Circulating Decimals

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CIRCULATING DECIMALS

Chapter 1

The Sabbath-school library of the Penn Avenue Church was really in a disgraceful condition. For years it had been let alone, until it had finally put itself into that state of dilapidation which let-alone things can so skillfully assume. Covers were sadly torn, corners curled, fly leaves gone; in many cases the first dozen or twenty pages of the book missing, to say nothing of great gaps in the middle of the story or history. Some books had almost every leaf defaced by those irritating scribblers who are never safe creatures with a lead pencil in their hands. Many of the books were missing, having been swallowed into that mysterious vortex which engulfs lost things, no person living being able to give a lucid account of their departure. And, to crown all, according to the statement of Mrs. Marshall Powers who knew most things, “Not more than half the books were fit for a Sabbath-school library in the first place.”

Who needs a photograph of a disabled library? Alas, the ghastly remains lie around so profusely that there is no need for more than a word to recall the very bend of their limp covers—those which have covers left. Such was, and had been, the

condition of the Penn Avenue library for many a month. It had been long since a book had been spoken of by the bright girls and boys who belonged to its Sabbath-school without a contemptuous curling of upper lips. Spasms of interest had been from time to time awakened, and much talk had been wasted in repeating the patent fact, ”We certainly ought to do something about our library,” the main difficulty being that the effort went no farther than talk; and the day came when a suggestion of this sort would set the aforesaid lips to curling in derisive incredulity. They believed—those boys and girls—that the Penn Avenue library was dead.

Such, however, was not the case. One summer morning it revived. The young ladies’ society took hold of it with interest; they would have a fair and festival forthwith; they would spare no pains and no expense to make the matter a grand success and secure the means for a new and complete library, which should at once be the admiration and the envy of every other church in town.

Do you need to be told how that society hummed and buzzed after that? Meetings were held each week, sometimes twice a week. Committees were formed and dashed hither and thither through the crowded streets. Worsted, and canvas, and embroidery silk, and ribbon, and beads, and lace came to the front and became matters of even more importance than usual. The air was full of them, parlors were full of them, tongues were full of them; go where you would, you were destined to hear about “a lovely rose-

colored tidy in a new stitch," or "an elegant afghan," the materials for which were to cost twenty dollars, or a "magnificent Bible cushion" that was all a mass of raised silk embroidery that would take "days and days of close work to finish;" or of some other of the endless pieces of fancywork getting ready for the fair.

Neither was the festival part neglected. The city was districted; the streets were canvassed; miles of energetic walking were accomplished, and the result was cake—black cake, white cake, brown cake, chocolate, delicate cream, coconut, sponge, and, to crown all, the "loveliest great mound of angel food that was ever made in this town!" So one enthusiastic mass reported. Think of a company of rational beings, meeting and eating up a loaf or two of angels' food for the purpose of securing a Sabbath-school library! Cakes were not all! Jellies, pickles, chickens, ham, tongue—Oh, what-not! If you had looked into the receiving room of the Penn Avenue Church on the afternoon of the eventful evening, you would have almost supposed that the dear people were making ready to give a Christmas dinner to this great, cold, homeless outside world, so bountiful were the provisions. But they were not; they were only preparing to eat their way into a Sunday-school library for the use of their own boys and girls.

But let no novice suppose for a moment that the afternoon of this day had been reached in peace. If I should undertake to give you a history of one third of the troubles through which the self-sacrificing leaders walked, my story would be far too long. Did not Helen Brooks say that Sallie Stuart's pincushion was a "dowdy-

looking thing" and should not be on her table; that Sallie did not know how to do fancywork anyway, and never ought to have tried?

Did not Alice Jenkins say that Stella Somebody had marked her sofa pillow "ridiculously high;" that it was really a disgrace to a church to charge such exorbitant prices?

And did not both Sallie and Stella hear of these things by that mysterious process which is rife in all society, and which nobody understands, and did they not both withdraw in affront, declaring that they would have nothing more to do with the Penn Avenue fair, nor the Penn Avenue Sabbath-school? This is only a hint of the miasma of which the air was full.

But one story I must tell you, and a true tale it is. If any of the Penn Avenue people read this, I ask their pardon for making it public, but it should be recorded as a matter of history. It was all about a doll. A great, beautiful waxen doll, direct from Paris, having wonderful real hair, and wonderful eyes that looked as though they must be real, and rosy parted lips, and teeth that gleamed like pearls. This doll was a special grant of grace to the young ladies' society. Mrs. Archer, just returned from a European tour, had brought it home for the very purpose to which she now dedicated it, namely, the library of the Penn Avenue Sabbath-school.

Think of the number of children in that Sabbath-school whose very arms would quiver with the desire to clasp such a treasure as their own! Assuredly there were fifty fathers in the congregation

who would think nothing of investing a dollar for the possibility of securing it for the darling at home. Nothing easier than to sell fifty tickets, at a dollar each, and let the child whose fortunate number corresponded with the number on the inside of the Parisian lady's Parisian slipper carry off the prize in triumph, while the forty-nine other children held their breaths and controlled their sobs as best they could.

