

# MY POOR WIFE.

BY J. P. SMITH.

## CHAPTER III.

At the end of the cedar-walk I took up my position, lighted a cigar, and tried to wait as patiently as I could. It was a lovely evening in late June, and the drowsy hum of the bees, mingled with the breath of roses and syringas, coming from the old English garden behind the walk, sent my thoughts wandering back to another evening in June, just a year ago, when I had sat on the same bench, burning with love and suspense, waiting to ask the fair lady who had given me trust today to be my wife. We had known each other from childhood, and during my sister's lifetime little Edith had lived almost as much with us as at the Hall. I remember I had proposed to her at the early age of fourteen and had been favorably answered. "Yes, Paul," the young lady had said, lifting up her rosy lips for my sheepish kiss. "I will marry you, as you are the eldest, and have asked me first—and then, when you're dead I'll marry Arty, if he's good."

To which arrangement Arty—at the time being hopelessly in love with Edith's French governess, a black-eyed vivacious damsel of twenty-nine—cheerfully agreed.

After that I saw nothing of her for many years. My sister beginning to all and being ordered to the South of France, I spent my holidays for some years with her and my father at Riviera; then I passed into Sandhurst, and, after that, I had five years with my regiment in India.

In the meantime matters had not gone smoothly at home. My handsome brother Arthur, destined for the bar, and who was supposed to have all the brains of the family, turned out to be a desperate scamp and an unmitigated fool. He disgraced himself at Oxford; then, throwing aside all sense of restraint and decency, sowed the most prolific crop of wild oats ever chronicled in the sober and respectable annals of the Dennyses of Colworth. Before he had reached his twenty-second year he had squandered two considerable fortunes—one left him by his mother, whose favorite child he was—another by his godfather, besides plunging my poor father into a gulf of debt that eventually hastened his death. Hearing of his critical state and heavy troubles, I resigned my commission and hurried home, only to find him, alas, resting quietly in his grave, and my wretched brother an exile in the wilds of Australia, whither he had gone to evade his creditors.

It was a very dreary home-returning, and bitterly did I anathematize my precipitancy in giving up my profession to moon away my life at Colworth in solitude. Nearly all the "chums" of my boyhood had "moved on" somehow, except my immediate neighbors at the Hall, the old General and his niece; and I think, but for their kindly reception, I should have started wandering again. The former I found in a very precarious state of health and temper, the combined influences of gout and unlimited brandy-water making him a trying companion to poor Edith, who was however most patient with him, and as devoted as any daughter could be.

At first I did not recognize in the beautiful and graceful young lady who greeted me so easily and kindly the child I had played with years ago; but, by degrees, landmarks of old times cropped up, we found we had not forgotten each other in the least. I fell head over heels in love with her at once, and for weeks hovered about her in a state of beatific suffering, not daring to hope, and unable to tear myself away. Day after day I told myself I had not the slightest chance. Was she not the most beautiful, charming, angelic creature in existence, besides being the presumptive heiress of the old general's vast wealth? Was not every eligible male in the country my rival? Yet, I stayed, and by degrees the delightful, intoxicating fact became clear, even to my bewildered senses, that she showed more favor to me than to any other suitor. She had always a smile of welcome and a bright word for me, and at times, when she believed herself unobserved, I have caught her lovely blue eyes stealthily resting on me with a look of unmistakable affection that fired my blood, and made me lose my head for the moment.

One day, driven to desperation by one of those stolen glances, I resolved to try my fate and learn the best or worst. She had gone to spend the afternoon at the Rectory, her uncle told me, but would be back to dinner. I went to the cedar-walk, knowing she would return by that way, and spent a feverish hour preparing for the attack, composing heart-rendering appeals, declarations of eternal devotion; and yet the moment she stood before me in her blooming beauty, with a slim white finger held under her nose within an inch of my moustache, and said beseechingly—"Oh, Paul, dear boy, do try to get this wretched thorn out for me! That stupid little curate only drove it farther in, and it does hurt so!" all the stored up eloquence went clean out of my head.

