THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW.

Mr. E. Francis, in Longman's.

They were cutting Farmer Sibley's largest hayfield; it was 11 o'clock, and the men had just "knocked off" for the light meal known in these parts as "luncheon." A big flagon of cider was being passed round from one to the other, accompanied by goodly slices of bread and cheese. The farmer himself stood a little apart under the shade of a large elm which grew, midway in the hedgerow that divided this field from its neighbor, paying a half scornful attention to the scraps of talk with which the laborers seasoned their meal. He himself was not given to self-indulgence, and inwardly chafed at the loss of this half-hour from the busiest time of the day. He had worked as hard as any of his men, and was, indeed, hardly to be distinguished from them, except by the better quality of his clothes. He was a tall strong-looking fellow, with a face as sunburnt as any of theirs, and arms as muscular and brown. He was coatless and wore a great chip hat; his shirt-sleeves were rolled up above his elbows, and his shirt was open at the throat. Two teams of horses stood in the shadow of the hedge, plucking at the twigs or stretching down their necks toward the grass which they could not reach; the vast field, half cut, lay simmering before him in a blaze of light; the dome overhead glowed almost to whiteness, for the sun at this hour was intolerably hot. Yet even as the master gazed, impatiently longing for the moment when he could set his hands to work again, he saw a figure rapidly crossing the field, looking from right to left, as though in search of someone. It was the figure of a young woman; so much he could divine from the shapely outline and springing ease of motion, but her face was at first lost to him under the deep shade of her broad-brimmed hat. She approached the group of laborers first and made some inquiry in a tone too low for him to distinguish the words. He saw his foreman, however, turn towards the tree beneath which he himself stood and jerk his thumb over his shoulder. Evidently the young woman had come in search of him.

She made her way towards him, walking more slowly and indicating by her aspect a certain amount of diffidence. A comely girl—he could see that now—dark-eyed, dark-haired, and glowing with health and life.

"If you please, sir," she began timidly, "I came—my father sent me. It's about the taxes."

She drew from her pocket a little blue paper of familiar aspect, the demand note for the rates collected four times a year by the overseers for the Branstone Union. The angry color glowed in Jacob Sibley's face as he twitched the paper from her hand.

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried; "what have you got to do with it?"

"I am Isaac Master's daughter, of Little Branstone," she said hastily. "He collects the rates for our parish, but he's very ill in bed. He's had a stroke, poot father has, and I'm doing his work for him."

"He should have known better than to send you to me," returned Jacob, still wrathfully. "I never heard sich a tale in my life. 'Sendin' a maid to collect the rates! 'Daily! Where will the womenfolk stop?"

"Nobody else made any objection," said the girl, with a little toss of her head. "I've got it all right, except yours; and father thought I'd best come and ask for it."

"Then you can tell your father as he did make a very great mistake," thundered Sibley. "'Tis bad enough to be bothered about they dalled rates wi'out havin' a woman set up over you."

He tore the paper into fragments as he spoke, scattering them to the breeze. "There, you just turn about and go home-along, my maid, and tell your father that's my answer. If your father bain't fit to do his work hissel', he did ought to get somebody else to do it for en—some other man. The notion o' sendin' a maid! I never did hear o' sich a piece o' cheek!"

The girl, without waiting for the end of his indignant commentary, had turned about as he advised, and was now walking swiftly away, her head held very high, angry tears in her thick lashes. Jacob impatiently jerked out his watch; it wanted still ten minutes of the time when work would have to be resumed. He dropped the watch into his pocket again, whistling under his breath, a good deal out of tune. Once more fragments of the men's talk reached his unwilling ears.

"That be Bethia Masters, that be—a wonderful good maid. They d' say the wold man 'ud be fair lost wi'out her. The Parish Council did give her leave to take his place for a bit so long as there was a chance he mid get better." "She be a shapely maid and a vitty one." "E-es, she's well enough; looks a bit tirer now,walkin' i' the heat three mile here and three mile back." "E-es, and a sarcin' at the end o't," chuckled an old fellow under his breath. "I'ear Maister he did gi' 't to hee! I heerd en. Our Maister bain't partial to payin' rates at any time, and he didn't reckon for to hand over his money to a 'ooman."

Farmer Sibley watched the retreating figure idly; it was true she was a shapely maid. How lightly and rapidly she walked; 'twas a long way, too—three miles or more. He could have wished he had not been quite so hard with her. He might have asked her to sit down and rest for a while; he might have offered her a glass of cider. He almost wondered at his own outburst of irritation as he looked back on it now, and watched the girl's retreating form with an increasing sense of shame.

The toilsome day was over at last, the horses stabled, the men fed. Farmer Sibley was smoking the pipe of peace in his trellised porch with a pleasant sense of weariness. It was good to rest here under the honeysuckle in the twilight, and to think of how much had been accomplished during the long sunny hours which had preceded it.

