



NEVER lose an opportunity to see something beautiful. Beauty is God's handwriting.—Kingsley.

## Militant Mother

(Farm and Home.)

BY ARVILLA BELLE DAVIS

THE kitchen clock struck four, and with a regretful sigh Mother laid down the April number of "The Housewife's Friend," wherein she had been reading a graphic and interesting article concerning the grievances of "John Bull's Militant Daughters."

"I don't believe in women's rights," she soliloquized, as she enveloped her anguished, middle-aged figure in the voluminous folds of a huge gingham apron, in anticipation of her task of preparing the evening meal, "but if them Englishmen are bound they won't give their womenfolk whatever it is they want. I don't know as I blame the women so very much for trying to make 'em pony up, though it does seem as if they might find some way of getting what they want without smashing windows and burning down houses and starving themselves to death in jail."

"Now, if I wanted anything," she continued, gazing into the depths of a huge wooden box, "and I wanted it as bad as them English women want to vote, I bet a cent I could find a better way than that of overcoming any objections that might seem to stand in the way of me getting it. But I wouldn't fight. No sir! I believe a woman can get whatever she needs or wants without a row. If she can't, seems to me she ain't any too smart."

Having settled the "suffrage question" at least to her own satisfaction, Mother explored the cavernous depths of the wood box only to find it as empty as "Mother Hubbard's" famous cupboard.

Out in the yard the puff-puff of a gasoline engine and the ping-whizz of a saw mingled with the cheerful voices of Father and "the boys," as they were busy sawing wood with the new engine. Mother considerably refrained from mentioning the condition of the wood box. Instead, basket in hand, she went out to gather chips among the debris of the wood pile.

Fourteen-year-old Bob hailed her appearance with a joyous shout. "Come and see the new engine, Mother, she's a peach! Just see her chew up that wood pile! Father says she's the best helper he ever had in his life. She'll turn the grindstone, too. Father hitched her on to it this afternoon and ground the scythes and sharpened the corn knives, and after supper he's going to hitch her on to the barn pump and fill the tank chock full. Hurrah! no more sawing wood and pumping water by hand on this farm!" And Bob stood on his head and waved his long legs in the air as a fitting expression of his unqualified approval.

Somehow, for once, the joyous chorus found no echo in Mother's heart. It may have been the gorgeous paint and aggressive puff-puff of the little red engine that annoyed

her, it may have been mere feminine jealousy at hearing another "she" so enthusiastically praised and admired. Whatever the contributory causes may have been, certain it is that on that day and hour the needs of militancy took root in Mother's patient heart.

Nobody had ever called Mother "a peach" for doing her duty faithfully and well. Nobody had ever told her she was "the best helper in the world," even though for more than twenty years she had, daily and almost hourly, performed tasks that did not rightfully devolve upon her to do—many of them things that should



All Caresses Cheerfully Accepted

have been done by the stronger hands of Father and the boys.

"I never did believe in women's rights," she soliloquized again, as she poured some kerosene over the chips and reached for a match, "but I—I don't know but there may be something in it after all. Here I've been teasing all these years for a pump in the kitchen and—" gazing reflectively at the bottom of an empty water pail—so far I've got about as much attention paid to me as the Home Secretary paid to them English women. I wonder—"

But what Mother wondered about was lost when she disappeared with a water pail in each hand. Returning she set the pails of water in their accustomed place, filled the tea kettle, made the biscuits, fetched jam and cheese from the cellar, and hung a clean towel on the "roller" with mechanical precision.

Father and the boys came in to supper and still the new engine was the all-engrossing topic.

"She'll save her cost in less than six months," boasted Jim.

"And I won't have to turn the grindstone," exulted Bob.

"I hope she won't forget what she's told to do," said Frank, with a significant look at his younger brother who in his excitement had forgotten to grease the wagon in preparation for to-morrow's trip to market.

"She hasn't a fault that I can

see," added Father, and so the talk went on.

An observant spectator might have noticed the unusual spark that glowed and scintillated behind Mother's spectacles; but Father and the boys were accustomed to leaving her entirely out of the reckoning, and they did not see. The "praise service" was still in full swing when they took their hats and went out to connect the new engine with the barn pump.

