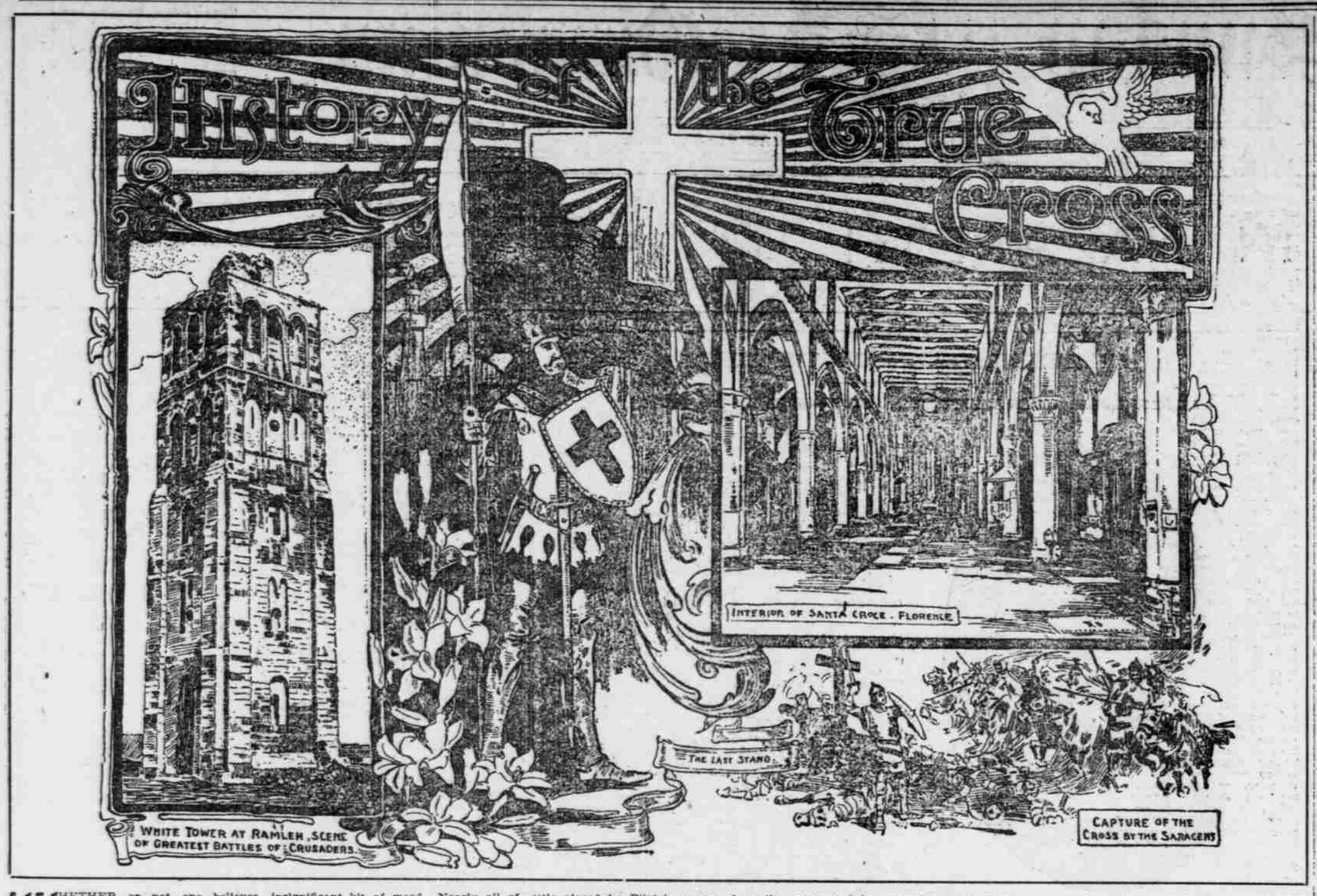

WHETHER or not one believes that the cross of Christ was ever discovered, the story of that wood which for centuries the world accepted without question as the true cross is one of the most fascinating in all history, especially at Easter time.

For nearly 1000 years that piece of wood was the focus of the Christian world. Vows of faith were made upon it, pilgrims innumerable through many generations knelt before it in adoration; thousands upon thousands died to rescue it from the hands of the infidel. Kings resigned their thrones to rescue and defend it, and when at last under the conquering Saladin it disappeared forever from view, a mighty cry of anguish went up all over the Christian world.

