

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

MABEL'S MUSEUM.

The mistress of the manse opened the door decisively and then hesitated. Behind her was the hot, disorderly kitchen; before her the cool dining-room with its long table partially set, its shaded windows; and in its farther corner, curled up in the big rocking chair, the little daughter, smiling happily over her book. It was this part of the picture that had called the halt. Mothers do not enjoy making disagreeable requests. They really do not.

The morning had been one of unusual hurry and flurry. A belated letter announcing a party of guests for dinner had thrown the quiet household into a sudden fever of preparation. Mabel had entered into the general excitement with all the zeal and exhilaration that a prospect of "company" always arouses in a child, and her services had been invaluable. But her mother had noticed how the willing feet had lagged a little on their last errand and the sigh of weariness that had come unbidden. She had been glad to dismiss her to rest and wonderland, and now there was real regret in her heart and voice as she spoke at last.

"Mabel, dearie, I am sorry to disturb you, I know you are tired, but Mary Ann is so busy."

The little girl looked up in a dazed way. She had travelled too far into wonderland to get back at a moment's notice. But the present with its delightful fore-look was easily recalled.

"Ho! I'm not tired a bit! What is it?" "Would you mind getting the potatoes for dinner?"

The chair rocked violently as Mabel scrambled out of it, falling over her own feet, and the book landed with a slam on the window-seat.

"Mind! Course not!"

And so, stumbling and tumbling and laughing, she burst into the kitchen.

"Where's the pan, oh, Mary Ann?" she sang.

Mary Ann made no answer. None was needed. The pan was self-evident. But Mary Ann was grumpy. She did not approve of unexpected company and she was venting her ill-humor on a silver teapot, much to the teapot's advantage. The little girl touched her frowny head lightly with the pan as she passed by.

"Oh I'm going down cellar—and—and—you're a good feller—yes, you are, Mary Ann!" the broken song continued.

Mary Ann's clouded face began to vie with the teapot.

"Go 'long wid ye!" but she chuckled with pleasure.

The pan suddenly became a tambourine, and a moment later landed with a clatter at the foot of the cellar stairs.

"Mamma!"—a shout from the depths. The mother walked hurriedly from the pantry to the head of the stairs to ask softly, "What is it, dear?"

"How many shall I get?"

"Oh, that depends on the size—twenty, perhaps."

Before she had reached her moulding-board again, she was recalled.

"Mamma!"

"Well, dear?"

"I think I'll get twenty-one to make sure."

The protracted stay below was accounted for a little later.

"I picked out all the funny ones I could find. Some of 'em are awful funny."

The pump handle rattled and the sudden stream of water striking upon the heaped-up potatoes splashed in all directions. Mary Ann's face was in full range.

"Oh, you bothersome child, you! I wish I'd got the petaties meself!" she cried, spluttering.

"I didn't mean to, Mary Ann; I'm awful sorry."

The child's face and tone were full of penitence, and the kind Irish heart behind the rough speech and manner was touched.

"Niver you moin, darlint. A little water won't spile my beauty."

Mary Ann was surprised and delighted at her own wit. She laughed until the tears dropped into her silver polish and "unexpected company" began to seem less of an unmixt evil.

But the episode had a subduing effect upon Mabel, who fell to work in silence.

"There, I've pared three. Three goes in twenty-one—that's one-seventh. Mamma! one-seventh are done."

"How fine!"

Now the art of digging potatoes is not included in any college curriculum, and it was the family conviction that the parson's potatoes carried into the cellar every year enough of mother earth for a next year's growth.

"This water's awful muddy, mamma. It's just black."

"You had better pour it off and get more."

"Oh, but I don't want to. I like it this way. I'm going to excavate at Pompeii and then I'll have a museum! Ladies and gentlemen, behold me as I descend into the depths! What is this I discover (I guess these two huggled up so close in the hill that they 'most grew together.) Ladies and gentlemen, these are the real-and-true Babes in the Wood, just as they were left by their cruel uncle! I hope he got buried up in the ashes to pay him."

"Well, they got buried up, too."

"Mary Ann, you mustn't interrupt my museum. Here are two potatoes just as round—as round as anything. I tell you what! They're loaves of bread. Mamma, didn't you say they found some loaves of bread at Pompeii?"