The sound of a light foot caused him to raise his eyes, which he had partially closed a few moments before, and the ensuing click of the garden gate made him sit upright and crane forward his head. A girl's figure was making its way down the little paved path, a girl's voice once more greeted him tremulously.

"If you please, Mr. Sibley, I'm sorry to trouble you, but—"

Jacob Sibley in the evening was a different person to the Jacob Sibley of the fields; he stretched out his hand and drew her forward by the sleeve.

"Sit down, my maid," he said; "sit ye down. You've a-had a longish walk, and for the second time to-day, too."

Bethia came into the shadow of the porch; her face looked pale in the dim light, and he could see the bosom of her light dress rise and fall quickly with her rapid breath.

"If you please, sir," she began again "I know you'll be vexed, but father, he's very much undone about the taxes. He'll be gettin' into trouble, he says, if he doesn't send the money off to-morrow. 'He made me come back and ask you again. We'd take it very kind if you'd let us have what's owing sir."

Her tremulous tone smote Jacob; stretching out his big hand once more, he patted her shoulder encouragingly.

"There don't be afeared, my maid; don't ye. I'll not bite ye."

A dimple peeped out near Bethia's lip. "You very nearly did bite me this morning," she said.

"Nay, now," returned Jacob, smiling beneath his thick beard, "I weren't a-goin' to bite ye; I was only barkin', maid. Lard, if you did know I, you'd say wi' the rest of 'em that my bark was worse nor my bite. There! What about this trifle o' money as I owe for the rates? How much is it? Daily! I don't know how 'tis, but it fair goes agen me to pay out money for taxes. It do seem so unfair when a man's farm's his own—land and house and all—for government to go and say, 'You've a-got a house, and you've a-got land as your father and grandfather have a-bought wi' their own money—you must pay out for that, my lad; you must hand over whatever we pleases to ax for.' 'Tisn't as if they'd consult a man. If they was to say to I, 'Mr. Sibley, you be a warmish man, and there's a few good poor folk up i' the union; what be you willin' to allow us for them?' I'd call that fair enough, and I'd tell them straight what I was willin' to 'low. But no; they goes and settles it all among theirselves wi' never a word to nobody, and jist sends out a paper wi'out by your leave or wi' your leave, 'You be to pay so much, whether you like it or whether you don't.' 'Tain't fair."

"I dare say it isn't, sir," rejoined Bethia very meekly; "but I'm not askin' you on account of the government—I'm just askin' you for father's sake. He's fretting terribly, and the doctor says he oughtn't to upset himself."

"Well, I don't mind if I do make an end o' this here business for your father's sake, maidy; but I d' 'low I'd jist as soon do it for yours."

"For mine!"

"E-es, because you do ask I so pretty. I did speak a bit sharp to ye this mornin', but it was along o' being vexed wi' the government—I wasn't really vexed wi' you, my dear."

Bethia began to laugh, her little white teeth flashed out in the most charming way—her bright eyes lit up. Jacob gazed at her with increasing favor.

"I bain't vexed wi' you, my dear," he repeated affably, and then, suddenly standing up, darted into the house. In a few minutes he emerged again, carrying a little packet, which he handed to her.

"It be all there, wrapped up i' that bit o' paper; you'd best count it and see as t be right. Will ye take a glass o'milk or summat?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Sibley; I'm very much obliged, but I think I must be getting home now. It's growing dark, and my father will be anxious."

"Wouldn't you like nothin'?" insisted Jacob. "A posy o' flowers or summat? There's a-many o' them growin' i' the garden, and nobody ever thinks for to pick 'em."

"Of course not; a man does not care for such things, I know. You live all alone, don't you, Mr. Sibley?"

"All alone, my maid, since my poor mother died. She went to the New House fifteen year ago. I'm what you mid call a reg'lar wold bachelor, I be."

He threw out this last remark with such an obvious wish to be contradicted that Bethia hastened to return, "Not so old as that, I'm sure, Mr. Sibley. My father always speaks of you as a young man."

"I be jist upon farty," returned Jacob with surprising promptitude. "Farty; that be my age. Not so old for a man."

"Not at all old," returned Bethia, very politely; then extending her hand, "I'll say good-night now, sir."

"Won't you have a posy, then? Do. Help yourself, my maid. I'll walk a piece o' the way home wi' you, and then you needn't be afeared."

"Very well, and thank you kindly."

She followed him out of the porch, and up a path that led round the house to the old-fashioned garden at the rear, where there were roses, and lilies, and pinks, and sweet williams growing in a glorious medley. She uttered little shrieks of delight, as she ran hither and thither, breaking off here a cluster of roses, there a lily-head. Jacob stalked silently behind her, clasp-knife in hand cutting ten stalks where she had culled one, until a very sheaf of flowers rested in his arms.

"I'll have to go all the way to carry it for you," he remarked, in a satisfied tone.

Bethia turned and clapped her hands together. "Oh, what a lot! I never thought you were going to get all those for me. How shall I thank you?"

