

"Some Say"; Neighbours in Cyrus

Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards



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Title: "Some Say"
Neighbours in Cyrus

Author: Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards

Release Date: November 13, 2008 [EBook #27251]

Language: English

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"SOME SAY"



NEIGHBOURS IN CYRUS

BY

LAURA E. RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN JANUARY," "MELODY," "QUEEN HILDEGARDE,"
"FIVE-MINUTE STORIES," "WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE,"
"NARCISSA," "MARIE," "NAUTILUS," ETC.

TWELFTH THOUSAND

BOSTON

DANA ESTES & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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Colonial Press:

C. H. Simonds & Co., Boston, Mass., U.S.A.
Electrotyped by Geo. C. Scott & Sons

"SOME SAY"

TO MY
Dear Sister,
FLORENCE HOWE HALL,
THIS VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

"SOME SAY."
Part I.
Part II.
NEIGHBOURS IN CYRUS

"SOME SAY."

Part I.

"And some say, she expects to get him married to Rose Ellen before the year's out!"

"I want to know if she does!"

"Her sister married a minister, and her father was a deacon, so mebbe she thinks she's got a master-key to the Kingdom. But I don't feel so sure of her gettin' this minister for Rose Ellen. Some say he's so wropped up in his garden truck that he don't know a gal from a gooseberry bush. He! he!"

The shrill cackle was answered by a slow, unctuous chuckle, as of a fat and wheezy person; then a door was closed, and silence fell.

The minister looked up apprehensively; his fair face was flushed, and his mild, blue eyes looked troubled. He gazed at the broad back of his landlady, as she stood dusting, with minute care, the china ornaments on the mantelpiece; but her back gave no sign. He coughed once or twice; he said, "Mrs. Mellen!" tentatively, first low, then in his ordinary voice, but there was no reply. Was Mrs. Mellen deaf? he had not noticed it before. He pondered distressfully for a few moments; then dropped his eyes, and the book swallowed him again. Yet the sting remained, for when presently the figure at the mantelpiece turned round, he looked up hastily, and flushed again as he met his hostess' gaze, calm and untroubled as a summer pool.

"There, sir!" said Mrs. Mellen, cheerfully. "I guess that's done to suit. Is there anything more I can do for you before I go?"

The minister's mind hovered between two perplexities; a glance at the book before him decided their relative importance.

"Have you ever noticed, Mrs. Mellen, whether woodcocks are more apt to fly on moonshiny nights, as White assures us?"

"Woodbox?" said Mrs. Mellen. "Why, yes, sir, it's handy by; and when there's no moon, the lantern always hangs in the porch. But I'll see that Si Jones keeps it full up, after this."

Decidedly, the good woman was deaf, and she had not heard. Could those harpies be right? If any such idea as they suggested were actually in his hostess' mind, he must go away, for his work must not be interfered with, and he must not encourage hopes,—the minister blushed again, and glanced around to see if any one could see him.

But he was so comfortable here, and Miss Mellen was so intelligent, so helpful; and this seemed the ideal spot on which to compile his New England "Selborne."

He sighed, and thought of the woodcock again. Why should the bird prefer a moonshiny night? Was it likely that the creature had any appreciation of the beauties of nature? Shakespeare uses the woodcock as a simile of folly, to express a person without brains. Ha!

The door opened, and Rose Ellen came in, her eyes shining with pleasure, her hands full of gold and green.

"I've found the 'Squarrosa,' Mr. Lindsay!" she announced. "See, this is it, surely!"

The minister rose, and inspected the flowers delightedly. "This is it, surely!" he repeated. "Stem stout, hairy above; leaves large, oblong, or the lower spatulate-oval, and tapering into a marginal petiole, serrate veiny; heads numerous; seeds obtuse or acute; disk-flowers, 16 x 24. This is, indeed, a treasure, for Gray calls it 'rare in New England.' I congratulate you, Miss Mellen."

"Late, sir?" said Mrs. Mellen, calmly. "Oh, no, 't isn't hardly five o'clock yet. Still, 'tis time for me to be thinkin' of gettin' supper."

"Don't you want I should make some biscuit for supper, mother?" asked Rose Ellen, coming out of her rapt contemplation of the goldenrod that Gray condescended to call rare, he to whom all things were common.

Her mother made no answer.

"Don't you want I should make a pan of biscuit?" Rose Ellen repeated. Still there was no reply, and the girl turned to look at her mother in some alarm.

"Why, mother, what is the matter? why don't you answer me?"

"Your mother's deafness," the minister put in, hurriedly, "seems suddenly increased: probably a cold,—"

"Was you speakin' to me, Rose Ellen?" said Mrs. Mellen.

"Why, yes!" said the girl, in distress.

"Why, mother, how did you get this cold? you seemed all right when I went out."

"Gettin' old!" cried Mrs. Mellen. "'Tis nothin' of the sort, Rose Ellen! I've took a cold, I shouldn't wonder. I went out without my shawl just for a minute. I expect 'twas careless, but there! life is too short to be thinkin' all the time about the flesh, 'specially when there's as much of it as I have. I've ben expectin' I should grow hard of hearin', though, these two years past. The Bowlers do, you know, Rose Ellen, 'long about middle life. There was your Uncle Lihu. I can hear him snort now, sittin' in his chair, like a pig for all the world, and with no idea he was makin' a sound."

"But it's come on so sudden!" cried Rose Ellen, in distress.

"That's Bowler!" said her mother. "Bowler for all the world! They take things suddin, whether it's hoarsin' up, or breakin' out, or what it is. There! you've heard me tell how my Aunt Phœbe 'Lizabeth come out with spots all over her face, when she was standin' up to be married. Chicken-pox it was, and they never knew where she got it; but my grand'ther said 'twas pure Bowler, wherever it come from."

She gazed placidly at her daughter's troubled face; then, patting her with her broad hand, pushed her gently out of the room before her.

"Mr. Lindsay's heard enough of my bein' hard of hearin', I expect," she said, cheerfully, as they passed into the kitchen.

"Don't you fret, Rose Ellen! You won't have to get a fog-horn yet awhile. I don't know but it would be a good plan for you to mix up a mess o' biscuit, if you felt to: Mr. Lindsay likes your biscuit real well, I heard him say so."

"That's what I was going to do," said Rose Ellen, still depressed. "I wish't you'd see the doctor, mother. I don't believe but he could help your hearing, if you take it before it's got settled on you."

"Well, I won't, certain!" said Mrs. Mellen. "The idea, strong and well as I be! Bowler blood's comin' out, that's all; and the only wonder is it hasn't come out before."

All that day, and the next, the minister did not seem like himself. He was no more absent-minded than usual, perhaps,—that could hardly be. But he was grave and troubled, and the usual happy laugh did not come when Rose Ellen checked him gently as he was about to put pepper into his tea. Several times he seemed about to speak: his eye dwelt anxiously on the cream-jug, in which he seemed to be seeking inspiration; but each time his heart failed him, and he relapsed with a sigh into his melancholy reverie.

Rose Ellen was silent, too, and the burden of the talk fell on her mother. At supper on the second day, midway between the ham and the griddle-cakes, Mrs. Mellen announced:

"Rose Ellen, I expect you'd better go down to Topham to-morrow, and stay a spell with your grandm'ther. She seems to be right poorly, and I expect it'd be a comfort to her to have you with her. I guess you'd better get ready to-night, and Calvin Parks can take you up as he goes along."

Rose Ellen and the minister both looked up with a start, and both flushed, and both opened wide eyes of astonishment.

"Why, mother!" said the girl. "I can't go away and leave you now, with this cold on you."

Her mother did not hear her, so Rose Ellen repeated the words in a clear, high-pitched voice, with a note of anxiety which brought a momentary shade to Mrs. Mellen's smooth brow. The next moment, however, the brow cleared again.

"I guess you'd better go!" she said again. "It'd be a pity if Mr. Lindsay and I couldn't get along for a month or six weeks; and I wrote mother yesterday that you would be up along to-morrow, so she'll be looking for you. I don't like to have mother disappointed of a thing at her age, it gives her the palpitations."

"You—wrote—that I was coming!" repeated Rose Ellen. "And you never told me you was writing, mother? I—I should have liked to have known before you wrote."

"Coat?" said Mrs. Mellen. "Oh, your coat'll do well enough, Rose Ellen. Why, you've only just had it bound new, and new buttons put on. I should take my figured muslin, if I was you, and have Miss Turner look at it and see how you could do it over: she has good ideas, sometimes, and it'd be a little different from what the girls here was doin', maybe. Anyway, I'd take it, and your light sack,

too. 'Twon't do no harm to have 'em gone over a little."

Rose Ellen looked ready to cry, but she kept the tears back resolutely.

"I—don't—want to leave you, with this deafness coming on!" she shouted, her usually soft voice ringing like a bugle across the tea-table.

"There! there! don't you grow foolish," her mother replied, with absolute calm.

"Why, I can hear ye as well as ever, when you raise your voice a mite, like that. I should admire to know why you should stay at home on my account. I suppose I know my way about the house, if I be losin' my hearing just a dite. It isn't going to spoil my cooking, that I can see; and I guess Mr. Lindsay won't make no opposition to your going, for any difference it'll make to him."

