

A LOAN OF HALF-ORPHANS.

A NARRATIVE IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

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I.

SHOWING HOW A BENEVOLENT LADY DEVOTED HERSELF TO AMELIORATING THE CONDITION OF HALF-ORPHANED CHILDREN AND DESTITUTE CATS.

IN philanthropic matters — being easily started, but stopped only with great difficulty — Mrs. Haverwood bore a close resemblance to a lady-like middle-aged locomotive with an inadequate brake.

Philanthropy was more than a hobby with Mrs. Haverwood; it was a passion. To say that her bonnets had to be specially bulged out in order to accommodate her organ of benevolence would be, of course, extravagant; but to say that the considerable circle of her friends had to bulge out in all directions, and usually in a hurry, to make room for her frequent and violent benevolent eccentricities would not be extravagant at all; it would be literally, and in many cases annoyingly, true.

At the period of her life to which attention here is directed, Mrs. Haverwood's dominant benevolence, if I may so phrase it, was the amelioration of the condition of half-orphaned children in the city of New York. A person of a less resolutely philanthropic temperament would have been satisfied to pool her good intentions toward half-orphans with one or another of the charitable institutions designed, directly or incidentally, for their benefit already in existence. But that sort of an arrangement did not suit Mrs. Haverwood at all. Not only in her dealings with half-orphans, but in her dealings with affairs generally, she wanted — if I may be permitted the use of a bucolic metaphor — a ten-acre lot in which she could flourish around and kick up her heels. In other words, she had a will of her own and liked to do things in her own way. In her experimental stage of benevolence she had allied herself at one time or another with very many of the charitable institutions of New York; but, as her experience grew, she gradually had relinquished them all: on the ground that every one of them was managed by a set of stubborn and unreasonable people whose natural tendency was to do everything wrong, and who obstinately refused to permit her to set them right.

I may add that, in addition to resigning from these several charitable societies because of the pig-headedness of their respective members,

Mrs. Haverwood would have resigned, on similar grounds, had this been practicable without creating a scandal, from the society of her husband. Possibly because he realized the strain of the situation, — and if he did not it was not because of lack of opportunity, — Mr. Haverwood most considerably relieved it by retiring, with a discreet complaisance by no means in keeping with his normal character, not only from his home, but from his planet, to another, and presumably a better, world. He probably felt certain that, temporarily, at least, — that is to say, until such time as Mrs. Haverwood should join him there, — it would be a quieter world, anyway.

It is only just to Mr. Haverwood's memory, however, to interpolate here the statement that, while he certainly was extremely positive in most of his opinions and acts, it was only in the line of his dominant hobby that he was an aggressive man. His hobby was the commendable one of desiring to pose as a patron of art; and the pertinent fact may be added that some of — indeed, most of — the art which he patronized was as queer as it possibly could be. But it would be very unfair to blame him for his artistic shortcomings. He was a product of his times: the period immediately preceding the development of the Hudson River School, when every New Yorker who aspired to high social position had to own enough old masters, in very gorgeous frames, to fill a picture-gallery of reasonable size. Because of this necessity, Mr. Haverwood built a more than reasonably large picture-gallery and stocked it with magnificently framed old masters — every one of which had faded almost to the vanishing point, and was as brown as a bun. To accompany him to this apartment, after one of his own heavy dinners, when he was all aglow with the factitious benevolence derived from his own Sillery, and there to hear him descant upon the merits of these immortal works, was decidedly better than going to the play. His untimely death was a bitter blow to the picture-dealers — even if it did result in giving his widow absolute freedom, and absolute control of one of the biggest and soundest fortunes in New York.

Being thus disengaged from both domestic and extraneous entangling alliances, and having the command of practically unlimited money, Mrs. Haverwood was in the position, as it were, to take what she wanted from the pack and to go it alone. And then it was, to pursue the simile, that she took half-orphans from the pack, and devoted herself to the amelioration of their con-

dition with all the energy of her very energetic body and soul.

That this benevolent lady entertained the most positive views in regard to the way in which a half-orphan's condition ought to be ameliorated, and that these views were utterly unlike anybody else's views on the same subject, are inferential truths which scarcely need to be stated in set terms; and because this was her attitude, and also because she was sick and tired of struggling constantly against stupid opposition, she adopted the radical course toward half-orphans of founding an institution for their succor, in the management of which she united in her own person all the functions of president and secretary and treasurer and board of advisory trustees. With a commendable desire to perpetuate in connection with so notable a charity the memory of her lamented husband (who, in point of fact, always had fought shy of charities; who, for some unknown reason, had manifested a peculiar antipathy toward half-orphans; and whose detestation of cats frequently was avowed in violent terms), Mrs. Haverwood gave to her institution the name of the John L. Haverwood Female Half-Orphanage and Destitute Cat Home.

The destitute cats were an after-thought. Mrs. Haverwood was quite devoted to cats, and since she was starting a charitable institution, as she very sensibly put it, there was no reason why she should not give the cats a show; and the more, she reasoned, because the scraps remaining after feeding sixteen half-orphans easily would suffice for the sustenance of thirty-two cats. The whole number of half-orphans that she had in view was twenty-four; and the whole number of cats was to be forty-eight; but her plan provided for harboring the half-orphans in relays of eight in her own home—where their condition was to be ameliorated by training them in the ways of domestic service—and for harboring a proportional number of cats with them. One of her objects being to inculcate among her human beneficiaries the habit of kindness toward the lower animals, each half-orphan was made responsible for the well-being of two destitute cats; and as each relay came from the institution to her private residence, the sixteen cats pertaining to that particular relay came with it.

Expense being a matter of secondary consideration with Mrs. Haverwood, she had caused to be constructed for this transportation service a vehicle, resembling a small omnibus, especially adapted to its needs. On the two inside longitudinal seats sat the eight neatly-uniformed half-orphans; while outside, firmly secured on the roof by a simple system of bolts and catches, the sixteen cages containing the sixteen cats were arranged (like the oars of a Roman galley) in a

double bank. Even in New York, where queer sights on the street are not unusual, this vehicle always attracted a good deal of attention as it made its weekly trips back and forth between Mrs. Haverwood's private residence and the John L. Haverwood Female Half-Orphanage and Destitute Cat Home.

II.

TELLING HOW MRS. HAVERWOOD TIRED OF HER CATS AND HALF-ORPHANS AND DECIDED TO THROW THEM OVERBOARD.

THAT the estimable founder of this excellent charity would continue for any considerable period of time to take an interest in it was not expected by even the most sanguine among her intimate friends. Mrs. Haverwood believed firmly that the spice of charity was variety, and she governed herself by this belief. Like a stout, but benevolent, butterfly she fluttered happily from one to another project for the alleviation of human misery; took a turn, as occasion offered, at reforming different breeds of heathen; and always was ready at a moment's notice to join any society for the suppression of any really interesting variety of vice.

In the course of a year or so, therefore, quite as a matter of course, half-orphans began to pall upon Mrs. Haverwood, and destitute cats to lose their charm: under which changed conditions she rejoiced rather than lamented when, for family reasons, sixteen of her twenty-four female half-orphans suddenly were reclaimed by their several remaining parents; and she even beheld with composure the outbreak of a fatal distemper among the destitute cats, by which two thirds of them were hurried prematurely into unwept graves. This rather startling shrinkage in both lines of inmates occurred in the early springtime, and Mrs. Haverwood almost came to the determination then and there to kill the remaining cats, send the remaining half-orphans packing back to their relatives, rent the half-orphanage, and so—in not much more than an eye-twinkle—bring her venture in this particular sort of charity definitely to an end.

