

get it by heart, too, and always remember it. Do read it, mother."

Mrs. Thompson, her arms full of the cracked mulberry plates, paused a moment to let her eyes fall on the new copy. "A soft answer turneth away wrath," was what she read. It was not that the proverb was new; she had read it scores of times; but there was something in its appropriateness to the present moment that felt like a cool, sweet wind on her heated pulses.

"I will have it ready in a moment, Robert," she said quietly. Mr. Robert Thompson looked up. Evidently he had not expected so pleasant a reply. If the truth must be told, he had thought a good bit that morning about the white ware. Not in the way of granting it, but that she would probably be sulky over it when they got in to dinner.

"It doesn't feel here as it does in that blazing meadow," he remarked to his friends, as they went into the cool north room to dinner. "Folks that can keep indoors this weather have an easy time of it; they don't know what heat is."

Mrs. Thompson wondered whether this was a slap at her. Her face looked scarlet enough for any amount of heat. As to sitting down with them, she had enough to do to wait on the party. It was washing-day, and Mollio must not be called.

"This butter must have been kept in the kitchen, it's like oil," said Mr. Thompson.

"I took it out of the cellar since you came in; I will go down and get you some more, if you think I had better," was the reply, given pleasantly.

"Never mind. Well, I declare! Do you call this meat boiled?" went on Mr. Thompson, as he began to carve. "It's harder than a rock. If meat has to be cooked pretty fresh this weather, it needn't be like this."

"I tried to have it nice, Robert," she said, striving to choke down a rising sob—as well as an angry word.

Mr. Thompson, aroused by a quiver in the tone, looked at his wife; his friends looked at one another. She sat down at length, but could not eat. Mr. Thompson finished the meal in silence.

He was watching his wife's face; there was something in it he did not understand—a kind of patient, hopeless look, as if she no longer cared to struggle onward. The old mulberry ware did look dingy on the snowy white tablecloth; almost too bad for these chums of his to sit down to; he wondered he had never thought of that before. Robert Thompson grew thoughtful.

He passed into the kitchen when they were going out again—how hot and stifling it felt with that big fire, as bad as the south meadow. His wife had been in it cooking; that must have made her face scarlet. Indoors was not so comfortable a place after all, if you had hot work to do, was the idea that flitted through his mind. And, perhaps, the work was over-much for his wife, who at best was but a delicate woman.

A fresh, cool breeze had sprung up from the south, as he went out, walking slowly, but the sun was burning hot still. Robert Thompson waited to wipe his brows; and in that moment the voices of his companions came towards him from the other side of the hedge, where they stood in the little shade it cast.

"I never pitied a woman so much in my life," quoth one of them. "She works like a slave, and does not get even so much as a 'thank ye' for it from Thompson. He's a good fellow, but uncommon down upon the work. Strong as a horse himself, he thinks, I suppose, women must be the same."

"Yes, Bob's a sterling good fellow, but Jane Lawrence made a mistake when she said yes to his asking," said the other. "Jones, she wasn't cut out for a farmer's wife, especially one who keeps his folks to it like Thompson does. She's over sensitive—delicate; any lady but she would have turned long ago and bid him give her proper help. He won't make his money out of her many years if he don't take better care of her; she'll run down fast. Awfully changed she is; she looks as faded as the old house-rooms—and they haven't seen a coat of paint since grandfather Thompson's day."

"Ah, she'd better have took Joe Burnham. The Lawrences used to have things nice in their home, and she'd have got 'em so still if she'd married Joe. His wife's just gone out in her pony chaise. I say, Jones, I wonder whether Thompson's wife's ever sorry?"

Was she? The unconscious comments of those, his warm friends, came crushing down on Robert Thompson's heart and brain like a bolt of fire. That she rejected Burnham for him he knew, when she came home to the old homestead and took care of his invalid mother. Tenderly had she done it, too. Could she be wearing out her life in hard work for him; she, the mother of his boys; she whom he loved so well, for all his churlishness? Robert Thompson stole away; he could bear his thoughts no longer, and he felt that he could almost kill himself for his blind heedlessness.

The afternoon wore on toward evening. Mrs. Thompson had finished her indoor work—the washing up of the dinner dishes and the putting of the rooms straight—and was going in with an armful of fine things that she had taken from the clothes lines, when the sound of wheels made her look around.

"I've brought that white ware, Mrs. Thompson," said the brisk voice of Grover, springing from the cart and lifting down carefully a large hamper.

"But I didn't order it, Mr. Grover," she rejoined in rather a frightened voice.

"The master did, though. Mr. Thompson came down this afternoon and said the things was to come up to you at once. There's the dinner set you admired, and a tea set as well. Where shall I put 'em?"

"Bring 'em in, please," she answered rather faintly. He did as he was bid and then drove off.

Mrs. Thompson sat down by the hamper of crockery and cried as if her heart would break. They were magical tears, too, for they washed all the weariness and despair from her face, and the shadow from her eyes and heart. She forgot that she was tired, or that the day was hot; she only thought how kind Robert was, and what a wicked woman she had been for saying to herself in her temper that she'd rather have had Squire Burnham. Then she unpacked the treasure, pulling them out from amidst the hay, and singing softly all the while. O, it was beautiful, that ware! with its clear opaque white, and here and there a delicate tracing of fuschia or convolvulus.

Mr. Thompson came in and found her in the midst.

"What is it, Jenny?" he asked—the old fond name he used to call her.

"O Robert!" taking a step toward him.

