

## THAT TEA-POT.

BY SIDNEY DAYRE.

"I'D NEVER in the world 'a' thought of buying it myself—that tea-pot—for, betwixt you and me, it was an ugly little thing enough. Squatty No shape to it at all, and the spout sticking out in just the way you thought it hadn't ought to. And it wasn't nice and clean-looking like my gold-banded china, but dingy. The flowers on it, though, was the worst. Not painted in neat little nose-gays, but just as if they had been pitched at it—stary and scraggy, and with great streaky green things running clear off the edges.

"The way I come to have it was: when I carried my sweet flag-root down to the store where my nephew—John Caleb Plummer—clerks, he was just unpacking a lot of crockery, and he held up that tea-pot.

"Now," says he, 'ain't that a beauty?"

"I thought it or'nary-looking enough, myself, but, of course, I wasn't going to run his goods down.

"Antique, you see," says he. "They're all the rage down to Boston. They've sent this out for a sample, and it's the first one that's come into the neighborhood. I ain't forgot how I broke yours, long ago, when I threw a turnip at the cow, when I left the gate open and she got into the garden, and it went smashing into the pantry-window. So, now, I'm going to give you this."

"He spoke as if he thought it quite a thing to do, and, of course, I couldn't let on I didn't think so myself. Not that I was going to say I thought anything I didn't think, but he talked away so fast, I hadn't a chance to say anything but a thank-you. That was always the way with John Caleb. The gate left open, and the cow, and the turnip, and the broken tea-pot, and now me given this humbly little thing instid of it, from which, you'll see when I've told you, I was going to have quite a deal of worry—was all along of his way of stopping to talk—talk—talk, about all the big things he was going to do, the summer he chored at our place.

"Of course, I had to use it, for fear of hurting John Caleb's feelings if I didn't, and it soon got dingier 'n ever with the hot water, and when a nick came on the spout, and another on the rim—I found it nicked awful easy—it didn't begin with a tin tea-pot scoured up with whiting and the least morsel of soft-soap.

"Folks from Boston's been coming out here to

our neighborhood for the last few summers. The old tavern is all fixed up with long porches, and it looks gay when they go driving about in their style carriages. And, one morning, as I was setting my bread to rise, someone knocked at the kitchen-door, and I see two ladies there: one of 'em was plump and nice-looking, and the other was older, and taller, and scrawnier.

"Good morning," says the little one. "Beg your pardon for coming around: we knocked at the front-door and no one heard, and we came to ask you for a drink—and besides, we were so much attracted by your lovely old-fashioned roof, and the vines clambering over it."

"I always thought the vines was pretty," says I, "but I can't say I think much of the old gambrel-roof."

"As the tall lady was drinking the water I gave 'em, t'other one gave a little scream.

"That old tea-pot!" says she, pointing to where it set, on the back of the stove. I was provoked enough to think they'd seen such a common-looking thing about.

"Yes," says I, "it does look old enough, and mean enough, but they didn't stop to hear anything I said after I said 'old.'"

"Perhaps a hundred years," says the oldish lady, while she put on her glasses to look.

"Such a darling, stumpy little thing," says the young one.

"It did look a hundred years old, if it looked a day, and I hadn't the face to contradict 'em.

"Just the kind of thing you might expect to see in such a charming old house," says one.

"They turned it round, and kept going on over it till the tall lady said:

"I s'pose you wouldn't like to part with it, would you?"

"I couldn't, for the life of me, tell whether they wanted to make fun of me or not, so I wasn't very quick to speak: but the little lady didn't give me much time, for she said, provoked like:

"Now, aunt, you always get before me. I want it, if it's to be had."

"Could you be induced to part with it?" asked the aunt.

"Why, ma'am—" says I.

"What would you be willing to take for it?" says she, very eager.

