

Current Literature.

A VOICE FROM THE FARM.

"You say that my life is a round of toil? ... The old art farmer said: 'That I scarce can rest from the oft-told mill ...'"

Backbone and Grit.

"The stage has gone, sir, but there's a widow lives here, and she's got a boy, and he'll drive you over. He's a nice little fellow, and Deacon Ball lets him have his team for a trifle, and we like to get him a job when we can."

"It was a hot day in July. Away up among the hills that make the lower slope of the Monadnock Mountains, a friend lay very ill. In order to reach his temporary home, one must take an early train to the nearest station, and trust to the lumbering old coach that made a daily trip to K—."

"Would we not come in and have some dinner?" "Yes." "Would he send for the deacon's team?" "Yes." "And the boy?" "Yes."

"And the dinner was eaten, and the team came round—an open buggy and an old white horse, and just as we were seated the door of the little brown house across the way opened, and out rushed the widow's boy."

"In his mouth was the last morsel of his dinner; he had evidently learned how to 'eat and run.' His feet were clad in last winter's much worn boots, whose wrinkled legs refused to stay within the limits of his narrow and faded trousers. As his legs flew forward his arms flew backwards, in an ineffectual struggle to get himself inside a jacket much too short in the sleeves."

"There he is," said the hostler, "that's the widow Beebe's boy. I told him I'd hold the horse while he went home to get a bite." The horse did not look as if he were doted to be held, but the hostler got his dime, and the boy approached in time to relieve my mind as to whether he would conquer the jacket or the jacket conquer him and turn him wrong side out.

He was sun-burnt, freckled, large mouthed and red haired—a homely, plain, wretched little Yankee boy, and yet, as we rode through the deep summer bloom and fragrance of the shaded road, winding up the long hills in the glow of the afternoon sun, I learned such a lesson from the little fellow as I shall not soon forget.

He did not look much like a preacher as he sat stooping forward a little, whisking the flies from the deacon's horse, but his sermon was one I wish might have been heard by all the boys in the land. As it was, I had to spar him on now and then by questions, to get him to tell about himself.

"My father died, you see, and left my mother the little brown house opposite the tavern. You saw it, did you sir—the one with the lilac bushes under the window? Father was sick a long time, and when he could not work he had to raise money on the house. Deacon Ball let him have it, a little at a time, and when father was gone, mother found the money owed was almost three hundred dollars. At first she thought she would have to give up the house, but the deacon said, 'Let it wait a while,' and he turned and patted me on the head, and said: 'When Johnny gets big enough to earn something I shall expect him to pay it.' I was only nine then, and remember mother cried, and said, 'Yes, deacon, Johnny is my only hope now,' and I wondered and wondered what work I could do. I really felt as if I ought to begin at once, but couldn't think of anything to do."

"Well, what did you do?" I asked quickly. "I was afraid he would stop, and I wanted to hear the rest."

"Well, at first I did very funny things for a boy. Mother used to knit socks to sell, and she sewed the rags to make rag carpets, and I helped."

"How? What would you do?" "Well, the people who would like a carpet could not always get the time to make it. So I went to the houses among the farmers and took home their rags, old coats and everything they had, and out in the woods they cut and rapped them up. Then mother sewed them and sometimes I sewed some, too, and then I rolled them into balls and took them back to the owners, all ready to be woven into rags."

"Did they pay for your work?" "Oh, yes, we got so much a pound, and I felt quite like a young merchant when I weighed them out with our old steelyards. But that was only one way; we have two or three old apple trees out in the back yard by the wall, and we dried the apples and sold them. Then some of the farmers who had a great many apples began to send them in to us to dry, and we paid them

so many pounds all dry and had the rest to sell."

"But you surely could not do much in ways like these."

"No, not much, but something; and we had the knitting."

"Did you knit?" "Not at first, but after a while mother began to have the rheumatism in her hands, and the joints became swollen and the fingers twisted, and it hurt her to move them. Then I learned to knit; before that I wound the yarn for her. I had to learn to sew a little, too for mother didn't like to see the holes without patches."

"And he looked half smilingly at the specimens on his knees."

"Yes, sir; but I was in a hurry and mother said it was not done as it ought to be. They had just been washed and I couldn't wait for them to dry."

"Who washed them?" "I did, and ironed them, too. I can wash and iron almost as well as mother can. She does not mean to let me, but how is she going to help it? She can hardly use her hands at all, and some days she cannot leave her chair; so I had to learn to make the beds and to scrub the floor and wash the dishes, and I can cook almost as good as a girl."

"Is it possible? I shall have to take supper with you on my way back to the city and test your skill."

Johnny blushed and I added: "It is a pity, my boy that you haven't a sister."

"I had one," he said, gently, "but she died; and—if she had lived I should have wished her to lift, and bring wood and water, and scrub as poor mother always did. Sometimes I wish I could have sprung all the way from a baby to a man. It is such slow work growing up; and it was while I was waiting for you to grow up that she worked so hard."

"But, my boy, you cannot certainly expect to be son and daughter and mother all in one. You cannot do the work for a whole family."

"Yes, I can; it isn't much, and I am determined to do it and the work that my father left undone. I'm going to pay that mortgage if I live."

"Heaven grant you may," I said fervently, under my breath, "for not many mothers have such a son."

"Mother don't know I mean to do it, and she is very anxious I should go to school, and I mean to some time; but I know just where the boys in my class are studying, and I get my lessons at home. Mother reads to me out of the book while I am washing the dishes or doing the work, and we have great fun. I try to remember and repeat it, and if we come to any place we can't make out, I take it over to the teacher in the evening; she is very kind, and she tells me."

