

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87*)

Missionary Work at Home

Chapter 1.

The war and the subsequent legislation gave the ballot to several millions of slaves. They were utterly unprepared to meet and discharge the responsibilities of citizenship, with due regard to their own interests as well as those of the State.

It became thus a matter of patriotic devotion to the state as well as of philanthropic interest in the welfare of the freedmen, to provide for the proper education of these new citizens.

Here and there through the South schools were established for their instruction. Many of them came to the north, and philanthropy rejoiced in and encouraged their migration as thus these almost heathen were brought to its own doors for instruction and training.

Not very long after the war a Cincinnati lady with one of her sons went south for the winter months. Several weeks before the time set for her return, the family at home received a letter from the mother, which after dwelling upon the prospects of the freedmen, their almost hopeless condition in the then south, the various schemes for their education and civilization there, wound up as follows:

“I have become greatly interested in two very bright colored girls here, who have frequently attracted my attention by their neatness, their quiet manners and their intelligent looks. Their deportment is exceptionally modest and their appearance is prepossessing (sic). So far as I can learn their characters and antecedents are good. Their friends are eager to have them go north to live and I have about concluded to send them, trusting that homes and occupations may be found for them.”

This letter called forth an answer in which the danger of assuming so grave responsibility was dwelt upon and the mother was urged to reconsider the matter and leave the girls in their homes rather than bring them among strangers where they would necessarily be a source of constant anxiety to their would-be benefactor. In response a telegram was received which read “Letter came too late. Girls started for C. Today. Harry and Laura take care of them till I come.” This message was a bomb which threw consternation into the family camp. An excited consultation was called in which the son and his wife, the daughter and her husband, expressed in strong terms their opinion of this wild scheme.

Said Harry (the son) “It is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. Two girls about whom we know little or nothing and who probably are idle and shiftless, coming out here among strangers to try their fortunes! They are not used to Northern ways; nobody will want to employ them; they will be discontented and there will be the mischief to pay generally. Mother has got itself into business now! And to cap the climax we must take care of them till she comes home! If she must try such a wild experiment why didn't she have them wait until she comes.”

John, the son-in-law, usually extremely mild in his manner and conversation, joined in

the strain of denunciations saying, "Well, Laura, I must say that your mother's course is a great surprise to me. It seems to me she must be a little bit off and I shall at once begin to look for symptoms of insanity in our children."

The poor wives, while sympathizing strongly with their lords, tried in vain to induce them to take a less doleful view of the affair. A cloud hung over each household.

Chapter II

In a peaceful New England parsonage sat the clergyman and his wife before a comfortable fire. In the evening mail had come to him a letter from an intimate college friend in the South, the son of the mother whose letterhead caused such commotion in Cincinnati. This letter said "Mother and I have taken a great fancy to three Negro girls, whom we have met. They are neat, capable looking, in fact decidedly bright. Their history is good and they are highly recommended in excelling in the nursery. Their religious education has been sadly neglected. There is little chance for them here and friends want them to go North. Having often heard you lament the scarcity of good nurse girls in your village, I have taken the liberty, without consulting you, to send one of these girls to you. She will arrive in care of a friend of mine shortly after this letter reaches you. I should hardly have ventured to assume that she will be welcome, had I not known your necessities and also your warm interest in the freedmen. I feel quite sure that you will never regret this step which may, at first thought, seem somewhat hashy." The minister and his wife looked at each other in dismay. What a strange thing for their friend to do! But then he had always shown himself a man of good judgment, one not carried away by enthusiasm nor sudden fancies. They had warmly espoused the cause of the freedmen; had wanted to do missionary work among them and here was an opportunity brought to their very door. It must be Providential! But what should they find for her to do? A competent nurse had been secured several weeks before and they had no reasonable excuse for dismissing her. Possibly she would like an assistant. Happy thought. Bridget was consulted and answered indignantly "Indade she wouldn't have the heathen nager round." Depressed by this emphatic response minister and wife again set their wits to work. Another bright idea occurred to them. Possibly some member of their congregation would be glad to take her. The next day was spent in trying to find among their parishioners a home for the expected maid of the colored persuasion.

Finally a young couple about to embark on the untried sea of housekeeping, consented to take her.

The pastor and wife were once more comparatively at rest.

Chapter III

Forty-eight hours have passed since that exciting telegram was received by the sons and daughters in Cincinnati. When, after a day of toil Harry turned the key in the latch of his house door; he felt at peace with all the world. Business was booming, gas and railroad dividends had poured in upon him during the day; he had secured the best box for the opera festival; and he felt aglow with amiability and benevolence. Visions of an appetizing meal succeeded by a restful evening before a cheerful fire with wife and children gathered about him filled his mind with pleasant anticipations. In the hall his wife with serious aspect, met him and said.

“Oh Harry the girl has come.”

“What girl?”

“That colored girl from Florida.”

“Oh, hang that girl! Don't tell me anything about her. I know what to expect. A good for nothing deceitful creature. I've no doubt; who will give us no end of trouble and — —”

“Now my dear,” said his wife, “don't be so hasty in your opinions. She looks like a good-natured quiet little thing, and your feelings will probably change when you see her.”

“See her” said Harry, “I don't want to see her! I won't see her!”

“Come now Harry, don't be so unreasonable. She is as demure and innocent appearing as a baby and I'm sure there is no harm in her. Let me send upstairs for her.”

“No, no,” raved Harry, “send her away to the infirmary, the Employment Bureau, House of Refuge, anywhere. Only get her out of the house before she robs us or poisons the baby. [Zounds], what an insane project this is of your mother's.”

“Now, my dear husband, you must see this girl and you shall before you commit her to the street or some charitable institution.”

Stepping to the door she called “Jane, bring Topsy down here.”

“Topsy indeed,” groaned Harry, dropping in a state of exhaustion into a chair, “an appropriate name, no doubt.”

Down came Jane bringing with her a neatly dressed, attractive, bright, excessively bright black rag doll! —

What followed must be left to the imagination.

A similar scene was enacted at the home of the son-in-law.

When the New England Clergyman received his doll, he thought of his numerous sympathetic parishioners, who had helped him to find a situation for this capable maid who would prove so useful in the nursery. The next day but one he was to face them from his pulpit.

He laughed nervously and said

“Wife I wish Sunday were over.”

[Kemper, Theo]
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Greve Editor
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