

Men and Money

Nellie McClung

Illustrated by

E.J. Dinsmore

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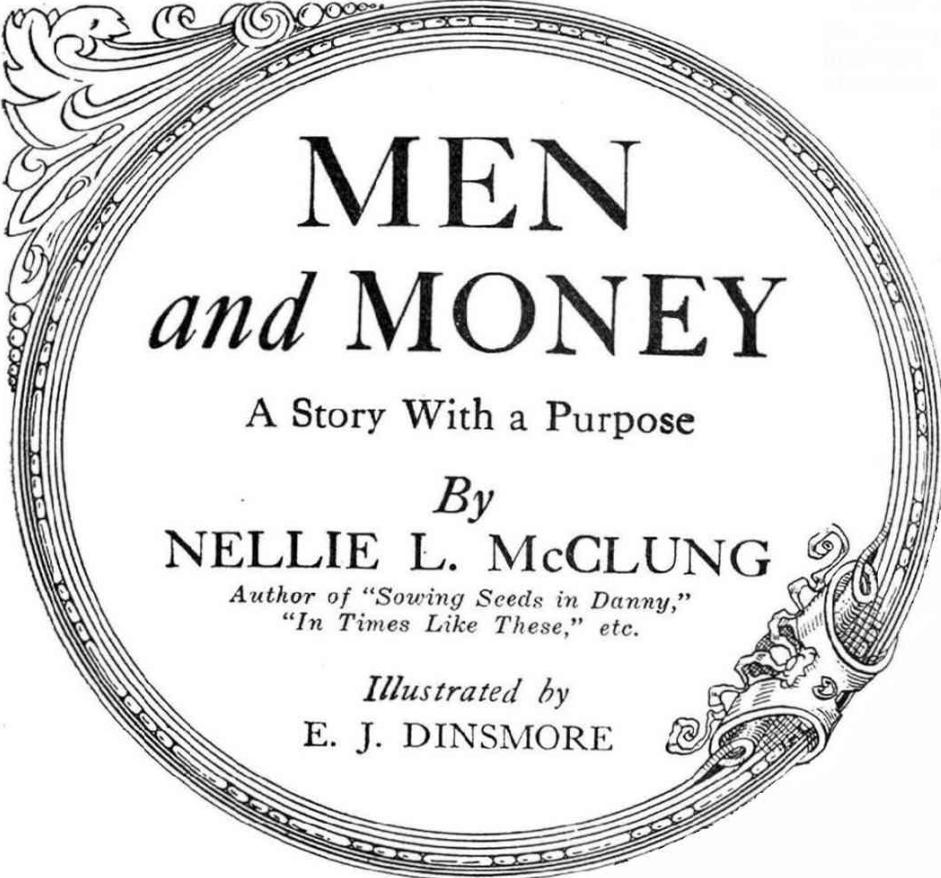
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MEN *and* MONEY

A Story With a Purpose

By

NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Author of "Sowing Seeds in Danny,"
"In Times Like These," etc.

Illustrated by

E. J. DINSMORE

NOTE.—*There is a purpose in this story by Mrs. McClung. It is designed to show the need for more recognition of the mothers who gave their sons that the world might be saved. Every Canadian should read it. In addition it is a splendid story, one of the best that Mrs. McClung has written.*

In a certain small prairie town in Western Canada, twenty-five years ago, two houses were built side by side. You will perhaps remember them when I tell you that they stood on thirty-three foot lots and were painted a stone

color with brown trimmings. Each had a door and a large window in the front, with a small verandah elsewhere, over which were two small windows; each had a gray roof and lean-to kitchen, and the houses were divided from each other by a stone colored and brown fence, painted with what was left over from the houses.

You do not need to be told that the same man had built them, owned and rented them, and you know he was a dull fellow, without imagination, or he would have put a dab of red paint somewhere in the trimming of one, and green in the other, or an extra gable in one, or another sort of kitchen, or put the chimney or a window in a different place or made some change to break the spell. But he did not do any of these things because he had simply built them to rent, and renters are expected to be glad of anything to live in, and not to expect too much for twelve dollars and fifty cents per month, strictly in advance.

