



THE HOME CIRCLE

"NEAR TO NATURE."

A farmer's life is the life for me;
I love to ramble the dusty road,
To loaf betimes 'neath the shady tree
Until I come to the old abode—
The old farm-house, with its sagging eaves,
And the blissing bloom of the trumpet
vine
Where the sunlight flickers among the
leaves—
A farmer's life is the life for mine.

No care, no thought of the noisy street;
Just singing birds and the humming bees
And clover tang that is doubly sweet
When drifting by on a lazy breeze—
To loaf about in the noontide glow
And glance at times at the curtained
gloom
Where chairs are waiting in ordered row
And dishes gleam in the dining-room.

And dinner-time—ah, the homely fare!
No smirking waiters to stand behind
And lift the plates with a frigid air.
No mystic dishes in French outlined,
But homely fare—just the chickens fried
And biscuits light as a flake of snow,
And new potatoes, and sweets, beside,
And gravy such as the gourmards know!

And pickles, jellies, and wondrous jam,
And quince preserves, and some marmalade,
And buttermilk, and some juicy ham,
And cake and pie that is rightly made—
And then stroll out, with that full content
Which comes to one who has eaten well
To bask in shade that is heaven-sent
And thank one's stars for the dinner bell!

A farmer's life is the life for me!
Ah, why do we till we're old and gray,
Trudge city streets, when we might be free
And eat this country fare every day?
But day grows late, and the sunset hush
Comes softly, silently sighing down,
And we get up and away we rush,
Recalling things we must do in town.
—Wilbur D. Nesbit.

WHEN AGNES WON APPRECIATION.

Agnes stood looking at the tray thoughtfully. She was thinking of what Miss Andrews had said at the last meeting of the Girls' Club: "There is a joy in doing things the best way one can, and when one honestly wins appreciation its price is beyond rubies."

"I don't believe I'll find the joy," said Agnes. "And as for appreciation, if Mrs. Winton is pleased she never says a word. It will just take up time, and it won't do any good whatever. It isn't as though I were carrying poor food to her."

Still she did not take up the waiting tray. It was filled with a substantial meal in the every-day dishes, and it was for Mrs. Winton, who was in her room having one of her "bad days."

"Bad days indeed!" Agnes had once said indignantly to herself when some visitor consoled with the lady. "It's some one else that has had bad days when Mrs. Winton doesn't feel well."

But after a moment Agnes began to unload the tray. She knew well enough how to prepare a dainty tray Mrs. Winton, in spite of her fretful temper, meant well by her young helper, and she had given Agnes time off to attend an afternoon cooking class and had paid her tuition. One of the recent lessons had been on invalid cookery, and the teacher had especially emphasized the need of daintiness.

"I don't believe she will even notice," said Agnes. "Likely she'll turn away without even tasting it; and if she could eat at all, the other was all right." Nevertheless, she took some smaller and prettier dishes for the tray. She gathered several nasturtiums to lay on the napkin. She poached a fresh egg to have it piping hot, and put it on a round of golden toast. The tea was just the right amber color, and the half orange was large and juicy. "It does look better," admitted Agnes as she lifted the tray. "There is joy in doing things the best way. But she'll never notice."

Mrs. Winton turned her head with a frown of pain. "I can't eat," she said faintly.

"If you'll leave it on the stand a few minutes, perhaps you'll feel like taking your tea at least," suggested Agnes.

"Leave it," murmured the sick woman.

Mrs. Winton's sister came in as Agnes was leaving, and from the doorway she heard her say: "Lucy, you must turn around and eat a little. See how appetizing your tray looks."

Thereafter on Mrs. Winton's ill days Agnes took time to prepare food especially for her. She learned, too, to stroke the aching head until the sufferer fell asleep. She knew when hot water bottles and extra pillows were needed. She heard no word of thanks, and Mrs. Winton was as fretful and critical as before. But Agnes still searched after that ideal of doing the best she could. It was a hard place. The house was large, and most of the work fell upon Agnes's shoulders. She always looked forward in the hope of finding a pleasanter place to work.

