

and whom it will fit," said Ida. "I hate the sight of it."

A ray of light came into Aileen's mind. Something had annoyed her friend. She could see traces of tears on her cheeks. Weariness and headache would not account for these.

"My darling," said Aileen, "you have been grieving about something. Do tell me what is amiss? Have I said anything to pain you, or have you had bad news in your letters from home?"

Aileen's look of concern touched Ida, and she returned her friend's caress, whilst her face brightened.

"You have done nothing, dear—you could do nothing unkind to me or to anyone else. I have had a fit of the blues—that is all; but it has been enough to make me turn from fashion and finery, and to find in them only vanity and vexation of spirit."

"Then you are superior to me; for I find pretty garments very attractive, and never more so than when you wear them," said Aileen cheerily. "I am not the only one who holds that opinion. My father, mother, Maurice, and Parry declared that your dress and pose were perfection at rehearsal."

After this tribute Ida brightened visibly, and having taken a cup of tea, declared that it was just possible another hour's rest would enable her to take her share in the entertainment, and she did so.

At its close she was deservedly complimented, and thanked for the effort she had made; and as all present joined in the praise, Ida's spirits rose in proportion, and, despite the previous mortification, she retired to rest, feeling that, after all, life was worth living.

(To be continued.)

## SOME HAPPY SPINSTERS.



SPINSTER, or spinstress, has more than one meaning in English, though generally, in its collective sense, it denotes an unmarried woman from the daughter of a viscount downwards. The term occurs in *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*. A spinning-house was

formerly a house of correction for women, in which the inmates were compelled to labour at work which would have been an honour to them at home, and which might have prevented their getting into trouble at all. Hence, old Fuller, in his *Worthies of England*, well remarks: "Many would never be wretched *spinsters* were they spinsters in deed, nor come to so public and shameful punishments if painfully employed in that vocation."

The census of the British Isles shows that the proportionate increase in the number of women as compared with men has continued, until the excess now stands at something like a million. Hence, it follows, that for a very large number of these spinsters there is only slight prospects of marriage, apart from emigrating to the Colonies or to the United States, where women are in the minority.

This state of things is supposed to be to the disadvantage of women; but that there are compensating advantages to those who will look for them is sufficiently obvious. When all things are as they should be, marriage is no doubt the happiest state for either a man or a woman. But there are so many instances in which both sides realise that they were united at the wrong time, or that a mistake was made in their becoming united at all, that marriage is certainly not the most felicitous condition to large numbers who have contracted it. This is not as it should be, but it is nevertheless a fact; and what we would emphasise is, that single women have far happier surroundings than those who have taken a false step in such a case. They have opportunities for serving themselves and others which the married cannot take advantage of while the management of a home devolves upon them. It seems worth while to take notice of some of the successful work which spinsters, as such, have been enabled to undertake, and which in many cases could only have been undertaken by women in a single condition. Who could tell us how much the world owes to spinsters? Of one thing we may be very certain, viz., that the world would be much worse off if there were none of these self-denying creatures to carry on its works of mercy.

It is an advantage to be brought up in such

a way that work becomes to us, as it were, second nature. A century ago at this time there were living in the Suffolk village of Lavenham two little girls named Anne and Jane Taylor, the first of whom lived to be very aged, while the other passed away when she was just over forty, in 1825. These girls had much native talent; but probably the habits of industry in which they had been reared did more for them than their cleverness.

Isaac Taylor, Jane's father, was an accomplished copper-plate engraver; and the life of the family a hundred years ago at Lavenham, in Suffolk, seems to reveal to us the best side of eighteenth-century life. The family removed from London in 1786, when Jane was only three years old, but she was old enough to at once fall in love with the fine old house and large garden, the rental of which was only £6 a year, provisions and other things in the village being proportionately cheap. It almost seems as if, for a family of that kind who could take advantage of opportunities, those were the veritable good old times.

Jane was of a happy disposition, and is said to have shown as a child "an uncommon fertility of imagination in creating pleasures for herself." She, as it were, inhabited "a fairy-land, and was perpetually occupied with the imaginary interests of her teeming fancy." She had a habit of building castles in the air, which she afterwards thought to be injurious to a developing mind; but probably such exercises did her no harm. We believe that it was Lord Macaulay who attributed part of his success in life to that habit.

While Jane was growing up, the industry of all members of the household appears to have been a perfect marvel. Even when, in alliance with her sister Anne, Jane had, as little more than a child herself, become a successful writer for the young, her productions are said to have been "written in minutes or in half hours redeemed from other occupations to which more importance was attached in their own view, as well as in that of their parents."

Jane Taylor advanced from one thing to another, until she became recognised as one of the leading authors for children in the early part of this century. The literary work thus undertaken was the most difficult that anyone can attempt; but the success achieved is best shown by the way in which Jane Taylor's little poems have survived the test of time. Her pieces are still in high favour in the nursery, and are not likely soon to become obsolete, or even to become successfully rivaled.

