

O'NEILL

Devonshire Idyls.

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DEVONSHIRE IDYLS.

*FOURTH EDITION.*

# DEVONSHIRE IDYLS.

BY

H. C. O'NEILL

PART-AUTHOR OF "OUR NURSES AND THE WORK THEY HAVE TO DO,"  
"NEW LIFE, ITS GENESIS AND CULTURE," ETC.

"In order to teach men how to be satisfied, it is necessary fully to understand the art and joy of humble life—this at present, of all arts and sciences, being the one most needing study."—*Modern Painters*, vol. v.

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## P R E F A C E.

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IMPRESSIONISTS of the new school, reading their own melancholy into a humanity they look at with a half-contemptuous pity, would fain have us believe that life is scarcely worth living on any terms—certainly not, when money is short, and food means daily toil, and the care of children interferes with preconceived notions of love and pleasure.

In these days of hurry and competition, there is no doubt that the “art and joy of humble life,” as Ruskin puts it, is in danger of being lost from among us. Half a century ago, there were traces of such an art existing in many a Devonshire home, where dwelt simple country folk lapped in sweet content.

These tales relate some of the incidents of those bygone times. They would have no merit if they were not absolutely true, except in unessential details of name and place.

▼

Will any of my readers care enough about Mary to go and look for her grave? Let me tell them they will not find it, though I stood by it once. Nor can the name of the Rev. Thomas be found in diocesan records, nor Muttlebury in the county map.

Yet many things of which I tell still linger on in the pleasant West country, and, if I chose, I could show you the very school-house where Janey learned to sew, and more than one little maid who knows what "behaviour" means. When Devonshire lanes and Devonshire lakes and Devonshire manners have all been swept away from the land, it will, I fear, be the worse for us, and not the better.

As for me, I am thankful to have known and loved them all; to have had a childhood bounded by so fair an horizon; and to have passed my most active years amongst a people so gentle, so kindly, and so true.

*April, 1892.*

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# DEVONSHIRE IDYLS.

—♦ 36 ♦—

## MARY'S MUG.

IT'S just an old bit of clome—not china, fine and thin; and it's plain blue and white. Maybe it's not your ordinary blue and white. Maybe it's a pattern you never saw before. Maybe it came from the old Leeds pottery, that's shut up now more than a hundred years ago, and so folks admire it because 'tis rare of its sort. But that's not why it stands on my chimney-piece; and that's not why I love it.

'Tis nothing but a quart mug. And I dare say that the first good woman who bought it—or bartered a score of new-laid eggs for it at Barnstaple Fair, in the year seventeen hundred and something,—handed it to her good man that night at supper full of sweet Devonshire cider, and I doubt he ever looked at the colour or the pattern of it, but just emptied it at a draught, and said, “Fetch us another drop, missus, will 'ee? I'm proper thirsty, I be.”

It wasn't full of cider when I first saw it, and it isn't because it holds a measured quart that I care for it.

It's full of quite another draught for me, and it holds what is more precious than the sweetest wine that ever came from the vintage of Tokay.

For it is full of memories. And when one grows old, the sweetest thing in the world is to remember the bright years that are past.

\* \* \* \* \*

Time long ago, when the sun always shone warm in summer, and we donned our cotton frocks true to the season of May as the coming of the cuckoo, there was a little cottage standing on the sloping side of a goyle, down which ran a tiny lake. If you were not born in Devonshire, as I was, you will have to be told what a *goyle* is; but you will feel quite certain you know what a lake is, and will only think that I have made a mistake in saying the lake *ran*. "Lakes don't run," you know; "they are pieces of water surrounded by land, and they are quite level and still, except when the wind blows over them." Very true—in geography books for children that is what lakes are. But not in Devonshire. There the lakes are not smooth flat waters, but running streams, leaping over the moss-grown stones; sprinkling the sweet ferns swaying on the banks; rippling round the spotted trouts; tossing defiant sparkles to the dishwasher,—and, oh dear, you don't know what a dishwasher is any more than a goyle! How can I write in plain English, if I'm to tell you what Mary's mug holds? For Mary's mug is just full of Devonshire pictures, and Devonshire pictures can't be described in those common words which we all understand—being what are taught in the Board schools; and I can't stop to explain everything, or I shall never get on with my story. A goyle is—just a goyle; and you must take my word

for it, or else go down to Devonshire and see for yourself. And a dishwasher is just a little bird with a white breast and a short tail, and it makes the prettiest bob curtseys as it stands looking out for its breakfast on the edge of that fairy waterfall in Liddicombe Lake; and now you'll know it next time you see it.

The cottage stood on the side of the goyle as aforesaid, and old Mary lived in it. Years and years before I saw it, and that was long, long ago, Mary's man built it to bring home his "missus" to. She was a proper Devonshire maid, straight and slim, with bright black eyes, and very outspoken, as most west-country maids be. And when her young man had "walked" with her all a long summer through—walked to and fro over the common to the sound of the church bells on a Sunday afternoon, he with a bit of lad's love in his button-hole, and she with her "Common Prayer" folded in a clean cotton handkerchief with a pink border to it, and a spray of flowering thyme put in to mark the Psalms—she thought it was about time to do something more than walk to church together. And so, when Jan said to her, "What be thinking of, Molly, then?" she spoke up, and answered, "Where be us gwine to live to, Jan? There ain't no cot that I know by hereabouts, and thee mustn't set thyself down fur away from thy work."

"Mother's a lone widow woman, Mary, and her 'ill be glad enough I should bring thee home, where there's chambers to spare and lack o' company."

"Nay, lad, nay. I don't hold with two livyers under one roof. Give me a place to ourselves, Jan, and let I be missus in it."

And so, with the help of Molly's "feyther," Jan built that little house. And its walls were good

honest "cob"—none of your rubbishy bricks and mortar, through which winds blow and rains leak, but warm, thick cob walls, and a fine thatch of straw atop.

Mary used often to tell me it was "a little old scam place;" but that was long after, when the thatch was green with houseleek and yellow stonecrop. When she first came there as bride, with a "good man" of her own, and hung up her grandmother's mug on the dresser hook, she was proud enough of the cot which her Jan had built for the most part with his own hands; and in it for more than sixty years Mary "lay down missus and got up master," as we say thereabouts.

John was a brave steady chap, and he lived out his appointed span of life in the cob cottage with the thatched roof. And he never knew but what he was master in it. He was slow and steady; but she was flippant on her feet, and sharp to her tongue, and ordered all that came into the house, and most that went out of it.

The first thing that came was a little maid. And Mary said, "Us'll call her Tamasina, after my granny as give me the blue mug there." But Jan said, "My mother's christened Lizbuth, though 'em do call her Betsy for short. I reckon Lizbuth's a fine name, Mary, and mother 'ud be pleased?"

The missus held her tongue till the Sunday came, when she and her gossips took the child to church. And as she hitched up the big tea-kettle to the chimney crook before they started, and raked up the turf-ashes, she said to her man—

"I tell 'ee what, Jan, us'll have a drop o' elderberry wine to-night, and a hot toast in it. Wilt thee broach the little cask before us go away, Jan?"



And I'll dust out grandmother's mug, and us 'ill drink the little maid's health out of it. Us couldn't do no less, could us, Jan, seeing—her's named to grandmother?"

And Jan scratched his head, and thought of the nice hot toast and the deep draught of spicy wine, and made answer, after a bit—

"No, us couldn't, I s'pose," and quite forgot how he had once thought Lizbuth was a fine name. And when the parson said, "Name this child," and Mary's first cousin on her mother's side answered, "Tamasina, please, sir," and dropped a neat little curtsey as she spoke up, and the parson said in his loud sonorous voice, "Tamasina, I baptize thee,"—then Jan looked round to the little maid's mother, who sat in a pew behind, and saw her winking away a bright tear as she thought on the grandmother who had been so good to her, and taught her to spin and sew, and "learnt her behaviour;" and as he looked at his wife and listened to the parson, he forgot all about Lizbuth for the second time, and thought Tamasina the finest name that ever was. Is it not true that "a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife"?

And Jan and his missus and the gossips sat round the hearth that evening, in the big settle; and the women-folk sipped their wine out of tumblers genteelly, and stirred the sugar up with the little old, thin, silver spoons that Tamasina the elder had left behind when she said good-bye to this world. But Jan drank deep draughts out of grandmother's blue mug, not forgetting to say first—

"I wish 'ee all well; and here's to the health of the little maid who's named to grandmother. Thank God for all His mercies!"

For Jan was a good lad and steady, and he also had "larnt behaviour." But I think he enjoyed himself all the more because his missus had her way.

And when the gossips were gone away, through the starlit night, across the moor to their own homes, Mary said—

"Car' the cradle up to chamber, Jan, and I'll rake up the turves, and latch the door, and hang up grandmother's mug for fear he should get hurted." And though she had three chores to do, and he had only one, he hadn't got up over the chamber stairs before she was after him. For Mary was flippant on her feet in those days.

When I knew her first, she wasn't as young as she used to be. Jan was dead, and the little maid was "growed up," and had a man and a home of her own miles away. And the five children who came after her were all out in the world—some one place, some another; but Mary still lived on in the old cob house in the goyle which her man had built; and grandmother's mug still hung on the dresser hook; and Mary sat in the settle by the turf fire, and knitted long grey stockings for the farmers' wives, who had their own hands too full of children, and chicken, and dairy work to have much time to spare for sitting down quiet and knitting. But Mary had plenty of time. Her man was gone, and the children were gone, and her own little bits of work—chores, as she called them—didn't take her long, and were all done up early in the day.

When Mary was tired of knitting, she got up off the settle, and rolled up her stocking, and stuck the pins in the ball, and put it away in that big

basket which always stood just under the table by the door. And then she went out into the garden, and saw the gooseberries were coming fine and big; and she reckoned she could pick enough to make it worth her while to trudge into Ashcombe and sell them. It was Saturday, too, that day, I think, and next day was White Sunday, when most folks who had a "man" and children wanted to make a pie. And though most folks in those parts had a garden,—and, of course, a garden has gooseberry bushes in it—still everybody's garden did not lie to the south like hers did. She had never failed of gooseberry pie at Whitsuntide as long as her man had lived, for her berries were always ready a week or ten days before any one else's. That was one reason why John built his house in a goyle, and a goyle that ran east and west, and was "loo" from the cold north winds, and lay out his garden sloping to the southern sun.

But poor John was gone, and so was gooseberry pie in that cottage. For when the parish allows you one shilling and sixpence per week, 'tis all you can do to buy a loaf of bread, and a bit of tea, and now and then a quarter of butter.

One and sixpence won't buy everything. But Mary never *wanted* anything—"not she, thank God!" as she would say many a time. Folks who have gooseberries in their garden splats can sell them when they can't afford to make pies, especially if they are beforehand with their neighbours. And when gooseberries are no longer green, currants, you may be sure, are waxing red and black in the summer sun.

This particular Saturday it was gooseberries Mary went into her garden to pick, and as she picked she

measured them into grandmother's blue mug,—one, two, three quarts good measure, and then Mary stayed her hand. "Never pick a bush clean out," she used to say; "a body never knows what they 'ill want to-morrow." And then the basket was covered with a fresh rhubarb leaf; and the Sunday cap, so neatly plaited, was donned. The little old black silk bonnet was put on over the full white borders that framed the withered cheeks; the clean blue-checked apron tied on; the black "turnover" pinned across vitty; the turves raked together, so that she might find fire on her return; and then, hiding her door-key in the thatchen eves, the old lady started on her three-mile walk. She was still flippant on her feet, though "her 'ill never see eighty again for all her's so spry," as Mrs. Crocombe said to me that day, when we watched the dapper little figure coming down over "the Lawns," knitting as she walked.

"But what us 'ill do for our arrants when the Lord pleases to take her, I don't know, not I. Run out, my dear, and stop her, do—though, there! her's sure to come in."

And I, nothing loth, did her bidding, while the farmer's wife hastily broke some bread into a basin, and with a huge iron ladle dipped a few savoury broth out of the big pot hanging to the chimney crook, and set it on the end of the long oaken table.

"Sit thee down, Mary; sit thee down. You'm off early to-day. I wasn't looking for thee so soon, and I've two or three arrants for 'ee this morning. Have 'ee room in that there basket for my eggs, or must I pack 'em separate? Eggs is getting plenty now. I s'pose I must let 'em go a shilling a score."

For the old woman would take anybody's eggs up

to Ashcombe, and change them at the village shop into tea or sugar, or anything else that was wanted for the week's consumption. But to-day there was more than tea or sugar required, and, while Mary was eating her broth, Mrs. Crocombe reckoned out her pence and two or three sixpenny bits that must be paid over and above the eggs for reels of cotton, and ounces of cloves, and a quarter of blne, and a pot of best blacking, so that Farmer Crocombe's boots might not disgrace his missus as he walked up the church path next day, conscious of his position as parson's churchwarden.

Mary's basket was big, as I have said, and there was plenty of room in it for the eggs; and against she had finished her broth, all the items were packed away in her head, and she rose to go, with "Thank the Lord, and you, too, kindly, missus;" the stocking was unrolled and the needles began to click; and—"Thee shall have a cake to car' home with thee, Mary; my baking will be out by then," called Mrs. Crocombe after her, as she picked her way over the stepping-stones by the back door.

The basket was pretty full against she got to Ashcombe, but it was fuller still when she came back. The stocking had to be put by in her large pocket; for though you "can knitty a bit" when one arm only is loaded with a basket, you can't knitty at all if you are carrying a big bundle in your other hand as well. In that bundle was the loaf which the parish sixpence had been changed into, besides the little screw of tea and sugar, and the bit of cheese, and a happorth of salt, and two candles, which had all been got out of the remaining shilling.

That was Mary's week's shopping for herself, and

in the basket were all the "arrants" she had been intrusted with by the farmers' wives, whose houses she passed on the road. And when they took out their little parcels, there was always something put back instead. An odd duck's egg, which wasn't worth selling—a bit of cold bacon, left over from the men's dinner,—or, as good Mrs. Crocombe promised, a figgy cake hot from the oven.

Not much, perhaps, in return for a long walk and a heavy basket! But what did she want more? She never went to bed hungry, and she never lay cold—the parson's wife saw to that; and blankets don't wear out very fast when there's only one little old woman to sleep under them, and they get a careful wash once a year in the long summer days, and keep for the rest of the year the scent of the sweet yellow furze bushes they were dried upon in the hot sunshine.

She never wanted for anything while she was alive. "What can a body want more than a full belly, and a warm back, and a good thatchen roof over their heads?" she was wont to say.

But one day she told me a secret.

I was sitting in the old window-place, plucking wheatears to be roasted for supper, when she came by. I wonder, do you know how many wheatears it takes to make a dish for a farmhouse supper? Anyhow, Mary was quite right when she said, "Dear sakes, Miss Annie, that's an everlasting chore you'm at; do 'ee let me help 'ee a bit." And while we sat together in the afternoon sunshine, a big semmet between us to put the feathers in, and the light, glinting on the pretty little birds as they lay in a heap on the sill, showed up their dark-pencilled eyebrows, and accentuated the pathos of

their closed eyes and ruffled wings, she began to talk out of the fulness of a heart that was generally held still and shut up.

“I’m getting an old woman now, my dear. I sem I shan’t be able to go arrants much longer; and the Lord, He’ll preserve me from being a bed-lyer, that He will. I allus was a spry maid and flippant to my feet, and when I can’t go no longer I’ll lie down and die. I’ve got all ready for the burying, and, I pray the Lord, Jem won’t let the parish lay me in my grave alongside of my old man. But there—Jem lives t’other side of Barnstaple, and he mightn’t come to hear of it in time; and he’s a lot of children, he has! But I’ve got all ready to lay me out—’twould only be the coffin and that to pay for. There’s a new shimmy Miss Ellen gave me last Christmas, and there’s a short bedgown as belonged to your poor Aunt Bessie, what I had for a keepsake; and I’ve plaited up a clean cap, for fear I should be took sudden and not able to do it at the last—and there’s only one thing wanting. And I’d wish to be a handsome lych, I would; so as not to scare them as come to look at me.”

“And what’s that one thing, then, Mary?” I said; for if she liked to talk about her burying, why should I hinder it? “What is it you’re wanting?”

“It’s the stockings, my dear. I haven’t had a pair of white cotton stockings since I was a maid, and I can’t abide the notion of lying in my coffin in thickey coarse black ones. If I only knew where to put my hand on a pair of nice, white, boughten ones, I’d die happy.”

“Mary,” I said solemnly, as I put down the last trussed wheatear in the dish—and the tears stood in my eyes as I thought of my dear old woman buried

by the parish, and with coarse black stockings on those active little feet and neat ankles,—“Mary, I *promise* you I’ll get you a pair of white stockings for the burying, if you die before me.”

And Mary, as we drank a cup of tea together after I had cleared away the feathers, said—

“Don’t ’ee forget then, my dear; for I’d wish to be a handsome lych, and the Lord ’ill reward ’ee. It’s a heavy weight off my mind, it is; for my old man was always so much thought on.”

But the old woman’s time was not come yet. The autumn passed away, and the winter, and another summer came, and its garden stores ripened. One day Mary came down to the farm again, and with her came grandmother’s blue mug in her basket; and the mug was full of big black currants with the bloom fresh on them, and two or three of the sweet-smelling leaves lay at the top.

“What have you got to sell to-day, Mary? And you’re never going up to Ashcombe town in all this heat!—a Friday, too; why, all the folks are away to market!”

“No, my dear, no; I’m past going to Ashcombe any more. My poor old feet has pretty well run their last, I reckon. And I’ve brought ’ee something in a present, if you ’ill please to accept of it.”

And out of her basket came the mug, full of currants. And, as she put it in my hand, the old woman dropped the little curtsey which she had learned from her grandmother was “behaviour” when you “proffer some’at to a lady.” Mary was old and I was young, but “manners is manners” all through life. And as I was going to turn out the berries in a bowl, she held my young fingers in her old withered hand: “Keep on, my dear; keep mug



and all, for old Mary's sake. There's no one else sets such a vally on grandmother's mug as you do, and I've allays ordained you should have en when I was gone; so you'd best take en now, for you mightn't get en then. There's no knowing what the parish might do, and Jem so far away."

\* \* \* \* \*

How many years ago was that? I hardly know. I remember how we sat and told, and drank tea together in the little old parlour,—Mary and me alone, for the "maister" and "missus" were gone to market. And I put one of the black-currant leaves in the teapot to give it a flavour—which it did. And we talked of many things—of Jem, her darling son; of Humphrey; and Ann, "who had married such a daft body, and lived over to Welchland!" of Tamasina's christening, and the best way to make elderberry wine; of Mary's good "place" that she married from, and where she got the magnificent wage of a "whole pound a quarter;" of her wedding-gown, which lasted her for Sunday best till Tamasina was "growed up a proper big maid," and Humphrey could run alone, and the cradle was empty—and kept empty, too, till it was turned over to Ann, who married the daft body, and lived to Welchland. The wedding-gown was a white calico spotted with pink. I remember it well; for when it would not wear any longer as a gown, the tail of it was cut up into three-cornered neckerchiefs, and many a time I've noticed the spot so like the shape of the wheatear's eye with its darker line of brow. Mary's low-cut neck of her black stuff gown showed a goodish bit of the kerchief underneath.

And so we sat and told in the gathering twilight

—told of the past with all its little homely details and simple joys. But we never once mentioned the burying that must come by-and-by, or the parish coffin, or the white stockings. One doesn't need to rake up the bottom of one's heart every day.

Soon after this I went away for a bit, and when I came back it was winter weather, and, I remember, I caught cold driving twenty miles through lanes blocked with snow, and over the bleak common. And one morning, when my cough, which had kept me upstairs for a week or more, was getting better, and I was thinking that I might perhaps get out for a turn in the sunshine, a messenger came to my bedside, and said—

“Please, miss, do 'ee know as old Mary, her's terrible bad. And the doctor, he've sent her some physic, he has, but her says her can't die easy without you come to her. I'd have come and fetched you before, but her wouldn't let me, 'cause her knowed you was badly.”

It wasn't long before I was climbing the old stone stairs which led up to the chamber and to Mary's bedside. There she lay breathing heavy and short, but her eyes met mine fondly, and both her withered hands were held out to me.

“God bless 'ee, my dear, I knowed you'd come! No, you can't do nothing for me. You can't give me a new inside, and this one's wored right out. I've worked hard in my time, I have. And the children's all put out in the world; and now I'm going to my old man, and he'll be main glad to see me. The things is all ready in the big chest. And I'm all washed and clean; folks won't have much trouble to lay me vitty in my coffin. . . . Is Jem come?”

But the afternoon wore away before Jem came. The doctor came and went. The parson looked in, and said a prayer by the dying-bed. The neighbours had kindly words and offers of help for the night-watchers. But Mary spoke to none. She lay there, propped up on the clean pillows, her head on my shoulder, her hand in mine.