Now, all this proved to be very correct reasoning. Hot buckwheat cakes on a frosty morning never disappeared faster than those fifty tickets were exchanged for shining silver spheres or crisp national currency. With great satisfaction did the committee count out its fifty dollars for the treasure of the Lord, mourning over but one thing: "We might have had seventy-five or a hundred tickets just as well as fifty."

Still, it was not all smooth sailing. Murmurs long and deep began to be heard, and presently they waxed loud enough to claim attention. There were those among some of the fathers and mothers in Israel who succeeded in making it understood that they had conscientious scruples against gambling, even for religious purposes. They declared that this thing ought not to be, and therefore must not be.

Triumphant were the answers: "The tickets are all sold. What are you going to do about it?"

But the conscientious element was in earnest. Something ought to, and therefore something *could* be done about it. The money could be refunded, the tickets destroyed, the Parisian lady

valued at a reasonable price and set up for sale, if they would, but never raffled for.

Great was the consternation, loud were the voices. Give back the fifty dollars! Guess they would, hard as they had worked for it! Great need in being so squeamish! They had heard of people who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. They believed, if the truth could be told, the trouble started with somebody who was disappointed because his little girl did not get a ticket. *They* were not going to give up the doll, not they. Did people suppose they would do all the work and then be dictated to by a few narrow-minded men and women? The strife ran high; it threatened to rend in pieces the young ladies' society. There were those who would do nothing if the Parisian lady was insulted; there were those who would do nothing if the raffle was permitted.

Into the midst of the turmoil came the Sabbath to make what lull it could. The offending lady was carried home on Saturday by one of her allies and securely locked in the "spare chamber" to spend the Sabbath in repose. Alas, and alas! The day was warm, the windows of the spare room fronted the south; the blinds had been thrown wide open the evening before to catch the last rays of light for a special object and, by some strange mismanagement, had not been closed again. The blue-eyed lady in her armchair directly in front of the window looked her loveliest all day; and all day the sunbeams hovered around her, and wooed her, and kissed her, and caressed her, never realizing the fierce heat of their love. And on Monday morning, when the determined committee went to

remove my lady to her throne in the church parlor, behold, her delicate complexion was seamed and soiled. What had been red cheeks were simply long faded streaks, extending in irregular lines to her neck; her eyelashes were gone, her nose was gone, her lovely lips were washed out, and she was, in short, a ruined wreck of her former self.

There was no raffling at that fair. The money was returned, the doll was patched up, and packed up, and sent to a little niece of one of the committee—the disappointed auntie having bought my lady for a trifle-and apparent calm succeeded the angry threatenings. Yet despite all their efforts at composure, the young ladies *could not* get away from the miserable feeling that the trouble was, in some way, due to the opposition; and cold looks, and sarcastic speeches, and discomfort, and distrust had it very much their own way among certain of the workers.

Well, the fair was held. Tidies, and tidies, and tidies! The number and variety seemed endless.

“Tidies to right of us, tidies to left of us, tidies before us, tidies behind us, tumbled and tangled,” paraphrased a young man who caught his sleeve button in one of the meshes and drew a small avalanche of them to the floor. Another, looking on hopelessly at the mass, asked what sort of carpets they would make. And another, turning from them to the pincushions, wanted to know if some of those things were not large enough for bolsters. All this aside, of course.

Sales were brisk apparently, and yet many articles were unsold. The trifles, the small keepsakes, the pretty nothings found ready purchasers; but the pieces that represented miles of silk embroidery, and hours of toil, and were to bring large returns were still the property of the young ladies when the evening was over. It was over at last, and weary bodies and excited brains sat down to count the spoils. There was a bill to pay at the fancy store for materials; there was a bill to pay at the confectioners; there was a bill to pay for dishes rented, and broken, and otherwise injured; there was a bill to pay for cream—where *do* all the little bills come from which swarm round a distracted treasurer at such a time? Unexpected expenses and enough fancywork on hand to stock a modest store! The bills were paid, and the wearied soldiers went into camp for repairs, mental and moral; and there was deposited with the treasurer of the library fund the sum of twenty-two dollars and sixteen cents!

After that there was a lull in the Penn Avenue Church.

Chapter 2

The next spasm that seized them started in the choir. *They* would give an entertainment, musical and literary. No such gross and material things as food for the body should intrude. Committee meetings were again in order of the day. It was soon found that even in preparing for "a feast of reason and a flow of soul," differences of opinion would arise. Should it be the cantata of Queen Esther, or the operetta of the Milkmaid, or something lighter than either? Say, the Dance of the Fairies? There were those who thought a series of tableaux would be better than any of these, and there were those who thought there was talent enough in the Penn Avenue Church to get up a genuine play instead of one of these milk-and-water affairs.

At last, after some plain speaking and a few heart burnings, it was decided that the cantata of Esther should have the right of way, the casting vote in its favor being made because there was a young man visiting at the Judsons' who had just graduated from the theological seminary and would make a "magnificent Haman."

They began rehearsals. Music was to be interspersed between the various scenes, and certain sopranos were asked to prepare

choice selections, such as, “I think only of thee, love,” and “My heart’s dearest treasure,” and “Ever thine own, love,” and a few other of those gems which we hear screamed out by seraphic voices to large and appreciative audiences. I have never heard it explained why so much of our popular music should be wedded to words which the performer would blush to repeat in prose to an audience of more than one; but the *fact*, I suppose, is indisputable.

