

A Country Courting

The July sun was sending its slanting rays across the kitchen floor, as Mrs. Jane Whitford moved about getting supper. Her spry step and energetic movements were in accord with the cheerful scene. Everything betokened thrift and neatness; not a fly was to be seen and no dust was visible to the naked eye. Of course it was there, for no housekeeper ever gets complete victory over the dust demon, but it was out of sight in Mrs. Whitford's kitchen, which is all that can be expected. There was reason for the absence of the fly, for the outer door and all the windows were protected by blue cotton screening, the frames of which were painted green, a discord in color to be sure, but the occupants of this comfortable farmhouse had strong nerves, hence no one was disturbed and the screens fulfilled their purpose.

A large black and white cat sat in the sunshine which streamed in at the door, lazily snapping at the flies on the outside, regardless of the futility of his effort. He had white paws and a white spot under his chin, which his mistress called his apron, and which was always in a state of snowy whiteness. "Sam" was evidently the family pet and had a reputation for great intelligence.

"Why," Mrs. Whitford would say, "if I tell him to roll over, he'll do it just as quick and he does look so cute. He knows what I say to him as much as folks do."

But Sam was prone to mischief sometimes. He delighted in putting his paw through the screen door, and just now, as Mrs. Whitford came from the pantry, she spied him in the act of beginning his mischievous work. He had already made a small rent.

"Oh, you rascal!" she cried, as she took the broom to him and sent him flying out-doors, "if you aint the biggest rogue, now I've got to mend that screen again. This's the fourth time I do believe that cat has put his paw through that screen door."

She procured scissors, needle and thread and was repairing damages when a woman came into the yard and walked up the drive-way to the house. "How'd do, Ellen?" called Mrs. Whitford, when her visitor was within hailing distance, "aint this a splendid day? I'm really glad to see you. Come in an' set down. I'll be done with this in a minute," she added, handing her visitor a chair and keeping on with her work.

The woman, Ellen Bemis by name, returned her greetings, and said "I'll jus' stop a minute long's you've got it most done. But you're gettin' supper, fer your table's set. I mustn't stay long if it's so late."

"Late? taint so very late an' if 'tis you're goin' to stay. I'd look well lettin' you go on home jus' supper time," returned Mrs. Whitford cordially, as she finished the rent and put away her sewing tools.

"Well," said Mrs. Bemis, with a proper show of reluctance which was wholly superficial, as she had intended to remain all along, "I s'pose I can, if it aint goin' to be any trouble to you I sh'll be rather late to supper if I wait 'til I git home, sure enough."

She was a middle-aged woman, and, as she removed her bonnet in response to her hostess' urgent invitation, time's imprint was shown in the sprinkling of gray hairs among the brown locks parted over the narrow forehead. Her gray eyes spoke of many trials borne and misfortunes experienced, but there was a kindly light shining from them, notwithstanding.

"How's all your folks?" asked Mrs. Whitford as she oscillated from pantry to tea-table, and the two women exchanged news and family happenings.

Ere long, a tall sun-burned young man came in with a pail brimming with frothy milk in his hand. He spoke to Mrs. Bemis and then asked his mother.

"How much milk'll you need t'night, mother?"

"Oh, gi' me two or three quarts," she answered. He measured out the milk and went out, saying he would be in to supper soon.

Mrs. Whitford was a widow, and her son was the delight and pride of her life. She always talked about John a great deal to her friends, and never spoke as if he possessed a fault or lacked a virtue.

After the evening meal was done and John was finishing the chores at the barn, Mrs. Bemis remarked as she wiped the dishes for Mrs. Whitford:

"John's a payin' attention to Addie Churchill now, aint he?"

"Yes," said his mother good-naturedly, and then lowering her tone, she added: "Don't you tell, Ellen, but

I expect he intends to speak t'night. He's goin' up there. You better stay 'til he's ready an' ride along with him as far's the turnpike. It'll save your walkin'."

