

By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

WILL SHAKESPEARE'S LITTLE LAD.

BY IMOGEN CLARK. CHAPTER VII.

Pray you, sit by a side, And tell's a tale.

A Winter's Tale.

He hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book; he hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink; his intellect is not replenished.

Thomas Whittington, whose duty it was to tend Mistress Hathaway's sheep, was stretched full length upon the ground, in the shade of a spreading elm, fast asleep. He did not present a very gallant appearance as he lay there in his shepherd's attire of grey russet with his bag and bottle at his side. His long thin legs were sprawled far apart and his blue bonnet had fallen from his head, disclosing his straggling, unkempt locks. A shaft of sunshine pierced through the leaves above and descended upon the lined and weather-beaten face which, from exposure to sun and wind, had grown the color of the pampered prodigal's cloak in the painted cloth. It danced persistently over the great nose and into the cavernous mouth, whence issued such rumblings and whistlings and sighings as must have frightened the sheep had they not become indifferent and heedless by this time. For Thomas was when he was wrapped deep in slumber. Did he clatter about the barn or in the buttery, his great shoes—set with nails—beating out a barbaric sort of music, did he speak in his gruff voice or roar you out in his hearty laugh, or did he break into song, though he could get no farther in it than the one line (but 'twas no matter surely, since he had no notion of tune)—why, all those sounds compounded together could not make up a tithe of the din which was ever the accompaniment of his repose.

But though Whittington slept at his task, his conscience was easy; the rough-haired little tyke at his side made an excellent deputy, and mounted guard over the shepherd's crook, keeping a wary watch of the woolly masses lying about asleep, or greedily cropping the herbage. The dog, like his master, was old, and often drowsed in the long sunny hours; but it was always with one eye open, and woe betide the silly sheep who sought to exchange his pasture land for another. He was shown the error of his way on the moment and made a shamefaced example of for the instruction of his kind. Nor could any stranger venture into the field without giving the nay-word which should account satisfactorily for his presence there.

The boy singing 'Constant Susanna' as he came across the meadows, however, was no stranger, and neither was his companion, the dignified hound. The small guardian of the peace pricked up his ears at the sound of the pleasant music with its burden of 'lady, lady,' and sprang forward a few feet to greet the new-comers, wagging his tail in welcome and giving vent to his joy in great noisy barks which failed to arouse his master. Hamnet pulled the sharp pointed ears and patted the little cur who leapt up to be caressed, but Silver passed on with an almost disdainful step, waiting for the boy to seat himself before he took up his own position near by, sitting up on his haunches and overlooking the field where the grazing sheep lay—soft, white patches amid the green, almost as if the snows of winter still lingered there. The other dog sat gravely erect, all idea of drowsiness dispelled, his eyes now turned upon his flock, and anon cast furtively at one of his visitors as if trying to read his thoughts and discover whether any enemy for his own authority troubled the placid breast. He almost wished that some disturbance would occur amongst the lambs and sheep, that he might be called upon to show his power and thus awaken some spark of respect in the indifferent, town-bred eyes. He breathed shortly, and snapped at a fly with unnecessary vehemence.

Hamnet watched his sleeping host for a few moments in silence, then with a roguish look on his face he broke a long twig from a bush nearby and stripped it quickly of all its leaves save two at the slender top. He leaned forward cautiously on one elbow and dangled the branch just above Whittington's nose letting it rise and fall in quick succession and making a buzzing noise the while with his lips. The heavy snores did not diminish for some minutes, then there was an interval of quiet, followed by a great gasp which ended in a growl. The sleeper threw up his arm to shield his face, but the pertinacious insect darted at his ear and at the bit of brown throat left exposed to its attack. Backward and forward, wherever there was an unguarded spot, that cunning, winged thing found its way, and the buzzing increased until one would have thought a whole hive of bees had mistaken Thomas Whittington for some new species of flower, some 'love-indulgence,' and were enamoured of his sweetness. At last the tortured man struggled up into a sitting position and waved his arms frantically about his head, crying in his stentorian voice:

"Aroint ye! aroint ye! I be e'en at my work. Can't ye leave an honest man alone? I be e'en at my work watchin' o' Mistress Hathaway's sheep."