When I had successfully, though rather clumsily, performed the operation, I fell upon my knees at her feet, and, seizing her hand, pressed it to

my lips, as I stammered out rapturously—

"Edith, Edith, my darling, I love you—I love you. Oh, say it is not in vain! I—"

Here I stopped in dumb dismay, for Edith, with a look almost of horror, hastily dragged her hand from me, and, covering her crimson face with it, cried hysterically—

"Hush, hush—oh, please hush! You—you don't know what you are saying! Oh, this is a dreadful mistake! I—I—thought you knew—you had guessed I—"

"Loved some one else?" I prompted fiercely.

She bent her head in assent, her face still buried in her hands.

"No, I did not guess," I answered hoarsely, after a short pause; "and I think, Miss Stopford, if you review your conduct to me during the last two months, you will have to admit you gave me little reason for arriving at such a conclusion. Who is he?" I demanded roughly.

"I—I can't tell you; don't ask me. Oh, Paul, dear old friend, won't you try to forgive me?" she pleaded, lifting her lovely tear-stained face timidly to mine. "I am so sorry, so sorry if I have pained you—I did not mean to indeed. I—I thought you looked upon me only as a sister whom you had known—"

"A sister!" I interrupted, with a harsh, loud laugh—"a sister! Edith, can you look me in the face and say you believed such a thing? No! I thought not—as she covered away from me instinctively. "You knew what you were doing well—well; but you would not spare your dear old friend's one single pang—you would drag him to your feet, and let your heartless vanity batten on his anguish! Oh, it was shameful! Had you not a glut of victims already?"

"Paul," she cried impulsively—and there was a touch of decision in her voice that silenced me—"that is enough; I will listen to no more—let me pass, please. One day you will be sorry for those words—on your bended knees you will ask my pardon!"

"Now, now, my dearest, my sweetest," I interrupted impetuously, falling down again before her, love overmastering every other emotion. "I will ask your pardon a thousand times, if you will only give me one little word of hope! Oh, Edith, if you knew how I loved you, you—you would pity me a little!"

I had seized her dress, and was kissing its filmy frilling wildly, when her cool white hand was laid on my brow, and she whispered tenderly—

"I can't, I can't pity you, Paul. Don't you—don't you understand you have come too late?"

## CHAPTER IV.

With an imprecation I sprang to my feet, cursing her for a consummate flirt, and left her sobbing and reproaching me for my wrath and cruelty.

That night I went to town and tried to drown despair in dissipation. At the end of a fortnight I had almost persuaded myself I was cured, when, one night at the opera, I saw her seated beside a young fellow of whom I had been vaguely jealous from the beginning. Lord Sandmouth's sailor son, just returned from sea.

She was smiling on him as she had smiled on me, and my jealousy broke forth as fiercely as ever. I could not tell whether I loved or hated her most. The next day I determined to put the sea between her and me, but could not at once decide to which side of the globe I would steer—whether to make for Norway or the Nile, New York or New Jerusalem, when I remembered a commission, entrusted to me by a dying friend in India some two years before, and I decided on fulfilling it before starting on a longer journey.

He had died of fever in the jungle, and I was the only European with him during his illness. He had asked me on my return home to find out if his mother was still alive, deliver a package of letters into her hand, beg her forgiveness, and tell her how deeply he regretted their long estrangement. For fifteen years he had not seen or heard of her, but he gave me her address at their time of parting, in a remote village on the coast of Donegal.

After a weary railway journey, and many hours' painful jolting over miles of wild barren mountain, I found my friend's mother living in a desolate farm-house halfway up a craggy peak overlooking the sea, eight miles by road from the nearest post-town—and a more disagreeable, repellent, harsh-toned old woman it was never my ill-luck to come across.

It was with a feeling of repugnance that I delivered the poor fellow's last request for forgiveness, hearing the way she sought to make spiritual capital to herself out of his very death, and improve the occasion for my benefit.

Unceremoniously cutting a pharisaical phrase short, I was in the act of rising to take my leave when a girl entered, her apron full of freshly-dug potatoes, which she held out to Mrs. Sasey for inspection.

"Mike sent you in these, and wants

to know if he's to go digging for the market."

With an imperious gesture she silenced the girl, motioning her to the window, where, after the first startled glance in my direction, she sat quite still, looking out to sea.