Mr. Lindsay, thus appealed to, stammered, and blushed up to his eyes, and stammered again; but finally managed to say, with more or less distinctness, that of course whatever was agreeable to Mrs. and Miss Mellen was agreeable to him, and that he begged not to be considered in any way in the formation of their plans.

"That's just what I was thinking!" said his hostess. "A man don't want no botheration of plans. So that's settled, Rose Ellen."

Rose Ellen knew it was settled. She was a girl of character and resolution, but she had never resisted her mother's will, nor had any one else, so far as she knew. She cried a good deal over her packing, and dropped a tear on her silk waist, the pride of her heart, and was surprised to find that she did not care. "There's no one there to care whether I look nice or not!" she said aloud; and then blushed furiously, and looked around the room, fearfully, to be sure that she was alone.

Early next morning the crack of a whip was heard, and Calvin Parks's voice, shouting cheerfully for his passenger. The minister, razor in hand, peeped between his shutters, and saw Rose Ellen come from the house, wiping her eyes, and looking back, with anxious eyes. A wave of feeling swept through him, and he felt, for the moment, that he hated Mrs. Mellen. He had never hated any one before in his innocent life; while he was pondering on this new and awful sensation, the pale, pretty face had sunk back in the depths of the old red-lined stage, the whip cracked, and Calvin drove away with his prey.

Mrs. Mellen came out on the steps, and looked after the stage. Then, with a

movement singularly swift for so stout a person, she made a few paces down the walk, and, turning, looked up at the windows of the houses on either side of her own. In both houses a figure was leaning from a window, thrown half out over the sill, in an attitude of eager inquiry. At sight of Mrs. Mellen they dodged back, and only a slight waving of curtains betrayed their presence. The good woman folded her arms deliberately, and stood for five minutes, absorbed in the distant landscape; then she turned, and went slowly back to the house.

"There!" she said, as she closed the door behind her. "That'll keep 'em occupied for one while!" and there was infinite content in her tone.

Mr. Lindsay, coming in to breakfast, found his hostess beaming behind the teakettle, placid and cheerful as usual. He still hated her, and found difficulty in replying with alacrity to her remarks on the beauty of the morning.

"I expect you and me'll have a right cozy time together!" she announced. "You no need to put yourself out to talk to me, 'cause I reelly don't seem to be hearing very good; and I won't talk to you, save and except when you feel inclined. I know an elder does love to have a quiet house about him. My sister married a minister, and my father was a deacon himself, so I'm accustomed to the ways of the ministry."

Mr. Lindsay stirred his tea, gloomily. The words recalled to his mind those which had so disturbed him a day or two ago, just when all this queer business of the deafness had come on. He remembered the spiteful tones of the two neighbours, and recalled how the words had hissed in his ears. He had thought of going away himself, lest he should encourage false hopes in the breast of his gentle young friend—or her mother; surely Rose Ellen,—as he said the name to himself, he felt his ears growing pink, and knew that he had not said the name before, even to himself; straightway said it again, to prove the absurdity of something, he was not sure what, and felt his throat dry and hot. Now Rose Ellen herself was gone, and for an indefinite time. She had not gone willingly, of that he was sure; but it was equally evident that her mother had no such thoughts as those two harridans had suggested. He glanced up furtively, to meet a broad, beaming glance, and the question whether he felt feverish any.

"You seem to flush up easy!" said Mrs. Mellen. "I should be careful, if I was you, Mr. Lindsay, and not go messing round ponds and such at this season of the year. It's just this time we commonly look for sickness rising in the air."

Mr. Lindsay stirred his tea again, and sighed. His mind seemed singularly

distracted; and that, too, when the most precious moments of the year were passing. He must put all other matters out of his head, and think only of his great work.

Had the Blackburnian Warbler been seen in this neighbourhood, as he had been told? He could hardly believe in such good fortune. The shy, mistrustful bird, hunting the thickest foliage of the tallest forest trees,—how should his landlady's daughter have seen it when she was seeking for ferns? yet her description had been exactly that of the books: "Upper parts nearly uniform black, with a whitish scapular stripe and a large white patch in the middle of the wing coverts; an oblong patch—" but she had not been positive about the head. No, but she *was* positive as to the bright orange-red on chin, throat, and forepart of the breast, and the three white tail-feathers. Ah! why was she gone? why was she not here to show him the way, as she promised, to the place where she had seen the rare visitor? He might possibly have found the nest, that rare nest which Samuels never saw, which only Audubon had described: "composed externally of different textures, and lined with silky fibres and thin, delicate strips of bark, over which lies a thick bed of feathers and horsehair."

It should be found in a small fork of a tree, should it? five or six feet from the ground, near a brook? well, he might still search, the next time he went out; meanwhile, there were the ferns to analyze, and that curious moss to determine, if might be. "But mosses are almost hopeless!" he said aloud, with an appealing glance across the table, where he was wont to look for sympathy and encouragement.

"Soap dish?" said Mrs. Mellen, with alacrity.

"Well, I don't wonder you ask, Mr. Lindsay. Why, I found it full of frogs' eggs this very morning, and I hove 'em away and scalt it out. It's drying in the sun this minute, and I'll bring it right up to your room directly."

She beamed on him, and left the room. Mr. Lindsay groaned; looked about him for help, but found none, and retired, groaning, to his study.



Part II.

The minister had had a delightful but exhausting afternoon. He had gone to look for the nest of a marsh-hen, which he had some reason to think might be in a certain swamp, about five miles from the village. He did not find the nest, but he found plenty of other things: his pockets bulged with mosses and roots, his hat was wound with a curious vine that might possibly be *Clematis Verticillaris*, and both hands were filled with specimens of every conceivable kind. Incidentally the mosquitoes and black flies had found him: his face was purple, and, like that of the lady at the Brick Lane Branch tea-party, "swellin' wisely;" and blood was trickling down his well-shaped nose from a bramble-scratch. He had fallen down once or twice in the bog, with results to his clothes; and altogether he presented a singular figure to the view of his parishioners as he strode hastily through the street. Heads were thrust out of windows, staid eyes rolled in horror, but the minister saw nothing. He was tired, and absorbed in his new possessions. It was good to sit down in his study, and spread his treasures out on the broad table, and gloat over them. A clump of damp moss rested quietly on his new sermon, "The Slough of Despond," but he took no note. He was looking for a place to put this curious little lizard in, and after anxious thought selected the gilt celluloid box, lined with pink satin, which the Mission Circle had given him on Christmas for his collars and cuffs. He felt, vaguely, that it was not the right place for the lizard, but there seemed to be nothing else in reach,—except the flutter-work pen-box, and Rose Ellen had made that for him. Ah! if Rose Ellen were here now, how much she could help him! it was so much easier for two to analyze than one. He at the microscope, and Rose Ellen corroborating, correcting from the textbook,—it was a perfect arrangement.

The minister sighed heavily. Mrs. Mellen brought in his tea, for it was Wednesday evening, and he preferred an early cup of tea, and a modest supper after the meeting. Food distracted his mind, he was apt to say, from thought, a statement which his landlady treated with indulgent contempt, as she had never known him to remark the difference between "riz" bread and the soda article.

She set the cup down before him, and he promptly dipped a fern root into it; then started back with a cry of dismay.

"Well indeed, sir!" said Mrs. Mellen, "I should think so, truly! What did you do

that for, and spoil your tea?"

"The—tea—a—that is, it is of no consequence about the tea!" said Mr. Lindsay, hastily.

"I fear I have injured the root. I thought it was water. Dear! dear! Miss Mellen was in the habit of bringing me a glass of water when I brought plants home."

Mrs. Mellen said nothing, but brought the water, and a fresh cup of tea; but Mr. Lindsay had fallen into the depths of the moss, and took no notice of either.

She left the room, but presently returned, knitting in hand, and stood, unnoticed, in the doorway, glancing from time to time at the minister. He certainly was "a sight to behold," as she said to herself. She may have thought other things beside, but her face gave no sign. Presently the bell began to ring for Wednesday evening meeting. Mrs. Mellen glanced again at the minister, but he heard nothing. The botany was open before him, and he was muttering strange words that sounded like witch-talk.

"Stamens six, hypogenous! anthers introrse! capsule cartilaginous, loculicidally three-valved, scurfy-leaved epiphytic!" What did it all mean? A slow flush crept over the woman's broad, placid face; her eyelids quivered, her eye roamed restlessly about the room. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, and breathed heavily, as if in distress; and still her eyes came back to the slender figure in the great chair, bent in absorbed interest over the table.

Ding! dong! ding! the notes came dropping through the air, clear and resonant. Even a deaf person might hear them, perhaps. Mrs. Mellen was evidently struggling with herself. Once she opened her lips as if to speak; once she stepped forward with outstretched hand, as if to shake the man into wakefulness and attention; but she did not speak, and her hand dropped again; and presently the bell stopped, and Sophronia Mellen went away to her sitting-room, hanging her head.

