

## WHAT IS A LETTER?

Let affection tell.

A tongue that speaks of those who absent dwell;  
A silent language uttered to the eye,  
Which envious distances in vain deny;  
A link to bind where circumstances part;  
A nerve of feeling stretched from heart to heart,  
Formed to convey, like an electric shock,  
The mystic flash—the lightning of the brain—  
And thrill at once thro' its remotest link  
A throeb of passion by a drop of ink.

## WILLOW GRANGE.

A STORY OF LIFE IN EASTERN OREGON.

BY BELLE W. COOKE,

AUTHOR OF "TEARS AND VICTORY."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

A few days after the events narrated in our last chapter, Charlie Cleaveland and Johnny Thomas went with Will Sanders to a barn-raising at Jim Sanders' place. On their return home, Cleaveland acted very strangely. He shunned the sitting-room, and just before nightfall he took his things and his bedding to the wool-house, saying to Earle that he thought it would be better for him to sleep there.

Earle made no objection, but Bertha said she feared he might not be comfortable there.

"As much so as here, I think," said Charlie; "and I shall be out of the way."

"Look here, old fellow! You do not suppose you could ever be in the way in my house, after all you have done for me, do you?" said Earle.

"I hope not," said Cleaveland, blushing like a girl; "but," and he stammered and finally said; "I think I had better go."

"Go where?" asked Earle.

"To the wool-house, for the present, if no further," said Cleaveland.

Earle said nothing to this, for Bertha, who stood somewhat behind Charlie, placed her finger on her lips and motioned him to be silent.

When he was gone out, Bertha said:

"Don't you see that he has heard some of those ridiculous stories that Mrs. Zimmerman was telling me the other day? Wait till you can talk with him alone. I cannot bear to have anything said to him about them in my presence. He has always been such a perfect gentleman here; and to think of his being suspected of anything wrong! I believe it would shock his feelings almost as much as if he were a woman."

"Indeed, so do I," said Earle. "Did you see him blush? I do not see why it should not hurt him just as much as it would any girl to be slandered. A pure man loves his good name as much as a pure woman does hers, or at least he ought to. But what a contemptible world this is, that can't see anything done the least out of the usual way without making evil out of it. I cannot see, for the life of me, why it is any more out of character or dangerous to the well being of society for a well-educated Christian gentleman like Charlie to cook in a lady's kitchen than it would be for a heathen Chinaman, who has never been taught to control his passions, and has no high and noble standard of action. Why, you might have had a Chinaman here twenty years, and Mrs. Sanders would not have found fault with you."

"Unless she was a Chinese-hater, or wanted him herself," said Bertha.

"Well said!" replied Earle. "Envy is at the root of it, no doubt. But I am going to sound the thing to the bottom."

"Oh, dear!" said Bertha. "I do not know as we had better keep Mr. Cleaveland any longer, if it is going to make gossip. What have I done? Have I ever done an improper thing?"

"Do not ever ask me such a question again, my wife. Your actions have been perfect. No living being could have found fault with you, if they had been here all the time. If you were an angel, you would be no purer in every thought, word and deed."

"There, dear! I believe you are in earnest. You need say no more to assure me that my question was unnecessary," said Bertha, with tears in her eyes.

"As for Cleaveland's going away, we cannot do without him. I cannot, and it is certain you are not able to do the work for this house now, and I do not intend to give in to the opinions of such slanderous, narrow-minded people," said Earle, emphatically.

"But, my dear, it may be that Mr. Cleaveland will not wish to stay, and it may cost me too much worry of mind to be advisable for us to wage the battle against custom and popular opinion very long."

"I know what must be done," said Earle. "You must have a girl for company. You ought to have had one all along, perhaps. I think that would stop the fault-finders; don't you?"

"Perhaps so. But who could I get? I do not want one of Mrs. Sanders' girls, I am sure, and—do you suppose I could get Mrs. Zimmerman's oldest girl, Greta Schuman? I would like her, I am quite sure, if I must have anyone. I do not know as I would like to have anyone all the time."

"It is true we would prefer to be alone together much of the time; but I do not think the little German would feel above staying in the kitchen at such times, and I think you may be glad to have her after a while. I have no doubt they

would be willing to have us take her," replied Earle.