I resumed my seat half unconcernedly, and stared at the new arrival with an interest quite unaccountable to myself; certainly, her beauty did not appeal to me, she did not even strike me as being possessed of ordinary good looks. Her face was covered with freckles and tanned by the sun, and her hair fell in an unkempt mass around her neck and shoulders; her dress was a coarse serge, unrelieved by the slightest attempt at trimming or ornament. While I looked, my thoughts went back to Edith, on whose face I had often feasted, sitting in the sunlight, as this girl was now, her pretty fingers sparkling with diamonds, bangles and bracelets tinkling musically on her wrists and mingling with the soft frou frou of lace and silk each time she drew her needle through the everlasting strip of oatmeal cloth. Lace—could I imagine such a texture shadowing that child's little brown fat fingering the clay-crust potatoes on her knees? I began to wonder lazily who she was—servant or relation of the grisly chateleine?—when my surmises were brought to an abrupt close. Mrs. Casey's improving oration had reached a rounded period, and I was evidently expected to say "Amen" and take my departure, chastened and edified in spirit. I rose to say good-by.

"You will have a charming afternoon for your walk, Mr. Dennys," she said, taking my hand with some alacrity. "Situated as you behold I am, away from all civilization, I regret it is not in my power to offer you even the form of hospitality." When I had murmured a hasty disclaimer she resumed complacently, "But you will have a charming afternoon for your walk; you came from Ballykilligan, did you not?"

"Yes, I walked thence—I could find no car in the village; it must be eight or nine miles at the least."

"Because you came by the road; by the cliffs and across the Goat's Back it's not quite five. Helen, my granddaughter here, will put you on the track if you like."

I said I would like, and the next minute Helen and I were standing outside. I waited for a moment thinking she would want hat, cloak, or sunshade, but, as she seemed to consider herself fully equipped, we started at once across the sloping meadow that led to the brink of the cliff, where she paused with shyly averted face, pointed to a tiny sheep-track winding round the coast, bade me keep to that until I had turned the third point, then to steer inland in a southerly direction until I came to a ruined cabin.

Here I interrupted her, somewhat aggrievedly, explaining that I was quite a stranger in these parts, and would be sure to lose myself if she did not accompany me farther.

"Besides," I concluded tentatively, "as your grandmother impressed on me, it certainly is lovely weather for walking, and you have nothing particular to do this afternoon, have you?"

"I have nothing at all to do; if you wish, I'll go with you as far as you like," she answered, much to my surprise, and starting at a break-neck pace down the cliff.

(To be Continued.)

## NONPLUSED JOKERS.

### One Verse of Poetry Paid for Robbie Burns' Dinner.

Here is a story told of Robert Burns in his youth. Burns was living in the town of Ayr, and though still young had attained more than a local reputation as a poet, says the Newcastle (England) Chronicle. One day he was passing through the main street of the town and saw two strangers sitting at one of the inn windows. With idle curiosity he stopped to look at them. Seeing him and thinking that the rustic might afford them some amusement while waiting, the strangers called him in and asked him to dine with them. Burns readily accepted the invitation and proved a merry, entertaining guest. When dinner was nearly finished the strangers suggested that each should try his hand at versemaking and that the one who failed to write a rhyme should pay for the dinner. They felt secure in the challenge, believing that their rustic guest would pay for the meal. The rhymes were written and Burns read the following: "I, Johnny Peep, saw two sheep; two sheep saw me. Half a crown apiece will pay for their fleece, and I, Johnny Peep, go free." The strangers' astonishment was great and they both exclaimed: "Who are you? You must be Robbie Burns."

### Pleasing the Birds.

A scientist once put an automatic musical box on the lawn, and spent many hours watching the robins, bluebirds and other birds gathering about it. A looking glass put up where the birds can see themselves in it, is also very attractive, while a combination of a musical box and a looking glass pleases the birds more than anything else one could put out for their amusement.

### One Exception.

"I know there's a good deal said about sandy foundations," observed the metaphysical boarder, "but sand makes the best foundation for a prize fighter." "Still," objected the argumentative boarder, "you can't build a prize fight on anything but rocks."—Chicago Tribune.

## TALMAGE'S SERMON.

### "A WEDDING PRESENT," LAST SUNDAY'S SUBJECT.

"Thou Hast Given Me a South Land; Give Me Also Springs of Water. And He Gave Her the Upper Springs, and the Nether Springs."—Joshua 15: 19.

