

MRS. GRAY'S VISITORS.

If there is a time trying to house-keepers it is the period called spring-cleaning.

Farmer Gray's wife was no exception—good, motherly soul that she was. She was up with the lark day after day, and gave little rest to those working under her supervision.

Reuben was her pride—the boy who, utterly regardless of the clean, sand-floored, would walk boldly in where no other foot dared tread, leaving his imprint in mud to mark his course—the boy for whose future she had woven such wonderful air-castles.

He must be a lawyer, a great man, one whose name she should some day see in the public prints. This seemed to her the very height of ambition.

Reuben was coming home—a college graduate—to spend with them his vacation, and then back to the Metropolis to earn fame. Was it any wonder the floors, the walls, the ceilings, must give evidence of their mute delight?

Trudging along at a slow jog-trot, occasionally speaking a word of encouragement to the tired mare, Farmer Gray was nearing home. But a troubled look rested on his face, very different from the bright cheeriness generally found there, and ever and anon his eyes wandered stealthily to a little figure perched on a high seat at his side.

One could see only the face—a pinched, worn little face, from which two great brown eyes peered out, and seemed to take in every blade of grass by the roadside, every leaf upon the trees, as some wonderful heaven-sent vision accorded her.

"You mustn't mind, my dear, if Mrs. Gray seems a little put out like, when she first sees you. It's house-cleaning time, and she don't much like strangers botherin' her; but she'll soon find out you won't be in the way, and when she sees the roses comin' back to your cheeks she'll be happy enough. Only don't worry her if at first she's a wee bit flustered."

"Oh, I'm sorry you brought me, if she won't like it!" answered the child—for child she seemed, sitting there, though seventeen summers had passed over her head.

"There, there, now! She will like it, I tell you; and when she once sees you, and feels sorry for you, you'll find how kind and good she is," said the farmer, striving, with the remembrance of duty done, to reassure his sinking heart as he came in sight of his own pasture-land.

He had gone bright and early that morning to the doctor's in the market town, to tell his old friend of the honors his boy had won, and that soon Reuben was coming back to them; and after giving him a few words and a warm hand-shake of congratulations, the doctor had added:

"I was thinking of you, wishing for you, as you entered. There is a little girl here who is dying for the want of pure country air and a little nursing in the way of food. She needs plenty of milk, and liberty to roam all day in the fields. Take her back with you, Gray; it will be the making of her, and I am coming down soon to see how she's getting along."

"It's house-cleaning," answered the farmer, and a world of meaning was in that short sentence.

Both men looked grave, but the doctor spoke again: "We can't let the girl die if it is. I tell you, Gray, she is starving for country air, for green fields and the music of the birds. Let her go. Mrs. Gray won't turn her out."

So it was decided. But Farmer Gray's "Whoa!" rang out a little less loud than usual, as he reined up the old horse at his own door; but the quick housewife's ears caught it, and it brought her speedily to the door to bid him welcome and see that his boots were fit to tread her spotless floors. The tracking on them with mud must be left for Reuben.

Poor Mrs. Gray! She was hot and tired, though she would not have acknowledged it. Her feet were weary, for all the day they had borne her weight.

"What have you got there, Seth Gray?" questioned she, in tones shrill and sharp. "Company, I declare, and it's house-cleaning!"

Then, as the farmer tenderly lifted down the girl in his strong arms, she continued: "A child, I declare! Well, all I can say, Seth Gray—you must stay at home and take care of her!"

She turned away, forgetting, in her indignation, even her floors. "Never you mind," said the farmer, as he noticed two great tears swimming in the large brown eyes, and trembling, ready to fall, on the jetty lashes, while the delicate mouth quivered. "It's just her way. She don't mean it. Come now, dear—"

"You'd better show her the spare room," interrupted the shrill tones again, as they entered.

Then, as her husband returned alone from his errand, his wife's wrath broke its bounds.

"Are you mad, Seth Gray, to put any more care on my shoulders at this time? You can take another ride to

town to-morrow, and take the child back where she came from. My hands are full enough."