Half an hour later there was knocking at the door, and the sound of many voices, anxious voices, pitched high and loud, on account of Mrs. Mellen's deafness.

"How's Mr. Lindsay? When was he took sick? Have ye had the doctor?"

"Do you think it's ketchin', Mis' Mellen? Think of all the young children in this parish, if anythin' should get the rounds! My! it's awful!"

"How does he look? Some say he was purple in the face when they see him coming home through the street. Most everybody did see him, and he was a sight! Apoplexy, most likely!"

"Has he ever had fits, think? he don't look fitty, but you never can tell."

"Have ye sent for his folks? You'd feel better to, I sh'd think, if he's taken; some say he has a mother rollin' in wealth, down Brunswick way."

"Well, some say he ain't nothin' of the sort. Christiana Bean saw an aunt of his once, and she hadn't flesh enough on her to bait a mouse-trap with, Christiana said so."

"Does he know you, Mis' Mellen? it's awful to see folks out of their heads; I don't know how any one kin bear to see it; you'd better let me come in and spell you a bit; you look clean tuckered out with the fright you've had."

Mrs. Mellen stood and looked quietly at the crowd of "members" that surged and cackled about her.

"I could hear better if one'd speak at a time!" she said, mildly.

"Did you want to see Elder Lindsay? it—it must be gettin' near meetin'-time, isn't it?"

"Meetin'-time! meetin's over, and Mr. Lindsay never come nigh. Do you mean to say he ain't sick? do you mean to say—"

"What *do* you mean to say, Mis' Mellen?"

Mrs. Mellen held the door in her hand, and still gazed quietly at the excited throng. At length,—

"Whatever's the matter with Mr. Lindsay," she said, in clear incisive tones, "I ain't going to let in no lunatic asylum to drive him clean out of his mind. Deacon Strong and Deacon Todd, if you'll step this way, I presume Mr. Lindsay'll be pleased to see you. And if the rest of you 'ud go home quiet, mebber it might seem more consistent. There has been a meetin', you say? the Baptists will be just about comin' out now."

An hour later, the two deacons were taking their leave of Mr. Lindsay. They stood, hat in hand, and were looking at the young man with pitying eyes. They were elderly men, of kind disposition.

"Well, Mr. Lindsay," Mr. Todd was saying; "I guess we've said about all there is to say. Of course 'twas a pity, and such things make talk; but 'twon't occur again, I dare say. Some say—"

"It *may* occur again," cried the young minister. He was sitting with his head in his hand, and despair in his face.

"It may occur again! I seem to have no mind, no memory! I am unfit to be a minister of the Christian Church. My brethren, what shall I do?"

The elder men exchanged glances: then Deacon Strong stepped forward and laid his hands on the young man's shoulder, for he loved him.

"Mr. Lindsay," he said, kindly, "so far as I can see, there's only one thing the matter with you; you want a wife!"

"A wife!" repeated Charles Lindsay. His tone suggested that he had never heard of the article.

"A wife!" the deacon said again, with emphasis; and his fellow deacon nodded assent.

"A sensible, clever young woman, who will help you in parish matters, and be a comfort to you in every way,—a—hem! yes, in every way." The deacon reddened through his beard, and glanced at Deacon Todd; but the latter was a kind man, and knew Mrs. Strong, and gazed out of the window.

"And—and tell you when it was time for meeting. I don't know as you'd have to look more'n a hundred miles for the very young woman that would make the right kind of helpmeet for you, but you know best about that. Anyway, Mr. Lindsay, it is not good for man to be alone, we have Scripture for that: and it's quite evident that it's particularly bad for you to be alone, with your—a—your love of nature" (the deacon caught sight of the lizard, peering disconsolately out of the gilt celluloid box, and brought his remarks to a hasty conclusion). "And so we'll be going, Mr. Lindsay, and don't you fret about to-night's meeting, for we'll make it all right."

Mr. Lindsay bowed them out, with vague thanks, and muttered expressions of regret. He hardly heard their adieux; the words that were saying themselves over and over in his head were,—

"You want a wife!"

Did he want a wife? Was that what was the matter with him? Was that why he went about all day and every day, these last weeks, feeling as if half of him were asleep? He had always been a strong advocate of the celibacy of the clergy, as far as his own case went. Nothing, he had always assured himself, should ever come between him and his work. A wife would be a perpetual distraction: she would want money, and amusement, and a thousand things that he never thought about; and she would interfere with his sermons, and with his collections, and—and altogether, he would never marry. But now,—

And what was it that happened only the other day, here in the village? A man and his wife had been quarrelling, to the scandal of the whole congregation. They were an elderly couple, and when it came to smashing crockery and emptying pails of water over each other, the minister felt it his duty to interfere. So he called on the wife, intending to reason with her first alone, and then, when she was softened and convinced, to call in the husband and reconcile them, and perhaps pray with them, since both were "members." But before he had spoken a dozen of his well-arranged and logical sentences, he was interrupted by loud and tearful outcries.

The lady never thought it would come to this, no, never! Some thought she had enough to bear without this, but she knew how to submit to the will of Providence, and no one should say she struv nor hollered. She knew what was due to a minister, even if he was only just in pants; she only hoped Mr. Lindsay wouldn't see fit to say anything to her husband. Take Reuben Meecher when he was roused, and tigers was tame by him: and if he should know that his wife was spoke to so, by them as wasn't born or thought of when they was married, and nobody couldn't say but they had lived respectable for forty years, and now to come to this! The lady was well used to ministers, and some of the most aged in the country, and she knew what was due to them; but for her part, she thought 'twas well for ministers, as well as others, to speak of what they'd had exper'ence in, and then there would be no feeling!

The visit was not a success, nor did it cheer the minister to hear the old couple chuckling to each other as he went sadly away, and to feel that they were laughing at him.

But he was very humble, and he laid the spiteful words to heart.

What did he know? What had he to say to his people, when it came to the real, terrible things of life? What had he had in his whole life, save kindness and a

sheltered home, and then study, and a little divinity, and a little science? He sat and gazed at the image of himself in his mind's glass, and found it a gibbering phantom, with emptiness where should be eyes, and dry dust where should be living waters.

As he sat thus sadly pondering, the sound of voices struck upon his ear. The window was open, and now that his mind was awake, there was no question of his hearing, when the two next-door neighbours leaned out of their back windows, across Mrs. Mellen's back yard. He had grown to loathe the sound of those two voices, the shrill cackling one, and the fat chuckle that was even more hateful. What were they saying now?

"You don't tell me she wants to git him for herself? speak jest a dite louder! She can't hear ye, and he's so muddled up he never heard the bell for meetin', some say; but there's others think he'd ben drinkin', and Deacon Strong and Deacon Todd jest leagued together with Sophrony Mellen to hide it. He was black in the face when he came home, and reelin' in his walk, for I see him with these eyes."

Charles Lindsay started as if stung by a venomous snake. He put out his hand to the window, but now the sharp voice broke in, anxious to have its turn.

"Well, I shouldn't be a mite surprised if 'twas so, Mis' Bean, and you've had experience, I'm sure, in such matters, after what you suffered with Mr. Bean. But what I was sayin', some do say Phrony Mellen's bound to have the minister for herself, and that's why she sent Rose Ellen off, traipsin' way down to Tupham, when her grandma'am don't need her no more'n a toad needs a tail."

"I want to know if they say that!" replied Mrs. Bean. "But you know, some say Rose Ellen's got a beau down to Tupham, and that's why she went off without askin' leave or license, and her ma deaf and all. I see her go myself, and she went off early in the mornin', and if ever I see a person what you may call slink away secret, like she'd done somethin' to be 'shamed of, 'twas that girl. *She* knew what she was goin' for, well enough. Rose Ellen ain't no fool, for all she's as smooth as baked custard. Now you mark my words, Mis' Peake,—"

At this moment, the back door opened with a loud clang. Mrs. Mellen stood on the doorstep, and her eyes were very bright. She said nothing, but gazed calmly up and down the yard, as if considering the beauty of the night. Then, after a few minutes, she turned and scrutinized her neighbours' windows. Nothing was to be seen, only a white muslin curtain waved gently in the moonlight: nothing was to be heard, only a faint rustle, probably of the same curtain.

"It's an elegant night!" said Mrs. Mellen, aloud. "I thought I heard voices, but my hearin' does play me such tricks, these days."

Her calm, sensible voice fell like balm on the distracted ears of the minister. He was soothed, he knew not why. The horrors that those harpies suggested,—could there be truth in them? Rose Ellen with a—his mind refused to frame the detestable word! Was there anything true in the world? Was it all scandal and hatefulness and untruth?

He rose and paced his study in anguish of mind, but his ears were still awake,—he thought he never should regain the joy of losing himself,—and now another sound came to them, the sound of wheels. Why did his heart stop, and then beat violently? What was there in the sound of wheels? It was the late stage, of course, and Calvin Parks was driving fast, as usual, to get to his home, five miles away, before ten o'clock at night. But that stage came from Tupham, and Tupham meant Rose Ellen. Rose Ellen, who was as smooth as baked custard, and who had a—the wheels were slacking; the steady beat of the horses' feet stopped; the stage had paused at the Widow Mellen's door.