"He thinks 'tis the fairies pinching him for his laziness," Judith whispered in delight, bending toward her brother. She had just crept through the field, and watchful Crab, seeing her coming, had gone to meet her, escorting her as Silver had escorted Hamnet a short time before.

The boy nodded in response and brought his switch down with stinging force upon the hairy fore-arm, whereat Whittington gave a roar of pain like a bull in a rage.

"Out upon ye, ye pestiferous gad," he shouted. "I did but close my eye to wink. I be an honest labourer, I be, an' one that mindeth a's duty, come wet or dry. There's meat for ye in other places than in Mistress Hathaway's meadow. Away, I say—nay, then, Crab, to't, to't."

them to right and left as the wind whirled the snow from trees and rooftops. Silver, quivering all over, uttered a deep note of approval, as the scared woolly things, with much bleating, huddled together in the farthest corner of the field. The uproar was so unlooked for and so tremendous that Whittington threw himself over on his face and fell to kicking the air with his great feet. Then again did that saucy insect, augmented by another guided by Judith's hand, dart hither and thither, buzzing and stinging about the prostrate man's ears, while near him two voices sang with appropriate emphasis:

"Pinch him black and pinch him blue, O, thus our nails shall handle you!"

The man tossed from side to side and cried for mercy.

"Let be," he groaned, "I'll e'en fess. Marry, I was at 'The Bunch o' Grapes' yestreen, an' there was ale i' plenty, an' the way to Shottery was grievous long, an' I comed na home at curfew; but I seed ye na—nay, that's as true as Crab hath loongs—I seed ye na at your dances. I comed straight home, though the road were long an' waverin'. My sleep's been broke—nay, then, I will slip no more! 'Tis a parlous thing for an old man to play the lad, but 'twas an occasion—an occasion—Steve Sly put up the ale—"

His words were cut short by a peal of laughter from the children, which was like a dash of cold water over the frightened man, restoring him to his senses on the moment. He sat up and turned a half-angry, half-ashamed face upon his persecutors.

"Methought 'twas the fairies," he muttered. "But ye will na tell Gillian; she hath a frampod way o' takin' a man up. Did she but know I'd slept at my task I'd hear nowt but that. Wull ye keep peace? Good then, I be na feared. I fecks 'twas parlous wrong I do protest, but 'twould never ha' happed an Crab had na been minded to watch. A Shepherd's a man, hark ye, that should e'en keep ever awake for fear o' dangers coming to a's flock."

"Even so, Thomas, that's what the book saith."

"I got it from no book, truly—I know not the insides o' a book."

"We put it into English only the other forenoon," Hamnet persisted, "like this: 'Shepherds are wont sometimes to talk o' their old lives whilst the cattle eek the cud under the shade, for fear if they should fall asleep some fox, or wolf, or such like beast o' prey should fall upon the cattle.'"

Judith moved a trifle nearer the speaker, half in admiration, half in terror of what might be lurking in the thicket beyond the boundary of the field.

"Hath he not wit, Thomas?" she asked, nodding her head in the direction of the boy. "Marry, thou shouldst hear him say it off in Latin. Thou hast it memorit, sweet Hamnet, I wis—come—come—say it."

Hamnet fung out his arm in a declaiming fashion and began to chant the words:

"Pastores aliquando dum pecas sub umbra ruminant antiquos suos amores recitare solent—"

"Now, what a thing learning be-eth!" Thomas interposed; "but I'd liefer ha' the English—it soundeth more familiarly. There was but a word o' thy gibberish that I'd e'en knowed afore—'twas 'dum.' By my troth, a man would soon be dumb an he had to talk that heathenish stuff! Now I praise Heaven I come o' dull parentage, an' what I ha' to say I must e'en say in few words an' fair English. But lad, go to, thou art a marvellous scholar."

"Nay, I differ not from the other boys; thou shouldst hear our form go to say the Fables. Wert ever at school, Thomas?"

"Nay, I had na toime; my father tended sheep an' I must e'en fall to when that I was a little lad. But tell me what thou dost and when goest thou to thy lessons?"

"At six i' the morning o' summer and seven o' winter, wet or cold, sunny or sweet, when one would liefer play micher—it matters not, then, one must be."

"I'm in the third form now, and this is what I must e'en do. Every morn I must say two parts, one out o' the Accidence and the other out o' the Grammar (I'll show thee my grammar some day, with the picture o' the boys in the tree gathering apples.)"

