Dickens Wrote Most.

Among novelists the palm for the greatest quantity of writing, so far as mere amount is concerned, is generally conceded to Charles Dickens.

A woman would never think of singing in a street car, but men apparently have no hesitation in giving vent to their feelings in merry whistling in such a public place.

A West African king is the owner of an umbrella which measures six yards in diameter and affords shade for a table with 30 diners.

A battery of modern German artillery, using the new quick-firing guns recently supplied to them, can fire 60 shots a minute at a range of over five miles.

THE WIDOW : : : : : : : : : M'CLANE....

"IF that's you, Elvira," said the widow McClane, "don't stand there with the screen door wide open. Come on in. Do you s'pose I want to be shooin' flies out of the house all the rest of the summer?"

Elvira hurriedly shut the screen door, but she was too late. A fly had flown in.

The widow laid down her sewing and, advancing cautiously, flapped her blue-checked apron. The fly, retreating, lighted on the screen, where he buzzed defiantly. With her left hand the widow opened the door an inch or so, and with her right she made covert passes at the fly. Her outstretched fingers traveled stealthily across the screen and up and down, while her large mouth sympathetically worked itself open and shut. From the street she appeared to be affected with a sort of mild insanity; but when a fly was in question the widow McClane cared little enough for the opinion of the people on the street.

After further effort she succeeded in corralling the fly, flung wide the screen door, spread out her fingers and let him go. Dazed by his sudden release from imprisonment, he remained suspended in midair for a drunken moment, then winged his way straight into the sunlight.

The widow fastened the hook with a vicious clamp.

"There!" she exclaimed, returning to her chair by the window and taking up her sewing, "if there is one thing in the world I hate above another, it's flies."

"I'm sorry I made so much trouble," said Elvira, wistfully, twisting the corner of her apron.

"'Twasn't no trouble," responded the widow. "Leastwise not much. Set down. You make me nervous enough to fly to the moon, standin' there fidgetin'."

Thus admonished, Elvira timidly ensconced herself in the nearest rocker, from which vantage ground she furtively watched the widow, whose grim, weather-beaten face now bent over her work. Her needle moved unevenly back and forth until the thread shortened itself to a finger's length. Taking two or three decisive stitches one above the other, she drew out the needle and bit off the remaining thread.

Then she spoke.

"Well, what is it, Elvira?" she inquired.

A faint flush rose to Elvira's eyes, creeping thence to the roots of her hair.

"It's about Joe," she answered.

"So he's asked you to marry him, has he?"

"Yes," assented Elvira, the flush growing more vivid under the sharp scrutiny of the old woman's eyes.

"If you've come to ask my advice," said the widow McClane, "I say, marry him."

"He ain't much acount, accordin' to what people tell me," ventured Elvira apologetically.

"He's as much account as the ones that's talkin' about him, I reckon," retorted the widow. "They ain't any of 'em worth shucks as far as I can see; but that ain't here nor there. He's a man, an' any sort of man is a protection to a woman, if he ain't any better than just a scarecrow, hung up to keep awny the hawks. The world's full of hawks on the lookout for widder women, waitin' to peck 'em to death the

"WHAT IS IT, ELVIRA?" SHE INQUIRED.

first chance they get. I've been a widder nigh on to twenty years, an' I know."

"My old man was like Joe," she said, returning to the subject in hand. "He wa'n't much account, kinder projec'in' around at first one thing an' then another an' not doin' much of anything after all, but he kept off the hawks. Pore feller, he had asthma. You could hear him most a mile off a-wheezin an' a-wheezin'. Sometimes I thought it would set me plumb crazy the noise he made, but many's the day since I'd bin glad enough to hear him wheezin' agin. That there asthma kept him from doin' pretty much everything he oughter done. He couldn't chop wood for it or bring in the kindlin' or make the fires. I had to do all that. He got so after a while he couldn't do nothin' but set in the chimney corner an' nod; but s'long as you've got to work anyway it's kinder good to know you've got somebody settin' in the chimney corner a-noddin', to sort of keep you company while you're at it."

