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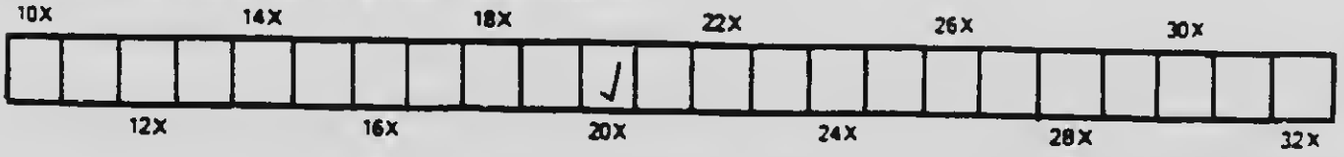

THE VILLAGE ARTIST


H.E.FRITZ.

The Village Artist

By
ADELINE M. TESKEY
Author of "Where the Sugar Maple Grows"

"To wake the soul by tender [illegible] art,
To raise the genius, and to [illegible] heart;
To make mankind in conscious [illegible] head,
Love o'er each scene, and [illegible] they behold."

New York Chicago Toronto
Fleming H. Revell Company
London and Edinburgh

The Village Artist

By

ADELINE M. TESKEY

Author of "Where the Sugar Maple Grows"

"To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart;
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold."

New York *Chicago* *Toronto*

Fleming H. Revell Company

London and Edinburgh

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Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 27 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

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The Village Artist

I

MRS. SIMON SLADE: ARTIST

"You've seen the world
The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountains round it and the sky above?"

"  E were a quiet kind of people in the village, going around with a dreamy slow look in our eyes, perhaps seeing very little on the outside, but living a great world within," said Mrs. Simon Slade, one

day I had succeeded in launching her on one of her delightful reminiscent talks. "We knew nothing about what some people call progress, we were always behind in the fashions, and thought very little about the great big world beyond our own neighbourhood, so we looked on Mrs. Fitzpatrick as a kind of curiosity when she came to live among us."

I was interested, and in reply to a few questions from me she continued:

"Mrs. Fitzpatrick was born and raised in the village, and was a nice enough sensible girl before she ever left it. She had a kind of good look in her face in those old past days, as if she had the evidence of things not seen—I suppose it was that look

Fitzpatrick fell in love with when he asked her to marry him and go off to the city.

"She probably never would have come back to the village only that the old homestead was left her, and —well, she was obliged to. Fitzpatrick had died, and there wasn't overly much left, what with theatres, and concerts, and stylish clothes, and she was glad to fall back on the old home and a cheap place to live in.

"But, my, she was restless! Her eyes that used to be soft and blue, with kind of deep places in them where you could imagine something mysterious and not altogether of this world was hiding, had grown hard and shifty, too hard and slippery-like for even a thought to have a resting-place in them; and she was

always wanting something she did not have.

"She complained a great deal that there was no society in the village, no concerts or operas, nor anything to make life worth living.

"She was in her most discontented mood one day when I carried her over a glass of boiled custard I had just made fresh—I knew her mother when she was a girl.

"She only took time to thank me for the custard when she broke out, 'This village is an awful little hole to live in, nothing to either see, or hear, or enjoy in any way—a strip of common,' she says, scornfully waving her hand (which she took great pains to keep white) out towards the vacant lot in front of her house, 'a pool of water in the middle of it, and a row

of poplars—and it will be more unendurable in winter,' she says. (She got to talking very nice and using high-sounding words since she had lived in the city.) But she was really pale and all fagged out with hearing, and seeing, and doing nothing, so I thought I'd paint a little just to cheer her up a bit—bring out the colours of things she could see and hear, or sense in some way, sitting on her own stoop.

"'A new piece of embroidery work every week is that old strip of common,' I says, 'green background with sometimes bluebells thrown on, sometimes white daisies with brown hearts, sometimes pink clovers, or buttercups, or dandelions. The pattern changes and changes, before we tire of one another comes; and it's

the home of perhaps thousands of pretty flashing things, if we'd only the eyes to see them. There's the ant in glossy black suit, and the red ladybug, and the blue bottle-fly, and all the handsome caterpillar and moth family. Then the heavens above are down in that little pool of water every day, blue one day and gray the next,' I says, 'perhaps with great sailing clouds, but never two days the same. And on clear white nights you'll find the moon and stars down there too.'

"'Why I never thought of looking for all *that*,' said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, peering curiously over at the little puddle of water. 'I remember now I did see the full moon reflected there one night.'

"'In winter time fairies seem to

take in hand the old common. How else can each blade of grass and faded flower-stalk shimmer in silver gown and jewels, and the pool become one big diamond itself,' I says.

"'Three hundred and sixty-five times a year evening hangs her great picture across the western heavens, giving us a new design every time. I don't wonder a mite,' I says, 'that those poplars over there are trembling with delight at the scene that's before them this minute.'

"Mrs. Fitzpatrick looked quickly over at the setting sun, which she could see from her front stoop, retiring in all his trappings of purple and gold and crimson; then she looked half scared at the shivering poplars.

"'One would think,' says she, 'to hear you talk, that those trees were people.'

"'Trees almost seem like people to me,' I says; 'living beside them year after year you get to love them. I think to know one good old tree—one tree which, through the storms of a long life has stood straight and strong, smiling up into the face of God—helps you.'

"She looked over at the poplars again.

"'Then morning comes stealing, stealing in, touching every commonplace thing with her pink fingers, making it at least for a moment, uncommon. And every flowering shrub and tree pours incense in her path. Did you ever go into an apple orchard at blossoming time

just before sunrise?' I says, laying aside my paint-brush, so to speak, to ask her the question.

"She thought a moment, and then she said she did not believe she ever got up that early, except when she was a baby.

"'Well,' I says, 'if you got into a drug-store when the corks were out of all the perfumery bottles, you wouldn't smell anything half so sweet.

"'After the coming of dawn is the meeting of sun and earth,' I says, 'and everything puts its best foot forward for that, same as if 'twas for a wedding. The flowers wake up and open their eyes that were shut all night, and every leaf and twig, every wheel and thread of cobweb is hung with diamonds. The choir of birds

always seem to be giving us a wedding march which they were away behind the world somewhere practicing all night.

"'You never get a chance to be lonesome,' I says, 'with so many things to take your attention. One day it's the broad smile of the sun, and another day it's the winking rain; and the wind,' I says, 'now whispering and sighing like a lover, and again howling like a cross husband.

"'There's the crowd of scents themselves,' I says, 'they're a big family. One scent, when you get a whiff of it, perhaps carried to you by a puff of wind, puts you in mind of when you were a small body trudging the country road to school. A squirrel was darting in and out be-

tween the fence rails, a grasshopper was playing his sharp fiddle in the mulleins, a bobolink, in white coat and black vest, laughed for pure joy, it was such a nice day; and you could hear the ring of an axe way off in the bush. The clover blossoms were growing by the roadside, and now every time you smell clover that picture comes up before your heart's eye *just* as fresh as if it were not years and years old. Another scent puts you in mind of your wedding day, or the day and the place where your William, or John, or Simon proposed to you—perhaps kissed you for the first time. You'll remember you went around that day thinking all the world was yours; the birds sang special songs for you, and the flowers were never so large

and bright before. God hung His moon that evening just outside your bedroom window, and His stars sang to the music of your heart. And the scent of one little flower, perhaps a sweetbrier or wild violet, brings the whole scene back.

"'Then perhaps another scent reminds you of your mother and the day you laid her away with a white rose in her folded hands in sure and certain hope of the resurreetion; and you think of the golden streets and the gates of pearl, the harps and the palms, and you forget all the lonesomeness and scarcity and bareness of this life, and feel that it is worth while to be immortal.'

"The fagged look had left Mrs. Fitzpatrick's face, and she was looking real interested.

"'Then we are treated to a concert from daylight until dark,' I says, 'a concert you cannot hear at all, with the other noises, when you are in the city. For a soprano, I never heard one that could take higher notes than Cricket; and for a bass, lower notes than Bumblebee. And then the crowd of musicians that comes in between these two. There's now and then a bird-song,' I says, 'that strikes the ear of your soul, and lifts you right up and away from all the toil and grind and disappointment of life, and rests you—you never can tell how—and you go back to work again glad that you live.

"'As for society,' I says, 'I don't know as I make out well what you mean. For myself, I don't get much time to be alone. There's the dog:

he follows round after me, sits down when I sit down and walks when I walk, and pays so much attention to me that I cannot well get out of paying some attention to *him*. Even a dog will have friends if he shows himself friendly. And the ducks and the chickens gabble to me every time I go near them; and although I do not understand their language, it does not seem polite not to answer back. Then my canary in his cage: he'd feel hurt if I did not chirp at him a few times each day. I play with the children and neighbour a good deal.'

"'Yes,' she said, 'you're a good neighbour, and you're a great artist too. You've brought out the local colours,' she says,—you remember I told you she used high-sounding

words—'in a way that I shall not soon forget. Mrs. Slade,' says she, 'you've painted the glory of the commonplace.'"

II

MRS. SLADE'S GARDEN

"This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank, it means intensely, and means good;
To find its meaning is my meat and drink."

"THERE are days," said Mrs. Slade, "that the kingdom of God seems to come very nigh to man. Marconi must have felt it when he learned his great secret. And all the rest of them, discoverers and inventors, when they heard the whispers of electricity and steam, or learned how to put together a great machine. The secrets of nature are floating round us everywhere, and I haven't a doubt we'd hear more of them if

we were not addling our brains with something of less importance. It is given one person to hear *one* class of secrets, and to another a different class."

She was leaning her arms on the fence which separated our yards, and talking to me, a summer resident of the village.

"Sometimes," she continued, letting her eyes follow the flight of a swallow, "I think it has been given me to paint pictures so as to show people the things that are 'round them. Things they won't see unless some one takes God's great broad picture and puts it in sections on a small canvas before their very eyes."

She paused again, and I waited.

"'Seems as if I found out a good deal of the world when I began to

work in this garden," she resumed, waving her hand out towards the small plot of ground which surrounded her home. "When Simon and I were married we came to live here in this house on the outskirts of the village. Just as soon as we were settled inside the house I saw that the yard was in bad shape, had been so ever since the house was built. The clay that was thrown out when the cellar was dug had been left lying in heaps, and there it lay through the years. Of course it got trampled down some, and the grass had grown over it, and, just as grass will, like a beautiful cloak of charity it covered a multitude of ugliness, but still the yard was very uneven, full of great humps and hollows. As I said, we were just new married,

and Simon would have done anything any man *could* do at that time to please me. Those of us who are most partial to them must admit that men get a little over those obliging ways as time goes on,—but he was very busy, and I hated to ask him to fill in those hollows. So I says to myself, 'When he's away from home between meal times *I'll* do it.'

"I took a basket and a shovel and went off to where some earth was lying loose. I put as much as I could carry into the basket, and in this way began to fill up the unevenness in the yard. I worked almost a week before Simon noticed—men are not as sharp for noticing little things close by them as women—but he insisted when he learned my intentions on rising early every

morning, and before breakfast with a shovel and a wheelbarrow, which he had borrowed from a neighbour, he was not long in getting enough clay to level the whole yard.

"'Men are quite handy to have 'round at *times*,' said Miss Finch, one of my neighbours when she saw how quickly the work had been done. She never bothered with a man, and always spoke slightingly of them.

"Next I wanted grass seed to sow the brown clay which did not look very well dotting the green grass, and as money was not any too plenty with us at that time, I cast about in my mind how I might get the grass seed at lowest cost. Just watching some pretty graceful pigeons flying in and out through a hayloft window put an idea into my head. 'I'll get

neighbour White to let me brush up the hayseed that will be lying thick on the floor of that loft,' I says to that inner something we call *myself*; 'it being spring the hay will be nearly all eaten up by his horses.'

"Well, I got the seed and sowed it, and in no time—although I'll confess I was watching it so hard it seemed a long time *then*—it came up as green and pretty as you please, creeping, creeping everywhere, as the poet says.

"In the front corner of the yard at the right-hand side was an ugly heap of stones; not nice round stones, glistening as if they were full of all the precious jewels mentioned in Revelations, but jagged slatey stones you couldn't imagine a beauty in. I wanted those stones

moved away, but, as I said, I couldn't bear to ask Simon to move them. So it came to me, 'plant one of these little vines, that search out every nook and corner, beside the stone-pile,' and I went to the bush and got me a wild clematis. To make a long story short, the vine grew, and after awhile I would not have that stone-pile moved for a good slice off Carnegie's fortune—if Andrew had his money made at that time. Bits of the gray stone peeped out here, and stuck out a jagged point there, through the delicate green vines with their starry sprays of white blossoms, until one might think I had made a study to fix them just so.

"'Who taught you, Mrs. Slade, how to arrange your rockery?' says Mrs. Murray to me—she's our fine

lady you know, and has fountains and ferneries, and everything in her garden 'cept a stone-pile—one day she stopped to admire my garden.

"'I didn't arrange it, Mrs. Murray,' I says, 'I just planted the vines and let the rest happen.'

"She laughed one of her little bubbling laughs, that always put me in mind of a warbling vireo, and says she, 'You just let it occur.'

"At the same time that I put a clematis at the stone-pile, I planted another at the left-hand front corner of the house; and it grew to the roof falling in a shower of green leaves and white starry blossoms all summer long. Then there was a stump almost at the very front door-step which affronted me. But its roots were in firm and there was no hope

of moving it out of its place; so I dug a hole down into the heart of it —its heart being softer than the heart of some folks I know—put in a little earth, and planted it full of cardinal flower. Even Simon, man and all as he is, noticed how well those red flowers looked in that gray stump. Of course it was a great care to keep it damp enough, for cardinal flower out in the wild generally grows near water; but to those who love, care is a joy.

"Then I went out to the fields and the woods, and got me meadow rue and ferns, violets and trilliums, johnny-jump-ups and twin-flowered honeysuckle, wild columbine and bluebell, Jack-in-the-pulpit and bouncing-Bet, sweetbrier and iris, and planted full every corner of my yard.

"I brought buttercups from the fields, and at the back of the yard I planted them in a thick border, and behind them I planted a row of black-eyed Susan. They both flowered at the same time and had yellow flowers, so I called that my sunset corner. The buttercups flower all the season.