"Marry, what doth that teach? Boys need na be showed how to climb a tree and steal fruit. 'Tis born in 'em, methinks."

"Nay, sure, Thomas, 'tis the tree o' knowledge, like the one that stood i' the Garden o' Paradise, and the boys are e'en picking the fruit for their advancement. But thou bring'st me out—where was I? Oh! we say the accidence and the grammar, and then, look 'ee, each boy must form the first person o' a verb active in any o' the four conjugations. And we may go home at eleven for our dinner; but we must be back in our places at one, and so to continue there till three, or the half-hour past, then there's a rest for a quarter o' an hour; that over, lessons till the half-hour after five, and then to end with reading a piece o' a chapter and singing two staves o' a psalm and lastly with a prayer. 'Tis near six—"

"Ha! done, ha! done!" Thomas cried; "I feel the sleep comin' back to my eyelids."

"But our lessons in the afternoon," Hamnet continued, with a laugh—"nay, then, thou must hear it all, sith thou hast asked. 'Tis not so bad, I warrant, for thee to hear as 'tis for us to do, especially as Sir John hath a ferula this long, and an arm as mighty as old Sir Guy's to wield it withal, and a way o' looking from under his brows that sendeth a boy's heart down into his shoes an it so chanceth that he hath not got his lesson overwell. 'Tis strange how a glance will make the wits fly as if they were so many clouds, and his look, marry, was like a strong wind scattering them away! We have lessons in Syntax in the afternoon that we must e'en say memorit, then must we construe and parse all the words that hold the force o' the rule. Two days in the week there are lessons in Aesop's Fables, and other two days in Cato, which we must construe and parse likewise and say out Cato by heart. And Fridays must we e'en translate those lessons into English, construing one o' them into Latin."

"Now, I give Heaven thanks the week is done."

"Nay, there's Saturday for part o' the day—"

"I be glad I be a little wench," Judith laughed, "and need not pother my head wi' such things. Girls don't have to study, and I shall always have Hamnet by to tell me what I ought to know; only I be like thee, Thomas, I'll not want to hear it in Latin, save just the little bit that maketh one hunger for the English words. But I like ' that about the shepherds telling o' their old lives to keep awake. Tell us a tale now, one that's true, an thou canst not tell us something about the fairies."

Thomas glanced apprehensively over his shoulder.

"I wot nowt o' the fairies, save that they do none harm unless that they be angered thereto."

"Nay, Gillian saith they do, and 'tis best we pray to be kept from their evil devices."

"Believe it na, lass. Gillian knoweth nowt, though I be thinkin' she felt their anger herself in her young days. Doubtless she touched an elfin's ring all shinin' wi' drops when she went forth wi' the other wenches to gather May-dew, for her beauty's not overmuch to look at now. 'Tis small wonder she prayeth to be kept from their furdur wrath. But 'twas she affronted 'em first—'tis a way she hath! Speak 'em fair and do 'em no ill, little maid, so wull they only help thee."

"Dost know how to go invisible?" Thomas shifted uneasily and turned an anxious eye upon the speaker.

"There be-eth ferneseed now," he muttered.

"Oh! ay, but verily, Thomas, 'twill not work," Hamnet rejoined, in eager tones. "Once long ago I found me some, or what looked like it, and I swallowed it quick; then I climbed me into the buttery window to get at the marchpane Gillian had but just made, and she, turning spied me and, thwack! thwack! went her broom. I faith, I was not invisible, as my poor back could vouch. But I have heard o' a better way, and 'tis e'en like this; come close, the both o' ye, and Silver and Crab mount guard. 'Take water and pour it upon an ant-hill, and look immediately after and ye shall find a stone o' divers colours sent from the fairies. This bear in your right hand and ye shall go invisible.'"

"A stone, say'st thou?" Judith asked cautiously. "Is't what my Grandam Hathaway meaneth by a lucky stone, or is't what father told us was the 'loopher's stone? Wilt seek it, Hamnet, and when? Thou dost not truly think we can go invisible, dost thou?"

"Nay, then, how can I say? In good sooth I shall search for it some day, and thou may'st come wi' me, but thou must not breathe a word o' this. Come, promise."

