



TUMBLE-DOWN FARM

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

A knock was heard at the door; the same maid who had hurried into the garden came in.

"Please, ma'am, the doctor is here."

"But why do you look so white?" the mistress asked, reading the servant's face with quick apprehension. "Is Miss Maud worse?"

"Please, ma'am, the doctor must speak to you."

The maid lingered for a moment.

"What is the matter?" Vanity asked.

"Our smallest young lady has got small-pox," the servant said, shuddering as she spoke. "Master has seen the doctor, and we don't know what to do."

Vanity Hardware had the terror of that disease which every woman feels, and she turned pale herself.

"And the little lady is master's pet?"

The servant continued, "and mistress has always made so much of her; and she has always slept beside mistress, and she won't hardly go out of her sight."

"I dare say," Vanity remarked, "her mother will nurse her."

"There it is, you see," the said said, closing the door, and speaking in a confidential whisper; "master says the mother shall not go near her. You see—closing the door more impressively—"master is so proud of his little lady, and he says the risk shall not be run."

"Can't they get a nurse?" Vanity asked.

"Don't you see?" the other replied, "that's where it is. This little lady is so used to mistress singing to her, and being with her, that she will not allow any nurse to come near her; and we only keep her quiet by the five minutes saying: 'Mamma's coming, dear,' and even then she bursts out times and times. And if you please, doctor says the little lady must be kept quite away from everybody; and your room is the best in the house for her; and will you please come down stairs? Your room is made dark, and the little lady is to be taken there at once."

Vanity came out upon the gallery over the large entrance hall, out of which several doors opened and one or two short flights of steps ran up different passages. At the top of one of these flights stood the redoubtable old lady in a most excited state. For some inexplicable reason, she had gathered up her skirts; and the first idea her figure suggested was that of a stout elderly lady, of indelible purpose, who was about to wade a river.

"I always said so," the old lady called out. "This comes of your Sunday-school tracts. But Maud never would listen to advice—nor since she was four years old!"

"Poor Maud, pale and crying, sat upon a chair. Beside her stood the doctor and her husband; the wail of the sick child was plainly heard. At the sound, the mother started to her feet.

"Augustus!" she called out piteously. "I must go! Doctor, do say that I am to go! Baby will die if she frets on in this way. It is cruel to keep me! It is my duty to run whatever risk there may be. Do let me go. I cannot bear to hear her."

"Maud," her husband said, drawing close to her, "I cannot permit it. We must get a nurse. Baby will soon cry herself to sleep."

"Oh, it is cruel!" she said; "it is cruel!"

"At this point the soldier brother spoke. 'I feel for you, Neville,' he said to his brother-in-law; 'but I do think my sister is right. Her duty is with her child. Let her go, and leave the rest in the hands of God.'"

"Mind," the old lady called out, "I don't agree with either of you. Remember that hereafter."

"Now, Augustus," the wife cried, "now you will let me go!"

Neville, feeling the tide running sharply against him, saw that he must speak decidedly. Like many easy-going people, he could, on occasion, assert himself irresistibly.

"There must be an end of this," he said. "Doctor, let us have a nurse at once. Maud, you must not go near the child; your life is too valuable to us all."

Vanity had watched this scene with a remarkable look on her face; and now she hurried down stairs, and crossed the hall to the lady's side.

"I will nurse the baby," she cried. "I am not afraid!"

The whole company stood transfixed. The young soldier acknowledged the power of beauty by gazing for a moment at the stranger with a possibly too obvious admiration, but he soon recollected himself.

Maud Neville looked up.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she said. "It wouldn't be the slightest use. Baby will have no one but myself."

"I know, I know," Vanity replied almost impatiently. "Come with me."

Maud looked up in wonder; as for the rest, they stood in silent amazement; even the old lady was at a loss for a sentence. "Come with me," Vanity repeated, in a decisive voice. "Did your servant follow us?"

To the surprise of everybody, Maud Neville rose and walked across the hall with Vanity. The servant followed, and all three went out of sight.

