

WIGGIN KATE SMITH

HOMESPUN TALES

Kate Wiggin
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Kate Douglas Wiggin

Homespun Tales

Introduction

These three stories are now brought together under one cover because they have not quite outworn their welcome; but in their first estate two of them appeared as gift-books, with decorative borders and wide margins, a style not compatible with the stringent economies of the present moment. Luckily they belong together by reason of their background, which is an imaginary village, any village you choose, within the confines, or on the borders of York County, in the State of Maine.

In the first tale the river, not "Rose," is the principal character; no one realizes this better than I. If an author spends her summers on the banks of Saco Water it fills the landscape. It flows from the White Mountains to the Atlantic in a tempestuous torrent, breaking here and there into glorious falls of amber glimpsed through snowy foam; its rapids dash through rocky cliffs crowned with pine trees, under which blue harebells and rosy columbines blossom in gay profusion. There is the glint of the mirror-like lake above the falls, and the sound of the surging floods below; the witchery of feathery elms reflected in its clear surfaces, and the enchantment of the full moon on its golden torrents, never

twice alike and always beautiful! How is one to forget, evade, scorn, belittle it, by leaving its charms untold; and who could keep such a river out of a book? It has flowed through many of mine and the last sound I expect to hear in life will be the faint, far-away murmur of Saco Water!

The old Tory Hill Meeting House bulks its way into the foreground of the next story, and the old Peabody Pew (which never existed) has somehow assumed a quasi-historical aspect never intended by its author. There is a Dorcas Society, and there is a meeting house; my dedication assures the reader of these indubitable facts; and the Dorcas Society, in a season of temporary bankruptcy, succeeding a too ample generosity, did scrub the pews when there was no money for paint. Rumors of our strenuous, and somewhat unique, activities spread through our parish to many others, traveling so far (even over seas) that we became embarrassed at our easily won fame. The book was read and people occasionally came to church to see the old Peabody Pew, rather resenting the information that there had never been any Peabodys in the parish and, therefore, there could be no Peabody Pew. Matters became worse when I made, very reverently, what I suppose must be called a dramatic version of the book, which we have played for several summers in the old meeting house to audiences far exceeding our seating capacity. Inasmuch as the imaginary love-tale of my so-called Nancy Wentworth and Justin Peabody had begun under the shadow of the church steeple, and after the ten years of parting the happy

reunion had come to them in the selfsame place, it was possible to present their story simply and directly, without offense, in a church building. There was no curtain, no stage, no scenery, no theatricalism. The pulpit was moved back, and four young pine trees were placed in front of it for supposed Christmas decoration. The pulpit platform, and the "wing pews" left vacant for the village players, took the place of a stage; the two aisles served for exits and entrances; and the sexton with three rings of the church bell, announced the scenes. The Carpet Committee of the Dorcas Society furnished the exposition of the first act, while sewing the last breadths of the new, hardly-bought ingrain carpet. The scrubbing of the pews ends the act, with dialogue concerning men, women, ministers, church-members and their ways, including the utter failure of Justin Peabody, Nancy's hero, to make a living anywhere, even in the West. The Dorcas members leave the church for their Saturday night suppers of beans and brown bread, but Nancy returns with her lantern at nightfall to tack down the carpet in the old Peabody pew and iron out the tattered, dog's eared leaves of the hymn-book from which she has so often sung "By cool Siloam's shady rill" with her lover in days gone by. He, still a failure, having waited for years for his luck to turn, has come back to spend Christmas in the home of his boyhood; and seeing a dim light in the church, he enters quietly and surprises Nancy at her task of carpeting the Peabody Pew, so that it shall look as well as the others at next day's services. The rest is easy to imagine. One can deny

the reality of a book, but when two or three thousand people have beheld Justin Peabody and Nancy Wentworth in the flesh, and have seen the paint of the old Peabody Pew wiped with a damp cloth, its cushion darned and its carpet tacked in place, it is useless to argue; any more than it would be to deny the validity of the egg of Columbus or the apple of William Tell.

As for "Susanna and Sue" the story would never have been written had I not as a child and girl been driven once a year to the Shaker meeting at the little village of Alfred, sixteen miles distant. The services were then open to the public, but eventually permission to attend them was withdrawn, because of the careless and sometimes irreverent behavior of young people who regarded the Shaker costumes, the solemn dances or marches, the rhythmic movements of the hands, the almost hypnotic crescendo of the singing, as a sort of humorous spectacle. I learned to know the brethren and sisters, and the Elder, as years went by, and often went to the main house to spend a day or two as the guest of Eldress Harriet, a saint, if ever there was one, or, later, with dear Sister Lucinda.

The shining cleanliness and order, the frugality and industry, the serenity and peace of these people, who had resigned the world and "life on the plane of Adam," vowing themselves to celibacy, to public confession of sins, and the holding of goods in common,—all this has always had a certain exquisite and helpful influence upon my thought, and Mr. W. D. Howells paid a far more beautiful tribute to them in "The Undiscovered Country."

It is needless to say that I read every word of the book to my Shaker friends before it was published. They took a deep interest in it, evincing keen delight in my rather facetious but wholly imaginary portrait of "Brother Ansel," a "born Shaker," and sadly confessing that my two young lovers, "Hetty" and "Nathan," who could not endure the rigors of the Shaker faith and fled together in the night to marry and join the world's people,—that this tragedy had often occurred in their community.

Here, then, are the three simple homespun tales. I believe they are true to life as I see it. I only wish my readers might hear the ripple of the Maine river running through them; breathe the fragrance of New England for-ests, and though never for a moment getting, through my poor pen, the atmosphere of Maine's rugged cliffs and the tang of her salt sea air, they might at least believe for an instant that they had found a modest Mayflower in her pine woods.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN. July, 1920.

ROSE O' THE RIVER

I. The Pine And the Rose

It was not long after sunrise, and Stephen Waterman, fresh from his dip in the river, had scrambled up the hillside from the hut in the alder-bushes where he had made his morning toilet.

An early ablution of this sort was not the custom of the farmers along the banks of the Saco, but the Waterman house was hardly a stone's throw from the water, and there was a clear, deep swimming-hole in the Willow Cove that would have tempted the busiest man, or the least cleanly, in York County. Then, too, Stephen was a child of the river, born, reared, schooled on its very brink, never happy unless he were on it, or in it, or beside it, or at least within sight or sound of it.

The immensity of the sea had always silenced and overawed him, left him cold in feeling. The river wooed him, caressed him, won his heart. It was just big enough to love. It was full of charms and changes, of varying moods and sudden surprises. Its voice stole in upon his ear with a melody far sweeter and more subtle than the boom of the ocean. Yet it was not without strength, and when it was swollen with the freshets of the spring and brimming with the bounty of its sister streams, it could dash and roar, boom and crash, with the best of them.

Stephen stood on the side porch, drinking in the glory of the sunrise, with the Saco winding like a silver ribbon through the sweet loveliness of the summer landscape.

And the river rolled on toward the sea, singing its morning song, creating and nourishing beauty at every step of its onward path. Cradled in the heart of a great mountain-range, it pursued its gleaming way, here lying silent in glassy lakes, there rushing into tinkling little falls, foaming great falls, and thundering cataracts. Scores of bridges spanned its width, but no steamers flurried its crystal depths. Here and there a rough little rowboat, tethered to a willow, rocked to and fro in some quiet bend of the shore. Here the silver gleam of a rising perch, chub, or trout caught the eye; there a pickerel lay rigid in the clear water, a fish carved in stone: here eels coiled in the muddy bottom of some pool; and there, under the deep shadows of the rocks, lay fat, sleepy bass, old, and incredibly wise, quite untempted by, and wholly superior to, the rural fisherman's worm.

The river lapped the shores of peaceful meadows; it flowed along banks green with maple, beech, sycamore, and birch; it fell tempestuously over dams and fought its way between rocky cliffs crowned with stately firs. It rolled past forests of pine and hemlock and spruce, now gentle, now terrible; for there is said to be an Indian curse upon the Saco, whereby, with every great sun, the child of a paleface shall be drawn into its cruel depths. Lashed into fury by the stony reefs that impeded its progress, the river looked now sapphire, now gold, now white, now leaden gray; but

always it was hurrying, hurrying on its appointed way to the sea.

After feasting his eyes and filling his heart with a morning draught of beauty, Stephen went in from the porch and, pausing at the stairway, called in stentorian tones: "Get up and eat your breakfast, Rufus! The boys will be picking the side jams today, and I'm going down to work on the logs. If you come along, bring your own pick-pole and peavey." Then, going to the kitchen pantry, he collected, from the various shelves, a pitcher of milk, a loaf of bread, half an apple pie, and a bowl of blueberries, and, with the easy methods of a household unswayed by feminine rule, moved toward a seat under an apple tree and took his morning meal in great apparent content. Having finished, and washed his dishes with much more thoroughness than is common to unsuperintended man, and having given Rufus the second call to breakfast with the vigor and acrimony that usually mark that unpleasant performance, he strode to a high point on the riverbank and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed steadily downstream.

Patches of green fodder and blossoming potatoes melted into soft fields that had been lately mown, and there were glimpses of tasseling corn rising high to catch the sun. Far, far down on the opposite bank of the river was the hint of a brown roof, and the tip of a chimney that sent a slender wisp of smoke into the clear air. Beyond this, and farther back from the water, the trees apparently hid a cluster of other chimneys, for thin spirals of smoke ascended here and there. The little brown roof could never

have revealed itself to any but a lover's eye; and that discerned something even smaller, something like a pinkish speck, that moved hither and thither on a piece of greensward that sloped to the waterside.

"She's up!" Stephen exclaimed under his breath, his eyes shining, his lips smiling. His voice had a note of hushed exaltation about it, as if "she," whoever she might be, had, in condescending to rise, conferred a priceless boon upon a waiting universe. If she were indeed "up" (so his tone implied), then the day, somewhat falsely heralded by the sunrise, had really begun, and the human race might pursue its appointed tasks, inspired and uplifted by the consciousness of her existence. It might properly be grateful for the fact of her birth; that she had grown to woman's estate; and, above all, that, in common with the sun, the lark, the morning-glory, and other beautiful things of the early day, she was up and about her lovely, cheery, heart-warming business.

