

A BOOK FIEND AT HOME.

It was in the kitchen on the second floor of a Danbury house. The occupants of the room itself indicated that it was not an abode of wealth.

The husband and father was a mechanic two months out of work, with no immediate prospects of a resumption at his trade. He was a light-faced man with rounded shoulders, thin, straight brown hair, and light blue eyes with a careworn expression, not entirely hidden by the look of expectation which now filled them. The woman, his wife, had black hair, a pale, thin face, and preternaturally large black eyes, —handsome eyes, but very tired looking. They were sitting in this room because of its fire, as the night was damp, raw and chilly. On the table between them were a pile of circulars of an advertising nature, which the two children were admiring because of their large type and illustrations. The man ran his hands through his very thin hair on his head for the twentieth time, and said, —

"Yes, sir, every book I sell fetches me a dollar. If I only sell five a day, that will be five dollars. Of course, there can be no doubt of selling five."

Of course not. His mind contemplated a day's round among his townspeople. He saw that he could in that time visit at least forty families, and one of every eight taking a book—a book so generally and cordially recommended—was not an exaggerative freak of the imagination. On the contrary—looking over the formidable array of recommends—this was a strikingly mild computation. There was a twinge of regret that he had not taken the project in hand long ago.

"But even three books," said his wife, hopefully, "would pay well. Or two books. Two dollars a day is a good sum."

The tired eyes looked around the scantily furnished room, over the threadbare clothes on her family, down at her own rusty garments, and then grew rested again as they contemplated the two dollars. It was a very good sum indeed.

Still, he did not so consider it. His eyes again sought the list of recommends, and his mind roved along the route he should take, including forty visits, and he began to think that in fixing on five sales a day he had done an injurious thing. What if there were ten? It was a pretty good leap. But was it unreasonable? If there were fifteen it would be better. It would be a good joke if he was, in his highest flight, getting way below the mark. And it might possibly be so. A smile unconsciously crept into his face as these thoughts filled his mind.

"I ain't felt so encouraged in months," he said to his wife. "We have bemoaned our ill-luck, but how do we know but that my being thrown out of work was the best thing that could happen me?"

"I hope so," said his wife. Poor woman! She had need of encouragement. And it was a good thing to see the tired eyes brighten. It was a long time since they had. He looked into her expectant face, and his own grew brighter under the inspiration. Presently he aroused himself with the remark, —

"Well, I must get abroad early to-morrow morning, as I'll have a long day's work."

Whereupon his wife prepared the children for bed, and pretty soon the father and mother retired, but hardly to sleep.

At nine o'clock the next morning he was ready to start. There was not as much enthusiasm as on the evening before, but that could not be expected. Daylight is eminently more practical than lamplight. His patient wife had made his old suit look really presentable, and had prepared him a lunch of bread and butter to eat at noon, for he expected to be too busy to come home to dinner. The lunch he carefully stowed away in his pocket, and his canvassing book he put under his arm. He was hopeful, having just stimulated himself by another careful glance at the recommends. Still, the expression of weariness was there, and the faithful woman who stood before him looking into his face saw it more plainly than was good for her. His features showed thinner with the sunlight streaming upon them. She saw in all their lines the effects of a long sickness that had taken all the earnings, and of a brooding and worry that had come from days of unsuccessful search for work. From wedded life, and she saw in their record a steady, uncomplaining fight, and a constant one, thus her mind went back over the years of their tender love for her. Then she looked quickly into the careworn face again and by an impulse which she could not control, threw her arms about his neck and sobbed aloud.

"Lizzie!" he cried, dropping the books to fold his arms about her.

She made no reply, but only clung the tighter to him.

With that delicacy of feeling, occasionally found among the poor even, he stroked her hair in silence, waiting patiently for the paroxysm to pass away. He had no need to ask her why she cried. Every sob that convulsed her weak frame was eloquent of a past full of bitter struggling. But it hurt him to hear her, not that he minded the memory, as far as it affected himself, but only as it told of her suffering.

"Oh, John," she murmured in a broken voice, "we are so poor, we are so poor. God help us!"

Then she lifted her head, wiped away the tears from her face, and smiled as she did it, to show him that she was herself again.

