

THE BREAKING OF WINTER.

BY PATIENCE STAPLETON.

"THAT's the fust funeral I've went to sence I was a gal, but that I drove to the graveyard."

"I dunno as that done the corp enny good."

"An' seems all to onc't I miss old Tige," muttered the first speaker half to herself.

It was snowing now, a fine mist sifting down on deep-drifted stone-walls and hard, shining roads, and the tinkle of sleigh-bells, as a far-away black line wound over the hill to the bleak graveyard, sounded musical and sweet in the muffled air. Two black figures in the dazzling white landscape left the traveled road and ploughed heavily along a lane leading to a grove of maples, cold and naked in the winter scene.

"They say Ann Kirk left a good prop'ty," said the first speaker, a woman of fifty, with sharp black eyes, red cheeks, few wrinkles and fewer gray hairs in the black waves under her pumpkin hood. She pulled her worn fur cape around her neck and took a new grasp on her shawl, pinning it tight. "Ann an' me used to take a sight of comfort driving old Tige."

The man, her companion, grunted and went sturdily ahead. He was enveloped in a big overcoat, a scarf wound around his neck and a moth-eaten fur cap pulled down over his ears. His blue eyes were watery from the cold, his nose and chin peaked and purple, and frost clung to the short gray beard about his mouth.

"Who'll git the prop'ty?" panted the woman. She held her gown up in front, disclosing a pair of blue socks drawn over her shoes.

"Relashuns, I s'pose."

"She was allus so savin', keepin' drip-pins for fryin', and sellin' nearly every mite of butter they made; an' I've heered the Boston relashuns was extravagant. Her sister hed on a black silk to the funeral to ride to the grave in; I guess they are well-to-do."

"Dunno," gruffly.

Somehow then the woman remembered that glossy silk, and that she had never had one. Then this sister's husband, how attentive he was leading his wife out to the sleigh, and she had seen them walking arm-in-arm the past summer, when no man in Corinth ever offered his arm to his wife un-

less it were to a funeral and they were first mourners. "Silas never give me his arm but the fust Sunday we were merried," she thought; "bein' kind to wimmen wan't never the Lowell's way." A sharp pain in her side made her catch her breath and stop a moment, but the man paid no heed to her distress. At the end of a meadow on a little rise looking down a long, shady lane, stood a gray old farm-house, to which age had given picturesqueness and beauty, and here Maria Lowell had lived the thirty years of her married life. She unlocked the door and went into the cold kitchen where the fire had died down. A lean cat came purring from under the table, and the old clock seemed to tick more cheerily now the mistress had returned.

"A buryin' on Christmas Eve, the minister said, and how sad it were, and I felt like tellin' him Ann an' me never knowed Christmas from enny other day, even to vittles, for turkeys fetched better prices then, an' we sold ourn." She went into a frozen bedroom, for Corinth folks would have thought a man crazy to have a fire in a sleeping-room except in sickness; she folded her shawl and cape and laid them carefully on the feather bed, covered with its gay quilt, the fruit of her lonely hours. Mechanically she set about getting supper, stirring the fire, putting a pan of soda biscuits in to bake, and setting a dish of dried-apple sauce and a plate of ginger cookies on the table. "Berried on Chrismus Eve, but little she ever thought of it, nor me, and little of it Jimmv hed here to home."

She looked at her biscuits, slammed the oven door, glanced cautiously around to see if Silas, who had gone to milk the cow, were coming; then drawing her thin lips tighter, went back into the cold bedroom. With ruthless hand tearing open an old wound, she unlocked a drawer in the old mahogany bureau and took out something rolled in a handkerchief—only a tiny vase, blue and gilt, woefully cheap, laughed at by the cultured, scorned by the children of to-day. She held it tenderly in her cold hand and brought back the memory that would never die. It was years and years ago in that very room, and a little child came in holding one chubby hand behind him, and he looked at her with her own bright eyes

