

## The Family Circle.

### APRIL IN ENGLAND.

Oh, to be in England,  
Now that April's there!  
And whoever wakes in England  
Sees, some morning, unaware  
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf  
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,  
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough  
In England—now!  
—Robert Browning.

### CLOSE TO SPRINGTIME.

Gettin' close to springtime—know by the way  
The sun is streamin', gleamin' in the middle o'  
the day;  
Know it by the river that is lazyin' along,  
An' the mockin' birds a-primpin' o' their feathers  
for a song!

Gettin' close to springtime—know it by the signs;  
Heard it in the whisper o' the maples an' the  
pines;  
Feel it in the blowin' o' the breezes, singin' sweet;  
See it in the daisies that are dreamin' at my feet!

Gettin' close to springtime; hopes he'll come to stay  
Got a million kisses for the red lips o' the May!  
Wearyin' to meet her—list'nin' all the time  
For the tinkle o' her footsteps—her roses an' her  
rhye!  
—Frank L. Stanton, in *Atlantic Constitution*.

### HOW IAN MACLAREN'S "BONNIE BRIER BUSH" GREW.

As was the case with Miss Harraden's "Ships that Pass in the Night," Ian MacLaren's "Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush," which is attracting such attention now, was much less the result of premeditated purpose or the outcome of overmastering impulse than an accident precipitated by friendly coaxing and stimulus. This is according to his own confession. Mr. James Ashcroft Noble relates, in *The Bookman*, the details of an interview that he had with the author soon after the appearance of his very successful book. Mr. Noble first read the book as a professional critic, and it so affected him to both laughter and tears that he determined to see and talk with the writer of it.

Having discovered that Ian MacLaren was the Rev. John Watson, of the English Presbyterian Church, he visited his home, at Sefton Park, and found a man who did "not look literary," who was "tall, strongly built, with cleanly carved, decisive features, and the steady, alert eyes which testify to a firm will and a perfectly poised nervous organization"—"one of those born leaders and helpers to whom a man or woman in what is colloquially called 'a tight place' might go with a sure expectation of receiving aid, guidance, comprehension, sympathy." We quote from Mr. Noble's narrative:

"You must have been collecting and arranging your materials for some time, and looking forward to the publication of this or some similar book, at a suitable opportunity."

"No," replied Mr. Watson, "not even that. The existence of the book was entirely unpremeditated. It is as great a surprise to me as it is to any one; I can't even yet get over my wonder at it. Nothing could well be further from the lines of activity in which I had deliberately set myself to travel."

"Then how did it come about?"

"Ah, that's a very odd story. You perhaps know that Dr. Robertson Nicoll and I have been acquaintances for some time, and I have contributed to his magazine, *The Expositor*, a number of articles on my own class of subjects. Well, Nicoll is a wonderful man; he sees what nobody else can see; he's just 'no canny.' I forget how long it is since he began to bother me to write some sketches of Scottish life—he knew I could do it—so he said—and I must do it for him. He kept on—talk, talk, talk—in that queer, quiet way of his, and I answered nothing, because there was nothing to say. Then he began to write letters, and finally to send telegrams, and then I said, 'This is growing serious; I must put a stop to it.'

