

Addie Armstrong's Piece

('Youth's Companion.')

'Please, teacher, Addie Armstrong wants to speak a piece on examination day.'

Miss Dixon looked over the head of Addie Armstrong's little spokeswoman to Addie herself, stunted, high-shouldered, swarthy—blushing darkly now.

'Would you like to speak a piece, Addie?'

'Yes'm, if—I could. I never did,' hesitated Addie, in the voice which reminded one of the 'rough, gruff voice of the big, huge bear' in the story.

'Then you shall,' said Miss Dixon, recklessly cutting off retreat by the barrier of her word. 'Come to-night, after school, and I'll read it to you.'

'Yes'm!' Addie tiptoed away on air, and besought every girl in school not to tell that she was going to have a piece. She had been an inmate of Number Eight four years, and had reached that point in the school journey, borne on the shoulders of classes crowding up from below.

Her last teacher had said, 'Logarithms or long division will be all the same to Addie, and if it will make her happy to go in at the north door instead of the south, and to hang her hat in Closet Eight instead of Seven, why shouldn't she? There is more room there!'

Because the pressure weakened at this point, Addie was stranded. Classes came and went, but Addie stayed. Every promotion day saw a despairing girl blurring her exercises with hot tears, but the beginning of the next term never failed to find her hopefully buzzing away at Lesson I. again.

She studied hard all day. She studied all the evening, tucking her book under her pillow at night, that she might begin again with the daylight. Annie, three years older, would sometimes 'see if she could say it' then. Perhaps she could, for she had some ability to remember words. But when the day of written examinations came, and her little stock of knowledge was tried and sifted by 'questions not in the book,' she wrote out, in a precise hand, the wildest statements, the most chaotic jumble of words that were ever appraised by a marking teacher. The small percentage allowed for neatness would never tide her into Number Nine.

And yet what a dear, helpful child she was, how ready to run on an errand, to water the window-garden, to manage the blinds, to lend a pin or a pencil! On stormy days how efficiently she buttoned and tied up weather-proof the precocious youngsters who grinned at her derisively in classtime, but took their bumped heads and bruised fingers straight to her at recess!

So when Addie made her trembling request, her teacher gladly granted it, although she had reserved the last recitation for a graceful, silver-voiced scholar.

'Silvia has been speaking ever since she was four years old, and is really a little spoiled,' she reflected. 'It will be as good for her to be silent, for once, as for Addie to speak.'

At four o'clock Addie's brown face looked over the dictionary.

'Yes, I remember, Addie. It is to be a flower afternoon, because it is June. Ada

has "Little White Lily;" Emma, "Buttercups and Daisies;" May, "The Strawberry Blossom," and so on. This is about the rose, and you may carry some roses. Listen:—

The lily has an air—

Here a little boy brought Miss Dixon a note from the principal.

'I must attend to this at once. Come



'I KNOW MY PIECE.'

Monday night, Addie, and I will try again.' Miss Dixon hurried away.

On Monday night Addie did come to the desk, squared her toes to a crack in the platform, and clasped her hands behind her.

'I know my piece,' she said. 'I can say it all.'

'O dear child, did you take the paper home? I meant to read it to you before you looked at it. Let me hear you, then.'



'HELEN CLOSED HER MOUTH.'

In deep tones, and with perfectly impartial stress, Addie recited:

'The lily has an air,
And the snowdrop a grace,
And the sweet pea a way,
And the heartsease a face—
Yet there's nothing like the rose
When she blows Christina Rozzity over.'

'Wh-a-t? Oh, I see! But that is nonsense. Christina Rossetti is the name of the writer, and I wrote the word "over" to remind myself of a note on the other side. See—"There's nothing like the rose when she blows"—blossoms, you know—bursts from a tight little bud into a great, fragrant, velvety flower. Now we'll try it again.'

The teacher read the words slowly, and with strong emphasis.

'Now, Addie,' and Addie panted through, as before.

'Oh, hush!' and the teacher went through it all, line by line. But what Addie had learned, she had learned. She drew a long breath at each trial, and brought all her force to the task, but once started, she was like a bounding, jerking, ungovernable little locomotive on a down grade.

Then Miss Dixon realized the situation. She had given her word to Addie, and could not disappoint the child. It would take every minute of the time before examination to drill her into a proper rendering of the poem, and there were forty-nine other children to work and plan for. She looked despairingly over the lingerers, waiting for dismissal, until her eye fell on Helen Kirtland.

Helen was the only daughter of Mr. Kirtland the lawyer; a dark-haired, blue-eyed, slender girl, with force and shrewdness and impishness in her pale face—a restless creature and a leader among the schoolgirls, whom she led too often into forbidden ways. There were days when Miss Dixon felt that she herself had 'very little influence with the administration'—days when a general perversity filled the air. It would end at last in a little heap of penitent notes on Miss Dixon's desk, and the air would be clear again.

But the whim-controlled disturbing force was likely to awaken at any time. It seemed very likely to awaken now, for Helen had a grievance. Could she not hear above her the thump of brooms, the tinkle of pails and the joyous clatter of the girls who were permitted to put the store-chamber in order?

No one could paddle and sweep with such ardor as Helen, and here she was, cut off from the rare privilege 'just because she was sick last week,' as she said, with a scornful lip. It was Monday now. She sat maliciously enjoying Addie's blunders, and bracing herself against any possible 'good talk' from the teacher. Miss Dixon read her face, but she was desperate.

'Helen,' she said, 'Addie has never had a piece before, and you see that she needs a great deal of help before she can recite properly. I have not the time. You are our best reader. Will you go with her to the small recitation-room and drill her for half an hour?'

Helen's sympathies were quick, and she was not sullen. Then the authority of the position appealed to her.

'Yes'm,' she said, cordially, 'May we lock the door?'

'Here is my key. Please read the poem first. I want to see what your ideas are.'

Helen read it with perfect feeling and emphasis.

'See if you can make Addie do as well.'

Helen smiled at Addie and Addie smiled back, and the girls went off together very happily.

'I hope that isn't too ideal to work well,' breathed Miss Dixon, as she went to un-