"Simon laughed when I planted the buttercups and said they were nothing but weeds, but I says, 'I call them *miracles*, coming up each year with no one planting and 'tending them but God.' And one time when I was shut in for weeks with my poor ailing eyes, I could see that border of cheery gold nodding and smiling to me there in that darkened room. 'That picture,' I says to Simon, 'which I carry with me every-

where I go, can neither be bought nor stolen.'

"I have often wondered how many others have carried away from my garden a picture to hang in some corner, some hidden corner perhaps, on memory's wall, to turn out and look at on dark and gloomy days. It has made me think a great deal more of planting a garden than I once did. When I am planting a bed of violets, or primroses, or anything else beautiful, how do I know, when that bed is in full bloom, who is going to carry it away in his heart, to have and to hold as a precious thing from that time forth and forever more. For sometimes our most valuable possessions, which no eye shall ever feast upon but our own inward eye, is something we

have caught in a moment, by the grasp of a hand, or the glance of an eye, or by some hidden sense we can neither name nor understand. Planting a flower-bed is a religious work to me now.

"Then, it may have been imagination, but I thought the wild things, the butterflies, bees, and birds, found out my wild garden and crowded there with their bright dresses and musical voices, and made of my little front yard a grand banqueting place. I became acquainted with them all, from the humming-bird, that seemed to feel no need of rest or residence, to the snail carrying his house on his back; and from the flaming oriole with his hammock swung between earth and heaven, to the brown toad on the ground watching for his fly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Slade, smiling reminiscently, while she picked up her garden hoe preparatory to going into the house, "that was Simon's and my first year together, I don't know whether that had anything to do with making it one of the brightest and happiest years of my life."

III

THE GARDEN'S MESSAGE

"It was but the note of a summer bird,
Bnt a dream of the past in my heart was stirred,
And wafted me back to a breezy spot,
Where blossomed the blue forget-me-not."

"I LIKE to think of some good my garden has done besides pleasing myself—and Simon," continued Mrs. Slade. (We frequently had neighbourly chats, sometimes in the sitting-room of one of our homes; sometimes in her garden; sometimes across the back fence.) "I always think that my flowers carried a great message to Jule Doherty.

"Jule had come from somewhere, no one knew where, to take care of a wool depot in the village. It was thought she came from the country because she knew all about wool. Jule was good-looking, but with a hard white look in her face, which somehow made me shiver, and she was sullen, and silent, and cross. A whisper had followed Jule into the village that she was not what she ought to be; when people told what they had heard about her they talked under their breath. When the girls of the village met her on the street they looked at her curiously, or else looked in another direction, and the boys—some of them—stared boldly at her. 'Twas said that Ben Leith would wink at her if he could catch her eye (Ben was no better than he

ought to be himself), but Jule tossed her head and flaunted her ribbons defiantly in the face of the whole community.

"When she came to the village she rented a room and boarded herself—poor young thing only seventeen—and soon made it pretty well understood that she wanted to be left alone. She seemed to know she was down, and made up her mind to stay down and not try to get up again.

"The first Saturday afternoon that Jule was in the village Mrs. Brady tied on her clean apron, took her knitting in hand, and went over to call on the new girl; learn all about her old home, how she happened to come to the village, and anything else interesting she might have to

tell,—this was before the evil whispers regarding her past life had come to the place. But Jule saw her coming, and slammed and bolted the door in her face. Another woman sent her little girl in with a few hot buns, just from the oven, as a sort of friendship offering; but the child was crossly ordered to carry them home again. So in a very short time the village learned that there was no way of reaching Jule's heart.

"'She's a bad one,' said Mrs. Brady, 'or Ben Leith wouldn't be winkin' at her!'

"'She never darkens the door of a church or Sunday-school,' said Mrs. McTavish, 'and she's but a slip of a girl yet. It's terrible to see a young thing so hardened, and beyond the reach o' gude. It does

seem as though some people were *born* to be bad—born deevils to be plain—tho' they're sayin' now no one's born to be damned.'

"'They kin sin away their day of grace,' said Peter McKim. 'I handed that girl a tract last Sunday, an' she rolled it into a ball an' fired it at a passin' dog —— People kin sin away their day o' grace, I tell you!'

"The girl had queer habits; she would seldom go out walking except very early in the morning, or late in the evening. Of course the wool depot had to be 'tended in business hours.

"On one of her early morning walks she came out here past our place, and I, standing in my nightgown peeping through the slats of the shutters, saw her start and stop

when her eyes fell on my garden. She was looking at the sunset-corner where I had the buttercups planted. Her eyes got large for a moment, then they seemed to sink away, as though she were thinking hard about something. A queer shadow swept her face, and she hurried on past the house, the red ribbons of her hat flying out behind her like something real and alive was after her.

"The next morning I saw her come again, stealing along this time, and looking all around her, as if to see whether any one was noticing her, and stand gazing at my yellow wild flowers. Before she left that morning I saw her wipe away a tear —or wipe her eyes anyway.

"For three days she came just so,

stealing along like the break of day itself. On the fourth morning she went around to the side of the garden, near the yellow border, and kneeling on the ground she reached through the fence and just touched the buttercups with the tips of her fingers. She shuddered when the pure soft things seemed to kiss her hand. She drew it quickly back as if they had stung her, and jumping to her feet she almost ran away.

"The next morning she came again, and this time she reached her hand through the fence and plucked a handful of the buttercups. She had no sooner drawn them to herself than she burst out a-crying and shook as though she'd shake to pieces. 'Go out and cheer her up a bit,' says Simon (he had got curious

and was peeping through the shutter at her too), but I says, 'Let her cry a spell, crying will maybe do her good. Sometimes,' I says, 'I think God unseals our eyes by washing them with tears.' While we were talking she laid her face down in the grass, with the buttercups placed close to her cheek, and cried, and cried. Then she got up and went away.

"That night as luck would have it (I always feel a twinge of conscience when I use that word *luck*), some cattle broke into my garden. They seemed to make straight for my border of buttercups, ate all the tops off them, and trampled the plants down into the dust. My beautiful yellow border! I could have cried! I saw what had hap-

pened the moment I peeped through the shutters to see whether Jule was coming. I dressed, put on my sunbonnet and rushed out. There I stood gazing at the desolate waste when Jule came along. I seemed to have eyes in the back of my sunbonnet, for I knew she had come without turning around. I knew she would feel as sorry as myself, so without looking at her I called out, 'Come in and see my poor buttercups.' She seemed to forget herself, all her old sullenness and crossness, and stepping through the gate, she came over to where I was standing.

"'They're ruined, ruined entirely,' I says, almost crying while I stooped down and tried to lift a few of their poor broken stalks out of the dust.

"Jule seemed to feel sorry for me, for she spoke up, and says she, with a comforting sound in her voice,

"'Oh, they'll come up again; the roots are there, and they'll grow again and be as nice as ever next summer.'

"Then I says, straightening up and looking at her (I'll never know what made me say it), 'Isn't it beautiful the way God gives everything a chance to try again—a chance for another summer?'

"Jule turned and looked at me, a quick frightened look, and says almost under her breath: 'Everything but a woman.'

"I had not thought of the whispers about her past life since she had come into my garden until I saw that look, and heard these words,

and I acted as if I did not notice them and went on talking.

"'It seems as if by the very little buttercups and growing things H'd teach us, His big human children, that when we're broken down and trampled on, and our lives are made a mess of, just to start fresh and try it all over again. He'll keep on giving us His smile and His presence just as He keeps on giving His sun and refreshing showers to them.'

"I talked on in a sort of rambling way, smoothing, and patting and lifting some of the heads of my poor draggled buttercups, saying in sheer loving silliness (I had got to acting towards my flowers the same as if they could hear, and see, and feel), 'Try, try again, my beauties; there's a chance for another summer,' when

suddenly I looked up and saw that Jule was crying a little soft easy cry without any noise.

"'These buttercups are just like the ones that grow at home on the farm,' she sobbed. . . . 'They grow thick there in our fields. I often gathered them when out there walking with Dad. Yours put me in mind of the old home and—*him*.'

"'And your ma,' I added.

"'She's dead,' says Jule.

"'I haven't seen Dad, and the farm and the buttercups for two years.'

"'You ought to run home and make them a visit,' I says, still not looking at her.

"'I'm not fit,' she gasped, 'not fit to go under Dad's roof. I'm his only child, and I disgraced him.'

"She was crying bitterly now, shaking all over, and I put my arm around her, and right then and there began to paint a picture. In the foreground, as artists would say (I boarded one a summer and learned how they talk), I put a poor old dad, whose eyes were growing dimmer and dimmer with unshed tears looking at the buttercups and wondering where in the wide world his little girl was. Then I painted the stillness and lonesomeness of the house when he'd come home at nights. And how he'd think of his girl the last thing before he went to sleep, and the first thing when he'd wake in the mornings. He had forgotten all the wrong she had done in the great hunger he had to see her.

"Jule trembled all through her when I was touching my brush on that part.

"How her vacant place at the table would be like a stab in his heart three times each day.

"Then I painted the old dog around the farm looking lonesome too; and the flower-garden and all the little singing birds that come back every spring, with their neighbourly ways building their nests in the apple-trees and in the corners of the very porch. One pair of robins I made come back to the same old nest year after year. Then I put in the soft green fields, dotted here and there with buttercups and daisies, and the lambs gambolled and played out there; the grave sedate cows with their big soft eyes, and the kind

old horses wanting to rub their noses against your cheek.

"Jule was very still while I went on painting, and when I had finished the picture she says, 'I'm going home! I'll start to-night!'

"She went off on that evening train; and I was at the station to see her start, and give her a little posy of the buttercups I had managed to pick out of the mess of broken plants, just to keep the old farm fresh in her mind until she reached home.

"I believe," added Mrs. Slade, after remaining silent and thoughtful for a few moments, "that I got more real pleasure painting up that picture of the old farm, the poor dumb things, and the father watching and waiting, than any piece of

work I ever did. I'm most ashamed to tell you how I acted on the road home from the station after seeing Jule off. I could have jumped for joy—I most believe I did—I was young then. With my head up in the air I walked along singing—that part of the village was then just like a country road—and if you'll believe me, a bit of a song bird struck up and helped me as if his heart too was bursting with joy. 'Little bird what do you know about the joy of helping any person?' I says—my heart was that full I wanted to talk out to everything—but the saucy fellow sang all the louder as if he really had a share in it. I stooped down and snatched up a handful of buttercups growing by the wayside and kissed them. I was

almost crazy with happiness that it had been given me to paint the picture that was to work on poor Jule's heart, and send her home to 'Dad.'"

IV

THE NEIGHBOURS

"The degeneracy of art has always been characterized by a turning away from the invisible and a bowing down to the visible."

"BUT Satan meddled with even the Garden of Eden, how could I expect he'd stay away from *my* garden!" continued Mrs. Slade, as if there had not been an interval of some days between her last talk and the present. "After awhile my two neighbours, the one on my right, and the one on my left (they're both dead and gone now, poor things), seemed to grow jealous of my garden.

"'There's Serena Slade,' said Mrs. Barney—she knew me from a little girl and made free to call me by my first name—a-wastin' most of her time makin' a posy of her front yard; fit her better to be in the house patchin' a quilt, or braidin' a door-mat, or doin' some work that really belongs to a woman.'

"This hurt me some for I've no doubt a bit of pride over my garden had crept in. I wanted my neighbours to admire my work.

"Then Mrs. Green on the other side, whispered it 'round that I was neglecting Simon; she knew the man had not a meal of victuals fit to eat; that it was out of all reason that I could spend so much time in the garden and attend properly to my house.

"This made me shed a few tears; I kept in as long as I could, but one day I burst out and told it all to Simon and asked him if I was starving him. First Simon laughed, and then when he saw the tears in my eyes he put his arm around me—we were young then—and he says—kind of joking-like:

"'Man' does not live by bread alone. I never look at that garden of yours,' he says, 'without saying over to myself, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for Serena, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."'

"I thought it wicked for Simon to wrest Scripture in that way, and I told him so.

"But after that I laughed in my neighbours' faces; what cared I for

them as long as my Simon was pleased! This went on for a week, then something seemed to say to me, very soft and low, 'paint up the good points of your two neighbours.'

"I fairly gasped for breath. I knew that was the very hardest kind of picture I could tackle, too hard I thought for my inexperienced hand. But I could not get the idea out of my mind, and that very day I got the canvas in place—speaking figuratively—and the brushes in hand, and was just setting about searching for Mrs. Barney's good points, when she walked by my house. Seeing me in my garden she says with an important air:

"'How can you waste your time, Serena, over flowers? a-foolin' with those wild flowers,' she says; 'you'll

get poisoned with poison ivy, and Simon will have a doctor's bill to pay next,' she says.

"I didn't try to answer her—'twould mar my picture; I just walked into the house and thought and thought about Mrs. Barney. I remembered that she had a heap of trouble; she had told me about burying her little baby, and that she never could bear to part with the little dresses. And she had told me that one time her man had typhoid fever, and she never had her clothes off nights for six weeks, sitting up giving him medicine and baths. And I knew, although she did not tell me, that sometimes he drank and acted ugly at home. While I sat there studying I seemed to see her as one of the sweetest, patientest crea-

tures on which the sun ever rose or set. I kept a-painting on, making her sweeter and lovelier every minute. I could not make her a beauty exactly, or do much with the features of her face which were uncommonly plain, so I painted her having a beautiful soul. And, if I do say it myself, the picture was good.

"Then Simon came home to supper, and we had a lot to talk about, and I could not paint Mrs. Green until next day.

"The next morning before I got at my task, I saw Mrs. Green tossing her head as she passed my garden and looking kind of spiteful, but I was bound on painting her and that was not going to stop me.

"Mrs. Green was well-favoured,

any one could see that at a glance; her face and the features of it were well shaped, and I painted away until I made that pretty mouth of hers not so thin-lipped and down at the corners. I knew it was like that when she was happy. Her eyes were brown and big, and I painted all the hard glassy look out of them and made them just as soft and mellow as when she was a girl talking to her best beau. Then I struck all the ugly sarcastic wrinkles out from her face, and took off the scowl between her eyes. Some wrinkles to my mind are pretty, laughing wrinkles at the sides of the mouth, and sweet, kind wrinkles around the eyes. I left them. Then her nose which had grown to a pretty considerable point,

I knew was intended for a Greek nose, and I painted it that way. I knew when I had my beautiful picture finished and was looking it over with my mind's eye, that Mrs. Green at one time in her life looked like it. And I felt that way down in her heart somewhere she must be like that yet, for when I first came to be her neighbour she brought me in a pie for our dinner—Simon's and mine. So I says to myself, 'when an artist goes to paint a portrait he does not make prominent the warts and blemishes, he just passes them by as though they were not there, and searches for the pretty spots.'

