

Under the Crust

Temptation Brings Us All to a Common Level

By May Needham Elliott

A STOOPED figure, wearing a hat which flopped up and down about his head as he walked, sauntered up the path which led to a comfortable stone house beyond an orchard. His coat sleeve, which was ripped the full length of his arm, dangled in the air. A long string, torn from the lining of the sleeve, hung down almost to his ankles. Half-dried mud clung to the old shoes; from the worn toe of one, part of his own anatomy peeped.

He began to whistle, which act immediately drew attention to his face. Not a great deal of its expression could be seen, for the uncut growth of beard was very dark. About his mouth grew a blacker ring—whether it was caused by the puckering of his mouth, or by dirt, would have been hard to say.

Suddenly he stopped. There before him stretched a sleeping man. He gazed at the figure a moment and then stole very quietly past toward the house. He knocked upon the door. All was stillness. He started back down the gravel path, but had gone but a few steps when he heard the door cautiously opened. Looking around quickly he saw the curly head of a little girl presenting itself to view.

"Hello, there!" he called before she could shut the door.

His cheerful, open tone evidently reassured her for she asked, a trifle cautiously, yet not fearfully, "What do you want?"

"I want to see your mother, I reckon," he smiled.

"My mother ain't here, Mister."

"Where is she? Can you call her?"

"Somebody told me she was in heaven, but daddy says she's over there," Her forefinger pointed up the valley toward the church, with the weeping willow trees around it.

"I see, little girl." The man's voice contained a note of sadness which did not escape the child, young as she was. He

turned and rapidly made his way to the place in the orchard where he had seen the man. The tramp discovered that he was still asleep and gazed at the face intently. Asleep, William Alexanders showed none of the pride and cruelty which he cultivated in the lines of his face in his waking moments. Relaxed as it was then, it pictured only grief, disappointment and weariness.

The tramp sighed. "I'm tired too," he said softly to himself. He flung himself on the grass under a neighboring tree. A big juicy apple lay within his reach. A pile of them was not far away. His hand slowly reached toward the apple, hesitatingly picked it up. Looking at it hungrily, the tramp felt of its plump red sides. He raised it almost to his lips, then quickly threw it from him. "I am almost a fiend when I'm hungry," he muttered between compressed lips. He gazed about languidly at the orchard, the houses, and then sank into a half doze.

The sun threw a warm, lazy light over the little valley. To the north, a high hill stretched itself up, while opposite it, another strained its weight first to the southward, and then, bending back, reached long arms toward its sister incline. Thus there was formed a cavernous indentation near the top of the cliff, where shadows assembled at all hours of the day. Here and there only did a stray bit of sun creep through, to cast stolen glances upon the dark carpet of flowered moss.

The stone house of William Alexanders nestled close up to the south hill; at that moment, a flock of sparrows squatted upon the roof and cavern echoes converted their chatter into one continuous scream—a weird break upon the stillness of the autumn afternoon.

Suddenly the voice of a child rose above the clamor of the sparrows. "Daddy!" The tramp could see the little girl making her way around the piles of apples. "Oh, dad-

dee-ee!" She prolonged the last part of the word until it was almost as much of a chirp as is the sparrow's song.

William Alexander stirred, yawned, then sat up. "Daddy!" again sounded the voice and the man called: "Yes Margerite; what is it, dear?"

"Why, I wanted to tell you there was some one at the house a while ago—why—there he is now, daddy—there!"

The tramp saw her point toward him and he also arose.

"What do you want?" demanded William Alexanders after taking an inventory of the man's clothes. That question was the same which his daughter had asked, but the tramp started at the difference in the two tones beneath it.

"Well, why don't you answer? What may you want with me?" There was a slight emphasis on the words "you" and "me" as if to express the utter absurdity of two such contrasting characters having any business with each other.

"I reckoned on getting a bite to eat, partner. I haven't had anything since—"

"Not much! Why don't you work like I do, and then you wouldn't have to go hungry!"

"I don't work," the tramp answered slowly, "because no one will let me work."

"And why won't they?" roared William Alexanders, his love for argument coming to the surface. "I'll warrant there's a reason back of it."

