

The Garden of a Commuter's Wife.

(By Mabel Osgood Wright.)

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"That is not a female wood thrush," I asserted boldly. "It is a veery that has come up from the spring to help the wood thrush drive away intruders. If you were a red squirrel or a garter snake, you would get a good pecking, I can tell you; but as you are a human being, the thrush asks me to tell you to go away, and not come back."

"Really, this is most extraordinary!" gasped the chief. "Do you take no interest in bird study? This is the only method of learning their normal habits. Perhaps you would like to join my class. It might open a new vista before your unseeing eyes. I would take you at half rates if you are connected with the doctor's household."

My patience vanished. Ah, for a tomahawk to hurl! Lacking that, I used words.

"One moment, if you please, before you leave. I am Barbara, the doctor's daughter, and I know the birds in this field and these woods as well as I do the fingers on my hands. So well do I know them that I will not have them worried, or their privacy invaded. Even if I did not object, it is useless for you to go about in a mob to try to learn a thing about them; for, so surrounded, not one of their actions would be normal. Two, even, is a crowd, if you wish to learn the ways of birds. How would you like to have a party of ten or a dozen people camp outside the window of your bath-room to 'observe' you? Would your actions be normal and unfurled?"

One of the young girls giggled, but still the chief would not retreat, and tried suavely.

"This is the new method of 'naming birds without a gun,' my child, instead of shooting the poor little things to learn their names, as wicked scientific men do."

"But even you haven't learned their names rightly, it seems; so how can you teach these others? And I'm sure it's no worse to kill a few outright to be object lessons to hundreds in a museum, than to shatter the nerves of entire families, and addle unhatched eggs, as you are doing. Now I think I know why my pair of mourning doves deserted their nest over in the pines last week. You've been observing them, too!"

The chief actually blushed, stammered, then led the retreat, which was made the more rapidly, as at that moment Bluff, Lark, and the hounds, having found my trail, nosed me out, and though naturally most polite dogs, something about the conspirators jarred upon them, and they said all the things that I could not say.

In the afternoon, in driving along the wood road with father, I came upon the party crouching by the wayside and evidently endeavoring to identify a large round nest well up in an oak tree by aid of a colored picture book of birds' nests. I do not think they were successful, because the nest happened to be the old winter home of a gray squirrel!

June 15. Rose Sunday. A gentle shower last night, together with a warm, hazy morning, has unloosed hundred of buds, and the Rose Festival is now open. For two weeks at least we shall think and almost eat and drink roses. Nothing rare or wonderful, or large; merely plenty of good healthy, old-fashioned roses, the only kind worth growing in the garden of the commuter's wife.

I gathered four bouquets from the great bushes this morning, one for the table, one for church, one for father's desk in the study, and one for Martha Corkle, whom I found down in the garden before breakfast, gazing at the flowers in a state of pensive admiration. Martha has not had her usual spring and snap of late. I've been afraid the climate is

too hot for her, and I was glad to have a chance to speak with her out of doors.

"No, Mrs. Evan, I can't say as I do feel natural like. Some'ats come over me, and no disrespect intended, I think it's the beer, Mrs. Evan, or, I should say, the want o' it."

"What! beer!" I asked in alarm, visions of the stately Martha overcome by drink rising before me.

"Maybe you never knew or else disremember, Mrs. Evan, that in the old country we all had our allowance of ale or 'ome-brewed, the same which is meat and drink to the stomach, Mrs. Evan, mine as being house-keeper never being less than eight pints the week. Not that I blame you, Mrs. Evan; for how can the lady give out beer for one in a 'ouse that would upset another, Mrs. Evan, and I'd not take the responsibility of seein' it served to Delia, she bein' Irish and so hot-headed; and Eliza would take it to heart sore, she thinkin' all beers and liquors the Devil's dish-water, though she bein' herself one of the white cheese breed of women that a drop o' beer would hearten. I've thought it over, Mrs. Evan, and I don't see the way clear to it, bein' the fault o' mixed races, and not yours, mum. For that matter, Timothy Saunders he says there isn't any 'ome-brewed to be got over here, the same bein' thin and watery, and I do claim there's no such thing for making one feel respect for the stomach as 'ome-brewed along with a lean cut o' beef."

Neither could I see the way, and I could understand her craving, though I had not before thought of the omission. Beer dealt out in the kitchen of a New England physician! and Martha was not one to take it secretly. Irrespective of the Village Liar and the Emporium, such a thing was not to be considered. Poor Martha, as well as the sundial, it seems, is the victim of changed conditions.

I turned the talk to the roses, and gave her a bouquet for the blue and white ginger jar that she keeps for stray posies on the sill of the long window above the kitchen table, and promised her a row of geraniums to fill the shelf, a frilled curtain for the top, and a canary—things that made the Somerset kitchen so quaintly attractive; for stiff as Martha is, she is not ashamed of loving flowers, in fact, such an idea would never occur to her. Still, I'm afraid that they will not be as "heartening" as the home-brewed. I think this is a matter that I may bring before Evan without breaking my vow of never talking servants.

June 18. Evan says the beer question will adjust itself. Blessed faith of man! But then, I've observed things generally do, if not scattered and tossed about by argument like thistle balls in a gale.

I spend several hours every day now in arranging my flowers, for outdoor roses are blooms of a day that need frequent renewal. I have a special shelf in the pantry for this work, the tool-house being overcrowded. I am also now realizing the benefits of a large supply of flower holders of various shapes and sizes. Not only have I inherited a whole family of blue and white bowls, the most fascinating receptacles for short-stemmed garden roses, and two darling India jars that belonged to father's mother, as well as some pieces of fine cut glass; but friends knew my foible, and my wedding gifts ran to vases, instead of coffee spoons and pie knives; while Evan has given me half a dozen inexpensive jars of a fine shade of dull-green glass for holding heavy, long-stemmed flowers, like peonies, hollyhocks, and lilies.

The honeysuckles that wall the long walk on the north-west, and drape the windows and porch, are in bloom, and the humming-birds only leave the feast the long-tubed flowers offer when dusk and the hawk-moths appear together.

I have anything more intoxicating than a great bowl of pink, red and white roses that have been picked before the dew drops are dried and weathered with the morning sun? They

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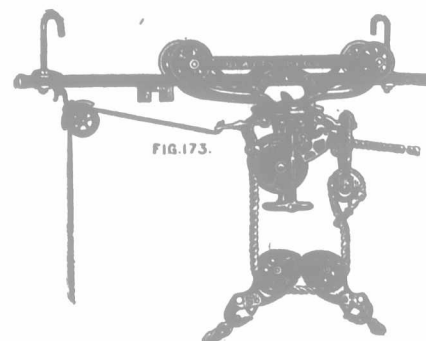


FIG. 173.

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go to my head as wine might, and when I bury my face in them I feel moved to dance and sing like a bay chante. I am a pagan these days, dazzled by color, moved by sensations not logic, and ruled by the Outdoors. Father says he hopes that I am not a pagan at heart, but a Christian pantheist, for he says and moreover affirms it to be the most wholesome and sane of beliefs. I can carry a bouquet of roses to town daily, the name of Maypole, which he acquired in lily-of-the-valley time still adhering to him. Some of the other commuters, hoi polloi, with their chins and egg on their noses, cannot understand what