

WHEN Silas Handover was elected president of the Literary Club of the town of Pretensia he was a happy man. Not that he was in any way fitted for the position. Far from it. He knew nothing about literature, and never desired to know. He attended every meeting of the club and, apparently, always listened with great interest. But, while the rest of the members discussed whether Shakespeare could have written "Trilby," or Milton could have composed "Mary's Little Lamb," Silas was planning how he could extend his dry-goods business, or save money by making one clerk do the work of two. This was of more interest to him than all the rhapsodies over Plato, Bacon and the rest of the notables who came up for consideration before the Pretensia Literary Club. Why, then, was he so gratified when he was unanimously elected to the important position of president?

Silas' family, including the baby of two months, had great social ambitions. Mrs. Handover, especially, had been struggling for years to obtain a footing upon the dizzy pedestal of Pretensia Social Life. Hitherto, she had failed. But now that her husband was president of the noted Literary Club, her cup of joy was full to overflowing, and that was the reason why Silas was so happy. It would assist him, too, with his business, so he reasoned, and that was something.

The night of the election, Miss Arabella Simpkins read an exhaustive paper on the Life of Thoreau, dwelling especially upon his best known work, "Walden." It now behooved Silas to be alert, and follow what was going on. This was a difficult task, as years of inattention made it hard for him to keep his mind away from cotton, silk, ribbons and collar-buttons. He had never heard of Thoreau before, and had not the slightest idea whether he lived in the time of Moses, or was a class mate of Confucius. Gradually, however, his interest became aroused as Miss Simpkins describes the life of the quaint philosopher in his little cabin by the beautiful Walden Lake. Then, in a thrilling voice, she read extracts from his works. One passage appealed to Silas as magnificent, and he listened with much attention.

"Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry, determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. Weather this danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses. If the engine whistles, let it whistle itself hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run?"

Silas liked that, and the very next morning he bought a copy of "Walden" from a book-store down town. That day he studied by heart the piece which had so interested him, and when he returned home in the evening he repeated it to his wife and admiring family. The baby was particularly delighted, and showed his appreciation of his noted father by numerous gurgles of delight.

When the children were all in bed, Silas informed his wife that he was going to follow Thoreau's teaching to the letter. It would be necessary for him to do so, he believed, as president of the Pretensia Literary Club. "I am going to begin at once," he concluded. "I am going to live as Thoreau did, 'deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails.' I am going to rise early in the morning and eat my breakfast without any perturbation. My, that's a great piece, and if that old philosopher found it good, why should not I, the biggest merchant in Pretensia, and president of the Literary Club?"

Silas Handover went to bed that night with sweet visions of the morrow before his mind. He would put Thoreau's words into practice, and live one day as "deliberately as Nature."

Thinking thus, he fell asleep. He was awakened about two o'clock in the morning by a yell which rattled the windows and stopped his watch. In a few moments everything was in an uproar. The baby had the colic, and was contorted with agony. While Mrs. Handover was frantically searching for some-

A LA THOREAU

by H. A. CODY



thing to sooth its pains, Silas tramped up and down the floor in a vain endeavor to stop its howls. He turned it upside down, he patted it on its back, danced it in his arms, and even whistled "Daddy's gone a-hunting." When he resigned his charge to Mrs. Handover, the perspiration was pouring down his face, and he collapsed into the nearest chair.

"Thoreau was a bachelor, was he not?" he asked as he looked enquiringly at his wife, who was endeavoring to force some liquid down the throat of the squirming creature in her arms.

"He was," she snapped. "Give me that shawl. Why do you ask such a foolish question at this time of the morning?"

After two hours of ceaseless efforts, the baby felt better and fell asleep in its mother's arms. But, try as he might, Silas could not sleep. He tossed restlessly until daybreak, when he arose, dressed, and made his way down to the kitchen. He would light the fire, and prepare a cup of coffee for himself. It was not necessary to disturb the rest of the household. He wished to begin the day as "deliberately as Nature." He was a thoughtful man, and had a great regard for the feelings of others. So now, as he moved about the kitchen, he was very careful not to make any noise. He dropped the coal-scuttle only twice upon the floor, upset three chairs, knocked down a half-dozen tin pans hanging on the wall, and slammed a door once. But he did it all "deliberately as Nature," so he told himself, so there was no harm in it.