"Very kind! Who wouldn't be kind to such a boy. I felt the tears coming to my eyes at such a smiling vision of this young fellow's work while his poor old mother held the book in his twisted hands and tried to help him learn."

"But all this doesn't earn money, my boy. How do you expect to save if you spend your time indoors?"

"Oh, I don't do girl's work all day; no, indeed! I have worked out our taxes on the road. It wasn't much, but I helped the men build up a stone wall down by the river; and Deacon Ball lets me do a great deal of work for him, and when I get a chance to take anybody from the hotel to ride, he lets me have his team for almost nothing and I pay to him whatever I make. And I work on the farm with the men in summer, and I have a cow of my own and sell the milk at the tavern; and we have some hens, too, and sell the eggs. And in the fall I cut and pile the winter's wood in the sheds for the people who haven't any boys—and there's a good many people here who haven't any boys," he added brushing a fly from the old horse with the tip of his whip.

After this we fell into silence and rode through the sweet New England roads, with Monadnock rising before us ever nearer and more majestic. It impressed me with a sense of its rugged strength—one of the hills, "rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun;" but I glanced from the mountain to the little morsel of humanity at my side with a sort of recognition of their kinship, somehow they seemed to belong together. I felt as if I were some sturdy stuff woven in them both. It was only a fancy, but it was confirmed the next day, for when I came back to town after seeing my invalid friend, I called on Deacon Ball. I found him white-haired and kindly faced. He kept the village store and owned a pretty house and was evidently very well to do. Naturally we talked of John and the deacon said to me, with tears in his old watery blue eyes:

"Why, bless your heart, sir, you don't think I'm going to take his money, do you? The only son of his mother, and she a widow all tied up in double bow knots with the rheumatism beside. True enough, let his father sell the money, and my wife she says, says she to me: 'Well, deacon, my dear, we've not got a child and will be just as we were of a hundred years from now if the widow never pays a cent; but 'ordin to my calculation it's better to let the boy think he's a paying.' She says I might as well try to keep a barrel of vinegar from working as to try and keep that boy from working. It's the mother in him and it's got to work. We think a good deal of the widow, Mandy and me. I did before ever I saw Mandy; but for all that we hold the mortgage and Johnny wants to work it out. Mandy and me, we are going to let him work."

I turned away, for I was going to sup at Johnny's house, but before I went I asked the deacon how much Johnny had already paid.

"Well, I don't know; Mandy knows—I pass it to her—she keeps the book. Drop in before you go to the train and I'll show it to you."

I dropped in and the deacon showed me the account. It was the book of a savings bank in a neighboring town, and on its pages were credits of all the little sums the boy had earned or paid, and I saw they were tending to widow Beebe's name. I grasped the deacon's hand. He was looking away over the house tops to where Monadnock was smiling under the good-night kiss of the sun.

"Good-bye sir, good-bye," he said, returning the squeeze with interest. "Much obliged I'm sure, Mandy and me, too; but don't you be worried about Johnny. When we see it we know the real stuff it takes to make a real man—and Johnny has got it; Johnny is like the mountain over there—chuck full of grit and lots of backbone."

Stock.

Animals as Doctors.

M. G. Delaunay, in a recent communication to the Biological Society, observed that medicine, as practiced by animals, is thoroughly empirical, but that the same may be said of that practiced by inferior human races, or, in other words, by the majority of the human species. Animals instinctively choose such food as is best suited for them. M. Delaunay maintains that the human race also shows this instinct, and blames medical men for not paying sufficient respect to the likes and dislikes of the patients, which he believes to be a guide that may be depended on. Women are often more hungry than men, and they do not like the same kinds of food. Nevertheless, in asylums for aged poor, men and women are put on precisely the same regimen: Infants scarcely weaned are given a diet suitable to adults—meat and wine, which they dislike, and which disagree with them. M. Delaunay investigated this question in the different asylums of Paris, and ascertained that children do not like meat before they are about five years of age. People who like salt, vinegar, etc., ought to be allowed to satisfy their tastes. Lorcain always taught that with regard to food people's likings are the best guide. A large number of animals wash themselves and bathe, as elephants, stags, birds and ants. M. Delaunay lays down as a general rule that there is not any species of animal which voluntarily runs the risk of inhaling emanations arising from their own excrement. If we turn our attention to the question of reproduction, we shall see that all mammals suckle their young, keep them clean, and clean them at the proper times. When dogs are mated, these maternal instincts are frequently rudimentary in women of civilized nations. In fact, man may take a lesson in hygiene from the lower animals. Animals get rid of their parasites by using dust, mud, clay, etc. Those suffering from fever restrict their diet, keep quiet, seek darkness and airy places, drink water and consume things in moderation. When a dog has lost its appetite it eats that species of grass known as dog's grass, which acts as an emetic and purgative. Cats also eat grass. Sheep and cows, when sick, seek out certain kinds of herbs and eat them; but these maternal instincts are frequently rudimentary in women of civilized nations. In fact, man may take a lesson in hygiene from the lower animals. Animals get rid of their parasites by using dust, mud, clay, etc. Those suffering from fever restrict their diet, keep quiet, seek darkness and airy places, drink water and consume things in moderation. When a dog has lost its appetite it eats that species of grass known as dog's grass, which acts as an emetic and purgative. Cats also eat grass. 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