Salt of the Earth

By Margaret Sutton Briscoe

AND so, sister dear, you want to hear the whole story of our boy Hal and Wilhelmina? I don't see why I should not tell it to you, as the years when it hurt us all are far behind. For a *long* while I couldn't even think of it with any composure, but now—if I had known that I should ever feel able to tell the whole history to you, actually smiling over parts of it, I suppose I should have felt less bitterly at the time. And yet I don't know. It never comforted me very much, when a child, to be told that a cut finger wouldn't be hurting by the time I was twice married. Pain is pain. While it lasts it hurts, even if you do forget some of the pangs by to-morrow.

In the case of Hal and Wilhelmina, I was doubly distressed by the miserable feeling that I had, as it were, cut my own finger; and you know to be suffering with only yourself to blame makes everything just so much harder to bear.

Of course, though you have never heard all the story, you know that Wilhelmina was, at one period, *our cook*. Time does much for us, my dear, but it cannot and does not spare me a pang as I make this plain statement. Yes, she was our cook, my dear; and while my share of blame came later, the engaging of Wilhelmina Schroder as a servant of our house seemed at the time the right thing to do. It came about in this wise:

Wilhelmina's father was a plain, thrifty German farmer. He lived up the county road on his own farm quite prosperously until he indorsed a note for a friend. The friend failed, and Schroder was called upon to pay heavily. The first thing he did on hearing this bad news was to drive down to our farm and ask counsel of my dear husband; for, as you know, everybody in the county comes to him for advice when in trouble. Schroder wanted to mortgage his farm and work off the claim by degrees, but my husband does not believe in mortgages.

"Make your sacrifice now, Schroder," he said; "don't think of mortgaging. You will never catch up with life again if you do. Sell, and buy a smaller house somewhere in the neighborhood. You can then hire out yourself and your team by the day. Don't spend the little capital you have."

I was afraid he might have offended Schroder by suggesting that he should work as a hired man; but my husband said that Schroder was too sensible for that, and so it proved. Within a week he had moved into a little house not far away from us, and not only was he at work himself, but we heard that his three daughters were also looking for what they called "service places." Schroder had no sons.

As it happened, shortly after Schroder's visit I received a letter from my Mary, telling me that she and her children were coming to stay with us for a time; and the very day the letter came my cook gave warning.

When the cook gives warning in the country, you know what that means. I felt quite distracted.

Then I thought of Schroder's girls, and wondered if one of them would answer as a cook. When I suggested this plan to my husband, his amendment was that we should take all three of them into our service.

"As they have never lived out before, it would be easier for them to start together," he said. "Our second girl has been unsatisfactory; send her away, and turn over the whole establishment to the Schroders."

"That would mean taking an extra woman," I said; "can you spare the money?"

"Better than Schroder can," said my husband, laughing; "and, besides, you won't find three women any too many after Mary's children come."

So it was settled, and my husband drove down to the little house, engaging the three girls that same afternoon. They were very glad to come, and I to have them. In fact, I was never so comfortable in all my housekeeping as when I had those girls with me—Wilhelmina as cook, and her sisters working about the house,

They had been splendidly taught. I really had to raise my own standards of cleanliness to meet theirs, and pretend that I was used to the furniture being moved out and swept under, in place of being only swept up to—you know what that means. My husband says I actually cried when Mr. Schroder came over some months later and very abruptly took his girls away from me. He was "on his feet again," he said, and able to keep his daughters at home, where their mother, who was ill, needed their services. I have never seen Mr. Schroder but that one time. He talked with a strong accent, and was a round-faced, honest-looking Dutchman, with large, ruminating blue eyes. Wilhelmina inherits her eyes from her father, but not her beauty—that comes to her from her mother, whom I never saw but once either. She chanced to hear one day that Wilhelmina had hurt her finger and so could not milk the cows, which was one of her duties, and her pleasure as well. Neither of the other girls understood milking. Knowing this, Mrs. Schroder came over, very kindly offering to help us by undertaking the milking herself. She proved a beautiful milker, my husband said, and I could see that she had been a remarkably pretty woman, but had grown stout and heavy and stupid. That is the only time I ever saw her closely. Even then I was glad to note that Wilhelmina had not the same tendency to heaviness, though I almost believed her beauty could stand a greater handicap.

