We Wish to all the readers of The Guardian
A Merry Xmas
MOORE & McLEOD.

HE THAT KEEPETH ISRAEL---BY "PHILO"

This story contains no advertising and is published by Moore & McLeod, for the perusal of their "Christmas Guardian" readers.

By "Philo"

The restful quiet of his own study seemed to to be more noticeable that night than ever before. The day had been a hard one. Difficult to understand indeed were the problems it gave him to solve; problems which dwelt with the ever vexed phases of want, of idleness, of sin. And in this mood of his, a mood tense and overstrained by the day's coping with what seemed to him so endless, so unfathomable, so utterly at variance with the watchful care of "Him who slumbers not, nor sleeps," Philip Montgomery for for a moment asked himself the question :—

"Does He see? Does He know?"

Then ashamed of the doubt implied he said sorrowfully :—

"And to me is given the work of bringing them to a greater understanding. To me, wronged and suffering undeservedly myself. It seems to me sometimes that I am only groping blindly after what I am trying to teach them, the difference between them and me lying mainly in the fact that I know; indefinitely, vaguely enough at times but surely; each day each hour, each moment bringing me the assurance that to trust HIM is all, no matter how dark the clouds may be or how black the outlook—trust HIM and all will be well."

If his words implied a weakness, a doubt that he did not fully believe what he taught to others it was an injustice to himself; for no truer stronger advocate of the truth plain and easy to understand, not involved in scientific mystery, but the Truth, suffering, dying and risen for mankind existed than Philip Montgomery.

A strong, earnest man whose whole life was devoted to his work. A man who when first met made one ask involuntarily:—

"What has given him that look? Is it suffering, loss, or resignation?" He was a mystery to many, a close friend of no one more than another, yet every one's friend when trouble came or sorrow tried. He had a temporary charge (for he was not in full orders) of one of the largest churches in Chicago; one to which the wealthy and influential flocked, attracted by the eloquence of his words and the strong magnetism of the man himself. Yet his life work, or rather his every day work was among the poorer classes, among those who needed everything—common everyday needs for this world and eternal salvation in the next.

He spent lavishly among these people—of his wealth for he had private means and his stipend was a generous one; of his time and of his best in every way. And if at times his work seemed profitless, his efforts of no avail he always comforted himself with the assurance "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." These words were the text that he had chosen for his next Sunday's sermon; strange that they came for that Sunday for the sermon had been written weeks before. It lay on the table before him ready for revision, and he picked it up turning over the pages listlessly as if wearied out. He read the text aloud as if the very sound of the words comforted him and answered the question he had asked himself a few moments since. A knock at his study door interrupted him and, not waiting for a reply a woman entered, coming over to him and laying her hand lovingly on his shoulder.

"It's you sister, is it? Sit down and tell me of the day's happenings. I have not seen you since early this morning."

"I seldom see you now Philip. You will certainly break down if you keep this up. But I have come to ask you about something tonight. Have you time to listen to me or are you too tired?"

"Time Isabelle? I have always time to help you in anything. You have always been so much to me dear. Only for you I would have—"

"I thought that was a forbidden subject Philip?" she said as she put her hand softly over his lips, kissing him on the broad white forehead as she did so. "But I have come to ask you about—" here she drew her chair up to the fire, turning to look at her brother who from under his hands shading his eyes was watching her every movement.

"Yes dear, about what?"

"About Mona, Philip." He rose and stood in front of the fire looking down at her.

"What about Mona, Isabelle?"

"I wonder if you couldn't do something with her Philip? She says, emphatically and decidedly that she will never go back to her husband, and although we know that she has good reasons for her decision she must not carry it out." "Yet it is a matter that neither of us should interfere in. Mona knows her own mind surely and is aware fully of all it means should she take such a step."

"Yes, she knows. Bu I think Philip that her life is just about unbearable, and I don't wonder at her at all. Yet she must not leave him; you must not let her do so Philip."

"I am afraid I have nothing to say in the matter. Mona is a dear friend of ours, but even friends have a limit in the giving of advice to each other."

"But, Philip, she will listen to you, and for my sake I want you to try and dissuade her from her purpose. Why, I remember the time you came back from England; she was only married three years then and—and—"

"I know when it was Isabelle. When I, disgraced, took you with me here?" She assented.