Oh, those rehearsals! Why are they attended with so many trials? Does Satan make special arrangements to be present at all efforts of this kind? And, if so, why? Does his superior genius recognize in these gatherings fruitful soil for the developments dear to his heart, I wonder?

Miss Minnie Coleman was general-in-chief of this particular entertainment, and she dropped a limp heap among the cushions one evening and recounted her trials to sympathetic ears. “Such a time. Mamma! You never saw anything like it. It really is enough to discourage one with any attempt at doing good! Who *do* you suppose wants to be Vashti? That ridiculous little Kate Burns! She says she knows more than half of the part already because she helped them get this up in the Vesey Street social. The idea! Everything she did was to prompt at one of the rehearsals! She is too dumpy for a queen; and she has a simpering little voice. Oh, it would be just too ridiculous for anything, and yet she is bent on it; she has talked with each one of the committee separately and hinted that we ought to propose her. Then there’s that Jennie Harmon, vexed because she hasn’t been chosen for Esther. She

makes all manner of fun of Essie (whom everybody says is just the one for the part), and I'm really afraid Essie will hear of it and refuse to act. The girls are so hateful. Mamma, you haven't an idea! They get so excited about things that don't go just as they want them; they burst right out with whatever is in their minds. Three of the committee went home crying tonight just because of things that they had overheard said, and I'd cry, too, if I were not so provoked. It does seem too bad when we are working for benevolence and trying our best to make a little money to have people go and spoil things in this way. Jessie Morrison is fretting, too; she doesn't like her part; says her mother thinks the dress is unbecoming. 'What of it?' I asked her, somebody had to wear it, and it might as well be she as anyone. Well, she said her mother did not think it was exactly a proper dress to appear in in public. So absurd! I am just tired of the whole thing. I told Fannie tonight I would give anything if we were safely out of it all, and if I once get through I shall wash my hands of all benevolent enterprises in the future. Fannie was a poor one to talk to, though; she is so vexed because she hasn't been asked to sing a solo that she could tear everything to pieces. I'm sure I hope these library books, if we ever get them, will do a great deal of good; they ought to, such a world of trouble as they have made."

Ah, well, they lived through it. It is surprising how many trials we do succeed in pushing through and coming out alive on the other side!

The cantata argued and frowned and sparred and grumbled its ways into perfection. The large hall was engaged for two evenings because a complete rehearsal at the hall was a necessity. The town was duly placarded, inviting the public to the unique entertainment gotten up by the energetic young people of the Penn Avenue Church. The usual number of street jokes floated through the air about the “Penn Avenue Theater” or the “religious opera,” sent afloat by that large class of irreligious young men who inhabit every town and city, and who seem to know by instinct just what is appropriate to a religious body and just what is not. When the church and the world start out to walk hand in hand, it is a curious thing that it is always the world that sees the inconsistencies and laughs, and always the church that is blind.

The modern Queen Esther did hear of the trouble, and, unlike her great namesake, faltered and pouted and would have nothing to do with the affair, so at a late hour a new queen had to be hastily chosen, who marred the occasion by forgetting some of her parts; and this is only a hint of the trials which encompassed the executive committee that evening. Still, as I said, they lived and came to the hour when they sat down to count their gains.

From this exercise they rose up sadder and wiser girls. The costumes had been so unique, and so rich, and were of such brilliant colors that, being available for the occasion only, many things had to be bought and the bills sent to the treasurer. The purchases did not seem many nor heavy, as they were bought by different people at different times, but they counted up so

mercilessly when the figures were set in those inexorable rows! Then the charge for the hall was simply enormous. The poor committee looked at each other and said this a dozen times during the counting up; the idea of charging as much for the use of the hall for the rehearsal as they did for the regular evening! Who would have imagined such a thing! Then the bills of the piano lenders were more than they had supposed possible, and the printer's bill was another ruinous item. Will it not be easily credited by the great army of the initiated that nineteen dollars and two cents gave the sum of the net proceeds of all these weeks of outlay! Actually nineteen dollars and two cents!

"There!" said the treasurer, tossing down her pencil with a determined air. "I shall not add that column again! I've begun at the top, and in the middle, and added the fives and the nines separately, and done everything I can think of, and it comes every time to that miserable little nineteen dollars and two cents! Let's take the nineteen dollars to pay for the shoe leather we've worn out and hand in the two cents to the library committee, and then go and drown ourselves."

They laughed, as girls will at almost anything if somebody will only lead off. But when they reached home they, every one of them, cried. Poor things! My heart aches for them. There is no class of workers more utterly to be pitied than those who struggle and toil, making bricks often times without straw, and who find at the close that, someway, the bricks seem not to have been worth the cost.

It was months afterward, winter indeed, before the library association gasped again. Then up rose the women, the respectable, middle-aged, matronly women. The library must be replenished, the money must be raised. It would not do to set girls at it; girls always got into trouble, they were so sensitive, so quick to take offense, so lacking in self-control. They—the matrons—would do this thing speedily and quietly. They would have an oyster supper on a large scale, make preparation for a great many guests, furnish oysters in every possible style, and with them such coffee as only they could make, to say nothing of the inevitable cake and cream, and side dishes for those who did not relish oysters. So they went to work quietly, skillfully, expeditiously. Baking, broiling, frying, stewing! What tales could not the kitchens and pantries have told during those days! They got through to the weary end, not without heart burnings and a few tears and much pressure of lips lest they speak unadvisedly and occasional home confidences not flattering to their fellow workers. And I protest that in this age of the world, with Satan so manifestly at the helm as he is, it is not possible to get up a church fair, festival, opera, or what not, without these, but the matrons were, as they had promised to be, on the whole, discreet, forbearing, and silent; no open breaches came.

