

THAT QUIET HALF-HOUR.

THE PLAINT OF A HOUSEMOTHER.



"I REALLY THINK YOU MIGHT HAVE MANAGED TO READ IT."



I REALLY think you might have managed to read it, Maude; the 'Acanthus' has been in the house for a week," said my husband, as he buttoned his glove, mounted the dog-cart, and drove to the station on his way to London. I looked regretfully after the cart as it whirled round the corner, for there was reproach in every

line of dear Tom's back, and I knew he was saying to himself, "She has nothing to do, positively nothing, and yet she will not read one little paper to please me."

"I will find time for it to-day," I resolve, and indeed I wish to read the article very much. My husband has to leave early as the journey to London is rather long, he breakfasts alone, and then I have my three elder children for company during my repast. As the porridge and bread and jam disappear, I have to answer a good many questions.

These are some of them :

How old was Jack Cade when he rebelled?

Will the Queen only see people who speak good grammar?

Why do Americans talk English when America was found out by a Spanish man?

Why do we have six bothering cases to learn about in Latin, when there are only three in English?

Why don't iron ships sink?

Why are places called Parishes?

What are Thugs?

Who was it made wings of wax?

I have to give twenty minutes after breakfast to looking in the Encyclopædia for the answers to such of these questions as I have not been able to furnish, and I wish my children's wits did not travel so far



"I HAVE TO ANSWER A GOOD MANY QUESTIONS."

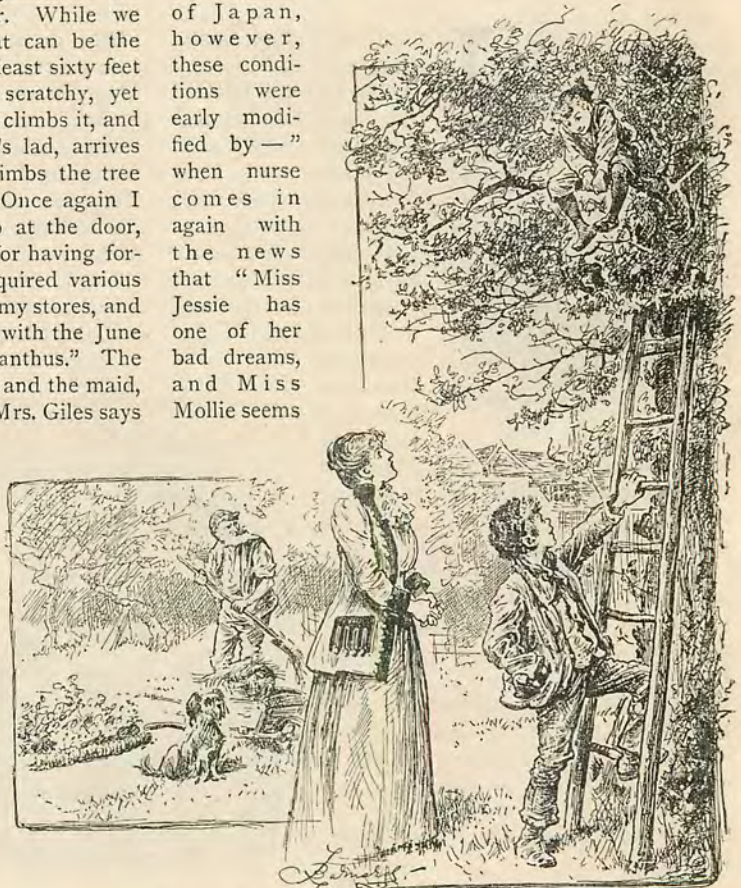
afield, or that my head were better lined. A visit to the nursery follows, then an interview with cook, rather a longer one than usual on account of a coming dinner party, next a walk round the garden and a talk with the autocrat who digs therein, a visit to the stables, and finally a chat with the governess in the schoolroom. An hour has to be spent at the writing table, and after this I feel I have earned a rest in a comfortable chair, and a look at "The difference, and the likeness, between the early art of Assyria and Japan." Half-way through the first page, just when I am revelling in the quaint paradoxes and bold assertions of Julius Blakiston, a tap comes at the door, and the parlour-maid says: "If you please 'm Master Jack is at top of the elm-tree, and he has let his boot fall, and he wants to know if he may come down without it?"

Of course the "Acanthus" falls to the floor and I run out to the tennis-lawn to see what Jack is doing in the elm.

"Mother, I stuck in this fork," says the squeaky voice from out the tangle of leaves high above my head, "and I unlaced my boot to pull my foot out, but then I dropped the boot; shall I come down and fetch it?"

