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OUR LIFE IN A COUNTRY VILLAGE.

AN ACTUAL EXPERIENCE.

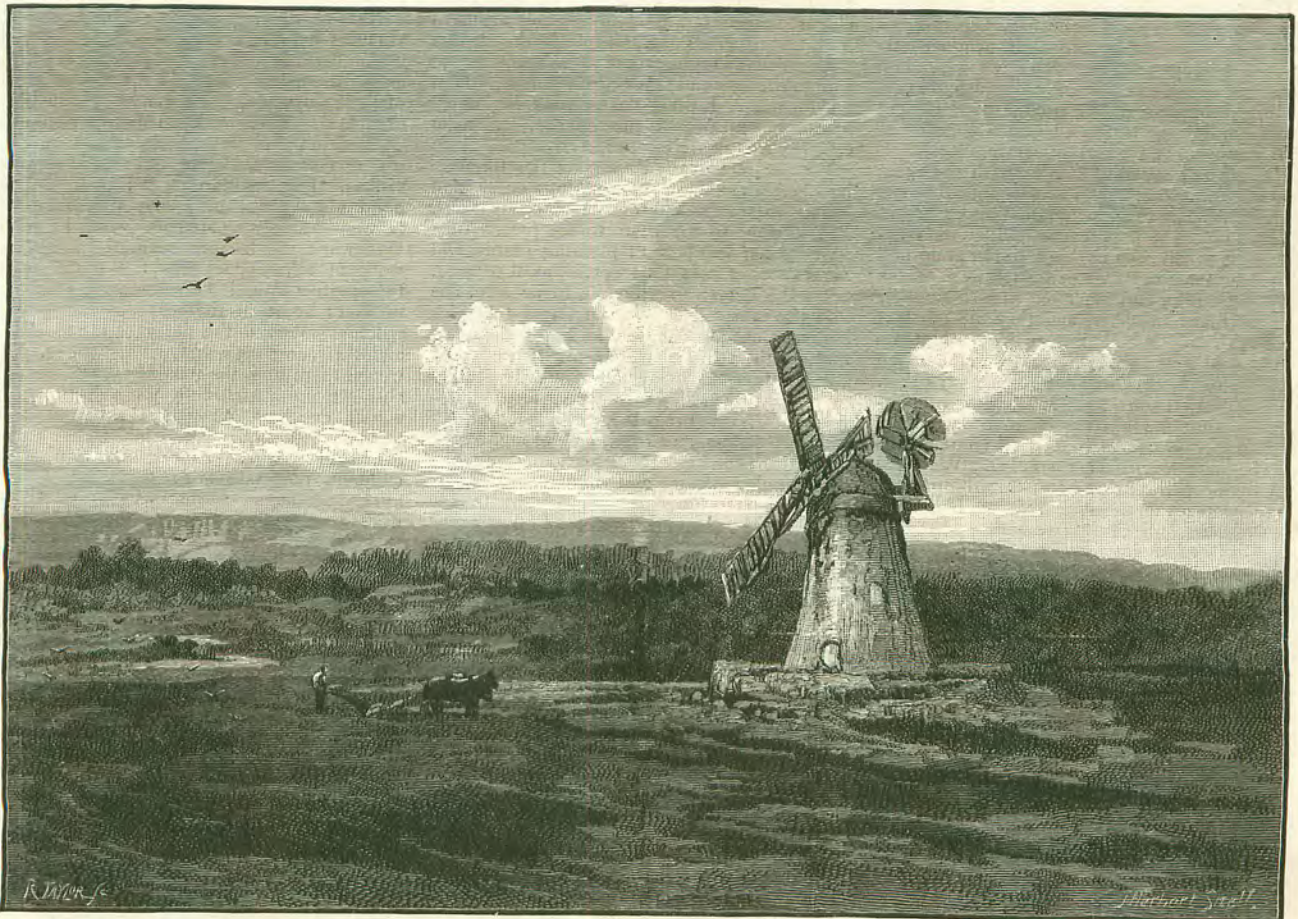
By A COUNTRY GIRL.

I AM not going to write a grand essay, only a simple account of our country life. We were so happy all through those years of rusticity that I love to look back upon them, and to tell of them.

