

turned his alert, sweet little face up to the massive guardian of the Park.

"You mean who set the trap, Officer?" he inquired proudly. "I did. It did work nicely, didn't it? I'm glad you like it." And again the happy, gratified smile flickered on his face, as he tried to hold his lips in restraint, and gazed down proudly at the ruins of his success.

There was a startled silence for a moment. Bob took a step toward his little cousin, but stopped again as the man in riding clothes spoke.

"Who are you?" he asked gently. "Who are you, my lad?"

Max looked about the circle of intent faces doubtfully, hopefully. It was a great moment. Would they feel its im-

portance? Would they grasp the reality of Make-Believe? Would they know the intoxicating sweetness of the air one breathes in the land of May-Be? That wonderful game of "Let's Pretend," the beginning and the end of romance—would they play it fairly? His whole soul wanted this consummation of a beautiful, a successful effort. He would risk it. In grave silence they waited, these grown-ups, so hard to please, so hard to understand, and Max's hope grew in the stillness. With his legs wide apart, with his brows drawn anxiously together and the blue, innocent search-light of his gaze playing over them, with a seriousness that trembled to solemnity, he spoke.

"I'm Bill the Trapper," said Max.

A HOUSE OF MERCY

By Jennette Lee

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. W. TAYLOR

I



UNT MERCY, what are you thinking of?" The young man turned his head a little on the pillow to look inquiringly toward the door.

It was the door of Room 24 leading into the men's ward. Aunt Mercy had been standing there for five minutes, gazing intently before her into space. The serene face framed in the white muslin cap had a rapt, waiting look. It reminded the young man of a German Madonna that he had run across last summer in an old gallery corner, whose face had haunted him. "Aunt Mercy, what are you thinking about?" he repeated gently.

She turned slowly toward him, the placid look breaking into twinkles. "I was thinking I'd better turn Mr. Ketchell's mattress p'other end to, and put a bolster under the upper end. It kind of sags."

For a moment the young man on the pillow looked a little bewildered. Then he lay back and laughed till the iron bedstead

rang and the men in the ward pricked up their ears and smiled in sympathy.

Aunt Mercy smiled too, stepping leisurely toward him.

"There, there," she said as she adjusted the sheet and lowered his pillow a trifle, "I dunno's I'd laugh any more 'bout that. 'Tisn't so very funny to change a mattress t'other end to."

He raised a hand and wiped the laughter from either eye. "But you looked as if you were thinking of angels and cherubims and things, Aunt Mercy."

She nodded placidly. "I gen'ally do," she responded, "but that don't hinder knowing about mattresses and bolsters. . . . I wouldn't laugh any more for a day or two if I was you. The bandages might get loose." She slipped a careless hand along his forehead, gathered up a cup and plate from the stand beside him, and slid plumply from the room.

His eyes followed her through the door, down the long ward as she stopped here and there for a word or a question. Once she raised her hand sternly at a bed and sniffed. The cap-strings bristled fiercely.

"He's catching it," muttered the young man from the private room, "I knew he would. You can't keep a baccy pouch in the same room with Aunt Mercy." He sighed a little and glanced, without turning his head, toward the window where the spring clouds sailed and filled with swelling whiteness. A breath of freshness stole in softly. On the sill was a bowl of pansies. He lay looking at them idly. His lids fluttered and closed—and lifted again and fell shut.

Out in the ward the men were laughing and talking. Sanderson, robbed of his baccy pouch, was sullen and resentful, and the men were chaffing him. Aunt Mercy drifted through the swing door at the end of the ward. She placed the cup and plate on a dumb waiter and crossed the hall to the women's ward. A nurse met her as she came in at the door. "Mrs. Crosby is worse. Temperature a hundred and four," she said in a low voice.