The tramp looked away. "Yes, there's a reason," he said dreamily. "I met up with a temptation once that was too much for me. I yielded. I got in wrong. And I can't get out." His lips shut with finality on the last word.

Alexanders looked at him triumphantly. "I knew it! And people know that, young man. People can tell that you are weak—that you—as you say—yielded; and although they may pity you they can't afford to have you around. You might steal or—"

The tramp looked at the apple he had thrown away and smiled whimsically. Then his face grew grim. "Mine was no ordinary temptation, though, I'd have you know, I fought with desperation but—"

"None of them are ordinary with fellows like you! You—"

"Good day, partner," sighed the tramp as he turned to go.

"Here, wait a minute, you! We'll have this out before you go. Why do you dare to call me 'partner?' I have nothing in common with you and I resent that—"

"I beg your pardon but you do have something in common with me." The tramp spoke through shut teeth and his eyes burned with the intensity of his feeling. "When God created such fellows as you, he did not give you so much the head start of fellows like me that you are different from us under the crust." He hurled his words into the very face of Alexanders. "Have you been tested with the supreme test? Have you? Well, you will be! Adversity will come to you some time. Temptation will not always pass you by. I tell you," he shouted this, so fierce was the well of feeling within him, "I tell you, temptation will not always pass you by!"

The echo came from the cabin above: "Pass you by!" And the echo of the echo dimmer still: "You by!"

Alexanders said no word; the tramp stood glaring at him, while little Margerite, who had listened with speechless astonishment to the conversation, part of which was beyond her comprehension, trembled. She felt, intuitively, that the spell should be broken somehow, so she stooped down, picked up the very apple which the tramp had thrown away and said tremulously:

"Won't you have an apple, mister?"

The question brought him to himself again. "No, thanks," he replied curtly, and turning, strode rapidly away.

"Take it, you fool!" shouted Alexanders, and he threw the apple at the retreating figure. The hill threw back the word "Fool!"

He took Margerite's hand, and led her to the house. They were both singularly quiet that afternoon and evening. Finally, the little girl kissed the man good-night and crept off to her bed. He sat in his chair by the window and the moonlight threw a soft, gray haze over him. How long he sat there, he did not seem to care. Soon a small barefooted figure in a night-dress crept into the room and climbed into his arms. She pulled his shaggy eyebrows. "What you thinkin' about, daddy?"

"About that tramp, Margarite."

"I've been thinkin' about him too, daddy," She kissed him on the neck. "And say, daddy, I—I wish we'd give him something. I don't know what makes me wish it, but I do. I—"

"So do I," her father broke in almost huskily. "We will next time, Margarite." She curled down in his arms and watched the moonlight filtering through the window screen. "Daddy, I'll be seven years old, to-morrow. Mrs. Grimes told me."

His arms held her closer. "My, you're getting to be a woman, aren't you? A great big girl, eh?"

"How old are you, daddy?"

He sighed. "Forty-five."

"My, that's a long time to live, ain't it? Don't it seem like a long time?"

"Sometimes, dear—like a long, long time. But run along to bed, now, and we'll see about a birthday party to-morrow."

But long after the child had gone he still sat there. It may be true that the face is an open window showing the inner soul, but only God can read it truly.

At last he arose, walked to the door of his daughter's room, and then crept cautiously to her bedside. There he knelt, and the one who can read the minute details of people's lives, saw tears upon the hard man's face.

The tramp had strode rapidly down to the river. Dogs had barked at him and little children had ran away to hide as he passed. A few minutes later he might have been seen dragging his canoe from its hiding place, but before he climbed into it, he turned toward the little valley and shook his fist.

"Adversity is coming all right! You think you are safe, and you can just think so, for all I care! They used to say that your precious little valley used to be part of the river bed—and it may be again! Just wait and see how much the old dam is worth to you! Sometime a storm is coming. . . ."

His words were fulfilled sooner than he could have expected, for that very night, fierce thunder clouds; black smoking wind clouds, teased the heavy rain storm which was coming faster and faster toward the little valley.

In the early dawn the little town presented a far different sight from that of the day previous. The church spire and the second story of a house here and there was all that could be seen of buildings. The water twisted the tops of the weeping willows until it seemed that they must be pulled up by the roots.