under his curly hair. "Muver, Jimmy's got a s'prise." She remembered she told him crossly to go out of the cold room and not bother her. She remembered, too, that his lip quivered, the lip that had yet the baby curve. "It was a present, muver, like the minister sed. I got candy on the tree, but you didn't git nawthin', and I buyed you this with my berry money." The poor little vase in that warm chubby hand—ay, she forgot nothing now; she told him he was silly to spend good money on trash, and flung the vase aside, but that grieved childish face came back always. Ah, it would never fade away, it had returned for a quarter of a century. "I never was used to young ones," she said aloud, "nor kindness," but that would not heal the wound; no self-apology could. She went hurriedly to the kitchen, for Silas was stamping the snow off his feet in the entry.

"I got fifty dollars for old Tige," he said, as he poured his tea into his saucer to cool; "he was wuth it, the honest old creetur!"

The little black-eyed woman did not answer; she only tightened her lips. Over the mantel where the open fireplace had been bricked up, was a picture in a narrow black frame, a colored print of Washington on a fine white horse, and maidens strewing flowers in his pathway.

"When Tige was feelin' good," continued Silas, "he'd a monstrous likeness to thet hoss in the pictur, monstrous! held his hed high an' pranced; done you good to see him in Bath when them hosses tried to parss him; you'd a thort he was a four-year-old! chock full of pride. The hackman sed he was a good 'un, but run down; I don't 'low to overfeed stock when they ain't wurkin'."

"Ourn has the name of bein' half starved," muttered the woman.

Silas looked at her in some surprise. "I ginerally gits good prices for 'em all the same."

"We ginerally overreach every one!"

"Goin' to Ann's funerel hez sorter upset ye, M'ri. Lord, how old Tige would cavort when Jim would ride him; throw out his heels like a colt. I never told the hackman Tige was eighteen year old. I ain't over pertikler in a hoss trade, like everybody else. He wun't last long I calc'late now, for them hack horses is used hard, standin' out late nights in the cold an'—"

"Was the Wilkins place sold out terday?" said the woman hastily, with agoniz-

ing impatience to divert his thoughts to something else.

"Yes, it were," chuckled Silas, handing his cup for more tea, "an' they'll have ter move ter Bosting. You was ginning me for bein' mean, how'd you like to be turned outer doors? Ef I do say it, there ain't no money due on my prop'ty, nor never was,"

"Who air you savin' it fur?" said Maria, quietly. She sat with downcast eyes tapping her spoon idly on her saucer; she had eaten nothing,

"Fur myself," he growled, pushing his chair back. He lit a pipe and began to smoke, his feet at the oven door.

Outside it was quite dark, snow and night falling together in a dense black pall. Over the lonely roads drifted the snow, and no footfall marred it. Through drear, silent forests it sifted, sifted down, clung to cheery evergreens, and clasped shining summer trees that had no thought for winter woes; it was heaped high over the glazed brooks that sang, deep down, songs of summer time and gladness, like happy, good old folks whose hearts are ever young and joyous. Over the wide Kennebec, in the line of blue the ferry-boat kept open the flakes dropped, dropped and made no blurr, like the cellar builders of temples and palaces, the rank and file, the millions of good, unknown dead, unmentioned in history or the Bible. The waves seething in the confined path crackled the false ice around the edges, leaped upon it in miniature breakers, and swirled far underneath with hoarse murmur. In the dark water something dark rose and fell with the tide. Was there a human being drifting to death in the icy sea? The speck made no outcry; it battled nobly with nature's mighty force. Surely and slowly the high wharfs and the lights of Bath faded; nearer grew the woods of Corinth, the ferry landing and the tavern-keeper's lamp.

"I heered suthin' on the ferry slip," said a little old man in the tavern, holding his hand behind his ear.

"Nawthin', night's too black," said the tavern-keeper; "you're allus a hearin' what no one else do, Beaman."

No star nor human eye had seen the black speck on the wild water, and no hand lent it aid to land.

