

Written by Mr.
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Childhood Friend

THE BEGINNING OF THE DEW DROP SOCIETY.

The sun was low down the sky on a beautiful afternoon in late September of the year eighteen eighty-six. Macie Stevenson and my younger brother Joe and I were riding home from the school we attended at the old New Hope Church, - four miles from where we lived. We rode two horses, who for all the meek and modest natures were famous in their day. She rode a horse named "Printer" who, to his many amiable qualities added that of being fond of very young chickens and would eat them if he had a chance and had to be watched. Joe and I rode a horse named "Morgan", famous for his sorrel hair and the number and prominence of his bones. These horses, their worse enemies would acknowledge, were at least safe for children, - in that they never did anything more malicious than stumbling and throwing you gently over their heads, - and that out of sheer laziness, - or stopping resolutely at whatever place took their fancy, and were quite indifferent to the switches applied by our helpless hands.

We had talked of everything - all three at once - never pausing a moment even to listen to each other, until at length for some reason that has never been explained, there was lull in the conversation. We rode along in silence for a moment or so, when from a clear sky and apropos of nothing: "let's have a society", said Macie.

"A what?" I said, being wholly unprepared for this thrust.

"A society", Macie repeated. "You know a society".

"What kind of a society? What for, and why and who" -

"O, a society", she said with evidences of disgust at my stupidity. "We've been reading a book called "The Westbrook Parsonage" and in it was a Society called "Dew-drop" and I think it would be nice for us to have a Society and name it "Dew-drop". "Don't you?"

"I sure do", I said, inspired not so much by the need of a society or any contribution it might make to the great public questions of the day, but by the romantic name "Dew-drop". It seemed quite sufficient to organize ourselves just for the purpose of being called "Dew-drop". The rest was as vague and indefinite as a dream, and mattered as little to us. From that until the time we reached home we talked of nothing else, - how nice the meetings would be, how it would help to fill up the hours at recess, and how when our larger brothers and sisters then at college would talk about their societies on their patronizing way, we could say: "Oh that's nothing - we've got one, too"! And the more we talked, the more fascinated we became with the idea, until with true feminine impatience "let's do it now, - tomorrow, - as soon as we go back to school" said Macie. "Sure", I said ready for anything now. "And let's don't tell anybody at home about it until we get it going, and give 'em all a grand surprise". Feeling no doubt that this would be the shock of their lives. By that time probably "Printer" stumbled and "Morgan" promptly followed suit and drove these ingenious ideas from our heads so effectually that they did not return until the next day.

But the next day they did return. At recess when we had played everything we could think of, the persistent idea of the day before came back into Macie's head, and she determined to carry it into speedy execution. She talked it over among the girls and demanded

that I should do the same among the boys and in less than ten minutes - accompanied by the sound of the piano which Miss Mell Lathan, our teacher was playing in the music room - the historic Dew Drop Society came into being. To be sure it was without form and void, and we had no more idea what our object would be, or how to proceed than if we had been a group of chattering apes instead of good, proper school children. But nothing daunted by such trivial details we proceeded; we gathered on benches and called ourselves "The Dew Drop Society", - and immediately found ourselves embarrassed as to what to do next. Then somebody remembered vaguely that societies had Presidents. "Let's have a President", said this ingenious person.

"Yes, and let it be Ella Sterling", added somebody else, - and then in a few minutes by popular acclaim, with or without her consent, Ella Sterling was made our first President, who no doubt has long ago forgotten the honor thus so violently thrust upon her. Then - what next? Should we be a literary society, a pleasure club or a political party, - should we be a band of anarchists, or revive the Ku-Klux Klan of former days? This minor question we were at a loss to decide. But all the same we were a Society and duly christened "Dew Drop" and that was enough for the moment. And with what pleasure and pride we told at home in the days that followed of the modern ideas prevailing in our school and how up-to-date we were, and how Erskine College and the rest had nothing on us. In our mad enthusiasm we met every day, and sometimes twice a day, - until it was eventually thrust upon us that we were without ^{for} motive or object.

We were helped later towards proper organization in a very remarkable way. Miss Mell Lathan, our teacher, soon began rehearsing

us for the Christmas entertainment that the school was to give, and among the plays that we were to produce was one called the "Jim-Town Lyceum", a play which represented the meeting of a literary society in the Western back-woods, and we all thought it very funny, - and it proved to be very helpful and in a way we had not anticipated. From this play we discovered the following points concerning the nature of societies in general: That every society should have a secretary whose duty it was to write up minutes; that the president should have the opportunity to say something, at least once in a long time, that motions should be properly made and seconded, instead of simply saying, "let's do so and so"; that treasurers were individuals that handled money where there was any and begged it where there was not; and that societies met at stated times and not only where there was nothing else to do or when we were bored to death. So we proceeded along these lines and elected a Secretary, Eunice Resborough, whose duty it was to write the minutes, and who half the time forgot to write them and the other half forgot to read them. Then a Treasurer, Burtie Brice, who though she entered on her office in all good conscience, when she was told that she was to handle money was still very much embarrassed by the fact that there was no money to handle, - and whose report with painful regularity was: "assets nothing, disbursements nothing".

