

THE LOWER SHELF

By MRS. ANNA REAVIS GIST.

I have just finished reading a great book by a great author, in which he tells of a wonderful corner for echoes a corner so peculiarly situated with acoustic properties so sensitive and delicate that the foot steps of one person echoed and re-echoed, until it seemed that hundreds of people were passing; and it was a familiar pastime for those living near to listen and muse thereon, wondering whether the echo would never cease, whether it might not be the tramp of the people coming into their lives that they heard, or the tramp of those gone on before, for some were coming, some going, some hurrying, some faltering, some firm, some a mere patter, patter, some afar, some near, but all in the distant street.

I've read that story often before—very often—and always with interest, but never with a keener delight than this time, and as I laid the book down just now, the echoes seemed to come into my room.

All sounds of life are dead, save the unceasing sobbing of the night wind as it sweeps over the fast whitening world without—it is a very cold night too and I draw my chair closer to the big open hearth—full of blazing red coals, with a wrought iron grate and a brass fender and a draft of such suction that stray scraps of paper, held near, whirl and eddy until in a flash they disappear into the capacious chimney down which the winter storm moans and groans and shrieks and screams as though it and the run away bits of paper were chasing each other, like the thoughts in my mind when the night wind blows and solitude creeps over the world. The flame fitfully fanned; plays hide and seek with the shadows, all other lights are low and I am alone with the echoes, and as they whisper and whisper, I dream and dream and dream. What a way they have of merry making when the night wind sighs and they startle us with the familiarity of their voices; they speak not always in the tone we have latest heard, but as often in the sound of "a voice that is still," one whom we have "loved long since and lost awhile," for you know every house has two classes of tenants, the ones who laugh and talk and work in it and the ones who long ago fell asleep in it and who came silently back at an hour like this and whisper in the accents that we know and that stir the heart, and so quietly that the very silence is eloquent. Which is more vividly present with us in our solitude, the one who sleeps after a busy day, or one that sleeps after a long busy life? Which one enters the holy of holies within us of tender and sets the echoes stirring? The fire sputters and flutters and the echoes answer "which."

An hour ago or more a sleepy little form crept upon my lap and clasped, about my neck, two chubby dimpled arms, "a necklace of love" that I wouldn't exchange for gold or jewels and she droozily said "tell me a story, mother."

I seem to hear the baby voice now and again to say, "A story? a story of what little daughter?"

"Oh of when you were a little girl like me," and the echoes came like a mighty host from the hazy hills of long ago, and I told her the story of the echoes, in which there were little children like her, who played together and sang together and trod the beaten paths of the old orchard together, where some of their sweetest memories, like birds of bright plumage, have built their nests, which through all the years; and how they loved the snow as she does and watched for old Santa with the same anticipation that she does, and she listened to the story of dolls and sleds, candles and cookies, so often repeated, with as great interest as though it were the first time she had heard it; if I failed to relate some part that had interested her before, she supplied it and often corrected me in the narrative. It was as real to her as though it were her own. The story finished and she lay in my arms thinking, suddenly she said "Did you

have lots of cookies, mother and were they always on the lower shelf?" She hesitated a moment and then continued, "Aunt Emma keeps hers on the lower shelf and I love Aunt Emma."

I remember how the tired little face flushed as she poured forth her childish interpretation of life's lesson in which the letters spell "love and gentleness and patience" and the sum total to the problem is a "merry heart that doth good like a medicine." How often by us older grown it is read through a glass and darkly—nothing out of order, no dust nor litter—these things are more to be avoided than disappointing a child and free access to a cookie jar means crumbs you see.

How often I've seen children—mere babies—look with wistful eyes at the jars upon the upper shelf and turn away disappointed for the things they longed for and looked for and that were dear to their childish hearts were withheld and dealt out only upon request and then sparingly and with many an admonition that took away half of the appetizing flavor. Do you know I want to go to my baby's room and kneel by her little cot while I tell her, how in her simplicity she has taught me a great lesson in human love—I shall never forget it—a little child sat in the midst of the wise men one day, and taught them and a little child is teaching yet.

The clock on the mantle is striking the hour, the cold of the night wind is striving for entrance through door and window crevice and my fire is burning low, still, the echoes tire not. Ah, me,—from the midst of distant years there comes a picture—hazy and indistinct as to detail, yet in some respects as clear and vivid as though it were but yesterday that I saw it—an old stone cookie jar—always on the lower shelf—I see an expectant baby face with tiny hands out stretched—hands so small and chubby that to grasp your finger tests their capacity and the echoes grew louder and more insistent as they bring a chuckle of delight which bubble forth when baby hands find the good things within the jar, smiles and dimples form a heart that is satisfied.

