

Bidding Off of Maria Fairchild.

There'd got to be an auction, Loretty Smith Wilkinson, best way I could fix it. I turned over more'n a million plans in my mind, till my head felt like a wind-mill in a still breeze, and therewasn't nothin' that seemed to kinder stand out before my dizzy eyes, 'cept an auction, and I just thought the sooner I had it, the better. Pa's been dead nigh onto a year, and there's all them farm tools goin' to waste for want of bein' used. I shan't never undertake to hire my farm run ag'in, and I can't run it alone. Yes, sir, I'll just sell all but the house, and garden patch, and one cow, and my bay horse, and have an auction of the farm tools and lots of old furniture and stuff I don't need. Then, Loretty Smith Wilkinson, I shall begin to feel as though I was livin' and had room to breathe, and opportunity to breathe, without bein' all cluttered up with that mess of stuff all the time."

"You don't mean to say that you're goin' to keep right on livin' here all alone, Maria Fairchild? What'll you do in tramp time, a quarter of a mile away from the nearest house, and them big dark woods 'other side of you? You're hyin' in the face of Providence!"

"How can I be hyin' if I'm just stayin', Loretty? Now don't you go to work and worry 'bout me, for after the auction, I've no doubt, I'll be just as comfortably fixed as you be, and probly a great deal better."

"Well, don't get huffy, Maria. I didn't intend to hurt your feelin's any, but I couldn't bear to think of you livin' all alone where nobody'd know if you was took sick or wanted anything. Have you decided when your auction's goin' to be?"

"Yes, I'm goin' to have it the sixteenth of February, and that'll be two weeks from next Friday. Ebenezer Fisher's jest taken notices to the village, for me, and his brother Abe's goin' to be auctioneer. I'm powerful sorry I can't ask you to stay this afternoon, but I've got such an awful lot of work ahead of me to git my house in order for folks as probly will be comin' in to warm themselves if it's too cold to stand outside all day, that I've too drove to spend many minutes visitin' jest now. Then I've got to kinder fresh up a good share of the stuff, so it'll bring as big a price as possible, and altogether, I've got my hands full. But I hope to see you at the auction, even if I ain't got nothin' you're likely to want to bid off, and say—I've just thought! If 'taint too much trouble, I'd be real obliged to you if you could stay all day on the sixteenth, and help me make coffee for them as wants it. I'm goin' to make a lot of doughnuts too, for there ain't nobody goin' to say Maria Fairchild's stingy, if she is an old maid, and I guess there's lots will be thankful for somethin' hot, and somethin' to stay their stomachs, after standin' around in the cold."

"I'll be more'n glad to come and help you, Maria, and I can as well as not. If there's anythin' else I can do for you beforehand, you let me know."

"Yes, I will, thankye, Loretty; good-bye."

After the departure of her visitor,

Maria Fairchild went back into the kitchen of the large, old home, and began her task of re-varnishing a massive table that until lately had adorned the parlor.

In Squire Fairchild's prime,

the house had been considered little less than a mansion in those parts, and his extensive farm lands were the pride of the country. Ethan Fairchild had managed well, and, therefore, must be a rich man, concluded his neighbors; but after the death of his wife, the squire took little interest in anything. He rarely left the doorway during his latter years, and under the slack attentions of his farm hands, his crops ceased to yield so abundantly as in former times, and showed plainly the want of the efforts of the master of the place. Even the house, and the well kept barns and stables began to look forlorn and dilapidated, and the general appearance of shabbiness extended to the animals as well. With rough, unkempt coats, the once sleek horses ambled along with downcast heads, meekly giving up to the spirit of gradual decline, which seemed to prevail. When Maria remonstrated, calling her father's attention to some new evidence of neglect on the part of the hired men, the squire would say, merely:

"There, there, Maria, I'll speak to Joe about it. Don't go to fussin' over nothin'. Things will come out straight in the end."

But the result was that things became crooked rather than straight.

The fences sagged, posts leaned, scraggly branches drooped—in fact, everything seemed to have become tired and to have settled down for a rest. This feeling likewise seized the squire himself, and one day he too sank into a peaceful slumber from which he never woke.

People said that now Maria Fairchild would likely spunk up and marry Jed Tompkins, whom the squire had disliked for no apparent reason than that Jed would deprive him of the daughter who, to the best of her ability, made her father comfortable. But Jed had left the town some years before, and if he had heard of the squire's death, he made no sign.

