

Gratitude

By THE EDITOR

The scene of this story is laid among the blue grass regions of old Kentucky. In this land made famous by its fair ladies and fast horses, there lived an old, widowed mother. She made her home in an old, tumbled-down cottage. The weatherboarding had not tasted paint for years, and the shingles had deserted the roof in places. Comfort found it impossible to stay in that house, for the chilly winds would chase her outdoors through the cracks. The inside of the house was bare except for a table and a few chairs and a wood stove. There was nothing to brag about in this neighborhood, but the old mother was proud just the same. She was proud of her boy. This young fellow would soon be out of high school, and it was her ambition to put him through college.

To this end, she was applying herself very industriously. Daily, she could be seen out on her ten-acre onion and bean farm. True, the place was so full of rocks that it reminded one of the Rocky Mountains in its infancy. It was enough to discourage the professional farmer; but to this old lady, every rock was only a stepping-stone to a higher education. So the prospects of a glorious career for her boy, transformed her rocky, onion patch into a modern Garden of Eden. As she pulled up the iron grass and the ragweed, she pictured her boy as a captain of industry or a college professor; and the weeds in her hands took on a brilliant coloring and became scented with a fragrance suggestive of roses in full bloom.

One day, the little lady said, "Son, I have saved up one hundred dollars to start you in college. By living cheaply, you will be able to make out for a good many months." Soon after, the time came for the young fellow to leave his mother for college. He kissed her goodbye, and, in his homespun suit, he took the train for the first time in his life.

Not so very long afterwards, we see the little mother bending over a letter in the feeble light of an oil lamp. She has just received a letter from her boy, and she is laboriously trying to decipher the message. The writing was legible enough, but little mother has had very little practice in reading. She could not read every word, but she got the gist of the letter. Her boy needed more money already. Fired by the mental pictures of her darling boy grown to be a success among successful men, she soon had more space cleared out. And where there was a rock, now onion shoots were bursting the earth, or bean vines were eagerly trying to see who first could reach the top of the beanpole. She got up earlier, worked harder, quit later. She was more tired. But it was a service of love. It was all for her boy.

Time rolled by, and, with the passing of time, the mother heart became lonesome. She was homesick for her boy. Nothing else could satisfy her. Nothing but her boy could bring comfort to her aching heart. She robbed her savings, and caught the next train out of town.

An old-fashioned lady in an old-fashioned bonnet and cape, with an old-fashioned umbrella and carpetbag, engaged a city policeman in conversation. "Can you tell me where So-and-so is?" she asked mentioning a boy's name. "Can I tell you where he is!" exclaimed the policeman. "Lady, how can I? There are fifty thousand people in this city. The college is full, and they are all strangers to me. How can I know him?" But seeing the disconsolate effect of his discouraging remarks, and repenting somewhat of it, he inquired hopefully, "Where is he working?" "He is not working," she assured him. "He is a college boy." "A college boy! Oh, a college boy! Well, go down a block this way, then turn to the right, and keep on going until you get to the campus." She followed the directions. She did not know what a campus was, but when she reached a big, beautiful space dotted with beautiful buildings; she rightly concluded that there is where her boy must be. She was on her way to the Administration Building where, the policeman said, she should inquire for him. And, would you believe it, who should be coming down from the opposite end of the walk but her darling boy! Immediately, her heart went pit-a-pat; her breath became short; her steps were faltering; her eyes were moistening; her whole being was experiencing a peculiar thrill.

Boldly marching down the walk was her darling boy. On one arm, a girl was hanging; on the other, another girl was hanging. They wore their hair short and their dresses likewise. They were laughing and joking with him.

Presently, the mother stopped short. She could go no farther. Down went the umbrella! Down went the carpetbag! She stood ready to embrace her darling boy. But he did not even see her. In fact, he was looking away. "Oh, look at the lady!" one of the girls was saying. "Isn't she the funniest thing? Where in the world did she come from?" "I don't know. I am sure she has made a mistake," replied the young fellow as he led the girls away.

The little mother looked at her weather-beaten umbrella and age-worn carpetbag and threadbare cape. And she understood. But, just the same, she could not keep back the hot tears that forced their way out, and burned their courses down her wrinkled cheeks. It was a broken-hearted little lady that traced her weary steps to the station. There, in solitude and anguish of heart, she spent half the night, waiting for the train that would take her lonesome self to a lonely frame house where, at last, she could give vent to her pent-up tears.

But, when morning came, long before the sun showed his broad, smiling face over the distant hills, a little mother was ready for market with a basket of beans and onions. She was working all the harder, because he was her boy.

"Colossal ingratitude!" you say. You would not even shake hands with a

despicable ingrate like that. Ah, Brother, that rascal is a gentleman compared to you who ignore the Man Who gave His own life that you might live.

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Let me give you the picture of another little home, another little mother and another boy. This little mother also had an ambition to see her boy climb the heights of success and occupy the mountain peaks of human achievement. She took in washing. She became a willing slave to the washtub in order that her boy may receive a college education.

Some time after he entered college, the little woman received a letter from her boy. With trembling hand, she opened it. Her eyes, having begun to fail her, she adjusted her glasses. "My darling Mother," it said, "you need not send so much money, because I have a job now. I am hoping to be able to make my way through, without calling on you for so much help. The holidays aren't coming any too soon for me. It seems so long since you and I were together just by ourselves. . . Mother dear, I love you more than ever. Every day, I thank God for you . . ."

