

## *The Simple Life.*

Written by Margaret Williams.

IT seemed the last house on the road, which had stretched flat and dusty and featureless, for the five miles since he left Birchville, edged by barren pasture land, overgrown with brambles, and with here and there a stunted tree to break the monotony. He slowed his bicycle down as he drew near, looking at the small square dwelling with its whitewashed fence and green shutters and tiny unpainted barn at the back, and a little patch of cultivated ground in which, between rows of bean-poles and cabbages, he could see the moving flutter of a woman's skirt. She had her back towards him stooping to gather something. She turned as he stopped at the gate, and he could see her hands full of green leaves and earthy roots.

"Can you tell me," he began, dismounting, and then paused as he saw her coming towards him. When she moved, something about her struck him instantly as incongruous; he could not have told what it was. She was young and might have been pretty, but that her hair was strained back too tightly from her thin face, giving her a look of plainness. She wore a pink cotton blouse, washed many times and faded, and a short cloth skirt that sagged ungracefully at the back.

"I'm going to ask you," he said, as she came near, "to let me have a drink at your pump and then put me on the right road to Allentown?"

When she spoke, the incongruity resolved itself instantly. She had the voice of his own native city, clear cut, educated.

"This is the Allentown road," she said,

"And won't you come in, please? The pump is just round at the side."

She held open the gate, and he leaned his bicycles against the fence and followed her in. There was a tin dipper on the pump; he filled it and drank. The water tasted good after seven miles of dusty riding. While he was drinking he observed her again. There was a curious restlessness in her face, a look at once eager and disappointed. It was the expression that comes to those who have watched empty roads for a long time. He glanced at her hands; they were earth stained, and squared at the finger tips by out door toil, and they too had the same nervous lines, the same tired wistfulness.

"I suppose it is very hot riding," she said, as he set the dipper down.

"Scorching!" He looked about him at the tidy garden path with its lines of beans and tomatoes, a few summer annuals blooming unobtrusively among the sober green and brown; a garden essentially utilitarian.

"You have a nice place here," he said.

"Yes. It's very quiet." She dropped the lettuce she was holding into a half filled bucket that was near. Her eyes met his, and there was something childish in their look, almost an appeal. She hesitated a moment, and then said: "Allentown is six miles from here. Won't you come into the house and have some tea before you go on? I was just going to make it."

He looked at his dusty boots.

"I am alone just now," she said, "and it's so quiet here—no one ever comes. One is so glad to see anybody."