The front door opened into a small hall, whose meagre space was partially taken up by a gray painted stairway, and which afforded the occasional caller a full view of the inward workings of the kitchen, unless the door at the other end was kept shut; but the careful housewife overcame all danger of such exposure by hanging curtains over the door space. The living-room was to the right as you came in the front door, and the dining-room was separated from it by an archway, and more curtains. The dining-room had one window, whose upper portion contained squares of red, blue, and amber colored glass; the large window in the front room followed the same design. The walls were plastered, and the floors were of fir.

By these peculiarities, I am sure you will know the houses I mean.

Well, as I said, there were two of them side by side, and by a curious coincidence, they received their occupants the same day, and both mistresses were brides. William Brown, book-keeper for an implement firm, who had gone East and married Stella Morrow of Peterboro, and Herbert S. Wilson, banker, who had married Miss Summers, one of the teachers, were the tenants, and the people of the small town called that street "Honeymoon Avenue."

When the observant ladies of the Reception Committee of the Ladies' Aid called on the two brides, which they did in due course, they were unable to decide who had the best furniture. Mrs. Wilson had a green carpet and green chenille portieres; Mrs. Brown's were dull blue; Mrs. Wilson's china was the tea rose design, Mrs. Brown's was the gold clover leaf; Mrs. Wilson had house plants; Mrs. Brown had a bird; Mrs. Wilson had a silk eiderdown on her

spare room bed, Mrs. Brown had a crocheted bedspread which her grandmother had made.

After careful discussion, the visitors of the Reception Committee were unable to institute a comparison, which should be abundant proof that the house of Wilson and the house of Brown had got away to a fair start.

At the end of the first year, the equality which had existed between the two families, was at an end, for there came into the Brown home a small, pink, blue-eyed infant, who constantly mistook the night for day, and persisted in wanting everyone to stand at attention.

Mrs. Wilson, who ran in the first afternoon to see him, presented him with a handsome garment, replete with blue bows, which she had bought the week before at a church bazaar, because, as she explained to her husband, "it was so hard to get out without buying something." It was really a very handsome present for the young barbarian, who mistook it for something of an edible nature, and even the first time it was put on him, chewed one of the dainty blue bows into shapeless squadginess. But this misdemeanor did not decrease his mother's admiration.

There were times, of course, in the first six months, when she wished he was not quite so imperative, and she often wondered how he could tell when she had gone down cellar for the vegetables for dinner, and why he raised such a piercing wail every time she went out of the room. But she always rushed to him with breathless haste, fully expecting to find that some evil had befallen him. When she reached his crib and found that he was still intact, her thankfulness always drove out her indignation, and when he flashed his blue-eyed, two-toothed, dimpled smile at her, she forgave him freely, and marked his "board and keep bill" paid to date.

The observant caller would not have any difficulty in deciding which house had the best furniture, after the first year. The Wilsons now had a new and handsome Turkish rug in their living-room; the Browns had a cradle in theirs; the Wilsons had Japanese grass mats and swinging chairs on their verandah, the Browns had a baby carriage on theirs. But there was no envy on either side of the mud brown paling which divided the two houses; everybody was satisfied with what they had. Sometimes, indeed, when young John Brown, dreaming of wolves, bears and kidnappers, awakened with loud wailings in the middle of the night, the Wilsons, hearing him, were sorry for their neighbors and were very glad that the quiet and calm of their own lives had not been disturbed by one of these overbearing young things who know nothing of that unwritten law regarding the right of others to undisturbed sleep at nights.

Young John Brown awakened regularly at the hour of five each morning, and insisted upon his parents doing likewise. Perhaps it was the spirit of his industrious grandmother, the one who had made the crocheted quilt, which had been inherited by him, for he loathed late sleeping, and saw to it that both his parents began the day bright and early. Having accomplished this by the simple and unaided method of the human voice, young John settled down to a calm and refreshing sleep, during which time his mother, on tiptoe, hurried through her work, to be ready to take him out when he awoke.

Her neighbor joined a literary club that winter, and studied Maeterlinck, and Matthew Arnold, fragments of which she passed on to young John's mother,—who said when the baby was old enough to take with her, she would be able to attend the meetings too. But the first time she took him to church, he tried to usurp the attention which, by all laws of fair play, belongs to the minister, and so had to be taken out in disgrace.

John's father saw in his bounding energy large possibilities of future greatness.