"When I had Mrs. Green's portrait almost finished she passed my house, and looking in at the flowers she tossed her head again. But it

didn't seem to make any difference, she still looked lovely to me. 'That toss of the head is only a wart,' I says, 'it isn't the real Mrs. Green.'

"By the time I had finished my paintings I loved those two women so well I wanted to do something for them. I couldn't think of anything good enough scarcely until the thought flashed into my mind, 'Take them each a bunch of your flowers.'

"With this I went out and picked a cluster of buttercups, soft little yellow things with green hearts in them, and in among them I mixed some of those starry sprays of wild clematis, and round the whole I put some of my very finest ferns, and you've no idea how feathery and elegant that bouquet looked. Then

I made another bouquet exactly like the first, took off my kitchen apron, and went over to Mrs. Barney's carrying my flowers.

"'They're to put on your tea-table, Mrs. Barney,' I says, handing her one of the bouquets. First she looked surprised, then she got red, and says she, hurriedly burying her nose in them—the clematis smells sweet—'You're better to me than I deserve, Sereny, these flowers are beauties there's no mistake.'

"Then I carried the other bunch to Mrs. Green. She was sitting on the porch, and when I handed her the flowers she looked like she was shot. A kind of shamed look crept into her face and made her cheeks look drooping-like; she said almost in a whisper, 'puts me in mind of the

flowers that grow in the bush to home.' I believe if I'd have stayed there three minutes longer Mrs. Green would have burst right out a-crying.

"Well the upshot of it was, by the next spring Mrs. Barney and Mrs. Green wanted to fix up their front yards, and I was over helping them, turn about.

"And when we got these yards done, it seemed as if the fever had grown on us to beautify everything, and we turned our attention out to the street in front of our homes. The vacant lot opposite us, where the widow McShane always pastured her cow—as long as there was any grass there—had an old rickety fence around it, and we three women, all armed with spades,

went out and dug little holes in the earth here and there along that old fence, dropped in a few morning-glory seed, which I had saved from the fall before, and by midsummer the old fence was covered with glories. Then we dropped seed in here and there all through the village where we could find a suitable vacant spot. In one hollow unsightly place where a house had been burned down years and years before, and the old cellar had become more than half filled up, I threw a handful of scarlet poppy seed. They all grew and the old cellar was a flower-bed that summer. The desire to plant flower seed seemed to take like the smallpox among the women, and they all got to scattering seeds.

Some seed fell by the wayside, and some on stony ground, and some fell among thorns, and other fell into good ground, but, unlike the seed of Scripture, they all grew and flourished. And that is how ours is the prettiest village in the Province."

V

"PAINTING UP BEN LEITH"

"To become new self-acquainters,
And paint man, man, whatever the issue!
Make new hopes shiue through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
To bring the invisible full into play,
Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters?"

"WELL," said Mrs. Slade one day as we sat together in her grape-vine arbour, "you want to know how I went about painting up Ben Leith?

"Ben was not much more than a big boy, but a pretty bad boy according to reports—a village is a great place for getting up reports—so I

made up my mind to see what I could do at painting him up so's he could respect himself. For I hold if one respects *himself* it doesn't matter so much whether other people respect him or not.

"He had a pipe that he occasionally smoked, and 'twas said he soaked that white clay pipe in tobacco juice to make it look like he was an *old* smoker. He hung around the post-office every night until the lights were put out, and when that was closed you could generally find him with a number of other boys propped against a board fence which was decorated with huge circus posters. He could be found every Sunday night with the group of loungers who stood around the church door passing remarks on the congregation,

certain members of it, as they came out—he sat in one of the back seats so he could get out of the church before the others. He wore his hat on the back of his head, tipped over towards the left ear, and tried to look as hang-dog as a boy of his age well could; but somehow, 'way down, back in, I always saw something good about Ben. And I believe the poorest soul has a saving remnant in him, if we only look sharp enough to find it.

"I watched for a chance, and one day I met Ben, and I says, 'Why Ben Leith, how tall you're growing! getting to be quite a gentleman, eh? Curious,' I says, 'how it comes natural to boys as they grow taller and handsomer, to act the man, and take on gentlemanlike ways.'

"Ben looked foolish, began to paw the ground with his big brown boot, and muttered, 'I guess I ain't much on the gentleman.'

"But I stopped him, and I says, 'Haven't I the sight of my eyes, Ben? Don't you think I know a gentleman when I see one, even if he is not much more than a boy? I can see the good look in even a boy's face the moment I set eyes on him, and there's no use in his denying it. If I see it I won't believe him before I believe the sight of my own eyes,' I says.

"Ben laughed sheepishly, and twisted a button on his coat until I thought he'd have it off. But he got away from me as soon as he could.

"This was all the painting I did

that time, but his mother told me that Ben went home that evening and blacked his boots and combed his hair before he came to the tea-table.

"Soon after that I went around one night and called on Ben's mother when I knew Ben was in the house I had got interested in that picture and liked working on it.

"Ben did not run away as he sometimes did before. I suspect the little painting I had done pleased him and he wanted to see me do more.

"I talked on with his mother a spell, and before I left the house I says, turning to him, 'Ben I've a book I know you'd like well to read. Your brow is growing so large and high, I know brains are growing in

there. And good clear eyes generally mean brains behind them too.'

"Ben's eyes took on a new clearness.

"'It's a very interesting story,' I says. 'I thought when I was reading the book that you'd like it, and I'm just going to send it over to you. I like to lend books to people that can appreciate them.'

"Ben shuffled in his seat, and said, 'I'm not much on readin'.'

"But I says, 'Now, Ben, you're just underrating yourself. I know you have it in you; don't be too modest to own to it.'

"That night I sent him two of the most interesting story-books I could find, about boys, and great adventures with wild beasts and snakes. When he had read them

he brought them back, and asked whether I had any more of the same kind to lend.

"'Ben Leith,' I says, 'you seem to have the brains of the village! I'll lend you more books, of course I will. It isn't every boy that cares for good reading.'

"Then I lent him more, and he kept coming, and I kept lending.

"It was said that when Jule Doherty was here in the village Ben would wink at her if he could catch her eye. But I wasn't supposed to read Ben's heart, or know the meaning of his winks, so I says, when he came to return the books I had lent him:

"'I heard, Ben, that you were the only one in the village that paid any attention to poor lonesome

Jule Doherty. The little girl has no mother,' I says; 'and is only seventeen, and any one that said a kind word to her or did a kind deed for her deserves praise. She's gone home now, and we may never see her pretty face again, but it was very nice in you if you were thoughtful away ahead of the rest of us. You kept up the credit of the village if you did that,' I says, 'and put to shame the rest of us. I'm afraid a great many of us are priests and Levites,' I says, 'passing by on the other side, hurrying after our own concerns, what we think important; it's only here and there, one in a hundred perhaps, that's the good Samaritan. Great, isn't it, Ben, if you've been the good Samaritan of the village?'

"Ben blushed a dull heavy red.

"But I went on not noticing. 'Every little village and town has its few good people, and I like to think our village is not behind any of them in—sand. I've heard the boys use that word,' I says, 'and I suppose they mean pretty much the same by it as the Bible means by *salt*. I think it's Matthew,' I says, 'speaks about certain people being the salt of the earth.'

"Ben looked most as if he could sink into the ground, or cry.

"Another evening I handed him a nice little love-story, and I says, 'This is a love-story, Ben.' He acted as if he did *not* know whether to take it or not. 'Somewhere in this world, I says, 'there's a little girl you're going some day

to ask to be your wife, and it won't do you any harm to learn how it is done.'

"It was dusk—I chose that time a-purpose to have my little talk—and I could not see whether Ben got red in the face or not. But I think he did, for he stammered out quick, 'I'm never goin' to get married.'

"I went right on, and I says, 'Be sure and get one just as nice as yourself, Ben.'

"He seemed to forget that he said he was never going to be married, for says he, quick-like, 'I want one a heap nicer than myself.'

"'I wouldn't let myself fall in love with a girl that drank,' I says.

"Ben turned quick and looked at me.

"'It would spoil the sweetness of

her breath. Then she might get to like it, and turn out a drunkard. That would be terrible,' I says.

"'Nor I don't believe I'd let myself love one that smoked. It wouldn't be a very nice habit to practice around the house—not very clean. The smoke would darken up the white lace window curtains terribly, and the tobacco would colour her teeth, and make her mouth not so sweet and pretty to kiss. Take the red out of her lips and cheeks, and make them blue,' I says.

"'Nor one that was fast, and said bad words,' I says. 'A woman should be as good at least as the man she marries. When you're good yourself, Ben, expect good in the girl you give your heart to.'

"'Every one expects women to be

better than men,' said Ben, with the softest tone I ever heard in his voice.

"'Well,' I says, 'a good boy ought to get a girl as good as himself. When you are keeping yourself nice and good for her, Ben, she ought to be keeping herself nice and good for you.

"'A sweet pretty little creature I have no doubt she'll be,' I says. 'I'm sure you'll be proud of her, and of course she'll be real proud of you.'

"'Pshaw!' says Ben, jerking his head to one side. But I saw, even in the dark, that his eyes were all a-shine looking at the picture I was painting of his happy future.

"The next time I saw him, I says, 'You've been practicing up—what they call training, or physical culture?'

"'No,' says Ben, 'I ain't been doin' anythin'.'

"'Well,' I says, 'what's broadening and straightening those shoulders of yours? My, but you'll be wanting to sport a cane and silk hat next!'

"Ben wriggled his shoulders, braced them back a bit, and walked on.

"'I don't know what's come over my Ben,' said Mrs. Leith, one afternoon I was at her house helping her with an apple-paring. 'The other day I saw him put his old brown pipe, he's been tryin' hard, in spite of all I could say, to smoke, down on a stone in the back yard, and smash it with another stone. Then I watched him when he did not know it, and he was standing before the looking-glass straightening back his

shoulders, and exercising so as to keep them straight—I have always been afraid Ben would be round-shouldered, he let himself lop down so. And he's got so particular, must wear a collar week-days, brushes his clothes; and once I saw him practicing with a stick out of a window blind, to see whether he could manage to walk with a cane.'

"'But aren't you deceivin' the boy, Serena?' says Simon to me one day—he was the only one who knew what I was working on—'you don't see anything as nice in him as you're paintin'?'

"'Simon,' I says, 'the divine image is somewhere in that boy, and I'm training my eye to see it.'"

VI

THE CHURCH PICTURE GALLERY

"Of all worlds, to him the most real is the world of man's thoughts."

"YES," said Mrs. Slade, "you admire our church, and I'm glad you do; it's the oldest church in the village, and I always hold that old things and old people ought to have more value to them than the new and the young. I have often said to Simon that I had no patience with people excusing themselves for shortcomings because they were old (unless they had fallen into second childhood), that was only a reason

why more should be expected of them. Hadn't they all the years in which to add to their faith virtue; and virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. The poor young things have all these yet before them to learn in the years to come, some of them in a hard school, but the old ought to *know* the lessons.

"Yes, I'll acknowledge that I did do a considerable towards beautifying the outside of the old church. It is built as you see of stone. I reckon there wasn't any brick made 'round these parts when that church was built. It had stood out for many years in the bleaching sun without a tree 'round it, and had become quite gray and faded looking.

"Well, first I got several roots of

ivy and planted them up against the old church. That ivy grew and grew, creeping here and creeping there, spreading its soft green wings, seeming to mother the old stones and cover up all their defects.

"Next I persuaded a young farmer who attended the church to bring in some nice young oak trees, and I helped him plant them (held the trees straight while he shovelled in the earth) just where I wanted them. 'The oak,' I says to the farmer, 'is a proper church tree, an example of what a Christian should be—growing stronger with the years; minding little the most furious storms; a blessing to every one who looks at it or comes under its shadow.'

"I have never seen a heathen tem-

ple, but they tell me that they are always set in pretty groves of trees, and made as inviting looking as possible, and I did not calculate that our village church should remain any longer bare and unattractive looking—even to those who had never opened the eyes of their spirits to see its *real* beauty.

"I planted in the shady corners great clumps of fern—dug them up myself in the bush,—maidenhair and adder's tongue, wood fern and chain fern.

"Even the farmers of the congregation, who had been looking at ferns all their lives, said that they never saw their beauty until it was shown up against that old gray church.

"Between us all (by this time sev-

eral other women were interested) we made our church look as pretty and inviting-looking as any heathen temple that ever was built.

"But the inside of the church—we never dared to meddle with *that*. I suppose to strangers it looks very plain, with its square pews and high narrow pulpit, but to us it is richly decorated with memories. Some of the younger people proposed at one time to introduce modern furniture, to change the square pews and high narrow pulpit; but we older people who could see with the heart's eye so many pictures in the old church could not bear to have an article changed.

"There is the old pulpit in which have stood many preachers—*good* men; all of them, I believe, with the

Name spoken about in Revelations written in their foreheads, but some of them a terrible weariness of the flesh to listen to. The dear slow old man who never could stop short of an hour; and the sprightly young fellow who hadn't enough depth for you to sink a bucket and draw it up full, if you know what I mean by that. Poor young preachers, my heart often ached for them when I thought how painful the deepening process might be. At times there came the man with such a great message from God that he made us forget time, and everything else but a sense of the Infinite; and we went out from that old church feeling it was possible to live the life of love, and joy, and peace.

"In front of the altar have stood

the brides in their robes of white, stepping, with a sort of holy joy, over the threshold of a new life. On the same spot too have rested the coffins of those who had already entered the new life on the Other Side. That picture of the coffins, the long black coffins, the folded hands within seamed and work-worn, and the short white coffins, where the waxen baby fingers knew naught of earth's conflict, stands out sharply for most of us.