"I'll carry it for you," repeated Jacob. "This way out, my dear; there's a little gate jist here."

A faint after-glow still lingered on the horizon, but already the silver sickle of the young moon appeared in the transparent sky. A bat circled round their heads from time to time, yet some love-lorn thrush serenaded its mate somewhere not far off, his liquid ecstatic notes filling the air, as it seemed. Great waves of perfume were wafted to Bethia's nostrils as she paced along beside the farmer, whose tall figure towered above her, the silhouette of his face showing clear above the irregular line of hedge. As they walked he questioned her from time to time, and learned how the girl had only come back to live with her parents within the past year, having been absent for some time teaching school at Dorchester.

"School teachin'!" commented Jacob. "That be how you do speak so nice and clea. I speak awful broad myself—never had much eddication."

"Hadn't you?" returned Bethia, with interest.

"Nay, never had no time for that. My father, he died when I were a lad, and my mother weren't one as could manage a farm so very well. She was a bit soft, my poor mother, and very easy taken in. So I did put my shoulder to the wheel, and I mid say I've been a-shovin' of it ever since."

"I wonder you didn't get married, Mr. Sibley," said Bethia, with perhaps a suspicion of archness in her voice.

Jacob only grunted in reply, and an embarrassed silence fell between them, and remained unbroken until they had reached Little Branstone village.

Jacob accompanied the girl down the by-lane which led to her home, and followed her into the kitchen; there, however, he refused to stay, in spite of Mrs. Masters' civil request that he would sit down and rest.

"Nay," he returned gruffly, "I'll be gettin' home-along now; I only come so far to carry this posy."

Depositing his fragrant sheaf upon the table, he nodded right and left at mother and daughter, and withdrew.

"Dear! Well, to be sure! Dear heart alive, Bethia, ye could ha' knocked I down wi' a feather when he come marchin' in. Lard ha' mercy me, maidy, you be clever to ha' got Jacob Sibley for a man. That there man do fair hate women of all sarts. There, he do never so much as look at one—and to think of him a-walkin' all that long ways jist for to carry them flowers! He did give you the flowers, too, I suppose?"

"Yes," returned her daughter; "but you mustn't call him my man, please mother. He only meant to be polite."

"Well, I'm sure he did never try to be polite to any maid afore," returned Mrs. Masters with conviction. "They do say he were crossed i' love when he were a young 'un. Did he give 'ee the money, child?"

"Yes, mother, and was very nice and kind altogether. I think he was sorry for father when I told him how ill he'd been."

"Oh, to be sure, that's it," agreed her mother jocosely. "All they flowers be for father, too, I d' 'low. Come let's fetch 'em up to en."

Poor old Masters, ill though he was, chuckled feebly on hearing the marvelous tale, and expressed in quavering tones his belief that his daughter was a-doin' pretty well for herself.

The girl, who had lived till now absolutely heart-whole, could not repress a certain flurry of excitement, and passed the next few days in a state of expectancy; but Jacob Sibley gave no further sign of life. Though he appeared at church on Sunday, he kept his face religiously turned away from the pretty tax-gatherer's, and at the conclusion of the service rushed from the door without pausing to look round.

Bethia bit her lip and instead of dallying a little, as was her custom, to chat with one or other of her acquaintances, hastened home.

"Were Farmer Sibley there, my dear?" inquired the mother.

"Yes, but he didn't speak to me—he didn't take a bit of notice of me. Put that notion out of your head, mother—there's nothing at all between him and me."

Soon the attention of the little household was entirely absorbed by a more acute and immediate cause of trouble; poor old Masters, after a brave struggle, and in spite of the adjurations of his neighbors, found himself unable to "hold on;" he loosed his feeble grasp of life suddenly at last, and went out, as his wife sorrowfully remarked, "like the snoff of a candle."

After the funeral was over, the question of ways and means stared the mother and daughter in the face. Mrs. Masters did a little business—a very little business—with a small general shop; it was quite insufficient to support them. Her health was not good and Bethia was determined not to leave her; there was no opening as a teacher in that village, and such sums as she could earn by taking in sewing would add very little to their modest income. She resolved to make a bold appeal to the Parish Council for permission to continue to fill her father's place.

"I could do it every bit as well as a man," she averred. "I have done it during the last few months. The accounts are all in order—I have found no difficulty anywhere. Do let me try, gentlemen."

The gentlemen in question were at first taken aback, then amused, finally moved. After all, they said to each other, there was no reason why the girl should not try. So long as the duties were discharged exactly and punctually, there was no reason why they should not be undertaken by a woman as well as a man.

"But there must be no favoritism, Miss Masters," said one, with a twinkle in his eye; "no letting off of any particular friend. You must be firm, even with your nearest and dearest. If people don't pay up after two or three applications, you must harden your heart and take out a summons."

"I will," said Bethia seriously.

