

HANNAH BINDING SHOES.

BY LUCY LARCOM.

Poor Loue Hannah,
Sitting at the window binding shoes,
Faded, wrinkled,
Sitting, stitching in a mournful muse,
Bright-eyed beauty once was she,
When the bloom was on the tree;
Spring and winter
Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

Not a neighbor
Passing nod or answer will refuse
To her whisper,
"Is there from the fishers any news?"
Oh, her heart's adrift with one
On an endless voyage gone!
Night and morning
Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

Fair young Hannah,
Ben, the sunburnt fisher, gayly woo;
Hale and clever,
For a willing heart and hand he sues.
May-day skies are all aglow,
And the waves are laughing so!
For her wedding
Hannah leaves her window and her shoes.

May is passing;
Mid the apple boughs a pigeon coo;
Hannah shudders,
For the mild southwester mischief brews.
Round the rock of Marblehead,
Outward bound, a schooner sped;
Silent, lonesome,
Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

'Tis November;
Now no tear her wasted cheek bedews;
From Newfoundland
Not a sail returning will she lose.
Whispering hoarsely, "Fishermen,
Have you, have you heard of Ben?"
Old with watching,
Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

Twenty winters
Bleach and tear the ragged shore she views;
Twenty seasons!
Never one has brought her any news.
Still her dim eyes silently
Chase the white sails o'er the sea;
Hopeless, faithful,
Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

ALPHABETS.

I have before me copies of some fourscore alphabets, classified into eastern and western. As I compare these different sets of phonetic symbols, the questions arise,—Why does the letter A stand first in almost every one of them? Why is it followed immediately by B? Whence the shape or form of both the characters? In answer to the first question, Jacob Grimm, in his "Deutsches Wörterbuch," says: "A is the noblest and earliest of all sounds, issuing full from the chest and throat, which the child learns first and most easily to express, and which the alphabets of most languages rightly place first." Let me also quote Noah Webster:—"A is naturally the first letter, because it represents the first vocal sound naturally formed by the human organs, being the sound uttered with a mere opening of the mouth without constraint, and without any effort to alter the natural position or configuration of the lips."

Other writers go so far as to ascribe, not only the sounds, but the visible forms of letters, to the same origin. Each side of a child's mouth, when uttering this sound, gives likewise a copy of A. The lips are apart, forming an acute angle with sides of equal length. The perpendicular position in present use is not the oldest mode of writing this symbol. The oldest eastern forms are nearly horizontal. I do not here take into account the little *a*, which is evidently a modification of *o*. The first sound puts the lips apart—in antithesis; the second, B, shuts them—causes a synthesis. Now, look upon the side of a child's face, and you see a B formed by the closed lips; not, however, the well-rounded letter of modern typography—this belongs to a high degree of art,—but a slender form, such as may be seen on old gravestones, or in copies of old Greek and Italian inscriptions. The Phœnician and old Hebrew shapes are still nearer the scrawl which children make in their first attempts at writing. Let us see now what the child can say with these two vocables, keeping in mind that *m* and *p* are merely modifications of B, both in speaking and writing. Long ago, in the East, it learnt to name its father *ab* and its mother *am*. These are probably the oldest words in human speech. They are monosyllables, the natural result of a child's capacity of articulation, an historical necessity. Names of the objects nearest and dearest to it are the child's first words. But these one-syllable names are soon doubled—they become *abba*, or *papa*, and *amma*, or *mama*. As a sacred name applied to the Supreme Being, *abba* has its historical rise in Assyria. It travels westwards, and becomes an epithet of ecclesiastical superiors. As *baba* it passes to the Bishop of Alexandria; it comes to Rome in the form of *papa*, holy father. It is used by Jew and Gentile as a secular name for father. In the Russian language, without an alphabet till late in the ninth century of our era, it appears as *baba*, but means an old woman. In Spanish it is likewise *baba*, and signifies saliva, or slaver, such as issues

from the mouth of a child. In short, it becomes *babe*, *baby*. Father and child, *papa* and *baby*, are complements one of the other, mutual correlatives in word and fact. And let me remark here also that the form of the word *Babel* is worth reconsideration.