When Jem came at last, she opened her eyes once more. "I'm quite ready," she said, so softly we could scarce hear the words. "I'm ready, and the things are in the big chest."

By-and-by I laid her down gently on the bed, and closed the black eyes, once so bright, which saw nothing now—not even Jem, her "eldest lad," as he knelt, a man of well-nigh sixty, by her side, and cried his heart out.

And old Mary had her one wish gratified in her death, which had been left unfulfilled till then. She made a handsome lych. The white cotton stockings did not fail her; and the familiar old face, with all its lines smoothed out by the tender hand of Death, lay softly smiling, out of the net borders she herself had plaited, at all the old friends who came to show their last respect to one who had lived out a long life among them—a long life and a hard one, but never a discontented or an abject one. With no luxuries and but few comforts, she lived out an honest life, and died as became a woman who respected herself.

No complaints, no groans; everything ready, and her old man waiting for her; her children put out in the world, her good-byes said, her keep-sakes given, she, like the patriarchs of old, "drew up her feet in bed and fell on sleep"!

She did not have a parish coffin or a parish burial.

The snow melted away and left the roads clear, and there were snowdrops and aconites enough to sprinkle on the grave. And when I look into the old blue mug, and see all the memories it is full of, I find, at the bottom of all, the bright sunshine, and the scent of the moorland, and the ringing voices of the children's hymns which attended her to her grave by John's side.

And Mrs. Crocombe said to me as we turned to go home that afternoon, "Her was a dear old critter, that her was, and us 'ill find her wanting!"

## A STORY OF SOMETHING.

WHEN I was a little maid at home, early in the "forties," *something* happened. What it was I did not know then, and I am hardly likely to be able to find out now, since so many years have passed away. Science has made great strides in those fifty years, but I doubt if its steps have yet covered the debatable land that lies between the seen and the unseen, the material and the spiritual.

As for me, I am *not* scientific. Born in a corner of England still haunted by pixies, and with Irish blood running in my veins, is it likely? Nay, would it be possible?

We are fond of describing ourselves nowadays as the "creatures of circumstance," and a great deal is also talked about "heredity" and "environment." In my case, both these forces mixed my blood and coloured my senses with a tinge of what you might perhaps call *superstition*. You are quite at liberty to call it so, though I am not at all sure that is the right name for it.

Anyhow, that the world in which I lived was full of presences incorporeal, and therefore impalpable and mostly invisible, was a creed certainly not taught me by my mother, who was an Englishwoman, and yet I believed in it as firmly as that I had two eyes in my head—which also I never had

seen and never could see. I rather think this was the belief of my forefathers, who lived on friendly and familiar terms with St. Patrick and other saints in the green island of Erin. And though they were sadly wanting in that regard for their descendants which induces sensible English folks to lay up for their children the sort of goods which rust and moth can corrupt, they stored up and passed on a kind of spiritual protoplasm—a wealth which thieves cannot steal, even were they desirous to do so,—and of this, I, my father's youngest child, inherited a Benjamin's portion.

Moreover, I was born in Devonshire. And when I was old enough to sit up to table and eat an egg "like a lady," my nurse taught me to make a hole in the bottom of the shell when I had finished, so that the fairies mightn't use it as a boat to sail away in. The custom was a good one, and I keep to it still.

It was when I was a year or two older that "something" happened.

"Go up to Churchtown, Ellen, and take the little maid with you," said my mother. "I want you to call at the post-office and see if there's a letter for your master." For in those days we had no penny post; and people who, like ourselves, lived a mile or more away from Churchtown,—where postman alighted from his old horse, after a ride of twenty miles, with two leathern bags slung across the saddle,—had to fetch their letters when they expected any. And on this particular day, I remember, we carried ninepence-halfpenny to pay for it, and we brought the money back intact because the letter was franked.

But it was a long while before we got home

again, and my mother was beginning to be very anxious about me, and the tea was waiting.

It wasn't such a very long walk, and we could have done it quite well in an hour and a half if only Ellen would have taken the road through the wood, and gone up "Farmer Ward's Hill," as we generally did. But no, as we turned out of our own gate, she took the road to the left.

"That's the wrong way, Ellen," said I.

"No fy," said she; "it's the right way for we. I dursn't go over Farmer Ward's Hill when it's getting dark like—and on a Friday, too! No, not for ever so."

"But why, Ellen?" persisted I. "We've often gone that way before."

"Yes, my dear, yes; us have a-bin, but it ain't safe now. There's Avice Lord—her that lives to Farmer Dallin's—she were coming home last Friday, just in the dimpses, and her's not been the same maid since." And Ellen shook her head and groaned.

Never been the same maid since! What an awful thought! Suppose we should find ourselves in like case, and when we got home mother should not know us because we were other folks, and not our own selves! I had no more wish to go through the wood and over Farmer Ward's Hill that evening. But the other road was a long way round, and we must walk fast; and I, afraid of I knew not what, clung tight to my nurse's hand, and asked no more questions.

Still, we were well overtaken by the dimpses before we got home. And the last thought in my mind as I settled myself down to sleep that night was, "What could have happened to Avice Lord

that she was never the same maid again after she was caught in the dimpses on Farmer Ward's Hill ? ”

The next morning I was helping Ellen to make the beds—for my mother thought it was good for our lungs to shake and lift the blankets and pillows, and we sisters always took turns in helping the servants,—and the sun was shining brightly outside, and the birds singing. Encouraged by this, I ventured to ask once more, “ Do tell me, nurse dear, what happened to Avice Lord, then, on Friday last in the dimpses ? Do tell me, please ! ”

But Ellen was loth ; missis had often bid her not fill my little head with “ nonsense. ” And then, too, she was frightened herself, and did not know rightly what to make of it. So I did not get much more out of her than : “ Her angered the old woman, I s'pose, and so her drawed a ring round the maid with her broomstick, all in the mux of the road, and dared her to get out of it. ”

Here and there,—in the cottages round about, now and then, when I carried little presents to the mothers of new babies, or a bit of our own dinner to a bed-lyer,—I used to hear odds and ends of talk about Avice Lord, and how “ her'd never been the same maid, ” and how not a thing would stay in its place, or a cat bide in any house that she entered. But every one knew that the lady down to Crosscombe Cottage was very particular, if she was kind ; and they thought on the puddings, and the cans of broth, and the nice little frocks and skirts ; and if I asked pointed questions about Avice, I only got evasive replies. And as the girl left that part, and took service somewhere up country, the story gradually died out of my mind.



But some years after, when I was "grown up," I was detained at a friend's house, where I had been spending the day, till it was too late to walk home five miles alone, and Tom Wheedon was sent against me with a horse. I remember how glad I was to see him and the old white mare. The moonlight shone on them as they crossed the high rocks, and struck into the shadowed bridle-path up which I was climbing.

There was nothing to be afraid of, for I was never afraid of being alone; but, somehow, company was pleasant among those wild rocks and dark cliffs, where Sir Roberts' hounds were often heard giving tongue and rousing the echoes—though both he and his dogs were dead and buried a good hundred and fifty years since. But they could not rest in their graves, as the old tales ran, because of the sins he died unrepentant of. There was no mystery about these sins; they were talked of openly. Perhaps you will laugh when I name them; but no one laughed, in our parts, when we said, one to another, that "old Sir Roberts could not lie easy, and no wonder—for he fed his dogs on white bread, and cut his nails on a Sunday." I do not laugh even now. I think we should all be better Christians if we minded what we were taught when we were little—that the children's bread is not for brute beasts; and that, if we give to these, we defraud those for whom it was ordained. Moreover, with regard to his other crime, we are all aware that no good ever comes from putting off till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day. There are different opinions as to the best day for cutting one's nails, and every one has a right to his own opinion; but never have I heard any one so heterodox as to advance the view

that Sunday was the right day. Sir Roberts must have chosen it in wilful insult to the Christian feeling of his neighbours, or in besotted ignorance of the difference between right and wrong. No one doubted the justice of his punishment. The rest due to weary bodies after a lifetime of right-doing, or at least right-striving, could not be for such as he. Still, the thought of him, as he wandered restlessly round, was far from cheerful, and Thomas and the old mare were welcome. And as one eerie thought led to another, I recalled the maid who lost her identity, and suddenly questioned—

“You never lived hereabouts, when that queer story was told of the girl up to Farmer Dallin’s, did you, Tom?”

“Well, yes, miss, I did,” he allowed, though a bit slowly and unwillingly, I thought. “My mother, her used to work for the old Farmer Dallin afore I was born; and though I was most times to Combe, I hired myself out to the young farmer for a year, just for old acquaintance like.”

“And did you ever hear the rights of that story, Tom? It was a very queer story, wasn’t it?”

“Well, yes, miss, it were a queer sort of a consarn; but I couldn’t say as I knowed the rights of it, though I knowed all as a body could know about, seeing I were there at the time, and Avice, her were my own sister, for my mother took another man after poor feyther was drowned off Beacon Rock in the herring-time.”

“Avice your sister, Tom! and you there when it happened! Oh, do tell me all about it.”

Tom hummed and hesitated a bit. Evidently it was a subject he didn’t care to talk about; but, after all, he began—

“I wa’an’t tell ’ee no lies then, miss, and I can’t say how it come about at all; but I can’t go far wrong, I reckon, if I tell ’ee what I saw with my own eyes, I s’pose, and heard with my own ears. There’s a many curious things in this world, there be; and this one’s the curiousest I ever came across. But if ’ee want to hear it, this is how it was.” And Tom cleared his throat, and, having made up his mind to tell, set straight off to recount events perfectly well known to him and much pondered on, and therefore without the least break in his narrative. “My sister Avice, her was a peart maid, her was—nothing couldn’t ever get over she. Her’d scrub down the house when her was no bigger than my little George be now—he that tends the crows to maister’s; you know un, Miss Annie,—the one with the carroty poll. And her couldn’t ’a bin more nor fifteen year old when the missus begged of mother to let her come girl at the farm, and she’d larn to cook vitty, and dairy work and all that like. And Avice, her were terrible spry. Her dapped round like anything. There wasn’t no maid in the neighbourhood anywhere that had her gumption. It wasn’t more than a twelvemonth after she came to old Missus Dallin’s afore she made the butter and the cheese and all that, what the missus had never trusted to a girl before. I’ve heard her say often, ‘Avice, thank the Lord, thee wasn’t born stupid;’ that’s what the old missus said, her did. And the maid was that peart, her’d up and answer, “’Tisn’t a fool as ’ud suit at the Barton, is it, missus?’ And the eyes of her ’ud twinkle, and her ’ud fly round double quick. Her was that spry all the chaps was after her. But her wouldn’t look at none of them. Her was my own sister, was Avice, and I know

what I'm a-saying of. And Fridays her'd go into Combe with the butter and the eggs and that like, so stiddy, just as if her were an old woman, her would. The missus would tell 'ee the same word for word if her was living; but her died, poor soul, most directly after Avice left the farm; her couldn't stand no racketing, and her never cheered up like again after Parson Joe came that night—— But there, I ain't got to Parson Joe yet. No fy—I were a-telling of Avice, and how spry her was afore her met with that there old woman on Farmer Ward's Hill as drewed a ring round her." And Tom shook his head very soberly.

"But what did she draw a ring round her for, Tom? Do tell me."

"Well, there 'tis, Miss Annie; how can I tell 'ee what I doan't know? I wouldn't tell 'ee no lies—not if I knowed it. I wasn't there to see. Only Avice, her come home all of a tremble and quite skeered like. And her said the old woman had drawed a ring round her, and dared her to get out of it. And Avice said it was because her wouldn't buy a broom of she. And so her drawed the ring in the road mux with thickey broomstick. But the old woman were Tammy Kale, Dicky Kale's grandmother; and folks do say her can overlook a body, and 'tain't safe to anger she. Avice were a spiritty maid then, and her wouldn't be *said* by Dicky Kale's grandmother, 'tweren't likely. And her wouldn't have nothing to do with Dicky, no ways. He didn't come of a good lot, and I don't blame her. But Avice, her wouldn't stand no nonsense, and so her just shut her eyes and turned herself round three times, and then took and made a leap right out so far as her could, and when her opened her eyes

Granny Kale were a-goo, and her besom and all. But 'twas got quite dark all of a minute, and 'twere only in the dimpses when the maid shut her eyes. Her couldn't see nothing and so her rinned, and her rinned, and her wasn't long on the road that night. Missus, her was terrible frightened to see how the maid looked. But that wasn't the worst of it. Avice that was such a handy maid and never tored up nothing, when her went to take up the broth for supper down went the bowl to ground; and when her picked up the sherds and went to dresser to reach down another, her knocked the pint mug right off his nail—but he wasn't clome, and so he didn't tear up. So it was all that evening, and the next day, and the next; and right on through the week the maid wasn't herself, and whichever way her turned, and whatever way her looked, something took the clomen ware, and it all rattled and shook, and so often as not something or other would jump right off the shelf, or the table, or wherever it might be. And the maid looked badly, her wasn't her old spiritty self at all—her that were the spryest maid in the country round. But us were all fond of the maid, and us didn't take no notice. But I reckoned that when White Sunday came I'd clean myself up a bit, and go over to Molland, and see the old Winifred—her that's called the wise woman—there's many folks goes to her, and her's got a powerful lot of charms. Her spoke feyther's warts away. I've heard poor mother tell of it many's the time. But Molland's pretty nigh on seventeen mile away, and I couldn't get for to go till the days were a bit longer and yeaning-time were over. And one day the old maister and missus was gone into Ashcombe with the cart and horse; and I was out and about on the

land, looking after the ewes and that ; and Avice were in the house. And then I see it was getting on for six o'clock, for the bullocks was lifting their heads, and the cows was moving on over the ' Little Park ' towards the geät. So I follows 'em to the yard where the shippon was, and ties up the bullocks, and goes on up over the yard to call the maid to come milking. And as I go along up over the stoäns, what should I see but the milking bucket dapping down over the court ; so I picked en up, and says, ' Well met,' says I, ' I were just a-coming to fetch ee ; ' and I took en down to the yard, and stood en beside of Blackberry, 'cause her were the first cow I allus milked. And then I went for the stool, and to fetch the maid. And as I went up over the stoäns this time, there was the semmet coming along, and close behind he were maister's old lanthorn, dapping along like as if they were dancing. Well, I didn't know what to make of it, but I picks 'em up and carries 'em up the step into the big kitchen, and I hung 'em up on the nails where they belonged to.

“ The maid were there, hitching up the chimney crock, and her turned round to see what I were a-doin' of, and when her faced the semmet he gave one great jump and there he was, in the middle of the floor, dapping about like mad. And the lanthorn, he wouldn't bide neither ; he was off again. And the bellows banged agin' the wall. And the big dish kettle what Avice had just hitched up tipped over into the turves. And the maid, her stood there quite skeered like, and her didn't say nothing. ' Avice,' says I, ' Avice, maid, what's up, then ? ' For I heard a great racketing up in the chamber overhead, where the maister's old mother lay—her

that was a bed-lyer, for her were more than ninety years old. And I said, 'What's up wi' old granny, then? and what be 'em after, tumbling the things about like that?' But her made answer quite serious, 'There's nobody up there, Tom, and thee'd better ways go on to milking.' And her looked that strange there was no telling. But I couldn't go on milking and not know what was up, and maister and missus away to Ashcombe.

"So I went to the chamber stairs, and just as I were a-taking off my mucky shoes, not to make no dirt on the planches, what should I hear but somebody coming down over the steps quite careful like, just as the little uns do! And there was old granny's armchair, that allus stood by her bedside, with the patched cushions in it, dapping down over the steps one leg at a time; and he come on quite stiddy like, and, when he got down into the kitchen, he give a great jump like, and got to where the semmet and the old lanthorn was already. And he set to, and they set to—and wherever the maid looked there was a jump; and the big bellows was amongst 'em, and the clome rattled, and all the things in the kitchen danced just as if it were shearing-time in the big barn. But 'twas grandmother's chair that *finished* me. When I see en a-dapping down over the chamber stairs, foot and foot like a Christian, I was that terrified I runned to the stables, and I jumped on to the back of the old mare, and I rode for life's sake out against maister and missus, for I knowed they'd be on their way home by then. And, sure enough, I met 'em in the Danes. And maister, he saith, says he, Tom, you drive missus home, and I'll take the old amer and go after Parson Joe. Us can't stand this

no longer. Maybe he'll come and say some words.'”

And Tom stopped to draw breath, for he had gone on talking very rapid. The moon was hid under the clouds; and I think we both felt the night was rather dismal, and there was no knowing what might be about.

“And did Parson Joe come then?”

“Well, miss, yes—he comed; but not then. He said he must study a bit first; and he'd got what they calls a 'black book,' and he read up some 'words' in it. But, there, I won't tell 'ee what I don't know, miss. There were a many lies told up; and Avice, her never were the same maid again. And the old granny, she never spoke like no more; her that was a bed-lyer so long. And missus, her died soon after Avice went away foreign. The parson, he brought his book with un when he came; I seed that with my own eyes, for he carried it himself, and I held his horse the whiles he went up over the stairs into the chamber. And the churchwarden, he comed likewise; and the waywarden he brought two stoäns out of the road on Farmer Ward's Hill. There was a deal said and done. And they telled I that parson got a bit of the rope they hanged Tony Parkins the sheep-stealer with, when parson's grandfather was living to Dunster. But I never seed that, and I won't tell 'ee nothing but what I seed; though the rope might 'a come in handy to bind up the old witch's tongue with, if so be as her did have a hand in all that terrifying business. But what I knows, I knows for truth, and that's what I tell 'ee, Miss Annie. And my sister Avice, her wasn't *never* the same maid again. And the old missus her died soon after Avice went



away; and though I didn't see no more but the outside of Parson Joe's big book, I know there must 'a bin something in en, for I heard a cruel loud screech while I were standing there by the upping-stock holding his horse. And Avice, her went as white as a sheet."

"But how about the clome and things, Tom? Did they stop jumping about after that?"

"Oh yes, miss. Parson Joe, he *said* them, and they couldn't do nothing afterwards. But it was grandmother's chair finished me. When I saw en dapping down over the stairs just like a Christian, I was up and off like a hare. I won't tell 'ee no lies, but that I seed with my own eyes; and a body could not stand that, could he, miss? And Avice, her never were the same maid again."

\* \* \* \* \*

We got safe home that night, down Farmer Ward's Hill and all; and I don't know now why the story of Avice made so strong an impression on my mind. There was nothing so very dreadful in it. Mrs. Dallin died, it is true, in little more than a year afterwards, but she always had been an ailing body, and I've heard it was dropsy carried her off at last.

The old granny, too—well, when one remembers what her age was, ninety and over, and that she had been a bed-lyer several years, we cannot say that she was taken away before her time! And though Avice was "never the same maid again," and "went away foreign,"—which means up the country to service, somewhere in the Midlands—she got a good place, and a good husband, and I believe she is living still.

There comes a turning-point in many a girl's life,

when she is never the same again. We walk about in the midst of many mysteries, and yet, when we are young, all the world seems to lie open to us and the sunshine. Then comes something, we don't quite know what. Something that, like the old Tammy, draws a circle round us—an environment that we can only free ourselves from with a great effort.

I don't know that I should be terrified now, in my riper years, even if I were to meet old Tammy, besom in hand. I've seen too many old women to be afraid of them; and a besom is not only harmless, but very useful, to my thinking.

But I know well—and, like Tom, I'll speak the truth about it—that if I were to meet grandmother's chair, or my own, for that matter, coming down over the chamber stairs, step and step, like a Christian and all by itself too, it would "finish me," and that like Thomas, I should "run for my life"!

## CHRISTOPHER COMER.

WHAT to do with our boys and girls is a problem which English fathers and mothers appear to have a good deal of difficulty in solving nowadays. Well-educated men and women clasp their hands in despair, and, with a thousand or two per annum at their backs, talk gravely of the expenses of a growing family. I sometimes wonder how they would have managed to make both ends meet, had they stood in my friend Christopher's shoes, who, earning but fourteen shillings a week, had to feed, clothe, and educate twelve sons and daughters on it! A wage of fourteen shillings a week in Devonshire implies that you have your health, and work hard too. A labouring man, such as Christopher Comer, has no floating cash at the bank to draw on when he has a doctor's bill to pay and no week's wage coming in; though, if he is thrifty, he has saved a few pence every week to meet the payment into a sick club. I pride myself on being a good manager, but I know I should find it hard to save those few pence.

For my part, I think Christopher one of the cleverest men I know; and last time I saw him, as I shook his hard, honest hand, I told him I was proud of his acquaintance.