"I guess I will," said the other.

There was a silence for a few moments as the two women went on with their work. Then Mrs. Bemis spoke.

"Jane," said she seriously, coming nearer, as she wiped a cup, "I come up here t'night 'cause I wanted to tell you somethin', if you'll promise not to tell John. I do want to make trouble between lovers, but I thought you'd like to know."

"I shan't say an'thin'," returned Mrs. Whitford calmly.

"Well," said Mrs. Bemis, "I was up to Elm Grove the other day. She's Hiram's second cousin, you know. She lives in Bayville now, and when I was to the station waitin' for the train home, who should come in but Addie Churchill's mother. When she saw me, she walked right up to me an' says:

"'Good aft'noon, Mis' Bemis, as friendly as could be, tho' we aint much acquainted. I couldn't think what on earth made her so approachin', but I found out."

"'Wanted to quiz you, didn't she?' asked Mrs. Whitford; "she knows you'n I are cousins, an' she thought she was goin' to find out 'bout family matters, I'll be bound."

"'Yes, 'twas just that,'" said Mrs. Bemis; "she begun by askin' how my folks was, an' kinder led up to you and was terrible anxious about your health. Then she says, 'Mis' Bemis, I don't want to ask what's none o' my bus'ness, but I sh'd be glad if you'd tell me some things about John Whitford. You know he's been goin' with my Adeline for some time an' I think he's gettin' ready to speak. I want to know if he's liberal. The Whitfords haint had the name o' bein' very generous an' I don't want any girl o' mine to marry a stingy man. I've seen enough o' close folks. My oldest sister married a man who's terrible tight in the pure-strings an' she aint had no comfort o' life ever since. I hate to have another one o' the same kind in the family, though o' course John Whitford's a nice feller."

"'Mis' Churchill,' says I, 'you needn't worry none about John. His father was kinder close, I s'pose, but he died when John wan't but four years old, an' he's ben brought up by his mother, as generous an' free a woman as ever I see, if she is my cousin. I guess he won't turn out very stingy,' says I."

"'No,'" said Mrs. Whitford, with mild scorn, "she can sleep o' nights, for all the tight-fistedness there is in John. Come out an' set on the porch, Ellen, now the dishes are done. What else did she hev to say?"

"'Sam,'" the cat, came purring around as the two women went outside, and ensconced himself in his mistress' lap.

"'Oh, she kinder apologized an' said she didn't doubt he was all right, but she thought she'd like to know, that was all. She said she thought a man that was close wasn't near the man he ought to be in other things, it kinder warped his character in every direction. She had a great horror of it. She told how her sister's husband had spells sometimes; 'twas when he was worried over money matters. He'd come in an' set down to the table an' eat his vittles without sayin' a word all dinner-time, an' keep it up for several days at a time. 'Twas terrible depression,' she said, 'to have to live with such a man.'"

"'Yes, must be,'" assented Mrs. Whitford. "My man wasn't like that though he was a pretty good hand to stick to a dollar."

"'Well, nobody's perfect. It's too bad, but when you git right down to the fine point, Jane, even the best o' folks has got some weakness or failin' that spoils the effect, sometimes. If I was to hev my choice of a stingy an' a spendthrift I don't know, but I believe I sh'd take the close man ev'ry time, for I'd be likely to hev somethin' in my old age an' not be haunted by the poor house, if I did hev to go without some things I'd like to hev.'"

"'Yes, but jes' the same, a middlin' free man's more comfortable to git along with, to my mind,'" returned Mrs. Whitford, as she stroked Sam's back.

"'I hear a minister preach a sermon once on generosity, an' he was awful cute. Some o' his ideas hev staid in my head ever since. I remember one thing he said: 'Twas a good thing some folks did die; 'twas fortunate there was an end to their meanness. Why,' sez he, 'I've known folks so close they wouldn't give you a piece of their minds, without chargin' for it.'"

