

## The Inglenook.

### Mrs. Busby's Idols.

Mr. Joseph Busby eyed the sky as he leisurely walked from the barn to the house. The morning sun was veiled by a fleecy mist while low in the southwest a bank of dark gray clouds was visible.

After his prolonged scrutiny, Mr. Busby pondered the matter. It was not until he had washed his hands and face on the back kitchen porch and entered the room where his wife was taking up the breakfast, that he said:

"Pears like it might rain."

"That is what you always say if there's a cloud in the sky," Mrs. Busby said tartly; "I'll thank you to lift that boiler on, just the same."

"Goen to wash? It's most certain to rain."

"Let it rain. I haven't any patience with such weather," and Mrs. Busby rushed down cellar after a pitcher of cream.

Her husband never hurried. He put the boiler carefully on the stove, built up a good fire, and, in obedience to a gesture from his wife, took his place at the table.

Mr. Busby always thought before he spoke. This time after a brief but earnest blessing, he devoted himself to ham, eggs, and potatoes for five minutes before saying in his drawing voice:

"That was a powerful sermon of the elder yesterday, Miranda. I always thought that text about Ephraim bein' jined to his idols might apply to some of us. Most everybody has idols of some sort or other."

Mrs. Busby stirred her golden brown coffee reflectively. "Perhaps so. I hope the people who need it took Mr. Ranton's fine application. As for me I once had an idol, but God took it."

There was a pause. The thoughts of both husband and wife travelled to the parlor where hung the picture of a child, a wee maiden with laughing blue eyes and dimpled arms. It was the picture of little Leah, their only child, whose death twenty years before had left the old farm desolate.

Mr. Busby's heart was too deeply stirred by memories of his child to speak. But when a dash of rain came against the window-pane his wife exclaimed crossly:

"There, it's raining. And if I don't wash on Monday, nothing goes right all the week."

"Taint an idol, is it Mirandy?" The good man of the house pushed back from the table. "Now, it don't seem jest right to be so sot as you air on doin' your work exactly as you want to. It pears to me it might be an idol."

"What an idea! Just look there, Joseph. See that dirty spot on the tablecloth where you've rubbed your old coat sleeve. This tablecloth was clean yesterday morning and now it must go in the wash, making three this week. I do wish you would be more careful."

"Why, now, Mirandy, I do try to be careful. I wish you would use tablecloths. I thought you bought some turkey red ones."

"Yes, I did buy them, and a look of disgust crossed the face opposite Mr. Busby. "But I want it understood I am not going to use 'em. I will work my fingers to the bone before I'll set my table with anything but a white cloth," and she stroked the glossy linen approvingly.

"I know, Mirandy, but maybe that's another idol. You see, you think a sight of such things."

"Now, Joseph Busby, if you are going to talk such nonsense as that you better get to work. Just see there. The sun is shining. So you see it was right for me to wash after all."

"Maybe so," and the eyes of the simple-hearted man softened as he looked through the east window at the sun-kissed young foliage from which the rain drops were yet falling. "Maybe so, Mirandy. You air an uncommon woman and have been a good wife to me for twenty-seven years. You hain't got many idols, Mirandy, not half as many as I have. But this always thinken your way is best—"

"See here, Joseph Busby," there was an undertone of almost fierceness in her voice. "I think such twisting of the Scriptures is sinful. If I have idols, I can tend to 'em, that's all," and Mrs. Busby strode into her bedroom and shut the door violently.

When she returned to the kitchen she was in possession of the field. Joseph had gone to his work.

"High time," she sniffed; "idols'—indeed!"

She put her clothes to soak, and carrying her dishes into the pantry she began washing them. Her thoughts were not pleasant ones; the frown on her face told that. The window before which she stood was thickly covered with a thick growth of morning glory vines. A few of the daintily twisted buds, unheeding the threatenings of storm, had opened their pink, blue and white cups and peered in at the flushed face of the worker. But Mrs. Busby was too busy, too disturbed by her husband's words, to notice their beauty.