Bertha rode over to the house of Mrs. Zimmerman that very evening, to see what arrangements could be made, and all the family were delighted with the idea of Greta's going out to service.

Bertha did not wish anyone to come to her and spend the time in idleness, and she thought it might be a good plan to educate her own cook, as she might need one soon. So she proposed that Greta should come, and she would teach her how to keep house in the style which would suit English people, with a view to giving her good wages when she should become competent. Meanwhile, she promised to clothe and board the young girl till she was fitted to earn something more.

This proposition was accepted with thanks, and Greta was established as waiting-maid and assistant dish-washer, a position that Johnny Thomas had formerly filled with considerable success.

Earle Russell had a long confidential talk with Cleaveland as soon as he had an opportunity, and Charlie told him all about the slanderous stories which he had heard over at the barn-raising. There are always plenty of people who, with mistaken kindness, are ready to report to one the evil which is said of him, and think that they are thereby doing him a friendly service; but such people are seldom among the wise ones of the earth. Unless, indeed, there be cases where one may doubt a friend and wish to give him an opportunity to defend or explain himself, or caution him about his future action, the practice of repeating gossip to one's friend is to be avoided as one which is sure to give pain and unhappiness. There are circumstances where it is well to inform one, if he may be thereby placed on his guard, and prevent a recurrence of like misrepresentations. Then it is an act of friendship. The great, grand Golden Rule is the best test, and is as fitting in such a case as in a thousand others. The person who told Charlie Cleaveland about what was said of him may or may not have been his friend; but he felt thankful to know it, because he could now be on his guard. And his respect for Mrs. Russell was so great that he would have preferred to leave immediately rather than to have her subjected to suspicion on his account.

The great fact that the gossips had to build on, was the incident that happened on the night of Earle's accident, when Bertha had gone out to rescue the perishing lamb. Will Sanders told, at his brother's house, that when he had looked out, on hearing persons passing his sleeping place, he had seen, with his own eyes, in the clear moonlight, Bertha in Cleaveland's arms, and that when he spoke to them, "Cleaveland dropped her like a hot potato," as he elegantly expressed it.

His sharp-nosed sister-in-law said it was just as she herself had suspected; no man in his right mind would slave in a woman's kitchen if there was not something wrong. She had been sure of it when she was there and saw him waiting on her like she was the Queen of Sheba. "And, as for me," she went on, "I am not going to associate with no such high-feeling women, that are too good to live like common folks and cook their own victuals and wait on themselves, without having men to do it for 'em."

Upon this, one of her girls told her that she used to associate with Mrs. Jones, who lived down in the valley, and Mrs. Jones always kept a Chinaman to cook for her.

"But that was a very different thing," said Mrs. Sanders.

"Yes," said the saucy Matilda, "I should think it was, powerful different; for Charlie Cleaveland is a long sight better and smarter than any Chinaman ever was."

Her mother advised her to "shut her mouth," and went on berating Mrs. Russell.

Of course this conversation was repeated to all the neighbors, as it was carried on before the children, and probably many additions were made on each repetition, as is usual in such cases.

Earle persuaded Cleaveland that the talk would cease if Bertha procured a companion of her own sex, and showed him how impossible it would be for them to get along without his help while Bertha's health was so delicate. She had not felt so well as usual since the night when she had so nearly frozen her feet. The great nervous excitement of that time had produced such an effect on her nervous system that she had many sleepless nights and restless days.

Her brother's marriage was celebrated on the appointed day, and the wedding-cake which was sent came in good order. Bertha made a little feast on that day, and trimmed the cosy sitting-room with pressed ferns and maple leaves, and made fresh wreaths from dried mosses and everlasting flowers, and found quite a pretty display of wild flowers. Only a few varieties were out in bloom so early, but a little crimson, bell-shaped grass flower and the white trilliums and purple dentarias, together with the luxuriant grasses and some gray lichens and dripping mosses, made a very sweet and pleasant sight, for the middle of March, when arranged in a large white platter and placed in the center of the table.

Greta was delighted with the little display.

"Oh, Mrs. Russell, it is so lovely! How do you make it so pretty, with only the little wild-wood flowers? I never knew one could."

"I love the wild flowers and mosses just as well as the cultivated ones," said Bertha.

