

## Choice Literature.

### THE FAILURE OF DAVID BERRY.

Mr David Berry used to keep his shop in a small wooden building in his own yard, and worked steadily there a great many years, being employed by a large manufacturing company in Lynn at soling and heeling men's boots. There were just such small shoe shops as his scattered among the villages and along the country roads. Most of the farmers knew something of the shoe-making trade, and they and their sons worked in their warm little shops in winter when they had nothing else to do, and so added a good deal of ready money to their narrow incomes. The great Lynn teams, piled high with clean wooden shoe boxes, came and went along the highways at regular times to deliver and collect the work. Many of the women bound shoes, and sometimes in pleasant weather half-a-dozen friends came together with their bundles, and had a bit of friendly gossip as they stitched. The little shops were only large enough for the shoe benches, with shiny leather seats and trays of small tools, sprinkled with steel and wooden shoe pegs and snarled with waxed ends; for their whetstones and lapstones and lasts, and the rusty, raging little stoves, with a broken chair or two, where idlers or customers could make themselves permanently comfortable. No woman's broom or duster had any right to invade the pungent, leathery, dusty, pasty abodes of shoe-making; these belonged to men, and had a rudeness akin to savagery, together with a delightful, definite sort of hospitality as warm as the atmosphere itself. If there were not a life-sustaining, broken pane of glass somewhere, the door had to be left ajar. There were apt to be apples on the high window ledges, and anyone might choose the best and eat it, and throw the core down among the chips of leather. The shoemaker usually had a dog, which wagged an impartial tail at each newcomer; for the shoemaker always sat in the same place, and society came and found him there, and told news and heard it, and went away again. There were some men who passed their time as guests in shoemakers' shops, especially in winter; their wives were fortunate in having other sources of income, and merely looked out for their rights in the matter of neighbourhood news. These shoemakers' guests were a distinct and recognized class. There never were many of them, and they each had a sufficient excuse for idleness, either in their diligent wives, or some slight physical hindrance to active labour.

One can not follow a farmer as he ploughs his furrows in a clayey field and expect the time to be given to steady conversation, but a shoemaker sits all day pounding, pegging, and silently shaping leather with his thin sharp knife; sits at the receipt of custom and news. He likes to have his time beguiled with idle talk; he grows wise in many ways, and deeply reflective as he grows old. The humble hero of this brief tale, Mr. David Berry, was one of the pleasantest and wisest and least prejudiced of shoemakers. You could not spend five minutes' pegging time with him and miss hearing an ever-to-be-remembered piece of rural wisdom, some light coin of country speech, bearing the stamp of that mint where wit holds the hammer.

He was always an old-looking man for his years, and as wise of countenance as a Greek philosopher. In the days when parishioners listened critically to sermons, and on Mondays and Tuesdays argued excitedly for and against the minister's opinions, Mr. David Berry, though never a fierce partisan, could always keep the points and heads of the discourses very clear in his mind. He was much respected among the old residents of the town, and always made Judge Hutton's and General Barstow's best boots, and patiently repaired the footgear of half the men and women of his neighbourhood. Everything prospered with him in early life; his wife was busy and cheerful, and helped him to earn, though nobody could help him to save. His steady business brought in enough—Lynn work and custom work together—to pay for their house and bit of land in course of time, but David Berry was one who liked to give for giving's sake; he believed with all his heart in foreign missions; he considered the poor, and was in every way a generous man. People did not notice this trait at first, because he never had large sums to give, and one never looked for his cramped handwriting at the head of a subscription paper, but you always might find it before you came to the end.

Everything prospered until he and his wife were far past middle life, and then suddenly became aware that the growth of the town was leaving them at one side. The tide of business had swept away from the old shoe shop. Sometimes Mr. Berry did not have a customer all day, and his wife came out with her sewing and sat on the door-step to keep him company. The idlers had disappeared, some to another world, and the rest evidently had followed the track of business; they were off at the square looking at men who drove new horses by and tried to look unconscious; at mercantile strangers who came from Boston; at the great brick walls of the new mills which were going to bring so much money to the town. Professional idlers have no spirit of loyalty, they find occupation in the occupation of others, and they are fond of novelty.

