why you take so much trouble to entertain your ... guests. I was going to say, ‘friends’; but some of those you gather about you can hardly lay claim to that title, perhaps. At least we are very unlike you, and I should think could not be congenial. Of course I can understand why you should entertain us occasionally—because other people do, and because it is considered the proper thing; but why should you do it so often and so differently from others? If you have peculiar views, why should you care to have other people imbibe them? Now, are these not questions enough? How are you

going to manage them?"

"The questions spread over a great deal of ground. I fancy it would require more than one evening to consider them. Let me narrow them down to that definite one which you asked me, about dancing. Do you remember? I will tell you what I have decided is the best way to answer that. Let us resolve ourselves for the next hour into a reading-circle. I have brought some books from the library, especially one, that I should be glad if you would look at. I will not ask you to read the whole of it; but certain marked portions in it answer your question more concisely, and I am sure much more clearly, than I could possibly do. Will you read what I have marked, Miss Benson?"

"A reading-lesson!" said that young lady, with lifted eyebrows. "I am not fond of reading, except of certain kinds. I would much rather hear you talk. But if you insist, of course—Am I to read aloud for your edification?"

"Thank you, no. Read to yourself, please. I am very familiar with the book, and we shall get on faster in that way."

"Who wrote this remarkable volume which seems to have made such an impression on you?" asked Miss Benson, eyeing the small book with an air of suspicion. "Some old fogy, I presume, who knew nothing about his subject."

"The author's name is accepted among literary people, I believe, as an authority, at least for conscientious effort and carefulness of statement. As to what he knew on this particular subject, you will be better able to judge, perhaps, after reading his

views.”

“And what are you to do while I am conning my lesson? Sit and gaze at me with those great brown eyes of yours? I shall mix you all up with the author’s ideas, if you do, and never be able to extricate you.”

“Oh, no!” said Kissie, laughing. “I shall go on with the book I am reading; but I do not mean to be absorbed in it. I shall be ready for conversation at any time, and shall like being interrupted.”

Silence reigned for the next ten minutes, broken suddenly by an indignant outburst from Miss Benson.

“This is the most intolerable book I ever read. I know that these statements are false. Utterly false! I wonder at you, Miss Gordon, for tolerating them for a moment. Nothing could ever make me believe them. Yet the thought that there are persons in existence who could write such things, and that there may be some who actually believe them, makes my cheeks burn. You have spoiled my favorite amusement for me. I shall never be able to dance again without thinking of some of the horrid things I have read here. How can you like to poison innocent pleasures by the vile imaginings of a bad man?”

“My dear Miss Benson, you cannot mean that. You must know the author’s name. He is a minister of the gospel and a theological professor. His reputation is above reproach. Because he has earnestly tried to make plain to us what bad men think and feel and say concerning the thoughtless and innocent, shall we turn from him in disgust? If there is truth in it, will it make it any less a

truth to be angry with the one who points it out? I can understand your indignation. I had much the same feeling when the tremendous facts with which this book deals first faced me. It is simply horrible to think that what we call recreation can be used for such base ends, and talked about in such base ways, as this writer has pointed out. But I think we must remember that he is only pointing out what he says he knows exists. Unless we can prove his statements false, does it not become us, as respectable members of society, to consider them?"

Miss Benson was already reading intently; apparently she had heard little of Kissie's response to her outburst. A few minutes more, and she pushed the book from her, her face aglow with indignation, and fixed angry eyes on Kissie's face.

"Am I to understand, Miss Gordon," she said, in a voice she tried in vain to keep from trembling, "that you endorse the horrid statements which you have marked? Do you honestly believe that we who dance, and have danced all our lives, are influenced by such motives as are attributed to us in that book?"

Kissie hesitated, choosing her words with utmost care.

"I would not have proposed this evening's frank consideration of a disagreeable subject," she said gently, "had I not felt sure that you would bring to it an unprejudiced mind, and discuss it with an honest purpose to reach the truth. The author you have been reading makes no such sweeping statements as you did just now; he accords everything, it seems to me. He knows that there are young, pure-minded, pure-hearted girls who dance, as they talk

and sing and laugh and do a hundred other things, without a thought beyond the entertainment of the moment; but he also knows that there is another, and in every way a repulsive, side to this thing; and he acts on the very well-known principles that ignorance and innocence do not always shield from harm. If his statements are true—”

“They are not true!” interrupted Miss Benson. “I will not tolerate such an idea for a moment. They are a collection of monstrous falsehoods gathered for the purpose of making a sensation.”

For a moment Kissie was silenced. It was not because she had no reply to make, but rather that she feared she should say too much. When she had given her guest time to feel ashamed of her vehemence, she spoke again.