And, you see, there was only one way of putting a stop to it; so I just followed the example of the unjust judge in the parable, and I sat down there and then and wrote a story which I sent off to him. I have every reason to believe that it was a very poor story, but it was all the better on that account, for it seemed that I could only convince him of my penury by exhibiting my rags. But oh, that man! As I said just now, he really is 'no canny.' I got the manuscript back, and with it a letter. I wish I had kept that letter; I should have liked to show it to you. But it ran something like this: 'I shall not print this story. It is not what I want, and not what I know that you can do. Write something else in your true vein, and send it to me soon.' You see Nicoll didn't know when he was beaten, but I knew when I was beaten. There was nothing for it but to give in, so I thought of some types of character which I had known in my Scottish parishes when I was a young minister fifteen years or more ago, and I selected one or two of them, and wrote 'Domsie,' which you remember is the first sketch in the 'Brier Bush.' And, by the way, there is just one point which I should like to mention now. Some people seem curious about the 'originals' of this and that character in the stories. If the book continues to interest people I should like it to be known that there are no originals—that there is not a single portrait in the volume; the people are simply individualizations of types that are familiar to every minister—or, for the matter of that, to every layman—in any Highland or semi-Highland parish. But I was telling you about 'Domsie.' This time I didn't receive the manuscript back again. I simply got a letter from Dr. Nicoll, the purport of which was that 'Domsie' had affected him much in the same manner that you were kind enough to say it had affected you. It was just what he wanted, and should appear in an early number of *The British Weekly*. Then he wanted more, and somehow the other stories came into shape, till finally the book was published. And there it is; but, as I have said, it is a surprise to me still."

"Well," I said, "I think that is one of the most curious histories of an imaginative work that I ever heard. The story most like it is that of how George Eliot was induced by G. H. Lewes to try her hand at fiction; but it is clear that when the idea was suggested to her she took to it much more readily and kindly than you did. The ordinary notion of imaginative creation is that it is the outcome of an irresistible impulse."

"It wasn't so in my case. I was not conscious of any power in that direction; and even now that the book is published, and you and other kind critics have said all sorts of pleasant things about it, I feel as doubtful about myself as ever."

### GOOD HUMOR IN THE FAMILY.

Good humor is rightly reckoned a most valuable aid to a happy home life. An equally good and useful faculty is a sense of humor or the capacity to have a little fun along with the humdrum cares and works of life. We all know how it brightens up things generally to have a lively, witty companion who sees the ridiculous points of things and can turn an annoyance into an occasion for laughter. It does a great deal better to laugh over some domestic mishap than to cry or scold over it. Many homes and lives are dull because they are allowed to become too deeply impressed with a sense of the cares and responsibilities of life to recognize its bright and especially its mirthful side. Into such a household, good but dull, the advent of a witty, humorous friend is like sunshine on a cloudy day.

While it is always oppressive to hear persons constantly striving to say witty or funny things, it is worth while, seeing what a brightener a little fun is, to make an effort to have some at home. It is well to turn off an impatient question sometimes, and to regard it from a humorous point of view, in-

stead of being irritated about it. "Wife, what is the reason I never can find a clean shirt?" exclaimed a good but rather impatient husband, after rummaging all through the wrong drawer. His wife looked at him steadily for a moment, half inclined to be provoked, then with a comical look she said, "I never guess conundrums, I give it up." Then he laughed, and they both laughed, and she went and got his shirt, and he felt ashamed of himself and kissed her; and then she felt happy, and so what might have been an occasion for hard words and unkind feelings became just the contrary, all through the little vein of humor that cropped out to the surface.

Some people have a peculiar faculty for giving a humorous turn to things when they are reproved. It does just as well oftentimes to laugh things off as to scold them off. Laughter is better than tears. Let us have a little more of it at home.—*Religious Herald*.

### A LITTLE TRAVELER.

A pale little lad in a west-bound train glanced wistfully toward a seat where a mother and her merry children were eating lunch. The tears gathered in his eyes, though he tried to keep them back. A passenger came and stood beside him.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Have you no lunch?"

"Yes, I have a little left, and I'm not so awful hungry."

"What is it, then? Tell me; perhaps I can help you."

"It's—it's so lonely, and there's such a lot of them over there, and—and they've got their mother."

The young man glanced at the black band on the boy's hat. "Ah," he said gently, "and you have lost yours."

"Yes, and I'm going to my uncle; but I've never seen him. A kind lady, the doctor's wife, who put up my lunch, hung this card to my neck. She told me to show it to the ladies on the car and they would be so kind to me; but I didn't show it to anyone yet. You may read it if you like."

The young man raised the card and read the name and address of the boy. Below were the words:

"And whosoever shall give drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

The reader brushed his hand across his eyes and was silent for a moment. Then, "I'll come back very soon," he said, and made his way to the mother and her children.

