

## Aunt Matilda's Off-Days

(By Susan Teall Perry, in "The Standard.")

"It's one of your Aunt Matilda's off-days, Phemie. Don't mind her, child," said Uncle Jacob, who was cutting corn in the field.

The stalks of corn were two or three feet higher than the little girl's head, as she stood with a small tin pail full of cold water from the spring.

"You came just in the nick of time. I was so thirsty I thought I'd have to leave my work and go for water."

Uncle Jacob had what Phemie called 'a lovelight look' on his face when he put the pail to his lips and drank of the clear, cold water.

Phemie had been crying, and Uncle Jacob knew it as soon as he looked at her face.

"You see, Phemie, that Aunt Matilda's crab apples did not jelly as stiff as she wanted them to yesterday, and she had to boil all that stuff over again. That's what's upset her. It's a big job to pour all that jelly out of the glasses, and boil it over twice, all those glasses to wash and dry."

"I washed the glasses, uncle, and dried them. I didn't mind—only—only—I wish Aunt Matilda was always pleasant, as she is sometimes. I love her so much when she speaks in her kind way. She's so very kind when she is kind."

"Folks will have their off-days, Phemie, the best of them."

"But you don't have any off-days, Uncle Jacob."

"Maybe things do not go criss-cross with me as they do with most of folks, child."

"Well, your cows broke into the oat lot, you know, and the bay colt was lost for a week, and then the army worms came, and such a lot of potato bugs, and just such sort of doings as those make off-days, don't they? But you never talked cross, or looked cross about these troubles, Uncle Jacob."

"Maybe the Lord gives me a large measure of grace, Phemie. We can't keep our tempers without his grace, child. And, besides, if I had been upset and made off-days for myself, what good would it have done? Your aunt does well by you; she gives you plenty to eat, and she makes you as nice clothes to wear as any of the other girls have."

"Oh, yes, Uncle Jacob, I know it, but—"

Uncle Jacob took the little girl in his strong arms, and hugged her close to his loving heart, and then gave her about a dozen kisses on both cheeks.

Phemie was the only child of his dead sister. Her father died before her mother did, and Uncle Jacob went out to the far West and brought the little orphan girl home to live with him. He knew it was love that Phemie wanted that morning, as she stood with such a lonely look on her face among the tall cornstalks. Love is the greatest thing in the world for us all.

There had never been any children in the house where Uncle Jacob and Aunt Matilda lived, until Phemie came there. They had lived twenty years without a child in the family, and Aunt Matilda had very prim ways of keeping house, because there had never been any little busy hands to put anything out of place. And Aunt Matilda did her own work, and not being strong, she got very tired often, and Phemie had heard her tell how she seemed to have her nerves all on the outside of her body. She spoke kindly at times to Phemie, but there were a great many off-days in Aunt Matilda's life, and the little girl tried to be very patient and do everything she could in the way that

would please her aunt. Aunt Matilda had even been so kind as to buy Phemie a large doll, and she had made pretty clothes for her, and it was the little girl's great comfort.

She went back to the house, leaving the little tin pail of water in the corn-field with Uncle Jacob. It was her work, and of course the pleasantest kind of work, that of carrying a pail of fresh water to Uncle Jacob, when he was working far away from the well. It saved him from walking back and forth and losing his time from his work, and then Uncle Jacob was always so loving and kind when she brought him the water.

When Phemie went into the kitchen there was a pan of potatoes on the table to pare and some sweet corn to husk for dinner. She sat down by the big table and began to pare the potatoes. Aunt Matilda was straining her jelly and putting it into the glasses; she had a troubled look on her face, and when Phemie asked how many potatoes she should pare, she spoke up in a sharp way and said, 'I should think you'd pared the potatoes long enough here to know without asking.' So the little girl put what she thought would be the right number in the kettle.

'Such a bothering time as I've had with the jelly,' Aunt Matilda spoke out, 'it's enough to try the temper of a saint. I never had such a job of it before in my whole life.'

Somehow Phemie thought Aunt Matilda meant that she was to blame for it in some way, because it was the first time she had ever been there at the jelly making.

Uncle Jacob came in, but he did not say much. Phemie had noticed that he never did when Aunt Matilda had off-days.

After the dinner work was done up, Phemie went to her little bedroom, over the kitchen, and got her doll. She had named the doll Sarah, after her mother.

'Sarah,' she said, 'we will go out together and sit down under the lilac bushes by the parlor window. You've been shut up here all day. I was busy with the work, or I should have taken you down before. Aunt Matilda is in awful trouble about her jelly.'

It was a sunshiny place under the lilac bushes; the lilac blossoms had gone long before, but there were some yellow artichokes in blossom, and at the right hand side Aunt Matilda's gay bed of phlox made the place very bright.

'I'm very lonely, Sarah,' spoke Phemie, in a low tone of voice, 'so very lonely to-day. It's one of Aunt Matilda's off-days, Uncle Jacob says, and I mustn't mind it. I tried to do everything I could to please her, because off-days, I suppose, is some kind of sickness, and folks can't help sickness. I'm glad Uncle Jacob don't have that kind of a disease, though; if he had it, too, I couldn't bear it here, Sarah. I know I couldn't. It don't seem to be a catching disease, and I'm glad of it. I wouldn't like to get it. Aunt Matilda seems so unhappy when they come, those off-days. But we'll do the best we can, Sarah, for this is the only home we have on earth now. You know Aunt Matilda made us both such nice clothes to wear, and gives me enough to eat, but you don't have to eat, Sarah.'