Numberless fragments alleged to be bits of the True Cross are still in existence, and the Church of Santa Croce at Florence possesses the inscription which was intrusted to it by Constantine. Contrary to the general idea, these fragments, if all gathered together, would form but an insignificant bit of wood. Nearly all of them are so minute that they can scarcely be seen by the naked eye. They are mostly inclosed in large and imposing reliquaries, and because of their size the impression has gone abroad that the alleged parts of the true cross extant today would make many crosses if brought together.

Discovery of the Cross.

The main section of the wood long known as the True Cross was lost at Jerusalem. The faith of men in the verity of that wood shaped the history of Europe and changed the whole course of events in Christendom for centuries.

On or about May 3 in the year 326, Helena, the mother of Constantine, is reported to have made the discovery. The story runs that this venerable woman visited the Holy Land in her 79th year, and was guided to the site of Calvary by an aged Jew who had treasured up all the traditions which the anti-Christian animosity of Jerusalem's heathen conquerors had failed entirely to obliterate. An excavation was made, and at considerable depth three crosses were found. With them, but lying apart by itself, was the title placed by Pilate's command on the cross of Christ.

According to some church authorities, however, among others Chrysostom and Ambrose, the title, or part of it, remained attached to the cross of Christ, and this distinguished it from the crosses of the thieves which had been buried with it. Others hold, and this is the generally accepted version among Roman Catholics, that at the instigation of Marcarius, Bishop of Jerusalem, the three crosses were carried to the bedside of an invalid woman and applied singly to the patient, who was cured by the touch of one of them. It was therefore selected as the cross that had been dyed with the blood of the Savior.

The greater part of the cross thus vindicated was deposited in a church built upon the site of the discovery. Here it was enshrined in a splendid silver case. Helena took the remainder to her son in Constantinople, whence a portion was sent by Constantine to Rome.

Now, whether Helena discovered the True Cross or not is a question involving much argumentation which cannot be entered into here. The wood was accepted as the True Cross of Christ, and was so venerated for centuries, as the fragments still left are venerated today. A festival commemorating the discovery is celebrated by the Latin and Greek churches every year on May 3.

For 300 years the principal portion of the wood obtained by Helena in Jerusalem and known as the Vera Crux (the True Cross), was kept in the custody of the Bishop of Jerusalem, and was exhibited every Easter Sunday to the pilgrims who thronged the Holy City. From time to time persons of large wealth and influence were allowed to purchase small fragments and splinters, and these were carried to Europe and placed in monasteries, abbeys and churches. They were most highly prized and received with the greatest veneration. Some of them have had most interesting histories.

Cross Captured and Retaken.

The history of Jerusalem and its sacred place and relics during three centuries after Constantine is very obscure. In the seventh century the Holy City went through a series of vicissitudes. In 611 the Persian Emperor, Chosroes, descended upon, captured and sacked Jerusalem. The churches were burnt, and among other precious relics carried away was the True Cross. Ninety thousand Christians fell fighting in defense of the cross, which was only taken after the last defender had fallen.

The tide of battle rolled westward and northward. The victorious monarch retired beyond the Euphrates, bearing with him the cross as the chief trophy of his conquest. Jerusalem was in ashes, and for 14 years the Christian world mourned the loss of the cross and prayed for its restoration. While it was in the hands of the infidel, a new power began to arise, which was to control the destinies of the Eastern world, destined to become the most powerful opponent of the cross. The camel-driver of Mecca had become a prophet and saw visions, and the children of Ishmael and Esau had begun to assume the inheritance of Esau and Jacob. The Crescent began its rise while the cross was in the hands of its enemies.

Then Heraclius, Emperor of Rome, declared war upon Chosroes, and, after many years of varying success, finally cut the Persian Army to pieces at Nineveh in 627. The True Cross was recovered and brought to Constantinople in triumph.

Heraclius in person restored it to Jerusalem. He would fain have carried it on his shoulders with the utmost pomp into the city. But, as the story runs, he was stopped suddenly at the entrance by some invisible power, and found that he could not go forward. The patriarch Zachary, who walked at his side, suggested to him that this pomp seemed not in consonance with the humble appearance which Christ made when he bore the cross through the streets of Jerusalem. The Emperor accepted the reproof. He laid aside his royal purple, put on mean garments, and, barefooted, entered the city and placed the cross in its former abiding place. The day of its return is celebrated as the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and remains to this day in the Roman and English church calendars as Holy Cross day.

