

CHOICE LITERATURE.

TORRICELLI.

My old friends Jack and Helen Burbank left me mistress of their elegant mansion on the Hudson while they took one of their unexpected flights to Europe. This time it was for Birdie's eyes. Birdie, their idolized daughter, was then a "sweet girl graduate," and a fine type of the frail American beauty. She had been abroad several times already, but no climate gave roses permanently to her cheeks. Jack was a big handsome fellow, who for some years had been doing business in Wall street. What business precisely I never found out. When he entertained his male friends they always talked of "margins," and "puts," and "calls," and "straddles," and made me think of what St. Augustine says: "The trifling of adults is called business." Once I ventured to quote this. One of the heavy men present looked at me for a long time, debating whether it were worth the while to pay any attention to me; and then he said, ponderously, "Madam, we brokers are the Atlases that bear the world upon our shoulders. All business is supported by and through us." I did not know how to answer him, but all the same I felt that he could and should have been silenced instead of me. Subsequently I learned a good deal about 'those Atlases.'

A few words will give an idea of Torricelli, the costly home of the Burbanks. Jack, somewhere in his travels abroad, had been greatly charmed by an old pile with sugar-loaf towers—quaint, picturesque, dreamy. Helen shared his admiration, and Torricelli was the result. The towers already ivy-clung, were wonderfully beautiful, especially in moonlight, overlooking the lovely terraces, decked with fountains, statues, and shrubbery, that separated the mansion from the river.

One summer afternoon I sat with Helen on one of the broad piazzas. Lovely trailing vines curtained us from a too glaring light, and cast their shadows upon the floor of real mosaic. Birds sang in the shrubbery or bathed themselves in the fountain basins; bees hummed above the cups of luxuriant flowers of every kind that an extravagant professional florist could grow in the open or in his greenhouse. Helen, fanning herself languidly as she sat in a luxuriant arm-chair, said: "How are you ever going to amuse yourself in this barrack while we are away?"

"You call this a barrack, and yet the drapery of a single window has cost a thousand dollars!" I spoke reproachfully, for I felt that Helen was an ungrateful woman. I did not understand then what became very clear to me afterward.

"Oh, well, cousin. You know the alpha and omega of Jack's business creed is 'visible opulence.' He says nobody is rich only so long as people believe him to be so. We have two houses full of costly things that we can not use and really do not want, and all the world envies us our grand fortune. Do you know I never think of us as fortunate?" And with this Helen rose, made a turn across the veranda, and then dropped back into her seat with a sigh.

"Helen Burbank!" I cried. "Do you mean to tell me you are not a happy woman? Is not Jack the best of husbands?"

"Oh yes. I suppose I am a happy woman, and of course Jack is a good husband, but—Come, Cousin Jane, let us ride around the grounds. The carriage has been waiting an age." And Helen dragged on her hat and gloves and her costly dolman. As we descended the broad steps of the mansion a footman in blue and cream-coloured livery ceremoniously opened the carriage door, shut it when we were seated, and then mounted his seat behind the elegant barouche, where he sat like a statue with folded arms.

The park of Torricelli was beautiful; the day magnificent; yet as the luxurious carriage rolled noiselessly over the graded roads, I could see that Helen was ill at ease. I thought it was that gorgeous footman, and told her so. She smiled, and said: "Jack thinks we must have everything, and that includes a coachman and footman in livery. I hate the whole thing, and I know he does; and now, Cousin Jane, never mention the subject again."

My cousin Helen had changed wonderfully since she became a fine lady, indifferent to all the pleasures in the world. She was a buxom, rosy minx at twelve, as I remember her. Then fortune separated us for years. I visited her once in the city of Philadelphia, then Jack was a "struggling writer." She wore a ten-cent calico dress then, and did all her own work. After that they bought a little farm some thirty miles from that city, and there they lived some ten years. I used to think that those must have been Helen's dark days—cooped up in a dismal country cottage, working like a slave from morning till night. I often thought of it when I saw her lolling in her blue sail-lined landau, too listless almost to hold up her dainty parasol.

