

# Little Amplas

He Arrives at the Farm.  
What His Grandparents think of Him.  
His Great Service.

JESSIE WRIGHT WHITCOMB IN  
"YOUTH'S COMPANION."

MPLIAS and Deborah Hicks, for some reason or other, did not occupy so high a position in their neighbors' estimation as in their own opinion they were entitled to occupy.

What Vermont farmer was more thrifty, more saving, more careful than Amplas? Whose stock in the neighborhood was so carefully sheltered from the winter winds? Who had so many water-tight little out-buildings for the protection of all that was theirs? Whose apples were better

Their daughter Letitia had not done well in her marriage, and, though she lived in a town not a hundred miles away, Deborah and Amplas had not seen her since she left them. She had several children. Deborah and Amplas always spoke of them doubtfully, surmising that they probably had more of the characteristics of the shiftless Canes than of the thrifty Hickses.

But the nephews were gone, and a boy to do chores, or a girl to take hold in the house, would not be unhandy. Beside those worldly calculations, which seemed commendable to both, was a desire, unacknowledged by either, to do something for their one child, Letitia.

sisters, little as that," was the weak rejoinder.

"He would take your time from your work, being sickly?" questioningly.

"He might grow strong up here. I wonder if he favors you."

"He might get up the cows, and fetch water to the field, and gather the cobs and such like. I done all such when not mor'n five."

Gradually they came to the conclusion that little Amplas must come; but it took so long to do so that when Amplas drove over to Bethel to meet the boy at the station he had to go in a sleigh. He knew that his grandson was only seven, yet when he saw the conductor take off a little scrap of a boy he never thought of the child being his property. The conductor spied him.

"Here's your boy!" he shouted. "Labelled for Amplas Hicks, Stoneborough." Amplas made some remark, but his "Ho, ho, ho!" died in his throat as he looked down at the mite of a child gazing so gravely up into his face.

"You my gran'per?" asked the boy.

"Ye, 'spect I am," and Amplas tried to laugh. But he couldn't. He felt more awkward than ever before in his life. He had never been accustomed to noticing children, and he did not know a child ever looked so—so little, so meditative, so wise. The boy's great, solemn eyes threw Amplas into a perspiration.

"You little Amplas?" he asked, nervously; "come, we must be getting home to Deborah."

He strode off toward the sleigh and the boy followed. Expecting in some way to find the boy beside him, Amplas got into the sleigh, but there was a great gulf of deep snow between it and the platform where the little Amplas stood, gravely watching.

"I got a bag," he said, holding up a check in his little, bare, red hand.

So Amplas had to get out and fetch the bag, and this time he lifted little Amplas into the sleigh. Something about the slight, trustful weight made his face turn scarlet. He looked down sideways at the boy and saw he was shivering. Then old Amplas tucked the robe around little Amplas with a curious sense of protecting something.

The boy did not seem to grow warm on that long, cold ride home. He just sat and shivered uncomplainingly, while

and not to try to dress him "fashionable," that is, not to buy him any clothes unless they were forced to do so. It seemed to Deborah now, that nothing could be good enough for that little boy.

She had some flannel in the house and she meant to make him good warm underclothes. But he would need stockings before she could possibly knit them, and shoes, too.

She had never seen Amplas seem so interested in anything human as in that boy. He could hardly eat for looking at him. As for little Amplas, he devoured his ham and eggs and potatoes and biscuits and drank his milk with a gusto that would have seemed an ill omen to Amplas and Deborah the day before, but which they looked on now with the greatest satisfaction.

Nothing was said, for the Hicks household was not a talkative one, until little Amplas looked up at his grandfather and philosophically remarked:

"If I eat like this I'll soon be able to do all your work."

"I don't want you doing no work," was the gruff reply. "You're to play."

Deborah tried to look unconscious. Her husband was a very brave man to renounce his lifelong opinions so publicly!

The next day Amplas declared he must go to Bethel to buy a strap, and he insisted on taking little Amplas with him.

Deborah sewed her fastest while they were gone, scheming in the meanwhile about shoes and stockings. Her schemes, however, were vain, for when Amplas came home he broke in with:

"There, Deborah, little Amplas must go warm! See the great bargains! I was always a master-hand at buying."

There was a thick cap, and a heavy overcoat, and a warm suit, and a pair of stout shoes, and a whole bundle of other things. Little Amplas strutted around with a grave joy in his philosophic eyes that was almost intoxicating to the unaccustomed givers.

On Sunday Amplas suggested that they should drive to Lympus to meeting to show off little Amplas and his new clothes. It was a somewhat novel proceeding, in view of their relations with their neighbors.