In a few days the news of her installation as assistant overseer spread through the place, one of the first to hear of it being Jacob Sibley.

Bethia was standing in the kitchen shelling peas one morning when his knock came at the door, almost immediately followed by the appearance of his large person from behind it.

"Be this here true what I've a-heerd?" he inquired abruptly. "Be it true as you be a-goin' to carry on this rate-collecting same as your father did do?"

"Yes, Mr. Sibley," answered Bethia, not without a certain pride. "The Parish Council gentlemen think I can do it as well as anybody; and I'm glad to say they've agreed to let me try."

"I don't agree, then," cried Jacob violently. "It bain't at all fit or becomin' for a young 'ooman same as you to be a-goin' about from house to house, visitin' folks and axin- them for their money. It bain't proper, I tell 'ee."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Bethia, with a toss of her pretty curly locks. "What's it to you, Mr. Sibley, anyhow?"

"I don't like it," growled Sibley. "Will you go and ax folks for it, same as you did ax I?"

"I shall leave a little note first," said Bethia, with a business-like air, "a demand note, you know. If they don't pay up I shall call personally."

"It bain't the right thing for a female," repeated Sibley, sourly; "least of all for a young female. Folks 'ull be givin' ye impidence."

"Oh, no, they won't," returned Bethia, with dignity. "I'm not one that anybody could take any liberties with, Mr. Sibley."

He stood leaning against the table, frowning.

"Will ye ax 'em rough-like, or will ye ax 'em civil?" he inquired, after ruminating for awhile.

"Why, of course I shall be civil, Mr. Sibley."

"Will ye ax 'em so civil as ye did ax I?" he insisted, with a kind of roar.

"I'm sure I don't know," stammered the girl, taken aback for a moment. "Yes," recovering herself, "certainly I shall. There's no reason why I should make any difference between you and anybody else."

"You tell I that to my face! You'll go a-speakin' 'em soft and a-smilin' at 'em pretty, jist same as ye did do to I! Dalled if I do allow it! Dalled if I do, I say!"

"Really, Mr. Sibley," said Behtia with spirit, "I don't know what you mean. It's very rude of you to talk to me like that, and I do not see why you should interfere. I shall be business-like and polite, as I always try to be with everyone, and I shall be firm too. The Law will support me just the same as if I were a man."

"Dalled if I do allow it," repeated Jacob, still in a kind of muffled bellow. "A British ratepayer I be, and have a-been this twenty year and more, and I say I bain't a-goin' to allow it. I know my rights so well as any man, and I bain't a-goin' to be put upon by a 'ooman. I bain't a-goin' to allow any young faymale t' be took out o' her proper place and set up where she's no business to be. I'll have no faymale tax-collectors a-gaddin' about this here parish if I can prevent it. I'll protest, maid, see if I don't, and, what's more, not a farden o' rates will I pay into any faymale hands."

Bethia, more and more irritated by his manner, thought it time to assert herself finally, and withdrawing her hands from the basin of peas, and looking him full in the face, she returned, with great firmness, "Won't you, Mr. Sibley? Then I'll make you."

"Lard ha' mercy me! Listen to the maid!" exclaimed Jacob, bursting into a fit of ironical laughter. "'I'll make ye,' says she. Look at her," pointing at the girl's slender form. "That be a good wun! I tell 'ee, Miss Masters, you'll find it a bit hard to make I do anything I've not got a mind to do."

Bethia took up a pod again and split it viciously. "I've got the Law at my back," she remarked.

"Ho! ho! ho!" chuckled Jacob, this time with unfeigned merriment. "Listen to her! The Law at her back, indeed! Such a little small back as it be! Why, maidy, I could jist finish ye off wi' one finger!"

"I'm not talking of brute force," said Bethia, with flashing eyes. "The Law is stronger than you, Mr. Sibley. Now, if you'l kindly go away and let me go on with mywork I'llbe much obliged."

But Jacob did not take the hint. He sat down on the table instead, and watched the girl as, with an affectation of ignoring his presence, she moved about, filling her saucepan at the tap, peeling the potatoes, setting them on to boil. She did everything swiftly, deftly, and gracefully, holding her head very erect meanwhile and being a little sharper in her movements than usual on account of her inward irritation. By-and-be Mrs. Masters came creaking down the narrow stairs, and started back at the sight of the farmer.

"Dear! To be sure! I didn't know you had visitors here, Bethia, my dear. Won't you sit i' the armchair, Mr. Sibley? Do 'ee now. I'm sure 'tis very kind o' ye to come a-visitin' o' we in our trouble."

Bethia marched past her mother, removed the pot from the fire and carried it over to the table.

"Could you make a little room, if you please?" she inquired tartly.

Jacob chuckled and rubbed his hands as he slowly removed his ponderous frame; then the remembrance of his former grievance returned to him and he gazed at the widow loweringly.

"You don't like this here notion, Mrs. Masters, I hope?" he inquired severely.

"What notion, sir" returned the poor woman, startled.