The city of Debir was the Boston of antiquity—a great place for brain and books. Caleb wanted it, and he offered his daughter Achsah as a prize to any one who would capture that city. It was a strange thing for Caleb to do; and yet the man that could take the city would have, at any rate, two elements of manhood—bravery and patriotism. Besides, I do not think that Caleb was as foolish in offering his daughter to the conqueror of Debir, as thousands in this day who seek alliances for their children with those who have large means, without any reference to moral or mental acquirements. Of two evils, I would rather measure happiness by the length of the sword than by the length of the pocket-book. In one case there is sure to be one good element of character; in the other there may be none at all. With Caleb's daughter as a prize to fight for, General Othniel rode into the battle. The gates of Debir were thundered into the dust, and the city of books lay at the feet of the conquerors. The work done, Othniel comes back to claim his bride. Having conquered the city, it is no great job for him to conquer the girl's heart; for however faint-hearted a woman herself may be, she always loves courage in a man. I never saw an exception to that. The wedding festivity having gone by, Othniel and Achsah are about to go to their new home. However loudly the cymbals may clash and the laughter ring, parents are always sad when a fondly-cherished daughter goes off to stay; and Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, knows that now is the time to ask almost anything she wants of her father. It seems that Caleb, the good old man, had given as a wedding present to his daughter a piece of land that was mountainous, and sloping southward toward the deserts of Arabia, swept with some very hot winds. It was called "a south land." But Achsah wants an addition of property; she wants a piece of land that is well watered and fertile. Now it is no wonder that Caleb, standing amidst the bridal party, his eyes so full of tears because she was going away that he could hardly see her at all, gives her more than she asks. She said to him, "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs."

The fact is, that as Caleb, the father, gave Achsah, the daughter, a south land, so God gives to us the world. I am very thankful he has given it to us. But I am like Achsah in the fact that I am not satisfied with the portion. Trees, and flowers, and grass, and blue skies are very well in their places; but he who has nothing but this world for a portion has no portion at all. It is a mountainous land, sloping off toward the desert of sorrow, swept by fiery siroccos; it is "a south land," a poor portion for any man that tries to put his trust in it. What has been your experience? What has been the experience of every man, of every woman that has tried this world for a portion? Queen Elizabeth, amidst the surroundings of pomp, is unhappy because the painter sketches too minutely the wrinkles on her face, and she indignantly cries out, "You must strike off my likeness without any shadows!" Hogarth, at the very height of his artistic triumph, is stung almost to death with chagrin because the painting he had dedicated to the king does not seem to be acceptable; for George II. cries out, "Who is this Hogarth? Take his trumpet out of my presence." Brinsley Sheridan thrilled the earth with his eloquence, but had for his last words, "I am absolutely undone." Walter Scott, fumbling around the inkstand, trying to write, says to his daughter, "Oh, take me back to my room; there is no rest for Sir Walter but in the grave!" Stephen Girard, the wealthiest man in his day, or, at any rate, only second in wealth, says, "I live the life of a galley-slave; when I arise in the morning my one effort is to work so hard that I can sleep when it gets to be night." Charles Lamb, applauded of all the world, in the midst of his literary triumph, says, "Do you remember, Bridget, when we used to laugh from the shilling gallery at the play? There are now no good plays to laugh at from the boxes." But why go so far as that? I need to go no farther than your street to find an illustration of what I am saying.

Pick me out ten successful worldlings—and you know what I mean by thoroughly successful worldlings—pick me out ten successful worldlings, and you can not find more than one that looks happy. Care drags him back to business; care drags him back. Take your stand at two o'clock at the corner of the streets and see the agonized physiognomies. Your high officials, your bankers, your insurance men, your importers, your wholesalers, and your retailers, as a class—as a class, are they happy? No. Care dogs their steps; and, making no appeal to God for help or comfort, many of them are tossed everywhere. How has it been with you, my hearer? Are you more contented in the house of fourteen rooms than you were in the two rooms you had in a house when you started? Have you not had more care and worry since you won that fifty thousand dollars than you did before? Some of the poorest men I have ever known have been those of great fortune. A man of small means may be

put in great business straits, but the ghastliest of all embarrassments is that of the man who has large estates. The men who commit suicide because of monetary losses are those who cannot bear the burden any more, because they have only fifty thousand dollars left.

