

One Touch of Nature

Written for The Western Home Monthly By Ida M. Halliburton

I SHOULD think, Joe," said Mrs. Martha Taylor to the subdued-looking individual before her, "that you needed almost anything worse than you needed that."

As she spoke, her glance swept the bare room and rested at the somewhat contemptuous "that," on the occupant of a red wooden cradle.

"Well, I s'pose it does look that way to you," said Joe, apologetically, "but, you see, we mustn't let the race die out; and Mary and I, I cal'late, are doin' our share to keep it up."

"What the race needs," said Martha severely and somewhat truthfully, "is not more babies, but better ones."

"So I've always told Mary," said Joe, brightening up. "Now, look at our children. They are all healthy and they're good; and this little un," he said, gazing proudly at the latest addition, "is the sixth that we'll rock in this cradle. Afore the fust one came Mary was fussin' with clothes and such, and I felt like doin' somethin' so I up and made the cradle. And that petticoat," he added, pointing to a gray woolen homespun, "has wrapped them all when they was little." He reached over as he spoke, grasped the gray petticoat, and deftly turned the little sleeper on its side.

voices should fill the quiet hours. As the years passed, they had gradually ceased to speak of their hopes as their dreams faded. They had never openly expressed regrets to one another. David became a little more silent, more observing of other people's children, more open-hearted to all. The tiny guests that had peopled his fancy had departed and left a place there for all children. Martha became a little less responsive to the children of others, somewhat more conservative in her associations and embittered in her speech. The waters of love reserved for her own, and refused to other children, had turned bitter at their source.

It seems strange that the disappointment which mellowed one character should harden another; yet the same sun which enhances the beauty of the rose, shrivels the violet.

David and Martha had never discussed the question of adopting a child, but had refused to do so when a good chance presented itself.

David's young cousin with his wife and child, resided in a nearby city. He was a comparative stranger to the rest of the Taylors. When the Taylor property had been divided among the four brothers, this young man's father preferred money to acres, and on being granted his request



French Colonial Troops camping among the sand dunes in northwest France

"They allus sleep better if they're turned over once in awhile," he explained. "I've heard Mary say, when they were teething, that she wished they had six or seven sides to turn them on to. Not that they were very cross," he added hastily. "As I was just sayin', our babies are all good uns. Just feel how strong he is," he urged, as he paused for breath.

As Martha reached forward gingerly to touch the pink little hand, the tiny fingers clung to hers when she tried to withdraw it.

What a strange feeling the touch gave her; so soft and tender and yet so strong to cling. The sensation was not unpleasant, but it was, to her, unendurable; so she loosened the little fingers and after stepping to the bedroom to bid Mrs. Joe good-bye, she took her departure.

Mrs. Taylor hastened home to prepare her husband an appetizing lunch to welcome his return from town. As she went, she pondered the question, "why was it Joe Barton with his five acres of stony ground had a houseful of babies, while she and David Taylor with their broad acres of fertile land had never been blessed with one?"

'Twas not often that Martha pondered thus. Her heart had gradually hardened to such thoughts. But the little fingers had done their work and the door of memory swung open to the ghosts of past hopes and longings.

She recalled the time when David had brought her, as a bride, to the little cottage which now did service as a harness room. She had met the joy of married life with a quick appreciation and its trials with a brave acceptance. She and David had shyly spoken of the time when the patter of children's feet should echo through the little rooms and children's

had moved to Ontario, while the brothers remained on the broad Taylor acres in Nova Scotia. Though the "rolling stone" had not acquired wealth, he had succeeded in giving his only son a good education. This son, bereft of family ties, had married young, an ambitious little stenographer, who was also alone in the world. They were soon blessed with a little son, who was as bright, happy and normal, as a child of such a union should be.

But the young parents were not spared to see wee Jack grow up for their lives were suddenly cut off in a train wreck as they were returning to their home from the city. Jack was taken care of by a kindly old lady from whom his parents had rented rooms until a date was set for his relatives to meet and arrange for his future among them.

Martha and David were the last to arrive at this meeting, where the other relations had planned that the only childless couple among them should adopt Jack. When Martha had removed her wraps she joined the rest. Her heart gave a throb as she found wee Jack nestled in David's arms, one chubby hand clasping his work-hardened fore-finger and the curly head resting where she had hoped her own child's head should be cuddled. David's face shone with the tenderness of newly-awakened love, but on the faces of the relatives there glowed a pity and tolerance which quickly changed Martha's love to bitter pride and jealousy.

David, with the unerring instinct of love, read her heart, and the hope of adopting Jack died at its birth. A chill seemed to fall upon the company. Plans were made to leave Jack with the old lady who had practically been his nurse, the expenses to be met by the relatives.

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