In ugly silence Silas smoked his pipe, while equally still, Maria washed the dishes. She stepped to throw the dish-water outside the door and then she heard a sound. The night was so quiet a noise traveled miles. What was it, that steady smothered

thud up the lane where so seldom a stranger came? Was it only the beating of her heart after all? She shut the door behind her and hurried out, wrapping her wet cold hands in her apron. Suddenly there came a long, joyful neigh!

"How on airth did that critter git home?" cried Silas, jumping to his feet.

Nearer, nearer, in a grand gallop, with tense muscles and quivering limbs, with upraised head and flying mane, with eager eyes, nearer, in great leaps thrusting, time and distance far behind, came that apparition of the' night.

"Oh, my God!" cried the woman wildly, "old Tige has come home-come home to this place, and there is one living thing that loves it!"

The light flared out from the open door. "How on airth did he git across the river?" said Silas, querulously. "An' how am I goin' to git him back in this weather?"

There he stood, the noble old horse that her boy had raised from a colt, had ridden, had given to her when he went away. "Mother," her boy had said, "be good to old Tige. If ever father wants to sell him, don't you let him. I'd come back from my grave if the old horse was abused-the only thing I loved, that loved me in this place I cannot call a home. Remember he has been so faithful."

Ay, he had been faithful, in long, hot summer days, in wide, weary fields, in breaking the stony soil for others' harvest, in bringing wood from the far forest, in every way of burden and work.

He stood quivering with cold, covered with ice, panting after his wild gallop; but he was home, poor brute mind! That old farm was his home: he had frolicked in its green fields as a colt, had carried a merry-voiced young master, had worked and rested in that old place; he might be ill-treated and starved, he did not grieve, he did not question, for it was home! He could not understand why this time the old master had not taken him away; never before had he been left in Bath. In his brute way he reasoned he had been forgotten, and when his chance came, leaped from the barn, running as horse never ran before, plunged off the wharf into the black waves, swam across and galloped to his home.

"If there is a God in Heaven, that horse shall not go back!" cried the woman fiercely; "if you take him from here again it shall be over my dead body! Ay, you may well look feared; for thirty years I have

frozen my heart, even to my own son, and now the end's come. It needed that faithful brute to teach me; it needed that one poor creature that loved me and this place, to open the flood-gates. Let me pass, and I warn you to keep away from me. Women go mad in this lonely, starved life. Ay, you are a man, but I am stronger now than you ever were. I've been taught all my life to mind men, to be driven by them, and to-night. is a rising of the weak. Put me in the asylum, as other wives are, but to-night my boy's horse shall be treated as never before."

"But M'ri," he said, trembling, "there, there now, let me git the lantern, you're white as a sheet! We'll keep him if you say so; why hadn't you told me afore?"

She flung him aside, lit the lantern and then ran up to an attic chamber under the eaves. "M'ri, you hain't goin' to kill yourself?" he quavered, waiting at the foot of the stairs. She was back in a moment, her arms full of blankets.

"What on airth!"

"Let me alone, Silas Lowell, these were my weddin' blankets. I've saved 'em thirty years in the cedar chist for this. They was too good for you and me; they air too poor fur my boy's horse."

"But there's a good hoss blanket in the barn."

"The law don't give you these; it mebbe gives you me, but these is mine."

She flung by him, and he heard the barn door rattle back. He put on his coat and went miserably after her.

"M'ri, here's yer shawl, you'll git yer death." The barn lit by the lantern revealed two astonished oxen, a mild-eyed cow, a line of hens roosting on an old hay-rack and Maria rubbing the frozen sides of the white horse. "Put yer shawl on, M'ri, you'll git yer death."

"An' you'd lose my work, eh? Leave me, I say, I'm burning up; I never will be cold till I'm dead, I can die! there is death 'lowed us poor critters, an' coffins to pay fur, and grave lots."

Silas picked up a piece of flannel and began to rub the horse. In ghastly quiet the two worked, the man watching the woman, and looking timorously at the axe in the corner. One woman in the neighborhood, living on a cross-road where no one ever came, had gone mad and murdered her husband, but "M'ri" had always been so clear-headed! Then the woman went and began piling hay in the empty stall.