A great many curious eyes turned on them in that country church; and after meeting was over Amplas and Deborah were so anxious to exhibit their new pos-



MESSENGERS OF MERCY.

Amplas did not think that his grandson was much hurt until he picked up the little, pale, still child, and finding he did not move or seem to breathe, carried him—oh! so gently—to the house, wondering dully that the boy could be so light and little. Then he drove furiously for the doctor, while Deborah worked with a heavy heart over the moaning baby.

That was an awful week. The "Ho,

said, desperately. "I'm going to have a Boston doctor if it takes the farm!"

And he did; but it was a bitter disappointment to him. The verdict was the same. The child would never be anything but a cripple, and there wasn't one chance in a thousand that he would live through his fourteenth year.

Then toys came into that house.—there had never been such a thing as a toy in it before,—and a music-box, and many things that Deborah and Amplas had scorned in the good old days.

Deborah, in her recently acquired sympathy with suffering, found time to make clothes for a waif of a baby; and Amplas began to know where his pocket-book was when other people were in need.

They did not realize that they had changed, but other people where wide-awake to the fact.

"The change that's come over the Hickses on account of little Amplas is astonishing!"

"The Lord visited them with a heavy hand, but the loving kindness of it is showed forth in their renewed hearts," said the minister, gravely, and his listeners nodded in solemn assent.

Even little Amplas heard remarks of that kind as he lay in his trundle-bed, and he pondered over them in his philosophic fashion.

One night when Amplas thought the boy was asleep he broke out in bitter bewailing of the accident to Deborah,

"His life is ruined—the wick is all to be burned out in seven year. Doctor said to-night, out to the road gate, that little Amplas is jes' getting weaker and weaker, and that the chances are he'll drop asleep some of these days and never wake up again—and him gettin' so strong and chipper before that gate acted so like a tarntion fool! Wish I'd never had a gate on the farm! Deborah, we've never knowed what it was to lie before little Amplas came. And just as we're finding out he's to be taken from us!"

"It's a judgment on us for our hard ways," sobbed Deborah. "I've laid awake nights feeling it in my bones."

"What good is it if we've got to lose him! Money, nor the farm, nor nothing, is nowhere compared to that little feller with me!" And Amplas groaned with his head in his hands.

Then came a clear, wise little voice from the trundle-bed:

"You needn't to mind, gran'per and gramma. I think I like it better this-a-way. You needn't to mind about me. It would be awful resting to fall asleep and not wake up no more."

He paused. The old people lay still, waiting for the child's voice in the dark.

"And I guess that was a good gate," went on the small philosopher, "for Theophilus Bangs told Sam Beech that Deborah and Amplas Hicks were a sight Christianer and wonderful nice people since little Amplas was hurt, and he guessed it was a good thing. And I'm awful glad if it's a good thing, you're so awful good to me. And you don't mind any more."

So it happened that, long after a small white stone bearing the words "Little Amplas, Son of," etc., "aged eight years and one month," had been put at the head of a tiny new mound in the graveyard, people in all the country round looked to Deborah and Amplas Hicks for sympathy in affliction and in time of trouble.

Some there were who remembered the story, and occasionally told in reminiscence fashion how Deborah and Amplas used to be "terrible hard and close, and that-a-way, before little Amplas came."



THE BERRY PICKER.

picked or lasted longer than theirs? Who could show more maple sugar at sugar-time? Whose household goods had lasted so long, or looked so well preserved, as those cared for by Deborah? Whose farm was kept in better shape or managed more profitably than theirs?

But their neighbors declared that Amplas was close; that Deborah was stingy; that they were hard to live with; that their one daughter, Letitia, had married that good-for-nothing Charlie Cane simply to get away from the paternal roof.

Gossip said that the two nephews who had lived with them had grown sour-looking in their service, and that, being weary of life, they had finally run away one night to nobody knew where. Public sympathy had not been with Deborah and Amplas in the matter.

Amplas thought he understood the reason. His neighbors were meanly jealous of his good fortune. Ill luck that came to others never came to him; his hayricks did not burn, his cattle did not die mysteriously, his land did not refuse to yield bountifully to his labor. And by contemplating all these pleasing differences, Amplas was able to bear up against the disapproval of his neighbors.

So it happened that Amplas, with his bushy beard and low, self-approving "Ho, ho, ho!" after all his own remarks, and the tall, spare Deborah, to whom half-witted Theophilus Bangs always referred as "a perfect taper," so eluded themselves more and more in their old reddish-brown farmhouse set far back from the road. People said in varying tones that Deborah and Amplas were getting "unneighborly" and "very retirin'," as well as "close-and-that-a-way."

