

POWER LOT

A Story of "Down East"

BY SARAH McLEAN GREENE.

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CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

"Correct. The sun has laid her pink-ruffled, rosy-fluted nightcap onto the pillar o' rest all ready to put on the minute she's set the buckwheat cakes to raise, an' the codfish to soak, an' wound the clock, an' turned in. Pigs is squealin' from the pen, cows is mooin' from the pastur'. Hand me over that thar' bedquilt; let's heave the rest o' this tangled, loonatic-asylum, crow's nest lot o' truck into 'er, an' call it a mess. Here we be—a whole quilt full. What 'm I bid? Sight unseen—treasures o' the mine, gems o' the ocean, products o' man's inventive natur' the world-over—swell-bodied pickle dish, Aunt Lucindy's hymn book, crock o' tallow fat, tin lantern with one hinge on, fact'ry-turned butter print representin' five mice an' a dung-shovel, cullender f'r strainin' squash with the bottom right handy to it all ready to be soddered in, harf a spoonholder patterned arfter the tower o' Babbie, lots o' little pieces o' ch'ice imported East Chelsy china jest fit to milk the ducks into—all here—an' I ain't begun ter name 'em. Start 'er up, somebody. What 'm I bid? Seven cent—ten cent—my kinkdom come, you folks want the 'arth for nothin'?"

"Jest let me show ye—take this 'ere quilt full, an' tie 'er up, so-fashion, an' when ye git 'er home, nail 'er up to the beam, an' stan' off an' strike 'er with a mawlet, an' she'll make a rattle that 'ud stop the yop of a whole houseful o' bawlin' babies an' put 'em ter sleep in no time. What 'm I bid for this 'ere original, long-pendulum, giganatical, cyclone-avalanche, dynamite, thunder an' lightnin', Niagry baby-rattler? Twelve cent—thirteen cent—fifteen cent—fifteen—fifteen—an' gone—to Mis' Homer Millet—at fifteen cent. An' well done, say I. Now, then, meetin's broke up. Thank ye for yer kind attention. Farewell. Adew—an' all the rest o' the s'ciety trimmin's. But the excitement was not yet over. For Dose Ellery's horse, exasperated by his long and tedious anchorage to a fence-post, at the first loosening of the hitchline had backed into the adjacent barn and smashed the tail-board of the wagon and with it the rickety incubator which Dose had bid off early in the afternoon as a mysterious prize which was to sprinkle his dooryard with early chickens.

"Never mind, Dose," said Captain Belcher unofficially, on his way from the auction ground. "It's money in yer pocket ter git shet o' the thing. Now look here," he lifted a row of mathematical fingers. "Ye paid twenty-five cents f'r that ol' fool-wrack o' an artificial breeder, didn't ye? An' ye'd a rot-roasted about fifteen dozen o' eggs in 'er fore ye'd a give 'er up as a bad job an' kicked 'er to the sunny side o' Jericho. Eggs at this present minute is ten cents a dozen. Reckon on 'er up, an' ye're a dollar an' a quarter to the good, Dose; say nothin' of the bad langwidgie pilin' up ag'in ye in the ledger what's so full now 't the leds to the cover won't hardly stay shet. You take that dollar an' a quarter and git some oats f'r the old hoss what's been savin' ye good money."

"You can talk, Belcher," said the sorrowful Dose: "twan't your money nor your incubator."

"I wouldn't set up any pelly-loo over it, Dose," said the woman with the quiltful of treasures, and she paused so that their rattling might not obstruct the wisdom and condolence of her speech. "The A' mighty has writ it down an' set it goin', that the 's nothin' like a old hen to raise chickens; an' when you go ag'in natur, you've got your

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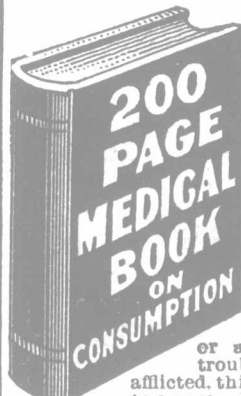
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hands full—you've got 'em too full."

"I know that the A'mighty set it goin' that the 's nothin' like a old hen to raise chickens, but I never heered afore that He writ it down," said Belcher.

"Well, He did so," said the woman of the quilt; and she was one of the sort that could face out Belcher or any other mortal.

"Whar' abouts?"

"In the Bible, Stu Belcher. That's whar'."

"I seen it thar,' myself," said a meek little woman, who was the quilt-woman's next-door neighbor, and had acquired a wise habit of courting her good-will perennially and conciliating her on all occasions.

"What part o' the Bible?" persisted the foolhardy and thunderous Belcher.

"You open the leds o' yourn, ef you've got one, an' read tell you come to it," said the quilt-woman; "an' you'll see some more things there that you never heern tell on afore, Stu Belcher."

She went rattling down the road, the meek woman maintaining a gait of stout partisanship at her side.

"That's a cute gal," said Belcher, pointing his finger after her, to Rob, who, dispossessed of the babies, but with his lilacs still in hand, approached at this moment. My mother an' father kind o' wanted me ter make up to 'er when we was young folks together, but I kind o' ducked my flyin'-jib an' wriggled out o' the channel, an' laid by in the cove till the danger was over, an' she got spliced onto somebody else."

Captain Belcher, being in a meditative mood, regarded Rob and his wilted lilacs with unusual pensiveness and interest.

"This gittin' spliced is a risky business, Rob. Ye seem to think a good deal o' yer flowers. Old Mis' Skipper giv' 'em to ye?"

"Yes."

"She's of the natur' of laylocks herself; so's Mis' Belcher, my woman; but the old gal heavin' out o' sight over yander, she's more like them other flowers ye're holdin'."

"The delilahs and pineys?"

"Aye; though I suppose the proper way ter pronounce 'em is dallyers an' pe-o-nys; all the same, they're a flauntin' high-steppin' sassy kind o' flower. Cuby, now—Cuby Tee-booo—she's a good deal on the dallyer. An' pe-o-ny line."

Rob's face was fine and sad; his stalwart physical development at Power Lot, God Help Us, had edified Captain Belcher beyond measure; it was a winsome face, too, and Captain Belcher spoke again.

"Perhaps—I ain't saying nothin'," he continued, guardedly; "but I'm goin' ter look inter some matters o' law a leetle, an' ef it don't make none o' the innercent folks 'round here liable, and ef Cuby kind o' huffs ye off an' gives ye the cold shoulder, way she done ter-day—mebby it c'n be proved 't that old loafin' demmy-rip of a jestice o' the peace what was asked ter jine you two warn't in no condition for the job, in which case you could each go your own way hawk-free an' freedom-wild. I ain't promisin' nothin', but I'm mixing up my tar with an eye to seein' what c'n be done. F'r I like ye, Rob. Ye ain't no nincompoop sech as I thought ye might be when ye first hove in sight; ye're as honest an' stanch a young craft as I ever hailed, an' d-d ef I wouldn't like ter see ye free ter selec' somethin' tasty in the line of a laylock f'r a partner, f'r I reckon ye kind o' favor 'em, same as I do."

Rob smiled as he took the Captain's friendly outstretched hand, although he made no confidences of his own. He pursued his solitary way up the Steeps in a leisurely manner, often pausing, having no incentive for hastening to any waiting heart the world over, and night having settled down on the potato patch and every other field of labor. He saw Mrs. Byjo piloting her boarder home from the evening they had spent with Mary. He reached the Stingaree

(Continued on next page.)