Aunt Mercy nodded. She went slowly down the ward. White faces on the pillows greeted her and followed her. Aunt Mercy beamed on them. She stopped beside a young girl and bent over to speak to her. The girl's face lighted. It lost its fretted look. Aunt Mercy had told her that she was to have a chop for her dinner if she was a good girl, and that there was a robin out in the apple tree. She turned her gaunt eyes toward the window. Her face listened. Aunt Mercy went on. . . . A nurse coming in handed her a slip of paper. She glanced at it and tucked it into her dress. It was a telephone message from Dr. Carmen, asking to have the operating-room ready for an appendicitis case in ten minutes.

The girl with the gaunt eyes called to her.

"Aunt Mercy." The voice was weak and impatient.

Aunt Mercy turned slowly back. She stood by the bed, looking down with a smile.

The girl thrust an impatient hand under her cheek, "Can I hear him in here?" she demanded.

Aunt Mercy glanced toward the window. "The robin? Like enough, if he flies this way. I'll go out and chase him 'round bime-by when I get time."

The girl laughed—a low pleased laugh.

Aunt Mercy's tone had drawn a picture for her: The robin, the flying cap-strings in swift pursuit, and all out-doors—birds and trees and sky. She nestled her face on her hand and smiled quietly. "I'm going to be good," she said.

Aunt Mercy looked at her with a severe twinkle. "Yes, you'll be good—till next time," she said.

The nurse by the door waited, impatient. Aunt Mercy came across the room.

"Get 15 ready. . . . Find the new nurse. . . . Send her to the operating-room. . . . Send Henry to the ambulance door. . . . Tell Miss Staunton to have things hot and put out the new ether cones. It wants fresh carbolic and plenty of sponges." The nurse sped swiftly away.

Aunt Mercy looked peacefully around. She gave one or two instructions to the ward nurse, talked a moment with one of the patients, smiled a kind of general benediction on the beds and faces and sunlit room, and went quietly out. . . . At the door of the operating-room she paused a moment and gave a slow, comfortable glance about. She changed the position of a stand and rearranged the ether cones.

The next minute she was standing at the side door greeting Dr. Carmen. The ambulance was at the door.

"It's a bad case," he said. "Waited too long."

"Woman, I suppose," said Aunt Mercy. She was watching the men as they put the trestles in place.

"He looked at her. "How did you know?"

"They're 'most always the ones to wait. They stand the pain better'n men." She stepped one side with a quiet glance at the litter as the men bore it past. "She'll come through," she said as they followed it up the low stairway.

"I wish I felt as sure," responded Dr. Carmen.

Aunt Mercy glanced back. A man was standing at the door, his eyes following them. She looked inquiringly toward the Doctor.

"Her husband," he said. "He's going to wait."

Aunt Mercy spoke a word to a nurse who was coming down the stairs, with a motion of her hand toward the man waiting below.

The little procession entered the operating room, and the door was shut.

II

THE man in the reception-room was waiting. He was thick-set, with dark hair and eyes and an obstinate chin. He looked up with a doubtful flash as Aunt Mercy came in.

"How is she?" he demanded. He had sprung to his feet.

Aunt Mercy descended into a creaking chair and folded her hands quietly. "Sit down, Mr. Dalton," she said, "I'm going to tell you all about it."

The words seemed to promise limitless details.

He sat down, chafing a little, and looking at her eagerly.

She smiled on him. "Hard work waiting, ain't it?" she said.

His face broke a little.

"Did she get through all right?"

Aunt Mercy nodded. "Yes, she got through." She rocked a little in the big chair. "She's standin' it pretty well, considering," she added after a pause.

"Will she get well?" The question burst at her.

She looked up at him slowly—at the dark eyes and obstinate chin. "I don't know," she said. She waited a minute. "I suppose you'd rather know the truth," she asked.

"Yes,—yes."

"I thought so." The muslin strings nodded. "When my husband died they didn't let us know how sick he was. I've always thought we might 'a' saved him—between us—if we'd 'a' known. They wanted to spare my feelings." She looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes." He waited a little less impatiently. The world was a big place. Everybody died. . . . Would Edith die? . . . He looked at her imploringly.