"Certainly not; think of the holes you would make in your stocking!" I shout, then send Jessie for the gardener's boy to come with a ladder. While we await him I have time to wonder what can be the pleasure of climbing that tree. It is at least sixty feet high, and its bark is very hard and scratchy, yet twice a week during the summer Jack climbs it, and never wearies. William, the gardener's lad, arrives beaming, puts the boot in his pocket, climbs the tree and helps Jack on his downward way. Once again I go back to Assyrian Art. Another tap at the door, this time nurse enters with an apology for having forgotten in the early morning that she required various tapes, buttons, and cottons. A visit to my stores, and again I am seated by the open window with the June breeze ruffling the pages of the "Acanthus." The door opens, this time without ceremony, and the maid, with a scared face, exclaims, "Please 'm Mrs. Giles says what shall she do with Jim? He has scalded himself dreadfully, and could you go down to her at once." This means a rush to my medicine cupboard, whence, armed with cotton wool, linseed oil, and lime water, I fly across the meadow to the lodge, and stay there attending to Jim's hurts, and trying to comfort his mother till the sound of the luncheon bell sends me to the house to carve roast mutton and serve rice pudding for all four of my flock, who are gathered now. During this meal I keep the conversation to cricket matches, dolls, and such like topics, so that I may not have to seek the Encyclopædia again, and dinner ended, Jack and

Jessie go to practice, and Mollie and Bertie ought to start for a walk, while I might pick up my delightful magazine, but Mollie climbs on my lap and beseeches for a story, Bertie says nurse won't be ready yet, Assyrian Art once more gives way, and the story is forthcoming. At the end Mollie gives me a hug and runs off, and I am stretching out my hand for the book, when I hear the crunch of wheels on the gravel, the hall bell rings, and visitors are announced, the kindly people who "come early to catch you before you go out." It is a lovely day, and it seems several friends have the same idea, for till half-past four I have the pleasure of greeting one after another of my neighbours. Then I have to drive out myself, to visit acquaintances whose "day" it is, in places some miles apart. Home again at 6.30. "I *will* have my quiet half-hour before dinner," I think, but Tom helps me out of the carriage saying, "Maude, I want you in the long walk, there are far too many scarlet geraniums, come and see which are to be taken out." We walk about till the dressing bell rings, with the children at our heels, and the gardener beside us. Dinner over I feel quite certain of my half-hour with the "Acanthus," which is a magazine printed for private circulation and lent to Tom by a friend at his club. I have read ten pages, and have just got to the paragraph beginning "In the fairy-land of Japan, however, these conditions were early modified by—" when nurse comes in again with the news that "Miss Jessie has one of her bad dreams, and Miss Mollie seems



"WILLIAM CLIMBS THE TREE AND HELPS JACK."

very hot and restless." I mount the nursery stairs, and stay till Jessie is quietly asleep, and Mollie's temperature ascertained to be normal, and on coming back to the drawing-room I find Tom talking with an old gentleman and his daughter, our nearest neighbours, whom he is hospitably asking to stay the rest of the evening; they have come for a book, and Tom delights to display his treasures, so the hours pass quickly, and at eleven, when they leave us, I am really too tired to read any more.

"I suppose you must take the 'Acanthus' back to-morrow, Tom?" I say when we are alone. "I have not had time to read that paper."

"I fear I must; Sir Charles asked me for it to-day, but I am sorry you have not read it, for I asked Blakiston to come on Thursday instead of Stuart, who called to tell me he must leave town to-morrow, you don't mind, dear, do you?"

"What about Mr. Blakiston? Certainly not, I shall be glad to have him at dinner," I reply, but I regret more than ever the loss of the half-hour that would have made me acquainted with his charming article.

"I am afraid you do not care about reading so much as you did, my dear," says Tom, patronisingly, as he walks to the door.

"Tom, how *can* you?" I exclaim, vehemently. "It is that I have such incessant interruptions—listen," and I hold his coat button, while I recount the day's experiences.

"Well," he says, unmoved, "this is exceptional. Jemmy Giles doesn't get scalded, and the Waltons don't come in for the evening, always."

"No, of course not, but this is only one day of my usual life, and *other* interruptions occur instead," I say severely. It is useless, I know. Tom goes to smoke, and at the club to-morrow he will say to Sir



A TALK WITH THE AUTOCRAT WHO DIGS IN THE GARDEN (p. 44).

Charles: "What a pity it is, so many women give up everything in the way of culture a few years after they marry!"

I ask—how am I to read newspapers, magazines, travels, novels, biographies, within a month of their publication (to say nothing of having such a book, perhaps as Oliphant's "Scientific Religion" thrown in occasionally)—and yet to lead the life of a sociable woman with a household to look after? Will someone reply?
M. R. L.

HAD HE KNOWN.

A STORY OF NEW ZEALAND GOLD THIRST.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.



DO not readily associate the idea of quietness with a mining township. It seems to be taken for granted that where men search for gold there must be excitement and adventure, that the pulse of existence will be quickened to feverish rapidity, and life's struggle fought out with relentless energy. But much depends on the measure of success granted to the gold-seekers. After all, Nature is more inclined to be parsimonious than prodigal of her treasure. As in most businesses there is a retail branch, so also in gold-mining. Where its gatherings are by grains and pennyweights rather than by ounces—where, in fact, men are making their livings and not their fortunes—it sinks to the level of

an ordinary trade, sober and steady in its operations as any old-established city business.

And so, the village among the mines of which this tale will be told was quiet as any country hamlet amid flowery meads, and with little enough golden about it except the autumn corn-fields. Even the main thoroughfare seemed veiled in seclusion and mystery; for after starting from the beach as a broad, well-formed street, it changed suddenly to a grass-grown lane, then narrowed to a bridle-track, then, as if ashamed of this conclusion, buried itself in the bush. There was bush all round—a New Zealand forest, dense and dark. There were hills also: a hundred wooded peaks formed the jagged outline of the misty, purple-tinted range that swept the eastern sky-line. Westward was the sea, spread with islands and broken into bays. So, between the water and the hills, the settlement lay