She did not allow her reminiscences to interfere with her work. The movement of her needle kept time with the movement of her lips.

"I've bin watchin' you, Elvira," she went on, looking over her glasses at the younger woman, "ever since you've bin a widder, an' it seemed to me you were goin' over the same old road I went over. It's a mighty hard road. There ain't no soft places in it. I've seen you tryin' to get along, livin' with your sister. I know what that is. I've bin all through it. An' there's one thing I can tell you from experience."

She paused for an impressive moment and stabbed the air with her needle by way of emphasis. The needle pointed straight at Elvira.

"What is it?" she asked, dodging involuntarily.

"If you want to find hard hearts in the time of trouble," answered the widow McClane, "you don't never need to go outside of your own family; specially if you're pore."

Her mouth, snapping shut with the last word, settled itself into hard, firm

SHE WAS ALL IN A FLUTTER AS SHE WENT OUT TO HIM.

lines. Elvira, catching a glimpse of her own red mouth in the narrow mirror over the mantel, fell to wondering if it would look like that twenty years later.

"If you've got a little money," the widow continued, "if you're independent of 'em, you're all right; but the good Lord help a widder woman that's pore. There ain't a forlorner creature on top of the earth. Yes, I've lived with my relations. I've worked like a nigger day in and day out, scourin', cleanin' an' scrubbin', an' then had the cost of my keep thrown in my teeth from mornin' till night. If I had it to do over agin I'd go an' hire out to strangers before I'd work for my kinfolks. A servant is welcome to what she can eat an' drink an' wages besides everywhere in the world except with her own kin.

"I've watched you slavin' over there at Sarah Ann's, Elvira, cookin' an' washin' an' ironin', an' when you was through, instead of restin', like any other servant would er done, tendin' to the baby. I'd ruther break rock on a turnpike any day in the year than tend to a baby—while Sarah Ann run around to the neighbors a-tellin' 'em how she was bein' imposed on, havin' to take care of her pore relations."

Elvira gave a little sigh. She opened her mouth to speak, but the widow was before her.

"I was mighty glad when I see Joe a-shyin' round after you," she said. "Mighty glad. Take him. That's my advice. It don't make any difference how triflin' he is; take him. A woman has a hard time alone in the world. It takes a good strong woman to fight her way through. As I said before, the minute her husband dies she's common pickin' for everybody. Did you ever hear of a bank that failed but what it had some widder woman's savin's in it? Did a storm ever blow over this town that it didn't tear down the widder woman's fences an' leave all the rest a-standin' high an' dry? An' lawyers! They're allus layin' for the widder woman's money, allus!

"This thing of not belongin' to nobody," she went on, "that's the worst of it. To think you haven't got even a good-for-nothing man to set down by you of an evenin' an' talk to you. When things go wrong, and they mostly go wrong, if you've got somebody to complain to it takes away half the trouble of it. Suppose you fall down an' hurt yourself. Where's your shoulder to cry on? Suppos'n you cut your finger. Who's to wrap it up for you an' tie the ends of the two threads, sayin' he's sorry for you, even if he ain't? Suppos'n the world gets blacker'n usual, so black you can't see a sign of day breakin' nowhere, an' you fall to sobbin' about it. Who's to put his arm around you, an' say, 'There, there?' Nobody. Nobody in the world! I tell you, it's a mighty lonesome life; a mighty lonesome life!"

As Elvira sat silently listening a sudden fear sprang into her eyes. What if, since she had started out over the same road the widow McClane had traveled, she should be forced to travel it to the end? What if there awaited her, too, twenty years of that lonesome life. A sickening thrill of apprehension shook her. She looked away from the woman before her, who, old and wrinkled and careworn, sitting there stitching, stitching for the sole purpose of keeping body and soul together, seemed the incarnation of desolate widowhood, to the window. The fear in her eyes gave place to a smile.

