

MY FIRST READER.

BY MARGARET EYTINGE.

I see a book. It is a First Reader. A First Reader is a book for very young children.

And being a book for very young children, containing in a condensed form the milk of literature, who would have imagined that it ever could have by any possibility become the means of bringing the greatest confusion and vexation to a grown-up? But it did. I, Samuella Golden, am that grown-up. And I am the author, or nearly the author (under the ablest supervision, I frankly confess), of that First Reader.

The way it came about was this. I have always been passionately fond of children. When but a decidedly small specimen of humanity myself I adored all the smaller specimens with whom I chanced to meet. At the tender age of six, there being then no baby at my own home, I deliberately entered the home of our washer-woman one day, knowing her to be absent at the time, and stole her five-months-old Patsy from the cradle in which he was peacefully sleeping, and in spite of his kicks and yells, when he awoke to the situation, I managed to carry him safely to our house—fortunately not far distant—and place him in the arms of my very much astonished mother. And when he was reclaimed and carried away again by his rightful owner, I sat me down on the floor with a bang, and pined my mouth to its utmost width, and lifted up my voice to its utmost height, and refused most emphatically to be comforted.

This love of little ones did not diminish in the least as I grew in stature and in years. On the contrary, it seemed to increase, and it became as natural for me to talk baby talk to and make baby rhymes for every wee darling that came in my way as it was for me to breathe. And for the older youngsters I had always a story ready—some simple thing about simple things, but, by virtue of creation, my own. And having contrived to be an unobserved listener to several of these stories, and having also learned from Sue, his little niece, that I "made up out of my own head" the jingles with which she often sought to entertain him, Mr. Erickson, our school-master—and a very clever fellow too—said to me one afternoon, "Miss Golden, I have undertaken a task in which I think—nay, I am sure—that you can, if you will, be of great assistance to me."

"And pray what may that task be?" asked I, wondering.

"The preparation of a First Reader," he replied. "I do not expect the pecuniary results to be princely, though no doubt you would realize enough to compensate you for whatever time you might expend; but the practice would be excellent for you, and perhaps open the way for better paying literary work."

"Literary work," repeated I. "Why, I never even dreamed of such a thing."

"Did you not?" he said, with a smile.

"Well, you are not the first person who has remained in ignorance of his or her particular talent until a friend discovered it. But are you willing to give me a helping hand with the book?"

"Most willing," said I. "Tell me plainly what I am to do, or to try to do, and I will begin this very evening."

And I did begin that very evening, and extremely glad I was to do so. For I had already, although April had scarcely set in, trimmed my usual amount of spring hats and bonnets, which—our community not following strictly, for good and sufficient reasons, the decrees of fashion—also included most of the summer ones, thereby cutting off that source of income for four or five months. And it had been highly necessary that another source should be discovered immediately. From which statement you will naturally infer that the Golden family was golden only in name. It was. Otherwise, of course

I mean in a money sense, it was nickelly, and not that to as great an extent as desirable.

Father—well, any kind of steady business seemed to disagree with father; consequently he contributed to our support only by fits and starts. Daniel, our eldest boy, worked faithfully as an assistant book-keeper in a publishing house in New York city, and sent nearly half his salary to mother the first of every month. George, our youngest boy, was clerk (with a hope of some day becoming one of the firm) at the Willwood general store; and I, as I have intimated above, was the Willwood milliner. But work as hard as we might, Daniel, George, and I, we could do no more, even with the intermittent helps from father, than take care of ourselves and the rest of the family in the humblest way. (The rest of the family consisted of mother—a darling—grandmother—another darling—and three of the sweetest, cunningest little girls, two, five, and six years old, that ever needed to be taken care of.) So, as you may well imagine, I was not only delighted, but extremely delighted, to get the chance of assisting Mr. Erickson with the Reader. And I confided as much to Matt Brewster when we were coming home from church together the next Sunday evening. "Because, you see, Matt," said I, "if I succeed with this, maybe I can go on writing until"—and I caught my breath at the boldness of the idea—"I am found worthy of a place in the juvenile magazines, and, as a successful writer, I could help the family much more than I can now, for literary work is for all seasons, and millinery only for two or three months out of the whole year."

