

CHOICE LITERATURE.

SHADOWS.

A little word—soon spoken,
In petulance and pain—
A golden link once broken
And never whole again.

Upon the brow a shadow,
Upon the lip a play,
The wealth of El Dorado
Can never buy away.

A shaft of sin and sorrow,
From heart to heart of love—
And O, the sad to-morrow
And the one heaven above!

O why should the true-hearted
Be to its own unkind,
Why should sweet love be parted
And scattered to the wind?

O why to all so smiling
Save to the one alone—
And other hearts beguiling,
But that we call our own?

O mystery of loving—
O wilful, tearful way,
That lingers in the shadow
And trifles with the day!

THE BOARD FENCE.

"Shoo, shoo, get home you plaguy critters!" cried Mr. Babcock, waving his arms, as he chased a dozen sheep and lambs through a gap in the fence.

It was a wooden fence, and when he had succeeded in driving the animals to the other side of it, he lifted it from its reclining position and propped it up with stakes. This was an operation he had found himself obliged to repeat many times in the course of the season, and not only of that season, but of several previous seasons.

Yet Mr. Babcock was neither slack nor thrifless; in fact, he rather prided himself on the ordinary appearance of his farm, and not without reason. How then shall we account for his negligence in this particular instance?

The truth was that this fence formed the boundary line between his estate and that of Mr. Small; and three generations of men who owned these estates had been unable to decide to whom it belonged to rebuild and keep it in repair. If the owners had chanced to be men of peaceful dispositions, they would have compromised the matter, and avoided a quarrel; but if, on the contrary, they belonged to that much larger class who would sooner sacrifice their own comfort and convenience than their so-called rights, this fence would have been a source of unending bickerings and strife.

And of this class were the present owners. Again and again had they consulted their respective lawyers on the subject, and dragged from their hiding-places dusty old deeds and records, but always with the same result.

"I say it belongs to you to keep it in repair; that's as plain as a pike-staff," Mr. Babcock would say.

"And I say it belongs to you—any fool might see that," Mr. Small would reply; and then high words would follow, and they would part in anger, more determined and obstinate than ever. The lawyer's fees and the loss by damages from each other's cattle had already amounted to a sum sufficient to have built a fence around their entire estates, but what was that compared to the satisfaction of having their own way?

At last, one day, Miss Letitia Gill, a woman much respected in the village, and of some weight as a land-owner and taxpayer, sent for Mr. Babcock to come and see her on business; a summons which he made haste to obey, as how could it be otherwise where a lady was concerned?

Miss Letitia sat at her window sewing a seam, but she dropped her work and took off her spectacles when Mr. Babcock made his appearance.

"So you got my message; thank you for coming, I'm sure. Sit down, do. I suppose my man Isaac told you I wanted to consult you on business—a matter of equity, I may say. It can't be expected that we women folks should be the best judges about such things, you know; there's Isaac, to be sure, but then he lives on the place; maybe he wouldn't be exactly impartial in his judgment about our affairs."

"Yes, so," said Mr. Babcock.

"Well, the state of the case is this: When Isaac came up from the long meadow to dinner—they're mowing the meadow to-day, and an uncommonly good yield there is—when he came up to dinner, he found that stray cows had broken into the vegetable garden."

"He did, hey?"

"You can fancy the riot made. I declare Isaac was almost ready to use profane language. I am not sure that he didn't; and, after all, I couldn't feel to reproach him very severely, for the pains he has taken with that garden is something amazing; working in it, Mr. Babcock, early and late, weeding, and digging, and watering, and now to see it all torn and trampled so that you wouldn't know which was beets and which was cucumbers. It's enough to raise anybody's temper."

"It is so," said Mr. Babcock.

"And that isn't all, for by the looks of things they must have been rampaging in the orchard and clover field before they got into the garden. Just you come and see;" and putting on her sun-bonnet, Miss Letitia shewed Mr. Babcock over the damaged precincts.

"You don't happen to know whose animals did the mischief?" said Mr. Babcock.

"Well, I didn't observe them in particular myself, but

Isaac said there was one with a peculiar white mark, something like a cross on its haunch."

"Why, that's Small's old brindle," cried Mr. Babcock. "I know the mark as well as I know the nose on my face. She had balls on her horns, didn't she?"

"Yes, so Isaac said."

"And a kind of hump on her back?"

"A perfect dromedary," said Miss Letitia. "I noticed that myself."

"They were Small's cows, no doubt of it at all," said Mr. Babcock, rubbing his hands. "No sheep with them, hey?"