Then the popular opinion was that

anyhow Maria would fix up the place,

but when it became known that there really was no money, and that Maria was, indeed, a poor woman, speculations changed to expressions of wonderment as to what she would do, anyway. Then came the announcement of the auction.

"Dear me, Sus!" exclaimed one good

old "jest to think! Maria ain't

more'n thirty-five if she's that, and to think she's come to this!"

"Well," said another, "I don't see what on earth she's goin' to do when she's sold her furniture. I should'a thought she'd kept it and took summer boarders from the city. That furniture's real good if 'tis old. My land! Age ain't nothin' ag'in stuff like that in the squire's house. That's the kind that gits better instead of worse. Ain't no imitation 'bout it neither! Every stick of it's the real genuine wood!"

Maria worked industriously. Before the afternoon had gone, several handsome, old-fashioned pieces had received shining coats of varnish, and gleamed anew with restored beauty.

Loretty Wilkinson arrived bright and early on the eventful day, and if she noticed the closed up appearance of certain portions of the house, she said nothing, but had her thoughts.

"Why, Maria, where'd you git that stove?" said she, as she caught sight of a peculiar object in the woodshed. "That ain't never your show-off parlor stove, is it?"

"Yes, Loretty, it is," answered Maria. "I've got one in there, you know, and this one ain't nothin' but a relic, you might say. I'm 'most in hopes nobod'y'll buy it, for that's the one thing I can't bear to part with; but I ain't thinkin' 'bout it any more'n I can help."

It was a curious article. On top was a mirror mounted like any chandelier mirror, and at each side was a blue glass vase.

"Them held grasses most of the time," explained Maria, "and how many times I've seen pa shave himself in front of that glass, with his shavin' cup set there to keep warm on the side. But that was 'fore we had the stove in the parlor; after the stove was moved in the parlor we kept a fire in it only on some occasions, and ma used to joke me about my sparks; but 'tain't a subject I can talk about to nobody."

"Yes, I know," said Loretty. "You was thinkin' 'bout Jed, if I was you, I wouldn't sell it 'thout I'd got to."

"Maybe I can't let it go, Loretty, but well see. There! There's some folks come already, and Abe Fisher's leadin' in the way to the barns."

The day was clear and cold. Notices of the auction had been circulated far and wide, and many farmers and their wives had driven in from the surrounding towns, bent on procuring something from the squire's place. The kitchen and sitting-room were well filled during the greater part of the day, and the steaming coffee and the new doughnuts found ready consumers.

Curiosity had brought many, not only to the grounds, but into the house itself, for the reputation of the squire's possessions had led many to see for themselves if the house was stripped from cellar to garret, or whether, as some affirmed, Miss Maria had loads of much better stuff she wouldn't think of selling.

The closed doors quenched the ardor of those

intending a general survey of the house,

but the fact that the coffee was served in Mrs. Fairchild's best old-fashioned sprigged china cups, conveyed the idea

that there must be lots of valuable articles retained by the present owner.

The afternoon was half gone, and

most of the things were sold. Dishes,

substantial milk-cans bearing the squire's name, sleighs, carriages, and

many articles besides the farm-tools and the furniture had been purchased, and yet the stove remained in its corner of the woodshed. Maria saw it as she passed through on errands, and thought she would say nothing about it if Abe Fisher did not see it. She had fully decided she could not let it go.

A little later, as she was getting a

cup of coffee for a neighbor, her glance fell on the group outside the window, and she saw with dismay her stove dragged up for display. With a cry she darted through the door and up to the chimney.

"Oh, don't sell that, Abe, I can't let it go! It's jest the only part of my life I can't get away from. You musn't put it up!"

"It's on the list, Maria," said Abe, "and it'll sell all right."

"I know it, Abe, but it's like sellin' part of me. It is part of me, you know," she cried wildly. "Oh, no. If you sell that, I go with it!"

"Then I'll bid my hull stock of worldly goods for it!" said a loud voice, and elbowing his way through the crowd, a stranger took Maria Fairchild in his arms.

"It's Jed Tompkins!" gasped the

members of the group.

"Yes, sir," laughed Jed, "and he's here jest in time to buy up the most valuable thing in the lot. And see here, you folks, anythin' Maria wants back, I'll buy from you, fer my money's hers and she's got a fortune of her own, too. I may as well say, to cut matters short, that her father privately made over his property to me, some years ago, on condition that I'd keep away and not marry Maria till he was dead, as he couldn't spare her. I've only jest heard of his death, bein' on a long trip out West, and catchin' wind of this auction, I've rode all night and all day to git here. Now you jest leave Maria to me, and tomorrow we'll straighten up the auction business."