The evening of the supper came. Dark!—Was it ever darker? Rain!—Not a fitful dash with gleams of moonlight between. Just a steady, pelting, pitiless rain, mud at every crossing, pools of water at some. Warm—So warm that, to the average oyster eater, the

very thought of one of those bivalves was disgusting. A few damp yet resolute people stood around in the corners of the great room and steadily ate large dishes of oysters, double dishes, some of them, and the minister, the one who perhaps could afford it least, ushered in from the dark outer world, in the course of the evening, seven wet, hungry newsboys and gave them such a supper as they will tell of twenty years hence, and paid the bills! Meantime the cooked oysters in large quantities were sent out to the deserving poor, and the uncooked ones were forgotten and left in the warm room all night, and by morning were not fit for the deserving poor, or any other poor! In the early forenoon of the next day, while the rain was thus falling drearily, a few draggled and discouraged females winded their way homeward, laden with soup tureens, cooking utensils, and a loaf each of cake! And this was the outcome of the Penn Avenue's third effort!

Now, you are not to suppose that this church was poor. It was not wealthy in the sense that some city churches are, which need only to mention a want to have it supplied from a full treasury; but its members, the great majority of them, lived in comfortable, and some of them in elegant, homes; none of them ever arranged for himself to have a supper brought in by his friends in order to help him through with the current expenses of the year. Not one of them had ever been known to solicit articles for a fancy fair in order to help pay house rent, or even pew rent. All of them were in the habit of putting their hands in their pockets and furnishing the money with which to meet all these reasonable needs. Why, then,

did they resort to such pitiable devices to replenish their church library? Is there any person who can give a satisfactory answer to that question?

I want also to be understood about those young ladies. They were by no means working for self-gratification; they were honest in their desire to raise money for the cause; neither were they of a more quarrelsome disposition than others of their age and position. The simple fact was that the unusual surroundings, the endless rehearsals, the posing in characters strange to them, the curious costumes which made them feel unlike themselves, the need for haste and undue exertion, the necessity for planning for so many contingencies, the sense of responsibility, the consciousness of criticism freely offered, the possibility of failure—all these strained heavily on young nerves unused to great strains and produced the highly wrought condition of nervous irritability which made the things that would on ordinary occasions have raised a merry laugh start the quick tears instead. I take the bold ground that the misunderstandings, heart burnings, and coldnesses, sometimes far reaching in their influences and results, are almost necessary accompaniments to work of this character; there are notable exceptions, but exceptions emphasize rules. Really now, how many church festivals, fairs, concerts, cantatas, Christmas dramas, and what not have you watched closely from their inception to their close without hearing of a *jar* which did not more or less harm?

What does this prove? I am not proposing to prove anything by it, I am only stating certain facts. Also, I am advocating the cause of the Penn Avenue Church; it was like unto other churches.

Chapter 3

If you please, now, go back with me to the early summer in which the first spasm of interest in regard to the library took hold of the young people. The new superintendent, unwittingly perhaps, set the ball to rolling by remarking that the library had been closed and locked by vote of that executive committee of the school, until such time as there were found to be any books worth giving out. Then, among those who had looked at each other and shaken their heads in disapproval of such a state of things, were the young ladies in Mrs. Jones's class—ten of them. They occupied the corner down by the door, between the door and the east window; a corner that was cold in winter and warm in summer; a corner that other classes shunned. Perhaps that will give you a hint in regard to Mrs. Jones's class. They were young ladies belonging to a certain clique; none of them wealthy, none of them even well-to-do, in the sense which you probably mean by that term. They represented comfortable homes where the fathers worked hard daily for daily needs, where the mothers took their share of daily burdens, where the daughters did what they could to help lighten the burdens of both.

For instance, one was a sewing girl and went every day among the fine houses on the fashionable streets to do plain sewing. Another was a milliner's apprentice, and in the busy season, worked over bonnets from seven o'clock Monday morning often until twelve o'clock Saturday night. The fact was, she knew some of the Penn Avenue Sabbath-school teachers who had their bonnets sent home in the gray dawn of the Sabbath morning, because they *must* have them for that day's worship. Another managed the entire culinary and kitchen department for a large family, in order that the mother might sit all day and sew (on the many garments which were brought to her to cut and fit and repair and make). Still another was a clerk in a fancy store and knew much about the pretty things that less busy girls than she were fond of making. Two were teachers in the graded school and spent their Saturdays in helping with the family ironing to relieve an overburdened mother.

Workers they were, every one; not a drone in the hive. By common consent they were almost entirely counted out of the "fancy department," as they had named the young ladies' society. *They* had not time for fancywork, neither did they move in the same circle with the fancy workers. Oh, they attended the same church and were on friendly enough terms with the young people, at least with those whom they knew sufficiently to exchange bows when they met on the street. They met nowhere else save in church. I am sure you know all about those subtle, oftentimes mysterious, yet plainly defined society distinctions. They are to be

found in every village, however small, as well as in our largest cities.