I always loved the country, though it was my fate to spend my early girlhood in town. Father was a captain in the Navy, and hated

the confinement of town life as much as I did, and his brief visits home were always times of delight to us three girls, for he used to carry us off to some little fishing village, where we ran wild in perfect freedom. My mother declared I should soon tire of the dull country, as in town I always wanted so much change and gaiety, and yet remained discontented.

Mothers know best, of course; and, strange to say, others know us much better than we know ourselves—yet still it seems to me that one is the best judge of one's own tastes and requirements. I always felt town-life and town-society irksome, and was ever pining for something I had not got, though I felt that to live in the sunshine and fresh air



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OUR WINDMILL.

of the sweet broad country would content me, whatever else I had not. Perhaps it is a relic of primitive savagery to love freedom and sunshine above all things, but in my mother's town house we enjoyed neither of these. Unfortunately our mother did not understand us in any way. Unfortunately, too, there were no boys in the family; and it is undeniable that we three girls were given to quarrelling. We had nothing particular to do, though we were never exactly idle; but desultory reading, dressing, and party-going, and a certain number of charitable works, do not fill life. Julia had dreams of becoming a hospital nurse, but was too lackadaisical and hysterical to do so. Agnes was quite sure she should enjoy being a cook (she was the practical one, and was always merry, even in those days); and I knew I should be happy in a country cottage, surrounded by books and little children, with no one to restrain me from being myself. Mother said we had everything we wanted, and we ought to have been very happy as we were. So, perhaps, we ought.

* * * *

I will not speak of the sad time which came upon us so suddenly, and called out all our dormant self-reliance and womanliness. Our mother died—and we felt bitterly that it was too late to clear up any misunderstandings. At the same time we lost all our money, and dear old dad came back to us from sea, shattered in health, and suffering from complete loss of memory, the result of sunstroke. So now, instead of chafing under restraint, we longed for someone older and wiser than ourselves to turn to for advice.

We were left almost penniless, and even our most treasured possessions were sold off, though we should have two pounds a week to depend upon during our father's lifetime. This income could not maintain us anywhere but in some out-of-the-way place, and we fixed on a remote country spot, near an old-world fishing village. Here we rented a cottage, whose sole attraction consisted in its adjacent apple-orchard, and strip of ground which might be converted into a garden—at present it was only a weedy waste.

It was not my ideal "cabin with the roses round the door," and Julia thought she couldn't endure such an "inartistic hole"; but Agnes saw in it infinite possibilities, and declared it would soon be both comfortable and pretty. Poor old dad had an idea it was a taut little ship, and convulsed us with laughter at his funny mistakes, and then we cried at the pathos of it all. But, to please him, we christened it "The Two-decker," and began at once to rig up the front room as a cabin. We had saved some light furniture and knick-knacks—just a very little—from the wreck of our former greatness, but it was enough to furnish our four-roomed cottage. We were totally inexperienced at house-furnishing, as at housekeeping, and made infinite blunders; nevertheless, we finally reduced "chaos to cosmos," (if I may apply Carlyle to such trifles,) and our country life began.

At first we did not see much romance in Cinderelladom. We slaved from morning till night, and yet our work was never done. Who of the uninitiated would imagine the extent of the work in a four-roomed house with four people! There was cooking, scrubbing, washing; washing-up three times daily; meals to be prepared and put away; fires, grates, boots, rooms to be cleaned; sewing, making and mending; and a profundity of detail attendant on all of these such as would never enter into the mind of man or of undomesticated woman. But at last the simplicity of the life began to charm us; its constant manual labour precluded the possibility of mental ennui; its unhampered freedom and originality engendered mirth and light-heartedness. At first the washing of a sheet was a