Thus reassured, he took his books again and sallied forth. And the pitying husband was left behind, and a book-canvaser appeared instead. Striking off to another part of the town, his malignant presence soon darkened a doorway. The servant appeared in answer to the summons. She looked into his lean face, which, to a prejudiced person, had a somewhat sharkish aspect, and then at the parcel under his arm, and shook her head in a very depressing manner.

"We don't want nothing," she said, and carefully closed the door. Owing to the lack of presence of mind on his part, he neglected to put his foot in the way and prevent the door from being closed, until he had his own say, and thus the first opportunity was lost. He sighed, and went to the next door.

Here he rang the bell twice, but there was no response. The occupants had seen him approach.

Somewhat weakened in faith, he went to the third house. The family received him, thumbed over the specimen book, admired the pictures, and said they were not prepared to subscribe now, but could tell better in the Spring. He had received considerable strength and hope from this reception, but he left it behind when he withdrew. He thought of his waiting wife and children, and instinctively wiped something from his eye, which, were he not a book-canvaser, might have done very well for a tear.

At the fourth house a woman came to the door, gave him a hard look, and immediately shut herself in. Not a word had been exchanged. He slowly retired. The next building was a lumber-office. A man with spectacles was bent over some papers at a desk. He looked up, and hearing the canvasser, detected at a glance his mission, and stared coldly at him. Our friend began, in a faltering voice, —

"I have called to solicit your—"

"That'll do," said the lumber-man, in a stern voice, resuming his inspection of the papers on the desk.

The canvasser gave him a look as if he would like to knock him endways, and then withdrew. Outside the building he paused a moment, as if undecided what to do. He was strongly tempted to go home and give up in despair, but the thought of his poverty checked this impulse. He looked up and down the almost deserted street, on which the sun lay in a glare of heat. Not a ray of hope did he detect in the buildings or in the air. He passed three houses without the courage to call on any of them. Those who saw him pass must have wondered if he was not ill or deranged. At the fourth house he stopped. A little girl answered his call. She saw the books under his arm, and taking the cue from his appearance, said, —

"We don't want anything." And she, too, closed the door in his face. Smarting under the humiliation of his defeat, he passed several houses without calling and brought up at a factory. He went through the building to the office, his feet feeling as if full of lead, and his heart scarcely lighter. It was only the picture of the pale-faced sobbing woman at home that gave him the strength to step at all. There were several men busy in the long room through which he passed. They saw his mission and turned up their noses in derision. They worked for their living, and could afford to despise the lank shirk who went about selling books and living on the fat of the land. Their looks were not undetected by this miserable man with the picture of the crying woman in his heart, and he went into the office with an air of humiliation not calculated to command the respect of the three young clerks at work there. He entered and removed his hat. The three clerks stared at him, but said nothing about his being seated.

"I have called, gentlemen," he commenced, in a voice he strove to make firm, but which trembled in spite of himself, "to see if you would like to subscribe to a new book."

An expression of dislike showed so plainly on their faces, that he stopped short. The three young men enjoyed this very much. They came very near to being the victims themselves, but by showing an uncompromising front they had saved themselves, and overcome a nuisance and a bore. Highly satisfied with their success, they placidly returned to their work, leaving him standing bare-headed, with an uninterrupted view of their backs. For a moment he remained there confused and sick at heart, not wanting to remain, and still not having the courage to go. But the young men paid no more attention to him, and his position becoming unbearable, he replaced his hat and slunk out of the building. With a heavy heart and a tortured mind he went his way, stopping here and there with more or less luck, but no sales. The noon passed without his lunch. He had not the heart to eat it. Had it been three yards of lead pipe, he could not have felt less like boiling it down. There was a lump in his throat by which a cambric needle would have found difficulty in forcing its way. He began to notice that the people whom he passed were eying him with dislike, and giving him the greater share of the walk. It was hard to be poor, it was hard to be so unsuccessful, but it was ten times harder to be an object of derision, scorn, distrust, and contempt. He started for home with an aching heart. It was going back to a full contemplation of his miserable condition, but there were love and sympathy there with all the distress, and the miserable man stood sorely in need of them.

When he went in his wife heard him and came into the room where he was. The look of hopeful expectation died out of her pale face in

a flash. One glance at him told the whole story more eloquently than words could have done. He laid down his books shivering as he did so. When he went to turn toward her, the loving arms were about his neck and the tired head with the sobbing voice was pressed upon his shoulder.

"Oh, Lizzie, it was all so dreadful!" he whispered.