"And you know how to name them all, too," said Greta. "How did you find out that? You must know nearly everything, I think."

"Oh, no," said Bertha; "only a very small be-

ginning of a few things, child. I hope to go on learning more and more till I die, and perhaps a long time after that."

"You learn! Will you go to school more? How will you learn?" asked Greta.

"I learn from books that I read, and from my rambles in the woods and over the hills I learn of the flowers and plants, their habits of growth and formation. I sometimes watch the birds and insects, too, and learn of their habits, and I learn of people. When I hear your mother talk, I learn of what we call the idioms of the German language, and I have even learned some things of you," answered Bertha.

"How of me?" asked Greta, in astonishment.

"I have learned how neat and careful and patient a child of your age may be made by a mother's faithful teaching, and I am glad to know the fact. It is a good lesson for me."

"Oh, Mrs. Russell, I am glad to hear you say I am neat and careful. I do want and try to be, and I wish to learn all that is good and of use, to make my mother and brothers and sisters happy, and you too, if I might; and I would so like to learn to make things lovely, as you do."

The warmer days of Spring came swiftly on, and brought for Bertha more of the pleasant outdoor life that she so delighted in, and she found Greta an invaluable companion in her rides and rambles. She took pleasure in teaching her the names and habits of the wild plants, and gave her lessons in several studies at home, besides teaching her to keep house and sew. This was a pleasant occupation for Bertha, and served to pass away her time in a manner that made her feel she was doing some good, and Greta improved very perceptibly.

Early one morning in May, Hans Schuman came riding swiftly over from his home, with the intelligence that the baby had been bitten by a rattlesnake.

"And mother says Mrs. Russell and Greta must come over quick, and Mr. Cleaveland, too, if he is a doctor. Poor little baby is swelled all up."

Then there was haste and excitement in the Bird's-nest, Earle protesting that Bertha ought not to go. But she silenced his objections by asking:

"What if it was your baby, and only one woman who could help within ten miles?"

The little cavalcade was soon on the way, Cleaveland and Greta going on as fast as possible, while Hans and Earle, with Bertha, rode more slowly.

When Cleaveland first saw the patient, he knew it must die. The wound was on the child's foot, and its flesh was purple and swollen clear up to its body. The little thing seemed to be suffering intensely. The mother was almost beside herself with grief, and had done nothing for the child but pour down whisky, which the father said would be certain to cure it.

Cleaveland could do nothing but endeavor to ease the pain, and he told the parents frankly that there was no one who could save the patient when the poison had become so disseminated all over the body. He administered soothing injections, and the child became more quiet.

When Bertha came, she took the baby from its weeping mother, and held it till just before its last struggle. She closed its waxen lids over the clear, blue orbs with gentlest touch.

"And now," said she, "little Katie is in heaven."

She comforted the poor mother as best she could, and helped to prepare the little one for its lowly bed under the violets.

The story of the baby's accident was told by Hans to Earle and Bertha on the way over.

"I was out in the corral milking the cows," said he, "and the mother came out with the baby to help me, and while she opened the big gate she set Katie down on the ground. She had not more than turned around from her before Katie began to scream; but the mother thought she was mad, and would not take her up again to spoil her, but said, 'Bad girl, to cry so,' and went on to her milking. It was too dark to see much, but she was so near to Katie she thought it no harm to leave her there, for she believed her as safe there as inside among the cattle. But the child screamed awfully, and I said, 'Something is hurting her, I think, mother; she never cries so else.' I was just through with milking my cow, and I went to the baby and took her up, but she did not stop crying. I heard the leaves rustle as I took up the child, and I said, 'Something bit her, I believe, mother.' But the mother said, 'Der kindt is mad, I tells you, Hans. Coom mit me and work.' So I put the poor little thing down, and she cried so pitiful and clung to my feet so that I said, 'I will milk the other cow, mother, if you will only take her in and see what is the matter.' The mother took the baby into the house, and when she looked to see, its foot was already swelled up; a place as big as an egg, and looked red and angry. Then the mother cried out, 'It is von rattlesnake! I knew they would sometime bite mine Katie! Oh, mine little Katie! She will die! She will die!' Then we could do no more with the mother, she was so full of grief."

(To be continued.)

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