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A Missionary Penny

AND

HOW IT BOUGHT A BABY

CHAPTER I

A MISSIONARY PENNY

"Polly, I just guess you'll have to put on your hood and run around with these clothes to Mrs. Bement's. They were in a great hurry to get them before to-morrow."

"They are always in a hurry for their things 'round at Mrs. Bement's, ain't they, mother? Seems 'most as if they hadn't enough things to last."

"Pretty much so, Polly. What are you studying over now, daughter?"

"A missionary penny, mother," replied Polly, pushing back her heavy dark hair and looking up at her mother as she stopped a moment in her work of folding the white, freshly-ironed clothes away in a basket.

"Where did you get it, dear?" asked Mrs. Clinton.

"A lady spoke on missions at our school to-day, and she gave us each a penny and said she wanted to hear in a month or two whether it had grown any. How can I make it grow, mother?" asked Polly, resting her head on both hands as she gazed at the bright penny looking back at her from the old brown table.

"I've heard of selling pennies for missions," answered her mother. "There, Polly, the basket is ready; do you mind going out in the dark, dear? How short the afternoons are."

"No, indeed, I like to do anything for *you*," said the child, tying on her rather shabby little hood, "but I don't like Mrs. Bement. She never thinks the clothes come home soon enough, and she never has the money to pay, and she thinks you ask too much, and——"

"And yet she keeps giving us the wash, and the money always does come in sometime," said Mrs. Clinton, laughing at Polly's grumble.

"Nellie Bement is horrid, too. She is in my class at school, and always tucks her skirts close around her as if she thought I'd give her smallpox."

"She must know you will not, Polly."

"I wonder how she'll make her missionary

penny grow! Well, here goes, I'll be back in a jiffy"; and Polly scampered off, the basket on her arm, the penny in her hand.

"She is a dear child," said the mother, turning briskly to her ironing again. Mrs. Clinton, being deprived by death of both husband and son, had taken to laundrying as a means of support, and contrived to keep her twelve-year-old daughter and herself fairly comfortable in two good-sized rooms of a respectable tenement house in upper New York. She often worked far into the night, for she meant Polly to be as well educated and clothed as could be done by any of *her* efforts.

Polly waited in Mrs. Bement's front entry for the maid to bring back the basket. Presently a young voice cried from the second floor, over the banister:

"Catch, washerwoman! Here comes your basket!" and Polly's basket came bounding down stairs, almost overturning, as it rolled into the hall, a light table on which stood a delicate china tray. Polly dropped her missionary penny, and springing forward with a little cry caught the stand before it fell.

A young man stepped out of the parlor to

see what the noise was. His first glance told him that Polly was not to blame, and he looked farther.

"Nellie, what pranks are you up to now?" he called, seeing the mischievous face of his little cousin looking down the staircase.

"Nothing. The basket did not go down stairs right, that was all. It has not been brought up properly."

"There was nothing the matter with the way it was brought up," muttered Polly, searching for her penny. "Your own maid did it," she added with a twinkle of her brown eyes, for the funny side of a thing always struck Polly if there *was* a funny side, and there generally is to everything, and even her extreme dislike for Nellie Bement could not overcome the wish to laugh at her own little pun.

"Have you lost something?" asked the young man, as Polly still peeped under mats and behind the table and chairs.

"It is my missionary penny," said Polly, raising toward him her flushed face.

"Oh! what good can a *penny* do, Polly Clinton?" said Nellie, coming down stairs. "That

lady talked great stuff to-day at school, didn't she? I'm not going to take a lot of trouble to earn money for people I care nothing about. I'll just ask mother for some money. I'd rather do things for people I love."

"'What thank have ye?'" quoted the young man half to himself as he leaned against the wall, watching Polly.

"That's the verse I learned yesterday," said Polly, looking up shyly. "It's easy to work for people you love, isn't it?"

"To some people, yes. Everybody does not find it easy to work even for love. Can't you find your penny?"

"No, sir," said Polly. "And what shall I do?" There was a sound of tears in her voice.

"What a fuss about a penny!" said Nellie. "You have no way of making it grow, anyhow, unless you help your mother wash."

