



*Mrs Deacon Gray's
Bonnet*

CHARACTER BUILDING STORIES

Poor little Lettie, how tired she was; and yet there was no break in the stream of ladies all the afternoon. Madame La Vert has just returned from the East with a superb stock of **millinery***; and Lettie was

so pretty and **obliging**, and -- withal was noted for such excellent taste and



skill in combining and blending, that her counter was constantly thronged with ladies, whose pretty, explosive comments over the fresh beauty of each new love of a bonnet, or hat, had grown so tiresome to the tired nerves of the weary little **milliner**, that she felt desperate enough to rush forth into the bright, free sunshine, and leave the chattering group to help themselves.

But a glance at the tired face of her kind mistress gave her new endurance. And so all the bright, afternoon she stood upon her tired, aching feet, and talked over and over, to each successive group, the same weary nothings. But at length the gathering

night brought a **lull**, and she was permitted to run home to her supper.

"Madame, need I come back tonight?"

"Why, yes, to be sure, Lettie; just see that pile of goods; they must all be marked before we sleep, for the rush tomorrow will be much greater than today."

Poor Lettie went home with a heavy heart, and the way seemed longer and more dreary as she reflected upon her speedy return, so that not even the nicely prepared lunch or gentle **endearments** of her kind mother could coax a smile upon the sad face.



"You stayed late, Lettie; don't you intend going to church tonight."

"Oh! Mother; I did want to go so badly, but Madame says I must go back to the shop. The new goods have just come today, and as usual we all have to work night and day."

"I'm real sorry, daughter; but I hope, dear, you will not, lose your serious impressions in the midst of so much talk and fashion."

"I haven't a moment to think, mother; it's just fashion, and flowers, shade and color, laces, and ribbons, over, and over, until I'm so tired I can hardly stand upon my feet."

Lettie hurried back to the shop, and as she was the only one of the shop girls who was familiar enough with the business to assist in marking, she and the Madame had the room to themselves.

Lettie was a great favorite with Madame, and she ventured in the course of the evening to speak of the meetings that had been in progress during her absence.

"Yes, Mrs. Deacon Gray was speaking of it. She says a great many of our young people have united with the church. I was surprised that such girls as Delia Shaw and Hattie Holcomb were among the converts; they were

so fond of dress and society, I didn't think they ever gave a thought to their souls."

"If you had been to the meetings, dear Madame you would wonder how any one could come away without feeling that eternal life is the only thing in this weary world worth striving for."



Madame turned and looked into the earnest face of the young speaker, and then, with a strange little sigh, said, "I see you, too, are thinking about these things, and I'm glad of it. I'm no Christian; but once, when I was about your age, I was deeply impressed with my state as a lost sinner; and looking back now I believe, if I had been permitted to remain under the Christian counsel of my mother a few weeks longer, I should have led a different life. But suddenly placed in a crowded shop, with no companions save the thoughtless, **giddy** girls, I lost the true path and have ever since been too constantly in this busy whirl to find time to change. Ah, me! I

shall have to take time to die, some day, and what then? I wish I had my life to live over again, Lettie."

"Oh, Madame, our pastor said, that while it was better, safer, and easier, to come to Jesus while we are young, yet that it was infinitely better to come late than never."

A silence fell upon the two, each busy with her own thoughts. Lettie looked up from her work after a while, and asked Madame if she thought she could spare her tomorrow evening to go to the inquiry meeting.

"I hope so, if we can finish marking tonight. There will be a great deal to do tomorrow, but we will crowd pretty close rather than have you miss another night."

Lettie went home feeling more hopeful and less tired than she was at tea-time, and as she listened to her mother's glowing account of the good meeting she thought, Tomorrow night, ah, tomorrow night, I, too, may find peace and joy in believing.

Poor Lettie, like too many others, felt that she could make but little progress outside of the

meetings. She never dared to pray, "Lord save now; right here may I believe in thee;" but as she would bend busily over her work, her thought would be, "Perhaps God will hear his people pray for me tonight. Perhaps I shall be the next to be blessed. Oh, if it would be; but I'm so wicked."