“I am younger than you, Miss Benson, and must not presume to teach you. Yet, my attention having been strongly called to this subject, it is possible that I may have thought about it in a way which has not occurred to you. May I ask you what you suppose to be the underlying objection to this particular amusement which we find among so many thoughtful men and women? Why do such large numbers of our clergymen and teachers and leaders in religious thought, when they express any opinion in regard to the dance, at least advise against it? I know you are careful to explain that you are not interested in religion; but I am sure you will concede that the church is on the whole the representative of the best men and women of the day. Are they on this particular subject

all narrow-minded and prejudiced, or insincere and sensational, or have they grave reasons for their position?"

"I never heard a single sensible reason advanced against dancing," declared Miss Benson. "It is all namby-pambyism. 'Late hours,' and 'too light clothing for the season,' and 'too violent exercise,' and other folderols. As if people never kept late hours except at dancing-parties! And as if they were not capable of managing all these points within the line of common sense, if they chose to do so! Every objection I ever heard advanced against dancing could, with equal propriety, be urged against a dozen other amusements about which the religionists are not only entirely silent, but in which they can join on occasion with as much immoderateness as the worst of us."

"Every objection except the one urged in this book," said Kissie pointedly, and made haste to add, before her guest could again express herself with regard to the book:

"I grant you that many of the so-called arguments which have been used against dancing have been so weak that they have naturally created a sentiment in its favor; but I believe the difficulty to have been that few, if any, persons could be found who were willing to speak plainly; they called us young and pure-hearted; and the idea of the past has been that, in order to continue so, we must remain in ignorance. Besides, I think most people shrink from the storm of indignation and unbelief with which we are disposed to meet all outspokenness which clashes against our previous ideas."

At this point Miss Benson laughed, not ill-naturedly. "You are growing sarcastic," she said, "and I do not wonder. It was silly in me to blaze out at you so. You are not to blame, my child, for the sentiments in that book. I will admit that they make me ablaze with indignation, and that I am no nearer believing them than I was at first. But I will admit another thing, and that is that you have set me to thinking on lines in which I never thought before. It may be, as you say, that good men and good women have reasons, other than the silly ones which they have thought best to advance, for their opposition to this amusement. I mean to find out. Will you lend me this book? I shall study it carefully. I will write to the author, I think; or get my grandmother to do so for me; I believe I should like that better. I will go to see certain mothers who I know will not allow their daughters to dance. I have laughed at them for their inconsistency in allowing equally irreligious ways of amusing themselves. I will make them tell me whether they know any better reasons for their position than those which I have heard that they advanced. I declare to you that I did not think people had reasons, logical ones. I thought it was the weakest sort of fanaticism. 'Would you like to die while you were dancing?' a pious old aunt of mine once asked me solemnly. Why not, pray; as well as at a tennis party or a bicycle race? Yet that same aunt hasn't by any means the same horror of those amusements that she has of dancing. I wonder if it can be possible that—" She broke off abruptly, and commenced again.

"If a sixteenth part of what that horrid book hints at be true,

then it is an insult to common decency for young ladies to countenance the dance in its very mildest forms. But, mind you, I believe nothing of the kind.”

“Miss Benson, did you never meet any person who objected to dancing on other than those commonplace grounds which have disgusted you by their lack of logic?”

“Yes,” said Miss Benson, her face flushing to her forehead, “my cousin Frederick objects to it. He will not dance himself, and he does not want me to; and he has no fanatical scruples of any sort, nor has he ever given me a single reason, sensible or otherwise, for his position. It makes me more angry than I can tell you to think that possibly he has some such horrid ideas as are advanced in this book. Well, I am not going to lecture you any more. Forgive all the rude things I have said. I am going home now, to continue my investigation.”

“She was very much excited,” Kissie explained to her mother, while trying to give an account of the interview. “Part of the time, I think, she was really angry. That book has some very startling things in it, you know; and they were very new to her. She is honest and outspoken in her convictions, and not afraid of anybody. I cannot help hoping that something will come of it.”

Chapter 11

Criticism and “Comfort Bags”

Something did come of it; but it was quite different from that which Kissie Gordon had hoped, and to a degree expected, when she began her experiments. Miss Benson, a young lady who had always danced—with more moderation, it is true, than many used, and with perhaps a greater degree of care as regarded partners, yet under favorable circumstances was always ready for that amusement—danced no more. She had no very lucid explanation to give as to this change in her habits. She was apt, when questioned, to shrug her shoulders after a foreign fashion that she had acquired during a long residence abroad, and to reply that she was a victim to advanced ideas, that dancing had ceased to be entertaining to her, and that people that wanted to know more in that line must consult Kissie Gordon. This, after a little, became an embarrassment to Kissie. People did consult her, people with whom she felt that she had not two ideas in common; and she

knew not how to answer them.

What spell had she woven about Miss Benson? she was asked. Miss Benson was really growing as “peculiar” in some respects as was Miss Gordon herself; and she used to be the last person that one would think of accusing of having whims of that character. Was Miss Gordon a witch? And was she going to practice her incantations on others of their set?