"Why, this here notion o' your daughter a-gaddin' about lookin' after the rates."

"Well, you see, we be so hard pressed, we be," faltered she. "My daughter do try to do her best to earn a little all ways she can. I'm sorry as you've got objections, Mr. Sibley."

"It doesn't in the least matter if he's got objections or not," put in Bethia tartly. "It's no concern of Mr. Sibley's. So long as he pays up regularly himself he need not trouble himself."

Jacob got out of the armchair and once more approached the table.

"Now, look 'ee here," he said threateningly, "this herein past a joke. I do forbid ye for to do it—do ye hear?"

Bethia looked at him steadily. "I hear and I can only repeat what I said before. Now, Mr. Sibley, will you please go away? I'm going to dish up."

"Bethia, my dear!" protested Mrs. Masters feebly. "There, she've a-got sich a spirit, Mr. Sibley, you must excuse her. She be a little vexed, you see, wi' your findin' fault wi' her. I'm sure, the longer you stay, Mr. Sibley, the better we'm pleased. We've nothin' much fit to offer ye, but if ye'd like to sit down and take a bite wi' us you're truly welcome."

Bethia shot an indignant glance towards her parent, and Jacob stood hesitating for a moment; then with a laugh he drew up his chair to the table.

"I'll not refuse a good offer," he said.

Bethia fetched a plate, knife and fork, and glass, setting each before him with somewhat unnecessary clatter. Then she served up the vegetables, brought out a roll of butter and a small piece of cheese from the buttery, and took her place in silence.

"I'm sorry," began Mrs. Masters regretfully, "we've got nothing better to offer ye, Mr. Sibley. My daughter and me seldom eats meat of a weekday."

"Don't make excuses, mother," interrupted Bethia with asperity. Mr. Sibley knows very well that we are poor."

The meal proceeded in silence for the most part, Mrs. Masters making an occasional remark, to which Jacob responded with a gruff monosyllable. Bethia did not speak once, but had never looked prettier in her life; the angry sparkle still lingered in her eyes, and her cheeks were flushed. Whenever she glanced at her visitor her countenance took on an additional expression of haughtiness.

At the end of the repast Jacob stood up. "I'd like a word wi' ye private, Miss Masters."

"Oh, I beg pardon, I'm sure," apologized the poor old mother, hastening to efface herself.

As soon as her heavy footsteps were heard in the room upstairs the farmer turned to Bethia.

"I've a-come to see ye friendly like," he remarked, "and I'll come again. I ax ye, as a friend, my maid—will ye gie this notion up?"

Bethia looked if possible more indignant than before.

"No, Mr. Sibley," she returned promptly, "I tell you—as a friend—I won't."

"Then you'll ha' trouble wi' I, I warn 'ee," responded he, almost with a groan.

Jacob Sibley kept his word, and gave the poor little rate-collector an inconceivable amount of trouble.

He took no notice whatever of her demand notes andofficial reminders; and when she called to see him in person, though he received her with civility and even undisguised pleasure, he resolutely refused to part with a farthing. The friendliness with which he hailed her advent, and entered into conversation on indifferent subjects, gave place to a rigid silence as soon as she touched on the motive of her visit, and he would shake his head fiercely as often as she reverted to the point.

One day she found him in what she took to be a softened mood. It was in the spring, and the consciousness that it was grand weather for potato-setting, added to the recollection of a long and successful day's work, had put him in an unusually good humor. He was smoking in his porch when she drew near, and at once invited her to sit down and rest.

"You do look a bit tired, my maid," he remarked; "tired and worried."

"I am tired and worried too," said Bethia, looking up at him appealingly. "I'm afraid of getting into trouble, Mr. Sibley."

"Oh," said Jacob, "how's that?"

"They will be down on me for not sending in the money regularly," returned the girl tremulously; "I've got it all in except yours."

Jacob instead of immediately becoming wooden of aspect, as was his wont, gazed at her searchingly. "You'd be all right if you was to get mine?" he inquired.

"Yes—oh, yes, Mr. Sibley. Couldn't you pay up and have done with it?"

Jacob shook his head, but this time apparently more in sorrow than in anger.

"Can't be done, my maid. I've a-passed my word, d'ye see, and I be forced to stick to it."

"I think you are very unkind," said Bethia; "you are trying to force me to give up one of the few ways I have of making a living."

"E-es," said Jacob, "'tis true; 'tis the very thing I be a-doin'. You said if I didn't pay up you'd make me—well, how be you a-goin' for to make me?"

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to send you a summons," cried she, with gathering anger. "'Tis my duty and I must do it."

Jacob's face changed. The color mounted in his brown cheeks, and when he spoke his voice was unsteady with surprise and wrath.

"You don't mean that," he said quickly. "You'd never do it."