Rarely does history tell of a young woman who showed such an all-round capacity for doing things well as Jane Taylor. At twenty she was an accomplished copper-plate engraver, who was able to assist her father in his pro-

fession. By way of recreation she was able, at the same time, to do most useful service with her pen; and all the while her domestic tact was of a kind to make her an acquisition in any household. What is more, she fully lived out her Christian teaching in her own life. Jane must have been an altogether delightful personage; and certainly she has to be ranked among successful spinsters.

One of a somewhat different kind, and who till the close of her life suffered more or less from the effects of an accident in childhood, was Anna Sewell, daughter of the author of *Mother's Last Words*. We rightly class Miss Sewell as a *special genius* in her own department, because she has surpassed all competitors in that forcible simplicity of language which is hardly less than an art. Like Jane Taylor, Anna Sewell passed away in middle age, when, in the natural course of things, she might have been expected to reach the height of usefulness. One rainy day, when returning from school, as a little girl, she slipped and very badly sprained her ankle. That mishap was destined to colour the whole of her after life, although, as her fond mother says, her life was not discoloured by it.

So long as she lived, Anna Sewell was the light of her home and of her mother's life. Both were eminently happy in their Christian profession; they were a help to each other in their every-day life; one seemed to be the complement of the other. Persons who, despite their bodily frailty, have yet become, as it were, a helpful influence to others, must necessarily be powerful characters, and such was Anna Sewell. Her powers of mind and large-hearted sympathies would have prompted her undertaking many works; but physical weakness was always present, and ardent aspirations had to be repressed. "Her very varied capacities enabled her to enter with unfeigned interest into a great variety of subjects," remarks Mrs. Bayley. "She could see at once how a picture should be composed, a fact or sentiment expressed, a garment cut out, how flowers should be arranged, what a committee should or should not do; but with all these mental resources, the frail body refused to do its part, and days and nights had to be spent in enforced idleness."

What would life be to the majority of girls or women under such conditions? Would they rise above weakness and depression to make even disadvantages contribute to their success? The experience of many humble-minded Christians proves that God gives strength to achieve even this miracle. Whatever Anna was enabled to do she would not leave undone; and any work she set her hand to she did well. As a critic of works in manuscript she rendered good service to her mother; and when she undertook to write



herself, the writing was of a kind to live and perpetuate its author's name. We have to remember Anna as the author of *Black Beauty*; and it is the extended circulation of that biography of a horse, or plea for kindness to animals in general, that warrants our putting the name of Anna Sewell on our list of successful spinsters.

Although the sprained ankle was the beginning of Anna's trials, it was followed by others which could not have come from such a cause. We find that her ailments were of that painful and depressing character which would have overwhelmed an ordinary girl; but in this case the beauty of Anna's character was brought out by affliction. It is said that "She could bear pain without showing it in her face or voice." Her mother once asked Anna if she never broke down or fretted over it; and the reply was, "Sometimes, when I am alone in my room, I do say, 'Poor Nannie!'" Still, despite all, Anna seems to have thought more about others than herself. When the family lived at Catton, old Mrs. Sewell would occasionally visit the poor, when Anna would ask her to call on some particular person, with the remark, "It is her washing-day, and she would be so pleased to see thee."

In the case of Anna Sewell, the best came last. The last seven years of her life were years of weakness, pain, and confinement to the house; and yet it was in those years that she actually did her life-work in writing *Black Beauty*. Too weak at times to write at all, she could at other times just command strength enough to use a pencil, when "the mother, sitting by, received the paper from the weary hand, and made a fair copy of it," so completing the work. It was a wonderful achievement altogether, and shows how varied are the instruments used by God. When she had arrived at her weakest condition physically, Anna was rendering her strongest service.

This book, as everybody knows, was quite a phenomenon, not only as being the work by an invalid, but as being written by a woman at all. Some years ago the public was surprised to learn that a certain author, who described with rare graphic power various pastimes and recreations, pertaining to the open air, was a weakly cripple, who had to be propped up in his chair to enable him to write at all. In the case of Anna Sewell and *Black Beauty*, readers might have supposed that the author had made a life-long study of horses, stables, and grooms; and had, in point of fact, lived amid scenes similar to those she depicts. "Where you have obtained your stable-mindedness I can't imagine," remarked one to Anna herself. "Are you sure you have

never stood on the steps of an omnibus, to collect passengers and watch the traffic?" Anna lived just long enough to see her book published, and to hear of its success; and then she entered into rest. Surely her life was in the most blessed sense a successful one.

Among single women who have made a name for themselves by dint of hard service, the name of Agnes Strickland, the historian, should not be overlooked. In the preparation of her chief work, Agnes Strickland was assisted by her sister, who would not allow her name to appear on the title-page. It seems that the chief ancestor of the family came over with William the Conqueror, and through being the first to land on English soil he took the name of Strickland. Agnes was born in 1806, and died in 1874; and for some years before her death she enjoyed a Civil List pension from the Government.