One noon when she carried up a tray she found Mrs. Austin, the doctor's wife, in the room.

"Agnes," said Mrs. Austin as the girl turned to go after making Mrs. Winton comfortable, "have you ever thought about being a nurse?"

"Yes," said Agnes. "I wanted to be one, but it is out of the question now."

"I have noticed that you are quite helpful about the sick room, and the doctor has spoken of it, too. Why is it out of the question?"

"I haven't enough education. I was in high school only a year when

father died, and I had to go to work. I inquired at the hospital, for I had wanted to be a nurse ever since I knew about it. I was too young then, of course, and they told me that nurses should have a high school education."

"Yes," said Mrs. Austin. "But that could be arranged in cases of special aptitude if the person were willing to do some home studying. I dare say by application you could prepare yourself by the time you are eighteen."

"O, do you think so?" cried Agnes eagerly.

Mrs. Winton sat up from her pillows. "I don't want you to say anything more," she said. "I won't have any one tempting Agnes away from me. She's the only girl I ever had that didn't get on my nerves. I don't know what I would do if she should leave."

Mrs. Austin smiled, and Agnes went back to the kitchen, her head in a whirl. Could it be that Mrs. Winton was fond of her? And was there a chance yet that her ambition might be realized? When the work was done, she went to her room for one of her old high school books. She would begin studying immediately.

As she sat at work that evening Mrs. Winton came into the kitchen and took a chair. "Agnes," she said, "I was just joking to-day when I said that Mrs. Austin wasn't to ask you to go away. If there is a chance for you to be a nurse, I want you to take it. I'll help you all I can, and Mrs. Austin is going to ask the doctor to lay out a study course for you."

"O, Mrs. Winton," stammered Agnes, "you are too good to me!"

"There, there! You are a good girl. You've been very patient and industrious."

"Anyway, I'm just past sixteen," said Agnes, raising her head. "It will be two years before I leave you. And in the meantime we will try to find another girl. I will help her to learn your ways. And I'll never forget what I owe you."

"Then I want you to do well when you enter on your new work, and you must come to see me sometimes and be a credit to me."

"O, I will!" cried Agnes.

Agnes smiled when she was alone. "I know now what the reward of doing your best is. It's an opportunity to do better yet. If I'd just been going along any way, this chance would never have come. And it just grew out of my every-day work, though a year ago no one could have made me believe that it would. And Miss Andrews was right. When one honestly wins appreciation, its price is above rubies."—Girls' Companion.

THE AWKWARDNESS OF GERALD.

By Anie E. Harris.

"Oh, 'Rard! you don't do it a bit right!"

Gerald balanced himself where he stood and looked over his glasses at Gertrude.

"S'pose you do it yourself," he suggested. "You know I'm not fussy about being in your old show."

"Well, you might be decent about it and not act so awkward just when you're supposed to wake the princess. Where are you going, 'Rard?"

But he was gone, and the tired little stage manager was left alone in the midst of her properties. The witch's pointed hat was slipping over one ear, the witch's old red shawl was slipping off her shoulders, and all her beautiful plans for giving a "really truly show" seemed slipping away from her, too.

Here was the stage they had fixed in the carriage barn, with a real curtain to pull—Hector had fixed the curtain. Here was the old woman's spinning-wheel, brought by great labor from the attic. Here was the canopied couch, made from the harness-box and three or four linen robes.

When the time came for the public performance, there would be the whole family of dolls to represent the sleeping courtiers, and Gertrude herself was to be the princess. Gerald was to have been the prince, but he was evidently provoked about something.

"Perhaps I can coax him back, though he doesn't want to be in it. What did I say, I wonder!"

Thinking back over the rehearsal, it was easier for Gertrude to remember the many times she had lost her patience and kept silence than it was to recall just what she had said at last. Times without number she had been obliged to coax her headstrong twin back to some enterprise he had left in disgust. It was hard work sometimes but she usually succeeded. She would try her most persuasive arguments.

