A STEWARD OF MYSTERIES

By Jane Ellis Joy.

CHAPTER I.

In the Deeps.

Trimly buttoned in a fine spring overcoat, Henry Ford, florid, fair and smiling, pushed open the door of his brother's room. "Well, Cyril," he said, almost gaily, "will you bid a fellow good-by?"

Cyril laid the Bible that he was reading on the top of the bureau and rose to his feet. A slender youth he was, with what strs. Browing calls "the shadow of a kiss" arching his upper lip. The "shadow" might have been neightened by the present pallor of his face, which intensified also the darkness of his hair and eyes. He was greatly agitated. "Good-by, Henry—and good wishes," he said, controlling his voice with difficulty and extending his hand. A futile effort at a smile exposed the white, even teeth.

"This is rough on you, I know; but I'll make things right one of these days, Cyril," said the older brother, consolingly. And, picking up his grip which lay at the door, he hurried downstairs.

Cyril heard the back door open and shut. He stepped to the window overlooking the backyard and saw Henry, accompanied by their father, pass out of the little swinging iron gate, the two men taking their way along a side street that led to the railroad station.

This method of egress from the house was in keeping with the secret nature of Henry Ford's departure from Myrtlebridge for the West, where he hoped to begin life anew. The story of his fall is only a variation of the old story of a trusted employe abusing the confidence reposed in him.

When the exposure came, Mr. Ford went promptly to the rescue of his son—pledging the family home, a very good property at Rowena—to pay the Trust Company that was Henry's security. This act of the father's ended the prosecution and gave Henry his freedom. Very little about it got into print, and, save for those immediately interested, Myrtlebridge directly forgot the little sensation.

From his window Cyril watched the two figures as long as they re- ther did not seem to think so too; mained in sight. He was fighting back the conviction that had at first, when he learned the truth, overwhelmed him, namely: that the thing that had happened was worse that death. That his brothat, on the contrary, Henry carried himself so jauntily and unconcernedly through it all, mystified and pained Cyril. It was not that he wished his brother to suffer. Oh, no, not that! Cyril hardly understood his own complex feelings. Five years older than himself, Henry had until a few days ago been his ideal. The ideal was shattered, and the dust of the wreck hung over the family like a cloud.

Just six months of College life Cyril had known. Oh, the dreams that he had dreamed during the winter! On Thursday the telegram had come. Cyril must strike out as a bread-winner.

When his father and brother passed out of sight, Cyril let his eyes rest on the backyards that stretched from left to right. Bay-windows,, with here and there a conservatory, stretched from the second stories opposite. Rowena was a suburb of Myrtlebridge. Lately it had been absorbed by the city. He could see boys in one of the yards leaping with a pole. At one of the back gates a maid-servant was receiving homage from her "young man." Grass was springing up in the yards, but the buds on the shade trees were still tightly cased in their winter coats of mail. Further away larger skeleton trees reached above the mansard roofs, and between two buildings a tall church steeple shot up against the pale yellow and pink clouds in which the March sun was lingering.

To Cyril there was no message of hope in the winter-bound buds or the northering sun. Nature was cold and impersonal and voiceless. And of God, what did he know? He had been trying to get consolation from his Bible when his brother interrupted him to say farewell. In the Book he had read: "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee." He had called and called.

Yet, until the blow had fallen, he had considered himself religious. In certain fervent moments he had felt a decided yearning to be a minister. Oh, to lead people to better lives! To reveal the truth! To be, like Moses, a messenger from Jehovah! "Ah," he thought now as he paced the room in the twilight, "it is all over. I know now I never could have been a preacher. I'm not sure that I believe in—"

It was Minnie who interrupted the negation. "'Cyril," she said, "come downstairs and help to com fort mother."

He had supposed his mother had gone to her room to take a nap. He hurried to her side with an apology, and added soothing words.

"Nobody can say that anybody lost a cent by Henry!" began Minnie with brave defiance, nestling against her mother's rocking chair.

"Henry was a good son—always so thoughtful about me," sighed Mrs. Ford, regretfully. "He intended to put back all the money he—borrowed."

The open partiality of his mother and sister had never been resented by Cyril. "We'll just have to be brave and stand together, and do the best we can," he said. How he wished at that moment that he was religious! Oh, to be able to w[illegible] [illegible]rt from [illegible]est some[illegible]es and the heavens for his l[illegible] himself!

