

FACES WE SELDOM SEE

* III—THE PERSONALITY OF "PANSY"

BY DENNY CORNELIUS JOHNSON



WRITERS of marked ability and with great earnestness of purpose must, of necessity, leave some imprint of their personality in their works. This is pre-eminently so of Mrs. Isabella M. Alden, and all who have known and loved her as "Pansy,"

will find in her the realization of the ideal they have formed of her character through reading her books.

There is in and about her the same high standard of right and wrong; the same deeply-rooted principles; the same unselfishness of life and loving sympathy; the same bright, happy Christianity, and, above all, the same entire consecration to the Master and His service which breathes through all her writings. With her they are not mere theories, existing only on paper and in the author's mind, but are the rules that govern her own daily life.

Mrs. Alden is not one who, dwelling in the valley, tells of the imagined beauty of the mountain tops around, but, instead, tells of the beauty she knows is there; and, being a firm believer in practical Christianity, lends a helping hand to those who find the way strewn full of rocks and pitfalls. But so



MRS. ALDEN

quietly and unostentatiously is this done that often the weary, footsore traveler does not recognize the hand that smoothed this bit of path, or pushed aside that jagged stone. For one of the strongest, and one of the most attractive elements in Mrs. Alden's character is her modesty and shrinking from publicity of any kind, and her humility in regard to the great good her works have accomplished, for self-ennoblement has no part in her work, but, instead, she has consecrated intellect, as well as heart and life, to the service of Christ.

Perhaps the ideas of the personal appearance of "Pansy" may be as many and varied as her readers themselves. All may not have pictured her as she is, a woman of less than medium height, with dark-brown hair and eyes of a like color. No photograph can ever do her justice, because it can give but one of the many expressions of the bright, earnest face, its changing lights being one of its greatest charms. The accompanying portrait, though one of the best and truest ever taken, while it shows the well-shaped head, with its wealth of brown hair, and the low, broad forehead, gives but a glimpse of the sweet, firm mouth, and fails entirely to tell of the clear, fresh complexion, and of the roses in the cheeks. It is altogether powerless to record the tender thoughtful expression in the eyes, and can, at best, only hint at the many others those brown eyes are capable of. For they are expressive, most wonderfully so! They are at all times full of sincerity, whether brimming over with merriment, filled with tender love for the dear ones in the home and dear friends outside the family circle; glowing with enthusiasm over some cause in which all their owner's sympathies are enlisted, or when lighted up with the perfect faith and trust that comes only from a "life that is hid with Christ in God."

Mrs. Alden is a little near-sighted, and this imperfect vision makes it very difficult for her to remember faces, unless seen so often as to become familiar. In manner she is unassuming, genial, refreshingly natural, and possessed of a gentle dignity that, while repelling undue familiarity from effusive strangers, yet invites confidence from any who may need her help or sympathy. Dress is a matter of secondary importance to her, but she is always neatly and tastefully attired. She has an especial preference for certain shades of gray.

It would be difficult to find two people better suited to each other, more tenderly devoted, or more thoroughly one, in all their interests and aims, than are Mrs. Alden and her husband, the Rev. G. R. Alden; and it would be

hard to imagine a cheerier, brighter home than theirs in Washington. Dearly loving her home, Mrs. Alden is deeply interested in all that pertains to its comfort and happiness, and it is here, as perhaps nowhere else, that the beauty of her life and character are most plainly seen, and one can appreciate more fully than ever before the secret of her power over young people; for, beside the keen insight into human nature which makes her books so enjoyable, the moment you hear her clear, infectious laugh, you realize how thoroughly young at heart she is.

To say that "Pansy" is a busy woman scarcely seems to express it, for the demands on her time and talent are constant and almost innumerable. Her morning hours are spent at work in her cozy study, uninterrupted, unless by something very important. A good idea of what Mrs. Alden considers "very important," may be gathered from the fact that however crowded with work or pressed for time, she is always accessible to her family, or to callers, and her great love for children is evinced by the cheerfulness with which she will pause in the midst of her work, to meet a child who has come to visit her.

