OUR · FARM · HOMES

The Knowltons' Thanksgiving

(New England Homestead)

By ELLA H. STRATTON

(Continued from last week)

"THERE, those fish will help out your Thanksgiving dinner," he growled, throwing three small trout into a pan. "That is more'n I expected to get. I saw Ben Adams, and he says Snapum has already bargained the farm away to a stranger. I'm thankful none of the town folks will have it, anyway."

"I'll get right up and fry the fish for your supper," she said briskly, ignoring his last words. "You must be hungry and cold. It looks like a terribly raw day out, and I wouldn't wonder if we had a big storm."

"You needn't mind cooking the fish for me; I couldn't eat none of it if you did. I suppose the horses and cows and hens will have to eat as long as there is anything left for 'em," he muttered ungraciously as he started for the barn.

"When a man like your father once gives up, he is the most unreasonable and ungrateful being in the whole world, Nellie," she said, looking after him as she went on with the preparations for supper. "Now he'll make a good meal of those fish and some nice fried potatoes, but he'll grumble all the while he's eating 'em. Some folks are made that way, and it's no more use to try and change 'em than it is to try and change the spots on a leopard—not one bit. Set the table, daughter, and we'll have supper all ready when he comes in. He'll relish it."

That was just what he did do, while his wife sipped her tea and ate nothing, and Nellie played with the food on her plate. Snapum's name was not mentioned, but the reproachful glances cast at his daughter told very plainly what was in James Knowlton's mind. After the meal was over he took his paper and sat down to read it, while his wife knitted in silence.

Suddenly a loud knock at the door startled them. Had Snapum come to gloat over their misery? Knowlton stole across the floor and threw the door open without ceremony. A tall man stood there, with snowy coat, outstretched hands, and eager eyes. Knowlton looked at the bearded stranger curiously, but the mother's eyes were keener. She knew her boy.

"Jimmie, my Jimmie!" she cried, joyfully, then she threw her arm around him and laughed and cried as she kissed him again and again, holding him at arm's length between whiles to trace her boy's likeness in the unfamiliar bearded face.

"I didn't know you, son; indeed I thought—" the father began, then stopped abruptly. He could not tell his son what he thought.

"I'd have known you anywhere, father," laughed Jimmie happily. "You're not a day older than you were when I last saw you—not a day. Oh, it is good to see you both and the old home again, though I have a home of my own now, and a wife and two babies."

"My little Jimmie, and I'm a grandmother! Why didn't you write and tell us? Why didn't you let us know where you were? We—we thought you might be dead, Jimmie," said the mother with gentle reproach.

"Well, I didn't like to write until I was successful, and then—then there was so much else to think of that I kept putting it off. I didn't think, mother, truly I didn't, but I see now that it was a wrong thing to do. I had no right to add anxiety and uncertainty to your other troubles," he admitted, laying his strong hand upon hers with a loving pressure.

Then they told the story of the mortgage, little by little, and he listened with a smile that puzzled them.

"Snapum says he has sold it already, Jimmie," she said forgetting that her visit was to be kept a secret, but her husband did not notice the words. "He has sold our home to a stranger."

"So he has—he has sold it to me, mother," cried the son with a glad shout. "He didn't know me, and I took good care not to tell him my real name. I had to buy it in the name of my wife's brother, but he will deed it to you. That mortgage will cause no more trouble. I'll attend to that. I could not get it in any other way, you see. Snapum would never have sold it to James Knowlton, Jr."

"How did you know about it?" asked the father.

"I saw the foreclosure in the paper and didn't let the grass grow under my feet until I had possession of that mortgage, I can tell you. It took me less than fifteen minutes to start for home after I read it," he laughed. "I have taken the home paper, under another name, for years, just to keep track of the town."

"But, Jimmie, my boy, can — can you afford this? That mortgage cost you quite a little sum. I haven't reckoned up the interest lately — I couldn't," questioned the mother anxiously.

"I rather guess I can," was the confident reply. "I'm not a millionaire, but I can put enough in the bank to keep you and father from worrying when I go back to the ranch. I met Nellie out here with Jim Brown, and they didn't know me. Is that it? Well, he used to be a decent sort of a boy. I have hoped for you to sell the farm and come and live with me. You will be welcome, I can tell you that. It is a great country out there—a great country. Our ranch is as large as this whole town, and there is plenty of room. I've a Jimmie, too, and a little Mary, mother, and they both want to see you. But if you'd rather stay in the old home, you shall, and we'll visit once a year. We can decide that later. Just now I want to know what you've got for dinner to-morrow. I'm hungry for one of the old-time Thanksgivings you used to get up, mother. My wife is a fine cook, can't be beat, but every woman gives a different taste to her victuals, and I'm just hankering for yours."

James Knowlton and his wife looked at each other questioningly. They could not tell him that their Thanksgiving dinner was to be plain, everyday sausage.