This corner class looked at each other and shook their heads with the rest, but they did one thing more. Sarah Potter said, "Girls, let us *do* something. Mrs. Jones, let us have a Sabbath-school library."

"Well" said Mrs. Jones briskly, heartily, "I'm agreed. Let us, by all means." Then they laughed a little. Mrs. Jones was a tailoress and worked hard all day, and every day, and was devoted to her ten young ladies.

But Sarah Potter had more to say. "Oh, now, I mean it. It is high time something was done. Let us meet tomorrow evening at Jennie's and talk it over."

Now, Jennie was one of the ten, and all meetings to discuss ways and means were always held at her house. In fact, it was the settled place of meeting for anything connected with this class. It had been two years since Jennie had met with them elsewhere than in her own room. Yet the class was always counted as numbering ten. One glance at her pale, bright face would have told you the story. She never left her room, nor her bed, and looked forward now to but one way of leaving that spot, which would be when they carried her out into the world once more, in her coffin! Yet Jennie was the strong bond of union in that class. "She is the class soul!" affirmed Mrs. Jones in her strong and somewhat quaint language, and the one to whom she spoke understood and did not controvert it.

Workers are very apt to move promptly in whatever line they take up. The next evening the ten met in Jennie's room. She was eager to receive them, ready to further their plans to the best of her powers. But had they any plans?

"Sarah began it," they said, "she must tell us what she wants."

"I want a new library; and I say, let's get one, somehow."

"Very well, I'll be secretary and put that down. So much decided. 'A library somehow." Hannah Wood wrote the sentence in large letters, the others gleeful meanwhile. "Now, Sarah, proceed. We are all ready for the plans."

"I haven't any plans; only that the thing must be done. It has been talked long enough. Yes, I have plans. Look at the Women's Board; see how much money they are raising with ten cents a month. Why couldn't we draw up pledges for ten cents a month and get signers? There are ten of us to work; ten cents a month from everybody that we can wheedle into giving it. A regular decimal performance."

"Circulating decimals at that," laughed her sister. "Think how we shall have to circulate through this town to get signers!"

"Jennie, you must be our treasurer; we'll report to you once a month. Mrs. Jones, won't that be nice?"

The subject was fairly opened for discussion and vigorously was it discussed. Before the evening closed, each of the ten had a copy of the pledge written in a fair round hand. "We, the undersigned, do pledge ourselves to give ten cents each month at

the call of a person holding this paper, for the benefit of the Penn Avenue Sabbath-school Library Fund, until such time as we shall ourselves erase our name from this paper."

"And it will be one long while before you get a chance to do that" affirmed Sarah Potter, reading the pledge with grave satisfaction. "If ever our church gets into another muddle over a library, I shall be disappointed."

This was the beginning. The girls pocketed their papers, kissed Jennie, and went home. Thereafter, steady, silent work was done with these pledges. The thing created scarcely a ripple on the surface of the church society. The sum asked for was so small; it was so easy to change your mind and erase your name at any time; it was so improbable that those girls would call for so small a sum many months in succession; it was so much easier to comply than to refuse; people laughed and said one to another, "Do you know what those girls in Mrs. Jones's class are trying to do? Poor things, they want books badly. I hope they won't be old and gray before a new library is bought, but I am afraid they will at that rate. Oh yes, I put down my name! It is a whim that will blow over very soon, and it is just a trifle anyway."

Very few members of the fancy department even heard of the plan; they were busy making pincushions for the fair and did not often meet the other class. But the original scheme widened. The ten met one evening at Jennie's call in her room; she had a plan.

“I’ve been thinking all the week, girls, and praying over it. Don’t you believe we could each give an evening a week to the library?”

“Oh, dear, yes; two of them if there was money in it! I’m becoming interested and mercenary.” This from Sarah Potter.

“Well, why don’t you each go into business?”

“Why don’t we what?” unbounded amazement in tone and manner.

“Go into business,” repeated Jennie. Then she laughed. “I’ve been thinking; and I find there is some one thing that each of you can do, and do well. Why not get up an evening class, one evening a week, and give the result to the library fund?”

“Bless your dear heart! What an idea! There isn’t a thing in life that I know how to do!”

“Yes, there is. Don’t you know, Trudie, that you make better cake for the festivals than any of the fancy cooks? People always say so, and I know two girls this minute who would be delighted to learn. I believe you could have a large class.”

“To learn to make cake? What an idea!”

“It is a good one, isn’t it, girls? I’ll tell you, Trudie; I was praying about our library this very morning, and I asked the Heavenly Father to give me an idea; and just then the Emmons girls came in. They expect company, and they were dreading all the work there would be to look after. Sadie said if it were not for cake she wouldn’t mind, but she never had success, and it gave her

the blues to think of having to attend to it. Just then it flashed over me this whole plan, and I knew it was an answer to my prayer."

"Oh, Jennie, Jennie! Cake making and praying are too far apart to get mixed in that way. Do you really thing God attends to such things?"

Then it was time for Mrs. Jones. "Why, dear me!" she said. "Don't you know your Bible? 'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do *all* to the glory of God.' If he is to be glorified by our work, it is likely he knows a good deal about it."

