

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVELTHE ILLUMINATION OF MRS.
HUNTER.

By Mary A. P. Stansbury.

Mrs. James Hunter was a notable housekeeper. So far back as domestic tradition ran she had come of a line of notable housekeepers—women who waged unrelenting war not on dirt alone, but upon all that nondescript variety of material which they are accustomed to comprehend under the generic term of "litter."

Her carpets were guiltless of a suspicion of dust, her floors scrubbed to the last degree of whiteness, and her furniture ranged at exactly symmetrical angles with her spotless walls. Her brass and silver emulated the brightness of the rising sun, and even kettles and pans transformed to mirrors, reflected the keen-eyed countenance of their mistress.

But Mrs. Hunter's energies were by no means exhausted upon inanimate objects. Each Hunter baby by turn had to take its first independent journey into the world with its snowy cambrics protected by a blue calico "creeper," which was replaced on the child's arrival at school age by a checked gingham apron of proportions ample to envelop its small person and to protect its clothes from soil. In vain five years old Tom had protested against the objectionable over garment.

"The boys call me 'sissy,' muvver!" he declared with tears, but Mrs. Hunter's only answer was, "My little boy must learn not to be ashamed of anything that mother thinks best for him to wear."

One had only to scan the row of slippers ranged along the wall of the rear entry, from the number nines of Mr. Hunter himself to the small red morocos of the youngest child, to understand that the sacredness of the Hunter interior, like that of a Hindu temple, demanded the removal of ordinary footwear upon entrance.

Mrs. Hunter was by no means unloving. She would have been ready at any moment, had the emergency arisen, to give her life cheerfully for her husband or children. None the less there was no room in her scheme of living for the small indulgences which might disturb the rigidity of her domestic code. To tolerate anything which might in any manner "make dirt" was to her a moral impossibility.

If her children's innocent desires or secretly cherished tastes conflicted with the housewifely regime, so much the worse for them, since the system admitted of no compromise.

It would be difficult to do justice to Mrs. Hunter's feelings when, after an unaccountably restless night, she found herself one morning unable to rise from her bed. Could it be possible that she was going to be ill. And if so, what would become of the housekeeping? As well might a watch be expected to keep time with its mainspring broken.

She had been accustomed to apply to all "hired help" the single adjective "shiftless." Was it to the hands of such as these that her spotless kitchen and closets, the preparation of the family meals, the care of the children's wardrobe, the supervision of washing and cleaning days, were to be intrusted? She groaned aloud, vainly struggling with the pain and faintness which attended every effort to move. As the day advanced her suffering increased, and by the time the doctor arrived she was in a burning fever.

This proved the beginning of a long and dangerous illness, when through many days of weakness and delirium

those who watched at her bedside alternated between hope and despair.

At last the crisis passed and, with slow and feeble flow, the tide of life turned once more shoreward. For a time after recovering consciousness she was too weak for any connected thought. All the cords of interest and authority she had been used to gather in so strong a clasp, had slipped unnoticed from her nerveless hands and she felt no impulse to take them up again.

Once she awoke from a more than usually refreshing sleep with a new sense of clearness in her brain. She made no movement and the two neighbor women who were sharing the care of her, supposed her still unconscious. The sound of their low whispering came to her ear with singular distinctness.

"If Jane Hunter hadn't taken a turn for the better there'd been a different deal in this house. I can tell you. Of course they'd 'a' missed her terribly at first. 'Twould have taken a good while to get used to having things move along easier like. Jane's been a good woman—none better, and mighty capable dear knows! But she's held altogether too tight a rein. To be sure her children have gone well enough so far, but I wouldn't want to bank on 'em for the next five or ten years. When home is too spick and span for anybody to have a good time in, young folks are bound to go somewhere else for it."

"You're right there Mary. I made up my mind a good while ago that I'd let my folks do while I'm alive some of the things they'd be certain to do after I was dead."

For a moment Mrs. Hunter's heart almost stop beating. Could it be possible that her death would have been in the nature of an unconscious relief to those whom she loved better than her own soul? She shuddered with almost passionate indignation. But slowly the excitement subsided and with pitiless persistency her memory began to trace long forgotten incidents.

