

ing with her aunt, but the reader will not be surprised to hear that she had views of learning the milliner's trade.

Spring seemed to be coming early that year; the sap had started in good season in the maple-trees, and the snow was going off steadily. Easter was neither very early nor very late, and winter was departing with unusual gentleness. The weekly newspaper spoke of a very early spring indeed, farther south in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and told wondrous tales of first blue-birds and the astonishing flight of wild geese.

But in Walsingham there was plenty of snow in the woods and along the fences. The renewal of life along the fields, the bloom of color in the wintry thickets, the reddening willows and the brown buds gave the same old pleasure and sense of spring-like hopefulness. After a day or two of warm rain and the swift departure of both frost and snow, the brooks began to run, and the children began to play beside them, and all the waggon-wheels in Walsingham seemed to be trying to see which should carry the most mud on their spokes.

It was the first week in April. Easter fell upon the eighth; and in spite of the muddy roads the weather was so lovely that everybody, old and young, began to venture out to pay visits or to do errands. It had rained so hard all day on Sunday that there were very few people at church, but by the quick and efficient means of telegraphy which prevail in country neighborhoods, it was hardly Monday noon before the most remote parish heard the news that the minister was going to have an Easter service, and a Sunday-school sermon.

Many young people were summoned to the parsonage Tuesday and Friday and Saturday nights to practice, and already the minister had sent Sarah McFarland a long piece of poetry, that she might have time to learn it. She was by far the best speaker among the young people, and had often figured in both school and Sunday-school to the delight of everybody. She had a clear, pretty voice, and she gave the lines she repeated with a good deal of natural dramatic talent. You never thought how well she spoke, but only how beautiful or interesting the poetry was, which is the best praise one can ever give.

The messenger who brought the book was Mrs. Martin, a lively, talkative person, who lived near the parsonage.

'Seems as if we were right on edge o' summer this warm day,' she said, unfastening her heavy shawl and unbuttoning the winter jacket under it.

'Yes,' said Sarah McFarland's mother, 'but you do right not to dress too thin driving in this damp air, Mrs. Martin.'

'I must be thinking of spring,' returned the guest. 'I hear there's goin' to be a number o' new spring bonnets appear out on Easter Sunday. Mis' Folsom got hers, and so did her sister, Mis' Pease, when they were to Portland, and they said 'twas earlier than usual to lay off winter things, but they didn't know but they might wear 'em if it continued pleasant like this. 'Twould sort of mark the day; and I've heard of others.'

Sarah McFarland's heart felt as heavy as lead. It had never occurred to her that the looked-for day of change had already come, when she could stow away that obnoxious old velvet bonnet and hope that every moth in Walsingham would get a bite of it before another year. But she had nothing to wear in its place.

She kept giving eager glances at her mother, the quick color kept coming and

going in her cheeks during Mrs. Martin's visit, and she listened only with half-interest to the plans for the Easter service in which, it seemed, John Tanner, as well as herself, had consented to take part.

All our heroine's pleas for a new bonnet were unheeded by her father, who said that he was hard pressed for money, and she must wait for what she wanted until the first of May. He was not a stingy man, but Sarah was old enough to know that he was hard pressed oftentimes.

She gave a quick sob of disappointment before she thought, and said, 'O father, I wouldn't tease you, but I've got to speak Sunday, and stand right up in front before everybody in that dreadful old bonnet of Aunt Sarah's. It does look so, father!'

John McFarland turned just as he was hurrying out at the door and looked at her kindly.

'I think my little girl looks pretty in anything,' he said.

Then both felt very shy, and he hurried away still faster, stumbling down the step after he spoke.

Sarah felt only half-appeased then, but it was something she was going to remember with happiness all her life long—her father's speaking so.

The days flew by until Saturday, and the spring weather held to its bright intent; sometimes the soft mist covered the country and hid the distant hills, and then the spring sun came out again.

Sarah had learned her long Easter poem and they had had the last rehearsal the night before. John Tanner had a beautiful tenor voice and was going to sing a solo. People talked of nothing but the Easter service.

