

"From something he said, I forget now what. It is a shame for such a fellow to go to the dogs."

"When I talk to him like a Dutch uncle he declares that he can stop—has stopped."

"Until he starts again," said the doctor, switching a persistent fly from the horse's flank, and before Willard could go on about his friend, the old man branched off another turn in the road and gossiped away about Cairnes' people, the church, politics, and his patients.

Willard had come out with him knowing that he would learn from a reliable source all about the congregation. In return he yielded up freely all desired information about himself and Mr. Aller, for the doctor was inquisitive to the last degree. It was high noon before they returned to Cairnes, and Mr. Willard feared his friend might have gone to seek diversion alone, and Mrs. Ostrander would think him remiss in giving her invitation. Fortunately Fred had just finished his dinner, and was sitting in the upper balcony, with his heels on the top rail.

"Well, I would like to know who is going to amuse me," he exclaimed. "While you are philandering off with the sisters—"

"Only with 'a man and a brother,' " put in Willard.

"All the same, I have passed a poor morning. That is a respectable, well-mannered pump, but I can't commune with it all day, and even the rush of business down below has wearied me. Three purple calico dresses, a rolling-pin, and seven nutmegs sold since nine o'clock, to my certain knowledge. Where is the rural missionary society, with tea at early candle-light, and gentlemen paying a mite admitted? You promised me wild, wicked fun of that sort."

"It begins to-morrow, Hugh, a picnic at the lake."

"All right, and this afternoon I propose to call on you at the parsonage. It is no sort of matter about you, if you want to be away making pastoral calls. Miss Hopkins will suffice—that Titian-haired girl is Miss Hopkins, is she not?"

"Titian was about a hundred when he died—yes, there are gray-haired maidens in the congregation."

"See here now, if I never saw an old master in the flesh (my flesh), I know the red-yellow-haired girls

that were all the go in Venice, and Miss——"

"Be still," said the minister. "If you stay here, just remember that there are proprieties that one of us must have regard to——"

"Of course, I'll leave every prune, pickle, and prism to you."

"No, you won't, Fred; you will put a curb to that tongue of yours, and remember that—Oh, you know well enough that our life here can't be one big joke."

"No, perhaps a very little, feeble, flat one," assented Fred, but he understood that Willard meant him to conduct himself with dignity. Fred was a gentleman by instinct and training, but he was so full of hilarity that he often in society forgot that Willard could not romp like a riotous boy just freed from school.

The chosen picnic ground was on the lake shore, but not at the point nearest Cairnes. It was a grove between a beautiful white-sanded beach and a strip of pine woods, and distant about three miles. By half-past eleven the following day everybody seemed to have arrived on the spot. The woods re-echoed with the shouts of children. All about the horse-sheds, roughly erected, where the wood ended, were the men who had been willing to leave their farm-work for a day's recreation. Many had resisted the temptation, and so the wives and sisters far outnumbered them. These last were occupied according to age and disposition: the matrons overlooking hamper and getting dinner ready, the younger women and girls laughing, chatting, and encouraging conversation, with such youths as strayed away from the less elegant society around the horse-sheds.

Aller, who was as full of little vanities as ever was any girl, had arrayed himself (it being very warm) in an English suit of white flannel, and he could not fail to note the admiration following surprise that his attire excited in the young ladies. The men agreed with Mrs. Huggins, who ejaculated, "Law, Suz! a fellow dressed in white! if he had only worn a blue sash and a pink nosegay, he would have been as pretty as Hope Hopkins." However, the men soon found there was nothing of the Miss Nancy about Aller, and they liked his jovial ways. Mr. Willard, having been warned by Mrs. Ostrander that his business before dinner was to