But Jerusalem was not long destined to remain in repose. For many years it was to be the scene of fiercest battles, and, indeed, the streets of no other city have been washed with so much blood. The crescent was in the ascendant, and in the year 637 Jerusalem again bowed her head to a conqueror in the person of Omar, leading the Arab forces.

But Moslem rule was tolerant. A special edict permitted the cross to remain in the custody of the Christians of Jerusalem, and pilgrims continued as before to throng all the avenues of approach to the city. Worship, however, had to be carried on in a quiet and unostentatious manner. For 400 years the Caliphs governed Jerusalem, and the holy places remained in their hands.

During those 400 years pilgrims came from all over the Christian world to adore the cross and visit the holy sepulchre. Thousands perished and were buried about the walls of Jerusalem. The history of these pilgrimages has never been written, but it is beyond question that the piece of wood known as the True Cross in Jerusalem influenced the history of every nation in Europe, and guided the destiny of Christendom.

At the beginning of the 11th century El Hakim, the fanatic Caliph of Egypt, invaded Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem. The cross was rescued and concealed by Christians in the Holy City, and remained hidden for many years, at times being exposed to the eyes of the devout during the turbulent years that were passing in Jerusalem. For nearly a century the pilgrims suffered many wrongs and privations, and then came the day of vengeance.

Crusaders and the Cross.

The entire history of the first, second, and part of the third crusades belongs to the story of the True Cross. All over Europe oaths were made upon its fragments to "take the cross" and redeem the Holy Land. The cross was the sign to distinguish the crusaders. Armies knelt when priests lifted the jeweled reliquaries which held minute fragments of the sacred wood, and the faith of the Christian world was pledged to its rescue.

During the years which marked the approach of Godfrey and his crusaders the cross remained concealed in Christian hands in Jerusalem, until that morning of the 13th of July, 1099, when the white horsemen appeared on the Mount of Olives the Christian hosts entered the breach, and Jerusalem again was in the hands of the Christian world.

It was a furious and bloody combat when Jerusalem fell into the hands of the crusaders. No quarter was given, and the streets ran red with the blood of infidels. Suddenly the carnage ceased, swords fell from the hands of slayers, as a procession of priests, headed by the legate of the Pope, filed along bearing the wood of the cross. The crusaders beheld it safe and intact and fell on their knees to give thanks for its deliverance. The Christian kingdom of Jerusalem was founded. Restored to its place in the rock of Calvary, the cross was again the object of unmolested pilgrimages from all over the world. One by one the Christian Kings of Jerusalem died and were buried at its base. Godfrey first at its right, then Baldwin on the left, lay down and slept at the foot of the cross they had rescued. For 187 years the kingdom had existence, and then it became but a name, a sounding title annexed to Western thrones, until it fell before the sword of Saladin. Guy of Lusignan, the unworthy and last King of Jerusalem, took the cross to the plain of Galilee, to rally the drooping spirits of his soldiery, and lost it with his kingdom.

On July 1, 1187, a council of knights was called in the camp of Sephouri, where the Christian army was gathered for the last struggle with Saladin. Dissensions, jealousies, enmities, all the ordinary consequences of greed, ambition, avarice and pride, had weakened the kingdom. There were jealousies and dissensions even in that last camp, and the council of the knights was fierce and angry.

The Holy Cross was raised in the center of the camp. The army of the Cross and the army of the Crescent were encamped within a few miles of each other. Their leaders presented a remarkable contrast in character, which doubtless influenced the result of the battle. But the religion of the Cross could not be held responsible for the shame of the one who was a worthless king and a perjured knight, nor was the Crescent to be entirely credited with the nobleness of the other. Guy was an exceptional disgrace to Christianity; Saladin was an exceptional glory to Mohammedanism. Yielding to the advice of the Grand Master of the Templars, and against the council of Raymond, Count of Tripoli, the wisest and noblest of the knights assembled at the council, Guy moved the army out upon the plain of Haltin. Saladin advanced from the seashore to meet him.