On Bowling Green, New York, there is a house where Talleyrand used to go. He was a favored man. All the world knew him, and he had wealth almost unlimited; yet at the close of his life he says: "Behold, eighty-three years have passed without any practical result, save fatigue of body and fatigue of mind, great discouragement for the future, and great disgust for the past." Oh, my friends, this is a "south land," and it slopes off toward deserts of sorrows; and the prayer which Achsah made to her father Caleb we make this day to our Father God: "Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water. And he gave her the upper springs, and the nether springs."

Blessed be God! we have more advantages given us than we can really appreciate. We have spiritual blessings offered us in this world which I shall call the nether springs, and glories in the world to come which I shall call the upper springs.

Where shall I find words enough threaded with light to set forth the pleasure of religion? David, unable to describe it in words, played it on a harp. Mrs. Hemans, not finding enough power in prose, sings that praise in a canto. Christopher Wren, unable to describe it in language, sprang it into the arches of St. Paul's. John Bunyan, unable to present it in ordinary phraseology, takes all the fascination of allegory. Handel, with ordinary music unable to reach the height of the theme, rouses it up in an oratorio. Oh, there is no life on earth so happy as a really Christian life! I do not mean a sham Christian life, but a real Christian life. Where there is a thorn, there is a whole garland of roses. Where there is one groan, there are three doxologies. Where there is one day of cloud, there is a whole season of sunshine. Take the humblest Christian man that you know—angels of God canopy him with their white wings; the lightnings of heaven are his armed allies; the Lord is his Shepherd, picking out for him green pastures by still waters; if he walk forth, heaven is his body-guard; if he lie down to sleep, ladders of light, angel-blossoming, are let into his dreams; if he be thirsty, the potentates of heaven are his cup-bearers; if he sit down to food, his plain table blooms into the King's banquet. Men say, "Look at that odd fellow with the worn-out coat," the angels of God cry, "Lift up your heads, ye everlasting gates, and let him come in!" Fastidious people cry, "Get off my front steps!" the door-keepers of heaven cry, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom!" When he comes to die, though he may be carried out in a pine box to the potter's field, to that potter's field the chariots of Christ will come down, and the cavalcade will crowd all the boulevards of heaven. \* \* \*

Man of the world! will you not today make a choice between these two portions, between the "south land" of this world, which slopes to the desert, and this glorious land which thy Father offers thee, running with eternal water-courses? Why let your tongue be consumed of thirst when there are the nether springs and the upper springs; comfort here and glory hereafter?

You and I need something better than this world can give us. The fact is that it cannot give us anything after a while. It is a changing world. Do you know that even the mountains on the back of a thousand streams are leaping into the valley. The Alleghanies are dying. The dews with crystalline mallet are hammering away the rocks. Frosts, and showers, and lightnings are sculpturing Mount Washington and the Catskills. Niagara is every year digging for itself a quicker plunge. The sea all around the earth on its shifting shores is making mighty changes in bar, and bay, and frith, and promontory. Some of the old sea coasts are midland now. Off Nantucket, eight feet below low-water mark, are found now the stumps of trees, showing that the waves are conquering the land. Parts of Nova Scotia are sinking. Ships today sail over what, only a little while ago, was solid ground. Near the mouth of the St. Croix river is an island which, in the movements of the earth, is slowly but certainly rotating. All the face of the earth changing—changing. In 1831 an island springs up in the Mediterranean sea. In 1866 another island comes up under the observation of the American consul as he looks off from the beach. The earth all the time changing, the columns of a temple near Bizoli show that the water has risen nine feet above the place it was when the columns were put down. Changing! Our Columbia river, once vaster than the Mississippi, flowing through the great American desert, has now dwindled to a small stream creeping down through a gorge. The earth itself, that was once vapor, afterward water—nothing but water—afterward molten rock, cooling off through the ages until plants might live, and animals might live, and men might live, changing all the while, now crumbling, now breaking off. The sun, burning down gradually in its socket. Changing! changing! an intimation of the world even infused into the mind of the heathen who has never seen the Bible. The Hindus believe that Brahma, the creator, once made all things. He created the water, then moved over the water, out of it lifted the land, grew the plants, and animals, and

