

REVERIES OF A BACHELOR.

OVER A WOOD-FIRE.

I have got a quiet farm-house in the country, a very humble place to be sure, tenanted by a worthy enough man, of the old New England stamp, where I sometimes go for a day or two in the winter to look over the farm accounts, and to see how the stock is thriving on the winter's keep.

One side the door, as you enter from the porch, is a little parlor, scarce twelve feet by ten, with a cosey-looking fireplace, a heavy oak floor, a couple of arm chairs, and a brown table with carved lions' feet. Out of this room opens a little cabinet, only big enough for a broad bachelor bedstead, where I sleep upon feathers, and wake in the morning with my eye upon a saucy colored lithographic print of some fancy "Bessy."

It happens to be the only house in the world of which I am *bona fide* owner; and I take a vast deal of comfort in treating it just as I choose. I manage to break some article of furniture almost every time I pay it a visit; and if I cannot open the window readily of a morning, to breathe the fresh air, I knock out a pane or two of glass with my boot. I lean against the walls in a very old arm chair there is on the premises, and scarce ever fail to worry such a hole in the plastering as would set me down for a round charge for damages in town, or make a prim housewife fret herself into a raging fever. I laugh out loud with myself, in my big arm chair, when I think that I am neither afraid of one nor the other.

As for the fire, I keep the little hearth so hot as to warm half the cellar below, and the whole space between the jambs roars for hours together with white flame. To be sure, the windows are not very tight, between broken panes and bad joints, so that the fire, large as it is, is by no means an extravagant comfort.

As night approaches I have a huge pile of oak and hickory placed beside the hearth; I put out the tallow candle on the mantel (using the family snuffers, with one leg broke); then, drawing my chair directly in front of the blazing wood, and setting one foot on each of the old iron fire-dogs (until they grow too warm), I dispose myself for an evening of such sober and thoughtful quietude, as I believe, on my soul, that very few of my fellow men have the good fortune to enjoy.

My tenant, meantime, in the other room, I can hear now and then, though there is a thick stone chimney and broad entry between, multiplying contrivances with his wife to put two babies to sleep. This occupies them, I should say, usually an hour; though my only measure of time (for I never carry a watch into the country), is the blaze of my fire. By ten, or thereabouts, my stock of wood is nearly exhausted; I pile upon the hot coals what remains, and sit watching how it kindles, and blazes, and goes out—even like our joys!—and then slip by the light of the embers into my bed, where I luxuriate in such sound and healthful slumber as only such rattling window frames and country air can supply.

But to return. The other evening—it happened to be

on my last visit to my farm-house—when I had exhausted all the ordinary rural topics of thought, had formed all sorts of conjectures as to the income of the year; had planned a new wall around one lot and the clearing up of another, now covered with patriarchal wood, and wondered if the little rickety house would not be after all a snug enough box to live and to die in, I fell on a sudden into such an unprecedented line of thought, which took such deep hold of my sympathies—sometimes even starting tears—that I determined, the next day, to set as much of it as I could recall on paper.

Something—it may have been the home-looking blaze (I am a bachelor of, say, six-and-twenty), or possibly a plaintive cry of the baby in my tenant's room—had suggested to me the thought of—marriage.

I piled upon the heated fire-dogs the last armful of my wood; and now, said I, bracing myself courageously between the arms of my chair, I'll not flinch; I'll pursue the thought wherever it leads, though it lead me to the d— (I am apt to be hasty)—at least, continued I, softening, until my fire is out.

The wood was green, and at first showed no disposition to blaze. It smoked furiously. Smoke, thought I, always goes before blaze, and so does doubt go before decision; and my Reverie, from that very starting point, slipped into this shape:—

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SMOKE—SIGNIFYING DOUBT.

A wife? thought I; yes, a wife!

And why!

And pray, my dear sir, why not—why? Why not doubt; why not hesitate; why not tremble?

Does a man buy a ticket in a lottery—a poor man, whose whole earnings go in to secure the ticket—without trembling, hesitating and doubting?

Can a man stake his bachelor respectability, his independence and comfort, upon the die of absorbing, unchanging, relentless marriage, without trembling at the venture?

Shall a man who has been free to chase his fancies over the wide world, without let or hindrance, shut himself up to marriage-ship, within four walls called home, that are to claim him, his time, his trouble and his tears, thenceforward forevermore, without doubts thick, and thick-coming as smoke?

Shall he who has been hitherto a mere observer of other men's cares and business—moving off where they made him sick of heart, approaching whenever and wherever they made him gleeful—shall he now undertake administration of just such cares and business without qualms? Shall he, whose whole life has been but a nimble succession of escapes from trifling difficulties, now broach without doubtings that matrimony, where if difficulty beset him there is no escape. Shall this brain of mine, careless working, never tired with idleness, feeding on long vagaries and high gigantic castles, dreaming out beatitudes hour by hour, turn itself at length to such dull task work as thinking out a livelihood for wife and children?