"Well, now I think of it, there were sheep—they ran away as soon as they saw Isaac. Yes, certainly, there were sheep," said Miss Letitia.

"I knew it—they always go with the cows; and what of me—?"

"It's to fix damages," said Miss Letitia. "As I said before, women folks are no judges about such matters."

Mr. Babcock meditated a moment, and then said,

"Well, I wouldn't take a cent less than seventy-five dollars, if I were you—not a cent."

"Seventy-five dollars! Isn't that a good deal, Mr. Babcock? You know I don't wish to be hard on the poor man; all I want is a fair compensation for the mischief done."

"Seventy-five dollars is fair, ma'am—in fact, I might say it's low. I wouldn't have had a herd of cattle and sheep trampling through my premises in that way for a hundred."

"There's one thing I forgot to state; the orchard gate was open, or they couldn't have got in; that may make a difference."

"Not a bit—not a bit. You'd a right to have your gate open, but Small's cows had no right to run loose. I hope Isaac drove them to the pound, didn't he?"

"I heard him say he'd shut 'em up somewhere, and didn't mean to let 'em out till the morning calls for 'em. But, Mr. Babcock, what if he should refuse to pay for the damages? I should hate to go to law about it."

"He won't refuse; if he does, keep the critters till he will pay. As to law, I guess he's had about enough of that."

"I am sure I thank you for your advice," said Miss Letitia, "and I mean to act upon it to the very letter."

Scarcely was he out of sight when Miss Letitia sent a summons for Mr. Small, which he obeyed as promptly as his neighbour had done.

She made to him precisely the same statement she had made to Mr. Babcock, shewed him the injured property, and asked him to fix the damages. It was remarkable before he did this, that he should ask the same question Mr. Babcock had asked; namely, whether she had any suspicion to whom the animals belonged.

"Well, one of them I observed had a terrible crooked horn."

"Precisely—it's Babcock's heifer; I should know her among a thousand. She was black and white, wasn't she?"

"Well, now I think of it, she was; one seldom sees so clear a black and white on a cow."

"To be sure, they're Babcock's animals fast enough. Well, let me see; what you want is just a fair estimate, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I should say ninety dollars was as low as he ought to be allowed to get off with."

"Oh, but I fear that will seem as if I meant to take advantage. Suppose we call it—say seventy-five."

"Just as you please, of course; but hanged if I'd let him off for a cent less than a hundred, if it were my case."

"And if he refuses to pay?"

"Why, keep the animals until he comes around, that's all."

"But there's one thing I neglected to mention—our gate was standing open; that may alter the case."

"Not at all; there's no law against keeping your gate open; there is against stray animals."

"Very well; thank you for your advice," said Miss Letitia; and Mr. Small departed with as smiling a countenance as Mr. Babcock had worn.

But at milking-time that night he made a strange discovery—old brindle was missing! At about the same hour Mr. Babcock made a similar discovery; the black-and-white heifer was nowhere to be found. A horrible suspicion seized them both—a suspicion they would not have made known to each other for the world.

They waited till it was dark, and then Mr. Babcock stole around to Miss Letitia's, and meekly asked leave to look at the animals which had committed the trespass. He would have done it without asking leave, only that thrifty Miss Letitia always shut her barn doors at night.

While he stood looking over into the pens where the cows were confined, and trying to negotiate with Miss Letitia for the release of the heifer, along came Mr. Small in quest of his brindle. The two men stared at each other in blank dismay, then hung their heads in confusion.

It was useless to assert that the damages were too high, for had they not fixed them themselves? It was useless to plead that Miss Letitia was in a manner responsible for what had happened, on account of the open gate, for had they not assured her that that circumstance did not alter the case? It was useless to say she had no right to keep the cows in custody, for had they not counselled her to do so? As to going to law about it, would they not become the sport of the whole town?

"He that diggeth a pit, he himself shall fall into it," said Miss Letitia, who read what was passing in their minds as well as if they had spoken, for the light of Isaac's lantern fell full on their faces. "However, on one condition I will free the cows and forgive the debt."

"What is that?" Both thought the question, but did not ask it.

"The condition is that you promise to put a good new fence in place of the old one that separates your estates, dividing the cost between you, and that henceforth you will live together peacefully, so far as in you lies. Do you promise?"

"Yes," muttered both in a voice scarcely audible.

"Shake hands upon it, then," said Miss Letitia.

They did so.

"Now let the cows out, Isaac; it's time they were milked," said she. And the two men went away driving their cows before them, and with a shame-faced air, greatly in contrast with the look of triumph with which they had before quitted her presence.

