

Aunt Diana

The Sunshine of the Family

QUIET, natural home story, this, but full of character and interest for those who delight in domestic details of life. A young girl takes charge of a large family in a motherly fashion that wins regard, and the incidents are all pleasing and consistent.

This serial will greatly please home readers, and its influence cannot help but benefit and enoble the mind and the purer impulses of the heart.

CHAPTER I.

There are conflicts in most lives—real hand-to-hand combats, that have to be fought, not with any bodily weapons, but with the inner forces of the being—battles wherein the victory is not always to the strong, where the young and the weak and the little ones may be found abiding nearest to the standards.

Such a conflict had come to Alison Merie, breaking up the surface of her smooth outer life, and revealing possible shoals and quicksands, in which many of her brightest hopes might be wrecked. It was a quiet little scene, "felicity plants are worth nothing."

To any ordinary spectator the interior of that little room would have presented a picture of perfect serenity and absolute comfort. Even the young creature comfortably seated in a chair by the window, with an open letter and a cluster of deep red roses lying among the folds of her white gown, presented no distracting image, though the cheek had lost its wonted fresh color, and the dark, dreamy eyes had a look of doubt that was almost pain in them.

Two years ago—she had been sixteen then, and, oh, how discontented and ill and unhappy she had been. It was not only the loss of her mother, it was her own incapacity for responsibility, her morbid dislike to her surroundings, that had fretted all her fine color away. Change of air would do her good, and then Aunt Diana had come down upon them with the freshness of a moorland breeze.

"You must give your eldest girl to me, Alison," she had said to Alison's father; "she wants care and watching more than Miss Leigh has time to give her." And, of course, Aunt Diana had her way.

Instead of the whirl of machinery—for her father's sawmills were just behind their house—Alison had now only to listen to the soft flow of the river that glided below the green lawns and shrubberies of Moss side; instead of waking up in the morning to look across the dusty shrubs and trees to the vast wood piles and masses of unswam timber, that seemed endlessly between her and the blue sky, Alison's eyes had now the finest prospect; one shaded garden seemed to run into another, and when the willows were thinned or bare in winter time, what a view of the river and green meadows on the opposite side!

The moral surroundings were almost as much changed. Instead of Miss Leigh's dry method of instruction, Aunt Diana had placed within her reach many a pleasant short cut to knowledge, had suggested all sorts of enviable accomplishments; money was not stinted, where Alison's talents could be turned to account.

In this pleasant but bracing atmosphere Alison had thriven and grown. She was still a tall, slim girl, somewhat youthful in look, but with plenty of warm life and energy about her; and though the dark eyes had still their old trick of dreaming, they seemed to dream more happily, and the shadow did not lie so deep in them—not, at least, until the June afternoon, when Alison sat sighing and visibly disturbed with her lap full of roses. It was evident at last that she found her thoughts too painful, for after another half hour's intense brooding she suddenly jumped up from her seat, scattering the flowers where they lay unheeded on the Indian matting, and walked abruptly to the door. She had dropped her letters, too; but she went back and picked them up, not replacing them in their envelopes, and then she went out into the passage.

A dark oak staircase led into a little square hall, with bookcases like a library, with a harmonium on one side; a glass door opened into a conservatory, through which one passed into the garden.

Alison turned the handle of a door just opposite the staircase, and stood for a moment hesitating on the threshold.

What a pleasant room that was, half studio and half drawing room, full of cross lights, and artistically littered with an odd jumble of medieval and modern furniture—oak chairs and cabinets, basket work longes, tiny tea tables, bits of Italian princesses, and hanging cupboards of quaint old china that gave warm coloring to the whole. Alison's eyes were still fixed on a lady who stood with her back toward her, painting at an easel.

"Well, child, what now?" The voice was nicely modulated, clear and musical, but the manner slightly abrupt.

Alison came forward at once and inspected the picture. "It is very pretty, Aunt Di," she said, forgetting her own worries in a moment. "It is one of your best. I think I see what you mean, but to me it is all beautiful; that old man—pensioner, is he not? and that poor, tired sheep, that seems to have dropped down by the way, left behind by the flock, is so suggestive of the title, 'Noontide Rest.'"

"That is what I intended. You are an intelligent child, Alison; both the man and the sheep must be old; it is not for young creatures to rest at noontide; my old pensioner has already borne the burden and heat of the day."

"Of course, I see what you mean, Aunt Di."

"My parable is not hard to read," replied Miss Carrington, with a smile, but as Alison studied the picture with increased interest and admiration, a pair of shrewd, kindly eyes were studying the girl's face.

