



"Of a' roads to pleasure
That ever were tried,
There's none half so true
As one's ain fire-side."

The Degeneration of Mrs. Nesmith.

"He is a farmer," said Adella Mason, and she added in a moment, "isn't it queer to think of me as a farmer's wife?"

"Yes, it is," answered her friend in a tone of disapproval. "I don't like it. I've a good mind to break up the match—if I can."

"Why, Nellie Jerome! What a thing to say."

"Well, if you'd had two or three friends who had gone to live in the country you would think just as I do about it."

"Why, it is just lovely where I am going. It is an old house where Mr. Nesmith's grandfather lived. It is old-fashioned, of course, but it is picturesque, and there are beautiful big elms around it. You must come and visit me, and I know you will be charmed with my home." She blushed a little at the last word.

"It isn't the place I am thinking about," said Miss Jerome gloomily; "it is you."

"Well, what about me? Do you think I am going to be worked to death? I am not. I have visited at the Nesmiths' and I saw that the men folks were the thoughtful, considerate kind. It isn't a large farm and I am going to enjoy the work."

"Yes, I know. But you don't understand what I mean. I have seen what happens when a city girl goes to the country to live. Will you listen and not get angry while I prophesy a little? And remember it is not theory, but what I know and have seen."

"Go on."

"At first you will keep up with your music and reading. You will wear your pretty clothes and call on the neighbors. You will go out of doors every day and be cheerful and contented. After a time you will forget to change your dress afternoons, you will neglect your piano and stop singing. You won't have time to read, and you never will step out of the house if you can help it. You will be continually putting over your housework, never getting it done, and you will be tired and out of sorts all the time. You will call it a dull old place where you live, and you will be continually finding fault with your neighbors. As for your husband—of course, not knowing him yet, I can't tell what effect your degeneration will have on him. Sometimes they get sour and fault-finding; once in a while one takes to drink. It all depends on the man. The change in you, though, is what I think of most. You won't have anything to make life worth living, and it will be all your own fault, for you will have deliberately thrown away the things that were worth while. There! Isn't it a pretty picture? You have a good disposition, Della; I will say that for you. Lots of girls would never speak to me again if I had talked to them this way."

"How long will the process of degeneration take?" Della asked slowly and there was a deep color in her face.

"Well, I'll give you a year and a half," said her friend judiciously.

"Come and see me at the end of that time."

"I shall come unannounced," laughed Miss Jerome, "so as to find you in your dingy calico dress and dirty apron. I won't promise to stay long, as I shall probably be desperately homesick."

It was nearly two years before Miss Jerome fulfilled her promise to visit her friend. It was a cold, blustering day in March, and she had already begun to feel homesick before reaching the Nesmith house. She had hardly stepped into the yard when the front door opened and a figure ran down the path to meet her. It was Mrs. Nesmith.

"Come right in," she said cordially, and she hurried her guest through a little entry and into a warm, sunny room.

Before she knew what had happened, Miss Jerome found herself, with her wraps off, seated in a comfortable chair, toasting her feet at a stove. She gave a hasty glance about the room. "Lots of sunshine, books, papers, plants at one window, piano open," was her mental comment.

"I saw you coming," Mrs. Nesmith was saying, "way down the road; for in my countrified way I am always on the lookout for passers. But I did not recognize you till you almost reached the yard."

Miss Jerome's visit was extended to a week, and she was sorry when the day came when she must go home. The two friends were having their last talk together.

"I was a false prophet," said Miss Jerome significantly, as she looked about the pleasant room. "What is more, I am very glad I was."

It was the first reference that had been made to the talk they had two years before.

"You have not degenerated," she went on. "You

have improved wonderfully. I have long thought that fads were the country woman's salvation, and you have more of them than you used to have. There are your plants, and your music—it is so nice to have those weekly sings here, when all the neighbors come—and you have the long walks with the neighbors' children, and in summer you have botany and birds. It has done me good to see the way the young people flock to you and to see how you help them and advise them on every subject under the sun. Best of all is your perfect sympathy with your husband, and your interest in his work. I have had a lovely visit and I am so thankful that I was a false prophet."

"If you hadn't prophesied," said Mrs. Nesmith with a whimsical smile, "you would have been a true one." Miss Jerome looked puzzled. "Please elucidate," she said.

"What you said that time made a very strong impression on me, and I determined that I would not degenerate. It has been hard not to, sometimes. It is a natural tendency and I had to fight against it. I could see just how true it all was, what you said. I have to keep a sharp lookout, now, not to backslide, but I think the worst of the struggle is over. I do enjoy life so much—you don't know. I am a very happy woman, and I owe it to you that I am not what you described."

"I am glad that I had a little to do with it," said Miss Jerome, "but don't give me all the credit. Most of it belongs to that strong will of yours, my dear."

NONA RUSS.

A Christmas Acrostic.

Suitable for Christmas entertainment.

BY A. M. K.

Nine children, each bearing a letter, march, while singing to time, "Marching Through Georgia":

Sing we now of Christmas time, the best of all the year,
Peace and happiness abound, the season of good cheer;
Blessings rich from heaven above are scattered far and near,

While we sing "Merry Christmas."

Chorus—
Sweet peace, good-will to men, the angels sing,
Glad bells awake and happy echoes ring.
For tidings glad to rich and poor alike to-day they bring,
While we sing "Merry Christmas."

Each child in turn recites:

C Christ was born on Christmas day,
In a manger low He lay.

H Heavenly angels praise His name,
"Peace on earth" the glad refrain.

R Rich the blessing given to earth,
Gracious gift, sublimest worth.

I I will sing on Christmas morn
Of the Saviour who is born.

