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The Wife of Ben Bow.

By Hezekiah Butterworth.

Author of "The Ghost of Graylock," "Brook Farm," "How Longfellow Wrote His Best-Known Poems," etc.



LOSE by the bowery old country roads of West Roxbury is the historic town of Dedham, Massachusetts, in whose woods, fields, and old houses New England still lives. The Dedham woods still grow green, and shade the silent Charles River, and the old Fairbanks house, built in the year 1636, is yet visited, and especially by artists on account of the beautiful trees in its yard.

On the border of the Dedham woods some sixty years ago, there lived a young farmer by the name of Benjamin Bow. His wife was a hard working woman of simple tastes and habits. She had very strong sympathies and antipathies, and these gave her individuality, and she came to be known among the farmers as "The Wife of Ben Bow." The farm of Ben Bow was on a lonely road between Wigwan Pond and the Charles. It yielded a bare support. The wife of Ben Bow helped her husband in the field and meadow, and rarely left the place.

One summer day two of the amiable philosophers who were frequent visitors to the Brook farm community rode into the Dedham woods and called at the solitary farmhouse of Ben Bow. They were young ladies, and were looking for Indian pipe, a remedy then famous for the cure of certain nervous diseases. The lonely wife of Ben Bow received them kindly, and went with them into the near woods, and found plenty of the looked-for waxy plant amid the Creeping Jenny, boxberry leaves and liverwort of certain hollows among the rocks. The poor woman gathered it eagerly, like a slave. She would not let the young ladies touch it until she had prepared it for them by cleaning the roots.

"I understand all these things," she said, "and it is not often that I have the chance to do polite ladies like you a favor. I wish I could see such folks oftener. Ben is good to me, but it seemed as though I should go distracted sometimes before the little one came, I was so much alone. My heart hungers for friends. But, then, I have the river, and the ponds, the trees, and the birds, and my dear babe. Nature is pleasant here, and I ought to be grateful with that little heart. Where do you live?"

"At Brook Farm." "I want to know. You are some of those book people who are trying farming there. I wish you would let me come over there and help you sometimes. I would be willing to work for nothing for the sake of the company. I make beer out of roots; it is good for the blood, they say. Come in and have some. I wish I had something better to offer you. They tell me that your people do not eat meat."

The two young ladies followed the wife of Ben Bow into her humble home. The root beer was excellent. As she was passing the rustic beverage the glass fell from her hand and broke.

"I'm so unfortunate," she said. "My right hand isn't steady. See there, I have lost my middle forefinger."

She raised her hand and moved the fingers, showing the misfortune. The two visitors looked at it with real pity, for they had already found kinship in the heart of the woman.

"I lost that finger by an accident when I was a little girl. I got it crushed in the mill, and the doctor came and took it off. My hand has never been steady since—kind of paralyzed. But I can strike with it a hard blow. It is in light work that it trembles and fails. My arm isn't over steady, and sometimes I think my brain isn't over right. I sometimes fear that I may become touched in mind. Have you a doctor among the folks at Brook Farm?"

"Yes," said one of the ladies. "If you will return our call I will have him look into your case, and it shall cost you nothing."

"You talk from your heart," said the woman. "I have often wished I could find some persons of learning to speak to. There are many things in this world that I do not understand."

"There are many things that none of us understand," was the humble confession of this pupil of the philosophers. There are some things that even George Ripley does not know."

The woman looked very much surprised.

"I have thought some thoughts of my own and Ben says they are queer. It seems to me that there is an inward world, and that everything is governed by the law of the spirit of life, which is the law of the inward world. All of the oak for a hundred years is in the acorn—in the inward principle. All of the golden robin, its joy, its feathers and song, is in the egg—the inward principle. It seems to me that things come down from Heaven through the inward law and principle—through the mysterious agent we call life. The Ought, which is the law of the Eternal Spirit, is written in every soul. It is living revelation. Now, when life begins to grow, it come out of the inward world, and when we die it is to go into the unseen regions of life, or to the inward world whence we came.



Ben Bow's Wife.

That world tends upward. I believe that the whole universe of life will be our home, and I believe—I'm glad Ben is not here—that animals have souls. I study over these things when I am alone."

The ladies heard this rustic philosophy with sympathetic interest, whether or not they believed it. They dreamed that they had found a priestess, and they had. "You are one of us," said Miss Needham. "You are seeking truth."

"May you be blessed for saying that," said the woman. "That makes me happy in my immortal and inward nature, that will one day leave the form that adapts itself to outward nature here."

The two ladies spoke of Kant's view of apperception, of the soul's consciousness of itself, its thoughts and creations. The woman listened eagerly.

"I never saw the soul as I do now," said she. "Apperception, do you call it? That makes one see the spirit. Oh, I am so glad you called! Ladies, listen. I believe that when I die I can come back again. I believe that if I were dead and you were in danger, I could give you warning."

There was a faint cry in a cradle that had been partly covered, and that the visitors had not noticed.

"My baby is waking up. He generally sleeps two hours at this time of day. I feel safe to go out and leave him, if I don't go too far, for the dog watches



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