

How Matilda Helped the Curate

By JANE OSBORN

(Copyright, 1920, by Associated Literary Press.)

She was not at all pretty; in fact, some persons thought Matilda was not even good-looking, but for all that there was something in her frank, good humor, and a liveliness in her little gray eyes that always began by amusing and usually ended by captivating all those who came in her way. "If she were a beauty," her younger sisters used to say, "we wouldn't so much mind having Matilda walk off with all the laurels." And they perhaps took a little satisfaction in the fact that several years after they had both married Matilda Grant was still Miss Grant—still, to be sure, fascinating and amusing.

Everyone used to think that Matilda would end by marrying her childhood playmate and companion, Paul Meade, and it had been whispered more than once that there was an engagement. And it was also whispered, though Matilda made a confidant of no one, it was Paul's fault that when, not long after Matilda's twenty-seventh birthday, he went off to South America on a big engineering scheme, he did not take Matilda with him.

"Matilda acts exactly like a disappointed spinster," said her sister Clara one day. "She's gone into church work as if her last hope went with Paul to South America. She's at church now taking charge of one of those tiresome guilds, and she spends more than half her time going about and visiting the poor parishioners."

Constance smiled and looked up from her sewing. "Disappointed spinster!" she said with a laugh. "I think you have forgotten our new curate. It's his guild she's working for, and his poor she's visiting, and the end of it all will be that he will propose like the rest, and I almost think Matilda would take him, too."

Clara gasped: "You don't mean that little Mr. Cobb, do you? How perfectly ridiculous! Why, a man like that couldn't even amuse Matilda. He's a mere boy and he hasn't had any experience. To be sure he's the most

she'll grow tired of poor Mr. Cobb and break his young heart."

At the very time that the sisters were discussing Matilda's affairs over their sewing she was working with her usual earnestness with the young curate.

"Do you know, Miss Grant," he said, looking at her with an intensity of purpose that almost surprised Matilda and made her feel for the first time the real force of the young man. "I want to ask you something. I thought I'd speak to the bishop about it at first, but it seems as if you could perhaps give me the best and wisest answer. Knowing me so well you can best and naturally advise me. Please don't consider the personal side at all." He paused nervously and then came to the point. "Do you think I ought to marry?"

"You see, I want eventually to devote my life to my little mountain mission. That's always been my ambition, and when I first spoke to the bishop about it he advised me not to marry until I had established myself, because of the hardships of the work. It didn't seem hard then, for a year ago I had never even considered the possibility of wanting to marry. But since I have been here it has come upon me very forcibly. Of course I wouldn't want to marry a woman who wasn't as devoted to the cause as I am; but a young woman like you, a little older than I, with her whole heart in the cause, couldn't help but be an inspiration to me."

Matilda had listened to this studied, but obviously heartfelt, declaration with the color deepening in her cheeks and her eyes lowered with embarrassment. "If only he liked me for something besides my devotion to the cause," she thought, and then, after a pause, she said:

"I understand your point of view perfectly. I am glad you have put it as you have. Yes, I do think a wife would be helpful to you; one who admires you and would have your interests at heart. Yes, Stephen, I think you are right." She spoke with hesitancy and faltered because of his undemonstrative behavior.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart," said the curate. And then some one, the sexton, no doubt, came into the room and ended his confessions.

Matilda went home that day with a confusion of ideas, some pleasant, some very disconcerting. To devote herself to the mission of the neighboring wild mountain district might be almost as absorbing as being an engineer's wife in South America. And then she thought with her cheeks burning with annoyance that she had hoped for a more ardent declaration. Matilda kept her promise to her sisters, and when she found her way to their tea table that afternoon she told them that the curate had proposed. "In a way," she explained. "It was a queer sort of a proposal, but I didn't refuse him. The sexton interrupted us, but it is settled. I'm Mrs. Parson Cobb for the rest of my life."

It was while Matilda was waiting for the call from the curate that she was expecting that evening that a telegram reached her from New York. Her heart sank within her as she read. "I will be with you in two days, Paul Meade." And as she re-read it the vision of mountain missions and curates vanished from her and in its place came a thousand recollections of the old friend, Paul.

Fortunately for Matilda's peace of mind, Stephen Cobb had been called to his beloved mountain mission the day after the telegram came and had left Matilda with only a very kind farewell, and did not seem to notice the look of anxiety in Matilda's eyes as he promised to tell her all about his plans on his return.

An hour before Paul's arrival Stephen returned from the mountains and hastened to the house of Matilda, who had decided that whatever Paul's reason for returning, she would stand by her guns and marry the only man she had ever really encouraged. If she had made a mistake she would suffer the consequences, she resolved, but when she saw the curate's face before her she thought with a guilty conscience of the telegram and Paul.

