

left us the day she had called, she had given us a special invitation to spend a day with her in the following week. She named Wednesday, for on that day the baker came along the ridge here by the shore and then went over to the Two-Mile. She was confident he would let us go with him. But we had said we would go across Salt Pond in our boat, then hire a horse and carriage at one of the hotels on "the road." This arrangement had greatly shocked her, as being extravagant in the extreme. She said they were monstrous dear at them liv'ries. We promised after her remonstrances that if the wind should be in the east we could venture to walk from the road. Thus the matter was left. For some reason, we hardly knew why, Mrs. Rankin had interested us greatly; we were very desirous of making that visit.

Mrs. Yates remained silent so long that we asked her about Mr. Rankin. Was he ill? Instead of replying she went on from where she had left off.

"Wall, old Rankin—though he wan't old then—didn't have his wife but a year. She had one child, John, that lives under the cliff yender, and died in two months after. Lucky for her and good 'nough for him, I say. He was edgin up to Randy Sherman in les'n six months, pleasant as a barsket of chips, jest as he always is. I tell you, you c'n hev some hopes of a man or woman as sometimes rares up and is mad, and gits in the wrong, and is sorry. But when you find one that's always in the right and never gives in, look out, I tell ye! Randy Sherman was teachin' school in that very same schoolhouse where Mr. Rankin lives now when he began to shine up to her. I s'pose she thought he was sweeter nor honey. Anyway, she married him, and I don't reckon she's seen many happy days sence. Women is fools! Fools, I say!"

Maria Jane made such a violent gesture that the peas fell out of her lap and rolled over the floor. Max rose slowly from under the bed and casually ate all the peas he could find.

"Most everybody blames Randy, of course. They say there never was a pleasanter man to git along with than Mr. Rankin. There's only a few as has a kind of sense of what he really is. Wall, whatever he is, he's got to furl his sails now, for I do believe, as I said, that the Lord's goin' to take him. He's sick. and Randy soon's

she heard of it, which was night before last, was gone over to nuss him. She's wuth fifty of him, I say."

Evidently we should not spend the day at present with Mrs. Rankin.

The story that Mrs. Yates had told kept in our minds. The next afternoon an "east turn" came up, so that it was really cold sitting out in front. We started out for a walk along the cliff road, which winds along above the sea and close to it. Carriages were whirling by us and the dust flew. By this time we knew just where were the different routes of the public vehicles, "barges" they call them here. We suddenly decided to take a "barge," which went within a quarter of a mile of that schoolhouse where the Rankins were.

Alighting, we walked through a small patch of sweet fern that sent up to us its odor of wild and rock pastures. We were on a hill and the ocean, gray and misty in its east turn, was before us. There was the building we sought, alone, its old red paint nearly worn off, its whole aspect desolate.

Now that we were here we suddenly felt that we might be intruding. We sat down in a bed of sweet fern—"sweet fern" they call it here, and the boys sometimes dry its leaves and make cigars of them.

Presently we heard a sound at the door, and, looking, saw the gaunt form of Randy Rankin standing there. Her face was turned away from us and toward the water. Her dark gingham gown hung straight down. She had her hands clasped tightly before her, and she suddenly flung them upward. There was not a house in sight—a fog was setting fast over everything.

Turning to go back in the house, she saw us and started. Then she recognized us. We rose and she stepped out in the tall grass about the old, flat stepstone.

"I'm mighty glad you've come," she said hoarsely. "I didn't dare leave him, and I did wish somebody was here."

Her scraggy face was perfectly pallid. She had not slept since she came to the place.

"How is he?" we whispered.

"He's goin' fast. I don't expect he'll last more'n to the turnin' of the tide, and that's at eighteen minutes past 7 to-night. I've just ben a-lookin' into his almanac to find out; it's com-