

The Inglenook

The South Door.

By Margaret H. Eckerson.

It was such a fine, convenient barn, such a model in all respects, that Giles Hewitt felt his excessive pride in it a perfectly justifiable thing; and as he strolled about it this sultry July morning, surveying it from all points of view, he could not restrain his oft-repeated encomiums, "Admirable! Admirable! Fine! None better in the country!" Then, as he spied Esther, his wife, looking for early apples in the orchard below, he called, in his soft, slow voice, "Come up here, Esther."

The call troubled her. She had no time to spare, as this was a very busy morning, crowded with work, and the girls, Ria and Ella, were engrossed with preparations for a picnic at Point o' Rocks, on the lake, that afternoon. As for the barn, how thoroughly she knew it, from the shining cow that served as a weather vane to the foundations! It had been the staple of Giles' conversation for months, and she could not tell how many times she had meekly followed in his wake to survey its conveniences.

"Esther, do you hear me?" The soft voice was distinctly peremptory. Giles Hewitt always expected his women folks to come at his bidding.

She put down her basket, filled with red Astrachans, and went reluctantly up the hill.

"I want you to see how well these doors work now," said Giles, leading the way to the rear of the building.

What a grand view these doors framed! It always struck her with a sense of loveliness quite inexpressible in words. She drew a long, sighing breath as she looked on wood and meadow, dimpled dells, and swelling hills, church spires rising whitely from hamlets, and a river winding afar like a silvery ribbon. Northward a blue lake glittered like a jewel in an emerald setting, and in the west a circle of hills vanished delicately like a dream into the softly-tinted sky.

"How beautiful!" she said. "It roasts me just to look. I could sit here and look—just look—for hours! Oh, Giles, if the house only stood here on the hill, and I could only see all this from the kitchen door!"

"The house is in the best place, Esther, sheltered from the north winds. I don't understand why you are always saying that."

She sighed. "Yes, I know; but such a view is food and rest. Oh, I know you think me silly. Yes, I am truly glad you have such a big, convenient barn—so many nice labor-saving things about it. It must be good to have things as you want them." She began to plead her apron hem nervously. "I was thinking that now the barn is finished, and all the crops so promising, and the hay crop is so large, that you will be willing to let me have the door cut through the south side of the kitchen. You know how long I have waited to have it done!"

She looked so wistfully meek, standing there with a timid, deprecatory smile on her lips. She had never been a self-assertive woman—no one knew that better than Giles. Nevertheless, he felt annoyed and angered. He had not called her up here to discuss her whims.

"You know," she went on, "I just want a common door with a glass sash, and then I'd like a little stoop running to the end of the house. I could do the churning out there and lots of little chores—the kitchen is so small and hot—and it won't cost much. Johnson calculated he could do all I wanted for forty dollars."

"Johnson!" his tone was distinctly angry. "You see, Giles"—she pleaded the apron over and over, quite upset at his perceptible annoyance—"It was when he came down to the house one day for a drink of buttermilk—and you know what a hand he is to joke. He said, 'This is a sort of unhandy kitchen, Mrs. Hewitt; you'd better move up to your husband's barn, and have it airier and handier.' Then I told him how I wanted a door cut through on the south, and we talked it over, and he figured it up, and—"

"Good heavens, Esther," cried Giles, too vexed to listen further, "I never knew such a gadfly as you are. You get an idea in your head and harp on it eternally. 'Door! Door! Door!' You can't think or talk of anything else. And now, after all the barn has cost, and the necessity for economy, one would think you would have some common sense. But you are a Royal!"

He enered as if thus branding her signified that her people had been extravagant and wasteful. Then, noting the quivering of her lips, and the tears welling beneath her lids, he was more angered than ever, and went on, irately, "For forty years my mother used that kitchen; and I never heard her complain; but some women want the world, and having that, would cry for the moon. Don't you say door to me again."

She turned away without a word, and went down the hill to the orchard bars. She wiped her eyes before she took up the apples, and trudged back to the house. The girls must not see the tears.

"Mother is a long time picking apples," said Ella Hewitt, as she frosted a tempting cake just baked for the picnic.

