

"MIS' ELDERKIN'S PITCHER."

"Ye see, boys," said Sam Lawson, as we were gathering young wintergreen on a sunny hillside in June,--"ye see, folks don't allers know what their marcies is when they sees 'em. Folks is kind o' blinded; and, when a providence comes along, they don't seem to know how to take it, and they growl and grumble about what turns out the best things that ever happened to 'em in their lives. It's like Mis' Elderkin's pitcher."

"What about Mis' Elderkin's pitcher?" said both of us in one breath.

"Didn't I never tell ye, now?" said Sam: "why, I wanter know?"

No, we were sure he never had told us; and Sam, as usual, began clearing the ground by a thorough introduction, with statistical expositions.

"Wal, ye see, Mis' Elderkin she lives now over to Sherburne in about the handsomest house in Sherburne,--a high white house, with green blinds and white pillars in front,--and she rides out in her own kerridge; and Mr. Elderkin, he 's a deakin in the church, and a colonel in the malitia, and a s'lectman, and pretty much atop every thing there is goin' in Sherburne, and it all come of that 'are pitcher."

"What pitcher?" we shouted in chorus.

"Lordy massy! that 'are 's jest what I'm a goin' to tell you about; but,

ye see, a feller's jest got to make a beginnin' to all things.

"Mis' Elderkin she thinks she's a gret lady nowadays, I s'pose; but I 'member when she was Miry Brown over here 'n Oldtown, and I used to be waitin' on her to singing-school.

"Miry and I was putty good friends along in them days,--we was putty consid'able kind o' intimate. Fact is, boys, there was times in them days when I thought whether or no I wouldn't take Miry myself," said Sam, his face growing luminous with the pleasing idea of his former masculine attractions and privileges. "Yis," he continued, "there was a time when folks said I could a hed Miry ef I'd asked her; and I putty much think so myself, but I didn't say nothin': marriage is allers kind o' ventursome; an' Miry had such up-and-down kind o' ways, I was sort o' fraid on't.

"But Lordy massy! boys, you mustn't never tell Hepsy I said so, 'cause she'd be mad enough to bite a shingle-nail in two. Not that she sets so very gret by me neither; but then women's backs is allers up ef they think anybody else could a hed you, whether they want you themselves or not.

"Ye see, Miry she was old Black Hoss John Brown's da'ter, and lived up there in that 'are big brown house by the meetin'-house, that hes the red hollyhock in the front yard. Miry was about the handsomest gal that went into the singers' seat a Sunday.

"I tell you she wa'n't none o' your milk-and-sugar gals neither,--she was 'mazin' strong built. She was the strongest gal in her arms that I ever see. Why, I 've seen Miry take up a barrel o' flour, and lift it right into the kitchen; and it would jest make the pink come into her cheeks like two roses, but she never seemed to mind it a grain. She had a good strong back of her own, and she was straight as a poplar, with snappin' black eyes, and I tell you there was a snap to her tongue too. Nobody never got ahead o' Miry; she'd give every fellow as good as he sent, but for all that she was a gret favorite.

"Miry was one o' your briery, scratchy gals, that seems to catch fellers in thorns. She allers fit and flouted her beaux, and the more she fit and flouted 'em the more they 'd be arter her. There wa'n't a gal in all Oldtown that led such a string o' fellers arter her; 'cause, you see, she'd now and then throw 'em a good word over her shoulder, and then they 'd all fight who should get it, and she'd jest laugh to see 'em do it.

"Why, there was Tom Sawin, he was one o' her beaux, and Jim Moss, and Ike Bacon; and there was a Boston boy, Tom Beacon, he came up from Cambridge to rusticate with Parson Lothrop; he thought he must have his say with Miry, but he got pretty well come up with. You see, he thought 'cause he was Boston born that he was kind o' aristocracy, and hed a right jest to pick and choose 'mong country gals; but the way he got come up with by Miry was too funny for any thing."

"Do tell us about it," we said, as Sam made an artful pause, designed to draw forth solicitation.