Later he took a s[illegible] th his father, and the tw[illegible] under- in full stood one another a[illegible] over accord talked the su[illegible] The home would be [illegible]oken with the selling of the house. Already an offer for it had been made. Mrs. Ford and Minnie were going South on a long visit to Mrs. Ford's sister. The change would help them to get over the shock. Mr. Ford would continue his business—that of a traveling salesman.

"I'm sorry for you, Cyril," said the father. "Had you concluded that you wanted to be a clergyman?"

"Oh, no, father. That was only a boyish fancy. I'll get a job of some kind in town. Don't you worry about me, father. I'll give you a lift with the general expenses. By the way, did Henry have some money—enough to live on for awhile—when he gets to his destination?"

"Yes, I looked out for that."

In less than a month the Ford's affairs had been adjusted, and the erstwhile college student was domiciled modestly in the back attic room of a boarding-house in Clinton Square. The low-ceiled room, four flights up, with its old-fashioned dormer windows looking out on roofs and chimneys and the sides of sky-scrapers, was a great change from the accomodations that Cyril had been accustomed to. In business hours he might have been seen in the department store of Kishbaum Company selling cheap jewelry, beaus, crosses, and the like. Apparently he had recovered equipoise. The employment had proved a blessing, in that it compelled him to put painful thoughts out of his mind for a certain number of hours every day.

But it was not possible altogether to escape them. He fancied one day that an acquaintance passing through the store—a young man from Rowena—did not care to speak to him. Perhaps it was only a conjecture resulting from his extreme sensitiveness; the young man may have been in a hurry. Yet Cyril felt hurt because his recognition did not receive more than a nod. The two had attended the same church and had sat in the same Bible class.

After that Cyril was shy of taking the initiative with acquaintances. If he chanced to see one walking along the store aisle he became absorbed in adjusting the trinkets on his counter. "If folks care for me they'll have to make the advance," he thought, "I don't propose to be snubbed."

This attitude intensified his feeling of strangeness in his new environment. He was courteous to the boarders in the house, but as neither men nor women of them fitted his ideals, he had little to say at the table conversations. Unintentionally he was getting out of touch with everyday life and everyday people. A trifling incident in the summer suggested this to him.

Sunday dinner was in progress when red-haired Miss Kenelly said smiling across a dish of fruit, as Cyril took his place opposite her: "Mr. Ford, you ain't religious are you?"

"Give it up," was Cyril's answer, as he condescended to smile feebly.

"I want to know, because"—the girl giggled as she glanced at Mr. Batton, seated at the end of the table—"well, I bet a quarter that you weren't."

"I'm afraid you are rash, Miss Kenelly," said Cyril, with another condescending smole, as he took a roll and broke it in half. "What grounds had you for such an opinion."

"Why, religious people, they believe in the Bible, and sort of follow it."

"Oh, do they?"

"Of course," said the girl. "And it says in the Bible, 'Laugh with them that laugh, and weep with them that weep.'"

There was a general laugh.

"Well, it's something like that," maintained Miss Kenelly, flushing under her red pompadour. "And Mr Ford, he never laughs—at least I never saw him laugh until just now."

The only one in the house that Cyril cared to talk with was Mr. Gradly, the occupant of the third-story front room. Mr. Gradly was like Cyril, in that he did not join in the nonsense talk at the table, nor did he play cards—one of the amusements that the boarders were much given to. He was older than Cyril, by at least ten years. Cyril fancied that he had some family trouble, as he never mentioned relatives. One evening, late in the autumn, he asked Cyril to come to his room to see his window-garden. "I've been experementing, Mr. Ford," he explained. "I planted a variety of seeds in the spring, and there has been a struggle going on all summer among the plants. Do you know plants kill one another? Yes, they encroach and push, and finally the strong crowd out the weak—just as with human beings."

"I see," said Cyril, examining a tangle of little withered leaves under a spread of thrifty ones that belonged to the victorious specimen. "There isn't much brotherhood among plants."

"Brotherhood! Men have been playing the game of brotherhood for a great many years—playing it as little children play make-believe. But perhaps you want to find out things for yourself; I'll say nothing more on that topic. Do you find the city a cheerful place?"