"Now, I'd heard John Caleb tell someone how them tea-pots was worth seventy-five cents—and dear enough at that, to my way of thinking—so, though I'd 'a' been glad to give it away to anybody for nothing, only for fear of giving offense, I began calc'ulating how much I ought to throw off for the use I'd had of it, and the nicks I'd made in it, though how anybody could use the thing without nicking it, would be past my understanding, and I thought it would be about right if I said forty cents. I knew I could get a good tin one for less money. So says I:

"'I'm sorry about the nicks, ma'am—'

"'Oh,' says the young lady, 'the nicks are just charming. They look as if they might have been made by your great-grandmother. Perhaps they were.'

"'Indeed, ma'am—' says I.

"'Please set a price on it,' says the old lady, without giving me a chance to say that it wasn't at all likely my great-grandmother ever had such a poor piece of stuff in her house.

"'I'll give you five dollars for it,' says the young lady.

"'But' ma'am—' says I.

"'I'll give you six—seven—eight—' says the old lady.

"I was so dumfounded I couldn't speak a word, but stood looking first at one and then at t'other, which, like enough, was why they thought I didn't think it was enough to pay, when goodness knows I was wondering whether or no they mightn't be a little bit crazy.

"'You can take time to think of it,' says the aunt. 'Have you any other pieces of old-fashioned ware, or china?'

"'Right glad I was of the chance to show 'em I had something a little decent, so I stepped to the cupboard where my gold-banded china was, and threw open the door. But the taste of some people is amazing. I see they meant to be polite, but they turned away from that cupboard and says:

"'Oh—thank you,' and looked again at that tea-pot. They talked over it till I felt more and more sure they must be a little touched in their intellects, and then went away, saying they'd call again.

"And that very afternoon the old lady came again.

"'You see,' says she, 'my niece and I, we're trying who can make the largest collection of old china, and if you're willing to take ten dollars for it, I hope you'll let me have it.'

"'But, ma'am—' says I, and then I tried my best to tell her it wasn't worth no such money, and I didn't set any particular store by it, and she could have it for forty cents. But, without

being such a chattering one as her niece, she had such a persistent ride-over-you way of saying her say, that the next thing I knew I was standing there with a ten-dollar bill in my hand, and she gone, carrying that tea-pot as if it had been a king's crown.

"Soon, though, I began to think more of how the money was to go than how it had come. Maria Ann Plummer, my namesake, sister to John Caleb, had wrote me how her children was puny and her husband laid up with a sprain just at harvest-time, and they had hard work to rub along and hire help. I always did believe in helping one's own kin, so the next morning, after I'd got my work done up, I put the ten dollars in a letter and stepped down to the village and put it in the post-office. Then I went in to ask John Caleb how much dried boneset they could take of me this season.

"He was unpacking crockery again, and the first thing I set my eyes on was two or three of them tea-pots, as like to the one he'd given me as one pea is like another. I was most afraid he'd see me color up at sight of 'em, for it brought to my mind how I'd gone and sold his present; I didn't mean he should know it as long as I could help it.

"But as soon as I'd settled about the boneset, I turned round and went straight to the tavern where all the city folks was staying. You see, I was glad of the chance of doing one of them two a little good turn, seeing I'd got such a deal of money from the family.

"The youngest one was setting out on the long porch, but when she see I wanted to speak to her she took me to her room.

"'I'm glad enough to be able to tell you,' says I, 'being your mind was so set on one of them tea-pots, that they've got more of 'em down to the village, at the store—my nephew, John Caleb Plummer, he clerks there—and I come to let you know so they wouldn't be gone, though I can't honestly advise you to get one, for truth is truth, and it's my plain duty to let you know they don't wear well.'

"'Do you mean,' says she, 'that your tea-pot was got at the store?'

"'Yes,' says I.

"'When?' says she.

"'Why, it must be well on to a month ago,' says I. 'I never see anything get shabby-looking quite so soon as that tea-pot did.'

"And then—well, you'd ought to seen that woman laugh. Laughed and laughed till the tears come out of her eyes, and I couldn't for the life of me help laughing along with her.

