

AFTER RAIN.

The country road at lonely close of day Has rest awhile from the long stress of rain; Dripping and bowed, the green walls of the lane Reflect no glimmering light; no colors gay Has drying summer left; the sky is gray, As though the sweeping had not eased the pain; The autumn is not yet, and all in vain Seems summer's life—a blossom cast away! The air is hushed, save in the emerald shade The rain still drops and stirs each fretting leaf To soft insistence of its little grief. The hopeless calm all thought of life denies; But, hark, and now through silence, unafraid, A robin ripples to the chilly skies. —Helen Hay in Harper's Magazine.

NAN'S METAMORPHOSIS.

A Story of a Spelling Match. By Adelbert F. Caldwell.

She was such a forlorn looking figure as she shuffled along the frozen river road in the late November sunshine.

"I believe I never saw such an aimless, shiftless family in my life," declared Judge Hilton emphatically as he and his daughter Mildred detected the thin clad figure before them. "If anything, she's as bad as the rest, though when her mother died I imagined the responsibility of caring for the family would have a beneficial influence on Nan. Instead I actually believe it's had the opposite effect. Just look at that torn dress and ragged shawl! If a girl had any spunk, she'd never be seen on a thoroughfare as public as this is in such a slatternly condition."

"But think, father," and Mildred looked up considerately, "how hard she must be obliged to work even to exist" the family, as Uncle Joe used to say. I believe she has a load of evergreen now to sell for winter decorations. It isn't an easy job by any means the poor girl has." And Mildred tucked the thick robe more snugly about her.

Nan Hascall lived in the old abandoned mill down by the falls. 'Twas all the shelter Job Hascall could get after his wife's death, for rents were not easily obtained when it was known that the family's one source of income was cut off.

Mrs. Hascall had somehow succeeded as by almost a miracle, frail as she was, in providing food and shelter for the growing family of ten.

Job was forever lounging about the postoffice steps in summer, and his winter watch tower was the settee in the west window of the small variety store near the tavern.

"Perhaps next week I'll be able to get a job somewhere," he would say in the early spring days, as in a shamefaced manner he went by his wife at the wash tub, bent on his accustomed loitering ground, and when the first frost came in the fall he would brace himself to declare: "I may get a chance loggin' fore winter's gone. Wouldn't wash all the time. Better let some few things go."

But to let anything "go" was impossible and keep the roof over their heads and shoes on the many pairs of feet.

The morning after Mrs. Hascall's burial Job said to Nan: "Do the best you can, child. 'Tis all we can do, even the best of us, and perhaps something will turn up."

However, nothing had, save the rent bill, and as there was nothing with which to meet it they were obliged to move into the tumble down mill.

"I guess we can live here awhile," concluded Job, "if we can get 'nough to eat and something to wear. No matter if we don't have the best."

After her mother's death the struggle for existence rested almost wholly on Nan. How she managed to get along was a six months' mystery. After that the people ceased to wonder, and the Hascalls lived only in their own thoughts.

"Who do you imagine will get the scholarship and money for expenses at the seminary?" asked Mildred as they were going up the half mile hill before reaching home.

"I haven't an idea! Yes, I have too. I shouldn't say that." And Judge Hilton looked out of the carriage thoughtfully. "Either Ralph Holman or Ethel Maynard will get it. They're by all odds the best spellers in town."

"I don't know," deliberated Mildred. "When Nan was in school, she had the reputation of being able to spell any word given her. No one ever got above her. To spell well seemed to be her one ambition. She never recited correctly in geography. Were she asked where Russia is it might be the longest river in Maine or the capital of Ireland for anything she could tell, and she never was accused of saying the multiplication table accurately."

"But she will not go," laughed Judge Hilton.

"No! I don't suppose she will, but if she should she'd give them a pretty hard push—and might win. Of course no partiality could be shown in such a contest. I wish she'd go," impulsively.

And at that very moment Nan herself was meditating on the same subject.

"I'd like to go, just to show them I'm not all fool. Don't care nuthin for the prize. What would I want of a scholarship?" And Nan smiled grimly at the thought of such a thing. "But I can spell, if I don't know anything else."

A sudden, defiant glance shot from her deep, angry eyes.

"I'll go if I don't want it, just 'cause I—I hate them—the whole kit, George Lewis, Ethel Maynard, Ralph Holman and all 'cept Mildred. She's the only one that's ever treated me decent. Guess they'll be surprised when they see me there." Nan snapped off a twig by the roadside. "And I'll beat them too."

After that, wherever Nan was—gathering evergreen, going after her weekly washing or cooking their scanty meals—a disreputable looking scabby

book was her furtively hidden companion, from which, when no one was noticing, she selected for constant review the words of foreign derivation and those which she herself designated as having been thrown together in the dark.