She returned the look with one full of gentleness. "I don't see how she's going to live," she said slowly. The face under its white cap took on a trance-like look. The eyes were fixed on something unseen. She drew a quick breath. . . . "But I guess she will," she said with a tremulous laugh.

The man's lips parted.

She looked at him again. "If I was

you, Mr. Dalton, I'd go home and feel pretty big and strong and well, and I'd hope pretty hard."

He looked at her, bewildered.

She was on her feet. She ran her eye over his face and person. "I'd wear the cleanest, freshest clothes I could get, and I'd look so 'twould do her good just to set eyes on me."

He flushed under the two-days' growth of beard, and ran his hand awkwardly across his chin. "But they won't let me see her?" he said.

"Well, I don't know," responded Aunt Mercy. "It'll do her good—whether she sees you or not," she added energetically.

He rose with a smile, holding out his hand. "I believe you're right," he said. "It gives me something to do, anyway, and that's worth a good deal."

"Yes, it's something to do," she responded, "and I don't suppose any of us knows just what cures folks."

"Could I see her to-morrow, perhaps?" he asked, watching her face.

She shook her head emphatically. "Not till I think best," she replied with decision.

His face fell.

"And not then," she said, "unless you're feeling pretty well and strong and happy."

He gave a little abrupt laugh. "Oh, you've fixed that all right. I sha'n't sigh—not once—in a dark room—with the lights out."

Aunt Mercy smiled serenely. "That's good." At the door she paused a moment. "I wouldn't reckon too much on seeing her," she said. "I sha'n't let anyone see her till she asks. She won't pay much attention for three-four days yet."

A peculiar look crossed the man's dark face. "That's all right," he said. "I can wait."

"Outside the door he lifted his face a little to the fresh breeze. His eyes stared absently at the drifting sky. "Now, how did she know Edith wouldn't want to see me?" he said softly, "how did she find that out?"

III

EVERYTHING connected with the hospital was under the absolute control of Aunt Mercy. Each member of the white-capped corps of nurses looked to her for



She ran her eye over his face and person.—Page 756.

direction, and the cook and the man who ran the furnace refused to take orders from anyone else. It was no unusual sight for the serene, white-framed face, with its crisp strings to appear among the pipes and elbows of the furnace-room, and leave behind it a whiff of common sense and a series of hints on the running of the hot-water boiler. Even Dr. Carmen himself never brought a patient to the House of Mercy without asking humble and solicitous permission of Aunt Mercy.

There was a current belief that the

Berkeley House of Mercy belonged to Aunt Mercy herself; and I am not at all sure that Aunt Mercy did not think so—at times. The hospital had been endowed twelve years before by a rich woman in gratitude for her recovery from a painful disease. She had wished to reward the surgeon who had cured her. And when Dr. Carmen had refused any payment beyond the usual fee, she had established the Berkeley House of Mercy over which he was to have absolute control. He, in turn, had installed Aunt Mercy as matron of the

hospital—not with the understanding that she was to have absolute control, but as being, on the whole, the most sensible and reliable woman of his acquaintance.

The result of the arrangement was as has been stated. It was not known that Aunt Mercy had ever refused him, point-blank, permission to bring a patient to the hospital. But she sometimes protested, with a shrewd twinkle in her eye, "Oh, I can't have that Miss Enderby here. She's always wanting to have her own way about things!" Then Dr. Carmen would laugh and bring the patient. Perhaps he gave her a hint beforehand. Perhaps the fame of Aunt Mercy's might had reached her. Perhaps it was the cool, firm fingers. . . . Whatever might be the reason, it is safe to say that Miss Enderby did not once have her own way from the day that she was carried into the wide doors of the House of Mercy, a sick and querulous woman, to the day when she left it with firm, quick step, and turning back at the door to fall with a sob on Aunt Mercy's neck, was met with a gentle little push and a quick flash from the white-capped face. "There, there, Miss Enderby, you run right along. There's nothin' upsets folks like sayin' good-by. You come back some day and say it when you're feeling pretty well."