"Here we be!" said Calvin Parks. "Take my hand, Rosy! so, thar she goes! Hope ye'll find yer ma right smart! Give her my respects and tell her,—wal, I swan!"

For the door flew open, and out ran the minister, torn and stained and covered with dust, and caught Rose Ellen by both hands and drew her almost forcibly into the house.

"Mother!" cried the girl. "How is she? I—I got so scared, not hearing from her, I couldn't stay another day, Mr. Lindsay!"

"Oh,—your mother?" said Mr. Lindsay, incoherently. "She—a—she seems to be in excellent health, except for her deafness. It is I who am ill, Rose Ellen: very ill, and wanting you more than I could bear!"

"Wanting me?" faltered Rose Ellen, with lips wide, with blue eyes brimming over. "You, Mr. Lindsay, wanting me?"

"Yes, Rose Ellen!" cried the minister. They were still standing in the passage, and he was still holding her hands, and it was quite absurd, only neither of them seemed to realize it.

"I have always wanted you, but I have only just found it out. I cannot live at all without you: I have been only half alive since you went away. I want you for my

own, for always."

"Oh, you can have me!" cried Rose Ellen, and the blue eyes brimmed over altogether with happy shining tears. "Oh, I was yours all the time, only I didn't know you—I didn't know—"

She faltered, and then hurried on. "It—it wasn't only that I was scared about mother, Mr. Lindsay. I couldn't stay away from—oh, some said—some said you were going to be married, and I couldn't bear it, no, I couldn't!"

But when Charles Lindsay heard that, he drew Rose Ellen by both hands into the study, and shut the door. And only the lizard knew what happened next.



It was a month later.

There had been a wedding, the prettiest wedding that the village had ever seen. The whole world seemed turned to roses, and the sweetest rose of all, Rose Ellen Lindsay, had gone away on her husband's arm, and Deacon Strong and Deacon Todd were shaking hands very hard, and blowing peals of joy with their pocket-handkerchiefs. Mrs. Mellen had preserved her usual calm aspect at the wedding, and looked young enough to be her own daughter, "some said," in her gray silk and white straw bonnet. But when it was all over, the wedding party gone, and the neighbours scattered to their homes again, Sophronia Mellen did a strange thing. She went round deliberately, and opened every window of her house. The house stood quite apart, with only the two houses close beside it on either hand, and no others till you came quite into the street itself. She opened every window to its utmost. Then she took a tin pan, and a pair of tongs, and leaned out of the front parlour window, and screamed three times, at the top of her lungs, beating meanwhile with all her might upon the pan. Then she went to the next window, and screamed and banged again, and so on all over the house. There were twenty windows in her house, and by the time she had gone the round, she was crimson and breathless. Nevertheless, she managed to put her last breath into a shriek of such astounding volume that the windows fairly rang. One last defiant clang of the tongs on the tin pan and then she sat down quietly by the back parlour window, and settled herself well behind the curtain, and prepared to enjoy herself thoroughly. "They shall have their fill this time!" she murmured to herself; "and I shall get all the good of it."

For some minutes there was dead silence: the event had been too awful to be treated lightly. At length a rustling was heard, and very cautiously a sharp nose, generously touched with colour, was protruded from the window of the left-hand house.

"Mis' Bean," said the owner of the nose. "Be you there?"

"Well, I should say I was!" was the reply; and Mrs. Bean's fat curls shook nervously out of her window.

"Maria Peake, what do you s'pose this means? Ain't it awful? Why, I've got palpitations to that degree,—don't s'pose there's a robber in the house, do ye? with all them weddin' presents about, 'twould be a dreadful thing! 'Tain't likely he would spare her life, and she tryin' to give the alarm like that! Most likely she's layin' dead this minute, and welterin' in her—"

"Ssssssh!" hissed Mrs. Peake, in a deadly whisper. "Melissa Bean, you won't let a person hear herself think. 'Tain't no robber, I tell ye! She's gone out of her mind, Phrony Mellen has, as sure as you're a breathin' woman!"

"You don't tell me she has!" Mrs. Bean leaned further out, her eyes distended with awful curiosity, her fat lips dropping apart. She was not a pleasant object, the hidden observer thought; but she was no worse than the skinny cabbage-stalk which now stretched itself far out from the opposite window.

"I tell ye," Mrs. Peake hissed, still in that serpent-whisper, the most penetrating sound that ever broke stillness, "She's as crazy as a clo'esline in a gale o' wind. Some say she's wore an onsettled eye for six weeks past, and she glared at me yesterday, when I run in to borry an egg, same as if I was one wild animal and she was another. Ssssh! 'Tis Bowler, I tell ye! They go that way, jest as often as they git a chance! I call it an awful jedgment on Elder Lindsay, bein' married into that family. Some say his mother besought him on her bended knees, but he was clean infatooated. I declare to you, Mis' Bean, I'm terrified most to death, to think of you and me alone here, so near to a ravin' lunatic. I don't think nothin' of robbers, alongside o' madness. She might creep in while you're standin' there,—your house is more handy by than mine, 'count of there bein' no fence, and—"

"Yah! bah! ha! ha! ha! hurrah!" sounded in sharp, clear tones from Mrs. Mellen's window. Two ghastly faces, white with actual terror, gazed at each other for an instant, then disappeared; and immediately after was heard a sound of bolts being driven home, and of heavy furniture being dragged about.

But Mrs. Mellen sat and fanned herself, being somewhat heated, and gazed calmly at the beauty of the prospect.

"I've enjoyed myself real well!" she said. "I couldn't free my mind, not while Rosy and Mr. Lindsay was round; I've had a real good time."

She fanned herself placidly, and then added, addressing the universe in general, with an air of ineffable good will:

"I shouldn't wonder if my hearin' improved, too, kind o' suddin, same as it came on. That's Bowler, too! It's real convenient, bein' a Bowler!"



NEIGHBOURS IN CYRUS



NEIGHBOURS IN CYRUS.

"Hi-Hi!" said Miss Peace, looking out of the window. "It is really raining. Isn't that providential, now?"

"Anne Peace, you are enough to provoke a saint!" replied a peevish voice from the furthest corner of the room. "You and your providences are more than I can stand. What do you mean this time, I *should* like to know? the picnic set for to-day, and every soul in the village lottin' on goin', 'xcept those who *would* like best to go and can't. I've been longin' for these two years to go to a picnic and it's never ben so's I could. And now, jest when I *could* ha' gone, this affliction must needs come to me. And then to have you rejoicin' 'cause it rains!"

The speaker paused for breath, and Miss Peace answered mildly: "I'm real sorry for you, Delia, you know I am; and if the' was any way of getting you to the grove,—but what I was thinking of, you know I couldn't finish Jenny Miller's dress last night, do what I could; and seeing it raining now, thinks I, they'll have to put off the picnic till to-morrow or next day, and then Jennie can go as nice as the rest. She does need a new dress, more than most of the girls who has them. And she's so sweet and pretty, it's a privilege to do for her. That's all I was thinking, Delia."

Mrs. Delia Means sniffed audibly, then she groaned.

"Your leg hurting you?" cried Miss Peace, with ready sympathy.

"Well, I guess you'd think so," was the reply. "If *you* had red-hot needles run into your leg. Not that it's any matter to anybody."

"Hi-hi," said Miss Peace, cheerily. "It's time the bandages was changed, Delia. You rest easy just a minute, and I'll run and fetch the liniment and give you a rub before I put on the new ones."

Mrs. Means remaining alone, it is proper to introduce her to the reader. She and Miss Peace were the rival seamstresses of Cyrus Village; that is, they would have been rivals, if Mrs. Means had had her way; but rivalry was impossible where Anne Peace was one of the parties. She had always maintained stoutly that Delia Means needed work a sight more than she did, having a family, and

her husband so weakly and likely to go off with consumption 'most any time. Many and many a customer had Anne turned from her door, with her pleasant smile, and "I don't hardly know as I could, though I should be pleased to accommodate you; but I presume likely Mis' Means could do it for you. She doos real nice work, and I don't know as she's so much drove just now as I am."

Delia Case had been a schoolmate of Anne Peace's. She was a pretty girl, with a lively sense of her own importance and a chronic taste for a grievance. She had married well, as every one thought, but in these days her husband had lost his health and Delia was obliged to put her shoulder to the wheel. She sewed well, but there was a sigh every time her needle went into the cloth, and a groan when it came out.

"A husband and four children, and have to sew for a living!"—this was the burden of her song; and it had become familiar to her neighbours since David Means had begun to "fail up," as they say in Cyrus.

Anne Peace had always been the faithful friend of "Delia Dumps." (It was Uncle Asy Green who had given her the name which stuck to her through thick and thin—Uncle Asy believed in giving people their due, and thought "Anne made a dreffle fool of herself, foolin' round with that woman at all.") Anne had been her faithful friend, and never allowed people to make fun of her if she were present.

A week before my story opens, when Mrs. Means fell down and broke her leg, just as she was passing Miss Peace's house, the latter lady declared it to be a special privilege.