Had it been possible to dismember and to obliterate her institution in fact as easily as in thought, it unquestionably would have disappeared without another moment of delay. But Mrs. Haverwood found that getting rid of her half-orphans would involve so much correspondence with their respective fathers or mothers, that to enter upon it at that time would keep her for half the summer in town. Therefore it was—all her plans having been made for a summer in Europe—that she conceived the project of transferring the eight half-orphans and the sixteen destitute cats still remaining on the foundation to her own home, thus enabling her to

discharge the matron and to close the half-orphanage; with the corollary project of offering for the summer the free use of her home, and the free usufruct of the half-orphans to carry on its domestic service, together with the supplies necessary for the maintenance of so large a household, to young Mr. and Mrs. Ridley Cranmer Latimer: in whom she had just begun to take a benevolent interest, and for whom, therefore, she could not do too much.

The arrangement thus outlined, Mrs. Haverwood perceived, would save in her own pocket a very considerable sum of money; would confer a substantial benefit upon two deserving young people; would continue to the latest possible moment the training of her charges in the ways of domestic servitude; and, finally, would enable her to arrange matters by letter with her half-orphans' whole parents in such a way that she could get rid of the entire bothersome business on the very moment of her return.

On the other hand, when this handsome offer of free lodging and board and service was made to Mr. and Mrs. Ridley Cranmer Latimer, these young people accepted the benefits tendered to them with a grateful alacrity; at least, to be quite accurate, Mrs. Latimer came forward briskly with her gratitude, while Mr. Latimer followed more temperately in her impetuous wake. The offer, truly, was made most opportunely. They had been married only a couple of months, and Mr. Latimer—who was an assistant designer to a firm of silversmiths—had taken his annual holiday of a fortnight in order to go upon his wedding journey. It was impossible, therefore, for him to have another holiday that summer; and what they had expected to do, until Mrs. Haverwood made them this liberal tender of her half-orphans and her home, was to board at a farmhouse in the Hackensack Valley—whence Mr. Latimer would come into town to his work every day. Mrs. Haverwood's plan was so much better than their plan, and she was so careful to make plain to them that they really would be doing her a great service if they would keep the house going, and so keep the half-orphans going too, that the upshot of the matter was their acceptance of her offer in the same spirit of frank friendliness in which it was made.

"I shall not burden you with many directions, my dear," Mrs. Haverwood said to Mrs. Latimer in the course of the talk which they had together when the matter finally was arranged. "In dealing with my charges my method is a very simple one: I am careful to select for the performance of each household task a half-orphan of a suitable age and degree of intelligence; and then, to give them that confidence in themselves which can be created only by encouraging them in self-resource and self-reliance,

I leave them to perform the task entirely in their own way. When it is completed I commend them or reprove them, as the case may be. This, I am confident, is the only rational method of instruction. All that I ask is that you exactly adhere to it."

"And when they are bad," Mrs. Latimer asked a little anxiously, "what do you do to them?"

"When verbal reproof is inadequate," replied Mrs. Haverwood, "I administer to them, in accordance with the gravity of the offense, one of the three punishments which the remaining parent of each of my charges has agreed to sanction, and which the rules of the half-orphanage prescribe. For light offenses, they are compelled to stand upon one leg, with the other leg projecting in front of them as nearly as possible in a straight line, for a length of time commensurate with the extent of the offense. As this attitude involves a considerable muscular strain, they are permitted to change from one leg to the other at intervals of one minute and a half. The children themselves," continued Mrs. Haverwood, "have given to this form of correction the name of 'going legetty'; and I confess," she added with a kindly smile, "I have fallen into the way of using that name for it myself. As I have said, it is only a punishment for offenses of a trifling sort; but for such, I assure you, it works admirably well."

"And when things get more serious what do you do?" Mrs. Latimer inquired with a good deal of interest.

"The second and more severe punishment," Mrs. Haverwood answered, "is what we call—using the children's name again—'all-four-ing.' In this case the culprit is compelled to go down on all fours, and to remain in that position for a period to be determined, as in 'going legetty,' by the gravity of the offense."

"But what do you do when they are really seriously bad—bad enough, I mean, to be regularly spanked if they were n't half-orphans, and could n't be?"

"Then," said Mrs. Haverwood, sternly, "they are bagged!"

"Bagged?" repeated Mrs. Latimer, in a tone of interrogation, "I don't quite understand."

"No, I suppose not. The punishment is an unusual one, but we find that it works to a charm. It consists simply in compelling the offender to get into a stout bag,—we have bags of various sizes, of course, to fit any size of half-orphan,—which then is tied closely around her neck with her arms inside. The bag is of such ample dimensions that she can raise her hand to her head in case her nose tickles or a fly bothers her, but the hand still remains within the covering. Even the small-

est of my charges feels keenly the ridicule which is the dominant quality in this form of punishment; and the larger girls—we have had several of sixteen and seventeen, you know—never have had to be bagged more than once.”

“I should think not!” exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, feelingly.

“And in inflicting any of these punishments, my dear,” Mrs. Haverwood said in conclusion, “you will do well to make them as public as possible. It is my custom, and I advise you to follow it, to punish in the drawing-room; then, if any one happens to call, the culprit suffers the additional mortification of being exhibited ‘going legetty,’ or ‘all-fouring,’ or ‘bagged,’ as the case may be, to a total stranger. The discipline, I assure you, is most salutary.”

“And what about the cats?” Mrs. Latimer asked.

Mrs. Haverwood smiled pleasantly as she answered: “Ah, there you will have no trouble at all. All that you will have to do is to see that each half-orphan feeds her two cats regularly and not too abundantly, and that they have ample liberty in the house and yard.”

III.

EXHIBITING MRS. LATIMER'S FIRST ACTUAL DEALINGS WITH HALF-ORPHANS AND CATS, AND HER INCIDENT MISERY.

At ten o'clock of a June Wednesday morning—that is to say, coincident with the departure of Mrs. Haverwood for the steamer, which was to start at noon—Mrs. Latimer took over the entire establishment, and formally assumed the tripartite duties of her domestic, semi-parental, and feline trust; and before eleven o'clock of that same June Wednesday morning she began to realize with a good deal of emphasis that in thus endeavoring to run a cat-encumbered house by half-orphan power she had accepted a contract of rather appalling size. By six o'clock, when her husband came home to dinner, she realized the extent of her contract so fully that her very strongest desire was to abandon it altogether; but by that time the party of the first part, Mrs. Haverwood, was racing along well to the eastward of Fire Island (with the feeling that her interior department was traveling with even greater rapidity by a different conveyance), and the relinquishment of the trust was impossible.

“You see, Ridley,” Mrs. Latimer said,—and it was a very great comfort after such a day to be able to tell about it, and to be sure of sympathy,—“you see, the trouble is that it seemed simple before I began, but that instead of being simple, it's all as mixed up as it possibly can be!”

“How was it simple, and why is it mixed up?” Mr. Latimer asked, at the same time set-

ting her more comfortably upon his knee and kissing her—which affectionate encouragement caused her to give a little restful sigh of happiness, and to reply in much more spirited tones:

“What was simple, you dear boy, was Mrs. Haverwood's rule as to how I was to manage the half-orphans and the cats; and what is so dreadfully mixed up is what happens when I try to put this rule into practice. She said, you know, that the cats simply were to be fed regularly and given ample liberty in the house and yard, and that when I wanted anything done all I had to do was to pick out a half-orphan ‘of a suitable age and degree of intelligence,’—those were her very words,—and then to let the half-orphan go ahead and do it in her own way. That sounds simple enough, does n't it?”