The next day matters moved on in the old **groove** at the shop. There was more trimming and showing,



but Lettie comforted her tired little self with the soft whisper, "Tonight, yes, tonight, the good pastor is going to tell us so plainly just how to go to Jesus. And then, it seems to me, I'll not care for hard work and the many things that worry me so now. I wonder if Christians ever do feel real sad, or if they ever hate folks, or want to do any wrong thing. I guess not, for mother says to be a Christian is to be like Christ." Just here her **reverie** was broken off by the entrance and hearty greeting of Mrs. Deacon Gray.

"How do, Lettie? Busy, as a bee, as usual, but where is the Madame?"

Lettie pointed to the workroom, and Mrs. Gray hurried on. "Oh, Madame La Vert, I've just taken a letter out of the office that has put me in a perfect flurry. You see the folks down at Lee have heard about our good meetings, and Dr. James and wife, and Deacon and Mrs. Stoakes are coming on the evening train to stay over tomorrow. You know how stylish those ladies are, and I wouldn't have them see me wear that old spring bonnet I fixed over myself for anything. I was reading in Madame Demorest of the sweetest thing, and I want you to get it up for me."

"But my dear Mrs. Gray, do you know this is the afternoon before, and opening time, too? Why, bless me it's quite impossible."

"Now, don't say so, Madame. I know you can crowd it in some way. Now, do pray, **oblige** me, and you shall lose nothing by it, I assure you."

Madame bent her head over the pattern presented by Gray, and took in, item, by item, the pretty, French design for a spring bonnet.

"Sweet isn't it?"

"Yes, very; it will make up elegantly," said the **demure** little **artiste**, mentally estimating, the effect such a **novel**, yet beautiful design would have upon her reputation.



"Mrs. Gray, I'd say we would attempt it, if it were not, for one thing. You know Lettie is my only dependence for such work, and I have promised that she may go to the meeting tonight; and I have as much, and I fear more, promised than I can finish by midnight."

"Oh, if that's all that's in the way of my wearing the handsomest bonnet that ever entered Graysville chapel, I'm sure to do it. I can coax Lettie to give up one meeting I know."

"But Mrs. Gray, you know Lettie is among the anxious, and really, I don't feel as if it would be right, to place a straw in her way."

"Oh! **pshaw**; what difference can one meeting make? Why, Madame, any one would think there were to be no more meetings to hear you talk."

"Well, Mrs. Gray, we do not know that there will be, for her, or us."

"Oh dear! you are as gloomy as a tombstone today. I'm not expecting to die, and you never looked better. Come, say I may try my powers of persuasion on Lettie."

"Well, perhaps I am foolish; it certainly don't become me to lecture one so long a Christian upon matters of conscience."

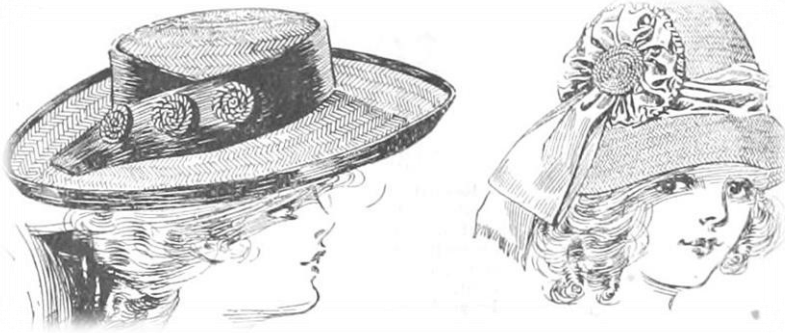
"I'll do the fair thing by Lettie, you see now, if she will give me this evening. They're poor, are they not?"

"Yes; Lettie is her mother's only dependence."