Graduation day was just around the corner. "George," said a senior student to his roommate, "Lend me five dollars. It is a case of immediate necessity, and I cannot wait until payday." "What! Since when did you learn to speak of a five-spot in such a careless and off-hand manner? Do I now observe the inevitable reaction of your magnificent lectures against extravagance?" But the first speaker completely ignored the veiled compliment to his admirable virtue of religiously observing strict economy. "I have to go home, George," he merely declared. "Go home! And you—the valedictorian at commencement!" "But commencement would not be commencement without mother, George. She was with me at grammar school commencement; she was with me at high school commencement. She must be with me at this commencement."

The next scene shows a stalwart, young man beside a little woman. He is coaxing her to attend the graduation exercises at college. She is objecting quite strenuously. "But, son, I am an old woman now. Look at those wrinkles! And that white hair! And these old clothes! I would be so much out of place. Everybody else would be dressed in silk and satin. Sonny, you just go on, and be through with your commencement. Then you come home. I'll have a cake baked for you. And we will have a commencement of our own." But there was no use remonstrating. There was no way other than his way. "Yes, I know all that, Mother, but you just have to come. I won't take 'no' for an answer."

Then came commencement night. The auditorium was crowded to capacity. Relatives and sweethearts and guests of the graduating class engaged in a subdued conversation, as with great expectancy they waited for the exercise to begin. Behind the curtain, the class arranges itself in a big semi-circle. Out in the audience, and

among those occupying the front seats is a little lady wearing a gingham dress. In one hand, she holds an umbrella. On her lap is a carpetbag. The entire picture reminds one of the days of long ago. What a direct contrast she makes against her immediate, twentieth century surroundings! No, she is not there because of her own desires. She came on the persistent solicitation of the class valedictorian.

The curtain rises, and the lady in the gingham dress rises too. In all that throng of people, she saw only one. That was her boy. The preliminaries took quite a bit of time, but she scarcely noticed anything said or done unless she thought it would have something to do with her boy. Upon that stage of action, there was but one actor. That was her boy. At last, he arose to deliver his address. Her boy was now going to speak. She wondered if there was anybody there who did not know that that boy was her boy. Gladly now she would rush up to the platform to gather in her arms the precious form of her boy. But, of course, she must not do that. Not in that gingham dress, anyway! She wouldn't do anything in the world that might disgrace or even embarrass her darling boy. So, she just clung to her seat. But, while she was motionless and silent, her heart was praising God. She was praising God because he was so strong in body and mind and so big at heart.

The house rang with cheers and reechoed with a thunderous applause, as the valedictorian finished his address. It wasn't so much the remarkable address that unloosed such a demonstration. Others, just as good, had been delivered within the memory of many that were present there that night. But no other boy had ever won the hearts of both the student-body and faculty as this boy had. His clean life and loving spirit had won the admiration of all. Of course, he had enemies. No man can walk uprightly without stepping on somebody's pet corns. But even his very enemies secretly admired him.

The cheering was just commencing all over again when the President of the college arose to speak. When silence was restored at last, he said, "It has been the custom of this college to encourage good behavior, and to recognize it in a special manner. A medal of honor goes to the young man or woman whose scholarship is high and whose conduct has been exemplary. Owing to the fact that the medal is not awarded for scholarship alone, but for scholarship plus exemplary conduct, none except the faculty knows the person to be so signally honored. Laying his hand upon the shoulder of the valedictorian, and announcing the fact that he was the choice of the faculty, the President, with a highly commendatory speech, pinned the medal upon the lapel of the young man's coat. But it did not stay there long. Tearing the medal from his coat, the young man lightly vaulted the edge of the platform, and, in the twinkling of an eye, he was fastening that medal on the gingham dress of a little lady. Throwing his arms around her and kissing her, he kept telling her, "Mother, it isn't mine. It belongs to you. I don't deserve it. It is the result of your teachings. Mother, it is your medal."

Then pandemonium broke loose for a season. Everybody joined in the un-

controlled and uncontrollable cheering. In another minute, the students were leading an organized mob. They caught the valedictorian, hoisted him on their shoulders, and marched him around and around until the auditorium presented a dizzy scene. Then they lifted him to the platform, and set him right in front of his mother whom, in the meantime had been elevated to this position. Then one after another, a round of cheers echoed and re-echoed to the vaulted dome of the building. But this time, the cheers were not for the boy. They were now cheering the mother of such a boy.

Late that night, when the revelry had died down and the revelers had gone, a great, big boy and a little lady could be seen walking down the street together. She did not speak. He could not speak. Every once in a while she would pull him to herself and hug him. Once inside the station, they looked at each other. Neither could say anything. They just cried. At last, putting his arms around her, he managed to gasp, "Mother, you are the best little mother a fellow ever had."

"I could be a pal with that boy," you say. Yes, you can do nothing else but like him. He had a grateful heart.

Yet some of you are just as mean as the first boy in your attitude toward Jesus. He died for you, but you refuse to recognize him. He suffered for you but you reject him. Ashamed of his mother! Ashamed of Jesus! Can it be?

*"Ashamed of Jesus, just as soon
Let midnight be ashamed of noon.
'Twas midnight with my soul till He,
Bright morning star, bid darkness flee."*