"I can take care of her," she explained to the doctor, when he expressed regret at being obliged to forbid the sufferer's being moved for some weeks, "just as well as not and better. David isn't fit to have the care of her, and—well, doctor, I can say to you, who know it as well as I do, that Delia mightn't be the best person for David to have round him just now, when he needs cheering up. Then, too, I can do her sewing along with my own, as easy as think; work's slack now, and there's nothing I'm specially drove with. I've been wishing right along that I could do something to help, now that David is so poorly. I'm kin to David, you know, so take it by and large, doctor, it doos seem like a privilege, doesn't it?"

The doctor growled. He was not fond of Mrs. Means.

"If you can get her moved out of Grumble Street and into Thanksgiving Alley," he said, "it'll be a privilege for this village; but you can't do it, Anne. However,

there's no use talking to you, you incorrigible optimist. You're the worst case I ever saw, Anne Peace, and I haven't the smallest hope of curing you. Put the liniment on her leg as I told you, and I'll call in the morning. Good day!"

"My goodness me, what was he saying to you?" Mrs. Means asked as Anne went back into the bedroom. "You've got something that you'll never get well of? Well, Anne Peace, that does seem the cap sheaf on the hull. Heart complaint, I s'pose it is; and what would become of me, if you was to be struck down, as you might be any minute of time, and me helpless here, and a husband and four children at home and he failin' up. You did look dretful gashly round the mouth yisterday, I noticed it at the time, but of course I didn't speak of it. Why, here I should lay, and might starve to death, and you cold on the floor, for all the help I should get." Mrs. Means shed tears, and Anne Peace answered with as near an approach to asperity as her soft voice could command.

"Don't talk foolishness, Delia. I'm not cold yet, nor likely to be. Here, let me 'tend to your leg; it's time I was getting dinner on this minute."

It continued to rain on the picnic day; no uncertain showers, to keep up a chill and fever of fear and hope among the young people, but a good, honest downpour, which everybody past twenty must recognize as being just the thing the country needed. Jenny Miller came in, smiling all over, though she professed herself "real sorry for them as was disappointed." "Tudie Peaslee sat down and cried, when she saw 'twas rainin'," she said, as she prepared to give her dress the final trying-on. "There, Miss Peace. I did try to feel for her, but I just couldn't, seems though. Oh, ain't that handsome? that little puff is too cute for anything! I do think you've been smart, Miss Peace. Not that you ever was anything else."

"You've a real easy figure to fit, Jenny," Miss Peace replied, modestly. "I guess that's half the smartness of it. It doos set good, though, I'm free to think. The styles is real pretty this summer, anyhow. Don't that set good, Delia?"

She turned to Mrs. Means, who was lying on the sofa (they call it a l'unge in Cyrus), watching the trying-on with keenly critical eyes.

"Ye-es," she said. "The back sets good enough, but 'pears to me there's a wrinkle about the neck that I shouldn't like to see in any work of mine. I've always ben too particklar, though; it's time thrown away, but I can't bear to send a thing out 'cept jest as it should be."

"It *don't* wrinkle, Mis' Means!" cried Jenny, indignantly. "Not a mite. I was

turning round to look at the back of the skirt, and that pulled it; there ain't a sign of a wrinkle, Miss Peace, so don't you think there is."

Mrs. Means sniffed, and said something about the change in young folks' manners since she was a girl. "If I'd ha' spoke so to my elders—I won't say betters, for folks ain't thought much of when they have to sew for a livin', with a husband and four children to keer for—I guess I should ha' found it out in pretty quick time."

"Hi-hi!" said Miss Peace, soothingly. "There, Delia, Jenny didn't mean anything. Jenny, I guess I'll have to take you into the bedroom, so's I can pull this skirt out a little further. This room doos get so cluttered with all my things round." She hustled Jenny, swelling like an angry partridge, into the next room, and closed the door carefully.

"You don't want to anger Mis' Means, dear," she said gently, taking the pins out of her mouth for freer speech. "She may be jest a scrap pudgicky now and again, but she's seen trouble, you know, and she doos feel it hard to be laid up, and so many looking to her at home. Turn round, dear, jest a dite—there!"

"I can't help it, Miss Peace," said Jenny. "There's no reason why Mis' Means should speak up and say the neck wrinkled, when anybody can see it sets like a duck's foot in the mud. I don't mind what she says to me, but I ain't goin' to see you put upon, nor yet other folks ain't. I should like to know! and that wrapper she cut for Tудie Peaslee set so bad, you'd think she'd fitted it on the pump in the back yard, Mis' Peaslee said so herself."

"Hi-hi!" cried Anne Peace, softly, with an apprehensive glance toward the door; "don't speak so loud, Jennie. Tудie ain't so easy a form to fit as you, not near. And you say she was real put about, do ye, at the picnic being put off?"

"She was so!" Jenny assented, seeing that the subject was to be changed. "She'd got her basket all packed last night, she made so sure 'twas goin' to be fine to-day. Chicken sandwiches, she had, and baked a whole pan of sponge-drops, jest because some one—you know who—is fond of 'em." Miss Peace nodded sagely, with her mouth full of pins, and would have smiled if she could; "and now they've put it off till Saturday, 'cause the minister can't go before then, and every livin' thing will be spoiled."

"Dear, dear!" cried Miss Anne, her kind face clouding over; "that does seem too bad, don't it? all those nice things! and Tудie makes the best sponge-cakes I ever

eat, pretty nigh."

Jenny smiled, and stretched her hand toward a basket she had brought. "They won't really be wasted, Miss Peace," she said. "Tudie thought you liked 'em, and I've got some of 'em here for you, this very minute. You was to eat 'em for your own supper, Tudie told me to tell you so."

"Well, I do declare, if that isn't thoughtful!" exclaimed Miss Peace, looking much gratified. "Tudie is a sweet girl, I must say. Delia is real fond of cake, and she's been longing for some, but it doos seem as if I couldn't find time to make it, these days."

"I should think not!" cried Jenny (who was something of a pepper-pot, it must be confessed), "I should think not, when you have her to take care of, and her work and yours to do, and all. And, Miss Peace,—Tudie meant the sponge-drops for *you*, every one. She told me so."

"Yes, dear, to be sure she did, and that's why I feel so pleased, just as much as if I had eaten them. But bread *is* better for me, and—why! if she hasn't sent a whole dozen. One, two, three—yes, a dozen, and one over, sure as I stand here. Now, that I call generous. And, I'll tell you what, dearie! Don't say a word, for I wouldn't for worlds have Tudie feel to think I was slighting her, or didn't appreciate her kindness; but—well, I *have* wanted to send some little thing round to that little girl of Josiah Pincher's, that has the measles, and I do suppose she'd be pleased to death with some of these sponge-drops. Hush! don't say a word, Jenny! it would be a real privilege to me, now it would. And you know it isn't that I don't think the world of Tudie, and you, too; now, don't you?"

Jenny protested, half-laughing, and half-crying; for Tudie Peaslee had declared herself ready to bet that Miss Peace would not eat a single one of the sponge-drops, and Jenny had vowed she should. But would she or would she not, before ten minutes were over she had promised to leave the sponge-drops at the Pinchers' door as she went by, for little Geneva. There was no resisting Miss Peace, Tudie was right; but suddenly a bright idea struck Jenny, just as she was putting on her hat and preparing to depart. Seizing one of the sponge-drops, she broke off a bit, and fairly popped it into Miss Peace's mouth, as the good lady was going to speak. "It's broke, now," she cried, in high glee, "it's broke in two, and you can't give it to nobody. Set right down, Miss Peace, and let me feed you, same as I do my canary bird." She pushed the little dressmaker into a chair, and the bits followed each other in such quick succession that Miss Peace could

make no protest beyond a smothered, "Oh, don't ye, dear; now don't! that's enough!—my stars, Jenny, what do you think my mouth's made of?" (Crunch!) "There, dear, there! It is real good—oh, dear! not so fast. I *shall* choke! Tell Tудie—no, dearie, not another morsel!" (Crunch.) "Well, Jenny Miller, I didn't think you would act so, now I didn't."

The sponge-cake was eaten, and Jenny, with a triumphant kiss on the little rosy, withered-apple cheek, popped her head in at the parlour door to cry, "Good day, Mis' Means!" and flew laughing away with her victory and her cakes.

"Well, Anne Peace," was Mrs. Means's greeting, as her hostess came back, looking flushed and guilty, and wiping her lips on her apron, "how you can stand havin' that Miller girl round here passes me. She'd be the death of me, I know that; but it's lucky other folks ain't so feelin' as I am, I always say. Of all the forward, up-standin' tykes ever I see—but there! it ain't to be supposed anybody cares whether I'm sassed or whether I ain't."