Then the maid-servant was seen flying into the sick child's room, where the sound of closing shutters was heard. Thence she ran up stairs and disappeared. Then again she darted down to the doctor and whispered to him. After this she drew down every blind and closed every shutter of the hall windows, reducing the place to darkness. Then, without explaining these proceedings, she disappeared once more.

The whole party still remained motionless, none daring to speak, and in the darkness and suspense it seemed that several minutes passed away.

At last, low, soft, sweet, in the most soothing lullaby note, they heard a voice singing:

"Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky."

"Why," whispered Neville to his brother, "that is Maud singing to the child. She sings that hymn to her, night by night."

Then, in the semi-darkness of the hall, the husband saw his wife, dressed in a long, loose morning robe which he knew well, bearing the child in her arms and chanting as she slowly moved across the hall. The effect of the song on the sick child soon appeared. The little weary voice caught up a word or two here and there, and sang it in a drowsy, satisfied tone.

"Maud," the husband whispered, in a low, reproachful voice, "I am grieved."

He felt a hand in his own. Maud had slipped up to him from behind.

"Hush," she said. "Can't you understand?"

The sweeping gown touched his feet, and the muffled head of his child was close to his own, as the mysterious figure glided by, still singing:

"Jesus, give the weary
Calm and sweet repose;
With thy tender blessing
May mine eyelids close."

"Why," Maud whispered Neville, clasping his wife's hand, "I could have sworn it was your very voice!"

"Is it not wonderful?" she whispered back. "Baby believes she is in my arms, and she is quite happy."

In the darkness Neville felt his wife leaning her head on his shoulder, and pouring out the mingled sorrow and thankfulness of her heart.

Meanwhile the dusky figure was seen slowly moving up the wide stairs toward the room where the child was to be laid. Low, sweet, the lullaby sounded:

"Grant to little children
Visions bright of Thee,
Guard the sailors' tossing
On the deep blue sea."

"But, Maud," the husband said, "when she leaves the child in the room, how much better shall we be?"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed his wife, but in the lowest of whispers, "she is going to nurse baby through the illness. The room is dark. Baby will never know, till she is well again."

Vanity had reached the door of the sick room. They could now see her figure plainly, and she turned round, as if to give the mother one last glimpse of her darling.

"Through the long night watches
May mine angel spread
Their white wings above me,
Watching round my bed."

The song was over. The dark threshold was passed. And the brave actress was shut in with her task and her danger.

CHAPTER XIX.

The housemaid understood her business. Without waiting for the word of command, she let in the light once more, and the whole party saw each other.

"Maud," the husband said, breaking the silence, "what does all this mean?"

"Really, Augustus, you are stupid! Don't you see? Little Maud thinks I am that of a stout elderly lady, of indelible purpose, who was about to wade a river. But such a clever girl! I really thought it was myself singing. She asked me, 'Have you any little thing you sing to the child?' So I sung her a verse of 'Now the day is over.' The verses, the music, the way, and going to stay with her. And the instant. And then she went in to baby in the dark—and took her up, singing all the while, and baby put her little head against her shoulder, and was quite soothed and still!"

"The mother's tears fell as she spoke, and the husband was moved himself.

"What a brave act!" he said. "I should have thought a woman would as soon have walked into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. For a poor and lovely girl—for a lovely girl she is—to risk her beauty for the sake of a sick child is real heroism. I shall never forget what that girl has done. And if she were to catch the small-pox, and her face were spoiled, I should never forgive myself."

"No more should I!" the soldier called out. "Never!"

"Rest," said Pembroke, the old lady said loftily, "will you be good enough not to be too absurd? Providence did not expect you to nurse the child."

"I feel," Augustus continued gravely, "that I must take the whole responsibility of the young woman's future upon myself."

"Not the whole of it, Augustus!" the soldier called out earnestly. "I ought to help you. Share and share alike, you know. No, I don't exactly mean that; but really, old fellow, I could not let it all come on you, you know."

"Listen, Tom," his brother-in-law remarked; "if that girl were to pay the price of her bravery with her face, I don't see what I could do for her. It would be an awful result of so gallant a deed. If that happened."