This brought a new problem: We must have money - and from where? It did not occur to us that money usually came from the members, so we cast about to find methods of getting it from somebody else. We thought of dime readings, which sounded dry enough to kill the idea at its very birth; then of sleight-of-hand performances, in no one em-

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barrassed by the fact that none of us could do tricks, nor did we know of anybody who could. Then some one in a moment of inspiration conceived a brilliant suggestion: Write to President Cleveland to see if he would help us. His money or suggestions would both be welcome, especially his money. That was a clever scheme; it was the easiest and would give us standing in the community, - and best of all was a method of raising funds without any effort or sacrifice on anybody's part. President Cleveland was duly addressed, and was invited to become a "little pewdrop" on the stern condition, however, of paying as he entered, the initiation fee of one dollar. (It was five cents for less distinguished persons, unable to appreciate their privileges). This letter the President has not answered yet, and I suppose the historic little missive was found in the crowded pigeon-holes of the official desk when he died and we might picture the mortification to his heirs when they discovered that such a trivial neglect excluded them and their posterity forever from becoming little "pewdrops".

After this approval by our President, there was nothing else for it, - our parents must be held up and made to pay, - not for any particular purpose that we were then able to specify, but only that our Treasurer might have something to report. To our enduring consternation, they came nobly to the rescue, and in most cases no questions asked; but I am convinced that to this day it was a clear case of obtaining money under false pretenses, for they were under the impression that it was for missionary purposes, - and it is only to the fact that we never told them that the officers of the society are not this day amenable to the law and are liable at any time to be haul-

ed to prison and never to come out thence until they had paid the uttermost farthing. At any rate, we took the money and remained not "A Missionary Society", but just a "Society" - and then cared not hardly a maple leaf about foreign or home missions, or any of the great concerns of the church that our devout fathers and mothers seemed to have so much at heart.

But the money did at length go to just such a cause. First of all, I think because we could not think of anything else to do with it; most of the boys in the society were girls and so could not have baseballs and bats or anything belonging to athletics.

Then second, on account of Rev. H. B. Blakely, who shortly before that was called to our church, and came on the scene in the nick of time to save that money. He had heard of our efforts to organize a society, and being under the impression, as everybody else was, that it was a "Missionary Society", patted our ingenious little heads and told us we were good children, and that we ought to meet in the church. This idea was all the more readily received as the summer vacation was approaching, and there was no other place where we could conveniently get together, - so there we went, and as noiselessly as the daylight, we found ourselves changed into a regular religious body, a regular contributor to foreign and home missions, meeting in the church under the control of the session, and a large and, as we thought, an indispensable part of New Hope congregation.

This led in time to a most important and stimulating event: We got out names in the paper! Never, I fancy can any of these charter members forget that bright and auspicious week when the Associate Reformed Presbyterian came out and announced that among the

contributors to the cause of Missions in Mexico was ten dollars from the "little Dew-Drops", - and ten dollars in those days of hard times and scarce pennies was a most considerable sum, - as our parents had reason to know. But one thing dampened our ardor: We were called "Little Dew-Drops". The Dew-Drops we didn't mind, but Little was both incorrect and unfair. It was not the original name, which was simply "Dew-Drop", and should remain; and besides we did not care any longer to be described as little.

The boys had lengthened their trousers, and the girls were fixing their hair in more modish ways, and here and there among the older ones there were actually vague preparations for college. Dew-Drops we would remain therefore, - for they were pure, refreshing and beautiful, - but as for the "Little", - we would none of it! So the next time we appeared in the paper, the editor, bribed by the receipt of another ten dollar bill, called us by the dignified title of "The Dew Drop Society of the New Hope Church", and that we have ever since remained.

Of the season that followed, I have no immediate knowledge, as I was among those sent away to school, and not before I needed it. But I know that about this time our Society was very much indebted to a dear old lady, who was asked to "take charge" of us - who was very young at heart and whose gracious ways seemed to teach us that nobody need ever grow old. This was Mrs. Caldwell, mother of Mrs. Robert Simonton, and among whose many distinctions was that of being grandmother to the interesting Simonton family, who constituted no small part of our membership. She had the Society under her direction for several seasons, and tided us over the critical period of a change in membership when the charter members were all going away, and a new

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generation was taking our places and during which she saw to it the expanding energies of the organization was directed in proper and worthy channels; and if the Dew Drop Society should ever attain the dignity of erecting a memorial tablet to anybody, I hope it will be in honor of this dear patron of ours who helped us over the most critical stage of our existence.

Years came and went. The original members became college graduates, and a newer and younger generation has long since taken our places; who although they might not have felt the same sentiment towards it as those that brought it into being, yet fell heirs to all our enthusiasm and more, and has profited by our mistakes. And I am sure that to this day that not one of these charter members in recalling the first chapters of its history - when fond recollections present them to view - but breathes an inarticulate blessing on the Dew Drop Society, - of this generation and all that are to come in future years. *Just here*

And there is just one more thing: It surely must appeal to all of us as being divinely appropriate that she who first suggested the formation of this Society, - which proved at last to be of a missionary nature - should herself become its first representative on the foreign field - Miss Macie Stevenson. I wonder if the Dew Drop Society ever fully appreciated this peculiar honor? That one of the best known missionaries in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church should have been its original member. She presents to us an inspiring, if difficult, example to follow, and one that should call forth all of our best energies in the future.

And I wonder, too, if the time will ever come - for who knows what these giant days are bringing us - when the Dew Drop Society can undertake to be the main support of her who was its creator and so truly and honorably represents it.

If such day ever dawns, not only we, the first charter members, - not only New Hope Church, who nursed her in its bosom, - but the Christian Church at large, and I think, too, the angels in heaven, would all say with the utmost fervency: "God bless the Dew Drop Society".