"Oh, Matilda," said the curate with beaming blue eyes, "I am going to marry Deaconess Gray in the spring. My little mountain deaconess has promised to marry me as soon as her pledge expires. I am the happiest man in the world. She is so impatient to meet you."

It came upon Matilda in a flash, and because the excited curate was so full of thoughts of his beloved deaconess he did not notice the excitement in Matilda's voice as she congratulated him or the abruptness with which she rose and bowed him to the door.

Two days later Matilda announced her engagement to Paul Meade, her old boyhood friend, who had never known till he left her that he had loved her all his life.

Went Slowly.

"I understand that his wife has run away and left him?"
"She has left him, all right; but she didn't run—she had on a hobbleskirt."

THE QUICKENING

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

Copyright, 1906, by Francis Lynde

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

Bastrop Clegg, whose distinction was that of being the oldest loafer in the circle, spat accurately into the draft-hole of the stove, sat back and tilted his hat over his eyes.

"Well, boys, I reckon hit's erbout time, ain't hit?" he moralized. "Leetle Tom must be a-goin' awn two year old; and I don't recommonder ez Tom 'r his pappy has ever done a livin' thing for Nan."

A half-hour later, Brother Japheth, trudging back to Deer Trace on the pike, saw the light in the long-deserted cabin back of the new foundry plant; saw this and was overtaken at the Woodlawn gates by Thomas Jefferson with Longfellow and the buggy. And he could not well help observing that the buggy had been lightened of its burden of household supplies.

Tom turned the horse over to William Henry Harrison and went in to his belated dinner somberly reflective. He was not sorry to find that his mother and father had gone over to the manor-house. Solitude was grateful at the moment; he was glad of the chance to try to think himself uninterruptedly out of the snarl of misunderstanding in which his impulsiveness had entangled him.

The pointing of the thought was to see Ardea and have it out with her at once. Reconsidered, it appeared the part of prudence to wait a little. The muddiest pool will settle if time and freedom from ill-judged disturbance be given it. But we, who have known Thomas Jefferson from his beginnings, may be sure that it was the action-thought that triumphed. They also serve who only stand and wait, was meaningless comfort to him; and when he had finished his solitary dinner and had changed his clothes, he strode across the double lawns and rang the manor-house bell.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Deer Trace family and the two guests from Woodlawn were in the music-room when Tom was admitted, with Ardea at the piano playing war songs for the pleasuring of her grandfather and the ex-artilleryman. Under cover of the music, Tom slipped into the circle of listeners and went to sit beside his mother. There was a courteous hand-wave of welcome from Major Dabney, but Miss Euphrasia seemed not to see him. He saw and understood, and was obstinately impervious to the chilling east wind in that quarter.

Ardea lingered lovingly on the closing harmonies of a nocturne, and when the final chord was struck her hands lingered on the keys until the sweet voices of the strings had sung themselves afar into the higher sound heaven. Then she turned quickly and surprised her anesthetized audience.

"You poor things!" she laughed. "In another five minutes the last one of you have succumbed. Why didn't somebody stop me?"

The iron-master said something about the heavy work of the day, and helped his wife to her feet. The Major came awake with a start and bestirred himself hospitably, and Miss Euphrasia rose to speed the parting guests—or, rather, the two of them who had been invited. In the drift down the wide hall Ardea fell behind with Tom, whom Cousin Euphrasia continued to ignore. "I came to tell you," he said, in a low tone, snatching his opportunity. "I can't sleep until I have fought it out with you."

"You don't deserve a hearing, even from your best friend," was her discouraging reply; but when they were at the door she gave him a formal reprieve. "I shall walk for a few minutes on the portico to rest my nerves," she said. "If you want to come back—"

He thanked her gravely, and went obediently when his mother called to him from the steps. But on the Woodlawn veranda he excused himself, and when the door closed behind the two in-going, he swiftly recrossed the lawns to pay the penalty.

The front door of the manor-house was shut and the broad, pillared portico was untenanted. He sat down in one of the rustic chairs. The door opened and closed and Ardea stood before him. She had thrown a wrap over her shoulders, and the light from the music-room windows illuminated her. There was cool scorn in the slate-blue eyes, but in Tom's thought she had never appeared more unutterably beautiful and desirable—and unattainable.

"I have come," she said, in a tone that cut him to the heart for its very indifference. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"I'm afraid I haven't left myself much to say," he began, penitently. "I was born foolish, and it seems that I haven't outgrown it. But, really, if you could know—"

"Unhappily, I do know," she interrupted. "If I did not, I might listen to you with better patience."