"You ain't goin' to use thet good hay fur beddin,' be ye, M'ri?" asked Silas in pathetic anxiety.

"I tell you let me be, Who has a better right to this? His labor cut it and hauled it; this is a lime when the laborer shall git his hire."

Silas went on rubbing, listening in painful silence to the click of the lock on the grain bin, and the swish of oats being poured into a trough.

"Don't give him too much, M'ri," he pleaded humbly, "I don't mean ter be savin', but he'll eat hisself to death."

"The first that ever did on this place," laughed the woman wildly.

Then standing on the milking-stool she piled the blankets on the grateful horse, then led him to the stall where she stood and watched him eat. "I never see you so free 'round a hoss afore," said Silas; "you used to be skeered of 'em, he might kick ye."

"He wouldn't because he ain't a man," she answered shrilly; "it's only men that gives blows for kindness!"

"Land of the living!" cried Silas, as a step sounded on the floor, and a queer figure came slowly into the glare of light by the lantern, a figure that had a Rembrandt effect in the shadow—an old man, lean and tall, shrouded in a long coat and bearing on his back a heavy basket.

"You can't be a human creetur, comin' here to-night," said Maria; "mebbe you're the Santy Claus Jim used to tell on as the boys told him; no man in his senses would come to Sile Lowell's fur shelter."

"M'ri's upsot," said Silas meekly, taking the lantern with trembling hand; "I guess you've got off the road; the tavern's two mile down toward the river."

"You've followed the right road," said Maria; "you've come at a day of reck'nin'; everythin' in the house, the best, you shall have."

She snatched the light from Silas and slammed the barn door, leaving Tige contentedly champing his oats, wondering if he was still dreaming, and if his wild swim had been a nightmare followed by a vision of plenty. In the kitchen Maria filled the stove, lit two lamps and began making new tea.

"Thet was a good strong drorin' we hed fur supper, M'ri," said Silas, plaintively, keenly-conscious of previous economies; "pears to me you don't need no new." She paid no heed to him, but set the table with the best dishes, the preserves—Silas

noted with a groan—and then with quick, skillful hand began cutting generous slices of ham.

"I hope you're hungry, sir?" she asked eagerly.

"Wal, I be, marm," said the stranger; "an' if it ain't no trouble, I'll set this ere basket nigh the stove, there's things in it as will spile. I be considerable hungry, ain't eat a bite sence yesterd'y."

Silas's face grew longer and longer; he looked at the hamper hopefully. That might contain a peddler's outfit and "M'ri" could get paid that way.

"An' I hain't money nor nawthin to pay fur my vittles 'less there was wood-sawin' to be done."

"Wood's all sawed," said Silas bitterly.

"I wouldn't take a cent," went on Maria, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. "Ann Kirk thet hed the name of bein' as mean as me, was berried to day, and folks that keered nawthin' fur her is a goin' to hev her money an' make it fly. They say 'round here no grass will ever grow on her grave, fur ev'ry blade will be blarsted by the curses of the poor."

"M'ri, you a perressed Christian!" cried Silas.

"There's good folks unperressed," interposed the stranger; "but I dunno but a near Christian is better nor a spendthrift one as fetches up at the poorhouse."

"Right you air!" said Silas, almost affably feeling he had an advocate.

The stranger was tall and bony, with a thin, wrinkled face bronzed by wind and weather, with a goatee and mustache of pale brown hair, and a sparse growth of the same above a high bald forehead; his eyes were a faded brown, too, and curiously wistful in expression. His clothing was worn and poor, his hands work-hardened, and he stooped slightly. When the meal was ready he drew up to the table, Maria plying him with food.

"Would you rather have coffee?" she asked.

"Now you've got me, marm, but land ! tea'll do."

"I should think it would," snarled Silas; but, his grumbling was silenced in the grinding of the coffee mill. When the appetizing odor floated from the stove, Silas sniffed it, and his stomach began to yearn. "You put in a solid cup full," he muttered! trying to worry himself into refusing it.

