Abiather's Notion

"He's gettin' old and full of notions, Abiather is, the same's them first Hebrews used to get old and full o' days." With these words spoken to herself, Elgiva Ann crossed the room to the twelve paned window, where she bent to bring her puckered eyes beneath its middle sash for an unobstructed view of the late November landscape. Snow covered the rolling ground in every direction, and fine particles driven by the high wind filled the air. She readjusted her spectacles but was still unable to see ten rods from the house.

"It's queer why he stays out in such a storm," she murmured with provoked anxiety. "But that's man-like. A woman wouldn't do so! Home's the place for anybody, specially durin' such weather, and when they're seventy years old!"

Elgiva Ann, frowning and worried, took herself away from the window. She was a slight built woman, with yellow-gray hair. Her skin was strangely clear for one of her years, and her hazel eyes seemed to have kept something of their youth. Age, however, revealed itself in her cautious movements; still Abiather called her "sprightly," and she liked the compliment this inferred.

She raised the teakettle and poked the fire wrathfully beneath it.

"It was one o' his queer notions a-keepin' Silas Goodwin on janitor to the church long after he'd lost his usefulness," she continued in sibilant murmurs. 'Just 'cause Silas'd been so long,—that wa'n't no reason. Of course it 'uld hurt him to give it up. It 'uld hurt anybody. It hurts folks to die, but the Lord don't let them live forever—not in this world."

Elgiva Ann turned the slice of bread she was toasting on a fork before the coals. "Then his givin' the increase of the West pasture flock to the fresh air fund—somethin' 't he'd read in the papers, goodness knows what! But that notion ain't nothin' to this other 'n' of his! I've read of such doin's in stories, but I never knew of such to actually happen. Of course it would be a good thing for Deborah Saunders, I ain't sayin' it wouldn't. An' it 'uld be good for us to do it. But there ain't no call for it. Those that's in authority have made provision for just such cases, and I don't see why Abiather need to interfere."

Elgiva Ann placed a fresh slice on her toasting fork. "I ain't set against it,—that is, not downright. It seems to me as if 't would be puttin' ourselves up to doin' good deeds—strainin' like. It 'uld look foolish as long's there's no call for it; and that's what I mean to tell Abiather when he comes."

The cat came and rubbed her back against Elgiva Ann, and crawled in and out about the stove leg. Elgiva Ann watched her when not watching the toast.

The room was small and low, with woodwork painted a dingy, streaked blue. The side-walls were papered, the figure being of a pattern which it is now the fashion to call anything but pretty. The ceiling was smoke-stained, and the lath showed in paler, parallel streaks.

There was a loud stamping of feet on the outside. Elgiva Ann closed the stove with a bang and looked for the entrance of the comer. Presently the door opened, letting in a rush of cold air and snow, followed by Abiather Whiteford, Elgiva Ann's husband.

"What made ye come in at all, Bi? Ain't ye 'most froze?"

"No," he replied with bluff cheeriness, panting while he removed his outdoor garments.

The room was full of a dreamy warmth impregnated with sweet, homely smells. The rattle of the supper dishes, the roar of the fire, the singing of the teakettle, the soft purring of the cat—all had something cozy, restful, and inviting in them. Abiather, holding his ear close to the stove to receive its warmth, felt all without a thought or question. He was dressed in a heavy brown suit of woolens. His face, always red, had had its color heightened by the freezing wind. His hair and beard—long, but not too long—were only less white then the snow that had recently fallen on them. The smile which so often broke over his face revealed the even, perfect work of the city dentist. The blue in his eyes was of the early morning sky.

"Supper's ready, Abiather," Elgiva Ann said presently, with a rising accent.

The early night of winter had come on. Elgiva Ann had lowered the green shade at the window, and lighted the lamp in the center of the table. Abiather drew his chair up, and they bowed their heads while he said grace.

