INNER BEAUTY
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Ashley looked down at her gloved hands; lacy, pink, beautiful gloves, they were. She had begged and cajoled Grandma until the dear soul had stopped what she was doing long enough to crochet the lovely gloves for her.

With a dainty index finger she fondled the delicate shell stitches that outlined the gloves at her slender wrists. The shells looked almost like ruffles,
leaning one against the other, going all the way around the edge of the gloves. So very beautiful the gloves were. And they matched her dress perfectly.

She smoothed the dress in a caressing way, feeling a bit guilty for having paid the exorbitant price listed on the tag. She had hoped it would go on sale, but it hadn’t. On one of her many trips into the expensive store, she had decided that she was going to have the dress. Regardless!

Ashley remembered her conscience niggling her as she tried it on. She had thought of all the pieces of Christian literature the money would buy for the missionaries to distribute among the natives but she brushed the thought aside almost as quickly as it had entered. For once, she decided, she was going to splurge. Really splurge. After all, she had earned the money to pay for the dress. She worked hard at her part time, afterschool job. Didn't she deserve this reward?

With a light heart, she gave the beautiful dress to the sales clerk and told her to ring it up; she wanted it.

All the way home, she wondered what her mother would say about the price she had paid. It was truly an expensive dress. The most expensive she had ever owned, to be truthful. But, still, she felt she deserved it. It wasn't like she did this all the time, she told her conscience.

Her mother wasn't home when she walked inside the house. A brief note posted on the refrigerator door let her know her parent had gone after some groceries. Ashley felt relieved. She took the dress up to her room and hung it on a thickly-padded, sweetly-scented hanger inside the closet; then she ran lightly down the steps and set the table and peeled the potatoes, two daily-assigned jobs for her.

She helped her mother with the groceries when she returned home, stating that she had bought a pretty dress. Her mother merely smiled and asked what color it was as she continued putting the canned fruits and vegetables on the pantry shelves.

And now, sitting in the church pew beside her mother, Ashley's mind was on nothing but the dress and her gloves.
She touched the soft fabric with her fingers, marveling at its texture and hue, and she knew it was the most beautiful dress in all the world. It was so becoming to her, bringing out the natural, light rose tint of her cheeks and accentuating her green-blue eyes and auburn hair. She felt like a princess; she felt elegant. Indeed, it was expensive, and it would take her a long while to earn such an enormous sum again; but she didn't mind; she felt it was worth every dollar she had paid for it.

And then, like a sword cutting through her vain thinking and deep into her heart, came the preacher's words, "The king's daughter is all glorious within: . . ."

"I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations: therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever" (Psalm 45:13, 17).

"There is a beauty that far surpasses the mere physical beauty," the minister was saying. "It is the inner beauty. Man dresses up the outward; and he may even be able to conceal for a brief period of time what he is really like on the inside. Eventually, however, the real man will be exposed; then no amount of careful dressing or of expensive clothing will be able to cover up for him."

Ashley felt as though a bomb had exploded around her. It was as if the minister had been describing her and what she truly was!

She felt the color drain from her cheeks. How many, many times God had used their minister to preach right to where she was falling short! It had happened over and over again and again.

She closed her eyes, recalling how far short she had come of God's "mark" for a true Christian only the past week, and she blushed in shame. She had been a bit catty to Erline Hoke when Erline asked her if she could please help her with her math assignment. Erline was forever wanting her to help her, she had felt, and she was getting tired of it. After all, there were others besides herself who were every bit as capable of helping Erline, she had decided.

"I feel so comfortable and at ease around you," Erline had told her shyly once when she was helping her.
Condemnation filled Ashley's heart now. She knew she had had a sharp tongue when she told Erline no, that she had other things she had to do.

And when Cassie Miller came, asking would she, Ashley, please help her finish a dress she was making, she had been unkind to Cassie too.

"You sew so prettily, Ashley," Cassie had stated, "and I make such a mess of things. I wanted this dress for when Dorrie and I go to that young people's gathering at Brushtown. We're to sing that night, and I'm all nervous over knowing about it. You seem to be so composed and relaxed, always. I'm praying for the Lord to help me to be relaxed and calm, like you are."

Ashley remembered how she had allowed her irritation -- over being asked -- to show through: she had told Cassie that she felt it was time she, Cassie, learned to do things for herself.

Another wave of remorse and condemnation washed over her. Cassie was a mere babe in spiritual things and along spiritual lines, and yet she, Ashley, had been unkind to her. What must Cassie think of her! she wondered, feeling tears form in her eyes. After all, she had told Cassie how much she loved the Lord and how very much He meant to her. Where was her inner beauty? Jesus had declared in no uncertain way that it wasn't always those who called Him, "Lord, Lord, . . ." who were His disciples and followers, but it was those who did the will of the Father Who was in Heaven. And what was "the will of the Father?"

Ashley took a tissue from her small, dainty, perfectly-matched-to-her-shoes-and-dress clutch and wiped the tears from her eyes. She had had mere lip fruit; mere head and mouth religion. She had never actually and really experienced what real salvation from sin and true forgiveness was all about, she realized suddenly. She had only the cold formalism of religion, and because she had gone to church from the time she was born and had lived a clean, good, careful moral life, she had quite naturally assumed she was a real Christian. Now, however, she realized with a sudden and acute awareness that she had never, never had a truly born again experience, and with the Divine revelation came a floodtide of conviction. She knew that she must make her peace with God. She wanted the "inner beauty" about which her pastor was preaching.
Getting to her feet as though some unseen force had lifted her, Ashley walked down the aisle to the altar, weeping brokenly. True, the sermon was not finished, but she couldn't wait any longer. She wanted to know that her sins were forgiven and that her name was written down in the Lamb's Book of Life. She must make things right with both Cassie and Erline, she knew; and she would. She would ask them to forgive her. But for now, she must be forgiven by God. She wanted to be "all glorious within." Oh, she did. She did!

"Are there any others who would like to come and pray, like Ashley has done?" the minister asked, his voice breaking on a sob. "The altar is open," he added. "The fountain of blood is still flowing for sinners. Will you come?"

Ashley heard a rustle of skirts coming down the aisle to join her at the altar. Sobbing brokenly, and with contrition of heart and soul, she began praying. She was thankful and happy for whoever may have come forward for prayer, but her one deep concern was for her own soul. At any cost, she must get things taken care of between God and herself. Too long she had gone on, thinking her morality would get her into Heaven. Today she knew differently: God's Word had smitten her and pierced through her soul like a dagger had been plunged into its very depths.

"'All glorious within,' " she cried aloud. "O God, please, please, save me; forgive me. Make me 'all glorious within. . . .""

And God answered her prayer!