"In the front seats the old people who were hard of hearing could always be found. Any time I can shut my eyes and see the snowy locks and the spectacled eyes, the bent shoulders and the trembling hands, but withal the rapturous look; as if they were ready at any moment

to take the wings that death brings and fly away.

"A little farther back have been seated the middle-aged people, grave and sedate, while their sons and daughters around them were glancing shyly at each other. I can yet at any moment see Donald Grant looking at Mamie Fraser who sat across at an angle from him. Donald looked at her, I believe, all the time except during prayers, and I would not be sure he did not take sly glances then. She, the little puss, never once glanced his way, and tried to look unconscious; but I could tell fine by the colour that came and went in her apple-blossom cheek, that she knew well Donald was looking at her. 'Twas in that church that Simon and I first laid eyes on

each other, and knew at a glance, Simon says, that we were intended for each other. Nice place, isn't it, for the introduction of souls?

"The truth is the old church is a picture-gallery, full of every kind of picture which would be admitted into any respectable gallery, and each one of us carries away in our memory the pictures that hit us hardest.

"I haven't a doubt that the picture which stands out strongest in Mrs. Thompson's mind is that of her little baby boy in the minister's arms; when the good man called him 'Joshua Peter' and put a large handful of water on his round unconscious head. Little Joshua Peter when he felt the cold water, set up a terrible roar that frightened us all, and fought the minister's hand with

his little pink fists. I reckon he showed his fighting nature right at the start. He's a man grown now—down in South Africa among the mounted poliee.

"Then there was little William Shakespeare, a baby that was pieked up on the eountry road, and the county paid the widow McNair to 'tend him and bring him up. The widow was determined to start right, so she gave him a good name, and brought him to the ehureh to be baptized. I remembered all of us who looked on thought it was a useless undertaking, eonsidering the bad stoek we suspeeted that boy had sprung from. But I've lived long enough to believe in whoever it was that said, 'Every one is born nearer to God than to any ancestor,' for that

boy has grown up as good and respectable a young man as you'd want to see.

"But to return to the seats: I can find any number of pictures among them. In the right-hand corner was the seat of Mary Bryler, where she sat all one winter every Sunday morning, with her great dark eyes directed towards the minister, but I knew from the shadows which lay in them, that all the time they were off in a distant land looking at the man she once thought loved her with another woman by his side. The silent soul tragedies, that bleed the heart and blanch the cheek, if we could only see them we might paint pictures enough to hang 'round the world! Mary understands it all now; she has gone on to that coun-

try where they shall hunger no more, not even for love. I reckon a number of us must go on there before many of the happenings of this life are made plain to us.

"There's one corner into which I cannot allow my mind's eye to wander without seeing Myra Simpkins, a slip of a girl who laughed at everything that happened out of the ordinary, from a sudden emphatic thump the minister at times gave the pulpit cushion, making the dust fly, to the efforts of a mosquito searching for juice in the slippery bald spot on a man's head. The most grave of us could scarcely keep a sober face if we looked long at Myra's twitching lips and dimpling cheeks.

"Another corner Mrs. Crossley

has consecrated to tears. She sat there for years and years, and shed tears into her hemstitched pocket-handkerchief on the slightest occasion.

"A little farther back is the seat where Farmer Cronstat, sunburned and heavy, has had a Sunday-morning nap for at least twenty-five years.

"In the left-hand corner of the 'T' sat the man I always called the Eolian Harp—every passing breeze seemed to blow on his spirit. Under the pleasant south wind of music or a good sermon I have seen such a glow in his face that I had no doubt he was in the third heaven; and if you once saw the look of reverence which could creep over his countenance, you'd forgive that man any-

thing. Then when the north wind of something unpleasant swept the harp of his spirit, he was all down and backslidden.

"Not far from him sat an old man whose face was never anything but a network of wrinkles. Poor man, what wonder he became wrinkled! he never enjoyed the service very much, he was so burdened with keeping a sharp eye on the bad boys.

"In the back seats sat those mischievous boys, no real bad in any one of them; but boys will be boys. Why, out of that back seat has come more than one preacher, and good men to fill just as worthy callings.

"Then there's the choir corner; I always see *moving* pictures when I look there; one moment charm-

ing me with harmony, the next moment fretting me with discord. Dear, dear, after awhile the old choir set got married (much of the courting was done in the choir, or on the road home from practice), left the choir-gallery, and settled down sedately among the congregation in the body of the church. Some of them are now looking at their own boys and girls in the choir-gallery; singing the same old hymns and suffering the same old heart-burnings.

"At one time a wandering young fellow with a great musical gift came to the village, and he was engaged to play the church organ. Well, he *could* play, there was no mistake about that, and he touched depths in our hearts with that old

organ which we didn't know were there before; the old church at times shook and trembled and seemed to reel and sway under his playing. My, how the people crowded out to hear him! Some who never had come to church before, came then. Ah, we common people without any great gifts of our own, or any way in which to express what we thought, and what we felt, almost worshipped the young fellow when he played that organ. We could hear the voice of God calling to him, 'Up, up My son, I have made thee a little lower than the angels.' But voices of appetite were also calling that young man; he obeyed these, and went out—and down. There were others too who once sat in those old square

pews —— Ah! the heart-breaking pictures which hang here and there in the shadowy corners of that old church picture-gallery, one cannot bear to give them more than a passing glance.

"But I stay long and lovingly gazing on one picture—the prayers that have gone up from that old church. I can see them like incense rising to heaven. Many of the Christians who once knelt in those pews are now lying under the greensward in the churchyard, but the influence of the prayers are wrapping the old church around like soft clouds.

"So you see it is beautiful both within and without; and I believe every one in the village, saint and sinner, is proud of our old church."

VII

THE TEA-MEETING

"Nothing is commonplace except to him who is himself prosaic."

"THERE is one picture that stands out in the broad light which I did not tell you about when describing the church picture-gallery," said my old neighbour the following day—"the tea-meeting."

I expressed a strong desire to hear it described, and she began:

"Perhaps it was because we were so shut away from the world with all its distractions that we set so much store by this meeting. To

many of us it was the event of the year; Mrs. Ephraim Hart always got her new bonnet, or her old one fixed over, just before the tea-meeting.

"About three months ahead of time the choir began to practice what they called 'special music,' and that was the beginning of many heart-burnings. On most occasions two or more young men in the choir thought they could sing the bass solos which came in the anthems, and if the honour was given to *one*, the others were jealous. At the same time several girls were vying with each other about the treble solos, and the poor leader was at his wits' end. He generally managed as we believed in long programs at our entertainments, to give each of

them a solo, so they were all there tea-meeting night.

"As the time drew nearer there were meetings to appoint committees. The committee to look after the provisions met right here in my sitting-room the last time.

"'I'll give butter,' says one woman; 'And I'll give bread,' says another. They lived in the country but attended the village church. 'I'll give chickens,' says Jacob Bender's wife, another country member. Many a church member who would have felt it hard work to be a cheerful giver to the Lord of silver or bank-notes, found it no cross to give gingerbread and pies.

"'We'll look to you for the tarts, Mrs. Law,' says the chair-woman of the committee to the baker's wife

year after year. I haven't a doubt Mrs. Law has made thousands of tea-meeting tarts. Simon says that if there is no eating and drinking in heaven he does not know what will become of Mrs. Law's gift for making tarts. Mrs. Ephraim Hart always brought in a boiler full of fried cakes from the farm.

"Then there was the committee of women to see after setting tables; some wanted to set them at one end of the Sunday-school room, and others at the opposite end. Some wanted one *long* table, and others wanted short tables. Some wanted linen table-cloths, and others thought a strip of white cotton would do well enough. The feeling ran pretty high at times. I've known more than one woman to drop out of the work be-

cause she couldn't have her own way.

"There was always a little jealousy hovering 'round in the vicinity of the cakes. One woman had a habit of tasting each cake and pronouncing aloud her opinion of its quality. She was not a general favourite. It was quite an honour to have what was considered by the bulk of the women the *best* cake. It was looked upon as almost an unpardonable sin to stint the eggs and butter in the tea-meeting cake.

"After every one else was through, the young people who had been waiters had their tea; and—well, boys and girls when they get together act the same the world over I reckon. The fun 'round that table, and the compliments and flatteries,

and the quantity of pie and cake that disappeared would make the first chapter of a story-book.

"The tea-meeting was considered a good place to announce an engagement; we never would have the face to put it in the newspaper after the manner of city people, but the women whispered it around to each other at the tea-meeting; and then the married women told their husbands. The men, although they did not say so much about it, were just as willing to hear as the women.

"The girls always got new frocks for the tea-meeting—or what passed for new, frizzed their hair extra, and scented their handkerchiefs. The young men got new neckties, and handkerchiefs with coloured borders, which they arranged in the outside

breast pockets of their coats, with a corner of the border sticking up. This handkerchief was for show—I suppose they had one for use in some one of their other pockets.

"After the supper came the program of speeches, recitations, anthems. As 'twas in the church the program committee did not think it proper to have love songs, or any songs of a worldly nature. I have my doubts as to whether *real* love songs should be called worldly; but I know everybody does not agree with me. Then some of the girls might recite a piece, and there were speeches from the ministers. The latter were always seated on the platform of planks made for the occasion and covered with buffalo robes. The speeches were of all sorts according

to the men, but consisted largely of jokes. For *my* part I think matrimony too serious a subject to be joked about, but that's only the opinion of one woman.

"Heh, heh, excuse me for laughing. I was thinking of the night McClosky's boy hid a cat under the platform, and as soon as the ministers began the speaking pussy began to meow; and one of the jokes, a matrimonial one, was lost both in the telling and the hearing.

"The hands of the church clock pointed near to twelve before the votes of thanks were passed to every one—we were never in too much of a hurry to do things decently and in order—who had in any way conduced to the evening's success or pleasure. By this time small jeal-

ousies were forgotten; we sang *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*, and went home feeling better acquainted with each other, and more in love with each other, for having spent that evening together at the tea-meeting."

VIII

"THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL-HOUSE"

"A faded shabby little book,
Besmeared with many an inky stain,
Down from my silent shelves I took,
And turned the well-worn leaves again.
Not dearer to the scholar's heart
His tomes of vellum and of gold
Than this which has become a part
And parcel of the days of old."

ANOTHER morning I found Mrs. Slade out in her garden working among her flowers. She seemed to know my never-flagging interest in her village sketches, and without any solicitation she began:

"You must go 'round and see our schoolhouse; you'll not find a pret-

tier in the Province. You see when the things we planted 'round the church began to grow and make it look so beautiful, I thought of the poor old neglected schoolhouse where we all had gone carrying our A B C books in our hands, and I determined to see what I could do for it.

"'You'll have to get the permission of the trustees before you can do anything,' Simon says.

"There were three trustees. One, Adam Sykes, lived on a farm near the village, and I went to see him first.

"I found Adam ploughing. The earth was rolling up over his ploughshare rich and brown and sweet-smelling; the stubble-field yet untouched spread out before him like a

great carpet dashed with yellow, brown and purple. 'You're taking the first steps towards spreading the table for a hungry world, Mr. Sykes,' I says, by way of being agreeable. I knew he was a hard man to get along with.

"But he said brusquely, 'I never think o' nothin' o' that sort; I'm ploughin' this field for the money I want to git out o' it, Mis. Slade.'

"'I see hundreds of hungry people being fed as a result of your ploughing,' I says.

"'I see a dollar a bushel for wheat, an' that's all I see,' says he.

"I then told him what I wanted to do with the old schoolhouse.

"'Flowers and trees!' he almost yelled. 'It'll never do! They cost money, and I reckon the people

think they are payin' taxes 'nough a'ready!'

"I told him it would not cost the people a cent.

"Then he said the property belonged to the township, and he reckoned they did not want it cut up and mutilated.

"The more I said the more he argued, and I left him and went to see the other trustee.

"This man was as hard to reason with as the first—I often wonder when it is so easy to be agreeable why more men don't practice it. He said, 'My idee o' children goin' to school is to learn books, an' I don't b'lieve in them losin' time a-starin' at posies. They'll never make their livin' in *that* way. The teacher's business,' he says, 'is to make 'em

keep their eyes on their g'ography an' grammar, their readin' an' writin' an' 'rithmetic.'

"Well, I saw I could do nothing with him, so I went to the third man, Jonathan Gooden. I left him last because he lived the farthest from the village.

"Jonathan and I had gone to that same old school together, and had stood side by side in the same classes. We were almost boy and girl sweethearts in those old days, and if Simon had not come along a few years later dear knows where it would have ended.

"'Don't bother your head, Serena,' says he kindly, when I made known to him my business, 'that old schoolhouse ain't worth all that trouble. It's an *old* building now, as old as the

village itself. You and I ain't exactly young any longer, an' we 'tended there when we were youngsters together.'

"'That's just one reason I think it's worth bothering about,' I says, 'because it's old and full of recollections, some that bring tears, and some that bring smiles. It seems to me decorating the home of these old recollections is like planting flowers on the graves of those we think a lot of.'

"He had been ploughing, too, but he threw the reins which had been around his body, over a stump and invited me to take a seat beside him on a log which lay on the ground.

"The air had a tender feeling in it, like the very sky itself might at any moment weep sympathetic tears, a lone pine tree sobbed as though be-

moaning its solitary condition, and a robin in its topmost branches chirped sharply and cheerfully, as if bound to see the bright side of life in spite of tears and sobs. I knew this was my time to brighten up some of the old pictures that hung around the schoolhouse, so I says:

"'Many of them are dead and gone now, Jonathan, whom we used to know in that old schoolhouse.'

"'That they be,' said Jonathan. 'And many of our brightest 'opes that were born there are dead an' gone too, Serena,' says he, scraping the ground with the toe of his boot.

"I knew what he meant. Jonathan took it hard when Simon came around. He never married himself.

"'Do you mind that old book,' he

says, 'out of which you used to try to explain the rules of grammar to me, Serena? You marked it, an' wrote in it, tryin' to knock 'em into my head. I don't understand the rules any better now than I did then, but I have that old inky thumb-marked book yet. Bring it down once in a while an' look at it, something like one looks at the photograph of some one belongin' to you that's dead.'

"'Do you remember Jimmy Gray, Jonathan,' I says, to change to something more cheerful, 'who used to sit on the front bench dangling his bare sunburnt legs that were too short to reach the floor?'