IV

AUNT MERCY was thinking to-day, as she went back along the wide corridor to Room 15, that the new patient was not unlike Miss Enderby. There was the same inflexible tightening of the lips and the same contracted look of the high, level brows. The lips had not opened except for low moans, and the eyes were closed. As Aunt Mercy stood looking down at them, they fluttered softly. They opened for a moment and closed again with a dull look.

Aunt Mercy bent her head and listened to the heavy breathing. Then she spoke softly to the nurse in charge, who listened obediently and went away. It was not an unusual thing for Aunt Mercy to assume control of a case at any moment. Perhaps she was most likely to do this about three or four o'clock in the morning when all the hospital was asleep and a chill had crept into the air. The nurse in charge of a critical case would look up to find Aunt

Mercy standing beside her, fresh from a cold bath, with a smile on her big, restful face and a whispered command on her lips that sent the tired nurse to bed with a clear conscience.

The patients that Aunt Mercy assumed in this peremptory fashion always recovered. Perhaps they would have recovered in any case. This is one of the things that no one knows. It may be noted, however, in passing, the patients themselves as they came into the new day, holding fast to Aunt Mercy's hand, cherished a belief that had it not been for that firm, plump hand, the new day would not have dawned for them. . . . They had no strength and no will of their own. But through the cold and the darkness, something held them; and when the spirit came creeping back with the morning, the first thing that their eyes rested on was Aunt Mercy's face.

V

THE woman's eyes opened suddenly. They looked for a moment, dull and unseeing, into Aunt Mercy's. Then they fell shut. Aunt Mercy's fingers noted the pulse and passed once or twice across the high, fretted brow. Slowly a look of sleep passed over the face and the strained lines relaxed. Aunt Mercy, watching it, gave a nod of satisfaction. Out in the orchard the robin sang his twilight song, slow and cool and liquid, with long pauses between, and the dusk crept into the white room, touching it.

Aunt Mercy sat passive, waiting, the eyes under her white cap glowing with a still, deep look. All the threads of life and death in the hospital gathered up and centred in the quiet figure sitting there. Not a pulse in the great building beat, or flickered and went out, that Aunt Mercy did not know it. But she sat waiting while the twilight deepened, a look of restfulness in her big face. Now and then she crooned to herself, half humming the lines of some hymn and falling silent again, watching the sleeper's breath.

The night nurse paused outside the door, and a little rush of gaslight flickered in. Aunt Mercy rose and closed the door and shifted a screen noiselessly to the foot of the bed. The long night had settled down for its sleep. And Edith Dalton's soul was

keeping watch with death. Slowly it sank back into the grim hold . . . only a spark left, with Aunt Mercy keeping guard over it. . . . So the night passed and the day, and another night and another day . . . and the third day dawned. Edith Dalton would have said, as the spark glowed higher and blazed a little and lighted her soul, and her eyes rested on Aunt Mercy's face, that the figure sitting there had not left her side for the three days. Down through the deepest waters, where death lulled her and heaven waited, she had felt a touch on her soul, holding her, drawing her steadily back to life; and now she opened her eyes and they rested on Aunt Mercy's face and smiled a little. Then the lids fluttered together again and sleep came to the face, natural and sweet.

Aunt Mercy's eyes grew dark beneath the white cap. She touched a bell and gave the case over to the day nurse that came. "She will be all right now," she said. She spoke in the low, even voice that was not a whisper and not a tone. "Give her plenty of water. She has been very thirsty. But there is no fever. Don't call me unless there is a change. . . . Then send at once." She departed on her rounds.

No one would have guessed, as the fresh, stout figure moved in and out among the wards, that she had not slept for two nights. There was a tradition that Aunt Mercy never slept and that she was never tired. Dr. Carmen laughed at the tradition and said that Aunt Mercy slept as much as anyone, more than most people, in fact, only she did it with her eyes open—that it was only a superstition that made people think they must shut their eyes to sleep. The Hindus had a trick worth two of that. Aunt Mercy knew the trick, and she might tell other folks if she would, and save the world a lot of trouble.