But this sudden trip to Italy. It was "apropos of nothing," Helen said, for Birdie could not endure the sea, and no foreign country ever agreed with her. A day or two before they sailed I remarked to Jack that it would forever remain a mystery to me why people who had delightful homes like Torricelli could ever leave them, unless absolutely obliged to do so, and especially that they could leave them to roam over the world without any specific object, sleeping in the dingy crypts of steamers, and paying double for food that must make them sigh for their French cook at home.

Jack looked at me. I think he was going to say something serious, but instead he declared that I was envious of their prospects of enjoyment, and then pressed me to join them. Helen and Birdie also urged me. I told her I would not relinquish the fun of running Torricelli a couple of months for anything, and that I would wager her ladyship's idle servants would not have quite so much leisure when once I was in charge.

The family left at noon. The next morning I sent for Hobson, the butler. I told him that during my management I would have all tradesmen's bills sent directly to me

when goods were delivered. There would be no dinners—Hobson looked aghast—no dinners, I repeated, only a little lunch at one o'clock for me and any friend who might call. Then I went over the larder with him, and took note of what supplies there were, locked the wine-cellar, and kept the key. By that time I no doubt had the reputation, from butler to scullion, of being an "awful crew." It always seemed as if neither Jack nor Helen cared how much was ordered, nor how enormous the bills were. I could not endure such lack of system, and I told Helen so. "Oh, well," she replied, "you don't suppose I could hint to that butler, for example, that he is not going all right? I know we pay for wine enough for a large family. We use very little at our dinners you know. But what can be done? Jack won't interfere with Hobson's management, and as for me, I'm quite afraid of the creature. You can overhaul his work if you dare. Better let him alone, though. Take everything easy, and enjoy this Eden, as you call it, as best you may." And then she told me to use her room and her writing-desk, and if the house should get on fire, to save a big ledger in the under closet of it. "It is an old journal cousin. You might like to look at it; but it would probably bore you. Perhaps it wouldn't though. You are a little sentimental." I thought the speech rather strange, and often thought of it afterward.

Days passed before I had leisure to rummage in the closet of Helen's beautiful ormolu desk. Her journal was written in a cumbersome old ledger covering several years of Helen's early life, but not one word after her installation as mistress of Torricelli. For three days I spent every spare moment upon that journal. I think nothing ever so astonished me. It was a revelation.

EXTRACTS FROM HELEN'S JOURNAL.

"Philadelphia, March—, 186—. Jack has decided that we are to leave the city. How, or exactly when, we don't know. We have such a hard struggle to live. We never know from month to month what our income is going to be from Jack's writings. I live in daily apprehension of the time when we shall have to use the little sum so carefully hoarded for Birdie's education. Birdie is having great trouble with her teeth, and Jack looks at times almost haggard. We must get out of these little stuffy rooms before another heated term. Oh, for the sight of God's green earth, and for one long breath of barmy air! Jack says, 'Yes, we must go, dear, but it is a leap in the dark.' I don't feel so. I believe in the country. God seems nearer there. I lived in the country till I was twelve years old. I know how to take care of chickens, make butter and cultivate flowers. He smiles incredulously when I tell him this, and sighing, kisses me and Birdie. I too have had misgivings, but not now, for the doctor hints that Birdie is in danger, and Jack he says, needs a change. When I think of my treasures in danger I feel as if I had the strength of an army."

"Plainville, N.J., March 10. Birdie seemed worse, and Jack made me bring her down here to stay with the Hodges till he packs up our things. It is too bad that the dear boy has to do all the work alone. I hope he won't forget to bring pussy. We are to stay here while we look around for a cottage and an acre of ground. The land here is too high, and I feel sure there is malaria, though the residents of the place all deny it. I feel it in the damp air, and smell it in this nasty, sticky, clayey soil. Coming down to the ferry, I bought a bagful of seed. Oh, how I long to begin farming! I'm not a bit blue over the prospects, though we must take Birdie's money to buy our cottage and land. Jack is a little dubious about this leap in the dark, though he wouldn't admit it. I know, though, by the way he plays his violin. I never hinted this to him, and so his precious old friend is my secret ally."