"Go and put yourself in that easy chair opposite, and tell me all about it," she said at last, raising her by a good

humored little push. "I must finish this bunch if I am to enjoy my night's rest, but I can listen to any amount of lettered woe," with a suggestive glance at Alison's hand.

"Oh, Aunt Di, how do you find out things so?" stammered Alison; then, as she used to do, she moved to the chair that was always reserved for Miss Carrington's visitors, whom she was wont to entertain after a fashion of her own.

"I wonder how long I am to have patience," observed Miss Carrington, painting on industriously, Alison sat with drooping head, looking at her letters, with one foot resting on the other. "I am quite sure those are Rudel's straggling characters; that boy's handwriting is a disgrace to the family; it has put him out of my will forever; fancy one's nephew being such a sorry scribe."

"Rudel does write badly," returned Alison, with a faint little smile, "but I like his letters better than Miss Leigh's; there is one from Miss Leigh, too; do you admire her handwriting, Aunt Di?"

"No; it is too thin and angular," returned Miss Carrington, severely; "it wants freedom and breadth; it reminds me too much of Miss Leigh herself."

"I do not think we are any of us very fond of her," interrupted Alison. "I know she forgets father dreadfully, and Roger, too, though he is so good to her."

"Roger is good to everyone but himself," responded Miss Carrington; "but even he, with all his good nature, has owned to me that Miss Leigh has a trying manner. You see, Alison, fussy people make poor companions. Miss Leigh has never leisure for anything but her own worries; she is too overworked for cheerful conversation; if she could forget Poppie's misdeeds, and Miss Leigh's pettiness, and Rudel's roughness, and the servants' failures for about half an hour at a time, I could quite fancy Miss Leigh a pleasing companion; but now let me hear her letter."

"It is dreadfully long," sighed Alison, as she reluctantly obeyed. "It was evident that she wished Miss Carrington to read the letters for herself, but Aunt Diana held a different opinion."

"My dear Alison," it began, "I am afraid that my weekly account will be little more cheering than the last; indeed, I am arriving slowly at the conviction that, unless some change be made in the household arrangements, I shall be compelled, however reluctantly, to resign my post."

"Humph! that looks bad," from Miss Carrington.

"I have done all I can in representing to your father the mischief that must result from his injudicious treatment of Mabel; she is becoming so thoroughly spoiled, so entirely her own mistress, that no amount of reasoning has any effect upon her. I do not wish to lay any undue stress on her behavior to myself; but her treatment of Mr. Roger, and the bad example that she sets to Poppie, not to mention the constant bickering that is always going on between her and Rudel, are quite destroying the harmony of the household. You may imagine, my dear Alison, how trying all this is to a person of my sensitive temperament."

"I always said it was a black day for us when Miss Carrington took you away from the Holms. With all the deference to your aunt's benevolence and good feelings, I can not help thinking that a daughter's place is with her widowed father. Of course, you will talk the matter over with your aunt, and perhaps you may be able to assist me to some solution of our difficulties."

"PATIENCE LEIGH."

"Patience has changed to impatience," muttered Miss Carrington, grimly. "Sensitive people never own to being out of temper, but I should have said myself that there was a spice of ill-temper in that letter. Poor Miss Leigh is decidedly ruffled."

"She never could manage Missie; I always knew that," returned Alison, sorrowfully.

"And how old is Mabel, or Missie, as you call her?"

"Sixteen last birthday, Aunt Diana," "Humph! there is not a more troublesome age."

"Aunt Di, I have something very serious to say. These letters came two or three days ago, and I have been thinking about them ever since. I do believe Miss Leigh is right in what she says, and that I am shirking my duty."

"Since when?" a little dryly.

"Since I got quite well and strong and happy, about a year ago," returned Alison, answering most literally, "I ought to have gone back then, and not have stopped on here quietly, taking the good of everything, and enjoying myself just as though I had no duties, and no place in life. It is all my fault if Missie is getting the upper hand, and making every one uncomfortable. I ought to go home to father and Roger."

"There was no immediate answer to this, but at another moment Miss Carrington had walked to her slowly, and then, standing beside her, her hand stroked the girl's hair with a mute caressing gesture. "Do not cry about it, Alison," she said presently; but her own voice was not quite so clear as usual. "It is not a thing to be decided in a hurry; we must look at it all around; Missie is never a sure guide. No one is quite their own mistress, even at eighteen, and I am afraid you will have to ask my leave, unless you prefer running away."