“Christopher,” said I, “you’ve brought up your family to be a credit to you, and useful to society; and though your wife is gone first, and you are left alone in your old age, with only Dan to be a comfort to you, still I’m sure you must be glad at heart to know how well they’ve turned out; and I feel it an honour to know such a man!” I had to speak loud, for my friend is hard of hearing; but though he is turned of seventy, nothing else fails him.

A slow smile lighted up the honest face which has turned such a brave front to the difficulties of life, as he took in the nature of my compliments. “Iss fy, they’m middling good children, all on ’em, though some on ’em has done better than others; and me and their mother, us have tried to do our duty by ’em, and teached ’em what us could. Us couldn’t give ’em no money, and not much schooling, but us did the best us could, and nobody can do no more. Kitty, her worked hard for ’em all; her was a good mother, that her was.”

Christopher Comer is a very old friend of mine. Nowadays folks address him as Mr. Comer, I observe. When I was a girl, and he was a young chap, just wed, and come to live at “Little Comfort,” every one knew him by the name of “Chris,” and his wife was plain “Kitty.” I remember well the first time I saw her. He was a native of the parish, but “her didn’t belong hereabouts,” the farmer’s wife said, who, when she brought in our weekly butter, excused herself for being a day late because she was “so terrible put about to get through the dairy work at all, Kitty Comer being that bad her couldn’t come up to do no chores.”

“No, ma’am; I reckon you don’t know her,” she continued, in answer to my mother’s inquiries; “her

isn't one of these parts. Chris, our farm man, I reckon you know he. His mother was poor old Betty Comer, who died to Crock Meads, where the landslip was seven years ago. And Chris, when his mother was took and the cottage falled in like, he went off to Molland, and worked for Farmer Tapp. And there 'twas he took up with Kitty, who was girl there. Catherine's her proper christened name, I s'pose, but her never goes by no other than Kitty. Some folks talk of *Kit and Christy* by way of meaning the grey mare's the better horse, but I don't know anything against her, I don't, though her doesn't belong hereabouts; and us just calls her Kitty, the master and me, us do; and her's a terrible handy young woman to have about the place, for her can do most anything."

But poor Kitty Comer was "took bad" more than a week ago, and "couldn't do nothing;" and Mrs. Turpit was sadly "put about," and we ran out of butter in consequence, and had to make the best of bread and dripping. For in those days there was no running out to shop for a pound of butter when you wanted it. Butcher's meat and butter came on regular days, once a week, and you ordered what you wanted for next Friday or Saturday, as the case might be.

Kitty might not belong hereabouts, but she was a person who soon made her presence felt; and though she was a new comer, we found her wanting directly she was laid by, and it behoved us, not only out of neighbourly kindness, but also with regard to good housekeeping, to bestir ourselves, and see what could be done to bring her to the front again. "Took bad" might mean anything, and my mother was never one to send remedies

without knowing what was the matter. So the very next morning I was despatched to hear all about it, and report to my elders. I did not go empty handed, you may be sure; for whatever it was that had taken Kitty, a quarter of tea and a little packet of groats would be sure to come in useful. And, moreover, Kitty was a stranger, and something must be done by way of introduction. So my mother packed the little basket while I tied on my sun-bonnet; and pleased enough was I to have an errand that would take me out over the hills that lovely morning.

Children that live in towns miss a great deal of the pleasure of life, as well as the training which comes from taking part in life's responsibilities. And it cannot well be helped. Other things there are which balance the disadvantages; but a disadvantage it nevertheless remains, that children cannot be sent out for a walk alone, and that they cannot be allowed to make friends while they are still little ones with the people on whose labours they depend in great measure for the comforts of their own more luxurious homes. I was but "in my thirteen," but though it was quite three miles away to Little Comfort, where Chris and Kitty lived, my mother had no fears in letting me walk there alone; and knew, moreover, that when I got there, I should know almost as well as herself what to say and do. I was always welcome in the cottages of the country folk—for, as Granny Richards used to say to my mother, "Miss Annie, her's always so homely like, but her isn't one with 'no hem to her garment' for all that." But that's neither here nor there. Perhaps some day I may tell you how I came to earn praise I was always so proud of.

This morning I must take you with me in my walk over the hills to see what was the matter with poor Kitty, who was "took bad."

She lived to Little Comfort, as said before. What that name means precisely, folks are not agreed about. Some maintain that the prefix is an adjective of *limitation*, and points out you must not expect much when you get there. I, for my part, side with those who lay the emphasis on the noun, and only use the word "little" as a term of affection, just as the Germans do their diminutive *chen*. Perhaps the meaning shifted with its inhabitants. When old Granfer Lord lived there, I fancy the "Comfort" must have had a tinge of irony in the application. When I was there in the last year of Kitty's life, and drank a cup of tea with her, and ate bread of her own baking, and cream from her own cow, and smelled the white jasmine that peeped in at the window, and the roses in the great beaupt which stood on the sill, I thought no name could have been hit on to suit it better.

But whoever lived there, it was always "Little." Just a kitchen back and front, with a "lean-to" one side and a shippon on the other. And above, a couple of chambers, and a sort of loft over the shippon. Little as it was, Christopher would never have got it for a shilling a week if it hadn't been in such a tumble-down state when Granfer Lord died, and his slatternly daughter moved into the next parish. Farmer Paramore, on whose land it stood, hadn't any spare money to lay out on it, for that was the year after the great failure of the potato crop, and when the corn harvest was not much better than a failure. To be sure, bullocks were looking up then, but just for a year or two

cash was very scarce. And when Christopher hired himself to the Barton Farm, at twelve shillings a week, the farmer said, "I hear thee art going to settle and take a missus ; and, if thee will, thee can have Little Comfort very cheap. I can't do nothing in the way of repairs, but thee shall have it for next to nothing. Think it over, lad."

So Chris thought it over, and said "Yes" to the bargain. But he did more than say "Yes." All that year, when he had a day off, or an idle hour, he was to be found down in the "Bottom" where the cottage lay—patching up the roof, plastering the walls, white-washing the chambers, cleaning out the shippon, or digging in the garden, so that he might have all things in order by the time he brought home his missus.

That was already more than a year ago on the day I started in my white sun-bonnet, basket in hand, to see what was the matter with that same missus, otherwise Kitty Comer, who had been "took bad."

My mother came to the gate to see me off, and, when she had watched me over the bridge, and lost sight of me as I turned to the left, up the steep hill known as Cosdown Cleave, she went in again to her sewing. But I, light of foot and light of heart, climbed up the path that led over the Cleave to Cosdown itself. More than once I turned to look back. At my feet lay the blue sea, glancing and gleaming in the sunlight; and running up the opposite hill, and crowned by the church, was the village we lived in. White houses, thatched roofs, green trees, the brawling stream, spanned by the two-arched bridge near our garden gate—I see them all over again in memory, almost as clearly.



and certainly with a keener sense of the wondrous beauty of that view, than I was conscious of then. Fifty years may dull some senses, but it sharpens the edge of others. On the down the air was sweet with mingled odours of winter and spring. The damp peat drying in the hot sun mixed its pungent scent with the mellow sweetness exhaled from thickets of yellow gorse in full bloom. There were wheel-tracks through the heather and peaty ground, and there were clearings in the furze-brake, and I had no difficulty in finding my way to Little Comfort, though it was difficult to believe wheels could really have gone down the steep, almost perpendicular, side of Cosdown to the Bottom, where the cottage lay—just one little human home, nestled in between a tiny stream and a tree or two; a garden plot, fenced in by a rough stone wall; a potato field, and, all round, the swelling heathery downs, rising and rising, till all was lost in the blue haze of distance. The farm where Christopher worked was not more than half a mile off, but it lay in another dip, and could not be seen from where I stood, on the edge of the steep, able to throw a stone, if I had so wished, into the low chimney a couple of hundred feet beneath me.

“Thank ’ee, miss, kindly, for calling, and my duty to the lady. A cup of tea’s a real comfort when a body’s forced to bide all day in the chimbley corner. My man, he doth all he can for me; and he’s a real handy chap and dreadful good to the baby: but I’m proper tired of kettle-broth, day in and day out; and the bacon and cabbage is what I can’t make no use of. Missus, her’s very good to me too, and Chris fetches home a drop of new milk for the little maid and a pint of scald

for me. And the missus, her'd have come herself to see me, but her's terrible put about, having no girl now, and the maidens bound to go to school and all. But, please the Lord, I'll soon be about again."

"How long have you been ill, Mrs. Comer? and what does the doctor say to you?"

"Bless 'ee, my dear, don't call me Mrs. Comer. I'm just plain Kitty, I be; that's what all the folks call me, though my christened name is Catherine, after my feyther's aunt up to London. And as for the doctor, miss, us can't afford to send for he; and I reckon he wouldn't come nuther, all this way. 'Tis just the boneshave I've got, and cruel bad it was the first day I was took. It strikes you in your bones, miss, it doth; and then a body can't heave nothing, and I was just forced to creep about two-double till Chris he come home and help me up over the chamber stairs. And there I lay to bed best part of a fortnight, I did; and little Janey, her were that cross I got most mazed with her, 'eause I couldn't wash her, nor do nothing proper. Chris, he did all he could. He'd light the fire and get his own vietuals, and make a drop of kettle-broth for me. But he couldn't bakey the bread, and we was bound to get a loaf from the shop—and that's poor stuff, is boughten bread; it ain't got no nature in it, Chris he saith. But he fetched home a drop of barm last night, and my bread's hefting fine, it is; and the hearthstone 'ill soon be hot, and I'll bake the loaf under the dish-kettle: he won't burn to-day, no tino! for I've nothing to do but sit here and watch en."

That was my first visit to Kitty Comer. But she and I soon became friends, and her tall figure,

decided features, and rapid movements flash across my vision often, as I think of bygone days. Kitty was very independent in character; but if you have a hungry and fast-growing family of boys and maidens, and the earnings of the father don't amount to more than twelve shillings a week in winter, and fourteen or fifteen in hay-time and corn harvest, there is not much to spare after you have fed them all, and the mother must bestir herself if they are to have decent clothes on their backs. Kitty did bestir herself to good purpose, and yet she was glad of neighbourly help. Our worn garments made Sunday frocks and coats for the little ones, for her needle was seldom put away unthreaded; and ready-made baby clothes were always a welcome gift to a busy mother. But these were only now and then presents—just tokens of neighbourly kindness, and accepted as such—never begged for.

“Thank God, I've the use of my senses,” Kitty would say; and “When the Lord sends mouths, He sends meat,” she'd often tell me. Political economists will perhaps sneer at this sentiment, and point to the starving children in our London slums. But then the question may fairly be asked, “Did the Lord send *them*?”

Kitty had no doubt whatever that *her* children were sent her by the Lord, and I think I agree with her. Anyhow the meat was not wanting. “But however do you manage?” I asked one day; and she, nothing ashamed of her thrifty housekeeping, let me in to some of her ways.

“You see, miss, my man he's never idle, he isn't. He's up with the daylight, and often before it, and he keepeth the garden splat always tilled; and we've

a rare lot of taties this year, and green stuff, and that more than us can eat. And so us make shift to keep a pig now. Chris he had a fine slip of a pig from master, and he let un go very reasonable to we. There were nine shillings I'd earnt up to Barton by charing, and that just paid for un. And what with the small taties, and the cabbages and garden stuff, what we'd plenty of as I boiled down for un, he didn't cost us a farthing till I put un in to fat a month before Christmas, and then 'twas four shillings for barley meal. And he *was* fat. He made eight score and over, he did, when us weighed un. And us lived on chitterlings and such-like for pretty nigh a month. The best part of the loin I sold fresh in to Combe, and made near on six shillings for it,—most enough to buy a new slip with. But I wanted that money bad enough to go against the boys' boots. Shoe-leather's the hardest thing to come by, and us can't go barefoot. Then I made up some hog's puddings, too, and they bought 'em to parsonage, and that was another two or three shillings to go for shoemaker George. And the rest of un I put in pickle, and it 'ill last us well on to Michaelmas, I reckon. Us never looks to have fresh meat, but a bit of pork is tasty like for dinner with the cabbage and that. Sometimes, if I'm lucky in selling a few flowers in to market, or mushrooms, or worts, or the few blackberries the childer picks in the Fall, I buy in a bit of suet and make 'em dump-lings for dinner when the pig-meat's done, and so us gets along to Christmas again. And what I gets by a day's washing in and out with the farmers' wives, I puts it all by for clothes for Chris. He must go decent, he must; and after I've bought the bushel of wheat out of his wages, and got it ground to mill,

and paid for a drop of barm for the hefting, and just a candle and that to shop, there's not much left. I got a stock of bees too, miss, last year; and Chris he ordered up a fine bee-butt for 'em; and I reckon to make nine or ten shillings of the honey this year, let alone a drop of metheglin for ourselves—it's handy at christenings and such-like. One wishes to pass a compliment round when the gossips come home from church. And as for firing, the childer brings in a goodish bit of sticks and furze stumps; and master, he lets Chris have a load or two of turf when the horses ain't so busy and can fetch it in. For Chris, he's not one to make a fuss about working after hours when rain's coming and the hay out, and the master he maketh it up to un one way or another. And vearns and fuz for yetting the oven us can always have for the cutting. Yes, miss, it's a tight fit some whiles; but us never lets the little ones go hungry to bed, and the like o' we don't look to live like gentry.

“Jackey, he's in his eleven, and a very handy boy. I look to get him a place next Fall, and then we shan't be so many mouths at home; and many's the penny he earns now by holding a horse, or running arrants after school's out.”

Up early and down late—tilling his garden in the dewy morn, setting his potatoes in the slow twilight—cleaning himself Sundays and taking the bigger children with him “to prayer” in the summer afternoons, lived and laboured Christopher Comer many a long year. No one ever heard a word against him. “A very *quite* chap,” the neighbours said, “and honest as daylight.” Kitty was said to be too ready with her tongue, but none the less she was always in request. She was strong and rapid;

no one got through a day's wash like she did, and her clothes always hung sweet and white on the line. And perhaps her sharp tongue and quick decision of character gave the tone to the household. Chris would have "heard of it" fast enough if he'd ever been seen coming out of the public. "No fy!" I heard her say; "my man know'th better than that. A drop of home-brewed, such as he getteth up to Barton in harvest-time, is not a bad thing; but that mucky trade up to 'Fox and Goose,' it shan't go down his throat while I'm alive to hinder it—and money out of pocket too, no tino! What's given to mun is another thing; but to take the bread out of the children's mouths, no fy!"

And so they grew up. Sometimes, in a hard, cold winter, just before pig-killing time, the little ones' cheeks would look rather pale, and Kitty would have a gaunter frame than usual. Sometimes when there was a new baby in the cradle, its mother would say, "Thank you kindly, sir, and may the Lord reward you," as the parson slipped half a crown into her hand. But the children were always welcomed as they came—"they bring their own love with them"; and Chris found his chief pleasure in life standing at his cottage door on a Sunday morning with the last baby in his arms, and two or three others a little older clinging round, "telling to daddy." The children were kept to school—not one of them but learned to read and write and figure a bit. For though Kitty was no scholar, as she often said, "she hoped she knew her duty," and the school pence were duly hoarded in the black teapot which was seldom used in those days for its rightful purpose. In later and more prosperous times, when Isaac was gone to sea, and Jane was off

to 'Merica and doing well there, and Bill carter to Farmer Farthing, and Lizbuth gone to service with the parson's aunt, away "up country," and little Kit was learning carpentering, and three fine lads were in the Queen's navy, and sending home a pound or two to help father and mother and the four young ones at home, then the teapot was often in request for afternoon tea. Ah me! many is the pleasant cup I have drunk out of it, touched up with the cream from Kitty's own cow. For a cow she had, that was the pride and delight of her life in her latter days. Her latter days—for Kitty Comer is gone now.

But it was Christopher's history I set out to tell, and I've drifted into Kitty's life, and her sayings and doings. Good faithful wife and mother—but, after all, what would she have been without her man?

"Kitty, thee mustn't be so quick with thy tongue," I've heard him say. "It takes all sorts to make a world." Patient beyond ordinary, "Good times and bad times and all times pass over," might have been his motto, if he had wanted one to live by. Wet and shine, cold and heat, seed-time and harvest, Chris knew he had not the ordering of them, but it was his to make the best use of whatever was sent. "What dreadful wet weather!" said I one day, as he passed me with an old sack tied round his shoulders. "Bless 'ee, miss, 'twill make the taters grow like anything!" was his answer. And when the little Lizzie was cross, one hot summer day, and wanted to stay in the cool house instead of fetching "mother's arrants" home from Churchtown, he bid her "never quarrley with God's sunshine, my maid; thee can't make it, and thee might mar it."

The worst I ever heard from his lips, when all the land was crying out for rain, and the lakes dried up with long drought, was a hesitating remark as he looked at the sky, "'Tis a pity fine weather should ever do harm!"

Up early, and down late. Hard work and no great pay. So life went on. The boys and girls grew up, as I said, and chose their own paths. Father and mother would both have been better pleased, I think, if the lads had stuck to the land as they did. But the sea has often an overpowering attraction for lads brought up within sight and smell of it, and five of the young Comers became sailors. The first who went was Bob, and him they did gainsay; the end of that was that he made a runaway start—worked his way to the nearest port; and, after long weeks of waiting and anxiety, they got a few lines: "Dear father and mother, this comes hoping to find you well as thank God it leaves me at present, dear father and mother Im tuk as boy on the *Nautylus* sailing from Cardiff so no more at presunt from yer loving son Robbert."

Poor Kitty! she shed many tears over that scrawl, and many more followed from the same source before she saw her lad again. She dreamed of him by night, and watched the wild waves tossing from Cosdown Beacon many a day, before he came back. Little Dick, who died of scarlet fever when he was three, and lay in the churchyard, cost her no such anguish. "I know where he be," she would say; "the Lord took him to heaven, and I know he's well off there, nuther hungry nor cold; but Bob, there's no telling what he's after,—and who's to mend his stockings?"

But they never gainsaid the others when they



talked of the sea as Bob had done. And the other four went into the Queen's service with their father's blessing and a good bundle of well-knit stockings. The world seemed bigger both to father and mother, when letters came from the four quarters of it, telling of what their boys were seeing and doing. They weren't much of scholars, but between them and little Sam, who bided to school longer than the rest because he was "dillicate," they could spell out the letters when they came, and then they would be folded away in the big Bible, and on wet Sundays, when Kitty never went to church, she had them all out to look at and tell over again. And when either of the sailors came home, what a joy! Well-grown fellows they were when they went away; but discipline, and good clothes, and self-respect made them hold their heads much higher when they came back, jingling loose cash in their trouser-pockets, and telling of all the wonders they'd seen in foreign ports, as sailors do. Even Bob the runagate came home a fine man to look at—nothing of the collier about him, though his first trip was made in a coal-ship; and he was well thought of in the merchant service.

I sometimes wondered what the world felt like to Christopher as he got on in years. When the lads and maidens were little ones, he could not have much time for thinking. The Crimean war loomed in the horizon, but Chris only "heard tell we was fighting the Rooshians." The Indian Mutiny, the American war, filled English hearts with horror and keenest sympathy. Chris and Kitty were but pondering how to get Isaac and Bobby new shoes; while the squire's wife, who had a sister married in India, forgot Kitty's boys as she prayed for her far-away dear

ones; and the parson, in his anxiety about American investments, failed in his Christmas gift of coal. That was something near and tangible. America and India were but words while her boys were yet safe at home. But when they got their wings and flew, what did America and India look like then, to the father and mother who never saw a map, and had never been twenty miles from home?

A bounded life has narrow interests and few joys. But perhaps the joys are keener for being few, and the interests deeper for their very narrowness. Certainly no one could take a deeper interest in the crops and the cattle, and all the wild things that nested about them, than the folks at Little Comfort. Then the flowers they grew! Stocks, double-daisies, gilly-flowers (or, they call them in Devonshire, "bloody warriors"), roses, sweet-williams, and jasmine all clustered round the porch, and were scented through the casement window.

"I were always fond o' flowers from the time I were but a little mite of a chap," says Chris; "and Kitty, her's dreadful took up with them too: and there's ne'er been a time when us hadn't a few in the garden splat, though when the children was little us hadn't much like in the windows—a handful of children makes both hands full of work. But there, a body can mostly come what he sets his mind to, and us set ours on a garden."