"There's Joe!" she cried. "I do believe he is comin' here. He must er seen me an' followed me. Yes, there he is, waitin' for me. Good-by, I must be goin' right away."

And she was all in a flutter of happiness as she rose and went out to him.

The widow McClane followed her. She carefully closed the screen door, again fastened the hook and looked out at the two as they nodded gayly over their shoulders at her and walked arm in arm around the corner.

"He ain't half good enough for her," she said aloud. "He's knock-kneed an' pigeon-toed, an' cross-eyed in one eye, but he's better'n nothin'. He'll kinder do for a prop. He'll stand up for her agin the world that's suc ha hard place for a pore widder woman."

Swiss Courtship Tactics.

Swiss maidens have wide and deep courtship license; but in many of the cantons they are allowed but a narrow choice of bridegrooms, it being a rigorously enforced, if unwritten, law that they must marry a youth of their own neighborhood. In many villages every marriageable youth belongs to a society whose sole object is to prevent any and every youth from outside from coming a-courting the maidens of the society's village.

The society has a password, frequently changed—almost never divulged. A lover of the village, if challenged, gives the password, and it is an "open sesame" through the on-guard ranks of the protective society.

He may climb and woo uninterrupted, undisturbed. But the lover from afar must fight his way past the challenging sentinels or use the shrewdest and most successful stealth.

Japanese Dentists.

The Japanese dentists perform all their operations in tooth drawing with the thumb and forefinger of one hand. The skill necessary to do this is acquired only after long practice, but when once it is obtained the operator is able to extract half a dozen teeth in about thirty seconds without once removing his fingers from the patient's mouth.

An Inevitable Smash.

"Well, Kitty, where is all your parlor bric-a-brac?"

"Oh, Bobby got a football Christmas—and it was too cold for him to play outdoors."

A Right of Burial.

Despite the growing difficulty of finding space for the interment of public men witihn the walls of Westminster, at least one noble family still enjoys a prescriptive right of burial there. These are the Dukes of Northumberland, who have the exclusive use of a spacious vault in the Chapel of St. Nicholas. This vault, which was the last resting place of the Seymours, was opened as recently as 1883 to receive the remains of Lady Percy, the elder sister of the present duke.

In Old Missouri.

Mrs. Olive—It is rumored among the neighbors that your husband beat you last night. Is it true?

Mrs. Poplar—There isn't a word of truth in the report. He struck at me several times, but failed to hit me. You know, he played with the St. Louis nine last season.—Chicago Evening News.

Ireland's Oldest Church.

The oldest Christian structure in Ireland is a remarkable building, evidently very ancient, but wonderfully well presereved, at Dingle, in county Kerry. It is popularly known as the "Oratory of Gallerus." Who Gallerus was history does not say, but as the oratory has stood practically uninjured for more than 1,000 years, he was probably one of the converts of St. Patrick.

Where Rubber Comes From.

The principal rubber-producing region is the valley of the Amazon, the greater portion of the rubber of commerce coming from Brazil, Venezuela and the the United States of Colombia. Much, however, is contributed by Central America and Mexico. The product of Africa is steadily increasing, and the planting of many thousands of rubber trees in India under government supervision will soon place that country prominently in the list of rubber-growing lands.

Must Have Been Bad.

Hicks—Here, take this 2 cents.

Wicks—What for?

Hicks—Take it, I say! There, now go buy yourself a better cigar than that you're smoking!"—Somerville Journal.

Luck.

Policeman—Mr. Smartie, I have some bad news for you. Your shop was burglarized last night, and thieves carried off everything.

Smartie—Is that so? How lucky I am. It was only yesterday that I marked down my goods 25 per cent.

"She sent me a Catholic picture," said a woman whose friend had sent her a photograph of a Raphael "Madonna and Child" for Christmas.—New York Commercial Advertiser.

The aggregate military expenditure of the British empire has advanced during the last 30 years from about £25,250,000 to close upon £50,000,000.