"You can't glorify God by making cake."

"Can't? Then I should like to know what business you have spending your time making it. There's the direction."

"If you can turn cake into library books, Trudie, I should say the way was plain." This from Mary Brooks.

Then Nettie Brooks: "Come, Trudie, take your cake and move out of the way. This is a splendid notion, but what in the world can I do? I know how to sell fancy goods, and sort colors, and bear all manner of impudence from ladies who tumble them over, but I have no colors to sell."

"Oh, Nettie, I thought of you! Look at your lovely handwriting. Think of that winter when you took lessons to help the writing teacher pay her board, and said you did not know what in the world you learned for. It may be that God had you do it for just this time; and, don't you think, I know three scholars for you. I've had ever so many calls today."

“Put her down,” said Hannah gravely. “She’ll get scholars; Jennie had prayed it all out for her. I know what I can do; I can teach decimal fractions. I’ve been at it all day, and I think I could teach them to a post. But the question is, where is the post?”

“Mr. Nelson is willing to send his chore boy to an evening class if one is started; and Mrs. Silverton is willing to send both the Brewster boys.”

“I shall teach an evening school and teach decimal fractions, and circulating decimals at that. Every scholar shall circulate around a new Sabbath-school library before another year. I begin to see floods of daylight.”

Do you think this scheme came to naught? Not in a single instance. During the long winter evenings, the cake classes, and the soup classes, and the writing classes, and the dress-cutting classes, and the arithmetic classes were busy and enthusiastic.

“I suppose Jennie prayed them all there,” said Sarah Potter thoughtfully, when, after a night of heavy rain, they met to compare notes and found that all could report progress. It grew to be their working motto, “Jennie prayed us through.” They worked carefully; if Jennie was praying, the work must match the prayer.

“Girls,” she said to them one night, “I’ve been thinking. Hannah, you dear child. Bud says he begins to understand how to divide; he thought he would never know. He said the carrying business bothered him always until last night you made it as plain as day. Can’t you teach him how to carry himself over bodily into the service of the Lord?”

Said Hannah with amused voice but tearful eyes, “Oh, you blessed little fraction! I’ll try! I truly will.”

“We must all try hard,” Jennie said. “It is God’s chance for us each. It grows on me. The library will come; I feel sure of that, but so much else will come if we teach for his glory. Oh, girls, it is blessed to work for him! I cannot do it, but I am glad to say over and over again, ‘They also serve who only stand and wait.’ I can only lie and wait, but I pray for the workers.”

“Ah,” said Hannah, “foolish child! She doesn’t see that she is the hub, and we, nothing but the spokes in the wheel!”

They went home strengthened. There was more to do than merely to secure a Sabbath-school library; and there was more done. It was about this time that the fancy department counted over its nineteen dollars and two cents, and wept!

Well, the winter hasted away; spring came and passed, and the workers worked steadily, quietly on. Almost anything that takes a year to do is done quietly. The mere surface talkers always get through talking early in the year, and conclude that because they are tired of the subject it has, therefore, dropped. Very few people even took time to notice the regularity with which their pledge was presented to them and their ten cents claimed. Those who noticed it said with a patronizing, and somewhat pitying, smile, “So you are not tired of that little effort of yours yet, eh? It reminds me of the old fable of the bird trying to carry away the sand on the seashore. Well, every little helps, and I am sure every effort is commendable. Our library is certainly a disgrace.”

This class, having encouraged (?) the workers, calmly shouldered the “disgrace” and went on their way thinking no more about it. And the ten-cent pieces accumulated.

New names were constantly added. Most of Nettie Brooks’ customers in the fancy store signed to please her; she was so accommodating they all liked her. The high school girls signed because Miss Wood was interested in it, and all the scholars liked Miss Wood. And a whole army of people signed because poor Jennie, lying always on her white bed, was pleased to have them, and it was “very little to do for one so afflicted.”

This same Jennie, as the days went by and the little iron bank in which she kept her money grew full and must needs be emptied again, had another plan, which involved taking the minister into confidence. So one day, a little before the spring opened, he came and sat by Jennie’s couch, and they talked long together. And at the next meeting of the “Decimals,” which by tacit consent had come to be considered their pet name, he was present; and there was more talking, and the minister’s wife and the minister’s mother were received into confidence.

Not long thereafter came an express package to the ministers door—books; but nobody thought anything of that, ministers were always buying books. There was a certain upper room in the parsonage, clean and sunny, and destitute of furniture, save shelves and chairs. The shelves had been crowded with newspapers, but one day they gathered themselves into systematic bundles and took their silent way to the attic; they had been superseded. The shelves

were dusted and treated to a row of new books in tasteful bindings. Thereafter the “Decimals” spent many leisure moments in the upper room of the parsonage, admiring books. People wondered occasionally why those girls in Mrs. Jones’s class were running to the parsonage so much. Mrs. Marshall Powers explained the mystery by saying she supposed the pastor and his wife were trying to get an influence over girls of that class. The pastor heard it and laughed and said to his wife that the fact was that the girls of that class were getting a great influence over him; he wished they were multiplied in every church in a tenfold ration.

And the days passed and more express packages came; and on one or two occasions certain packages went back again, for the committee on selection was very choice and very cautious.

