

A LAY PREACHER.

BY ROSE TERRY COOKE.

"I DON'T know," said Mrs. Simmons, shaking her head. "I don't know what on airth Mr. Styles' folks will do. She's dreadful delicate, and he's got dear knows what's a-ailin' of him—minister's complaints, dyspepsia, 'nd suthin' er nuther in his throat; and there's them two peepin' miser'ble children. They hain't been here but goin' on three months, 'nd their help's goin' to leave—don't like the country. Land alive, how notional them helps be! Anybody would think, to hear 'em talk, they'd lived in first-class houses to home, and had the best of society and all the privileges."

"That's so," heartily returned Uncle Israel Jinks, who was leaning on Mrs. Simmons' gate, having, as he phrased it, "a dish o' talk."

"That's so, marm; them sort of folk is like the wind—allers a-blowin'. I've observed considerable, bein' in years an' allers keepin' my eyes open; and I've allers noticed that the things folks makes the most fuss over is the things they hain't got. That's human natur', Miss Simmons. We all hear the sermon for the folks in the next pew. Human natur' is queer, very queer, on-accountable."

"Well!" snapped Mrs. Simmons, who seemed to feel a thorn in Uncle Israel's illustrations somewhere, "that ain't the p'int we was aimin' at. We've all got human natur' to be born with, so we've got to lump it. The p'int is, can anybody in this town be got to help Miss Styles for a spell—anybody that'll stay till they can better themselves?"

Uncle Israel lifted his straw hat with one hand a little way, and began to scratch his head. "What should you say to Desire Flint, now?"

There was a hesitating sound in the cracked voice and a glimmer of suspense in the faded blue eyes as he spoke.

"Desire Flint!!!" No hesitation in Mrs. Simmons' prompt reply. "Why, Uncle Israel, she ain't no better than a fool! anyways, not much."

"She ain't a fool; she ain't nobody's fool," was the meditative answer. "Desire's simple, but sometimes I think a good many folks would be better for a grain of her simpleness, 'nd she's real handy if you'll tell her just exactly what to do and how to do it. Dr. Porter said she nussed old Miss Green splendid, jest as faithful as could be, nothin' forgot or slighted. There's suthin' in that, now, I tell ye."

"She does say the queerest things. You know yourself how she up and told Deacon Mather he was a wolf."

"I know, I know; she speaks in meetin', that's a fact, and she's got the Bible to her tongue's end, and she b'lieves in 't, lock an' stock. Now we all know 't won't do to swaller the Bible whole that way. Where should we be if we did? Goody