The handful of chimneys and the smoke-spirals rising here and there among the trees on the river-bank belonged to what was known as the Brier Neighborhood. There were only a few houses in all, scattered along a side road leading from the river up to Liberty Center. There were no great signs of thrift or prosperity, but the Wiley cottage, the only one near the water, was neat and well cared for, and Nature had done her best to conceal man's indolence, poverty, or neglect.

Bushes of sweetbrier grew in fragrant little forests as tall as the fences. Clumps of wild roses sprang up at every turn, and over all

the stone walls, as well as on every heap of rocks by the wayside, prickly blackberry vines ran and clambered and clung, yielding fruit and thorns impartially to the neighborhood children.

The pinkish speck that Stephen Waterman had spied from his side of the river was Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood on the Edgewood side. As there was another of her name on Brigadier Hill, the Edgewood minister called one of them the climbing Rose and the other the brier Rose, or sometimes Rose of the river. She was well named, the pinkish speck. She had not only some of the sweetest attributes of the wild rose, but the parallel might have been extended as far as the thorns, for she had wounded her scores,—hearts, be it understood, not hands. The wounding was, on the whole, very innocently done; and if fault could be imputed anywhere, it might rightly have been laid at the door of the kind powers who had made her what she was, since the smile that blesses a single heart is always destined to break many more.

She had not a single silk gown, but she had what is far better, a figure to show off a cotton one. Not a brooch nor a pair of earrings was numbered among her possessions, but any ordinary gems would have looked rather dull and trivial when compelled to undergo comparison with her bright eyes. As to her hair, the local milliner declared it impossible for Rose Wiley to get an unbecoming hat; that on one occasion, being in a frolicsome mood, Rose had tried on all the headgear in the village emporium,—children's gingham "Shakers," mourning bonnets

for aged dames, men's haying hats and visored caps,—and she proved superior to every test, looking as pretty as a pink in the best ones and simply ravishing in the worst. In fact, she had been so fashioned and finished by Nature that, had she been set on a revolving pedestal in a show-window, the bystanders would have exclaimed, as each new charm came into view: "Look at her waist! See her shoulders! And her neck and chin! And her hair!" While the children, gazing with raptured admiration, would have shrieked, in unison, "I choose her for mine."

All this is as much as to say that Rose of the river was a beauty, yet it quite fails to explain, nevertheless, the secret of her power. When she looked her worst the spell was as potent as when she looked her best. Hidden away somewhere was a vital spark which warmed every one who came in contact with it. Her lovely little person was a trifle below medium height, and it might as well be confessed that her soul, on the morning when Stephen Waterman saw her hanging out the clothes on the river-bank, was not large enough to be at all out of proportion; but when eyes and dimples, lips and cheeks, enslave the onlooker, the soul is seldom subjected to a close or critical scrutiny. Besides, Rose Wiley was a nice girl, neat as wax, energetic, merry, amiable, economical. She was a dutiful granddaughter to two of the most irritating old people in the county; she never patronized her pug-nosed, pasty-faced girl friends; she made wonderful pies and doughnuts; and besides, small souls, if they are of the right sort, sometimes have a way of growing, to the discomfiture of cynics and the

gratification of the angels.

So, on one bank of the river grew the brier rose, a fragile thing, swaying on a slender stalk and looking at its pretty reflection in the water; and on the other a sturdy pine tree, well rooted against wind and storm. And the sturdy pine yearned for the wild rose, and the rose, so far as it knew, yearned for nothing at all, certainly not for rugged pine trees standing tall and grim in rocky soil. If, in its present stage of development, it gravitated toward anything in particular, it would have been a well-dressed white birch growing on an irreproachable lawn.

And the river, now deep, now shallow, now smooth, now tumultuous, now sparkling in sunshine, now gloomy under clouds, rolled on to the engulfing sea. It could not stop to concern itself with the petty comedies and tragedies that were being enacted along its shores, else it would never have reached its destination. Only last night, under a full moon, there had been pairs of lovers leaning over the rails of all the bridges along its course; but that was a common sight, like that of the ardent couples sitting on its shady banks these summer days, looking only into each other's eyes, but exclaiming about the beauty of the water. Lovers would come and go, sometimes reappearing with successive installments of loves in a way wholly mysterious to the river. Meantime it had its own work to do and must be about it, for the side jams were to be broken and the boom "let out" at the Edgewood bridge.

II. “Old Kennebec”

It was just seven o'clock that same morning when Rose Wiley smoothed the last wrinkle from her dimity counterpane, picked up a shred of corn-husk from the spotless floor under the bed, slapped a mosquito on the window-sill, removed all signs of murder with a moist towel, and before running down to breakfast cast a frowning look at her pincushion. Almira, otherwise “Mite,” Shapley had been in her room the afternoon before and disturbed with her careless hand the pattern of Rose's pins. They were kept religiously in the form of a Maltese cross; and if, while she was extricating one from her clothing, there had been an alarm of fire, Rose would have stuck the pin in its appointed place in the design, at the risk of losing her life.

Entering the kitchen with her light step, she brought the morning sunshine with her. The old people had already engaged in differences of opinion, but they commonly suspended open warfare in her presence. There were the usual last things to be done for breakfast, offices that belonged to her as her grandmother's assistant. She took yesterday's soda biscuits out of the steamer where they were warming and softening; brought an apple pie and a plate of seed cakes from the pantry; settled the coffee with a piece of dried fish skin and an egg shell; and transferred some fried potatoes from the spider to a covered dish. “Did you remember the meat, grandpa? We're all out,” she

said, as she began buttoning a stiff collar around his reluctant neck.

“Remember? Land, yes! I wish’t I ever could forgit anything! The butcher says he’s ‘bout tired o’ travelin’ over the country lookin’ for critters to kill, but if he finds anything he’ll be up along in the course of a week. He ain’t a real smart butcher, Cyse Higgins ain’t.—Land, Rose, don’t button that dickey clean through my epperdummis! I have to sport starched collars in this life on account o’ you and your gran’mother bein’ so chock full o’ style; but I hope to the Lord I shan’t have to wear ‘em in another world!”

“You won’t,” his wife responded with the snap of a dish towel, “or if you do, they’ll wilt with the heat.”

Rose smiled, but the soft hand with which she tied the neckcloth about the old man’s withered neck pacified his spirit, and he smiled knowingly back at her as she took her seat at the breakfast table spread near the open kitchen door. She was a dazzling Rose, and, it is to be feared, a wasted one, for there was no one present to observe her clean pink calico and the still more subtle note struck in the green ribbon which was tied round her throat,—the ribbon that formed a sort of calyx, out of which sprang the flower of her face, as fresh and radiant as if it had bloomed that morning.

“Give me my coffee turrible quick,” said Mr. Wiley; “I must be down to the bridge ‘fore they start dog-warpin’ the side jam.”

“I notice you’re always due at the bridge on churnin’ days,”

remarked his spouse, testily.

“‘T ain’t me as app’ints drivin’ dates at Edgewood,” replied the old man. “The boys’ll hev a turrible job this year. The logs air ricked up jest like Rose’s jack-straws; I never see ‘em so turrible ricked up in all my exper’ence; an’ Lije Dennett don’ know no more ‘bout pickin’ a jam than Cooper’s cow. Turrible sot in his ways, too; can’t take a mite of advice. I was tellin’ him how to go to work on that bung that’s formed between the gre’t gray rock an’ the shore,—the awfullest place to bung that there is between this an’ Biddeford,—and says he: ‘Look here, I’ve be’n boss on this river for twelve year, an’ I’ll be doggoned if I’m goin’ to be taught my business by any man!’ ‘This ain’t no river,’ says I, ‘as you’d know,’ says I, ‘if you’d ever lived on the Kennebec.’ ‘Pity you hed n’t stayed on it,’ says he. ‘I wish to the land I hed,’ says I. An’ then I come away, for my tongue’s so turrible spry an’ sarcastic that I knew if I stopped any longer I should stir up strife. There’s some folks that’ll set on addled aigs year in an’ year out, as if there wa’n’t good fresh ones bein’ laid every day; an’ Lije Dennett’s one of ‘em, when it comes to river-drivin’.”

“There’s lots o’ folks as have made a good livin’ by mindin’ their own business,” observed the still sententious Mrs. Wiley, as she speared a soda biscuit with her fork.

“Mindin’ your own business is a turrible selfish trade,” responded her husband loftily. “If your neighbor is more ignorant than what you are,—partic’larly if he’s as ignorant as Cooper’s cow,—you’d ought, as a Kennebec man an’ a Christian, to set

him on the right track, though it's always a turrible risky thing to do." Rose's grandfather was called, by the irreverent younger generation, sometimes "Turrible Wiley" and sometimes "Old Kennebec," because of the frequency with which these words appeared in his conversation. There were not wanting those of late who dubbed him Uncle Ananias, for reasons too obvious to mention. After a long, indolent, tolerably truthful, and useless life, he had, at seventy-five, lost sight of the dividing line between fact and fancy, and drew on his imagination to such an extent that he almost staggered himself when he began to indulge in reminiscence. He was a feature of the Edgewood "drive," being always present during the five or six days that it was in progress, sometimes sitting on the river-bank, sometimes leaning over the bridge, sometimes reclining against the butt-end of a huge log, but always chewing tobacco and expectorating to incredible distances as he criticized and damned impartially all the expedients in use at the particular moment.

"I want to stay down by the river this afternoon," said Rose. "Ever so many of the girls will be there, and all my sewing is done up. If grandpa will leave the horse for me, I'll take the drivers' lunch to them at noon, and bring the dishes back in time to wash them before supper."

"I suppose you can go, if the rest do," said her grandmother, "though it's an awful lazy way of spendin' an afternoon. When I was a girl there was no such dawdlin' goin' on, I can tell you. Nobody thought o' lookin' at the river in them days; there was

n't time."

"But it's such fun to watch the logs!" Rose exclaimed. "Next to dancing, the greatest fun in the world."

"Specially as all the young men in town will be there, watchin', too," was the grandmother's reply. "Eben Brooks an' Richard Bean got home yesterday with their doctors' diplomas in their pockets. Mrs. Brooks says Eben stood forty-nine in a class o' fifty-five, an' seemed consid'able proud of him; an' I guess it is the first time he ever stood anywheres but at the foot. I tell you when these fifty-five new doctors git scattered over the country there'll be consid'able many folks keepin' house under ground. Dick Bean's goin' to stop a spell with Rufe an' Steve Waterman. That'll make one more to play in the river."