“Yes,” Mr. Latimer answered; “it certainly does. It seems to me that even I could keep a house that way.”

“Suppose you try!” said Mrs. Latimer, with a touch of bitterness in her voice. “Oh, I don't want to be cross,” she went on repentantly; “but if only you knew the bothers I have been through with to-day, Ridley dear! Where the hitch comes in is in making both ends of Mrs. Haverwood's rule about the half-orphans apply. ‘Suitable age *and* degree of intelligence’ was what she said. Now, since you think it's so easy, tell me how old a girl you would set to such a piece of work, for instance, as cleaning the knives?”

“Why, quite a little girl ought to do that sort of thing, I should think,” Mr. Latimer replied considerably; “one about eight or ten years old. If I had a half-orphan of about that age in stock, that is the age that I should use.”

“Yes, that's just what I thought too. Well, Polly Carroon is just nine years old,—I have all their names and ages, and the addresses of their people, you know, in the list that Mrs. Haverwood left with me,—and so I set Polly at the knives. But what the list does n't say anything about is their intelligences. Polly, I don't think has any intelligence at all. Just as Mrs. Haverwood told me to, I let her go at her work without any directions beyond telling her to take the knife-board out of the kitchen so that she would n't be in our way. And then things got to going so badly that I forgot all about her, and it was n't until we wanted the knives for lunch that I went to hunt her up. And where do you suppose that child was?”

Polly Carroon's whereabouts evidently being extraordinary, Mr. Latimer declined to venture even a guess.

“In the drawing-room, with the knife-board on one of the blue satin sofas, and bath-brick dust scattered everywhere! She had cleaned just one knife, and then she had got her two especial cats for company, and had gone to one of the

front windows to look out into the street — and there she was ! ”

“ And what did you do ? ” Mr. Latimer asked, with a show of serious interest that was very creditable to him.

“ I all-foured her, of course ; but all-fouring her for the rest of her life won't get the iron-rust out of that sofa, and what Mrs. Haverwood will say about it I'm sure I don't know.

“ But I give you just this one instance, Ridley dear, to show you how very hard it is going to be to make Mrs. Haverwood's rules work out in practice. Age and intelligence don't go in couples at all ; and leaving the children to do things in their own way may teach them self-reliance, but it is certain to make a mess.”

“ And do you mean to say that things have been going wrong like that all day, you poor child ? ”

“ Oh, that little trouble does n't really count. I spoke of it because it happened to be the first. Some of the things really were dreadful — like the way Susan Poundweight almost killed herself when I set her to washing the back-kitchen windows. Susan is one of the biggest, you know — she's nearly seventeen, and quite pretty — so I thought that she would do to wash windows very well. I asked her if she knew how to sit outside on the sill, and she said she did ; and then I told her to go ahead. And then the first thing I knew I heard a dreadful scream, and I saw her legs rising up in the air inside the kitchen, and the rest of her going down backward outside, and I just had time to rush to the window and get hold of one of her feet as she was beginning to slide away. Fortunately, all of the half-orphans, except Polly Carroon, happened to be in the kitchen, and I made them all catch hold of her, three to each leg, and hold her with all their strength until I could get out into the back yard and grab her by the shoulders ; and then we all let her slide gently down to the ground. If I had started her at washing upstairs windows,” Mrs. Latimer added solemnly, “ Susan Poundweight would have been by this time a dead girl ! ”

“ It looks as if none of them had any intelligence at all — as if they'd got nothing but age,” Mr. Latimer observed.

“ You won't say that when I tell you about Jane Spicer,” Mrs. Latimer answered. “ She has n't any size at all — at least none worth speaking about, considering that she's over thirteen years old — but she's got enough intelligence to supply all the half-orphans in the house if she only could divide it up and pass it around. And the coolness and presence of mind of that mite really are wonderful ! Just listen to the way she straightened out the worst tangle of trouble I got into all day.

“ A couple of hours or so ago, when we were

beginning to get ready for dinner, things all of a sudden went as wrong as they possibly could go. I had sent Sally Tribbles down cellar to the ice-chest for the meat, — Sally is a big stout girl nearly fourteen, — and somehow or another in coming up-stairs she had managed to stumble over one of the cats and had gone down backward with the joint flying right over her head into the ash-bin ; and I'd just caught Biddy O'Dowd — she's an untidy little thing — wiping out the soup-tureen with the hand-towel ; and the two little Wells girls, the twins, you know, Xenophona and Sophonisba, had got scalded both at once — they do everything together that way — while they were trying to fill the tea-kettle ; and Martha Skeat had just shaved off the ends of three of her fingers with the potato slicer ; and in the very moment that I turned my back on the kitchen table to tie up Martha's hand, three of the cats were up off the floor like a flash, — the cats are everywhere, Ridley, they make me perfectly desperate ! — and were eating the croquettes that I had just finished making up into forms.” Mrs. Latimer's voice broke a little as she recalled that culminating moment of agony, and Mr. Latimer had to kiss her repeatedly before she could go on.

“ Well, just as everything was in that awful way, Jane Spicer came into the kitchen, — I had sent her to get something from the store-room, — and the way that that child took in the whole situation at a glance, and then instantly began to make everything go right, was nothing short of a miracle ! She whisked the cats off the table and away from the croquettes as she ran across to the sink where the twins were howling together at the tops of their voices, and when she found what was the matter with them she was in and out of the store-room like a flash and had them sitting on the floor in one corner with their scalded hands in the starch-box — they are dreadful little objects now, for they got the powdered starch all over themselves. Then she dashed down cellar to Sally, and picked her and the beef out of the ash-bin, — you must n't mind about the beef, dear ; I washed it most carefully myself, and ashes are clean, anyway, — and brought them both up to the kitchen. Sally was n't a bit hurt, but she had the most shocking head you ever saw ; her hair full of ashes and all over cobwebs. And then, with the utmost coolness and presence of mind, Jane collected the cobwebs from Sally's head and gave them to me to bind on Martha's cut fingers, because cobwebs, she said, stopped bleeding better than anything else in the world. It was wonderful, Ridley, simply wonderful, the way that child attended to everything in just the right way — and Susan Poundweight, who is big enough to make two of her, all the while

standing stock still, like the sleepy goose that she is, and never raising a hand.

"It did seem as if this dreadful day never would come to an end, Ridley dear," Mrs. Latimer said in conclusion. "But it has ended at last, and you have come home, and now I can't have any more serious worries, I'm sure."

Mrs. Latimer's statement that the day had come to an end at six o'clock in the evening obviously was as loosely inaccurate as her assertion that she would have no more serious worries was a presumptuous essay in personal prophecy. But Mr. Latimer, who yearned over her as she told him her tale of woe, did not attempt to correct either of these errors although he perceived them both. On the contrary, rather did he endeavor to encourage her in her belief that this weary day was ended with its third quarter, and that in his sheltering arms she had found a secure haven of rest.

And, really, from the moment that Mr. Latimer crossed the threshold things went so swimmingly that Mrs. Latimer's right to rate herself as a prophetess seemed to be above dispute. Their dinner, served to a charm by the super-intelligent Jane Spicer, was quite the merriest dinner that ever they had eaten: for, after all, with every allowance for drawbacks, there was a good deal to exhilarate them in thus finding themselves in absolute possession of a large and luxuriously appointed dwelling, with a train of eight half-orphans ready (in theory, at least) to obey with a sparkling alacrity their lightest or their most severe commands.