This could not, of course, be other than annoying to Kissie, who had no desire to pose as a sorceress, or to boast of her influence in any way. There were times when she groaned over all this in secret, and wondered whether she was simply making a series of mistakes.

If her last effort was a mistake, it was increasing in magnitude. One and another of the girls came to her curiously. What was the book that she had given Miss Benson to read, which had produced such an impression on her? Would Kissie lend it? They would really like to look at it, if for no other reason than because they were curious. Kissie lent it, and lent other books treating on the same topics, and they were read; and the reading aroused discussion and more or less indignation. Truth to tell, there was indignation in unexpected quarters. Certain of the mothers took the matter in hand, borrowed the books for themselves, and afterward took occasion to censure Kissie somewhat severely for the character of the reading-matter that she was circulating.

“It has put ideas into my innocent child’s mind which she had

never thought of, and never would have thought of in a hundred years," said one irate mother. It happened that her "innocent child" was one of the most inveterate dancers, and was reputed to be not over-particular as to her partners. Miss Benson's gay cousin, when this remark of the mother was repeated to him, laughed immoderately; and, when Miss Benson inquired anxiously as to what had aroused his amusement, he replied that that same "innocent child" put more ideas into the minds of some people than her mother dreamed of, and added that he had always suspected Mrs. Ware of being an idiot; now here was proof positive. This did not greatly enlighten Miss Benson, but troubled her.

Kissie took her bewilderment to her mother.

"Mamma, what do you suppose it all means? Mrs. Ware says she wonders at your permitting me to read such books as I have been circulating; that they are not suited to young people, nor indeed to any persons of refined taste."

Mrs. Gordon was greatly disturbed; it was torture to her to have her daughter criticized. "I certainly cannot agree with Mrs. Ware," she said anxiously. "Ignorance is in no sense of the word synonymous with safety. I know there are mothers who seem to think it is; but I have come to feel, especially of late, that to a conscientious, right-minded girl knowledge of danger is one of the best safeguards. The old proverb that "to be forewarned is to be forearmed" holds good in these lines, as in all others. At the same time, daughter, of course you should be very careful when you

give books to young girls to read, that their mothers do not object. They must be true mothers, after all, though their ideas may not be like ours. I have known too many parents who seemed not to give a thought to what their children were reading, to clash carelessly with any who are anxious upon that point. Don't be discouraged, dear; we must learn to work as carefully as possible, and do the very best we can, and then leave the results."

This was the way she talked; but her daughter knew, nevertheless, that she would have been willing to bear almost any affliction herself to save her treasured girl from unfriendly tongues.

Despite their efforts for care, the leaven spread, and criticism continued. People who heard that Mrs. Ware objected to the book that Kissie Gordon had lent to her daughter, straightway were seized with an irresistible desire to read it for themselves, and read, and lent to their friends; and for a time discussion and criticism ran high. Some of it was friendly, and much of it was averse. They said Kissie Gordon had been brought up in the country; she had been brought up by fanatics; she did not understand the usages of polite society; and a dozen other not very serious things, which are yet sometimes harder to bear than grave charges would be.

Let it not be supposed that there were no thoughtful ones; others besides Miss Benson—a few—after the indignation over the first book read, had cooled, considered the subject for the first time from another point of view than that of mere amusement, talked

gravely with one another concerning the statements made, secured other books and read them, and talked with a few, a very few, strong, sweet-souled mothers and teachers, who had had experience in life, and knew why they thought as they did.

Meantime, Kissie's Monday evenings continued; and so far from growing unpopular were they, that, as the weeks passed and the evenings lengthened, they bade fair to be the most successful evenings of the week. Miss Benson continued to accept her invitations, and, while she had little to say to Kissie herself, seconded all her efforts at entertainment with a heartiness that won the gratitude and love of that young schemer.

One unexpected thing that grew out of the reading of the borrowed book, and of other books that went in its train, was a reading-circle. It was not a very literary affair. Some of those that took up the matter were by no means literary.

"Why, yes," one of the girls had said when the idea was proposed to her, "I think it would be a very nice plan. I wonder we have not thought of it before; reading-circles are becoming quite the style, I think."

So theirs was organized, and became with some of the younger ones the fad of the hour. For the most part, popular books of a thoroughly enjoyable character were chosen—books valuable from a literary point of view, books that thoroughly educated people at least glanced over and those who were not thoroughly educated, but wished to appear so, liked to say that they were reading.

By degrees the young ladies dropped into the fashion of bringing their pretty bits of work with them to the reading-circle, thereby making the gentlemen envious of their good fortune in having something to do with their hands while they listened. It was perhaps this innovation that first set Kissie to thinking in a line that developed an entirely new set of occupations. She one day fell in with a leaflet written by an earnest worker among the lumbermen's camps of northern Michigan. It was a well-written appeal for such simple and practical aid as commended itself at once to Kissie Gordon's taste. Her delight in her discovery was exhibited at the breakfast-table one morning.