"Oh, will you let me go, Aunt Di?" with a sudden start of joy, as though the knots that her conscience had tied were suddenly cut through in a most unexpected way.

"My dear, if it is right I will help you to go," was the expressive but somewhat curt answer to this; but as she spoke, Miss Carrington's hands pressed the girl's head a little heavily.

Inspection would have pointed out certain bachelor arrangements—some costly Turkish pipes; a pair of pistols, splendidly mounted; some silver cups and tankards, with various inscriptions on them, all engraved with the name of Greville Moore, and purporting to be certain prizes in the half-mile race, the high jump, throwing the cricket ball and other feats of prowess, performed by some youthful athlete.

An elderly man, with a long white beard and mustache, in a black velvet coat, sat with his back to the light, playing the violin. His face, seen in repose, was clear old and handsome, in spite of the deep lines that time and perhaps many cares had traced upon it; but his eyes were cast down, as though in deep meditation, an habitual action, for Mr. Moore had been blind half his life.

He was playing from memory an exquisite fugue from Bach. The thin, somewhat wrinkled hand held the bow with a precision, a delicacy, a mastery knowledge, that seemed surprising in his situation. Apparently he was lost himself in enjoyment of the sweet sounds that he had conjured up in his darkness, for a smile played round his lips as the harmony widened and vibrated, and his foot softly moved as though in unison. In a moment the fugue was ended and the bow lowered.

"Is that you, Sunny? Little witch why have you stolen a march on the blind man? Of course, you have flown through the window?"

"Aunt Diana set me the example," returned Alison, demurely. "How do you do again, Mr. Moore?"

"Oh, nicely, nicely; time always passes quickly with me in my own special world of musical conversation; if she could forget Poppie's misdeeds, and Missie's pettiness, and Rudel's roughness, and the servants' failures for about half an hour at a time, I could quite fancy Miss Leigh a pleasing companion; but now let me hear her letter."

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FACTS IN TABLOID FORM.

In point of geographical elevation Madrid is the highest city in Europe.

Much Canadian lumber goes to China, largely for railroad construction.

A decided reduction of tariff rates goes into effect in Denmark, January 1.

The total number of sailing vessels in the world is double that of steamers.

The average number of deaths through railway accidents in Holland is one a year.

Tattooed portraits of the last six French presidents were found on the skin of a burglar named Bertip arrested in Paris.

Two million dollars will be spent in improvements on the great steel plant of the United States Steel Corporation at Emslay, Ala.

A 1,000-horsepower vertical gas engine, said to be the largest of its kind, was recently put into operation at Run-corn, England, driving an electric generator.—Milwaukee Free Press.

The proposed American exposition to be held in London next year has been thoroughly organized and special efforts are being made to secure exhibits from the western part of this country.

Although there are only eighteen flags used in the international code of signals which is used by warships and merchant ships all over the world, they can be made to represent no fewer than 20,000 distinct signals.

The Welland canal, which connects Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, is twenty-seven miles long. It was begun in 1824 and completed in 1833. Its original dimensions have been greatly enlarged, and there is now a depth of fourteen feet.

Prof. Frederick Starr, anthropologist at the University of Chicago, has been made an officer of public instruction under the French government. The consul explained that this was one of the highest honors in recognition of his work in Mexico.

The winter of 1658 was a hard one in Europe. Charles X. of Sweden crossed on the ice the Little Belt, the strait between Funen and the Peninsula of Jutland, with his whole army—foot, horse, baggage and artillery. The rivers in Italy bore heavy carriages.

According to the accepted authorities there are 3,424 spoken languages in the world today; or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say dialects. Of this number 287 are Asiatic, 587 European, 276 African and 1,624 American. By far the greatest number of these belong to savage and semi-savage tribes and nations.

France's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has taken action against a cinematograph company for an act of unprecedented brutality to a horse. In a series of pictures called "The Lover's Revenge," a carriage drawn by a horse was seen to rush over the edge of a cliff and be dashed to pieces. The pictures had not been faked. On old blind horse harnessed to a carriage was really driven over the edge of the cliffs near Boulogne to obtain them.

The work of compiling a great technical dictionary, which was begun under the auspices of the Association of German Engineers, has been abandoned on account of the great cost, which, it was discovered, would be four times greater than originally contemplated.

There is a great need of just such a dictionary as was proposed in all the arts, sciences and crafts, and the decision of the German engineer will be heard with regret by workers all over the world.