Business had gone to another part of the town, and it was the plainest sort of good sense to follow it. One morning, after much trotting back and forward, an express wagon was backed up to the door of the little shoe shop in David Berry's yard, and loaded with the old shoe bench and the rusty stove, and all the sole-leather and old shoes and boots, and the idler's chairs, and a great quantity of queer-shaped, wooden lasts, and these were soon bestowed, looking meagre enough, in a narrow, brick store down town. The rent had been a great lion in the way to a man who had never paid any rent; but Mrs. Berry was sanguine, and had no sentimental ties to the old shop, which she had always complained of as a dirty place and a temptation to the loafers of that neighbourhood. Before long she succeeded in getting a good offer for the empty little building from a neighbour who was enlarging his hen-house, and could not understand why her husband was slow to seize upon such a good handful of ready money, and, even after he had taken it, would not stay at home and lend a hand at the moving. Mrs. Berry declared that the yard looked a great deal better without the old shoe shop. She could sit at her favourite window in the kitchen now, where the light was best, and look far down the street, as she never could before, to see the people passing.

But David Berry felt old and bewildered in his new quarters. The light was not nearly so good, and his tools were scattered, and he had to get up and cross the room half-a-dozen times in an hour, when formerly he had only to reach to the shelf above his head or across to the cutting board. He put up some signs in his window, made for him long ago out of friendship by one of the idlers, whose only gift was one for ornamental penmanship. "Boots and Shoes Repaired While You Wait" was the most prominent of these, and brought the industrious little man a good many hurried ten cent jobs of pegging and heeling. Some of his old friends followed him; those who could afford to have their boots made still did so, for David Berry had won considerable renown for making comfortable shoes. But almost every one in the fast-growing, extravagant, little town thought it better to spend two dollars three times in the six months than five dollars once, and ready-made boots and shoes were coming more and more into favour. Still there was work enough to do, though life was not half so friendly and pleasant as it used to be; and it always seemed strange to the little, round-shouldered, old man to take his long walk down the street after breakfast, and put the new key into the lock of an unfamiliar door. Mrs. Berry thought that her husband had lacked exercise, and that his walk did him good. She promoted him to a higher station of respectability in her own mind because he had a store down town, even though that store was a queer little three-cornered place tucked in at the head of the street between two large blocks.

There was only a north light in the new shop, and this seemed strange to a man who had been browned like a piece of the leather he worked upon, because, small as the old shoe shop was, there were five windows in it, facing east and west and north, besides the upper-half of the door, which was glazed, and faced to the southward. In dark weather, as the autumn came on, he had to light up early, and the care of the three lamps, which were necessary for the new place of business, seemed very troublesome. But he pegged and pounded away bravely. The old bench and the lapstone and all the tools were familiar, if the surroundings were not. He often said to himself that he should have felt like a king when he was a young journeyman to have had such a good location and outlook for business as this. There was an opportunity, besides, for making new friends. An old sailor with a wooden leg came in one morning to have his one boot patched, and the two men instantly recognized a capacity for comfortable companionship in one another. David Berry had made one wretched fishing voyage to the banks before he finally settled upon his trade, and this made him a more intelligent listener to the life history of a mariner than was commonly to be found.

So the old sailor was unmolested in the best seat by the stove, by the time winter had set in. There was a poor, little child, too, who came almost every day, and sat by the work bench and watched the sharp knife and the round-headed hammer, the waxed ends and the lapstone do their work. Mr. Berry had seen the little thing as he went to his work in the morning, and it being natural to him to inspect people's shoes before he glanced at their faces, he had been compassionate toward a worn-out sole, and offered his services at mending it. The child put her little hand into his, and they walked along together to the shop. She was a poor, little body, and grateful for the luxurious warmth and for an apple, but the mended shoe she took quite as a matter of course. Ever since, she had come every day for a while—to sit beside the bench, to run errands, to love the kind old man and look at him eagerly—but into what crevice of the town she disappeared when she went out of the shop door, he never knew.