"Comfort-bags! Mamma, they are the very things to help me solve a problem that has been on my heart for the last three days."

"Comfort-bags?" repeated Mrs. Gordon, looking up from her letter with an air of interest. "The words have a very comfortable sound, daughter, but I confess that they do not convey any idea to my mind."

"Why, mamma, this article is written by one of those missionaries among the lumbermen. Don't you remember how interested papa was in their work? This is an appeal for ever so many comfort-bags; and it describes how to make them. Little bags, six inches or so square, made out of strong material, cretonne or something of that sort, and filled with all manner of little things, which it never before occurred to me could be called 'comforts,' but I suppose they are. At least, one can conceive that their absence might create a good deal of discomfort. Shirt-buttons, and

suspender-buttons, and needles fitted to sew them on; threaded needles, with cunning little pockets for each separate thread to be tucked in. Wouldn't it be fun to make them? There are other things in the same line, and careful directions given; the idea is to fit those men who are away from home and family, with little conveniences for doing bits of sewing for themselves. There is a suggestion about putting a little letter into each bag, with a word of comfort and sympathy in it. Isn't that a beautiful idea? You shall do that part, mamma. Don't you believe we could take up such work as that in our circle? My first thought in connection with it was that it would afford some legitimate employment for the idle and mischievous hands of our young men, who now occupy themselves with taking the scissors away from some girl who needs them every few minutes, and snipping bits of cord, and sometimes more valuable articles—lace and ribbon—scattering them about the floor. What is to hinder their sorting out buttons of various sizes and colors, and putting them into the bags? And for that matter, threading the needles? I could never understand why a young man should consider it an accomplishment to be utterly useless in regard to such work. I mean to suggest it to them. Some of them may be lumbermen in camp themselves some day."

"It is a lovely idea," said the mother, "so simple and commonplace that the wonder is that it was not thought of long ago. I suppose there are innumerable little things like that which could be done for the comfort of others, if somebody would only think of them. The very name, 'comfort-bags,' is suggestive. Why

couldn't there be comfort-bags made for other classes of persons, sick children, for instance, in hospitals and orphans' homes? A little bit of a doll not much longer than my thumb might be put in, with dainty dresses for it made out of nothings. A tiny picture-book, only a couple of inches long; a pretty card or two; some bits of bright flannels and kid, to make needle-books of, with directions for making them; all children delight in making things. Some of those poor little creatures, who sit day after day in their wheel-chairs might be helped in ways like these to pass many an otherwise weary hour. All these, and a dozen other trifles, could be put into little bags, which could be made to shirr, and so could be hung on the little arms of the individual owners."

"Oh, mamma," said Kissie; "what a beautiful thought! And so large a one! It reaches in ever so many ways, even at first sight. We shall do that, too. I know that some of the girls would have done things for others long ago, if they had only thought of it. I wonder if they cannot be made happy over the thought of doing something besides eternally entertaining themselves?"

As the winter passed, the reading-circle flourished; so did the comfort-bags; so also did the conversation sociables that grew out of the comfort-bags. On no account would the leaders thereof have called these sociables missionary meetings. In truth, there never had been since the world began missionary meetings quite like unto them. Missionary intelligence was acquired without the acquirers being aware that they were having aught to do with missionaries. Nevertheless, the circle became exceedingly

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interested, not only in certain lumbermen of the northern camps, but in the mountain girls of North Carolina and kindred States. A few of those who knew what they were trying to accomplish occupied no small amount of time, and did no little special corresponding, with a view to culling from all possible resources facts as curious and pathetic as possible concerning these brothers and sisters of our land, about which these other brothers and sisters had known absolutely nothing. The little leaflets issued by the various mission boards, giving vivid pen-pictures of the lives of some of the mountain girls and their pitiful struggles and sacrifices in order to learn to read, were so surprising a revelation that for the time being even the all-important matter of dancing slipped into the background, and the dancers gave their thoughts to the needs of others.

Chapter 12

“Could You Not Help *Me*?”

It would perhaps have been difficult for a casual observer to understand why Kissie Gordon had many sad hours over the result of her experiments. Some of them were undoubted successes, yet none knew better than she that she was not accomplishing what she had hoped. Many of her hopes she would have found it hard to put into words, yet some of her disappointments were tangible enough.

There, for instance, was Tiny Wilson, the girl about whom she had thought so much and prayed so earnestly. There had been a time when Tiny had clung to her, asked her advice on all sorts of trivial matters, and showed a disposition to be guided by her tastes. Manifestly that time was past. Tiny held aloof from the reading-circle and the conversation socials. She did not even come to Kissie's Monday evenings, but had always a polite regret ready. Moreover, the poor young creature was rapidly acquiring so

reckless an air that more than once those interested in her had heard the hateful word "fast" applied to her.