Saladin observed how the Christians gathered in strangest array about the wood of the cross, and remarked, as an Arabian historian records, that they rallied around it, "as if they believed it their greatest blessing, strongest bond of union, and surest defense."

All day long the tide of battle surged over the field of Haltin, and night fell with its fate undecided. It was July 4, and all day the two hosts had fought with the greatest fury. Saladin made desperate attacks with 80,000 men, and the charge of 20,000 horsemen led by the Sultan in person was one of the most terrible in military history. The plain of Haltin became a very hell, where, as an old chronicle says, "the sons of heaven and the children of fire fought their great battle."

Saladin directed his main efforts toward the capture of the Holy Cross, for he surmised that its capture would decide the fate of the day. Fighting around the cross fell the bravest of the Christian knights, fell thousands of soldiers. Not until its last defender had fallen did the Saracens seize the sacred talisman. So on the field of Haltin the cross was lost, and never again was it to be in the possession of the Christians. The Saracens rejoiced greatly over its capture, and over the splendor of the gold and jewels which encased it. Saladin himself took the wood and probably finally destroyed it.

His victory was complete, and he pursued it until he captured Jerusalem, and this put an end to the kingdom which Godfrey had founded. A great wail arose over all the Christian world when the terrible news that the cross was lost spread over Christendom. Crusaders thronged to the Holy Land to do battle with Saladin. How Richard Couer de Lion fought with the Moslems, and how he finally made a truce with Saladin for a term of years is told in history.

Richard again and again made effort to purchase the cross from Saladin, but in vain. It is stated that some of the English crusaders who went to Jerusalem were permitted by Saladin to see and kiss the cross. But soon afterward it disappeared and was never seen again. Doubtless long ago it became dust of the dust of Jerusalem.

Seven hundred years and more have elapsed since the true Cross was lost on the plain of Galilee, and save for the fragments that are supposed to survive it has become but a memory.

For centuries it was the burden of song and story, and the minstrel swept his hand over his harp to sing of brave deeds done in the Holy Land in the great battles that waged about the Cross of Christ. Whether it was truly the Cross of Christ or not, history cannot point to another talisman that has played such a figure in the great drama of humanity.—George E. Walsh.

ON THE VOICE OF SONG

NEW ENGLAND ROMANCE WHICH REACHED A CLIMAX EASTER MORNING

BY WINTHROP ALLEN

HE followed her down the wavering pathway from the schoolhouse to the brook. She sat on the bank, her sharp chin resting on her knees, her great, unchildish eyes staring straight into the shadowy depths of the woods.

He waited for her to speak, but she ignored his presence. Finally he seated himself beside her and said abruptly:

"You hadn't ought to run away like that. You'll get a black mark for it."

"I don't care," she murmured mechanically. Then, with a sudden burst of passion, she cried, "I hate to be shut up in that stuffy room, and I hate the teacher. She talks through her nose."

Then, because he was sorry for her, he tried to make her forget the misery of that first day in the district school, while he told her of the robin's nest in the big tree yonder, and the fishes that hid in the deep, dim pool around the bend of the stream.

And when they parted she threw both arms around his neck, kissed him impetuously, and cried:

"I like you! I like you! But you are the only person in this whole town I do like!"

For she was only 10.

He found her leaning dejectedly against the stile at the end of her aunt's garden. The moonlight fell upon her upturned face, white and drawn now, with heavy circles under the eyes.

"I hate it all, the sewing, the baking, the very house. She's put moth balls under the parlor carpet, and she makes me dust the room every morning. I want to be out with the birds and flowers. I want to do as I like!"

Then, because he did not understand the girl's temperament and had been born and raised in calm, puritanical environment he replied gravely:

"Your aunt knows what is best for you."

She drew back, like a child struck by the hand it loves.

"You are like all the rest. No one loves me. No one understands me. I wish I was dead."

And she walked back to the house, her head high, but her lips quivering, for she was only 15.

He met her at the depot. He was breathing hard, for he had just heard the news and had been walking fast. She was folding her ticket with a trembling hand, when he drew her behind a baggage truck, piled high with trunks, where they were safe from curious eyes.

"What does this mean? Where are you going?" he demanded, sternly. After a year at the theological seminary, he felt that he had a right to direct the actions of his fellow-beings.