"We want a lot," laughed Maria.

"Set up an' eat," called the stranger

cheerily; "let's make a banquet; it's Christmas Eve!"

"That ham do smell powerful good," muttered Silas, unconsciously drawing his chair up to the table, where the stranger handed him a plate and passed the ham. Maria went on frying eggs, as if, thought her husband, "they warn't twenty-five cents a dozen," and then ran down into the cellar, returning panting and good-humored with a pan of apples and a jug of cider; then into the pantry, bringing a tin box out of which she took a cake.

"That's pound cake, M'ri," cried Silas, aghast, holding his knife and fork upraised in mute horror. She went on cutting thick slices, humming under her breath.

"Might I, marm," asked the stranger, pleasantly, "put this slice of ham and cake and this cup of milk aside, to eat bymeby?"

"How many meals do you eat in a evening?" growled Silas, awestruck at such an appetite; "an' I want you to know this ain't no tavern."

"Do eat a bite yourself, marm," said the stranger, as Maria carried the filled plate to the cupboard. The impudence of a tramp actually asking the mistress of the house to eat her own food, thought Silas. "We've eat our supper," he hurled at the stranger.

"I couldn't tech a mite," said Maria, beginning to clear up, and as he was through eating, the stranger gallantly helped her while Silas smoked in speechless rage.

"I'm used to being handy," explained the tramp. "I allus helped wife. She's bin dead these twenty years, leaving me a baby girl that I brought up."

"You was good to her?" asked Maria wistfully; the stranger had such a kind voice and gentle ways.

"I done the best I could, marm."

Doubting his senses, Silas saw Maria bring out the haircloth rocking-chair with the bead tidy from the best front room.

"Lemme carry it," said the tramp politely. "Now set in't yerself, marm, an' be comfurable." He took a wooden chair, tilted it back and picked up the cat. Maria, before she sat down, unmindful of Silas's bewildered stare, filled one of his pipes with his tobacco.

"I know you smoke, mister," she smiled.

"Wal, I do," answered the tramp, whiffing away in great comfort. "Pears to me you're the biggest-hearted woman I ever see."

She laughed bitterly. "There wan't a

cluser woman in Corinth than me, an' folks'll tell you so. I turned my own son outer doors."

"It was part my fault, Mri, an' you hush now," pleaded Silas, forgiving even her giving his tobacco away if she would not bring out that family skeleton.

"I've heered you was cluse," said the stranger, "an' thet you sent Jim off because he went to circuses in Bath, an' wore store clothes, an' wanted wages to pay for 'em."

"All true," said Maria, "an' he wanted to ride the horse, an' was mad at workin' him so hard." She went on then, and told how the old animal had come home.

"An' me thinkin' the critter was a speerit," said the stranger in a hushed voice. "Beat's all what a dumb brute knows!"

"I thought mebbe," went on Maria, twisting her thin fingers, "as Jim might be comin' home this time. They says things happens curious when folks is goin' ter die—"

"Your good fur a good meny years, M'ri," said Silas, pitifully.

"There's folks in this world," said the stranger, his kindly face growing sad and careworn since the mother's eager words, "that ain't mean enuff, an' comes to charity to the end—"

"That there be," assented Silas.

"And as can't bring up their folks comfurable, nor keep 'em well an' happy, nor have a home as' ain't berried under a mortgage they can't never clear off."

"Ay, there's lots of 'em," cried Silas, "an' Mis Lowell was a twitting me this very night of bein' mean."

"An' this good home, an' the fields I passed thro', an' the lane where the old hoss come a gallopin' up behind me, is paid fur, no mortgage on a acre?"

"There never was on the Lowell property; they'll tell ye thet ennywhere," said Silas.

"We uns in the South, where I. come from," said the stranger, shading his face with his bony hand, "ain't never fore-handed somehow. My name is Dexter Brown, marm, an' I was allus misfortunat. I tell you, marm, one day when my creditors come an' took the cotton off my field, thet I'd plarnted and weeded and worked over in the brilin' sun, my wife says-an' she'd been patient and long-sufferin'—'Dex, I'm tired out; jest you bury me in a bit of ground that's paid fur, an' I'll lie in peace,' an' she died thet night."