The Journal of the American Medical Association has the following: "Modern civilization furnishes no better example than this of the possible victory over pestilence and disease, when the warfare is carried on in the light of modern scientific knowledge. The sanitary record of the Japanese in their war with Russia are the two great object lessons of recent years, demonstrating that men can neither work nor fight to the best advantage unless protected from infection and preventable diseases."

One of the great railroads to the Pacific coast is perfecting plans for a forest of eucalyptus trees in San Diego county, Calif., from which to obtain a steady supply of cross-ties. A ranch of 8,000 acres has been purchased for this purpose, and as a start 100 acres will be planted. It is estimated that in eighteen years the company will be able to harvest from six to eight ties to a tree, and keep up the harvest thereafter continually. At present the system uses about 3,000,000 ties annually. In eighteen years the company thinks it will be able to obtain from its forest 7,000,000 annually.

Money circulates in Mexico from pocket to pocket. Almost every Mexican in professional or business life carries on his person anywhere from \$200 to \$500. Even the poor Indian in his blanket can more than likely produce a greater sum than the average traveler. It was but a few days ago, according to observers, that one Mexican of the middle class asked another in a casual way if he could change a \$1,000 bill. The other pulled out a wallet from his inside pocket and counted out nearly \$2,000. Time after time this happens, and it is regarded as no uncommon thing for a Mexican of the middle class to carry between 1,000 and 2,000 pesos on his person.

What Dr. Sven Hedin regards as the greatest achievement of his recent explorations in India is the discovery of that continuous mountain chain which, taken as a whole, is the most massive range on the crust of the earth, its average height above sea level being greater than that of the Himalayas. Its peaks are 4,000 feet to 5,000 feet lower than Everest, but its passes average 3,000 feet higher than the Himalayan passes. The eastern and western parts were known before, but the central and highest part is in Bonga, which was previously unexplored. Not a tree or a bush covers it; there are no deep-cut valleys, as in the Himalayas, for rain is scanty.

The Magic Christmas Play



Wee Elsie had been told, By some hobgoblin bold, To hang her stockings neat, And then this verse repeat: 'Twickleda, brickedleda, fee fi fo fum, Stocking, oh, stocking, much bigger be come.'

On Christmas Eve, therefore, She said these lines thrice o'er. Lo! hardly were they said, When right above her head A pair of stockings were That surely seemed, to her A giant to belong—

"Good-night to you," she said, And clambered into bed, Quite sure next day would show Them filed from top to toe.

"Whoo there! my Jupiter, Gallant and Gray! Quietly, reindeer, a moment here stay." Have you given them his sleigh, Old Santa made his way? Quick down the chimney fue, And through the fireplace, too.

"Dear me, what's this I see? It surely cannot be— News but a greedy miss Would hang such things as this!"

men swung himself down from the branches, and behold, it was Robert, grinning and chucking.

"I reckoned yo' alla couldn't get dose nuts out de tallies' tree, so I done shove 'em down for you."

So their first effort was made easy. That day's labor showed a fine start on the nut heap, that grew and grew in the corner of the garret.

It was not always so easy. After the meadow trees were stripped they had to hunt in the woods, and often the trees were too high for the boy to climb.

Other times he and Margy could go up together and they would both dance on the limbs with all their strength, till the nuts came rattling down in a jolly shower.

Sometimes, as the October days grew colder, they would come home with teeth chattering and fingers and noses blue with cold. Then mother would thaw them out and give them hot lemonade.

And the pile of nuts in the corner of the garret grew and grew. You mustn't think that picking up the nuts was all of the work. Not by any sort of means. For every nut had a little green house of its own; and although sometimes the four little walls of it fell away at a touch, often the nut gatherers had to try force.

Two stones would do the business—one to pound on and the other to pound with. Fingers and thumbs got pounded, too, sometimes, and if you want to know if it hurt or not, just try pounding your own finger sometime when it is half frozen.

But that was part of the affair, and mother's arnica bottle and salve would stop the ache and dry the tears. Then, too, it was very interesting to unwind

Greek church. While this date was never changed, the reckoning of it made according to the Gregorian calendar, which was adopted in the latter part of the sixteenth century, and upon which computations of time in nearly all civilized nations have since rested.—American Queen.

Little Johnny's Resolutions. "Next Tuesday'll be New Year's day," Said little Johnny Luke. "Some resolutions, mom declares, I really ought to make. Mom's promised to stop gossipin', An' so has Sister Sue. I guess I'll resolve a bit. Let's see—what shall I do?"