"But that happened," said Pembroke, interrupting, with great excitement, "if her face were spoiled, it would not be your business, Augustus. As you say, you could do nothing for her. In that case, sooner than she should die of a broken heart, I—I would marry her myself!"

"Thomas Pembroke," exclaimed the old lady, "I am horrified. But while we stand talking here, that claimant—here she points to the closed doors of the sick chamber—may come down those stairs and take some of us into eternity!"

Not a thought about the little sick child upon whom Death seemed to have laid his hand; not a thought about the brave young woman who had taken the poisoned frame to her own breast. She retreated precipitately, flew into her room and shut her door with a terrific crash.

CHAPTER XX.

Vanity was alone in the darkened sick room. Her little charge was satisfied with the song of "Now the day is over," and as often as the small sick voice plaintively out "Mamma," the reply of a chanted voice assured the little sufferer that her best comforter was at hand.

But the generous glow died out, as all emotion fled from the dark room. Vanity had time to think what she had undertaken; and it must be confessed, she began to feel afraid. She resolved to stay at her post, however, and, when the sick nurse arrived, she announced her resolution of sharing the duties, and still keeping up the kind illusion which gave tranquility to the little sufferer.

On the whole she was calm. Now, upon the subsidence of the terrible excitement of the last few weeks, Vanity knew the state of her own heart. The awful end of her father had been a stunning stroke of Fate. Vanity had never known the facts of her father's life. The robberies of which he was suspected were never, with her, matters of positive knowledge. Still, she knew that her father was a bad, unscrupulous man; his conduct made it evident that some terrible danger was ever hanging over his head. His death, appalling as it was, forever hid the worst facts she suspected from discovery or from legal proof.

But Willie Snow had broken poor Vanity's heart. In spite of his weakness, which she could not but despise, she loved him still. In her secret heart she still cherished the dangerous memory of handsome Willie Snow. The secret threads which bind the heart of a woman to a man are inexorable. She thought of his winsome ways, his handsome face, recalled their love scenes, hated her rival.

In the darkened room of sickness, with penitential hand, Vanity Hardware talked thus with herself:

"I have exposed myself to fearful danger; if my life is sacrificed, shall I much regret it? But if I survive, and leave this room with beauty unimpaired—then, Mistress Nancy Snow, beware! You stole my lover from me. I shall repay you. I know my power. I shall steal your husband from you. Then tear your hair as I tore mine, and sob and cry for death as under your cruel hands, I sobbed and raved and cried! If I am not to make Willie my own—why, here I have exposed myself to danger—let me be struck down; but if I come forth hence unhurt, then I shall tear my life as my own. Willie! Willie! by your weak, impulsive nature and by my beauty you shall yet be mine! After that, come what may!"

From the hour she took this resolution, all her fear of infection or of death was gone. She even courted danger. There was her fatalism again. "Dare anything; give Fate every chance of wrecking your scheme; and if you pass unscathed, then call your life—call Willie's life—your own!" So she went about her self-imposed task no longer with the tenderness of her first impulse, but with a stony calmness, under which lay a secret sense of approaching triumph.

Time went by. The attack of smallpox was not severe, and the child soon began to mend. Vanity in the dark room still played her part of mother, and the child would never be still unless her "mother" was at hand. She grew fond of her little charge. The child was the most patient of sufferers; would whisper "Thank you, mamma," with grace and prettiness every time she was tended; Vanity began to feel a new affection in her breast, a tenderness for this little child.

Had this story been narrated in the shape of a comedy, a pretty scene might have been arranged here. A well-ordered flower garden, toward the end of October, in a genial year when summer lingered long. In the midst of the garden a large, low house, with a long veranda in front, and above the veranda a balcony. Maud Neville standing below, talking with Vanity Hardware in half whispers, lest by any chance the small ears inside should hear.