Alexander's was one of those houses which had the second story above water; and how the tramp did it, he could not have told, but he finally drew near to it with his boat, and a few hours later reached an old cabin far down the river into which he went, followed by Alexanders, who carried Margarite. It was a little less than a miracle that they came through safely, but miracles do happen sometimes. There was nothing to eat. Black woods stretched out behind them, in which, Alexanders knew was the still blacker swamp. Many were the lives which had been lost there. Before them rushed the river. In their exhausted condition neither of them could expect to reach the nearest town alive that night. The following morning the tramp said:

"Well, I guess we're in for it. I'd hate to risk our lives by crowding all three of us into the boat; one of us will just have to stay here, the other take the girl and go down to New Desden. Of course, we might all get there safely, as we got here yesterday but I don't think you care to endanger your daughter's life again as it was then."

"No, indeed," said Alexanders, with a slight shiver, "that was terrible."

"Then, one of us must stay here."

Alexanders was silent.

"Do you know the river very well?" asked the tramp, "Are you used to rowing? Do you feel sure that you wouldn't risk your daughter's life in the attempt to get her there?"

"No," said Alexanders, after a pause. Should he trust his daughter in the hands of a tramp, a tramp whom he had insulted, who might take her life even? On the other hand, he knew that if he should undertake the task it would be certain death for both of them.

"You had better go, then," he remarked as an afterthought.

The tramp read his thought, and to calm his mind, said:

"Do you think that I would risk my own life to save both of you, just for the sake of harming you? The only thing which you need to fear is hunger, and I am pretty sure that I can be back with something for you to eat before you starve. That is," he continued, "I am tolerably sure that I can. We will get ready now and start. Of course, it may not take as long as we might expect. It won't take us as long to get there as it will for me to get back for I will have to fight the river on my return trip."

The tramp looked steadily into Alexanders' eyes. "Sir," he said, "there are three things in this world that I love. One of them is my canoe, which was given me by old White before he died. He was really white, God bless him. Another is—well, I don't need to tell you that—and a third is a piece of cake which was given me the other day by a woman who—well I don't need to tell the whole story. I want to keep it for a souvenir. It is on that old shelf over there. I wouldn't have mentioned it but for the fact that you might think it an ordinary piece of cake and eat it. There are circumstances connected with it which make it very dear to me and I want to keep it. You understand. I will bring you something to eat when I come back."

After he had gone with Margarite, Alexander sat down upon an old stump and waited for the night to come. He was very hungry, and he wondered, even then, how he could ever live through the two or three days during which he would have nothing to eat.

The next day he allowed himself to look hungrily at the shelf where was the piece of cake. But he did not go near it. The succeeding day he unwrapped the paper which was around it and longed for it.

"If I had only not said those words to the tramp the other day about temptation, I would eat it. I guess—no, I will not give him the satisfaction of knowing that I gave up." He carefully replaced the paper, and sat on the old stump again.

But there came a time when he felt that the whole world did not matter. There was only one thing that mattered. That one thing predominated everything else. His stomach longed for satisfaction. Everything

else was of little consequence. His pride—where was it? He didn't care. As long as that craving, gnawing; that awful empty feeling was there he could not even think. He pulled his feet toward the shelf, reached for the cake, tremblingly unwrapped it, and raised a crumb of it to his lips. It was hard, but that did not matter. He could swallow it, and that was enough.

Suddenly, before he had broken anything from the main portion of it, he stopped. His own words seemed ringing in his ears. "You yielded."

"It's only a piece of cake," he said to appease the voice.

"But it's all he's got besides the canoe and he loves it. Perhaps it's a wedding cake. . . ." In his mind he saw a mound with weeping willows bending over it. He reached back toward the shelf. But his stomach—it would not yield. Slowly, almost mechanically, he brought it back to his lips. A few minutes later, not even a crumb of it remained. . . .

That evening, just after Alexanders had thrown himself down on the hard floor to sleep, the tramp came. The first thing which the starved man asked was:

"Have you something for me to eat?"

He jerked the food from the tramp's hand, and ate as greedily as he knew he dared under the circumstances. The tramp waited patiently until he had finished. Finally the hungry man looked up and asked:

"Is Margarite safe?"