Set his mind to. Yes, I think that was the secret of Christopher's life. He knew what he wanted, and set his mind to it. Many folks don't know what they want, and they change their minds first one way and then another, and so they "come nothing." That Devonshire idiom "to come" anything, is, I suppose, cousin to the German "be-

kommen." Certainly it is not the common English word which implies movement of the body. It distinctly implies mental acquisition. "I can't come thickey," says the little maid at school, sighing over a difficult sum. Perhaps it implies power over other things to make them move towards us. Anyhow, it's a solid truth that we can mostly "come," get, or become whatever we set our minds to. Christopher set his mind to other things outside his garden as well. He set it towards bringing up his children to be a credit to him. They should "larn behaviour," he declared, from their babyhood, and learn it they did accordingly. "Behaviour" covers a good part of life, and means a good deal. "Behave theeself, Dick," says mother, when Dick wants more than his share of pudding at supper. "'Tain't behaviour," admonishes father, when Lizzie goes to sleep in church. And "Her knoweth how to behave, her doth," was held to be quite a sufficient character when Kitty took her eldest maid up to a lady who was looking out for a girl to train as housemaid. What the lady wanted her servant to *do* could easily be taught her, but *behaviour* must be learnt at home. And all the children, both boys and maids, did learn it; and, accordingly, when they were put out into the world, they soon fitted into whatever place was vacant for them. I never heard of any one of them that they were square pegs in round holes. How to behave towards work, was to do it as well as you could. How to behave towards those that paid you wages, was to mind what they told you, and say, "Thank you," when you got your money. How to behave with regard to money, was to keep it against you wanted it. How to behave towards yourself, was to be

clean and tidy, and "keep your clothes mended up." How to behave to your neighbour, was to "lave un boide." How to behave to the world in general, was never to be beholden to it for anything you could do for yourself.

Self-respect carries a man through many difficulties, and it carried Chris well on to seventy years of age. Year by year he had more comforts about him. Year by year he held his head higher. Year by year one or other of his children came back to see father in the old place, and tell of their doings to ears that were getting hard of hearing. Then, too, they would talk of "poor mother," and go to lay posies on her grave, and tell of all "her ways," none of which would Chris allow to be altered by any of them. Polly, the youngest maid, who came home from service to keep father's house, complained sometimes that he would not let her bake the bread on Thursday, because mother used to do it on Wednesday. "Her always had her reasons, had my missus; and though I don't rightly call 'em to mind, I know they was good ones, and us can't do better than stick to them." And Wednesday it had to be.

Time goes on, and Chris still lives, but he is up in years now, as he owns himself; and when chance brings me near Little Comfort, and I drop in to see him, the conversation is mostly on one side, because he can't hear at all what I have to say. Not that it much matters. Conversation proceeds on regular lines in those out-of-the-way corners of the world. He can guess well enough what I have to say about the weather and the time of year, and answers accordingly. Then there are the proper compliments to be made about our health; and a

man who "knows behaviour" so well can always fit in his information about Polly's husband (for Polly is married now, but not gone far from the old home) and the baby into its proper place without hearing my sympathetic answers.

Last time I went it was a Saturday afternoon, and I expected to find Polly there, "ordering up the place" for Sunday, and darning father's stockings. Instead of which, Christopher himself, with his silver-rimmed glasses on, was sitting on the window bench, stitching at his shirt buttons himself.

"Iss fy, miss, there ain't much I can't turn my hands to when needs must; and Polly, poer maid, her's got a nympling-gang, and her can't do naught. So I fetched off work a bit early, and washed down the kitchen; and Danny, he'll clean down the dresser and that, when he cometh—for mother her never liked to see things out of the way on Sundays. It had to be all clean and polished then, kettle and all, and so it shall now. Her'd often speak up to me and the boys if us came in with mucky boots, or didn't lay out our Sunday clothes vitty afore us went to bed. Us never forgets it now; and I reckon her's pleased if her can see us, and I sem her can wherever the Lord's seen fit to take her to. Danny, he's a bit fearsome at times; he says he knows there's a spirit or some'at following un up over the chamber stairs in the dimpses. But I tell he that if 'twere her spirit, her wouldn't do un no harm. Her was allus good to us while her was here; and why should her be different now? And her was always right down glad to see 'ee, miss, and so be I."

The ground-plan of life for human beings is laid

down on certain well-known simple lines, which apply all the world over, and, for those who can follow them out, living has its joy and its reward. Labour and rest, night and day, food and sleep, marriage and rearing of children, are the warp and weft of earth's existence, whether for queen or people. Some make a fair pattern of their web; some tangle the thread and throw the shuttle angrily. Some weave slowly a good solid ground, and finish off with a golden fringe. But what we weave we must wear, and it is all we have.

Chris and his wife wove steadily and truly the pattern their forbears had taught them. And when I hear in church the Evening Psalms for the 27th of the month, and we come to that verse beginning, "Thou shalt eat of the fruit of thy hands," and ending with "Oh well is thee, and happy shalt thou be," I think of Christopher Comer, and how he lived and laboured, loved and lost.

## THE SCHOOL AND ITS SCHOLARS.

THERE are schools and schools—that we all know: schools where a little learning is knocked into dull heads with many raps from schoolmaster's cane; schools where many rules of grammar are taught and few rules of conduct; schools where the children are turned out proficient in fractions, and well able to define the boundaries of Russia, and to tell all about the aborigines of Australia; schools which show up well in the inspector's reports, and get good "grants;" Board schools, where the mistress slaves at her book-work and at grinding her pupil teachers, but gets her dinner anyhow; voluntary schools, so called, where the parson's wife bribes the mothers by frequent treats and universal prizes to send their little ones to be taught; and compulsory schools, where the master dare not turn out a rebellious or impudent urchin, much less chastise him. Such, and many more of varying shades of character, exist up and down through the length and breadth of the land. But the school I am going to tell you about was not one of these. How many years ago it held sway does not matter; it

was "once on a time," and its whereabouts was in Devonshire.

If you had got up early enough on a winter's morning, you might have seen the children gathering together from the lanes and over the common; some making short cuts across a field for the pleasure of having a stone fence to climb at the top and a brawling stream to jump at the bottom. I have seen them often, when the moon was not set, and the last few stars were just fading away in the dawn, trooping along with thick naily boots and rosy cheeks, and then making a sudden run to be in first when they saw "governess" in the distance, coming through the Lawns, with her stout umbrella in one hand and her bag of books in the other. Generally they were all in their places against she reached the school-room door, and the old clock in the corner pointed to five minutes before eight; and the bright faces looked brighter as they all stood up with a sharp bustle and shouted out, "Good morning, ma'am." Children's voices are apt to partake of the nature of a shout when each one wants to "speak up" for fear governess shouldn't hear his particular "good morning" and know he was "behaving;" and the tones were only a trifle moderated by the thought of the reproving eye and the quieting reminder, "Hush, my dears; I'm not deaf yet."

There was one little maid that was most times late, however, but even she was generally in before all the names were called, and if not, there was always "law given" to Nanny Hooper, for she had a longer walk than any of the others, and never missed, rain or shine, though the three miles that lay between her home and the school was rough



walking, even if she came by the road; and she mostly brought her breakfast in her hand—a slice of dry bread—and ate it as she came.

Nanny was only ten years old, or, as she preferred to tell those who asked her age, “in my eleven;” but she was the eldest of six brothers and sisters, and “mother’s right hand.” In that capacity she had to nurse the baby while the other four were being washed and dressed, and to sweep out the kitchen and fill the tea-kettle from the spring before she started for school.

“Nanny *must* go to school now,” her mother said, “or else she’ll never get no larning afore her’s growed big enough to be put out to get her living. But dear so’s e! ma’am, it’s hard to spare her, for she’s as handy as a woman, for all her’s so small of her age.”

I wonder which was the most use to Nanny when she was “put out in the world,”—the reading and writing she learnt at school, or the handiness she got from her mother’s teaching at home? However, that is a question you and I have nothing to do with: in fact, we had better not attempt to answer it one way or another. The law of the land has settled it for us, that learn to read and write we must, whether we like it or not; and Heaven send we make some use of our accomplishments!

Nanny did like it. To walk three miles, regardless of weather, and then to sit and rest in a warm room with other children, mostly older than herself, and all better dressed, was indeed happiness: and to take turns in reading the chapter in the Bible, to say tables, and be shown how to write her copy without making blots, was far easier and pleasanter work than fetching in furze to heat the oven with, or carrying about a heavy child.

Yes: Nanny loved coming to school, and so did all the others. Nobody need bribe them to be good children and not go miching. Their fathers and mothers often said what a fine thing learning was, and told them of the times when they were little, and had no chance of schooling. If a child was naughty at home, mother used to wonder (out loud), "however governess could have the patience to put up with the maid, and teach her lessons, when her was that stupid in scrubbing down the chamber at home; she was sure her'd never make no hand to her book;" and the gravest disgrace that could befall an idle little maid at school was to be told that, if she didn't want to learn, governess certainly wasn't going to take the trouble of teaching her, and she had better not come any more. This happened to Susan Vicary once, when she was dawdling over her sums, and governess had found her twice in the act of catching flies instead of adding up figures. Governess got up and opened the door for her, and said, "Good morning, Susie. Tell your mother I've given you a week's holiday." Governess said it quite politely, and smiled at Susie as she reached her sun-bonnet down and hung her slate up on a nail. But Susan burst out weeping, and was found by the others, when school was over, hanging about the door with red eyes, afraid to go home. The next morning, Susan and her mother were there before any one else; and, with many protestations from Mrs. Vicary that she was properly ashamed any child of hers could be so ungrateful, and many tears and promises from Susan, the week's holiday was rescinded, and every child in the school got good marks for attention, not only that day, but for long afterwards.

It was not much learning these children got, in spite of their attention and governess's best endeavours. The room was small, being, in fact, only a cottage kitchen, and twenty children filled it, leaving no space for blackboard, or maps, or desks, or any of the paraphernalia thought necessary nowadays for teaching. There was a long oaken table down one side by the window. There was an oaken settle by the hearth-place, where the cottage's proper occupant sat and knitted when she was at home. There were three forms and two chairs, on one of which governess sat when she had time to sit at all. When there were more than twenty children, some of them had always to stand; and whether there were twenty or twenty-five, every child wanted individual attention. Scarcely two were of the same age or capacity, or were learning the same lesson at the same time. They came at eight o'clock in the morning and stayed till half an hour after noon had struck; but they had no more for the day—the distances were all too great for the little ones or governess to take the walk twice over. It's against all rule to work four and a half hours straight off; it's against all rule to have so many scholars in so small a space; it's against all rule to give holidays as punishment. But all this happened before the Education Act was passed, and if you sit with open door and a fine current of air through a wide chimney, there's no fear of suffocation; and if you get plenty of bodily exercise in the afternoon, a little extra application of your brain in the hours of forenoon has no bad effect, and the balance is kept. But, after all, they get very little learning, as I said before; and we are told "a little learning is a dangerous thing"!

I don't think myself that is quite true. Little minds can only take in a little of anything; the overplus runs out to waste like a teacup too full. What the mind can make use of, it will surely retain. James Farthing never got beyond the rule of three, but he learned that joyfully, and it was at the tips of his fingers, as we say, when he left school (he came for three winters only, and earned the money for his schooling in the summer), and had to go out in the world and earn his living. And he took his ciphering book with him, and when he had a bit of time evenings, he used to take it out and do over the old sums for pleasure.

Jem certainly had no more than a little learning, but it was no source of danger to him; quite the contrary—his little learning stood him in good stead all his life. If a young man apprenticed to the blacksmithing can reckon up his master's books at the end of the year, and make out the little bills for shoeing the farmers' horses, and set against so many chain-harrows mending, and so many new wheel-tires, the price of the haulage of a ton or two of culm, and make no mistake in the final amount due to the smith, that lad is sure to be reckoned as "vallyable," and to be brought on well in all the trade mysteries by his master, even though there may be a blot on the little account sent in to Farmer Lethaby, and even though, if you could have taken a look at Jem as he sat writing, you would have been amused at the way he squared his elbows, put his head on one side, and rolled his tongue.

But the school inspector, when he came, was not at all amused. He was very much displeased. He scoffed at Jem's attitude, and his "rule of three."

"What! a big lad like that? he must be fifteen, I

should think. He ought to be in fractions. I'm afraid, Miss Palfreman, we must ask for some change in the management of this class," etc., etc.

That was long counted as a black day in the annals of our school—the day the inspector came. No one was any the better for it, and some were much the worse. It was a shock to the constitution; and, like all shocks, it took time to get over.

It was such a nice morning, too, that Monday, when the parson sent down the strange gentleman, without a word of warning, to see the school, where all the bigger children of the tiny parish were assembled. I remember it well. Monday morning, and all the frocks were clean; every face bright and rosy. Martha Crick, at the top of the class, had the privilege of bringing governess a big bunch of clove-pinks and southernwood; and the posy stood in a blue jug in the centre of the table, where the copy-books were laid out in order, and a dozen or more eager little heads and willing right hands were waiting for the word of command to begin writing. And what was the copy?

"It's in the New Testament, my dears," says governess, as she stands with her Bible in her hand before she begins to dictate; "but I shan't tell you where, because I want you to find it for yourselves. What we find for ourselves, after much looking for it, is apt to stick in our memories. And I want this to stick in yours. It's the writing you've got to think about now, and the spelling, and where to put in your stops, so that you can read the sense of it proper. And you shall write it over six times, and whoever has more than six mistakes will get a bad mark. Six times will print it on your minds; and whoever can say it over without a mistake, and

bring me chapter and verse by next Sunday, shall come home to tea with me after prayer is out."

And all pens being dipped, and all eyes fixed, governess gave out slowly and clearly all through, and then once again, word by word: "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we have commanded you."

There were one or two who felt sure they should be invited to tea next Sunday. There was Martha, at the top of the table, and Samuel Tucker, who sat next to her. They knew all the names of the books in the New Testament, and very rarely muddled up the Gospels and Epistles. Willy Tucker, who was allowed to sit next his brother, because he was shy, having only just come to school, made a false start with "Study to be quite;" but he never thought much about his spelling, if only he could get done as soon as his big brother. Christopher, who came next, was the sexton's son, and prided himself on knowing more "textes" than any other boy in the school. He felt sadly put about at not being able to remember having heard this particular one before. He would get out his Bible directly he got home and begin to read "Aets" all through; he was sure he should soon put his finger on it.

Alice Bevan was certain that Matthew had said it—or was it one of the Romans? Anyhow, she had all the week before her to find out. There was no time to think of that now; governess had given out the verse all through, and with a last injunction to remember—"up-strokes light, down-strokes heavier," had turned her attention to the second class, who gathered in a ring round her, and were waiting to be questioned in their "tables," when a tap was heard

at the door, followed by the entrance of a strange young gentleman in clerical dress.

“Good morning,” said he; “I’ve been calling on your parson, by the bishop’s desire, as his lordship is very anxious to ascertain the state of education in his diocese, more especially in those out-of-the-way spots where there is no certificated master or mistress under the rule of the National School Society. He tells me, however, that there is a very efficient school in this parish, kept up by voluntary enterprise, and by your leave I should like to examine it, in order to make my report as complete as possible.”

Governess had time, while this little speech was being made, to face the position, and to consider the dilemma in which she found herself. She looked at the young man in his correctly cut clothes, and his “Nugee” hat. “Not long in orders,” was her mental verdict, “fresh from college, and chosen to be diocesan inspector on account of his good degree.” *Would* he be able to examine her little flock, and find out what they knew? If you don’t know what the children are being taught, how can you ascertain what they have learnt? But he was waiting for her to speak—she must rise to the occasion. To decline his proposal would condemn both her school and herself as failures. There was nothing for it but acquiescence.

“Certainly, sir,” said she, with her best air of politeness, setting the gentleman the only chair in the room which could be made available—her own,—and placing it as conveniently as was possible for facing the children who were writing at the table.

“Perhaps you would like to look at their copy-books—the big ones are just doing their writing-lesson—a dictation, to-day, out of the Bible.”

“Presently, ma’am, presently,” he replied; “it is best to do things in order. I always begin at the beginning. Children,”—standing up and clearing his throat, which was affected by the peat smoke from the fire on the hearth—“Children, reading is the most important factor in education; to be able to read clearly, correctly, intelligently, is the first step on the ladder to success in this world. The Prime Minister of England had to learn to read when he was little; the Queen of England was taught her alphabet before she was four years old! First class, get out your reading-books; I wish to hear you read.”

“Not got any reading-books? Do I hear aright? Is this possible, ma’am?”

“Yes, sir; they don’t learn to read with me; I do not take them till they have passed out of the Infant School, which is held in the church vestry, and there they learn to read. When they come here we read a chapter in the Bible every morning first thing, and that is all we have time for; and we have no other reading-books.”

“A chapter in the Bible! A very bad plan—teaches the children irreverence to use Holy Scripture as a school-book; and besides, it is not that modern English which it is so essential the rising generation should get a full command over. No, thank you, no; I do not wish to hear them read a chapter. I am sure the bishop would not countenance any such proceedings!”

And the young man, who had brought out his report-book, wrote as first sentence under the heading of “Muttlebury School,” “Reading neglected; no reading-books supplied. Mem: To tell bishop about the Bibles.” Aloud: “I should like to examine the children in spelling. Stand up.”



The youngsters who were accustomed to stand round governess, to repeat their spelling, and other lessons in the vacant part of the tiny room, giving up their place at table for the little ones and their slates, not only stood up, but began to sidle out from their forms behind the table, and the little second-class to sidle in.

"Keep in your places," ordered the gentleman, wondering what was going to happen.

Governess began to explain.

"Allow me, ma'am; I must conduct the examination myself"—in an aside; "be kind enough not to interfere."

Before every one was in place again, another note had been added to the report—"Very bad order in school; number of seats insufficient."

But the children could spell fairly well, and, when once started on "able, ability; blessing, blessedness; curious, curiosity; duty, dutiful," went on swimmingly till the spelling-book was shut up, and the gentleman began to try them with strange words, to test their ears for sound, and their knowledge of syllables.

Martha stared blankly at Samuel when asked to spell "perturbation," and William blushed to the roots of his hair at "technicality." "Please, sir, us haven't learnt he," at last he found courage to say. And the examiner wrote in his report, "Spelling learned by rote; no knowledge of syllabic sounds; books old-fashioned."

By this time tears were being hastily dried on the corners of the clean Monday pinafores. The boys, too proud for such manifestation of feelings, but unequal to these demands on their brain power, looked pale and cross. Instead of being asked,

“How many sheep must you shear in an hour, if you have to finish a flock of 300 in one day, and you have only 5 pairs of shears to do it?” when Timothy Whidden would have worked the answer out in his head first, and then neatly put it on his slate; he was completely confused by having a sheet of paper, ruled and numbered, placed before him, and told to work out with pen and ink, while five minutes were allotted to him for time, the unheard-of question, “If 327 men can consume 109 cwt. of bread in 11 days and  $\frac{3}{4}$ , how much does each man require per diem?”

Abstract ideas are completely foreign to the mind of a country lad. Tim had never seen so many men together in his life; why, there were not two hundred people, men, women, and children all told, in the parish! And a hundred-weight of bread, what did that look like? Mother, when she baked, had a bushel of wheat and sent it to mill to be ground, and it made thirteen big loaves and lasted the family about a week. He bit the end of his pen, he dipped it in the ink-pot three times, he scratched his head, but when the gentleman said, “Time’s up,” poor Tim had but two blots and a smudge by way of answer to show up. No wonder he got a bad mark. Is it not the first duty of a scholar to be ready to grasp ideas foreign, and words new? Timothy could only work amongst the familiar. Alas for poor governess, who used to take hold of the thoughts and facts already at home in the brains of her pupils and work out with them the useful problems of life! Alas for the poor little maidens, who in the grammar lesson spoke of definite and indefinite articles, and had never heard of “adjectives absolute”! The inspector shook his head mournfully, and said he

was afraid his lordship would be much disappointed.

Let us draw a decent veil over the remainder of that morning. The inspector is gone, disappeared into the darkness of the past. His report is neatly printed, and lies, one in a dusty heap of pamphlets, on the office shelf, amongst other diocesan records. But the children are still alive—out of the twenty-two present that day, but *one* has passed away to the silent land, and twenty-one still survive, and, as grown men and women, play their part, and help to make Devon what it is. Do they play their part well or ill? Perhaps that question will answer itself later on. Meanwhile, the children are a pleasanter subject than the examiner: let us go back to them.

They were not all good. I don't pretend they were. But, as a general rule, they came because they wished to learn, and because their fathers and mothers had pointed out to them what a fine thing "learning" was, and how kind it was of governess to teach them; and, accordingly, they applied their small minds to learning, and absorbed such knowledge as they could assimilate, and was useful to their state and condition.

Timothy Whidden got over his discomfiture with respect to the hundred-weights of bread when it was explained to him next day, that ciphering on paper was not so useful to him as the power of ready reckoning in his head, which he was so proud of; but how could a strange gentleman from London tell that, or, indeed, know what his business in life was likely to be? But governess knew, and gave him an opportunity of distinguishing himself by working out a very difficult question with regard

to mugs of cider and firkins of beer, relative to corn harvest and labourers' wages, which Tim found no trouble in applying to the workmen on his father's farm.