"You forget," said Matt, "your rich uncle who is coming here from Australia soon, and who will, no doubt, so arrange things that the family will need no help at all from your hands."

"Oh dear!" said I, "so I did. But he has forgotten us for so many years—ever since I was five, and I was nineteen on my last birthday—that now he has condescended to remember our existence, and promise us a visit, it's no wonder that I can't keep him in mind. And we are not sure that his coming will benefit us any. He may be a cranky old man, and very hard to please. It is more than likely he is, for father (with whom he could never agree, though he is his only brother) tells me he was an unusually cranky young one."

"Oh, you must make him pleased with you," declared Matt, decisively. "You have one advantage, and a great one, over the others. You are his goddaughter, you know."

"I know it to my sorrow," I assented. "Samuella! What a name to give an unfortunate girl baby! If it hadn't been for that saving 'Ella,' what would I have done? Fancy a woman's being called 'Sam' all her life!"

"But you will do your best to get into the old chap's good graces, won't you?" said Matt, coaxingly.

"Well, yes, I will, since your heart seems to be set upon it," I promised, though I wondered at the time why he was so anxious that I should become a favorite of Uncle Sam's. "I'll do everything but give up the Reader."

Matt Brewster was chief proprietor of the store where my brother George was clerk, and he was also my acknowledged lover. The latter fact made me the envy of half the girls in Willwood, for Matt was considered the handsomest and most fascinating young bachelor in the place. He was tall and slender, with very fair hair, light blue eyes, a straight nose, and a small mouth.

Mrs. Leroy, the young wife of old Captain Leroy—looked up to with great respect by three-fourths of the population of Willwood, because she had her bonnets and gloves straight from Paris, gave it as her opinion that his brow was too narrow, and his chin too retreating. "Give me," she said, calmly and coolly, "the school-master, any day, in preference. He is not quite as tall, but his shoulders are

broader, so is his forehead, and he has a certain manly look and way about him that is utterly lacking in Mr. Matthew Brewster."

Strange as it may appear, I did not feel as indignant at this adverse criticism of my betrothed (by-the-way, I had stipulated at the time of our engagement, now two months old, that marriage should not be thought of for at least two years) as some of the other girls did. Nettie Haley, for instance—daughter of Haley the builder, with a snug little fortune in her own right, inherited from her mother—was particularly wroth.

"She only talks that way," she said, referring to Mrs. Leroy, "because she wants to seem different from everybody else, just as she sends to Paris from this out-of-the-way village for her bonnets and gloves. Why, there's no comparison between the two men. Matt dances beautifully; Mr. Erickson don't dance a step. Matt sings lovely; Mr. Erickson can only join in a bass. Matt has a complexion like a girl's; and Mr. Erickson has one like—like—"

"A man's," I suggested, mischievously, as she paused for a comparison.

"Oh, pshaw, Ella, what a tease you are! And about your own beau, too! But I don't really believe you know"—and here she heaved a deep sigh—"what a lucky girl you are."

Well, I began the Reader, and soon became so absorbed in my work that everything I cast eyes upon instantly resolved itself into a First Lesson. Did the butcher stop at the door, "I see a man; he is a butcher; a butcher sells meat," immediately flashed through my brain. Did one of my intimate friends call, I greeted her in my mind with, "I see a girl; her name is May" (or Lib, or Molly, whichever it might be); "she comes to tell some news." My very dreams were haunted by like examples. I saw the queerest things. Their names were gibberish. They played strange and ridiculous pranks. But for all that—perchance in consequence of all that—the book progressed rapidly, and the first hundred lessons were almost completed, when mother received a letter from a cousin of hers, dated from the same place in Australia from which Uncle Sam's had come. It read as follows:

"DEAR SARAH,—Your brother-in-law starts for Willwood in a few days. I trust that he will arrive safely, and bring you permanent relief from your pecuniary troubles. You will find him much changed in personal appearance—the result of several hard fights in which he has been engaged—since you last saw him. Never handsome, he is now—peculiar-looking. I write this especially to warn you, and to have you warn the others, not to allude in the slightest way to the physical blemishes it will be impossible for you not to observe, as any such allusion would have the effect of rousing him to furious anger. With love to Samuella, upon whom he seems inclined to look with favor, and kind remembrances to the rest, I am yours faithfully,
Tom."