"Jersey Pine Barrens, April 5, 186—. Here we are actually settled in our new home almost a month. Birdie has learned to walk, and is already much better. Jack and I cannot express our joy over the change, nor sufficiently censure our folly in living so long cooped up in the city. We are half a mile from a little settlement that is sure to grow rapidly, for it has a railroad just opened. A nice cottage of seven rooms, a chicken yard and house, and a big wood-shed over the back door. There is no well, though, and Jack has to bring all the water in a keg placed on a wheelbarrow from a lake almost a quarter of a mile away, for that is only a little farther than our nearest neighbour's, and Jack prefers to get it there. We must have a well by and by. We put all our savings, except a few dollars, into this place. The poor man who built in could not pay his mortgage, and was on the point of losing it for \$300. As it is, he got \$75 to go west with, for we gave \$500. The place, if anywhere else, could sell for \$1,000 easily. There is ever so much land all around, with little pines and oaks, and the huckle-berry bushes are just a tangle. How I long for them to get ripe."

"There is a big garden spot cleared. The little trees come quite up to the end of our veranda on the north side. Oh! it is delightful to sit on our little veranda and listen to the mocking-birds in the woods. Jack can imitate them on his violin. To-day I did all my washing and ironing. Jack helped me. Washing is not hard, and ironing is really artistic work."

"April 10.—Yesterday Jack got our neighbour's horse, and ploughed for the first time. Oh, such crooked furrows! I led the horse at first, but he soon sent me into the house, that he might be free to express his feelings, I think. While I was there he said: 'I know the science of ploughing. I know what you do to make the plough go right or left, deep or shallow, but really, you don't plough by science, but by instinct.' I stopped the horse, and looked squarely at Jack and said, 'Jack, I know you can plough. Why, any common man can learn to plough. Just have patience.' Then he made me come in, and I got him a nice dinner. When he came at sunset he looked triumphant, and tired as he was, his face all begrimed, he seized me and waltzed me round the little dining-room till he nearly upset Birdie's cradle. He had got the 'knack,' he said. I never saw him look so handsome."

"April 12.—To-day I made my first loaf of real raised

bread. It was another grand triumph. I set the sponge late last night with half a yeast cake. It was cold, and I did not know how to keep the sponge warm. Finally I set my boiler upon the kitchen table, poised on four bottles, and with a tiny lamp underneath. Then I put on the cover of the boiler, and went to bed. I got up before Jack. My sponge was ready to run over. I mixed my bread, and set it in the boiler turned on its side before the stove, the dough covered with a cloth. Jack had not seen it, and it was finally baked and cold at dinner time when Jack had finished ploughing and harrowing his ground. What a surprise it was, for Jack is particularly fond of good bread. He asked where I got that splendid loaf, supposing some neighbour had sent it to me. I did not answer him directly, and Jack turned to Birdie, seated in her high chair, and gravely asked her where that loaf came from. 'Mamma—to be,' she replied, pounding her plate with her spoon. I thought Jack would not understand her word for 'stove,' but he did, and expressed great pride in my skill. I don't think he is as proud as I am of his learning to plough, and told him so. Last night a big empty house in the village was burned down—set on fire accidentally by tramps, it is said. We must be doubly careful of fire—no fire engines owned here."

"April 16.—The 'Daily Proteus' sent Jack twenty dollars last week for two editorials. Oh, how rich we felt! We immediately bought and set out a lot of fruit trees and shrubs, also some evergreens and shade trees. I made Jack hire a man a week to help him. There is an old neglected strawberry patch near the cottage, and three rows of raspberry bushes. I have spent hours on my hands and knees pulling out old grass roots and last year's weeds from these poor strawberries. Then I sprinkled ashes over them, and from the first I have poured all my dish-water and soap-suds on them; I wonder if I shall have one strawberry?"

