

# A BACK-DOOR VISITOR

By Emma C. Dowd

MRS. CRINE, in neat print dress and gingham apron, stands at her molding-board in the kitchen cutting out cookies. The table is laden with baking implements and materials.

Mrs. Gaston knocks at the outer door. She wears a trailing tea-gown of pale blue wool, elaborately trimmed with ribbon and lace.

"Good-morning," said Mrs. Gaston, "I thought I'd run in the back way, so's not to trouble you to go to the front door. I can't stay but a minute anyway. I don't want to hinder you. Can you lend me a little lemon flavoring? We always use vanilla; but Annie came home with a new cake receipt yesterday, and it calls for lemon flavoring. I don't think it's half so good as vanilla; but I knew you used it, and I told Annie I'd come over and borrow some. Oh, thank you! Well, I'll take the bottle right along, if you won't need it. I forgot to ask Annie how much she wanted.

"Don't make any excuses. This kitchen is lovely. You ought to see mine—such a looking place! Be thankful you don't have to have a girl to muss around. Oh, Annie does let things go so at loose ends! I should be raving distracted if I didn't stay out of the kitchen. Annie isn't exactly an untidy girl. She's neat about some things; but her ways are so different from what I've been accustomed to. Now, go right on with your work, and don't let me hinder you.

"Well, as I was saying about Annie, she isn't the best cook in the world. Now, I think steamed potatoes are so much nicer; but Annie always boils hers. Tell her? Well, that shows you're not used to servants! I guess she wouldn't stay long if I should keep nagging her. I think sometimes I won't keep her another day, only she does make such good chocolate cream pie—I'll say that much for her! Bertie is so fond of chocolate cream pie!

"Oh, is Russell Conwell coming here? No, I don't suppose we shall go. I don't care much for lectures. Besides, I don't like to leave Harold very long with just Annie to see to him.

"Well, as I was saying about chocolate cream pie, it is the only thing Harold will eat for his lunch in the night. He's rather wakeful, poor child! He's always been nervous and excitable. He was three last November. Well, as I was saying, Annie always puts a piece of pie on the table by the side of his crib, so he can reach it handy when he wakes. There was a week or two awhile ago that Annie got to giving him mince turnovers instead; but I was glad when she went back to chocolate cream, for I think it's better for him. That's about as simple as anything.

"I never saw a tot so fond of sweets as he is. Yesterday he cried because there wasn't any cocoanut cake in the house. I had promised him some, and then had so many things on my mind I forgot it. He was so disappointed at supper time that I let Annie go right to work and make a nice large layer-cake. She played with him to keep him awake while it was baking. It wasn't cool enough to eat before nine o'clock; but he had his cocoanut cake before he went to bed. I don't see how some mothers can refuse their children all the goodies. There's Mrs. Olmstead—she never gives Charlie a bit of rich cake; but I make sure he gets a good slice every time he comes over to play with Harold—I feel so sorry for him, poor little fellow!

"Is Mrs. Lines sick? No, I hadn't heard. I'm no gossip. I have enough to do, I tell folks, to care for my own family, without meddling in other people's affairs.

"Oh, did I tell you about the treat Harold had one night last week? Bertie and I were up to the church supper, and there was some ice-cream left over. I told Mrs. Simpson if nobody else wanted it I'd take it home to Harold—he's so fond of it. It was ten minutes of twelve when we got home, and Bertie thought it was too bad to wake the child up. The idea! Harold was glad enough of it. He did look so cute curled up there in the big chair in my room! For once in his life he had all the ice-cream he wanted; but he almost went to sleep again before he finished it. He had to tell Annie all about it the next morning.

"Annie's pretty good to Harold. She hasn't so much patience as I wish she had. Now he goes to kindergarten—Annie gets him off before Bertie and I are up. Of course he likes to play, and she doesn't understand him. Sometimes when he's half-dressed he wants a frolic, and won't let her put on the rest of his clothes. If she'd humor him, he'd come round all right; but instead of that she goes off about her breakfast, and of course he doesn't want to stand there in a cold room with his clothes off waiting for her. The little fellow gets chilly, and naturally he cries. The other morning I had to get out of bed and come down-stairs in my bare feet, to straighten things out.

"We get Annie quite cheap from the Home; but

then we have to furnish her clothes. It is unfortunate she

can't wear my things—or she thinks she can't. Of course, I'm more slender than she; but I believe she could get into them if she wasn't so afraid of being pinched.

"Annie's improvidence worries me. I don't know what I'm going to do. For instance, we generally have three or four kinds of cake in the house—Harold is so fond of cake!—and I believe if we had a dozen kinds Annie would put them all on the table at once. She'll cut from every loaf, and of course we get tired of them in that way. Oh, she's very trying!

"Thank you!" taking a hot cookie offered by her neighbor.

"How nice it must seem to be baking yourself! But house-work doesn't agree with me—I never was brought up at the wash-tub. I should be dead in a week if I tried to do my own work. Bertie grumbles a little when the grocery and meat bills come in. He thinks I might see to things. Isn't that just like a man? I tell him I have enough to do without going into the kitchen, and Annie is extravagant. I dare say. But I don't see what I can do. I can't buy everything and deal it out to her. No, thank you, not any more," waving away the cookie tin. "They are very nice. Annie make lovely cookies, just as thin and crisp! I'll send her over with a plate next time she makes them. You can have her receipt if you like.

"Well, I must be going. It's a relief to have Harold at the kindergarten for a few hours. I know where he is for a little while. I shall be glad when he is old enough to mind, so he won't get into so much mischief.

