

## My Mother's Hymn.

My Mother's Hymn! I hear it now,  
As through the trees above her home,  
The night wind whispering soft and low,  
Like angel music seems to come,

And waft upon my ravished ear—  
In strains as from the harps of gold,  
And seraph voices sweet and clear—  
The hymn she sung so oft of old.

How many times my hands have pressed  
For her the thrilling organ keys  
To that dear tune she loved the best,  
Sweetest of sacred melodies.

And as I struck "Ward's" well-loved chords,  
A far-off look came to her eyes,  
Her sweet voice trembling through the words,  
"How blest the righteous when he dies."

How blest the righteous, oh, how blest,  
When freed from earthly toil and pain,  
The spirit leaves the expiring breast,  
With Christ forever more to reign.

"So fades a summer cloud away,  
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er  
So sped her soul, at close of day,  
To loved ones on the other shore."

And when we laid her form away,  
No more to greet our mortal eyes,  
We sung to "Ward" above her clay,  
"How blest the righteous when he dies."

—Elsie M. Howell.

## "WASH-LADIES."

## AN EMERGENCY AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

When Deacon Granby informed us, one morning, the second year after father's death, that Coppleton Bank was "broke," we could not, at first, understand the signification of the term; nor did we realize, to its full extent, the misfortune which had befallen us, until we found that the few dollars Marian happened to have in her purse, for incidental household expenses, was all the money we could call our own. Our little patrimony, the income of which had barely sufficed to lift us above actual poverty, was gone,—it had been recklessly squandered by the bank's trusted cashier, whose propensity for luxuries and speculation had ruined hundreds of hard-working men and women.

We were not so unfortunate as many of the depositors, for we still had our home,—the dear old homestead which had sheltered generations of Pettigrews. But to exist, one must have something in addition to a house,—somewhat wherewith to buy clothes and furnish sustenance for the body. Deacon Granby, who was our nearest neighbor, and who, by reason of his propinquity, and our unprotected condition as "lone females," had constituted himself our adviser on all matters of business, suggested "raisin' gardening sass" to sell to the hotels at Fairford. But, as our little kitchen garden was only large enough to grow the vegetables and small fruits we used ourselves, "truck-farming" was voted to be an incorrect solution of the vexatious problem, what to do for a living. For two whole days we seriously considered strawberry culture, and borrowed all the available books on the subject, but, at the close of the second day, we decided that the risks would be too great. We should have to rent a larger plot of ground than our garden, and then the birds, or a drouth, or cut-worms, or grass-hoppers, or whatever is the pest which is detrimental to the success of a berry crop, might prevent our realizing anything from our venture the first season, then what?

"No, we must think of something," said our wise Marian, "that will require no capital to start. If only we weren't such dunces?"

But we were, alas! We were not clever enough to teach school, like so many reduced gentlewomen; not one of us could go beyond the "Rule of Three," if, indeed, we could go that far; and I doubt very much if we could have told the difference between a microbe and a megatherium, or whether a polliwig and a plesiosaurus were identical, or the contrary.

Prue, who had been two terms at the Fairford academy, was the cleverest, as well as the youngest and prettiest of the three of us. She could play fairly well on the "instrument," as everybody in Torrington called the parlor organ, but her knowledge of music was too limited for her to think of taking pupils. Marian could sing "like the cherry-bins," to quote our neighbor and adviser, the deacon, but, although her voice was clear as a flute, and she could lead the singing at meeting, she scarcely knew the difference between a sharp and a flat. Teaching music, therefore, was no more the answer to the vexed question than was school-teaching or gardening.

Marian and Prue could do all sorts of plain and fancy sewing; they could make dresses, embroider impossible birds, and beasts, and flowers; they could net and knit, and crochet, but there was no demand in our village for Kensington monstrosities, or any kind of fancy work,—our village folk had yet to be "educated up" to aesthetic art,—and every family made its own gowns, and did its own knitting. As for my own accomplishments, it would have puzzled a civil service examiner to determine them. Like so many young women of my class I knew a little of many things, useful and otherwise, but not enough of any one thing to justify my teaching it to others. But we must do something or starve.