Her hands ceased trembling. She clasped them firmly about the handle of her traveling bag and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Out into the world I love. Out where I will find music. I'm starving for it. She won't let me sing about the house. In the 10 years I've lived with her, she has never kissed me once—she has never asked me if I was happy. I'm going to the people of my father. I am of age and no one can stop me."

She paused. Perhaps she hoped that some one might at least try."

"You will come back? You will write to me?"

"No! Yes!"

And then, because he loved her, he said nothing more, but helped her on the train, and watched until only a faint line of smoke marked where it crossed the state line.

And she, pressing back the scalding tears, murmured:

"I thought he would care! But he is like all the rest of them—ice—ice! And I shall learn to do without him, yes, I shall forget him!"

For she was only 20!

The Rev. Archibald Truax, minister of the First Congregational Church of North Groton, bent over, his hands clasped between his knees and his eyes fixed on the dying embers.

Mrs. Sawyer, president of the Ladies' Aid Society, from her post on the opposite side of the fireplace, studied his attitude with a glance that was pitying, almost maternal.

"I trust you will not consider what I have said an impertinence, Mr. Truax," she remarked, finally, as he did not offer to speak.

"O, no; not at all, my dear Mrs. Sawyer," he exclaimed hastily, nervously—pulling himself together as if his mind had been far away from his study and the woman who was watching him curiously. "On the contrary, I realize the truth of all you say. I have been absorbed in the literary side of my work. I have sacrificed my social life to my studies. You know my book is to be brought out shortly, and I am most anxious for its success."

"We are all anxious for that," she said, rising and smiling down upon him. "But, my dear boy, let me imagine I am still your teacher, humanity is a broader field for study than the most magnificent library endowed by man. You will come to see me before you leave? Do! Good night!"

And she was gone.

He returned to his deep-tufted chair and closed his eyes wearily. Mrs. Sawyer had called ostensibly to tell him that she must resign from church work, preparatory to an ocean voyage for her health. She had always been his mainstay, in women's circles, but it was not so much the news of her impending departure that had distressed him as certain little remarks which had stood out clearly in the course of their conversation. Moreover, it was obvious that she voiced the sentiments of his congregation.

His people were disappointed in him. The social life of the church was apathetic. They felt that their pastor owed it as a duty to bring to the silent parsonage a helpful young wife.

It had all been said so skillfully, so diplomatically, that not a single arrow rankled in his breast.

And his answer! How stilted and insincere it echoed in his mind now! Sophistry, every word of it! Had he really been studying to advance the creed he had espoused, or to forget? Had he written the book to bring glory upon his church or to show her that he, too, could do something to attract the attention of the great outside world?

He crossed the room and threw up the window shade. The world lay flooded in moonlight, and the street ran straight and wide and white—to her.

What was she doing? What was she thinking? Of him? Or perhaps she was wrapped in the music she loved, seated at the piano, or standing with her violin tucked close to her white throat. Her long, tapering fingers, soft as velvet, tender as a May breeze, were caressing the lifeless instrument that could not feel her touch. If he could only take those hands in his—could hold her close—

With a crash he pulled down the shade and strode back to the fireplace. A grim, bitter smile played about his lips. If his congregation knew, would they still wish him to marry?

Then his mind traveled back to the day Mariana Chester had left North Groton, tearing asunder the chilling environment in which fate had held her for 10 weary years. Every drop of Italian blood in her veins had cried out against the puritanical atmosphere of her maiden aunt's home; and Miss Chester, on her part, had never forgiven her young brother's love for the girl's mother. He had found her in the factory where he was superintendent. What mattered it that she was the gentle slave of the husband she adored to the day of her death? Or that she had been driven to manual labor by mere force of circumstances? She was a foreigner. She wept over mere trifles. She openly made love to her husband in the presence of strangers, and kissed him in public places. She lacked self-control. But her orphan child should be raised differently.

And so Mariana had endured it for 10 long chilling years and then had gone back to her mother's people in the dingy Italian quarters of New York. Her grandmother, a weazened creature, who drank much sharp wine and said many prayers to the Virgin, received her with open arms. Other kinsfolk made much of her and raved over her voice and took her to a sharp-tongued master who alternately praised her pure tones and swore at the neglect of this beautiful gift. Then came her introduction into the chorus of the great opera company, and life seemed to open before her, a glorious, golden vista. Like one in a happy dream she donned cotton velvets, tarnished spangles and paste gems. She saw and felt nothing of these, but heard only her music, wondering if the day would ever come when she, Mariana Chester, might bring an audience to their feet with bravos ringing on their lips.