"'Why, yes,' says he, heartily, 'that sandy complected freckled-face little chap with light hair. I mind

him well. Ha, ha! He'd cry if you'd only make a face at him.'

"'And turn as red as a boiled lobster if you'd praise him,' I says. 'Jimmy as he grew older and began to read, you remember,' I says, 'he always could say off by heart all the little pieces of poetry in the school readers. You mind him reciting *The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck*, one Friday afternoon, and he kept saying it over and over to himself for a month after?'

"'I mind it well,' he says, slapping his knee and laughing. 'We called him Casy Biancy for a nickname, you know, an' he grew mad an' cried—he was a techy little chap—then the teacher got wind of it and made us quit.'

"'Jimmy is a great poet now,'

I says, 'has his books printed and read by the hundreds.'

"'Yes,' says he, looking thoughtful, 'it's worth while decorating that schoolhouse in honour of Jimmy himself.'

"'Then,' I says, 'behind him sat Evangeline Harris, who had made up her mind to be a school-teacher; but poor Evangeline tried over and over again and never could pass an examination to get a teacher's certificate. The girl was nigh broken-hearted. Then she went and learned nursing at the hospital, and when she got through with that some wealthy woman took her off across the Atlantic to Rome, where she went to see the Coliseum. And I might say she took us all to see the Coliseum, for there was not a

man or woman in the village who did not with his or her mind's eye see it because Evangeline Harris had been there. My!' I says, 'if the seats in that old schoolhouse could talk, could tell all the dreams that have been dreamed, and the castles that have been built by those who have sat on them, there'd be something worth listening to.'

"'That there would,' he says.

"Then I says, 'You mind that boy that no one knew who owned him, picked up, you remember, as a little baby on a door-step (sat on the left of the schoolhouse next the wall); his feet toed in, and his elbows flared, knees mostly patched; he is now a Cabinet minister.'

"'An' the fellow on the seat behind him,' he says, 'also next the

wall, pockets always bulgin' with trash; used to feed an old rat that stuck his head out through a hole in the floor with the crusts from the children's lunches; always foolin' with some animal; now he's charge o' the Zoo in the city.'

"Both of us sat silent for some time gazing down the dim vista of the past.

"'There was Billy Bond,' he broke in at last.

"'That was the little chap who was always tossing back his head to get the hair out of his eyes,' I says, 'had a kind of cowlick that threw a lock down over his left eye?'

"'Yes,' he says, 'he wouldn't learn anything either; made a mess o' spellin', was nowhere in g'ography or grammar, couldn't remember a

word of history, was thrashed, kep' in, and called a blockhead. Then 'long came a man to the village who talked about grasses, an' flowers, an' trees; butterflies, and birds, an' bugs, an' Billy took to that man like a Highlander to his bag-pipes; went walkin' with him, an' talkin' with him; an' now that blockhead boy is professor of natural history in the university.

"'An' Kate Bennett, pretty Kate, whom Billy wanted to marry (Kate had no eyes for anybody after that chap o' hers died down there in Cape Town) went as a missionary to Africa. I always thought a homely girl would do well 'nough to be et up by them cannibals.'

"I shook my head in disapproval, and Jonathan laughed.

"We were both silent for awhile again, while the pine tree sobbed, and the robin sang, then I says, 'Amelia Brigden married a foreign looking chap and went off to live in New York. The husband has grown rich on stocks, and Amelia is a grand lady now. Balls, and dinners and dresses, I reckon by what she says in her letters, takes up most of her time. She writes home about it, and boasts considerable to her brother's wife here in the village; she says she's president of three or four fashionable woman's clubs, and is a *society leader;* those were her very words in the last letter.'

"I heaved a little sigh, for I always wanted to do something worth while myself in the world. Jonathan must have heard the sigh, for says he:

"'It depends altogether what you are leadin' whether you have a right to feel proud o' bein' a *leader*. I don't know, 'cordin' to what I read in the newspapers, as I would be very vain o' leadin' some o' the capers o' these New Yorkers. You know,' he added, after a short pause, 'Melia was pretty scarce to home, in her young days, an' p'raps prosperity kind o' upsets her. Always the way, I hear.'

"'If we want to know where *most* of the old girls have gone,' I says, 'we must look in the direction the boys have taken.'

"Then we talked about the chap that whittled the desks, and afterwards became a carpenter and builder, and the one who pretended to faint when he wished to escape a

class. 'An' now he's one o' these here cunnin' lawyers,' says Jonathan. And the boy who was always sailing a little boat, he had made with a jaek-knife, on every puddle of water, and now he is sailing the high seas.

"'Some o' the boys,' said Jonathan proudly, 'have carved their names where generations yet unborn shall read 'em!'

"'One or two of them at least,' I says, 'have only sueeeeded in earving their names on the baeks of seats, and on the trunks of trees that grow in mueh frequented plaees.'

"'Three or four o' the boys fill drunkards' graves,' says Jonathan sadly, 'an' poor Joe Conners is in the penitentiary for forgery.'

"He was very sad after this, for he and Joe had been chums—sat to-

gether in the old schoolhouse; so to cheer him up I says,

"'Will you ever forget the day that Zoo chap—you know he was the mischief of the school—pretended he sat down on a pin, and he suddenly, when the schoolroom was unusually quiet, gave a howl fit to wake the dead, and held up to the startled school-teacher a pin which he had bent with his fingers.'

"'An' another day,' says he, laughing fit to roll off the log, 'he brought a mouse to school, and let it go to run 'round the floor under the girls' seats. There was a chorus of smothered *ohs*, and in the twinkling of an eye every girl had her feet gathered up on her seat; even the schoolma'am was holding her skirts up to her ankles.

"'Oh,' says he at last, gasping for breath, 'go on and decorate the old schoolhouse as grand as you please; it's more worthy of it than any other place in the village! I'll see to it,' he says, 'that the other two men are agreeable. They generally come in to my way of thinking in the end.'

"'Then,' I says, 'it will make it a pleasant place for the children that attend there *now*.'

"'Yes,' he says absently, 'I suppose it will; but it's a monument to them *old* days *I* want to see placed there.'"

IX

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE VILLAGE

"We never shall be blessed until we know how much more we want than we have ever sought."

I WAS standing in my neighbour's garden, when a man with iron-gray whiskers and hair, a very slight stoop of shoulders, and the general appearance of having reached genial middle life, came along the sidewalk. He looked in, spoke pleasantly to my companion, and acted as if he might have stopped to chat if there had not been a stranger present.

"That's our rich man," said Mrs. Slade, as she busily grasped handfuls

of weeds which the recent rains had developed.

"Why," I said, "I thought that was the grocer that kept the shop down there at the corner. I did not dream he was rich."

"Yes," she returned without lifting her eyes from her work, "he's very rich, the richest man in the village."

I was puzzled, and this inscrutable woman allowed me to remain so for a few moments, then she began:

"He was an only child and had intended to go to college and prepare himself for some profession, but just as he was ready for college his father, who kept the grocery then, had a stroke of paralysis, so the lad's plans were all changed. There was no help for it, he had to stay at home, mind

the groeery, and support his father and mother. I reckon 'twas quite a blow to him at first, it is usually a blow to all of us—who are not giants in faith—to have our plans knocked in the head; but he soon reeovered, and set his whole mind towards gathering riches."

"Dear, dear," I exelaimed, looking after him ard thinking of all the misers I had ever read about. "He seems quite humble in his groeery, weighing out the tea and sugar, counting the bars of soap." I added, "How did he make his wealth?"

"Pieked it up here and there every day, a little at a time," she returned. "You see when the young fellow had to step into his father's shoes in the grocery a lot of responsibility fell on his shoulders; and even in one

short year he was rich in experience —grocery experience.

"Then there were the people hard to please; Mrs. McCready who thought the tea in his grocery had lost its flavour, and Mrs. Bailey who complained about the butter, and Mrs. Jones who said the soap and starch, of which he had bought a large stock, were no good. And there was Denis Morisen, who came to the village to work on the canal,—they were dredging it here then—he ran a grocery bill for himself and nine of a family until pay-day, and ran himself away in the night-time without paying his grocery bill. And there was the other grocery in the village that failed, and the stock was sold off below cost, and the poor young fellow who was endeavouring

to pay his debts one hundred cents to the dollar could sell scarcely anything for months. He grew white and thin and worn looking, but he had time through all those experiences to grow rich in patience.

"Although the college doors were barred against him, he seemed determined not to be shut out of everything, so he went around with his eyes and ears open. I often think myself that Nature with her great storehouse says to every one of us, 'Help yourself.' 'Take what you want. All I have is yours.' And I've come to believe, after all these years of watching that all of us get pretty nearly what we want most. Now that man when he was a lad wanted to *know* things, and when he went for a walk Sundays—he had

not time to go any other day—he saw the flowers and the plants, and the rocks. He heard the birds and learned their different notes. Preachers may not agree with me, I don't know, but I believe all those children of the woods and of the fields were preaching great uplifting sermons to him, and that that Sunday walk did the boy's soul as well as his body good. I've come to know that religious tracts and revival meetings with their stirring songs, earnest prayers and moving sermons, good and all as they are, are not the only means of helping a man to keep his body under, or his spirit on top, whichever way you have a mind to put it. And I have thought that when we go on to where sermons are not required, per-

haps one of our chief delights will be looking from the God side at those simple, commonplace things, and seeing the whole of what they mean."

Mrs. Slade weeded a few moments in silence, then she resumed:

"The outcome of all the lad's studying was, that very soon there wasn't much that any one knew about those outdoor things that *he* didn't know. 'It's almost as good as goin' intil a college hall to go intil that grocery,' said Mrs. McTavish (she's our smart woman—Scotch). If it's only a pound of sugar he is weighing you out, he'll tell you a lot about the sugar-cane, and, even when the thermometer is twenty below zero, you're off down South, walking among its tall silky stalks, with

the soft southern breezes fanning your cheeks, and the mocking-bird making melody for your ears—and heart. And if it is a hot day in summer, thermometer up near ninety, and you've lost your relish for common food, and run into his grocery for a little something appetizing, he, while he measures you out, perhaps a pint of maple syrup, will begin to talk of the maple sugar groves further north. And you see the great gray trunks of the trees, the spreading branches, the long dim aisles leading everywhere. Spring stirs in your blood, you hear the wind in the trees, the call of the crow and the blue jay; and before you know it your temperature has fallen several degrees. He has educated us all here in the village a pretty considerable.

"Then, while he was still young, he and Dorothy Brown loved each other, any one with half an eye in her head could see that; but how could he take a wife in there with his poor old ailing father and mother? After awhile Dorothy grew miffed because he did not speak up his mind, picked up with another man (love was not the eternal thing to her that it was to him), and her old lover looking on, pale and silent, grew rich in sorrow. It's not generally looked on in that way, but I've been long enough in this world to learn, that for fitting a man to live among his fellow beings, a brother to his kind, there isn't anything more valuable than riches of that sort.

"In time he grew to know so much

that it became the regular practice for the whole village to go to him for advice on all sorts of subjects, from the selling of Widow McShane's pig to the casting of Jerry McClosky's vote. So he grew as rich as Crœsus in power.

"When he had gone through so much himself, so many trials, he had sympathy with others in trouble, time to listen to every one's story or complaint, so of course he grew rich in friends. The very dog rose to his feet and wagged his tail when he heard his footstep, the grocery cat went to meet him every morning and rubbed her sides against his legs, and even his delivery horse looked happy when he was the driver.

"Then," said my informant, straightening up from her stoop-

ing position to look me full in the face, "from being interested in every man, woman, and child in the village, every walking, flying, creeping thing, every growing thing, even to the little dusty weed by the roadside, you can easily see, as the years went by, he grew rich in what the Bible sets the highest value on. So I haven't a doubt he's the richest man in the village."

X

OF ACTORS AND MUSIC

"Very fast and smooth we fly,
Spirits, though the flesh be by;
All looks feed not from the eye
Nor all hearings from the ear:
We can hearken and espy
Without either."

"YES," said Mrs. Slade reminiscently — as if she had been cogitating on the subject — the next time we were enjoying a *tête-à-tête*, "Mrs. Fitzpatrick had lived so long among the artificials off there in the city that it took her some time to come back to where she could enjoy the fresh and natural. Everything that she saw or heard, when she first came back, put her in mind of some-

thing she had seen or heard on the stage. She raved about this actor and the other actor, calling them all by name as freely as if they had been her own first cousins. The most of them had curious foreign-sounding names I never could remember—if I had wanted to do so. She seemed to set great store by knowing them all —having seen each one act. 'Bernhardt is divine,' she says, clasping those two white hands of hers together, and letting her eyes roll back in her head.

"I had in my life seen gleams of divinity like flashes of lightning in human faces, but I never yet have seen the man or woman whom I dared to call divine; but I said nothing, I wanted time, and our wholesome village life to work the cure.

"She went on to say that she doted on the drama, that the world and life were so tame she thought we required the stage to waken us up a bit.

"'Our village is a stage,' I says, 'and all the men and women are the actors and the actresses, even little children—the babies have their part to play,' I says, 'bringing in on the stage of life nearly all the unselfish love we've got.'

"But she shook her head and said nothing but the tragedies of Shakespeare suited her. 'Think of his insight into the human heart,' she says, 'and the way he shows up human passion.'

"I answered her in the words of the poet,

"'Let Shakespeare write his tragedy,
There is enough in life for me.'

"'Nothing happens here to make even a ripple on life's surfaee,' she says; 'it is tragedy that stirs your blood, and you ean't see that anywhere to perfeetion but at the theatre.'

"'There's a tragedy being aeted in many a bosom right around you,' I says; 'you're probably elbowing tragedy every time you get into a little village erowd. Dead hopes, slain joys, strangled ambitions, you're walking beside them day by day.'

"Then she clasped her hands together and says she, 'It is so thrilling to see remorse—Shakespeare's soul-harrowing remorse!'

"Sandy MeBain, the poor young chap whose appetite for strong drink had altogether mastered him, was

passing on the other side of the street just then, and I says, 'Look at that poor boy; think of the tragedy that is going on on the stage of his soul every day of the year, every hour—perhaps every minute of the day; a fight,' I says, 'between Right and Wrong, and before the fight is through one of them is slain. And I haven't a doubt,' I says, 'if it is Right that's gone under, that, on his sobering up days, Remorse stalks iron-shod over the plain of his spirit. I can see it all any time I let my mind's eye run in that direction.