"I'd rather do that," cried Polly, a flood of anger taking possession of her at the taunt in Nellie's tone, "than give away money that I hadn't earned."

"Nellie, be quiet," said her cousin. "Miss Polly, don't bother about your penny. The maid will find it in the morning. I will give

you another if you will accept it, only you must promise not to look at it till you get home." He put a little piece of paper he had been twisting up into Polly's hand.

"Oh, thank you so much; can you spare it? The maid will be *sure* to find it, will she?" queried Polly anxiously.

The young fellow laughed.

"Yes, I can spare it. Of course the other will turn up."

"Pax, what a goose you are," said Nellie, as the door closed on Polly and the basket. "How much did you give her?"

"That's my affair; it will not break me. I rather think I have made a good investment," returning to his book beside the library fire. "Polly deserved something for not getting angry at you."

Polly ran home in haste and bounced into the cheery kitchen quite out of breath.

"Mother, I lost my penny, and Nellie threw the basket down stairs at me and nearly upset a table, and somebody gave me another, and Nellie said I couldn't make it grow anyhow, and I'll not go there again even if Mrs. Bement never has a clean stitch to wear the

rest of her life. Now where's my penny?" and Polly tugged energetically at her pocket.

"You said you lost it and somebody gave you a table, Polly," said her mother, picking up Polly's coat and hood and hanging them up on a peg behind the door.

"No, no," said Polly, "you are all mixed up."

"I don't think it was I who was mixed," returned Mrs. Clinton, laughing. "Now tell me about it."

"Here it is," said Polly. "Oh—" with a gasp of surprise as the unfolded paper disclosed a bright quarter of a dollar; "that's not a penny!"

"It has grown pretty fast, hasn't it?" said her mother, as Polly held it up, her eyes bright with delight.

"Why did he do it, mother? Do you think he meant to?"

"Tell me about it, dear."

Polly curled down into her mother's lap as Mrs. Clinton sat down to rest before the fire, and told her little story, ending with:

"Isn't he good? I wonder why?"

"I guess he thought my Polly was trying to serve the same Master as he was."

"I don't know whether I am or not," said Polly, doubtfully. "People I don't like I don't want to do anything for."

"But that won't do, Polly, 'for if ye love them only which love you, what thank have ye? For even sinners also love those that love them.' That is only a kind of selfishness after all. We give where we want to, and do good only when we want to, and then get tired giving to one thing and turn to something else; and if people are not grateful and do not thank us, we don't want to do anything. That is not what Christ likes. It is not His spirit."

"That's what it means when it says: 'Be not weary in well doing,' isn't it, mother?" said Polly.

"That's about it, dear."

"I know I get weary in well doing," said Polly, energetically. "I try awhile and then I want to go off and have a regular tear."

"Polly, Polly," expostulated her mother, "what an expression! I sometimes think you should have been a boy."

"There's not a bit of doubt of that," replied Polly, wriggling off her mother's lap and seeing-sawing on heels and toes; "then I might have

pummelled Nellie Bement. But, as I'm not a boy, I think I'll go to bed."

"A very good place for small belligerents," said Mrs. Clinton, giving her girl a good-night kiss. "Remember, Polly, 'if ye love them *only* which love you, what thank have ye?'"

Polly shook her long, red hair.

"I'll think about it," said she, blowing a last kiss as she vanished into the little chamber which she shared with her mother.

Mrs. Clinton sat and thought until the fire came up. She did not know what better she could do for Polly than pursue the course she had begun, yet, as her little daughter grew older and prettier, she feared for the companions she might meet in their restricted circumstances; and knowing the child must have companionship, longed for a better home.

"Still," she sighed, "our flat is quite respectable, after all, and maybe I can hire a little house out of town some day. How glad I am father gave me enough reading, writing and grammar to talk pretty straight to Polly, so she will not be ashamed of me. May our dear Lord help her to a better livelihood than laundry work, yet glad enough am I to do

that, and thankful to Him for His goodness."

She read her chapter, put the fire right and went to Polly's side, looked at the rosy little face a minute, and kneeling down thankfully commended her child and herself to the care of a loving Father