"Wal, ye see, Tom Beacon he told Ike Bacon about it, and Ike he told me. 'Twas this way. Ye see, there was a quiltin' up to Mis' Cap'n Broad's, and Tom Beacon he was there; and come to goin' home with the gals, Tom he cut Ike out, and got Miry all to himself; and 'twas a putty long piece of a walk from Mis' Cap'n Broad's up past the swamp and the stone pastur' clear up to old Black Hoss John's.

"Wal, Tom he was in high feather 'cause Miry took him, so that he didn't reelly know how to behave; and so, as they was walkin' along past Parson Lothrop's apple-orchard, Tom thought he'd try bein' familiar, and he undertook to put his arm round Miry. Wal, if she didn't jest take that little fellow by his two shoulders and whirl him over the fence into the orchard quicker 'n no time. 'Why,' says Tom, 'the fust I knew I was lyin' on my back under the apple-trees lookin' up at the stars.' Miry she jest walked off home and said nothin' to nobody,--it wa'n't her way to talk much about things; and, if it hedn't ben for Tom Beacon himself, nobody need 'a' known nothin' about it. Tom was a little fellow, you see, and 'mazin' good-natured, and one o' the sort that couldn't keep nothin' to himself; and so he let the cat out o' the bag himself. Wal, there didn't nobody think the worse o' Miry. When fellers find a gal won't take saace from no man, they kind o' respect her; and then fellers allers thinks ef it hed ben them, now, things 'd 'a' been different.

That's jest what Jim Moss and Ike Bacon said: they said, why Tom Beacon was a fool not to know better how to get along with Miry,--they never had no trouble. The fun of it was, that Tom Beacon himself was more crazy after her than he was afore; and they say he made Miry a right up-and-down offer, and Miry she jest wouldn't have him.

"Wal, you see, that went agin old Black Hoss John's idees: old Black Hoss was about as close as a nut and as contrary as a pippage-tree. You ought to 'a' seen him. Why, his face was all a perfect crisscross o' wrinkles. There wa'n't a spot where you could put a pin down that there wa'n't a wrinkle; and they used to say that he held on to every cent that went through his fingers till he'd pinched it into two. You couldn't say that his god was his belly, for he hedn't none, no more'n an old file: folks said that he'd starved himself till the moon'd shine through him.

"Old Black Hoss was awfully grouty about Miry's refusin' Tom Beacon, 'cause there was his houses and lots o' land in Boston. A drefful worldly old critter Black Hoss John was: he was like the rich fool in the gospel. Wal, he's dead and gone now, poor critter, and what good has it all done him? It's as the Scriptur' says, 'He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.'

"Miry hed a pretty hard row to hoe with old Black Hoss John. She was up early and down late, and kep' every thing a goin'. She made the cheese and made the butter, and between spells she braided herself handsome

straw bunnets, and fixed up her clothes; and somehow she worked it so when she sold her butter and cheese that there was somethin' for ribbins and flowers. You know the Scriptur' says, 'Can a maid forget her ornaments?' Wal, Miry didn't. I 'member I used to lead the singin' in them days, and Miry she used to sing counter, so we sot putty near together in the singers' seats; and I used to think Sunday mornin's when she come to meetin' in her white dress and her red cheeks, and her bunnet all tipped off with laylock, that 'twas for all the world jest like sunshine to have her come into the singers' seats. Them was the days that I didn't improve my privileges, boys," said Sam, sighing deeply. "There was times that ef I'd a spoke, there's no knowin' what mightn't 'a' happened, 'cause, you see, boys, I was better lookin' in them days than I be now. Now you mind, boys, when you grow up, ef you get to waitin' on a nice gal, and you're 'most a mind to speak up to her, don't you go and put it off, 'cause, ef you do, you may live to repent it.