S Stores of gifts and happiness,
Homes both rich and humble bless.

T Thanks, our heavenly Father, dear,
For Christmas blessings every year.

Merry Christmas, hear the shout,
Ring the glad old world about!

A All the world rejoice to-day—
Merry, happy, Christmas day.

S Saviour born in Bethlehem,
"Peace on earth, good-will to men."

Sing, then, happy children, all this merry Xmas day,
All is joy on earth to-day, all sorrow cast away,
Hearts are light and free from care and gentle peace has sway,
While we sing "Merry Christmas."

Somebody's Birthday.

This is somebody's birthday.

Just as sure as fate;
Some little boy is six years old,
Some little girl is eight.
Some little boy is three to-day,
Some little girl thirteen.
Some little twins are exactly two—
Two apiece, I mean.

Some one is eating his birthday cake
And laughing over the plums;
Some one is counting her birthday dolls
On all her fingers and thumbs.
Some one is bouncing his birthday ball
Or winding her birthday watch.
Some one is not too wise or tall
For birthday butter-scotch.

Think of the beautiful birthday books,
Think of the birthday cheer,
Think of the birthday happiness
Every day in the year!
Every day in the year, my dear,
Every day we're alive,
Some happy child is one or two
Or three or four or five.

—Ethelwyn Wetherald.

The Red River Settlement.

Some Reminiscences of Fifty Years Ago — Chiefly Schoolroom Memories.

Out of the mists of the past appears such a quaint little figure, with its odd mixture of old-womanishness and childish ways. Looking at Lizzie T., with her big shawl enveloping her head and shoulders, the ends knotted behind her back (a very general and easy-going playground costume amongst us all, where comfort was everything and fashion never considered), one could hardly tell whether she was nine or fifty years old. Indeed, there were times when she took on the dignity of the latter, and others when she hardly showed the natural development of her real age, which, I think, was about ten or eleven. Lizzie's grasp of a subject was always of the vaguest. Instruction seemed only to tickle her mental palate, refusing to go much further down. It could not reach her digestive powers, and never arrived at assimilation point. Sometimes a name or sometimes an idea would seem to have "caught on" and would make its sudden and often most inappropriate appearance, with an air of self-satisfaction and proud triumph, most upsetting to the gravity of teacher and fellow-pupils alike. But Lizzie had her ambitions, and whatever task was set her classmates she would try her hand at it or die. A girl on the same form had ended a very well written account of the Bishop's sermon of the Sunday before, by quoting its text. Lizzie had been agonizing over her own chosen subject, "The Pig," and had arrived at nothing more descriptive than the words, "The pig is a very dirty animal; it is fond of rolling in the mud." At this point Lizzie had literally "stuck in the mud" and could get no further, but a way out of it was suggested by the praise accorded to her comrade. "It was all because she put a text at the end," thought simple Lizzie, "and so will I." With much painful effort, the tip of her red little tongue following the ups and downs of her scratchy slate pencil, Lizzie laboriously inscribed what was the Bishop's chosen motto for his schools, "In Thy light shall we see light," well known to the pupils in both, and with no thought of incongruity and not a vestige of irreverence, her slate with its curious little essay was handed to her teacher, as by one who deserved well at her hands. The next lesson in the composition class did not leave a free choice of subjects, but each girl was to describe what she had noticed when taking her last walk upon our only winter road, the frozen Red River itself. "Why! you are quite poetical," said her instructor to the girl occupying the top seat on the bench. "That is really very well told. You may have three good marks for your composition." "I'll have three marks too," said Lizzie to herself. "Why, I remember lots of poetry." So she began thus, though cruel fate denied her a finish to her poetical venture: "When we went out for a walk on the river we saw the snow-birds running (pronounced rooning) about on the fury tomulet, and the bee".....and there she came to a standstill. There was something queer about it, she felt; perhaps it was odd that the snow-birds and the bee should be "running about together, especially in winter." Anyway, the mental supply had failed, and with it all hope of Lizzie's three marks. "What a figure of fun you look, Lizzie," said her teacher to her, jokingly, one day. "I wish we could send a sketch of you to Punch. But there, you don't know what I mean by Punch." "Oh, yes, indeed I do," replied the undaunted Lizzie, "He's in the Bible—Punchus Pilate." She really was more familiar with Bible stories than any other kind, and so, after her own jumbled fashion, it was there Lizzie mostly sought her inspirations. On another occasion, she wanted to describe how very sorry they would all be when the time came for her teacher, whom she really loved, to leave them and return to England, and this is how she transposed the situation: "Mrs. M. will be sitting on the boat, when she has said good-bye to us, tearing her hair and gnashing her teeth." I have heard since those days that Lizzie became a good, sensible little wife and mother, but I believe that she has long passed away, as have so many others whose girlish faces I remember so well.

Another schoolroom episode I recall as I write, partly because of my introductory mention of Lizzie's costume. We all had big, square shawls to twist around us and tie firmly behind us when the bell ordered us out for a romp in the snow, which we could shake off like powder when we went indoors again. These shawls were folded square, and placed one above another in a large empty tea-chest, which stood, papered and ornamented, either in a corner of the hall or of the schoolroom. On Saturdays the Bishop would occasionally come to see us, and the girls, all seated decorously before him, were, in most kindly form, asked questions testing their progress. Frank J., the mischievous, the idle, a lad of 8 or 9, would delight in riding down on his grey pony from the Fort, sometimes with the judge, his father, more often by himself, to have "a lark" and scare the girls if he got a chance. Sometimes it would be by a sudden appearance through the window, landing on his head, or after hiding in the cellar in the dining-room, popping up through