"If they only knew you as I do, my own boy." He smiled, his iron grey hair seemed scarcely fitting for her favorite endearment.

"But they know nothing Isa, and perhaps they never will know. Oh Isa," he said with a shudder," if I had not had the certainty of my innocence to comfort me I never could have borne it. But there will be nothing more I hope. If the story should ever reach here I would leave at once. Even although the truth seems a long time coming we must keep our peace until we can speak openly. Never mind dear—we have trespassed on forbidden ground, let us come back to Mona. What were you going to say when I harked back to those dreadful days?"

"Say? Oh, when she saw you she said Isa dear, he is perfect adorable. And ever since it has been the same story. What Philip says is right, what Philip wants must be done at once. She was just the same always, those whom she loved she loved unreservedly; those whom she disliked she disliked cordially. We have been friends for so long Philip, for years before she met you or ever any of us left England, and I understand her better perhaps than you do. You have learned dear during her many visits to us what a splendid character she has, and what a dear good, generous heart. And knowing it you must do all in your power to prevent her ruining her life in this way. Won't you try, Philip dear, to make her see what is the right thing for her to do?"

"I'll try Isa—I'll do my best."

"Its growing late Philip—and I see that you are revising your sermon for Sunday, so I'll leave you now. Good old brother—God keep you safe dear." She noticed the wistful look in the deep grey eyes bent lovingly upon her as she spoke and added:—

"The clouds will lift yet Philip. Patience dear—patience, and faith." He that that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. See dear, your own chosen text offers you consolation and comfort that is beyond my love to offer you. He knows—He sees; He will make it right in His own good time."

"Patience Isa? And Faith? God knows I have tried to have both, but the way is long—the waiting so weary—"

"But at the end of the road is the reward of patience and the guerdon won by faith. Is the crown not worth the cross?" His answer was almost inaudible:—

"If it were not I could not bear it any longer." She did not answer him, but slipped quietly from the room leaving him alone, turning as she went away to take up the manuscript from the table. He had been seated only a few moments when without a premonitory knock to announce her coming another woman entered bringing with her a subtle oriental perfume which betrayed her individuality even before he saw who it was.

"My dear Mona," he said, "what a surprise!"

"At this hour of night," she answered, "I suppose you never thought of my being up until now."

"Well, to tell you the truth I had not thought anything about it. What has kept you up any way?"

"I wanted to see you, Philip. You are always so busy now that I never see you at all."

"Isa said almost the same thing to me a little while ago. I am busy—but there is so much to do since the incumbency has been vacant. If I could alleviate ever so little of the misery here—put the things that go to make the next life worth looking forward to it would be something accomplished. But this isn't the time or place to preach a sermon. Did you want to see me about something Mona?" She had seen as he spoke, the text of his sermon written in large letters at the head of the page.

"Do you believe that Philip?" she asked looking at him with inquiring eyes

"Do I believe it? Yes indeed Mona I do believe it."

"Then you believe that God sees and knows all about what makes our lives miserable — countenances wrongs and never puts them right—sees men and women ruin their lives without even a regret—allow the rich to rob the poor—gives the hypocrites the pick of this world's best—oppresses and keeps down those who try to be honest, to lead good lives and keep His commandments, and sends happiness, peace and prosperity to those who transgress the spirit of the law whenever possible, keeping to the letter of it only from fear of what the world would do were it openly violated?" He interrupted her sternly.

"You have taken a wrong meaning from the words Mona. A bitter meaning and one utterly at variance with the idea of a God Who is all Father—more, of a God who knows, understands and will never suffer us to be tempted or burdened beyond our strength." While he spoke she had taken the seat his sister had occupied earlier in the evening, and he followed sitting on the other side of the fire place.

"Does God neither slumber nor sleep Philip?" Her voice had softened and now held a quivering enticing note in it, like that of a coaxing tired child. His attitude was stern—the sternness of a man of enormous will power keeping firm hold on himself for fear he would reveal himself.

"I am sure not" he replied.

"But Philip, that's your business to talk that way. You have to say that you believe He neither slumbers nor sleeps. But in your heart CAN you believe when you see, so much more than I ever can how fearfully lives get muddled?" He went over to his desk and lit a cigar, she never taking her eyes from him as he did so. When he again sat opposite her she spoke again:—

"Philip, I want your help. Some one must help me I am so terribly, painfully left to my own resources. Will you help me?"