Chapter 4

There came a day toward the close of summer when the Penn Avenue Church called a congregational meeting.

The object thereof was to discuss not a Sabbath-school library—their hopes in that direction had sunk below zero. Neither the fancy department nor the choir would venture a pin cushion or a song. Not a matron could be coaxed to offer a suggestion. Nobody dared say “cake” or “oysters” aloud. The subject under discussion was a new carpet for the church parlor. One was sadly needed; indeed, no more church socials could be held until the parlor was refurnished because no matron could be found who would preside as hostess.

It was voted to secure means for a carpet forthwith. Then did the chairman of the library committee delight the hearts of the carpet committee by announcing that they had unanimously voted to place the funds raised toward a new library in the hands of the carpet committee to use at their discretion, inasmuch as there was no present prospect of a library, and the amount raised would be such a trifle compared with what would have been needed for that purpose.

Then arose a cloud that presaged a storm. The funds were raised for the purpose of securing a library. What right had this committee to vote them away? Could they not be placed in the bank until such time as the needed amount was secured and then used for their legitimate purpose? Tongues were numerous now and waxed eloquent; differences of opinion were marked and were urged with energy. The cloud, at first no bigger than a man's hand, bade fair to spread over all the congregation and involved them in a party squall.

Then up rose the pastor. The long weeks of silent action were over; the time for speechmaking had come. It was true that the funds under discussion had been raised toward the purchase of a new library; it was also true that without a general vote to that effect, the committee would not be justified in turning those funds into another channel. At this point the belligerents who desired a new carpet and meant to have it at once looked disgusted; and the belligerents who desired a new library and meant to have one sometime, if they could get it, looked complacently defiant and affirmed with nodding heads that they should never, no, *never*, vote away that sum of money for any other purpose under the sun!

But the pastor had more to say; also, he had something to do. The congregational meeting was held in the Sabbath-school room, and just behind the pastor was the great handsome library case, closed and unoccupied for many a day; for, to the honor of the Penn Avenue Church, be it written, they had not left the old library

to lie in dust on the shelves, but had selected, and mended, and recovered such of the books as were deemed worthy of being missionaries and freighted them to a Western Sabbath-school.

That was accomplished during the pin cushion and tidy fever, when expectation ran high over the immediate prospect of re-peopling those library shelves; but, as you are aware, the hopes centered on fairs and festivals had been vain, and the library shelves were vacant and dust covered. So thought every person in that church that afternoon save ten.

"I have something to show you," said the pastor, and, as if by magic, those handsome doors swung open, revealing rows upon rows of books—unmistakably new, handsomely bound, delightfully large, many of them. Tier upon tier they rose. It took but little arithmetic for those familiar with the library case to discover that there must certainly be more than three hundred books.

"Three hundred and forty-five!" said the pastor, reading the mathematical calculations all over the room. "Handsomely bound," and he took one in his hand, "duly marked and numbered," and he opened to the flyleaf and read, '"Penn Avenue Sabbath-school Library. No. 7.'"

What did it mean? Where did they come from? How were they obtained? Nobody spoke, yet these sentences seemed to float all over the room, so distinctly were they written on the sea of eager faces.

“I can tell you about them,” said the pastor. “Yes, they are new, every one of them, and they are ours if we vote to accept them. I have very little doubt but that we will accept them, for they were bought by our own money which we had deliberately and in sound mind dedicated to that purpose.” He further explained that the money was procured by a system of decimal notation not so thoroughly understood as it ought to be; it had long been known that ten times one were ten, but the power of the number ten divided into tenths, and circulating freely and repeating themselves after the peculiar manner of decimals, was not generally understood or appreciated. We were indebted to the rising generation for many things, and not the least among them, in this church hereafter, would, he thought, be the exposition of the power of circulating decimals.

Had the pastor suddenly become insane? What in the world was he talking about? The opposing forces forgot their opposition and were lost in a common curiosity. Why were people looking over to those girls in Mrs. Jones’s class? What had *they* to do with it?

Hark! The pastor was speaking again. He had forgotten certain statements that he was to make. One was that these books were not evolved from cake and pickles, nor yet from tidies and slippers; but were the representation of the value of systematic offerings and systematic work done by individuals and individually devoted to this cause. Another was a request that, for reasons which would be better understood in the future than they

now were, the library be named the Jennie Stuart Library. And still another was the announcement that, as the library pledges held good until the signers erased their own names, the collectors would still continue their duties, hoping, by this means, to render any future leanness of library shelves an impossibility in Penn Avenue Church.

Light was beginning to dawn, albeit it was still much obscured by fog. The Jennie Stuart Library. She was one of Mrs. Jones's girls. Decimals—One, two, three—Well, there were just ten of them; it had not been noticed before. But how could *they* have secured such a library as that? Could it be possible that the little ten-cent affair of theirs had grown to such dimensions!

I suppose it is needless to tell you that the threatened storm blew over and smiles and congratulatory speeches ruled the hour. The decimal class received a vote of thanks, which overwhelmed them with blushes; their suggestions were adopted by a unanimous vote. Penn Avenue rose to the acknowledgment of the fact that the only proper way to manage a Sabbath-school library was to have a standing committee to supply and add new books in monthly installments.

