

A PAGE FOR Y's.

A GIRL'S INFLUENCE.

By Annie M. Vail.

(Continued.)

Mabel waited in vain, and finally went to the meeting after ten o'clock, her thoughts full of icy cars and broken rails and ghastly burdens so often brought home to that "division town," its railroad graves outnumbering by far those of promoted soldiers.

Lizzie Clifford relieved her anxiety. Ed. had been in to supper; then she was certain he had found some urgent opportunity of doing good. It was the sister who was uneasy now, with the thought of what might be the matter. She slipped out at once, and went home to find if there was any news of him.

It was a spree of more than usual magnitude. It began with larking about the streets with old comrades, whom he still found amusing. An uproar in a saloon over a turkey raffle drew them all in to see what was the excitement. It was a drunken crowd, and right away complications arose, which made it seem for the moment the easiest thing to take the drink offered and get away.

He might have stopped then, but the instant it was done he felt he had renounced everything. Mabel's power, all he had based his claim on, had not held him.

"Farewell, Paradise!" he cried, hoarsely, his voice lost in the hubbub of unmeaning laughter and howls and curses. He drank repeatedly, and—"Come on, boys," he was the leader of the van in a foray to "paint the town." Before the watch-meeting was over, a company of drunken men and reckless women were behind the bars to await the proceedings of the Police Court.

There was no morning paper. Alice came to Mabel and told her, gently but unsparingly. "I thank God this has happened," she said. "The Lord can save him yet, but you see you can not."

Mabel was terribly overcome. There was sense of loss, and sickening disgust and shame. Her condescension suddenly appeared to her as it had to others. "Oh, Alice, where did I do wrong? Should I never have spoken to him, when he seemed so wrought upon, and I

thought it might be the turning point?"

"No, dear, that was right, I am sure. It was when he made it such a personal matter—there was the danger. If you had shared the responsibility and the friendship—I don't mean to blame you." And Alice took the shrinking little figure in her arms, and dropped tears on her bright head. The lesson was so hard.

"Alice," she weakly whispered, "will it be right to abandon him now for one misstep?"

"My child," said Alice, "if he could do as he has now, with so much at stake, what will restrain him when he has no fear of losing you? He must have a surer anchorage than the influence of the girl he wants to please."

"They will say I might have saved him."

"Perhaps; but, my child, the sacrifice is not yours to make. Listen, Mabel, what does wifehood mean? It means motherhood. Have you any right to bring on innocent children the consequences of drunkenness and licentiousness?"

"Thank you, Alice, I thought perhaps I must go on, and I did not see how I could."

Clifford's fine was a heavy one. He would have had to lie in gaol if Mabel had not privately sent the money. The transaction was fatal to any lingering touch of sentiment. He made no plea, and left town at once. His first month's pay was sent to cancel the obligation. Afterward, Mabel knew he could not be doing very badly, since she learned from Lizzie that he sent money home regularly.

It was a heavy time for Mabel. Those who criticised before blamed her now. She was thoroughly humiliated; the place seemed intolerable to her. The opportunity came to her and Alice to take with friends a European tour, and they went gladly.

I cannot interest you in Mabel's later history. It leads through pleasant paths, and finds her the centre and inspiration of that only earthly paradise, a perfect home. Not quite so slight and girlish, but lovelier than ever, one New Year's morning found her playing gleefully with her crowing, laughing, dimpled babies, when a letter was brought in.

With a touch of the old dramatic instinct, the writer had used his knowledge of trains and mail delivery to

insure its reaching its destination on that particular day.

Mabel studied the commercial college handwriting of the superscription without enlightenment, but a glance at the signature carried her back almost too strongly to that experience whose recollection had made her more and more the friend and teacher of young girls, a receiver of confidences and counsellor in difficulties. That very afternoon she was to matronise a bevy of them while receiving at the cosy "Y" headquarters down town.

It was a reassuring letter, a little highflown, as in the "guardian spirit" and "guiding star" days.

"I would not have you think I did not suffer," he wrote. "The thought of all my folly had cost me was terrible, but I comprehended after a time that it had been too wild a dream. Miss Santly wrote me a letter about that time, which made me fighting mad at first, but it told me what was what. I couldn't have kept up to your mark. I want you to know that your goodness did help me, and the revival was not lost on me. I never gave up altogether. I belong to the church. I trust I am now a humble Christian."

He told her, besides, that he had risen to the proud position of passenger conductor, and was saving money for a home. He thought, perhaps he knew, the "presiding goddess" might be pretty and better educated than he was, "but he knew too much now to get his eye on a college-bred girl he couldn't keep in sight of."

The letter told her what he had too good taste to say outright, that she need not reproach herself with the thought that his disappointment had done him any lasting harm.

"That takes every bit of conceit out of me," she thought, smiling happily, for she had entertained such haunting thoughts.

She looked at the letter, with its schoolboy penmanship, stilted diction, and occasional misspelt word, and glanced with a little shudder through the portiere, where at the library table sat the genial, cultured gentleman, her husband, the ideal of her inmost soul, with whom every taste and faculty was in fullest accord. Just then he looked up.

"From my old protege," she said, waving the letter gaily. "He is promoted, and has found a presiding goddess."

(The End.)