Saturday was bright and fair, and Anne Peace stood at the window with a beaming smile, watching the girls troop by on their way to the picnic. She had moved Mrs. Means's sofa out of the corner, so that she could see, too, and there was a face at each window. Miss Peace was a little plump, partridge-like woman, with lovely waving brown hair, and twinkling brown eyes. She had never been a beauty, but people always liked to look at her, and the young people declared she grew prettier every year. Mrs. Means was tall and weedy, with a figure that used to be called willowy, and was now admitted to be lank; her once fair complexion had faded into sallowness, and her light hair had been frizzed till there was little left of it. Her eyebrows had gone up, and the corners of her mouth had gone down, so that her general effect was depressing in the extreme.

"There go Tудie and Jenny!" cried Miss Peace, in delight. "If they ain't a pretty pair, then I never saw one, that's all. Jenny's dress doos set pretty, if I do say it; and after all, it's her in it that makes it look so well. There comes the minister, Delia. Now I'm glad the roses are out so early. He doos so love roses, Mr. Goodnow does. And the honeysuckle is really a sight. Why, this is the first time you have fairly seen the garden, Delia, since you came. Isn't it looking pretty?"

"I never did see how you could have your garden right close 't onto the street that way, Anne," was the reply. "Everybody 't comes by stoppin' and starin', and pokin' their noses through the fence. Look at them boys, now! why, if they ain't smellin' at the roses, the boldfaced brats. Knock at the winder, Anne, and tell 'em

to git out. Shoo! be off with you!" She shook her fist at the window, but, fortunately, could not reach it.

"Hi-hi!" said Anne Peace. "You don't mean that, Delia. What's roses for but to smell? I do count it a privilege, to have folks take pleasure in my garden." She threw up the window, and nodded pleasantly to the children. "Take a rose, sonny, if you like 'em," she said. "Take two or three, there's enough for all. Whose little boys are you?" she added, as the children, in wondering delight, timidly broke off a blossom or two. "Mis' Green's, over to the Corners! Now I want to know! have you grown so 't I didn't know you? and how's your mother? Jest wait half a minute, and I'll send her a little posy. There's some other things besides roses, perhaps she'd like to have a few of."

She darted out, and filled the boys' hands with pinks and mignonette, pansies and geraniums.

It was not a large garden, this of Anne Peace's, but every inch of space was made the most of. The little square and oblong beds lay close to the fence, and from tulip-time to the coming of frost they were ablaze with flowers. Nothing was allowed to straggle, or to take up more than its share of room. The roses were tied firmly to their neat green stakes; the crown-imperials nodded over a spot of ground barely large enough to hold their magnificence; while the phlox and sweet-william actually had to fight for their standing-room.

It was a pleasant sight, at all odd times of the day, to see Miss Peace bending over her flowers, snipping off dead leaves, pruning, and tending, all with loving care.

Many flower-lovers are shy of plucking their favourites, and I recall one rose-fancier, whose gifts, like those of the Greeks, were dreaded by his neighbours, as the petals were always ready to drop before he could make up his mind to cut one of the precious blossoms; but this was not the case with Anne Peace. Dozens of shallow baskets hung in her neat back entry, and they were filled and sent, filled and sent, all summer long, till one would have thought they might almost find their way about alone. It is a positive fact that her baskets were always brought back, "a thing imagination boggles at;" but perhaps this was because the neighbours liked them better full than empty.

"Makin' flowers so cheap," Mrs. Means would say, "seems to take the wuth of 'em away, to my mind; but I'm too feelin', I know that well enough. Anne, she's kind o' callous, and she don't think of things that make me squinch, seem's

though."

Weeks passed on, the broken leg was healed, and Mrs. Means departed to her own house. "I s'pose you'll miss me, Anne," she said, at parting, "I shall you; and you have ben good to me, if 't *has* ben kind o' dull here, so few comin' and goin'." (Miss Peace's was generally the favourite resort of all the young people of the village, and half the old ones, but the "neighbouring" had dropped off, since Mrs. Means had been there.) "Good-by, Anne, and thank you for all you've done. I feel to be glad I've been company for you, livin' alone as you do, with no husband nor nothin' belongin' to you."

"Good-by, Delia," replied Anne Peace, cheerfully. "Don't you fret about me. I'm used to being alone, you know; and it's been a privilege, I'm sure, to do what I could for you, so long as we've been acquainted. My love to David, and don't forget to give him the syrup I put in the bottom of your trunk for him."

"'Twon't do him any good!" cried Mrs. Means, as the wagon drove away, turning her head to shout back at her hostess. "He's bound to die, David is. He'll never see another spring, I tell him, and then I shall be left a widder, with four children and—"

"Oh, gerlang! gerlang, *up!*" shouted Calvin Parks, the stage-driver, whose stock of patience was small; the horse started, and Mrs. Means's wails died away in the distance.

In this instance the predictions of the doleful lady seemed likely to be verified; for David Means continued to "fail up." Always a slight man, he was now mere skin and bone, and his cheerful smile grew pathetic to see. He was a distant cousin of Anne Peace's, and had something of her placid disposition; a mild, serene man, bearing his troubles in silence, finding his happiness in the children whom he loved almost passionately. He had married Delia Case because she was pretty, and because she wanted to marry him; had never known, and would never know, that he might have had a very different kind of wife. Perhaps Anne Peace hardly knew herself that David had been the romance of her life, so quickly had the thought been put away, so earnestly had she hoped for his happiness; but she admitted frankly that she "set by him," and she was devoted to his children.

"Can nothing be done?" she asked the good doctor one day, as they came away together from David's house, leaving Delia shaking her head from the doorsteps. "Can nothing be done, doctor? it doos seem as if I couldn't bear to see David fade away so, and not try anything to stop it."

Doctor Brown shook his head thoughtfully. "I doubt if there's much chance for him, Anne," he said kindly. "David is a good fellow, and if I saw any way—it might be possible, if he could be got off to Florida before cold weather comes on—there is a chance; but I don't suppose it could be managed. He has no means, poor fellow, save what he carries in his name."

"Florida?" said Anne Peace, thoughtfully; and then she straightway forgot the doctor's existence, and hurried off along the street, with head bent and eyes which saw nothing they rested on.

Reaching her home, where all the flowers smiled a bright welcome, unnoticed for once, her first action was to take out of a drawer a little blue book, full of figures, which she studied with ardour. Then she took a clean sheet of paper, and wrote certain words at the top of it; then she got out her best bonnet.

Something very serious was on hand when Miss Peace put on her best bonnet. She had only had it four years, and regarded it still as a sacred object, to be taken out on Sundays and reverently looked at, then put back in its box, and thought about while she tied the strings of the ten-year-old velvet structure, which was quite as good as new. Two weddings had seen the best bonnet in its grandeur, and three funerals; but no bells, either solemn or joyous, summoned her to-day, as she gravely placed the precious bonnet on her head, and surveyed her image with awestruck approval in the small mirror over the mantelpiece.

"It's *dreadful* handsome!" said Miss Peace, softly. "It's too handsome for me, a great sight, but I want to look my best now, if ever I did."

It was at Judge Ransom's door that she rang first; a timid, apologetic ring, as if she knew in advance how busy the judge would be, and how wrong it was of her to intrude on his precious time. But the judge himself opened the door, and was not at all busy, but delighted to have a chance to chat with his old friend, whom he had not seen for a month of Sundays. He made her come in, and put her in the biggest armchair (which swallowed her up so that hardly more than the bonnet was visible), and drew a footstool before her little feet, which dangled helplessly above it; then he took his seat opposite, in another big chair, and said it was a fine day, and then waited, seeing that she had something of importance to say.

Miss Peace's breath came short and quick, and she fingered her reticule nervously. She had not thought it would be quite so dreadful as this. "Judge," she said—and paused, frightened at the sound of her voice, which seemed to echo in a ghostly manner through the big room.

"Well, Miss Peace!" said the judge, kindly. "Well, Anne, what is it? How can I serve you? Speak up, like a good girl. Make believe we are back in the little red schoolhouse again, and you are prompting me in my arithmetic lesson."

Anne Peace laughed and coloured. "You're real kind, judge," she said. "I wanted—'twas only a little matter"—she stopped to clear her throat, feeling the painful red creep up her cheeks, and over her brow, and into her very eyes, it seemed; then she thought of David, and straightway she found courage, and lifted her eyes and spoke out bravely. "David Means, you know, judge; he is failing right along, and it doos seem as if he couldn't last the winter. But Doctor Brown thinks that if he should go to Florida, it might be so 't he could be spared. So—David hasn't means himself, of course, what with his poor health and his large family, and some thought that if we could raise a subscription right here, among the folks that has always known David, it might be so 't he could go. What do you think, judge?"

The judge nodded his head, thoughtfully.

"I don't see why it couldn't be done, Miss Peace," he said, kindly. "David is a good fellow, and has friends wherever he is known; I should think it might very well be done, if the right person takes it up."

"I—I've had no great experience," faltered Anne Peace, looking down, "but I'm kin to David, you know, and as he has no one nearer living, I took it upon myself to carry round a paper and see what I could raise. I came to you first, judge, as you've always been a good friend to David. I've got twenty-five dollars already —"

"I thought you said you came to me first," said the judge, holding out his hand for the paper. "What's this? A friend, twenty-five dollars?"