men on it. Out of his eye went the sun. Out of his lips went the fire. Out of his ear went the air. Then Brahma laid down to sleep four thousand three hundred and twenty million years. After that, they say, he will wake up, and then the world will be destroyed, and he will make it over again, bringing up land, bringing up creatures upon it; then lying down again to sleep four thousand three hundred and twenty million years, then waking up and destroying the world again—creation and demolition following each other, until after three hundred and twenty sleeps, each one of these slumbers four thousand three hundred and twenty million years long, Brahma will wake up and die, and the universe will die with him—an intimation, though very faint, of the great change to come upon this physical earth spoken of in the Bible. But while Brahma may sleep, our God never slumbers nor sleeps; and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth and all things that are therein shall be burned up.

"Well," says some one, "if that is so; if the world is going from one change to another, then what is the use of my toiling for its betterment?" That is the point on which I want to guard you. I do not want you to become misanthropic. It is a great and glorious world. If Christ could afford to spend thirty-three years on it for its redemption, then you can afford to toil and pray for the betterment of the nations, and for the bringing on of that glorious time when all people shall see the salvation of God. While, therefore, I want to guard you against misanthropic notions in respect to this subject I have presented, I want you to take this thought home with you: This world is a poor foundation to build on. It is a changing world, and it is a dying world. The shifting scenes and the changing sands are only emblems of all earthly expectation. Life is very much like this day through which we have passed. To many of us it is storm and darkness, then sunshine, storm and darkness, then sunshine, storm and darkness. Oh, build not your hopes upon this uncertain world! Build on God. Confide in Jesus. Plan for an eternal residence at Christ's right hand. Then, come sickness or health, come joy or sorrow, come life or death, all is well, all is well.

In the name of the God of Caleb, and his daughter, Achsah, I this day offer you the "upper springs" of unfading and everlasting rapture.

## JIM HEARD CHARLES DICKENS.

And He Said the Audience Was Very Still.

Jim was a student at Yale in the latter '60s, and so was in New Haven when Charles Dickens gave public readings in that city from his own works, says the New York Times. Jim neglected many of the privileges the college offered to him, but he had sense enough to take advantage of the opportunity to hear Dickens. The master's interpretations were a revelation to Jim and to this day he has not lost the deep impression they made upon him. The Young Women's Dickens club of Bozville somehow recently learned these facts and a cordial invitation was promptly sent to Jim to meet the club and give his recollections of Mr. Dickens. The invitation was accepted and Jim, who is a good talker and not a bit shy, simply delighted his auditors with his description of Mr. Dickens as a man and a really eloquent estimate of him as a reader. He told what a wonderful actor he was and how a strange new light was shed upon his characters by the revelation of his own conception of them. From generalization Jim came finally to particularization and was telling of the wonderful effect produced by the rapid changes of tone of voice as Mr. Dickens was reading from the "Christmas Carol." Jim said there was a suspicion of Yuletide in the atmosphere as the reader introduced the benevolent old gentleman, who had come to Ebenezer Scrooge for a Christmas contribution. He then described the tremendous effect of the sudden transition of the harsh, metallic voice of Scrooge, as that "clutching, grasping, covetous old sinner" surlily asked whether there were no longer any workhouses. "The audience was so still," said Jim. "The audience was so still that you might have—might have picked up a pin." And Jim, utterly unconscious how he had spoiled his climax, continued serenely on, albeit not a little puzzled at the smiling faces before him.

## Passing of the Family Bible.

The "Decadence or Passing of the Family Bible." These words mean much more than appears on the surface. Every man and woman remembers the pleasure and pride which he or she felt in the large family Bible in their childhood days. Remembering this, have you stopped to think for a moment how few large family Bibles are in evidence today? My attention having been called to this, curiosity prompted me to make inquiries of the manager of one of the most prominent religious publishing houses in the city. "The demand for the large book gradually ceased during the last decade," he said. "It is no longer considered the thing to have a handsome family Bible as the principal ornament of the parlor table. In the first place, the records which were once made in it are now registered. The size which has now taken its place is a serviceable one with good maps, flexible covers and excellent print. It is gotten up at less expense, and it is now considered proper for every member of the family to have an individual Bible, instead of depending upon the large, unwieldy volume of our grandfathers."

A bare cupboard always furnishes food for thought.