"Am I not here to help any one I can? But before you say any more let me tell you that I have had a fearfully wearying day, and that perhaps I may not see things right tonight. But I'll try to—I'll do my best at any rate."

"Oh Philip, if you could only see things as I do" she said wistfully.

"Then perhaps I could not help you any Mona." His laugh as he spoke was forced and and un-natural. "If we both looked at things from the same standpoint we might wander out of the path. But tell me what your trouble is if you really want me to help you. I have seen for some time past that there is trouble."

"Of course you have seen it" she said with a tremor in her voice. "I knew you did and you've read me through and through I am afraid."

"Not by any manner of means. You are not so easily read."

"But you know Philip, surely you know that I have made up my mind not to return to my husband?" His eyes were fixed on the glowing fire; hers were watching his every move, his every expression.

"Why" he asked after a long silence. "For what reason."

"For so many reasons I could not commence to enumerate them. We have been drifting apart for years, now we are hopelessly seperated. I have evidence enough to justify me in the step I am taking should I care to bring it into any court of law, but I am not going to take such a step as that. You would admit that I am right were I to tell you all, but I will not do that. I am simply glad that I have these reasons because they give me an opportunity to keep away from a man whose personality I loathe."

"And you married him. Why may I ask?"

"Why does any silly, romantic girl of eighteen marry, will you tell me? There should be a law to prohibit such marriages."

"Your husband is returning?"

"Yes, he is coming for me next week, and then we are going back to London Philip, must I go?"

"Were you really thinking about leaving him definitely?"

"I must Philip, I must. You cannot know the daily degradation it is for me to live with a man who by his own actions has made me dispise and hate him." Philip Montgomery's face grew white and set.

"You have asked me the hardest question I think, that I ever have had to answer. 'Until death us do part' Mona, are you going to make of the words merely an empty formula?"

She turned her face away from him.

"Does God see and know my life, and not only mine but that of the countless others who have the same story to tell Philip?" she asked softly, and then neither of them spoke for some moments.

"Ah" she said. "Give me some comfort Philip—life is a difficult thing to live right, and I have tried hard to live it as I should." "Yes" he answered very gently, "Life is difficult—it requires all the courage brave men and women can summon to their assistance."

"But Philip—I—I—haven't told you all. Now I must finish my story. You must help me Philip, no matter what you have to bear, you must help me. It's hard to say Philip, but I must say it all tonight." She was not looking at him, therefore she did not see him set his lips firm and hard, and his brows contract as if in pain. He had forseen all this for weeks past. Now it was come and his face showed the mental suffering he was enduring.

"Tell it now Mona, I am ready to listen."

"Well it has always been bad enough Philip. But there is another—I love him Philip." Her voice had fallen to a whisper.

"I am very sorry Mona—more sorry than I can tell you."

"There's nothing to be sorry for Philip. You should be glad. Glad that out of the cold gray dimness of my life has arisen a gleam of sunshine so golden that it brings me a glimpse of the heaven you believe in and preach of so eloquent. It's a forbidden glimpse, I grant you that, but that makes it not less sweet. It's Heaven, just the same—even if a Heaven far off and beyond my reach. But to get a glimpse of Heaven like that, and to turn back to a life which means hell—yes, hell in all its horrors—would you make me do that Philip? Would you? Could you?" He was silent for a moment.

"But what would you do? You surely do you really mean to go to this man whom you love?"

"No Philip, I love him too well for that—even if he would ask me to go. And he will never do that."

"Does he know this—this—what you have just told me?"

"He has not known it long."

"Is he happy?"

"He has never to'd me that he is unhappy. But then he has never told me that he loves me."

"Is he free to do so?" Philip Montgomery spoke very slowly.

"He is free—but, you know" She paused as if for words to express herself right.

"But you are not. I understand Mona. He is at least a man of honor."

"He is the soul of honor."

"Then perhaps he will keep silence unto the end, and you will bear bravely unto the end. I pray you may."

"The end?" she questioned. "That means?"

"Until you are free for him to speak, or until the "silver cord is loosened" and the land is reached where there is no marriage or giving in marriage." "Oh" she whoed as she spoke. "Your solution is indefinite, Philip. But even if I would go to him I could not do so unasked. And now that my husband is coming back from his long absence I must decide what to do, and I have simply no courage left to decide anything. Go with him when the man I love is—oh, Philip, Philip, I wish you knew all he is to me." She was on her feet holding out beseeching hands to him, but he did not see them. He was standing too, facing her.