"Rufus ain't hardly got his workin' legs on yit," allowed Mr. Wiley, "but Steve's all right. He's a turrible smart driver, an' turrible reckless, too. He'll take all the chances there is, though to a man that's lived on the Kennebec there ain't what can rightly be called any turrible chances on the Saco."

"He'd better be 'tendin' to his farm," objected Mrs. Wiley.

"His hay is all in," Rose spoke up quickly, "and he only helps on the river when the farm work is n't pressing. Besides, though it's all play to him, he earns his two dollars and a half a day."

"He don't keer about the two and a half," said her grandfather. "He jest can't keep away from the logs. There's some that can't. When I first moved here from Gard'ner, where the climate never suited me—"

"The climate of any place where you hev regular work never did an' never will suit you," remarked the old man's wife; but the interruption received no comment: such mistaken views of his character were too frequent to make any impression.

"As I was sayin', Rose," he continued, "when we first moved here from Gard'ner, we lived neighbor to the Watermans. Steve an' Rufus was little boys then, always playin' with a couple o' wild cousins o' theirs, consid'able older. Steve would scare his mother pretty nigh to death stealin' away to the mill to ride on the 'carriage,' 'side o' the log that was bein' sawed, hitchin' clean out over the river an' then jerkin' back 'most into the jaws o' the machinery."

"He never hed any common sense to spare, even when he was a young one," remarked Mrs. Wiley; "and I don't see as all the 'cademy education his father throwed away on him has changed him much." And with this observation she rose from the table and went to the sink.

"Steve ain't nobody's fool," dissented the old man; "but he's kind o' daft about the river. When he was little he was allers buildin' dams in the brook, an' sailin' chips, an' runnin' on the logs; allers choppin' up stickins an' raftin' 'em together in the pond. I cai'late Mis' Waterman died consid'able afore her time, jest from fright, lookin' out the winders and seein' her boys slippin' between the logs an' gittin' their daily dousin'. She could n't understand it, an' there's a heap o' things women-folks never do an' never can understand,—jest because they *air* women-

folks.”

“One o’ the things is men, I s’pose,” interrupted Mrs. Wiley.

“Men in general, but more partic’larly husbands,” assented Old Kennebec; “howsomever, there’s another thing they don’t an’ can’t never take in, an’ that’s sport. Steve does river-drivin’ as he would horse-racin’ or tiger-shootin’ or tight-rope dancin’; an’ he always did from a boy. When he was about twelve to fifteen, he used to help the river-drivers spring and fall, reg’lar. He could n’t do nothin’ but shin up an’ down the rocks after hammers an’ hatchets an’ ropes, but he was turrible pleased with his job. ‘Stepanfetchit,’ they used to call him them days,—Stepanfetchit Waterman.”

“Good name for him yet,” came in acid tones from the sink. “He’s still steppin’ an’ fetchin’, only it’s Rose that’s doin’ the drivin’ now.”

“I’m not driving anybody, that I know of,” answered Rose, with heightened color, but with no loss of her habitual self-command.

“Then, when he graduated from errants,” went on the crafty old man, who knew that when breakfast ceased, churning must begin, “Steve used to get seventy-five cents a day helpin’ clear up the river—if you can call this here silv’ry streamlet a river. He’d pick off a log here an’ there an’ send it afloat, an’ dig out them that hed got ketched in the rocks, and tidy up the banks jest like spring house-cleanin’. If he’d hed any kind of a boss, an’ hed be’n trained on the Kennebec, he’d ‘a’ made a turrible smart

driver, Steve would."

"He'll be drowned, that's what'll become o' him," prophesied Mrs. Wiley; "specially if Rose encourages him in such silly foolishness as ridin' logs from his house down to oun, dark nights."

"Seein' as how Steve built ye a nice pigpen last month, 'pears to me you might have a good word for him now an' then, mother," remarked Old Kennebec, reaching for his second piece of pie.

"I wa'n't a mite deceived by that pigpen, no more'n I was by Jed Towle's hencoop, nor Ivory Dunn's well-curb, nor Pitt Packard's shed-steps. If you hed ever kep' up your buildin's yourself, Rose's beaux would n't hev to do their courtin' with carpenters' tools."

"It's the pigpen an' the hencoop you want to keep your eye on, mother, not the motives of them as made 'em. It's turrible onsettlin' to inspeck folks' motives too turrible close."

"Riding a log is no more to Steve than riding a horse, so he says," interposed Rose, to change the subject; "but I tell him that a horse does n't revolve under you, and go sideways at the same time that it is going forwards."

"Log-ridin' ain't no trick at all to a man of sperit," said Mr. Wiley. "There's a few places in the Kennebec where the water's too shaller to let the logs float, so we used to build a flume, an' the logs would whiz down like arrers shot from a bow. The boys used to collect by the side o' that there flume to see me ride a log down, an' I've watched 'em drop in a dead faint when I spun by

the crowd; but land! you can't drown some folks, not without you tie nail-kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls; I've rid logs down the b'ilin'est rapids o' the Kennebec an' never lost my head. I remember well the year o' the gre't freshet, I rid a log from—"

"There, there, father, that'll do," said Mrs. Wiley, decisively. "I'll put the cream in the churn, an' you jest work off' some o' your steam by bringin' the butter for us afore you start for the bridge. It don't do no good to brag afore your own women-folks; work goes consid'able better'n stories at every place 'cept the loafers' bench at the tavern."

And the baffled raconteur, who had never done a piece of work cheerfully in his life, dragged himself reluctantly to the shed, where, before long, one could hear him moving the dasher up and down sedately to his favorite "churning tune" of

Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
But Wisdom shows a narrow path,
With here and there a traveler.

III. The Edgewood “Drive”

Just where the bridge knits together the two little villages of Pleasant River and Edgewood, the glassy mirror of the Saco broadens suddenly, sweeping over the dam in a luminous torrent. Gushes of pure amber mark the middle of the dam, with crystal and silver at the sides, and from the seething vortex beneath the golden cascade the white spray dashes up in fountains. In the crevices and hollows of the rocks the mad water churns itself into snowy froth, while the foam-flecked torrent, deep, strong, and troubled to its heart, sweeps majestically under the bridge, then dashes between wooded shores piled high with steep masses of rock, or torn and riven by great gorges.

There had been much rain during the summer, and the Saco was very high, so on the third day of the Edgewood drive there was considerable excitement at the bridge, and a goodly audience of villagers from both sides of the river. There were some who never came, some who had no fancy for the sight, some to whom it was an old story, some who were too busy, but there were many to whom it was the event of events, a never-ending source of interest.

Above the fall, covering the placid surface of the river, thousands of logs lay quietly “in boom” until the “turning out” process, on the last day of the drive, should release them and give them their chance of display, their brief moment of

notoriety, their opportunity of interesting, amusing, exciting, and exasperating the onlookers by their antics.

Heaps of logs had been cast up on the rocks below the dam, where they lay in hopeless confusion, adding nothing, however, to the problem of the moment, for they too bided their time. If they had possessed wisdom, discretion, and caution, they might have slipped gracefully over the falls and, steering clear of the hidden ledges (about which it would seem they must have heard whispers from the old pine trees along the river), have kept a straight course and reached their destination without costing the Edgewood Lumber Company a small fortune. Or, if they had inclined toward a jolly and adventurous career, they could have joined one of the various jams or “bungs,” stimulated by the thought that any one of them might be a key-log, holding for a time the entire mass in its despotic power. But they had been stranded early in the game, and, after lying high and dry for weeks, would be picked off one by one and sent downstream.

In the tumultuous boil, the foaming hubbub and flurry at the foot of the falls, one enormous peeled log wallowed up and clown like a huge rhinoceros, greatly pleasing the children by its clumsy cavortings. Some conflict of opposing forces kept it ever in motion, yet never set it free. Below the bridge were always the real battle-grounds, the scenes of the first and the fiercest conflicts. A ragged ledge of rock, standing well above the yeasty torrent, marked the middle of the river. Stephen had been stranded there once, just at dusk, on a stormy afternoon in

spring. A jam had broken under the men, and Stephen, having taken too great risks, had been caught on the moving mass, and, leaping from log to log, his only chance for life had been to find a footing on Gray Rock, which was nearer than the shore.

Rufus was ill at the time, and Mrs. Waterman so anxious and nervous that processions of boys had to be sent up to the River Farm, giving the frightened mother the latest bulletins of her son's welfare. Luckily, the river was narrow just at the Gray Rock, and it was a quite possible task, though no easy one, to lash two ladders together and make a narrow bridge on which the drenched and shivering man could reach the shore. There were loud cheers when Stephen ran lightly across the slender pathway that led to safety—ran so fast that the ladders had scarce time to bend beneath his weight. He had certainly "taken chances," but when did he not do that? The logger's life is one of "moving accidents by flood and field," and Stephen welcomed with wild exhilaration every hazard that came in his path. To him there was never a dull hour from the moment that the first notch was cut in the tree (for he sometimes joined the boys in the lumber camp just for a frolic) till the later one when the hewn log reached its final destination. He knew nothing of "tooling" a four-in-hand through narrow lanes or crowded thoroughfares,—nothing of guiding a horse over the hedges and through the pitfalls of a stiff bit of hunting country; his steed was the rearing, plunging, kicking log, and he rode it like a river god.

The crowd loves daring, and so it welcomed Stephen with

bravos, but it knew, as he knew, that he was only doing his duty by the Company, only showing the Saco that man was master, only keeping the old Waterman name in good repute. "Ye can't drown some folks," Old Kennebec had said, as he stood in a group on the shore; "not without you tie sand-bags to 'em an' drop 'em in the Great Eddy. I'm the same kind; I remember when I was stranded on jest sech a rock in the Kennebec, only they left me there all night for dead, an' I had to swim the rapids when it come daylight."

"We're well acquainted with that rock and them rapids," exclaimed one of the river-drivers, to the delight of the company.

Rose had reason to remember Stephen's adventure, for he had clambered up the bank, smiling and blushing under the hurrahs of the boys, and, coming to the wagon where she sat waiting for her grandfather, had seized a moment to whisper: "Did you care whether I came across safe, Rose? Say you did!"