"Notice the shape of his head, Stella," he often said, "it is a perfectly rounded head, indicating a well-balanced disposition—see the full forehead, with observation and reasoning equally full—veneration and conscientiousness especially large. This boy will never shirk his duty:—Never mind, Stella, even if you can't get out to the Browning Club, or whatever it is, you're doing something when you are bringing up young John Brown. You'll have more to show for your time than the members of the Club, in the spring."

"Of course I will," John's mother said happily—"I expect John will be walking then, and won't I be proud when he can step out with me in the afternoon, in his blue suit and white straw hat, and is able to pass the time of day with the neighbors. He tries to say things now, and I think that's very smart for a baby only ten months old."

"He's a wonder," declared Mr. Brown, with conviction.

When John passed his first birthday, and began to walk on his fat, uncertain little legs, he had his first photograph taken, and the friends on both sides of the house were remembered in the distribution. Most of them wrote back, with strongly expressed admiration; some with faint words of praise, and one unhappy aunt sent not a word, and was struck off Mrs. Brown's correspondence list forthwith. Mrs. Brown was too amiable a woman to be resentful even of such neglect, but she considered that any one

who was not moved with admiration on beholding such a beautiful child's face, was too dull to bother with.

"When I go East, I'll go to see Aunt Grace, and ask for the picture. Evidently it is of no use to her," said Mrs. Brown.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown's good opinion of their son was further enhanced, when, soon after his first birthday, he began to talk. Just what he was saying seemed to be unknown, except to the immediate family. But it was plain as day to them. When asked what the kitty says, and what the cow says, and what the pig says, the answers he gave were strikingly similar in each case, but outsiders are often dull in such matters.

At sixteen months, he had learned one unmistakable trick—he saluted and responded when his name was called. "John Brown," called his father, when he entered the front door, and John Brown, in whatever part of the house he happened to be, struggled to his feet, and placing his heels together, stood very straight, and raising one fat hand, answered:

"Present."

At least his parents said that he said "present," and it certainly sounded as much like that as anything else.

His next trick was to tell, with unfailing accuracy, where his papa's boy was, by patting his own blonde head, and giving utterance to an animated whirl of sounds, which seemed like a succession of "da's," but which his parents had no difficulty in understanding. What the child said was, "Right here, right here!"

The Wilsons were brought over to hear John's tricks, and although he did them beautifully, and they laughed in apparent enjoyment, there was a slight lack of heartiness about their applause, and if John had been a real actor, he would have known that his audience was not in full accord with him, and that for some reason he had failed to put it over; but John did not care anything about their applause anyway—he had two devoted slaves on the front seats, and he did not look past them.

When the Wilsons went home, they laughed a little about John's tricks. "The Browns are nutty over that kid," said Mr. Wilson—"they make me tired sometimes."

His wife suddenly went serious. "It's nice to be silly—sometimes," she said wistfully. "I often wonder. . . . and wish——"



“Raising a squalling kid doesn’t appeal to me,” said Wilson.

“I don’t see it,” he said, “raising a squalling kid does not appeal to me—it is too much like work—if you want to, you can adopt a half-grown one—past the howling age—I can’t see myself parading up and down in my nightshirt, singing ‘Beulah Land’ the way Brown did last summer. Echoes of that coming across the fence was enough for me. A kid costs too much time, sleep, and money, and I tell you, May, they’re not worth it—Now that’s the straight truth! Look at my father and mother—they raised eight, and my mother was an old woman, with a bonnet, at forty. She never had a good time—she just slaved for us kids. Every last one of us now are married and gone, and the two old folks are there alone. We write at Christmas, and send a shawl and a pair of gaiters, that’s all the communication there is between us—It isn’t fair, but what can we do? I can’t talk to my mother for five minutes—we belong to different worlds—She couldn’t raise kids and read the newspapers too, and she dropped behind. Maybe she doesn’t know it, but I do. It’s nobody’s fault, I guess—but it’s uncomfortable, and I can’t see the sense of raising a family, and losing all the fun in life.”

They had argued the question before, and always to the same conclusion.

That afternoon when Mrs. Wilson was going down town for a hair-shampoo and manicure, and saw her neighbor hanging out a washing, with young John holding on to her skirts and clamoring loudly for attention, she

rejoiced in her freedom, and the pleasant life she had. Bert was right, children were too much trouble!