"Mebbe she never knowed what it were

to scrimp an' save, an' do without, an never see nawthin', till all the good died in her," muttered Maria.

"Part o' my debt was wines an' good vittles fur her, marm."

"I'll warrant!" said Maria quickly, "an' she never wept over the graves of her dead children, an' heered their father complainin' of how much their sickness hed cost him. Oh, I tell you, there's them that reckons human agony by dollars an' cents, an' they're wus'n murderers!"

"M'ri!" cried Silas.

"Mebbe, marm, you are over-worried ternight," said the stranger softly; "wimmen is all feelin', God bless 'em! an' how yer son loved ye, a tellin' of yer bright eyes an' red cheeks—"

She turned to him with fierce eagerness. "He couldn't keer fur me, I wan't the kind, I don't mind me of hardly ever kissin' him. I worked him hard; I was cross an' stingy. He sed to me, 'There's houses that is never homes, mother.' I sneered an' blamed him for his little present." She ran and brought the vase. "I've kept that, Mr. Brown, over twenty years, but when he give it to me, bought outer his poor little savin's, I scolded him. I never let him hev the boys here to pop corn or make candy; it was waste and litter. Oh, I know what he meant; this was never a home."

"But he only spoke kind of ye allus."

"Did you know Jim? Been gone this ten year, an' never a word."

Silas, a queer shadow on his face, looked eagerly at Brown.

"I did know him," slowly and cautiously—"he was a cowboy in Texas, as brave as the best."

"He could ride," cried Maria, "as part of a horse, an' Tige was the dead image of that Washington horse in the pictur, an' Jim used to say thet girl there in the blue gown was his girl—the one with the bouquet; an' I used to call him silly. I chilled all the fun he hed outer him, an' broken-speerited an' white-faced he drifted away from us, as far away as them in the graveyard, with the same weary look as they hed in goin'."

"An' he took keer of much as a hundred cattle," said Silas; "they has thet meny I've heerd, in Texas?"

"They has thousands; they loses hundreds by drought—"

"Wanter know?" cried Silas, his imagination refusing to grasp such awful loss.

"Wal, I knowed Jim, an' he got merried—"

"Merried!" from both the old parents.

"He did, He says, 'I wunt write the home-folks till I'm well off, for mother will worrit an' blame me, an' I hain't money, but Minnie an' I love each other, an' are satisfied with little.'"

"Minnie," the mother repeated. "Was she pretty?"

"Woman all over you be, to ask thet, an' she was," said Brown, sadly; "with dark eyes, sorter wistful, an' hair like crinkled sunshine, an' a laugh like a merry child, fur trouble slipped off her shoulders like water off a duck's back."

"An' they got prosperous?" asked Silas uneasily,

"They was happy," said Brown with gentle dignity; "they was allus happy, but they lived under a mortgage, an' it was drift from pillar to post, an' ups an' downs."

"An' they're poor now," muttered Silas, visions of Jim and his family to support coming to him.

"Hush!" cried Maria. "Tell me, sir, was there children? Oh, the heart hunger I've had for the sound of a child's voice, the touch of baby hands. You an' me grandpa and grandma, Sile! an', my God! you think of money now."

"Set calm," pleaded Brown, "for I must hev courage to tell ye all."

"An they sent ye to tell us they was comin'?" asked Silas, judging of their prosperity from the shabby herald.

"They asked me to come, an' I swore it. There's a queer blight as creeps inter our country, which without thet might be like everlasting Paradise. Ourn is a land of summer an' flowers, but up here in this ice-bound region, the air is like water in runnin' brooks, it puts life an' health in ye."

"There's the blight o' consumption here. We're foreordained to suffer all over this airth," muttered the woman.