And presently little George felt a pair of loving arms about him, and a woman's voice, half sobbing, calling him a poor, dear little fellow, begged him to come with her to her children. And for the rest of that journey, at least, motherless Georgie had no lack of mothering.

### I CREATE EVIL.

A lady writes that this statement in Isaiah xlv. 7 troubles her. The verse reads: "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." Is not this equivalent to saying that God is the author of sin? I answer, Isaiah is writing here about Cyrus. (See verse 1). Cyrus was a Persian. The Persians, taught by Zoroaster, believed in two gods, the one good and the other evil. These two gods they thought were in perpetual conflict, and hence there was an alternation of light and darkness in nature, and of prosperity and adversity in the lives of men. But the Jewish prophet proclaimed and emphasized the fact that there is only one God who made and controls all things. He is the God of the day and of the night; the God of health and of sickness; the God who sends sunshine and showers; the God who causes drought and barrenness. The reference here is not to moral evil or sin, but to suffering, or that which causes it. The sons of Jacob said in regard to Joseph:

"An evil beast hath devoured him. Job said. 'Shall a man receive good at the hand of the Lord, and not receive evil also?' God said to the Hebrews again and again, by His prophets: 'I will send evil upon you.' We speak in the same way. Evil often means trouble, misfortune, suffering, without any reference to the moral character of the sufferer."

Evil is contrasted with peace, as light is with darkness. Now, the Hebrew word translated "peace," as every scholar knows, means, primarily, health, soundness, prosperity. This contrast shows that Isaiah is not writing about sin, but about the result of sin. Men sin against God, and then He withholds from them His favor—the blessings of peace—and sends evil upon them.

Thus it is evident that Isaiah is not here solving the problem of the origin of sin. He is only telling us that God, in both nature and providence, reigns supreme, and reigns alone.—C. E. B. in *Herald and Presbyterian*.

### A NOVEL TEXT.

An old minister named Walter Mills was going to church one Sunday morning, and passing an old lady on the street he spoke to her and asked her to attend church. The old lady asked him what denomination he belonged to and he told her. She said she had no love for that denomination, and would not go to hear their minister preach.

Mr. Mills on hearing this said, "I am the minister."

This nearly took the breath from the old lady, but she quickly got over her surprise and said, "Are you, and what might your text be this morning?"

Mr. Mills answered, "Beef and greens," and started off towards the church.

The old lady looked after him and muttered, "'Beef and greens,' what does he mean? I must go and hear him." And off she started.

When the minister got into the pulpit he saw the old lady in the front pew. After the opening services were over, he proceeded to preach, taking his text from Proverbs. "Better a dinner of herbs and contentment therewith, than a stalled ox with sorrow."

The instant the old lady heard it she exclaimed: "Yes, it's 'beef and greens' after all," to the surprise of the congregation.

Mr. Mills then took up her words and said, "Yes, brethren, it's 'beef and greens,' and he preached an eloquent sermon."

### TALK TO THE CHILDREN.

Children hunger perpetually for new ideas. They will learn with pleasure from the lips of parents, what they deem drudgery to study in books; and even if they have the misfortune to be deprived of many educational advantages, they will grow up intelligent if they enjoy in childhood the privilege of daily listening to the conversation of intelligent people. We sometimes see parents who are the life of every company which they enter, dull, silent and uninteresting at home among their children. If they have not mental activity and mental stores sufficient for both, let them first use what they have for their own households. A silent home is a dull place for young people, a place from which they will escape if they can. How much useful information, on the other hand, is often given in pleasant conversation, and what unconscious, but excellent, mental training in lively, social argument. Cultivate to the utmost the art of conversation at home.

It is proposed to remove St. Enoch Parish Church, Glasgow, from its present position in St. Enoch Square, "to some locality where it may be of greater benefit." Subway and other operations have cracked its walls, and, as it would take a very considerable sum to execute the necessary repairs, the Presbytery think removal best.