Of course, the opposition to the appropriation for the new carpet was withdrawn, and gracefully, too. Everybody shook hands with everybody and congratulated themselves and the world generally, and said, "Who would have thought that such trifling subscriptions would amount to anything!" And, "They were sure

those girls deserved a great deal of credit." And, "Who were they, anyway?"

It is true that Mrs. Marshall Powers said it was a queer way to manage business, and there ought to have been a committee of selection. She was sure she *hoped* the books were worth reading! But even she was *almost* satisfied when she had examined them.

And so, at last, Penn Avenue Church had a new library.

"We have lost our motive power," said the girls, laughing a little, as they met together in the evening to talk things over.

"I'm afraid," said one, "it will be humdrum work now. It was such fun to ask people for their ten cents and see some of them look bored, and some look like martyrs, suffering, in order that we might learn the folly that was in us."

"Yes," said another, "now that it is all out, and the glorification has begun, I shall grow tired and ashamed of collecting money. There will be so much said and so many questions to answer. I'm almost sorry we promised to continue."

"Oh, you wretches!" said Mrs. Jones. "What is the use in being sorry about anything when Susy Perkins has learned to make cake and keep her temper in the bargain? And Alice Burns can make her own dresses and means to work for something besides her own self hereafter; and poor Bud is going to join the church tomorrow and be a minister, for anything *you* know? The library is the very least of it, you ungrateful creatures!"

The girls laughed again, but with tender notes in the laughter. "Oh, we know it," they said with shining eyes. "That part of it is

lovely, and we are glad to go on. But we are afraid the library business will grow commonplace after this. We must ask Jennie to give us something that will lift it up."

Dear, thoughtless girls! Even then He was preparing that which would forever lift the Penn Avenue Library above the commonplace!

It was only the next afternoon that they were summoned, the class and their teacher and the pastor, to Jennie's room to meet a guest whose presence has power to hush all other interests. The "King of Terrors" he has been named; but there was no shadow of terror anywhere about that room, least of all on the peaceful face of the one who lay on her white couch with a spray of late blossoming roses in her hand. Yet they had gathered to say good-bye.

The circle was to be broken; the central figure, as they loved to call her, had been called. They were very still; there was no sound of weeping in the room. Tears would have seemed out of place in view of the shining of that face on the couch.

"Girls," she said, breaking the hush; she was not looking at them; her eyes were resting on a heavy gold band which encircled her finger. "Girls, I have been thinking," the same simple words with which she had been wont to preface her sweet and helpful thoughts to them during all the days gone by. It struck them like a knell. Was is possible that this might be the last time? "I have not been sure about this ring until today. There was a time when I thought to take it into the grave with me; but why should my poor

worn-out body be decked with a ring? It will not need it in the resurrection morning; I will not let this ring lie in the dust and wait. I will leave it to work while I go away to rest. Girls, some of you knew Kent Pierson? You did, Nannie? Yes, and you all know he is in Africa today, working for Christ. But you did not know that I was to go out to him, did you? When he put this ring on my finger, I thought I would surely be well enough to go in another year. But I am going to heaven instead, and I have been thinking that our ring should do some of my work for Africa. Will you take it, girls, and change it into books for the library? Books about the needs of the heathen and the work of the missionaries, and tell all the boys and girls who read them that those books are Kent Pierson's voice, calling them to service."

The tears came then, and low sobbing. Not from fair Jennie; her eyes were bright and her face smiling. "Don't cry," she said gently. "You need not. For me, you know, all the bitterness is passed. I am too near home to cry. I suppose it will be hard for Kent for a little while, but then, it will soon be over, and heaven is as near to Africa as it is to you."

They kissed her silently that day—their voices were not to be trusted-and went out softly, as from the guest chamber of the royal palace. Nearer they were to the invisible presence than they had known. That very night, "or ever she was aware" Jennie saw the "shining of his face." No noise, or sound of wings, or rush of music, at least so far as those left behind can tell:

They watched her breathing through the night,
   Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
   Kept heaving to and fro.

Their very hopes belied their fears,
   Their faces their hopes belied.
They thought her dying when she slept,
   And sleeping when she died.

The plain gold band was exchanged for books, and it came to pass that an upper shelf in the Penn Avenue library was cleared and held as sacred ground for those five books. Never had books been more carefully chosen than these, and as the pastor marked them, “The Kent Pierson Library, presented by Jennie Stuart, gone to heaven,” he almost wondered whether there hovered over him angel witnesses to see whether his part of the commission were well done.

It lies around us like a cloud,
The world we cannot see.

One of the five, the first in the row, was that wonderful record of a consecrated life. *Crowned in Palm-Land;* and the pastor, as he read the sweet, and simple, and unutterably pathetic story of that life of love and service, and finally of that lonely death with not a human eye to watch the last triumph of faith as the feet touched the valley of the shadow, felt that such a book would do faithful work for Jennie and for Africa.

Barely five days after Jennie had been laid to rest in the Hillside Cemetery, that consecrated book began its work for foreign missions; the story of which can only be told when we all meet where they will never say foreign missions anymore because the foreigners will have become fellow citizens.

"There are ten of us still," said the girls, looking through tears at the consecrated upper shelf. "Jennie is working with us."

And they felt, every one, that the Penn Avenue library had received its "lifting up."