Aunt Cynthia's Easter.

By FRANK H. SWEET.

A NEW minister had come to slow moving, out of the way Spruce Hill, and with his coming had appeared a spirit of change and improvement. He was fresh from his theological course and eager with youth and love for the work.

Hitherto the church had been to Spruce Hill a place of solemnity, only to be visited at required intervals and as a duty. Now, under the ministrations of this young zealot, it gradually came about that duty could be approached from many directions and not all of them were necessarily thorny or narrow.

Among other innovations were the Easter sermon and church decoration. The new minister made the announcement one Thursday evening after prayer meeting and added that he hoped all would be present and that the ladies of the church would arrange for a tasteful and appropriate decoration.

"I DON'T THINK I'VE HAD THE PLEASURE OF MEETING MRS. BRAY."

After service the women stood about irresolutely, looking at each other with blank, questioning faces.

"I guess you'll have to excuse me, Mr. Kent," one of them said at last bluntly. "I ain't got any flowers, an', besides, I don't know anything about decoratin'."

"Nor me," "Nor me," "Nor me," came in rapid succession and in evident relief from the other women. "'Tain't time yet for flowers to bloom."

"Can't we find a few callas and Easter lilies and narcissuses and perhaps some other white flowers?" asked the minister, with less confidence in his voice.

"All the houses in the neighborhood can't scare up white posies enough for a buttonhole bouquet," declared one woman aggressively. "As for Easter lilies, I ain't never seen one, an' narcissus I ain't even heard of. The idea o' decoratin' a whole church at this time o' year!"

"I've heard Mis' Bray speak o' narcissus," said a woman reflectively, "she that was the florist's wife, you know. An', come to think, she's likely a master hand at this decoratin' business."

"Who is Mrs. Bray?" asked the minister quickly. "Perhaps she can help me out with this. Curious I have not heard of her before."

"Oh, I don't know," dryly; "folks sort o' die away from the world after they go into the poorhouse. Mis' Bray's husband was for gettin' on, so he went to the city an' learned the florist's trade. For a time he done well. Then his business broke, an' he died. An' his wife come back here an' lived up what little she had. After that there was nothin' but the poorhouse."

"Well, we will find her," eagerly. "Will you go with me, Mrs. Perry?"

"Why, yes; I don't mind if I do. Cynthia Bray was as much of a lady as anybody round."

The next afternoon the minister's buckboard stopped in front of the poorhouse, and he and Mrs. Perry alighted. Several men and boys were slouching about the yard, and on a bench near the door were four or five old women. Mrs. Perry looked them over critically.

"Not there," she declared concisely. "Cynthia wouldn't grow to look like that. We'll go in."

In answer to their knock a hard featured woman came to the door.

"Mis' Bray?" she repeated. "Oh, Aunt Cynthia, as we call her, is a good worker, so we keep her in the kitchen. I don't s'pose she's had a visitor afore in five years. Won't you come in?"

They entered. Five minutes passed; then a little old woman, with a deprecatory manner, stole softly into the room.

"Did—did you wish to see me?" she asked tremulously.

Mrs. Perry sprang forward in quick forgetfulness of the immeasurable distance which lay between her social position and the poorhouse.

"Why, you poor soul," she cried sympathetically, "how old you've grown! My hair ain't begun to turn yet, an' here your'n is perfectly white."

"It's been a long time since you and I were young," answered the old woman gently. Then she colored with sudden remembrance and drew herself up stiffly.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked.

"Come, Cynthia; don't talk that way," remonstrated Mrs. Perry. "You know farmers' wives are always workin', an'—an' it's a good piece from our place to the"—

"Poorhouse," said the old woman calmly.

"Well, yes, poorhouse," deprecatingly. "But never mind all that. I've brung the minister."

"I don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Bray before," said the minister, rising, "and yet I've called here several times."

"No; we haven't met," acquiesced the old woman. "I generally stay in the kitchen."

"I must acknowledge this visit is mostly a business one, Mrs. Bray," he said, resuming his seat. "You see, I am planning to have the church decorated for Easter, but the ladies of my congregation assure me that such a thing is utterly impossible. I have come to you as a last resort. Can you help me?"

The old woman looked from one to the other with a sudden yearning in her eyes. Then a soft flush began to steal over her face.

"It isn't easy to decorate without anything to decorate with," she said tremulously. "In the city we used to have palms and Easter lilies and no end of ferns and delicate things to bank with."