He stretched out his little finger and linked it with hers while they both said solemnly together:

"Ring finger, blue bell, Tell a lie and go to hell!"

When that ceremony was over, the boy insisted upon a repetition of it with the shepherd, and thus, having bound his hearers to secrecy, he was enabled to continue his conversation.

"An ever I go invisible," he said, sitting back on his heels and resuming his natural tone of voice, "I'll be given with Gillian for the drubbing she gave me—I'll eat her marchpane and her carraways; I'll spirit them all away to Weir Brake and feast the boys. Thou shalt have my stone sometimes, Judith, sweet—tell me what thou wilt do with it."

"Methinks I'll hold it very close and steal soft to where Susanna and her gossip sit and listen to their talk. They've many secrets, and they say so oft when I come by, 'Hem! small pitchers have great ears,' and fall a-laughing. So I'll e'en hearken when they see me not, and then flout them after, and make as if some little bird flying through the air had whispered their sayings to me. But an thou goest invisible, fair brother, what wilt poor Silver do?"

Hamnet rubbed his chin reflectively; for the moment, he had left his dog out of his calculations.

"An I had the stone, I could get cates for him in plenty," he said, slowly, "but he'd liefer go without, I wot, and see me than have all the cates in Christendom. Nay, then, I'll not e'en seek the stone; thou may'st, an thou list, thou and Thomas, but tempt me not. I make my share over to thee."

Judith looked off at the sunny meadows and up at the hot, cloudless sky, then her glance came back to her companions lolling comfortably in the shade. She patted her gown softly.

"I'll keep," she murmured, "I'll keep; there's no such rhyur; I can seek the stone any time. I'd liefer stay here wi' thee and watch the sheep; and that we may not sleep and danger come, we'll e'en pretend we be shepherds, and we'll talk o' our old lives."

"Hurrah! Jude," Hamnet shouted; "I do protest I like the game passing well. Here, thou must have the crook to hold, and Crab shall stay by thee an he were thy very dog; and Silver lie thou close to me—so! I'll keep thy cloak, Thomas, about my knees—the air is chill, methinks. And thou may'st have thy bonnet and, yea, thy bottle. Now we look like real shepherds, i' faith. Come, Judith, begin—begin—'tis thy own thought."

"La, now, I prithee, do not ask me," Judith protested, with more the air of a fine lady than a simple country bumpkin; "I have no wit. I'll e'en listen to thee and Thomas."

"In sooth, thou must say something or spoil the sport. 'Tis not hard when once thou hast made a beginning. Come, I'll help thee—once on a time—"

"Once on a time—marry and amen! I can think o' naught; and yet I would not vex thee." She drew her brows together in thought; then her face cleared.

"I'll e'en sing a verse from the Coventry pageant that grandam hath so oft told us of. 'Tis not new to thee, Hamnet, but it must serve, and 'tis about the shepherds."

She paused for a minute, then beating the air softly with the crook she sang:

"As I toudred this enders night Of three jolly shepherdes I saw a sight."

"We're three jolly shepherds too, I wene!"

"And all about their folde a starre shone bright; They sang terli, terlow, So merrilie the shepherdes their pipes can blow!"

"Now afore heaven a pious song an' a godly," Thomas cried. "Sing 's another verse, wench."

After a moment's hesitation Judith went on in her sweet, childish treble:

"Down from heavene, from heavens so highe, Of angels there came a great companie, With mirth and joy and great solemnitie, They sang terli, terlow, So merrilie the shepherdes their pipes can blow!"

"'Tis thy turn now, Hamnet," she said, when she had come to the end of the carol.

"Methinks 'tis bitter cold," he mumbled, with chattering teeth, "else 'tis the rheumatisms hath crept into my old bones these bitter nights. A plague o' sitting here, year after year!" he broke off coughing.

Judith clapped her hands in delight. "I know thou'dst find the way," she cried, with no tinge of envy in her voice; "but go on—go on!"

"I mind me o' many things," he continued. "Now it so befell upon a day." He paused and cast a wary glance around.

"Nay then, brothers," he went on, in a blood-curdling whisper, "hist! there's fearsome noises abroad, and mark you shadow stealing through the hedge. Avant there, avant!"

Judith dropped her badge of office and threw herself face downwards upon the ground, clinging to Thomas in her terror and screaming with all her might while the two dogs added their voices to the hurly-burly.