"I'll have to do it," said Bethia, "if you force me to proceed to extremes. Oh, Mr. Sibley," she added, almost passionately, "cannot you be sensible; can't you make an end of it at once and for all? If I'd been a man instead of a girl you wouldn't persecute me like this. You'd think it quite natural for me to want to take my father's place wouldn't you? What difference does it make? I can keep the accounts, and make the applications, just as well as any man. Why should you try to bully me?"

"Now look 'ee here, my maid," said Jacob, "if you come to that, 'tis you what be a-tryin' for to bully I. I've a-set my face against this 'ere notion. No respectable young 'ooman did ought to go a-trapesin' fro' one house to t'other, a-puttin' herself for'ard and a-coaxin' folks out o' their money, whether it be for the government or whether it bain't. 'Tis a question between us two which can hold out the lougest. Now if you was to give in to I—"

"Well," said Bethia, bending forward with unconscious eagerness, "what would happen if I were to give in to you?"

Jacob took out his pipe and stared at her, and then he got up and paced about the little flagged path.

"What would happen?" she repeated sharply. "What would you advise me to do?"

"Oh, I don't know," returned Jacob confusedly. "I haven't had time for to think of that."

It was now Bethia's turn to spring to her feet. "I think you are hard, and obstinate and cruel! Yes, cruel, to try and put upon my poor mother and me! But I'll have an end to this shilly-shally work; you shall be forced to pay, sir."

She hastened down the path. Jacob, after delaying a moment to lay his pipe carefully on a corner of the seat, strode after her and opened the garden gate, holding it for a moment so that she could not pass through.

Bethia glanced at him. He did not look angry, but resolute; his jaw was firmly set and his eyes steady. It struck her forcibly that he had a good face—honest, open, manly—and she realized with a little pang that it was probably turned towards her for the last time in friendship.

"I'll give you a month," she said waveringly.

"Ye mid as well say a year," returned Jacob. "'Twill be all the same."

Thereupon he opened the gate and she went away.

The alloted time of grace passed very slowly, and though Bethia continued to post a little demand note every week, no notice was taken either of her appeal or of herself.

Late on the last day of the month she was making her way back from the town with a very melancholy face, when, at a turn in the road, she suddenly encountered Jacob; Jacob in holiday attire, carrying a large nosegay of monthly roses and lilac.

"Hullo, my maid," he cried genially, "well met! I were just a-goin' to see you."

"Were you?" returned Bethia, in a very small, constrained voice.

"E-es, I was a-bringin' you these here flowers. I seed 'em i' the garden just now, and I thought you'd like 'em."

"Oh, Mr. Shibley, you shouldn't give them to me!" cried the girl with a catch in her voice. "I've—I've just been and taken out a summons against you."

"Oh, and have you?" said Jacob, staring at her. "Well, that's summat."

"Yes," returned Bethia desperately. "I waited till the end of the month and then I had to do it; it was my duty. Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Well, to think on 't," said Jacob, still apparently more surprised than angry. "Lard ha' mercy! That be a pretty thing for a maid to do."

"So you'd best take back your flowers," broke out Bethia. "I know everything's at an end between us. I've quite made up my mind to it."

"Ah," said Jacob, eyeing her thoughtfully; "'tis queer once folks makes up their minds how a notion will stick i' their heads. Now all this month I've been a-thinkin' and a-thinkin'—I never was one to do a thing in a hurry—but at last I reckoned I'd got it settled. 'I'll lo it,' I says, 'I'll ax the maid to marry I—that'll be the best way out of it. She'll not want to go agin me then,' I says. "And you go and summons me."

Bethia burst out crying. "Oh, Jacob," she cried, "why couldn't you have done it before? If you had asked me kindly—if you had told me to give up for your sake, I—I—I—"

She broke off, sobbing bitterly.

"'Tis true," said Jacob regretfully, "I mid ha' asked ye a bit softer—I mid ha' spoke a bit more kind—but you did go and put my back up with stickin' to the notion so obstinate. Says I to myself, 'So soon as ever she gives in I'll ax her—but she must give in'—and you wouldn't. So then I thought—'Dally! I'll ax her first and then we'll see.' And then you go and put the Law on me afore I've time to open my mouth."

"Oh, Jacob! I waited a whole month," protested Bethia, almost inarticulately; "and you never said anything, and I thought you didn't care about me and it seemed to be my duty."

She covered her face with her hands. Jacob stared at her for a moment, and then suddenly slapped his thigh and burst into a roar of laughter.

"I d' 'low the maid done it out o' pique," he cried ecstatically, "I d' 'low she did! She did do it along of her feelin's bein' hurt with me a-holdin' back so long. That's a different story, my dear—a different story altogether. I bain't one to bear malice along o' that; 'twas but naitral arter all. E-es, I d' 'low I be a terrible slow coach; but, ye see, I'd a-got set i' my bachelor ways, and it did take I a long time for to make up my mind; and then, as I do tell 'ee, I wur a-waitin' and expectin' for you to give in. But I've spoke now, and if you'll but say the word, my dear, all can be forgive and forgot."