"You shall have it, Jimmie, you shall have it," said the mother after a pause. "But we'll have to get up early and right lively to get it ready. We—we didn't plan for much this year, you see."

"No, we didn't exactly plan for much of anything," admitted the father with a flush on his cheek, and his eyes fell before his son's steady gaze. "But it isn't too late yet. The turkeys and chickens are just as fat as they were yesterday, and the horses can go to town just as quickly as they could last week. I'll be up at four o'clock and we'll have the Thanksgiving of our lives, for we have a sight to be thankful for, mother."

It is strange how prosperity will seem to change a man's very nature, isn't it? James Knowlton was at peace with himself and the world! The dinner next day was a triumph of culinary skill and no one enjoyed it better than he. But the mother feasted her eyes on her son's happy face, trying in vain to make him look like the Jimmie of ten years before. She was content and thankful for the blessed privilege of waiting on her loved ones. There is little need to add more, for the end is easily imagined. Snapum's rage, when he found out the deception, was useless, his revenge had gone for ever. James Knowlton gained influence and respect when it was known that he had a comfortable sum in village bank. Nellie was married at Christmas, and, as Brown went west to settle upon the next ranch to his brother-in-law, the father and mother have decided to go also and be near their children. A cosy home, just large enough for two is being built for them, midway between the two others, where they may find rest and comfort for the rest of their days.

The War of the Homekeeper

By H. Georgina Toole, Ontario Co., Ont.

EUROPE at the present moment is in the throes of a mighty conflict in which thousands are fighting and dying for freedom. The continent and the world must be freed from "Kaiserism" by roar of cannon, clash of arms and the shedding of hero blood.

The household is also (or should be) waging a war for freedom. The housewife must be freed from the despotism of housekeeping by careful instilling of relative values, the cultivation of serene poise and the rending of habit's iron chain.

To many present-day housekeepers and homemakers, their task has become a burden almost too great to be borne, because they serve the house instead of the house serving them. Perfect order throughout the house is relatively quite unimportant when compared with steady nerve, sweet temper and kindly sympathy. Be our house ever so beautiful it is not so precious to us as perfect health. No matter how much our husbands may appreciate neatness and order, they are secondary to our perfect companionship. The children will have forgotten 20 years hence whether or not we washed on a certain Monday, having the clothes on the line at the customary hour. The mother who left the tub to give kindly sympathetic counsel will ever live in the memory.

Everyone in order to be able to render his or her task the best of service must be, at times, freed from it for longer or shorter periods. The wife who spends an afternoon each week in the home of a friend who discusses and sympathizes with the difficulties and accomplishments of others, returns to her own tasks with fresh heart and new helpful ideas.

Let us fight against the bondage of housekeeping. Our work should be a pleasure, not a task. Let us make home-making a delight with our husband, children and family life come first, and our household tasks still important, but secondary. Let us live and work from day to day that our children may say of us, "Mother was a perfect housekeeper," but "She was a perfect homekeeper."

Including the Neighborhood

By Hilda Richmond

In a very busy country neighborhood where the hard work of the summer was always succeeded by a series of delightful social affairs—a round of good times carefully planned for in the autumn—one of the young girls surprised the group making arrangements for the first party by saying, "Why not include the whole neighborhood?" It was the first time anyone had thought of such a thing and the novelty of it took their breath away. "We can make the affair a little larger and have it in the school house, or our big new barn, or the township hall, or even out of doors one of these mild nights and invite everybody."

Well, that was the beginning but now every good time takes in young, old, middleaged and even the little ones. After the busy fall work is over the young folks get together and carefully map out the season's pleasures. Perhaps there is a lecture to begin with, followed by the serving of refreshments, then a musical, or children's entertainment, then a Christmas tree and celebration or a Thanksgiving frolic. After the holidays come surprise parties, lectures, concerts and sleighing parties depending largely upon the weather and the state of the roads. Since they have taken in the neighborhood everything is pleasanter all around and nobody wants to go back to the old way.

The success of the plan from the very first has been due to several factors. The young people consult the older folks and give them a share in the plans and in carrying them out, and the spending of money has always been frowned upon. Some of the people are well-to-do while others are in moderate circumstances so all are on an equal footing. The Christmas tree, which is the "big" treat of the year to the children never is loaded with anything but ten cent gifts. In the matter of food much liberty is allowed as country people like to have an abundance, but it is all home-made and not expensive. Another thing that has helped is the fact that local talent is made much of and even the little ones have a place occasionally in the entertainments. It is all so delightful and so home-like and so inspiring that it is no wonder the young people feel proud of their social affairs each year.

The entire community has improved in every way since the new venture, and even the doctor laughingly complains that people are healthier out that way and the young folks are spoiling his business. The church has received a decided uplift, the school is better in every way, the civic atmosphere is clearer and the people are happier and more ambitious than ever before.—Indiana Farmer