Once more she seemed to be climbing the stairs to the room of Jack her older boy. She saw herself pausing in the doorway in surprised displeasure at the sight of a great oak branch trained against the wall and holding a number of birds' nests of various sorts and sizes. A few fallen twigs and straw lay upon the spotless matting underneath.

"Jack!"

She saw the apprehensive look on the boy's face as he glanced up from his book of natural history.

"What do you mean by filling the house with litter?"

"Oh mother! I'm making a collection. See, here's a hang-bird's nest—I've looked for an empty one ever so long. And this—"

"Jack, if you want a collection of nests, you can keep it in the barn loft. The house is no place for it."

"But mother—"

"Don't argue, Jack dear. I simply can't have such messing. Take them out directly."

How plainly now she saw the hurt expression on the boy's eyes as he silently obeyed her.

Another picture: This time it was Tom standing in the kitchen doorway with a beautiful collie puppy in his arms.

"Can't I have him, mother? Henry Jarvis will give him to me if you are willing. See, what a little beauty he is!"

The young face was flushed with eagerness—the two pairs of eyes, the boy's and the dog's seemed to plead in unison.

"I'm sorry, Tom, but you should have remembered what mother has told you

before. I can't have a dog tracking up the floors and scratching up all the door panels. You will have to give him back."

"O, mother, please!"

"Tom, I am surprised. Don't you know when mother has said no you are forbidden to tease?"

The boy turned away with a half sob. His arm tightened around the silken body of the little creature, whose small red tongue licked his hand as if in silent sympathy.

"Mother." Now it was Susie's voice she heard. "Dick and Jessie are coming over after supper, and their cousin Mary Gray." She flushed and hesitated.

"Yes, daughter. What is it?"

"Mother, could we have a fire in the parlor? Jessie's mother always lets her!"

"Susie, I have told you often enough that a clean pleasant kitchen is good enough for children to visit in. I can't have you racing over the parlor carpet."

"But, mother," Mr. Hunter gently protested, "don't you think they might just this once? I'll buy another carpet when that one's gone."

"Jabez, I wonder that you can counsel weakness."

Oh, fool and blind that she has been! It was such little, easy things as these that they would have been doing—if she had died!

It was hard to wait for the morning. At last it came, and with the first gray streaks of the dawn Mrs. Hunter heard the careful steps of her husband at the door and his whispered question:

"How is she?"

"Better—better!" she answered for herself in a voice clear though faint. "Oh, Jabez, come here! Tell me that you—and the children—would have cared if I had never got better!"

"Jane—dear—" faltered her husband, horror-stricken. She saw the terror in his face.

"No, no! Don't be frightened! I know what I'm saying. I'm not feverish, but I've seen things! Jabez, listen! I want the parlor opened—every day, mind! And Tom is to have a dog, and Jack shall bring all out-of-doors into his room if he likes! Oh! this shall be a different place, and I another sort of mother, if God lets me get well!"

Mr. Hunter laid his hand on his wife's forehead with awkward tenderness. Her own pale fingers closed about it and the eyes of the mother and father met in a new understanding and compact, which was to transform a house to a home, and shape to loving ends the lives of those who dwelt within it.—The Western Recorder.

The greatest men who have written tributes to the Bible built wiser than they knew for their own immortality.

A WONDERFUL FEAT OF
SURGERY.

The successful transplantation of the cornea, literally giving a blind man sight through another's eye, must be reckoned among the greatest marvels of surgery. The patient, lately exhibited by Dr. Zirm to the Medical Society of Vienna, had lost the sight of both eyes through ulcers. It happened that the surgeon had to take out the eye of an eleven-year-old boy, which had been ruined by a steel splinter although the cornea was left intact; and pieces from this eye were inserted in slits cut in the opaque cornea of the man's eyes. Almost normal vision was restored to the right eye, the experiment failing in the left. A slight veil can be seen over the restored eye, but small-print can be read.