A little rumbling and a sudden brightening of the fire startle me from my dream—the baby is gone—by a strange force of mind and of fancy he has become a school boy, who has lain aside his childishness for boyishness, but he still seeks the place where the cookie jar stands.

Perhaps he emptied it when he left, but that does not trouble him nor stay his foot steps for one minute, he knows it is not empty now—he never found it so—it will be filled with cookies crisp and brown, just to his liking, as though some blessed fairy, anticipating his wants, had mysteriously waved about it a magic wand and lo! it was filled.

I see him with his hands in the pockets of his knickerbockers, his cap back from the brown locks that wouldn't curl; the flush of health on his cheek and the love-light of a boy in his eye as he enters the door and eagerly lays aside book and pencil, the stern things of his life. A whistle of assurance escapes him when he finds the fulfillment of his expectations and he feeds thereon to his satisfaction.

The coals slip with a thud, like that of coarse earth falling into a new grave.

My boy has become a man—the season of boyhood is so brief—with manhood's pride and strength written on every feature, but the spirit of the eternal boy snuggles within the coat of the man, whispering and coaxing him to taste and see that the cookies are good and have the same flavor as of old. The thing that caused the baby to chuckle and the boy to whistle and make them happy, warms the heart of the man and makes him glad. He may not speak his delight always, but that makes no difference, it is there just the same, for be it baby, boy or man the heart remains the same, sensitive alike to kindness or disappoint-

ment. All this the echoes told to me and the fire; I listened and learned and the fire has slipped from one bar to another until with a rattle and a last plunge they arouse me and the little heaps of coal smoldering so red and cheery a short time ago, are at last charred and scarred in their glorious fight to scatter abroad the warmth and comfort stored within them by nature's great furnace of power and heat, for warming up this old world of ours. And I am reminded by these inanimate struggles about me and the constantly whispering echoes that there is another struggle going on to warm up this old world, and a part of this struggle is to deal justly and be generous with words of praise and commendation to our fellow travelers he they large or small and withhold not the words of encouragement and endearment that are expected and longed for, as something a thirst longs for water, or by our indifference, some day when we are hungry and long to be fed, we may find our selfishness has put the jar beyond our reach and has left a stone or a crust on the lower shelf instead. We do not waste time when we pause to listen to the echoes, they return to us that which we have meted out, the sound is very like the song we sing—let it then be Peace on earth, Good Will to Men. Listen, oh, ye of many cares, that the echoes may have no uncertain sound—never mind the crumbs—never mind a little undoing of your plans—keep the cookies on the lower shelf where baby hands may reach and baby heart may feed and be glad.

There'll come a time when the little feet will take another path than the one to the cookie jar and the sound will echo and re-echo as the hundreds of people were passing, but 'twill be in the busy distant street outside and not one in sight; the hearth will be tidy and well swept; the coals will be white and lifeless, below the last bar and fire will have given up the struggle to cast abroad warmth and cheer, because the thing it fed on has been withheld and the glow died out for want of nourishment; all this when the child that scattered crumbs one baby day, will have joined the host of the past and the cookie jar stands unmolested.

Brethren Church.

The brethren church was first organized in Richardson county at Silver Creek, four miles north of town, by people who came here from northern Illinois in 1868.

The city church was built in 1897. Elders Henry Meyers, Forney, Messler and Stump were among the early ministers. The pastors in later years have been Elders E. L. Yoder, Burnworth, Keller, Harrison, Barker, Ditch Haskins and Teeter. The present pastor, Rev. J. F. Watson came from Beaver City eleven months ago. Rev. J. G. Dodds was called as associate pastor last summer.

The custom of an annual revival service, is continued at each church. Both Sunday Schools have Christmas exercises.

In times past, the school made a special effort to secure gifts for the needy by preparing a manger, and the offerings placed therein were always very satisfactory indeed.

The thought is to teach the young to give good gifts to such as are in actual need, the same as was this poor old sinful world, when the Father gave us a precious Savior, that incomprehensible gift to mankind. The thought second is, to give fewer gifts and less expensive ones, to such as have need of nothing in the wide world.