Martha looked rather pale as she took her place as usual next morning at the top of the table; but the bad taste of those ugly words "perturbation" and "technicality" was taken away by governess dictating an imaginary letter, for the first class to write, to an imaginary cousin in London, in which they described the *perturbation* the whole school was thrown into by the strange gentleman's visit on account of the *technicalities* of an examination with which they were not familiar. Like a shying horse which has to be brought up close to the dreaded object, they all looked askance at one another till they had learned what those "nasty words," which had brought them to grief the day before, meant, and how they were to be used. When they once found out that "perturb" was first cousin to a very old friend, "disturb," and that "technicality" was nothing like such a bad word as it sounded, they got the five syllables written down without more ado. And when governess gave them leave to write the letter over again in their own language, and to leave out anything which the problematical cousin would not be likely to understand, the smiles all returned as they dipped their pens afresh, and proceeded to inform dear Cousin Jane that "us was properly terrified, for the words of him were as long as a kite's tail, and hadn't no sense at all."

And that was the end of the spelling lesson! Though, I dare say, if you were to ask either of those children, even to-day, how to spell "technicality," you would get it correctly given without

hesitation. But I wonder if the knowledge has been of the slightest use to them? Would it come under the head of education proper?

There was one Jacob, a curly-headed lad, full of nonsense and high spirits, amongst those twelve who were writing on that memorable morning. Indeed, it was his spirit of restlessness and habit of interference which infected the class at times, and put governess up to making them learn that said text. "Jacob," she said sharply, turning round a day or two after from correcting sums, and seeing those roguish eyes fixed on the window, and a pencil balanced on the tip of the little pug nose,—“Jacob, what *are* you about?”

“If you please, ma’am,” was the answer given, with great gravity and politeness, “I’m studying to be quiet.”

Every one laughed. Who could help it? But the urchin did not get the best of it after all, for governess quietly retorted—

“Quite right, Jacob, as far as you’ve got; but how about the rest of the verse? Are you doing your own business, and working with your own hands as I have commanded you?”

Poor little merry Jacob! he has learned to work with his own hands, he has gone through many troubles, many adventures in foreign lands, many vicissitudes of life and fortune, but he has never forgotten that morning’s snub, which lost him the prestige of being the readiest-witted in the class.

“What good are his wits to him,” asked the sober-minded ones, “if he don’t know the difference between a whole and a half?”

Did we learn irreverence by using the Bible as a lesson-book? Many a time has that question been

asked, but I think we should always have said "No" to it. On the contrary, governess used to maintain that it taught reverence for God's Word. It was read each morning as the first lesson of the day, and she told us that if we were not able to read our Bibles and understand something of what the holy men of old were inspired to write for our benefit learning to read would be of little use to us. "The Bible is the first of all books," she used to say; "and if I can't teach you, my dears, with its help, to be good children, and sensible children, and to mind your duty, and learn how to live in this world, I'd rather shut up school at once." No, no, whatever else the children didn't mind, they knew they must mind when the Bible was being read; and if any one was not there in time, a whole good mark was subtracted from the day's sum-total, And how they would all try to understand what they read, for they knew governess cared more about that than anything else!

Very funny were the mistakes made sometimes. "Do you know what is meant by the Feast of Dedication?" was the question asked when the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel was the day's reading. The question was passed round till it came to Janet Tucker, a big girl, and not over sharp.

"Yes, ma'am; it's the school feast."

"Oh, Janet, Janet! can't you think of any feast without meaning curranty cake and cream?" thought governess, with an inward sigh at Janet's stupidity; aloud, however, she said—

"What makes you think of the school feast, then?"

"Please, I thought schooling was the same as eddication."

After all, it showed Janet thought about the words, and tried to understand; and many folks, even more learned than Janet, and with the very best intentions, read their own ideas into Bible words. The confusion between schooling and "eddication" is one which Janet's betters often fall into. Samuel Crick also thought about what he had read, when, being questioned on the last chapter of St. John's Gospel, he summed up St. Peter's curiosity, and the reply our Lord thought fit to give him, in these words: "St. Peter, he wanted for to know what should come of John, but the Lord He wouldn't give un no satisfaction; He told un 'twasn't no odds to he what happened to John, and he should mind his own business."

Perhaps, indeed, some folks who can express themselves more elegantly do not grasp the moral so clearly. But, then, Sammy came of a family who were noted for minding their own concerns, and so his little brain was alive to accept teaching which fitted in so well with preconceived ideas of right and wrong. After all, the best education can but draw out, and train up, and foster the latent forces and the seeds of good which have been already planted in a child's being.

Sammy went to sea when he grew up, and now, like St. Peter, he owns a boat, and catches fish, and mends his nets on the shore. Last week, I overheard him talking to his wife, who was worrying over a neighbour's "nasty" ways, and saying, as women will, "'Twould sarve un right if I telled the parson of mun."

"You lave un boide, Sally," was his answer. "'Tain't no consarn of yours."

Sammy Crick is reckoned a very honest man, and

neighbourly; and I don't wonder at it—the world goes best when we sweep our own doorsteps.

But I must not go on too quickly. Five and twenty years ago the children were still at school, and learning their lessons. I want you to see what sort of lessons they were, and how their lives and their schooling were woven in together; and then you can look round on the men and women they have grown up into, and ask yourselves the question, "Was it for good or for ill they learned this or that, and learned it *so*?"

The Bible lesson was the first, I have said already; and what came next? Repetition of hymns, spelling, and the Collect for the week; writing of copies; writing from dictation, which was always something governess wished to impress on our memories. How all longed and tried to be the one who should show up the writing-book without a mistake! But that could not often be, even when governess helped us with the spelling of a new or long word. Sometimes it was a bit out of the newspaper. Sometimes a piece of poetry. Sometimes one of Miss Martineau's charming descriptive chapters in "Health, Husbandry, and Handicraft," that furnished subject for our pens; but whatever it was, we had to remember it. Next week, or the week after, or it might be three months hence, governess would ask what we knew about the prospects of the corn harvest in America, or the way the Dutch people made their butter and cheese; and woe to that child who could not write down from memory some sort of sensible account of that information which it had once written from dictation. And then the two pages were compared, and it was seen what the writer's memory was most retentive of. Governess



laid great stress on a correct memory. What fun the children thought it when she wrote down on a slip of paper an imaginary message which had to be delivered to an imaginary person, and then whispered it to each child before they left school, and told them to bring back the answer next day! And what a laugh we had at the crooked answers some of us brought, and which did not fit at all with the question when it was read out! Perhaps this was only play, and not lessons. But those who went to service when they grew up, and remembered what they had learnt as to the faithful carrying of messages, got praised by their masters and mistresses for good memories and good sense.

What a child is taught when it is little, whether in play or in earnest, becomes its stock-in-trade when it is grown up. And governess never forgot the sort of homes we came from, or the calling it was likely we should follow in later years. Being country children, our sums, instead of dealing with abstractions, were made living to us by tossing about queries amongst loads of hay, the market price of wool, and the average number of pounds of butter produced by each cow in a given farm in one year, and what was the cost of keeping a pig, and how many children could be fed on ten shillings a week when wheat was so much a bushel. Thus they never learned "one thing at a time," which some authorities maintain is the only way to learn anything well. They learned the first principles of domestic economy, while they learned at the same time to master the mysteries of Practice and Rule of Three. They learned to look beyond their own little bounded horizon as they wrote dictation. They learned from beginning to end of their school-life

that manners and pretty behaviour go to the making of us—the making of the men and women they should grow into. To be told that they had “no hem to their garments” was what prevented many a rude word or slovenly habit. An image well applied sinks deep into the childish mind, and colours, half unconsciously, the surface of its life.

In July and August school broke up. There was much to be done at home in those months. Haytime and harvest came and went, and then in September we gathered together again.

Once a year came our school feast, when we had tea in the parsonage fields, and marched there in procession through the warm June lanes and over the breezy common. James Hawkins walked first, being a big strong lad, and able to carry the school flag. Then came the other children, two and two, and governess in a cart behind, laden with the great basket full of buns. She used to make them herself, I know, and good they were; and though she would get up at six o'clock to set them hefting, the last batch would be taken hot out of the oven when she started at two o'clock in the cart.

Mrs. Gregory sent the butter by her two little lads. Mrs. Crocombe would bring the cream for tea herself, for fear her Matthew, whose hands were full of flowers with which he was bent on decking the horse's head, should spill it by the way. Parsonage dairy would supply the milk; and a pound of tea always found its way by some hand or other into the parsonage kitchen by the time the big kettle was boiling; and a loaf or two of farmhouse bread was never wanting.

The school feast was not *only* a school feast; it was a gathering of all the mothers in the parish to

meet governess, and to talk over their children's progress in the last year—to tell what they wanted for the future; to plan and to ask advice about the coming winter. And no one came empty handed. Tables were spread in the field for the elders. Children sat on the grass round; each one brought his own mug to drink out of, and not a child had dreamed of tasting any dinner that day. "What's the use of filling your stomach with pork and cabbage, when there's cake and bread and jam, as much as you like, for tea at four o'clock? It would be flying in the face of Providence," said they. I think I can hear their songs as they march abreast, so brave and bright, with flowers in their hats, and laughter in their eyes, and pride in their gait. How sweet they looked in their clean pinafores and fresh-combed hair, boys and maidens walking hand in hand, and drawing up in a semicircle round the verandah at the rectory, where sat the parson and the parsoness, with perhaps a friend or two! How the children vied with one another in making their best bows and curtseys to the gentlefolks! And then all joined in singing the hymns and songs which they had learned since last feast. Next came the games, and tea, and little presents to be raced for, and the strolls round field and garden by way of rest, and chats to friends and kindly notice from the parson. Finally, the Evening Hymn rose on the air, and with three cheers for governess, and friendly good-nights all round, the fathers and mothers picked out their little ones, and formed into shadowy groups as they wended their way over the common, contented to be very tired, since it was the fatigue of pleasure. They turned their faces homeward, and soon were lost to view in the dim twilight.

I hear the little brown owls hoot again, I listen for the nightjar's burr. The land-rail seems to have never ceased its cry from then till now, as I stand once more on the furzy mound just outside the rectory gate, and count how many glow-worms I can see—or fancy I can see. For it all happened five and twenty years ago, and the commons are enclosed now, and the children grown up, and I am far, far away.

I read in last week's *Exeter Gazette* that the children in the Board School at Muttlebury were visited by her Majesty's inspector, and that they passed thirty per cent. in grammar and drawing. I wondered, as I read, whether the dairies and poultry yards keep up their credit in that neighbourhood. It sounds very well, doesn't it, to read of thirty per cent.? And the ratepayers will, no doubt, pull out their purses more cheerfully in consequence. But I am telling you about a school where the children passed cent. per cent. in the science of living, and for which the ratepayers never pulled out their purses at all. The inspector did not "think much of them," it's true; but inspectors are but mortal men, and fallible in their judgments. There is another test which no one gainsays, and it is the test of experience. Two out of that band of scholars, about sixty in all, lie asleep in Muttlebury churchyard; the rest have grown up into men and women, all useful, all contented, all healthy, and more or less prosperous. Not one, and I can count them all, has turned out a drunkard, or a fool, or an idler. And under these circumstances the inspector's opinion of them does not count for much.

Analysis and free-hand drawing seem rather superfluous acquirements for folks who have to milk

cows and plough fields. And yet you and I are dependent for the comfort and health of our households on those very men and women who look after the dairy and gather in the corn. All life comes back to the cultivation of the land in its first lines. From this basis proceed all the possibilities of civilization. In our ideal of education, I suppose, we are striving to bring the blessings of civilization into closer contact with the cultivation of the soil, so that Nature and art may walk hand in hand through a beautified England.

But life is too short for a man to learn everything and do everything. His span of life is still bounded by seventy years, and, out of these, how many can be given up to what is commonly called "education"? Amongst the people on whom rest the security and the foundations of English society, that is the labouring classes, certainly not more than one-fifth, or fourteen years, and generally in the country not more than eight or nine, are devoted to book-learning or schooling proper. Surely those few years—one might almost say those few months, for a child's school hours are but twenty-five per week, and that but for ten months in the year—should be used to fit it for the life it is leading, and is likely to lead in the future, and not for one it has no chance of entering, and for which the market is already overstocked. Grammar and mathematics, drawing and French, are accomplishments which do not find their place in the life of an agricultural labourer, and would lend no grace to the home where his wife must wash and bake, sew and cook, if she would play her part as good missis and good mother.

But enough of reflections—you can make them

for yourself. I will go on with the story of my school.

There was another break in lessons at Christmas, but it was only for a few days; unless Christmas Day fell on a Friday or Saturday, school began again on the Monday after. On Christmas Eve, we always had a preliminary pudding down at the schoolroom, and it was a standing joke to ask the old woman of the cottage what she had boiling in her big crock. Surely it wasn't washing day, one or other would surmise, as the steam bubbled up. It was held "manners" to ignore expectation of the pudding, because that was governess's special present to the children; and who could tell for certain whether her purse was full enough to warrant her in laying out the needful sum for suet and plums this year?

It was never mentioned beforehand, and was treated as a great surprise, when, at half-past twelve, old Mary would say, just as the little ones were gathering up their books and slates,—

"I sem there's some'at a-boiling in my pot as ye might like to have a taste of, if so be as ye bain't in no cruel hurry to get hoam to yer dinners."

And then would come the cheerful answer,—

"No, no, Mary; us bain't in no particular hurry to-day."

And Jacob would pull back the forms, and Lizzie reach down the plates, and governess would lay the cloth; and out of many a pocket would come a spoon—iron, it's true, but clean and bright—put there by the careful mothers when they started the youngsters in the morning, with many injunctions not to show it "till thee knows if there's any call for it, Jack." Mary's dresser could muster a score of so of plates, but spoons would have run short else.

This was the first taste of Christmas-tide, and it was sweet. A little joke, a trifle of mystery and expectation, is dear to children's hearts; and if governess, as she often did, invited Louey or Janey home to tea with her about a week or ten days beforehand, there was a pleasant understanding that it was because her help was wanted in chopping suet or stoning raisins (we used to call them figs), and what a delightful secret to keep from the other children! Only "mother" got wind of it, and would say to her good man as they were sitting in the chimney corner—

"I say, father, bain't it your turn to fetch governess home a load of firing? I reckon they'll want an extry lot of turves or some'at to keep that great crock o' Mary's a-boiling on Christmas Eve."

And the farmer would scratch his head, and say, "Well, well, the little maid's getting on fine with her book; I'd as lieve hear to her reading out a chapter as the passon hisself: and as for Jackey, he can count the sheep like a man, that a' can! Iss, fy, governess shall have the turves. I reckon I can spare a horse to fetch 'em in before then."

And, sure enough, there would be a nice little heap of turves, and a bundle or two of faggots landed at the cottage door, some morning before man and horse went off to their day's work of ploughing. And long before that heap was done, one or another little maid would bring a message to school—

"Father's got a little load of wood waiting for you, Mary, if you'll please to let him know when you've room to house it."

'Twasn't likely Farmer Ward would let Farmer Gould have to say "nobody took thought for keeping the cold out of governess's bones but he"!

It was cold, sometimes; very cold. But as no one lived very near the school—it was a mile and more away from most of the houses, and two or three from some—there was good run for every one, both before and after school, which kept the blood in circulation.

Once—it was only once, I think—that Shrove Tuesday, being a very cold hard frosty day, governess let the children off lessons at ten o'clock, and said they should all have a run to warm them up. It was when the measles were about, and more than half the children were absent. And the parish, according to old custom on that day, was going out to shoot the foxes on the cliff.

Foxes were rampant in those early spring days. We met them in the lanes as we were going to school, before the sun was up. They played havoc amongst the young lambs. No farmyard was safe, and the farmers' wives brought their young chickens into the back kitchen at night. As to killing them by fair means (which, I have always been told, implies a pack of hounds and a lot of red coats), that was out of the question. And so the farmers would go out with their guns and dogs on this one day in the year, and hunt them out of their fastnesses in cliff rocks (where they brought up their families of bright-eyed cubs), and shoot them down without mercy. No doubt it was very shocking. Most men seem to think that to shoot a fox is next door to murder. But we who thought much of our turkeys and geese, thought less of Reynard, and were glad enough to get rid of him by any means. And fox-skin muffs and rugs were very fashionable amongst the farmers' wives in those parts.

As many as seven fell before the guns that Shrove



Tuesday, I remember ; and we came home tired and hungry at six o'clock. The bare black rocks and the cliffs red and grey, with here and there a clump of old dark green yew trees, rise up before my mind as I recall that day : the yapping dogs, the shouts of the lads, the waves of the angry sea dashing into the caves below, and the red glint of the setting sun going down behind Lundy Island.

A pretty figure those children would have made in an inspector's report that day !

The passing of the New Code may be a very wise measure ; I am not going to set myself up against the opinion of my betters ; I was brought up to be careful how I gainsaid those in authority. But just now public opinion is rather chaotic on the subject of the best sort of teaching for the little ones, and we all have a right to speak of our own experiences.

Individuals differ, and so do their needs in the way of education. Localities are various, and what suits the country would be futile in the town. But wherever we live, it is well to bear in mind that life is very short, and that, after all, you can't put more than a spoonful into a spoon !

## THE PATCHWORK QUILT.

“WHEN thee can sew vitty, little maid, I’ll give ’ee some patches that ’ill set up a fine quilt; and a nice patched bed-quilt is a thing every maid should have against her’s wed. And it can’t be made in a day nor a year, and so thee must take it in hand betimes, for there’s a many stitches go to the making of it.”

Little Janifred Rattenbury was sitting on a low form (without any back to it) in Ashford school-house, and it was a hot June afternoon. Her little fingers were warm and sticky, her big brown eyes full of tears; for governess, as they always called the schoolmistress, had just pointed out to her that none of those grimy stitches in the cloth she was hemming were set suant, and that she would certainly get a bad mark for her sewing if she didn’t do very different in the next half-hour. To sit indoors of a fine hot afternoon is bad enough of itself; to sit still and learn to sew is still worse. But to know that you will get a bad mark as well, is “cruel hard.”

Janifred was only eight years old, and passion soon flares up in a child’s heart. In another minnte the thread would have snapped, and the tears fallen. But old Mrs. Thorne, who had just looked in to have a word with governess about her granddaughter who was to leave school for service in a

week or two, happened to cast a glance at the child's stormy face. There are some folks in the world who always put fire to fire, and are surprised at the blaze which follows. Mrs. Thorne was not one of these. She did not say, "You be a stupid maid, then, Janey,—eight years and not able to sew no better than that!" On the contrary, she quenched the fire of passion in the little bosom, and let in the sunlight of hope. To have some fine pieces out of Granny Thorne's chest,—to "set up" a quilt just as if she was "growed up," and ready to take a place like Rebecca Thorne, who was sixteen, and "did up her hair," and wore a black alpaca apron on Sundays instead of a pinafore,—to make a quilt against she got married, that was something worth living for! Janey drew a long breath, twinkled away the tears, straightened her back, looked up in the kindly face bent over her, and said, "Thank ye, ma'am; then I'll try for certain."

But school was nearly over, and Janey's thread was grubby and knotty, and, with all her tryings, the bad mark was inevitable. The next day, however, was better. By mother's advice she washed her hands very clean after dinner, and did not stay about on the road to school, picking wild strawberries. And, somehow or other, the afternoon did not seem so hot, and her thimble was not missing; and governess set her a fresh clean duster to hem, and Janey felt that each stitch was looking more like what it ought to look; and she kept on thinking of the quilt, and what sort of patches Granny Thorne would give her, so she forgot to look out of window and wish she was running after the ducks that quacked so loudly in the meadow behind the school-house.

That was only the first day of many on which Janifred tried to sew "vitty." But before she was ten years old Mrs. Thorne had signified her approval of some needlework she had sent down to the school to be done, and which governess had returned to her by the hand of Janifred with the message that, if the old lady was pleased with the sewing, she might look out the promised patches, for that Janey had done the most of it.

Granny Thorne's chest contained wonderful bits of all sorts, and Janey went home overflowing with joy. What might not be made of bunches of rose-buds on a white chintz ground (the cuttings from some grand lady's sofa-coverings; for Granny Thorne's father had been an upholsterer in Barnstaple many years ago), and then those bits of all the gowns granny had worn since her marriage? These were the beginning of Janifred's beautiful bed-quilt,—but only the beginning. When she was sixteen she came to us to be trained as a housemaid.

"I hope her'll be a good maid," said her mother, when she brought her down to our house and stepped into the parlour to have a word or two with my mother before she left. "Her taketh a wonderful good hand to her needle, her doth; and her can dusty and scrubby fairish. But her wanteth a bit of looking to now and again about the corners and that, or else her might happen to neglect them. And will you please to let her come home sometimes after prayer is out o' Sunday afternoons? for her father and me'll miss her sadly, I reckon, for a time. But there! none o' us likes to part with the children when they'm grown up, for all they'm such a handful when they'm little."