Stephen recalled that question, too, on this August morning; perhaps because this was to be a red-letter day, and some time, when he had a free moment,—some time before supper, when he and Rose were sitting apart from the others, watching the logs,—he intended again to ask her to marry him. This thought trembled in him, stirring the deeps of his heart like a great wave, almost sweeping him off his feet when he held it too close and let it have full sway. It would be the fourth time that he had asked Rose this question of all questions, but there was no unperceptible difference in his excitement, for there was always

the possible chance that she might change her mind and say yes, if only for variety. Wanting a thing continuously, unchangingly, unceasingly, year after year, he thought,—longing to reach it as the river longed to reach the sea,—such wanting might, in course of time, mean having.

Rose drove up to the bridge with the men's luncheon, and the under boss came up to take the baskets and boxes from the back of the wagon.

"We've had a reg'lar tussle this mornin', Rose," he said. "The logs are determined not to move. Ike Billings, that's the han'somest and fluentest all-round swearer on the Saco, has tried his best on the side jam. He's all out o' cuss-words and there hain't a log budged. Now, stid o' dog-warpin' this afternoon, an' lettin' the oxen haul off all them stubborn logs by main force, we're goin' to ask you to set up on the bank and smile at the jam. 'Land! she can do it!' says Ike a minute ago. 'When Rose starts smilin',' he says, 'there ain't a jam nor a bung in *me* that don't melt like wax and jest float right off same as the logs do when they get into quiet, sunny water.'"

Rose blushed and laughed, and drove up the hill to Mite Shapley's, where she put up the horse and waited till the men had eaten their luncheon. The drivers slept and had breakfast and supper at the Billings house, a mile down-river, but for several years Mrs. Wiley had furnished the noon meal, sending it down piping hot on the stroke of twelve. The boys always said that up or down the whole length of the Saco there was no such cooking

as the Wileys', and much of this praise was earned by Rose's serving. It was the old grandmother who burnished the tin plates and dippers till they looked like silver; for—crotchety and sharp-tongued as she was—she never allowed Rose to spoil her hands with soft soap and sand: but it was Rose who planned and packed, Rose who hemmed squares of old white table-cloths and sheets to line the baskets and keep things daintily separate, Rose, also, whose tarts and cakes were the pride and admiration of church sociables and sewing societies.

Where could such smoking pots of beans be found? A murmur of ecstatic approval ran through the crowd when the covers were removed. Pieces of sweet home-fed pork glistened like varnished mahogany on the top of the beans, and underneath were such deeps of fragrant juice as come only from slow fires and long, quiet hours in brick ovens. Who else could steam and bake such mealy loaves of brown bread, brown as plum-pudding, yet with no suspicion of soggiess? Who such soda biscuits, big, feathery, tasting of cream, and hardly needing butter? And green-apple pies! Could such candied lower crusts be found elsewhere, or more delectable filling? Or such rich, nutty doughnuts?—doughnuts that had spurned the hot fat which is the ruin of so many, and risen from its waves like golden-brown Venuses.

“By the great seleckmen!” ejaculated Jed Towle, as he swallowed his fourth, “I'd like to hev a wife, two daughters, and four sisters like them Wileys, and jest set still on the river-bank

an' hev 'em cook victuals for me. I'd hev nothin' to wish for then but a mouth as big as the Saco's."

"And I wish this custard pie was the size o' Bonnie Eagle Pond," said Ike Billings. "I'd like to fall into the middle of it and eat my way out!"

"Look at that bunch o' Chiny asters tied on t' the bail o' that biscuit-pail!" said Ivory Dunn. "That's the girl's doin's, you bet; women-folks don't seem to make no bo'quets after they git married. Let's divide 'em up an' wear 'em drivin' this afternoon; mebbe they'll ketch the eye so 't our rags won't show so bad. Land! it's lucky my hundred days is about up! If I don't git home soon, I shall be arrested for goin' without clo'es. I set up 'bout all night puttin' these blue patches in my pants an' tryin' to piece together a couple of old red-flannel shirts to make one whole one. That's the worst o' drivin' in these places where the pretty girls make a habit of comin' down to the bridge to see the fun. You hev to keep rigged up jest so stylish; you can't git no chance at the rum bottle, an' you even hev to go a leetle mite light on swearin'."

IV. "Blasphemious Swearin'"

"Steve Waterman's an awful nice feller," exclaimed Ivory Dunn just then. Stephen had been looking intently across the river, watching the Shapleys' side door, from which Rose might issue at any moment; and at this point in the discussion he had lounged away from the group, and, moving toward the bridge, began to throw pebbles idly into the water.

"He's an awful smart driver for one that don't foller drivin' the year round," continued Ivory; "and he's the awfulest clean-spoken, soft-spoken feller I ever see."

"There's be'n two black sheep in his family a'ready, an' Steve kind o' feels as if he'd ought to be extry white," remarked Jed Towle. "You fellers that belonged to the old drive remember Pretty Quick Waterman well enough? Steve's mother brought him up."

Yes; most of them remembered the Waterman twins, Stephen's cousins, now both dead,—Slow Waterman, so moderate in his steps and actions that you had to fix a landmark somewhere near him to see if he moved; and Pretty Quick, who shone by comparison with his twin. "I'd kind o' forgot that Pretty Quick Waterman was cousin to Steve," said the under boss; "he never worked with me much, but he wa'n't cut off the same piece o' goods as the other Watermans. Great hemlock! but he kep' a cussin' dictionary, Pretty Quick did! Whenever he heard any new

words he must ‘a’ writ ‘em down, an’ then studied ‘em all up in the winter-time, to use in the spring drive.”

“Swearin’ ‘s a habit that hed ought to be practiced with turrible caution,” observed old Mr. Wiley, when the drivers had finished luncheon and taken out their pipes. “There’s three kinds o’ swearin’,—plain swearin’, profane swearin’, an’ blasphemious swearin’. Logs air jest like mules: there’s times when a man can’t seem to rip up a jam in good style ‘thout a few words that’s too strong for the infant classes in Sunday-schools; but a man hed n’t ought to tempt Providence. When he’s ridin’ a log near the falls at high water, or cuttin’ the key-log in a jam, he ain’t in no place for blasphemious swearin’; jest a little easy, perlite ‘damn’ is ‘bout all he can resk, if he don’t want to git drowned an’ hev his ghost walkin’ the river-banks till kingdom come.

“You an’ I, Long, was the only ones that seen Pretty Quick go, wa’n’t we?” continued Old Kennebec, glancing at Long Abe Dennett (cousin to Short Abe), who lay on his back in the grass, the smoke-wreaths rising from his pipe, and the steel spikes in his heavy, calked-sole boots shining in the sun.

“There was folks on the bridge,” Long answered, “but we was the only ones near enough to see an’ hear. It was so onexpected, an’ so soon over, that them as was watchin’ upstream, where the men was to work on the falls, would n’t ‘a’ hed time to see him go down. But I did, an’ nobody ain’t heard me swear sence, though it’s ten years ago. I allers said it was rum an’ bravadder that killed Pretty Quick Waterman that day. The boys hed n’t give him a

‘dare’ that he hed n’t took up. He seemed like he was possessed, an’ the logs was the same way; they was fairly wild, leapin’ around in the maddest kind o’ water you ever see. The river was b’ilin’ high that spring; it was an awful stubborn jam, an’ Pretty Quick, he’d be’n workin’ on it sence dinner.”

“He clumb up the bank more’n once to have a pull at the bottle that was hid in the bushes,” interpolated Mr. Wiley. “Like as not; that was his failin’. Well, most o’ the boys were on the other side o’ the river, workin’ above the bridge, an’ the boss hed called Pretty Quick to come off an’ leave the jam till mornin’, when they’d get horses an’ dog-warp it off, log by log. But when the boss got out o’ sight, Pretty Quick jest stood right still, swingin’ his axe, an’ blasphemin’ so it would freeze your blood, vowin’ he would n’t move till the logs did, if he stayed there till the crack o’ doom. Jest then a great, ponderous log, that hed be’n churnin’ up an’ down in the falls for a week, got free an’ come blunderin’ an’ thunderin’ down-river. Land! it was chock full o’ water, an’ looked ‘bout as big as a church! It come straight along, butt-end foremost, an’ struck that jam, full force, so ‘t every log in it shivered. There was a crack,—the crack o’ doom, sure enough, for Pretty Quick,—an’ one o’ the logs le’p’ right out an’ struck him jest where he stood, with his axe in the air, blasphemin’. The jam kind o’ melted an’ crumbled up, an’ in a second Pretty Quick was whirlin’ in the white water. He never riz,—at least where we could see him,—an’ we did n’t find him for a week. That’s the whole story, an’ I guess Steve takes it as a warnin’. Anyway, he ain’t no friend

to rum nor swearin', Steve ain't. He knows Pretty Quick's ways shortened his mother's life, an' you notice what a sharp lookout he keeps on Rufus."

"He needs it," Ike Billings commented tersely.

"Some men seem to lose their wits when they're workin' on logs," observed Mr. Wiley, who had deeply resented Long Dennett's telling of a story which he knew fully as well and could have told much better. "Now, nat'rally, I've seen things on the Kennebec—"

"Three cheers for the Saco! Hats off, boys!" shouted Jed Towle, and his directions were followed with a will.

"As I was sayin'," continued the old man, peacefully, "I've seen things on the Kennebec that would n't happen on a small river, an' I've be'n in turrible places an' taken turrible resks resks that would 'a' turned a Saco River man's hair white; but them is the times when my wits work the quickest. I remember once I was smokin' my pipe when a jam broke under me. 'T was a small jam, or what we call a small jam on the Kennebec,—only about three hundred thousand pine logs. The first thing I knowed, I was shootin' back an' forth in the b'ilin' foam, hangin' on t' the end of a log like a spider. My hands was clasped round the log, and I never lost control o' my pipe. They said I smoked right along, jest as cool an' placid as a pond-lily."

"Why 'd you quit drivin'?" inquired Ivory.

"My strength wa'n't ekal to it," Mr. Wiley responded sadly. "I was all skin, bones, an' nerve. The Comp'ny would n't part with

me altogether, so they give me a place in the office down on the wharves.”

“That wa’n’t so bad,” said Jed Towle; “why did n’t you hang on to it, so’s to keep in sight o’ the Kennebec?”

“I found I could n’t be confined under cover. My liver give all out, my appetite failed me, an’ I wa’n’t wuth a day’s wages. I’d learned engineerin’ when I was a boy, an’ I thought I’d try runnin’ on the road a spell, but it did n’t suit my constitution. My kidneys ain’t turrible strong, an’ the doctors said I’d have Bright’s disease if I did n’t git some kind o’ work where there wa’n’t no vibrations.”