It came into Mr. David Berry's thoughts sometimes in the old shop how he had pegged away on his bench year after year, and how many men and women had kept him company for a time and then disappeared. There had been six ministers of the parish to which he and his wife belonged, and they had all gone away or died. It sometimes seemed as if he were going to peg away forever just the same, and the rest of the world change and change; but in these later days the world outside seemed to fare on its prosperous and unbinders way, while he was battling against change himself. But for all that, he liked many things in the new life. He was doing more business, if only the rent were not so high; and Mrs. Berry was completely satisfied with him, which was most delightful of all. She could not have treated him better if he had owned the whole new shoe factory that was just being fitted with its machinery and office furniture. Some misguided persons went so far as to suggest that David should apply for work there, but his wife was scornful in the extreme, and so, to tell the truth, was David himself. Since his days as apprentice, and a few months spent as a journeyman in seeing the shoe-making world, he had been his own man.

Some time went by, and business seemed just as good, and even the continuous stream of passers-by in the street made the old shoemaker feel as if he could not work fast enough to keep up with the times. There was no question among Mr. David Berry's friends about his unflagging prosperity. His friend, the doctor, who said always and everywhere when he found opportunity that no shoemaker in town understood the anatomy of the human foot as Mr. Berry did, looked at him sharply once or twice, and asked if he had light enough, and if he had a good appetite nowadays, but there never was anything but an unaffectedly cheerful answer. The change had been good on the whole, and the rent was always paid on the day it was due, though Mrs. Berry forgot about it every quarter, and could not imagine what her man did with his money. Think of the work he had now! As much again as came to him in his shop in the yard. She asked him sometimes if he spent it for nuts and candy, remembering that in his early days he had yielded to such temptations, but David coloured, and shook his head soberly. He did buy an apple or an orange for the little girl sometimes, but he could not confess it even to his wife. Mrs. Berry sometimes looked into the place of business, and once or twice had found the child there, and asked all sorts of questions, but the old man hastened to suggest another subject, saying that she did no mischief, and kept some others out of that chair who would be in it and bothering him if she were not. When the little clerk's mysterious grandmother kept her at home, Mr. Berry felt very lonely. She was an odd, silent child; but they felt the warmth of each other's affection without a word being said, and were contented in their opportunity of being to-

gether. Mr. Berry sometimes believed that if the grandmother should die, from whom this stray little person ran away daily as a matter of course, he should try to persuade his wife to give the child a home. Before long Mrs. Berry would need someone to help in the house; but all this got no further than being a pleasant holiday flight of his imagination.

In the second year of Mr. David Berry's occupation of the down town place of business he yielded to bad advice, and enlarged his business unguardedly. The man who had bought the old shoe shop came in one night to get a pair of new boots, and after beating the price down unmercifully, and robbing honest David of nearly all his small profits, under pretence of hard times, and being a neighbour, and past favours shown about buying the building, he sat down for a friendly talk, saying that it was almost time for closing up, and then they could walk home together. David was glad to have a companion in his evening's journey of three-quarters of a mile. He used to go home to dinner at first, but of late it seemed to keep him out of his shop just when the mill people were likely to wish to come in. The little girl was apt to come in at noon and share his feast.

"You've got more room than you want here," said the unprofitable customer, looking about with a lordly air. "Why don't you put in some new stock? Why don't you keep ready-made boots?"

"I can't recommend them to customers," said the shoemaker, frowning.

"You needn't recommend them; they'll be snapped up quick enough if you keep the prices low. Plenty of ways of getting round recommendations."

