

THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY

Vol. IX. No. 2.

WINNIPEG, CANADA, FEBRUARY, 1908.

PRICE 10c. PER COPY.
\$2.00 PER YEAR.

CAPTAIN PENFIELD'S PINKS.

BY ALICE BROWN.

EZRA TIMMINS stood out in the road talking to Augustine Pratt. The talk was confidential and his attitude betrayed it, as he moved a little nearer and looked up into her face. He even laid a hand upon her arm, and that his daughter, Jane Ann, noted from her post behind the blinds. The two standing there in the road were an oddly matched pair. Angeline was tall and rather magnificent in poise, with a head held nobly. Even her plain calico dress, and her hair curled without ostentation, could not detract from this natural charm. Old Timmins, a fiery wisp of nerve and sinew, with a fringing whisker and large blue eyes, had worked himself into a confidential fury.

"An' don't ye say nothin', he urged, at the moment of laying his hand upon her sleeve. "Don't ye open yer head. I like to finish up them kind o' jobs and no questions asked. Jane Ann'll be tickled to death. You mark my words. O'ny when anybody's tryin' to do anything, it's nothin' but talk, talk, talk. Ye get sick o' talk."

"Well," said Angeline slowly, in her meditative voice, "I'll make up my mind."

"So do!" called Ezra, in the act of turning away from her. "You make up your mind."

That his daughter heard, and ejaculated "My soul!" from her vantage ground. Then she watched the parting, her father's alert, somewhat triumphant nod and Angeline's thoughtful attitude. Ezra came absently toward the house, and she met him at the door. His cheeks were flushed a little; his eyes were brightened; and he chuckled briefly to himself. But on the threshold, where Jane Ann confronted him, he stopped with a little jerk and immediately seemed to wither into lower stature, while the light faded out of his face.

"Oh," said he, weakly, "that you, Jane Ann?"

"Now, father," said Jane Ann, in an extremity of impatience, "who should you think it was? You hold on a minute an' let me get the broom. Hangin' 'round the road till your feet are all caked over! My soul! I should think you'd ground 'em into the dirt!"

She seized the broom as if it were a weapon, and administered a brushing that looked like castigation. She was strangely like her father in a way betraying no inward likeness at all. Of the same size and facial contour, nature had yet added some aggressiveness to her outline, so that, as they stood there together, she seemed to represent an active principle, some kinship wherein he was only passive.

"There!" said she, desisting, flushed with the vigor of her onslaught, "you come in now. I want you to set a spell an' git cool." She return-

ed the broom to its nail, and then placed herself before him as he sat by the window. Ezra took out his handkerchief, and wiped his head in embarrassment, until the thin, dry hair stood ludicrously erect. Jane Ann stood regarding him for a moment, and then took a chair by the other window. "Father," said she, ominously, "what's Angeline Pratt been sayin' of?"

Ezra started, in evident guilt. Then he recovered himself.

"Now, what you want to talk like that for?" he asked peevishly. "Who's keepin' anything from you?"

"You be, father!" Her eyes narrowed and bent themselves on his. An' I know what it is. Father, do you remember how long poor mother's ben dead? It's two years and three days."

"Yes, I do, Jane Ann, I remember all about it. Well, what then?"

"Nuthin'! On'y when you've be-un to run after Angeline Pratt, an' holler

"Father, where you goin'?" Her husband, in such exigencies, was wont to grow destructive, in a way threatening the household furnishings; but it never occurred to her that her father could be tried beyond his strength. Now he made no answer.

"Father!" said Jane Ann, taking a step toward the door, where he was hesitating, "you tell me where you're goin'. You aint creepin' off down to Angeline Pratt's?"

Ezra turned and faced her. "I'm goin'," said he, in some extremity of revolt, "over to 'other house an' set 'a spell."

"'Other house" was his old home, a little cottage beside this, where he and his wife had lived together for many years. Now it stood, orderly yet untenanted, a refuge for him, where he could smoke his pipe and muse over other days. Sometimes, indeed, Jane Ann swooped down upon him, and so raged over his tobacco that he would hide the pipe, only to return it for another blizzard and its dark penalties.

"I'll come over in a minute an' brush up a mite," said she, and then her father looked at her. He felt unsettled. Sometimes he was even afraid that, as his harried mind expressed it, he should do Jane Ann a mischief.

"Well, ye won't find me there," said he. "I ain't a goin'."

"You ain't? Where be you goin'?"

"I'm goin' up to the buryin' ground an' mow the lot. I 'spose I can do that without bein' bothered up!"

"Well! I must say!" remarked Jane Ann, and she watched him while he plodded off to the barn after his scythe, and then took the road leading safely away from Angeline Pratt's. Then she turned with a free mind to her baking. No matrimonial snares could await him at her mother's grave.

Ezra went absently up the road toward the old buryin'-ground. His eyes were wet with tears. He stumbled once or twice. It hardly seemed to pay to lift his feet in a world so full of exasperating circumstances. The only thing he knew very clearly about his daughter was that she had dyspepsia, and that his wife had been wont to go about sighing "Poor creatur!" on days like this. But his wife had stood in the gap between him and his alien offspring, and now she was gone, and there was no one to protect him any more. He felt entirely unfriended in a world meant only for the young. So he went into the little tangled buryin'-ground and sought out his own lot, not divided from its neighbors by any visible signs, but held in the memory of generation to generation. There, as he stood in dull reverie, leaning on his scythe, he became aware of a figure bent in strenuous efforts in a neighboring lot. It was the Widow Penfield. Ezra stood and regarded her



"They took hands like children and scurried down the path."

"I dunno's anything," he responded, mildly.

"You dunno's anything? You've been talkin' out there in the ro'd under everybody's face an' eyes, for twenty-five minutes by the clock, an' you dunno's she said anythin'! Father, I should think you was possessed!"

"Well," said Ezra, falling into the meekness which is more exasperating than revolt, "I dunno but I be."

"But what she say?" pursued Jane Ann, with an intensity not to be ignored. "Father, what does make you keep so close?"

Ezra was aware that he wanted nothing more than secrecy, and he looked his guilt. But the consciousness made him a little factious.

after her to think it over, so't anybody can hear it way in here—father, I should think you'd feel pretty small!"

Ezra started up from his chair, and fumbled for his hat. His hands were trembling. His mouth worked a little. But Jane Ann was the last person to guess whether he was moved by guilt or anger. She was used to raising whirlwinds without realizing very keenly what damage she did. Her father had taken his hesitating way toward the door. He always had the air of avoiding something as he walked about the room, when Jane was present. After he had been in the house with her for an hour, he seemed even timorous of the tables and chairs.