The next summer, John had a little brother, an exact duplicate of himself, blue-eyed, dimpled and imperative. In the hot nights, when the windows were open, the piping wail of the new baby often broke into the nightly stillness of the street. These midnight disturbances helped to decide the Wilsons to make a visit to the Coast, though they had a feeling of real pity for their neighbors left behind to struggle with the heat and the two young children.

“Maybe they like it,” said Mr. Wilson, when his wife was saying that some way she felt mean about leaving her neighbor, “some people do—it is a real instinct with some people to care for kids—but I must say it’s not so with me—and you can’t do them any good by staying—you don’t know how to mind a kid anyway.”

“She didn’t know, either,” persisted Mrs. Wilson—“but she’s learning—I could learn too—if I needed to. I wouldn’t be afraid to try it”—

Then she added quickly—“But I am glad I don’t need to learn just now.”

That winter, the baby, whose name was Tom, had a serious illness, requiring a trained nurse and a specialist. For a few days it looked as if he had decided to give up the journey on which he had started out so joyously six months before. His dimpled face, now shrunken and wrinkled like an old man’s, haunted his father as he went about his work—it was too cruel, that anything so little and so sweet should suffer pain.

“Brown walks like an old man,” Mr. Wilson told his wife that day as they sat at lunch in the hotel. They had been out late at a dance the night before, and she had phoned to his office that she did not feel like cooking, and suggesting that they “eat out.”

“I guess it would be a relief if the little kid did pass out. They can’t afford nurses and doctors’ bills like this. Brown was in to-day to see how much he could borrow on his Life Insurance, and I gathered from what he said, they are pretty well up against it!”

Then they talked of other things.

But young Tom Brown did not die. There came a day when the troubled look went out of his tired eyes, and he knew his mother when she bent over him.

When Brown came home to dinner, he did not get a chance to make his usual inquiry, “Well—how is he?” for his wife was waiting at the door, with the first real smile that he had seen for months.

“Billy,” she cried—“Oh, Billy, he’s better—he’s going to get well!”

And then, quite without warning, she, Stella Brown, the brave, patient, tearless one, buried her head on his shoulder and cried, and cried.

Softly stroking her pretty hair, he noticed for the first time that it had in it streaks of gray.

It was a hard pull for the Browns to recover from the financial depression following the baby’s illness. The specialist, who had been twice to see the child, was able by that occult gift which many specialists possess, to divine the amount of their savings, and make his fee cover it exactly.

“I wonder how he knew how much we had,” said Billy Brown reflectively, as he wrote the check which signed away all their savings for the last six years.

“That’s part of their course at college,” said his wife gaily. “Never mind, Billy, we have the boys to show for our time, and we’re still young and strong. We’ll start another savings account on the first of the month, and we’ll have garden stuff to sell, and our clothes will do for another year. We’ve enough left from the Insurance money you borrowed, to pay the nurse and our own doctor, and the bill at the drugstore, so we start even again—that’s not so bad.”

The two families did not see so much of each other in the years that followed, for the Wilsons moved into the big house which they built on another, and more fashionable, street, and sometimes months and months passed without the women seeing each other. The men met occasionally at the Business Men’s Luncheons which were given once a week, and always regarded each other with real friendliness. Mr. Wilson, in speaking of his old neighbor, said to his wife:

“I like Brown—but the stories he tells about his kids certainly make me tired. The man doesn’t notice that he’s shabby himself, and getting into a groove. He works in his garden as long as he can see, and then gets up early and goes at it again. But he’s bubbling over with enthusiasm all the time about the kids, and showed me their school reports. The kids are hustlers all right, and young John works in the printing office after school and is earning a set of books that way. The other fellow keeps chickens and has bought a bicycle. You’d think it was an automobile, to hear Brown talk about it. The man’s simply dippy over those two youngsters.”

“Well, I don’t wonder,” said Mrs. Wilson, “they’re handsome and clever, and the most beautifully mannered children in town, everyone says. Mr. and Mrs. Brown will realize all their own ambition, in the boys, and that’s something. They see their own dreams coming true, and that makes labor sweet and satisfying.”

“But they never have a trip or any fun,” said her husband.

“They get their fun at home—and that’s the best place,” she said. “Teas and dances and clothes don’t satisfy every woman, you know, Bert. Some of them have deeper ambitions than just to be well-dressed and able to play cards. . . . I sometimes envy the Browns. . . .”