After such a desperate sort of a day, Mrs. Latimer was glad to go very early to bed; but Mr. Latimer, whose day had not been desperate, was disposed to begin to get the good of his kingdom by sitting, for a couple of hours or so, in one of the vastly comfortable chairs in the library while he read the new magazine that he had brought home with him and smoked a refreshing cigar.

But in taking this pleasure which he had promised himself, Mr. Latimer was not betrayed by the zest of it into inconsiderate selfishness. Before he entered upon his own enjoyment, he attended punctually to certain matters which he knew were necessary to his wife's happiness—that is to say, he looked at the kitchen fire; tried the fastenings of all the doors and windows; went down cellar and made sure that there were no live-coals in the ash-bin, and that the plate covering the coal-hole was secure; and, finally, went up into the cock-loft and examined the bolts of the scuttle. It is but just to add that, in taking these several precautions, Mr. Latimer consulted not only his wife's comfort but his own—in view of the highly probable possibility that she might wake up at three or four o'clock in the morning and demand from him instant

and accurate information touching one or another of these points of danger, on the ground that she smelled smoke or heard a burglar. Smelling smoke and hearing a burglar were two things which Mrs. Latimer did with an energy and an inopportune-ness that Mr. Latimer—although his knowledge of these peculiar traits was but two months old—already was disposed to regard as excessive.

He returned from his tour of inspection just as she had got to bed, and—after lighting and placing by the bed-head the dark lantern which she had bought that very day to the end that they might the better protect the valuable property confided to their care—he made his report as he sat beside her holding her hand. The smell of the Japan varnish on the new lantern was very strong indeed; but Mrs. Latimer, when he commented unfavorably upon this smell, declared that he would find it delightful if he would only think, as she did, that it was oriental incense, and that they were in some very far Eastern shrine.

Knowing that one of her greatest pleasures was to talk herself to sleep, he sat quietly beside her while she talked for a while about the journey that they hoped to make some day to Japan and India; and then on and on about anything that happened to come into her head until the animation in her voice gave way to a delicious drowsiness, her words came slowly and with less and less connection, and at last she gave a little sigh of satisfied weariness and so dropped away softly into sleep. When her breathing became long and regular, assuring him that her sleep was sound, he drew his hand very gently away from hers,—which resisted the withdrawal by little instinctive clutches, as the wakeful body tried to signal to the sleeping spirit that he was going away,—and so, on tip-toe, went softly out of the room. Even at a much later period of his married life—when he was getting, indeed, to be quite gray and elderly—Mr. Latimer still found in this little ritual of slumber a certain quality which touched and thrilled him with a tenderness so searching that his love was almost pain.

IV.

TELLING HOW MRS. LATIMER WAS AROUSED FROM HER SLEEP BY THE SOUND OF STRANGE VOICES, AND WHAT SHE DID ABOUT IT.

THE library to which Mr. Latimer retired—a large, gravely luxurious room in the rear of the house, with three back windows opening toward the south, and with two side windows (over the picture-gallery) opening toward the west—was on the same floor, the second, with their bedroom. On the floor immediately above, so that help would be near in case any-

thing went wrong, were the eight half-orphans—three of whom slept in the front room and four in the back room; while Susan Poundweight, in consideration of her age and size, had the hall-room to herself. The cats were provided with sixteen cushioned boxes in the rear cellar—whence a cat-hole gave access to the back yard, and so enabled them, at their pleasure, to take the air. To prevent their escape, and as a safeguard to their morals, the yard was roofed over with a netting of wire.

Having earned by his several acts of considerate kindness an unqualified right to seek his own happiness in his own way, Mr. Latimer, upon betaking himself to the library, both sought and found it in the conjunction of himself and his cigar and magazine and vastly easy chair in that delightful book-room which for the time being was all his own. So keen, indeed, was his enjoyment of this heretofore untasted combination of luxuries, that he was rather more than half disposed to believe that he was the victim of a momentarily agreeable but ultimately bitterly disappointing dream.

But this super-refined psychologic doubt increased rather than diminished his pleasure, and for an hour or more he continued to read and to smoke with an unruffled satisfaction; save that once, fancying that he heard a slight rustling in the passage and the soft tread of unshod feet, he was disturbed by the fear—which investigation proved to be groundless—that Mrs. Latimer had forsaken her bed and her slumber to seek his protection in some sudden exigency of fright. But at the end of this reposeful period, suddenly, he truly was aroused by hearing his name called in a penetrating sibilant whisper, and then by seeing his wife standing in the doorway,—like a singularly attractive semaphore clad in white, and with tousled golden hair,—pointing the bull's-eye lantern at him with one hand and with the other beckoning him to come to her at once. Upon beholding this engaging apparition, he naturally fell a prey to the emotion of very lively alarm. With a cry of anxious affection he sprang from his chair, and in two steps was across the room and had Mrs. Latimer, lantern and all, tight in his arms.

"My darling!" he cried, "what is it? Are you ill?"

"H-s-s-s-h!" Mrs. Latimer answered in a guardedly low tone which quivered with repressed excitement. "H-s-s-s-h! Don't speak out loud, and do what I ask you quickly and silently. Get your revolver, and then we will go down-stairs together. There's a burglar in the house!"

Mr. Latimer's clasp upon Mrs. Latimer's person relaxed instantly; the eager look upon his face gave place to a look of bored annoyance; and in a perfectly calm voice he replied:

"Oh, is that all! I thought that there really was something wrong. You'd better get back to bed now—you'll catch cold."

"Don't, *don't* take it that way, Ridley. I implore you not to take it that way. I heard him most distinctly, I assure you."

"Yes, yes, I know," Mr. Latimer answered, a little petulantly, "but remember how very often you've heard him before, and what a lot of time I've wasted in hunting for him without finding him, or anything remotely like him. Come, now, be a good child," his voice became tender again, "and let me put you back in bed. If it was anything at all that you heard, you know, it was only the cats. Indeed, you'll get a bad cold if you stay around in the night air like this."

"Ridley!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, in a whisper that had a righteously incensed tone, "do you mean to tell me that I cannot tell a burglar from a cat?"

"Frankly," replied Mr. Latimer, "I don't think you can. I don't mean to say, of course," he continued, "that if a real burglar and a real cat came and stood right up in front of you together, in broad daylight, you could n't tell which was which—under those circumstances I do believe that you could tell them apart. But I do mean to say, and I speak from experience, that when it comes to telling burglars from cats at night, and by their voices only, you're bound to get them mixed every time."

"I never, *never* shall forget these bitterly cruel words—the first cruel words you ever have said to me, Ridley," Mrs. Latimer answered in a broken whisper that was more than half a sob. "But this is not the time," she continued, tragically, "to consider my own personal misery. Just now the property for which we are responsible is in danger; probably a portion of it already has been removed. You doubt my word, and you treat me as though I were but a foolish child,—no, don't try to kiss me: all that is at an end,—and I must waste precious time in arguing with you before you will believe that what I tell you is true. But if it must be, it must—so be good enough to listen to me carefully, and be good enough to believe"—this with much scorn and bitterness—"that I am *not* altogether a fool, and that I *am* telling you the truth."

"What happened was precisely this: I waked up suddenly,—aroused, I suppose, by an instinctive knowledge that danger was near,—and the first thing I knew I was sitting straight up in bed, listening with all my ears. At first I did n't hear anything at all. And then in a moment I heard most distinctly the tread of his bare feet—though he may have had on stockings—coming down the stairs from the third floor. He must have gone up without arousing me; and, of course, when he found

only the half-orphans up there, he came right down again. And then—just as I was expecting to see the door open stealthily, and the awful creature come into the room—I heard him stepping softly along the passage and keeping on down-stairs; and then, a minute later, I heard him talking to his confederate through the front-kitchen windows. His confederate is a woman, I distinctly perceived that one of the voices was a woman's voice.