"I was to the store this afternoon," Abiather said, taking his cup of tea across the table from his wife's hands. As he spoke he glanced around the ugly, green paper-and-wire lampshade at Elgiva Ann's face, ghastly in the tinted shadow. "Dr. Gregory was there, too."

Elgiva Ann seemed absorbed in pouring her own tea; and after a moment Abiather continued:

"They had a meetin' of the board las' night. Mis' Adams 'll stay a week longer; an' after she's gone they'll have to take her to the poorhouse. Deborah ain't helpless—quite. She gets about on her crutches. But it won't do to leave her alone, he says."

"Didn't her father leave a mite o' property?" Elgiva Ann interposed.

Abiather finished pouring his tea into his saucer before he answered. "Yes. But it's all owin' to the City bank; and more too. There won't nothin' be left after his debts is paid, he says." This he meant Dr. Gregory. "He says Deborah's grievin' herself most to death, a-thinkin' she's got to go. She ain't only thirty. He says it seems worse 'n it would if she was old. An' I don't know but he's right. The folks over 't the poorhouse are all old, except now an' then they have a baby left there till it can be taken to the orphan's home." Abiather's expression was one of vicarious suffering. "It's mighty hard lines," he finished; and was motionless for a time, his eyes fastened dreamily on the bit of red flannel deep in the oil of the lamp globe.

"Wa'n't it awful walkin' 'tween here an' the village, Bi?" Elgiva Ann asked. "I don't see how you ever waded there 'n back!"

"Yes," he said absently. "No, it wa'n't very bad!" he corrected impetuously. "Ben Wilson said he'd take her in an' keep her if he was able," he continued, dropping into his usual tones.

"He's just as able as we are!"

"We ain't got any children or grandchildren a-dependin' on us," Abiather suggested mildly as showing the difference.

"Well!" she said testily, but stopped abruptly. After a pause she added with something of the same tone: "Did you tell 'em you 'uld take her?"

"No. That's for you to say."

Elgiva Ann appeared mollified.

"You've be'n thinkin' of it, ain't you 'Givy?" Abiather asked the question softly, and then waited her answer behind his saucer which he was slowly draining of its amber liquid.

"Yes, I've be'n thinkin' of it," she said cautiously. "We're gettin' old, Bi; an' sha'n't live long. What 'uld become of her then—if we did take her? Elgiva Ann thought her husband would see the poorhouse inevitably staring Deborah Saunders in the face.

"What'll become of her then ain't for you or me to say," he replied. "But it might be required of us now," he added solemnly, and then paused. "It's an awful bleak, barren place," he resumed presently. "Of course the inmates have all the creature comforts, but——" Again the sympathetic suffering came into his face, and he let his sentence remain unfinished.

"I'll have to sleep on it," Elgiva Ann said, putting off the time when she should have to give a decisive answer. "But it does seem like an awful undertaking. And foolish! It's uncall—"

"But 'Givy—"

"Oh, I know what you'd say!"

Their voices had risen. There was a little burst of feeling like a small thunderbolt; and then the air between them slowly cleared again. By tacit consent the subject was put over for the present.

Before nine o'clock they had made their preparations for bed. Elgiva Ann drew the curtain aside and peeped out into the night. The storm yet ruled in fury over the country. Not a light could she see in any of the village homes, though she looked long and searchingly, rubbing the frost from the window with her worn and wrinkled fingers. She made a special effort in the direction of Deborah Saunder's home. The next morning Abiather noticed her abstraction and the worried, furtive look in her eye. "You ain't sick, 'Givy?" he said, with care in his voice.

"No."

Abiather watched her thoughtfully for a moment. "It ain't Deborah Saunders?" he asked.

"What makes you think it's anything?" she demanded petulantly, picking up her pan of supper dishes and going out of the room.

"If it's that I won't say anything more about it," he continued a little louder, so as to reach her ears.

"I hain't said it was that," she shouted back. "Deborah Saunders can come here!"