If Maud Neville's husband was proud of her looks this was not to be wondered at. As to Vanity, she had never looked half so lovely. Her recent illness had left a transparency in her complexion, and her eyes shone with softness and brilliancy. The scene is not yet complete. Besides these two pretty women, a third figure often appears. Tom Pembroke liked a morning cigar, and his habit had been to smoke it while walking in the kitchen garden. All of a sudden Tom took a fancy to the flower garden. So sure as Maud began to talk with Vanity about the sick child, so sure would Tom be seen idling round the garden with his cigar, and taking an opportunity of raising his hat to Vanity, whom everybody there treated as a person of no account. Maud felt that she must warn her brother to be careful. She loved her brother above every human creature except her husband and her children; but still Maud knew what men are, and she was a shrewd woman, who always had her say. She determined to tell Tom plainly that this sort of thing would never do.

(To be continued.)

WHIPPED THE WRONG BOY.

But the Old Gentleman Earned the Applause of the Ladies.

He was one of the oldest commercial travelers in Texas, and resides in Houston. He was out taking in Children's Day and the boat races. Late in the evening he boarded a car to go to town. There were twenty-one passengers and one small boy in that car. As it turned into Washington Street a couple of ladies filed in, and one by one the passengers rose and gave up their seats. By the time the car reached the Grand Central Depot there were twenty-two ladies, one large old gentleman and the small boy seated, while a row of able-bodied Houstonians developed their muscles by hanging from the ends of straps. The old commercial traveler seemed to be watching the boy, but the small boy was not watching the commercial traveler. At the market square two more ladies boarded the car and reached for straps. The old man was instantly rose, and with a courtesy bow surrendered his seat. Then he looked around for a seat for the other lady, and his eyes fell on the small boy, still seated and whistling to himself. A pained expression spread over the old man's face, and a startled gasp quickened on the boy's features as a large, firm hand reached his arm and a pained voice said: "John, get up at once and give your seat to the lady! Great goodness! That I should live to see a boy of mine sitting and whistling while a lady is standing! What will your mother say when I tell her this? John, I'm going to teach you right here to never disgrace my name again!" The small boy listened, open-mouthed, trying to wriggle out of the old man's firm grasp, but found himself suddenly elevated, and face downward, over a broad knee. He had just time to say, "What's your boy?" when there came what is described as one of the grandest, most symmetrical whackings ever administered in this or any other age. During the performance the boy repeated his original statement several times, in several different keys, and then he was stood upon the floor of the car. "He shouldn't lick the boy so if he's no relation of his," remarked the conductor. "I never seen him before," whined the boy. "What?" "What?" said the commercial traveler, "does the young rascal deny his own father?" Then the old man put on his gold specs, and his expression of astonishment was beautiful to see. "Why, bless me," he exclaimed, "why, I thought it was my youngest boy, John. Dear me! I hope I have not inconvenienced you, young man. You'll excuse me, won't you?" "But just then the car had reached Main street, and the boy got off, saying something that sounded like "police." When the old man looked about the car he found everybody smiling, and six ladies arose and quarreled with each other for the privilege of giving him a seat.

Rights of Cities.

The Buffalo Board of Aldermen proposes to spend \$10,000 to test the validity of the 999 years' extension of the Buffalo Street Railway Company. As the Enquirer says: "No pains and money should be spared to test whether a grant of the city of Buffalo to a corporation for thirty years can be extended by the Legislature for nearly a thousand years without any knowledge of our people or our officials." The principle involved is of interest to every city in the country.

THE JOKER'S BUDGET.

TESTS AND YARNS BY FUNNY MEN OF THE PRESS.

No Reason for Haughtiness—Made Light of It—Two Birds With One Stone—An Improvement, Etc., Etc.

Made Light of It.

Mr. Doolley—What do you mean by saying that your father made light of my proposal?

Miss Giggles—Well, he did. He used it to ignite his cigar with.—Detroit Free Press.

An Improvement.

Professor (reading)—"Dropping the reins, Mr. Flood assisted his wife from the carriage, and together they entered the store." Can any little boy improve upon this sentence?

Bright Pupil—The reins descended and the Floods came.—Life.

Would Expect Him.