"'Tis but play," Hamnet cried, in superior tones; "thou art a very baby girl to be afear'd."

Judith sat up and pushed back the curls that had escaped from her coil with a trembling hand and Thomas looked as silly as one of his own sheep.

"'Twas so very like," the little maid declared, "so very like, I could have sworn I heard a growling. I prithee pardon me for bringing thee out; I'll not be so frightened again."

"Marry, I'll not fright thee. That was not in the tale anyway: I did but make pretence a lion, or a tiger was coming for the sheep. But there! 'tis gone: we frighten him off wi' our shrieks. Well done, brave shepherds, well done, valiant men, our flocks are safe once more. Now to my tale. 'Twas upon a day—nay, I'll not tell that. H'm! let me think. Why! Judith, sweet, I'll e'en tell a tale o' those three shepherds thou wert singing of but now. They were sore mazed that night with the star's shining; 'twas brighter than the moon and sun put together, and it danced and danced as it moved across the sky, leaving a great roadway o' light in 's track. Now, one o' the shepherds was 's full o' heaviness, but when he looked up and saw the star he was exceeding glad, though he knew not why. He'd a wish in 's heart and he said it o'er quick; he knew that whatever one wisheth during a star's flight will surely come true, though he wist not that when it doth happen one is ever sorry. He would not have felt that way: his was a fair wish, and thou could'st not guess it, I warrant me, an thou'dst try six Sundays running. So I must e'en tell thee."

"This shepherd had a little lad o' his own, not any older than our cousin Philip Shakespeare, and not so big nor strong; he was crookbacked and could not walk. Now it so chanced that long before, when the little lad was but a babe, his father coming home one day was wroth—he was in 's cups—and the baby, creeping up to meet him, got in 's way, whereupon did the father knock him with his crook, and the baby fell down the deep ditch by the side o' the house. And after the first cry there was no more sound, so that the father was frightened, and gathered the child in 's arms and called him all sweet names—oh! he was sober enow then, I promise thee. 'Twas long before the baby ope'd his eyes, and then it fell a-moaning, and the poor man could do naught to ease the pain. Nay, Jude, sweet Jude, leave off crying, else I must e'en stop; 'twill all come right an thou hast the patience to listen."

"The baby didn't die, but he didn't get well neither—he could not walk at all and he was ever ailing. And his father loved him so much, and though he knew that the little lad loved him best o' everyone, he never could forgive himself for what he'd done, but he must needs think still and always: 'Oh, an I could only make my son well! So there was the wish in his heart, and that night, when he saw the star, he whispered it as he'd whispered it an hundred times before. But 'twas the strangest star! It didn't flash out o' the heavens into the nowhere; it just kept moving and shining and beckoning, each point a little hand, and all about there were soft voices crying, 'Follow! follow!'"

"Then did he and his brother shepherds get them up and go after, treading swiftly till they reached a low, dark byre, and they said among themselves how strange it was to come all that way just for that, and they were going forward. But the star stayed there with a great shining, and anon the voices cried: 'Enter—enter—worship—worship.' So they went within, and found the little Jesus lying amidst the straw with his mother sitting by and singing soft. Whereupon did each one make his reverence; but my shepherd coming last, stopped and looked with all 's heart in 's eyes, and the woman, speaking low, said: 'Thou'rt a good man, verily, an little children be so dear to thee.'"

"And he made answer: 'I be no good man, Madam lady.' 'Then he he up and told his story, whereat the Mother Mary's tears did flow, but she said: 'Nay, thou'rt good now, and thou art truly sorry. May heaven's blessings fall on thy own lad.'"

"And even as she spoke the little Baby Jesus smiled with His soft eyes, and put out one tiny hand. Then on a sudden did my shepherd feel his heart leap within him, and he turned and went out into the night. There was a glad song o' angels in the air all about, but he heeded it not. He'd no thought o' anything but just his little child. So he sped on, and lo! as he came to his home the door was ope'd from within, and there on the sill was his very own little son—straight and strong and wondrous fair to see. And when the father stood still, as he were in a dream and could not move, the little lad ran forward and

put his arms about him and led him into the house."

There was a moment's silence, then Judith drew a long breath.

"Oh! I be so glad," she cried, as she leaned across Whittington and patted her brother's arm; "'twas a brave ending, but I wish thou could'st tell what they did once they were within the house."