"Probably pa has called her to tag him about the barn," said Ria, who was deftly slicing pink ham for sandwiches. "That barn is the hub of his universe just now—has been for six months. He houses his cattle better than his women folks. Isn't this a fine, light, airy, handy kitchen?" "Very, for a man of his means," said Ella vexedly. "I'm just ashamed of such a gloomy, unhandy little pen. See the walls—rough boards that it never pays to clean; two miserable, tiny windows, stuck so high up you can't see out of them, and a cellar trap-door in the middle that takes up a good quarter of the room; no water brought in, and the well away down in front of the house; not a single convenience to make work handier or easier. And poor mother has had to put up with it all these years. Why doesn't pa have that door cut through for her?"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders. "Say, do tell me if his ham is thin enough. I want my sandwiches to be first-class."

Giles Hewitt was distinctly taciturn at the dinner-table at noon, and in view of his lowering countenance the meal proceeded in unpleasant silence. Immediately after dinner he made ready to drive to Hoyt with a load of grain. It was second nature for Esther to anxiously wait on him when he

dressed to go anywhere. She always put out his clothes, brushed them, tied his cravat, saw that he had a clean handkerchief; but to-day he told her coldly to go about her work—he would help himself. Presently he came into the kitchen, where she was washing the dishes, to blacken his shoes. Phew! how hot it was, and how dark that little corner where the cracked square of looking-glass hung, before which he fumbled with his cravat!

Esther stood at the sink, with her back to him, and just opposite the trap-door was a white cross, chalked in the rough wall boards marking the spot where she wanted the outer door cut. Somehow the sight of the innocent mark angered him again. She seemed to have chalked it for a purpose, and he went out slamming the door childishly.

Presently the girls came in, all in a flutter, looking very pretty and dainty in their simple lawns and big hats, and quite overflowing with the pleasurable anticipations of youth.

"It was a shame, mother, to leave you in this hot place to do the dishes alone," said Ria, penitently, "but we had to make ready. See! the Warmen boys are driving through the gate now." They kissed her and fluttered out, and she followed to take a look—a fond, proud look—after them as they rode away with their cavaliers.

It was almost insufferably hot that afternoon; the mercury mounted higher and higher in the tube on the stoop, the fowls went with drooping wings and gaping beaks, the cattle sought grateful shade and ruminated in shallow pools, the house dog dug a grave behind the currant bushes, in which he lay panting, with lolling tongue; vegetation shrivelled and wilted, the earth was cracked and baked. But by-and-by clouds gathered in the west, and gusts of wind capriciously swirled the dust and caught up sticks and straws in elfin dances. An old farmer driving by called to a man digging a ditch in a field, "I guess the dry spell is broken; a shower is coming up." Then he lashed his wet, faded team, so as to distance the storm if possible.

A gloom almost appalling settled upon the landscape, the bees flew to their hives, the cattle snorted and raced about, frightened at the rolling of thunder and the shooting of javelins of fire from the jagged clouds.

There was a going in the tree-tops—a strange, distant murmur of millions of rain-drops advancing with the swiftness of a mighty host.

"I wonder if Giles shut the barn door?" said Esther, hurrying out. Then there was a thunder-clap that seemed to shake the universe to its foundations, and a blinding, swirling deluge.

It was four o'clock when Giles Hewitt jogged homeward. Dixey and Topsy, his big black naves, resented being held down to a sober gait, and tossed their heads and snorted as they splashed through puddles. The clayey mud coked the wheel-rims, streaked the spokes, and clung in tenacious blobs to the hubs. Everywhere were signs of the storm's havoc, and Giles was conscious of certain ugly misgivings lest the new barn, the pride of his heart, might have suffered. But no. As he turned a corner he saw it silhouetted on its hill, dominating the landscape, the shining weather-vane all agleam with reflected glories of the west.

He breathed more freely now, and critically scanned his neighbor's fields to see what damage had been wrought.

When he came in sight of the white farm house he wondered to see a number of people in the yard. Then he said, "Gracious! if the old elm hasn't been struck! What a shame!"

Dan Conly, his neighbor, hurried down to