Behtia presumably did speak the word for she resigned her post as tax-collector that very evening, and she and her Jacob were "asked in church" on the following Sunday.

As for that matter of the summons, it was settled "out of court."

WILY HOUSEHOLDER.

From Baltimore American.

For years his family had roamed the suburban range. Constant conflict with human beings had developed their craftiness and cunning until they could scent an irate tenant ten blocks away. Naturally, having inherited the piled-up caution of generations of landlord ancestors, he was the ne plus ultra of dodgers.

I had been on his trail three months before I got sight of him. One morning, early, I peered from my window and saw him looking at the house. Before I could slip on some clothes and rush to the door he was gone, leaving nothing but the long stretch of trolley rails to mark his course.

One day I got connections with him on the telephone, but no sooner had I tried him with a gentle lure, suggesting that the hall needed repairing, than he was off like a shot. I had central ring his bell until central grew more than usually curt, but could not again draw him from his lair that day.

Truly, his caution was past understanding. Shrewdly-baited letters were dropped in his path every week, hinting at willingness to pay more rent if he would put more paper on the hall and have the woodwork varnished, but he sniffed disdainfully at them, and sent his agent for the money.

There were others in the range who hunted him, but I had marked him for my own. The others went blunderingly about the chase. They tramped in serried columns to the very door of his private office, bnt the anaemic private secretary was always ready to throw them off the scent. Once one of them was rash enough to walk past the private secretary and into the private office, but the place was empty. The game had flown. Had the man known as much as I about wild animals, he would have realized that this species always provides itself with a means of escape, even from its best-hidden fastnesses.

As for me, I was patient and bided my time. On an evening in December I met him in the theatre lobby and asked him for a match to light my cigar. I could see by his start of surprise that he knew me for an enemy, yet I regulated my conduct in such a way as to throw him off. I pretended not to know him. I drew him into conversation that developed the fact that we had many likes and dislikes in common. After that it was easy to get near to him when next I met him on the street, and from that to an exchange of introductions was simplicity itself. But it took me a whole year to head up to the point of asking him to call. Then I asked him out to dinner. Took him over the house, still pretending ignorance of his identity—pointed out what should be done, and bewailed the fact that my generous landlord was so pressed for time that he could not come to see for himself.

A few days later he wrote me that he had seen my landlord and taken the liberty of suggesting for me that the repairs I wanted should be made, and that they would be attended to at once. Then was my time; I closed in on him next time I saw him.

Now he will come to me and take money from my hand.

That is why I am the wonder, despair and envy of all the others on the subdo?"

CHILLIWACK COUNCIL.

A regular meeting of the council of the municipality of Chilliwack was held in the Court House on December 6. There were present Reeve Paisley and all the members of the council.

Minutes of the last meeting were read, and on motion approved.

Communications: From A. G. Long, submitting an offer and suggestions with reference to the purchase of fire-fighting apparatus for the town of Chilliwack. From C. E. Hope, regarding the advertising in the interests of the municipality of Chilliwack. From G. A. Keefer, resident engineer of the department of public works of Canada, with reference to the improvements being made at Chilliwack Landing. From J. L. Chadsey, asking for further time for the payment of delinquent taxes. From B. A. Irwin, calling the attention of the council to several nuisances near his property on Alma street. From G. W. Chadsey, giving statement of taxes paid by J. Zink on the N. W. ¼ of Sec. 18, Township 23. From A. J. Street, calling attention to the fact that his property was over-assessed in respect to the amount of acreage. From J. W. Galloway, respecting the enforcement of the Licence By-Law. From George Clark, regarding the acreage assessment of a part of Lot 422. From K. Cooper, respecting the enforcement of the License By-Law. From H. H. Gregg, respecting the amount of taxes due on his property. From J. S. Clute, regarding the smuggling of liquor by Indians. From E. F. Darcey, of the road superintendent's office, respecting the government grant on the Sumass trunk road. From L. N. Smith, respecting the liability of the Chilliwack Loan & Savings Co. under the License By-Law. From G. A. Roedde, giving quotation on a magistrate's register. From R. Roberts, respecting pathmaster's grant in his beat. From John Barker, respecting the taxes on his Chilliwack property. From C. W. Webb, making application to be placed on the voters' list. From J. W. Grayham, stating that he had performed two days' statute labor in 1900. From G. Fairfax, making application to be placed on the voters' list. From J. A. Catherwood, giving notice of the date of the reeves' convention. From J. W. Weart, enclosing statement of account from the Nelson-McPherson Drug Co.

Board of Works Reports.—Reeve Paisley and Coun. Wilson reported having let to J. Teskey the repairing of the trunk road opposite Mr. D. Nichol's place, at a cost of $12. Reeve Paisley and Coun. Ashwell reported having examined the improvements on the dyke carried out by F. C. Gamble; found the work well done, and recommended payment. Coun. Ashwell reported having examined the contract of J. Murray on the Young road, found the work well done and recommended payment. Coun. Good reported having examined the bridge constructed by E. Smedley on the Gibson road, found it completed and recommended payment. All of which were on motion received and adopted.