"Not very. Still I have no complaint to make. But I have been used to more company."

"'One can be mighty lonesome in a big stupid city."

Cyril was lonely. He felt that he was situated peculiarly—that he ought not to encourage people to be friendly with him, lest the secret that he had to guard might compromise him, or in some way lead to embarassment. He felt safe with Gradly, as the latter was reticent about his own affairs. The two took long walks together in streets and lanes and parks, seeing the city in its beauty and its shabbiness. Yet all the time Cyril was vaguely conscious of soul-hunger. Oh, for an opportunity to join in the work of making world something better than a scene of struggle between selfish competitors! To have that yawning chasm that kept him out of touch with people bridged!

"What is needed is higher ideals," he said one winter night to Gradly, as the two encountered a line of men and women coming out of a low resort. "If search after the hidden could be directed to the discovery of worthy things, what might not be accomplished! Isn't this common passion for mystery a token that that which will satisfy is somewhere?"

"Upon my word, Ford, that's so!" said Gradly, as if struck with the idea. "Why, you ought to be preaching Christ, instead of selling beads and crucifixes!"

"I wish I was as sure of that as you seem to be," said Cyril. "I used to attend church pretty regularly, but somehow I've lost my hold. I've been at church just three times since last Easter."

Another Easter was nearing. The spirit of spring was whispering messages in the tops of the park trees. Skies grew blue, and a thunder shower now and then washed the streets. Florist shops and market places were abloom with lilies and tender roses, hydrangeas and tulips. In stores one saw Easter eggs and the cunning rabbit, the butterfly and little peeping chickens doing duty as revealers of the mystery that life is eternal.

At Kishbaum's, Cyril Ford stood under a canopy of paper lilies selling jewelry and trinkets. There was a brisk demand for articles of religious significance.

A young man a year or two older than Cyril stopped at his counter to examine medallions. He looked at several, but seemed to decide against them all. "I'm looking for something that would do for souvenirs for an Easter Sunday-school class supper," he said to Cyril, when the latter was disengaged. "Our class of young men expect to entertain a class of young ladies next week in our Sunday-school room. I would like the little remembrances of the event to be suggestive in some way of Easter."

"We have some small lily pins in silver," said Cyril, when he had considered a moment. He reached under the counter and drew out a velvet-lined case containing the pins. They were small, but finely wrought and delicate looking.

The Sunday-school class supper young man took one up in his carefully-kept hand and examined it with apparent pleasure. The price was on the little card attachtached.

"They are just new—one of our specials for Easter," said Cyril.

"'I think this is just what I want," said the other. "I want forty of them."

Cyril sent a cash boy to the stock room with an order for more pins. While waiting, the customer said a few pleasant things about the Easter trade. Somehow the talk led to Easter music, and from that to churches.

"Are you working in some Bible class?" asked the customer.

"No, I don't belong to any."

"No? Well," with a pleasant smile, "come and look in on us at All Souls'. We want some new members; but you won't be pressed to join us if you don't feel inclined. I can assure you of a warm welcome and good company." pressed Cyril favorably. He looked the young man in the eyes questioningly. He was interested. "Will you kindly tell me what you mean by a 'working' class?" he asked. "I went to Sunday-school until I was about sixteen. None of our classes did anything but sit and listen to the teacher."

"Oh, we've given that kind of teaching up for some time at All Souls'. Our two adult classes are organized. We do more than listen to the teaching; we take a hand in it. We discuss the lesson and ask questions about it. The work is attended to generally by committees. We do some philanthropic work outside. One year we established a free bathroom and swimming pool for boys. Then we cooperate with the different schemes of the church, or whichever one—or two—appeals most to us. Part of our work is the getting of new members and spreading the New Movement idea to other classes in the city."

They both saw a customer waiting.

"I'm very glad I met you. Good-by," said the purchaser of the lily pins, as he received his change.

Cyril thrust into his pocket the two cards that the young man left on the counter. A heightening of color was the outward sign of his awakening to the knowledge that he—even he—might take a hand in activities that up to now had seemed remote. When he was free to examine the cards he drew them forth with a kind of curiosity. One was an ordinary visiting card bearing the name "William Whitman, Jr." The other was a large folding circular card giving the following information:

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(to be continued.)

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