

a brick house, and a chance of going to Congress or getting to be a bishop ——”

“Oh! Aunt Henrietta, hush!” Roxy was on her feet now. “I’ve got nothing to do with Mr. Whittaker or Mark, and if I had, you’ve no business talking that way. If you don’t hush I’ll say something awful.”

“Well, I declare! For a girl as religious as *you*, that’s a pretty how-do-ye-do, aint it, now?”

Here Roxy left the room to keep herself from saying “something awful,” leaving Mrs. Henrietta Hanks to gather her cape about her shoulders, put on her sun-bonnet and depart with the comfortable feeling that she “had cleared her skirts anyhow.” The faithful discharge of a duty disagreeable to others maketh the heart of the righteous to rejoice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOSSIP AND GIGGLING.

MISS MOORE was a gossip of the good-natured kind. She never told anything for the sake of harming anybody. She was as innocent in her gossip as she was in her habit of plucking out her front hair with tweezers to make her forehead intellectual. The milliner’s shop in a village is in some sort a news-dépôt. People bring hither their items of news and carry away whatever has been left here by others. It is a fair exchange. The milliner has the start of everybody else; for who should know so well as she whether Mrs. Greathouse will wear cherry ribbon or brown? Who knows the premonitory symptoms of a wedding so well as the skillful woman who trims the bonnet? And shall we condemn gossip? Only where it is thoughtless or malicious. For without the ventilating currents of gossip the village would be a stagnant pool. We are all gossips. The man who reads the daily paper may despise the “tattle” of the town, but he devours the tattle of the reporter who gets his livelihood by gossip. Whether we talk about a big world or a little one, it is the gossip about others that saves us from becoming eremites in the wilderness of our own egotism.

But did the red-bird that sang under Miss Moore’s window that morning ask whether his notes were a delight to any one’s ears? Or did he just whistle because whistling is a necessity of red-birdism? Miss Moore for her part did not ask whether her function was of use to the community or not. It was not her place to philosophize about gossips, but to gossip,—an employment in which she received the moral support of the best citizens. And in a village the general consent of the best citizens is of more weight than the decalogue.

But why should anything so clearly beneficial as gossip be carried on clandestinely? Why is a bit of gossip told in a voice that has something sly and wicked about it? Is it that one enjoys copyrighted information, which one is not to tell—or at most not with the name of the informant attached? Or is it that one likes to fancy oneself doing something forbidden?

At any rate Miss Moore, having possession of a bit of information