"'And there's So-and-So,' I says, mentioning the name of another young man here in the village (she knew all about the circumstances as well as myself), who has bitterly wronged two fellow beings—a woman

and a child. He has slain trust and innocence,' I says, 'and has put on the stage of the world a tragedy to which no human eye can see an end. And I can see his sin, in the middle of the pitchy night, standing before him in glaring scarlet, introducing him to Remorse; who, after that introduction, must be his lifelong companion.

"'And the tragedy in the woman's soul,' I says, 'where all the sweetest things that belong there are lying stark in death, and the remorse that will dog her every footstep, any woman has only to sit still long enough to let herself see it all.

"'And the little tender baby,' I says, 'who can't see the tragedy of having to work out the plan of life without a background.

"'There are the fathers and mothers dying by inches watching their children going astray,' I says, 'and the children breaking hearts over unworthy parents. There are the tragedies of the men and women who have made mistakes in their marriages—I have known them on both sides of the house right here in the village,' I says. 'Love has been ignored before marriage, or slain after it, and the future for them is a drear gray path which they must walk alone, as far as earthly companionship is concerned; or worse still, with a ball and chain attached to them. And it's a pretty blind person who cannot see Remorse linking arms with them to accompany them to the end of the journey.

"'You'll have to shut your eyes,'

I says, 'or you'll see tragedy everywhere. I reckon it was introduced unto the stage of the world by the first Adam, when he slew Purity in the Garden of Eden, and it will stay here until the Second Adam drives it off.

"'If you're in the mood,' I says, 'you can hear tragedy in the howl of a dog, the lonesome meow of a cat, the cry of some of the wild birds; for the whole creation,' I says, 'groaneth and travaileth in pain—according to Scripture.'

"'I must confess,' she interrupted, with a little laugh, and a shiver of her slim shoulders,—as if she had scarcely even heard what I had said —'that I like to see blood-shed and ghost-walking.'

"'And there are the old wounds,

thought to be healed, that bleed afresh if something touches them,' I says, continuing, 'and the ghosts of deeds done, and of deeds left undone that walk and haunt, oft in the stilly night. There are tragedies of love and murder (if murderous thought is murder) in most people's experiences—oh, no end of them! There isn't one of us,' I says, 'but has our tragedies, and the better we are, and the better we try to become, the more we are conscious that the best in us—patience, long-suffering, love—is being worsted, disabled, and slain, many and many a time. There are not many days,' I says, 'that the archangel and the dragon do not have a struggle on the stage of the soul of every man and woman you ever met.'

"She clasped her hands to her heart and gasped, 'Oh don't be too realistic!'

"'It's real life I'm showing you, not something prepared for an evening's entertainment,' I says, 'and like all real things it is more interesting to me than the counterfeit.'

"Then she branched into music, and said she was starving for some *good* music; that there was nothing really worth listening to but the great oratorios, such as *The Creation*, or the *Messiah*, which we had never heard here in the village, or some of the operas; nothing else had power to reach the soul, she said.

"'I can't agree with you there,' I says. 'Mrs. Green, my neighbor, lay a-dying, and although she was a believer, somehow her soul got all down-

cast, and she was full of fears at the thought of going into the great unknown world. We never could gather together a great choir of several hundred—you say that it takes that many to sing the *Messiah*—but Kirsty McAlister brought her accordion, and sat by her bedside, and with a little crack in her voice sang, *Sun of My Soul*, and Mrs. Green's soul was lifted right out of the slough of despond, and she was quite willing to go on her appointed way. And,' I says, 'many and many a time some old saint, or a body of 'em, singing, *Arise, My Soul, Arise, Shake Off Thy Guilty Fears*, has given my own soul power to raise her wings from the dust of earth. When I was still young,' I says, 'I heard Granny Neilson quavering—

she always had that kind of a tremble in her voice—*Arm Me With Jealous Care, as in Thy Sight to Live*, and it has made me walk more circumspectly ever since.

"'When the angels had a message of peace on earth, and good-will to men, on that first Christmas morning, they did not come with it to the priests and scribes,' I says, 'or the learned and great men, but they brought it to the lowly shepherds; so I have often thought that the angels had whispered some message to our village choir, when I sat there in the church and heard them sing, *The Shining Shore*, or,

> "There's a land that is fairer than day,
> And by faith we can see it afar."

"'There's something about those

two hymns, words and music,' I says, 'that seems to wash the dust and din of earth from souls—poor simple souls like ours of the village anyway.

"'*From Greenland's Icy Mountains*,' I says, 'sung by that choir, with the spirit and the understanding, has drawn a big collection out of the pockets of a congregation not noted for their liberality—to anything foreign; and I think a tune must have reached the soul before it could touch the pocket,' I says.

"I suppose Mrs. Fitzpatrick had grown tired hearing about hymns, for she murmured something about light opera, and heavy opera.

"'I don't know about operas, of your sort, or their power to move the soul,' I says. 'I never to my knowl-

edge ever heard one, but the mouth organ, with the soul of McClosky's boy behind it, playing *The Old Folks at Home*, has just compelled me to put on my bonnet and shawl and go off to see my old father and mother. Then,' I says, 'I'm not a dancer, haven't been brought up that way, but when Bill Gilooly leans out there against the rain-barrel at the corner of the street, and plays *The Girl I Left Behind Me* on his jew's-harp, I declare I *do* step faster around my garden, I know I do. And when my little musical clock strikes off *Soldiers of The Queen*, woman and all as I am, I feel as if I could shoulder a musket, and go out to fight the Zulus, or Soudanese, or any other turbulent man-eating tribe or people that needs to be quelled.

"'Every summer,' I says, 'an Italian woman, wearing a little embroidered shawl on her head instead of a hat or a bonnet, comes 'round through the village with a hand-organ, and plays, *Home, Sweet Home*, and *The Last Rose of Summer*, and I'm not ashamed to own that they pull hard on my heart-strings every time I hear them, and set me off longing for something—more love, or beauty, or perfection of some sort, than I suppose this old world will ever grow to in my time.'

"'I presume,' says Mrs. Fitzpatriek, looking like one in a dream, 'that you don't ever have even the *Hallelujah Chorus* here in the village.'

"'We have here in the village,' I says, 'our own peculiar choruses, oratorios, operas, to whieh the heart

of the listener can give any name he or she chooses.

"'Some spring morning, when the first early blossoms appear, you wake to find the galleries of the fruit trees filled with millions of bees, all uniting in a chorus, as deserving of the name *Hallelujah Chorus* as any other, to my way of thinking,' I says.

"'I do not myself despise any of God's choristers,' I says; 'at the first peep of dawn my old rooster hails the day with a cheerful salute; my neighbor's rooster responds, and in a few seconds a dozen roosters are sending in their responses. My interpretation of them is: "Throw off regrets!" "Begin afresh!" "Another day!" "Another day!" I call this a village chorus, you could not hear it in the city, and on the

farm there are not enough of roosters to make a choir.

"'Then,' I says, 'the spring oratorio of the frogs, if not ours exclusively, is not ever heard in the city. The operas of the harvest bee, the katydid, and the grasshopper, we share with the farmer, but not with the city people.

"'There are times when it seems to me,' I says, 'that the whole world, and all the worlds around it are swinging to music. But of course I know that is when the harp of my spirit is strung to chord with the tune and the time in which God is running His world.'"

XI

THE LITTLE WORLD OF THE POST-OFFICE

"Sometimes from this simple world to look out,
We see, not greed and spite and evil all
In that great world, where to the cynic's doubt
Naught that is good and happy may befall;
But a world tenderer far, and fair to see,
Worthy of love, and sympathy so sweet,
For that it is in fabric such as we,
Made up of these, our little worlds, complete."

"THERE are worlds within worlds, and worlds within worlds, millions of them," said my entertainer, one day we were seated in her snug sitting-room, the rain having driven us in from her garden. "I often think p'rhaps the angels are looking at us from their distance, just as we look at the heavenly

bodies, and see us running our little courses, revolving 'round each other, and—sometimes," she added sadly, "here and there, one shooting off from his or her appointed way, like a falling star.

"Now here's our village post-office, it's a little world of its own, with tragedy and comedy (I picked those two words up from Mrs. Fitzpatrick) enough, for those who have eyes to see and hearts to feel.

"Did you notice that the front step is nearly worn through from the thousand feet that have pressed it; fleet feet and feeble feet, all coming to that post-office in search of happiness,—or satisfaction for the moment at least. When I think of the written thoughts that have flitted out to the world through that slot, and

flitted into the village through that wicket, and the flutterings and sinkings of heart, the smiles and the tears that these thoughts have produced, the old post-office, with the foot-worn floor, and the yellow plaster falling off its walls, becomes a shrine—a box in which sacred things are kept.

"Regularly every Saturday night for years Mrs. Brown used to come to look for a letter from her son, Asa, who had gone off to Manitoba. She came from the far side of the village, where there was no sidewalk, battling often against wind and rain. When I shut my eyes and think about it, I can see that old woman standing there in the corner of the office where she could watch the sorting of the mail. She was all in a

nervous shiver, seems as if she never could calm herself, or quiet the great throbs of her heart that made her body tremble. When the mail was all given out, and she knew without a doubt that there was no letter for her from her boy, she would draw her old gray shawl tighter around her thin shoulders, and creep out of the post-office, the wrinkles in her face deepening, and her poor back becoming more stooped. If I would do any preaching to boys at all, I would say, 'Don't forget to write to the old folks at home.' Probably that careless boy could have had a letter for her there every Saturday night just as well as not, and comforted the poor old mother.

"A fine contrast Squire Murray made when he received a letter from

his young daughter, Rose, who was away at a girl's school. Rose used to write freely to her father, so her mother said, and tell him all her schoolgirl pranks. The Squire was very proper, and I verily believe if he had heard of any other girl doing all that Rose said she did, he would have thought it very foolish. But to get all these confidences in a letter from his own little Rose brought a pleased gleam into his eye, and he walked out of that post-office looking ten years younger for having read that giddy letter from a schoolgirl.

"Sometimes I used to think that the little office room was wrapped in an atmosphere of love, sometimes of grief, and, perhaps, when there was any little bickering going on in the village, such as election times, when

the great newspapers from the city were coming through, full of nasty speeches on each side, one about the other, and half of us here in the village favoured one party, and half the other it came near being an atmosphere of hate—it was whispered that a package of election 'boodle' (ugly word, isn't it?) came through that office once, but that's not for a woman to know.

"Perhaps each one of us had an atmosphere of our own, and if we carried love, or grief, or hate into that little office we imagined the room was full of it. I am sure when Becky Thorn used to get the flirtatious notes from the summer boarder that wore the white shoes, the room, to her—probably the whole world swam in a sea of silliness. And I

haven't a doubt when old Abraham Simpson came to drop the letter instructing the police of New York to send home the body of his only son, who had been shot in a drunken row in that city, the little post-office was filled with an atmosphere of woe.

"When Jimmy Gray received the letter telling him that his first poem was accepted by a publisher, he said that the floor of the office rose up, and the walls and windows danced. And when poor Kate Bennet read the letter containing the sad intelligence that her boy-lover had died of a fever out in South Africa, she said that the floor seemed to give away, and the whole building to reel and crash about her.

"Women got their love letters—

for I hold that a letter is of small account to a woman that has not love of some sort in it—and men got their business letters through that old wicket.

"There was Skinflint Carver (Skinflint was a nickname of course, given him by the village) who was in the office every day watching for some one of his numerous business letters, or his daily newspaper. He owned a sawmill and a fast horse, and speculated here, there and everywhere, playing sharp tricks. He was getting rich—in money. Poor Skinflint, I believe it gave him more concern what the daily newspapers were printing about the state of the markets, than what the recording angel was writing down about himself. His eyes had grown glittering

and hard, I always imagined that his whole body looked hard and I often found myself wondering—when younger than I am now—as I looked at him standing there in the post-office waiting for his mail, whether he would ring hard like a metal dollar if he were struck.

"Farmers came once a week for their weekly newspaper, and the occasional letter that drifted their way.

"It was on a drear day in autumn that I went into the post-office and found Hiram Jones, a young farmer, with a broad crape band around his hat, and three or four dozen envelopes, with a deep black border, spread out on the ledge befor 'im. He was putting a one-cent stamp on each envelope. I knew without being told that he was sending out the

notices of his father's death to all the old friends. He looked lonesome, and I went over and helped him lick the stamps and paste them on the envelopes. His brown large-featured face was softened by sorrow, but there were deeps in his eyes, and his mouth was shut firm and tight; and I knew that he was trying to stand up straight under his father's mantle, which had now fallen upon his young shoulders.

"Letters come in from north, south, east, west, from the hot climate and the cold climate. Kate Bennet sent her letters from the mission fields of hot Africa, and Asa Brown wrote home from Manitoba—which is cold enough for anybody. David McKenzie, here in the village, sent his letters regularly to the old home in

Scotland and received letters back smelling of heather; and Mary McClosky looked regularly for her letters from 'aeross the say,' which always inelosed a sprig of shamrock.

"Then I remember very well the white frightened face of a mother who had a letter telling her that her boy was wounded in the war. And the happy smile of another mother by her side whose son had just sent her home his first month's wages.

"Dear, dear, what a cheequered game life seems to us who eannot see the end; if we did not know that there was One handling the pawns (that's what they call the men in the game of chess, Mrs. Fitzpatriek says) pushing them in here, and out there, so as to bring the

game out at last to the greatest advantage to all, we'd be terribly discouraged, wouldn't we?

"Miss Grimshaw was at the post-office every evening, for years I believe, and it would seem as if she were always looking for samples of dry goods from the great city stores. Poor girl! she thought too much about dress, and her face looked like it. Then Kirsty McAlister came many and many an evening, hoping for a letter from her brothers—who were off in the city and too busy to write home letters—and all of us who looked into her face knew that she had caught God's secret.

"Then the boys came to see the girls, and the girls came to see the boys; and a number thronged 'round there every evening from no reason

at all—except from habit, or because they had nothing else to do. Ben Leith never failed to be there, and I never saw him get a letter.