We must do something or starve. We could not help it. One of our neighbors—a Biddad in petticoats—suggested that we rent or sell our house and "live out;" we couldn't bear the thought of parting with

our father's home. Besides, the neighboring village of Fairford, with its lately discovered medicinal springs, had—so to speak—broken Torrington's nose; the city people, who, in former years, had sought the repose and quiet of our picturesque hills, had transferred their preferences, and their envy-inspiring toilets, to Fairford Springs, and real estate was not now in demand. For the same reason, "keeping boarders," that last resource of many impecunious householders, was not any more a remunerative occupation.

Matters had arrived at a serious crisis,—we were in the same unfortunate condition as the boy who was after the woodchuck,—the butcher's cart had not stopped at our gate for over three months, when, one day in early June, Marian announced her intention of applying to the proprietor of the Fairford Hotel for a situation as waitress. "Uncle Si. Higgins," as the worthy boniface was called by everybody in that region, was an old friend and schoolmate of father's. His memory had not been impaired by prosperity; the springs discovered on his land had not, as in many instances of sudden success, proved lethan waters, for he remained the same kind-hearted, genial "Uncle Si." of his less opulent days.

"A waitress! O, Marian," grasped out dainty Prue. "Yes, my dear, a waitress, to the tune of three dollars a week, and an amplitude of goods things to eat," promptly retorted Marian.

"What will our folks say? By 'our folks' I mean the residents of Torrington."

"Whatever they please, as they generally do," independently responded the would-be waitress. "We are too poor, and I am too hungry for something besides baked beans, to care for anybody's opinion."

Prue, who had been in a brown study, here emerged from it to say:

"If Uncle Si. will give me a 'chance'—as they say around here—I, too, am ready to join the well-fed band of waitresses. The very thought of the flesh pots of the Fairford Hotel kitchen makes me ravenous."

Then I began: "Well, if you two are going, I don't see why I may not as well go with you," but Marian interrupted me.

"No, Beth, you must stop at home and take care of the house. Prue and I shall want to run over whenever we can get a spare moment, and we will always fetch you some of the goodies, depend upon it!"

So it was decided that they two should go to Fairford for the summer, and so sure were we that the momentous question was at last answered, that you may imagine Prue's and my own consternation and disappointment when Marian returned from Fairford and met our eager "Well, what success?" with the dampening "Uncle Si. doesn't need any more table girls; he engaged all his help for the summer last months."

She enjoyed our blank looks for a moment, then added: "But I have decided on something better than waiting at table. Come up to my room and I'll tell you all about it."

"Don't you want something to eat?" I asked with elder sisterly solicitude.

"Beans?" with a disdainful uplifting of her brows and a scornful curl of her red lips. "No, thank you! If you had seen the luscious chicken-pie, and the oysters, and the delicious—"

"Oh, stop!" interposed Prue from the head of the stairs, "Do you want to drive me mad? Tell us, instead, how you mean to rescue us from the bean slough."

"Well," began Marian, when we were comfortably seated in her room,—Prue and I on the bed and Mally in her low rocker,—"I went to the hotel, and when Uncle Si. told me he didn't need any more table girls—that's what he calls them—I felt as if our last hope was gone. He saw how disappointed I was, and said: 'I'll tell you, Mally, gal, what you'd ought to do; take in washin'.'"

"Washing?" in unison echoed Prue and I, our accent and expression indicating our disdain.

"Yes. Just wait, and you will view the occupation—profession if you prefer—in a less scornful light." Here she stopped to take the pins from her hair, which fell in heavy, blue-black masses over her shoulders, and framed a face almost as lovely as Prue's. "Uncle Si.," she resumed, "says there isn't a laundress in Fairford that can 'do up the company's fixens,'" mimicking Uncle Si.'s nasal tone and manner of speech. "Now, Mally, gal," he said, "I jes' seem to know how bad you want suthin' to do, an' I know that you an' them sisters of yours air jes' that porsnickety 'bout your own clo'se,—why, you allus look jes' if you'd stepped out of a band-box. Now, why shouldn't you do up the company's fine frocks and things, I want to know? There's lots more money in washin' than in waitin' on the table, an' they both begin with a w," he added with that funny twinkle in his left eye.

"If we lived in Fairford instead of Torrington, we might try washing," I said.

"Your livin' in Torrington don't matter a mite," said Uncle Si. "Jared Hamar'll kerry the clo'se back'ard an' for'ard in his mail coach, which you can pay him for doin'. The boarders pays handsome for laundry work, an' you can have all you'll want to do.' And so, sisters mine," concluded Mally, "I just decided at once that we would try it; we can't use our heads, let us be thankful that we are able to use our hands!"