“They’re welcome to the kids,—so far as I am concerned,” he said shortly. “It’s cost poor Brown all his salary to raise those kids so far, and now comes the most expensive time, for they have to be educated. He never takes a holiday—he does curl, but he never goes away for a bonspiel.”

“But they seem happy,” Mrs. Wilson urged; “there aren’t two people in town who stick together like the Browns—Don’t you remember that Sunday afternoon we saw them out walking with the boys? I thought they all looked so contented and happy, and the boys are such handsome youngsters—They may be poor, Bert, but they’ve something to show for their time.”

Her husband shrugged his shoulders irritably.

“I’ll tell you what they have,” he said. “They have a small six-roomed house, on a poor street, in need of repairs, five thousand dollars Life Insurance, and that’s all they have in the world. His salary just covers expenses—he’ll borrow on his insurance again to send the boys to college. He’ll skimp and save and work to the end of his days. He’ll never take his nose from the grindstone, and she’s the same!”

“The boys represent their life work,” said Mrs. Wilson persistently. “They haven’t got their money in the bank, the way we have; they have it in the boys—the way we haven’t. They’ve worked to better advantage than we have.”

“I don’t see it,” he said, and he went out of the room with every indication of impatience.

One morning at breakfast a few weeks later, Mrs. Wilson said to her husband:—

“Did you notice the school report this month?”

“No,” he answered tartly—“why should I?”

“There’s no reason,” she said quietly, “and no reason for my noticing it, only that I always do read it. Did you ever have a sore nail, which, somehow—you like to hurt? I don’t know why,—Well, I read the school report for some such reason as that—and it always hurts.”

A long silence fell upon them. What was the use of going over all the arguments again?

Before he left, he said more gently: “What were you going to tell me about the school report?”

“Nothing,”—she answered—“except that the Brown boys are ahead again. John has passed his entrance, with honors, and Tom is one year behind. Both names are the first on the lists.”

“That’s because ‘B’ is the second letter in the alphabet, I guess,” said Mr. Wilson. “Well, I’m glad you told me—I’ll know enough to keep out of Brown’s way for a few days.”

He said it laughingly, but his wife’s eyes were very listless and weary as she sat leaning her head on her hands.

She was still sitting there, when the maid came to clear away the breakfast dishes.

The Browns, like other people, had dissensions and mutinies at times within their ranks. No four healthy people ever lived together in perfect harmony for an indefinite period, and the number could be lowered again, and yet again, without upsetting the truth of the statement.

To try to bring about harmony, Mrs. Brown had made it the rule to have Saturday afternoon a free time for the boys, but sometimes, by failing to do the work on Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon had to be broken into by unfinished business, and this was the cause of the frown which hung heavily on Tom’s face, as he put strings on the sweet peas in front of the house.



“We’ve got too many flowers,” he said grumblingly.

“We’ve got too many flowers,” he said, grumblingly, “they always need to have something done to them. I like flowers that just grow, and look out for themselves—without bother to any one. Flowers aint supposed to be a worry to anyone—and spoil all his fun. If we hadn’t any, I’d have more fun.”

Mrs. Brown was cleaning the verandah, and his remarks were addressed to her.

“That’s so, Tom,” she agreed, “and if we didn’t have the veranda—I wouldn’t need to clean it, and if we didn’t have any clothes I wouldn’t need to wash them, and if we didn’t have anything to eat, I wouldn’t need to cook, and then I wouldn’t have to wash the dishes. We’re certainly in hard luck having so many things, you and I.”

Tom worked on in silence, thinking of what she had said, but his heart was with the gopher hunt.

“There are lots of the boys who never have a thing to do. Joe Peters has no cow to feed, or hens to look after, and they never bother with flowers. They just go out riding in the car every night, and I wish we were like them. The

boys don't even need to go to school if there's anything else they want to do. Their house doesn't look nice, but they sure have fun."

Just then, the afternoon mail came in, and in it there came a letter to Mrs. Brown from home. It was from her mother, and, as usual, she seized it with delight.

"Dear Stella," it began, "we had a family gathering to-day, and we had every member of the family but you, and so we have decided that we really must have you at the next one. You have been gone for fourteen years now, and you have not been home even once, and now we want you to come to us for at least a month. Your boys are big enough to leave now, and we know that Billy has always wanted you to have a holiday, but you are so conscientious about doing your duty to the boys, that you forget to do your duty to yourself.