"I faith! there's no more to the tale—the door was made fast. But I wot they were happy together, thus much hath floated out through the chinks and cracks. And now 'tis for Thomas to keep us awake."

"That I canna do, I ha' nowt to say. A shepherd's life be-eth a goodly life, but 'tis over-quiet; still I'd na change it for another. Here I be content wi' my sheep an' eanlings around me, an' if the sun shineth, why, welcome to 's shinin'; an' if the rain raineth, why, 'tis wull for all livin' creatures. Marry, 'tis a goodly world."

"That's never a tale, Thomas," Judith interrupted, with much severity. "Thou must e'en do as we did; we'll not let thee slip. Tell us why?"—she stole a glance at her brother from under her long lashes—"why thou singest 'I mun be married o' Sunday,' and then thou art not married at all?"

"Hark to the lass!" roared Thomas. "Love an' marriage—ho! ho! 'tis all the maids think on, I care na what their age. 'Od's heartlings! I'd na marry any she in Christendom. I loike my life as 'tis, wi' Crab here for my friend."

"But why—?" Judith began.

"Every why hath its own wherefore," Thomas returned, sententiously, "an' I ha' my reasons." He glanced at her suspiciously, a sudden idea lighting his slow brain. "Was't Gillian set thee on?"

The little maid brightened visibly.

"Not so, 'twas only me and Hamnet that wondered."

"I'd liefer hear a tale o' the wars," Hamnet said, coming to the rescue. "Thou wast living when Harry VIII. was king, and thou hast heard talk o' divers battles, e'en if thou hast not seen them; but an thou canst not remember any at this moment, prithee tell us why thou has no good wife."

"Wert ever in love, Thomas?" continued the little lass, "and didst have the moon-sickness and look pale? Gillian saith thou wert a brave fellow in thy youth, and never a better tripped it on the green."

"Gillian hath her good points, i' fecks, though she be curst o' tongue full oft," Thomas replied, good-humoredly; "she used to foot it fealty too. Lord! Lord! how many years ago it is. An' yet, methinks I could dance you a Rogero as wull as another e'en at this day—ay, or a Packerington's Pound. There was one little wench, I mind—nay then, how was she called?—'tis gone—'tis gone. But she tripped it better than the rest, an' up and down, an' in an' out she went. She'd eyes loike a doe's, an' as she danced the red come creepin' up i' her cheeks. I ha' na thought on her these many years, but it all cometh back."

"Thou didst love her then?"

"She were a very madcap wench wi' her songs an' her laugh, but I loved her na: I did but love her dancin'." There was another maid Joan, an' we'd made it up between us to marry. An' then, look ye, being a woman an' fond, she'd e'en ha' it I cared more for the lass I danced with; so she flouted me sore, whereat—nay, I were but a lad—I hid me to all the fairs an' wakes, an' danced an' danced just to show Mistress Joan I minded nowt her words. Then she up an' married a lout from Coventry, an' so the tale's ended."

"But what o' the other—the maid wi' the roses in her cheeks?"

"Why, I wot na; dead, surely, 'tis so many years ago."

"Peradventure she did love thee," Judith said softly.

"I can na say; she'd a merry tongue an' a light heart; but after Joan went away I sickened o' dancing, ah! they said the little wench came no more to the Green neither. So there's an end on't! Wull! I be an old man, now, an' I had a fair life—sunshine an' shade, an' sunshine again. I owe no man an' I envy no man, least o' all that lout! Coventry Joan married forty years ago come Halloween. They say a made a good end an' a were glad to go—she grew so sharp o' tongue. Nay, I envy no man a's happiness; 'tis enow for I to be here wi' Crab. I ha' saved by a tidy sum, an' it shall all be thine some day, lad."

"Not so, Thomas," Hamnet cried, "though I thank thee. I need not thy moneys, surely, and so my dear father would say. Give it where 'twould be more needed; there be the poor in Stratford, thine own home town."

"Soul an' body o' me! I'd do what I wull wi' my own. It shall be thine an I list, or the poor's. H'm!—that thought likes me wull, though I mean na for Steve Sly to ha' a groat o' what I ha' laboured for. But soft! how long the shadows ha' grown."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE WORTH-WHILE THINGS.

