

# An Epidemic of Welts

*A Story That Should Interest Any One With a Mathematical Imagination*

By ELIZABETH POLLARD

*Drawing by Fergus Kyle.*

MISS LETTERSBY trod softly as she entered the editorial sanctum. The first quick glance showed her that it was neither so grand, nor so imposing as she expected it would be.

"Well, Miss Lettersby, what can I do for you?" queried the editor, as he swung round on his revolving chair and motioned her to a seat with the manuscript he held in his hand.

"When I sent my last bunch of stories you promised to read them, and then give me your candid opinion," the girl reminded him, as she eagerly searched his face with a pair of hungry gray eyes.

"Ah, yes; so I did"—he was about to give her some encouragement to struggle on, but a keen glance convinced him that she couldn't hold out much longer. Her fine, classic features were sadly lacking in both flesh and blood, and she had a look that no matter how small her clothes were they would still be too big to fit her attenuated form.

"Well, I've gone over them carefully, and I honestly think you might do better in other lines," was the verdict.

"Can you suggest any lines?" she asked with clouded face.

"Well, er—knitting, for instance. If you'd go at it in earnest you'd find it fairly profitable, and the field isn't at all overcrowded."

"But I never learned to knit," she objected, with sinking heart.

"Neither have you learned to write stories," he retorted.

"Even so; I might better be engaged in defacing cheap paper than in spoiling good yarn."

"But you've already spoiled many a good yarn," cut in the long-suffering editor; "as an earnest knitter you'd probably meet with success."

She argued with him for some time, but he finally convinced her that she was being guided onto the right road.

SO Miss Lettersby went home racking her brain to discover some means whereby she could raise the necessary capital. The result was, she gathered up as much of her wardrobe as she could spare, and added thereto all the manuscript of her stories, then entered into negotiations with the rag-man. The wardrobe was light, but the stories were middling heavy, which brought the weight up to a fair average. The deal went through without a hitch, and the girl interviewed the lady from whom she rented a room. Mrs. Tubbs declared herself a corker at knitting, but with a big family to work for she had no time for such "extras."

"But if I do something for you instead, you might find time to show me how," pleaded Miss Lettersby.

"Sure thing. You can knit Bobby a pair o' stockin's."

Mrs. Tubbs was large and flat of form, dark-faced, with straggling dark hair, and expressionless dark eyes. To aid her limited understanding, she usually looked and listened with open mouth. She liked the young writer, as did the other inmates of the tenement. They looked upon her as rather loony, but harmless, and always diverting. That she should forsake literature for knitting was a sign of near-sanity; therefore Mrs. Tubbs encouraged the venture.

"You don't hardly know enough to buy the yarn alone," she tactfully intimated. "I'd go with you, only I scalded my foot this morning. I guess the Dutchwoman in the basement'll go if you ast her."

Miss Lettersby felt equally sure of Mrs. Krats. That lady used to hang around the literary den in hopes of improving her English. She had a habit of conning over the typewritten synonyms, but was rather hazy concerning their application. She cheerfully acceded to the request.

Side by side the two shoppers entered the store. Mrs. Krats, stout and round of form, fair, and rosy; the girl, slim, gray-faced, and black-haired.

An obliging floor-walker sighted them and came

forward. "What did you wish to see?" he asked of the imposing one.

"I vonts to stare at some yarn," affirmed the lady from over the Rhine. Then noting the puzzled look on the face of her questioner, "I vonts to gaze on some yarns," amended she.

The rose on her cheek was fast becoming a poppy when Miss Lettersby came forward. "Mrs. Krats wishes to look at stocking yarn," she said.

They bought the yarn, then Mrs. Krats went to the meat shop, leaving the girl to go home alone. The fine day tempted her into the park, where she met a young man with a sketching kit. They greeted each other warmly.



"Bobby came home with a note sayin' as how he had 'em."

"How are you getting on?" she asked the tall, pale young man after a few minutes' chat.

"Not very well," he returned gloomily, "I haven't sold a picture in an age. Have you sold any stories lately?"

"Yes; I sold a bunch to-day," she returned, with a whimsical glance at the package of yarn in her hand.

"That's good. Did the syndicate buy them?"

"I don't know," evaded she, "they're paid for, so I asked no questions."

"Lucky girl! I wish he'd buy some of my pictures," he said enviously.

She was about to say that she hoped it wouldn't come to that with his pictures, but she hadn't the courage to admit that she had proved false to her ideals, so she abruptly changed the topic and soon went home. Mrs. Tubbs set up a stocking, knit a few rounds, then handed it to her pupil, carefully showing her how to make the stitches.

But in writing the habit of compactness had grown on her to such an extent that she made the stitches so small that after knitting a few rounds the needles got so tight she couldn't budge them. Mrs. Tubbs sat by viewing with misgivings the efforts of the amateur.

"I can't knit another stitch, it's got so tight," deplored the knitter.

"Give it here, an' I'll see what I can do with it," proposed the other.

The instructor took the work in hand, knit till quite loose, then handed it back. Again Miss Lettersby knit on till the same trouble caused her to desist, when it again changed hands. This caused loss of time, so Mrs. Tubbs hunted up another set of needles and set up the second stocking. The plan worked beautifully. Miss Lettersby would knit on one till she had to give up, then take up the other. When Mrs. Tubbs had to sit down to nurse the baby she could knit long enough to loosen up both.

When finished, the stockings looked rather ridgy, but the head knitter declared they would look all right when they were on, especially if the child had nice fat legs.

Miss Lettersby groped around in her mind for a likely market.

"Auline Nester," she announced joyfully.

THE offering proved suitable to the present needs of Mrs. Nester, and she paid on acceptance. The ex-author was delighted to make such a speedy sale, so she reinvested, and hopefully resumed operations.

Now, it so happened that Auline was a very bad little girl, and often got punished in school. It was also a fact that Mrs. Nester was a careful mother and always looked in on her children before retiring. The night following the day on which Auline first wore the stockings was warm, and she had kicked off the covers. What was the surprise and indignation of the mother to see the lovely fat legs of her darling disfigured by angry red welts. She called her husband. "Just see what a brutal punishment Miss Teechum has given Auline," she whispered, with suppressed anger.

"Thunder and lightning," roared the father, "that girl isn't fit to—"

"Sh-h—" warned the mother, "don't wake her. If Auline finds she has any backing at home, no teacher can manage her."

"I don't care a fig. I'll lay a complaint against that teacher."

"Why were you whipped yesterday?" asked Mrs. Nester next morning.

"Because I mocked Ruby Janes when she stuttered," she promptly answered.

"That was very naughty. I hope you won't again merit such a whipping."

On the second night the welts were there as angry as ever, though the child declared she hadn't been punished during the day. This gave

Mrs. Nester the idea that the first welts were still unhealed, and she was proportionately indignant.

On the third morning Auline was lying in bed fast asleep when the pup came trotting in to pay her a visit. He put his paws on the edge of the bed, sniffed her hands, and licked her rosy face, but she gave no heed. He decided to play a joke on her. He took her stockings in his mouth and went out with them. His original intention had been to bury them in the garden where he kept his surplus meat; but as he was passing the open gate he saw a friend. Out he raced, and the two went frolicking into the alley, where he dropped the stockings.

Presently, along came two of the Grady boys. They spied the stockings, and Tommy examined them. "They're new," he remarked.

"There's a great big hole in the heel o' one o' mine. I've a notion to put on one," hazarded Din.

"There's a bigger one in my toe, so I'll put on the other," responded Tom.

They quickly made the exchange, then ran to school.

Meantime, other stockings were rapidly growing. (Continued on page 21.)