Brobdingnagian undertaking, but we grew to revel in the soapsuds (to be sure Ruskin moralises of their ideality, but I doubt his personal acquaintance with them) like any Madonna of the washtub. Peeling potatoes is a detestably dirty job, but there is a certain amount of art in boiling them, after all. And it was almost like the "camping out" I used to long for, chopping our sticks, and lighting the fire for our little kitchen breakfast. In the days when we slept on filled pillows we knew nothing of the dewy beauties of the early morning—but now we were shaking our mats in the garden at the song of the lark, or hanging out our clothes to the breeze which filled the sail of the early fishing boats. We forgot all discontent and disagreement in our busy community of interest; and even our common troubles welded us together in more than sisterly devotion. Poor old dad unconsciously increased our work tenfold, and our anxieties too, for he never grasped the fact of our poverty, and went about issuing liberal invitations and running up fabulous bills. It took all our wits to solve the problem of how to live, board, lodge and dress on two pounds a week, and an accumulation of bills and debts added to that was too terrible. At last we had to humble ourselves—and that was the bitterest pill of all—and tell the village tradespeople of our father's failing, and beg them not to supply him; but the dear, kind, simple souls—God bless them!—relieved us of all embarrassment by the way they received us. Here let me say that we were always treated with the greatest respect by all the village folk, and with wonderful kindness by the "neighbours." (That homely state of life which has "neighbours" from whom to borrow and return household trifles, and with whom to share little joys and sorrows, has a good comradeship unguessed by the more ceremonious fraternity of fashionable society.) Yes, the "cap'n's girls," as we were called—with no shade of disrespect—owe much to the simple villagers and fisher-people among whom our lot was cast. They never took advantage of our ignorance and inexperience, and none ever slighted us for our poverty.

So we were really happy by the time we had got everything in working order and began to understand our new occupations. But it went to my heart to see pretty Julia spoiling her hands with blacking grates, and Agnes's sweetness thus wasted, as it seemed, upon the desert air; though, to be sure, she said she was perfectly happy, and that this life was exactly her *gout*. But we agreed that, with a little management, we could arrange time to follow our favourite studies to prevent dwindling into mere Abigails altogether. With utmost joy, Julia went off with her paints and easel, and brought back wondrous sketches of the sea and shore, and brown-sailed boats, and brown-faced boys. And I looked forward with delight to the hour "off" with my books, and lay prone upon the grass among the buttercups reading Tennyson and our Magazine, or studied philosophy on the branched arm of an apple-tree in the little bit of orchard next the garden. Agnes declared that "the best recreation was change of work," and she never wanted more amusement than gardening after her house-work. In a wonderfully short time the garden was reclaimed from its waste condition, and in a season or two it became the loveliest "feast of nectared sweets" for Agnes's bees to sip and for us to scent and look upon. Honeysuckle climbed the porch, and the little flower-beds blushed with bright poppies and scented the air with old-fashioned stocks and mignonette and gilly-flowers; whilst in autumn Virginian creeper flamed over the thatch, right up to the chimneys. Every window, too, was like "The Window" which the poet invokes:—

"Vine, vine and eglantine,
Clasp her window, trail and twine!
Rose, rose and clematis,
Trail and twine, and clasp and kiss:
Kiss, kiss, and make a bower
All of flowers."

Our cottage, too, was as pretty as hands and fancy could make it. We tried to keep the cosy kitchen a triumph of cleanliness, and the cabin was a wonderful abode of art and curiosity. The chairs were made for comfort and not for beauty; the couch was draped with a union-jack; the walls were covered with every variety of curios, the relics of dad's voyages, with Julia's seascapes, hung with seaweed and fishing-net; and there was a corner for "flotsam, jetsam, and legend," and a sweet nook for reading in, lined with books. The whole was in the smallest possible compass, but no palatial hall was ever so much like Home.

One of our minor troubles, after the greater ones were disposed of, was in the matter of dress—for we were but girls after all. At the time of the "crash" we resigned ourselves to the future possession of merely one print and one homespun gown; but we longed for more dainty additions to our wardrobe sometimes—some little adornment to wear at the village concerts in the winter, or a light summer frock for church-going on sunny Sunday mornings. At length we began to think it was our Duty—with a capital D—to earn or save a little pin-money (if only out of respect to the Clothes Philosopher), and in some wondrous way we achieved this object all sublime. It was quite a gala day to us when first we donned the new, pretty home-made gowns, each with our own colour ribbons, and we prided ourselves on their simplicity as we never had done on all our ball-room finery.