"But there are the woods," suggested the minister desperately. "I notice lots of pretty things on my walks."

"Do you mean for me to take charge of the decorating?" she asked.

"Yes, but of course with plenty of help."

He turned hastily and glanced through the window. Something rapturous in the expression on the old woman's face made him lose command of himself for a moment.

"Well, I shall need help in gathering the decorations," she was saying as he turned back. "There will be things to cut and bring home and boxes and boards to build up for the banking. There are some bushes along the creek that I can fix up to look very much like palms at a little distance, and that dark moss below the ledge will make a beautiful bank on which we can arrange the early white flowers.

"But, there," breaking into a low, joyous laugh, which apparently frightened her, for she stopped suddenly and looked about in a scared, tremulous sort of way.

"I was only going to say," she went on deprecatingly, "that I haven't seen the church yet. I ought to go there first and look around."

"Of course. We will take you there this afternoon," volunteered the minister, beaming.

"And you can have my horse and wagon every afternoon if you like," added Mrs. Perry warmly. "Then there is my boy Tommy. You can have him to drive you."

The old woman's face was now absolutely radiant.

She was not thinking of the decoration now, but of the beautiful thing of not being forgotten. "God is good to have remembered me so lovingly."

The minister gazed at her a moment, then turned again to the window. "There will be no failure in the church decoration," he remarked to Mrs. Perry.

Nor was there, nor in the beautiful thing that had come to the little old woman. During the decorating she

"I CANNOT TELL YOU HOW MUCH YOU HAVE HELPED ME."

was like a different creature. When it was all over the minister went to her impulsively and grasped both her hands.

"I cannot tell you how much you have helped me," he said earnestly. "The decoration has been a perfect success, and it is all owing to you. But there is another thing I wish to speak about. My housekeeper is about to leave, and I need some one to take her place. Will you come and look after the parsonage—and me, too, for that matter?"

So the beautiful thing which had come to her was not of a day, but was to last through all the remainder of her years.

The First Electric Lights.

John Hollingshead was the first man to use electric light in London. In 1878 he installed six arc lamps at the old Gaiety theater and startled the Strand. The price of gas shares fell immediately. The cost of the lamps was $200 a week, and he ran them for nine months. An attempt to plant one inside the theater at the foot of the grand staircase was a failure. The women objected to the fierceness of the light. One of them, for instance, "pretended to be very anxious that the secret of her soft complexion should not be discovered." Professor Erasmus Wilson said of electric light at that time, "With regard to the electric light, much has been said for and against it, but I think I may say, without fear of contradiction, that when the Paris exhibition closes the electric light will close with it, and very little more will be heard about it." Mr. Hollingshead, by the way, had fitted up the Gaiety as early as 1869 with an electric searchlight, which flashed the length of the Strand. But he soon withdrew that for fear of scaring the horses.

To Find Your Affinity.

Your affinity is your mate, but unless you know the six types of happy married folks on Olympus, up to date, you may miss yours. Jupiter, king of heaven, ruler of men, house and business, must marry Juno, the queenly woman, plump, domestic, wise as Minerva, yet loving as Venus. Venus should mate with Apollo; but, being fond of all men and usually pretty, a Venus woman marries any one, often several times. Marry and be petted and adored she must or die. Minerva, on the contrary, can be happy only with a Vulcan, a man her counterpart, wise, lofty, patient, a reformer, teacher and philosopher. Both have contempt for frivolity and meanness and vice. Most all of the elderly single women in the world, especially those descendants from Puritan or Calvanistic stock, are single just because they are the Minerva type and too wise to marry any one but Vulcans. And Vulcan men, being the best of their sex, are scarce.—Nautilis.

Not What It Was For.

When Miss Julia Bryant, daughter of William Cullen Bryant, was a little child an aged lady, who was for a time a neighbor of the poet and his family, had been shown into the parlor of the house, where she was making her first call. She found the small Julia seated on the floor with an illustrated volume of Milton in her lap. Although she knew, of course, that it must be the artist, not the author, in whom at that early age the child was interested, she asked genially by way of beginning an acquaintance:

"Reading poetry already, little girl?"

Julia looked up and regarded her gravely. Then she explained, with an air of politely correcting inexcusable ignorance:

"People don't read poetry. Papas write poetry, and mammas sing poetry, and little girls learn to say poetry, but nobody reads poetry. That isn't what it's for."