She took off the witch's hat and saw, stowed them with the rest of the properties in an old sleigh in the corner and, taking Rosemary Edith, went out to find Gerald.

He was swinging in the hammock under the porter tree, reading and eating innumerable half-ripe apples.

Gertrude sat down with her doll, some distance in front of the hammock, and began pulling daisies to pieces. She had found out by this infallible method that she was to wed a merchant, live in barn and be married in yellow calico, before Gertrude took any notice of her presence. Then, having finished his story, he flopped over in the hammock and saw her there.

"How long have you been here?"

"Not very. Say, 'Rard, when shall we have another rehearsal?"

"I don't care when you rehearse. I'm not going to be in it."

"I can't do it without you, 'Rard."

"Don't care."

"And it's advertised, you know."

"Don't care."

"What did I say, 'Rard?"

"Never mind what you said. I guess you know well enough anyway."

"No, honest I don't."

"Never mind, then. I can keep out of it." And Gertrude picked up his book and strolled off toward the house.

"I'll have to try some other way, Rosemary Edith. He's mad about something, and I'll have to wait till he tells me."

Still, time went on and he didn't tell, in spite of Gertrude's wistful cast in his direction and the peace offerings of various kinds she placed before him. The problem of how to present the play without him was never absent from her thoughts.

The show was to come off on Saturday, according to the card which the twins had tacked to the fence by the roadside. It announced, in not very regular print, that G. and G. Heath would present "The Sleeping Beauty" in the C. B. Theater, Rear of 97 Grove Street, Saturday, August 9th, at 4:00 p. m. (C. B. means carriage barn.)

On Friday, Gertrude being as inflexible as ever, Gertrude consulted Papa. When he had heard Gertrude's version of the story he promised to find out what he could from Gerard's side.

After a little talk with the boy, he called Gertrude to him.

"Will he be in it, Papa?" she asked eagerly.

"I think not," was the answer.

"Didn't you tell him he must?"

"No."

Gertrude looked puzzled.

"What did I say that made him mad?" she asked after a moment.

"You said he was awkward."

"Is that all?"

"Come here, little daughter."

Gertrude came close and Papa took one of her hands.

"Are any of these fingers sore?" he asked.

"No, sir."

Papa took one finger between his own thumb and forefingers and pinched it gently.

"Does that hurt?"

"No, sir."

He pinched the same finger again and again, Gertrude meantime wondering whether this was a joke or just what. At last she winced.

"Oh, papa; that hurts," she said, drawing her hand away.

"Does it, little one? Then I think you will understand what I want to say to you about Gerard. You thought it a very little thing that you called him awkward, and, if it had been the first time, perhaps he would have thought so, too; but you have called him so before, rather often, I fancy, and so have the rest of us. It is like the finger, Gertrude. At first it didn't hurt at all, but after a while it did. Gerard is getting sensitive about his appearance, and I think he would rather take a severe punishment than be in the show, so I shall not insist."

"I am sorry I said it," admitted Gertrude, thoughtfully. "Shall I tell him so?"

"No, dearie, I wouldn't mention it at all; it would only make matters worse. Let it pass. There are ways of letting Gerard know you are sorry. By and by he will probably come around and want to help in some way. Then the kindest thing you can do is to let him, and take pains to thank him for his help, whatever it is."

Gertrude studied a minute on this advice, then she drew a long sigh and clasped her hands around Papa's neck.

"I'll do it, Papa; only I hope he will want to help on the play, for I can't do without him."

Gerard apparently had no intention of helping on the play, however; and up to Saturday noon Gertrude had not decided what she was going to do without him. Then a bright idea struck her, and she was actually glad instead of sorry to see the barn filling up with children just before 4 o'clock.

