

Aminta's Housekeeping.

BY HARRIET WHITNEY SYMONDS.

When Aminta Vine made a dismal failure of the Cranberry Creek school, the sympathies of Avoca Valley were strongly with Aminta's elder sister, Miss Dorinda.

It was an Avoca Valley habit to point out Miss Dorinda Vine as something of a paragon; her housekeeping was a matter of record; her energy and management had kept the old home place at the edge of town in thrifty condition; the small mortgage which old Adam Vine had put upon it was still there, but had been held in check, and even begun, under Miss Dorinda's administration, to shrink materially. If Aminta had but equalled Dorinda, said everybody, the mortgage would even now be a thing of the past.

Avoca Valley was not given to wasting sympathy upon Aminta in her defeats and failures, because, it was the universal opinion, Aminta never put her mind upon anything worth while. Thrift and self-denial had been required on Miss Dorinda's part, to educate her sister for a teacher, and the girl had rebelled against it from the start; she had a turn for fancy work, and she wanted to have a little store and sell her own work and other knick-knacks, and hotly had she pleaded with her sister to let her make the venture. Such a scheme appearing altogether empty and vain in Miss Dorinda's eyes, it was abandoned, and the school project pressed forward with dispatch. Aminta took her school course, received her diploma, and, through Squire Loveday's influence, was provided with school after school, only to lose them, the cause being placed by her employers upon the broad ground of "general incompetence."

Even Squire Loveday's kindly faith in Aminta's ultimate success was frosted, when word of her latest defeat reached him.

"It's no use, Evan," his mother told him, "for you to stew your brains and wear holes in your shoes hunting up any more situations for the girl; there is absolutely nothing to her."

"Why, I don't like to think that, mother," the Squire protested. "She certainly does make a mess of the teaching business, but maybe she might be good at something else; she was always a bright appearing girl."

"A glass head is bright appearing," returned his mother, sagely, "but isn't of much value. She isn't a money-earner, and she isn't even a help to Dorinda with the housework; why, if she starts to sweep a room, Dorinda says, and the cat's asleep on the hearth, Aminta'll sweep around her, rather than rout her up."

Squire Evan laughed like a boy. "Well—I suppose that isn't good house-keeping, but it shows she has a kind heart."

"Oh, yes, Minto always was a tender-hearted little thing," Mrs. Loveday admitted, justly, "and as affectionate as a lamb. I haven't any doubt she let the children run over her—that's why she couldn't manage any of the schools she's had; but it comes hard on Dorinda. I tell you, Evan, there's a manager, and she'll contrive to pay off that mortgage yet, single handed; I never felt uneasy about it, myself."

"Nor I," Evan returned, carelessly, "and shouldn't, if she were not to pay it at all. I'd gladly hand her over the papers to-morrow, or burn them; but she wouldn't agree to that."

"No, indeed; she'd insist on paying it, sooner or later. But Evan," the old lady, who had been tranquilly darning stockings, began to ply her needle more rapidly, to hide a bit of embarrassment, "I've thought often of a fine way you could get rid of that whole business of the mortgage, and it'd be a benefit all around. You're getting on a bit, my boy; I'm reckoning you'll be forty your next birthday, and it's fourteen years since Effie died. I'm not saying but that I'm plenty able to keep house for you for years to come; still, it looks to me like it wouldn't be more than wise for you to be picking out some one to step in, somebody that would know how to keep house and take care of things. Hannah's a tip-top hand to turn out work, but she can't plan worth a cent; and every time she has to go over the ridge to look after her mother I find it harder to get on with the work. It would be a comfort to have some one here, and I don't know who'd fit into the space as well as Dorinda Vine."

Notwithstanding the menacing ap-

proach of his fortieth birthday, Squire Loveday was a good deal of a boy, and at his mother's last words he colored boyishly. "I'll think it over, mother," he said, with a slight laugh, as he walked out to the shady side yard of his comfortable country home. His mother's advice had fallen into soil prepared for it by some half-recognized consciousness in his own mind. He respected Miss Dorinda Vine as a woman of fine character; she was handsome, too; in a mature way, for Dorinda was as close to thirty-eight as Evan Loveday was to forty. So far, the Squire had escaped any fervor of romantic attraction, but, he said to himself, that was doubtless because he was not a young man, and the romance of his nature had been lavished upon the young wife he had lost fourteen years ago. That, however, need not prevent his offering his hand and loyal affection to another woman; he needed a wife, and Orchard Hill needed a mistress younger than his mother. "Perhaps I'll step over, one of these days, and have a talk with her," Squire Evan decided, looking thoughtfully at the tall rosebush that swayed heavily with its great knots of dark crimson bloom.

Aminta Vine's latest home-coming was not made a festive occasion. Miss Dorinda felt that it was her duty to impress her sister with some wholesome though unattractive truths; she considerably deferred her lecture, however, until the close of the noon luncheon.

"Indeed, I did try," Aminta protested, earnestly, "but the scholars were all so big and strong and noisy, and one of the directors happened to drop in when they were behaving worse than usual, and he reported that I didn't keep order. Then the Board wanted a class started in Geometry, and you know I never was very strong in that—"

"I know all about it," Dorinda interrupted her sister's weak explanations. "There's no use going into the whys and wherefores; you're simply a failure—that's all there is about it. It's worse this time, because I was depending on your salary to pay the interest on the mortgage note, which is due, and this is the first time I haven't had it on hand; you know why—"

"Y—yes, I know," Aminta began to gather up the dishes with tremulous hands, and very red cheeks; she recollected guiltily well, that the interest money had gone to pay the doctor for setting the ankle she had dislocated by jumping out of the hay loft, and for attending her during the fever that followed. Aminta Vine was all of thirty years of age, yet she still retained the youthful instinct to romp, greatly to Dorinda's annoyance; and the younger sister had good cause to feel sensitive over the hay-loft accident. "Do you think," she asked, piling the plates and saucers together rather unsteadily, "that Squire Loveday will mind waiting for the interest a little longer, this time?"

"I wish you would leave the dishes alone," Miss Dorinda quickly undid her sister's work; "you get everything done. Of course Squire Loveday will never say a word about the interest, but that is not the point. I do wish you were able to do anything. If you had been capable of attending to the place and the housekeeping, I should have gone out to teach, and I can assure you there would have been no such absurd faults found with my management. But you couldn't even do the work in the house properly—take care, you're setting that sprigged bowl on the edge of the table. Mercy-me, do stop fussing around with the dishes; you make me nervous."

As Miss Dorinda's exhortations seasoned the daily meals of her younger sister through the lapse of weeks, life became something of a wilderness to the latter. One morning, however, she returned from an orchard stroll with the light of hope in her soft, grayish-blue eyes. "I've thought of something I can do," she announced, cheerfully, "that will help out the interest on the note. You know we heard Hannah's mother was sick and she had to go and nurse her. Well, I'll go and do her work for Mrs. Loveday, and let it go on the mortgage."

Dorinda was taking a loaf of fresh-baked bread from the pan; when she had placed it evenly upon the wire tray to cool, she looked at her sister with a sarcastic smile. "Mrs. Loveday being one of the best housekeepers in Avoca Valley," she observed dryly, "I presume your messy little dabs at housekeeping would amply satisfy her!"

Aminta turned away in disappoint-



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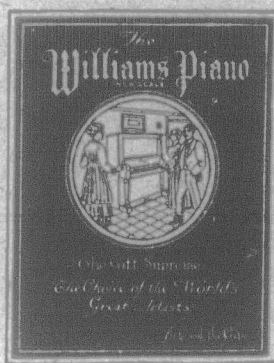
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