"'I'm glad you're so pleased,' I says. 'You've

done better by waiting, too, for the new ones is a deal brighter and prettier, if folks wants such shaped things, which I'm free to confess I don't—

"'I am pleased,' says she, 'it's the best thing I've heard for ever so long.' And she laughed again, till I thought she never would stop.

"When she did stop, I took the chance of telling how I'd been feeling it a weight on my mind about the old tea-pot. How her aunt had been so persistent I couldn't well say no, and then without stopping much to think about it I'd sent the money to Maria Ann, she being near kin to me and needing it, and so I couldn't very well give it back just now, but if she'd only tell me a place where I could direct a letter to her aunt when she went back to Boston, I'd be proud and glad to do it just as soon as I disposed of my boneset and other yarbs, and anyone could see it would be no more'n fair and right now that she could get a better one so cheap—

"But she wouldn't let me talk about it at all. After she'd done laughing, she took my hand, in the sweetest sort of a kindly way, and kissed me.

"'Don't you think any more about that,' says she. 'It's all fair and right as it is: for my

aunt insisted on doing as she did. She's got more money than she knows what to do with, and never values anything unless she pays a great deal for it. I think the money must have come to you just for the sake of Maria Ann.'

"It was good of her to say so. As I was coming down through the hall, she went across it to another room, and soon there was more laughing—as if plenty more folks was tickled to hear they could get some more of them ugly little tea-pots. I could hear it all the way downstairs.

"But dear me! as I went along past the end of the house, what should I see coming down from a window and going smash into a heap of bricks, but that tea-pot! And I just caught sight of the old lady, with her lips set together, looking mad.

"'There now,' says I to myself, 'some of them giddy things in there's managed to drop the poor old lady's tea-pot that she set her heart on so, and paid so much for. No wonder she looks worked up over it.'

"A while after, I asked John Caleb if the Boston folks had bought all his tea-pots, and he said they hadn't so much as looked at 'em. Queer, wasn't it?"

## THE OAK'S SECRET.

BY MARIE CORINNE.

NEAR the deep forest, dim with leafy shadow,

Relieved by sunny glade,

A sturly oak, o'er green and fragrant meadow,  
Once threw a welcome shade.

Here children oft in summer days were playing:

Here lovers held their tryst

When all the verdant boughs were gently swaying,  
By evening zephyr kissed.

In stately pride the monarch stood for ages,

Through sunshine and through storm;

And no rude blast, that round the forest rages,  
Had marred his kingly form.

One day the sky, aglow with noon-day gladness,

Grew dark with sudden woe;

The cyclone wild, descending in its madness,  
The mighty oak laid low.

When morning sunshine bathed the earth with splendor,

Crowds came and by it stood,

And noticed, as they spoke in accents tender,  
A curious knot of wood.

They hewed it open, that they might discover

The secret buried there,

And found—no doubt 'twas hidden by a lover—  
A lock of sunny hair.

Within the oak's tough bark the knot was driven,

Two centuries before;

They counted, from the place the trunk was riven,  
Two hundred rings and more.

The silent oak repaid no farther question;

That waving tress of hair

Betrayed the secret, with the sweet suggestion  
Of lovers' meeting there.

When summer moonlight tinged with silver glory

The velvety green earth,

Beneath its boughs was told the wondrous story,  
As old as Eden's birth.

Sweet promises were made, fond vows were spoken,

And sealed with solemn oath;

This golden curl was given as a token—  
Bright emblem of their troth.

In kindly heart of oak, through years unnumbered,

Reposed the precious trust,

While the fair head, from which the curl was sundered,  
Had mingled with the dust.

And many youths and maidens, hither straying,

Had owned love's potent spell;

Yet still the stalwart trunk and branches swaying  
Had kept the secret well.

While tales of cruel strife, and warriors' glory,

The world may well forget,

Around the humble sweetness of this story  
The fragrance lingers yet.

For still, though empires fall, and monarchs perish,

Though planets cease to move,

Throughout all change, mankind will ever cherish  
Thy name, O deathless love!