

The Family Circle

SIGNS OF RAIN

The hollow winds begin to blow,
The clouds look black, the glass is low,
The soot falls down, the spaniels sleep,
And spiders from their cobwebs creep.
Last night the sun went pale to bed,
The moon in halos hid her head;
The boding shepherd heaves a sigh,
For, see! a rainbow spans the sky.
The walls are damp, the ditches smell,
Closed is the pink-eyed pimpernel;
Hark how the chairs and tables crack!
Old Betty's joints are on the rack;
Her corns with shooting-pains torment her,
And to her bed untimely sent her;
Loud quack the ducks, the peacocks cry,
The distant hills are looking nigh;
How restless are the snorting swine!
The busy flies disturb the kine;
Low o'er the grass the swallow wings;
The cricket, too, how sharp he sings!
Puss on the hearth, with velvet paws,
Sits wiping o'er her whiskered jaws;
The smoke from chimneys right ascends,
Then, spreading, back to earth it bends;
The wind unsteady veers around,
Or setting in the south is found.
Through the clear stream the fishes rise,
And nimbly catch th' incautious flies;
The glow-worms, num'rous, clear, and bright,
Illumed the dewy dell last night;
At dusk the squalid toad was seen
Hopping and crawling o'er the green;
The whirling dust the wind obeys,
And in the rapid eddy plays;
The frog has changed his yellow vest,
And in a russet coat is dressed;
The sky is green, the air is still,
The merry blackbird's voice is shrill,
The dog, so altered is his taste,
Quits mutton bones on grass to feast;
And see yon rooks, how odd their flight;
They imitate the gliding kite,
And seem precipitate to fall,
As if they felt the piercing ball.
The tender colts on back do lie,
Nor heed the traveller passing by.
In fiery red the sun doth rise,
Then wades through clouds to mount the skies.
'Twill surely rain,—I see with sorrow,
Our jaunt must be put off to-morrow.

A STORY OF MY SCHOOLDAYS

When I was a lad of ten, I attended a boarding-school. Every Monday morning, after a Sunday passed at home, I brought back with me the magnificent sum of fifteen sous (about fifteen cents), with which I was expected to purchase my breakfasts for the week, the school furnishing only unbuttered bread for that meal.

One Monday, on returning, I found one of my school-mates (I even remember his name, which was Couture) in possession of a large turkey claw,—I say 'claw,' but it was really the whole drumstick, with the claw attached. As soon as he saw me, the boy called out:

'Come here, and see what I have!'

Of course I ran to see. He covered the top of the leg with both hands; and when he moved his right hand, the four fingers of the claw opened and shut like the fingers of a human hand. I was overcome with wonder. How could a dead claw be made to move like that? I was absolutely dazed as I watched the marvellous performance, which was repeated again and again.

Couture was older and more worldly-wise than I; and when he had worked my enthusiasm up to its greatest height, he coolly put the claw in his pocket and walked away. I went away, too; but the marvel haunted me, and I thought:

'If I only had the claw I could learn how to work it myself. Couture is no wizard. And what fun I should have with it!'

Finally my desire broke all bounds, and I ran after the owner of the fascinating claw.

'Give me that claw! Please do!' I pleaded.

'What! Give you a claw like that? Well, I think not!' was the scornful reply.

This refusal only whetted my desire.

'Then sell it to me.'

'How much will you give me for it?'

I began to finger my money in the bottom of my pocket.

'Five sous,' I answered.

'Five sous for a wonder like that! Are you making fun of me?'

Then, taking the precious object from his pocket, he began to manipulate it before my covetous eyes; and at each performance my desire for its possession increased.

'I'll give you ten sous,' I finally decided.
'Ten sous!' repeated Couture, contemptuously. 'Why, look!'

And the fingers opened and closed again as if they were alive.

'How much do you want for it?' I asked in a trembling tone.

'Forty sous, or nothing at all.'

'Forty sous!' I exclaimed. 'Almost three weeks' breakfasts! The idea!'

'As you please,' said my tormentor, indifferently. The claw disappeared in his pocket and he walked away again.

Again I ran after him.

'Fifteen sous!' I ventured.

'Forty,' was the firm reply.

'Twenty.'

'Forty.'

'Twenty-five.'

'Forty.'

Oh, that Couture! How well fitted he was to make his way in the world! How he understood the human heart, even at that early age! Every time that inexorable 'forty' fell upon my ears, my resistance weakened. Finally, I could stand it no longer.

'Well, then, forty!' I cried. 'Now give it to me.'

'Give me the money first,' was the reply.

I handed over my fifteen sous, and was compelled to sign a promise for the remaining twenty-five. The shrewd fellow would consent to nothing else. Then, taking the claw from his pocket, he said:

'Here it is!'

I received it eagerly; and in a few moments, as I had foreseen, I could pull the tendon which operated the claws as well as Couture himself.

For two minutes it gave me the greatest pleasure; after three minutes it amused me less; and by the end of four, not at all. I kept on working it, however, because I wanted to get the worth of my money; but I was disenchanted. Sadness followed, then regret, then the perspective of three weeks of dry bread, then the full realisation of my folly. All these sensations gradually merged into bitterness, which in turn became anger. I hated the object for which I had paid so dearly; and, going up to the wall, I tossed it over, so as to be sure of never seeing it again.

The memory of that schoolboy experience has always remained with me; and I may say that it has often restrained me when I was about to yield to some foolish impulse, or to purchase something I should be sure to discard as soon as the novelty had worn off. The faults of childhood are sure to exist in the grown man. The best way to combat them is to be made aware of their existence, and my boyhood transaction with Couture impressed at least one of my faults indelibly upon my memory.

HOW SHE DID IT

'I had a good deal of trouble with that census enumerator,' said Mrs. Brown. 'When he called for the blank he had left at the house he said it hadn't been filled out properly. Then he began to ask a lot of impertinent questions about things that didn't concern him in the least.'

'I told him it was nobody's business how old I was, and whether there was a mortgage on the property or not, and all that sort of thing. But he insisted on knowing. He even made threats. I declare, I thought I never would get rid of him. He stayed half an hour, and when he went away at last he said he'd come again when my husband was at home, and those questions would be answered or he'd know the reason why.'

'Well,' remarked Mrs. Smith, 'that shows that you didn't know how to manage him.'

'Didn't he come to your house, too?'

'Yes, but he wasn't there five minutes. I hadn't the least bit of trouble with him.'

'How did you manage him?'

'Why, I answered all his questions civilly.'

COULD BE TRUSTED

The late Lord Young of the Scottish bench was responsible for enlivening many a dull case. One of the best remarks that ever fell from his lips was the reply to a counsel who urged on behalf of a plaintiff of somewhat bibulous appearance:

'My client, my lord, is a most remarkable man, and holds a very responsible position; he is manager of some waterworks.'

After a long look the judge answered:

'Yes, he looks like a man who could be trusted with any amount of water.'

A NERVE TONIC NOT REQUIRED

The big-hearted, eminent physician had consented to see the patient without making any charge. There was a lingering doubt as to whether this was altogether a deserving case; but, as usual, the patient was given the benefit of the doubt. 'There,' he said, when the examination was finished, 'take this prescription to a chemist; he'll make it up for you for eighteenpence.' 'Thanks, doctor,' was