"I don't see what possessed Joseph to say that," she said as she began rubbing her clothes. "I gave up the only idol I ever had twenty years ago. I—"

She stopped abruptly. "Of course, it's that letter," she went on after a brief pause. "But he is wrong. It isn't idols that keeps me from doing my—"

Again she stopped she had almost said duty. A week before a letter had come from a little town in Kansas to Mr. Busby. The letter contained news of the death of Mrs. Emma Hale, a distant cousin of Joseph's. Mrs. Hale was a widow and left one child, a boy, two years old. The writer, a neighbor of the dead woman, went on to say she could care for the child no longer and if his relatives did not come for him he would be sent to the poorhouse. Joseph pondered the matter a day and a night. He then coolly proposed sending for the child and adopting it. His wife flatly refused. What—a child, a two year old baby, to make litter on her clean floors and upset her orderly plan of life?

"You must be crazy, Joseph," she said severely. "If it was a girl now and big enough to be out from under foot, I might think of it. But there haint any use talking about it."

Joseph Busby rarely opposed his wife, even in so small a matter as talking when she bade him be silent. However this time he said:

"We are grown old, Mirandy. The baby would be something to love us!"

These words came back to Mrs. Busby as she bent over the wash tub. Did she and Joseph need something to love them? She thought of the rambling old house with its many rooms, of the fertile acres surrounding it, and of the comfortable bank account. Then her mind wandered to the distant cemetery where a white marble cross marked her baby's grave.

"I couldn't give Leah's place to another," she whispered. "And yet he might make a place for himself. Oh, my baby, I miss her still!"

Withdrawing her hands from the suds, Mrs. Busby crossed the sitting-room and entered the parlor. No one knew, not even her husband, how many troublesome questions the mother settled before her child's picture.

She opened the blinds and looked long and earnestly at the laughing baby face.

"Do you want me to dear?" she asked tearfully. "Do you want me to take a noisy, troublesome boy into this home? Is it an idol, Leah, my wanting everything to quiet and orderly?"

Ten minutes later she was back at her washing. The parlor blinds were closed and all things were as they had been excepting Mrs. Busby's eyes; there was a new light in their grey depths. At half-past nine the last clothes were on the line. Returning from hanging them out, Mrs. Busby found a neighbor, Mr. Vance at the door.

"I've been down to the station," he said, and the eight o'clock train brought a baby for you, or Busby, rather."

"A what?" demanded Mrs. Busby, catching her breath.

"A baby." It was plain to see that Mr. Vance was enjoying the situation. "A woman who was going East on a visit brought it from Kansas. Said it belonged to some of Busby's folks. She left it in care of the ticket agent, and he sent it over by me. It's down to the road in my wagon, and a trunk too. The little fellow has cried most ever since the woman left him."

Mrs. Busby took down her green gingham sunbonnet and prepared to follow him out to the wagon without a word.

"Was you expecting it?" Mr. Vance asked, somewhat disappointed at her quietness.

"Not to-day," she replied briefly.

It was a plump, but tear-stained little face that met her eager gaze. There were great blue eyes, a rosy mouth, and closely curling yellow hair. But the child was unmistakably dirty and began crying again in a piteous fashion.

Mrs. Busby held up her arms. "Come to auntie, dear," she said coaxingly. "You want some bread and milk, don't you, and to see the dear little chickens?"

At the same leisurely gait of the morning, Mr. Busby again traversed the path from the barn to the house. Miranda's line of snowy clothes drying in the sun brought to his mind the conversation of the morning, but he expected no reference to it from his wife. A surprise awaited him. The table was laid for three, and at the guest's place stood a clumsy high chair that for twenty years had stood empty in an upper room. And on the floor sat a happy-faced child surrounded by clothes pins, empty bottles, a disused candlestick and a like collection of impromptu playthings.

"Why, who is that, Mirandy?"

"Joey Hale Busby" was Miranda's prompt reply, and picking up the child, she put it in her husband's arms. "There Joey, dear, make friends with Uncle Joseph