

'O Rest in the Lord.'

Village life moving so quietly through its narrow bed seems stagnant compared with the swifter movement of town and city. Upon the other hand, the least movement out of the ordinary attracts swift attention, and is soon known from end to end of the village.

Every child in Fingringhoe knew that the two cottages at the marsh end of East-lane were to be let or sold. No bills announced the fact, but when Miss Green died and her sister left the village, the lads and lassies made free of the fruit, and spent many hours playing in the gardens.

The cottages remained empty for some time. No farmer wanted them. They had all the laborers needed, and therefore no fresh 'hands' came to the village.

When William Clinch the younger came home, he was soon in possession of all there was to be known—that Mr. Owen, a Colchester tradesman who owned them, would be glad to get rid of them.

So it came about that when he left the office of Mr. Craske he had paid the deposit money and congratulated himself upon a bargain. He had obtained a promise from the auctioneer that his name should not be divulged as the purchaser.

Some weeks after this Fingringhoe was startled by the influx of some half-dozen men, who took up their residence and began to work in the cottages.

Nothing stirs the quiet of village life like a secret.

John Stokes was the first to attempt to gain some knowledge as he ferried over the men and their tools and baggage.

'Be ye from Colchester?'

'Aye.'

'Goin' to work in village, I reckon?'

'Somewhere hereabouts.'

'At one of the farms, maybe?'

'Maybe.'

This was puzzling, and John Stokes drew his oars in, and looked hard with one eye at the man who had answered.

'Long job?' he ventured again, as his boat slid into the water.

'All depends, mate.'

After the men had landed Stokes sat and watched them until they disappeared from his sight.

'Humph,' he ejaculated; 'close as a crab.'

Those cottages were the theme of the village taproom, and rumor began its tortuous course.

'Shouldn't be surprised if Squire bought 'em?' This was addressed to the landlord.

'More likely some tradesman in Colchester, but the men doan't come here, and can't learn rights on it yet.'

When the wooden fences were pulled down and the brickwork placed ready for iron palisading, the women found their opportunity.

'Reckon you're making nice place?'

'You'll see when 'tis finished, Missis!'

The speaker was a young man, but all had received orders from their employer, and knew not for whom the work was being done.

'Who bought these?' Womanlike, Mrs. Greenleaf came to the point at once.

'I didn't know anybody had—never heard.'

'That's all gammon. You know right enuf.'

'Oh, well, I do then!'

'Be it t'Squire?'

'Perhaps 'tis and perhaps 'taint.'

Even Mrs. Clinch's curiosity was aroused.

Coming back from the farm one afternoon across the marshes, she too stopped, and walked in through the open door. The alterations surprised her.

'Why, you be making big housen of these!'

'We be altering them a bit.'

'I should think so. Gentlefolk coming, I reckon. Bay winder and all,' she continued, as she noted that one of the cottages had so been altered.

'Wait till we're done; you'll hardly know 'em for the same.'

'People from Lunnun, maybe?'

'From world's end, for aught I know.'

William Clinch continued to live with his parents. He took no apparent interest in the cottages. Would stop and look as he passed, ask a few questions, and pass on.

One night his father was by his side, walking from the prayer-meeting.

'Will, what are you going to do?'

'Oh, by and by, father, maybe I'll find some work that'll suit. You don't want to get rid of me, do you?'

'Nay, boy, on'y I'm thinkin' you'll come to the end of your stocking soon, and it ain't good to be lazy, either. I'd be more sorry if ye went away for all that.'

'What are you going to do, father; work on at farm till ye die?'

'What else can I do?'

'You have no long stocking, I reckon,' and William laughed loud.

'Stocking, Will! Why, twelve shillin' a week doan't go far enuf for a stocking.'

A grim smile spread over his face.

'I reckon I'll keep on as long as I can, and then the poorhouse, unless I get ill and die. It's our lot, and I don't complain; the Lord has been wonderfully good to me and mine.'

William wanted to hear his father lay bare his thoughts concerning the future. 'Hard lines, though, for you, after a life of toil.'

'Nay, William, nay,' and the old man stopped and straightened himself. 'I used to think so once, but I hev larned what the Apostle says to be content. I hadn't any larnin', on'y scarin' of crows, but I've had strength by God's blessing, and I've got to love my master and the very land hereabouts.'

'Yes,' interrupted his son, 'but did you never wish some of it were your own?'

They were still standing. A strange, strong light shot from under the shaggy brows.

'William, that was once my dream, a bit of land and a cot, just to hide our heads in when age came, and I prayed it might be; but 'pears God's way isn't so, and tho' I don't like the poor-house, I'm content.'

'You have toiled hard and helped men to make money.'

'Hold your tongue, Will. I've naught but done my duty, and master has paid me for all I've done. Doan't bring none of them old temptations to me, for envy is the devil's sharpest spear.'

At last the cottages were finished. One was a cottage no longer. Its bay windows, trim lawn, and added story, made it a modern villa. Still they stood empty.

One Sunday morning William said to his father, 'Come for a walk, before chapel, and you come, too, mother.'

They strolled down the lane across the

marshes. The keen but sweet air from the sea blew fresh. Here and there a peewit uttered its plaintive cry, or the shrill scream of a hawk-heron broke the silence. When opposite the cottages William said, 'They've made a nice job of these; let us look inside and we can rest a minute.' Up the newly gravelled path round to the back, and, opening the door, into the kitchen they entered.

'Why, the men must have left these,' said his mother, as she sat down on one of the two wooden chairs. 'Nice place to live in, and the garden so nice, too.'

William was standing, Clinch wiping his brow with the clean red handkerchief—his Sunday one.

'Very nice, and the place so clean, too.'

William turned. 'Just the sort of place I should like to have seen you settled in, mother.'

'Aye, boy, sure it would be lovely; but, theer, God bless them as does live in it.'

'Amen,' said Clinch.

'Father, mother, do you know why I brought you here this morning?'

'For a walk before worship, I reckon.'

'Not that alone. This cottage is your very own.'

'Doan't talk such nonsense, lad,' and Clinch laughed until the rafters rang with the echo of his strong voice.

William continued, 'I bought these, one for myself, and one for the best parents God ever gave to man, and as soon as you like you can come and live here, and you will have one pound every week as long as you live.' He had spoken quickly trying to keep back his emotion.

His mother, flinging her arms around his neck, kissed him again and again. 'God bless you, God bless you, my Will. My weary back-aching days are over.'

Clinch was on his knees, great tears chasing one another down his brown face, his eyes closed, his hands clasped; then, with a great sob, he rested hands and head on the chair.

Mrs. Clinch knelt beside him. After some minutes, during which silence reigned—

'Clinch, God's ways be above our ways. He has given us what we never worked for, but what we years and years have longed for.'

Rising, Clinch grasped his son's hand in both his.

'Thank 'e, Will; thank God for thee, Will. Let us make haste to his house, and he slowly added, 'O rest in the Lord, and he shall give thee thine heart's desires.'

As they went, William said, 'Do not say anything about this to-day, please, not even to Kitty.'

His mother understood.—Baptist Times and Freeman.

Children and their Guests.

A good idea occurred to somebody, who gave it to the children of a certain Sunday School. It was that they should get up an entertainment, and invite their elders to attend it. Great success crowned the endeavor. A boy was chairman, and a girl was vice-president. The songs and solos, the speeches and recitations, were all given by children. The part of the adults was to applaud and give to the collection. They did both very generously, and not only were the funds benefited, but the children had what one of them called 'a magnificent time.'—English 'Sunday School Times.'

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