

'Ma' and the 'General Pike' Pitcher.

(By Grace Margaret Gallaher, in 'Youth's Companion'.)

'Mother,' the rocking-chair by the gate sounded slightly displeased with things, 'do you feel promptings to the strenuous life?'

'In what form?' The steamer chair on the piazza was evidently inviting a nap.

'Um—er—say golf; I haven't played for days.'

'Golf! A mile across lots to the links and three miles round them! Ask Lois.'

'Lois is in one of her now-you-see-me-and-now-you-don't moods. I can't find—'

The stones on the wall rattled, and through the swaying rows of sweet peas came a breathless voice.

'The most wonderful find—right here—Joe says we can drive easily—now, to-day—for fear some one breaks it—'

'A 1697 carved chest or a hood-top high-boy?' The tone would have dampened any but a true enthusiast.

'It's a "General Pike" pitcher!' There was a pause for every one to take in the great news.

'And we yearn for a General Pike pitcher above all earthly joys?'

'Alas, the ignorance of one's own kin!' said Lois, coming out of the sweet peas.

'Listen, Bess. It's one of the oldest and rarest pieces of native china. I've never even seen one, and father has hunted years for one. Think of its being up in this little Vermont village!'

'Who told you?' queried Bess.

'The postmistress. I asked her about old furniture and china the first day I came. I've just been down to the village. She was visiting up on the "Pond Meadow Hill" last week and saw an old pitcher in one of the houses; she can't remember whose, but she wrote down the name of the pitcher. Joe is willing to take us right up there now in the jolly-boat.'

Driven by Lois's impetuosity, the aunt and the cousin packed themselves and their remonstrances into the jolly-boat, a waggon of mixed architecture but unlimited capacity, and counselled Joe, owner of the vehicle, to drive to the Pond Meadow Hill.

The sun still stood over Haystack Mountain, but 'the sleep that lies among the lonely hills' was already creeping down its slope. Mrs. Gerard and Bess enjoyed the September beauty in silence. Lois brooded lovingly over the prize yet to be captured.

Lois's father possessed all the requisites for happiness but health. Shut out from the things of action, he gave his life to the things of the mind. A boyhood passed in an English village had given him a love for all the links that hold us to the past.

He dived in old records and gathered about him the antiquities of every country. He and his daughter had spent many days in little outworn villages picking up relics, curious or valuable.

At first Lois loved the old things because her father did, but gradually the collector's passion burned in her own breast.

Thus far perseverance had been forced to be its own reward. The 1697 chest was genuine indeed, so genuine it crumbled feebly away under the ministrations of the freight-handlers. The hooded highboy

proved to be wearing a head-gear not its own, and legs at least one hundred years too juvenile for it. The 'Pittsfield Elm' plate revealed to the unfriendly daylight cracks seaming it from side to side.

Other calamitous disabilities appeared mysteriously in all Lois's treasures. But she was of the stuff of which martyrs and



SHE BORE A SQUAT, BROWNISH PITCHER.

collectors are made. Each new expedition was 'a triumph of hope over experience.'

Mixed with the pure gold of her antiquarian passion was, it must be told, the dross of wounded pride. It was hard to be met always at the end of each hunt by the wise smiles of her father and his friends, and their 'You see, my dear, a genuine platter would have—' or 'You never find a really old chair with those marks on—'

'I do hope it hasn't a great bite out of it, like the George Third tureen!' said Lois to herself.

'Here's Pond Meadow,' announced Joe, pointing to open fields which stretched away from a mountain lake. A few houses stood along the grassy road.

'Let's begin here!' cried Lois, nodding at a rambling old farm-house, shining white



'MA'D GET RIGHT UP AND POUR US OUT A MUG TO COOL US OFF.'

and clean in the afternoon sun. There's an old man on the porch.'

'I quake, Lois,' whispered Bess. 'He looks like Jupiter in the Flaxman Homer.'

Evidently even the Olympians are as naught to your collector, for Lois was already saying in beguiling tones:

'Good afternoon, sir! We are very much interested in old-fashioned furniture, and we thought perhaps you had some we might look at.'

'No, ma'am,' replied the old man, with surprising quickness, 'I ain't, but if I had you should have it so quick you wouldn't know who you be. Me an' my wife we perfectly hate it. Just look in thar, if you want to know what we favor for furniture.'

He opened the door into a low, old room, with crooked windows and billowy floor.

'Oh!' cried the visitors, in anguish.

Red plush chairs and gilded tables crowded every space; huge chromos in vivid frames covered the walls.

'All our taste,' rejoiced the owner. 'No old traps for us. But some folks has other notions. Let 'em have 'em and welcome, I say. If you're thet sort, you'd better go to Miss Polly Ann Pettis; her folks has been here longer'n any one. Right to the end of the road she lives.'

The road soon grew to be no road at all, only a wide meadow running to the edge of the hill. Right at the end of things clung a little, low house, gray and moss-grown, its bit of a dooryard aflame with autumn flowers, asters, nasturtiums, hollyhocks and zinnias.

'Your dear!' whispered Lois. 'How nice to get it from such a place!'

The kitchen gate and door stood cordially open. The three peeped in as Lois knocked.

There must have been all over New England hundreds of such kitchens in the days of Adams and Jefferson. Absolutely clean, bare of all but necessities, and those of the clumsiest fashion, it spoke of toil and poverty.

But the little woman who entered from another door was eloquent of greater things. Her white hair and heavy wrinkles were defied by her straight shoulders and her eyes, in which burned immortal youth.

'Good afternoon!' She answered their greetings in a bright little voice. 'Won't you walk into the fore-room?'

A touch of pride in her voice made them look eagerly about; here might be treasures. It was only the humblest of sitting-rooms, with no carpet on the unpainted boards. Yet it represented Miss Polly's best; therefore her pride in it.

'A real pleasant day for a ride,' she began.

'Yes,' answered Lois's aunt. 'We are having beautiful weather.'

Lois, with the tact that was the wonder of the girls, divined the desire for information that would not satisfy itself by questioning.

'We are spending the summer down in Searsboro,' she said. 'We heard you had some old furniture we could look at.'

Miss Polly sat straighter. 'Just look around you. Everything's old. I'm most as old as the rest.'

'We heard of a General Pike pitcher; perhaps you know about it,' said Mrs. Gerard, who saw no reason for wasting time in overtures.

Miss Polly vanished to the kitchen. When she appeared she bore a squat, brownish and—to the unenlightened mind—ugly pitcher.

'Oh!' cried Lois. Her eyes began to glitter with the collector's joy. She received it into her hands as if it were a sacred vessel. The most searching examination proved it flawless, without crack or nick.

The heart of the young collector fairly bounded. Here was a relic of bygone his-