Right regularly she wrote dutiful little notes to the grim Miss Chester, who reading them, declared that the girl was music mad and would bring disgrace on the family name that had never known stain. But the unconscious Mariana was happy, absolutely happy, save when she thought of him—the man she had fully intended to forget. She wondered why he wasted time studying musty books, when he might live with her in this world of music and be happy. He could sing, yes, she had often heard him, and his voice was much better than that of the funny little tenor who stood behind her at rehearsals and whispered ridiculous compliments in her heedless ears.

Once Truax came to see her, came without warning, and she, partly because it was the way of her people and partly because of very joy at sight of him, laid both hands on his shoulders and, looking straight into his eyes, uttered the most absurd words of welcome, half Italian, half English. And she could not understand why he lifted her hands abruptly from his shoulders or why he turned first red, then white. Nor could she have understood why, that night in his bare room in the small college town, he walked the floor until day broke. For she had read that which she wanted to know in the glad light of his eyes when they first met, before he remembered.

He had never been brave enough to tell her the truth—that he loved her, but his profession and hers stood between them. Even when she crept back, like a wounded bird, to the cover of the Chester home at North Groton, he hesitated—and was lost.

Faded now the dreams of a brilliant career! A frightful railroad accident had left her maimed for life with a halting step that the voice of a diva could not redeem. There was room and welcome for her yet in the Italian quartet, but its very air seemed to mock her. And Miss Chester, dying, had left to her niece, as if in expiation for a trust she had somehow failed to fulfill, the Chester homestead and a sufficient income to maintain it.

So, from the noisy city, Mariana brought her old grandmother, a piano, a violin and stacks of opera scores and sheet music. The dark-green shutters were fastened back, heavy draperies came down, and sunshine came in. Flowers bloomed in every window, and thick or either sides of the walks. Birds chirruped in the south bay window, and the mistress of all was content—content but nothing more.

For full well she realized that another dream was fading. There were so many things a minister's wife must do, so many burdens she must help to bear. And what help could she, with her halting step, and her days and nights of pain, spent in a darkened room, offer to this strong, reliant young clergyman with his pale face and deep-set eyes. And having nothing to give, what could she ask.

The day after Mrs. Sawyer's call, he started on his Easter sermon. The younger element of his church had insisted upon special services, an innovation at North Groton. The new organist was arranging the musical programme, Elizabeth Grant, daughter of the Assemblyman from North Groton, was chairman of the committee on decoration. The air seemed charged with some new force, and Archibald Truax plunged into his sermon with a feeling that somehow it would make a crisis in his life. It was a learned dissertation on the recognition of friends in the world to come. Truax meant to make it comforting, but the typewritten characters struck back at him from the pages like dull, unremitting blows from the sledgehammer at the forge.

It was dusk of the Thursday preceding Easter Sunday when he re-read the manuscript and laid it aside with a sigh. Beautifully phrased, with every rule of rhetoric observed, and yet—

He thrust it into his desk, caught up his topcoat and hat and strode down the village street to—her. She received him in a circle of lamplight that seemed to surround her figure, gowned in soft, clinging gray material, like a huge halo. It was the first time he had called in months, yet she manifested no surprise. Perhaps he was in difficulty. Perhaps there was really something she might offer him, if only kindly advice. But no, he broached no matters connected with himself, but chatted with her as if it were an everyday proceeding for him to drop in at the Chester home. She was even more mystified when he accepted her invitation to remain for supper, but led the way into her small dining-room as if the feast had been in preparation in his honor for several days.

It was a bizarre little table, with a mass of sweet-scented bloom in its center, and for dishes many quaint conceits which the girl had picked up in New York's foreign quarters. And the rosy tint cast by the hanging lamp seemed to envelop something more than his mere body. He felt strangely happy. A new note sounded in his voice. He laughed almost boyishly. More than once Mariana gazed at him in wonder.

But that was before her grandmother slipped into the room and took her accustomed place at the table. Then Truax, looking up suddenly, saw her cross herself before she ate. Later Mariana rose several times and ran to the sideboard or the pantry for something she wanted, instead of ringing for the maid. She laughed as she did it, declaring that she hated prim servants in the room at meal time, when people wanted to chat and be "comfy."