Then He Landed.

"Beauty is a woman's most important attribute," said a New York beauty doctor. "She who increases beauty is woman's greatest benefactor. Husbands, brothers, even fathers—in their inmost hearts beauty is the thing they desire most to see in their feminine relations. Only the other day a gray, fat old gentleman entered a newspaper office and said:

"'Are you the managing editor?'

"'Yes,' was the reply.

"'I suppose that on you, then,' said the visitor, 'rests the responsibility for this morning's reference to my daughter Patty as Fatty. Take that!'"

An Ungallant Rascal.

"I suppose," said the angular spinster, "that you never had a romance?"

"Dat's where youse is wrong," replied the unlaundered hobo. "I wunst had a sweetheart wot wuz a dead ringer fer youse."

"And did she die?" asked the angular spinster as she helped him to another hunk of pie.

"No, ma'am," answered the hobo. "When leap year come round she asked me t' marry her—an' I run away from home."—Chicago News.

Dead Heat.

A schoolmaster who is in the habit of selecting extracts from his morning newspaper for dictation exercise read the other day a passage in which occurred the term "dead heat."

"Jones," said he, addressing an inattentive pupil, "what do you mean by 'dead heat?'"

"Please, sir," the youngster replied, "it's the heat of the place bad people go to when they're dead."—London Schoolmaster.

Giving Advice.

Professor—What is the matter with Mr. ——?

Learned Student—He is seriously afflicted with a paroxysmal inflammation of the vermiform appendix.

Voice From the Rear Seat—Aw, cut it out!

Caustic.

"Does your representative in congress entertain much?"

"No," answered the caustic constituent, "he doesn't entertain; he only amuses."—Washington Star.

His Definition.

"Pa, what is an 'interior decorator?'"

"I'm not quite sure, Wilfred, but I think it's a cook."—New York Times.

Every individual is a marvel of unknown and unrealized possibilities.—Jordan.

Witchcraft.

"The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," said John Fiske, "were the flourishing ages of the witchcraft delusion. Witchcraft in the early ages was considered one of the greatest of crimes, as much so as murder, robbery or any other serious offense against the law, and the belief in it was shared by the whole human race until the latter part of the seventeenth century.

"In England in 1664 two women were tried before Sir Matthew Hale, charged with bewitching several girls and a baby, and they were put to death, for at that time the evidence seemed perfectly rational. In 1615 in Genoa 500 people were burned to death on the charge of witchcraft. It was the proud boast of a noted executioner in northern Italy at this time that in fifteen years he had assisted in burning 900 persons charged with sorcery. In Scotland between 1560 and 1600 8,000 people were put to death, an average of 200 a year. The last execution for witchcraft in England took place in 1712, in Scotland in 1722, in Germany in 1749 and in Spain in 1781."

Crime and the Telephone.

From the beginning to the end of a transaction in crime the telephone comes into use, serving both sides with equal fidelity, says a writer in Appleton's Magazine. The thief uses it to determine which house he may safely rob. The man next door sees the burglar and calls up the police. The police arrive, catch the burglar and telephone for the Black Maria to take him to jail. The thief telephones a lawyer to defend him. The lawyer telephones for the bondsman to bail out his client, and the banker telephones the sheriff that the bondsman's check is good. When the day of trial comes the clerk of the court, being a kind gentleman, telephones to the burglar's lawyer; the sheriff telephones witnesses to be present. When the burglar is convicted and sentenced the sheriff uses long distance to tell the warden of the penitentiary when his prisoner will be delivered. After that the telephone line is kept hot by influential politicians petitioning the governor for a pardon.

An Embarrassing Moment.

The author of "Collections and Recollections" relates a personal experience of having said a "thing one would rather have left unsaid." Even after the lapse of twenty years, he adds, the recollection of the sensations of the moment turns him hot with chagrin.

A remarkably pompous clergyman, a diocesan inspector of schools, once showed me a theme on a Scriptural subject written by a girl who was trying to pass from the rank of a pupil teacher to the rank of schoolmistress. The theme was full of absurd mistakes, over which the inspector laughed uproariously.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he inquired when I handed back the paper.

"Oh," said I in perfectly good faith, "the mistakes are bad enough, but the writing is far worse. It really is a disgrace."

"The writing? What, my writing?" said the inspector. "I copied the theme out myself."

The Bread and Pipe Baker.

The lecturer at the cooking school sometimes enlivened her remarks with an anecdote.