"I'll resolve, I guess, to quit A-splittin' kindlin' wood; Then pop'll have to do that work, Like fathers always should. An' then, while I'm a-doin' it, I'll resolve to quit The Sunday school, for goin' there With me don't make no hit."

"I'd like to resolve some way To get myself a goat; I want a buttin' billy ram With whiskers on his throat. An' then I'll resolve, I guess, To beat up Tommy Hunt; He's took an' stole my girl from me, The doggone little runt!"

"I reckon that's enough fer me To resolve flat now; At any rate, I'll make that do— It's plenty, anyhow. Let's see—I start on New Year's day, Well, that ain't very fur. Won't mom be ticked when she finds How well I've minded her?" —Denver Post.

Christmas in King Alfred's Reign. In King Alfred's time, and through the middle ages Christmas began on St. Thomas's Day and lasted

DID YOU RING, GOOD SIR?



Which shows that even our forefathers had their troubles.—Cincinnati Post.

So Santy sadly took The stockings from their hook, And in their place he put One meant for smaller foot; Nor did he leave behind A gift of any kind.

Next day, at sunrise, a little maid sobbed, Bitterly crying that she had been robbed, When right before her the goblin appeared—

"Greediness robbed you," he said, as he leered.

Earning Christmas Money

The Boy and Margy thought and thought and thought. Finally they went to Violet Amanda in the kitchen, for they did not want to let father and mother know. It was to be a surprise.

This Christmas they had planned to keep the spirit of old St. Nicholas in their hearts, and there were to be gifts, bought with money of their own earning. How to earn it was the question.

Violet Amanda had no suggestions to offer, but Robert, the hired man, had an idea. Now, to look at Robert you'd never believe he could have an idea stored away under his black skin and wearily topknot; but looks are sometimes deceiving.

"Out in de meadow," he said, slowly, as Violet Amanda poured him a second cup of coffee, "dey's a powful heap sight ob hickry nuts on dem big trees, an' dey's mo' in de wood lof. Yo' all could git money fer dem nuts of dey lof ob dem shucks."

"Margy!" cried the Boy, "it's just the thing. How much could we get for a bushel of 'em, Robert?"

the long, narrow rag and show the wound to father after supper.

All through the nutting season neither father nor mother asked one single troublesome question, so that made it easy to keep the secret, although both Margy and the boy were sure to burst with the importance of it.

And the nut pile in the corner of the garret grew and grew. Every time they added to their hoard the whole was carefully measured till at last there were three full bushels, heaped to running over. Uncle Tom was let into the secret, and he came over one day when father and mother were gone and took away the nuts. Two days later he came back looking very important.

"Hullo, children," he said, "come out in the woodshed with me a minute. The old black cat's out there washing her face."

Out there, behind the chip pile they never looked at the black cat, but Uncle Tom opened his hand and showed them six big round silver dollars.

"There's your Christmas money," he said. "We'll divide even," said the boy generously, "even if you are the little-seed, because you worked just as hard. So there's three of 'em for each of us."

"What a Christmas we'll have," cried Margy rapturously.

"The best ever. It's great fun doing things ourselves."

until Twelfth Night, and was moreover as much a festival for fathers and mothers as for their children. There was no pantomime, it is true; but there was a Lord of Misrule, elected in every important household, at court, at the universities and above all, at the Inns of Court; and it was his business to see that there were no lapses into seriousness during the Christmas holidays. He was a very expensive institution, it seems; for in Edward VI's reign, when it was the business of the authorities to make the poor little boy-king forget all the murders that were keeping him on the throne, the Christmas revels were particularly costly and the Lord of Misrule's costume alone cost £52 8s. 8d.—New York Globe.

The Worm Turned. Mrs. Cobwigger—While it's true that women wear men's neckties, you surely couldn't expect me to appear in public in such a monotony as this. Where in the world did you ever get such a tie?

Cobwigger—My dear, that's the one you bought for me last Christmas.—Judge.

A Time of Peril. Clarissa—I'm always glad when New Year's day is safely over.

Fidella—Yes; it is saddening anniversary.

Clarissa—Oh, I don't mean that. Clarence and I always have a horrid quarrel suggesting improvements in each other's conduct.

Jessie Christmas! Little Jessie woke up on Christmas morning and called to her four-year-old sister Margy:

"Merry Christmas!" "Merry Christmas!" promptly answered the baby.

Steek on Hand. Bradd's—Going to make any New Resolutions this year, Spikes?

Spikes—New ones? I should say not. I've got a lot of old ones I've never used, by Jove!

DISCOVERED!!