"Yes," said Anne Peace, breathlessly. "They—they didn't wish their name mentioned—"

"Oh, they didn't, didn't they?" muttered the judge, looking at her over his spectacles. Such a helpless look met his—the look of hopeless innocence trying to deceive and knowing that it was not succeeding—that a sudden dimness came into his own eyes, and he was fain to take off his spectacles and wipe them, just as if he had been looking through them. And through the mist he seemed to see—not Miss Anne Peace, in her best bonnet and her cashmere shawl, but another Anne Peace, a little, brown-eyed, slender maiden, sitting on a brown bench,

looking on with rapture while David Means ate her luncheon.

It was the judge's turn to clear his throat.

"Well, Anne," he said, keeping his eyes on the paper, "this—this unknown friend has set a good example, and I don't see that I can do less than follow it. You may put my name down for twenty-five, too."

"Oh, judge," cried Miss Peace, with shining eyes. "You are too good. I didn't expect, I'm sure—well, you *are* kind!"

"Not at all! not at all!" said the judge, gruffly (and indeed, twenty-five dollars was not so much to him as it was to "them," who had made the first contribution).

"You know I owe David Means something, for licking him when he—"

"Oh, don't, Dan'el—judge, I should say," cried Anne Peace, in confusion. "Don't you be raking up old times. I'm sure I thank you a thousand times, and so will Delia, when she—"

"No, she won't," said the judge. "Tell the truth, Anne Peace! Delia will say I might have given fifty and never missed it. There! I won't distress you, my dear. Good day, and all good luck to you!" and so ended Miss Peace's first call.

With such a beginning, there was no doubt of the success of the subscription. Generally, in Cyrus, people waited to see what Judge Ransom and Lawyer Peters gave to any charity, before making their own contribution. "Judge Ransom has put down five dollars, has he? Well he's wuth so much, and I'm wuth so much. Guess fifty cents will be about the right figger for me:" this is the course of reasoning in Cyrus. But with an unknown friend starting off with twenty-five dollars and Judge Ransom following suit, it became apparent to every one that David Means must go to Florida, whatever happened. The dollar and five-dollar subscriptions poured in rapidly, till, one happy day, Anne Peace stood in her little room and counted the full amount out on the table, and then sat down (it was not her habit to kneel, and she would have thought it too familiar, if not actually popish) and thanked God as she had never found it necessary to thank Him for any of the good things of her own life.

So David Means went to Florida, and his wife and two children went with him. This had been no part of the original plan, but at the bare idea of his going without her, Mrs. Means had raised a shrill cry of protest. "What? David go

down there, and she and the children stay perishing at home? she guessed not. If Florida was good for David, it was good for her, too, and she laid up ever sence spring, as she might say, and with no more outing than a woodchuck in January. Besides, who was to take care of David, she'd like to know? Mis' Porter's folks, who had a place there? She'd like to know if she was to be beholden to Jane Porter's folks for taking care of her lawful husband, and like enough laying him out, for she wasn't one to blind herself, nor yet to set herself against the will of Providence." Doctor Brown stormed and fumed, but Anne Peace begged him to be quiet, and "presumed likely" she could raise enough to cover the expenses for Delia and the two older children. 'Twas right and proper, of course, that his wife should go with him, and David wouldn't have any pleasure in the trip if he hadn't little Janey and Willy along. He did set so by those children, it was a privilege to see them together; he was always one to make of children, David was.

She did raise the extra money, this sweet saint, but she ate no meat for a month, finding it better for her health. Joey and Georgie Means, however, never wanted for their bit of steak at noon, and grew fat and rosy under Miss Peace's kindly roof.

It was a pathetic sight when the sick man took leave of the little group of friends and neighbours that gathered on the platform at the station to bid him farewell. He had lost courage, poor David; perhaps he had not very much to start with, and things had gone hard with him for a long time. He knew he should never see these faces again, this homely, friendly place. He gazed about with wistful eyes, noting every spot in the bare little station. He had known it all by heart, ever since he was a child, for his father had been station-master. He could have built the whole thing over, with his eyes shut, he thought, and now he should never see it again. Yet he was glad to go, in a way, glad to think, at least, that he should die warm, as his wife expressed it, and that his tired eyes were going to look on green and blossoming things, instead of the cold, white beauty which meant winter to him.

He had scarcely ever left Cyrus for more than a day or two; he had a vague idea that it was not creditable to go to the other world, and be able to give so little account of this one. Now, at least, he should be able to look his seafaring grandfather and his roving uncle in the face, if so be he should happen to meet them "over yender."

He stood on the platform with his youngest child clasped close in his arms. This was the hardest part of all, to leave the children. His wife and the two older children had already taken their places in the car, and the good-natured conductor stood with his watch in his hand, willing to give David every second he conscientiously could. He came from East Cyrus himself, and was a family man.

Anne Peace stood close by, holding fast the hand of little Joey. Strange sounds were in her ears, which she did not recognize as the beating of her own heart; she kept looking over her shoulder, to see what was coming. Her eyes never left David's face, but they were hopeful, even cheerful eyes. She thought he would come back much better, perhaps quite well. Doctor had said there was a chance, and she did hear great things of Florida.

And now the conductor put up his watch and hardened his heart. "Come, David, better step inside now. All aboard!"

"Good-by, David!" cried Doctor Brown, waving a friendly hand.

"Good-by, David!" cried Anne Peace, lifting little Joey in her arms, though he was far too heavy for her.

"Look at father, Joey dear, throw a kiss to father; good-by, good-by, David!" The train moved out of the station, but David Means, his eyes fixed on the faces of his children, had forgotten to look at Anne Peace.

Winter came, and a bitter winter it was. No one in Cyrus could remember such steady cold, since the great winter of sixty years ago, when the doctor's grandfather was frozen to death, driving across the plains to visit a poor woman. The horse went straight to the place, his head being turned that way and his understanding being good; but when the farmer came out with his lantern, there sat the old doctor stiff and dead in his sleigh. Those were the days when people, even doctors, had not learned how to wrap up, and would drive about all winter with high, stiff hats and one buffalo robe, not tucked in, as we have them nowadays, but dropping down at their feet. There was small chance of our Doctor Brown's freezing to death, in his well-lined sleigh, with his fur cap pulled down over his nose and his fur coat buttoned up to his chin and the great robes tucked round him in a scientific manner. Still, for all that, it was a bitter winter, and a good many people in Cyrus and elsewhere, who had no fur coats, went cold by day and lay cold by night, as one good lady pathetically expressed it. There was little snow, and what there was fell in wonderful crystals, fairy studies in geometry, which delighted the eyes of Joey and Georgie Means, as they trotted to school, with Miss Peace's "nuby" over one little head and her shawl over the other. Every morning the sun rose in a clear sky, shining like steel; every evening the same sky glowed with wonderful tints of amethyst and tender rose, fading gradually, till all was blue once more, and the stars had it all their own way, throbbing with fierce, cold light.

It was a great winter for Joey and Georgie! They never thought of its being too cold, for every morning their toes were toasted over the fire before schooltime, as if they had been muffins, and they were sent off nice and hot, with a baked potato in each pocket, in case their hands should be cold through the two pairs of thick mittens which Aunt Peace had provided.

Then, when they came home, dinner was waiting, such a dinner as they were not in the habit of having; a little mutton pie, or a smoking Irish stew, with all the dumplings and gravy they wanted (and they wanted a great deal), and then

pancakes, tossed before their very eyes, with a spoonful of jam in the middle of each, or blanc-mange made in the shape of a cow, which tasted quite different from any other blanc-mange that ever was. Also, they had the freedom of the corn-popper, and might roast apples every evening till bedtime. Doctor Brown shook his head occasionally, and told Anne Peace she would unfit those children for anything else in life than eating good things; but it was very likely that was jealousy, he added, for certainly his medicines had never given the children these rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes.

And when bedtime came, and the two little brown heads were nestled down in the pillows of the big four-poster in the warm room, Anne Peace would humbly give thanks that they had been well and happy through another day, and then creep off to the cold, little room which she had chosen this winter, "because it was more handy." Often, when awakened in the middle of the night by the sharp, cracking frost noises, which tell of intensest cold, she would creep in to feel of the children, and make sure that they were as warm as two little dormice, which they always were. I do not know how many times she took a blanket or comforter off her own bed to add to their store; but I do know that she would not let Jenny Miller go into her room to see. She almost rejoiced in the excessive cold, saying to herself with exultation, "Fifteen below! well, there! and I s'pose it's like summer in Florida, this minute of time!" And then she fancied David sitting under an orange-tree, fanning himself, and smiled, and went meekly to work to break the ice in her water-butt.

Every week letters came from David Means to his children, telling them of the beauty all around him and wishing they were there. He said little of his health, but always assured them that Janey and Willy were real smart, and sent his love to Anne Peace and his remembrance to all friends at home.

The letters were short, and each time they grew a little shorter, till by and by it was only a postal card, written in a faint and trembling hand, but saying that the weather was fine, and father was so glad to get their little letter, and he would write more next time, but was very busy just now. When she read one of these, Anne Peace would go away into her little cold room for a while, and then would come back smiling and say that now they must write a real *good* letter to father, and tell him how well they were doing at school.