Pathmaster Charles Hawthorne reported the statute labor against Cand I. Hawthorne for the years 1900-1901 performed. Pathmaster John Barrett reported the statute labor against J. H. Keith for the year 1901 performed. Pathmaster Muirhead (1897) reported the statute labor for 1897 against F. L. and J. R. Muirhead performed. Pathmaster A. Munroe reported the statute labor against the D. Ellis property for 1900 performed. Pathmaster J. T. Maynard reported the statute labor against a part of the S. E. ¼ of Section 17, Township 26, for the year 1898 performed. Pathmaster I. Kipp reported the statute labor against D. McKenzie for the year 1901 performed. Pathmaster A. J. Street reported the statute labor against the Sun Life Co. and A. J. Street for the year 1898 performed. Pathmaster A. A. Cruikshanks reported the statute labor against Mrs. George Bamford for the year 1898 performed. Pathmaster Geo. Bamford Jr. reported the statute labor against Lot 379 for the year 1898 performed. All of which were on motion received, ordered filed, and the collector instructed to strike the same off the corporation books.

Collector Chadsey reported the following trades licenses still unpaid: E. W. Thomas, A. C. Wells & Son, F. Cawley, Chilliwack Loan & Savings Co., A. P. Wilkinson, J. L. Donovan, J. Ferguson, J. T. Wilkinson and J. H. Sangster.

Constable Atkinson reported that he had inspected the Chinese shacks on Young street, referred to in the medical health officer's report at last meeting, and found that the recommendations of the health officer had been complied with.

Moved by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Ashwell, that the reports of the collector and constable be received and placed on file.

Moved by Coun. Thornton, seconded by Coun. Good, that C. W. Webb's application to be placed on the voters' list be filed, and brought up before the court of revision of the voters' list.

Move by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Lickman, that the communication of J. A. Catherwood be received and filed, and that Reeve Paisley be appointed a delegate to attend the reeves' convention.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Thornton, that the communication from G. A. Keefer, resident engineer of the public works department, be received and filed, and that the Reeve, Coun. Wilson and Ashwell be appointed a committee to arrange for the building of a warehouse at Chilliwack Landing, expenditure not to exceed $250.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Thornton, that the communication from B. A. Irwin be received and referred to the board of health.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the B. C. Land & Investment Co. be refunded the sum of $9.07, being taxes paid in error on the N. W. ¼ of Section 18, Township 23, in 1899.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the communication from A. J. Street re his over-assessment be received, and that he be refunded when evidence is produced as to its correctness.

Moved by Coun. Thornton, seconded by Coun. Good, that the communication from J. W. Grayham be received, and that the collector be instructed to strike off the municipal books 75 cents of statute labor charged against him.

Moved by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Lickman, that the communication from C. E. Hope be received and filed, but owing to the lateness of the year it is not considered advisable to take the matter up.

Moved by Coun. Ashwell, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the communications from A. G. Long be received and filed, and the Reeve empowered to call a meeting of the ratepayers of the town to discuss the matter of fire protection, and that the clerk reply to Mr. Long accordingly.

Moved by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Thornton, that the arrears of trade licenses be placed in the police court for collection on the 17th December.

Moved by Coun. Ashwell, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the reeve and clerk be instructed to sign a check for $300 in favor of F. C. Gamble, for the improvements to the dyke on the Young road.

Moved by Coun. Thornton, seconded by Coun. Good, that a check for $40 be issued in favor of W. H. Higginson for the right-of-way on the Chilliwack river road, near the camp ground, when the board of works report the fence moved back.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the clerk notify Mr. Zink to complete his contract on the new road to the Lumsden ranch within the time limit.

Moved by Coun. McConnell, seconded by Coun. Good, that all obstructions on the highways within this municipality be removed, and that notice to that effect be posted.

Moved by Coun. Ashwell, seconded by Coun. Good that the communication from George Clark be received, filed and the clerk inform Mr. Clark to make his complaint at the next court of revision.

Moved by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Ashwell, that the communication from K. Cooper be received, filed and referred to the clerk for reply.

Moved by Coun. Wilson, seconded by Coun. Ashwell, that the communication from H. H. Gregg be received and referred to the collector for reply.

Moved by Coun. Ashwell, seconded by Coun. Lickman, that the communication from E. F. Darcey, road superintendent's office, be received and filed, and the clerk return thanks for the check which has been duly received.

Moved by Coun. Thornton, seconded by Coun. Good, that the communication from G. Fairfax be received and referred to the court of revision of the voters' list for action.

Moved by Coun. Lickman, seconded by Coun. Wilson, that the communication from J. W. Weart be received and filed, and that voucher be forwarded for the amount.

Moved by Coun. McConnell,