So much did I admire her that, while she was with me in the capacity of cook, I was so foolish as to find excuses for myself to visit the kitchen. She did look so pretty at her work. You know, dear, what a weakness I have always had for beauty. You remember how long I bore with a certain other cook, the one who drank, just because she had such a pretty face. It was the same way with Wilhelmina. I don't mean that there was any reason for dissatisfaction with her, for she was a treasure in every way. Indeed, she had and still has a lighter hand for pastry and cake than I myself. I loved to watch her with her sleeves rolled up to her pretty white elbows kneading dough or sweeping, with her light curly hair twisting out from under her mob-cap, her blue eyes earnest as if she were always saying her prayers.

I shouldn't have felt blameworthy if I had kept my admiration of Wilhelmina to myself, but my old tongue was so long, what must I do but prate of her beauty to others!

I told you it was her duty to milk the cows; and she had a healthy farmer's-daughter enjoyment of the barnyard. I used to note the little added spring in her gait when she stepped from the kitchen door-sill to walk down the barnyard path to the open-air work she loved. My own Mary was pretty enough, yet I knew that she could not compare with Wilhelmina. It was not only that the girl's face was beautiful, but her lithe, noble walk was something that to see simply delighted your eyes.

The barnyard path passes near our old west porch, you remember, where we used to sit together an hour or so after supper to watch the sunset, the boys and my husband smoking and all of us chatting over the past day. Every night sitting there I used to watch Wilhelmina's feet tripping by, helping to wear the path, and see her figure cross the setting sun. Every night I used to say, "Oh, Mary, my child, I do wish you had Wilhelmina's figure," and then they would all laugh at me.

How foolish I was to do this I never awoke to realize until one night, only a week before Schroder came so unexpectedly to take his daughters home, I looked up to see Rowland also craning his neck around a porch pillar to see Wilhelmina pass. Of course I never called attention to her after that, but I felt vaguely troubled. Hal was sitting beside Rowland on the night I speak of. I noticed that he did not even raise his eyes. They rarely do the same thing, my two dear boys; there were never two sons born of one woman so unlike as mine.

People have always said that Hal was my husband's favorite. That was only because he was so little a favorite with others. He has ever been shy, and hated company of any kind, as you know. "He is inarticulate only," my dear husband used to say, and he always reproved our Mary seriously when she grew vexed with her brother or called him stupid, as she would at times—girls think so little,

Hal's greatest joy was to be riding about the farm with his father; that was enough to content him.

My husband used to say laughingly that I loved Rowland best because he was beautiful; but you, my dear sister, know that was not true. Rowland has always been a great favorite with every one because he has pleasant ways, and is genial and undeniably handsome; while my dear Hal is heavily built and slow—yet good-looking enough in his way.

Rowland's quickness and grace have been of great disadvantage to his older brother, by reason of the contrast. You know how discouraged you'd feel yourself with some one near you always brighter and gayer and more of a favorite, no matter how hard you strove.

But to go back to Wilhelmina. Before she and her sisters left me, something else happened which again made me vaguely uncomfortable.

One evening, after we had all left the sunset porch, I thought I would go down to the barnyard to look at the new Alderney calf, which I had not seen. Perhaps, too, I wanted a glimpse of Wilhelmina with her skirts caught up from her pretty feet, her face happy and flushed as it always was when she was working among the farm animals. I waited until the milking hour was over, for my husband never liked any one but Wilhelmina about the yard then. He said confusion distracted the cows, and then they did not give milk so well. Under his rules ours certainly do give a great quantity.

When I reached the yard I thought at first I was too late, and that no one was there; then I saw Wilhelmina leaning against the closed lower half of the stable door. The upper half of the door was wide open. I was about to call to her when I realized that Wilhelmina was speaking to some one just inside the stable. Her back was half turned from the opening, and her head was bent. The moment I saw Wilhelmina's attitude and her drooping face I recognized something unmistakable. I said to myself in my sentimental old heart:

"I am going to lose the best cook I ever had, for Wilhelmina is surely listening to a love story, and she does look too pretty for anything."

Though I longed to know who was the man, and hoped it was not our second coachman, for he was unworthy of her, I was slipping off softly when Wilhelmina caught sight of me. She stepped forward quite quietly.

"Did you come to see the new calf?" she asked; and before I could answer, the lower half of the door swung open and my Hal walked out!