"Boxes of wedding flowers, and boxes of funeral flowers, from the city greenhouses, have both been handed out through that old wicket, and sometimes both have made me sad, and sometimes both have made me happy. I am sure it is a sin to be anything else than happy when some souls snap their bonds and fly away from their trials and sufferings here, and go on to where sorrow and sighing have passed away. I was happy when I saw the funeral wreath of poor rheumatic eighty-year old Jacob Hansel, it seemed to me like his crowning wreath; and I was sad when I saw the white roses for the

wedding of nineteen year old Nettie Darsh, when she married the rich old man of sixty —— Her relations made the match.

"There are scenes—dramas Mrs. Fitzpatrick calls 'em—that are open to the gaze of everybody, and there are little private dramas which no one knows anything about but oneself—and p'rhaps another. There's one in connection with that old post-office which no one saw but Emeline Delmer and myself—Emeline was my greatest friend and told me everything. It was when Joe North wrote her the letter asking her to be his wife. She answered the letter the same day, accepting his proposal. But, goodness! after she had the letter posted she was sorry, or thought she was. She began to think what a

serious thing marriage is, and her fears and forebodings almost suffocated her. She seemed to forget all about Joe, and half an hour after she had dropped the letter into the slot she went back to the post-office and asked to have it again. But the postmaster said it was against the law to return it, and he would not let her have it. So Joe got the letter next day. Do you suppose he'd let her back out after that? But Emeline really loved Joe, and it turned out all right in the end. I reckon the Bible is just as correct when it says 'perfect love casteth out all fear' as in all the rest of its sayings.

"Valentine's day has always been a great day in our office; hundreds, and hundreds of valentines have

passed through that old wicket. Comic valentines, in which we had the chance to give a hint, or press home a joke, honourably without signing our own name; and sweet, tender valentines, in which the shy lad dared in the words of the poet to hint at his own heart's yearnings. I have my own old first valentine yet; it runs something like this:

> "'Nor gold, nor splendour, satisfies
> The heart that yearns for love,
> I count one kind look from thine eyes
> All earthly wealth above.'

"——But I suppose valentines are the same to-day that they were forty years ago. Strange what various ways people have for searching after the greatest thing in the world. That valentine of mine came from Jonathan—but p'rhaps it's not fair

to mention names. Poor Jonathan!

"Well I have only given you a snatch here and there of all that has happened in our old post-office. As I said before, there are worlds within worlds, eaeh one of us who has walked into that post-office has been a little world in himself. The most curious world of the whole lot, and the one hardest to be understood, is the world each one of us carries in his own bosom."

XII

"AN OLD SETTLER"

"As one who walking in a forest sees
A lovely landscape through the parted trees,
Then sees it not, for boughs that intervene;
Or, as we see the moon sometimes reveal'd
Through drifting clouds, and then again conceal'd,
So I behold the scene."

"YOU have seen that old house that stands at the outskirts of the village?" inquired Mrs. Slade. "That's an old settler, the oldest in the village, but built of fine cedar logs, no give 'way to them."

Following the direction of her gaze, I saw in the distance an old log house standing in a field, with a few gnarled, twisted plum-trees in front of it.

"No one has lived in the house for years," she continued; "the roof's sinking in with age, and 'twouldn't be safe to step on the floor, but I never look there without seeing a lot of pictures—the life-pictures of that old house. P'rhaps you may see something different with your mind's eye, it's not given to two of us to see exactly the same, but I see the man who built that house coming through the woods on an Indian trail in the early days of the country. There was only one horse, and his wife rode—they were not long married—while he walked by her side carrying a gun. He was on the lookout all the way along for bears, wolves, rattlesnakes, or perhaps an ugly Indian.

"When he reached the spot of land

the government had allotted to him, he, with the help of a neighbour or two, cut down a few trees, and built their log house. One room the first year or two, except when visitors came, then some gray blankets were hung up for partitions. Simple enough, but within the four walls of that little house the greatest events of life have taken place. All the emotions have lived there turn about in spells, joy and sorrow, peace and pain, have all reigned at times under those cedar shingles. Life and death have wrestled there, sometimes one victorious, sometimes the other. Over that old pine floor have tripped feet as light as love can make them, and leaden as sorrow could load 'em. Out through the panes of those old windows,—you've noticed how small

the panes are?—have looked eyes of faith shining like heaven's own stars, and again eyes blurred with the mist of doubt, and the pain of disappointment.

"Baby fingers have made marks on those old plastered walls, and baby feet have helped wear the crevices in the floor. On that floor I see the farmer kneeling with his little group at family prayer; the mother with her face buried in her hand, trying despite her many cares to keep her mind on her devotions; the youngsters, their heads together whispering, perhaps giggling, while the father, with a glow on his upturned face, which sometimes made the children grow quiet to stare at him, asked God's blessing on them all.

"Then comes night, the children are asleep, the wolves are howling outdoors, and an occasional fox barks. The farmer is reading a newspaper, which came around the groceries from the nearest town, by the light of the tallow dip, and his wife listens, while she knits on one of his strong gray socks.

"Those old plum-trees in front of the house are in my picture too; full of white blossoms in the spring, and full of red plums in the fall. The birds, when they come back in spring from foreign parts, perch in their branches and sing, '*This is my own, my native land*,' the children play under them, and the farmer and his hired man rest in spells, after dinner on hot days, in the grateful patch of deep soft shade which they cast over

the grass. Live-forever, rosemary, and southernwood grow on either side of the front door-step, contending with the grass for right-of-way, and sweetening the air for yards around them. Under the large flat stone which forms the first step, a cricket lives and sings, cheerfully or sadly, according as your listening heart will have it.

"By and by, the daughter leaves for a home of her own. The courting has been done before the wide fireplace winter evenings, and out on a bench at the front of the house summer evenings. But the visions of the future could not have been brighter in two hearts and two heads if they had been roofed over by a palace.

"Then the boy gets married and brings home his wife. And the old

couple settle down, leave the care to the younger people, and sit in two easy rush-bottomed chairs out in front of the house, warming themselves in the sun, and talking about the good old times past and gone. Talking about their first baby, whose grave is in the corner of one of the fields; and they feel quite sure that that child was the fairest and brightest that was given them.

"In time the old man and woman move on to seek a city out of sight, and two graves are made beside the baby's in the lot at the corner of the field, inclosed by a white wooden paling.

"The son makes money on the land his father had cleared, builds another house and moves away from the old one.

"Years after that I see tramps making the old empty house a head-quarters to sleep in nights. And during the long dark hours they hear the soft creaking of a rocking-chair, and hear a mother singing a hymn to her babe. They hear the patter of children's feet, and their sunny laughter. The very walls whisper of good and beautiful things they had known themselves in by-gone days. A loving presence seems to draw the hot rebellious thoughts from their hearts, and wipe the oaths from their lips. And they go out on their next day's tramp, unwashed and unkempt, but better men from having spent the night among the influences of the *old settler*."

XIII

WINTER PLEASURES

"Your culture may be measured by the number of things you enjoy."

"WINTER time is very interesting here in the village," said Mrs. Slade to me in a reproving tone, one November day she dropped into my summer cottage and found me packing to return to the city. "Pity you can't stay with us; living here only in summer times you see but half our enjoyments. Pleasure comes to us here of her own accord; we never have to run about to catch her."

"What do you find in the village

in winter time that makes life worth living?" I asked, dropping into a rocker to rest my tired back that had stooped for an hour over a trunk.

"That's just the question Mrs. Fitzpatrick asked me," she returned, smiling absently, as if some shade of the past had risen up and was greeting her. "You know living in the city a few years had blunted her fine senses."

Without further solicitation she began:

"It was snowing, great large soft flakes, and it had snowed about so all night, so that there was not a track to be seen. Soon after breakfast, when I had the dishes washed up, I drew a pair of Simon's socks over my shoes and waded over to see Mrs. Fitzpatrick. I knew it was in

the winter time she buried Fitzpatrick off there in that city cemetry, and I thought perhaps the still winter day—for Nature can say more with silence than most people can with words—and the coming of the heavenly host might make her a bit lonesome to be off with him.

"'It is such a beautiful day,' I panted as I reached her door. 'I just couldn't stay in the house.'

"'Beautiful!' she says. 'This is a *terrible* snow-storm! The grocer's boy has been over and told me that it has done no end of mischief: the trains are blocked so they can't run, the telegraph lines won't work, and even our milkman is unable to get in from the country to bring us our milk. There'll be great delays,' she says, 'with freight, important mes-

sages can't be sent through on the wires, and no end of trouble.'

"'What a mercy,' I says, 'that God sometimes stretches out His hand and stops the hurrying to and fro of man; what with rushing trains, and flashing telegrams, and driving business he'd never, never in the world see any of the beautiful around him.'

"'Well, he hasn't much to see to-day,' says she, shutting the door against the snow-storm; 'everything is snowed in.'

"'Those great white flakes,' I says, 'coming down so noiseless, so pure, make me think of the angelic host, and all the world seems calmed by their very coming. Did you ever notice,' I says, 'how still the world gets when the snow angels are fluttering down in thousands? Perhaps

it may be my imagination, but I never remember hearing any one talking very loud or angry at such a time, and I've noticed even the crabbedest people in the village almost gentle.'

"Mrs. Fitzpatrick glanced out through the window at the falling snow.

"'When I look out,' I says, 'and see everything covered with that pure whiteness, the frozen mud and old wagon ruts, the unpainted fences, and broken sidewalks, the fields, and all the trees and bushes, I think everything in Nature's mighty temple is worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness. And d r, dear, when the sun comes out and lights it all up, setting aflame every hanging flake and fringe of icicles, I

can think of nothing but the *New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* Then on clear white nights when the moon and the stars shine down, throwing upon the silvery ground the shadows of the trees, with their great lace-work of branches, I can do nothing but fall back on Revelations again, *The tabernacle of God is with men,* can think of nothing else. Somehow I says, 'the pure white world opens a door to an inner room in your soul where no summer beauty has ever entered.'

"Mrs. Fitzpatrick looked wistfully out on the falling snow again.

"'If ever you should happen to feel all hemmed in during winter time,' I says, 'roads blocked and

fenees eovered, all you've got to do is look up into the skies, with no end to their outreachings to know that you have plenty of room.

"'Then,' I says, 'on bleak days, when the southeast wind has lifted the white mantle from the shoulders of earth, and is moaning 'round eorners, it seems as if Nature was feeling the sin of the world; and the trees, having renounced the pomps and vanities of summer, are, as the poet says, stretching long bare arms to heaven like patriarchs in prayer.

"'From the trees,' I says, 'one naturally turns to the birds, and I wonder whether down in the southern swamps they are praising God with the same old choruses we used to listen to up here.

"'Then winter time,' I says, 'puts

one thinking of the millions and millions of things with the sap of life in them, all happed up under ground, brooded over by the wings of the snow angel; with ear set it seems, listening for the resurreetion trump of Spring. The roots of the bright red roses, the round little croeus bulbs, the sacred heart of the Easter lily, and who can count how many more? And all the great families of things in which the red blood seems to have gone to sleep in their veins, as it were, rolled into some snug corner until a voice *we* never hear at all, calls them out again. How much those creatures see and hear that we know nothing about!' I says. 'One could spend a lifetime thinking about it. What dreams have they during their long

sleep? I wonder whether like ourselves they have the fun of planning how they'll spend the following summers. My!' I says, 'it does me good to think of all those creatures of God, unblotted by disobedience, lying by to come forth in spring to give new interest to the world. I don't know,' I says, 'I wouldn't like a preacher to hear me, he might think I wasn't orthodox, but I like to believe all those poor things go on to somewhere, that their little life here is not the whole of it. That we are going to hear the canary's song again, and the bobolink's laugh, that the sad note is somehow going to be struck from the cry of the poor hunted wild fowl.

"'Then winter,' I says, 'is the time I do most of my foreign travel-

ling. I stay at ho e in my garden mostly during the summer months but in winter, when it gets the least bit monotonous, I just go off South among the palm-trees and the orange groves, and have a change. I've travelled a good bit,' I says, 'been to every continent and a good many islands of the sea. And I've done it all without leaving Simon or going in body outside my own door-yard. I've often thoug' ' I says, 'that I never could bear to leave Simon here by himself and go off galloping over Europe or Palestine, as I hear some women do. I have heard that there are women and their daughters over there across the ocean spending money hand over fist, while the poor husband and father is at home in Ne· York or Chicago slaving away

to make it for them. Lonesome, isn't it? I never could do that way with Simon,' I says. 'I very often had him right in the room, with his shoes off, asleep in his armchair, while I in the rocking-chair opposite to him was off in thoughts to Greenland's icy mountains, or Afric's coral strand, or maybe up in the moon, stepping from star to star in the milky way, or travelling with some one of the heavenly bodies in its course.

"'Even in church,' I says, 'I may as well confess, when the sermon was long, or not over and above interesting, the minister might mention China, and instantly I would be transported to that curious country, wandering up and down the streets of their cities, meeting their funny little pig-tailed men, and their small-

footed women. Then I'd slip out to the rice-fields, or among their lilies. Indeed I have at times made a flying tour of the world before the close of a sermon.'

"Simon did not believe it was right for me to travel 'round so Sundays," she said with a reflective smile, dropping her narrative to make the remark, "and after that I tried to confine my Sunday visiting to the mission fields. When the sermon was dry enough to send me off travelling it always put Simon asleep."

She resumed her narrative:

"'Then I might be in the kitchen making a custard for supper,' I says to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, 'and the grating of the nutmeg would land me in Africa. I would wander 'round in

the jungles, get tangled in the tall grasses and creeping vines, admire the flamingoes and parrots, perhaps see a boa-constrictor or a lion. I would companion a spell with Livingstone and Stanley, and be much amused by various tribes of blacks.

"'A cup of good black tea,' I says, 'would send me off to India to enjoy myself among the elephants and the chimpanzees.'

"I like this travelling 'round alone, no one to interfere with you—talk when you want to be silent, point out evil when you are seeing only good, or spoil in any way the vision of your soul," she added, looking to me for assent.