"Now let me tell you what we have to offer in the way of inducement.

"We will all be here: father is very well this summer, and greatly enjoying his new Ford. He will take you all over to see the friends. The brothers and sisters are all wanting you, dear Stella, and they are full of plans for giving you a great time. The corn will be ready then, and I hear talk of a great corn-bake in the maple-bush, the first night you are here. The woods will be beautiful in September when the maples and beeches begin to turn."

Mrs. Brown had sat on the veranda step, to read her letter, and at this point in the reading, a cry broke from her.

Tom ran to her at once—

"Mother," he cried, in alarm—"what is it?"

Never in his life, had he seen his mother cry!

She was herself again in a minute.

"It's nothing at all, Tom," she smiled—"only I just got homesick for a minute. Your grandmother wants me to come back home, and of course, I can't, because it would take too much money; but I got lonesome for a moment, and I wanted to see the apple-trees and the plums that I planted, and I wanted to see the milk-house with the stream running through it, and the hollyhocks and hydrangeas, and I wanted most of all to see mother and father and all of them. But I couldn't leave you and John and Daddy here all alone,

even if we had the money, which we haven't, but we'll have lots of it when you and John are through school, and then we'll all go and see the old folks, and we'll stay a year, and motor all over Ontario in our Studebaker—and—"

The tears were still hanging around his mother's gray eyes, and Tom could feel them, although they were not visible.

He went back to the sweet peas, and soon had them all provided with good supports.

When he came into the house, his mother, shelling peas for dinner, was singing as usual.

"Mother," he said cheerfully, "is there anything else I can do? I don't mind work—I'd rather work, and I'm not going out with Joe Peters at all this afternoon—I want to stay with you—I'm sorry you can't go—but I'll hurry up with school—and we'll soon have lots of things."

"We have lots of things now, Tom," his mother laughed happily. "We have health, and each other—and lots to eat and enough clothes, and a good school for the boys, and I'm very happy. When we go home, we'll all go, I couldn't go away for a month and leave you two boys. I would be thinking all the time that your knees were out, and you had forgotten to wash behind your ears, and had gotten into poison ivy, or something, O! I am not homesick now, Tom, I am just thinking what a great time we will have when we all go back home to see our folks and your Daddy's people, and how proud I will be to show off my two boys."

John and Tom Brown went through all the grades in the Public School, and when they entered the High School, their record was something of a triumphal progress. They were able to take their matriculation from the High School, and then came the first real break in the family, when the boys went to the city to begin their college work. John was ready one year ahead of Tom, but he taught a year to help the family finances, and to let his brother catch up to him. The city was only fifty miles away, and the boys came home each week-end, on their bicycles, in the summer time.

In May, 1914, when the University reports came out, it was found that the one hundred dollar scholarship had been awarded to John Brown, and Tom had taken the second one of sixty dollars. Both boys were at home when the reports were published, and the little house, in need of repairs, fairly

throbbled with delight. Mr. Brown brought the paper home at noon, and laid it on the table before his wife. The headline told the story.

“Brown brothers take first and second scholarship for proficiency,” it said.

“The returns are beginning to come in, Mother,” said John, with a smile, as he kissed her.

Mrs. Brown’s voice was tremulous with happiness.

“Boys,” she said, “the returns have always come in. I got my reward every time either of you gave me a smile—or a hug; and every time I heard you laugh, every time I saw my boys learning how to do their part in life—I was repaid a hundred times. Your father and I have had a great time raising you two big fellows—you’ve kept us young, and well, and happy, and now you’re bringing our rosiest dreams to pass. Talk about returns? Here!” And she kissed both boys and put the loudest kiss of all on her husband’s bald head.

“Billy—old man—what sort of a time have we had—raising these two boys?”

“The very best,” he cried, “the very best!”

That was in May, 1914.

In August came the war!

At first no one believed that a real war had come; the time for that had gone by. It would be settled. The little groups of men who gathered on the street corners were unanimous in predicting that it would all be over by Christmas.

Every day, Billy Brown brought the paper home, when he came for lunch, and it was an excited group that read the war news, and traced on the new war-map, which an enterprising newspaper had sent out, the places mentioned in the reports.