Horne Tooke showed, more than eighty years ago, that "all our words, even those that are expressions of the nicest operations of our minds, were originally borrowed from the objects of external perception." Well, if words are borrowed from things, there arises a presumption at least that symbols or letters employed to represent words are also borrowed from things. In point of fact, our ten fingers have determined our decimal system of arithmetic.

These same fingers have been used as copies for the primary elements of the Roman notation. We have I, II, III, IIII, as on clocks and watches—plain imitations of the four fingers.

But how did V come to indicate five? Look at your open hand, with the thumb on one side, distended from the four fingers kept together on the other, and you have a natural V. So much for the left hand. Proceed now similarly with the fingers of the right, and they lead us up to ten, represented by X, or two V's. A basis of number is thus obtained from our own bodies, which basis may be amplified and modified to an indefinite extent. I need scarcely observe that the mode of writing four and nine—IV and IX—in our Bibles, for instance, were after improvements.

It seems to be unquestionable that obscure and unwieldy hieroglyphs were long antecedent to systematised alphabets. But so was the standard yard measure long preceded by the variable cubit and arm's length. The standard inch rose from a finger's breadth, and this again was measured by barley-corns. Ages passed away before any exact system of weights was elaborated. Thirty-two dried grains of the "staff of life" were reckoned as the weight of a small and now very old penny. Twenty of these ill-coined pennies were an ounce in weight, the counterpart of an inch in measure. Weights and measures are not arbitrary, not an invention; they are copied from the human body, or from things very near to us, and essential to human life. So numbers and their symbols from the hand, so primary letters from the mouth. Nature's ways are one and of a piece. They start uniformly from very simple beginnings; and in working out any system we are at first liable to a maximum of error. It is only after innumerable partial failures, slow attempts, that we arrive at a maximum of truth.

If we look at alphabets in the light of the organs of speech, we find the lips represented by the most numerous class. But lip-sounds are dependent to some extent upon education and physical surroundings over which we have no control. Upper class education or a level country develop lip-speech, while a good deal of manual labour or a hilly country strengthen the gutturals, or throat-speech. In the relaxing atmosphere of tropical climates the strong consonants of northern languages disappear, and soft sounds increase.

If we search for historical sequence among these lip letters, it will appear evident that while B and M are contemporaneous, P is later, and nothing else than B reduced by nearly one-half, that V is later still, since it is numerical and taken from the hand, is left-handed, is easily vocalised into u, which returns again to a semi-consonant power, for the Latin Paulus, by way of example, becomes the Spanish Pablo.

The reader may find the semi-labial F fully discussed in Donaldson's "Varronianus." The earliest dental, D, combines easily with the labials, and is clearly a modified P or half B. Probably all the lip letters in our alphabet, as well as the dentals, spring from only two primaries, one of which is copied from the lips, the other from the hand. They are all mutually interchangeable, not only from one language to another, but often in the same language. In reading different languages no character has given me so much trouble as S. It disappears and reappears in a most fugitive and tantalising manner. But it would be impossible, probably, on any hypothesis to assign the original of each letter. This, however, is not of very great importance. If a beginning is once made, the thing goes on, must go on. "Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte"; it is only the first step which is difficult.

What I have here written occurred to me twelve years ago. Some seven years since I was delighted to find that Professor Melville Bell had arrived at similar conclusions. In his pamphlet on "Visible Speech"—my copy has the date 1865—he says:—"The idea of representing sounds by letters is no novelty; it is as old as the first alphabet. Nor, perhaps, is the idea new of designing the forms of letters so as to suggest their sounds. Some principle of association—pictorial or otherwise directive—must have guided the framers of all original alphabets. It is even likely that, in many cases, the mouth itself may have been the model copied in the letters. But although this principle of symbolisation may have been kept in view by the designers of primitive letters, it has evidently been quite lost sight of by subsequent alphabetarians. These seem to have been guided merely by associations and convenience. Familiar forms were adopted from old alphabets in reducing new languages to writing, and symbols for unrepresented sounds were selected or invented to harmonise with the other characters. Then all became arbitrary, as alphabets remain to this day, leaving only here and there faint fossil traces of the original representative principle—like footprints in the buried sandstone—to reveal the secrets of an earlier

world." And again, "I went to the same source from which, as I conceive, the earliest alphabetarians derived their symbols, and constructed from the mouth itself, a new set of representative letters."