While engaged with some household duty, she frequently plans and thinks out the details of her stories, and when she enters her study it is always with her thoughts clearly defined and under perfect control; that they flow with ease and rapidity is attested by the steady click of her type-writer keys, which can be heard through the closed doors.

The chance remark of a friend will sometimes cause the main outlines of a story to flash upon her mind, and filling these in at her leisure it may be two or three years before she begins to write it. Few corrections are required in her manuscript, and it is never copied. The incidents are seldom founded entirely on facts, but her characters are often drawn from life, and are sometimes a combination of different types, or often the characters of some in whom she has become interested, wrought out and developed, as she thinks they ought, or as she fears they will. Aside from being engaged in writing some serial, there are short stories for children for the magazine of which she and her husband are the editors; Sabbath school lessons to prepare for primary scholars, and the many articles promised to different periodicals. Being thoroughly in sympathy with the Christian Endeavor movement, heartily and earnestly interested in all missionary and temperance work, there are urgent appeals from all these different organizations that she will take some part in the programme of their monthly, quarterly, or annual meetings, and once her consent is gained, there are short sketches appropriate to the occasion to be written for reading at that particular time, for it is almost an impossibility to induce her to make a "speech" or "address." Added to this is the great amount of mail received from young and old, strangers and friends, in all parts of the country. As much as possible of this is left in the hands of her secretary.

Mrs. Alden is a frequent sufferer from severe headaches, and because of this her afternoons are usually devoted to rest and recreation. And in the winter evenings a glimpse into the back parlor of the Alden home reveals a most enticing picture. For at this time, unless some engagement interferes, "rest and recreation" mean gathering about the table and listening to Mrs. Alden's sweet-toned voice as she reads some restful, entertaining story from one of her favorite writers, as Dr. Holland or Hawthorne, George MacDonald, Amelia Barr, or James Whitcomb Riley.

Mrs. Alden has but one child, a son, whose future, from present indications, is bright with promise, as he inherits from both father and mother their good and intellectual qualities.

As soon as the first warm days of spring have given place to the more sultry ones of summer, the family hasten away to their retreat in the shady groves of Chautauqua.

To that unspeakable blessing, of a noble, Christian father and mother, and to their wise and loving care, tender and helpful training, and to the inspiration of their beautiful lives, Mrs. Alden attributes, next to God, all that she has been able to accomplish. Some idea of the precious memory they left to their children may be found in the "dedication" of Mrs. Alden's "Prince of Peace."

Especially was her father her inspiration to write, for when a mere child, and only able to write in capital letters, he taught her to keep a daily diary, presumably for the convenience of the family. He also taught her to take notes of sermons, as she thought, solely for his pleasure and benefit, and in various ways constantly encouraged her to express her thoughts on paper. Looking back to that period, Mrs. Alden does not think he did this through any idea that she would be a writer, but because he believed the discipline of such a course to be good. But when this discipline of childhood began to bear fruit, and in early girlhood she had written a sketch entitled "Our Old Clock," which he wished to have published in the local paper, thinking it not wise for her own sake that it should be known to have been written by her, he gave her the pen-name "Pansy," explaining that the word meant "tender and pleasant thoughts," such as she had always given him. There is a tradition in the family, however, that she had earned the name long before, when a very little girl she had picked all the "fowers" from her mother's large pansy bed, and then, with the utmost generosity, presented her with all these stemless blossoms.

"Helen Lester," her first book, published in 1864, won a fifty-dollar prize, offered for the best book for children on practical Christianity, and against the use of tobacco.

To the wise solicitude of her parents, lest the simplicity of her character should be marred by overmuch praise, is undoubtedly due the fact that, although the author of over one hundred books since then, and the recipient of unstinted and unlimited praise, her character is still as unspoiled as when she signed her name for the first time "Pansy."

* In this series of "Faces We Seldom See" the following sketches, each accompanied with portrait, have been printed:

KATE GREENAWAY	February 1892
ALICE FREEMAN PALMER	May "
"THE DUCHESS"	October "