David Berry said nothing.

"And you are doing well as you are, so what you could sell extra would be clear gain, and draw in a sight o' folks who don't come in now. I hear they sell second choice shoes at the factory for next to nothing. My woman gets hers that way. You see, the thread'll break, or the needle, and make a scratch on the leather, or there'll be some little defect, and the shoe's just as good to wear, but 'twon't do to put in the shipping cases."

"I ain't goin' to palm off no such stuff on folks that respect either me or themselves," said Mr. David Berry, red dening.

"You can tell folks just what they be," urged the poultry merchant. "Some likes that kind the best. I can lend ye something to start on; just as soon lend ye as not."

The shoemaker rose and put by his tools and his apron, but made no answer. The little girl, who was lingering late, waited until he had put on his coat and hat and locked the door, then put her hand into his and trotted at his side. Sam Wescott was amused at the sight, but after they passed two or three squares, the child slipped away silently down the side street.

"I'd think the matter over about extending your business," he suggested again; and this time David Berry said, gravely, that he would think of it, and ask Mrs. Berry; then he spoke decidedly about other matters, but would hear no more of business until they parted.

He went in at the side door of his little house, and hung up his coat and hat in the narrow entry-way before he opened the door of the kitchen. Mrs. Berry was putting some old-fashioned shoe lasts into the stove. She was all dressed in her best, and there was a look of festivity; it was evident that she had company to tea.

"Step into the bedroom quick as you can, David, an' put on a clean shirt and your best coat. Mrs' Lester is here, an' her son's wife. They come over from West Farms in the stage, shopping, and I over persuaded 'em to spend the night. I just run over and asked the Wescotts to come, too. I've been wantin' to ask them this great while; you know, they're some connection o' the Lesters. I can't make this fire burn, no matter what I do. Them lasts is got too old-fashioned even to burn."

"There, hold! hold!" exclaimed David, rescuing a last from the very jaws of the devouring stove. "That last ain't to be burnt; it's a very particular one with me. I won't have ye take any o' those in the barrel."

"They're all one to me," said Mrs. Berry, laughing. "I wish barrel and all were out o' my way. Come, go and dress up, David, and have some ambition besides boardin' them old lasts!" She was very busy, but she turned round to look at him. "You feel well?" she asked, anxiously, disturbed by an unexplainable change in his looks. "Now you're doin' so well, you might shut up shop for a week, and go off and have a good visit somewhere. I'd like a change," she pleaded. "There, David Berry, you don't know how glad I be to have you out o' that little sixpenny shoe shop. I feel so free to have company when I want it, and not to stop and count every cent. I'm going to make some o' my best tea cakes, the kind that takes six eggs."

David stood, with the last in his hand, looking at her and faintly smiling approval. He was childishly delighted when she was pleased with herself and him, as she appeared to be to-night. Then he turned and went into the bedroom, and found his clean shirt and satin stock and his Sunday coat spread out for him on the bed.

After tea was over, and the women had settled down to steady conversation, Sam Wescott returned to the subject of the extension of David Berry's capital, and David said that he had been thinking it over, and believed it would be no harm to try and work off a few dozen pairs of the factory shoes. He had put by something for a rainy day, though his rent hampered him all the time, and his wood bill had been double what he expected. There was no place to store firewood at the little shop, and he had bought a foot at a time at an increased price. Before the tea-party broke up, he had borrowed fifty dollars from Sam Wescott. There was nothing said about the interest being put low, because they were neighbours. David Berry felt uneasy about this departure from his rule of never borrowing mon., but he didn't like to touch what they had in the bank. It was little enough, and yet his wife really wanted to feel better off, now that she was in her prime. For himself, he was older, and would be contented to do without tea parties and the tea cakes that took six eggs. But for several days Mrs. Berry kept saying, "What makes you so dumb, David?" And David would look at her with his slow smile, and make no excuse for himself.

(To be continued.)