

swindler again, will you?" An evil spirit is more contagious than the plague. Joe went home and scolded his wife, boxed little Joe's ears, and kicked the cat, and not one of them knew what it was all for. A fortnight after, Reuben's big dog was found dead by poison. Whereupon, he brought another action against Joe Smith, and, not being able to prove him guilty of the charge of a dog murder, he took his revenge by poisoning a pot lamb belonging to Mrs. Smith. Thus the bad game went on, with mutual worry and loss. Joe's temper grew more and more vindictive, and the love of talking over his troubles at the grog shop increased upon him. Poor Mrs. Smith cried, and said it was all owing to Reuben Black; for a better hearted man never lived than her Joe, when she first married him.

Such was the state of things when Simeon Green purchased the farm adjoining Reuben's. The estate had been much neglected, and had caught thistles and mullen from the neighbouring fields. But Simeon was a diligent man, blessed by nature with a healthy organisation and a genial temperament; and a wise and kind education had aided nature in the perfection of her goodly work.

His steady perseverance and industry soon changed the aspect of things on the farm. River mud, autumn leaves, old shoes, and old bones, were all put in requisition to assist in the production of use and beauty. The trees, with branches pruned, and bark scraped free from moss and insects, soon looked clean and vigorous. Fields of grain waved where weeds had rioted. Persian lilacs bowed gracefully over the simple gateway. Michigan roses covered half the house with their abundant clusters. Even the rough rock, which formed the door step, was edged with golden moss. The sleek horse, *foaling in clover, tossed his mane and neighed when his master came near*; as much as to say, "The world is all the pleasanter for having you in it, Simeon Green!" The old cow, fondling her calf under the great walnut tree, walked up to him with a serious, friendly face, asking for the slices of sugar beet he was wont to give her. Chanticleer, strutting about with his troop of plump hens and downy little chickens, took no trouble to keep out of his way, but flapped his glossy wings, and crowed a welcome in his very face. When Simeon turned his steps homeward, the boys threw up their caps and ran, shouting, "Father's coming!" and little Mary went toddling up to him, with a dandelion blossom to place in his button hole. His wife was a woman of few words, but she sometimes said to her neighbours, with a quiet kind of satisfaction, "Every body loves my husband that knows him. They can't help it."

Simeon Green's acquaintances knew that he was never engaged in a lawsuit in his life; but they predicted that he would find it impossible to avoid it now. They told him his next neighbour was determined to quarrel with people, whether they would or not; that he was like John Lilburne, of whom Judge Jenkins said, "If the world was emptied of every person but himself, Lilburne would still quarrel with John, and John with Lilburne."

"Is that his character?" said Simeon. "If he exercises it upon me, I will soon kill him."

In every neighbourhood there are individuals who like to foment disputes, not from any definite intention of malice or mischief, but merely because it makes a little ripple of excitement in the dull stream of life, like a contest between dogs or game cocks. Such people were not slow in repeating Simeon Green's remark about his wrangling neighbour. "Kill me, will he?" exclaimed Reuben. He said no more; but his tightly compressed mouth had such a significant expression that his dog dodged him, as he would the track of a tiger. That very night Reuben turned his horse into the highway, in hopes he would commit some depredations on neighbour Green's premises. But Joe Smith, seeing the animal at large, let down the bars of Reuben's own corn field, and the poor beast walked in, and feasted as he had not done for many a year. It would have been a great satisfaction to Reuben, if he could have brought a law-suit against his horse; but as it was, he was obliged to content himself with beating him. His next exploit was to show Mary Green's handsome chanticleer, because he stood on the stone wall and crowed, in the ignorant joy of his heart, two inches beyond the frontier line that bounded the contiguous farms. Simeon said he was sorry for the poor bird, and sorry because his wife and children liked

the pretty creature; but, otherwise, it was no great matter. He had been intending to build a poultry yard, with a good high fence, that his hens might not annoy his neighbours; and now he was admonished to make haste and do it. He would build them a snug warm house to roost in; they should have plenty of gravel and oats, and room to promenade back and forth, and crow and cackle to their hearts' content; there they could enjoy themselves, and be out of harm's way.

But Reuben Black had a degree of ingenuity and perseverance which might have produced great results for mankind, had those qualities been devoted to some more noble purpose than provoking quarrels. A pear tree in his garden very improperly stretched over a friendly arm into Simeon Green's premises. Whether the sunny state of things there had a cheering effect on the tree, I know not; but it happened that the overhanging bough bore more abundant fruit, and glowed with a richer hue, than the other boughs. One day, little George Green, as he went whistling along, picked up a pear that had fallen into his father's garden. The instant he touched it, he felt something on the back of his neck, like the sting of a wasp. It was Reuben Black's whip, followed by such a storm of angry words that the poor child rushed into the house in an agony of terror. But this experiment failed also. The boy was soothed by his mother, and told not to go near the pear tree again; and there the matter ended.

This imperturbable good nature vexed Reuben more than all the tricks and taunts he met from others. Evil efforts he could understand, and repay with compound interest; but he did not know what to make of this perpetual forbearance. It seemed to him there must be something contemptuous in it. He disliked Simeon more than all the rest of the town put together, because he made him feel so uncomfortably in the wrong, and did not afford him the slightest pretext for complaint. It was annoying to see everything in his neighbour's domains looking so happy, and presenting such a bright contrast to the forlornness of his own. When their waggons passed each other on the road, it seemed as if Simeon's horse tossed his head higher, and flung out his mane, as if he knew he was going past Reuben Black's old nag. He often said he supposed Green covered his house with roses and honeysuckles, on purpose to shame his bare walls. But he didn't care—not he! He wasn't going to be fool enough to rot his boards with such stuff. But no one resented his disparaging remarks, or sought to provoke him in any way. The roses smiled, the horse neighed, and the calf capered; but none of them had the least idea that they were insulting Reuben Black. Even the dog had no malice in his heart, though he did one night chase home his geese, and bark at them through the bars. Reuben told his master, the next day; he swore he would bring an action against him if he didn't keep that dog at home; and Simeon answered, very quietly, that he would try to take better care of him. For several days a strict watch was kept, in hopes Towzer would worry the geese again; but they paced home undisturbed, and not a solitary how-wow furnished excuse for a lawsuit.

The new neighbours not only declined quarrelling, but they occasionally made positive advances toward a friendly relation. Simeon's wife sent Mrs. Black a large basket full of very fine cherries. Pleased with the unexpected attention, she cordially replied, "Tell your mother it was very kind of her, and I am very much obliged to her." Reuben, who sat smoking in the chimney corner, listened to this message once without any impatience, except whiffing the smoke through his pipe a little faster and fiercer than usual. But when the boy was going out of the door, and the friendly words were repeated, he exclaimed, "Don't make a fool of yourself, Peg. They want to give us a hint to send a basket of our pears; that's the upshot of the business. You may send 'em a basket, when they are ripe; for I scorn to be under obligation, especially to your smooth tongue folks." Poor Peggy, whose arid life had been for the moment refreshed with a little dew of kindness, admitted distrust into her bosom, and the halo that radiated round the ripe glowing cherries departed.

Not long after this advance toward good neighbourhood, some labourers employed by Simeon Green, passing over a bit of marshy ground, with a heavy team, stuck fast in a bog, occasioned by a long continued rain. The poor oxen were entirely unable to extricate themselves, and Simeon ventured to ask assistance from his waspish neighbour, who was working at a short distance.