Now we did not live to ourselves, but the villagers became a part of our life. We did not undertake any organised charitable works as we used, but we found there were plenty of little ways of doing good without its being organised. There were no district visitors in Tytherleigh; if there had been, I suppose we, as cottagers, should have been district-visited. But we were denied this, and the good old Vicar—infirm and simple though he was—was always welcome when he came. Our work was simple enough—indeed, not work at all. Agnes was the friend of all the mothers, and her name was blessed in every home in the village. Julia—sweet witch!—gathered the fisher-boys about her, and their homage was touching to see. She wooed them from the "publics" with her arts, and set up a charming room for them on winter evenings, when she sang to them "Nancy Lee" and other things, dear to the hearts of sailors. I only played with the children, and talked to them on Sunday afternoons amongst the rocks or under the trees, and I can't help feeling that God taught them there, through His Nature, lessons they never would have learnt in a stuffy Sunday school. I believe in the Beautiful and Good. Don't you?

Of course there was a little romance to complete our village idyll. It is the fashion with ladies in high life to flirt and pick and choose, and remain single, after all; but such is not the way with cottage girls. So, since we had conformed to village ways in some particulars, we did so in all; and since every village maiden has her swain, we too, had ours. Julia's beauty bewitched the Squire; Agnes's brightness and good sense won the heart of the young doctor; and I—well, I was the "lass that loved a sailor." And, let me add, for the benefit of other young folk, these our swains were the only ones to whom our hearts were ever given, though we had all passed through sentimental experiences to

break the monotony of town life. Agnes had always treated with scorn those who paid her attention; Julia used to weep for those who paid her no attention; and I listened to the sighs of the most unsuitable suitors—for example, an elderly gentleman suffering from melancholia, and a consumptive young man with—alas!—one foot in the grave.

Judging from novels (which I seldom read) love-making must be a most serious business nowadays, and inwoven with tragedy. But we, in the village, were behind the times in

all things, so the love-making was simple and happy and old-fashioned. Our lovers came a-courting us, as in the good old days, and we were wooed and won amongst the roses or by the sea; and father approved and allowed them to come in the evening (for we were busy all day), and we kissed goodnight at the gate by moonlight, and went to church with them on Sundays. There were no tears in our happy courtships (I love these old-fashioned words) except for me, when Jack went off to sea. Of course

he was called "Jack," and I quite wished my name was "Nancy" that I might be more like the sailor's true wife in our favourite song.

* * * * *

Once I used to wish I were a wild South Sea Islander, or a pigmy in the Central African forests, or a roving gipsy revelling in freedom—but I have outgrown those wishes, for I know that a simple homely life in an English country village is the happiest in the world.

WHAT WORKING GIRLS SAY ABOUT SUNDAY.

By RUTH LAMB.



SOME time ago the scholars attending our large classes for mill and working girls in Manchester were asked to write short papers on the happiest way of spending Sunday. They were especially requested not to repeat what they had heard from teachers

or friends, but to give their own real opinion on the subject. Prizes were offered for the best papers.

A large number came in, some of which were very stiffly worded and more like short lectures on Sunday observance than expressive of the writers' own feelings.

Others again were long lists of religious services which would occupy every moment of the day except meal-times, and at each and all of them attendance was recommended by the writers. There were, however, many thoughtfully written papers, expressed too in such simple, natural language that even when they did not entirely fulfil the conditions imposed, the reading of them gave pleasure, and literal quotations will be found interesting.

It is cheering to note that in reckoning up the items which go to make a happy Sunday, attendance at public worship is scarcely ever omitted. In fact, three items are found in nearly every paper—church or chapel, school, and "a walk with my companion."

As a rule, our mill girl has her one special friend and confidante, and is most faithful in her friendship. Sometimes almost inconveniently so, for when she introduces her companion with a view to her joining the Sunday or week evening class, she stipulates that they shall sit together, saying, "She wouldn't have come only to be with me."

The new-comer may be quite unfitted for the particular class to which her friend belongs, but teachers often find it expedient to make a temporary concession, in order to retain both girls.

In several papers the writers report that they go to both church and school twice on the Sunday, and one adds, "I think this is the happiest way to spend a Sunday. *It is what I do.*"

In this case, the walk came in after early tea and before evening service.