The man looked across the table as she spoke. Her grandmother was drinking tea from an up-tilted saucer. And his mind traveled back 24 hours to a similar scene in the dining-room at the home of the Honorable Richard Grant. It had been a dinner, not supper. A soft-shoed servant had obeyed the unspoken behests of the host's only daughter. The meal had been served in many courses, yet the time had seemed short, for the conversation was clever. He remembered that Elizabth Grant had said little, yet her presence seemed the inspiration of much that was said. She had always impressed him as a woman of strong executive force, in spite of her deliberate, conventional bearing. He remembered, too, how well-groomed she always was, how admirably she fitted herself into the interests of those around her, whatever the occasion. Unconsciously he moved back from the table. He never would have done such a thing at the Grant home, but unconventional Mariana would not mind. He waited while she pressed a few dainties on her dear old grandmother, then he followed her restlessly into the parlor. He saw, as in a dream, her questioning face, her wistful eyes, but with a disconcerted apology, he asked for his coat and hat. He had been working too steadily at his desk that day. He must have fresh air and a long walk.

Passing out of the gate, he met the new organist coming in, and bowed mechanically. Then he walked rapidly down the street to the parsonage, where he locked himself in his study and thought far into the night.

On Easter Sunday his church was crowded. Truax, seated behind a mass of palms and lilies, found himself speculating as to their cost. He knew just how much the committee had been permitted to spend, and then he recalled that Elizabeth Grant had been chairman. The only daughter of her father, she had doubtless—

The organ, stationed in the gallery at the rear of the church, suddenly pealed forth in a veritable shout of triumph. Ah, that young man from Boston played well! But now the paean of praise died away into a rippling accompaniment, and the Reverend Archibald Truax bent forward, his hands clutching the arms of the crimson velvet pulpit chair in which he sat. That could be no voice save hers. And then his vision cleared, and he saw her there above him, half hidden by masses of Southern smilax and white bloom.

"He is risen! He is risen! And with him shall we live!"

O, the confidence of it, the absolute faith, the perfect purity, the unswerving fidelity! It seemed to him as if all the ideals he had ever tried to reach rang truthfully in that voice. Had it been given to this woman of little learning to know and live the great truths which he had somehow missed? And could she bring to him that perfect confidence which rang in her song? What mattered the opinion of the men and women he served? What mattered creeds, dogmas and conventionalities? She could breathe into his soul the power, the life it had never known, and, therefore, could never give forth.

And while she sang on and on, he sat staring, like one in a dream, at his manuscript, those empty words on which he had spent so many hours, those carefully built sentences which meant so little after all.

Her voice melted into silence, and from the vast congregation rose a sigh, as if the gates of paradise, having swung open, just for a moment, had suddenly closed again. But Reverend Archibald Truax leaned over behind his pulpit, his face buried in his hand.

When he rose to face his people he held in his hand no manuscript, nor did he open the pages of his Bible. He announced his text in a quiet voice:

"And the greatest of these is charity."

A strange Easter text, thought those who listened, but before he finished they saw the lesson he would teach, that out of the dead embers of old dogmas and creeds, out of the narrow boundaries of self-imposed rules, one must rise to a new and broader life and love which shall embrace all men. He spoke extemporaneously for the first time since taking his charge, yet people said that never had he preached like this. And Mrs. Sawyer, leaning back contentedly in her pew, remarked to herself: "Ah, he is awake at last!"

He had shaken hands with the last member of his flock, the church seemed strangely quiet and empty, yet still he stood in the small vestibule, at the foot of the stair leading to the organ loft. He must know whether she had heard him—understood what those words meant to him and to her. He was sure she had not left the church, yet overhead there was only silence.

But by and by came the sound of gentle footfalls, then steps that were halting and intermittent, and his heart beat fast and hard. She was before him, now, in the gray dress, with a wrap of the same material, and a flower-laden hat drooping over her face. Her eyes were bright, yet her mouth had a curve that was almost wistful.

"I have been waiting to thank you," he murmured, and wondered why the young organist remained at her side. "It was a delightful surprise to us all. I hope you will sing for us again, very often."

And again he glanced at the organist, who apparently felt called upon to make some explanation.