"Both women laughed.

"'O' course I don't give jest his words. He said too that the New Jerusalem measured twelve thousand furlongs, but some o' the folks that expected to git there wouldn't need all that room unless they stopped puttin' coppers

into the contribution box, an' I remember he give the Bible a great thump an' hollered up when he said it. As a general thing I don't enjoy a preacher that pounds the Bible, an' Hiram says 'taint usin' the good book proper, but we both thought he told the truth that time."

"'Pretty plain talk, I sh'd think,'" commented Mrs. Whitford.

"'Yes, but it didn't hurt us none to hear it. I told Hiram after meetin' I guess we was all hit an' that's what made the folks all laugh. We agreed we wouldn't put no more coppers in the box an' we haint. But I guess I'm lackin' in the generosity o' love, I don't hev the patience with other folk's notions I'd orter hev an' its jest as bad to be stingy with our charity as an'thin' else, I s'pose.'"

"'That's so, but I shouldn't wonder if we was all lackin' some in that line. I tell John human nature's awful weak stuff an' errin'. He seems to think Adeline's 'bout perfect, but he'll find out she aint. He was a talkin' the other day 'bout her bein' so independent, said 'twas all the fault she hed, an' he didn't think 'twas a very bad one either, only he thought a woman orter be willin' to lean on a n' be kinder easy influenced an' yieldin'. He expects she's goin' to change some after she's married; he should talk some of her ideas out of her, he said. I didn't say nothin', but I hed my private opinion.'"

"'Guess he'll have somethin' to do to bring that about,'" said Mrs. Bemis, smiling significantly. "But here's John an' the hoss all hitched up. I mus' be gettin' ready; he won't want to wait for me, if he's like the rest o' the men,'" laughing as she arose.

The young man tied the horse and went up stairs to make ready. Soon he appeared, arrayed in his best, and when his mother told him Ellen was going to ride as far as the turnpike, he assented with preoccupied air. As they rode along the country lane, bordered on either side with grey, ivy-covered walls, and now and then a stately elm or sturdy maple tossing its leaves in the evening breeze, not much was said. John asked if crops were coming along well with her folks and after Mrs. Bemis had answered, both relapsed into silence. The peace and quiet of the scene through which they were passing pervaded Ellen's mind and John was thinking of the future.

When they reached the turnpike the young man assisted his companion to alight. She thanked him for the ride, both said good-night and John drove on toward the home of the one girl the world contained for him.

The day had been hot and sultry, a typical July day, and as the twilight deepened, a dark thunder-cloud loomed up in the west.

A short distance from the Churchill's John found Adeline by the road-side, picking cherries from an old gnarled cherry-tree whose branches hung low. She stood on a stone wall, the folds of her thin muslin gown half revealing the supple lines of her slender figure, and the outline of her rounded arms was plainly visible through her sleeves as she reached for the fruit. She made a pretty picture, enhanced by a slight flush on face and forehead, as she turned her head and saw the team and driver.

"'How'd do, Adeline?'" said John, stopping his horse and getting out. "Pickin' cherries?"

"'Yes,'" she answered, as her color deepened and then faded. "I guess I better be goin' home, too. Looks as though we was goin' to hev a shower," and she sprang lightly from the wall to the foot-path by the road-side.

"'Hain't you better get in an' ride, then? I was comin' up to see you.'"

"'Praps I might's well,'" she answered slowly, and handing him the pail full of fruit, she got into the carriage.

"'I don't believe it's goin' to rain,'" he said, "don't you want to go to ride, Adeline? Let's go up by the South Dunham road."

"'I think 'tis goin' to rain,'" she returned with decision, but pleasantly, "you better put your team in the barn and we can set on the front piazza. Then if it rains we'll be near home."