Watts—So you don't look on young Sharpe as a coming man, don't you?

Potts—I would if I were in charge of the penitentiary.—Indianapolis Journal.

Orpheus and Morpheus.

Miggs—Your husband is a great lover of music, isn't he?

Mrs. Diggs—Yes, indeed. I have seen him get up in the middle of the night and try to compose.

Miggs—What?

Mrs. Diggs—The baby.

The Influence of Food.

"I am so fond of candy," said Miss Kittish to Mr. Goslin.

"That's what makes you so sweet, doncher know?"

"You must believe, then, that food has an important effect on a person's characteristics."

"I do."

"What a quantity of noodle soup you have consumed, Mr. Goslin."

In 19—

"Do you know?"

He blushed guilty, then hid his face behind his fan.

"This is Leap Year, and I am half tempted to take advantage of one of its privileges?"

Miss Bloomernew had been paying him attention for some time without coming to the point. Now, however, the slight hint was sufficient.—Puck.

A Little Knowledge.

First Small Boy—What is filthy lucre?

Second ditto (who reads the newspapers)—Why, money with microbes on it, of course.

Changing the Name.

"John," she said, rather sternly, "the coal bin is empty."

"Yes," was the disconsolate reply, "it's that way most of the time. It's never of use in any immediate emergency. I'm going to change its name, and call it a coal-bas-bess."—Washington Star.

The Reason.

Pastor—Do you ever play with little bad boys, Johnnie?

Johnnie—Yes, sir.

Pastor—I'm surprised, Johnnie! Why don't you play with good little boys?

Johnnie—Their mamma's won't let 'em.

Wise Precaution.

Maude—Isn't that new process of photographing through solid substances wonderful? How I do wish I could get a photograph of Algy's brain!

Belle—Why, do you think there is anything serious the matter with his brain?

Maude—No, but I want to be sure he has one, you know.—Detroit Free Press.

Until.

"How has Bluffton been doing?" asked the man who had been away from his native community for some time.

"Well, he has made a great deal of money, but—"

"Getting along well, is he?"

"Well, he seemed to get along first-rate until he tried to pass some of it."

Two Birds With One Stone.

"Molly, what shall I get you for your birthday—a doll or some candy?" asked a Texas mother of her pet.

Molly was silent for a few moments, and then a happy thought struck her.

"Get me a doll—one of those candy dolls that I can suck."—Texas Siftings.

Philosophy on the Cable.

In the car:

"Do you believe in the greatest good to the greatest number?"

"Well, yes."

"Then don't try to sit down on this side—eleven of us in this row have comfortable room now, but if you sit down, twelve of us will be crowded."—Chicago Record.

Popular Women.

Miss Longprue—Why, of course, Helen of Troy was beautiful. Do you suppose there would have been a twenty-year war over her if she had not been beautiful?

Mr. Shortcath (forgetting himself)—Oh, I don't know. May be she was rich.—New York Weekly.

No Reason for Haughtiness.

Editor—We won't print any such stuff as that.

Contributor—Well, you needn't be so haughty about it. You're not the only one that won't print it.—Pearson's Weekly.

Going Down.

De Hote—Yes, Brown is going down hill. Saw him in very tough company last night.

De Blote—Dear, dear! Is it possible? Where?

De Hote—Talking to a steak at the Cafe Rosbif.—New York Press.

An Instance.

"Moral courage," said the teacher, "is the courage that makes a boy do what he thinks is right, regardless of the jeers of his companions."

"Then," said Willie, "if a feller has candy and eats all himself, and ain't"

A Generous Offer.

"Your money or your life!" shouted

the footpad, with more brusquerie than is permitted in social circles where diamonds are worn.

"Permit me," said the gentlemanly book agent, opening his valise, "to offer you in lieu of my insignificant existence this calf, bound, gilt-edged, hand-tooled 'Life of Napoleon' in three volumes, payable on the instalment plan. Make your own terms; we never disappoint a subscriber, and if—"

He found himself alone.—Indianapolis Journal.