And not very long after the reception of this letter Uncle Sam made his appearance. He was "peculiar-looking," to use a favorite remark of one of our oldest citizens, "with a vengeance."

His head was bald in spots, as though the hair had been pulled out by great handfuls, and his face was all awry. Add to this the expression of an ogre, and you will not wonder that the children, who had been hastily dressed at news of his approach, were as hastily withdrawn to the kitchen when he arrived. Poor little darlings, we got them away just in time, for their lips had begun to quiver and their eyes to grow big with frightened surprise. "They will get used to him by degrees," whispered my mother, as I gave each of them a re-assuring kiss. "And now, Ella dear, go back and do your best to entertain him until your father comes in, while I see about the dinner."

I returned to the parlor. I sat down opposite our visitor. I found a dreadful fascination in his unsymmetrical face. I could not remove my eyes from it. I essayed to speak, but before my mouth was fairly open Uncle Sam bent his shaggy brows and growled, "And so you're Sam, are you? And what do you see that you stare in that way?"

And then the spirit of that First Reader, in spite of all that I could do to resist it, took complete possession of me. I replied slowly and distinctly: "I see a man; he is a queer-looking man; he has a crooked nose; he has a crooked mouth; he has a crooked chin; he has crooked eyes; he has an awful scowl; he is a rich man. I am a poor girl. I would rather be a pretty poor girl than a rich crooked man."

And that was the last of our expectations from Uncle Sam. He arose, thundered forth some words which I can not repeat, broke all the mantel ornaments at one fell swoop, and left the house never to return again.

I'll just add, to whom it may concern, that soon after the hopes of a fortune from my godfather were thus destroyed, my engagement to Matt Brewster was broken, and that young gentleman married Nettie Haley.

As for me, I was "lucky" enough to become the happy wife of John Erickson. And our First Reader proved a perfect success.

Tooth Drawing Extraordinary.

The fashionable and eccentric physician, Dr. Monsey, who lived in Sir Robert Walpole's time, took so keen a delight in drawing teeth by this particular process that, in the absence of a patient with a fee for the service, he would sometimes be his own dentist, and operate on himself from a pure love of art. The process was this. Round the tooth to be drawn the doctor fastened securely a strong piece of catgut, to the other end of which a bullet was attached. A pistol having been charged with this bullet and a full measure of powder, the operation was performed effectually and speedily. The doctor could rarely prevail on his friends to let him remove their teeth in this singular and startlingly simple manner. Once a gentleman, who had agreed to make trial of the novelty, and had even allowed the apparatus to be adjusted, turned craven at the last moment. "Stop! stop!" he exclaimed, "I've changed my mind." "But I haven't changed mine, and you are a coward for changing yours," answered the doctor, pulling the trigger. Even at this distance of time it would be pleasant to discover that the patient of this comedy was his grace of Grafton, and that, to avenge himself for the loss of a place in the lord chamberlain's gift, the operator attached the catgut to the wrong tooth.—*Leisure Hour.*

A Story of a Pocket.

A fire broke out in a dwelling house the other night, and after the man and his wife had safely reached the street the latter said that there was \$50 in the pocket of her dress, hanging in a second-story back room.

"I'll go for it," said the husband, and he plunged into the burning building.

The flames raged furiously, and the man did not return. At the expiration of an hour the fire was extinguished and the back building saved. Firemen groped their way up the rear stairs through water and blinding smoke, and found the man in the closet still fumbling at his wife's dress, looking for the money.

He was nearly suffocated with smoke, but had strength enough to say that he thought he would have found the pocket inside of two hours. It never occurred to him to seize the dress and rush out with that. Some men get so excited and nervous in time of fire.

The fame that comes from hanging is but hemp-tie honor.