Kissie knew only too well what was the matter. The young man, Harry Potter, who, despite his growing evil reputation, was still received into what was called polite society, was acquiring such an influence over Tiny that she stood ready to be haughtily indignant at so much as a hint that his judgment was not entirely to be relied upon.

The other one that was a special disappointment and pain to Kissie was her cousin Schuyler. He was by no means so indifferent to her as Tiny had become. On the contrary, he showed a lively interest in all her schemes, was nearly always present at her Monday evening gatherings, having a standing invitation by virtue of his relationship, and afforded Kissie no little help in entertaining her guests. Yet it was painfully evident that he made no progress in his own life, unless, indeed, he progressed downward. He came often to see her, running in, in cousinly fashion, when she was alone, to chat with her about one and another plan of hers, and to offer cordial assistance.

Yet even at these times he often fell into moody and absent-minded fits, when he appeared to be brooding over something entirely foreign to their talk. At such times he would respond to her words in a listless way, and awaken at last from his reverie, perhaps, with a long-drawn sigh. When she questioned anxiously, he repelled her kindly, but positively enough. Yes, he was troubled; but it was about matters that she did not understand, and

with which she had nothing whatever to do. No, she could not help him; no one could help him. He had been a fool, and must reap the consequences. The worst of it was, he told her one night in a sudden burst of frankness, that he could not bear the consequences alone; if he could, it would not be so bad.

Kissie, who could never forget certain things that she had overheard as to his passion for cards and the possible trouble he was making for himself and others because of this, could not but fear that it was anxiety of this kind that was haunting him. Yet he would not confide in her, so what could she do? For that matter, what could she have done if he had?

Others besides herself were anxious over Tiny Wilson. Miss Benson broached the subject one evening when she was alone with Kissie.

“The poor little thing seems bent upon her own ruin; she reminds me of one of those silly silver-winged moths, which persist in hovering about the lights. I really think her danger began in the dance, she is so absurdly fond of that amusement. She would never have been attracted toward a creature like Harry Potter if he had not been so superb a dancer. Think of having a reputation built upon such a foundation! However, it is well to be able to excel in something! Poor Tiny had her first society dance in our parlors. Not that I take the slightest blame to myself on that account,” she added hastily, apparently anxious to forestall what might possibly be said. “People ought to have common sense, and be able to observe ordinary proprieties, before they are allowed to

go into society at all.”

“I know it,” said Kissie. “That is a very old statement of the question, Miss Benson, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’”

Whereupon Miss Benson laughed; told her that she had retired into sarcasm, and she did not pretend to be a match for her in that; and promptly changed the subject.

It was over all these matters that Kissie was brooding one dreary winter evening. Without, the night was very dark, and a steady rain was falling, freezing as it fell. Kissie was quite alone. Her aunt, Mrs. Merchant, not being well, had of course sent for her sister. On ordinary occasions these sisters seemed more comfortable apart; but no sooner did Mrs. Merchant fall ill than she desired nothing so much as her sister’s ministrations. Mrs. Gordon, who always responded promptly to these appeals, had been absent all day. Kissie had been summoned to her aunt’s house to tea, but not being in the mood for a talk with Maud, or even with Schuyler in the presence of others, had begged to be allowed to remain quietly at home. She had spent part of the evening in answering some long-waiting letters. At last she leaned back wearily, in a most dejected attitude, and gave audience to some discouraged thoughts which had been haunting her while she wrote.

“Oh, dear! I wonder what it all amounts to. Our reading-circle is a success, I suppose, as such things go; and some of us are learning a good deal about home missions without being aware of it. But after all, what did I mean to do anyway? I had hopes that

have not been realized, and I don't know how to realize them. I wish there was somebody to help me."

Then she started up suddenly, and began to gather the papers that she had scattered about her, and to push one or two chairs into place. Her ears had caught the sound of the door-bell. It was too early yet to hope for her mother, and it did not sound like Schuyler's ring. She wondered who else could have ventured forth on so disagreeable a night, and felt that she was less in the mood for a call than for letter-writing. Then the little maid whose duty it was to answer the bell, without other warning than, "A gentleman to see you, Miss Kissie," ushered Mr. Macfarlane into her presence.

Kissie's eyes lighted with pleasure at sight of him. He was one of the few persons that she thought might help her. Since the evening when she had first heard his voice in the prayer-meeting, and realized that there was a power in his praying that she did not know by experience, he had continued to awaken in her a very keen desire to understand the difference between his religion and that of most others. They had become very good friends in a way, yet had had almost no opportunity for extended conversation.