"It did look pretty bad," he confessed. "And that's what I wanted to say;

it looked a great deal worse than it was, you know."

"I am bound to believe what I see with my own eyes," she rejoined. "Perhaps you can make it appear that seeing is not believing."

"Of course I can't if you take that attitude," he complained. And then he said irritably: "You talk about friendship! You don't know the meaning of the word!"

"If I didn't, I should hardly be here at this moment," she suggested. "You don't seem to apprehend to what degrading depths you have sunk."

His sins in the business field rose before him accusingly and prompted his reply.

"Yes, I do; but that is another matter. We were speaking of what you saw this evening. Will you let me try to explain?"

"Yes, if you will tell the plain truth." "Lacking imagination, I can't do anything else. Nan has had a falling-out with the old scamp of a moonshiner who calls himself her father. She came to me for help, and broke down in the midst of telling me about it. I can't stand a woman's crying any better than other men."

"And that was all—absolutely all, Tom?"

"I don't lie—to you," he said, briefly. She gave him her hand with an impulsive return to the old comradeship.

"I believe you, Tom, in the face of all the—the unlikelihood. But please don't try me again. After what has happened—" she stopped in deference to something in his eyes, half anger, half bewilderment, or a most skillful simulation of both.

"Go on," he said; "tell me what has happened. I seem to have missed something."

"No," she said, with sudden gravity. "I don't want to be your accuser or your confessor; and if you should try to pervert me, I should hate you!"

"There is nothing for me to confess to you, Ardea," he said, soberly, still holding the hand she had given him. "You have known the worst of me, always and all along, I think."

"Yes, I have known," she replied, freeing the imprisoned hand and turning from him. "And I have been sorry, sorry; not less for you than for poor Nan Bryerson. You know now what I thought—what I had to think—when I saw you with her this evening."

It was slowly beating its way into his brain. Little things, atoms of suggestion, were separating themselves from the mass of things disregarded to cluster thickly on this nucleus of revelation: the old story of his companionship with Nan on the mountain; his uncle's and Japheth's accusation at the time; and now the old moonshiner's enmity, Japheth's meaning look and distrustful silence, Nan's appearance with a child bearing his own name, the glances askance in Hargis' store when he was buying the little stock of necessities for the poor outcast. It was all plain enough.

"Tell me," he said, thickly; "you heard this: you believed it. Have I been misjudging you?"

"Not more than I misjudged you, perhaps. But that is all over, now; I am trusting you again, Tom. Only, as I said before, you mustn't try me too hard."

"Let me understand," he went on, still in the same strained tone. "Knowing this, or believing it, you could still find a place in your heart for me—you could still forgive me, Ardea?"

"I could still be your friend; yes," she replied. "I believed—others believed—that your punishment would be great enough; there are all the coming years for you to be sorry in, Tom. But in the fullness of time I meant to remind you of your duty. The time has come; you must play the man's part now. What have you done with her?"

"Wait a moment. I must know one other thing," he insisted. "You heard this before you went to Europe?"

"Long before."

"And it didn't make any difference in the way you felt toward me?"

"It did; it made the vastest difference."

They were pacing slowly up and down the portico, and she waited until they had made the turn at the Woodlawn end before she went on. "I thought I knew you when we were boy and girl together, and, girl-like, I suppose I had idealized you in some ways. I thought I knew your wickedness, and that they were not weaknesses; so—so it was a miserable shock. But it was not for me to judge you—only as you might rise or sink from that desperate starting point. When I came home I was sure that you had risen; I have been sure of it ever since until—until these few wretched hours to-night. They are past, and now I'm going to be sure of it some more, Tom."

"What if I should tell you that you are mistaken?"

"Don't," she said, softly. "That would only be smashing what is left of the ideal. I think I couldn't bear that."

"And you've been calling this friendship! Ardea, girl, it's love!"

Ardea shook her head slowly.

"No," she rejoined, gravely. "At one time I thought—I was afraid—that it

might be. But now I know it isn't."

"How do you know it?"

"Because love, as I think of it, is stronger than the traditions, stronger than anything else in the world. And the traditions are still with me. I admit the existence of the social pale, and as long as I live within it I have a right to demand certain things of the man who marries me."

"And love doesn't demand anything," he said, putting the remainder of the thought into words for her. "You are right. If I could clear myself with a word, I should not say it."

"Why?"

"Because your—loyalty, let us call it, is too precious to be exchanged for anything else you could give me in place of it—esteem, respect, and all the other well-behaved and virtuous bestowals."

"But the loyalty is based on the belief that you are trying to earn the well-behaved approvals," she continued.