Oh! sister dear, I suppose Hal showed me the calf; but when I got back to the house I could not have told if it were red or white, had any one asked me. My first thought was to go at once to my dear husband and tell him what I had discovered; but on thinking it over in the quiet of my room I soon saw that I had discovered nothing. Wilhelmina had stood by, calm and just like herself, while Hal showed me that wretched calf. He had been rather silent, to be sure; but if Hal had been garrulous, that would have been unusual for him. Altogether, the only evidence I had of a secret between those two lay in the look of conscious happy listening which I thought I had caught on Wilhelmina's face. This was no evidence at all, coming as it did from a foolish, sentimental old woman like myself. I therefore said nothing to any one, but, watching closely, never saw a word or look pass between Hal and Wilhelmina from that time to a week later, when her father came to take her and her sisters home. Their abrupt leaving was inconvenient to me, of course, and under other circumstances I should have resented it. As it was, far from crying, as my dear husband believed (how little our best-loved know us!), it was the greatest relief to me to see the Schroder team drive out of our gate with Wilhelmina on the front seat by her father's side.

How mistaken I was to rejoice in that sight!

Not two months after, as I was sitting one morning placidly sewing in my bedroom, my husband came in, and, taking a chair beside me, began turning over the contents of my work-basket. You know that he is not what one could call a "fidgety" man. If I find my work-basket in disorder, I know something has sorely troubled my husband, and that he has been turning over the matter in his mind, along with my spools and scissors. No one else ever dares touch my work basket.

"What is it, dear?" I asked; and he answered:

"Have you noticed that Hal has been much away from home of late?"

My heart sank unaccountably. "I thought he was out on the farm with you," I said.

My husband turned over my spools a little more, then said slowly: "No, he has not been with me. Can you guess where he has been?"

I was shaking like a leaf as I answered, "With Wilhelmina Schroder. Oh, my dear boy!"

"Have you suspected something there?" asked my husband.

And then I told him of the scene in the barnyard, saying that I had not mentioned it before, because it seemed such a straw to build fears upon.

"I am afraid your straw showed the way the wind was blowing," said my husband, and then he told me something which he in turn had been keeping from me.

A few days before, one of the neighbors had met my husband and mentioned to him seeing Hal at Farmer Schroder's.

He spoke so significantly that my husband asked him outright, "Have you a motive in mentioning this?"

Our neighbor, who is also an old friend, said frankly that he had, and added:

"Hal visits the Schroders frequently; I think you ought to know it."

My husband shook his head when I urged that Hal might have been consulting the farmer about the crops.

"I think you had better hear all," he said. "I have more evidence at hand. To-day I learned something from Schroder himself. He was walking on the roadside with a friend, and did not hear my buggy-wheels on the soft earth. He was talking loudly of his good prospects, ending, as I came up, with: 'An' den, t'ank Gott, Wilhelmina ish besphoke!'"

My husband laughed a little as he quoted this, but I burst into tears.

"It does look rather badly," said he.

I thought it looked wretchedly, yet, knowing that Hal loved his father as he loved no one else on earth, I did not feel hopeless, and implored my husband to speak to the boy. "If you forbid it he will give her up," I cried. "I know he will!"

"I know it, too," answered my husband, "but I cannot forbid this, my dear. Once before Hal entangled himself in a love affair of this same kind, and I interfered; he has never been happy since."

"I was not told of that," I cried.

"It was not necessary to trouble you," said my dear husband, "for Hal was very young then. The girl was of the same rank of life as Wilhelmina Schroder. Evidently that is Hal's taste, and he is a man now, he should be able to decide. I do not think he would be happy with a woman of his own rank of life. Has he ever been happy with his sister and her friends? They are all too cultivated, too dainty, for him. Hal has a slow, uncultured nature. He is frightened by the refinements even here in his own home. We must thank God that the boy's tastes are not low, as they well might be in his case. Hal wanted to honorably marry the first girl; nothing else occurred to him. We can't drive him too far; he is no boy now."

My dear sister, what could I say? This was a long, long speech for my husband, and he was right in every particular; but where did our boy get a nature that only a Wilhelmina Schroder could satisfy? I began to feel as if he were a cuckoo in our nest, though I don't believe the mother bird ever pushed the changeling out of the home tree and heart, do you? Some father birds would, I know. My husband was not of that kind.

"Let me speak to Hal," I urged; but no, my husband would not consent to that either.

"I dare not interfere," he said; "nor ought you to do so. We must watch and wait and be silent. The boy will speak to me before long; and, after all, he might do worse, far worse, than marry Wilhelmina Schroder."

Of course I cried out at this, as any mother would. In the bitterness of my heart I said a wicked thing; comparing my two boys, and crying:

"Oh, if Hal were but like Rowland!"

My husband smiled.

"Oh, my dear," he said, "Rowland may be more like Hal than you know, and Wilhelmina must have great natural refinement, or I should not have been obliged to go to Schroder and tell him he must take his girls home. A coarse woman

would not have attracted Rowland. It is all safely over now, and Schroder came for his girls, as you know; but you did not know, did you, that Rowland came to me in sore distress, entreating that Wilhelmina might be taken out of his sight before it was too late? Like Rowland, was it not? Careful as Hal is careless."