THE TWO WIVES.

"Such a child to be married!" said Aunt Tabitha.

"Not sixteen yet!" said old Mrs. Merwin. "I don't know what this world is coming to!" said Desire Higgins, who at forty-six, was an ungathered rose upon the bush of "maiden meditation."

Yes, it was all quite true. I was very young to be married, and yet it seemed as if I had lived a whole century since first I had seen Edward Rayner.

Only sixteen, and yet as I walked down the broad church aisle with the orange wreath in my hair and the gleaming wedding-circlet on my finger, I could hardly realize that it was only yesterday I was playing with dolls and chasing butterflies down the shady aisles of Aunt Tabitha's garden.

"I hope you won't regret your precipitancy, child," said Aunt Tabby.

"I know I shall not, aunt," I flashed back. For was not my hero stainless as Galahad, without fault, like King Arthur's self?

"Oh, yes," said Aunt Tabitha, in that dry way of hers that I particularly detested, "that's what all young wives think. I've heard girls talk just so before."

All this was very provoking, but what could I do?

Only preserve a dignified silence, and leave time to disprove all Aunt Tabitha's gloomy forebodings.

Oh, the cloudless summer sunshine of those first days of my wedded life.

Shall I ever forget them? Our sunset walks, the wild flowers we used to bring home from the meadows; the sweet, low singing of the birds.

I remember, even now, how people used to pause and look at us, and whisper one to another how handsome Edward was, and what a youthful bride I seemed.

N—was very gay that season, and when a telegram unexpectedly arrived, summoning my husband back to London, on business of vital importance, he left me with the less apprehension that I should be lonely.

"It will only be for a week, Rosa," said he. "And you must be as gay and happy as you can until I come back."

So he left me. And on that first evening of his departure I put a knot of white rosebuds in my hair, and went down into the great, cool verandah as gay as a lark.

Mrs. Ingoldsby Bennet was there—a friend of mine from London, with three blowy, overdressed daughters—and she smilingly made room for me, and introduced me to a friend sitting at her side.

"Mrs. Rayner—Mrs. Tennington."

Mrs. Tennington bowed and smiled in an automatic sort of way.

"Mrs. Edward Rayner, of Budding Vale?"

I bowed in some surprise.

"Exactly so," said Mrs. Tennington. "The world is quite full of curious coincidences. I knew your husband's first wife, Mrs. Rayner."

I coloured and then grew pale.

"I think you must be mistaken in the person, Mrs. Tennington," said I. "Mr. Rayner—my husband—has never been married before."

"Ah-h!" said Mrs. Tennington, with a little contemptuous laugh that made me hate her cordially; "it's so natural for a wife to believe as she chooses. But that don't alter the true facts of the case. Mr. Rayner was married, three years ago, to Isabel Mortimer, a friend of mine—and two years ago he was divorced from her. Yes, yes, I remember it all very well. People gossiped a good deal—they always will in a small place like Budding Vale—and how you ever lived there without hearing of it—"

"But I never lived in Budding Vale," I interrupted hotly. "I am only just from London."

"Oh," said Mrs. Tennington, wisely, "that accounts for it. And I dare say I'm telling tales out of school, if Mr. Rayner himself has chosen to keep his counsel on the matter."

And she nodded more provokingly than ever. Just then, to my infinite relief, a party of friends swept up to Mrs. Tennington, and I was able to slip away, with wildly-throbbing heart, and cheeks alternately flushed and ashy pale.

Was this true?

Had my husband, then, deceived me? Was I the wife of a divorced man—the successor to a heart which had lost all the bloom and freshness of a first love?

I was crying and sobbing with all the agonized anguish of a sixteen-year-old bride, who first finds out that life is not all a rose-twined holiday, when a soft, cool hand fell on my brow.

"Pardon me, but I was passing your half-opened door, and I could not help hearing your sobs. I, too, have seen trouble. Will you let me help and comfort you?"

She was tall and slight, with dewy, dove-like eyes, a face like Raphael's Madonna, and a dress of deep mourning that made her ivory skin appear whiter than it actually was.

The tender light of her pitying eyes, the sweet sympathetic tones of her voice went to my heart at once.

