

four years of poverty, with a fretful woman and three children to support, Tom Pinder returned to his old home and the hundred acres that had stirred his amusement and pity in the days of his prosperity. He brought some poor furniture with him and one cow and a gray horse considerably past his prime.

Bill went straight over to Tom's place, eager to re-establish the old, brotherly relations, willing to forget the past and to lend a helping hand. He met Tom at the gate.

"You'll have to take that back, Bill—what you wrote about Agnes," said Tom. "You—you as good as called her a liar!"

"I'm sorry I wrote that," replied Bill. "It wasn't kind—an' I'm out-an-out sorry for it! But she was promised to me, Tom—an' when I said I was glad you'd saved me from marryin' her, I said the truth."

"There you go!" returned Tom fretfully. "Maybe she's forgot just how things really were between you an' her—but, for all that, you might pretend that she's right an' you've made a mistake. It's infernal hard on a decent woman's pride, Bill, to know that a man despises her."

"I am willin' to let by-gones be by-gones," returned Bill, after a moment's hesitation; "but I'll not make a liar of myself just to suit her fancy! I am willing to be friends, for your sake, and say nothing more about the past; but I'll not put myself in the wrong about that matter."

"I guess that won't suit Agnes," said Tom miserably. "She says there shall be no friendship between us until you beg her pardon for that letter."

For a second Bill was inclined to take this humorously; but, seeing the woman herself in the door-way, with a supercilious expression on her pale but pretty face, he took it nastily instead. "Very well," said he. "Then I say there'll be no friendship between us until she begs my pardon."

He felt twinges of shame for this outbreak before he reached his own door; but the damage was already done. During the next two years he made many efforts to bring about peace; but every advance was repulsed. For the right to help them—to help Tom and the children, especially—he would willingly have done anything—that is, anything but beg Agnes's pardon for having spoken the truth. Sometimes, when the signs of struggle and poverty were more undeniable than usual, he was half inclined to pocket his self-respect and sense of honesty and do even that.

By the time this struggle of eight years' standing was reviewed the sixth cow was milked. Darkness had settled softly over the oat-fields and meadows, and a thousand fire-flies flashed their tiny lanterns in the bushes. But Jenny, the highly-prized Jersey, had not yet joined the herd.

"She'll come wanderin' along before mornin'," reflected Bill. "I'll leave the bars down for her."

II.

Morning came; but it did not bring the delinquent Jenny. Bill Pinder milked the other six and turned them out of the yard, set the milk away in the long creamers and attended to the morning wants of his horses, pigs and calves. He was a quick and thorough worker, and, except in haying and threshing time, could manage all the work of the farm single-handed. He was anxious about the missing cow, for she was the most valuable of the herd; but there was a patch of fodder-corn on the brow of the hill that required his attention in the worst way. He felt that he could handle this job and still have time to find Jenny before night. Very likely she would join the rest of the herd in the woods and he would find them all together, in some favoured spot of grass and water and shade.

From the corn-field on the brow of