"I don't want her to come if you feel that way about it, 'Givy. I thought it 'uld be kind o' pleasant for us, besides givin' her a home. She wouldn't be a care; 't least not much. An' she'd be good company. But if you feel——"

"I hain't said I felt. She can come. I want her to as much as you!"

Abiather tried to understand his wife. He felt that there was something that he did not know behind the high words with their impatient ring. He rose and went to the door where he could see her; but her face was set and non-committal.

Elgiva Ann would not hear to any talk other than looking toward Deborah Saunders's coming. When Abiather appeared really troubled because of her manner, she changed and became as pleasant and affable as he could have wished. For the moment he was more perplexed than ever; but in a day or two this wore away or was forgotten.

Before the week had passed Deborah Saunders was established in her new home. She was a bright intelligent young woman with a face that might easily be called pretty. Her happiness in so unexpectedly finding friends made her a joy in the house.

It was Christmas evening—Deborah had been with them about a month—when Mr. and Mrs. Ben Wilson called The two men got together on one side of the table and became absorbed in an earnest discussion of a certain village improvement. Elgiva Ann and Mrs. Wilson were by themselves; Mrs. Wilson was relating a strange dream she had recently had. Deborah with some needlework sat where she could transfer her attention from one group to the other.

After a time Abiather proposed that they should have some apples and rose to fetch them. He took the lamp, and followed by his friend, went into the cellar. Below—it just occurring to him—he shouted up through the floor to know if the ladies would excuse the light; and all laughed at his humor.

As the men had moved away, Deborah got upon her crutches and swung herself out of the room for a fresh supply of silk. Elgiva Ann watched until all were out of hearing, then turned to her caller. But Mrs. Wilson was the first to speak.

"You do enjoy having Deborah Saunders here, don't you? An' it's so good of you! I'm glad that it is so; an' 't you do!"

"Oh, I guess we do!" Elgiva Ann responded with warmth; and then, as if something she had forgotten had just come to her: "Your tellin' me that dream has just reminded me of one I had a little while ago. I don't know when I've had anything take hold of me as it did. It was awful. It seemed as if they were just a breakin' in at every window and door to carry me off to the poorhouse; an 't I had to fight 'em!" Elgiva Ann shuddered; her tones plainly said that even now she could not dwell upon the details of her dream.

"Was that why you took Deborah Saunders?" Mrs. Wilson asked, with a good-natured old-woman's laugh.

Elgiva Ann flushed a little. She was glad they were in the dark.

"Oh,—Deborah Saunders!" she said. "'Y, that was Abiathar's notion!"

PRACTICAL FARMING.

PERSISTENT MILKERS.

We sometimes see cattle owners or buyers pass through a herd of cows and remark that such and such cows are persistent milkers, while certain others are not. A keen observer may be able to tell with some degree of certainty which cows have this tendency and which have not, but my experience tells me more depends on the care and feeding than on any signs or markings. For nearly thirty years our main dependence has been on raising our own stock and yet occasionally I have bought in a few, and comparing these, in general outline and markings, with cows of our own raising, leads me to believe the above statement to be substantially correct, says a correspondent I have a cow in my stables now that I consider a proof of my theory that more depends on care and feed than anything else. I bought her three years ago, being given my choice in a herd of some thirty cows. Out of the herd I bought four cows at $25 apiece. The cow of which mention is here made had a fairly good dairy form, not perfect however, and I judged her to be a persistent milker. Evidently the cows had not suffered from over feeding, being on a rented farm, and all were dry longer than a cow should be for profit. The next fall they received better care and feeding and two of them responded in a much longer milk flow. This one cow the past season has entirely outdone her former records, and when but two months from time to be fresh again was giving about fifteen pounds of milk. I consider this cow has given fully one-third more milk, during the ten months in which she was milked than during any previous year, and it is all due to care and feeding. Perhaps I should explain what I mean by care and feeding.

