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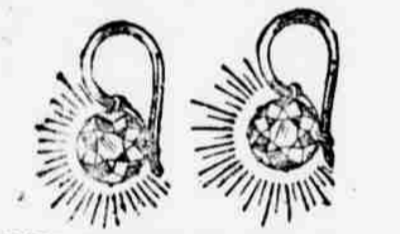
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# MALCOM KIRK.

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BY CHARLES M. SHELDON,

Author of "In His Steps," "Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert  
 Hardy's Seven Days."

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## CHAPTER X.

**DOROTHY PROVES HERSELF A HELPER.**

Next day Malcom Kirk had the melancholy pleasure of taking Philip Barton out to "The Forks." He had recovered sufficiently to be moved, and Malcom borrowed a spring wagon and placed him in it comfortably. He complained of feeling queer in his back, and the doctor told Kirk before he started that it would not be at all unexpected if Barton should be paralyzed. "In fact, Mr. Kirk, my examination makes it almost certain that the boy will probably never recover so as to use the lower part of his body. It seems probable that the wheels of the hay wagon passed over him after he fell out."

The prairie was one vast burned stretch of plain, with the road gray and distinct through it. Philip Barton lay back on the cot that had been arranged in the wagon box and looked up at Malcom with a white, strained face as he drove slowly along over the smooth, elastic prairie road.

At first Malcom drove on silently. The boy seemed to be quite comfortable, but unwilling to talk, and during that is a good deal more than I did for you."

Philip had listened intently. But something in Malcom's manner kept him silent.

"That wilderness where I was lost," continued Malcom softly as his early life before he entered the seminary came back to him, "was the wilderness of sin, and the wild beasts were my passions, and the friend who saved me was Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the lost, who gave himself a ransom for many."

There was not a particle of cant or attempt at preaching in what Malcom had said. It was so simple, so natural, that the boy on the cot hardly realized at first what the minister had said.

When it dawned upon him that Malcom had spoken of his own conversion, he closed his eyes, and his face twitched under his emotion. When he looked up again, Malcom had turned and was looking down at him.

"Do you mind if we pray here?" said Malcom.

Philip moved his head, and in his eyes a look of expectant wonder grew. Malcom stopped the horses. The prairie was wide and desolate and black, not a sign of life anywhere; the atmosphere was still; the sun shone over it all; the town lay distinct in the rear distance. And somehow it seemed as if Kirk spoke to God close by. He sat with his hands on his knee and looked out into the line of the horizon.

"Father in heaven," he said, "we do not know what it all meant when the Lord came to this earth and lived and suffered and died, but we know enough to feel sure that love for us was what made him do it—love for sinners. We are always asking something, Father, but what we want now is what thou dost want. Save another life—this one here that is in so much need. His body has been saved for a little while from physical death. Save his life for all time, from eternal loss. His mother is praying for him. All heaven is anxious for his salvation. If thou wilt show us what more we can do, dear Lord, we will do it. But lead him to thyself, for we cannot forgive his sins or keep him from them. Thou canst do it if he will let thee. For the great love of Jesus to us we give thee all we have, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Amen!"

He gathered up the lines and went slowly on, and for the next mile not a word was said. Then Malcom, hearing the boy move to change his position a little, turned and looked down at him.

"Do you believe that, Mr. Kirk?" he asked, while his lips quivered.

"What?"

"That 'all heaven is anxious for my salvation?'"

"Why not? The book says 'there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.' Why shouldn't heaven be anxious to have us repent?"

"I don't know, but—"

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." He cares as much for you as for any soul on earth," said Malcom gently.

Philip was silent after that during the rest of the drive. He lay with his eyes closed, and Malcom did not think it wise to talk any more to him, but a continual prayer went out of his heart for another sheep gone astray.

When they drove up to the house at "The Forks," Mrs. Barton came running out. She helped Malcom lift Philip into the house, and as the boy was being lowered upon a bed he reached up his arms and put them about his mother's neck. The poor woman sank on her knees and with her face buried on the breast of her boy sobbed out her heart's joy at his homecoming. When Kirk was ready to return to Conrad, she held his hand, reluctant to have him go.

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Kirk. I owe you more than I can tell. The fire carried off our grain stacks in the field out there, and we lost several of our sheds, but I would gladly go out into the world a beggar if Phil would only turn to God and give up the drink. And you and Mrs. Kirk have your great burden. I am selfish to add mine to it."

"Bear ye one another's burdens," quoted Malcom and added instantly,

the first two miles hardly a word was spoken. Then Malcom stopped the horses and bent down to arrange some part of the cot. When he had finished and gathered up the lines to go on again, young Barton spoke.