"Yes." He hesitated a moment. "Have you finished eating?"

"I guess so." Alexanders was looking down. He was thinking of the cake. He wondered how he could have been so weak as to have eaten it. His appetite was satisfied now. And he could not even then understand himself when it had mastered him. Strange that we can't realize a thing keenly only in the moment when it is with us. . . . The tramp was gazing at the shelf. He spoke in a low voice.

"Did you—eat my cake?"

"Yes." Alexanders looked towards the floor.

The tramp smiled a little sadly. "You're welcome, partner," he said.

Alexanders glanced toward his poor benefactor. A smile, partly of shame, partly of

understanding, and partly of sympathy, was on his lips. Slowly he reached out his hand to the tramp.

"Thanks. . . Partner," was all he said, but the outcast knew that he now had a friend.

Be Careful of Your Speech

Don't speak ungrammatically. Study books of grammar and the writings of the best authors.

Don't pronounce incorrectly. Listen carefully to the conversation of cultivated people; and consult the dictionaries.

Don't mangle your words, or smother them, or swallow them. Speak with distinct enunciation.

Don't talk in a high, shrill voice, and avoid nasal tones. Cultivate a chest voice; learn to modulate your tones.

Don't use profane language. Don't multiply epithets and adjectives; don't be too fond of superlatives. Moderate your transports.

Don't repeat scandals or malicious gossip. Don't sneer at people, or continually crack jokes at their expense; cultivate the amenities and not the asperities of life.—By Censor.

Analyzing a Man

When the Psalmist inquired, "What is man?" he was doubtless unaware as well as unmindful of the chemical constituency of the human body which long since his day has been carefully analyzed as follows: "An average man of 150 pounds contains the constituents found in 1,200 eggs. There is enough gas in him to fill a gasometer of 3, 649 cubic feet. He contains enough iron to make four ten-penny nails. His fat would make seventy-five candles and a good-sized cake of soap. His phosphate content would make 8,064 boxes of matches. There is enough hydrogen in him in combination to fill a balloon and carry him above the clouds. The remaining constituents of a man would yield, if utilized, six teaspoonfuls of salt, a bowl of sugar, and ten gallons of water." Moreover, from an anatomical point of view, man is "wonderfully made," as the sacred penman wrote. A physiologist declares: "A man has 500 muscles, one billion cells, 200

different bones, four gallons of blood, several hundred feet of arteries and veins, over twenty-five feet of intestines and millions of pores. His heart weighs from eight to twelve ounces, its capacity is from four to six ounces in each ventricle, and its size is five by three and one-half by two and one-half inches. It is a hollow, muscular organ and pumps twenty-two and one-half pounds of blood every minute. In twenty-four hours it pumps sixteen tons. It beats about seventy-two times a minute. In one year an average man's heart pumps 11,680,000 pounds of blood. The heart is a willing slave, but sometimes strikes—and it always wins."

North and South

The *Southern Review*, of Ashville, North Carolina, in its initial number gives the following, under the heading: "Propaganda that may revive secession,"

"The Southern farmer gets up at the alarm of a Connecticut clock. Buttons his Chicago suspenders to Detroit overalls. Washes his face with Cincinnati soap made in a Pennsylvania pan. Sits down to a Grand Rapids table. Eats Chicago meat and Indiana hominy fried in Kansas lard on a Saint Louis stove. Puts a New York bridle on a Kentucky mule fed with Iowa corn. Plows a farm covered by an Iowa mortgage with a Chattanooga plow. When bedtime comes he reads a chapter from a Bible printed in Boston and says a prayer written in Jerusalem. Crawls under a blanket made in New Jersey to be kept awake by a South Carolina dog—the only home production of the place."—*Christian Science Monitor*.

WHAT I SAW IN MY DREAMS

(Continued from page 113.)

Nephi and his brethren back to Jerusalem and get the "brass plates." Being a part of the divine method of revelation, the restoration would not have been complete without this sacred gift. It is one of the numerous "manifestations" of the Spirit whereby the things of God are revealed to man, psychologists and higher critics to the contrary notwithstanding.