"Mona" he said quietly, determinedly. "Will you let me tell you a story?" Her eyes were shining rapturously, and he motioned her back to her old seat. "I in turn am ready to listen, Philip."

"My story has not a great deal in common with yours. But it has always proved a great help to me in bearing my own cross, to know that some one else is bearing one too. Not from the principle that because I suffer I am glad that others do but because when I see them bear their burdens bravely it helps me with the weight of my own. So my cross may help you, Mona, I trust it may. What I am going to tell you has not passed my lips since I came here. Isa knows and understands." He paused and her eyes flashed across to him in mute response. Hungry eyes they were too, as if she could never look enough at the strong, handsome man before her.

"Did you ever know that I had a twin brother Mona? No? I thought not. He was my double in looks. We were not alike in disposition. We went to Eton together, I was to enter the Church. Geoff was to be a lawyer. But he did not like study, and I was often called upon to suffer for his escapades,—which I did always hoping that the day would come when he would settle down and take life seriously. But before I had finished my studies Geoff was gone leaving no trace to follow him by. After I took my first orders I spent the time studying hard for the next step and during that interval my mother died. Perhaps you will remember reading at some time of the sensation caused during an ordination in one of London's largest cathedrals, by one of the candidates being objected to in response to the request "But yet if there be any of you who knoweth any impediment or notable crime in any of them, for the which he ought not to be received into this Holy Ministry, let him come forth in the name of God and show what the crime or impediment is?" She bowed her head in assent.

"I was that candidate. A woman, coarse and ignorant, with a child by her side came forward and denounced me as the one who had married her and neglected her, left her and her child to starve and had for the past year utterly failed to send her anything for her support. Other things she laid to my charge too; I, not only a candidate for Holy Orders, but already having received the first step towards the Priesthood. I hardly know what followed; I was too dazed, too utterly striken to defend myself at that moment and when I could the proof was too overwhelming to be put aside- I well knew that Geoff was the man, but where was he! I was powerless to do anything but assert my innocence. It was useless, the marriage certificate bore my name, Philip Montgomery. I was Philip Montgomery, and the treachery of the brother I loved seemed to me blacker than the blackest hell. My ordination was not only stopped, but I was incapacitated from clerical duties in any form, so I left England to begin life anew. You know Isa's story, she threw her life in with mine and when I saw the shores of old England fade away in the distance I was glad that my father had not lived to see his son's degradation. For a while life was bitter, too bitter to take up in any way with any interest. My income was sufficient for our needs and more, and by degrees I interested myself in work among the poorer classes. I met a man in the work, our late incumbent, God rest his soul. He was a strong earnest man, a good true Christian and we got to be more than just good friends. One day I told him my story. He had a church here in Chicago, and after a time obtained permission from his Bishop for me to be his assistant. I was not known nor did not care to be, and I had my work among the poorer classes again. I went back to England to arrange matters permanently for the wretched woman who called herself my wife, for in the meantime she had been looked after but temporarily, during my years of absence. Why do I do it? Because she was my brother's wife—no, not his wife in reality for he had married her under my name, but he at once professed to love her, and she herself was innocent of any wrong doing. I think Mona, that in all that dark time, had I not fully realized that some where, some how light would come to me out of the darkness, that I would have let myself go and drifted, God only knows where. But the faith that had been my strength in the days when I looked forward to spending my life in His service upheld me then, and although I could see no way out I never forgot the assurance "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." God sometimes calls us to Him through suffering and sorrow, cleanses from the dross the pure gold after it has passed through the furnace of affliction, and perhaps my offering of myself was premature and I was not worthy to accept so great a trust. At first as I said before I did not see it in that way; afterwards I did and I am sure that He in his watchfulness will yet sanctify to me my suffering for my brother's sins. When I came back from England that time you were here, and your yearly visit ever since has been a bright spot in my life. I have been content to watch you and picture a future that I might have had, had God willed it so. But I might remain as I am, free and yet not free. You must remain as you are and since you know my story, can you not be strong and bear your cross bravely too? The man whom you love is doubtless ignorant of all your life is; do not tell him more of it—believe, be strong and yet more strength will come."