"You were one of the men that found me and brought me into the town, Mr. Kirk?" The boy had asked it twice before.

"Yes," replied Malcom, smiling. "You can't imagine what a great joy it was to me when we found you."

"And Carver was the other man?"

"Yes."

"That seems queer to me. How did he happen to go with you?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. He seemed eager to go."

"Was he had been drinking?" The question came with evident painful effort.

"Yes, I think he had," replied Malcom frankly. "But he was sober enough when we found you."

There was silence, and Malcom gathered up the lines again and started on. The day was very still, and there was a great cloud coming up in the southwest which promised rain before night.

"It was a great thing for you to do," said Philip slowly. "I'll never forget it, Mr. Kirk."

"It was a very little thing, my boy, compared with what was done for me once," said Malcom gravely.

"What was that?"

"I was lost once in a great wilderness and surrounded with wild beasts. I was sick and starving and unable to save myself. Night was coming on, and every minute added to my danger. Just when I had given myself up as lost and the wild beasts had gathered around me in the growing darkness a friend suddenly appeared. He saved me, but in doing it he lost his own life."

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." So he left her standing there, looking after him, comforted.

He went back to Conrad and faced the situation there with a courageous heart and an outward cheerfulness for Dorothy's sake more than anything else. There was no attempt on the part of either of them to disguise the fact that the prospect before them was one that would try all their Christian courage and faith. The winter was coming on, the crops had been almost a total failure owing to the hot winds, and the little boom of which Wilson had spoken in his letter had collapsed, leaving the town in a wrecked condition financially. The fields that had been planted to corn stood dry and hard, unfit for fall plowing, and even the storm that broke over the town that night was only local and had no far-reaching result on the general situation.

It was also a new and in some respects a terrible condition that faced

the poor woman sobbed out her heart's joy at his homecoming.

Dorothy. For the first time in her life she knew that she was poor. Malcom Kirk had never known anything else. Poverty was a heritage to him, and while it was full of discomfort and privation it had no terror. But Dorothy had for the first time on coming to that Home Missionary field felt the touch of grim and stern economy. Her little dowry saved from the wreck of her father's failure had been added to Malcom's small salary, but the illness of the baby and the constant calls on their help from various sources had eaten into this little fund, and it was gone. Dorothy's aunt would gladly have helped, but her own resources were shortened by business failures within the three years that Dorothy had been west. Now the loss of the parsonage with nearly everything it contained was added to all the rest.

"Little woman," said Malcom that evening after he had been to "The Forks," "we have very little left except our good looks, and the balance is in your favor."

They were sitting in the little room kindly offered them by one of their church members and had been talking over the situation with the frankness that had always characterized their married life.

"I used to read in the novels," said Dorothy, with a peculiar smile, "about the girl who married the poor but gifted young man and spurned the rich

and highborn sutor, but I never thought I should be material for such a story myself."

Malcom looked at her, and deep in his heart there was a battle going on that he hardly dared to analyze. He only knew that he longed somehow to be able to grapple a physical, tangible something and fight it for Dorothy's sake and prove to her that he could be more than a poor man.

"Malcom," Dorothy said as she came over and sat down on a stool near by and put her hands in his great brown palm, looking up at his sober, anxious face—"Malcom, once for all, if I need to say it, I am not afraid of being poor. I trust you. You do not think I will add to your burden by being weak at such a time as this? Was it not through sickness and health, for better, for worse, that I vowed to give you all I have and am until death do us part?"

Malcom Kirk caught up his wife, and a great shadow swept out of his soul, and a great burden fell off his heart. He had not really doubted Dorothy's ability to face any possible event in their lives, but he eagerly welcomed her loving unconditional statement of it.

Nevertheless he began his struggle for a new church and parsonage during the weeks that followed with vague questionings of his choice of a place for his life work. He no longer had any fears for Dorothy's sake, but he found himself blighting to give her what he could not give from any layman's foresight in the Home Missionary field where they now were.

It was at this time, with this experience personal and peculiar to his married life, that Malcom Kirk, fighting against great odds, began a work in Conrad that had the farthest possible results on its after life. This work was an attempt to unite the various churches in a combined and constant crusade against the saloon. Matters were nearing a crisis for the temperance cause. All over the state meetings were being held. The agitation for a prohibitory amendment was growing into such proportions that men who felt the pulse of the common people predicted victory. And still the whisky forces sneered at the possibility of an amendment.

Kirk succeeded in uniting the five other churches with his own in a series of union meetings during the week as well as on Sundays. His own church secured for the use of worship a little storeroom on the main street while waiting to hear from the Church Building society to which they had made application for a grant of \$500 to help rebuild church and parsonage.