The Stricklands were thus what may be called a genuine old English family; and though Agnes showed all the prejudices of her class, she and her sisters worked industriously both at painting and authorship when the family property became diminished. In his entertaining book on *East Anglia*, Mr. J. E. Richie gives some glimpses of the family as he knew them in his young days, some sixty years ago. "Mr. Strickland had been dead some years, and the widow and the daughters kept up what little state they could; and I well remember the feeling of surprise with which I first entered their capacious drawing-room—a room the size of which it had never entered into my head to conceive of. It is to the credit of these Misses Strickland that they did not vegetate in that old house, but held a fair position in the world of letters."

The family mansion thus referred to was Reydon Hall, not far from the picturesque little watering-place of Southwold, in Suffolk. This, according to Mr. Richie, was "a dismal old house, suggestive of rats, and dampness, and mould." It had its only partly-furnished rooms, unoccupied stables and attics, while there was "a general air of decay all over the place, inside and out." Houses of this kind, however, have oftentimes proved of greater interest to visitors than others better kept and of more commanding exterior. In any case, it was there that Agnes Strickland wrought and succeeded at her life-work. Even a family library cannot be said to be complete without her carefully-written volumes, though they need to be read with discrimination.

The way in which Adelaide Anne Proctor introduced herself to the world, and established her position as a writer, shows that she was never at a loss for resources. Born in 1825, she

passed away in the early part of 1864, at the age of thirty-nine. Her books have sold in such large numbers that she may properly be reckoned among English popular poets. Speaking of the character of her work, one remarks that, "Her unambitious verses, dealing with simple emotional themes in a simple manner, have a charm which is scarcely explicable on the ground of high literary merit, but which is due rather to the fact that they are the cultured expression of an earnest and beneficent life."

In his introduction to her *Legends and Lyrics*, the late Charles Dickens, who had long been acquainted with her parents, explains how he first became possessed of her writings. He inserted a poem in the Christmas number of *Household Words* for 1854, by one "Mary Berwick," who had supplied several other poems to the ordinary weekly issue. The author was supposed to be a clever governess who had travelled into Italy with her employers, and her letters were sent to a certain circulating library. One day in December, 1854, when Charles Dickens had engaged to dine with the Proctors, the secret came out. The Christmas number, entitled *The Seven Poor Travellers*, was then about to appear. "I took with me an early proof of that number, and remarked, as I laid it on the drawing-room table, that it contained a very pretty poem written by a certain 'Miss Berwick,'" says Charles Dickens. "Next day brought me the disclosure, that I had so spoken of the poem to the mother of its writer, in its writer's presence; that I had no such correspondent as 'Miss Berwick'; and that the name had been assumed by Miss Adelaide Anne Proctor."

This method of bringing herself before the world had been chosen by Miss Proctor because she desired that her work should be judged on its own merits. Because her father and the editor of *Household Words* were such close friends, Adelaide feared that her productions might be inserted for mere friendship's sake, when otherwise they would be rejected. In such a trait of her character there is something of which girls may take notice to their own advantage.

If you have a capacity to do anything, do it without attempting to lean on other people, or on any props other than the merit of your work will supply. This is the kind of independence you will need to cultivate if you wish to succeed in the best sense. A thing won by mere favour may be of little credit to you, if any credit at all. Hard work is one of the chief blessings of life; and in the good providence of God it is commonly followed by success. G. H. P.

## THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER.

By MARY E. HULLAH.

### CHAPTER I.

SQUIRE DARRACOTT'S daughter Kitty sat sewing in the parlour one bright June afternoon in the year of grace 1794. The sweet perfume of roses crept in through the open casement, the birds sang, and the butterflies fluttered athwart the trimly-kept garden. Within and without all was quiet and content. The window by which she was sitting overlooked a fine stretch of country. If she had been so minded, Mistress Kitty could have seen the village of Elmsfield, and beyond that the roof and chimneys of Lady Catherine Ardingby's house, Temple Grange.

But her eyes were fixed on her embroidery, and the needle flew swiftly backwards and for-

wards in her fingers. She worked on mechanically, while her thoughts were far, far away.

A year ago, Kitty Darracott, the only child of loving parents, had been as free from care as any maiden in the land; but of late shadows had been creeping up on every side. This afternoon she had betaken herself to the seclusion of the south parlour, and she was trying to face the difficulties that beset her path, to think them over before she was called to assist her mother in the gathering of lavender and rose-leaves wherewith to fill the china bowls that stood in every nook and corner of the house.

Kitty had been brought up in a strict school; she would not have dared to keep her

mother waiting, no, not five minutes after her appointed hour. Madam Darracott, a gentle, delicate woman, of no great force of character, was treated with the greatest reverence by the squire, and he had taught his daughter to be of the same mind. Whatever went wrong on the estate, or in the daily life at High Row, the mistress was not to be troubled with complaints.

The clock in the hall outside struck three. Kitty dropped her needle, pushed back her rippling locks, that would dance on her forehead from beneath the frills of her white muslin cap, and took a letter from the folds of her broad sash.

The letter was heavily sealed, and the con-