She drew her arms tighter about his neck.

"Don't talk of it, John. You did the best you could, I know, and if you have failed you cannot help it. We have got each other, and the children, John."

"Yes, Lizzie, but I am not the man I was when I left you this morning. Then I was respected if I was poor."

"John!" she cried in an affrighted voice, looking him in the face. "What have you done?"

"Nothing, my dear wife, but to try to get bread. But I have been made to feel that I was a scoundrel, a leech, an outcast, a scoundrel and a thief. I have been shut out of houses, bullied from shops, and shunned in the street." He quivered in every nerve as he spoke.

"All for my sake and the children's, dear John," she spoke up, her eyes full of tears. "God bless you!"

And in that benediction, so lovingly pronounced the burden fell from his shoulders.

The next day he gave up the agency, and the following week a man with a soiled shirt-front and a breast-pin took up the work, and in three days had sold sixty volumes and gained two pounds in flesh.

A LONDON OPIUM DEN.

I suppose a powerful, able-bodied African, raving drunk, is about as ugly an illustration of the depths of degradation to which intoxicating liquids can reduce a human creature as the most zealous Lawsonite could desire to make use of. I am sure of this, however, that Sambo at his worst, and when his opal eye-balls, rolling in frenzy, gleam like the jewel to which they are likened when it is exposed to the sun or to fire, and when his protruding lips shrink back and look as hard as ridges of black bone, healing his double row of vicious teeth, even then he is not such a repulsive-looking being as the yellow-skinned opium smoker after his third or fourth drunk, when he is propped by the considerate landlord against the wall with legs no more available than those of a rag doll, there to remain until consciousness slowly returns to him, when he will take a swig at the water jug to moisten his parched mouth, and go at the pipe again. The ugly spectacle, however, is not commonly on view. To behold it one must first gain admittance to a smoke-house. Unlike a public-house no sign distinguishes it, and its whereabouts is known only to the initiated. But the habitual opium smoker knows where to find it, and thither he resorts to snatch perhaps a couple of hasty pips if he has pressing business on hand, or to make a night of it—two, three nights and days as well for that matter—in congenial company. I had not much trouble in discovering two smoking-houses in the locality, the master of one being not a Chinaman but an Irishman. I told him what I required, and he suggested no obstacles. I was as welcome as anybody else to come to his house and to smoke a pipe as well if I had a mind to it. Evening was his busiest time. A few regular customers who lived in distant parts of London and had honoured him with their patronage for years, came for a quiet pipe in his best room in the day-time, but it was not until dusk that the common sort came, and then he was sometimes so full as to be obliged to turn people away. At dusk that same evening I was again in the neighbourhood. The house I was in quest of was situated in what notoriously is the worst part of the locality—up a court in a street the majority of the inhabitants of which are probably known to the police. Had I been in any doubt as to which was the particular court where my opium master lived, I should have been speedily set right, for at that very moment there came shuffling up the street two gaunt objects, Lascars seemingly, with their flimsy blue serge jackets buttoned close, and each with a woollen comforter round his throat, though the evening was close and sultry. They made straight for the court, and were in such a hurry that they reached the smoke-house and disappeared in at the door before I could overtake them. The door was ajar, and as I had made an appointment with the landlord, I walked in without scruple, and at the end of a passage there found a room where opium smoking was going at full blast. It was not a large apartment—not more than fifteen or sixteen feet square possibly; but a hasty glance around revealed to me thirteen individuals present, exclusive of the master of the house and an attendant. A dingy paraffin lamp hanging against the wall revealed the pretty picture. At least half the floor was covered with a large mattress, and on three sides of the square were placed bolsters as dirty as the walls themselves; and huddled nose and knees with their heads on the bolsters, two on a side, reclined six smokers in various stages of intoxication with the opium they were inhaling. There were two long forms in the room, and on one of them sat five customers, waiting their turn (the remaining two making up the thirteen were lying on the floor by the wall motionless as men asleep or dead), and being in no particular hurry to rest my head on a bolster I took a back seat, but in full view of the mattress. The opium master's assistant—