"Wal, you see, from the time that Bill Elderkin come and took the academy, I could see plain enough that it was time for me to hang up my fiddle. Bill he used to set in the singers' seats, too, and he would have it that he sung tenor. He no more sung tenor than a skunk-blackbird; but he made b'lieve he did, jest to git next to Miry in the singers' seats. They used to set there in the seats a writin' backward and forward to each other till they tore out all the leaves of the hymn-books, and the singin'-books besides. Wal, I never thought that the house o' the Lord was jest the place to be courtin' in, and I used

to get consid'able shocked at the way things went on atween 'em. Why, they'd be a writin' all sermon-time; and I've seen him a lookin' at her all through the long prayer in a way that wa'n't right, considerin' they was both professors of religion. But then the fact was, old Black Hoss John was to blame for it, 'cause he never let 'em have no chance to hum. Ye see, old Black Hoss he was sot agin Elderkin 'cause he was poor. You see, his mother, the old Widdah Elderkin, she was jest about the poorest, peakedest old body over to Sherburne, and went out to days' works; and Bill Elderkin he was all for books and larnin', and old Black Hoss John he thought it was just shiftlessness: but Miry she thought he was a genius; and she got it sot in her mind that he was goin' to be President o' the United States, or some sich.

"Wal, old Black Hoss he wa'n't none too polite to Miry's beaux in gineral, but when Elderkin used to come to see her he was snarlier than a saw: he hadn't a good word for him noways; and he'd rake up the fire right before his face and eyes, and rattle about fastenin' up the windows, and tramp up to bed, and call down the chamber-stairs to Miry to go to bed, and was sort o' aggravatin' every way.

"Wal, ef folks wants to get a gal set on havin' a man, that 'ere's the way to go to work. Miry had a consid'able stiff will of her own; and, ef she didn't care about Tom Beacon before, she hated him now; and, if she liked Bill Elderkin before, she was clean gone over to him now. And so she took to goin' to the Wednesday-evenin' lecture, and the Friday-even-in' prayer-meetin', and the singin'-school, jest as regular

as a clock, and so did he; and arterwards they allers walked home the longest way. Fathers may jest as well let their gals be courted in the house, peaceable, 'cause, if they can't be courted there, they'll find places where they can be: it's jest human natur'.

"Wal, come fall, Elderkin he went to college up to Brunswick; and then I used to see the letters as regular up to the store every week, comin' in from Brunswick, and old Black Hoss John he see 'em too, and got a way of droppin' on 'em in his coat-pocket when he come up to the store, and folks used to say that the letters that went into his coat-pocket didn't get to Miry. Anyhow, Miry she says to me one day says she, 'Sam, you're up round the post-office a good deal,' says she. 'I wish, if you see any letters for me, you'd jest bring 'em along.' I see right into it, and I told her to be sure I would; and so I used to have the carryin' of great thick letters every week. Wal, I was waitin' on Hepsy along about them times, and so Miry and I kind o' sympathized. Hepsy was a pretty gal, and I thought it was all best as 'twas; any way, I knew I couldn't get Miry, and I could get Hepsy, and that made all the difference in the world.

"Wal, that next winter old Black Hoss was took down with rheumatism, and I tell you if Miry didn't have a time on't! He wa'n't nowadays sweet-tempered when he was well; but come to be crooked up with the rheumatis' and kep' awake nights, it seemed as if he was determined there shouldn't nobody have no peace so long as he couldn't.



"He'd get Miry up and down with him night after night a makin' her heat flannels and vinegar, and then he'd jaw and scold so that she was eenymost beat out. He wouldn't have nobody set up with him, though there was offers made. No: he said Miry was his daughter, and 'twas her bisness to take care on him.

"Miry was clear worked down: folks kind o' pitied her. She was a strong gal, but there's things that wears out the strongest. The worst on't was, it hung on so. Old Black Hoss had a most amazin' sight o' constitution. He'd go all down to death's door, and seem hardly to have the breath, o' life in him, and then up he'd come agin! These 'ere old folks that nobody wants to have live allers hev such a sight o' wear in 'em, they jest last and last; and it really did seem as if he'd wear Miry out and get her into the grave fust, for she got a cough with bein' up so much in the cold, and grew thin as a shadder. 'Member one time I went up there to offer to watch jest in the spring o' the year, when the laylocks was jest a buddin' out, and Miry she come and talked with me over the fence; and the poor gal she fairly broke down, and sobbed as if her heart would break, a tellin' me her trouble.

"Wal, it reelly affected me more to have Miry give up so than most gals, 'cause she'd allers held her head up, and hed sich a sight o' grit and resolution; but she told me all about it.