Then Phemie hugged Sarah close to her heart as she buried her face in the doll's flaxen hair, and said, 'Oh, what a comfort you are to me! I love you just as much as Uncle Jacob loves me; he never has off-days.'

While Phemie was talking to her doll, Aunt Matilda was putting her jelly away in the china closet near the window. The blinds were closed, but the window was open and as she stood by the closet shelf she heard what Phemie said.

Aunt Matilda was really kind of heart, but she was one of those persons who unfortunately keep their best feelings in reserve. It had not occurred to her that she had off-days; she knew when upsetting things came

she felt much irritated. It was true, she acknowledged to herself, that the upsetting things overcame her, instead of her overcoming them. She sat down in the large easy chair by the fireplace. Living so quietly she had not given out love as she ought to have done; she had lived too much within herself. She began to realize Phemie's loneliness, her sweet obedience and patient work in her new home. It is love the child wants, love that shows itself, and Aunt Matilda quickly went out of the parlor and opened the back kitchen door, and called, 'Phemie, Phemie, dear! Where are you?'

Phemie jumped up in surprise, 'Phemie, dear!' She had never called her in that way before, and she spoke the 'Phemie, dear,' in such a kind, loving tone.

The little girl came as quickly as she could, but before she stepped across the threshold of the door, Aunt Matilda caught Phemie in her arms, kissed her, and smiled in such a loving way. Aunt Matilda never had any more off-days. Phemie wondered if she had taken some medicine that had cured her.

When Phemie was riding on the wood sled up the mountain side, one cold winter's day, with Uncle Jacob, she said, 'Aunt Matilda is just as good to me as—as you are, now, Uncle Jacob, and I really think she loves me, and oh, I am so very very happy!'

Any one of the many articles in 'World Wide' will give two cents' worth of pleasure. Surely, ten or fifteen hundred such articles during the course of a year are well worth a dollar.

'Northern Messenger' subscribers are entitled to the special price of seventy-five cents.

## 'World Wide.'

A weekly reprint of articles from leading journals and reviews reflecting the current thought of both hemispheres.

So many men, so many minds. Every man in his own way.—Terence.

The following are the contents of the issue of August 2, of 'World Wide':

## ALL THE WORLD OVER.

Shylock and the Pound of Soul—Reflections on the Education Bill Debates.—'Punch,' London.  
Lord Salisbury's Career.—'The Times,' London.  
South African Administration.—'The Mail,' London.  
Sir Michael Hicks-Beach.—'Daily Telegraph,' London.  
Robert Owen Memorial.—'Daily News,' London.  
From Clerk to High Commissioner.—'Daily News,' London.  
A French study of Queen Victoria.—By A. T. Quiller-Couch, in the 'Daily News,' London.  
P. T. Barnum, Storyman and Humorist.—By Joel Benton, in 'The Century Magazine,' New York.

## SOMETHING ABOUT THE ARTS.

Fall of the Campanile of St. Mark.—'Daily Telegraph,' London.  
Cartoons and Caricatures.—By C. L. H., in the 'Academy and Literature,' London.  
The Exportation of Rare Books to America.—'The Pilot,' London.

## CONCERNING THINGS LITERARY.

Heat.—By Archibald Lampman.  
Scythe Song.—Poem, by Andrew Lang.  
Summer Rain.—Poem, from the French of Albert Fleury, in 'The Pilot,' London.  
Separation.—Poem, by S. C. S., in the 'Westminster Budget,' London.  
The Poetaster in Martinique.—'Academy and Literature,' London.  
Ruskin at the English Lakes.—By the Rev. Canon H. D. Rawnsley, in 'St. George's,' the journal of the English Ruskin societies, Part II.  
The First Word of Flying.—By Andrew Lang, in the 'Morning Post,' London.  
Why Do Men Write Books?—New York 'Evening Post.'  
Contentio Veritatis.—Essays in Constructive Theology.—By six Oxford Tutors, Reviewed by Thomas Banks Strong, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, in the 'Commonwealth,' London.  
The 'Inner Light' To-day.—By Arthur Wallaston Hutton, in 'The Commonwealth,' London.  
The Bible as Literature.—'The Nation,' New York.  
Brownin's Message to the Twentieth Century.—By the Rev. John Bancroft-Devins, D.D., in the New York 'Observer.'

## HINTS OF THE PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE.

Shrewd and Sober.—'Academy and Literature,' London.  
Two New Educational Movements.—L. Popul: r Songs; II. A City Trades School.—'Commercial Advertiser,' New York.  
Diocletian.—Manchester 'Guardian.'  
The Becquerel Rays in Ocular Diagnosis.—'American Medicine,' Philadelphia.

## 'WORLD WIDE'

\$1.00 a year.

Special rate to subscribers of the 'Messenger,'

Only 75 cents.

JOHN DOUGALL & SON,

'WITNESS' BUILDING,  
Montreal.