"I can spell all the common ones without looking at them. J-u-d-g-m-e-n-t," she spelled. "Leave out the 'e' before 'ment.' Separate looks easy, but some'll spell it with an 'e' every time."

In early November Dr. Randall, a genial, retired practitioner, a man who had won the distinction of being the philanthropist of the village, had offered tuition and all legitimate expenses for one year at Douglass seminary to any young man or woman who should spell all others down in an old fashioned contest. This was to be held at the high school building about the middle of December. It made no difference whether the contestants attended school or not, the only requirement being that they couldn't be over 21 and must reside in town.

That Ethel Maynard or Ralph Holman or perhaps George Lewis would get it was the foregone conclusion in the minds of nearly all the inhabitants of the village.

"Just you wait. Perhaps you'll be mistaken," was Nan's soliloquy after hearing the matter thus prematurely settled. "I don't care for the old tuition; wouldn't have it anyway, but I'll show you I can do something," and she nodded her head defiantly to an imaginary, unsympathetic audience.

"All ready?" asked Dr. Randall the evening of the contest, glancing at the eager faces about him. "I think so," he added. "Ethel Maynard and Ralph Holman may be captains and choose."

Amid intense excitement long lines of spellers were soon in their places. "Any one else like to spell who hasn't been drawn?" And Dr. Randall looked over his gold bowed spectacles inquiringly. "I'll just wait a moment."

There was a slight stir back in the corner, and Nan Hascall slowly arose. "She here—Nan Hascall!" and a titter ran round the room.

Nan's face flushed with indignation. Mildred caught her eye and smiled approval.

"Your turn to choose, Mr. Holman," said Dr. Randall.

"Did Miss Maynard choose last? Very well, Nan Hascall!"

"Spell your best," whispered Mildred, and she pressed Nan's hand as the girl hurried by, her look of anger changed almost to a smile by Mildred's sympathy.

"I'll give you an easy word first." And "daguerreotype" was given out.

"If that's easy, I don't know what he calls a hard one." But Ralph spelled it correctly.

"Idiosyncrasies" followed. Three missed on "parallel," and Nan spelled it.

"One of the easy ones," she whispered. Word after word was given out until only four spellers remained on the floor, the two captains, George Lewis and Nan Hascall.

Mildred was never more anxious. "I do hope"—She was too interested to finish her sentence.

For ten minutes each spelled accurately every word that came to him.

"Neophyte," George hesitated, then spelled it with an I.

"N-e-o-p-h-y-t-e," spelled Nan calmly. There was hardly a breath in the room, so great was the suppressed excitement.

During the next five minutes Ralph took his seat, beaten.

"Well, well!" It was Judge Hilton's ejaculation of surprise.

"Metamorphosis."

Ethel began, hesitated, looked up in consternation, spelled it—wrong.

"Miss Hascall, metamorphosis."

"M-e-t-a-m-o-r-p-h-o-s-i-s," confidently. As she finished Nan was greeted with a round of applause such as had never before emanated from a Welchville audience. Again and again as it began to die out it was increased with greater intensity.

Mildred slipped on to the floor and gently drew Nan to a seat.

"I knew you'd win," she whispered. "I'm proud!"

"Of me?" interrupted Nan passionately. "Then—then I'll take the prize—and—and be somebody!"

"Your mother was always right smart at spelling." 'Twas Job Hascall's husky congratulation as he clumsily patted Nan's yellow braid.

"I decided 'twould be indeed a metamorphosis when I saw your look of anxiety and knew you cared," confessed Nan the day of her graduation. "If it hadn't been for that—oh, Mildred, I shudder to think!"—Forward.

Hens Fish in China.

According to the science column of a German weekly paper, the hens of China lead busy lives. When not engaged in hatching out a brood of their own kind, they are put to the additional and novel task of hatching fish eggs. Chinese cheap labor collects the spawn of fish from the water's edge, puts it in an empty eggshell, which is then hermetically sealed with wax and placed under the unsuspecting and conscientious hen. In a few days the eggshell is removed, and the spawn which has been warmed into life is emptied into a shallow pool. Here the fish that soon develop are nursed until strong enough to be turned into a lake or stream.

Not Adventurous Enough.

Dicky—I hain't goin to be an express messenger when I'm growed up after all.

Johnnie—Wot's catin you? You always said you was.

Dicky—I don't keer. I was talkin to an express messenger today who run on cars for 30 years an has never once been in a wreck or held up by train robbers.—Express Gazette.

HIS PROMOTION.

A few weeks ago I ran across a young army officer whose bronzed skin and sharp, piercing eyes denoted that he had just come in from the frontier—that is, so much of that great frontier as is now left. The sight of this young lieutenant brought to mind the hard time he had gotten the shoulder straps and of a narrow escape he had shortly after his blue uniform was adorned by the plain yellow shoulder bars.