Mr. Macfarlane always accepted her invitations to her Monday evenings, and exerted himself to an unusual degree to help her; he seemed thoroughly interested in her social efforts, and had perhaps been, on the whole, the very best helper she had found. Of course, occupying the position that he did as a young man of high family and large wealth, Mr. Macfarlane was popular;

and Kissie often felt that he had done more to popularize her efforts—make it fashionable, indeed, to attend her socials—than any others could. She was grateful to him; but they both lived such busy lives that there had been very little opportunity for personal sociability. Often on Monday evenings they did not exchange a sentence together beyond the greeting and the farewells at departure; though, as she took his hand for the good-night, she occasionally said, “Thank you for your help tonight,” or by some other simple, frank sentence showed him that his efforts were understood and appreciated.

“I am glad you are not afraid of the rain,” she said. “It sounds like a horrid evening outside; I am being worried because my mother will have to return home in the storm.”

Mr. Macfarlane assured her that the night was not so forbidding as it seemed, but confessed that he chose a rainy evening for a purpose. He wanted to have a friendly talk with her, a sort of visit “behind the scenes,” he added, smiling. Then, growing instantly grave, he explained that very recently he had heard that which had increased his desire to see her promptly.

“Let me begin,” he said, “by asking you if you know of any influence that can be brought to bear upon our little friend Tiny? I once heard her say that she felt a very special drawing toward yourself; and, as she needs a friend just now, a very special one, I have ventured to speak of her. If someone could come to her aid just at this time when she is in very great trouble, someone that would be both wise and kind, she might perhaps be won.”

Kissie turned toward him a face pale with anxiety. She had heard nothing of Tiny for several weeks. How was she in trouble? What did he mean?

“You have heard nothing?” he asked. “Oh, it is the old story. You know Harry Potter? By reputation, I mean. Do you know what an unbounded influence he has gained over the poor girl? I think none of us have realized its extent until just now. It seems there has been a secret marriage between them; he inveigled her into it, of course; she has no mother or father, you know, and, indeed, no wise friend that has the right to direct her. If the so-called marriage could have remained a secret until poor Tiny had entire control of her own affairs, he hoped, I suppose, to reap a harvest. There is no question that it is her property that interests him. He led her to believe that certain matters connected with his business and his property expectations would come to grief if the marriage was acknowledged; but that it would be worth everything—salvation, indeed, to be permitted to call her his own, and all that sort of thing, you understand; so she submitted to it. I do not know just when; some weeks ago, I think, the farce was consummated. Then he grew bold, took her with him to Harport, where he went last week, and registered as husband and wife at one of the leading hotels. The result was that the real Mrs. Potter, who was supposed by him to be at least a thousand miles away, but was stopping at the same hotel on her way to this town in search of her husband, appeared to them; and, to pass over the intervening hours of horror, Potter was arrested yesterday for

bigamy. Now can you imagine poor Tiny's state, and her need? Polite society will have nothing to do with Potter now, for a time at least. The saddest part of it is that they will place the poor little victim also under their ban, when in reality they are largely to blame for this state of things. Had the child not met him first in entirely respectable, and, as she supposed, unexceptionable homes, she would never have met him at all.

For the next half hour poor Tiny's miserable lot was discussed anxiously by these two earnest ones, with a view to planning, if possible, how best to help her. Kissie could do nothing without her mother's aid; but she was sure of her mother, and could promise anything that a mother and daughter could do for a deserted victim.

When the utmost had been accomplished that could be done without Mrs. Gordon's presence and help, Mr. Macfarlane suddenly changed the subject.

"And now, Miss Gordon, I wonder whether you will allow me to ask a question that has been on my heart for some time. How are you succeeding in your undertaking?"

Kissie felt her face flushing under his earnest gaze, and, hesitating how to reply, at last asked with a little laugh, "What is my undertaking, Mr. Macfarlane?"

"Perhaps that ought to have been my first question; but I fancied I understood it. Am I not right in supposing that you are trying to change the current of thought in the minds of our young people, trying to get them to think of others sometimes, and not

always of self; trying, in short, to help them to make more of life than they have done?"

"I think I am," she said humbly. "At least, I think that is my aim; but I do not feel that I am accomplishing it. I mean, I am disappointed in results. I hardly know what I wanted, but it was something different from what has resulted. I don't know just what is the matter, nor just what to do next. To tell you the truth, I was having a doleful little interview with myself about it all when you came. I have reached the point where I seem to need to do something else, something different; and I don't in the least know what it ought to be. Could you not help me?"

Chapter 13

“What More Can I Do?”

“Possibly,” he said, looking thoughtfully into the glowing fire in the open grate. “At least, perhaps we might help each other by talking the matter over frankly. It is because I think you have done wonders that I confess I should like to see you do more.”

“What more can I do?”

“Well, that is a question the answer to which might involve a long discussion. Nothing more, I am inclined to think, in the line in which you are working. But, as you say, one is not satisfied to stop there. Does it ever occur to you, Miss Gordon, that perhaps you began in the middle, to reach people?”

