

Occasional Papers.
SOME CHARACTER SKETCHES.
No. II.

A Way-faring Couple.

I am glad that our editor should have selected and made room in our issue of the 1st September for the insertion in full of one of the sketches by Mary E. Wilkins, from the very series about which, not knowing of her intention, I had already written, but too early for publication, my first little recommendatory article. Seeing that two of us are of one mind regarding these stories of Miss Wilkins, I have the less hesitation in introducing to you another couple, as complete a contrast to Joe Daggett and Louisa Ellis as they are to Adoniram and Sarah Penn, in the "Revolt of Mother." This sketch is called "A Way-faring Couple." Araminta May is waiting for her husband David to return from his work at the cotton mills. Their home is one of a long row of cheap houses stretched on each side of a narrow, dusty street, which had been built for the operatives, and before each was a little square of ground fenced in. Some were miniature vegetable gardens. Araminta had hers all planted with flowers, coarse and gaudy rather than delicate, but her taste ran that way. Some morning glories climbed up on strings towards the front windows, Araminta's great ambition being to have them thickly screened. "Folks can't look in and see us eat them," she said. The whistle had blown—men and girls straggled home, turning into this yard and that with an air of content. Araminta had been one of them before her marriage, but now David had said, "His wife might do his washing, ironing and cooking, but she should not work for other people so long as he had his two hands."

Every cent he could spare went to "rig Minty up." He could not bear to see her in a poor gown, so she dressed as punctiliously as if she had been a fine lady, "against Davy comes home," not, perhaps, in very good taste, for she somewhat preferred the cheaply gorgeous to more simple attire. To-day, when we first see her, Araminta has on a flimsy blue muslin, with a good many flowers and a lot of wide cotton lace upon it. Her father, a country minister on a pitiful salary, had died early, leaving his motherless child to shift as best she could, partly dependant, partly working her way, until at eighteen she married David. Since then all had gone merrily. Araminta hitherto had been more than content with her butterfly life, but opportunity was soon to be given to her to prove the existence of higher qualities, and that through no blame due to David. And this is how it all came about:

She had got ready a little extra tea to-night, a pie and some hot biscuits. "I'm awful glad you've come," she said, when a stout, curly-headed young fellow loomed up in the doorway. "The biscuits is all gettin' cold. What made you so late; it ain't pay night?" "No," said David, "it's turnin' off night. I've got turned off," and he dropped into a chair, resting his elbows upon his knees and holding his head in his two hands, in an attitude of extreme dejection. "It's some of Lem Wheellocks' doin's. If any fellow but him had been foreman, I'd ha' kept my place. He's always had a spite again' me, and I'll be hanged if I know the reason why." But Araminta knew the cause of Lem Wheellocks' grudge against her husband. Further on we are told that "there never was the least danger of David May's knowing anything which other people did not want him to know. The motives underlying people's actions were to him as the geological strata beneath the surface of the earth. He simply went along through life looking at the snow or the flowers, but thinking nothing of the fire or the gold which might lie beneath them." "The boss jest called me in," he continued, "and told me they didn't need me no more, and paid me just what was owing me, ten dollars. I dunno what Wheellocks' been tellin' him, and I don't care. Ef he wants me to go, I'll go. I ain't goin' to whine, and teaze him for work. I've got a little feelin', ef I ain't one of the upper crust." The worst of it is, Minty, I dunno how we're going to live or

where I'll get work. It's mighty dull times now. It's a mean kind of a box I've got you into."

"Now, don't you go to talkin' like that, David May! I don't want to hear it. Get up and wash you now, and eat your supper; the biscuits are all getting cold."

"The poor fellow got up, threw his arms around his wife's waist, and leaned his head upon her shoulder. She was as tall as he. 'Oh, Minty, I didn't know but you'd be fur goin' back on me, and blamin' me because I'd hed such bad luck. Some women do.'

"I ain't some women, then, but I will be, if you go suspectin' me of it again."

And this was the episode in their lives which made of them for the time being "A Way-faring Couple," and brought out in both characteristics hitherto unsuspected by themselves, or even by anyone who had previously known them. The casual observer on watching the young couple start out on their hundred-mile

tramp would naturally have supposed that the wife would have proved the weaker vessel, and the husband, sturdier of frame and stouter of limb, would have had the greater staying power, but it came about otherwise, the intense affection each bore for the other working diversely, making the weaker one strong and the stronger one weak.

By the magic of her graphic pen, Miss Wilkins makes us almost eyewitnesses of the departure of David and Minty May from their home in the small rural manufacturing town of Saundersville, in the hope of finding work at White River, a hundred miles away, or failing that, at Waterbury, some fifty miles further on.

She shows us Minty, with her basket of eatables, crowned with an enormous

bouquet of zinnias, marigolds and baysams. In the pocket of her blue dress she has placed her chief treasures, her little stock of cheap jewellery, and her two keepsakes, in remembrance of her father and mother—a Greek Testament, "father's book," and a tiny pincushion, made from a bit of mother's wedding-dress. David carries the few clothes they could not do without in a carpet bag. He had tried to make Minty draw upon their ten dollars of capital to defray her expenses by rail, whilst he made the journey on foot, an arrangement of which she would not even hear. She laughed at the idea of the journey hurting her; it would be fun. And here, at this crisis of their fate, most reluctantly we leave our story until another issue.

H. A. B.

(To be continued.)

"The great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps, with perfect sweetness, the independence of solitude." —Emerson.



A Game of Skill.

First-prize picture, camera competition. Photo by A. R. Knight, Woodstock, Ont.

One of Japan's Jewels.

The great attraction of Kamakura and one of the jewels of Japan is the Daibutsu, or great bronze Buddha. We approach it through a tree-lined avenue and get the first and best view of it at a distance of some 200 feet. It is a sitting figure, 49 feet 7 inches high, 97 feet 2 inches in circumference. The face is 8 feet 5 inches long and from ear to ear 17 feet 9 inches wide. The eyes, which are pure gold, are nearly 2 feet long. The circumference of the thumb is 3 feet. These figures give some idea of the size, and the figure is elevated on a stone platform, some 12 or 15 feet above the person approaching it. But no description can convey an idea of the majesty of the face. It is bent gently forward as if in brooding contemplation of the infinite. It represents perfect peace—the repose of the attained Nirvana.—[Sel.]



On the Aux Sable River, Middlesex Co., Ont.

Second-prize picture, camera competition. Photo by Wesley Morley, Brinsley, Ont.