Fifteen blazed the lights in the Bong-tong restaurant.

"Hallo, Bardsley," called Dumley, as he sat down at the next table; "been waiting long?"

Bardsley shook his head morosely.

"Half an hour," he answered in a voice of gloom.

"That so?" continued Dumley; "what's your order?"

"Two eggs, boiled four minutes."—Rockland Tribune.

Hardened.

"I just saw a man slip on a banana peel, and he came up smiling and never said an unpleasant word."

"I guess he must be learning to ride a bike."—Puck.

THE FIVE-FINGERED ORANGE.

One of the Rarest Plants in the World, and It Wears Gloves.

One of the rarest plants in the world is the five-fingered orange. The Japanese who, as well as the people of China, makes a specialty of cultivating ornamental curiosities in the vegetable world, consider this one of the most remarkable, and value it accordingly. But a single plant, which has been purchased and brought to San Francisco, where it now is, has, it is believed, ever left Japan.

The plant that bears the extraordinary fruit is an eccentric member of the vegetable kingdom. It is a dwarfish tree, which when fully grown does not average more than five or at most six feet in height, and is crooked enough to have been planted in the garden of the crooked man spoken of by Mother Goose:

"Who walked a crooked mile,
And found a crooked shillix,
Against a crooked stile,
He bought a crooked knife,
That caught a crooked mouse,
And they all lived together
In a crooked little house."

For a crooked plant does not exist. The gnarled trunk is tangled up with twisted branches, that seem never to have fully made up their minds which way to go, so that it would indeed be a difficult task to find two consecutive inches in the whole tree whose lines of direction are the same. The consequence of this is that the plant, which if it could be straightened out, would be at least twice as tall, is as broad as it is high. As fitting its cross-grained character, it has on hand hidden under its leaves and located in the most unexpected places, an unstinted supply of long, tough, needle-pointed thorns that understand their business thoroughly.

But all such little unpleasant peculiarities on the part of the five-fingered Japanese tree may well be forgotten when it is seen in July, covered with its beautiful blossoms, like those of an ordinary orange tree, but tinted with a beautiful pink blush of color and exhaling a most delicate and delicious perfume, or later in the season, when its fruit has ripened, and it looks as if it was hung about with great yellow gloves. These gloves are so redolent of the same perfume that scents the blossoms that the odor can be recognized a full mile from where the oranges are growing. On close examination, however, the fruit proves to be a human hand more than does any glove, a lean, slender-fingered yellow Chinese hand, with thumb and forefingers complete, each finger tipped with the long nail, thought so stylish in China, hard, pointed and claw-like, extending a goodly length beyond the ends of the digits. The hand is partly opened, the fingers curved a little upward, toward the palm, and the fruit itself very large, especially in proportion to the size of the tree that bears it, often reaching, when full grown, ten inches measuring from the wrist to the end of the middle finger, including the nail. Supports are always necessary, or the weight of the orange would break the branch upon which it grows. The contour of the hand exactly represents that of a human being, the proportional length of the several fingers and the thumb are correct, and even the cords on the back of the hand of a rather emaciated person are represented by the divisions of the fingers that can be traced from the point where they separate to the wrist.

The fruit, though exhaling so delightful a perfume, is not edible, as it is not properly an orange at all, but belongs to the orange oranges, of the Macura, no member of which bears fruit that can be eaten.

Curious Cuban Forts.

The most invulnerable and curious of all the forts erected in this part of Cuba says a letter in the Philadelphia Times, are made of old steam boilers.

At every factory of any age there were a number of worn out boilers which had been thrown aside. Each was about thirty feet long and six feet in diameter, and made of steel 5-8 to 3-4 of an inch thick. These were taken in hand at the machine shops, the braces and heads were knocked out and a doorway and loopholes cut in them. They were then carted to the top of knolls and set up on end and braced in place with railroad iron. Three floors were put in each, and a ladder was hung against the inside of the shell as a means of communication from top to bottom. These novel forts are so secure when the steel door is once closed upon the garrison that some of the planters have lost confidence in them for outposts.