“I do not think I understand.”

“Which is not strange; it is a most blind question. I find it difficult to put my thought into words. What I mean is, are not you, are not many of those who would help, especially young people, working only on the surface? To illustrate, take our own

social circle. At least ten of those whom we meet frequently are members of the church. Is there one of that number to whom religion seems to be a vital thing? We must not judge others, it is true; yet there are times when we must, for their own sakes, try seriously to consider their position. Have you felt a want in their lives in this respect?"

"So much so that I have not a friend among them to whom I speak freely on these topics with an assurance of sympathy."

"Then you understand what I mean. These young church-members have named the name of Christ, and are living without a sense of his place in their hearts and lives. It is in this direction that they need help."

"Mr. Macfarlane, what can be done to help them?"

"Pardon me; I hope and believe that you are more capable of answering that question than any other person of my acquaintance, that is at present in touch with them. You, who seem so fertile in schemes, and so successful in carrying them out, must surely have a plan for helping them at the most vital point."

"I have not. Believe me, that thought is at the root of all my efforts. I wanted so much to help them feel that religion is an every-day matter, and has to do with our slightest acts; but I have utterly failed."

"Miss Gordon, do they know what you want?"

"No," said Kissie, her eyes dropping before his earnest ones. Then; as he kept silence, and she had time to see what her reply admitted, she repeated: "No, as I told you, I have not talked with

one of them. I have meant to, sometime. I think my idea was to win them first to an interest in something besides their own amusement, and afterwards to try to reach the most important part.”

“The Lord Jesus Christ is the most winning person I know anything about,” he said, with a significant smile.

“I know it,” she said impulsively. “I know what he has done for me, and I do want others to understand it. I thought I was working in the right way, but my own utter disappointment convinces me that I am not. Oh, Mr. Macfarlane, I thank you. I needed help, and asked for it; I am glad He sent you to me. I thought there was nothing else for me to do; now I know that I can at least try to do something in an entirely different line. I will get the girls together, the professing Christians, some of them, those whom I think I can reach, and talk with them frankly and cordially.”

“Why do you shut out the boys, Miss Gordon? That strikes me as a very wise plan; but do you not think our young men need help in this direction?”

“I am sure they do; but I am also sure that I can do what I mean a great deal better with the girls alone. But, oh! I know a beautiful thing to do. Will you not gather the young men about you, and do for them what you have suggested to me for the girls?”

It was Mr. Macfarlane’s turn to look embarrassed. He prefaced his reply with a slight laugh. “I am fairly caught in my

own meshes, Miss Gordon, and shall have to make a confession. First, let me say that I have not consciously suggested an idea to you; if you will reflect a moment, you will note that the excellent plan which you have suggested was evolved out of your own inner consciousness. All that I did was to complain a little. Now, I will own that it is much easier to criticize than to work, and easier to set other people to work than to do it one's self. I have always had an earnest desire to see something done for the young people of our circle, something more than has ever been attempted; but I have done nothing myself, and shrink unaccountably from personal effort of this kind. I have watched your work with the very deepest interest, and had reached the conclusion that you were the one to help us all. I had not so much as thought of being myself a helper."

"Then we will try to help each other," said Kissie briskly; for with the dawning of a new plan of work her courage revived.

She promptly took the initiative, talking so eagerly and to such purpose that Mr. Macfarlane soon saw, to his dismay, an entire winter's work mapped out before him. Kissie had been so much engaged in her own development of what she still believed to be his idea that she did not notice his silence until he interrupted her.

"Miss Gordon, I am sure you have not an idea of how you are overwhelming me. I was very sincere in my statement that I knew not how to do such work, and it is humiliating to have to own that I shrink from it as almost an impossibility; yet I know it ought to

be done, and that I ought to try to help. Will you kneel with me now and here, and shall we together ask the Lord whom we serve to give us strength and wisdom and power with people?"

"You are right," said Kissie humbly; "I go too fast; I am always more ready to do, I am afraid, than to think. Certainly I need wisdom if one ever did, because to make a mistake in such a work as this would be dreadful. I should like to hear you pray for it, Mr. Macfarlane."

Without more words, they bowed together.

At first, it must be admitted, Kissie's mind was somewhat distracted with the strangeness of the scene, and the thought of the embarrassment that would result if the door-bell should ring again, and the little maid usher in a caller, or even her mother and her cousin Schuyler; but by degrees she forgot all these, and felt herself being lifted on the wings of prayer. Certainly if Mr. Macfarlane shrank from personal work, he knew how to pray. So humble and sincere and tremendously in earnest was he that before his prayer was concluded the tears were dropping quietly from the young girl's eyes. And when without rising he said, "You pray, Miss Gordon," it was with difficulty that she controlled her voice to respond.