"'All right,'" assented John, cheerfully. He drove into the barn, and before he could assist her to alight Adeline was out and had gone into the house with the cherries. A shadow came over John's face. "Just her plaguey independence," he muttered; "terrible afraid I'll help her out an' have a chance to hold her hand half a minute."

Adeline soon appeared with a wrap on her arm.

"'Ma says she thinks the shower aint comin' this way, but I better put on my sacque 'cause the wind's cool.'"

They walked slowly round to the front of the house, Adeline, who was a great talker, chatting blithely about the church picnic and other matters of

local interest. She finally asked him if he was going to the picnic.

"'I'm goin' if you are,'" he made answer, seriously.

The quick color came to her face, but she merely said she intended to go if nothing happened. There was an awkward silence as they seated themselves on the piazza steps.

But John at length screwed up his courage. "Adeline, is there anybody— you—like better'n me?"

"'No,'" in low tones, with averted face. John drew nearer, encouraged.

"'Do you—think you could make up your mind to take—me, Addie?'" She put her hand in his silently and smiled up at him. He pressed her hand and looked as a respectable lover ought, under the circumstances; very happy.

"'Praps I shan't suit you, Ad'line; you don't know only the best side o' me,'" he said with some solicitude.

"'Well, you don't know me neither,'" was the girl's reply. "I've got lots o' faults; you'll find that out," laughing.

"'I don't b'lieve it; you're the best girl the Lord ever made,'" protested the loyal lover, and so they talked and cooed in their new-found happiness.

So absorbed were they the approaching thunder storm was unnoticed until a few drops of rain and a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a sharp report, warned them the shower was coming.

Adeline sprang up.

"'Let's go into the parlor,'" she said, and led the way into the tiny front room dedicated to courtings, weddings and funerals. They were sitting at the two front windows watching the storm, when Adeline remembered her mother's injunction when they were discussing her future one day, for they were as fully assured that John would propose as that the sun would set. Flirting was unknown in their community.

"'You be sure,'" her mother had said, "to hev it in the bargain that you're to hev the butter'n egg money, an' then you'll hev somethin' you can call your own. He may be all right an' think he's willin' to give you everythin' you want, but it aint best to take no risks. An' he's got stingy blood in him; maybe it haint showed none yet, if his mother's free hearted an' brought him up generous, but what's in folks is bound to come out sometimes. It takes circumstances to bring out what's in folks an' he aint never had a fam'ly to support. You listen to me, Addie, and hev it fixed aforehand."

Adeline had demurred at the time and said she didn't care p'tic'larly 'bout the money. She didn't think it would look very well to begin talkin' 'bout what you was to hev when a man asked you. But her mother insisted it looked all right, and she would be a good deal happier after she was married if she did as she said. And Mrs. Churchill's strong will and decided opinion won the day.

"'You're goin' to let me hev the butter'n egg money, ain't you, John?'" Adeline asked, persuasively, as they talked about their plans.

A shadow came over John's face as he looked at the lowering clouds and the downfall of rain. He made no reply at first, but presently said, stiffly:

"'My wife'll be well pervided for.'" Adeline's mother was not aware that a prominent trait of John's character was a certain obstinacy if he thought he was driven. His mother understood this and was careful never to arouse his "contriness," as she called it. He was also quick to take offense but quick to recover from it, and he resented Adeline's question. He thought "it was some more o' her plaguey independence."

Adeline, who had been ready to let the matter rest was likewise disturbed by his reply.

"'I didn't mean you wouldn't do well by me, but every woman ought to have somethin' of her own, ma says.'"

At this John flushed up, his petulance increasing.

"'If your ma can't trust me to do the right thing prob'ly she wont want you to marry ma, and then repented and wished he had not said it. "Excuse me, Addie," he started to say, but she interrupted him.

"'I think if you was lib'ral at all, you wouldn't be gettin' provoked at such a little thing. Praps I better not have a man who thinks more of his money than he does of his wife,'" and Adeline's eyes flashed, for she was quick-tempered too.

