

A PAGE FOR Y's.

A GIRL'S INFLUENCE.

By Annie M. Vail.

(Continued).

Mabel was her own mistress. Plenty of people would have been happy to interfere with her affairs through her orphanage, but no occasion ever presented. She had always seemed naturally inclined to do the most desirable thing. She had chosen the best schools, she had exquisite taste in dress, housekeeping, literature and art; she was a delightful girl and a very devout and conscientious one. Her guardian managed her property. Her grandparents were her guests; nobody had entertained an anxious thought about her for years. Alice Santly experienced the very first one. She was several years Mabel's senior and her great resource. Only a strip of lawn separated their homes. Neuralgia had prevented her seeing much of the revival meetings; exhaustion from long-continued religious exaltation kept Mabel rather quiet; she had seen her friend every day, but Alice had guests, and there was no opportunity for being confidential, otherwise the very first mistaken move would have been analysed for her.

Mabel greeted her warmly when she came in for the first time for several days, and wondered how she would manage to tell her news.

"I am better, dear. I felt like putting you on your guard a little about young Clifford. I'm afraid of his getting too much interested in you. When these young scapegraces set out to reform they always expect everybody to stand around and admire, and the first thing most of them do is to offer exclusive attention to the nicest girl at hand—when they have no business to embarrass any girl with special devotion until they make a record. Of course this seems perfectly preposterous," she ran on, wondering why she did not feel entirely at ease; "but the less does not comprehend the greater, you know; he does not perceive his own deficiencies and he wouldn't naturally comprehend the hopelessness of the idea."

Mabel did not look up. "Don't you think he has a nice face, Alice?" she asked, her friend thought a little irrelevantly.

"Well, yes, that is, it might be," she answered slowly; "if there was

more behind it—intellect—ambition, and so on, as it is, it is a kind of *beaute de diable*, bears marks of dissipation, his tastes are low, he likes vile company. I, myself, have often seen him with—what makes you look at me that way, Mabel?"

"Oh, Alice, you don't know how he is changed," she said, "how manly and earnest he is since he has been trying to be a Christian. He turned to me from the very first. Along every step of the way I was the only one who could understand and help him; he has risen from such depths he must be helped and held—he depends on me—he says if I fail him he will be lost. I believe it has been given to me to stand by him and with him always!"

Alice listened aghast. "Mabel Armitage!"

"Alice, I have been so plainly led, I look back and cannot see any mistake, nor any point where I could have done differently."

Alice groaned. "I can," she said. "Just when that flattering sense of special influence and ownership began—that was the place. He depends on you—that is his religion, not Christ, and sweet and dear as you are, it will not do."

"God uses human means," she said serenely.

"But, Mabel, it is not a fit alliance if he is ever so sincere. You can't be happy with him—he doesn't know the first thing about the subjects which interest you—he's illiterate—you will be ashamed of him."

"I have always thought," said Mabel, sweetly, "that I could lay all at the foot of the cross; if the sacrifice is to be my pride of intellect, I can make it. It will be made enough for me to understand the language of the Kingdom."

Alice could endure no more; she went home dismayed. Neither did she worry Mabel with any more attempts to change her determination. It was too late for her counsel to be any use. But relatives and friends of the family did their whole duty. There was no halo of interest about Ed Clifford in their eyes. Grandfather and Grandmother were fairly broken-hearted. Her guardian tried to remonstrate. Aunts and Uncles made her extremely uncomfortable, but, if anything, more determined. Even the minister tried to undeceive her, but she pretty nearly convinced him against his judge-

ment. It was too late for anything but a special providence.

Through the influence of a wealthy member of the church, Clifford was offered the position of freight conductor by the company which had discharged him for drinking and misconduct. He was loath to leave the scene of his enchantment, but he could not gainsay his mother's logic. "She had slaved to maintain him in dissipation and idleness—now, if he had turned over a new leaf, he would show it by doing something to help along. Going with a rich girl was not earning a living."

His "day off" gave him every third evening, and Mabel looked forward to his coming. His beauty and tenderness were pleasing to her. He was so worshipful and presumed so little, and everybody else was finding fault with her.

It was strange how little apparent to Mabel had been her lover's mental and educational deficiencies, but the language of passion and religious fervor has an eloquence of its own, and they talked of little else. When she led off beyond his depth his tact did not fail him. He would say with perfect frankness, "I don't understand much about that, Mabel, you will have to be my teacher as well as my safeguard," and then it was easy to glide back to the theme on which he could be eloquent, her goodness and all she was to him. An occasional fault of diction made her wince, for she was nice and critical, but she told herself she was glad she had a sacrifice to make. She began to understand pretty clearly the narrowness of their mutual ground, but she had not tired of it. There were flowers along the path of duty. If time had been given for it to grow an older story she might have heled release, but so long as she believed in her divine commission she never would have faltered.

Clifford's train was due on the afternoon of the last day of the year. They were to go together to "watch-meeting" and "see the old year out." He had talked of the new year holding a different meaning from any other of his life—said that his life had grown so full of joy he thought his heart would burst with it, and then—if such inconceivable folly were not an everyday affair, if we did not continually see men sacrifice everything of value to a vicious impulse, what happened would be an incredible thing to relate.

(To be concluded).