When the neighbors light-heartedly discussed the war, predicting its early and successful ending, Mrs. Brown was silent and absorbed. One awful possibility held her heart in its cruel grip, and darkened her days with fear.

They might have to go!

There was no thought of conscription by the State, but there is a more inexorable law than was ever written down in cold type, and it was that law which was now driving the gladness and joy from the heart of many a man and woman.

It is the law of conscience—the conscription of conviction.

Sometimes, it comforted and re-assured her to watch the men who walked the streets, the men who were older than her boys, and yet unencumbered with family cares, and apparently idle. Surely they would go before there was a call for boys at school. She tried to think of the thousands and thousands who, all over the British Empire, were hastening, at the call. Hers would not be needed. Indeed, she said to herself, there would not be training schools enough to train those who were offering themselves; there would not be a call for men, when there were no facilities for training them.

And besides, it would soon be over!

The boys went back to college when the Fall term opened, but their weekend visits had lost all their joyousness. They talked of nothing but the war! Recruiting officers had come to the college, and urged every boy over eighteen to enlist.

“Why don’t they go to the bar-rooms and pool-rooms?” Mrs. Brown cried, indignantly. “Why do they not make their speeches to the idle men on the street corners. . . .”

“This isn’t a job for pool-room loafers, Stella,” said Billy Brown, gravely, “this is going to take the best we have, and I’m afraid—all we have.”

This was the first time he had admitted his fear that the war would be a long one, and there was something about his words that fell on her heart like the clay on a coffin.

The thing she feared, had come—Billy had admitted it—

But it was like her not to cry out or complain. There was no outward manifestation of the storm which swept over her soul, except that as the days went on, her face seemed to shrink and wither.

The Brown boys enlisted in December, 1914, and went to Montreal for their training.

The morning they left, the station was packed with people. Six other boys went with them, all under twenty-three years of age.

Some of the neighbors said they thought it queer of Mrs. Brown to go to the station. The neighbor who lived in the companion house next door, who had no son to send, was perfectly sure she could not have gone, if it had been her two boys who were going away. She was too sensitive and full of

imagination. But some people, she agreed, were not so fine in the grain, and it was well for them.

It was a dull winter morning, with a cloudy, red sunrise, and deep white frost on the trees, when the boys went away. A winter morning before sunrise is always dull and shivery, and does not make for cheerfulness; but there was no voice steadier than Mrs. Brown's, when she said goodbye to her two boys.

Mrs. Wilson noticed how she trembled, when she helped her into the back seat of their car, but it was not Mrs. Brown who was crying as they rode together on their way back from the station.

Mrs. Wilson did not try to frame any casual word of sympathy as she watched her friend, in deep admiration. At the top of the street they stopped to watch the train as it throbbed its way across the prairie. The smoke wreath lay against the sunrise, and was touched by the first beams that came over the edge of the earth.

“There's nothing more beautiful than smoke!” said Mrs. Wilson, absently.

Mrs. Brown did not hear her. Her eyes were fixed on the disappearing train, and her ears were strained to catch the last echo of its strident whistle.

When it was gone from her view, something like a sob broke from her, but she sat very straight, and her voice was steady when she said, as if to herself

—
“It seems right that they should go together.”

In the front seat, Mr. Wilson was speaking:—

“Brown, I congratulate you with all my heart. It's a wonderful service, to fight for the liberty of the whole world, when a terrible danger threatens it, and you're able to send two men to fight for all of us. I'm not going to tell you I sympathize with you—I don't, I envy you—and I'm very humble, in your presence.”

Billy Brown's face was pale and twitching with many emotions, but he made no reply. He probably did not hear what the other man said. There was a little scene being enacted in the dark recesses of his memory, and he saw himself opening the door of his house and calling:

“John Brown!”

From a litter of homemade toys he saw his eldest son, in a blue romper suit, with a tangled head of yellow curls, rise to his feet, and placing his little fat heels together, and lifting one plump pink hand in token of salute, answer:

“Present.”

“They have answered the call,” he said brokenly. “They have answered!”

It was a lonely house, when the boys were gone, although Mrs. Brown did not spend a moment in idle grieving. She went bravely to the boys’ room that afternoon, and carefully put away all their things, sometimes pressing a kiss on a cap or coat.