"April 17.—I have such trouble to make my pretty little white Leghorn hens sit. They lay all the time, and every few days one of them will excite my hopes by pretending to sit. I give her a nest of eggs, and that seems to banish the last vestige of seriousness in her intentions, and in a day or two I find her laying again. I am told that this is a 'feature' of the Leghorn fowl; a very bad one I think."

"My good neighbours, the Wormleys, moved to the city to-day. We are sorry enough to lose them. Jack spent nearly a whole day helping Mr. W. pack up his 'lures and penates,' as he said. Mrs. W. gave him some old chicken-coops, some much-needed farming tools, and a really good bedstead—old-fashion, but solid, and what I much want. This will be nice in our guest-chamber, and by and by we will get a mattress and some bedding. With all our poverty, though, we are able, thank God, to help others. Jack has helped another neighbour, Mr. Hall, two or three times when pressed with his work, and I have several times gone over and helped Mrs. Hall with her washing, for she is not well this spring, and she has a baby two months old."

"April 20.—Our new neighbours, the Pillsburys moved into the Wormley house to-day. I had some fresh bread baked, and I kept thinking I ought to carry a loaf to Mrs. Pillsbury. It seemed absurd, too, but while Birdie slept I put a loaf in a basket, covered it with a snowy napkin, and started. Mrs. P. came to the door. She had a towel on her head and looked very tired. I told her I was her nearest neighbour, and though by no means a spiritualist, I had been possessed with the idea that she wanted a loaf of bread. Her face beamed with pleasure. She said she was a spiritualist, and that bread was just what she most needed, as, in the confusion of getting ready, the staff of life was forgotten. She came out and chatted with me, and we agreed to loose no time in getting acquainted. She is almost as young as I am, but has no children yet. While talking in the shed a hen with feathers all ruffled up came in and settled herself in a corner behind a saw-horse. Mrs. P. threw her out-of-doors. She told me that hen had preserved her mania for sitting all through the journey. She was incorrigible. I timidly asked if I might borrow her, not dreaming of anything but a refusal to such an odd request. Mrs. Pillsbury said I was welcome to her services. 'But will she sit,' I asked, 'if taken to my place?' 'Sit!' exclaimed Mrs. P. 'That hen will sit in a pail of water, I do believe.' In less than ten minutes that Braham hen was comfortable sitting on my twelve duck eggs in the corner of my wood-shed. How nice if they hatch! Jack says they may be laid years eggs for ought I know. 'Commend me to you, Muggins,' for faith! he exclaimed, and then he had to play bear, and disarrange my collar and my back hair. He is always behaving like a big boy."

(Concluded next week.)

THE CRACKER.

"Cracker" is the name given to a class of Floridians. He is a native; and yet every native of Florida is not a cracker. The genuine cracker is a peculiar individual; in personal appearance, in habits, etc., he is different from other people. Any description of him must fail to give a correct idea of him. To be known and appreciated he must be seen and interviewed. Even then it is possible, aye probable, that there are heights and depths, etc., in his make-up and character that cannot be reached or fathomed. I wish, however, if for no other purpose than to satisfy somewhat the curiosity aroused by mention of him, to attempt a rough outline of him. His personal appearance attracts attention. He is, generally, long, lank, lean. His skin looks as though it was pasted on to the bones of his face; it has much the appearance, in colour and otherwise, of time-worn parchment. His hair and beard—usually of a light colour, or sort of sickly-looking yellow—are wholly innocent of the barber's art, and there has evidently been no waste of time in the use of the comb or scissors at home. His clothes are whatever he can get in that line; he evidently cares very little about colour or quality of cloth, or fit. He lives out of town, out of village, out of every considerable settlement of others than his own kind. He seems to have a settled dislike of modern ideas

* One of Jack's old names for Helen, I suppose, in those idyllic days.—Note by Cousin Jane.