Many writers alluded to their habit of

beginning and ending the day with prayer and to home Bible reading. Hymns are appropriately quoted by others, and throughout all the papers there is abundant evidence that these working girls regard the Sabbath as a good and precious gift from God, and one intended to be a season of refreshment both to soul and body.

One girl writes, "I have to get the breakfast ready and mother cannot spare me on Sunday mornings as I have to help her to get the dinner ready, but before they"—the brothers—"go to school we thank Our Heavenly Father for giving us another Holy day. We thank Him for is gift and the means of grace which it brings to us."

Others write as follows—

"I always enjoy going to school on Sunday. My Sundays are always welcome. For it seems quite a change from the mill."

"I try to get to school in the morning, but I always go to Chapel. not because it is the fashion but I love to go. I feel very greatly my need of Sunday."

"I feel very happy and strengthened for the work of the week. I know some who idle about or sleep all day, or if it be summer like to go excursions, but I think when Monday comes, they will be very dull and tired to begin with."

This writer's Sunday is very fully occupied, for beside assisting in household duties she finds time to work for her Master by tract distributing, and she sums up with these words—"I don't know a happier way of enjoying Sunday than my own. So how many meetings I go to I never seem weary or tired of hearing the old old story Jesus and His love. I never feel satisfied in what I do for Him, because he has done so much for me."

Another who occupies herself in a similar manner ends thus—"This is the end of my Sunday keeping, but I think as you read it, you will think I am very happy."

One who writes in the simplest manner possible says of some Mission services, "I like going there very much, because it is so nice."

A mill girl who must stay to help at home every other Sunday morning says, "When it is my sister's turn to stay in, I either go to Church or go for a walk with my Companion. In the afternoon I go to school then I go another walk for about an hour or so. After tea I go to church. It is very seldom I miss church on Sunday nights. I am allowed out till half-past nine and I think it is quite late enough for a young girl."

In two or three instances the advisability of preparing for Sunday by forecasting the household work is suggested.

"I don't often go out on Saturday night," writes one, "but stay at home and do what I can towards Sunday."

"To spend a happy Sunday, the first way is

to do what you should on Saturday instead of Sunday."

A third remarks that "we ought not to do cleaning of any sort on Sunday what we can do on another day."

Through the whole of the papers there runs a frank expression of the girls' opinion that it is right for them to help their mothers in household matters, though they may be earning their own livelihood in the mill or elsewhere. In the following, for instance: "We should be obedient to our parents and do what they wish us to do and be gentle and kind to our brothers and sisters and see that they are got redly for school as well as ourselves. And we should go to church and be there at proper time—not when it is over—and we should think of what we have herd red at church when we come home. We should think of God's mercy and kindness to us and try to do something for to please Him in return and do the best we can to serve God the remainder of the day."

Again: "I can't possible go to school on Sunday morning because I have to clean up the house, but I go on Sunday afternoon and Chapel at night and I stop to the prayer meeting after Chapel over every Sunday night."

Some writers acknowledge that they lie later in bed; others tell us they rise early and why. "I think the happiest way is to rise rather early and do what there is for me to do, then go to Church, then come home and help with the dinner, because it makes the afternoon so pleasant, then go to school, then go for a walk because there is nothing particular to do."

This girl evidently realises that cheerful willing service and a tidy well-ordered home are excellent ingredients towards making things pleasant on the Sabbath, and that "many hands make light work."

Another, whose summary of Sunday occupations includes help in the home, afternoon school and evening church, adds, "I like to go to Church very much in the morning, but I don't always go, for sometimes I feel tired and stay in bed a little longer."

"I write these few lines to tell you how I spend my Sunday. On Sunday mornings I very often get up in time to get ready for Church, but sometimes, it being a very fine morning, I go for a walk, but on Sunday afternoon I always go to school. Very often after school we have a walk until tea-time. Then I go to church."

Sometimes a girl not only tells how she spends her Sunday, but how she thinks her method might be improved upon. I will give two such instances.

"I get up on Sunday morning say my prayers, assist to get the breakfast ready; then after dinner, wash the dinner pots and straighten the things again and make it look tidy—then wash myself, get a book and read awhile—