I fell weeping on her shoulder.

"I don't know who you are," sobbed I; "but, oh, I am very unhappy."

She listened to my tale with soft, wistful interest.

"Do not judge him harshly," she said. "Remember, he is your husband. Wait, and let him speak for himself."

"Never!" I cried, indignantly. "He has deceived me; that is enough. Where are my trunks? I will return home at once, and never look upon his face again."

"Of whom are you speaking, Rosa?"

I started and uttered a low cry. My unknown comforter and companion hurried from the twilight room, murmuring some incoherent apology as she went.

In the opposite doorway stood my husband. "Edward!"

"Yes, Rosa, it is I. Before I had reached B—, I discovered that I had left some important papers behind by mistake. My journey is deferred until to-morrow morning. And now will you give me some explanation of this mystery?"

By this time my pride had rallied to the rescue.

"The mystery is very simple of solution," said I, haughtily. "Only that I am about to leave you."

"Rosa!"

"To leave you—at once and for ever," I repeated, firmly; "the husband of a divorced wife; the cold-hearted, treacherous deceiver—"

"Stop!" he said, coldly, and with a strange tremor of repressed excitement in his voice; "say no more. Rosa! surely I must be dreaming. This never can be true."

"Leave me, please," I said, faintly; "I would rather be alone."

"Do you really mean it, Rosa?"

"I do."

"Tell me first what is the accusation which you have to bring against me?" he persisted.

"Never!" I said, haughtily.

"Am I, then, to be condemned unheard?"

"Leave me!" I reiterated, passionately; "for I never will call you 'husband' again."

"Rosa," he said, gravely, "remember, that the decision of this hour will last for ever."

"So let it be," I muttered.

He turned away.

But as he turned a cold hand encircled my wrist.

The lovely lady in black was by my side again like a phantom.

"Stop a minute," she murmured; "I am your husband's first wife."

"Isabel!" he cried, starting as if some stunning blow had stricken him.

"Yes, Isabel," she answered; "your unworthy, sinning, yet repentant wife. Now, listen, Rosa Rayner, to the story of my life, and let your husband be acquitted or condemned according thereto."

And in a low, monotonous tone, like one reading a death warrant, she told of how an old lover had wooed and won her away from her wifely fidelity ere yet the honeymoon had waned over her bridal flowers; how she had fled with the gay Lothario; how judgment and repentance had come all too late, when her false lover left her to her fate.

"My life is blighted," said she; "but it is no reason that yours, too, should wither. The only reason for Edward Rayner's silence is a sense of pity and delicacy towards me—towards one who is not worthy of it. Oh, child, child! his heart is a heart of gold. Be thankful that you have won his love. I speak this as one may speak from the grave."

I rose, and tottered towards my husband.

"Edward, can you forgive me?"

"My Rosa!"

And all this time he never spoke to the shadowy form in black.

The next morning N—was all in a commotion.

Mrs. Mortimer, the pale, beautiful widow, whose room had been next to mine, had accidentally strayed too near a ledge of rock that overhung the sea, which became her coffin and her grave.

Two or three little boys had seen her fall.

"She walked right over," said they; "just like as though she was blind and didn't see the water."

"May Heaven have mercy on her soul!" I whispered.

And Edward, drawing me closer to him, murmured—

"God bless you for those words, my wife!"

CASHMERE SHAWLS.—The great mart for the wool of which these shawls are made is at Kilghet, which is said to be a dependency of Ladak, and situated twenty days' journey from the northern boundaries of Cashmere. There are two kinds of it—that which can be readily dyed is white; the other sort is an ashy color, which being with difficulty changed, or at least improved by art, is generally woven of its natural hue. About two pounds of either are obtained from a single goat once a year. After the down has been carefully separated from the hairs, it is repeatedly washed with rice starch. This process is reckoned important, and it is to the quality of the water of their valley that the Cashmerians attribute the peculiar and inimitable fineness of the fabrics produced there. At Kilghet, the best raw wool is sold for about one rupee a pound. By the preparation and washing referred to, it loses one-half, and the remainder being spun, three rupees' weight of the thread is considered worth one rupee. Shawls are made of various forms, size, and borders, which are wrought separately, with a view of adapting them to the different markets.