"Yes, no one sings like her—here—not even the handsome Miss Grant, who has studied abroad. It is the soul that sings, not the voice alone. And my Mariana has the soul of an angel. She will sing with me every Sunday now, for without her the church would seem empty. I could not play."

Truax had been standing with his hands clasped behind him. Now their grip on each other was like that of an iron clamp.

Mariana raised her misty eyes to his.

"Yes," she said, softly, "we are to be married soon, and we stopped to pray that we might be happy together always. I know it is not the custom of your church." There was something of the old defiance in her voice. "But no one saw or knew, and we must live our own life, Carl and I."

"Never fear, Mr. Truax," interrupted the young musician eagerly, "it shall be a happy life. Ah, I loved my music always, but now with Mariana, what shall I not do? Yes, wonderful things. I will make a name for her, only for her. A good woman, Mr. Truax, can make a man do all things."

And with an adoring glance at Mariana, who was gazing through the open doorway into the tender spring sunshine, he tucked his music under his arm, carefully adjusted her cane for her, and led her gently down the stone steps. She did not look back. Had she not decided it was best long, long ago?

And so he had let her pass out of his life without a word. And she did not know! Rev. Archibald Truax walked with downcast eyes toward the pulpit. He must go after his sermon. Perhaps he should read it that night. He had meant to take a lighter text for the evening service, but—

He came to an abrupt pause at the chancel rail. The tall, graceful figure of a woman stood between him and the pulpit steps. In her hand she posed a small white pitcher, with which she was watering the decorations.

"They wither so quickly when there is a large crowd, and I want them fresh for tonight."

Then he realized that Elizabeth Grant was before him.

"You are very thoughtful," he remarked, then added with a tired smile, which was not lost on the girl, "But that is nothing new. You are always thoughtful."

"Thank you," she answered quietly, "and if I may take the liberty of suggesting such a thing, I think you are very tired and should have a rest before the afternoon service. You preached with your whole soul this morning."

"Yes," he answered, but their thoughts did not run in the same channels. "Did you like it?"

"I like to hear you so earnest, but I think some of your assertions were rather sweeping. Most of us are better if we keep within the beaten paths, and there are few who have the courage, the strength of character, to face the responsibilities and consequences of rebelling against custom and conventionalities. But we will not discuss the matter now. Dinner is what you need just now. Won't you dine with us? John is outside with the carriage, and the drive will do you good."

He looked down at her—for by this time he was in the pulpit—and stood with his discarded manuscript in his hand. She was very sweet and womanly, and her eyes did not falter as he gazed wearily into their calm depths.

"No, thank you, not today. But tomorrow I may call."

Then suddenly he held out his hand, as if he needed her, and she without hesitation laid her cool, slim fingers in his hot ones, then with that rare grace among women, knowing that he needed no words, she left him with the lilies. For on the morrow he would come. She knew it.—Copyright, 1902.

The Message of March.

Who blows his bugle o'er the leas?
Who roves across the snow-clad hills,
With wanton locks upon the breeze,
Yellow as nodding daffodils?
Athwart the welkin, loud and long,
Sounds blare of bugle, snatch of song.
Awake, O world! (so March doth say);
Awake! for soon she'll wend this way,
With rose-wrought face and fair,
And April in her hair,
The Maid o' Spring!

Clasping the cruel window-grate,
With tearful face, in her gray tower,
Wan with her weary captive fate,
Spring sighs away the laggard hour,
Now, hark! The bugle's mellow blast!
And stripling March fares singing past,
Oh! thro' the bars, as he doth stand,
She waves to him her little hand.
How long the drear delay!
She sighs, Ah, well-a-day!
The Maid o' Spring!

The sluggard world from slumber wakes,
In answer to the herald call,
And as from face a lady takes
Her mask, at height of carnival,
The streamlet melts its icy guise
And tips along in olden wise.
While all its liquid notes it sets
To pulse of pebbled castanets,
With palm against her ear,
She lightly laughs to hear,
The Maid o' Spring!

The snows that lie on upland height
Are clipped by scissors o' the sun,
Like sheep that lose their fleeces white,
And into heaping clouds are spun,
That hang o'er fallow field and hill,
And sudden showers of silver spill,
While one by one the sylvan, shy
Blue violets break like rifts of sky.
And lo! along the lea
She wanders, wayward, free,
The Maid o' Spring!

—Edward U. Valentine.