"It seems old Black Hoss he wa'n't content with worryin' on her, and gettin' on her up nights, but he kep' a hectorin' her about Bill

Elderkin, and wantin' on her to promise that she wouldn't hev Bill when he was dead and gone; and Miry she wouldn't promise, and then the old man said she shouldn't have a cent from him if she didn't, and so they had it back and forth. Everybody in town was sayin' what a shame 'twas that he should sarve her so; for though he hed other children, they was married and gone, and there wa'n't none of them to do for him but jest Miry.

"Wal, he hung on till jest as the pinys in the front yard was beginnin' to blow out, and then he began, to feel he was a goin', and he sent for Parson Lothrop to know what was to be done about his soul.

"Wal,' says Parson Lothrop, 'you must settle up all your worldly affairs; you must be in peace and love with all mankind; and, if you've wronged anybody, you must make it good to 'em.'

"Old Black Hoss he bounced right over in his bed with his back to the minister.

"The devil!' says he: 'twill take all I've got.' And he never spoke another word, though Parson Lothrop he prayed with him, and did what he could for him.

"Wal, that night I sot up with him; and he went off 'tween two and three in the mornin', and I laid him out regular. Of all the racks o' bone I ever see, I never see a human critter so poor as he was. 'Twa'n't

nothin' but his awful will kep' his soul in his body so long, as it was.

"We had the funeral in the meetin'-house a Sunday; and Parson Lothrop he preached a sarmon on contentment on the text, 'We brought nothin' into the world, and it's sartin we can carry nothin' out; and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.' Parson Lothrop he got round the subject about as handsome as he could: he didn't say what a skinflint old Black Hoss was, but he talked in a ginerall way about the vanity o' worryin' an' scrapin' to heap up riches. Ye see, Parson Lothrop he could say it all putty easy, too, 'cause since he married a rich wife he never hed no occasion to worry about temporal matters. Folks allers preaches better on the vanity o' riches when they's in tol'able easy circumstances. Ye see, when folks is pestered and worried to pay their bills, and don't know where the next dollar's to come from, it's a great temptation to be kind o' valoooin' riches, and mebbe envyin' those that's got 'em; whereas when one's accounts all pays themselves, and the money comes jest when its wanted regular, a body feels sort o' composed like, and able to take the right view o' things, like Parson Lothrop.

"Wal, arter sermon the relations all went over to the old house to hear the will read; and, as I was kind o' friend with the family, I jest slipped in along with the rest.

"Squire Jones he had the will; and so when they all got sot round all solemn, he broke the seals and unfolded it, cracklin' it a good while afore he begun; and it was so still you might a heard a pin drop when

he begun to read. Fust, there was the farm and stock, he left to his son John Brown over in Sherburne. Then there was the household stuff and all them things, spoons and dishes, and beds and kiver-lids, and so on, to his da'ter Polly Blanchard. And then, last of all, he says, he left to his da'ter Miry the pitcher that was on the top o' the shelf in his bedroom closet.

"That 'are was an old cracked pitcher that Miry allers hed hated the sight of, and spring and fall she used to beg her father to let her throw it away; but no, he wouldn't let her touch it, and so it stood gatherin' dust.

"Some on 'em run and handed it down; and it seemed jest full o' scourin'-sand and nothin' else, and they handed it to Miry.

"Wal, Miry she was wrathy then. She didn't so much mind bein' left out in the will, 'cause she expected that; but to have that 'are old pitcher poked at her so sort o' scornful was more'n she could bear.

"She took it and gin it a throw across the room with all her might; and it hit agin the wall and broke into a thousand bits, when out rolled hundreds of gold pieces; great gold eagles and guineas flew round the kitchen jest as thick as dandelions in a meadow. I tell you, she scabbled them up pretty quick, and we all helped her.

"Come to count 'em over, Miry had the best fortin of the whole, as

'twas right and proper she should. Miry she was a sensible gal, and she invested her money well; and so, when Bill Elderkin got through his law-studies, he found a wife that could make a nice beginnin' with him. And that's the way, you see, they came to be doin' as well as they be.

"So, boys, you jest mind and remember and allers see what there is in a providence afore you quarrel with it, 'cause there's a good many things in this world turns out like Mis' Elderkin's pitcher."