

The Family Circle

VARIOUS REASONS

A thick-fleeced lamb came trotting by.
 'Pray, whither now, my lamb?' quoth I.
 'To have,' said he, with ne'er a stop,
 'My wool clipped at the ba-ba shop.'

I asked the dog: 'Why all this din?'
 Said he: 'I'm fashioned outside in,
 And all my days and nights I've tried
 My best to get the bark outside.'

A hen was cackling loud and long.
 Said I to her: 'How strange your song!'—
 Said she: 'Tis scarce a song; in fact,
 It's just a lay, to be eggs-act.'

I asked the cat: 'Pray tell me why
 You love to sing.' She blinked her eye.
 'My purr-puss, sir, as you can see,
 Is to a-mews myself,' said she.

I asked the cow: 'Why don't you kick
 The man who whips you with a stick?'
 'Alas! I must be lashed,' said she,
 'So I can give whipped-cream, you see!'

MORAN'S OWN

The wages paid to porters, those big, strapping, lusty fellows who handle cases like mere toys, are not apt to put these hard-working men in the moneyed class. And that was the only reason why the courtship of Moran and pretty Nellie Daly had stretched out over years. They loved one another as only the sincere, humble people do. They loved long before the wedding, and their marriage was only a way station on the road to happiness. There had been little of romance, little of poetry in their courting. They were of the silent people, who have the whole gamut of emotions, but who, lacking the dainty ways of a higher civilisation, can only be so direct in their wooing as in their hating.

It had taken Moran many years to be promoted from the sidewalk gang to the shipping floor, and when at last his elevation, with the rise in his wages, was accomplished, there was just one aim, one purpose in his mind.

And, although to some their courting might have seemed rough, uncouth, perhaps, on the day when Moran came to Nellie and repeated to her the oft-echoed phrase, 'I love you, Nellie, girl,' she never doubted, but believed, and that is the end and object of all courting.

Moran was the essence of concentration. Whatever he did was done with his whole heart and soul, whether it was working or loving.

At the big warehouse where he worked he had gotten himself the reputation of being the most silent and most steady man. The others, as healthy men will do, often indulged in rough, practical jokes, but Moran never shared in such skylarking. That did by no means make him unpopular. He always was civil, and smiled in a quiet, preoccupied sort of way and was liked by employers and fellow-workers.

'Oh, Moran is always the same; he never makes free,' they said of him, 'but he mends his own business and is all right just the same.'

At home, however, the shutters of his big heart were always wide open, and the man became an awkward, laughing boy, clumsily helping the little woman with her housework. As they had not stopped loving at the altar, household cares, scarcity of money, and minor tribulations were met with courage and smiles. When the sweethearts were together all the rest of the world was forgotten.

Then a boy was born to them. What first was welcomed as the culmination of all their happiness was the innocent cause of much misery and suffering.

The mother, never strong, was left enfeebled. Her health was shattered. Soon the case was diagnosed as hopeless, and then came years and years of drooping, during which the boy grew into quite a little sturdy man. With every day the mother grew more tired, wasted to a shadow, and ere long even the husband realised that recovery was impossible.

Moran grew quieter than ever at his work. In spirit he was always by that bedside at home. He raced home in the evenings, and then spent half of a night in caring for the invalid.

When Eddie began to understand he was instructed to tend his mother during the day, to give her the medicine, and do her wishes. At night the father would hover over the poor woman with a tenderness which only these big, silent men possess. He gave her every minute, and that left little Eddie very much alone.

The life of the son was cheerless. He could make no friends with the other boys in the street, as the day was spent with his mother. And she, poor soul, was too fitful, too ailing to vouchsafe him more than an occasional 'that's a good boy, Eddie.' As to caressing him—she was afraid to touch, to kiss him. She wanted him to live. So Eddie knew little of a mother's love and scarcely knew his father.

Thrown upon his own meagre resources, the little lad was practically compelled to build himself a little world of fancies, in which the father, who often forgot the boy's very existence, made the splendid, brave hero.

The boy's place at night, after the father's return, was a little stool behind the range, where he was out of the way—for Moran needed much space to move about. There he sat for hours watching his dad ministering to the sick mother.

Odd ideas and queer notions came to Eddie. He often thought when he saw his big father heating water or preparing a draught for the sufferer, how glorious it would be 'to be good and sick' some time and have the great dad be so nice and tender to a fellow.

One night Eddie somehow could not sleep on his mattress in the corner of the kitchen, and, quite late, he saw his father rushing out without hat or coat. He returned very soon with the doctor, and they shut the door of the bedroom behind them. Strange sounds like groans and sobs came from behind the door, and Eddie was just going to get up to see if he could not help at anything when the doctor came from the room and patted him on the head.

'Poor little beggar!' said the doctor.

And then Eddie dimly understood, shivered a little, and felt more alone than ever.

His aunt came the following day and took him with her to stay at her house for a week. When he came back the place looked the same as ever—but it felt differently to Eddie. The bedroom door stood wide open, and the bed within was vacant.

The father did not notice or greet Eddie, and just sat with folded arms at the table by the window, staring into space.

Eddie crept up to his usual place behind the range and waited. But the cruel loneliness grew more and more oppressive—and at last he could stand the uncanny quiet no longer.

'Dad,' he whispered, and trembled at the sound of his voice.

Moran stirred, not quite sure of what he had heard, and again went back to his brooding, never seeing the little lonely lad, who had slid from his stool and took a step toward him.

The boy kept on, slowly, cautiously, and eventually stood before his father, his hand clutching the edge of the table for moral and physical support.

'Dad,' he began again, his knees almost collapsing.

The father turned and focussed his swollen, bloodshot eyes upon the boy.

'Well, what is it?'

The little boy shook like an aspen, but it was his last chance, and he braced himself for the final effort.

'Dad, please, dad, don't you think we two should now stick together?'

And then Moran awoke from his direful trance and saw the quivering lips, the wistful eyes. In a flash the few years of the boy's life went past like a vision. He saw the lovelessness, the harshness, the solitude, and then Moran stooped and gathered to his breast the little lad who had waited so long and patiently for his niche of love.

Moran had found his own.—Exchange.

A FABLE ON GRATITUDE

The snake was trying to shed his skin.

'Help me off with this, will you?' he said to a frog that happened to be passing.

The frog kindly complied with the request, and presently the discarded skin lay stretched along the ground.

'Now,' observed the frog, 'I suppose you will do with that as I do with my cast-off garments—eat it.'

'No,' said the snake. 'There is something better in sight.'

Thereupon he ate the frog.

The moral of this is that there is more than one kind of skin game, and some kinds are meaner than others.