"The doctor said we could save her life, mother. I thought we wouldn't let her die for the want of tryin'."

Mrs. Gray said no more, but that evening, when she was washing her favorite china with her own hands, and a little figure, stealing up beside her, whispered: "Let me help you," though she answered, "Such as you cannot help," all remonstrance ended there, and soon the little fingers were deftly wiping the smoking dishes, and, with careful haste, putting each in its appointed place.

Somehow, as the days wore on, Mrs. Gray found she had more time to sit and rest; that, instead of added care, it seemed lessened, while a little fairy-like figure flitted here and there and everywhere, like a burst of sunshine.

House-cleaning was over now; her voice had lost its harshness, her brow its frown; and as Hope—who had rushed to her own room at the sound of wheels—watched her from a window open her motherly arms to welcome her boy and saw her happy, tear-dimmed eyes, the girl wondered how she could first have regarded the woman with such dread.

Hope's own eyes did not seem so big now; a faint peach-bloom had stolen into her cheeks; her figure had lost its angular lines in rounded curves, and all day a thanksgiving seemed to come bubbling to her lips in song.

"Why, who's that, mother?" questioned the tall, handsome young man, as he turned his laughing blue eyes out through the open window and saw the little figure flitting among the flowers.

"She's a child Dad brought me home in house-cleaning. I wasn't over-glad to see her but I think I shall miss her when she goes."

An amused smile overspread the listener's face. He could appreciate that welcome at so inopportune a season as house-cleaning time.

Reuben wondered, as the days lengthened into weeks, why his home-coming had never been so pleasant before.

He, too, began to think he would miss Hope when she went away. Somehow the parlor had lost its look of stiffness, and even had an air of habitation, with its fresh flowers in every available receptacle.

"Well, I suppose we have done all we can for Hope," said the farmer one day. "Poor child! she's an orphan, and will have to win her daily bread. But she's got back some of her strength, and the color has found its way back to her face again; and you must be tired of havin' the care of her"—this with a quizzical expression, while he narrowly watched his wife's face.

"You'll do no such thing, Seth Gray! Just like a man—when the girl's beginning to pick up to whisk her off to the hot town again. She's learned my ways now, and she's not much in the way. Besides, she's company for Reuben."

So it seemed, as out in the queer-roofed arbor they sat side by side, she listening, with downcast eyes and a happy, tearful smile, while he told her how different his home had seemed since she had entered it, and how in solving the enigma, he had discovered his love for her.

"But what will mother say?" asked the sweet voice—for, since Reuben came, she had learned to say "mother," too. "She has such great and wonderful dreams for your future and thinks that somewhere some princess, clad in shining robes, is waiting for you."

"I have found my princess, Hope!" he answered, placing his arm about her. "She is here, and her soul is clothed in such beauty—such glory shines through its windows, your eyes,—that she needs no outward embellishment! Only say you love me, darling, and I have no fear but that the mother who has ever smiled upon my boyish folly will not frown upon the first wisdom of my manhood."

So hand in hand, as the sun was sinking in magnificence, they entered the house together, and he led the shrinking girl to his mother's side.

"We have come to ask your blessing, mother," said Reuben, in his honest, manly tone. "Hope has made me very happy by promising to be my wife."

In mute bewilderment Mrs. Gray looked at them both, a sense of her own folly smiting her as with a sharp sword, and bringing with a crash all her castles to the ground.

But she looked from the calm, resolute face of her son to the sweet, fair girl whose hand lay in his, and, drawing Hope down, she kissed the young, red lips, and uttered no word of her disappointment.

Farmer Gray heard the news with a shake of the head and a twinkle of the eyes, as much as to say he had predicted it from the first.

But when the good doctor came, later, to tell them that their son, as they had supposed, given their son, a dowryless bride, but that he, her guardian, represented a snug little fortune for her—though, in his proud love and young ambition, Reuben would almost have wished it otherwise—as the farmer whispered to his wife:—"Blessings in disguise sometimes come even in house-cleaning, my dear," the last frown left her still comely face, and there is no one in the world so dear to her as Hope, her son's wife, and the little children whose feet bring dust or dirt, without reproach, upon the still spotless floor.