"But there it comes in waves of trouble—in awful haste—an' takes all at once, an' them that's well flees away and the sick dies alone. So the yellow fever come creepin' inter my home, fur Minnie was my child—the daughter I'd keered fur; an' fust the baby went from her arms, an' then little Silas (arter you, sir). Then Minnie sickened, an' her laugh is only an echo in my heart, for she died and was berried, the baby in her arms, and Jim was took next-an' he says" (only the ticking of the clock sounded now, never so loud before): "I want you, dad," (he called me dad) 'to go to my old home in Maine.

I want you to tell my father I named my dead boy for him, and I thought of his frugal, saving life with pain, and yet I am proud that his name is respected as that of an honest man, whose word is his bond. I'll never go up the old lane again,' says Jim, 'nor see mother standing in the door with her bright eyes and red cheeks that I used to think was like winter apples. And the old horse, she said she'd care for, I won't see him again, nor hear the bells. In this land of summer I only long for winter, and dad, if I could hear those hoarse old jolly bells I'd die in peace. Queer, ain't it? And I remember some rides I took mother; she wan't afraid of the colt, and looked so pretty, a white hood over her dark hair. You go, dad, and say I was sorry, and I'd planned to come some day prosperous and happy, but it's never to be. Tell mother to think of me when she goes a Sunday afternoon to the buryin'-ground, as she used to with me, and by those little graves I felt her mother's heart beat for me, her living child, and I knew, though she said nothing, she cared for me.' He died tellin' me this, marm, an' was berried by my girl, an' I think it was meant kind they went together, for both would a pined apart. So I've come all the way from Texas, trampin' for weary months, for I was poor, to give you Jim's words."

"Dead! Tim dead!" cried Silas, in a queer, dazed way. "M'ri," querulously, "you allus sed he was so helthy!"

She went to him and laid her hand on his bowed head.

"An' we've saved an' scrimped an' pinched fur strangers, M'ri, fur there ain't no Lowell to have the prop'ty, an' I meant it all fur Jim. When he was to come back he'd find he was prosperous, an' he'd think how I tried to make him so."

"The Lord don't mean all dark clouds in this life," said the stranger. "Out of that pestilence, that never touched her with its foul breath, came a child, with Minnie's face and laugh, but Jim's own eyes—a bit of mother an' father."

The old people were looking at him with painful eagerness, dwelling on his every word.

"It was little May; named Maria, but we called her May for she was borned three year ago in that month; a tiny wee thing, an' I stood by their graves an' I hardened my heart. They drove her father out; they sha'n't crush her young life,' I said. 'I'll keep her.' But I knowed I couldn't. Poverty was grinding me, and

with Jim's words directin' me, I brought her here."

"Brought her here!" cried the poor woman.

"Ay! She's a brave little lass, an' I told her to lie quiet in the basket till I told her to come out, fur mebbe you wan't kind an' would send us both out, but I found your hearts ready fur her.—"

With one spring Maria reached the basket and flung open the lid, disclosing a tiny child wrapped in a ragged shawl, sleeping peacefully in her cramped bed, but with tears on her long lashes, as if the waiting had tried her brave little soul.

"Jest as gritty," said Brown, "an' so good to mind; poor lass!"

Maria lifted her out, and the child woke up, but did not cry at the strange face that smiled on her with such pathetic eagerness. "Oh, the kitty!" cried Map. "I had a kitty once!" That familiar household object reconciled her at once. She ate the cake eagerly and drank the milk, insisting on feeding the ham to the cat.

"Him looks hungry," she said.

"We've all been starved!" cried Maria, clasping the child to her heart.

Such a beautiful child, with her merry eyes and laugh and her golden curls, a strange blossom from a New England soil, yet part of her birthright was the land of flowers and sunshine. Somehow that pathetic picture of the past faded when the mother saw a blue and gilt vase in the baby's hand—Jim's baby's.