"I thought so," and Mrs. Gray hurried over to Lettie, and laid her **proposition** before her in such an enticing manner, that Lettie from the first did not see how she could refuse. But, when Mrs. Gray added, "If you will do this for my sake,

I will show you how well I appreciate your little sacrifice, by allowing you to take your choice from the very best of Madame's new hats," Alas for Lettie! Satan had prepared the way for this by causing her to contrast her old, hat (which she must still wear) with the fresh, bright ones, borne off so triumphantly by one after

another of her young friends. And Sadie Lee had just asked her what kind



she had got; and when she replied that she had not got hers yet, Sadie said, "Oh! But you must take time to select one tonight, for we want you to come to church tomorrow;" and now here was the offer of that beauty that she had thought upon first, saying she would be willing to work her fingers to the bone to possess, and here it was, laid at her feet for one evening's work. But the meeting, ah, the blessing in store, was worth all the hats in the universe.

"Come, Lettie, I didn't think you'd be so long about deciding to **oblige** me," said Mrs. Gray. "You know you'll have all day tomorrow

for meetings, and will look as smart as any of the girls in your new hat."

"I guess I'll stay."



"That's a darling," and the stately figure bent to kiss the white brow, then hastily selecting materials for her bonnet, she, left with the

injunction, "Be sure and send it: up tonight, Madame. I wouldn't have it come in the morning for anything."

How busily Lettie's fingers plied in and out of the costly material, and yet it was eleven o'clock when she took the last survey, and then held it up for the inspection of Madame and the girls.

"Why, Lettie Lathrop! you have far excelled the pattern, cried Madame. "You should have been, born in Paris; such genius is seldom met here. And now you must go so far out of your



way to carry it home. I wish Mrs. Gray was not so particular about tomorrow."

"Oh, I'm not afraid, and the walk will do me good, after sitting so long."

Mrs. Gray bestowed as much praise upon the skill of the tired girl as the most exacting could demand.

"I'm afraid it is going to storm by morning; chilly, isn't it? I hope it won't turn cold, and spoil our calculations for tomorrow."



Yes, it was chilly, and very dark. On and still on pressed the weary little feet, and it seemed twice the distance it ever did before. The little window, with the cheery gleam of welcome, smiled upon her. Her mother met her at the door with many anxious inquiries, all of which Lettie answered in such a cold, constrained' manner as to quite alarm her.

"Lettie, you've worked yourself most to death. I did not think Madame La Vert would push you so."

"She didn't, mother;" and then the whole story came out. "Mother, I'm just as bad as Esau. I wish I could have spoken to you about it. Oh, dear, how my head aches thinking of it, and of that other text about gaining the whole world and losing your own soul."



"My dear Lettie, you are tired now in the morning you will feel differently."

"Oh! mother, this morning I thought I should go to meeting tonight, and somehow I felt as if I should meet Jesus there for certain, and that tomorrow I could go to church, feeling that I was in my Father's house,' and that I would be so happy that I should never grieve again."

Near morning, Mrs. Lathrop was awakened by the loud, wild tone of Lettie's voice. Hastily lighting her lamp, she was terribly alarmed at the change a few hours had wrought. As soon as it was light, she sent a neighbor for the doctor, and when he came and examined the restless, tossing form, he said, "This is a **singular** case. Your daughter, madame, must have been overtaxed, physically and mentally, to be so completely **prostrated** so soon."

He was soon informed of all the mother knew concerning her daughter's state, and shook his head gravely as he was told of the mental excitement and overwork.

What was Mrs. Gray's surprise, upon seeing her two friends come into her room, prepared to accompany her to church in their last spring bonnets! It spoiled half her delight in hers, to think that, all her worry was far worse than a **whimsical** fancy.



"Oh! What a beauty of a bonnet! Why, it is a, perfect little gem!" cried the ladies, with true feminine appreciation of the beautiful.

"You have not ordered yours yet," said Mrs. Gray, surprised to hear no word of apology offered for the old hats.

"Oh! yes," said Mrs. James; "but in the city it is so different from these country places. There, when the

season opens, there is such a rush, everybody wants their bonnets and hats, and in consequence, the poor, pale girls are worked day and night. So

I told my milliner not to hurry any one for me, as I could wait very well. You see I don't care for these things as I used to," said Mrs. James.