Together with all this work in the town Malcom was constantly sent for to speak in the district schoolhouses. His reputation as a temperance talker was growing. He often went out during the week and spoke to crowded houses, returning late at night.

It was during his absence from Conrad on one of these schoolhouse campaigns that one evening four letters came to him, and Dorothy opened them, as Malcom had always asked her to do, in order that answers might be sent in case he was detained from home several days at a time.

The first letter was from the superintendent of the Home Missionary society and read as follows:

Rev. Malcom Kirk, Conrad, Kan.

Dear Brother—It is with great regret that the society is compelled to announce to many of the churches who are commissioned on the frontier that, owing to a lack of funds in the New York treasury, it will be impossible to forward the quarter's salary when due. It is with the greatest possible regret that I am obliged to make this statement, but it is unavoidable. It is probable there may be a delay of three or four months before the money can be sent. Meanwhile your church must be urged to do all it can for your support until the weather church respond to the special appeal now being sent out by the society in behalf of the missionaries at the front. I am, your brother, etc.

The second letter that Dorothy opened was from the Church Building society expressing great regret that, owing to excessive calls from other fields, the society did not have the funds to spare at present to assist the unfortunate church at Conrad, but hoped to be able to do so at some future time, etc.

Dorothy hesitated before she opened the next letter, and in spite of her effort at self-control a tear fell with a hot splash on the envelope. She knew only too well what a real disappointment the letters she had already opened would be to Malcom.

The third letter bore a Boston postmark and was from the editor of a religious paper. It acknowledged the receipt of an article sent by Malcom some two months before and retained it with a view to publication when the press of matter already accepted would permit, etc. Payment for the article would be sent when it was published.

Dorothy's face flushed with pride at Malcom's success as a writer, and at the same time she could not help feeling that if the editor of that paper only knew how much they needed the money he would pay for the article when he accepted it instead of keeping the author waiting until it appeared in print. But she was unfamiliar with the customs of magazines and newspapers in this respect, and she rejoiced, after all, that her husband had been able to write anything that such a famous paper wanted.

The last letter also bore a Boston postmark, and after reading the letter Dorothy laid it down and rose to walk the little room, while her cheeks burned with excitement and her eyes flashed with a light that had not been seen in them for many days. The letter read:

My Dear Mr. Kirk—For several months we have been considering your name in connection with a vacancy on our editorial board and have at last decided unanimously to ask you to assume the place of assistant under the chief editor of the magazine. We have been led to this decision by our knowledge of your work on the German scholarship three years ago and also from a perusal of several articles recently written by you and printed in the Boston Review. In addition to this we know of your work in Conrad through Mr. Wilson, your old seminary classmate, who last year was on our board for a time. We make

you this offer and hope you will see your way to accept. The salary will be \$2,000 a year, with opportunity of increase. The press is as powerful as the pulpit in these days, and you may be sure your usefulness will not be shortened or lessened by making this change. We await your reply, hoping it will be favorable to us.

Here followed the name of a person who was at the head of one of the most influential papers published in New England. Dorothy knew well enough how much Malcom thought of the man and how often he had expressed his admiration for the character of his literary work.

She picked the letter up and read it through again. What was there in Conrad, this wild, uninteresting western town, struggling against a financial depression and a future as well as a past failure of crops? How could Malcom ever rise to any place worthy of his powers in this little church, so feeble and so poor? "It is true," she found herself saying; "it is true he chose the ministry as his life work, and he has often said he would not do anything else. But—"

She went to the door and stepped out on the little porch. It was after 10 o'clock and a frosty night. Down the main street she could see the lights from the saloons. There was a brawl going on in front of one of them, but that was common—a group of cowboys galloping down the street, firing their pistols as they came. That was not unusual. Dorothy shuddered. What of that promise she had made with Malcom to try to redeem the lost of Conrad? Was it worth while, after all? It would be so much pleasanter to live in Boston. They could have things and live as other people lived, and after awhile her husband would become famous, and—

"Well, little woman, won't you take cold out here?"

It was Malcom, and he led her into the house again. She had not seen him come. He had unexpectedly finished his engagement and been able to return much sooner than he expected.

She saw as he came in that he was very tired, but was making a brave effort to appear cheerful and contented. She hesitated about showing him the letters, but he had already seen the open envelopes on the table, and his hand went out toward them. Dorothy stood between him and the table.

"Will you read them in the order I say?" asked Dorothy.

"Certainly. Must I get ready for had news?" he asked soberly.

"It is for you to say," Dorothy answered. And she gave him the letters in the same order that she had opened them and stood watching his face hungrily as he read them.

[TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.]

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