He opened his arms and drew her close to his heart, kissing her as fondly and tenderly as he ever had in the days of his courtship. "I have been a brute, little wife," he whispered, huskily. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you? O, Robert! I never was so happy in my life! I have been to blame! I have not been as patient as I might."

"Yes, you have. You've been an angel compared to me; but all that is over. I did not think, Jenny; I did not, indeed."

"But—Robert—"

"You shall have more help in the house, another servant. We'll get her in, Jenny, long before the sewing-club comes round."

"O, Robert, how kind you are! I feel as light as a bird."

"And you are, almost," he answered, smiling a little sadly as he looked into her eager face. "We'll turn over a new leaf, Jane; heaven knows I did not mean to be cruel."

"Robert, you were never that."

"Well—we'll let it be; by-gones shall be by-gones if you will. Oh, and I forgot to say that I saw Leeds this afternoon. It's a very dull tin'e just now, the poor fellow says, without a job on hand; so I thought I'd give him one. They'll be here to begin to-morrow morning."

"You—are—not going to have the house done up?" she exclaimed in wild surprise.

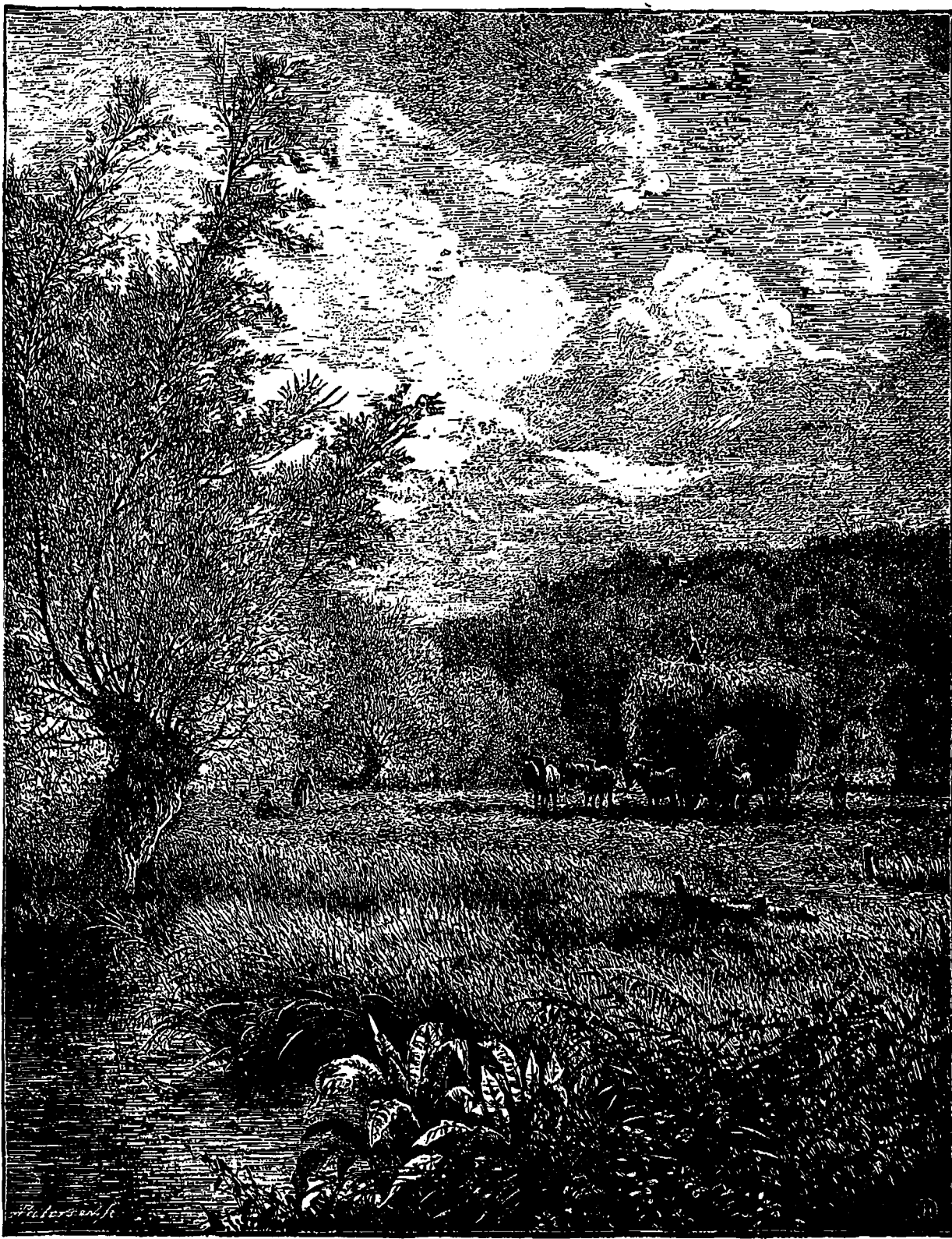
"Every square inch of it. And, once the painting and that's finished, we'll see what else we can do to make it look a little bit brighter."

She hardly believed it; she burst into tears. "And I have been so wicked!" she cried. "Only to-day I had quite wicked thoughts, Robert. I was envying Mrs. Burnham; I was feeling angry with everybody. It was the discouragement, Robert."

"Yes, it was the discouragement," he said, quite humbly. "We will do better for the future, Jane; I'll try another plan."

She cried silently for a minute longer; soft, happy tears; feeling that light had superseded darkness.

"And it has all arisen from my trying to carry out for a bit that blessed proverb:—'A soft answer turneth away wrath,'" she murmured. "Robert, did you ever before see such lovely white ware?"



HAY HARVEST.