It was now so dark they could not see each other's faces save when the room was lit by the flashes of lightning. The thunder was almost incessant and torrents of rain were falling. The storm of anger in the two young hearts increased also and it looked as if their future relations would be far from harmonious.

Suddenly, what seemed to them like a great blinding ball of fire, fell with deafening sound, and a noble tree lay prostrate in the road, near the house,

In a trice Adeline was clinging to John, terrified and trembling.

"'Oh John, John, aint you struck?'" she gasped.

"'Yes,'" he answered tenderly, as he held her, "right here," and laid his hand on his heart and laughed.

Some little details which would be uninteresting to outsiders ensued, and when the shower was over they went out to look at the tree. They found Adeline's father and mother and the hired man there.

"'Pooty close call for my barn!'" said Mr. Churchill.

"'Close call for your house, Abner, I sh'd say,'" was Mrs. Churchill's rejoinder. They all laughed and the three men set to work to remove the tree from the highway, for it had fallen directly across the road.

Adeline went with John to the barn when the way was cleared, and it occurred to her as he unhitched the horse that their dispute was not settled. "John," she whispered as he kissed her good-night, "it's all right 'bout the money. I don't care. Ma put me up to it."

"'Did she?'" he asked quickly. "Well, you c'n hev it, Addie; I intended you should, but don't tell you ma. It's none o' her affairs."

She laughed coyly.

"'I'll see 'bout that,'" was all she would say.

The next evening he had occasion to drive over to Mr. Bemis and his mother went with them. He went out to the barn to find Hiram, and Ellen asked Mrs. Whitford in an excited whisper, "Did he propose?"

"'Yes, an' he's got Adeline a diamond ring. Wonder what Mrs. Churchill will say to that!'"

THE SHAH'S CIRCUIT.

He Will Visit the Principal European Courts This Summer.

The Shah of Persia, having been four years on the throne, wishes to see the world, and has planned a long journey. He will visit St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London and Constantinople, and will be entertained at all the courts. It will be a costly journey, and the shah is not reputed to be rich; but his credit is good, especially in St. Petersburg, where the treasury is always ready to make advances to the ruler of a vassal state whose territory Russia covets.

Muzaffar-ed-din, the shah, is nearly fifty years old. He looks younger than he is, for there are no traces of gray in his jet-black hair and long, drooping mustache, and there are no lines on his narrow forehead. His eyes are soft and dreamy, the contour of his face is regular, and his smile is that of an indolent and weak man who can be easily amused.

He is a ruler without strength of character, who is believed to have secured the throne through Russian support when his older brother had a clearer right to it, and would have resisted foreign influence more strenuously. He is a pleasure-loving sovereign who likes to go about everything in the easiest way.

Great results may follow the shah's circuit of European travel. An empire larger than France and Germany together may be opened to European commerce; and Russia may find herself on the Persian Gulf and on the frontier of India (while Englishmen are asking whether Lord Salisbury was really in earnest when he declared that there was "room enough for all in Asia.")

COLORING CANARY BIRDS.

A popular color for canary-birds in England at present is a reddish yellow, or deep orange. This color, it is said, can be produced artificially by dieting the birds on a number of different substances, the chief of which is cayenne pepper mixed with molasses. Dealers are able to produce particularly desirable shades by varying the quantity of pepper and by adding occasionally a little turmeric or madder. Each dealer has his own formula, which he keeps secret. The plumage of the birds thus treated is apt to fade, and they are kept as much as possible out of the light.

UNLOCATED.

Mrs. Stubb—John, the kangaroo has pockets in which her young conceal themselves at the first scent of danger.

Mr. Stubb—Well, Maria, if they are as difficult to locate as those of the majority of her sex I can't see how the young ones find them.

THE BREAKING POINT.

Bertie has discharged his German valet.

What for? He told the Dutchman to crease his trousers, and the valet greased 'em.