"Philip" she pleaded "let me tell him a little more. Let me tell him just once more so that I will know that he knows, and then I will take myself out of his life forever." She came nearer to him, but he motioned her away. "You must not" he said firmly. "No with God's help keep the knowledge to yourself."

"But you have just told me that knowing of other's crosses help us to bear our own!"

He did not look at her; he threw himself down in his chair and he felt her come and kneel beside him, felt her lay her head on his arm and he shuddered.

"I must tell you dear. I could not help it" she whispered. "Which did you fear the most, yourself or me? You know who it is Philip. You know—I—" "Stop," he commanded. "Let me say it since I see the words must be spoken. Mona I love you, have loved you since the first time I ever saw you. Know it if you must, but know too that this is the last time we shall ever be together thus. The last until I am cleared of what I am accused of. The last until you are free to listen."

"Philip, Philip, I love you, I love you." She said the words despairingly," then again slowly as if they were a prayer.

He took her hand from his arm, the dear head from where it nestled close to him as if seeking protection from all that seemed to overwhelm her, and he pushed her gently from him.

"This would be Heaven in truth" he said at last "if there were no watchful God to see—no other Heaven to prepare for hereafter. And listen—my beloved- A man to keep faith with God must keep faith with himself. And if a man does not keep faith with himself he loses hold on himself. I want to take you into my arms you dear woman that I love, but that isn't keeping faith with God or myself. I see our story repeated over and over every day, but with the difference that many do not keep the faith. I've lived this hour over and over again for I knew it would come. Its too late dear, too late for you and impossible for myself even were you free. All that is left for us to do is to keep faith with each other and our own selves. God neither slumbers nor sleeps and we dare not. You must go now—and we must never refer to this scene again."

"Has it done any harm to tell each other? she whispered "I will do as you tell me—I will go back with my husband. But are you sorry we both understand" The answer in his eyes made her draw her breath rapturously. "The knowledge will be my comfort and consolation for ever," he answered. "No dear, I am not, never will be sorry" She came nearer to him and he kissed her gently.

"God guard you child. Good night."

When she was gone he knelt down where he stood his hands clasped as if in supplication. Then raising his eyes to a crucifix hanging on the wall "Dear Christ" he cried "Dost Thou never slumber nor sleep?"

Philip Montgomery's sermon the next Sunday was it was said the most forcible and eloquent he had ever preached, and that night when he once more sat alone in his study it seemed to him that at last a turning point had come in his life. The end was near, he knew, he felt it. He did not let his thoughts linger for a moment on the scene enacted there two nights before. It was just as if a great peace had come to him, as if a sign were given that God's watchfulness would soon lead him into peace. He said goodbye to Mona the next week and took up his work as if nothing had happened out of the usual order of things. When the telagram came which told of her husband's death on his way home, he did not look upon it with any feeling of thankfulness that the women he loved was free. He prayed God that the man was ready, and asked Him in His Infinite Goodness to have mercy on his soul.

Events drifted on as before only she stayed out of his life, and the next summer did not bring her to Isa and he as other summers had done. But it brought him his freedom, his exoneration, his innocence proved beyond a doubt; and long as the waiting had seemed, so doubly welcome was it when it came. It came about through Geoffrey Montgomery's death in Naples, and inquiries through the press as to his brother's whereabouts.

* * *

The first step towards restitution on the part of others was taken not many many months later when in the old cathedral which had witnessed his disgrace—before an eager interested throng he was rehabilitated in the world's eyes.

Alone he knelt while hands were laid in blessing on his head. In thankfulness he heard the words that made him a priest set apart for the service of God, and following on this ceremony the one that gave Mona to him for his own. It was a doubly solemn scene, and one never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. The words which united him to the woman he loved were spoken by the bishop who had taken him on trust, and as his hands were raised in blessing on the man and woman who knelt before him, a glad, golden ray of sunshine broke through the stained glass dome overhead, resting lovingly on the permaturely grey head and bowed figure of the man, illuminating the fair beauty of the woman, and lighting up as with a radiance from heaven the venerable, saintly face and uplifted hands of he who blessed in God's name the future of the two he had just made one. Then the organ pealed forth in glad rejoicing, and Philip Montgomery turned from the altar with his wife by his side and said so she alone could hear.

"In God's Own good time my beloved."

He that keepeth Israel neither slumber nor sleeps!