Janifred *was* a good maid, and before the year

was out my mother advanced her wages from the shilling a week she began with to a whole pound a quarter. She proved very handy indeed with her needle, as Mrs. Rattenbury had promised; and many a time I helped her to plan the patterns in that famous quilt, which grew apace in the four years she lived with us. Whenever there was nothing else pressing to be done, out came the bag with the patches in it, and many a wet afternoon it kept my little brother happy and busy listening to the history of every bit in it, and sorting the bundles of patterns to find a pink or a blue that matched, or a good contrast for the stars that were to form the border.

And then she left, and went up to London, as young ladies' maid, and earned higher wages, and was taught to cut out, and fit, and mend lace, and all sorts of fine work. That was—how many years ago? I hardly know. But all those old days came surging up before me last week, when I went to see Janifred's mother in her little cottage by Two-bridges. She is a widow now, and alone in the world—or pretty nigh alone, for her grandchildren are scattered, and only come to see her now and again. I suppose she has money laid by somewhere, for she has no one to work for her, and she is certainly not “on the parish.” She used to live at the mill when her man was alive, and between them they kept the country round pretty well supplied with bread, for she baked the flour he ground; and two or three times a week the old horse was “put in the sharps,” and the cart was carefully laden with delicious hot loaves, fresh from the clomen oven; and then, covered with a thick white cloth to keep the dust off, one of the boys

would take it out over the common and down the cleave, which was the way to Combe Stratton, the pretty little fishing-town where so many visitors came in summer.

I never heard of a baker making a fortune. The price of the staff of life has to be carefully kept down to the means of the many. But still, the man who grinds the corn, and the woman who kneads the dough and "yetts" the oven, have to be paid for their time and trouble. And for all you spend time and trouble on—making a good thing and a necessary thing—there remains a margin of reward over and above the customary cost of living. If you are thrifty, that margin has a way of spreading itself out to embrace the days when time is nearly over for you, and trouble a condition of the past; when the days have come for rest, and the hours for labour are at an end.

Mrs. Rattenbury had been thrifty all her life, and so now she is turned of seventy-six, she is living in comfort on that margin of profit laid by. I should not like to say where it is. Some may very likely be sewed into her "bed tye." Other bank-notes are probably to be found in a mortgage on that same little mill-house where once she kneaded her dough to the sound of the swirling water from the overshot wheel, and the clanking of the grindstone mixed with the crackling of the furze which glowed in the open mouth of the big cloven oven. Anyhow, she has a tidy home of her own, where the brass warming-pan shines brighter than gold, and the well-scoured teapot on the mantle twinkles an invitation to look in as you pass by her open door.

It was many, many years since I had seen her. Time and trouble had brought their message to both

of us. I was down in that country after long absence; and, in looking up old haunts, and recalling once familiar names, I asked for her.

“Sarah Rattenbury? Iss, to be sure; her that used to live to mill. Iss, her’s alive yet, and very lusty for her age. Her gitt’th about considerable, for her’s a good neighbour, and very handy at a death or a christening. Her know’th what’s what, that her doth. Her’s a terrible clean woman, too; and nobody can’t come up to she when there’s a baby in the way. Iss fy, you can’t miss her. Goo straight on, and you ’ill see a turve-heap by the roadside, and her house handy to it.”

The scent of the smouldering peat turves on the hearth was strong as I put my hand on the latch; and there sat Sarah Rattenbury within, drinking her cup of tea, quiet and alone in the evening of life, with the tall shadows of the ash thrown across the floor, as the sun flickered through the branches, and lighted up the dark corners of the little kitchen, where no dust lay even for a minute.

“Here’s an old friend, Mrs. Rattenbury. May I come in?”

“Why, dear heart alive, if ’tain’t Miss Annie! Well, I never! Who’d a thought to see you again, and all these years come and gone! Only to think! I’d a known your voice anywhere. But you’m altered, my dear, you’m altered; terrible fallen abroad, bain’t you, now? And you that was such a slim maid, too! But, there, ’tis what we all come to. Sit ye down, sit ye down, my dear. I’m that glad to see ’ee. And won’t you plaze to take a cup o’ tea?”

Pleased? I should think I did “please.” Visiting old places and old friends stirs up the inner depths

of one's being. We go back to the roots of life. We remember what we thought and felt and did when we first were becoming conscious of ourselves and of individual life. At seven years we are but a part of nature and the things around us; we live and move and have our being in home. At fourteen we are discovering that there is a "me," with a life of its own. At fifty we learn to sit loose, even to our own selves, and know that the world and its forces are rolling on faster than we can grow, and that, by-and-by, we shall be left behind. But at fifty, to come back to the scenes in which our soul first took life and form makes sudden demands on the physical frame, and the cup of tea was welcome. Where does one ever get a cup of tea as fine-flavoured as that which the old-fashioned country woman sips at her own fireside? Certainly not in the houses of our lady-friends. The country woman may economize in the handling of her tea, but she never economizes in the buying of it. A cup of tea is her one luxury, and it must be good. Accordingly, she buys the very best. Then, too, when four o'clock comes, the kettle, which was filled from the spring half an hour before, has just come to the boil, and the little black pot is carefully warmed by the fire, and the fragrant leaves uncurl.

I was thirsty, and Sarah's tea was a grateful refreshment as we sat and talked. There were all the children to ask and to hear about. One was married, another was dead; three were in America. George, her husband, was buried in the old churchyard, through which he had carried his big bassoon every Sunday in the old days, and tuned it up in the gallery while the parson was putting on his surplice behind the vestry door. The gallery is



gone as well as George and his bassoon, and so is old Farmer Tapp and his flute.

“They’ve got something they calls an harmony, my dear, but it’s a poor thing to hearken to, let alone to lead the singing; and it don’t come none of the good old tunes we was all so fond of years back. Ah! it used to sound beautiful when my man lifted the tune, and Martha Danells her led off with ‘High let us swell our tuneful notes,’ and the big bass viol, and Tom Danells’ fiddle, and Farmer Tapp’s flute followed it up.”

Mrs. Rattenbury was ready to cry, and my tears were not far off. It was time the conversation should be turned.

“Ah, many’s the time Janey and I have walked up over the cleave to church in those days. Do you remember that white shawl, with the flowers on it, I used to wear, and that Janey had afterwards?”

“Mind it?” said Mrs. Rattenbury, in a tone of surprise. “Why, I’ve got un now. Poor Janey, her set great store by that shawl, ‘Cause Miss Annie give it me,’ she’d tell; and I keeps un always laid up in lavender ever since her died. He only comes out to christenings. All Dick’s children have been took to church in that there shawl—all but the last baby as was born after his father died, and he didn’t have no luck at all. Susan, that’s Dick’s wife, her went over to her mother’s house, out to Hoar Oak, and the baby was carr’d to church there. And Susan, her was that put about wi’ Dick’s death, and one thing and another, her didn’t think upon the shawl till Sunday morning, and then ’twas too late to send over six mile to where I were living then, to borry it; and the poor little mite had to be wrapped up in any common

cloak, just to keep it warm, and it never had no luck at all. It caught measles afore it was six months old; and so soon as ever it could stand alone, it falled down and broke its collar-bone. And when the teeth of it were breeding, it got a proper scald head; and it were but going on for three, when it wasted away till it were nothing but a rames; and two years agone last Michaelmas, its poor mother had to bury it away to Combe, where her's gone to live—a strange place, and no belongings to follow it to the grave, and there it lies all alone. No; it never had no luck at all, hadn't Dick's youngest. I'd have lent Susan the shawl and welcome, if I'd knowed in time. But there! 'twas to be, I reckon. The others, they'm all strapping lads, and 'ill do well, I reckon. Joseph, he's the eldest, and now and again he comes and stops along of his granny for a bit. He goes to school out Molland way. Dick's old master have a-put un there; and he learneth fine, so they tell me. He's like my Janifred for that. None of the other children ever took to their schooling like her did; and wasn't her a hand to her needle! You 'ill mind that bed-quilt her patched when her was living with your ma, Miss Annie? I take en out sometimes, and look to en, and shake en out in the sunshine, and air en a bit. Would you like to see en, my dear?"

Poor, pretty Janey! The quilt that was to be ready against she wed—the "pieces" from Granny Thorne's big chest, the bits of my childish frocks, my sisters' and mother's gowns, and the servants' aprons, all finding their niche in it,—hexagons and squares, neatly fitted together; a beautiful quilt, beautifully sewn;—there it was, after five and twenty years, just as fresh as ever; and Jani-

fred lying in her grave, with daisies and king-cups for a coverlet. It never served the purpose it was ordained for. Janey died young, and with never a house of her own, or a husband. And yet it was the thought that warms so many a girl's heart that nerved the idle little fingers to learn to sew, and overcome present difficulties by the hope of a future joy. Are we put here to accomplish anything, I wonder; or are we only learning the use of our tools for future work?

"Don't you ever lie under it, Mrs. Rattenbury?" I asked; "the thought of Janey's fingers would make it pleasant to you, I think."

"No fy, my dear, that I don't. I got some new wool and quilted en up myself the first winter after her was took, for I'd never had time to do it before, though her left en with me for the purpose when her went off the last time; but I never haven't had the heart to use en. I takes en out of the drawer now and again, and looks over the patterns, and it's all like a story to me; and I sem I can see her again, with her bright eyes and all her vitty ways. And I can see the old church, too, and you and your ma coming up over the hill to prayer. And I say thickey there is the gown that missis wore; and thuccy were Miss Louey's, with the pink flower; and poor old cook, her had the dark stripe give to her at Christmas, and Janey the laylock check. And the middle of en is Granny Thorne's smart chintz with the red and yellow roses. 'Tis all spread out so plain as a map. And one time, when I were bad with the barn-gun, and forced to lie abed, I had en out jst to throw over the blankets and that, when the parson come to see me. It look'th well, you know, miss, to have a bit of needlework about, so

as to let folks know you don't come of a thriftless lot. And my old bed quilt, what I patched as a maid, he's most wore out. Sixty odd years he's worn and washed, so the colour of un is pretty nigh gone. That's the manner of we old folks, and our things match us. But Janey, her was took young, and her work 'ill last many a long year yet, and serve as a pattern to them as come after me, what good sewing should be. There's a many don't know nowadays what a needle and thread's for, and they run about with their tails all reaping and their stockings in holes—nasty boughten trade, there's no wear in it."

Janey died young; and her mother sat alone in her little house by the turf-heap, and thought of her dead children and the years that were gone. And sometimes she sighed for Dick, and sometimes the tears dropped fast on Janey's quilt; and then again the smiles came when she remembered that no one else in the parish could show such a fine coverlid when the parson went his rounds among the bed-lyers.

But Mrs. Rattenbury was not the only one who mourned the lost Janifred.

"No, my dear, no, Miss Annie, her wasn't wed, and that you know so well as I do; but I don't say 'twas never thought on like. If her had lived another year out, I won't say what wouldn't have come to pass. There was a fine young chap used to be always after her, and her never comed home but what he was down our ways, on one arrant or another, every evening. I reckon you 'ill call him to mind when I name un. He was Charley Richards' son, out to Cosgatefoot; and he was put young to the blacksmithing, and a very good hand he took

to it, he did. And whenever the maid were home, he come over to prayer at Ashford, though he didn't rightly belong to we're parish. He was christened Peter, that was the rightful name of him, but he were always called Curly, 'cause of his hair, which never would lie vitty like another lad's. Janey, her wouldn't have much to say to un first go off. He used to look a bit smutty, you know, Miss Annie; but there, 'twas the fault of his trade like, and a good trade 'tis too. I wouldn't have stood in his light if she'd fancied him, and sometimes I think her'd have said 'Yes,' if her hadn't been took when her was. Last time her was home before her caught the chill which settled on her lungs and carried her off so sudden, her brought that there quilt with her, and her says to me, 'Mother,' her says, 'when you've got a bit of time to spare, will 'ee get some wool and set it up in the frame and quilt it for me? I might want it one day, you know.' And her smiled to herself and coloured up. But I didn't ask no questions; I knowed her'd tell me time enough if 'twas to be. So I only made answer, 'Iss fy, my dear, I'll see to it. Will 'ee have it dimonds or runners? Anyhow, 'twill be a handsomer one than ever your father and mother lay under.' And just then us heard a whistling coming down the road, and Janey her looked out of the window, and then her coloured up again, and her snatched up the spread and ran upstairs with en. And afore I'd time to say, 'Why, whatever be 'ee scared at then?' there was a tap at the door, and Curly stood looking in. 'How be you, Mrs. Rattenbury?' said he, quite polite. But I knowed he wasn't come to see me, so I said, 'Middling, thank 'ee, lad. Won't 'ee walk in? Her 'ill be down

directly, and I've got my baking to look to.' And so I went on putting up the dough, which was all ready when the maid had called me off to tell about the quilt. And by-and-by her come down, and her was very stiff with un for a bit,—her was nearly caught, you see, and a maid don't stomach that easy. And then he asked her if her was coming to prayer next Sunday afternoon, 'cause, he said, there was going to be a fine wrastling after the folks was out. Squire Chanter, he'd give them a silver spoon to wrastle for. 'Twas Revel Sunday, you know, miss; and it always used to be the manner to stick the prize up in front of the gallery, where all the lads could see un. But there hadn't been a wrastling not for several years back, there hadn't—not on Revel Sunday, I mean. Old Parson Tom, he'd nothing to say agin' it, he hadn't; but that time his lady was ill, and he had to take her to foreign parts, there was a curate come for a year or two to look after things, and he was dead against the wrastling. He didn't know much about country ways, you see, and would have 'twas sinful. And he went about up and down through the parish, and there was a lot of talk, and the end of it was, that no one gave a silver spoon for several years. But that last year as Janey came home, he was gone; and Parson Tom, he were back again, and the men-folks was all wild to try their strength. And the parson, he said, 'Let 'em wrastle, if they've a mind to, and good luck to their backs. I wish I was young myself.' That's what he said. And I think he was right, I do. So long as they catch hold fair, and don't wear naily boots, I sem it's a Christian play, just so well as that there cricketing parsons nowadays tell so much about. A manly

sport they call it, and I dessay 'tis, I've no call to say nothing agin it; but a good wrastling-bout carries a deal more sense in it, to my thinking.

“ Well, Janey her said her'd go; and Peter he said, ‘ If so be as I get the silver spoon, 'twill be some'at towards housekeeping; ’ and he glimpsed up at her so cunning, just to see how her'd take it. And Janey, her said, ‘ Get along with you, Curly! What's a silver spoon to do, if you've got no broth in the pot? ’ But, for all that, her went to church Revel Sunday, and father and I went too; and Curly, he got the spoon, for he throwed Jan Tucker, and Jemmy Bale, and Lewis Elworthy one after the other. And he said, ‘ Please the Lord, I'll get the fellow to en next year, and then there 'ill be a pair of us. ’ But next Revel Sunday the old parson was dead, and so was my Janey, and that was rayley the last of the wrastling in our parish. Parson Green—he that's here now, miss—he won't hear tell of it at all: he's all for crickets, he is; but I can't see, for the life of me, that it's anyway better. Parson Tom, he made a fine sermon about it that Revel Sunday, I mind; and he'd got his text out of the Bible, too, and 'twas all about wrastling. ‘ You'm bound to wrestle, young men, ’ says he; ‘ us have all got to wrestle with Satan, and the braver us can tackle him, the likelier us 'ill win; and the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force, ’ said he, ‘ therefore, “ quit you like men, be strong: ” ’ that was his text, Miss Annie, and I often think upon it. But there! times are different now. But Curly Richards, he won the spoon, and 'twas the last one ever stuck up in front of the gallery. He's done well to his trade, has Curly; there isn't another blacksmith this side of Bratton as can titch un, so they tells me.”

The shadows were lengthening on the grass outside as we gossiped thus over our cup of tea. Poor Janey's quilt lay in the window, and caught the rays of the setting sun. Mrs. Rattenbury stood up, and wiped the tears from her eyes. The cows went lowing down the lane; the geese were marching home in long row across the grass; faintly in the distance I heard the clank, clank of the smith's anvil. The village world looked the same as it used to do when I was a little girl. The roses smelled just as sweetly. The turf smoke still curled blue as it rose towards the bluer heaven. But Janey lay quiet under the daisies and flowering thyme—a coverlet how different to the one her fingers had fashioned! The parson preached, too, from a very different text when I attended prayer in the old church next Sunday. He impressed on his flock the duty of almsgiving, and bade them never forget to put their shillings in the offertory bag. The gallery was gone, as well as the spoons. The village school was remodelled to suit the Education Act, and Charley Richards' grandchildren learned grammar and analysis for lessons, and crochet and crewel work at home, and made chair-backs and coseys for their mother's best parlour. And old Sarah Rattenbury sits in her little cottage by the turf-heap, and thinks of the days that are past.

Those days will never come again. For good or for evil, England is changing fast. But we old folks still cling to the ways our mothers taught us, still love to tell of the customs of our youth that to-day are thought so odd and old-fashioned.

I picked a sprig of thyme from Janifred's grave, and put it between the leaves of my Bible as I left the churchyard. On one page I read the words,



“ For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest ; ” and on the next, “ Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these ? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. ”

## *THE TRUE LOVE OF BARNABAS BUTTER AND BETTY KICK.*

**B**EFORE I tell you any more about my hero and heroine, please take notice of their names. And don't fancy I invented them, because I did not. Mr. Barnabas Butter and Miss Betty Kick were real names of real people, who lived so long ago that it does not much matter how candidly I relate their sayings and doings.

Perhaps you may think their names were odd? They were of a different opinion, and considered them to be very good ones; and, indeed, they were thought well of through the country. Betty held that "Barnabas" was distinguished, and matched her husband's fine stalwart appearance. While Mr. Butter never called his wife "Elizabeth" unless he was angry with her—which, of course, happened sometimes, for was he not a man and a husband?

But "Betty, my dear" or "Betty love" was her constant name for fifty years of married life. That is, in the privacy of home. Abroad, or before strangers, of course, she bore the more respectful appellation of "the missus."

Barnabas and Betty, then, lived and loved. In what fashion is just what I am going to tell you. Perhaps the fashion may seem to you as antiquated

as their names. If so, ask yourself the question whose fault it is? For my part, I should be sorry to think that common sense and plain morals were gone out of fashion, and buried with Barnabas and Betty in Leaworthy \* churchyard.

Love is of various sorts. The sort which found favour in the west country sixty or seventy years ago was of the delicately sentimental nature tinged with stern practicality. And "life," Barnabas Butter said to himself, when he was two and twenty and began to think of settling,—“life takes a deal of living; a man can't just sit down in the settle his father left him, and let it go on as it will. I've got to live it, and how can I live it alone? There's the dairy to see to, and the victuals to cook, and the chickens to feed, and the stockings to knit. 'Tis sartin, Barnabas chield, thee must take a missus.”

So communed our hero with his spirit, as he walked up and down his trim garden, the day of his father's funeral. Friends and neighbours were gone home, and it was late in the evening of a July Sunday. The winds whispered it, the leaves rustled it, the brook murmured it, the bees buzzed it as they hurried home laden with sweet nectar from honey-suckle hedges, “Barnabas! Barnabas Butter, thee must take a missus!”

The bees put Barnabas in mind of his duty towards them as well. He went straight into the big hall where his old great-aunt Charity, with the help of a stout girl, was putting things to rights.

“Can you give me a bit of crape, aunt? I'd most forgotten the bees, and I mustn't go to bed till that's seen to.”

“No, fy, thee mustn't, lad. Yes, I'll get thee a

\* Pronounced Loo'orthy.

bit directly." And the old lady hobbled off to a big bureau in the corner of the entry, and fetched two or three strips of black stuff, which the young man, with a grave air, carried into the garden, and fastened to the legs of the stage on which the bee-butts stood.

"Bees, bees," said he, slowly and solemnly, as he tapped on each straw roof, "your old master is dead; will you work for the new one?"

There was a murmur of assent, and the new master walked once more by the privet hedge, and past the blush roses that hung over the porch, and again all nature chimed softly in unison with his empty heart, "Thee must take a missus, Barnabas Butter; take a missus!"

While the new master sleeps on that first night of his mastership, we will make ourselves at home in his domains, and take a look round the land that is crying out for its missus. The shadows of the tall poplars lie softly on the grass; the crescent moon is sloping to the west; the white owls flit round the barn; the big night-moths hover on the lavender bushes; the faint trickle of running water but shows up the utter silence which had settled down on Buzacott Farm before the kitchen clock struck eleven.

Buzacott Farm lay in the parish of Leaworthy aforesaid. A parish so poor and so out-of-the-way, that in those days there was a doggerel rhyme handed about from one to the other in that part of the country, and which a stranger was sure to hear of, if ever by chance a stranger inquired his way there.

