

HOW BILLY WENT UP IN THE WORLD.

BY ANNETTE L. NOBLE.
A NEW DEPARTURE.

One beautiful day in early spring, the sun shone brightly in at the windows of what had once been Peter's cottage; but shiftless Peter never would have recognized his old home, save by the landscape around. Silas Barnard had already added a new kitchen, for Prissy was a famous house-keeper, and wanted plenty of room for all her cooking utensils and her domestic operations. How every pot and pan did shine to-day in the bright sunshine, while Prissy, her cheeks as red as ever, hovered over the fire, frying doughnuts. Si had added another room, and this last was a nursery. The arrival of the twins made such an apartment as necessary as the new kitchen. Five years had come and gone since Silas took Prissy for better or for worse; the twins were bounding children, a boy and a girl, or Jack and Jill, as Si persisted in calling them.

There was moreover, a baby. It was a good baby, healthy and perfect in all its members, but a more grotesque little mortal never flourished. Prissy and Si thought it decidedly pretty; but as it sat this day, crossed-legged on the floor, howling lustily for the hot doughnuts Prissy would not bestow on it, it looked like nothing but a Chinese idol. Well, as the sun shone and the baby screamed, and Prissy placidly warbled a hymn, the outer door opened and in walked William Knox.

"Where is Si, Prissy?"

"He will be in soon; he drove over to Langham, but it is time he was home."

"Well, I can wait while for refreshments," said the young man, laughing, as he secured two big cakes from the pan by the stove, and biting one, added: "You can cook a few things, Prissy, can't you?"

"Impudence! What did you seize the very hottest ones just from the fat lot? Si does that, too, instead of taking cool ones, which must be more digestible."

"Pshaw! I can digest a cannon ball."

"I believe you could. Why don't you get married, Billy? Then you would not have to come eating up your neighbors' cakes; your wife would make them for you."

"That would not be so economical, by half," replied Billy, sitting down near the "idol," whom he swooped up, perched on his knee, and silenced by filling its wide mouth with cake. Prissy, glad of the quiet, and unaware of the way it had been secured, went on talking.

"I declare, Billy, you are big enough to take care of a wife. I thought last Sunday, when you stood up to sing, you looked exactly like Goliath in our illustrated family Bible."

"Don't you like big men?"

"Yes, I do. I wish Si was twice as large as he is! I suppose a big fellow may be a sounder, but I always was of the opinion that, as a rule, he wouldn't have so many meannesses as a little one. A regular giant might get mad and toss his wife out of the window, but he ain't half so likely to count the potatoes she may cook for dinner, as if he were under weight. You see, Billy, the potato counter's wife has to despise his stinginess; but the chances are the big chap's wife will tell the neighbors she fell out of that window, and she will forgive him before her bones are set."

"Indeed! Why, Prissy, how you make me realize my prospective privileges. But it is too bad Si counts the potatoes—and are they small potatoes, too?"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Billy Knox! Si isn't so very small, and I can tell you his heart is almost as big as his body."

"Isn't that a little rough on his lungs, liver, and so forth?" quoth Billy, grasping out for another cake.

The hot hard began to scorch, and Prissy, taking it hastily off the fire, paid no more attention to her visitor for a while. He amused himself easily; ate more cake, tumbled the idol around in a sacrilegious way, told Prissy its head was going to be redder than ever his was, and his countenance by no means as handsome; finally he exclaimed:

"I have come to tell you and Si a secret."

"You are going to be married!" cried Prissy, turning square around and gazing at the young man, who colored a little as he returned:

"Can't a woman conceive of any other sort of a secret?"

"Of course she can; but why don't you be—be—looking out for a wife?"

"First, because I don't know a girl whom I would marry, who would marry me."—Billy paused a second, as if he would give Prissy a chance to deny that, if she could; then he continued: "Secondly, I could not support a wife yet, if I had one. I don't mean this to be true a great many years, however."

For reasons best known to her shrewd self, it was particularly delicious just then, for Prissy to remark, with hypocritical sympathy:

"Yes; get a good start first, and then find some nice, sensible poor girl, used to economy, or to taking care of herself; then you will get on slowly and surely."

When she had turned away, Billy suggested with would-be carelessness:

"What if I didn't happen to want a poor girl?"

"Gracious me! Would you marry a woman for her money?"

"No!" retorted Billy, savagely, and giving the idol a start that nearly knocked it off its base. "I wish the woman I want—I mean, I hope—"

The idol howled outright, as no real idol however heathenish, ever does howl; and Prissy snatched it away from Billy, declaring that he poked it as if it were made of putty and had no feelings whatever. In the excitement of this episode the subject last considered was allowed to drop, and the secret was forgotten until Si came home.