"The eighteenth century baker," she said, "was a pipe cleaner as well, just as the barber a little earlier was a surgeon. Everybody in those days smoked clay pipes, provided, the same as cups or spoons, by the coffee houses. Well, each morning a waiter carried his master's stock of pipes—some hundred perhaps—to the nearest bakery. The baker would boil them out, then dip them in liquid lime, then bake them dry. They came out of the oven as sweet and white as new."—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

A Popular Dye.

A small boy was one day sent for a pennyworth of indigo dye. He stopped to play marbles on the way and quite forgot what he was sent for. As he was determined to get it, he went into the chemist's shop and said to the assistant:

"What have people been dyeing with lately, please?"

"Influenza," was the answer.

"Ah! That must be it," said the boy. "Please give me a penn'orth"—London Illustrated Bits.

Saves Trouble.

"Why don't you come in occasionally between drinks," demanded the wife, "and see the play?"

"I don't need to," replied the bibulous husband. "The bartender is familiar with the plot, imitates the actors and also knows a lot of gossip about their personal and family affairs."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

Enlightened.

"We all make blunders. I thought once I was a square peg when I was really a round one."

"How did you find out your mistake?"

"I got into a hole."—Boston Transcript.

The Drummer.

"I sometimes think," remarked the regular patron, "that the snare drummer should be the best musician in the theater orchestra."

"He usually is," said the drummer.—Chicago Tribune.

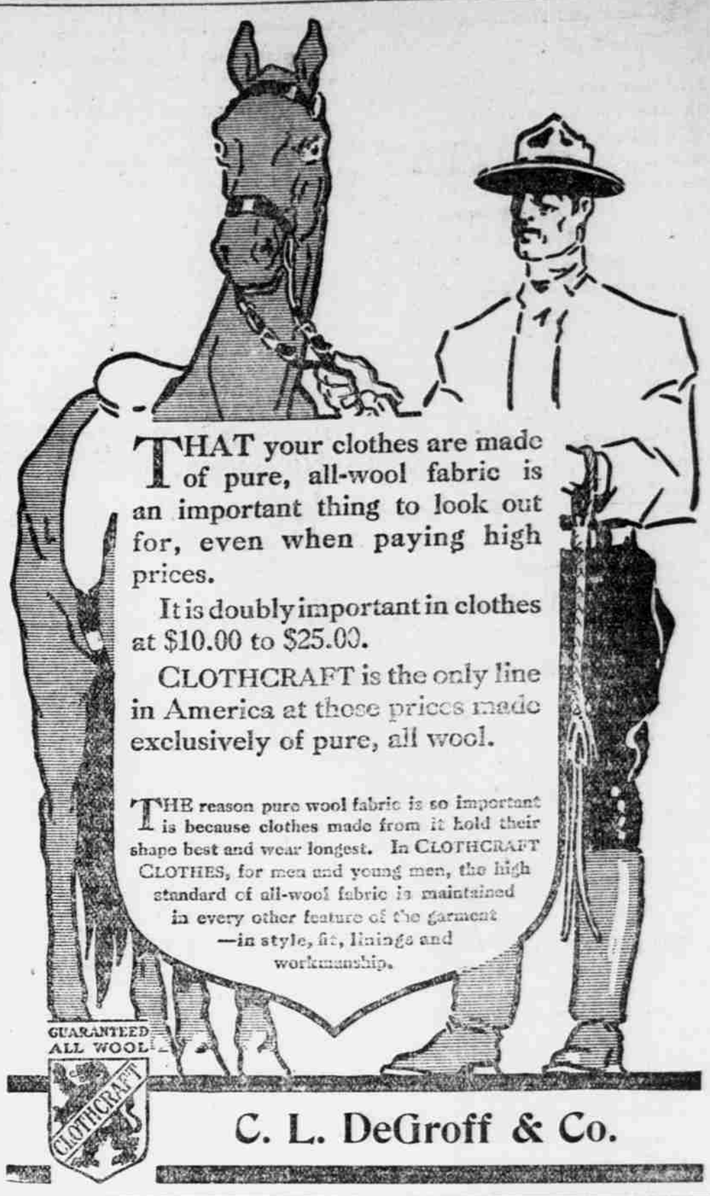
Nothing.

Jenkins declares that where he was in Switzerland the mercury often dropped to zero at night."

"That's nothing."

"What's nothing?"

"Zero."



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