"Leaworthy?" they would answer; "what, Loo-orthy, where the great spile was adood, where nine

mees ate a happord o' cheese, and ruined all the poor farmers to Loo-orthy ?”

No doubt there was a substratum of truth in this ironical query. But if the soil was rough and stony there was plenty of it, and the old farmstead was not crowded up with new roads and iron fences. It lay in the midst of its own fields and meadows and lanes. A big orchard came up to the milking court, and straggled down to the edge of the stream. The stream dawdled along through “inner One-park,” and “outer One-park,” and joined itself to the “water” which ran down Millcombe through the tall purple loosestrife, and pink downy willow-herb, which Aunt Charity called codlings-and-cream. Above the old house came the barn and the sloping green, where the geese cackled and straddled all the summer through, till, corn harvest being over, they were driven one day, and found their own way the next, in the golden “earidges”\* of the “Braunchen.” The green was bounded by many fields that all had thick hedges; here and there a big elder reared its head, and spread its milky blossoms all through June, and drooped its boughs laden with purple fruit in September. And the fields all had their own names. There was the “Rilland,” where Barnabas would go to pick cuckoo-flowers when he could only toddle along, holding by mother’s hand; and the “Tilland,” where he sought for mushrooms to bring home for “feyther’s breksis,” when he was bigger. But that was years before the press of living hampered his soul. My hero was a boy once—a boy who, like other boys, thought nothing of life, but a great deal of his breakfast and supper; and who ate and grew, and grew and ate

\* Pronounced “harishes.”

again, till his mother would cry, "Bless the lad, whatever will he come to!"

And this was what he had come to. A stalwart body, strong for work; a mind shrewd and keen with regard to his own business, but very simple and childlike with regard to knowledge and "book-learning," as he named it. He stood six foot in his stockings, and looked round on the maidens with a merry blue eye. Which of them would he marry? For marry he must; the farm wanted a missus.

"Take thee time, lad; take time," said old Aunt Charity. "Don't buy a pig in a poke."

"Time! I han't got no time," quoth he. "There's shearing not begun, and hay harvest just on us. Bless us and save us, a chap's got no time to go courting in!"

But if Barnabas had no time for looking after a wife just now in the busy summer weather, the girls in the farmhouses for many miles round were all sending thoughts out in the direction of Buzacott, and there was no lack of helpers at his shearing-party.

It was not the custom in those parts to hire men to shear. The farmers and the farmers' sons, with perhaps a few of the best farm men, all exchanged their services on such occasions.

This year old Farmer Butter's illness and death had thrown things behind, and every other shearing was out of hand before the new master of Buzacott could fix his day. And partly out of good feeling and sympathy, and partly because they were at leisure, and partly encouraged by mothers and sisters to be neighbourly to a good hardworking young fellow, who had got behindhand, there was no lack of offers of assistance when the day for the shearing

was at last named. The womenkind, too, showed an alacrity in washing up and mending the oft-used shearing suits which was a little unusual. These suits, they often said, "took a deal of washing." White, pure white, were the jackets and trousers of "duck" which they donned of a morning, and anything but white when they took them off before supper in the evening. For sheep and lambs, though they stand as emblems of innocence and purity in the abstract, are in the concrete, especially of a hot summer day, extremely dirty and greasy beasts.

Let's take a look at the big kitchen where the shearers are assembling about eight o'clock in the morning. One by one the neighbours drop in—neighbours reckon ten miles round—some on foot, some on horses, which they turn out on to the green after hanging saddle and bridle on one of the many crooks and nails that stud the outside walls of the farm kitchen. All are dressed in their Sunday clothes, and carry the shearing suits rolled and strapped over the shoulder.

One by one Farmer Butter greets them heartily, and bids them set to at the fried potatoes and cold ham. They then slip upstairs to change their broad cloth for linen clothes, and off to the barn, where Joe and Jack are already bringing in the sheep. What a noise, what a skurry, what a bleating of sheep, and barking of dogs, and shouting of men! Each man brings his own shears, and chooses his own corner in the barn, and soon twenty pairs of shears are busy on a score of beasts, who, their first unavailing struggles over, resign themselves to their fate like—well! like lambs.

The younger men think much of time, and there is a sort of unacknowledged racing between them.

Five sheep an hour is reckoned pretty fair work, though some will turn off six. The older men don't approve of such rapid dealing. "Do it proper, lads, do it proper; you'm bound to punish the poor beasts if you hurry 'em like that. I can't abear to see the poor critters nicked and bleeding. They'd ruther lie still a little longer, and keep a whole skin to their backs."

But when did youth and age ever agree? Young blood is hot and emulous. Middle-aged men may talk and take time; but laughter and striving, and an utter disregard of everything except the disgrace of being beaten by "another chap," was ever, as it is now, the characteristic of youth. And just outside the barn door stood old Dick Comer (the father of Christopher to Little Comfort), with his bucket of tar to anoint the nicks and notches, and so prevent the summer sun and flies from festering the cuts.

Shearing is hot work, and Aunt Charity did not fail to send up jugs of good home-brewed beer and cider to "wet the whistles" of the men. But they were too busy for much drinking, and the talk and the jokes were all good-natured. They broke off at noon for dinner, and washed hands and faces as they passed indoors. For, according to custom, there were set on a bench outside a row of pails in which lay steeping sprigs of wild flowering mint, nothing being so successful as this herb in removing the grease and smell from their hands. But dinner, albeit they were hungry, could not detain them long; and "drinkings," *i.e.* cakes and tea, was brought them in the barn by some of the girls who thought it fun to come and help the old lady bake them in the forenoon. And when the sheep was let



go, and rushed out of the door, only to be caught by Dicky Comer, then one or other would seize the opportunity to hand up cut-rounds already spread with cream, or gingerbread, and mugs of tea; and the men were nothing loth to straighten their backs and stretch their legs, for three minutes, before they cried once more, "Sheep ho!"

But supper was the event of the day. About eight o'clock the press began to slacken, no more victims were caught; one by one the men left the barn, and by nine all were washed and dressed and seated round the big hall table. Those who came down first, slipped in behind the long oaken table which stretched down one side of the room, and seated themselves on the bench fixed to the wall. Those who came last, were accommodated with chairs, and ranged themselves on the opposite side. Farmer Butter sat at the top, with his back to the window, and its broad sill served as his seat of honour, heightened as it was with a thick patchwork cushion. Here he carved the round of boiled beef which was the *pièce de résistance*, while "squab pie" stood further down—not one, not two, but several.

But Aunt Charity sat at the bottom, where she was near the kitchen, and could glance over her shoulder to see what the maidens were about, through the open door. And it was she who ladled out the plates of junket and cream when the meat was removed, and the big jug of strong shearing ale, brewed last Fall, and half a new cheese were set before the master.

It was a quiet supper to-night, for all were mindful of the "old maister," so lately gone from amongst them. But still, life has to be lived, and

the young step in as the old fall out of the ranks. The tall old-fashioned glasses were served round, each with a barley-ear and a droop of hops engraved on the brim. I have four of them now, and when I fill them with delicate flowers, and place them on my parlour shelf, I think on the past with a smile and a sigh. Each man filled for himself as the big jug made its circuit.

“Here’s to your good health, Farmer Butter,” said the oldest man present, rising to his feet as well as he could for stiffness, and speaking for the rest of the company by right of his years. “And us wish ’ee well, that us do, and good luck wi’ the land and the stock; and the Lord send ’ee a good missus, and a house full of little ’uns.” The rest of the company rattled their knife-handles on the table by way of assent, and nodded to Barnabas as they swallowed their ale at a gulp. But the old Devon race is always mindful of manners, and it was commonly understood that much joking would not be seemly in a house so lately a house of mourning. So, when Farmer Butter thanked them briefly for their help and good wishes, the jug made its second round in silence.

Still, as they wended home, some this way, and some that, under the soft summer sky, scarcely free from the lingering crimson of sunset though it was close on eleven, there was many a joke cracked, and many a surmise ventured as to the future mistress of Buzacott.

“He’s bound to get married, he is; the place can’t get on at aal wi’out a missus. Aunt Charity’s a good old soul, and no mistake; but her ain’t young enough to see to all that business—four hundred and odd acres, and so much of it grass

land. Fifteen cows they'm milking now, and the meadows 'ould feed more. I wouldn't say us shan't see a wedding in the Fall. I know who thinks a lot of him, and that's Farmer Worth's Jemima, and I know he's been over to Sparhanger a time or two lately. He might do worse, 'go further and fare worser,' as the saying runs; for Jemima Worth's a spiritty maid, and has got her share of good looks."

But the Fall came, and no wedding was talked of. Barnabas was still too busy to go a-courting.

When Christmas was close at hand, one grey noon when there was nothing particular to keep him at home, and it looked likely for snow, Farmer Butter ordered out his horse, saw carefully to his stirrups and bridle, and, saying nothing as to his errand there, rode off in the direction of Bamworthy, the market town some twelve or fourteen miles distant.

\* \* \* \* \*

Where, all this time, was Miss Betty Kick? At home with her father and mother at Grendon parsonage, and helping, as a good maiden should, in all household matters. Seventy years ago girls did not travel about the world as they do now. If their fathers were rich enough to keep horses and carriages, they might go once in a way to visit a friend in the same part of the country. But lawn tennis and even croquet, now so old-fashioned, were still undreamt of. Girls played battledore and shuttle-cock if they were in want of a little exercise. But that was not often the case—not often, at least, in the family of a country parson.

The Rev. Thomas Kick was a country parson, and he was not rich. He was a scholar and a

gentleman, and he had three daughters, to whose future he looked forward with some anxiety. Miss Elizabeth, our heroine, was the middle one. I have seen a picture of her, taken, perhaps, a year before the date of my story, when she was eighteen years old. In it she wears a white frock with short sleeves, and a waist close under her arms. Her brown hair is arranged in neat little curls on her forehead. A coral necklace adorns her plump neck. A pair of modest brown eyes look you full in the face. I believe it was taken in Bamworthy, where she often went to visit her mother's brother, who had a flourishing business in that town. A clothier he was, so I have heard, but childless; and he and his good wife were always glad when one of their nieces could be spared to come and stay with them for a week or so. It's a pretty little picture, and it used to hang in a little black frame between the windows in the clothier's best parlour. Does it not seem impossible that only seventy years ago photographs were not invented? Stranger even than the short waist and the brown curls. We may wake up any day and find these in fashion again, but we can never return to the time when "cartes de visite" were unknown, and "cabinets" in velvet frames did not exist.

But girls in short-sleeved frocks and girls in tennis suits have much in common. Outsides may differ. The parlours they live in may boast any or every style of furniture. Neat chintz or flimsy art muslins are but the background which sets off a maiden in her first bloom; and the young man who steps in, hat in hand, takes little count of accessories if the face turned to greet him be the face he seeks.

Young Mr. Butter had met Miss Betty at the market town more than once in his father's lifetime. It was known that she was a favourite with her childless uncle, Mr. Trufit, the clothier, and that fair-time or feast-time often found her with him. Mrs. Trufit, always glad of the help and company of a niece, was especially so at such times, when all their customers came to town for one reason or another, and most of them gave a call and expected to be entertained with savoury pies, or, at the least, with cakes and ale. All the three Miss Kicks were pleased to be invited; but Lavinia, the eldest, could not be so easily spared from the parsonage, and Kitty, the youngest, had not finished her education. And the Rev. Thomas, having little but learning to give his daughters, determined they should not want that. So it came to pass that, at this particular Christmas, it was Betty who was sitting in her Aunt Trufit's white parlour, when Mr. Butter, after transacting some business with the clothier, was invited by him to walk through from the shop into the dwelling-house and pay "his compliments to the ladies."

Ah, Barnabas, Barnabas Butter, was it for this that you rode fifteen miles on a cold December day—with the near prospect of a fall of snow to ride back through—just to get a chance of seeing a prim young girl in a grey merino frock, with rosy cheeks and clear hazel eyes, as she sat reading aloud to her aunt that gloomy afternoon?

Once, two years ago, Barnabas had danced with her at the Christmas party Mrs. Trufit always gave; she a shy little girl, and he a still shyer youth. Once again, six months later, he had met her walking in the street with a friend, and had "the honour

to inquire after her health, and that of her respected uncle and aunt ;” and when, left lonely in his house and his work, that cry arose in his empty heart, “Thee must take a missus, take a missus, Barnabas,” somehow or other he always seemed to hear the echo of those pretty phrases in which the well-bred girl thanked him for his kind inquiries, and had the “pleasure of informing him that all friends were as well as usual.”

What is it that makes *one* voice ring in our ears for ever, *one* presence never fade? We don't know. The essence of love is too subtle for analysis. Why did Betty's heart beat quickly, and why did she start and drop the magazine she was reading (it was the *Imperial Magazine*, just as fashionable then as *Macmillan* is now, though I dare say you never heard its name), even before her uncle opened the door, and introduced the guest? Ah! that is Love's secret.

“Here's Farmer Butter dropped in to take a dish of tea, Mrs. Trufit,” said the polite clothier, who knew manners; and he said “tay,” as was the fashion in those days.

“Hope I don't intrude, ladies,” said the equally polite farmer. And amid all the consequent civilities, and the little bustle attendant on bringing in the tea-tray, Miss Betty recovered her composure, and was able to hand the cake and press the cranberry jelly as beseemed her aunt's niece. And no one knew how her heart jumped when he said, “I'm sartin sure it must be good if you made it, miss.”

“Well said, lad; well said!” cried the uncle. And “Take another cut-round, Mr. Butter, do then,” followed up the hospitable aunt; “you'm making use of nothing.”

Seventy years ago, a dish of tea and home-made cakes were the cementing of friendship. When Barnabas ate the cakes and jelly Miss Kick had helped to make, it was, I think, a sort of love-feast to him. He ate much, and said little or nothing to her; but the tea tasted like nectar, and the jelly was ambrosia. And while he answered Mr. Trufit's talk, his spirit was keeping time to the old tune, "Thee must take a missus, Barnabas Butter; take a missus."

Was Miss Betty going to stay over Christmas with her aunt? at last he ventured to ask; and might he have the honour of sending her in some of the Golden Pippins out of his orchard? There was no apple so good for making jelly, he'd heard his mother say scores of times, and he'd picked a rare lot of 'em this Fall.

Aunt Trufit nodded consent, and Betty blushed prettily.

Accordingly, next market day, a big maund basket was left at the door, with Farmer Butter's best respects, and with it a letter which had cost its writer some considerable effort. It began, "Honoured Miss," and, in a concise, if somewhat formal style, begged her acceptance of a small offering from his orchard; and desired, with his "humble duty," to know if he might be permitted to propose a visit to her respected parents with a view to open up an acquaintance, which, "if agreeable to both parties," might, he hoped, ripen into a nearer relationship.

"Till then, dear miss, you favour me with your permission to address you, under your honoured parents' roof, I will not presume to sign myself as anything more than your humble servant to command,

"BARNABAS BUTTER."

Betty blushed again when she read this prim epistle, which was dutifully handed to her aunt.

"Whatever your father and mother'll say to it, Betty, I can't tell. They'm a bit stuck up at times. But, for my part, I think a maiden that's got no portion might go further and fare worse, if she turned up her nose at a likely young man, with a good farm of his own, and beholden to no man. If so be he ain't exactly what you folks call a gentleman, he won't make the worse husband for that; will he, Josiah?"

"Oh, dear aunt! I'm not thinking of husbands," said the modest Betty; and—"However shall I answer his letter?"

"'Tisn't for you to answer it; 'tisu't for you, my maid," said Mr. Trufit. "Give it to your father when he fetches you a-Toosday, and he 'ill say what he's a mind to."

The Rev. Thomas did say what he had a mind to, and his remarks were very pointed. The consequence was that Mr. Barnabas Butter did not call at Grendon parsonage—at least, not that winter. Betty returned home, and dutifully mended her father's socks, and read aloud to her mother in the evening. She never alluded to the young farmer; and her parents, after once thanking Heaven that the would-be lover lived twelve miles off, and that they could easily keep Betty out of his way, dismissed him altogether from their minds.

Not so Miss Betty. It was quite true she was "not thinking of husbands," as she told her aunt; but she thought a good deal of Mr. Barnabas Butter. What girl does not think about her first lover? He was a fine man, straightforward in his ways, and good to look at. Betty had looked at



him, and somehow that look had settled down into the very bottom of her virgin little heart. Betty was not given to self-analysis, or many searchings of soul. That is a modern phase of living. Betty lived in the beginning of the century, before such things were the fashion; and her searchings of heart were only when she said her special prayers at the Church's three great festivals—her special prayers for purity and righteousness. But when she did search her heart, she found, to her own great dismay, that, hid away under everything, there lay the remembrance of Barnabas Butter, and that one look.

Was the young man conscious that his image lay in this pure shrine? Whether or not, I think there is no better or safer place in this world for a young man's soul to be harboured, than in the innocent heart of a good girl. His soul, did I say? We were talking of his image—his reflection? But a young man hardly knows that he has a soul, I often think, till he sees it mirrored in a woman's eyes!

Anyhow, whether he were conscious or whether he were not, he made no sign. The spring came, and the spring went. The chickens were hatched out, and Aunt Charity did her best with them; the cows calved; the bees "played;" the hay grew; the cuckoo called. Nothing stood still at Buzacott Farm, and least of all its new master. Shearing feast was over, and this time Farmer Butter did something more than say, "Thanky, neighbours, one and all; I'm much obliged to ye for your good wishes." He had stood up on his legs, and cleared his throat, and made a speech himself; and the conclusion of it was—

"Buzacott Farm can't get along wi'out a missus,

that's sartin ; so let us all drink to her good health, my friends. And, please the Lord, she shall sit at the top of the table next shearing-tide."

And all the shearers rattled their knife-handles ; and the big jug of ale was passed round, and the tall glasses with the barley-ears on them filled to the brim ; and they all cried, " Three cheers for the mistress of Buzacott ! " and tossed off the clear brown liquor with a knowing air.

Two or three of the bolder spirits ventured to say, " Who be her then, lad ? Won't thee tell us ? "

But Farmer Butter smiled strangely, and held his peace.

Poor Aunt Charity ! ' This was how it had come about. The chickens were all very well ; she could manage them. The girl looked after the calves. The bees swarmed dutifully when the master was handy, and, by the help of poker and tongs and a tattoo played on the brass warming-pan (for bees, especially when they are playing, love a noise), were soon attracted to settle down on a convenient bough in the apple orchard, where they stayed till sunset, and old Dicky Comer shook them into a new butt. Aunt Charity, in spite of her seventy and odd years, bore up under all that. But when the hay harvest drew near, she lifted up her voice once more, and this time it was with all seriousness that she spoke. " Thee must take a missus, Barnabas ; thee *must* take a missus. All that grass land thee've got to mow, and all them haymakers I've got to feed : it's too much for me, lad, too much. Haymakers are the hungriest folks out—

' Fore-bit and Breakfast,  
Rear-bit and Dinner ;  
Nunmit and Crummit,  
And a Bit after Supper '—

that's what they had when my mother was a maid, and that's what they want to-day and for ever. I couldn't live through another hay harvest, and so I tell thee, lad."

Mowing-machines had not been invented in the "twenties," you know. But old ladies are hard to please, and perhaps, if Aunt Charity were alive now, she would lament for the good old times when hay-makers expected their eight meals a day, and *earned* them. I have heard old folks nowadays sneer at "them nasty machines, taking the bread out of poor folks' mouths." Bread! It was cake as well, let alone gingerbread and pies, that were carried out into the fields for "nummit and crummit" when I was a little girl and used to visit at Buzacott Farm. The long kitchen is silent now; the meads and lanes no longer hear the sound of the mower's scythe or the rasping hone. The man who owns the "machine" and two or three good horses, contracts for the job at so much an acre, and finds his own victuals. And Farmer Butter and his missus lie in the quiet churchyard alongside of old Aunt Charity.

Farmer Barnabas smiled strangely, as I said, when the neighbours rallied him about the new missus; but he kept his own counsel. He had made up his mind; and when a man has really made up his mind, there is a good deal to be done, and "the less said the better sped."

Ways and means are always at the call of an earnest purpose. Hay harvest was barely over when Barnabas took his first step on the road he meant to travel.

Grendon village lay a little way off the high road to Exeter, and the parish church lay a little way

out of the village. The parsonage was a good way from either.

The church was old and grey, and it stood at the bottom of a hill. The churchyard was planted with rhododendrons, while a big yew tree which stood by the lych-gate had watched over the comings in and goings out of Grendon folk for more than three hundred years. Close beside the gate, on the outside, was an upping-stock, and a linhay stood not far off, where folks who came from a distance hitched up their rough ponies while the bell chimed for prayer. Mostly these ponies had side-saddles on them, and the good women who mounted in the soft twilight after evensong each led her steed to the upping-stock.