About nine years ago he was an employee in one of the departments and, owing to a change of administration, lost his position. Like a great many of those who work for the government, he had ignored the lesson in the table of the ant and the grasshopper, so when he was turned out on the world he received a cold reception. The few dollars he had were soon spent, and then his credit was gone, and at last hunger stared him in the face. It was while the knocking and gnawing which come after a day or two without food were making themselves felt that he saw a United States flag hanging out of a window on Pennsylvania avenue. On the lower edge of that flag were the letters, in big black type, "Recruiting Office." The young man read those words, and in a fit of despair ascended the stairs to the office above.

He was greeted by a big sergeant, who sized him up and then told him that he would have to wait until the following morning, as the officer who enlisted men had gone home.

"But I want to enlist now," said the applicant.

"Well, you can't, my boy," said the sergeant.

"Say, old fellow, you just fix me so I can stay here until tomorrow," pleaded the young man.

"Oh, it's hungry you are, is it? Well, I'll let you stay overnight, and maybe the captain will take you."

That night he had his first meal in two days. It was not such as he had been accustomed to, but it was "filling," as he afterward said in speaking of it. When it came 9 o'clock, the sergeant walked into the squad room and ordered the half dozen or so recruits into their beds and turned out the light, but the following morning, as the officer who enlisted men had come early. In the darkness the ex-clerk lay awake, thinking of the past; of the days when he had been receiving a good salary, of the manner in which he had dissipated all of it, and of the many friends—those who were his friends while he had money. The past was dark, and the future was even darker. What could he, a young man of good family, amount to after five years in the army? Several times he arose and was going to escape, but each time the mite of courage that had been revived with a full stomach oozed away, and when morning came he was still an applicant for enlistment.

Breakfast brought back some spirit, and when the officer came in the young man was ready for him. The severe medical examination was passed, and, everything being satisfactory, up went his right hand, and he swore to bear true allegiance to the United States and to protect it against its enemies whomsoever. In a few minutes the doughty looking ex-government clerk was transformed into a decidedly awkward government soldier in a uniform that had much the fit of a gunny sack on a bean pole.

Some time passed, and the young soldier was at his post—I think it was Fort Niagara, Kansas—and he had a different appearance. His clothes fitted him perfectly, and he knew how to handle his feet and hands. He was a corporal in a troop of the Seventh cavalry. Two years passed, and he had received promotion to the highest noncommissioned rank obtainable in a troop—that of first sergeant. Another year, and his captain had recommended him for promotion. His record had been such that he was classed as a meritorious noncommissioned officer and worthy of becoming a commissioned officer if he passed the examination.

The sergeant's hopes and the ambition he had gained since his enlistment were now about to be gratified. But, alas, a cold blooded regimental commander had to pass on the recommendation. And he did so. He indorsed thereon the one word "Disapproved." The document was then forwarded to the headquarters of the department and there fell into kind hands, for the cold, unfeeling colonel was made to tell why he disapproved. It was for no other reason than that he personally disapproved of enlisted men getting commissions. This was hardly of enough weight to set aside army regulations, so the sergeant was ordered up for examination.

Again disappointment came, for he was sent out in the 6th as a company sergeant against the Indians and did not see the post again till the examination had been held.

In the next few months the colonel was partial to the sergeant and, an opportunity arising, made him sergeant major, the highest rank obtainable by a soldier and still remain an enlisted man. Every one in the post thought that the young "noncom." had won the old colonel's good will by his excellent behavior while in the field. This idea was set at rest when the time for recommendations came around, for the colonel refused to give his sergeant major recommendation, and he alone now had the power.

For the remainder of his enlistment the colonel kept the young soldier in the position of sergeant major. The latter had decided to give up, when one day a lucky thing happened. The colonel was promoted to be a brigadier general and thus taken from his regiment. The next year the sergeant major passed his examination and was commissioned in the cavalry.

The first summer of his career as an officer he was again after Indians and twice under fire. It seemed that ill luck did not desert him, for out of a whole troop it was he who received the only bullet, and it was near enough to graze his boot leg and hit his horse. Later, in an engagement against northern Cheyennes—and, by the way, within a mile of where General Miles was shot at by Lane Deer—he was shot at by an Indian at a distance of seven paces away.

The ex-clerk is now glad that he was let out of the departments, for he has a position for life at good pay, always increasing, and if he lives to be 64 years old will, in the course of events, become a lieutenant colonel and be retired on three-quarter pay.—Exchange.

Persistence.

Drop after drop, continually falling, wears a passage through the hardest rock. The hasty tempest, as Carlyle points out, rushes over it and leaves no trace behind. A great purpose is cumulative, and, like a great magnet, it attracts all that is kindred along the stream of life.

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