Her neighbor across the fence ran in to see her that afternoon, and found her in the midst of her work. She took it as a further proof of Mrs. Brown’s lack of sentiment. “She never seems to think anything will happen, and actually talks of when the boys come home. I can’t understand a mother being so composed at a time like this. And she’s going to take boarders! I would have thought she would want to keep that room just as the boys left it, with everything in it to remind me of them. I know if it were my case, I couldn’t bear to touch a thing. But then—every one isn’t like me!”

By her efforts in keeping boarders, Mrs. Brown was able to supply her two boys with many comforts, and the thought that she was able to follow them, with the ministry of her love, comforted her in many a tragic moment, when the horror of it all seemed more than she could bear. Then it was that, to keep the bitter waters from going over her head, that she sang as she worked, sang—to keep herself from thinking—and her neighbor, hearing her singing, wondered at her lightness of heart. She forgot that people sometimes whistle going past a graveyard, and it isn’t because they are light-hearted, but only frightened.

When the first Victory Loan was launched, there were many reasons why Herbert Wilson was made the Chairman of the Committee. He knew the business men: he had time: he had enthusiasm: he was a good speaker: he was a heavy subscriber.

His first address made a great impression.

“I have, unfortunately,” he said, “no one to send”—and his voice trembled with deep emotion. “I am one of those, whose life has not been blessed with children—but I will fully, freely, gladly give myself and of my means, to the cause of human liberty!”

To the first loan, he subscribed twenty thousand dollars: His picture was published in the city papers: A large poster hung in the plate-glass window of the drawing-room in the big house!

The war is over now. The Armistice is signed. The nations are explaining!
If this were a story—a piece of fiction—a romance—I would give it a different ending!

But it is not my story, and I have no option.

It was in August, 1917, when the sweet peas were spilling their perfume all over the garden, and the tomatoes were turning red upon the vines, that the news came!

Mr. and Mrs. Brown had come in from church, and were getting dinner ready, working together as usual. Two S. O. S. boys, working on farms near by, had come home with them for dinner, and to them Mrs. Brown was telling an episode in Tom's life, when he had run away to the swimming pool, and some of the boys had stolen his clothes, and he had to stay hidden in the rushes until it got dark enough for him to make his way home unobserved, and how he had dressed himself in his best suit, and gone out to find the gang who had robbed him.

They were laughing so much, they did not hear the door-bell, and the boy with the telegram came around to the back door.

The telegram regretted to inform them that Private Thomas Brown had been hit by a piece of shell and instantly killed, on August 1st.

The next Sunday, the other telegram came. It regretted to inform them that Private John Brown had been hit by a piece of shell on August 8th, and instantly killed!

In the front window of the small house, still in need of repairs, the scarlet leaves of the Service Flag have been changed to gold. A small woman, whose hair is all gray now, goes softly about her work, often stopping absent-mindedly, as if she were listening for some sound which she does not expect to hear. The springiness has gone from her movements, and the neighbor across the fence says Mrs. Brown is "ageing." But she still has a smile when her husband comes home, and to him she often says: "It seems right that they should go together!"

At the desk in the inside office of the implement house, Billy Brown still keeps the accounts of the firm. People say he bears up wonderfully well. Sometimes when he is all alone, his shoulders sag a little, and he has been known to talk to himself, generally just a word, a name, "John Brown!" he whispers. . . . and then, away back in the garden of memory, he sees a chubby

fist go up; he sees a sudden flash of blue eyes—then a toss of golden curls—and then he hears a childish voice make answer:

“Present!”

“They did not fail,” he whispers—“when their country called—they answered.”

He is not unhappy, for the past has its pleasures too, as well as the present.

The assigned pay ceased when the boys were killed; and there are no pensions paid, for their mother is not a widow, neither were they the sole support of anyone. There came, however, from the Department at Ottawa, two typed letters, just alike, expressing polite sorrow!

The Wilsons have enlarged their house again, and Mrs. Wilson has her own car now. Why not? The money which they loaned their grateful country, has been a good investment. It pays five and a half per cent. interest, and is free from taxation. Twice a year the cheques come, which speak a nation's gratitude.

For the loan of money, our Nation is very, very grateful. It is only the gift of men, that is forgotten!

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[End of *Men and Money*, by Nellie McClung]