If the young are not taught along this line at Christmas, they will heap gifts on their well-to-do associates, so they have nothing left for the needy, and many a hard working parent will be oppressed by simply satisfying the fad of making presents.

At all Christmas exercises the wonderful Christ should be exalted and lifted up before humanity, and our wonderful need of the precious gift should be emphasized, which in the fullness of time came and gave light and hope to a lost and ruined race. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. Let us give gifts to those who are sorely in need.—S. Lichty.

SHIP LINE FOR THE RICH

American Millionaires Seek Privacy During Ocean Trips Between This Country and Europe.

It would seem that American millionaires are becoming extraordinarily reserved and exclusive and they are beginning to object to traveling on the ordinary boats which voyage between America and Europe.

"We have a variety of objections to this mode of traveling," said Harry Payne Whitney, who with a big party of friends arrived in England the other day from New York. "The first is that even when you engage private suites at the cost of \$750 apiece, as I did for myself and my guests, the accommodation is not all that it might be and one has not the sense of privacy one desires."

The upshot is that a number of millionaires which includes the Pierpont Morgans, the Vanderbilts, the Ogden Millses, etc., are putting their heads together with the idea of building a few palatial floating mansions for their own exclusive use in which sumptuous suites of rooms decorated in the most approved manner will be at their disposal. The wealthy American now crosses so often to and from New York that there is an idea that a fitly equipped service of this kind, in which the prices would be four or five times more than the usual fees, would pay handsomely.

Some of the rich Americans like to cross with their own retinue of servants and even now in numerous instances take their own chef, who does his master and mistress's cooking on board.

LITERATURE AND THE BIBLE

Scriptures a Constant Source of Inspiration to Famous Writers of the World.

Direct, but not always accurate, quotations from Scripture and allusions to Biblical characters and events are very numerous in English literature. They are found in all sorts of books. Prof. Albert T. Cook has recently counted 63 in a volume of descriptive sketches of Italy, 12 in a book on wild animals, and 18 in a novel by Thomas Hardy. A special study of the Biblical references in Tennyson has been made, and more than 500 of them have been found.

The references to the Bible in the poetry of Robert Browning have been very carefully examined by Mrs. Minnie Gresham Machen in an admirable little book. In his longest poem, "The Ring and the Book," there are said to be more than 500 Biblical references.

With what pathos does Sir Walter Scott, in "The Heart of Midlothian," make old Davie Deans bow his head when he sees his daughter Effie on trial for her life, and mutter to himself, "Ichabod! my glory is departed!" How magnificently does Ruskin enrich his "Sesame and Lilies" with that passage from Isaiah in which the fallen kings of Hades start from their thrones to greet the newly fallen with the cry, "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?"—Century Magazine.

Corresponding.

For some girls there seems to be a special fascination about an aimless and silly correspondence with every man they have ever met, even those in the same city as themselves. This correspondence is always useless, and is likely to degenerate into a false and pernicious sentimentalism.

There is no reason why a man and a girl who are on approvedly friendly terms should not occasionally write to each other of their doings and those of their common friends, when the two live in different towns, when each has interesting experiences and opinions to give, and when the girl's mother knows and likes the man. But this mere writing for the sake of writing, indulged in by so many very young girls simply, it would seem, for the joy of being able to write to and receive letters from men, is a harmful and ridiculous practise that should be brought to a speedy end by those in authority over the girl.

Addressed the Jury.

A man who had never been in court before in his life was recently called as a witness in a court in southern Indiana. On being sworn he took a position with his back to the jury and began telling his story to the judge, who courteously said: "Address your remarks to the jury, sir."

The witness paused for a moment, but not comprehending what was said to him, remained in the same position.

The judge was then more explicit and said: "Speak to the jury, sir—the men behind you on the benches." The witness turned around, bowed awkwardly, and said: "Good morning, gentlemen."—National Monthly.

Englishwomen and the Law.

Tight-fitting dresses received some criticism from Judge Bacon at Bloomington. A lady sued a dressmaker, alleging that a hobble skirt supplied to her was not a proper fit because it was not sufficiently tight. Judge Bacon directed the dress to be fitted on, and, thus arrayed, the lady stood upon the bench in order that his honor might examine the skirt very closely. "I notice a little fullness in the skirt. Is that what you complain of? I notice that some dresses are made so tight now—in fact, indecently tight." Judgment was given for lady plaintiff for the cost of the material.—New York Sun.

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