So after much pondering and change of mind, they sent a letter to Letitia, saying that they would take and do well by her oldest girl or her oldest boy.

Hard work and disappointment had changed the pleasure-seeking Letitia of bygone days to something so calculating and sharp and unyielding that even Deborah and Amplas would have shrunk from such an exaggeration of themselves. The answer that reached the farmhouse was short and decisive:

"Mary can't go because I need her. John can't go because he is beginning to earn wages, and we need the money. But little Amplas can go if you want him. He is seven and not overgrown, and might fetch up on the farm."

The first decision was prompt. They did not want the sickly seven-year-old.

Deborah was disappointed. She had found a use for her imagination, and had already pictured to herself an industrious girl seconding her in all the work of the house.

Amplas, too, had had his dream, and had gone up and down with the cultivator with a vision of a stout boy hard at work over in the next field, and he had pleased himself by planning to leave to that stout boy, in the distant future, his precious farm.

Surely the sickly seven-year-old was out of the question!

But the more they thought of it, and the more Amplas became impressed with the fact that the child was named after him, the more they were inclined to alter their decision.

"He couldn't do chores enough to earn his salt," said Amplas, waveringly, halting in his hasty dinner.

"He would fret for his brothers and

Amplas lashed his horse in a most un-Hicks-like fashion.

"Here, Deborah," he said, carrying the boy into his wife. "He's high about froze. Ginger him up or something."

Deborah had not expected anything so little as this. She held the child on her lap by the hot stove in the warm, comfortable kitchen. She took off his thin little overcoat, and his thin little scarf, and the poor little cap tied down over his ears. She took off his worn shoes and cottony clothes, and rubbed him hard, and turned him and baked him before the fire.

She washed him in hot water to warm him, and filled him with hot ginger tea, which he took obediently until the tears stood in his eyes. When she saw those patient tears something blurred her own eyes, and she saw more than one little boy uncomplainingly drinking his scalding ginger tea.

She wrapped him in the heavy shawl which she had been warming, and held him in her lap—and cried. Yes, she, Deborah Hicks, who hadn't cried for years—for she boasted she wasn't the crying kind,—felt such a love and pity surge up in her heart for that bit of a boy—almost her own boy—that she cried as if her heart would break.

Little Amplas stared at her reflectively. "Don't cry," he said finally, "I like to live here with you."

She gave him a big hug and laid him like a bundle on the old soft lounge. She turned her hot biscuits in the oven, poked the sizzling slices of ham in the frying-pan, stirred the fried potatoes, poured boiling water into the teapot, and when old Amplas came stamping into the back shed from the dark, snowy world outside supper was smoking on the table.

Little Amplas watched everything with hungry eyes.

"Got him warmed up?" asked Amplas, as soon as he came in; "sint he the littlest thing you ever saw?"

Deborah had a suspicion that Amplas felt pretty much as she did. But perhaps she had already begun to wonder how she could get clothes for the boy. She and Amplas had virtuously and sternly resolved not to waste any money on him,

session that they were really cordial in their demeanor and more conciliatory than for months past.

"Lawsy," said one good woman, "Amplas Hicks actually seems to set store by that child—and him such a sickly, puny, white-faced slip! I didn't know Amplas would put up one minute with anything that couldn't work! Good land! it would make me jump out of my skin to have them great, solemn eyes staring at me the way they do at Amplas."

Deborah and Amplas had declared to each other resolutely that Letitia should "lie in the bed she had made," and that she need not expect help from them after casting in her lot with shiftless Charlie Cane. But in some way, after little Amplas came they began to talk about sending Letitia a bit of a box.

That box grew and grew until it turned into a barrel of potatoes, a barrel of apples, a barrel of comforts and other things made by Deborah's industrious, hard-worked fingers, and a barrel of flour from their own wheat. With the freight paid,—though that was a tug,—they went to Letitia, and the first warm, loving thoughts she had ever had of her home since she left it, came to her when she stood before those homely, country-looking barrels.

The bitterness of her reminiscences seemed to drop from her. After many an effort she wrote a short note. Cold and unfeeling it would have seemed to some, perhaps, but there was something in it that made Deborah think for many a day of the little Letty of years ago and, made Amplas wish he had also sent some maple sugar and a few beets and cabbages and even a little money.