"Yes, just as they were placed in the oven more than 1,800 years ago."

"Well, here they are, just as fresh as the day they were baked. Have a slice, Mary Ann?"

"No, thank ye. I don't admire raw potato," came from Mary Ann's tightly-closed lips.

"Seven potatoes pared; seven goes in twenty-one three times—that's one-third. Down I plunged again into the darkness! (Here's another pair of potatoes just hitched together.) I declare—I do declare! They are the Siamese twins! (I though.) I tell you how it was! Ladies and gentlemen, these twins didn't live happily together. One of them ate up all the dinner so the other couldn't grow. They quarrelled and scolded each other, thought twins were the same size, and the lava came and buried them both up. You see now what comes of quarrelling."

"S'pose you remember that next time you and Jack go to squabblin'."

"Mary Ann, you do interrupt so. You disturb my excavating. And here comes the funniest one of all—a big potato with three little ones growing out of it. Ho! I know! Ladies and gentlemen, this is the Venus of Milo! (Her head is rather crooked, but I guess I can pare it off.) These are her little stubs of arms. She was trying to 'scape and she fell down and broke off her arms!"

A silence followed broken by the clatter of knife and pan.

"Mamma, I've got fifteen pared. Fifteen goes in twenty-one—no—three goes in fifteen and three goes in twenty-one—that's five sevenths. That's a pretty hard 'xample. Well, I must descend again—down—down—down! What is this that I behold! (That's a queer-shaped

one, like a pear, only it's too knobby on top). Why, so it is! I never thought! It is the bust of Shakespeare. Mamma, it looks just like him. Ladies and gentlemen, here is the great Shakespeare himself. This is really just the splendidest museum! It's wonderf'ler than Barnum's!"

"Company'll want pertaties for dinner, Barnum or no Barnum. If youse don't hurry up I'll have to take a hand."

Mary Ann was gathering up her cloths and brushes. The silver lay in a resplendent row on the table—a regiment of glittering forks and spoons, commanded by Captain Teapot, who seemed to be swollen beyond his wont with the pride of his glory. How dazzling would be the effect on the eyes of "company"! Mary Ann surveyed them with pride and an expectation of compliments.

A few moments later the little girl stood at her mother's elbow. She brandished the potato-knife, and little drops of muddy water trickled from her finger tips.

"Three-thirds! Seven-sevenths! Twenty-one-twenty-oneths! They're all ready, mamma. My museum is finished—ten cents admission; but you shall come in for nothing, you dear little mammal! I think it's a pretty good way, don't you, mamma? I've studied art and house-keeping and arithmetic all at once; don't you think that's a pretty good way?"

Her mother thought it was a most excellent "way" to transform a disagreeable task into a pleasant pastime, and she told her little daughter so between kisses.

Such an odd-looking dish of potatoes as we had for dinner that day! Mary Ann "hadn't the heart to mash 'em." The "Venus of Milo" fell to me, and I ate it with much inward amusement.—Congregationalist.

TOM'S LESSON.

Uncle Jack had taken Tom for a walk in the woods, and as they came through the grove Tom idly brought his stick down upon a family of ants that were busy carrying into their home some crumbs that had been left by a picnic party.

"I am sorry that the woodland newspaper will have report a tragedy," said Uncle Jack, soberly. "They will have to say: 'While busy storing provisions in their home near Long Pond, the ant family was struck by a tornado, and nearly everyone perished. This was an excellent family, and was doing no harm. In the home were several little ones, who waited through the night for something to eat; but finding the house overturned and their parents missing, they started off into the woods and were lost. The cause of the tornado is unknown.'"

"Why is it like that?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Certainly. They have been at some pains to build that little house; see how ingenious they were in fashioning it! Now it is laid waste, and they must find a new spot. Some of the little ones are dead, too."

Tom looked down ruefully at the havoc he had made. "I know what will make them happy," he said; "I will leave this piece of nut cake from my lunch box, and they will eat that." He laid the cake down carefully, and was rewarded by seeing other ants swarm over it and carry bits to another place, where he thought they meant to build a new home. "I think they will soon forget," he said; "don't you?" "Probably; but if they forget, I am sure you will not," said Uncle Jack. And Tom found that he never did.—