"And now," concluded Mrs. Latimer, still speaking in a stony whisper, "I have told you all; and I am quite willing, since you desire it, to go back to bed, and there await my doom. I do not doubt that in the morning, supposing you survive me, you will find me lying there murdered; and all of Mrs. Haverwood's silver and most of her other valuable possessions will be gone. It is very, very cruel of you, Ridley, to treat me in this way. But in the presence of impending death I cannot be harsh with you, as you are with me. Remember, Ridley, when all is over, that I did love you with all my heart," and with these words Mrs. Latimer's voice went beyond tremulousness into the inarticulate region of sobs.

His wife's great earnestness, and the unusual circumstantiality of her narrative, combined to convince Mr. Latimer that for once, perhaps, her burglar was not made absolutely out of the whole cloth; and he was the more strengthened in this belief by suddenly remembering, as she spoke of the noises which she had heard, that he also had heard, or had fancied that he heard, footsteps in the passage but a little while before. Under these circumstances, while still leaning decidedly to the cat hypothesis, he was willing to admit that the asserted burglar was not absolutely impossible, and that the case was one which reasonably might be investigated. Moved by which considerations, he answered:

"Well, since you're so dead sure about it this time, I'll take a look for him anyway. Now come back to bed, and then I'll go gunning for him down-stairs."

"Without me?" demanded Mrs. Latimer in a most resolute whisper. "Indeed you won't do anything of the kind. I'm going with you, of course!"

Of burglars in the bush, Mrs. Latimer had a most lively horror; but when it came to burglars in the hand, and that hand her husband's, her fear was cast out by her love.

"Come!" she said, detaching herself from Mr. Latimer's arms, and making a heroic gesture with the lantern. "Come! If necessary, we will perish together; but, whatever may be my fate later, you shall not die in the basement alone."

"Oh, rubbish!" exclaimed Mr. Ridley testily, "we're not going to perish together, nor on the instalment plan either. Anyhow, you can't go

down-stairs looking like that to meet a strange burglar. What are you thinking of; and what, I should like to know, would he think of you?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Latimer, blushing like a delightful rose, "I did n't think—with a burglar, you know—it's—it's different, don't you see?"

"No," replied Mr. Latimer, with a great show of righteous severity, "I *don't* see. Even if he is a burglar, he is a man, all the same; and there's nothing about his profession—as there is about the profession of medicine, for instance—to give him special privileges. Really, I am ashamed of you! If you absolutely insist upon going down-stairs with me to receive him,—and I must say that I think you are over-punctilious in the matter: he certainly must be a total stranger to us, and obviously comes without an introduction,—at least do up your hair and put on your slippers and a wrapper."

The utterance of these sentiments of commonplace propriety in an entirely commonplace tone had the effect of putting the burglar at a different angle of Mrs. Latimer's mental vision, and, in spite of herself, her dread of him very sensibly decreased.

"Please hold the lantern—I'll only be a minute," she said, forgetting to whisper, and speaking, such is the force of association of ideas, in precisely the tone that she would have employed had any ordinary caller been waiting for her down-stairs.

"All right. There's not the least hurry, you know," Mr. Latimer answered; and his wholly matter-of-fact words and manner tended so much the more to bring Mrs. Latimer down from the high level of tragedy to the plane of every-day life that she went to the glass to do up her hair quite with her usual deliberation, and with her mind mainly occupied in deciding which of her two pretty wrappers she should put on.

V.

TELLING OF MR. LATIMER'S VAIN SEARCH FOR A BURGLAR, AND OF SUSAN POUND-WEIGHT'S EXTRAORDINARY BRAVERY.

THIS was Mr. Latimer's opportunity, and he promptly made use of it. Closing the slide of the lantern, that he might not be betrayed by the brilliant stream of light from the bull's-eye, and kicking off his slippers, that his steps might be noiseless, he stole softly down-stairs; and was fairly in the basement before Mrs. Latimer had much more than made a beginning at her hair.

In spite of his caution, he did not think that the chances in favor of his meeting a burglar were large. What he expected to meet was cats; and his intentions toward the cat or cats responsible for putting his wife into such a state of alarm, and for spoiling his own calm enjoy-

ment of his book and cigar, were not at all the sort of intentions proper to the acting head of a destitute-cat home.

And yet, convinced though Mr. Latimer was that he had come, as usual, upon a sleeveless errand, he certainly did have — as he tiptoed along the passage to the front kitchen — a curiously strong feeling that somebody was close beside him there in the dark. This feeling was instinctive rather than reasoning; but it was so overpowering that he actually backed up against the wall, and held his breath while he listened intently for some definitely convincing sound. On the score of prudence, he kept the lantern covered. The burglar, if there were a burglar, might have slipped away to either end of the long passage; and to let off the lantern in the wrong direction — thereby indicating his own whereabouts some seconds in advance of discovering the whereabouts of the intruder — might be productive of consequences of the most awkward kind. Many years before, when he was quite a little boy, some one had told him a story about a man who had killed a burglar by emptying a revolver into the darkness immediately behind the glare of a bull's-eye lantern — on the logical assumption that that was where the burglar ought to be. In the present instance, as he perceived with a rather chilling clearness, the conditions would be reversed but the principle would remain unchanged.

However, during the half minute or so that he thus stood rigid against the wall, the silence was absolute; and then, convinced that his instincts had got mixed with his imagination, and that the burglar was just as unreal as all the rest of Mrs. Latimer's burglars had been, he went on to the kitchen in a more rational frame of mind. The condition of the kitchen tended to restore his belief that the state of affairs in every way was normal. The locks and bolts of the doors, the fastenings over the window-sashes, the massive iron bars outside the windows — all were precisely as he had left them only a couple of hours before. Obviously, Mrs. Latimer's convincingly circumstantial statement had not even a cat back of it — the whole of it had come straight out of a dream.

And then, at the very moment that he had arrived at this quieting but not precisely soothing conclusion, there rang out upon the silence of the night a shrill scream of terror, which was followed in the same instant by another shrill scream of terror in a slightly different key, and simultaneously with this last came the sound as of two bodies — one rather heavier than the other — falling on the floor above!

Although Mr. Latimer never before had heard Mrs. Latimer's voice thus loudly raised and all a-thrill with fear, he knew very well that one of these screams of terror came from her. From

whom the other scream came he did not stop to consider — as the dreadful thought flashed through his mind that a burglar really had got past him in the dark, and that his defenseless wife was at the mercy of the ruffian in the regions above. Acting on the most natural impulse, the moment that this horrible possibility occurred to him he went up the kitchen stairs three steps at a time.

As he rounded into the hall above, he heard a sound of gasping breathing that seemed to come from near the foot of the front stairs; and when, reaching the spot, he brought his lantern to bear upon it, the sight that he beheld — while instantly abating his feeling of dread — filled him with a very lively surprise. There, seated upon the floor, with her legs sticking straight out in front of her, was Mrs. Latimer. Directly facing her, also seated upon the floor and also with straight-extended legs — the two evidently having collided in the dark and then fallen backward — was a pretty young girl, rather inclining to stoutness, whose neat gray frock and neat blue-and-white checked apron implied that she was one of their own half-orphans: an implication that was confirmed into a certainty, in the moment that the light from the bull's-eye lantern flashed upon her, by Mrs. Latimer's exclaiming:

"Why, Susan Poundweight! I thought you were a burglar! What *are* you doing here?"