The fence was built, and the strife ceased when the cause was removed; but it was long before Miss Letitia's part in the affair came to the public ear; for she herself maintained a strict silence concerning it, and she enjoined the same upon her man-servant, Isaac.

SELFISHNESS AND RUDENESS AT THE TABLE.

Among the small things which, if unchecked, would prove life-long annoyances, none are more conspicuous or more disagreeable than the rude, boorish, selfish habits so frequently developed in the conduct of children at the table. Here, as in all that is connected with the early training and education of children, parents should realize that they will be held accountable in a large measure if those committed to their care and guidance grow up with careless and reprehensible table manners.

If parents commence in season it is not hard to teach any child old enough to be brought to the table (and that should be as soon as they can be taught to feed themselves, if only with a spoon, we think), to be quiet, and wait patiently until the older ones are served, instead of allowing the child to call for its portion the moment it is seated, and, if delayed, demand something vociferously, emphasizing its wishes with loud screams and violent blows on the table and dishes. If this mode of gaining its own way is attempted, and the parent removes the little tyrant from the table for a short season of private admonition, the discipline will be found efficacious, and will not require repeating often. Of course, this will interrupt for a few moments the pleasant harmony which should be the crowning pleasure of each meal, but it will not recur often, and is a small price to pay for the comfort and honour of having our children become well-mannered, pleasant table companions.

Neither would we advocate bringing very young children to the table when one has company. That would not be courteous or respectful to guests. But when only the family are present we think the earlier children are taught to sit at the table with parents, brothers and sisters, and behave properly, the more surely will they secure good, refined table manners.

It is not difficult to teach a very young child to make its wants quietly known to the proper person and at the proper time. But what can be more uncomfortable and annoying than to sit at a table where the children, from the oldest to the youngest, are the dominant power, never waiting patiently for their turn to be helped, but calling loudly for whatever they desire; impatient if it is not brought to them on the instant? If attention is not given as soon as the words are out of his mouth, how unpleasant to see a child standing on the rounds of the chair, or reaching over other plates to help himself to whatever he desires! Parents can, with very little trouble to themselves, save their guests from witnessing such rudeness if they begin when every habit is yet unformed.

As soon as a child can speak he can be taught to ask for what he needs in a gentle, respectful manner, when requiring service of the nurses, or the waiter, as well as of his parents and superiors. "Please push my chair up closer." "Please give me some water." "Please pass the bread." And when the request is complied with, accept it and say, "Thank you." What hardship is there in requiring this from children just beginning to talk as well as from older lads and lasses? It will require but a very few repetitions of the lesson for the youngest to understand that it is the only way by which their wishes will be complied with; and it is surprising to see how soon this mode of calling attention to their wants becomes as easy and natural as breathing. Parents are culpable who do not give their children the advantage of such instruction and enforce it until they have no idea of asking in any other way.

And yet how many give no heed to this duty. How many hear their young charges calling impatiently or arrogantly, "Give me the butter, Jane." "Pass the bread this way." "Can't you hear, Jane? I've told you two or three times to give me some water." Or some may soften their imperious demands a little by saying, "I'll take the bread, please;" or "hand me the salt, Jane, please;" but the "please" is too far off to be very pleasant. It seems an after-thought.

Whispering, loud talking, abrupt calls for any article on the table, beginning to eat or calling to be helped the moment seated, before the oldest are served, is, in the highest degree, rude and vulgar, yet by far too common. Some natural feeling of restraint or diffidence may keep the young more quiet when at a friend's table, for part of the meal at least; but they can lay no claim to refinement or good manners if they use politeness only when among strangers—keep it laid away, like a new garment; to be put on occasionally, and to be thrown off as speedily as possible because not being in habitual use it becomes irksome.

Many other habits creep in and find permanent lodgment if the parents are not watchful of their children's behaviour at the table. Picking the teeth; handling the hair; carrying food to the mouth while leaning back in the chair; rocking, or tilting the chair back and forth while eating; filling the mouth too full; eating rapidly and with much noise from the lips; sitting with elbows on the table—all these, and a multitude equally vulgar, can be met by a careful mother's vigilance before they have time to take deep root, but if neglected will stamp a child with coarseness and vulgarity, no matter how exalted the station he was born into.—Mrs. H. W. Beecher.

THE Gospel teaches a communism which is unselfish; it says, "All mine is thine." But the world's communism is the very opposite. It says, "stand and deliver. All thine is mine." And the difference is infinite.—Doolittle.