“Hard to find, Mr. Wiley; hard to find!” said Jed Towle.

“You’re right,” responded the old man feelingly. “I’ve tried all kinds o’ labor. Some of ‘em don’t suit my liver, some disagrees with my stomach, and the rest of ‘em has vibrations; so here I set, high an’ dry on the banks of life, you might say, like a stranded log.”

As this well-known simile fell upon the ear, there was a general stir in the group, for Turrible Wiley, when rhetorical, sometimes grew tearful, and this was a mood not to be encouraged.

“All right, boss,” called Ike Billings, winking to the boys; “we’ll be there in a jiffy!” for the luncheon hour had flown, and the work of the afternoon was waiting for them. “You make a chalk-mark where you left off, Mr. Wiley, an’ we’ll hear the rest tomorrer; only don’t you forgit nothin’! Remember ‘t was the

Kennebec you was talkin' about."

"I will, indeed," responded the old man. "As I was sayin' when interrupted, I may be a stranded log, but I'm proud that the mark o' the Gard'ner Lumber Comp'ny is on me, so 't when I git to my journey's end they'll know where I belong and send me back to the Kennebec. Before I'm sawed up I'd like to forgit this triflin' brook in the sight of a good-sized river, an' rest my eyes on some full-grown logs, 'stead o' these little damn pipestems you boys are playin' with!"

V. The Game of Jackstraws

There was a roar of laughter at the old man's boast, but in a moment all was activity. The men ran hither and thither like ants, gathering their tools. There were some old-fashioned pick-poles, straight, heavy levers without any "dog," and there were modern pick-poles and peaveys, for every river has its favorite equipment in these things. There was no dynamite in those days to make the stubborn jams yield, and the dog-warp was in general use. Horses or oxen, sometimes a line of men, stood on the river-bank. A long rope was attached by means of a steel spike to one log after another, and it was dragged from the tangled mass. Sometimes, after unloading the top logs, those at the bottom would rise and make the task easier; sometimes the work would go on for hours with no perceptible progress, and Mr. Wiley would have opportunity to tell the bystanders of a "turrible jam" on the Kennebec that had cost the Lumber Company ten thousand dollars to break.

There would be great arguments on shore, among the villagers as well as among the experts, as to the particular log which might be a key to the position. The boss would study the problem from various standpoints, and the drivers themselves would pass from heated discussion into long consultations.

"They're paid by the day," Old Kennebec would philosophize to the doctor; "an' when they're consultin' they don't hev to be

doggin', which is a turrible sight harder work."

Rose had created a small sensation, on one occasion, by pointing out to the under boss the key-log in a jam. She was past mistress of the pretty game of jackstraws, much in vogue at that time. The delicate little lengths of polished wood or bone were shaken together and emptied on the table. Each jackstraw had one of its ends fashioned in the shape of some sort of implement,—a rake, hoe, spade, fork, or mallet. All the pieces were intertwined by the shaking process, and they lay as they fell, in a hopeless tangle. The task consisted in taking a tiny pick-pole, scarcely bigger than a match, and with the bit of curved wire on the end lifting off the jackstraws one by one without stirring the pile or making it tremble. When this occurred, you gave place to your opponent, who relinquished his turn to you when ill fortune descended upon him, the game, which was a kind of river-driving and jam-picking in miniature, being decided by the number of pieces captured and their value. No wonder that the under boss asked Rose's advice as to the key-log. She had a fairy's hand, and her cunning at deciding the pieces to be moved, and her skill at extricating and lifting them from the heap, were looked upon in Edgewood as little less than supernatural. It was a favorite pastime; and although a man's hand is ill adapted to it, being over-large and heavy, the game has obvious advantages for a lover in bringing his head very close to that of his beloved adversary. The jackstraws have to be watched with a hawk's eagerness, since the "trembling" can be discerned only by a keen eye; but there were

moments when Stephen was willing to risk the loss of a battle if he could watch Rose's drooping eyelashes, the delicate down on her pink cheek, and the feathery curls that broke away from her hair.

He was looking at her now from a distance, for she and Mite Shapley were assisting Jed Towle to pile up the tin plates and tie the tin dippers together. Next she peered into one of the bean-pots, and seemed pleased that there was still something in its depths; then she gathered the fragments neatly together in a basket, and, followed by her friend, clambered down the banks to a shady spot where the Boomshers, otherwise known as the Crambry family, were "lined up" expectantly.

It is not difficult to find a single fool in any community, however small; but a family of fools is fortunately somewhat rarer. Every county, however, can boast of one fool-family, and York County is always in the fashion, with fools as with everything else. The unique, much-quoted, and undesirable Boomshers could not be claimed as indigenous to the Saco valley, for this branch was an offshoot of a still larger tribe inhabiting a distant township. Its beginnings were shrouded in mystery. There was a French-Canadian ancestor somewhere, and a Gypsy or Indian grandmother. They had always intermarried from time immemorial. When one of the selectmen of their native place had been asked why the Boomshers always married cousins, and why the habit was not discouraged, he replied that he really did n't know; he s'posed they felt it would be kind of odd to go right

out and marry a stranger.

Lest “Boomsheer” seem an unusual surname, it must be explained that the actual name was French and could not be coped with by Edgewood or Pleasant River, being something as impossible to spell as to pronounce. As the family had lived for the last few years somewhere near the Killick Cranberry Meadows, they were called—and completely described in the calling—the Crambry fool-family. A talented and much traveled gentleman who once stayed over night at the Edgewood tavern, proclaimed it his opinion that Boomsheer had been gradually corrupted from Beaumarchais. When he wrote the word on his visiting card and showed it to Mr. Wiley, Old Kennebec had replied, that in the judgment of a man who had lived in large places and seen a turrible lot o’ life, such a name could never have been given either to a Christian or a heathen family, that the way in which the letters was thrown together into it, and the way in which they was sounded when read out loud, was entirely ag’in reason. It was true, he said, that Beaumarchais, bein’ such a fool-name, might ‘a’ be’n invented a-purpose for a fool-family, but he would n’t hold even with callin’ ‘em Boomsheer; Crambry was well enough for ‘em an’ a sight easier to speak.

Stephen knew a good deal about the Crambrys, for he passed their so-called habitation in going to one of his wood-lots. It was only a month before that he had found them all sitting outside their broken-down fence, surrounded by decrepit chairs, sofas, tables, bedsteads, bits of carpet, and stoves.

“What’s the matter?” he called out from his wagon.

“There ain’t nothin’ the matter,” said Alcestis Crambry. “Father’s dead, an’ we’re dividin’ up the furnerchure.”

Alcestis was the pride of the Crambrys, and the list of his attainments used often to be on his proud father’s lips. It was he who was the largest, “for his size,” in the family; he who could tell his brothers Paul and Arcadus “by their looks”; he who knew a sour apple from a sweet one the minute he bit it; he who, at the early age of ten, was bright enough to point to the cupboard and say, “Puddin’, dad!”

Alcestis had enjoyed, in consequence of his unusual intellectual powers, some educational privileges, and the Killick school-mistress well remembered his first day at the village seat of learning. Reports of what took place in this classic temple from day to day may have been wafted to the dull ears of the boy, who was not thought ready for school until he had attained the ripe age of twelve. It may even have been that specific rumors of the signs, symbols, and hieroglyphics used in educational institutions had reached him in the obscurity of his cranberry meadows. At all events, when confronted by the alphabet chart, whose huge black capitals were intended to capture the wandering eyes of the infant class, Alcestis exhibited unusual, almost unnatural, excitement. “That is ‘A,’ my boy,” said the teacher genially, as she pointed to the first character on the chart. “Good God, is that ‘A’!” cried Alcestis, sitting down heavily on the nearest bench. And neither teacher nor

scholars could discover whether he was agreeably surprised or disappointed in the letter,—whether he had expected, if he ever encountered it, to find it writhing in coils on the floor of a cage, or whether it simply bore no resemblance to the ideal already established in his mind.

Mrs. Wiley had once tried to make something of Mercy, the oldest daughter of the family, but at the end of six weeks she announced that a girl who could n't tell whether the clock was going "forrards or backwards," and who rubbed a pocket-handkerchief as long as she did a sheet, would be no help in her household.

The Crambrys had daily walked the five or six miles from their home to the Edgewood bridge during the progress of the drive, not only for the social and intellectual advantages to be gained from the company present, but for the more solid compensation of a good meal. They all adored Rose, partly because she gave them food, and partly because she was sparkling and pretty and wore pink dresses that caught their dull eyes.

The afternoon proved a lively one. In the first place, one of the younger men slipped into the water between two logs, part of a lot chained together waiting to be let out of the boom. The weight of the mass higher up and the force of the current wedged him in rather tightly, and when he had been "pried" out he declared that he felt like an apple after it had been squeezed in the cider-mill, so he drove home, and Rufus Waterman took his place.

Two hours' hard work followed this incident, and at the end of

that time the “bung” that reached from the shore to Waterman’s Ledge (the rock where Pretty Quick met his fate) was broken up, and the logs that composed it were started down-river. There remained now only the great side jam at Gray Rock. This had been allowed to grow, gathering logs as they drifted past, thus making higher water and a stronger current on the other side of the rock, and allowing an easier passage for the logs at that point.

All was excitement now, for, this particular piece of work accomplished, the boom above the falls would be “turned out,” and the river would once more be clear and clean at the Edgewood bridge.

Small boys, perching on the rocks with their heels hanging, hands and mouths full of red Astrakhan apples, cheered their favorites to the echo, while the drivers shouted to one another and watched the signs and signals of the boss, who could communicate with them only in that way, so great was the roar of the water.

The jam refused to yield to ordinary measures. It was a difficult problem, for the rocky river-bed held many a snare and pitfall. There was a certain ledge under the water, so artfully placed that every log striking under its projecting edges would wedge itself firmly there, attracting others by its evil example.