About the House.

LITTLE FEET.

Two little feet so small that both may nestle In one caressing hand; Two little feet upon the untried border Of life's mysterious land.

Dimpled and soft and pink as peach-tree blossoms In April's fragrant days, How can they walk among the briary tangles Edging the world's rough ways?

Ah! who may read the future? For our darling We crave all blessings sweet, And pray that He who feeds the crying ravens Will guide the baby's feet

TRAINING YOUR BOY.

The second of men's seven ages which may be reckoned as beginning when he puts on long trousers, is the most critical for the boy and the most responsible for the mother, writes a correspondent. During its course the youngster is subjected to many temptations, feels the awakening of many thoughts and ideas before unknown to him and catches his first glimpses of the world's evil. His attitude toward these new factors in existence, be they subjective or objective, is a matter of much greater influence than appears to him at the time.

Nor is it an easy matter to point out the true character and relation of the new forces with which he comes in contact. He is impatient of advice or restraint. Having been permitted to toddle unsupported he fancies that he can run alone. It is this fact that makes the mother's task so difficult, and calls for the greatest exercise of tact and loving judgment. There are two general methods, two schools, one may almost say, of treating boys during this age. The more prevalent method, the larger school, is that which shields him from every temptation from every evil association, and from every unrighteous act and thought. Judging it by the large, and in the light of its results as I have observed them, I must say that in my opinion it is a failure. It may be successful while it is possible for the treatment itself to continue, but it bears ill fruit later on.

Sooner or later, usually all too soon, the boy must come to the knowledge of good and evil and must choose between them, not in two forms nor in a score, but in a thousand. If his eyes have not been trained to see clearly the ugly shape beneath the pleasing exterior, if he knows not the principles on which to base his choice, if he cannot receive and parry subtle thrusts from unexpected quarters, he is as ill prepared for the battle of life as would have been a knight of old going out to mortal combat clad in silken armor.

There is no time when a boy's moral fiber and early training are more thoroughly tested than when he goes away to school or college, or when he leaves home to enter some business establishment. There he is certain to meet temptations of many kinds. There, also he must stand alone, with no reliance but that which his early training has given him.

If his home training has been ignorance of all that is unpleasant or evil in its consequences the boy is to be pitied. He is likely to be called a "softy" by his companions, and there is no delight so great as that of shocking or tormenting or destroying the illusions of a "softy."

They themselves know, perhaps, when to stop, when to draw back, when to turn away, but they do not think to point out the danger line to their untutored companion. It seems so unnecessary. He shrinks back at first, perhaps, but at length he takes the plunge, and when he does he plunges far.

There is an intoxication in first knowledge, be it good or bad when it comes at first hand. Therein lies the "softy's" peril, for it is marvelously easy for him to go beyond the depth, to lose the poise which is the governing gear and safety valve of all manly. It is true, as proved by all experience, that nobody can go to the devil at such a galloping gait as one of these same "softies." Nobody can sow a larger and more deadly crop of wild oats than the boy whose ears have been shielded from the very mention of all that such a sowing involves.

The other method of youthful training, which is less in favor now than formerly, consists in encouraging the boy to know the apple of evil by its taste. It is the Spartan method. It says: "Let the fox tear at his vitals. If he survives it will make him stronger for the next contest."

This plan might succeed admirably if it were true, as the poets have told us, that vice is a monster hateful at first view. Unhappily, it is true that the gay trappings of vice are often more attractive than the sober garments of virtue. The first slip may only whet the appetite for deeper draughts.

It seems to me that the most successful plan to follow is not a combination of these two, but a compromise between the two. Teach your boy what he must expect, what he must meet in life. Show him to what he should cling and of what he should beware. Caution him against sin and folly, not commandingly, but reasonably. Point out how they will warp his nature and spoil his life. Unfortunately, every community affords living object lessons for such instruction. Remember that he has reached an age of independent intelligence

and that your strongest hope lies in appealing to his intelligence. If you find that he is committing some venial fault, is doing something that he would not have you know, do not upbraid him; reason with him—strongly, intelligently, convincingly and—reasonably. Some persons will say that this can be of no avail. Their belief is the doctrine that wickedness is inherent, but it is not. If you have done your earlier work well and have led your boy to have a high and thorough respect for the competence of your judgment and the thoroughness of your own knowledge, you can convince him and direct him and help him over a few of the roughest places in life's roadway.