When I went to the farm where these cows were kept, everything indicated a scrimping of feed, and, like too many herds, they were permitted to roam during the fall months, even up to December; consequently at the first of December, when I bought them, they were thin, with rough coats. Under our treatment they were stabled as soon as cold, frosty nights came on, and were not allowed outside the barn yard after November first, and fed grain continuously until dry. This particular cow is now dry and given about two and one-half pounds daily of wheat chips, and is in fine order. It is folly to talk about persistent milkers, and allow cows to suffer during the fall months from hunger and cold. Another important matter follows generous treatment. The unborn calf will partake of this second nature, so to speak, of the mother. In other words, if the cow is well fed and cared for, so her term of usefulness is materially lengthened, her offspring will inherit these good qualities and themselves make better cows when matured. On the other hand, the poorly fed cow that will, of necessity, be dry four or five months, will transmit the same tendency, and her daughters will be no improvement on their dam.

THE VALUE OF COMFORT.

Mr. E. C. Bennett, in a letter, takes up this subject in the following: "One of the hardest things to impress upon farmers is the value of comfort to the cow. No matter how well and wisely feed, if the cow, is not comfortable she will not eliminate a full mess of milk.

"When the cow is wet and chilled she uses the feed for warming herself, and what is used in this way does not appear in the milk pail. It is gone, radiated to the wild prairie winds; lost forever. A cold rain causes her to shrink in milk. A raw wind dries her up. Foraging in the stalk fields in winter will do more harm than good. She must be where the temperature approximates summer temperature if she is to make milk as she will in summer weather. Don't send the cow to the fields for her feed in cold weather, bring the feed to her.

"Winter pastures are the delight of the horse raiser and the steer farmer, but a delusion to the winter dairyman. Be not deceived. The weather in winter is not suited to milk production and the cow must be sheltered from the rain, snow and wind. No matter how much green grass you have out in the winter pasture, the cow giving milk is not the animal to turn out there to eat it. She will do well at it for a time, but soon will adjust herself to the climate and fatten instead of continuing to fill the pail until spring. The place where creameries have to shut down in winter because of lack of milk, is where winter pastures are the most of a success, and the places where winter dairying is most successful, are those where no reliance is placed on winter pasture for cow feed.

"This does not prove that succulent food, like silage and roots, is deleterious in winter. Far from it. But succulent food should be fed in a warm barn, not out in the open field. This is a hard thing to impress upon those who are lovers of the steer. The more rich feed a steer has the less he cares for shelter. He will often sleep in the snow from choice.

"The heifer fed like a steer will be much like one, and as unlike what she should be for milk as possible. Be careful not to put her on a starchy diet and expose her to cold winds, nor even keep a cow in milk on pasture in cold weather. Shelter her, make her comfortable without forcing her to use her feed as fuel to keep her warm.

"Exposure is a fatal mistake no matter how seductive may be the temptation."

SCOURS IN CALVES.

The Live Stock Journal diagnoses and prescribes for scours in calves as follows: In the disease the bowel discharges are in a liquid condition, and of a white or yellowish-white hue. Now and again small masses of dense undigested curd are voided with them, as well as a thick, slimy matter, mucal, and sometimes blood. The evacuations emit a foul, pungent odor, which alone marks the presence of the malady in a shed. The faeces are voided frequently, and that act is attended with considerable straining and pain. The animal quickly loses flesh, is feverish and weak. When standing the back is arched and the belly tucked up; but when severely affected the calf is mostly found lying down, with the nose doubled into the flank, moaning and grinding the teeth. In a large majority of cases of scours a dose of aperient medicine is called for. This may take the shape of two or three ounces of castor oil, with thirty drops of tincture of opium, and a little peppermint water. Having removed the undigested matter contained in the bowels, relief from existing pain may be afforded by a further dose of tincture of opium, with which may be combined a couple of drops of carbolic acid, the whole to be given in well boiled milk, with which an egg has been beaten up. The patient should be placed in a warm, dry, well ventilated pen, well littered down. Should the pain continue, the medicine last prescribed may be repeated two or three times a day, and in the intervals a little carbonate of soda and lime water may also be given in a little milk. To prevent the disease is to guard against the causes. Where contagion is suspected, isolation, thorough cleansing, and disinfection, with efficient ventilation and drainage, should be provided.