Sister dear, imagine my feelings; learning in the same hour that both my boys had fallen victim to my—to Wilhelmina!

For the moment I was very angry; and yet, as Rowland had honorably spoken to his father, stamping out his passing passion, my husband was right in telling me of this. It did comfort me to have it so proven that Wilhelmina was *not* wholly unrefined; for Rowland is almost too fastidious. The girl he has since married is dainty as a flower, body and mind.

It must have been Wilhelmina's beauty that first singed Rowland's heart; and then she did have a wonderfully quiet, queenly manner.

I say that I found *some* comfort in my husband's argument; but that is as I now look back on it. In those hard days it seems to me I found comfort in nothing. I could only sit in my room, weeping and weeping over the utter sacrifice of my boy. I lost the power of thinking. My judgment quite forsook me. I could only give myself up into my dear husband's hands and do whatever he bade me—which was to do nothing.

As his father had prophesied, Hal's confession soon came. Perhaps the sight of my unexplained sorrow hastened it. He spoke to his father as they rode over the farm together one morning, and was told that, while it was impossible for his parents to approve such a marriage, nothing would be done to oppose it.

"You are now twenty-six years old," said my husband. "You refused the yearly allowance I offered you on your coming of age. I will now increase that sum, and offer it again to you on your marriage day, with the one provision that you and Wilhelmina make a home for yourselves."

When my husband repeated this speech to me, I was as nearly angry with him as ever in our married life. It seemed to me that he was simply smoothing the way for our boy to run down hill.

"Do you want Hal and his wife settling with the Schroders?" asked my husband. "*Marry* they will, one way or another. Do you want our grandchildren brought up as a part of that family?"

He was right, as always, dear sister; but I could hardly see it so when Hal came to my room, where I was then spending the greater part of my days, and told me that, owing to his father's generosity, he was able to marry at once.

"I won't ask you or father," he said, "or any of our family to be present at my wedding. You wouldn't want to come. It is to be as quiet as can be, in the old church where you and father were married, and where we children have all been bap'ized."

Oh, what memories those words brought to me! This was a long speech from Hal, and I knew to have made it he must have been feeling deeply; so I tried to answer, but could only kiss him and cry foolishly. He seemed to be satisfied, however, and this was all he told us of his plans.

Though Hal did not mention when his marriage was to be, we knew the date, as families do know those things by instinct. We learned afterwards that at Hal's request none of the Schroders were present at the ceremony either. In all but the one vital point he proved unusually careful. His only witnesses were our clergyman's wife, the sexton, and—whom do you think?—our old, old coachman, who taught Hal to ride, and his father too, for that matter. He has been like a member of the family so long that he had the same power to divine the day and hour of our boy's marriage. There he was when Hal reached the church, a wedding favor in his buttonhole, a nosegay in his hand; ready to open the door, bow his young master through, and respectfully follow him and Wilhelmina up the aisle. My husband said that Hal had tears in his eyes when he told him of this. We were all touched by it. But to think that our eldest son should have had as groomsman only a faithful servant following him!

Still, it was best so. We could not go to that wedding, and Rowland would not. He was very angry with his brother. I knew he had yet another reason for this than family pride alone. He had trampled out that same fire, and believed his brother could have done so with as little

cost. I don't know myself. Hal has few roots; those are strong and go deep.

Rowland was married before the half-year was out; such a satisfactory marriage in every way. It was a great comfort to us in our trouble to have this joy come breaking through; for although we thought ourselves unhappy before Hal's wedding, it was after its accomplishment that the real trials began. How were we to meet Wilhelmina, and she us? Remember, my dear sister, my last parting with her had been at my *kitchen door.*

Fortunately, I had little time to think of the meeting. A short while before the marriage my husband had bought a little cottage some miles down the road which passes our farm. He asked me to help him in furnishing it from garret to cellar. I knew, of course, without asking, why this cottage was bought, and for whom; but my husband said nothing, and I could not bring myself to open speech. We used to call the place "the little cottage" when we talked over the arrangements.

I think if I had not had the furnishing of that cottage to distract me I should have lost my mind during the interval between Hal's confession and his wedding. Perhaps my dear husband knew this; he understands most of those things taught by tenderness.

It was hard work to have all in order by the date my husband set, Hal's wedding day, but we did; and when it was done, tired as I was, I wished I had it all to do over again, carpentering, furnishing, painting—so restless was I.