a ragged youth without coat or waistcoat, and who seemed to have stirred his hair to the wildest possible disorder in an opium dream—was concocting something in a pipkin that stood on the hob of the fire-grate when one of the impatient waiters and watchers drew his attention to a smoker whose pipe stem had dropped from his lips, and who lay helpless and huddled, with his mouth ajar, and with a failing phosphorescent light in his half-open eyes. Well used to the job, the attendant hauled him off the mattress and laid him with the other two by the wall, while the first man on the form sprang forward with alacrity to take his place, and with a face expressive of blissful expectation resigned himself to the following ceremony. Unbuttoning his jacket, and divesting himself of his cap, he lay down on his side, with one hand under his head, as though composing himself to sleep, while the presiding genius got a pipe ready for him. With a bodkin he took from the saucer a portion of opium seemingly no larger than a moderate-sized pea, and holding it on the top of the implement twiddled it in the flame of the lamp, causing it to emit a sickening odour. When the morsel was sufficiently fried he placed it in the pipe bowl, and thrusting the pipe stem into the eager mouth of the smoker, applied a light to it, which the other sucked. Sucked is the word. Anything like blowing a cloud, such as happens when one ignites the fragrant birdseye in the bowl of a briar or meerschaum, or even a clean and honest clay, was out of the question. The Lascar's lips closed over the blunt stem as though they were glued to it, and one only judged that he was sucking by the drawing in of his cheeks. I observed the pipe narrowly, and could discern only the thinnest thread of pale blue smoke rising now and again from its bowl. What fumes there were the smoker swallowed, as his eye blinked lazily, and each moment more resembled that of a pig whose last gorge of barley meal was a treat to dwell on ere it fell asleep. I am unable to say exactly how long it took to consume the smouldering opium, but certainly not more than eight or nine minutes. At the end of that time a gurgling in the pipe stem announced that the charge was burnt out, and, for the time completely drunk and incapable, the smoker was bundled off the mattress to make room for the next customer. I don't know how long the two that were on the floor when I entered had been lying there, but they now began to rouse, shivering and shrinking in their clothes as though they felt cold, and staring at each other and about the room in a bemused way, and as though their brain was still "fuddled" with the powerful narcotic. Nor did they appear to recover completely until the tattered waiter handed them each a small cigarette of ordinary tobacco. After smoking it out they rose from the floor, shook themselves, and took a seat on the form, ready for another "drunk" when it came to their turn. They did not talk with each other during the long interval of waiting, or appear in the least inclined to be companionable, but for the most part sat with their eyes closed and their arms folded, as though anxious to shut out everything that might break the thread of their cogitation on pipes past and in prospective.

MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC.

Miss Emma Thursby's tour in Denmark has been eminently successful.

Miss Anna Bock, another American pianist, will shortly visit Europe, and probably play in London.

The boy pianist, Augustus Victor Benham, was well received by the Promenade audiences at Covent Garden.

MR. BRINLEY RICHARDS has been happily recovering in South Wales from the effects of his recent alarming illness.

JOHANN STRAUSS is at work on the score of a new operetta called "Der Lustige Krieg"—"The Merry War."

COLONEL MAPLESON and Signor Arditi, with a portion of Her Majesty's Opera Company, will sail for New York on September 23.

Miss Clara Louise Kellogg will sing in public for the first time since her return at the Worcester (Mass.) festival, September 29.

THE Italian opera at St. Petersburg has found a nugget in a young American singer named Nordica, on whom M. Vaucorbell, the Paris director, has been casting longing eyes, but in vain.

POOR Hermann Goetz's posthumous opera, "Francesca di Rimini," lately heard at Leipzig, is said to be more technically clever than ideally beautiful.

AMBROSE THOMAS has treated the same subject from a different point of view, and those supposed to know say the French composer has produced a brilliant, *Nous verrons*. Mlle. Caroline Salla will be entrusted with the title rôle in Paris.

MADAME Adelina Patti is to continue her concert campaign in the States at Steinway Hall, New York, on the evening of November 9. No arrangements are yet known to have been made by the gifted artist for appearances in opera.

It is stated "on authority" that Barry Sullivan will visit America in October, and that his son Amory has taken Baldwin's Theatre, San Francisco, at which establishment Barry Sullivan will open.

THE excitement over the recent massacre in Arizona still continues. Captain Jeffreys has gone to interview the Apache chiefs.

THE meeting between the Czar and the Emperor of Germany will take place on board the ironclad *Hohenzollern*, at the river Vistula.

THE verdict in the case of the *Doterel* explosion acquits the captain and officers of all blame. The court considered that the explosion had been caused by gas in the coal bunkers.