POULTRY NOTES.

Millet seed is a great egg-producing grain.

Always feed the mash crumbly, not sloppy.

Do not allow the mash to sour in the troughs.

A quart of grain for twelve hens is a good measurement.

Milk may be profitably fed in any form—sweet, sour or buttermilk.

Split the carrots in halves, and allow the hens to peck at them at will.

Have the feed troughs sufficiently large so that all the fowls can find room.

Buckwheat is an egg-producing food, but a steady diet of it is apt to overfatten.

The food must be changed often, giving a good warm mash in the morning, and whole grain at night. During the day a little grain may be scattered in straw, so that they can scratch for it, by this means giving exercise.

A complete separation of the flock in winter is a very important thing. The laying hens in one flock, the late chicks by themselves, and if any number of cockerels are kept, they should be kept separate from the rest. Unless the eggs are wanted for incubation purposes, the presence of cocks in the laying apartment is unnecessary.

In feeding for eggs during winter when fowls are confined, great care must be exercised not to overfeed. Laying hens do not require feeding three times a day, and when thus fed, overfeeding is almost sure to follow. A large production of eggs requires the consumption of a large amount of food. When laying hens do not eat rapidly and a good deal of it, stop feeding at once, and arrange to give them more exercise to bring them up to a good appetite.

John Bauscher, Jr., says of the Russian sunflower: "Single heads measure from twelve to twenty-two inches in diameter, and contain an immense quantity of seed which is highly valued by farmers and poultry breeders as an excellent and cheap food for fowls. They eat it greedily, fatten well on it, and obtain a bright, lustrous plumage and strong, healthy condition. It is the best egg producing food known for poultry, and can be raised cheaper than corn."

Green food is very essential to egg production. Clover hay steeped in warm water, and especially alfalfa clover, which comes the nearest to the actual green hay, will supply this. Vegetables of all kinds that hens will eat are good for them. Green cut bone, granulated bone, oyster shells, sea shells, broken crockery, sharp gravel, broken glass, coarse sand, meat scraps, old plaster, lime, oil meal, milk, both sweet and sour, make a variety in diet and grinding material.

Farmers should never ship eggs until they have first endeavored to get better prices for them nearer home. If they would retail their eggs and seek customers, a large sum would be added to the receipts from poultry. Fresh eggs are always salable, for every family must at times have them. It frequently happens when eggs are scarce, that one farmer must buy them from another, and in every village and town will be found those who prefer to buy from the farmer than from the dealers, provided the farmer sells only fresh laid. We prefer a good pickled egg to one that has been stored in a musty cellar from four to five months and is "fresh," simply because it is not "salted."

Penning up fowls is recommended, because they cannot stray and lay away from home, the eggs are always fresh and quickly gathered.

Poultry keepers ought not to sell March and April pullets, as many farmers do, for they lay in winter, when eggs are very scarce, and, consequently fetch high prices.

IN THE NAME OF RELIGION.

Well, well, said the old friend. How did you ever come to join the Salvation Army?

It was the only way, the young man admitted, that I could get the public to submit to my cornet playing.

BANQUETS OF OLD.

Those of the Present Day are Tame Affairs When Compared With the Feasts of Long Ago.

Banquets of the present day, even the most sumptuous, are but mean affairs compared with those of antiquity. The diner-out used to the opulence of the latter Egyptian Empire, the bon vivant accustomed to the splendor of Greece or the luxury of Rome, expected much of their entertainers, and usually were not disappointed.