"We shall become round-shouldered and hump-

backed," moaned Prue. "Our own clothes are not hard to do, but to hang all day long, and every-day, over the wash-tub or the ironing-table—"

Marian's buoyant tones interrupted my objecting speech:

"I don't intend that we girls shall do anything but the finest ironing. After my conversation with Uncle Si. I drove on to West Fairford, and engaged Roxanna Haines and her sister Almira to help us with the laundry work. They were glad enough of the chance, for the lobster canning will cease next week. Roxy and her sister will do all the washing, we three can manage the ironing, and so, my dears, the vexed problem is solved. What does it signify how one earns one's bread, so it's honestly got? and washing clothes for the city boarders is quite as respectable as waiting on them."

"But the name; washer-women," sighed Prue, with a woe begone expression on her pretty face.

"Wash-ladies then, if that will suit you any better, or better still, flat-iron and fluting artists!"

The first basket of clothes sent over from the Fairford Hotel belonged to a wealthy family from New York. There were several dainty gowns among the lot, and we succeeded so well with them—they looked so pretty, great billows of misty muslin and lace, and they smelled so grassily fresh and sweet—that the delighted owners sent us, the very next day, six white gowns that were "yalla as a duck's foot," Roxy Haines said, to bleach and do up.

Those gowns established the reputation of the "Torrington Laundry," or "Pettigrow Washery," as Prue had dubbed our undertaking, and in less than three weeks we had as much work as the two able-bodied women, Roxy and her sister, could do.

And so the days passed, to the merry rub-a-dub of the wash-boards; from early morning until late afternoon, Prue and Marian and I wielded the flat and fluting irons, and with cheerful hearts, for we could be sure of enough money to see us comfortably through the winter, while our reputation as capable "wash-ladies" would bring us customers another year.

One day we were ironing away with a will at some things which had to be sent home that evening. We were singing,—or rather, Mally and Prue were, while I joined my croak to their melodious voices whenever I could catch the air,—for work seemed to go the easier and faster when there was music.

"Girls!" suddenly exclaimed Prue from her table by the window, "Girls, look here! do you suppose the owner of this lovely skirt could be any relation to that wretch who robbed the Coppleton bank?"

Before her question was concluded Mally and I were by her side, examining the dainty fabric garment.

"I wonder if this Briggs can be related to our Briggses?" mused Marian, passing her reddened finger over the indelible characters marked on the cambric.

"Not likely," I responded, going back to my fluting iron. "'Our Briggses,' as you call them, are all safely over the border, where the laws of the United States can't prevent their having a good time with their ill-gotten wealth."

"I didn't suppose it was any of that identical family," said Prue, "but I should like to know if they are any kin. Ugh! how warm it is."

From Greenland's icy mountains,"

she began in her clear treble, to which Mally joined her seraphic notes, while I whistled the best alto I could muster.

When the things were ironed, Prue, who had heretofore studiously avoided being seen on the bleaching-ground, or anywhere near the clothes-baskets, surprised us by announcing that she was going to borrow Deacon Granby's buggy and drive with the clothes to Fairford.

"One of you can come with me, if you like," she said. "I dare say there will be room enough for two of us and the clothes-hamper."

But neither Marian nor I cared to take the long ride, so the child started off by herself, promising to return as quickly as it would be possible to urge old Debby, the rather indolent mare, over the eight miles of road between Torrington and Fairford.

It was eleven o'clock when we heard the sound of wheels, for which we had been listening most anxiously for more than an hour. We hurried to the gate, and looking down the long street which, in the bright moonlight, was almost as light as day, were surprised and alarmed to see the Deacon's buggy and two steeds,—Debby in the shafts and the second horse following closely behind the buggy.

"Something has happened," whispered Mally, with white lips, while my heart stood still with the fear and anxiety I felt for our darling.

"There are two persons in the buggy," again gasped Marian. "Oh! I wonder what has happened? Prue? Prue?" she called, opening the gate and running fleetly toward the approaching vehicle, "what is the matter? are you ill—hurt?"

"No, no, I'm all right, Mally—don't be alarmed," responded our darling's sweet tones, and the next minute the buggy drew up in front of the gate, and a young man, clad in riding dress, sprang to the ground and helped Prue to alight. "My sisters, Mr. Brandon," she said, waving her hand toward me and Marian, who were staring in amazement at the ap-