"What you goin' to do, Jed?" queried

Maria later, as she heard him struggling with something in the shed.

"I'm jest gittin' in the parlor stove ag'in. If I'm goin' to spend the evenin', seems as though a little fire would be good in the parlor. Stove-pipe's all right, I see."

"But there ain't no furniture in the parlor," laughed Maria happily.

"I believe I ketched sight of a chair or two as you unlocked the door,

Maria, and anyway, all we need's that

stove with them blue vases branchin' out at the sides, to make the room look real homelike—and say, we can't git that fire started up any too soon to suit me!"—*Lester Monthly.*

THE GOLD-HEADED CANE.

It stands in the corner yet stately and tall, with a top that once shone like the sun. It whispers of master-field, playhouse and ball, of gallantries, courtship and fun. It is nearly the stick for the dude of to-day.

He would swear it was deuced plain, but the bales of memory crown its decay—

My grandfather's gold-headed cane.

It could tell how a face in a circling catch.

Grew red as the poppies she were,

When a dandy stepped up with a swag-

goat.

And escorted her home to her door,

How the beans cried with jealousy.

"Joy! what a buck!"

As they glared at the fortunate swain,

And the wand which appeared to have

fetched him his luck.

My grandfather's gold-headed cane.

It could tell of the rides in the grand yellow gig.

When, from under a broad scuttle hat,

The girls of fair Folly were lustrous and big.

And—but not would it dare to tell of that?

Ah me! to those wiles that bespeak the coy.

How many a suitor was slain!

There was one though who conquered the foe when they met.

With the gleam of his gold-headed cane.

Oh, the odors of lavender, lilac and musk!

They scented these old halls even yet;

I can still see the dancers as down

through the dusk.

They glistened in the starry minute.

The small satin slippers, my grand-

mamma's pride.

Long, long in the chest have they lain;

Let us shake out the camphor and place them beside.

My grandfather's gold-headed cane.

—*Westway Literary Monthly.*

A Few Thoughts on Breathing.

If I rightly understand the process of breathing the nose and not the mouth, was made for breathing, yet how few people make general use of the nose for breathing.

Perhaps I can best accomplish my purpose of showing how few people make proper use of the nose, and some of the advantages gained by its proper use, by relating some of my own experiences.

When young and strong and vigorous, I found that at some time and in some way I had fallen into the habit of mouth breathing, and for good reasons resolved to break up the habit, but I had not duly estimated the undertaking. With great care I could breathe through my nose when sitting or standing, but when I began to walk I found I could not get a sufficient amount of breath without opening my mouth.

I had set out to overcome the injurious habit at any cost, so persisted in my effort to keep my mouth closed, walking quite slowly at first. After a time I found that I could walk a little farther at a time, and as I continued found that I could walk faster. I then saw that I was turning one flank of my nose, and, cheered with the hope of success, began to walk faster and farther, then to run slowly short runs, till finally I could run as far as my strength would permit, and that was much faster and farther than I could do when breathing chiefly through my mouth, and with much less fatigue.

I had turned the enemy's right flank

and was driving him before me, but the left flank was not so quickly turned; that was keeping the mouth closed while sleeping. I found it difficult to go to sleep keeping guard over my mouth to keep it closed. It is generally considered by people who have not tried it that it is harder to keep the mouth closed when awake than when sleeping. When I awoke during the night I invariably found my mouth open, my tongue dry and a bad taste in my mouth.

It took a long time to turn the left

flank and a great deal of hard fight-

ing, but finally I succeeded in turning both flanks and driving the enemy from his strong position and became master of the situation by day and by night.

I found that when breathing through my mouth I was using only the upper part of my lungs, that respiration was short and quick and that my body was not getting its proper amount of oxygen and that my blood was not properly purified and I was inviting all manner of illness into my system.

Since I have been breathing through

my mouth I have frequently, by im-

proper exposure, taken bad colds that

I now feel sure would have developed

into pneumonia had I not, in spite of

my cold, persisted in breathing as we

all should do, through the nose.

I once heard a prudent mother say

she was always careful when her babe

went to sleep to close its lips and hold

them closed a minute or so and they

would stay closed till it awoke.

How many mothers are there who

do this? How easy thus to form the habit!

"As the twig is bent the tree is inclined."

How many pains and ills might be

avoided by proper breathing! How

much clearer, brighter, and stronger

the mind would be if the blood were

well oxygenized!

If a breathing drill was required by

our public schools law, how much

better it would be for our children.

But, kind parents