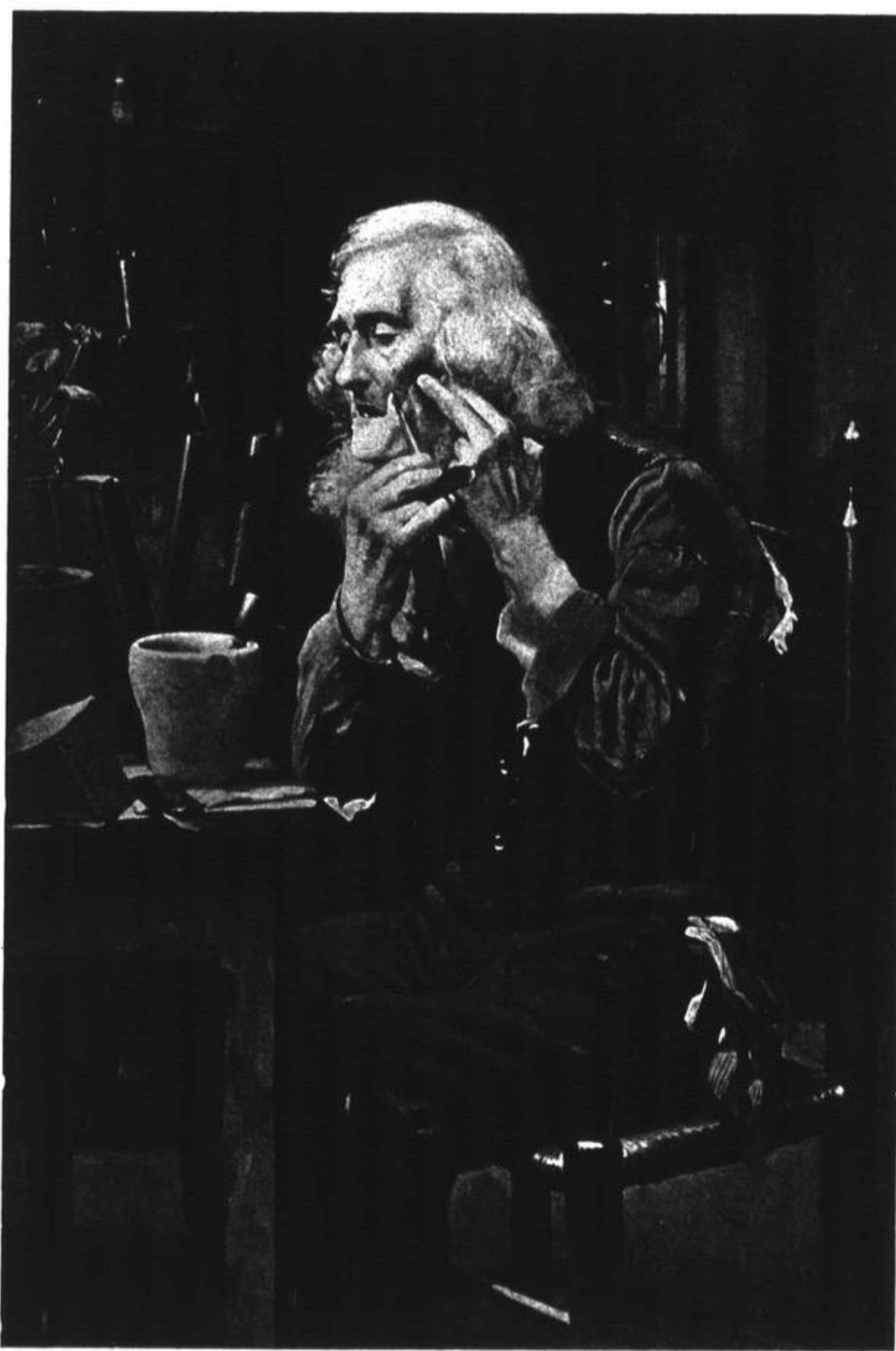
Then came the accident.—Little Amplas was very ambitious to help his grandfather, and had grown to be very useful in his willing way. He was manful and always confident of his ability to be of assistance in everything. Amplas would laugh and slap his knees and "Ho, ho, ho!" at night as he told Deborah what little Amplas had said or done.

But one day the boy was trying to open the heavy stockyard gate for his grandfather, when the wind took it out of his weak grasp. It knocked him down, and the weight slipped and struck him.

ho, ho!" died all away from Amplas. The cattle looked at him in a dazed fashion—they didn't know their strange master. He was too restless to stay out of the house, and to restless too stay out of it. He hated the doctor.

What business had the doctor to say, as he did, that little Amplas would be a cripple as long as he lived, and would not live long at best? that he could not have lived long, in any case, for he had no constitution? Why, he was going to leave little Amplas the farm!

"Money's nothing, Deborah!" he



A BENEDICT 60 YEARS TO-MORROW



TEA IN A HOP GARDEN.



HULLO, DAR, HONEY!