SILAS lighted the fire, but the stove would not draw. Smoke issued out of every opening, and quickly filled the room. He searched for the cause, and at last came to the conclusion that the pipe was too far into the chimney. Mounting a step-ladder, he reached over and endeavored to draw out the pipe a few inches. But the thing stuck. Carefully balancing himself, he gave a hard, sudden jerk, and as he did so the offending pipe came out with a rush, and over went Silas, ladder, pipe, soot, and all, with a crash upon the floor.

Several screams were heard upstairs, and in a short time Mrs. Handover appeared, followed by the maid and several children.

"Silas, Silas!" she cried. "What are you trying to do?"

"Living as deliberately as Nature," was the somewhat muffled reply, for the smoke was very thick.

"You certainly look it," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "Get up off the floor, and let us straighten things up."

It took some time to replace the stove-pipe, clear the

room of smoke, and clean up the dirt which had been made upon the floor. Silas said very little during this performance, and remained unusually quiet as he ate breakfast. He was partly through when the telephone rang. Mrs. Handover was about to answer it when her husband stopped her. "Let it ring, Martha," he said. "I am going to follow Thoreau for one day at least. Didn't he say, 'if bells ring, why should we run?'"

An amused smile overspread Mrs. Handover's face as she resumed her seat. The telephone rang twice more and then it stopped.

It was not long before the door-bell set up its wail. Silas would let no one answer it. He tried to eat "gently and without perturbation," but the incessant buzz of the bell was most trying. Then followed heavy thumps upon the back door, followed almost immediately by someone speaking in an excited voice. Silas heard the words "the store," and "thieves." He could stand no more, and rushed into the kitchen to find out what was the matter. Yes, the store had been broken into, so he was informed, and a considerable quantity of goods stolen. He had been called up on the phone but there was no reply.

In a few moments Silas left the house, and started down town. He tried to walk slowly. He wondered how Thoreau would have acted on such an occasion. But gradually his step quickened, until when the store hove in sight he was almost on the run. Then, in an instant, his foot slipped upon a banana skin, and down he went with a crash upon the hard sidewalk.

Silas knew nothing more until he opened his eyes, and found himself in his own house with his wife bending anxiously over him. He endeavored to rise, but sank back with a groan.

"What happened to me, Martha?" he asked. "Did I faint, or did a house fall on top of me?"

"No, dear, you slipped and fell on the sidewalk."

"What's that you say? I slipped? On what?"

"A banana skin, so I understand."

"Ah, that's a comfort," and Silas gave a sigh of relief. "I was afraid it was a nut-shell or a mosquito's wing."

Mrs. Handover started, and looked earnestly into her husband's face. Had the blow on his head affected his brain, she asked herself, that he should talk in such a strange manner? Silas saw the look, and understood its meaning.

"Don't be alarmed, Martha. My head's all right," he explained. "Thoreau said that we must 'not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing.' It was only a banana skin which did it, and so that isn't so bad. Ugh! My leg hurts me. Have you sent for the doctor?"

"Yes, but we can't get him."

"And why not, I'd like to know? Is he out of town?"

"No, he's at home. We phoned for him just as soon as you were brought in, but could get no answer. Then one of the clerks who helped to carry you home, went to his house, and could only get in at the back door, after he had banged for some time. The doctor was at his breakfast and could not be disturbed, so the clerk was told. It seems that the doctor, like yourself, was much impressed by Miss Simpkins' paper on Thoreau, and especially that piece which so much interested you, and, he, too, is going to 'spend one day as deliberately as Nature.'"

Silas choked back an expression which was ready to leap forth, while his face became very red owing to the exertion.

"Isn't there another doctor in town who will come?" he asked. "Must I suffer all day without getting any relief?"

"They are all away from home," Mrs. Handover replied. "We have tried everyone."

FURTHER conversation was impossible for the telephone and the door-bell began to ring, and kept on ringing all through the morning. There were calls from the various newspapers, asking for information about the robbery and the accident. Friends, and especially members of the Pretensia Literary Club, were anxious to hear how Mr. Handover was getting along, and all about the accident. Some came to the house, and stayed for a long time, talking about people they had known who had fallen and

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