“That galoot-boss ought to hev shoved his crew down to that jam this mornin’,” grumbled Old Kennebec to Alcestis Crambry, who was always his most loyal and attentive listener. “But he would n’t take no advice, not if Pharaoh nor Boaz nor Herod nor

Nicodemus come right out o' the Bible an' give it to him. The logs air contrary today. Sometimes they'll go along as easy as an old shoe, an' other times they'll do nothin' but bung, bung, bung! There's a log nestlin' down in the middle o' that jam that I've be'n watchin' for a week. It's a cur'ous one, to begin with; an' then it has a mark on it that you can reco'nize it by. Did ye ever hear tell o' George the Third, King of England, Alcestis, or ain't he known over to the crambry medders? Well, once upon a time men used to go through the forests over here an' slash a mark on the trunks o' the biggest trees. That was the royal sign, as you might say, an' meant that the tree was to be taken over to England to make masts an' yard-arms for the King's ships. What made me think of it now is that the King's mark was an arrer, an' it's an arrer that's on that there log I'm showin' ye. Well, sir, I seen it fust at Milliken's Mills a Monday. It was in trouble then, an' it's be'n in trouble ever sence. That's allers the way; there'll be one pesky, crooked, contrary, consarne'd log that can't go anywheres without gittin' into difficulties. You can yank it out an' set it afloat, an' before you hardly git your doggin' iron off of it, it'll be snarled up agin in some new place. From the time it's chopped down to the day it gets to Saco, it costs the Comp'ny 'bout ten times its pesky valler as lumber. Now they've sent over to Benson's for a team of horses, an' I bate ye they can't git 'em. I wish i was the boss on this river, Alcestis."

"I wish I was," echoed the boy.

"Well, your head-fillin' ain't the right kind for a boss, Alcestis,

an' you'd better stick to dry land. You set right down here while I go back a piece an' git the pipe out o' my coat pocket. I guess nothin' ain't goin' to happen for a few minutes."

The surmise about the horses, unlike most of Old Kennebec's, proved to be true. Benson's pair had gone to Portland with a load of hay; accordingly the tackle was brought, the rope was adjusted to a log, and five of the drivers, standing on the river-bank, attempted to drag it from its intrenched position. It refused to yield the fraction of an inch. Rufus and Stephen joined the five men, and the augmented crew of seven were putting all their strength on the rope when a cry went up from the watchers on the bridge. The "dog" had loosened suddenly, and the men were flung violently to the ground. For a second they were stunned both by the surprise and by the shock of the blow, but in the same moment the cry of the crowd swelled louder. Alcestis Crambry had stolen, all unnoticed, to the rope, and had attempted to use his feeble powers for the common good. When the blow came he fell backward, and, making no effort to control the situation, slid over the bank and into the water.

The other Crambrys, not realizing the danger, laughed audibly, but there was no jeering from the bridge.

Stephen had seen Alcestis slip, and in the fraction of a moment had taken off his boots and was coasting down the slippery rocks behind him; in a twinkling he was in the water, almost as soon as the boy himself.

"Doggoned idjut!" exclaimed Old Kennebec, tearfully. "Wuth

the hull fool-family! If I hed n't 'a' be'n so old, I'd 'a' jumped in myself, for you can't drownd a Wiley, not without you tie nail-kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls."

Alcestis, who had neither brains, courage, nor experience, had, better still, the luck that follows the witless. He was carried swiftly down the current; but, only fifty feet away, a long, slender log, wedged between two low rocks on the shore, juttet out over the water, almost touching its surface. The boy's clothes were admirably adapted to the situation, being full of enormous rents. In some way the end of the log caught in the rags of Alcestis's coat and held him just seconds enough to enable Stephen to swim to him, to seize him by the nape of the neck, to lift him on the log, and thence to the shore. It was a particularly bad place for a landing, and there was nothing to do but to lower ropes and drag the drenched men to the high ground above.

Alcestis came to his senses in ten or fifteen minutes, and seemed as bright as usual, with a kind of added swagger at being the central figure in a dramatic situation.

"I wonder you hed n't stove your brains out, when you landed so turrible suddent on that rock at the foot of the bank," said Mr. Wiley to him.

"I should, but I took good care to light on my head," responded Alcestis; a cryptic remark which so puzzled Old Kennebec that he mused over it for some hours.

VI. Hearts And Other Hearts

Stephen had brought a change of clothes, as he had a habit of being ducked once at least during the day; and since there was a halt in the proceedings and no need of his services for an hour or two, he found Rose and walked with her to a secluded spot where they could watch the logs and not be seen by the people.

"You frightened everybody almost to death, jumping into the river," chided Rose.

Stephen laughed. "They thought I was a fool to save a fool, I suppose."

"Perhaps not as bad as that, but it did seem reckless."

"I know; and the boy, no doubt, would be better off dead; but so should I be, if I could have let him die."

Rose regarded this strange point of view for a moment, and then silently acquiesced in it. She was constantly doing this, and she often felt that her mental horizon broadened in the act; but she could not be sure that Stephen grew any dearer to her because of his moral altitudes.

"Besides," Stephen argued, "I happened to be nearest to the river, and it was my job."

"How do you always happen to be nearest to the people in trouble, and why is it always your 'job'?"

"If there are any rewards for good conduct being distributed, I'm right in line with my hand stretched out," Stephen replied,

with meaning in his voice.

Rose blushed under her flowery hat as he led the way to a bench under a sycamore tree that overhung the water.

She had almost convinced herself that she was as much in love with Stephen Waterman as it was in her nature to be with anybody. He was handsome in his big way, kind, generous, temperate, well educated, and well-to-do. No fault could be found with his family, for his mother had been a teacher, and his father, though a farmer, a college graduate. Stephen himself had had one year at Bowdoin, but had been recalled, as the head of the house, when his father died. That was a severe blow; but his mother's death, three years after, was a grief never to be quite forgotten. Rose, too, was the child of a gently bred mother, and all her instincts were refined. Yes; Stephen in himself satisfied her in all the larger wants of her nature, but she had an unsatisfied hunger for the world,—the world of Portland, where her cousins lived; or, better still, the world of Boston, of which she heard through Mrs. Wealthy Brooks, whose nephew Claude often came to visit her in Edgewood. Life on a farm a mile and a half distant from post-office and stores; life in the house with Rufus, who was rumored to be somewhat wild and unsteady,—this prospect seemed a trifle dull and uneventful to the trivial part of her, though to the better part it was enough. The better part of her loved Stephen Waterman, dimly feeling the richness of his nature, the tenderness of his affection, the strength of his character. Rose was not destitute either of imagination or

sentiment. She did not relish this constant weighing of Stephen in the balance: he was too good to be weighed and considered. She longed to be carried out of herself on a wave of rapturous assent, but something seemed to hold her back,—some seed of discontent with the man's environment and circumstances, some germ of longing for a gayer, brighter, more varied life. No amount of self-searching or argument could change the situation. She always loved Stephen more or less: more when he was away from her, because she never approved his collars nor the set of his shirt bosom; and as he naturally wore these despised articles of apparel whenever he proposed to her, she was always lukewarm about marrying him and settling down on the River Farm. Still, today she discovered in herself, with positive gratitude, a warmer feeling for him than she had experienced before. He wore a new and becoming gray flannel shirt, with the soft turn-over collar that belonged to it, and a blue tie, the color of his kind eyes. She knew that he had shaved his beard at her request not long ago, and that when she did not like the effect as much as she had hoped, he had meekly grown a mustache for her sake; it did seem as if a man could hardly do more to please an exacting ladylove.

And she had admired him unreservedly when he pulled off his boots and jumped into the river to save Alcestis Crambry's life, without giving a single thought to his own.

And was there ever, after all, such a noble, devoted, unselfish fellow, or a better brother? And would she not despise herself for rejecting him simply because he was countrified, and because she

longed to see the world of the fashion plates in the magazines?

"The logs are so like people!" she exclaimed as they sat down. "I could name nearly every one of them for somebody in the village. Look at Mite Shapley, that dancing little one, slipping over the falls and skimming along the top of the water, keeping out of all the deep places, and never once touching the rocks."

Stephen fell into her mood. "There's Squire Anderson coming down crosswise and bumping everything in reach. You know he's always buying lumber and logs without knowing what he is going to do with them. They just lie and rot by the roadside. The boys always say that a toadstool is the old Squire's 'mark' on a log."

"And that stout, clumsy one is Short Dennett.—What are you doing, Stephen?"

"Only building a fence round this clump of harebells," Stephen replied. "They've just got well rooted, and if the boys come skidding down the bank with their spiked shoes, the poor things will never hold up their heads again. Now they're safe.—Oh, look, Rose! There come the minister and his wife!"

A portly couple of peeled logs, exactly matched in size, came ponderously over the falls together, rose within a second of each other, joined again, and swept under the bridge side by side.

"And—oh! oh!—Dr. and Mrs. Cram just after them! Isn't that funny?" laughed Rose, as a very long, slender pair of pines swam down, as close to each other as if they had been glued in that position. Rose thought, as she watched them, who but Stephen would have cared what became of the clump of delicate

harebells. How gentle such a man would be to a woman! How tender his touch would be if she were ill or in trouble!

Several single logs followed,—crooked ones, stolid ones, adventurous ones, feeble swimmers, deep divers. Some of them tried to start a small jam on their own account; others stranded themselves for good and all, as Rose and Stephen sat there side by side, with little Dan Cupid for an invisible third on the bench.

“There never was anything so like people,” Rose repeated, leaning forward excitedly. “And, upon my word, the minister and doctor couples are still together. I wonder if they’ll get as far as the falls at Union? That would be an odd place to part, would n’t it—Union?”

Stephen saw his opportunity, and seized it.

“There’s a reason, Rose, why two logs go downstream better than one, and get into less trouble. They make a wider path, create more force and a better current. It’s the same way with men and women. Oh, Rose, there is n’t a man in the world that’s loved you as long, or knows how to love you any better than I do. You’re just like a white birch sapling, and I’m a great, clumsy fir tree; but if you ‘ll only trust yourself to me, Rose, I’ll take you safely down-river.”

Stephen’s big hand closed on Rose’s little one; she returned its pressure softly and gave him the kiss that with her, as with him, meant a promise for all the years to come. The truth and passion in the man had broken the girl’s bonds for the moment. Her vision was clearer, and, realizing the treasures of love and fidelity that

were being offered her, she accepted them, half unconscious that she was not returning them in kind. How is the belle of two villages to learn that she should “thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man’s love”?

And Stephen? He went home in the dusk, not knowing whether his feet were touching the solid earth or whether he was treading upon rainbows.

Rose’s pink calico seemed to brush him as he walked in the path that was wide enough only for one. His solitude was peopled again when he fed the cattle, for Rose’s face smiled at him from the haymow; and when he strained the milk, Rose held the pans.