A hush of expectancy fell over the little audience as the curtain parted on the first scene of the play, then a murmur of delight and loud applause as the stage was fully revealed. A basket cradle (Norah's clothes basket) occupied the center of the stage and over its edge hung the long skirt of a baby dress. Those who stood up could see Rosemary Edith within the cradle. All about the stage sat the dolls in festive attire.

Presently, from the side entrance, came the witch—Gertrude in pointed hat and old shawl—leaning upon a broom. She spoke her lines with great seriousness, prophesying the spell which was to come over the princess at the age of fifteen and, when she had finished, hobbled away

to draw the curtains on Scene 1.

She had a very busy ten minutes then, removing the cradle and the dolls and replacing them with the properties for the second scene. The curtains parted and showed a bare room with the old spinning-wheel and one chair, on which was seated an excellent representation of an old woman in cap and shawl. Gertrude had spent all the early part of the afternoon constructing this dummy out of hay which she stuffed into one of Mamma's old morning dresses, above which she had placed Gerard's smallest football with a cap atop.

No one could question what it stood for, and again there was a burst of applause, loudest perhaps from the remote corner where Gerard stood wondering what his twin was going to do without his help.

Then came Gertrude as the fifteen-year-old princess, drawn by fate to find the only spindle in the kingdom by which the witch's curse could be fulfilled. She spoke brightly to the old woman, and turning her back and using a changed voice, made such replies as were proper. In this way she carried through the whole scene till she pricked her finger and ran off screaming with pain. This wasn't the way she wanted to do it, but who would draw the curtain if she didn't?

It required quite as much time as before to rearrange the stage this time, for she had to tug in from its corner the canopied bed, place Rosemary Edith on it, station the doll courtiers and dress herself in the costume of the prince. When she went to the old sleigh to get the costume, there stood Gerard.

"You're doing this great, Gertrude," he said, "and I want to help you. Shall I be the prince or draw the curtain?"

"Oh, thank you, 'Rard, please be the prince and I'll be the princess, as we planned."

So, after a little delay, Scene 3 was ready and the audience saw Gertrude sleeping on the canopied bed and Gerard approaching to wake her from her sleep of a hundred years. It was a very short scene, for Gerard had nothing to say. He simply came tiptoeing in with one finger on his lips for silence and one hand on his hip; and not even his worst enemy could have said he was awkward.

Having reached the couch, he knelt on one knee and kissed the Sleeping Beauty. She opened her eyes, put out her hands and, with his help, rose to her feet.

Just how this scene would have ended perhaps nobody knows, for there was no one to draw the curtain unless the twins went off the stage to do it. Probably Gertrude's quick wit would have thought of a way, but she was saved that trouble by the sound of Norah's voice in the doorway.

"Yes, Ma'am," she was saying to Mrs. Heath, outside, and the whole audience turned their back upon the stage stars and gave attention to this new arrival. Norah, finding all eyes fastened upon her, even Gertrude gazing in bewilderment, delivered message at once.

"Please, miss, your mother says have the children come out and have some refreshment."

They needed no second invitation, but poured into the yard, thirty strong, and swarmed about the table. While they were busy with the lunch, Papa drove into the yard. He left his horse with Hector and came to eat gingersnaps with the children.

"How did you get on, my dear?" he asked Gertrude.

"Pretty well, I guess. And Gerard did beautifully. I opened one eye to see him come. He was lovely."

"Did Gerard?"—but the boy himself was coming near and Papa could tell by his happy face that he had no need to ask. Instead, he put his arm

across Gerard's shoulders and drew him close.

"I see you have had a return on your pride," he said. "You are a national."

At a county school in the Maryland land the headmaster said: "I will give a penny to the boy who can ask me a question which I cannot answer."

Several tried unsuccessfully until one boy asked him:

"Please, sir, if you stood up to your neck in soft mud and I threw a stone at your head, would you dodge?"

There is only one way to get credit for immortality, and that is to live this life, and live it as bravely, faithfully and cheerful as we can.—Henry Van Dyke.

If a man is unhappy this must be his own fault; for God made all things to be happy.—Epictetus.

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