But Aunt Mercy only shook her head, and smiled, and went her way. And when the fight with death came, she went with each one down into that other world, the world of sleep and faith and unconscious power, on the borderland of death, where the soul is reborn, and waited there for life. She had no theories about it, and no pride; and if she had now and then a gentle, imperious scorn of theorists and bunglers, it was only the touch of human nature that made the world love her.

VI

It was the sixth day, and Edith Dalton was doing well—that is, the wound was doing well. As for the woman, she lay with indifferent eyes looking at the white wall of her room and waiting recovery. The only time that the look in the eyes changed was when Aunt Mercy appeared in the doorway for a moment, or sat by her bed. Then it would deepen to a question and flicker toward hope.

"Doing well?" Aunt Mercy would say. "They give you good things to eat, don't they?"

The woman smiled faintly. "Yes."

"That's right. Eat and sleep. And hope don't hurt—a little of it."

"Aunt Mercy?" The voice had a sharp note. It was the tenth morning, and the invalid was resting against the pillows that had been raised on the bed.

"Yes?" Aunt Mercy turned back.

"Hasn't he been to see me—once—my husband?" There was a shamed, half-imperious note in the words.

Aunt Mercy sat down comfortably by the bed and looked at her. Then she shook her head, chidingly. . . . "I've never seen a sick person yet that wa'n't unreasonable," she said.

The woman's face relaxed. "I know," she said, apologetically, "but when one is sick the days are long."

"You told me—that was four-five days ago," said Aunt Mercy, "that you didn't want to see him or hear his name mentioned. At least, that's what I understood."

The woman was not looking at her.

"So when he's been here, time and again—three times a day, some days—I've told 'em you couldn't see anybody—not even your husband. . . . I thought that was what you wanted?"

"Yes," said the woman, faintly.

Aunt Mercy nodded. "And now you're acting hurt and keeping yourself from getting well."

The woman flushed a little. "I don't think I am."

"Yes, you are," said Aunt Mercy, comfortably. "Of course it don't make any real difference. You'll get well some time. . . . Only it seems foolish. Well, I must be going on my rounds. Keep up

good courage." She stood up and moved toward the door.

"Aunt Mercy."

"Yes."

"You haven't time to stop a few minutes?"

"Why, yes. I've got plenty of time, if you want me. There's two operations this morning, but everything's ready."

"Two operations?" The woman's lips grew white.

"One's a man with five children. Got to lose his leg. . . . His wife's plucky. She's gone right to work earning money. But she's coming this morning to be with him for the operation. She said he'd stand it better. I guess she's right. They seem pretty close together. . . . That's the only thing I really envy in this world," said Aunt Mercy, slowly, . . . "having a husband that loves you and cares." She sat quietly watching the locust leaves outside the window. They shimmered in the light.

The woman raised a hand. "You don't understand," she said.

"Like enough not," said Aunt Mercy. "It's hard work understanding other folks' feelings. I don't more'n half understand my own. . . . I suppose you were kind of disappointed in him . . . ?"

"I don't know——" The words faltered.

"They be, mostly."

"Is everyone unhappily married?" the voice flashed at her.

"Well, I didn't say just that. But most of 'em find it different from what they expected—men being men. . . . Women are women, too. I'll have to go, now. It's time for the man, and she'll be waiting in the parlor. I told her to wait there." She

rose slowly. "You don't want to see him, if he should happen to come to-day?"

"No." The lips trembled a little and closed over the word.

"All right," said Aunt Mercy, soothingly. "Take plenty of time to get well. He can wait. He's a good kind to wait, I can see that." She had drifted out.

The woman's eyes followed her eagerly with a question in them. She put up her hands to cover them. When she took them down the eyes were filled with tears and a gentle light glowed in them. "Dear old Tom," she said, softly, "he can wait."