In the years since we last saw Billy, he had remained with Mr. Ellery until this, his twenty-second year. He had laid up several hundred dollars, but, better still, he had mastered every detail of farm work. Never was there a more steady-going, faithful worker about a farm than Silas Barnard; but Mr. Ellery often smiled at the difference between Silas and Billy. The one was content to work with a tool handed down from his grandfather; the other was progressive in the best sense of the word, applied to farming. Billy studied papers devoted to agriculture; Silas pronounced them full of new-fangled notions.

Mr. Ellery had several times allowed Billy to try experiments, which in the end proved him to be decidedly clear-headed. He never undertook anything of importance without consulting Mr. Ellery; he valued Silas' assistance highly, but his advice, not at all.

Silas did not return until nearly supper time. He had taken with him the twins, who came back so hungry they smelt the doughnuts at the gate, and began asking for them on the door-steps. Naturally there was not much time for conversation until supper was eaten and the juvenile element banished; then, while Prissy sat down to darn stockings, Silas and Billy chatted about various matters. At last Billy said:

"Haywood has bought this next farm, Si."

"I know it, but he means to sell it again the first chance, I hear. I always wondered Ellery didn't buy it. There isn't a prettier farm in the county, and it lies so close to his."

"He did not want all of it, and nobody has ever wanted to divide it."

"Well, if I had the wherewith to take that land, I wouldn't ask anything nicer," returned Si.

"What would you say to my buying that farm?" asked Billy.

He spoke lightly, but something in his tone made the other man look up and reply:

"I should say: Good for you, Billy Knox! But how could you do it? Has some long-lost relative left you a fortune?"

Leaning forward on the table, the young man exclaimed: "I came over on purpose to tell you my plans, for I really have had an idea of taking that farm. It is high time I started out a little bolder, and entirely independent of Mr. Ellery. Haywood is a capitalist, a straightforward, honest fellow, known to Mr. Ellery. He wanted him to add this farm to his, but he wouldn't hear that—didn't want it. While the two were talking about the farm one day last month, it just occurred to me that I could do that—that is, buy the farm even if I couldn't pay all cash down. When I suggested the thing to Mr. Ellery he approved of it heartily, so nothing remained but to talk with Haywood and come to an agreement. There is just one hundred acres at fifty dollars an acre—and I have taken it."

Silas gave a prolonged whistle, and Prissy waved a half-darned stocking in the air, crying:

"So that is your secret is it? A farm, not a wife—well, one will follow the other!"

"We have talked over and settled every single thing, Haywood and I," continued Billy, talking faster, with prosopope at their enthusiasm. "I paid five hundred dollars down. He dictates what crops, how many acres for meadow and pasture, how many acres to be ploughed and planted to corn, beans and potatoes, and how many sown to oats and barley. We each furnish one-half the seed, and when the crops are marketed, the proceeds are to be equally divided."

"How about live stock and tools?"

"I have more than enough money in the bank to get all I want for a good start after my first payment. I only lack one thing."

"What is that?"

"Si Barnard."

"What?"

"You. I must have you."

"But what will Mr. Ellery say to that?"

"He says 'yes.' We talked it over the first thing; he says he has had your services a long time, and can get along now without you, for he knows I will need you more."

Another thing, I want Prissy to take me to board. I mean to set myself up as independent as possible of my very best friends."

So that they won't feel a bit of responsibility about me. I told Mr. Ellery this morning that when once I was fairly started, I should not be running to him for help and advice, and if I did not, he must understand the reason why, and not imagine I was taking on airs."

"Well, the hull thing is downright sensible," said Silas; "but it is kind of amazing all the same, considerin' it isn't so very long since you came over the fence yourself into that potato patch."

Billy laughed; then glancing at Prissy he remarked: "Did you ever count the potatoes a woman cooks for dinner?"

"Billy!" be an Prissy indignantly; but Silas placidly answered:

"No, never! Won't they cook an odd number? They are an awful superstitious set—women are, generally speaking. I know, I have noticed one thing; Prissy knows how to pare a thin skin off a potato and not waste half. It comes of cutting neat as a dress-maker."

But Billy was shaking his finger at Mrs. Barnard, and saying: "Poor Prissy! If he'd only been a little bigger he never would have known it."

"If I was going to buy a farm," cried Prissy, "I'd cultivate some dignity, Billy!"

"It can't be a profitable crop, for Haywood didn't speak of it," retorted Billy, and then returning to business, he went on:

"This year, to begin with, Si, we will have twenty-five acres barley."

"Yes, there is where the money will be made—there, and on the beans, but there is no such easy paying crop as barley."

"Nothing to equal it," assented Billy, adding: "then fifteen acres for beans, ten corn, five for potatoes, and five for oats. We will mow and pasture the rest of the farm."