"Oh, ma'am," answered the young person, "when you came bumping into me that way, and we both went down kerflump, I thought *you* were a burglar, and that I'd got to my last hour! And truly, ma'am, there is one down-stairs — for I heard him sort of snorking with his breath, and I know he a-most caught me, when I was down there a minute ago."

"No," put in Mr. Latimer, "that was n't a burglar; that was me. I was sure I heard somebody; and so it was you, was it? And what were you doing down in the basement at twelve o'clock at night, I'd like to know?"

"If — if you please, sir," Susan answered, arising briskly, but speaking with a strangely marked hesitation, and getting very red as she spoke, "I — I thought I heard a noise."

"Well, and what if you did hear a noise?"

"Why, sir, I thought that — that mebbe I'd better go down and see what it was."

"Faithful girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Latimer, before Mr. Latimer could reply to this avowal. "Just think of it, Ridley! She thought she heard a burglar, and her sense of duty made her peril her life by going down into that utter darkness to confront that great danger alone! Susan, I am proud of you! You are the very bravest girl I ever knew!"

"Oh, it was n't nothin', ma'am," Susan answered in still more constrained tones. "I did n't — I did n't know for sure that it was a

burglar. You see it might 'a' been the—the cats. And anyhow, ma'am, I 'm given to walkin' in my sleep."

In delivering this disjointed and also incongruous explanation, Susan Poundweight addressed the darkness behind the blazing bull's-eye, while she herself stood in the center of the circle of brilliant light, and looked very much like a blushing half-orphan projected from a magic-lantern upon a screen. These conditions were not favorable to self-possession; yet even when due allowance was made for them, and also for the strain due to the very unusual circumstances of the situation as a whole, it did seem to Mr. Latimer that her contradictory statements were so curious, and that her embarrassment was so much in excess of its apparent causes, that some additional disturbing element remained to be revealed.

When they got up-stairs again, and Susan had been sent off once more to bed, he exhibited to Mrs. Latimer this application of astronomical principles to domestic affairs; and he added that he considered Susan's conduct to be very suspicious indeed. But Mrs. Latimer would have none of his domesticated astronomy; and she resented his suspicions in energetic terms.

"I am ashamed of you, Ridley," she said warmly; "I am thoroughly ashamed of you! Susan has done a very noble and heroic act, and you are treating her as though you had caught her trying to make off with the spoons."

"No, I 'm not sure that she was after the spoons, exactly," Mr. Latimer answered, "but I do think that she was after something or another that she 'd better not have been. You must keep a sharp eye on that young woman. Unless we are very careful she certainly will get us into some sort of a scrape."

"Scrape, indeed!" responded Mrs. Latimer, indignantly. "Your suspicions are as ungenerous as they are utterly unjust. Instead of her getting us into scrapes, I consider that it is an honor to live in the same house with her. Really, Ridley, we must stop talking about her, or I shall get seriously angry with you. You see, nothing that you possibly can say can change my convictions. Susan Poundweight has shown herself nobly true to her duty, and the bravest of the brave. If ever there was one, she is a heroine. She deserves the Victoria Cross."

VI.

TREATING OF MRS. LATIMER'S LONGING FOR ORIENTAL TRAVEL, AND EXHIBITING HER ABILITY TO CHANGE FANCIES INTO FACTS.

As has been inferred, perhaps, from some of the facts already stated, Mrs. Latimer's disposition reasonably might be termed imaginative. That this romantic quality had its practical

drawbacks, no one was more ready to admit than Mr. Latimer—whose experiences in consequence of it at times were very intense indeed. To be cautiously but firmly awakened at two o'clock in the morning, and then hurriedly despatched upon a reconnoissance along such remote frontier passes as the kitchen windows or the scuttle in the roof,—to make sure that marauding parties were not pouring in through those exposed openings,—he found decidedly wearing; and scarcely less wearing did he find what he very offensively styled the smoke-smelling act: to perform which he usually was aroused just as he was dropping off into his first sleep, and was sent flying down-stairs in search of a fire in either the kitchen or the laundry, with supplementary instructions—should these apartments prove to be in their normal state of non-combustion—to keep on to the cellar and make sure that there was not an incipient conflagration in the ash-bin.

But Mrs. Latimer's imagination also had its good side. As has been exhibited, she was quite capable of exalting the smell of scorching Japan-varnish, consequent to the lighting of a new lantern, into an odor of incense burning in an Oriental shrine; and of continuing along the line of fancy thus indicated by imagining that she and Mr. Latimer were visiting not only that particular shrine but various adjacent places of interest in the far East.

This longing for Oriental travel was, indeed, Mrs. Latimer's most vigorously ridden hobby. When the circumstances would permit it, her intention was that they should go upon a long Eastern journey: visiting all the lands mentioned in the Arabian Nights, and conducting themselves, generally, like a prince and princess got at large from that delectable storehouse of romance. Pending their departure upon this expedition, she insisted that they should anticipate its delights by assuming that they actually were traveling in the Orient, and by fancying the adventures of one sort or another which were befalling them by the way.

In order to give a still livelier air of realism to her system of imaginary travel—and especially to brace up the imagination of Mr. Latimer, whose faculty for etherealizing himself into an astral shape and then going off with it was not large—Mrs. Latimer very ingeniously contrived, out of cheese-cloth, costumes of an Oriental sort for them to wear while taking their mental jaunts. These garments, very vivid in hue, were patterned after the woodcuts in an old edition of the "Arabian Nights"; and their enthusiastic maker, while not contending that as costumes they were critically correct, insisted that they were near enough to the right thing to help along the illusion tremendously.

"When you actually are dressed like the pic-

ture of the African Magician, you know, Ridley dear," she said very earnestly, "it is impossible for you not to feel like him—even if African magicians in real life are dressed totally differently: and for you to feel like him is all we want. With a true African feeling like that inside of you, everything that we are talking about instantly becomes entirely real. Indeed, the turban alone, with its queer little point coming up in the middle, is enough to make you feel that you are thousands of miles away in a very foreign land."

But even with the assistance of the costumes, Mrs. Latimer had difficulty in imagining, and still more difficulty in making Mr. Latimer imagine, some of the situations which were most after her own heart. The apartment in Irving Place which they had inhabited since their marriage consisted only of a little sitting-room, with a still smaller adjoining bedroom; and, excellent though her powers of mental fabrication unquestionably were, Mrs. Latimer found the strain rather excessive when it came to converting these contracted quarters into, for instance, the palace inhabited by the Prince of the Black Isles. Mr. Latimer, being confronted with this situation, squarely refused to meet it. The best that he could do, he said, was to imagine that the Prince of the Black Isles had rented his palace furnished for the season, and had taken lodgings for himself on Irving Place in the city of New York. Of course, this would not answer at all. As Mrs. Latimer pointed out, they were pursuing the fancy that they were traveling in the East, not that Eastern people were paying them visits in their own home; and the upshot of the matter was that they had to abandon their trip to the Black Isles and take a fresh start in another direction.

As in the case of the palace, so in a dozen other ways were they brought up constantly in the midst of their fancyings with a round turn—such as a papered ceiling intervening when they wanted to contemplate the moon and stars, or a conspicuous absence of slaves when they clapped their hands.