"No, it isn't. It exists in spite of everything, and not because of anything. The traditions may try to make you stand it on the other leg, it's a way they have; but the fact remains."

"The traditions are about to send me into the house, and the principal problem is yet untouched. What have you done with Nancy?"

He told her briefly and exactly, adding nothing and omitting nothing; and her word for it was "Impossible."

"Don't you understand?" she objected. "I may choose to believe that this home making for poor Nan and her

wife is merely a bit of tardy justice on your part and honor you for it. But nobody else will take that view of it. If you keep her in that little cabin of yours, Mountain View avenue will have a fit—and very properly."

"I don't see why it should," he protested, densely.

"Don't you? That's because you are still so hopelessly primeval. People won't give you credit for the good motive. You must think of some other way."

"Supposing I say I don't care a hant?"

"Oh, but you do. You have your father and mother and—and me to consider, however reckless you may be for yourself and Nancy. You mustn't leave her where she is for a single day."

"I can leave her there if I like. I've told her she may stay as long as she wants to."

"No," she said decisively, "you will have a perfect hornets' nest about your ears. Every move you make will be watched and commented on. Don't you see that you are playing the part of the headstrong, obstinate boy again?"

"Yet you think I ought to provide for Nan, in some way; how am I going to do it unless I ignore the hornets?"

"Now you are more reasonable," she said, approvingly. "I shall ride to-morrow morning, and if you should happen to overtake me, we might think up something."

The door was opening gently under the pressure of her hand, but he was loath to go.

"I wouldn't take five added years of life for what I've learned to-night, Ardea," he said, passionately. And then: "Have you fully made up your mind to marry Vincent Farley?"

In the twinkling of an eye she was another woman—cold, unapproachable, with pride kindling as if she had received a mortal affront.

And then he bade her good-night and went his way with a lifting song of triumph in his heart which not even the chilling rebuff of the leave-taking was sufficient to silence.

"She loves me! She would still love me if she were ten times Vincent Farley's wife!" he said, over and over to himself; the words were on his lips when he fell asleep, and they were still ringing in his ears the next morning at dawn-break when he rose and made ready to go to ride with her.

(To be continued.)

The Antiquity of the Organ.

The organ is the most organic and comprehensive of all musical instruments. While the pipes of Pan, aside from that mythical personage, indicate a very ancient use of pipes as a means of producing musical sounds, the "water organ of the ancients" furnishes to the student of organ history the first tangible clew regarding the remote evolution of the instrument. In the second century the magriphe, an organ of ten pipes with a crude keyboard, is said to have existed, but accounts of this instrument are involved in much obscurity. It is averred that an organ, the gift of Constantine, was in the possession of King Pepin of France in 757, but Aldhelm, a monk, makes mention of an organ with "gilt pipes" as far back as the year 700.

The Little Things That Tell.

A South Side mother was dressing for a tea the other afternoon when the front door bell rang. She instructed the maid that if the visitor appeared to be about to make a formal call to say she was not at home. But the mother had not counted on the 5-year-old daughter playing in the front yard.

The maid, seeing a woman dressed as if for calling, obeyed instructions.

"She is not at home," the maid said.

"Why, she is, too, Minnie," came a sharp interruption from the child on the lawn. "I saw her lower the curtain just now."

"Perhaps she just came in," the maid responded weakly. "I'll see."

The situation was saved by the fact that the visitor was the mother's sister, whom the maid did not know.—Kansas City Star



I Am Going to Marry Deaconess Gray.

unsophisticated and delightful boy in the parish, but he doesn't know any more how to manage a girl like Matilda than one of his own choir boys would."

A few minutes later Matilda came upon her sisters. "Here," she exclaimed, undoing a package she had brought with her, "won't you take this, Mr. Cobb—wants to get the work off tomorrow. It is for his mission up in the mountains, where he supports a deaconess with his own money. Isn't that generous of him? I promised to finish these garments tonight, and I never could manage by myself."

Clara looked up in surprise. "The first thing you know, Matilda, that little curate of yours will be in love with you," she said, reproachfully. "I should think you'd have more sense than to trifle with a man's feelings like that."

"Why," laughed Matilda, "I think I'd make a very nice minister's wife, don't you?"

"You aren't engaged, are you?" asked Constance, timidly.

"Don't get excited," Matilda assured her. "He hasn't even proposed yet. I'll tell you when he does."

Before many days had passed it was quite obvious to the two younger sisters that Matilda actually had designs upon the affections of the honest-eyed Mr. Cobb.

"After all," said Constance, "she says she would like to be a minister's wife, and I suppose she has to marry some one some time."

"Yes," sighed Clara, "but I still think she is in love with Paul, and