

Please return to Miss Cady
281 Fourth Ave., Brooklyn

Alethea's Call

A United Offering
Story



Mrs. Cady

Alethea's Call

ALETHEA Dwight stood on the threshold and looked from the sign above the door to the tortoise-shell tablets in her hand. "Christian Home for Indigent Females," she read from the sign; "Mrs. Thomas S. Norton, 46 Bronson street," from the tablets, and puckers gathered between her straight black brows.

"This certainly is 46 Bronson street," she said, "but—a *Christian Home for Indigent Females*—why did Mr. Taylor send me here! However, here goes," and she rang the bell and asked for Mrs. Norton. Yes, Mrs. Norton was in, of course; she never went out—in fact, she couldn't. The young lady would find her two flights up, the third door on the left hand side.

Up those two flights ran Alethea with the question in her mind at every step, "Why did Mr. Taylor send me *here*?" At the third door she stopped and knocked, and when a voice answered within, there was Mrs. Norton, of course at home.

She was an old lady in an easy chair, who was looking toward the door with a smile of welcome, all ready for her guest. Alethea went up to her. "This is Mrs. Norton?" she began, hesitatingly; then, with more assurance: "I am

Alethea Dwight"; adding by way of introduction, "Mr. Taylor sent me."

The old woman's smile brightened; "I am glad to see you, my dear," she said; "sit down." And Alethea drew up a chair and sat down. She felt disconcerted; she felt that she must explain; but how could she begin? And this was far from being Alethea's way. But begin she must, for the old woman said nothing. She just looked at her and smiled. In fact Mrs. Norton had never had a visitor before, in all the ten years she had been in the Christian Home, with such a wealth of red brown hair, such deep blue eyes under such straight black brows, such a delicate nose and mouth, such a beautiful color, and all under such a marvel of a hat, and rising above so charming a spring costume. No wonder she was content to look and smile, and felt no need of words. But Alethea did not share the feeling. She had seldom been so uncomfortable and so sure that somebody should be saying something. Also she was there just to talk, so that somebody must be she!

"Mr. Taylor," she began again, "sent me," and again the old lady smiled. But this time she said: "I am glad he sent me someone so sweet to look at," and Alethea, who was used to compliments, and scornful of them, found herself pleased to find favor in this old woman's eyes.

"But I must tell you why he sent

me," she said. "He wants some of us young women in the parish to help about the United Offering, because next year is the last before it will be made, and he gave each of us ten names, and asked us to call, and see if the people knew about the offering and to explain it if they did not know, and to ask them to help. Yours is the first name on my list," said Alethea, "and that is why I came." And she stopped short.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Norton, and that "Well," as Mrs. Norton said it, meant, "Go on."

Alethea had in her hand a pretty bag, gay with gold and colored beads. This she opened, and took out a slip of blue cardboard, a printed card and some printed papers. "I don't know much about it myself," she said, "but these papers will tell. It seems that they want all the women in the Church to save up money for three years to give in a big offering at the end of that time. It is to be a thank-offering, Mr. Taylor said, made up of gifts one makes when one has something in particular to be thankful for." Here Alethea paused and the color deepened in her cheeks. She was thinking, "What nonsense I am talking to a crippled old woman in a charity home!" But Mrs. Norton only nodded her head, and said: "A thank-offering is a lovely kind to make, and it certainly is beautiful to have all the women making it together. What is it to be for?" she added.

“Mostly for training and sending and supporting women who go as missionaries. They can be very useful, Mr. Taylor says, as teachers, kindergarteners, nurses, doctors, and even in domestic science, or as musicians, among people in many distant places, and can help them often better than men can do. And they can even preach, the Rector says, which he thinks the best of all. He said they call it evangelistic work, and he said we must not forget to tell about that, because that is making our Blessed Lord known through the spoken word and through the life we live.” Alethea’s voice grew softer, as she said these words, and her face grew sweeter yet more serious, and she forgot to be self-conscious.

“The Rector told us we must read this card in every place and leave the leaflets and the box”; and she took the blue cardboard and put it into shape and set it on the stand by Mrs. Norton’s side—“and that, if the people we visit were willing, we could leave them, and come again in a week and see if they would keep the box and take a part in the gift. May I read the card?” And Alethea read:

“Resolved: That the United Offering of 1913 be given to the Board of Missions for woman’s work in the mission field, including the training, testing, sending and support of women workers; also the care of such workers when sick or

bright, and all of a sudden the thought came to her, 'Perhaps I might be a missionary sometime.' And years, years after, she was! Oh, when I read that," said Mrs. Norton, "I was so thankful for her; I just had to find something to put in my box."

Alethea stood up and held out her hand. "Thank you, Mrs. Norton," she said, "and good-bye. May I come again?" And she opened the door of the Home and went down the steps and through the little park across the way. She looked up through the branches of the trees and the summer sun shone on her, and she seemed to see something far away hidden behind the fair blue sky.

And what treasure sufficient could Mrs. Norton have found for her blue box, could her eyes have looked through time, as Alethea's were looking through space, and she could have seen in the years to come, in a far-off land, a tall and beautiful woman, with thoughtful brows and tender eyes, in the midst of a great company of girls, and could have heard her say: "And you might never have known your little mother, and she might never have had the joy of telling her dear children of the things of Christ, if one day, long ago, she had not paid a visit to a poor old woman in a charity home."

Copies of this Leaflet (U. O. No. 9) can be had from the Woman's Auxiliary, Church Missions House, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York.