Then she went back to Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

"'There was a farmer,' I says, 'who

came in past our house once a week to market, and he wore a bearskin coat, and every time I saw him he sent me off, whether I would or no, to Russia. Sometimes I'd spend a whole afternoon in Siberia, wandering 'round that lonesome place, and neighbouring with the exiles. Then when I had visited with those prisoners, I'd go off to St. Helena and other places where people are sent to live alone for punishment. Seems kind of nice,' I says, 'no matter where you go, from Timbuctoo to the North Pole, you find people that are breathing the same air as you, the same sun is shining on them as shines on you, they are roofed over by your blue sky, and the same great Love that is watching over you watches over them.'

"If you'll believe me, Mrs. Fitzpatriek put her two little soft hands, you could most squeeze into nothing, into mine, and says she, 'Mrs. Slade, you've done me more good than a hundred sermons; you've given me something to think about all winter.'"

XIV

A PICTURE OF HOME LIFE

"To say—I love you—only, and not care
Whether the love comes back to us again,
Divinest self-forgetfulness, at first
A task, and then a tonic, then a need;
To greet with open hands the best and worst,
And only for another's wound to bleed:
This is to see the beauty that God meant,
Wrapped round with life, ineffably content."

"I NEVER did believe in match-making," said my interesting old friend during our last afternoon together. "I always hold that if there are two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one, they'll find it out themselves quicker than anybody else. But it would look as if I had been a party to making a match between Ben

Leith and Jule Henderson. 'Providence,' I says to Simon, 'must have used my hand without my knowledge, for I'm sure all I said was without any designs of having part or lot in the matter. A few years after my talks with Ben, when he had brightened up to be as fine a looking chap as the village ever produced, and had become the proprietor of the wool depot, he found his way out to the farm where Jule lived. How he managed it I don't know; love laughs at impossibilities is an old saying; but the upshot of it was, Jule's poor old dad died, and in a short time Ben brought his girl-wife to the village.

"They were very happy, and it did old eyes good to see them like two birds b'lding their nest. I helped

Jule make her home simple and beautiful. I advised her to substitute plants for fancy-work, to have living, growing, interesting things for her daily and hourly companions. 'To watch one fern throw out a frond,' I says, 'and open out day by day like a spirit before your eyes, or one lily bring forth its pure white blossom, fills you with a gladness that all the fancy-work in the world, hair-wreaths, or leather frames, or berlin-wool work, tidies, sofa-pillows, antimacassars, cannot produce. Seems to me,' I says, 'that watering and tending that fern or lily makes you feel as if you were a co-labourer together with God in creating the beautiful.

"'The best furniture in my best room,' I says, 'are things that Na-

ture provided without money and without priee—great brown cat-tails mixed with long green blades of swamp-grass, plumes of ferns, and branehes of pressed autumn leaves. And at times during our long winter, when I get tired hearing the clamour of the world, for there are days when you seem to hear the whole world with its noise and unrest, and you feel oppressed and troubled, I go into my best room and shut the d r, and all the reeds, grasses, ferns, and leaves speak to me. The reeds whisper of streams of water, in whose cheerful company they have spent their better days, soon to be liberated from the bondage of winter by the voiee of the south wind. The branehes of pressed leaves talk of the trees whieh ere

long would shake themselves and laugh in the summer sunshine. The ferns tell the story of deep green woods and the soft singing of birds that beguile men of their toil. And,' I says, 'I go out of my best room feeling God is on His throne, it's all right with the world.'

"Jule dug up some of the old flower roots that grew in the farm garden, sweet William and bleeding heart, bridal wreath and widow's tear, tiger-lilies and peonies, and brought them all to her town garden. 'Seems to me,' she said, with a little sob in her voice, 'when I'm 'tending these that Dad is somewhere 'round.' Although she had only a bit of a front yard she made a bright spot of it, like a patch o' rainbow had got caught among the green.

Then Jule was a pretty girl herself, and neat as a pocket, and it was a sightly picture Ben saw every evening when he came home from his work—Jule, slender and lithe as a silver poplar, working among her flowers.

"But they were only married a few months when I noticed that a cloud had come over their sky; Jule had a minor sound in her voice which made me think of the wind just before a rain, and Ben was silent. I watched this little cloud for some time, but I said nothing; it's not for a third party to meddle with matrimonial clouds.

"Jule kept coming to my place as usual, but she was not the same girl. After awhile she could contain herself no longer, and she burst out in a

torrent of tears and told me that Ben was growing tired of her; that now, since he had once got her, he did not care for her as he used to care. 'And I suppose, Jule,' I says, quietly, '*you*, since you've once got *him*, don't care for him as you once did.' 'Oh, yes, I do,' gasped Jule, 'just as much—*more*.' 'Do you act like it, Jule?' I says kindly. 'Well,' said Jule turning red, '*he* doesn't act as he once did.' Then I thought it a proper time to show her a picture out of my private gallery.

"'When Simon and I were married about three months,' I says, 'I began to notice that he was growing careless. He would sometimes sit down in the only chair when I was standing; he would walk in a door ahead of me, and often sat at the

table thinking about something or somebody else, and never thought of *me*. I was hurt, and I showed it. Simon looked curiously at me flouncing around at first, then a hurt look came in his face, and after that he was silent and sullen.

"'Things went on in this way for some time. I sad and depressed, becoming more carcless every day about my house and my appearancc, and Simon swaggering 'round whistling as if he did not care a cent.

"'One day when I was out in my garden planting, and transplanting, trying to arrange the flowers to look their best—this was the only comfort I had now—it came to me, "Work up your own best points, paint yourself happy in spite of everything, and imagine yourself Simon's old sweet-

heart again." The idea took my fancy, and I went into the house and began to arrange everything as nice as possible for Simon's coming, just as I used to do in the old home when he was coming to see me. I picked flowers and put them in every corner. I spread the tea-table with my prettiest table-cloth, and set it for this particular night with my best china dishes. A bouquet of yellow and white flowers to match my gold-banded china adorned the centre of the table. When the table was set I put on a pink waist that Simon always admired. I had not been wearing it since the coolness came between us. I peeped in the looking-glass and smiled at my reflected face there. I saw that my cheeks had grown about the colour

of the pink waist,—they had had very little colour in them for some time—and my eyes shone like two stars. I was feeling happy already.

"'Everything was ready when Simon came home; he glanced at my pink waist, then at the table, and says he, "Who's your visitor?"

"'"I've no visitor," I says.

"'He looked surprised for a moment, but said nothing. But I noticed him watching me out of the corner of his eye while I was putting the toast and boiled eggs on the tea-table.

"'Well we sat down, he at the foot, and I at the head. We had been accustomed of late to eat our meals in silence mostly, but now when I was painting myself, Simon's happy sweetheart, I could not do

that any longer; so I began to tell him the little happenings of the day. I saw a surprised, questioning look in his eyes, but I kept on.

"'"Simon," I says, just as if there never had been any cloud between us, "you ought to have seen those two little Cox boys this afternoon; they came 'round here looking up into the trees. I saw they had something in their closed hands, and suspected they intended to throw stones at the birds; so I went out and spoke up pretty sharp to them. They did not answer me until I told them they might be arrested for killing the birds; then one of them opened up his chubby dirty little hand which was full of salt, and says he, 'We're not killin' 'em, we're tryin' to ketch 'em.'"

"'Simon laughed, and somehow that touching little story, and Simon's "ha, ha" seemed to break down the barrier between us. Simon told a story about when *he* was a little boy trying to put salt on birds' tails to catch them. And I told some more of the afternoon's incidents.

"'Then Simon began to tell me some of the happenings in *his* world, which he had not done for weeks, and by the time tea was over we had almost forgotten our suspicion of each other. I began to hum an old song Simon and I used to sing together before we were married, while I was gathering up the tea dishes, and Simon joined in and hummed too.

"'It was five years afterwards, one

night we were sitting side by side, gazing into the open fire in the fireplace, and I had on a pink waist again, not the same old waist, but one something the same shade, when Simon turned to me and says he, "Serena, do you know, I never see a pink waist without thinking of the time you and I had the sulky spell. Do you mind? What was the matter with you that time anyway, Serena?"

"'"Why there was nothing the matter with *me*," I says, "it was *you*, Simon. I thought you were growing tired of me. My heart was nearly broken, and you know you whistled to let me see you did not care."

"'"Why, Serena," says he reprovingly, "it was you who had grown tired of me. You never seemed

pleased any more when I came home, never dressed up or 'peared a bit glad to see me. You used before that to sing about the house, and you stopped singing entirely. I had to take to whistlin' to keep down my misery," says he.

"'We looked at each other and both of us laughed. Then Simon stretched across his hand, laid it on mine, and says he, "Serena, we were both so tuckered out with that quarrel we've never hankered for another one."'

"When I had finished my story, Jule gathered up her hat and said it was time she was going home to get tea.

"'Why, girl,' I says, 'it's only four o'clock.' But she *would* go.

"There was a full moon that

night, and after tea I saw Ben and Jule strolling up past our place arm in arm like two lovers. Jule had on her white muslin frock and broad-brimmed hat, and looked as pretty as a big white daisy."

XV

"WELL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET"

"Genius is the power of glorifying the commonplace."

"I SUPPOSE it never would have been dug there, if they had known the place would grow to a village," said my neighbour as we were passing the "well in the middle of the street." (She would have considered it a breach of etiquette not to accompany me to the depot on my departure for the city.) "At the time it was dug," she continued, "there was nothing here but a blacksmith shop and a tavern.

Some years after houses began to be built, streets to be made, and when it was all done lo, and behold, the old well was in the middle of the main street.

"It was very deep, and the best water that was anywhere about this district; on the hottest days it came up just as cool as if it were just out of an ice-house.

"My first recollection of the well was when I was a little shaver going to school. The schoolhouse was out beyond the tavern and the blacksmith shop, and on hot days we always stopped at the old well and let the water trickle on our bare, dusty feet. We youngsters used to call it giving our feet a drink. Sometimes one girl would pump, while the other one would hold first

one foot and then the other foot under the long nose of the old pump. Ough! it makes the funny shivers run through me yet when I think of that cold water being doused on my hot feet. Sometimes if the pump had not been used for a few hours we would have to pour in a little water to get it started. Give it a taste, we used to say, to make it hungry for more. We would find the water in the horse-trough, and dip it out with the battered rusty tin cup fastened by a chain to the pump.

"Oh, that tin cup itself, if it could speak what it might tell us about the lips that have touched its brim in search of the sparkling waters it held! Tender, innocent rosebud lips made for smiles and

kisses; withered tremulous lips breathing prayer and blessing on the world; polluted lips scorching the earth with blasphemies.

"As we got older, and grew too nice to go in our bare feet, we still stopped frequently at the old well—for a drink, or from habit, perhaps.

"We grew older still, and we liked to go to the well evenings to meet old friends—sometimes girls, sometimes boys, according to taste. It somehow got to be recognized, without any previous arrangement, that we should meet them there; and we'd dress up, and put on some of our prettiest things to go to the old well in the middle of the street. Heh, heh, I can see just as plain as day Hetty Hickson walking off towards that old well summer evenings, her

brown curls all tied up with pink ribbons, and a few seconds after Johnnie Baird, wearing his Sunday necktie, going in the same direction. They have been married now years and years.

"Then we grew older still and settled in life, and although we had our homes to attend to, we women still liked to go to the old well at times, to chat with a neighbour and hear the harmless gossip of the village and neighbourhood. If any one was taken suddenly ill we'd hear it there; or if there was any little mystery in the village that wasn't proclaimed on the house-top, it would be most sure to leak out at the well.

"Then the men gathered there forenoons, farmers who had brought a grist to the mill, and village men

who weren't fond of work, and they often got so excited talking politics you might have heard them half a mile away. The farm horses at the same time were quietly drinking at the horse-trough, apparently getting more satisfaction out of their portion of time than the creatures credited with having souls.

"The old well served us all—man, and beast, and bird. The cats and dogs on hot days, found it a convenient place to lap some comfort. The flocks of geese, from which we secured our feather-beds, held noisy conventions there at times. And many a bird, that had crossed seas and continents, came down out of the blue to rest awhile, and preen its dainty feathers in the cooling waters.

"When men came to the village selling medicine, corn-plasters, or soap; or perhaps to talk and practice mesmerism or phrenology, they always set up their stand, and lighted their kerosene torch evenings, beside the well, in the middle of the street. And one time an English Methodist who had preached in the parks in London came to the village to visit some of his relations, and he held a meeting Sunday evening at the old well. That night it became a well of Samaria to Bobby Brock, for there he first understandingly heard of the *Living Water*.

"Poor Bobby was a great drunkard, but after that night his desires were changed and he gave it all up. But once in awhile the flesh would strive for the mastery, and a terrible

craving would come over Bobby. It was Mrs. McTavish who advised him to go to the well in the middle of the street and drink all he could of the cold water when he felt the craving for something stronger coming on. Our house was not far from the well. I could see it quite distinctly from my bedroom window, and sometimes when the moon was full I have seen Bobby even in the middle of the night at that well drinking, drinking eagerly of its wonderful water.

"Another time a chance-man, as I call him, came to the village and set up his wheel beside the old well. It was said that if you placed twenty-five cents on that wheel it would turn around and bring you back twenty-five dollars. The men and boys flocked around him, some of them

coming miles, like bees around a honeycomb, until one day old man Spence laid one hundred dollars on the wheel, and it turned around and *nothing* came back to him. Then the men and boys left, and no chance-man can ever draw a crowd around the old well since.

"There are many other wells in the village, but in none of them does the water taste so good as in the well in the middle of the street. If a stranger came into our midst we would never think of offering him a drink from any other. Almost any hour of the day,—have you noticed?—you can see some one, perhaps a child with a two quart can, going to the well for water.

"It would seem as if one who ever drank from that well could never be

satisfied with anything else—in the way of drinks. When Paul Burton who had been brought up here in sight of the well, became a great traveller in foreign parts, climbing mountains and crossing deserts, tasting the wine of every country, he used to write back and say that his throat was parching for a draught from the well in the middle of the street.

"It isn't any 'old oaken bucket' as you see, and it has no moss 'round it, except the moss o' green memories, but that old unpainted, long-nosed pump is dear to the heart of every one who was born and reared in the village."

We had reached the depot, and the impatient engine was snorting in our ears. Clasping my hand in farewell,

the village artist said, while she gazed meditatively into the Indian summer haze, which to ordinary mortals obscured a distant view, "We are all part an' parcel o' the great world's picture, and the only thing that will make our corner worth looking at by and by, is to do our little part, and do it well."

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