But one afternoon, about the middle of July, there was a well-groomed horse keeping company with the little Exmoors, and a man's saddle was on its back. And while the Rev. Thomas Kick was tying on his bands in the vestry with his usual neat precision, a strange young man walked into church, with his head well up in the air, and a sound of determination in his footfall. The sunlight glanced through the deep-set mossy windows. The shadow of ferny fronds rested on the sills. The fiddler in the gallery was tuning up; his neighbour was screwing his flute together, and blowing into it to make sure nothing had got inside; the big bassoon was struggling up the gallery stairs, escorted by Granfer Ward, when old Isaac, the clerk, bustled along the aisle, and opened the door of a high pew with crimson linings (where the squire sat when "the family" was at "the Court"), and ushered the stranger in.

The congregation all looked at him; but he only

looked at the parson when he took his eyes off his book, and appeared to be listening to the sermon with grave attention. The parson preached his best, stirred, perhaps, by the unconscious flattery of a stranger's ear.

No one in the church knew who he was.

Did I say no one? That was a mistake. The parson's second daughter knew well enough. Her pretty round cheek flushed; but, then, it was a very warm afternoon, and the Sunday school children had claimed all her power to keep them in order before prayer went in. The clerk gave out the hymn—

“Come, let us join our cheerful songs,  
Wi' angels round the Throan.”

Betty's voice, which generally was as clear as a thrush's, failed her that afternoon; but no one noticed it, for the fiddle and flute tuned up with unusual vigour, and the strange member of the congregation sang out lustily. His was a “cheerful” voice indeed; and perhaps he may be pardoned for a little irreverence in his thoughts, if, when he came to the word “angels,” he looked at Miss Elizabeth for an instant. He was a very young man, and in love, as we know. After all, is it not a young man's duty to fall in love?

It was a good thing that the Rev. Thomas did not know his name, and that the idea never entered his mind that the good-looking stranger, who attended his ministrations so frequently during the next two or three months, was attracted there by any more mundane reason than his fame as a preacher. Before that Sunday evening in September when, coming back from a visit to his sick clerk,

He met Miss Elizabeth and her little sister walking in the lane with Mr. Butter, he had had time to swallow and digest the sweet flattery suggested by this frequent attendance. He took off his hat with an air of pleasant expectation; and "Mr. Butter, sir," introduced Elizabeth, primly, addressing her father by this title of respect, as was usual in those days; and no one noticed the flutter in her voice—Mr. Butter was too much engaged in thanking the reverend gentleman for his "excellent discourse," and the worthy rector was inviting him in to see his wife, and hoping he would favour them with his company to supper; while Kitty pretended to be gathering blackberries in the hedge, to hide her laughter.

Even when the company was gone, riding home by the light of the harvest moon, it was not the Rev. Thomas who made the discovery of the young man's identity with his daughter's would-be suitor of last Christmas. It was Mrs. Kick who found it out; but, like a wise woman, she said nothing. A wooer in the abstract is one thing. You count up his income, his position, his relations, and his education, and you decide that he is not a suitable match for your well-beloved daughter. But a fine young man in the flesh is quite another thing. You see his manly bearing; you observe the deference he pays to you; you remember he has a good estate of his own; and you know you were once young yourself!

Summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, are among the everlasting ordinances of heaven as it bends over earth, and encompasses its children with type and symbol of love and of increase. And so long as earth endures to reflect back heaven's

teaching, so long will men and maidens find their destiny and their duty in each other! Mrs. Kick knew all this, though she had never been to a "ladies' college" or dabbled in political economy and the philosophy of nations. And Mr. Darwin, who has thrown such light on the complex questions of natural selection, was still eating bread and butter in the nursery.

In those days the parcel-post had not been invented—not even the penny-post. But there were carriers in the land—honest folk who traversed the country in all directions with waggons, "covered in tarpaulin." Such a waggon passed to and fro between Bamworthy and Grendon village; and one day, soon after this date, there came a basket neatly packed, and in it a "green goose" and a couple of dozen of "Quarreners," for apple sauce. The basket was directed in an unknown hand to Mrs. Kick, with "best respects." The carrier could give no account of it. A little lad had brought it to him, with a silver sixpence, to pay for the carriage thereof. The family party at the rectory ate the goose with a good appetite on Michaelmas Day, and tried to guess who had sent it. Miss Elizabeth blushed and said nothing. The carrier's wife did "chores" for the parson's lady, and, somehow or other, a letter, beginning "Honoured Miss," found its way into Elizabeth's hand for the second time. But I believe that the Rev. Thomas was not favoured with a sight of this one.

Is there any need to tell the whole story of the next six months? We all know the persistence of growth—the power which even a trivial seed has when spring touches its heart; a power which will force even stone to yield and let its longing out to

reach the sun and air, to bud and to blossom. There is a seed in the heart of man which will grow too, and force its way through circumstances as untoward to its development as rock is to burgeoning plant. That seed is love; and Barnabas Butter was not the sort of man to be hindered in what he intended to do by any opposing environment. Even if Miss Elizabeth had not cared for him, I doubt if that would have disturbed his wooing. But he knew she did, and so he snapped his fingers at all else.

How did he know it? Ah, well; there are ways and means sacred to lovers! Much can be said in the politest of handshakes, even in paternal presence. And the lifting of an eyelid means more than whole quires of closely written note-paper.

The Rev. Thomas groaned, and the wife of his bosom sighed. But, after all, what had he to leave his daughters when Death should come to reckon with him? "After all," said they, "to have one well provided for, it is worth winking at something." It should be taken into consideration.

"Do you know, Elizabeth, that you will have to work hard if you marry this man?" said her father.

"Thank Heaven, I've the use of my hands, sir," replied his daughter.

"Can you milk a cow and make butter, child, do you think?" queried the anxious mother.

"When you and my father honour us with a visit you shall answer that yourself, mamma."

"But, oh, Betty, he'll call you his 'missus'!" cried Miss Kick, the elder.

"And that's just what I *shall* be," returned the honest girl.

And so, one fine day in Whitsuntide, Farmer Butter fetched his bride home.



Nowadays a parson's daughter must be figged out as smart as a grand lady when she weds; and the carriage that takes her to the nearest railway station must have white horses. Miss Betty chose her wedding-gown with regard to use, and a blue mousseline de laine, with a black silk spencer, was her Sunday dress for several summers after. And when she stepped daintily on the upping-stock by the rectory gate, it was that she might seat herself in the "taxed cart," by the side of her husband, who (looking grand in a new bottle-green swallow-tailed coat with bright brass buttons, knee-breeches, and a buff jean waistcoat) was to drive her home.

Home! Was that home—the big grey farmhouse that she saw shimmering in the distance, as the sun sloped towards the west? All the home she had ever known till now was the white parsonage on the hill—white and straight like a Dutch cottage. A new home! The words seem to contradict themselves.

Betty sat very still, with her hands folded under her duffle cloak, as the cart jolted down over the stony water-worn lane towards Buzacott. Farmer Barnabas had enough to do with his horse and the gates, to say nothing of the big stones and frequent ruts; but he did notice that his bride looked pale and timid, and, when he pulled up at his own gate and Dicky ran out to take the horse, he lifted her right out of the cart with his strong arms, and set her down on the other side of the threshold.

"Welcome home to the new missus!" said he with a loud cheerful voice, while an honest kiss on her pale cheeks brought back the colour to them. And when Aunt Charity got out to the lobby—the girl behind her bearing a candle lifted high—lo! there

stood a rosy smiling bride, holding her husband's hand.

"Glad to see thee, child; glad to see thee," said the old lady to the young one; "the place wants a missus, sure enough."

"And please Heaven it shall have one!" answered young Mrs. Butter.

\* \* \* \* \*

I knew Mrs. Butter many years after, when she was no longer young, and many is the tale she has told me of her first experiences as mistress of Buzacott Farm. She thought she knew a great deal before she went there, but soon found there was plenty more to learn.

Old Aunt Charity took to her bed before the year was out, and she never left it again till ten months afterwards, when they carried her over the threshold: the same threshold over which Betty had been lifted for luck, saw Aunt Charity borne out in sorrow; and Betty was left to face the work of a farm alone. But she had a brave little spirit, and a true heart. She saw to the scalding of the milk-pans, and she made the butter. She watched over the baling out of the chicken, and had an eye to the tending of the calves. She looked well after the "pig-meat," and rose early to cream her milk set overnight. Saturdays she baked; Spring and Fall she brewed. She planted her garden with sweet clove-pinks, and trained blush roses over the porch. The bees worked with a good will, and a glass of metheglin was never wanting if you dropped in to supper of a cold evening. She plied her needle busily, sitting in her neat parlour on sunny summer afternoons; and spun yarn for her husband's stockings in the autumn diapses. And

those long grey stockings, which Farmer Butter wore year in and year out, could have told many a tale of winter nights, of the clicking of busy needles, and the sound of baby laughter, as father played with the little ones and mother knitted by the crackling logs in the big kitchen.

Anxieties crop up everywhere in this world's trouble-ploughed soil. Seasons are uncertain. Bulls go down in price when you've a large stock; and wool rises when you've but a poor shearing. A farmer's life means adding little to little; and his wife must count her guineas often and carefully before she can spend one. But it's a life close in touch with Nature—Nature, the mother of us all; Nature, who soothes her children with the old, old tales beloved in all lands and in all times. Spring-time and summer, seed-time and harvest; the mother hen with her sheltering wing, the wandering lamb, the untamed colt, the brook by the wayside,—Betty had learned from her earliest days, by her father's knee, how all these things were parables; and now these parables were part of her daily reading, and the old life burgeoned out into the new.

Farmer Worth's Jemima had tossed her head when first she heard of Mrs. Barnabas, and reckoned that the "parson's daughter would make but a poor figure as farmer's wife."

"What can her know about salting pork and spinning wool?" she cried. "It's much if her man don't go barefoot and leery!"

But as Betty never knew what she said, she bore no grudge for it. And by-and-by the mistress of Buzacott knew how to let folks see there was no lack of good housekeeping under her rule. Farmer

Butter took pride in hearing folks compliment her cakes and elderberry wine; and in knowing that, bring whom he might to the old house, morning, noon, or night, there was never lacking a bright hearth and a fitting meal.

“This is not a very romantic story,” says my reader. Perhaps not; perhaps romance fits in better with broken vows and parted lovers. Perhaps it has nothing to do with faithful married love and daily household duties. Still, for my part, I like better to think of Mr. and Mrs. Barnabas as enjoying comfortable middle life in one another’s society, than I should ever do if they had filled two early graves apart—however romantic it might have sounded to tell of cruel fortune and broken hearts. Is it true we are sent here to grow our souls, and work out our salvation? And can we not do this in peace, and amongst kind friends? For me, and I hope for many, time’s bright flowers and eternity’s harvest grow best “at home.”

That summer—the summer Miss Betty became Mrs. Barnabas—there was a fine shearing up in the old barn. I’ve heard that there counted five and twenty shears at work; and Farmer Butter often told with pride how, in the country dance which followed supper, there was twenty couple footing it in “Sir Roger de Coverley,” and more when they stood up for the old-fashioned “wheel-dance,” which every one knew. Farmer Bale was there, and he led off with the bride by virtue of his being the largest holder of land present; and Farmer Worth’s Jemima, in a green muslin with pink roses on it, followed close after with the bridegroom. She was a “spiritty maid,” as the neighbours said, but she was good-hearted too; and, in the pleasure of the

dance, she forgot all grudge against the woman who had stepped into the shoes she once hoped to wear.

The time-worn planches creaked and shook; the laughter and jokes rang across the yard; and Aunt Charity, as she filled out the broth for the men's supper, was heard to say more than once—

“I'm right down glad Barnabas has got a missus, that I be.”

It was two o'clock and past when the last horse was unhitched, and the last guest rode away from Buzacott “shearing.”

And then the hay harvest came, and before the bride had well unpacked her boxes, she was up to her elbows in flour and cream, making cut-rounds for the men's “drinkings,” and learning all the traditions of “nummit and crummit.”

When the busy autumn came, there was the “crying of the neck,” and the “harvest home.” Now, I doubt if one man in the parish can remember a “crying.” Old things are indeed passing away. It was, I suppose, a remnant of some old pagan custom, but I don't think it is Christianity which has driven it out of the land. On the contrary, there was a good deal of Christian practice mixed up with the old pagan tradition of dedicating the first ears of corn to Ceres. (If I am wrong in my mythology, no doubt some scholar will set me to rights.) But no matter how the custom arose, it was a pretty sight, and a great interest to Mrs. Butter's children some few years after, as they trotted up to the fields the first day the sickle was put in the wheat. The first armful that fell to the ground was carefully gathered up by old Jonas, and put aside. And in his dinner-hour, they watched him plait it cun-

ningly in three strands, to represent the earth, air, and water, and bind it together in one neck.

“Mother, do ’ee let we bide up to supper,” pleaded small Barney, as spokesman for himself and his little sister Lavinia. “Jonas says he’s gwine to cry the neck on Sou’down to-night; and he’ll rin, and they’ll rin; and oh, mammy, he says he’ll be bound to get en in dry, spite o’ Thirza and all her ways. She shan’t wet en to spile the harvest, no tino! That’s what Jonas says.”

And Lavinia piped in with her little shrill voice, “Let we bide, mammy; do ’ee let we bide up for supper, and eat the frumitty.”

I can fancy the little ones clinging to their mother’s skirts half terrified, and half dancing with joy, when the sun set, and, the full moon rising over Long Barrow top, the whole of the reapers gathered in a circle round old Jonas. The men carried their reaping-hooks, the sheaf was borne by the old man. Bare-headed he stood in the light of the moon. Strange shadows flecked the mossy sward on Son’down as he held the firstfruits aloft, and waved his arms.

“We ha’un!” cried he, and the cry was long and wailing. The strange intonation fell on the ear like an echo from pagan days. One could fancy the fauns and weird beings of eld had taught the cadence to the first reapers of earth. “We ha’un!” cried he: and all the men in the circle bowed to the very ground, and their bright sickles glinted in the dim light, and made one think involuntarily of the end of the world and “the reapers” that “are the angels.” Not that these men were angelic at all. It was only Joe Somers, and Bill and Watty, whom we knew quite well; and two or three chaps

who wore fustian jackets and worked hard to get a living for themselves and their families. But the moonlight and the strange wailing cry lift one out of the present and the familiar; and when we lose our footing in this every-day world, the only other we know anything about is the world of the Bible, and we fling ourselves all unconsciously into its parabolic scenes.

“We ha’un!” cried Jonas again, and again the reapers bowed and waved. Then the old men took up another strain, at once more jubilant and more resonant, and, with an indescribable drawling utterance, sang out, “Thae Neck!”—sang it out three times; and twice the waving circle of bright steel flashed. And Livy screamed, and hid her face in her mother’s apron. But Barney jumped with delight. And when old Jonas held his trophy higher than ever, and, with one foot raised, and the left arm poised ready for a dash through the ring, sang out for the third and last time those mystic words, “Thae Neck!” the child could not restrain a shout of rapture; and as the old man charged forward, the men and boys rushed after him, and Barney, holding tight to his father’s hand, ran too—helter-skelter over the common, pellmell down the lane, out of breath across the green. But not to rush in at the front door, where the girl stood with a hidden pitcher of water to wet the “Neck.” No; old Jonas was too cunning for that. Past the hall door he ran; and while Fate, in the shape of Thirza Hooper, tore off to the back door only to dash her pitcherful over Joe Somers, who slunk in empty handed, old Jonas, with an agility surprising to his middle life and somewhat stiff back, jumped in through the open window of the big kitchen, and held up his precious Neck unwetted and in triumph.

The rest trooped in after, with loud hurrahs ; and the discomfited Thirza hastened to take up the steaming dishes of frumitty for the men's supper,—new wheat boiled in milk, flavoured with spice and currants, and eaten with huge chunks of brown bread. Barney sat up on the end of the oaken table, and dipped his spoon with the rest. But Livy had a cupful taken to her upstairs, and dropped off to sleep with a bunch of wheat-ears clasped tight in her rosy fist ; while her mother sang softly, as she had often done in her father's church—

“He doth the food supp'y  
On which all creature's live,”

offering up her “firstfruits” with a full heart—not to Ceres or any heathen deity, but to the God who had led her out of her father's house into woman's promised land, and made her “a joyful mother of children.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Shall we say farewell to Barnabas and Betty here and now ? No ; their lot is not yet perfect. “Life takes a deal of living ;” as my hero said years ago ; and there is a proverb, common to most lands, which bids us call no man happy till his death.

The seasons came, and the seasons went. The children grew up—not only Barney and Lavinia, but three or four more : all different, all precious to their mother's heart, and “favouring” their father in their sturdy sense and resolute will. By them and with them, Farmer Butter and his wife tasted most of the sweets and some of the bitters of married life. The young birds will not stay in the parent nest ; their wings grow strong, and away they fly.



Lavinia married a young lawyer in Bamworthy, who soon after moved to London, and passed out of the home life except for a letter or two each year. When you had to pay thirteen-pence halfpenny for a letter, you did not write once a week. Barney found his home and his fortune in Tasmania. One little grave was dug by the side of old Aunt Charity's, in the churchyard on the hill; and the three others went their several ways in the world, and finally Mr. and Mrs. Butter were left alone.

Before these last times, I was often at Buzacott; the youngest girl and I were of an age, and school-friends. Now she lives in France, having married an agent for some large wine-merchants, and her little ones have never seen the old home.

The last time I was there was not so very many years ago. Farmer Butter and his wife sat alone in her little parlour, and held each other's hands as they went down the hill of age together. His head was white, and her brown curls were smoothed away under a neat lace cap.

"Come once more to see the old folks, then, my dear?" said she.

"And glad to see thee, glad to see thee," chimed in Mr. Butter.

So I stayed with them a bright long week, and gathered blackberries in the lane where Susie and I had gathered them years ago. Then it was that Mrs. Butter gave me one of old Aunt Charity's flowered aprons as a keepsake. Indian muslin it is, covered with delicate sprays of embroidery.

I think the days must have had more hours in them a century ago. What woman nowadays could find time to set all those fine stiches, even though so much of the household needlework is

taken off her hands by the all-powerful "machine"? Sewing-machines and knitting-machines; sweeping-machines, washing-machines, mangling-machines; cream-separators and churns that make butter by themselves,—one might almost think there was nothing left for a woman to do! High schools and Board schools take her children out of her hand for a price, or even for nothing at all, and turn them out on one pattern. Old things are indeed passing away! But are all things becoming new? Nay, I sometimes think they are dying, or dead.

When I said "good-bye" to Mr. and Mrs. Butter, I did not know it was for the last time. I was to go in to Bamworthy by the evening coach, and they walked with me up the lane and out on the hill to meet it. I see them still in memory, as I saw them then, standing hand in hand with the light of the setting sun on their faces.

"Ah, Betty," said the old man, "we never thought to see such a sight—a coach and four horses rattling down over that there steep! Do thee mind the ruts, and the big stones, and the shaking thee got that time as we drove home in the cart the day we was wed?"

"Nay," she said softly, "I don't remember it at all."

"Why, what was thee thinking of then, not to mind that terrible bit of road?"

"Why, I was thinking of my good man, and what sort of a home I should make for him. As for the road, I didn't give it a thought: it was the road home, and thee sat by me."

The road home! That was Mrs. Barnabas all over: there spoke the missus, mindful of but one thing—her duty.

They did not live to see another blackberry gathering. Farmer Butter survived her just long enough to order the stone to be put up to his wife's memory, and to choose the text which followed her name.

ELIZABETH,  
WIFE OF  
BARNABAS BUTTER,  
OF BUZACOTT, IN THIS PARISH,  
AND DAUGHTER OF THE  
REV. THOMAS KICK,  
LATE RECTOR OF GRENDON.

*Born Jan. the 10th, 1802; died March the 15th, 1876*

---

“He that getteth a wife, getteth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.”

But before the stone was set up, the stonemason had to cut in another name below.

\* \* \* \* \*

Old times are indeed gone. The commons are enclosed and the heather rooted up. Sou'down echoes no more to the cry of the plover or the burr of the night-jar. “Harvest Home” is gone, as well as the reapers who “cryed the Neck.” Ruts are filled up in the lanes, and instead of creaking cart-wheels the rush of the steam-engine and the shriek of the steam-whistle sound through vale and over hill. Smart villas crop up on the sides of the stream. Farmers' daughters play the piano. The cream and poultry go off by parcel-post to London. And farmers close their bank-books with a sigh, and tell us that “the times are bad.”

And I must say that I agree with them.

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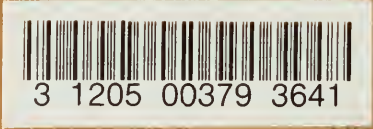
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