"Nor I," said Mrs. Stoaks, "for myself, although I enjoy seeing them on others; but I try to keep my body under, and to never let worldly matters shut me out from higher and holier duties."

Poor Mrs. Gray! how she wished her bonnet back again upon the quiet page of Madame Demorest, as she thought, "I do wonder if they saw or

heard Lettie last night? but no, they went to their rooms full two hours before she came: Poor little thing, how tired she looked! I hope she'll enjoy wearing her new hat better than I do mine."



Many were the admiring glances cast upon the new bonnet.

"Why," said little Tillie Wood, at the dinner-table, to her mother and sister, "it was all the beauty of a whole springtime compressed into one little mite of a bonnet."

"Yes, my dear, and I fear more than that. I greatly fear that your little Lettie's life will be the price nature will demand for this love of a bonnet;" and the good doctor told the pitiful story, and how Lettie **raved** continually about selling her soul for Madame La Vert's nicest pattern hat.

Mrs. Gray was overwhelmed with grief when she heard of Lettie's illness and strove in every way to atone for her want of thought; and while every word from the blue lips of the sufferer

went like a dagger to her heart, she prayed, that the blood of the precious soul might not be found upon her skirts. Her prayer was answered.

Out of the soft brown eyes, Lettie's own quiet self: looked once more, and the old smile, with an added brightness, lighted up her dying face.

"Madame—mother, I am going... Jesus loves me... Don't cry, Mother. Just think I'll never sin any more; never, never get tired again. Forgive you, Mrs. Gray? Ah, yes gladly and freely. You intended no wrong but, oh? I ask to watch, and help those who are trying to find the way to Jesus. Madame, dear Madame, I love you. You have always been good to me. Oh! be good to yourself. Come to Jesus. Mother, kiss me. I'm going. Don't —don't cry."



They covered her coffin with pale spring flowers; and laid her away in the quiet churchyard.

The curious eyes of Graysville were never again gladdened by the **finery** of Mrs, Deacon Gray. In **sober**, neat, but plain attire, she went about her Master's work, striving to redeem the time spent in pursuing the **fickle** goddess Fashion; and if she ever feels a desire after, any of life's **vanities**, she



goes to her room, and takes down a bandbox, she opens, it, and takes out the soft, fleecy fabric, over which Lettie's white fingers so diligently wrought. Pinned to one of the ties; is a paper; and while she reads with streaming eyes, we will look on:

"This **trifling** vanity cost a young life, and, but for the infinite mercy of God, I should

today have to answer for a lost soul—a poor trembling, seeking soul, from whom my selfish pride had almost hid the cross."

Word Glossary

Artiste--*a person who is highly skilled in some occupation, someone with artistic pretensions.*

Demure--*quiet and well behaved*

Endearments--*words or an actions showing affection*

Fickle--*likely to change*

Finery--*decorative and expensive clothing and jewelry*

Giddy--*silly and frivolous*

Groove--*A settled routine*

Lull--*a short period of calm in which little happens*

Milliner--*a person who designs, makes, trims, or sells women's hats (and sometimes dresses)*

Millinery--*women's hats and other articles made or sold by milliners*

Novel--*new*

Oblige/Obliging--*To do a service or favor for/Ready to do favors for others*

Proposition--*A plan suggested for acceptance*

Prostrated--*To reduce to extreme weakness or exhaustion*

Pshaw--*An exclamation used to express irritation, disapproval, contempt, or disbelief*

Raved-- *to talk wildly*

Reverie--*a state of having pleasant dream-like thoughts*

Singular--*Being the only one of a kind*

Sober--*Quiet or serious, not colorful or showy*

Trifling-- *Of little worth or importance*

Vanities-- *Something that is vain or worthless*

Whimsical--*resulting from a sudden turn of mind*

Republishing of Old Stories

www.lightindarkness.site