Silas, by this time, was greatly interested, and the rest of the evening was spent in lively discussions, which, practical and sensible as they undoubtedly were, would have no interest for the reader. Suffice it to say, all satisfactory arrangements for board, and for Silas' services, were made before Billy left the little home, at what was an unusually late hour for his inmates.

He felt a new delight in life, and an honest pride in the thought of being a landowner. Just within the boundary line of his new farm, stood the scraggy old tree in which the balloon had once been entangled. Billy, seeing its dark outlines in the clear starlight, smiled to himself, saying:

"I certainly alighted on this farm early in life. It ought to be mine by right of discovery. Little Ben was sound when he counselled me to do my work out in the sunshine. I can almost hear him stutt, 'as he did that night granny slept in her chair by the fire, and we danced about her like mad things. Dear old granny! I wonder if she has found Ben! If so, she must have wondered to see him in heaven, when she supposed she left him on earth."

Yes, granny had gone out from the cottage that had sheltered her so long. The year after Prissy married, she found her, one lovely summer afternoon, sitting with hands quietly folded, and her face as pleasant as a happy child—but quite dead.

It was a warm pleasant evening in the latter part of May, and Silas Barnard and his wife were enjoying an hour of rest after a busy day. It was Si's habit at this time to take down his old fiddle and play a few lively tunes for Jack and Jill who, if they were not like their namesakes, perpetually tumbling down hill, were always in motion, and ready for music. This night, however, after he had played "Bonnie Doon," and the "Arkansas Traveller," he dropped his bow, saying, "I'm beat out; we did a big day's work to-day, we drilled our last acre of barley."

"Whereabouts have you sown it?" asked Prissy.

"The four-rows we put on that land, nearest Ellery's, the two-rows is just south of it. Where is Billy to-night? Oh, I know; he said he was going over to see Ellery about something or other."

"Anything very important?" asked Prissy, with a knowing smile, which was lost on Silas, who was rather dull in some respects.

"Well, if he was as tired as I am, he wouldn't think anything important but his night's rest. He has worked as hard, certainly."

"Nan has come home."

"Has she?" asked Si, with innocent interest; "and how does she look? I. Where has she been this long time, anyway?"

"Why, Si Barnard, if I have told you that once I have told you a dozen times over."

"Well now, Prissy, do you want me to be keeping track of every pretty girl in the neighborhood? After the worry I had with you, I'm glad to let my mind sort 'em settle."

"I should think you had better! For a cool-blooded creature you did use to get into an awful ferment. Nan Ellery has been teaching school in a ladies' seminary about one hundred miles from here."

"What an idea! With all their money, is she going to earn her livin'?"

"That ain't it at all. You knew what great friends she was with that Miss Sara Wells. She was teaching in this school and got sick. Nan went to keep her place for her till she got well; then Mrs. Ellery said she was so interested in some lectures or other on literature—Nan was—she wanted to stay and enjoy them and Sara's companionship. Mrs. Ellery don't need her at home, and it must be a little dull for a lively girl out here in the country."

"She is a country girl and ought to be contented at home," said Silas.

"And so she is, as happy as a lark when she is at home. I was up there this afternoon, and I declare, she does get prettier every day of her life. Her dress was only a pink cambie, that didn't cost over ten cents a yard; but her cheeks were pinker yet, and her eyes just snap, or laugh, or sparkle, according to what she is saying or thinking."

"Yes, she is a nice girl, Nan is," said Si, with a long yawn; "but I'm so dead tired I'll just go to bed. It does pass my understanding what Billy was in such a taking to go over and ask about that old wagon for, when Ellery has been willing to sell it any time this twelve-month."

As he shuffled off with another jaw-breaking yawn, Prissy soliloquized: "It passes my understanding how a man can be so dumb over the very next man's love affairs, and the very one too who was so long-sighted in seeing reasons for coming over here, when he wanted to see somebody. Such far-fetched excuses as he's got up! I, kind of blushed for him, once in a while. Not as I want him to see through Billy, either, for, poor chap, he's aiming too high, I fancy, and he never'll want anybody to see him write if he only succeeds in hurting himself. Here, you two children, what do you mean by carousing around after your own father is in bed? Come here, directly, and let me undress you!"

The twins, who were doing nothing more riotous than throwing grass at one another, came meekly, and were put away for the night.

Yes, Billy had gone over to the Ellerys', after bestowing more care on his personal appearance, than might have been expected from a tired farmer going to see his neighbor on business. He found Mr. Ellery on the piazza, and seated himself near by.

The new farm was a fruitful subject for long conversations, and there was but one thing in the world more interesting to the young man, so all was well. It would have been better for him, perhaps, if he could