After Mother had washed the dishes and strained the milk, and fed the cat, and shut up the hens, and set the bread to rise, she stood on the steps gazing long and reflectively at the weather-beaten pump in the back yard, and listening to the aggressive puff-puff that resounded from the barn. Gradually the angry glow behind her spectacles melted into an amiable smile, and the corners of her patient mouth widened into a comprehensive and somewhat diabolical grin. But Father and the boys saw nothing unusual in the quiet little woman who lighted the sitting-room lamp when they came, and sat in her special chair mending stockings all the evening.

A neighbor dropped in for a chat and they talked of the weather, the crops, the prospects of the war, and of many other things, but most of all they talked about the new engine—of the help it would be to them, the time and labor and money it would save for potum, etc., etc.

And all the while that peculiar, comprehensive, diabolical little smile played hide-and-go-seek with the wrinkles on Mother's face—and they did not see!

Next morning Father and the boys

"Well, now, Jim," chirped Mother, "I'm awfully sorry, but you see, when the engine sawed up last night, it clean forgot to spit and fill the wood box up, and the fire went out before I got things cooked."

Jim looked at Frank, Frank looked at Bob, and Bob glanced appreciatively at his father, who was joking regarding Mother, while an appreciative grin struggled with a paternal frown on his face. But Mother's placid countenance evinced no evidence of anything out of the ordinary, and after an awkward pause he chuckled: "Well, Mother, if you'll give us some coffee and a bit, I guess we can make out, and possibly the engine will cultivate a better memory to-day."

"Now, I'm awfully sorry, Thomas," purred Mother again, "really, it's too bad—but when that engine pumped the water up at the barn last night, it clean forgot to pump any into the water pail, so there ain't any coffee. But here's some milk; won't that do?"

Breakfast ended in a cyclone of laughter. Father gathered up an assortment of kitchen knives and disappeared with them. Jim followed with a water pail in each hand. Frank went up at the barn last night, he dustriously, while Bob trudged patiently back and forth between the wood pile and the kitchen. Soon a row of sharp knives glistened from the table, and a large water barrel filled full to overflowing reposed in stately grandeur just outside the door, and a cheerful fire roared and crackled in the brick stove.

With a comfortable sense of duty well performed, Father gathered up his reins and started for the city, the boys departed on their way to the corn lot, and the "Dove of Peace" folded her beautiful wings and nestled close to Mother's exultant heart. But, alas for Father! When he pulled the canvas cover from his load in preparation for a busy forenoon, he found that the winged sight was a stubby corn broom, worn nearly to the handle, reposing placidly on the very tip-top of his load, and pointing reproachfully into his very face.

"I wonder what she means by that?" he muttered in puzzled wonder. As if in answer, a row of vacuum cleaners smiled at him from a nearby window. He resisted their charm a long, long while, but before he started homeward he walked briskly across the street and disappeared beneath a sign that read "Household Furnishings."

But even a vacuum cleaner proved insufficient to appease Militant Mother, for the very next market day she calmly informed him that "that pesky engine forgot to churn for her, and in consequence there wasn't any butter for her customers—and in spite of the fact that she only did so before she had told him with every appearance of sincere regret that his trousers were not mended because "that pesky engine forgot to clean for the house and she had to do it herself, and didn't have time to do any mending in consequence."

The day before that he had placidly informed Jim that "the boys would have to eat a bit of the out of the cupboard for their dinner, because that miserable engine would not pump any water through a hose for her to wash the outside of the windows, and it took her a long time to wash them by hand."

Mother had never seen a washing machine outside of the pictures in the advertisements, and for 20 years she had washed once (sometimes twice) a week with a wooden tub and a plentiful supply of "elbow grease" and a zinc washboard. But she never batted an eye when she told Father and the boys there wasn't a clean

shirt in the house for her to wash in the city, because "I forgot to turn the dime for her," adding facetiously that "I was in a just when she was out."

One evening, barely after the little red engine, Father smoked a pipe with a neighbor and talked in for a chat. In the conversation he mentioned the gasoline engine. Cyranost you more money than when you buy it. I guess you will probably do it, that it can do more of the hard work figured on, too."

It was then that Mother laid down the April number of "The Housewife's Friend," and was re-reading a interesting article concerning the grievances of "John Bull's Militant Daughters." Over the spectacles she peered the faces of Father and Bob, and winked derisively.

As a rule, the folds are ironed very hard, course, will quickly cloth. There seems no life of the cloth is by. Few women need the position of the folds changed from time to time.

