

Tales and Sketches.

THE SEASONING.

"I have brought your dinner, father,"
The blacksmith's daughter said,
As she took from her arms a kettle,
And lifted its shining lid.
"There's not any pie or pudding,
So I will give you this,"
And upon his toil-worn forehead
She left a childish kiss.

The blacksmith took off his apron,
And dined in happy mood,
Wondering much at the savor,
Hid in his humble food;
While all about him were visions,
Full of prophetic bliss,
But he never thought of magic
In his little daughter's kiss.

While she with her kettle swinging
Merrily trudged away,
Stopping at sight of a squirrel,
Catching some wild bird's lay.
And I thought how many a shadow
Of life and fate we would miss,
If always our frugal dinners
Were seasoned with a kiss.

—Selected.

WHAT ONE MOODY HOUR DID.

At a late hour one night, a poor old man, weak with hunger, and stiff with cold, entered a police station to ask for lodgings. While he sat by the stove, they heard him groan like one in distress, and the captain asked:

"Are you sick, or have you been hurt?"

"It is here," answered the old man, as he touched his breast. "It all came back to me an hour ago, as I passed a window and saw a bit of a boy in his night-gown.

What is it?" asked the captain as he sat down beside the man.

"It is heart-ache. It is remorse," the old man answered. "I have had them gnawing away at my heart for years. I have wanted to die—I have prayed for death—but life still clings to this poor old frame. I am old and friendless, and worn out, and were some wheel to crush me, it would be an act of mercy."

He wiped his eyes on his ragged sleeve, made a great effort to control his feelings, and went on:

"Forty years ago I had plenty. A wife sang in my home, and a young boy rode on my knee, and filled the house with his shouts and laughter. I sought to be a good man and a kind father, and people called me such. One night I came home vexed. I found my boy ailing, and that vexed me still more. I don't know what ailed me to act so that night, but it seemed as if everything were wrong. The child had a bed beside us, and every night since he had been able to speak, he had called to me before closing his eyes in sleep, 'good night, my pa!' Oh, sir, I hear those words sounding in my ears every day and every hour, and they wring my old heart until I am faint."

For a moment he sobbed like a child, then he found voice to continue:

"God forgive me, but I was cross to the boy that night. When he called to me good night, I would not reply. 'Good night, my pa!' he kept calling, and wretch that I was, I would make no answer. He must have thought me asleep, but finally cuddled down with a sob in his throat. I wanted to get up and kiss him, but kept waiting, and waiting, and finally I fell asleep."

"Well?" queried the captain as the silence grew long.

"When I awoke it was day. It was a shriek in my ears which broke my slumbers, and, as I started up, my poor wife called, 'Oh! Richard! Richard! our Jamie is dead in his bed!' It was so. He was dead and cold. There were tears on his pale face—the tears he had shed when he had called, 'Good night, my pa!' and I had refused to answer! I was

dumb. Then remorse came, and I was frantic. I did not know when they buried him, for I was under restraint as a lunatic. For five long years life was a dark midnight to me. When reason returned, and I went forth into the world, my wife slept beside Jamie. My friends had forgotten me, and I had no mission in life but to suffer remorse. I cannot forget. It was almost a lifetime ago, but through the mist of years, across the valley of the past, from the little grave thousands of miles away I hear the plaintive call as I heard it that night: "Good night, my pa!" Send me to prison, to the poor-house, anywhere, that I may halt long enough to die! I am an old wreck, and I care not how soon death drags me down."

He was tendered food but he could not eat. He rocked his body to and fro, and wept and sobbed; by and by, when sleep came to him, they heard him whisper:

"Good night, my boy, good night, my Jamie."

Angry words are lightly spoken,
In a rash and thoughtless hour;
Brightest links of life are broken,
By their deep insidious power.
Hearts, inspired by warmest feelings,
Ne'er before by anger stirred,
Oft are rent, past human healing,
By a single angry word.

Poison-drops of care and sorrow,
Bitter poison-drops are they,
Weaving, for the coming morrow,
Saddest memories of to-day.
Angry words! O, let them never,
From the tongue, unbridled slip;
May the heart's best impulse ever
Check them, ere they soil thy lip!

Love is much too pure and holy,
Friendship is too sacred far,
For a moment's reckless folly,
Thus to desolate and mar.
Angry words are lightly spoken,
Bitterest thoughts are rashly stirred,
Brightest links of life are broken,
By a single angry word.

—Selected.

PARTNERS.

I was sitting one day last week by Mrs. Graves' little work-table, engaged in the delightful task of teaching her the shell stitch, in crochet, when the door was burst open as if a cyclone were coming, and her ten-year-old boy bounced in. He made me a polite bow, it is true, but I felt that he was a very unpleasant occurrence, for he stumbled over my feet and upset our basket of worsteds, and seized his mother round the neck for a whispering in a thoroughly tumultuous and uncomfortable way. He received a gentle rebuke for his undue haste and carelessness, and permission, evidently to go to the bureau drawer, where I watched him upsetting a pile of clean handkerchiefs, and bringing forth in triumph—a fishing hook!

"Does your mother always let you treat her places that way, Frank?" I asked.

The bright, eager face turned upon me with a surprised look, and then with a sunny glance across the table, "Oh, mother and I are partners."

Partners! I felt a sudden pang in thinking of my own well-regulated nursery, whose clock-like rules permitted no such invasion of my places by my young folk.

"I won't go above the dam, mother," were the boy's parting words, as the door closed with a bang that alarmed the plaster.

"Frank is not always so noisy," apologised his mother. "He is very much excited just now, and I must save my little lecture about his want of consideration until it will be more likely to avail something."