As Aunt Mercy opened the parlor door he sprang to his feet. He was radiant with a look of courage, and his eyes glowed as he came toward her.

She shook her head, smiling a little. Then she turned to a young woman waiting by the door. She was strong and fresh and a look of purpose gleamed in her face. Aunt Mercy looked at her approvingly. Go down to Room 20, Mrs. Patton, on the left-hand side. I've told Dr. Carmen you're to be there. It's all right."

As the young woman left the room she turned to him again.

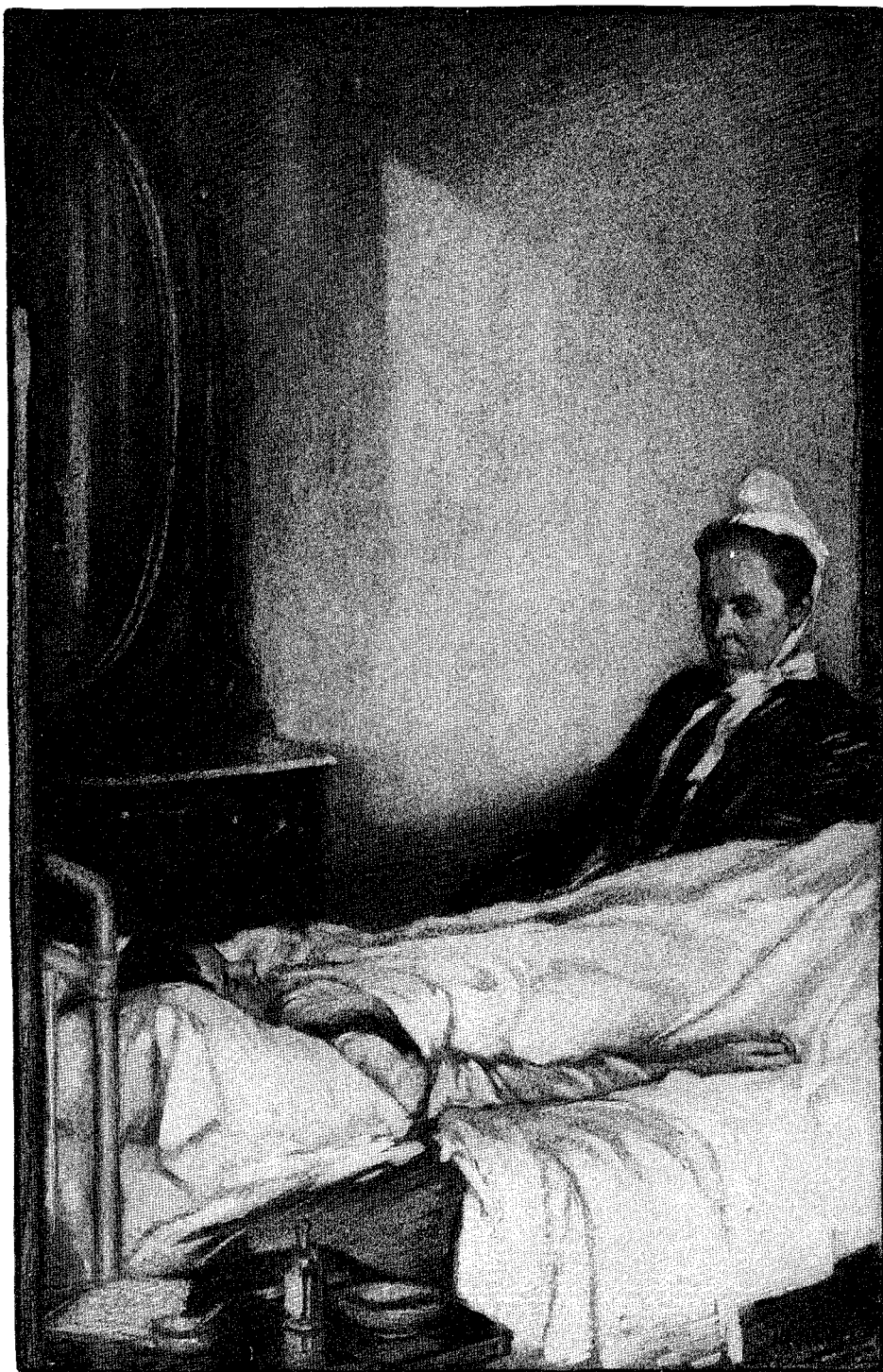
"Won't she see me?" he asked.