"It's pitty; fank you!" said the little creature. Then she got down to show her new dress and her shoes, and made excursions into the pantry, opening cupboard doors, but touching nothing, only exclaiming, "Dear me, how pitty!" at everything. Then she came back, and at Brown's request, with intense gravity, began a Spanish dance she had learned when they stopped at San Antonio, from watching the Mexican *senoritas*. She held up her little gown on one side and gravely made her steps while Dexter whistled. The fire leaped up and crackled loudly, as if it would join her, the cat purred, the tea-kettle, sung from the back of the stove, and little snowflakes, themselves hurrying, skurrying in a merry dance, clung to the window-pane and called other little flakes to hasten and see such a pretty sight. Maria watched in breathless eagerness, and Silas, carried beyond himself, forgetting his scruples, cried out:

"Wal, ef that don't beat all I ever see!

Come here, you little chick!" holding out his silver watch.

With a final pirouette she finished with a grave little courtesy, then ran to Silas: "Is there birdie in der?" and he caught her up and kissed her.

When the old lane is shady in summertime, and golden-rod and daisies crowd the way, and raspberries climb the stone-wall, and merry squirrels chatter and mock the red-breasted robins, and bees go humming through the odorous air, there comes a big white horse that looks like Washington's in the picture; and how carefully he walks and bears himself, for he brings a little princess who has made the old house a home. Such a fairy-like little thing, who

from her sunshine makes everybody bright and happy, and Silas's grim old face is smiling as he leads the horse, and Maria, with her basket of berries, is helped over the wall by Dexter Brown, who always says he must go but never does, for they love him, and he and Silas work harmoniously together. And grandma's eyes are brighter than ever and her cheeks as red.

"What comfortable folks they air gittin' to be," say the neighbors, "kinder livin', but I dunno but goin' a berryin' a hull artemoon is right down shiftless,"

Winter is over and forever gone from that household on the hill: the coming of gracious, smiling spring in' a sweet child's presence has made eternal sunshine in those ice-bound hearts,

HINTS TO FOOTBALL CAPTAINS.

BY WALTER C. CAMP.

MUCH has been written from time to time of the growth of the game of football, and the reasons for its popularity, but no one has described that which is the real secret of its fascination; viz., planning the campaign. Planning a football campaign is a most interesting piece of strategic work, and the amount of thought expended on it would astonish the majority of that eager audience which crowds the Polo Grounds on Thanksgiving Day.

"Get some of your old men back to coach," is a bit of advice often given to captains of crews and ball nines. But to no one is it so invaluable as to football captains. It is the careful planning of the season's work that will bring victory in November. Through the summer the captain has been counting over the material he will have as a nucleus in the fall, and he has also calculated about how much he can rely upon from preparatory schools. As a rule he treats with distrust all reports of wonderful men in the incoming class, for the players who may have been giants on school teams are generally lost in the crowd on a university field.

His first interest on looking over the men he means to make use of is this: Are there enough old men to steady the team? With five old men no captain should be discouraged, and with six or over he ought to be hopeful, provided he has a half-back and a quarter among them. The reason for this is that he can then arrange to have a veteran next to every

novice in his team, by scattering the three old rushers. It is amazing what steadiness can be infused into a team in this way. If the captain has six instead of five, he can then strengthen the weak side of his team by putting an old hand as an end-rusher on the side of the green half-back.

This plan of formation is merely for the early weeks of the season until the real campaign can be laid out. The veterans act as coaches to the new men, and after ten or fifteen days of playing in this way, the novices, if they be at all promising men, will have learned the general system of play, for the positions in which they stand. That is, the rushers will have learned not to bunch, *i. e.*, keep too close to the next man, and also not to lag, or be slow in lining up when the ball is down. They will have been repeatedly cautioned against tackling high and not getting through hard. A new half will have learned about how far back he ought to stand! and how quickly he has to kick. In this way the captain can accomplish a double amount of work, for while he is looking over his new material, and deciding upon what men will develop into the service, his old players are giving very efficient assistance to him by coaching the new ones and rapidly breaking them in. Were it not for this, things would be in almost as much of a mess after ten days' playing as at the start, for it frequently happens that a green captain will make so little use of his old men in the way of