"Thank you," she said afterward. "Thank you especially for praying for me. It made me feel the need of coming closer to Christ. I need the gatherings we have planned, for myself. I feel that heretofore I have been busy trying to serve Jesus, rather than living in communion with him."

This was the way the new departure was begun. Not that it was a glaring departure, or created much excitement in any way. The Monday evening gatherings continued, and the reading-circle grew, every week, more fascinating. But one evening a half dozen of the girls found that they had been summoned by note to a conference.

“What is Kissie going to do now?” they said to one another, as with laughter and chatter they made their way to her room at the appointed hour. “She has some precious scheme on hand, you may depend, which we are expected to aid and abet. And we are especially honored, too; so far as I can learn not a boy in our set has been summoned.”

“Well,” said one, “I am willing to help, whatever it is; Kissie’s plans are all delightful, I think. We never had so nice a season in some respects as we have had since she came among us. I don’t care if she is a bit fanatical; I am going to sustain her.” So voted they all.

When they were fairly seated in Kissie’s own pretty room, secure from interruption, and waited to hear what their hostess had to offer, she began: “Girls, I think you will be surprised when I tell you what I want of you tonight. I have called you together to ask you to pray with and for me. We are all Christians, but I want to be a better one, or a different one; I want to live Christ in my daily life as I have not been doing. Don’t you all want the same thing? Cannot we seven girls make a fresh start in life tonight?”

They looked at one another as if they feared that she had

suddenly become insane, or as if she were speaking a language that they did not understand. So strange a thing was it for these, who had been members of the church for several years, some of them since childhood, to be asked to pray with and for a young lady in full health, and without any special affliction having touched her. Yet manifestly she was not insane; her manner was never more quiet and reposeful than at this moment, and her bright, earnest eyes were fixed upon them, awaiting answer.

At last Minnie Wells, the least hopeful of the six, said abruptly: "I don't believe I know what you mean. I am a church-member; I joined the church when I was twelve years old because the other girls were joining, and I thought it would be a nice thing to do. But I haven't found much good in my religion; and, to be entirely frank, I don't believe I have a great deal. I wouldn't mind the genuine thing, if there is a genuine thing."

Then Hattie Wynchell: "Oh, Minnie, don't speak so recklessly. I am sure religion is genuine. I joined the church because I wanted to; and I understood what I was doing, and was happy in it then; but I must say, it hasn't been to me what I meant it should. And if Kissie Gordon is dissatisfied with her religion, why, I ought to be in dust and ashes over mine; that is the way I feel about it."

The ice was fairly broken. Before they realized it they were all talking, expressing themselves as frankly concerning this matter as they had about other matters of less importance. One of them confessed that she had sometimes longed to have somebody say to

her, "How are you getting on in your Christian life?" so that she might own that she was not getting on at all. But she admitted that this feeling was only occasional, and that she could generally get rid of it by going out and having a gay evening.

I think you would not be surprised to know that of all Kissie Gordon's experiments this bade fair to be most successful. A great many more people than we suppose are carrying about with them hungry hearts, wishing somebody would feed them with bread instead of husks.

All stories have to end in the middle. This one must, of necessity, for it is still being lived. Much might be told, it is true, about the two "clubs" organized one night, born in prayer. It was no formal religious meeting, having its set phrases and conventional forms, that they started; it was genuine heart-work. It was no more so among the girls than among the young men. Mr. Macfarlane, like many another, discovered that he had latent powers, and that God was waiting for him to use them. He had not before realized that he was a power among young men. They won others to their ranks; almost their first blessed trophy was Schuyler Merchant, who was persuaded to lay down his anxieties and his burdens and his sins at the feet of Christ, this new Christ, whom a stranger, and not his Christian mother or sister, had discovered to him.

"Oh, mamma!" said Kissie Gordon one evening, as she looked up from a note that Mr. Macfarlane had sent her with regard to some effort in which he needed the cooperation of the girls' club,

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“Oh, mamma, at last I have a helper! Or else he has one; I think that is it. I am just trying nowadays to do as he directs.”

And the mother, with wide-open eyes, and a little pang at her heart suggestive of coming changes, which as yet her stupid little daughter saw not the shadow of, studied the “helper” more closely, and kept her own counsel, as mothers must.

All this was in the days when the Christian Endeavor Society was young, and almost unknown beyond a very narrow circle. There came a day when certain young Christian workers went almost by accident to the small and comparatively unheeded annual gathering of that organization, and looked on with keen eyes, and listened with ever-deepening interest and ever-growing astonishment, until some of them met in the hall at the noon recess and said to one another: “Why, did you ever hear the like? We have a Christian Endeavor Society, only it isn’t named.”

Forthwith they went home and named it.

The two “clubs” came together, and became one; and Mr. Macfarlane was made chairman of the lookout committee, but they chose for their president Mrs. Kissie Macfarlane.

The End