One of the principal reasons, therefore, why Mrs. Latimer had been eager to accept the loan of Mrs. Haverwood's half-orphans and home was the large opportunity which these possessions would afford for making their fanciful life in the Orient more real. At a stroke they would possess a very good imitation of a palace; eight slaves in the persons of the eight half-orphans to come in response to hand-clapping; and, best of all, absolutely unrestricted access to a roof on which they could sit and look at the moon and stars, if they wanted to, through the whole night long.

Being come into her kingdom, Mrs. Latimer found the roof part of it, at least, all that her fancy had pictured and that her heart had de-

sired. Nor was her enjoyment of the romantic pleasure which the roof afforded her appreciably diminished by the fact that in order to attain it they were compelled to overcome certain obstacles of a material and unromantic sort.

"I know perfectly well, Ridley dear," she said, in the course of their first ascent to the housetop, "that when the Caliph of Bagdad went on the roof of his palace with his wife—"

"Wives," interpolated Mr. Latimer.

"If you don't mind, Ridley dear, I prefer to speak of them in the singular. Customs are different in the Orient; but I am sure that their little collection of wives is just as dear to them—to the nice ones, that is—as one wife is to nice husbands here."

Mr. Latimer did not venture any reply to this handsome profession of faith in the existence of a collective monogamous sentiment among the better classes of polygamists, and Mrs. Latimer continued: "Of course I know that when the Caliph of Bagdad and his wife went on the roof of their palace,—to enjoy the coolness of the night and the beauty of the heavens, just as we are now,—they did n't have to climb up a horrid little ladder, and then go creeping across a smelly cockloft, and he did not have to pull her up through the scuttle by her hands as you pull me."

"No," responded Mr. Latimer, "I don't believe he did. Indeed, I don't believe he could. Pulling you up, you see, is easy enough, for there's only one of you to pull. But if you were the kind of wife the Caliph of Bagdad had,—in any number of parts, like a subscription book,—I'd get completely tired out long before I'd hauled you all up here: to say nothing of the fact that you would n't all be up before it would be time to begin to pass you down. Of course the Caliph did n't manage things that way. What he did, I suppose,—with him, of course, expense was no consideration,—was to put in a big elevator and bring her up a dozen at a time."

"Please don't spoil the romance of it all, Ridley dear, by talking that way—and about elevators, too! How many times must I tell you that the palaces, and the dwellings generally, in the Orient are only one, or at most two, stories high? In such a building an elevator would be an absurdity. But what I am trying to tell you, dearest, is that while the Caliph of Bagdad and his wife did n't have to get on their roof in the uncomfortable way that we do, they could n't have had a nicer time after they got there than we are having now."

"On that," answered Mr. Latimer, feelingly, "I am betting high. Indeed," he continued, "I am willing to bet that they did n't have as good a time. How could he manage, for instance, I should like to know, about putting

his head in her lap—when there was just one of him and half an acre more or less of her? Our little plan lays the Caliph's out cold—and, if you don't mind, I'll take off my turban; it's rather in the way."

Perhaps it was just as well that Mr. and Mrs. Latimer's immediate neighbors did not also frequent the housetops, for the effect produced by these young people as they wandered about their roof in the moonlight, clad in loose and flowing draperies which had uncommonly the look of nightgowns, was decidedly queer. And it was a good deal queerer when Mrs. Latimer succeeded in putting the half-orphans into garments of the same Far-Eastern sort, and got them upon the roof in the capacity of slaves.

Mrs. Latimer's first intention had been to maintain the slave fiction continuously by dressing the half-orphans always in Oriental garb. But on more mature reflection she decided that this plan, attractive though it was, must be abandoned. On the score of ethics, she feared that the laying aside of Mrs. Haverwood's uniform dress might have a subversive effect upon the system of half-orphanly training which that excellent woman had devised; and even more to the purpose was the fact that the half-orphans themselves absolutely refused to accept as a chronic garb what Martha Skeat described, disparagingly, as "floppy heathen cloze." Susan Poundweight was still more emphatic, protesting earnestly that if ever she knew that anybody was lookin' at her when she had on things like them loose pants, she'd have a fit and then die.

Being thus unable and unwilling to carry out her plan in its entirety, Mrs. Latimer compromised matters by decreeing that the Eastern dress should be worn only on Mondays; which day was to be known as Arabian Nights day in the household calendar. All the younger children, delighting in the fun of dressing up in queer clothes, of course approved of this arrangement rapturously; and even the elder girls—including Susan Poundweight, who was not ill-natured, though she was as pig-headed as she possibly could be—came into it with a fairly good grace. That the masquerading tended to excite mutinously high spirits among the masqueraders was undeniable, and Mrs. Latimer presently found that things always went more violently wrong on Monday, that is to say, on Arabian Nights day, than on any other day in the week.

VII.

TELLING HOW SUSAN POUNDWEIGHT WRECKED THE PLUMBING AND WAS SUSPECTED OF MYSTERIOUS MISDEEDS.

As the summer slowly moved onward, Mrs. Latimer perceived, with an ever-increasing clearness, that she was carrying a good deal

more of a load of half-orphans than her shoulders were strong enough to bear. All that sustained her was the knowledge that relief was certain at a fixed and not distant point of time. From Mrs. Haverwood there came a letter, about the middle of August, stating that she had arranged with all the surviving parents of her charges to meet her in New York on the day succeeding her return, and then to take them instantly and forever off her hands. But for this cheering light at the end of her dark vista, Mrs. Latimer was of the opinion—as she many times confided to Mr. Latimer—that she necessarily must go wild.

Yet, with a single exception, her half-orphanly tribulations were of a petty sort; mere gnat-stings of trouble which would have been supported easily had they not gathered about her in so dense a swarm. The serious exception to this rule of trivialities was Susan Poundweight. In a purely material way Susan's awkwardness and carelessness were productive of a good deal of annoyance. Her faculty for breaking things was quite phenomenal; and more than phenomenal in that her destructiveness was confined exclusively to the gas- and water-system of the house, and always was of such a nature as to require the immediate presence of a plumber in order to set it right. Advice and correction were thrown away on her. After Mrs. Latimer had shown her exactly how to use the faucets of the kitchen sink,—this was after she had broken one of them off,—she went right ahead in her slap-dash way, and within seven weeks had broken off one or the other of those faucets no less than five times. On top of all this, she broke the sink itself twice by dropping into it first a flat-iron and then a large iron pot; she wrenched off, in some unaccountable way, no less than three gas-brackets; she managed repeatedly to deposit obstructing substances in the waste-pipes of the permanent wash-tubs, and she even contrived to let a heavy gridiron fall in such a malignant fashion that it punched a hole in the big copper boiler beside the kitchen range.

When these catastrophes occurred, Susan always was dreadfully cut up about them, and accepted, with a pathetic penitence, her merited reproof. She always went herself post-haste for the plumber, and usually brought him back with her; and she even insisted—all the while blushing, and evidently very much ashamed of herself—on doing what she could, by holding the candle for him and handing him his tools, to help him repair the wreck which she had caused. He was quite a young plumber, just starting in business, and Mrs. Latimer was both surprised and delighted by the exceeding smallness of his bills. Another thing that surprised Mrs. Latimer in this connection, though it was

some little time before she noticed it, was the odd coincidence that never on Arabian Nights days did the plumbing sustain the smallest injury at Susan Poundweight's devastating hands.