"Well, I must be going," rising. "I feel so good-for-nothing these days that when I get seated I don't want to stir. Oh, that makes me think!" Sits down again. "Have you tried Paddock's Nerve Cure? Well, it's the best thing! I'm on my second bottle. I'm giving it to Harold now, and he's sleeping better. I think. I'm trying to make Bertie take it; but he says he doesn't know what he'd take it for. Isn't that just like a man? I think in the spring and early summer everybody needs a little toning up. This is fine! You feel as if you'd been given a new lease of life every time you take it.

"You don't dare take patent medicine? Oh, well, I guess this is all right. They wouldn't put in anything that would hurt you. It isn't half so experimental as what the doctors give you. This has been tested, and it's cured hundreds of people.

"Well, I must be getting on. Bertie says I find my neighbors so entertaining I can't tear myself away, and I guess he's about right. Why, is that the noon whistle?" Rises again. "Well, well, you have kept me! I'm going to tell your husband that you are the most fascinating neighbor I have. Do run over! I am out nearly every afternoon; but come in the morning, and if I'm not at home don't be discouraged, but try it again. Well, I must go. I hope I haven't hindered you. If I'm not home by the time Harold gets there, there will be a how-do-you-do! You don't have a boy to keep the house in a whirl—you ought to be thankful.

"You wish you had? Oh, I don't know! He's enough to kill me! Well, I must be going," opens the

## "What's Physical Culture?"



door. "Do come over! Oh, yes, the lemon flavoring! Thank you. If I'd forgotten it, Annie would have had a fit. Well, good-by." Disappears, and then returns. "I'll send Annie over with this before night. Sure you sha'n't want it? Thank you ever so much! Good-by."

## His Hilarious Obsequies

By Tom P. Morgan

I WAS surprised at certain things about a funeral procession I met near the turning-mill," said the patent-churn man, who lately had driven into town. "The driver of the hearse had his hat cocked over his eye and wore a big cigar stuck in the corner of a broad grin. The occupants of the vehicles that followed seemed pleased with the way things were progressing. Many of the men were smoking, and in the rearmost wagon I saw a demijohn. Whose funeral was it? And why—?"

"Oh, that was Billy Smathers' obsequies!" broke in the landlord of the Pruntytown Tavern. "He was a great joker, Billy was—always gettin' off a good'n' on somebody. Sometimes it was askin' you what he was that was black outside and yellow within and barked like a dog, and when you couldn't guess it, tellin' you it was a kettle of hasty-puddlin'. When you said hasty-puddlin' didn't bark like a dog, he'd say he just put that in to make it harder to guess. And then he'd laugh and laugh and laugh.

"I remember yet, just as well as if it was yesterday, some of his earliest jokes. One of 'em was: 'Which you rather do, kiss Harriet Beecher Stowe or the Pope's toe?' That was a long time ago, you see. He was just as gaudy with practical jokes, too. One time he—haw! haw!—held up the hired girl's solid feller for two hours on a cold night, by pokin' a crowbar out of the second-story window and hoarsely threatenin' to shoot him dead.

"Billy's pet joke was one that he worked with a pair of stilts about nine feet long. He practised till he could get around first-rate on 'em, made a pair of long pants for the stilts, and a set of false whiskers for himself; and you better believe it jolted belated wayfarers up to meet a thin man fourteen feet or so tall, pirootin' around in the middle of the night. But one time he cured a feller that was at the point of death with the quinsy, by glarin' in on him at the second-story window, and remarkin': 'Ar-har! har! har-r-r!' in a voice like a white sepulcher. The sick man gave a screech, hopped 'most up to the ceilin', busted his quinsy, and got well.

"Billy used to have the biggest fun, though, springin' his stilt joke on them charcoal-burners from up Squantum way. You know how they are: work like cusses burnin' the charcoal, and then take it to town, and come home in the middle of the night as drunk as Injuns. It used to tickle Billy to walk up, fourteen feet tall, and holler down into the cart, and see 'em go into fits. But one night there was a new feller among charcoalers—little but chock full of wildcat. Billy came up behind the little man's cart, hollered down at him: 'Prepare to die!' and at the same time Billy prepared to laugh.

"Who are you?" says the charcoaler.

"I am the devil!" roars Billy.

"Just about then the little man swarmed right up the back of the cart, sailed out, and lit on Billy. A man on stilts ain't got no show and over they went backwards with a force that nearly busted Billy's crust. It was ten days before he was out again, and the first thing he did was to chop up them stilts. He said the last thing he remembered was the little wolf of a charcoal-burner sayin': 'If you are the devil, I'm in a devil of a fix, an' if you ain't the devil, you're in a devil of a fix.' And then he went on beatin' Billy like a tom-tom.

"Well, Billy's gone now—or at least it sorter 'ears that he is. He had a kind of sinkin' spell about two years ago, and was generally estimated to be dead; but he came to himself in the midst of the funeral, and riz up, and nearly laughed himself to death at the way the folks tried to break their necks gettin' out of there. But this time they are ready for him either way. If he don't come to before they get him buried they'll have the laugh on him; and if he does, they are loaded up to show him that they knew it all the time.

"Looks considerable like rain off to the southwest, don't it?"

## No Need to Move

NEAR the close of the Civil War, General Grant found it necessary to take a short railroad trip accompanied by his staff. His aide hustled into the carriage in which the General intended to ride, to see that the required number of seats were vacant.

He saw that Grant and the staff could sit together if an old man, who was a passenger on the train, consented to move forward. Approaching him, the aide asked:

"Would your mind moving forward so that General Grant and his staff can sit here?"

"There's no need for me to move," replied the old man, "the General can sit beside me and hang his staff out of the window."