"Come to-morrow about ten o'clock," she said, slowly, "she'll be wanting to see you then."

"How do you know?" He reached out a hand.

"I don't know, but I seem to feel it in my bones. She's most well. . . . She's well all through."

And she left him standing there, a glad light in his eyes, while she went down the corridor to the man waiting in Room 20.



Drawn by F. W. Taylor.

She sat waiting while the twilight deepened.—Page 758.

VOL. XXXIV.—80

THE POINT OF VIEW

THEY are telling us that our great wave of prosperity has about rolled by, and that nobody is likely to leave any more unexpected bags of gold on our doorstep for some time to come. They do not predict anything very dreadful—merely a return to the normal, a lull in conditions which have made us for a time a people envied for our astonishing commercial success.

A Grace After
Meat

No doubt the crops will still grow and we shall still sell wheat and oil and cotton to our neighbors, and still wear clothes and shoes and live in houses, and eat and drink, and educate our children. A great many of us will hardly know the difference between flush times and duller times, and many of us whose incomes are fixed, will profit by the decline in prices. Still, it tries the nerves a little to be told that things seem to be on the down grade, and to see the winnings of the stock market thrown month after month to the bears.

But there are great compensations for so much of a tumble as we have had so far, and probably for all the discipline there is in store for us. We needed discipline; needed it badly. We had so much prosperity that it was making serious trouble in the family. A newspaper that comments dolorously on the situation has declared that our good times have engendered neither rest nor content; that the increase of wealth among all classes, and the general betterment of our people, has had quite the contrary result from what might have been expected, and that instead of universal goodwill, we have universal unrest, mistrust, and hostility. There is an appearance of truth about that, for with a great treasure to divide, there has been much strife over the terms of division. Corporation has fought corporation, capital and labor have both tended, each for itself, to combine for the elimination of competition. The unions have striven to control all labor and fix the price of it and the terms on which it should be furnished. The multiplication of trusts and railroad

combinations has been the sign of a like thrifty purpose on the part of the employers of labor. The trust idea, mishandled and carried to extremes, has brought woe on its victims in the stock market, and the kindred excesses of the labor trusts will quite as surely bring their punishment. And the worst of it is, that many of the victims in both cases will be personally blameless, and will atone vicariously for other people's sins. But it does not appear that the prosperous farmers of the West, who have sold crops and paid off mortgages with honest money, are suffering ill effects from the late good times. They have been less pestered with the disconcerting problems of division. They have sold their crops and got their money, paid their debts and accumulated balances, and the resulting improvement in their circumstances has probably sweetened their tempers and improved their spirits.

Happy are the farmers, in that they do not have to be organized! We have had somewhat overmuch of the organization of labor. It has long been preached to us as a panacea for tyrannies and iniquities of all sorts; and now we have got it, and it bids fair to be the most galling tyranny and the biggest iniquity of all. Organization of labor means the submission of the many workers to the leadership of the few. It means, to be sure, the rule of majorities, but often of majorities that cannot think, and are controlled and driven by a few energetic spirits. No doubt its legitimate ends are worthy and its legitimate uses vastly important. No doubt it has come to stay; but it has not come to override law, flout justice, and put shackles on arms that should be free. We seem to have been so prosperous that we could better afford to bribe than to resist. Our time has been so valuable that we could not spare enough of it to enforce the laws, and especially those laws which should protect every man in earning his bread in any honest way that suits him.

Yes, in some, in not a few particulars, we