I can feel to-day, through the lapse of long years, the awful sense of humiliation and contrition that came to me one day in my own boyhood when my mother took me to her room and pointed out the evil possibilities of one bad habit that I had begun in secret, as I thought, from her. I had known that it was something not to be approved else I should not have hidden it, but I did not realize why it was to be avoided with the overwhelming conviction that her gentle tones of warning impressed upon me with a vividness that remains to this day. Neither coaxing nor command could have made the same impression.

The point that I seek to impart by this instance, and that will be borne out by others which these suggest to you, is this: Teach your boy to avoid evil. Do so, not by screening him, but by helping him to walk past it with head erect and feet unwavering, to look it in the face with a clear eye and to quell it by the strength of honest purity. Then alone will he be safe.

WHERE FASHION FAILS.

To look her best is every woman's duty, old and young, and the plain and the elderly ought to make the greatest effort. The trouble is that most of us begin by wanting to be in the fashion, and unfortunately the fashion often takes away every chance of bettering our appearance and increases all our defects.

For instance, just now, when the fashion takes its model, as a witty woman has pointed out, "from a feather duster," we are made painfully aware of how few women have beautiful figures and how badly many of us walk. To have a close sheath drawn over our hips and a mass of ruffles fall around our feet so that we cannot take a free step, and then with an aching arm to hold up the awkward thing as we walk, is ruinous to grace or beauty. And where the slender purse says that only one good walking dress is possible, what a grief it is to feel that this arrangement makes it sure to be spoiled in a very short time and forbids any hope of alteration.

KISSED BY THE QUEEN.

To be Knight of the Thistle is a big honor, of course," remarked an old quartermaster sergeant, amidst a discussion among some military men at Chatham, says Fearson's Weekly; but I can claim a distinction lots in front of that, or of kissing hands with the Queen, as they say of the custom observed by Cabinet Ministers when taking over the seals of office.

"You're chucking it, mon," observed a stalwart sergeant frae the far North. "Well," the veteran non-com. went on to explain, "the good fortune which befell me was to be kissed by the Queen," an intimation which caused the little party to gather round yet closer.

"You're having us, Jock," observed a credulous corporal, "and if you want the hatchet, say so, for the present holder is far outclassed."

"No," the distinguished soldier, as he claimed to be, contended, "it is you that's out of it, as you will see. You may have heard of my being the youngest bugler that took part in the Crimea, and such fact secured for me a place among the survivors who were inspected by the Queen after peace was proclaimed."

"When the wounded went by, some in chairs—"

"Quite so, Well, I was then a little flaxen haired, red cheeked youngster, very small for my age, and I suppose contrasted a good deal with the worn veterans. When my turn came to pass, Her Majesty asked how old I was, and on replying a little over thirteen, at the same time giving quite the best salute possible, the Queen said:—"Dear little fellow," and then gave me a kiss on the cheek. So you see how I came to receive a gracious distinction which from generals downward no other soldier has ever been able to lay claim to. That honor's mine alone."

PRINTED DRESSES.

A novel idea which has come directly from Paris is the decoration of dresses with water-color designs. Hand-painted mousselines are very popular for evening wear, and when a light, graceful pattern is artistically executed the result is admirable. A dress of white mousseline was finished in this scarlet pattern with a vine of rich scarlet trumpet flowers, which gracefully followed the outlines of the long over-skirt, and showed effectively upon the low-cut bodice. Bunches of artificial flowers fastened upon the left shoulder and trailing upon the arm served to complete a most unique and attractive toilet. Satin also is decorated in the same style, sometimes with an introduction of silver, gold or jeweled effects to give an added luster and brilliancy.

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