Vast was the magnificence of a feast given by some great nobleman during the reign of the Pharoahs. The guests, both men and women, came at midday, some in chariots, some in palanquins, and a few—doubtless those who lived near by—on foot. They were met at the doorway by slaves, and conducted to an anteroom, where their hands and feet were washed with perfumed water held in golden vessels; and their heads anointed with scented pomatum in sign of welcome.

Ablutions ended, the guests were crowned with lotus flowers, while chaplets of the same fragrant blossoms were hung about their necks, and a single bud given them to hold in the hand. They were then ready to pay their respects to their host and hostess, whom they found seated side by side on a large fauteuil in the reception room, exchanging ceremonious greetings with their visitors.

Sometimes men and women sat together in festive gatherings; sometimes the sexes were separated, but each received equal attention. A slave stationed behind each guest was ready to obey the least command, and time passed quickly in feasting and merrymaking. As the wine circulated, women as well as men were drawn into the whirl of dissipation, and furnished subjects for the merciless pencil of the caricaturist. The proof still exists pictorially that the fair sex of that time and country drank more than was good for them, while the lords and masters had frequently to be carried home from a festive gathering limp as the faded lotus blossoms resting on their fevered brows.

A strange custom was in vogue; in the midst of the feasting, when the senses seemed almost satiated, a slave appared bearing a small figure of a mummy, which he exhibited portentously to the revelers, saying, "Gaze here; drink and be merry, for when you die such you will be."

COURTESY.

"Great oaks from little acorns grow."

The mountain torrent increases as it proceeds towards the sea until it becomes resistless.

Kind words, little acts of courtesy, a helping hand often costs us nothing, yet these influences may tend to change the whole current of some young life, may be the means of changing the destiny of a nation.

Twenty years ago an elegantly dressed young lady—a real lady—ran against a ragged little newsboy. She turned immediately and said with a sweet smile:

"I beg your pardon, my little fellow; I am sorry that I ran against you."

The little boy looked at her for a moment with surprise, and then taking off about three-quarters of a cap, he bowed, very low and said, while a broad smile spread all over his face:

"You can have my pardon and welcome, miss; and the next time you may run against me and knock me clean down and I won't say a word."

The lady passed on, the boy turned to his companion and said, "I say, Jim, it's the first time I ever had anyone ask my parding and it kind a' took me off my feet."

The poor boy never forgot the smile and gentle words. He resolved to rise and be a gentleman. To-day he is at the head of one of the largest publishing houses in New York.

QUEEN OF SERVIA'S JEWELS.

The Queen of Servia, who has been spending the summer at Biarritz was so unfortunate as to lose some more jewels. It will be remembered that she lost a diamond ring last year. This time it was a parue of diamonds. A few days later an advertisement appeared in the local papers to the effect that if the jewellery was returned to the Queen she would present it to the poor of Biarritz. Two days afterward she received her lost or stolen diamonds by post accompanied by a sheet of coarse paper, on which was scrawled in printed characters: "I shall be curious to see if a Queen can keep her word." The Queen did keep her word, and presented the restored trinkets to the Sisters of Charity, who started a mammoth subscription list and a poor little seamstress in some way became the fortunate possessor of the jewels.

WORLDLY WISDOM.

A relative whom Mrs. Uppenup had not seen for many years came one day to visit her.

Maria, said Mr. Uppenup, after the family had retired to rest that evening, it seems to me you weren't any too cordial to Cousin Harriet, considering thepfact that this is the first time you and she have met for nearly a quarter of a century. You didn't even smile when you greeted her.

Henry, replied Mrs. Uppenup, have you noticed that when I smile it wrinkles my face all over? Well, I didn't want the wrinkles of twenty-five years to take effect on her all at once.

VICTORIA'S CORONATION RING.

There is a ring which the queen cherishes more than anything else she possesses, save her betrothal and wedding ring—a circlet of flat gold in which shines a ruby cross surrounded by diamonds, signifying the sovereign's union with her nation, her coronation ring, in fact, which she has worn every evening since the day it became hers by right, and which is jeaously guarded when not encircling her finger.