His nightly tasks over, he went out and took his favorite seat under the apple tree. All was still, save for the crickets’ ceaseless chirp, the soft thud of an August sweetening dropping in the grass, and the swish-swash of the water against his boat, tethered in the Willow Cove.

He remembered when he first saw Rose, for that must have been when he began to love her, though he was only fourteen and quite unconscious that the first seed had been dropped in the rich soil of his boyish heart.

He was seated on the kerosene barrel in the Edgewood post-office, which was also the general country store, where newspapers, letters, molasses, nails, salt codfish, hairpins, sugar, liver pills, canned goods, beans, and gingham dwelt in genial proximity. When she entered, just a little pink-and-white slip of a thing with a tin pail in her hand and a sunbonnet falling off

her wavy hair, Stephen suddenly stopped swinging his feet. She gravely announced her wants, reading them from a bit of paper,—1 quart molasses, 1 package ginger, 1 lb. cheese, 2 pairs shoe laces, 1 card shirt buttons.

While the storekeeper drew off the molasses she exchanged shy looks with Stephen, who, clean, well-dressed, and carefully mothered as he was, felt all at once uncouth and awkward, rather as if he were some clumsy lout pitch-forked into the presence of a fairy queen. He offered her the little bunch of bachelor's buttons he held in his hand, augury of the future, had he known it,—and she accepted them with a smile. She dropped her memorandum; he picked it up, and she smiled again, doing still more fatal damage than in the first instance. No words were spoken, but Rose, even at ten, had less need of them than most of her sex, for her dimples, aided by dancing eyes, length of lashes, and curve of lips, quite took the place of conversation. The dimples tempted, assented, denied, corroborated, deplored, protested, sympathized, while the intoxicated beholder cudgeled his brain for words or deeds which should provoke and evoke more and more dimples.

The storekeeper hung the molasses pail over Rose's right arm and tucked the packages under her left, and as he opened the mosquito-netting door to let her pass out she looked back at Stephen, perched on the kerosene barrel, just a little girl, a little glance, a little dimple, and Stephen was never quite the same again. The years went on, and the boy became man, yet no other

image had ever troubled the deep, placid waters of his heart. Now, after many denials, the hopes and longings of his nature had been answered, and Rose had promised to marry him. He would sacrifice his passion for logging and driving in the future, and become a staid farmer and man of affairs, only giving himself a river holiday now and then. How still and peaceful it was under the trees, and how glad his mother would be to think that the old farm would wake from its sleep, and a woman's light foot be heard in the sunny kitchen!

Heaven was full of silent stars, and there was a moonglade on the water that stretched almost from him to Rose. His heart embarked on that golden pathway and sailed on it to the farther shore. The river was free of logs, and under the light of the moon it shone like a silver mirror. The soft wind among the fir branches breathed Rose's name; the river, rippling against the shore, sang "Rose "; and as Stephen sat there dreaming of the future, his dreams, too, could have been voiced in one word, and that word "Rose."

VII. The Little House

The autumn days flew past like shuttles in a loom. The river reflected the yellow foliage of the white birch and the scarlet of the maples. The wayside was bright with goldenrod, with the red tassels of the sumac, with the purple frost-flower and feathery clematis.

If Rose was not as happy as Stephen, she was quietly content, and felt that she had more to be grateful for than most girls, for Stephen surprised her with first one evidence and then another of thoughtful generosity. In his heart of hearts he felt that Rose was not wholly his, that she reserved, withheld something; and it was the subjugation of this rebellious province that he sought. He and Rose had agreed to wait a year for their marriage, in which time Rose's cousin would finish school and be ready to live with the old people; meanwhile Stephen had learned that his maiden aunt would be glad to come and keep house for Rufus. The work at the River Farm was too hard for a girl, so he had persuaded himself of late, and the house was so far from the village that Rose was sure to be lonely. He owned a couple of acres between his place and the Edgewood bridge, and here, one afternoon only a month after their engagement, he took Rose to see the foundations of a little house he was building for her. It was to be only a story-and-a-half cottage of six small rooms, the two upper chambers to be finished off later on. Stephen had placed it well back from the

road, leaving space in front for what was to be a most wonderful arrangement of flower-beds, yet keeping a strip at the back, on the river-brink, for a small vegetable garden. There had been a house there years before-so many years that the blackened ruins were entirely overgrown; but a few elms and an old apple-orchard remained to shade the new dwelling and give welcome to the coming inmates.

Stephen had fifteen hundred dollars in bank, he could turn his hand to almost anything, and his love was so deep that Rose's plumb-line had never sounded bottom; accordingly he was able, with the help of two steady workers, to have the roof on before the first of November. The weather was clear and fine, and by Thanksgiving clapboards, shingles, two coats of brown paint, and even the blinds had all been added. This exhibition of reckless energy on Stephen's part did not wholly commend itself to the neighborhood.

"Steve's too turrible spry," said Rose's grandfather; "he'll trip himself up some o' these times."

"*You* never will," remarked his better half, sagely.

"The resks in life come along fast enough, without runnin' to meet 'em," continued the old man. "There's good dough in Rose, but it ain't more'n half riz. Let somebody come along an' drop in a little more yeast, or set the dish a little mite nearer the stove, an' you'll see what 'll happen."

"Steve's kept house for himself some time, an' I guess he knows more about bread-makin' than you do."

“There don’t nobody know more’n I do about nothin’, when my pipe’s drawin’ real good an’ nobody’s thornin’ me to go to work,” replied Mr. Wiley; “but nobody’s willin’ to take the advice of a man that’s seen the world an’ lived in large places, an’ the risin’ generation is in a turrible hurry. I don’ know how ‘t is: young folks air allers settin’ the clock forrard an’ the old ones puttin’ it back.”

“Did you ketch anything for dinner when you was out this mornin’?” asked his wife.

“No, I fished an’ fished, till I was about ready to drop, an’ I did git a few shiners, but land, they wa’n’t as big as the worms I was ketchin’ ‘em with, so i pitched ‘em back in the water an’ quit.”

During the progress of these remarks Mr. Wiley opened the door under the sink, and from beneath a huge iron pot drew a round tray loaded with a glass pitcher and half a dozen tumblers, which he placed carefully on the kitchen table. “This is the last day’s option I’ve got on this lemonade-set,” he said, “an’ if I’m goin’ to Biddeford tomorrer I’ve got to make up my mind here an’ now.”

With this observation he took off his shoes, climbed in his stocking feet to the vantage ground of a kitchen chair, and lifted a stone china pitcher from a corner of the highest cup-board shelf where it had been hidden. “This lemonade’s gittin’ kind o’ dusty,” he complained. “I cal’lated to hev a kind of a spree on it when I got through choosin’ Rose’s weddin’ present, but I guess the pig ‘ll hev to help me out.” The old man filled one of the glasses from the pitcher, pulled up the kitchen shades to the top, put both

hands in his pockets, and walked solemnly round the table, gazing at his offering from every possible point of view. There had been three lemonade-sets in the window of a Biddeford crockery store when Mr. Wiley chanced to pass by, and he had brought home the blue and green one on approval. To the casual eye it would have appeared as quite uniquely hideous until the red and yellow or the purple and orange ones had been seen; after that, no human being could have made a decision, where each was so unparalleled in its ugliness, and Old Kennebec's confusion of mind would have been perfectly understood by the connoisseur.

"How do you like it with the lemonade in, mother?" he inquired eagerly. "The thing that plagues me most is that the red an' yaller one I hed home last week lights up better'n this, an' I believe I'll settle on that; for as I was thinkin' last night in bed, lemonade is mostly an evenin' drink an' Rose won't be usin' the set much by daylight. Root beer looks the handsomest in this purple set, but Rose loves lemonade better'n beer, so I guess I'll pack up this one an' change it tomorrer. Mebbe when I get it out o' sight an' give the lemonade to the pig I'll be easier in my mind."

In the opinion of the community at large Stephen's forehandedness in the matter of preparations for his marriage was imprudence, and his desire for neatness and beauty flagrant extravagance. The house itself was a foolish idea, it was thought, but there were extenuating circumstances, for the maiden aunt really needed a home, and Rufus was likely to marry before long and take his wife to the River Farm. It was to be hoped in his

case that he would avoid the snares of beauty and choose a good stout girl who would bring the dairy back to what it was in Mrs. Waterman's time.

All winter long Stephen labored on the inside of the cottage, mostly by himself. He learned all trades in succession, Love being his only master. He had many odd days to spare from his farm work, and if he had not found days he would have taken nights. Scarcely a nail was driven without Rose's advice; and when the plastering was hard and dry, the wallpapers were the result of weeks of consultation.

Among the quiet joys of life there is probably no other so deep, so sweet, so full of trembling hope and delight, as the building and making of a home,—a home where two lives are to be merged in one and flow on together, a home full of mysterious and delicious possibilities, hidden in a future which is always rose-colored.

Rose's sweet little nature broadened under Stephen's influence; but she had her moments of discontent and unrest, always followed quickly by remorse.

At the Thanksgiving sociable some one had observed her turquoise engagement ring,—some one who said that such a hand was worthy of a diamond, that turquoises were a pretty color, but that there was only one stone for an engagement ring, and that was a diamond. At the Christmas dance the same some one had said that her waltzing would make her "all the rage" in Boston. She wondered if it were true, and wondered whether,

if she had not promised to marry Stephen, some splendid being from a city would have descended from his heights, bearing diamonds in his hand. Not that she would have accepted them; she only wondered. These disloyal thoughts came seldom, and she put them resolutely away, devoting herself with all the greater assiduity to her muslin curtains and ruffled pillow-shams. Stephen, too, had his momentary pangs. There were times when he could calm his doubts only by working on the little house. The mere sight of the beloved floors and walls and ceilings comforted his heart, and brought him good cheer.

The winter was a cold one, so bitterly cold that even the rapid water at the Gray Rock was a mass of curdled yellow ice, something that had only occurred once or twice before within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

It was also a very gay season for Pleasant River and Edgewood. Never had there been so many card-parties, sleigh-rides, and tavern dances, and never such wonderful skating. The river was one gleaming, glittering thoroughfare of ice from Milliken's Mills to the dam at the Edgewood bridge. At sundown bonfires were built here and there on the mirror-like surface, and all the young people from the neighboring villages gathered on the ice; while detachments of merry, rosy-cheeked boys and girls, those who preferred coasting, met at the top of Brigadier Hill, from which one could get a longer and more perilous slide than from any other point in the township.

