

## CHAPTER XXVII. A SACRED CONCERT

In spite of Miss Cornelia's new point of view she could not help feeling a little disturbed over the next performance of the manse children. In public she carried off the situation splendidly, saying to all the gossips the substance of what Anne had said in daffodil time, and saying it so pointedly and forcibly that her hearers found themselves feeling rather foolish and began to think that, after all, they were making too much of a childish prank. But in private Miss Cornelia allowed herself the relief of bemoaning it to Anne.

"Anne dearie, they had a CONCERT IN THE GRAVEYARD last Thursday evening, while the Methodist prayer meeting was going on. There they sat, on Hezekiah Pollock's tombstone, and sang for a solid hour. Of course, I understand it was mostly hymns they sang, and it wouldn't have been quite so bad if they'd done nothing else. But I'm told they finished up with Polly Wolly Doodle at full length--and that just when Deacon Baxter was praying."

"I was there that night," said Susan," and, although I did not say anything about it to you, Mrs. Dr. dear, I could not help thinking that it was a great pity they picked that particular evening. It was truly blood-curdling to hear them sitting there in that abode of the dead, shouting that frivolous song at the tops of their lungs."

"I don't know what YOU were doing in a Methodist prayer meeting," said Miss Cornelia acidly.

"I have never found that Methodism was catching," retorted Susan stiffly. "And, as I was going to say when I was interrupted, badly as I felt, I did NOT give in to the Methodists. When Mrs. Deacon Baxter said, as we came out, 'What a disgraceful exhibition!' I said, looking her fairly in the eye, 'They are all beautiful singers, and none of YOUR choir, Mrs. Baxter, ever bother themselves coming out to your prayer meeting, it seems. Their voices appear to be in tune only on Sundays!' She was quite meek and I felt that I had snubbed her properly. But I could have done it much more thoroughly, Mrs. Dr. dear, if only they had left out Polly Wolly Doodle. It is truly terrible to think of that being sung in a graveyard."

"Some of those dead folks sang Polly Wolly Doodle when they were living, Susan. Perhaps they like to hear it yet," suggested Gilbert.

Miss Cornelia looked at him reproachfully and made up her mind that, on some future occasion, she would hint to Anne that the doctor should be admonished not to say such things. They might injure his practice. People might get it into their heads that he wasn't orthodox. To be sure, Marshall said even worse things

habitually, but then HE was not a public man.

"I understand that their father was in his study all the time, with his windows open, but never noticed them at all. Of course, he was lost in a book as usual. But I spoke to him about it yesterday, when he called."

"How could you dare, Mrs. Marshall Elliott?" asked Susan rebukingly.

"Dare! It's time somebody dared something. Why, they say he knows nothing about that letter of Faith's to the JOURNAL because nobody liked to mention it to him. He never looks at a JOURNAL of course. But I thought he ought to know of this to prevent any such performances in future. He said he would 'discuss it with them.' But of course he'd never think of it again after he got out of our gate. That man has no sense of humour, Anne, believe ME. He preached last Sunday on 'How to Bring up Children.' A beautiful sermon it was, too--and everybody in church thinking 'what a pity you can't practise what you preach.'"

Miss Cornelia did Mr. Meredith an injustice in thinking he would soon forget what she had told him. He went home much disturbed and when the children came from Rainbow Valley that night, at a much later hour than they should have been prowling in it, he called them into his study.

They went in, somewhat awed. It was such an unusual thing for their father to do. What could he be going to say to them? They racked their memories for any recent transgression of sufficient importance, but could not recall any. Carl had spilled a saucerful of jam on Mrs. Peter Flagg's silk dress two evenings before, when, at Aunt Martha's invitation, she had stayed to supper. But Mr. Meredith had not noticed it, and Mrs. Flagg, who was a kindly soul, had made no fuss. Besides, Carl had been punished by having to wear Una's dress all the rest of the evening.

Una suddenly thought that perhaps her father meant to tell them that he was going to marry Miss West. Her heart began to beat violently and her legs trembled. Then she saw that Mr. Meredith looked very stern and sorrowful. No, it could not be that.

"Children," said Mr. Meredith, "I have heard something that has pained me very much. Is it true that you sat out in the graveyard all last Thursday evening and sang ribald songs while a prayer meeting was being held in the Methodist church?"

"Great Caesar, Dad, we forgot all about it being their prayer meeting night," exclaimed Jerry in dismay.

"Then it is true--you did do this thing?"

"Why, Dad, I don't know what you mean by ribald songs. We sang hymns--it was a sacred concert, you know. What harm was that? I tell you we never thought about it's being Methodist prayer meeting night. They used to have their meeting Tuesday nights and since they've changed to Thursdays it's hard to remember."

"Did you sing nothing but hymns?"

"Why," said Jerry, turning red, "we DID sing Polly Wolly Doodle at the last. Faith said, 'Let's have something cheerful to wind up with.' But we didn't mean any harm, Father--truly we didn't."

"The concert was my idea, Father," said Faith, afraid that Mr. Meredith might blame Jerry too much. "You know the Methodists themselves had a sacred concert in their church three Sunday nights ago. I thought it would be good fun to get one up in imitation of it. Only they had prayers at theirs, and we left that part out, because we heard that people thought it awful for us to pray in a graveyard. YOU were sitting in here all the time," she added, "and never said a word to us."

"I did not notice what you were doing. That is no excuse for me, of course. I am more to blame than you--I realize that. But why did you sing that foolish song at the end?"

"We didn't think," muttered Jerry, feeling that it was a very lame excuse, seeing that he had lectured Faith so strongly in the Good-Conduct Club sessions for her lack of thought. "We're sorry, Father--truly, we are. Pitch into us hard--we deserve a regular combing down."

But Mr. Meredith did no combing down or pitching into. He sat down and gathered his small culprits close to him and talked a little to them, tenderly and wisely. They were overcome with remorse and shame, and felt that they could never be so silly and thoughtless again.

"We've just got to punish ourselves good and hard for this," whispered Jerry as they crept upstairs. "We'll have a session of the Club first thing tomorrow and decide how we'll do it. I never saw father so cut up. But I wish to goodness the Methodists would stick to one night for their prayer meeting and not wander all over the week."

"Anyhow, I'm glad it wasn't what I was afraid it was," murmured Una to herself.

Behind them, in the study, Mr. Meredith had sat down at his desk and buried his face in his arms.

"God help me!" he said. "I'm a poor sort of father. Oh,

Rosemary! If you had only cared!"