At last came a week when there was no postal card; another week, and there came a letter edged with black and written in Mrs. Means's hand. The children were at school when it came, and Jenny Miller, coming in by chance to bring a

pot of head-cheese of her mother's making, found Miss Peace crouching in the corner of the sofa, weeping quietly, with the letter lying on her lap.

"Why, Miss Peace," cried Jenny, frightened at the sight of tears in those steadfast eyes, "What is the matter? Do tell me, dear! Why, you're real cold in here. I do believe the fire has gone out. You've had bad news, Miss Peace, have you? Do tell me, that's a dear soul, and don't cry."

"Yes," said Anne Peace. "The fire is out, Jenny, and David is dead."

She held out the letter, saying something about "privilege—think—rest;" but Jenny Miller was already on her knees, putting kindlings into the stove at a reckless rate. Then, when the fire was crackling merrily, she ran to fetch a shawl and wrapped it round the poor trembling shoulders, and chafed the cold hands in her own warm, young fingers. But soon Miss Peace grew uneasy; she was not used to being "done for," having only the habit of doing for others. She pointed eagerly to the letter. "Read it, Jenny," she said, anxiously. "I—I am all right, dear. It's come rather sudden, that's all, and those poor little children—but read the letter." The words died away, and Jenny, sitting down beside her, took the paper and read.

It began "Friend Anne," and went on to say that the writer's poor husband died yesterday, and she was left, as she always knew she should be, a widow with four children. It did seem to her as if he might have been let die to home, instead of being carted all the way down there and then have to send the remains back. She had to promise him she would send them back, though it did seem a pity with the beautiful "semetary" they had there, and full of Northern folks as it would hold and the undertaker a perfect gentleman, if she ever saw one. But the widow hoped she knew her duty, and she would not wish to be thought wanting in anything.

Now she supposed they would want to know how David passed away, though she had no "strenth" to write, not having had her clothes off for days or, you might say, weeks, nor slep' one consektive hour the last ten nights. Well, he had seemed to gain a little when they first came, but it wasn't no real gain, for he lost it all again and more too. The pounds just fell off from that man, it seemed as if you could see them go. The last month he fairly pined away, and she thought right to let the folks at home know that he was called to depart, but he wouldn't hear to it. "He said, Delia, he said, if you want me to die easy, he said, don't let on to no one at home but what I'm doing all right." So she set by and held her

peace, though it went against her conscience. Last Monday he couldn't leave his bed, and she said, "David, she said, you never will leave it till you're carried," and he said, p'raps 'twas so, but yet he wouldn't allow it, for fear of scaring the children. So that night he sat up in bed and his arms went out and he said "Home!" just that word, two or three times over, and dropped back and was gone. There she was, a widow with four small children, and what she should do she didn't know.

Away there in a strange land as you might say, if it *was* all one country, it did seem as if them as sent them might have thought of that and let them stay at home among their own folks. Not but what there was elegant folks there. Everybody hed been as kind as could be; one lady who was in "morning" herself had lent her a bonnet to wear to the funeral (for she wasn't one to send the remains off without anything being said over them); it was a real handsome bonnet, and she had taken a pattern of it, to have one made for herself. The lady was from New York way, and real stylish.

Mrs. Means intended to stay on a spell, as the money was not all gone, and her strength needed setting up, after all she had been through. Mr. Tombs, the undertaker, said he never saw any one bear affliction so; she told him she was used to it. He was a perfect gentleman, and a widower himself, so he could feel for her. Miss Peace might be thankful that she was never called on to bear affliction, with no one but herself to look out for; not but what 'twas lonesome for her, and Mrs. Means supposed she'd be glad enough to keep Georgie and Joey on a spell longer for company. Tell them they are poor orphans now, with no father to earn their bread. The writer wished her husband's remains to be buried in his father's lot, as she had no money to buy one. Miss Peace might see if any one felt to put up a moniment for David; he hadn't an enemy in the world, and he never begredged a dollar when he had it to give, for anything there was going. If he had thought a little more about her, and less about everybody's cat and dog, she might have something now to put bread in her children's mouths, let alone her own. Not that she had any appetite, a flea wouldn't fatten on what she ate. Lawyer Peters was his mother's third cousin if she was living. He spent more on those girls of his than would clothe the writer and her children for a year.

The remains went by the same boat with this letter, so Miss Peace would know when to expect them. Mrs. Means looked to her to see that David had a decent funeral; a handsome one she couldn't expect, folks in Cyrus were close enough about all that didn't go on their own backs, though she shouldn't wish it said.

So now there was no more, from Miss Peace's unfortunate friend, "the Widow Means."

After reading this precious epistle, Jenny Miller found herself, perhaps for the first time in her life, with nothing to say. She could only sit and press her friend's hand, and thrill, as a girl will, at the touch of a sorrow which she only now began dimly to guess. It was Miss Peace who broke the silence, speaking in her usual quiet tone.

"Thank you, Jenny, dear! I'm sure it was a privilege, having you come in just now. David Means was kin to me, you know, and I always set by him a great deal; and then the poor little children!" she faltered again for an instant, but steadied her voice and went on: "You'd better go home now, dear, for the fire is going beautiful, and I don't need anything. I—I shall have to see to things for the funeral, you know. And don't forget to thank your mother for the cheese. It looks real good, and Georgie doos like it the best of anything for breakfast. I guess I'll get on my bonnet, and go to see Abel Mound, the sexton."

But here Jenny found her voice, and protested. Miss Peace should not have anything at all to do with all that. 'Twasn't fitting she should, as the nearest kin poor Mr. Means had in Cyrus. Her father would see to it all, Jenny knew he would, and Doctor Brown would help him. She would go herself and speak to the doctor this minute. Miss Peace would have to be here to tell the children when they came home from school, poor little things! and that was all she should do about it.

Anne Peace hesitated; and then Jenny had an inspiration, or, as she put it in telling Tудie Peaslee afterwards, "a voice spoke to her."

"Miss Peace," she said timidly, "I—I don't suppose you would feel to pick those flowers you were going to send over to Tupham for the Sunday-school festival? I know they kind o' lot on the flowers you send, 'cause they're always so fresh, and you do them up so pretty. But if you don't feel to do it, I can send them word, or ask some one else"—

"The idea!" cried Anne Peace, brightening up. "I forgot the flowers, Jenny, I did so! I should be pleased to pick them, and I'll do it this minute. There—there isn't anything I should like so well. And I do thank you, dear, and if you really think your father wouldn't mind seeing—I am sure it is a privilege to have such neighbours, I always say. There couldn't anybody be more blessed in neighbours than I have always been."

In ten minutes Miss Peace was at work in her garden, cutting, trimming, tying up posies, and finding balm for her inward wound in the touch of the rose-leaves, and in the smell of mignonette, David's favourite flower. No one in Cyrus had such mignonette as Miss Peace, and people thought she had some special receipt for making it grow and blossom luxuriantly; but she always said no, it was only because she set by it. Folks could most always grow the things they set most store by, she thought.

So the Sunday-school festival at Tupham Corner was a perfect blaze of flowers, and the minister in his speech made allusion to generous friends in other parishes, who sent of their wealth to swell our rejoicings, and of their garden produce to gladden our eyes; but while the eyes of Tupham were being gladdened, Anne Peace was brushing Joey's and Georgie's hair, and tying black ribbons under their little chins, smiling at them through her tears, and bidding them be brave for dear father's sake, who was gone to the best home now, and would never be sick any more, or tired, or—or sad.

It was a quiet funeral: almost a cheerful one, the neighbours said, as they saw the little room filled with bright flowers (they all seemed to smell of mignonette, there was so much of it hidden among the roses), and the serene face of the chief mourner, who stood at the head of the coffin, with a child in either hand. It was an unusual thing, people felt. Generally, at Cyrus funerals, the mourners stayed up-stairs, leaving the neighbours to gather round the coffin in the flower-scented room below; but it did not seem strange in Anne Peace, somehow, and, after the first glance, no one could fancy any one else standing there. The old minister, who had christened both David and Anne on the same day, said a few gentle, cheering words, and the choir sang "Lead, kindly Light;" then the procession went its quiet way to the churchyard, and all was over.

Jenny Miller and the doctor followed Miss Peace home from the churchyard, but made no attempt to speak to her. She seemed unconscious of any one save the children, to whom she was talking in low, cheerful tones. The doctor caught the words "rest," "home," "happiness;" and as she passed into the house he heard her say distinctly: "Blessed privilege! My children now, my own! my own!"

"So they are!" said Doctor Brown, taking off his glasses to clear them. "So they are, and so they will remain. I don't imagine Delia will ever come back, do you, Jenny?"

"No," said Jenny, "I don't. She'll marry the undertaker before the year is out."

And she did.

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes

Original spelling and punctuation have been preserved except for the joining of common contractions.

Page 8: Added closing quotes:
(you seemed all right when I went out.)

Page 56: Removed extra quotation mark before I:
("You are too good. I didn't expect, I'm sure—well, you are kind!")

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