Claude Merrill, in his occasional visits from Boston, was very

much in evidence at the Saturday evening ice parties. He was not an artist at the sport himself, but he was especially proficient in the art of strapping on a lady's skates, and murmuring,—as he adjusted the last buckle,—“The prettiest foot and ankle on the river!” It cannot be denied that this compliment gave secret pleasure to the fair village maidens who received it, but it was a pleasure accompanied by electric shocks of excitement. A girl's foot might perhaps be mentioned, if a fellow were daring enough, but the line was rigidly drawn at the ankle, which was not a part of the human frame ever alluded to in the polite society of Edgewood at that time.

Rose, in her red linsey-woolsey dress and her squirrel furs and cap, was the life of every gathering, and when Stephen took her hand and they glided upstream, alone together in the crowd, he used to wish that they might skate on and on up the crystal ice-path of the river, to the moon itself, whither it seemed to lead them.

VIII. The Garden of Eden

But the Saco all this time was meditating one of its surprises. The snapping cold weather and the depth to which the water was frozen were aiding it in its preparation for the greatest event of the season. On a certain gray Saturday in March, after a week of mild temperature, it began to rain as if, after months of snowing, it really enjoyed a new form of entertainment. Sunday dawned with the very flood-gates of heaven opening, so it seemed. All day long the river was rising under its miles of unbroken ice, rising at the threatening rate of four inches an hour.

Edgewood went to bed as usual that night, for the bridge at that point was set too high to be carried away by freshets, but at other villages whose bridges were in less secure position there was little sleep and much anxiety.

At midnight a cry was heard from the men watching at Milliken's Mills. The great ice jam had parted from Rolfe's Island and was swinging out into the open, pushing everything before it. All the able-bodied men in the village turned out of bed, and with lanterns in hand began to clear the stores and mills, for it seemed that everything near the river-banks must go before that avalanche of ice.

Stephen and Rufus were there helping to save the property of their friends and neighbors; Rose and Mite Shapley had stayed the night with a friend, and all three girls were shivering with

fear and excitement as they stood near the bridge, watching the never-to-be-forgotten sight. It is needless to say that the Crambry family was on hand, for whatever instincts they may have lacked, the instinct for being on the spot when anything was happening, was present in them to the most remarkable extent. The town was supporting them in modest winter quarters somewhat nearer than Killick to the center of civilization, and the first alarm brought them promptly to the scene, Mrs. Crambry remarking at intervals: "If I'd known there'd be so many out I'd ought to have worn my bunnit; but I ain't got no bunnit, an' if I had they say I ain't got no head to wear it on!"

By the time the jam neared the falls it had grown with its accumulations, until it was made up of tier after tier of huge ice cakes, piled side by side and one upon another, with heaps of trees and branches and drifting lumber holding them in place. Some of the blocks stood erect and towered like icebergs, and these, glittering in the lights of the twinkling lanterns, pushed solemnly forward, cracking, crushing, and cutting everything in their way. When the great mass neared the planing mill on the east shore the girls covered their eyes, expecting to hear the crash of the falling building; but, impelled by the force of some mysterious current, it shook itself ponderously, and then, with one magnificent movement, slid up the river-bank, tier following tier in grand confusion. This left a water way for the main drift; the ice broke in every direction, and down, down, down, from Bonnie Eagle and Moderation swept the harvest of the

winter freezing. It came thundering over the dam, bringing boats, farming implements, posts, supports, and every sort of floating lumber with it; and cutting under the flour mill, tipped it cleverly over on its side and went crashing on its way down-river. At Edgewood it pushed colossal blocks of ice up the banks into the roadway, piling them end upon end ten feet in air. Then, tearing and rumbling and booming through the narrows, it covered the interval at Pleasant Point and made a huge ice bridge below Union Falls, a bridge so solid that it stood there for days, a sight for all the neighboring villages.

This exciting event would have forever set apart this winter from all others in Stephen's memory, even had it not been also the winter when he was building a house for his future wife. But afterwards, in looking back on the wild night of the ice freshet, Stephen remembered that Rose's manner was strained and cold and evasive, and that when he had seen her talking with Claude Merrill, it had seemed to him that that whippersnapper had looked at her as no honorable man in Edgewood ever looked at an engaged girl. He recalled his throb of gratitude that Claude lived at a safe distance, and his subsequent pang of remorse at doubting, for an instant, Rose's fidelity.

So at length April came, the Saco was still high, turbid, and angry, and the boys were waiting at Limington Falls for the "Ossipee drive" to begin. Stephen joined them there, for he was restless, and the river called him, as it did every spring. Each stubborn log that he encountered gave him new courage

and power of overcoming. The rush of the water, the noise and roar and dash, the exposure and danger, all made the blood run in his veins like new wine. When he came back to the farm, all the cobwebs had been blown from his brain, and his first interview with Rose was so intoxicating that he went immediately to Portland, and bought, in a kind of secret penitence for his former fears, a pale pink-flowered wall-paper for the bedroom in the new home. It had once been voted down by the entire advisory committee. Mrs. Wiley said that pink was foolish and was always sure to fade; and the border, being a mass of solid roses, was five cents a yard, virtually a prohibitive price. Mr. Wiley said he "should hate to hev a spell of sickness an' lay abed in a room where there was things growin' all over the place." He thought "rough-plastered walls, where you could lay an' count the spots where the roof leaked, was the most entertainin' in sickness." Rose had longed for the lovely pattern, but had sided dutifully with the prudent majority, so that it was with a feeling of unauthorized and illegitimate joy that Stephen papered the room at night, a few strips at a time.

On the third evening, when he had removed all signs of his work, he lighted two kerosene lamps and two candles, finding the effect, under this illumination, almost too brilliant and beautiful for belief. Rose should never see it now, he determined, until the furniture was in place. They had already chosen the kitchen and bedroom things, though they would not be needed for some months; but the rest was to wait until summer, when there would

be the hay-money to spend.

Stephen did not go back to the River Farm till one o'clock that night; the pink bedroom held him in fetters too powerful to break. It looked like the garden of Eden, he thought. To be sure, it was only fifteen feet square; Eden might have been a little larger, possibly, but otherwise the pink bedroom had every advantage. The pattern of roses growing on a trellis was brighter than any flower-bed in June; and the border—well, if the border had been five dollars a foot Stephen would not have grudged the money when he saw the twenty running yards of rosy bloom rioting under the white ceiling.

Before he blew out the last light he raised it high above his head and took one fond, final look. "It's the only place I ever saw," he thought, "that is pretty enough for her. She will look just as if she was growing here with all the other flowers, and I shall always think of it as the garden of Eden. I wonder, if I got the license and the ring and took her by surprise, whether she'd be married in June instead of August? I could be all ready if I could only persuade her."

At this moment Stephen touched the summit of happiness; and it is a curious coincidence that as he was dreaming in his garden of Eden, the serpent, having just arrived at Edgewood, was sleeping peacefully at the house of Mrs. Brooks.

It was the serpent's fourth visit that season, and he explained to inquiring friends that his former employer had sold the business, and that the new management, while reorganizing, had

determined to enlarge the premises, the three clerks who had been retained having two weeks' vacation with half pay.

It is extraordinary how frequently "wise serpents" are retained by the management on half, or even full, salary, while the services of the "harmless doves" are dispensed with, and they are set free to flutter where they will.

IX. The Serpent

Rose Wiley had the brightest eyes in Edgewood. It was impossible to look at her without realizing that her physical sight was perfect. What mysterious species of blindness is it that descends, now and then, upon human creatures, and renders them incapable of judgment or discrimination?

Claude Merrill was a glove salesman in a Boston fancy-goods store. The calling itself is undoubtedly respectable, and it is quite conceivable that a man can sell gloves and still be a man; but Claude Merrill was a manikin. He inhabited a very narrow space behind a very short counter, but to him it seemed the earth and the fullness thereof.

When, irreproachably neat and even exquisite in dress, he gave a Napoleonic glance at his array of glove-boxes to see if the female assistant had put them in proper order for the day, when, with that wonderful eye for detail that had wafted him to his present height of power, he pounced upon the powder-sprinklers and found them, as he expected, empty; when, with masterly judgment, he had made up and ticketed a basket of misfits and odd sizes to attract the eyes of women who were their human counterparts, he felt himself bursting with the pride and pomp of circumstance. His cambric handkerchief adjusted in his coat with the monogram corner well displayed, a last touch to the carefully trained lock on his forehead, and he was ready for his customers.

“Six, did you say, miss? I should have thought five and three quarters—Attend to that gentleman, Miss Dix, please; I am very busy.”

“Six-and-a-half gray sue’de? Here they are, an exquisite shade. Shall I try them on? The right hand, if you will. Perhaps you’d better remove your elegant ring; I should n’t like to have anything catch in the setting.”

“Miss Dix! Six-and-a-half black glaze’—upper shelf, third box—for this lady. She’s in a hurry. We shall see you often after this, I hope, madam.”

“No; we don’t keep silk or lisle gloves. We have no call for them; our customers prefer kid.”

Oh, but he was in his element, was Claude Merrill; though the glamour that surrounded him in the minds of the Edgewood girls did not emanate wholly from his finicky little person: something of it was the glamour that belonged to Boston,—remote, fashionable, gay, rich, almost inaccessible Boston, which none could see without the expenditure of five or six dollars in railway fare, with the added extravagance of a night in a hotel, if one would explore it thoroughly and come home possessed of all its illimitable treasures of wisdom and experience.

When Claude came to Edgewood for a Sunday, or to spend a vacation with his aunt, he brought with him something of the magic of a metropolis. Suddenly, to Rose’s eye, Stephen looked larger and clumsier, his shoes were not the proper sort, his clothes were ordinary, his neckties were years behind the

fashion. Stephen's dancing, compared with Claude's, was as the deliberate motion of an ox to the hopping of a neat little robin. When Claude took a girl's hand in the "grand right-and-left," it was as if he were about to try on a delicate glove; the manner in which he "held his lady" in the polka or schottische made her seem a queen. Mite Shapley was so affected by it that when Rufus attempted to encircle her for the mazurka she exclaimed, "Don't act as if you were spearing logs, Rufus!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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