It has already been said that Sarah McFarland had four younger sisters. The two elder ones were steady, school-going girls of twelve and fourteen; and then there was another pair much younger, of whom the larger, Esther by name, was a naughty person. She had now reached the age of seven years, and there was hardly a day that she did not lead little Eunice, a mild and timid child of five, into some sort of danger and mischief. They were too young to walk all the distance to school, but Mrs. McFarland said that Esther must go with the elder sisters when the summer term began.

One of Esther's last diversions had been to build dams in a neighboring brook, which was now in high flood. Now, when she was kept indoors because Eunice had got such a cold that it almost threatened the expense of a doctor, she had begun to play gaily that she was grown up and wearing trains.

Mrs. McFarland found her own best dress parading to and fro in the long wood-shed. Esther's head was high in air, and as she turned to behold the regal appearance of the train behind, which was already adorned with a fringe of little pine chips, she trod perilously into the front breadth at almost every step. Mrs. McFarland rescued the dress and spoke sharply to Esther, who couldn't quite understand such a needless excitement, or why she need be called a little torment.

'I will get something o' Sarah's,' she said, 'Sarah is real pleasant, and I'll play out-o'-doors again this afternoon. Eunice has got to stay in.' Later this bad little girl departed toward her favorite play-place in the pasture, clothed in a summer dress of her sister Sarah's, which she had, with unusual thoughtfulness, pinned up into clumsy festoons. She also wore the green velvet bonnet, set very much on one side, and the

worn-out feathers flapped weakly as she ran.

The bonnet lurched about, and if it had not been for the glory of being dressed up like a grown lady Esther could not have borne it on her head so long.

Presently, having discovered the brook to be in a glorious state, with sticks to dislodge and scamper after down the rushing stream, she was obliged to remove the heavy velvet bonnet, which bobbed over her eyes at inconvenient moments, and hung it scornfully to an alder bough and went her happy way.

At supper-time she appeared hungry and happy. She bethought herself to steal into the bedroom unobserved and hang Sister Sarah's summer dress in its place. It was splashed and muddy, and torn where she had pinned it up.

'I think it looks like a shower,' said Mr. McFarland, as they sat down to supper that Saturday night.

It did rain all night long, a searching rain that pattered steadily against the windows after it once began; and it rained half the next day, to everybody's dismay, but Sunday noon it cleared off bright and pleasant.

Sarah McFarland had been trying to forget about bonnets, but it was impossible. While it rained she was partly consoled, but when April began to smile she began to feel sad again. Her father was putting in the horse, and all the family were ready to go, even pale little Eunice, whose cold was better.

Suddenly Sarah came out into the kitchen to tell her mother that the velvet bonnet could nowhere be found.

There was a sudden consternation; they were already afraid of being late, and to everybody's surprise Esther began to cry.

'I was playing queen, and I dressed me up, an' I wore her old bonnet down by the brook, and it got in my eyes, so I taked it off, an' it's there now in a bush, an' it'll be all rained on!' Esther mourned aloud and lifted up her voice with her usual unaffected contrition at such moments.

'You dreadful little girl!' said Sarah. 'Why, I must stay at home, and who'll speak my piece?' Esther was frightened for once in her life.

'You've got to go, Sarah,' said her mother. 'Where's that pretty best hood o' Martha's that her aunt sent her?'

'Take my hat,' said Martha, 'and I'll wear the hood.' But Martha had a piece to speak, too.

It was a terrible emergency. Their father was calling. Martha hastily brought the white hood with its blue border and glittering beads; it had been sent only a week or two before for her birthday. Aunt Sarah was always peculiar about her presents.

For a moment this seemed more than a girl's heart could bear. Then Sarah thought that it was too bad to make everybody else miserable. She had a great tenderness for little Esther, who looked up at her so broken-spirited; the child hadn't meant to do wrong.

'Yes, I'll wear the hood; it's real light and pretty,' she said, gallantly, and they were all so happy at that sad moment's end.

Nobody thought for a minute of making Esther stay at home; they all crowded into the big two-seated waggon, but poor Sarah felt like crying all the way to church.

It was really a terrible ordeal to go up the aisle to the speakers' seats that faced the audience, wearing a white winter hood. Just as they were going into the church, which already looked full of people, Mrs. Martin, who seemed to be chief marshal,