Annoying though these aqueous and gaseous mischances undoubtedly were, however, they were but trifling matters in comparison with the really serious anxiety which Susan Poundweight caused (or was suspected of causing) in another and a much more perplexing way. The strange conduct of this young woman in the depths of the first night which she and Mrs. Latimer had passed together under the same roof never had been adequately explained. Neither of the three explanations, advanced hurriedly and inconsiderately at the moment, had been justified by the subsequent course of events. Mr. Latimer's explanation, that Susan had designs upon the spoons, had been disproved again and again as time went on by conclusive evidence that Susan was as honest as the sun; Mrs. Latimer's explanation, that Susan had gone down heroically to confront a burglar alone, and to capture him single-handed, had been disproved not less conclusively by repeated demonstrations of the fact that Susan was a pleasingly plump but entirely arrant coward; and as to Susan's own confused and contradictory explanation, that she was walking in her sleep, and had come down-stairs because she had heard a noise, its absolute absurdity was obvious from the start.

Yet, vexatious though it had been at the time, this unaccountable venture in nocturnal perambulation would have passed quietly into the realm of oblivion but for Mrs. Latimer's uneasy feeling that Susan's jaunts by night—in what obviously was a condition of dangerously wide-awake somnambulism—still went on. Of course, had she possessed positive knowledge in the premises she would have charged Susan squarely with the sin of misapplied migratory vigilance, and issue would have been joined. But she did not possess positive knowledge. All that she had to go upon certainly was a mass of indirect evidence of a suspicious but not demonstrating sort. Repeatedly she had been aroused from sleep as though by some slight but sudden noise. In almost every instance the noise had ceased before she had become sufficiently wide-awake to tell, with any degree of certainty, whence it came. Once, however, she fancied that she had heard a slight creaking of the stairs; again,—this was one warm night when the door leading into the passage was open,—that she had heard the faint sound of soft footsteps; and on several occasions it had seemed to her that the door of an upper room had been very cautiously opened or closed.

In the earlier stages of these manifestations, Mrs. Latimer regularly woke up Mr. Latimer,

and sent him cantering off into the lower or upper regions of the house—according to her fancied location of the fancied sound—to find out what was going wrong. But as the result of these expeditions invariably was to find that everything was going right, Mr. Latimer more and more resented being despatched upon such bootless errands; and on several occasions—by this time having been almost half a year married—he pained Mrs. Latimer deeply by the reprehensible hesitation that he manifested in getting out of bed, and still more pained her, on his return from hunting her supposititious sounds and smells, by denouncing in a brief but exceedingly forcible commination service of his own devising these acoustic myths and phantom odors of her mind.

It was because the alarming sounds continued without any alarming consequences, such as the murder of herself and Mr. Latimer and the disappearance of the plate, that Mrs. Latimer very unwillingly abandoned her burglar theory and took up in a tentative way the theory that, inasmuch as Susan Poundweight had been at the bottom of one nocturnal disturbance, she might be at the bottom of them all. But why Susan Poundweight thus should go careering around the house at night—supposing, that is, that she did career—was nothing less than an impenetrable mystery. Somnambulism would not account for it, for somnambulism was a product of the imagination, and Susan Poundweight was as conspicuously lacking in that refined mental attribute as Mrs. Latimer was conspicuously over-endowed with it. Nor was it reasonable to suppose that a person of Susan's dull nature would keep awake during the period divinely set apart for slumber save under stress of some motive of such exceptional energy that traces of it would be manifest, also, during the day; but during her waking hours—save for her continued demolition of the plumbing—Susan was as placid as a windless day in June.

In short, the situation was such that Mrs. Latimer could make neither head nor tail of it. Nor was Mr. Latimer able to give her any rational assistance when she exhibited to him her mystery for solution. All that Mr. Latimer did in the premises was to advance the inadequate and brutal opinion that, inasmuch as all the noises on which Mrs. Latimer rested her scheme of bewildering wonderment undoubtedly were the pure creations of her own fancy, there was no mystery to solve. Actually, of course, Mr. Latimer went off on this tack because he could not solve the problem either—as Mrs. Latimer promptly pointed out to him, with the comment (matrimony already had taught her something) that to do that “was so like a man!”

(To be concluded in the next number.)

Thomas A. Janvier.



SEE "OPEN LETTERS."

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OLD DUTCH MASTERS.

AELBERT CUYP (1620-1691).



ELBERT CUYP, born at Dordrecht, or Dort, in 1620, and not in 1605, as has been accepted until recently, was perhaps the most versatile of the Dutch masters. He was one of the first of the school, beginning with its robust incipency, and living to witness its decline. He died in 1691. By the diversity of his talent he contributed greatly to enlarge the list of those homely observations which characterize the art of his period, and the variety of his subjects makes up almost a complete repertory of Dutch life, especially in its rural phases. Indeed, such is the multifariousness of his investigations, and the vigor and independence of his way of proceeding, that he must have been one of the most active promoters of the school. He painted landscapes, sunsets and moonlights, marines, cattle and horses, people of various condition, from those of wealth and refinement to shepherds, portraits, pictures of barn-yard fowl, and groups of "still life"; and all with admirable coloring and execution. He was well-to-do, living upon his own estate, and painting what he pleased and at his leisure, and according to the inspiration of the moment. Taking nature ever as his guide, he rarely fails to impress us by a charmingly naïve conception, and an originality of handling quite his own.

Very little is known of his early life; he was the pupil of his father, Jacob Gerritsz Cuyt, an able landscape-painter. It is probable that he visited other parts of Holland before beginning to practise on his own account at Dort. He was little known or appreciated in his day, owing to the taste which sprang up at that time for the extreme finish that the works of Dou and his school exhibit. For this reason Rembrandt also suddenly lost favor, and other rare spirits like Ruisdael were misunderstood and neglected. Until 1750, the best examples of Cuyt were not valued at more than twelve dollars apiece. The English have the honor of first discovering him to the world, and consequently England possesses the majority of his works. The engraved example is one of his finest, and is to be seen in the Louvre at Paris. The picture is one of Cuyt's largest, measuring 5 feet 7½ inches high by 7 feet 6½ inches wide. The temperament of Cuyt led him to seek calm

and sunny scenes, and his rare faculty for rendering light, and the atmospheric effects of hazy morning, of glowing afternoon, and of golden evening, is well known. Dwelling on the banks of the placid Maas, he delighted to reproduce the warm skies of summer or autumn, and the amber-colored atmosphere that enveloped the surrounding hills, and found reflection in the dreamy water. To one proceeding directly from Italy to Holland, the difference in the sunlight of the two countries must appear a striking feature; that of the former is white and brilliant compared with the latter, which is soft and decidedly yellow. The brightest of summer days in Holland always impressed me as though the sun were veiled by yellow mists, and one's shadow upon the ground would not show clear-cut as in Italy.

Speaking of the painting here engraved, Fromentin, in his admirable work on the old masters of Belgium and Holland, has the following:

No one could go farther in the art of painting light, of rendering the pleasing and restful sensations with which a warm atmosphere envelops and penetrates one. It is a picture. It is true without being too true; it shows observation without being a copy. The air that bathes it, the amber warmth with which it is soaked, that gold which is but a veil, those colors which are only the result of the light which inundates them, of the air which circulates around, and of the sentiment of the painter which transforms them, those values so tender in a whole which is so strong — all these things come both from nature and from a conception; it would be a masterpiece if there had not slipped into it some insufficiencies which seem the work of a young man or of an absent-minded designer.

What these "insufficiencies" are may be seen in the proportion of the children to the shepherd playing upon the pipe, though this detracts nothing from the charm and poetry of the whole. Such, apparently, is the enchantment of the scene that I have come to imagine these little creatures as intended by the artist to represent the genii of the place, evoked by the music of the shepherd, and the harmony of this rarest of occasions, when all nature is attuned.

T. Cole.