By Harvey Wickham, in the Pacific Monthly.

Deacon John drove his plow straight forward through the furrow, and tried to keep his mind to his work. But it was impossible. Black trousers and a white shirt were torturingly uncomfortable, and even if he could have forgotten why he was wearing them he could not forget the tall brick church at his back. There was something else—something sad and portentous—that he did not want to forget. He had dressed up, notwithstanding the working day, just to show that he remembered. It was hateful to have that same sad and portentous thing testified to by the brick church. And yet it was to the church that everything now had come.

When he turned at the end of the furrow he could not help seeing that squat spire, finished only as high as the belfry, and the peaked front, surmounted by its glittering cross. Several specks were crawling up the broad steps. The people were beginning to arrive.

Deacon John halted at the bush where he had left his coat, collar and necktie. With a jerk he unhitched the surprised team—it being not yet 11 o'clock, the horses were looking for at least another sweltering hour before resting—and watched them crop their way

slowly homewards along an unplowed strip of sod. Then he dusted the soil from his trousers, mopped his forehead with a clean handkerchief, put on the rest of his Sunday raiment, and sat down on the stone wall that separated the farm from the highway. He even reached to his coat-tail pocket, found a pair of black cotton gloves that he had worn the last time he was a pallbearer, and put them on. But he kept his back to the church. He would not bow the knee to Baal. But neither would he, on the other hand, work during the hour of Hannah's funeral.

A deep-toned bell from the tower let fall a heavy stroke, startling, awful—breaking ruthlessly in on the stillness. Deacon John shuddered. He had been to so many funerals in his long life that the mere burying of the dead had lost most of its unnaturalness. But this funeral was unprecedented. Friends and relatives he had seen laid away—like Christians," he thought to himself. But he dared not follow, even in imagination, the rites and ceremonies that were now preparing. And to think that Hannah had looked gladly forward to all this!

The deacon was a pitiable figure of stern, unrelenting grief. The black specks pointed to him as they crept up the steps. Without dreaming that his struggles were known, he was the most talked-of person in town. He had discouraged his wife from going, and had assured his family that he was not going himself. It was time to show the rising generation that the elders held to principle, even when their hearts were touched. But as he began to think of what Hannah had been to him and to his, a stubborn tear rose gradually on the edge of his lower lid, diving suddenly in a salt streak across his cheek.

The deacon's farm was the first to be encountered on leaving the town. The Catholic Church was the first house of worship one passed coming in. Providence had arranged it thus, so that the Protestant elder and she whom he called the Scarlet Woman might be brought face to face. The Elder, long before attaining the title, had learned to fear and hate the Woman, hurling at her all the condemnatory speeches in the Bible. The Woman retaliated with a maddening indifference.

When John was a boy he never passed the church—then an ugly wooden building—except at a gait which would have taken him in safety past the worst of haunted houses. During early manhood his views were compacted by Nast's bitter cartoon of the Pope as a mitered snake—a horror that still twisted in and out among the confused mass of Old Testament imagery that he interpreted as allegorical references to the Papal See. Once, while the old edifice was being torn down, he had stumbled over a carved waterspout, kicking it with his boot under the impression that it was an idol—a part of the worship of the golden calf—and after the carpenters and masons had finished the new walls, and the mysterious paraphernalia of the Woman began to arrive, John was certain that the boxes contained all the abominations of the Ammonites and the Jebusites. Age had added to his boyish terror the deep, passionate convictions of a narrow, earnest and naturally religious mind. He could give plausible reasons and quote emphatic texts for the aversion that was in him, and the Presbyterian prayer meeting was never so lively as when Deacon John was lashing the Pontiff.

Yet these tirades always ended lamely. "Of course, some good people are Catholics," he would say. "May the Lord show them the light of his countenance in place of their idols made with hands."

This was his covert tribute to Hannah, whom he regarded as the great exception. She had married his own farmhand—had set up housekeeping in a corner of his own pasture—yet stood ready during the dark years of the hard times to lend her savings without security, enabling Deacon John to pay the mortgage interest and stave off ruin. When Bobby came; when the deacon had typhoid fever; whenever sorrow or trouble, or even joy in too great measure to be borne alone, had invaded his life, he had counted on the plain, quiet little woman who spoke English with a brogue, and who went to the—