The last nail was driven, the last curtain hung, the morning of the marriage; and that night for the first time my husband called the "little cottage" by its true name.

I could see that he, too, was somewhat restless, walking from window to window and looking out into the moonlight.

"Come," he said at last, turning to me; "it's as bright as day outside; suppose we have the colt harnessed to the buggy and drive down to Hal's cottage to meet them, get it over, and go to sleep in peace."

We did not talk much during that drive; the colt always behaved badly in harness, which engrossed us both; I knew my husband had selected the colt intentionally.

I don't like to dwell on that meeting, my dear. We were received by my boy and his wife; and though it was their home, it was we who showed them through it, opening every room and cupboard. When we came to the store-closet, which I had filled with preserves and groceries from my own stores, Wilhelmina turned gratefully to me; she was about to speak, but either I shrank back or she faltered, so not one direct word passed between us that night. My husband and Hal talked for four.

When I dared look at Wilhelmina, I could see that she had been crying. Her eyelids still kept swelling with unshed tears which she would not let fall. She showed great self-control, was quiet and subdued in manner, yet not without dignity. It was a trying half-hour to us all.

When we left them at last, my husband laid his hand on Wilhelmina's shoulder, saying what I had been trying to say all the while.

"This cottage is your wedding gift from us, my child. May you be very happy here, and God bless you."

Wilhelmina broke down then and covered her face with her hands. I liked her for it, but it was none the less bitterly hard to see my boy, so undemonstrative with his very own, comforting this stranger as I never would have dreamed he could.

I found that my husband felt this also.

"Hal will make her a good husband," he said with a sigh, on the way home. "She understands him; perhaps we have been to blame that we never have."

"Yes," I said, bitterly; "we have not been Schroders, and our friends are not of that kind."

"Our friends," repeated my husband, thoughtfully. "I had not considered them."

"No," I answered, "I suppose not. But there is not a woman in this county who is not to-night considering whether she shall or shall not call on Wilhelmina."

"It is for us to settle that," said my husband, still more thoughtfully; and then I wished heartily that I had held my tongue. But if I wished so then, I wished it again and more strongly the next day, which was Sunday.

Hal was married on a Saturday afternoon, and on Sunday morning about sun-

rise I was awakened by hearing some one moving stealthily in *my room*. Opening my eyes, I saw my husband standing by my bed. I was startled for a moment, thinking he must be ill, until he said, "There is nothing wrong," and added, "I have been lying awake, Mary, thinking over the social question you mentioned last night. I am now about to ride down to Hal's cottage, and, if you approve, tell him we wish him to bring his wife to our pew to-day. I think that will settle everything in the eyes of the neighborhood."

I knew it would, and I knew, too, in my wicked old heart, that I did not want matters so settled. I suppose I think entirely too much of what my neighbors do and say. It seemed to me that I could fore-hear the whispers and see the smiles of our best friends—for best friends will do that—when calling upon poor Wilhelmina, whose manners were nil, and whose English was remarkable at times.

I did not urge my husband against doing what he suggested, simply because I knew it would be useless if he had lain awake and decided that it was right. Also I knew his deferring the question to me was but a matter of courtesy, which he never forgets or omits. Then, too, if it were really right, I suppose I wanted it done; but, oh, dear sister, when Wilhelmina and Hal walked up the aisle to our pew that Sunday morning, and I saw the bonnets turning and moving and meeting in every pew in the church, I thought I should die.

I noticed gratefully that Wilhelmina was dressed simply. She was quiet and stately in appearance, looking rather pale and proud with her lowered lids. She has pretty white eyelids. I don't think outsiders would have suspected anything wrong, but you know there are no outsiders in a country congregation.

My dear husband knew the world better than I. He was again proven right. All the old county families called on Wilhelmina during the following week, and it was far better so.

Wilhelmina told me of these calls simply. She astonished me, too, by saying, humbly, that she had refused herself to every one of her visitors, as she "did not feel ready yet."

Touching, was it not? I felt so sorry for her, and grateful, too. She did indeed have much to learn before receiving any one, or returning calls either. All that could wait. Wilhelmina was a fine sensible woman in many ways. I think I should have admired her immensely had she been married to somebody else's boy. She was clever, too, and determined. When she found that she was a little old to unlearn the poor but distinct English she spoke, she deliberately dropped into a really pretty German accent, literally translated idioms, and so on. It covered a multitude of sins. One forgives so much in a pretty foreigner. This clever move of Wilhelmina's ought to have amused me then, as it does now, but the subject was a little too tender. I had not much sense of humor at that time.

"She is wonderfully plucky," said my husband. I knew she was, and as time went on and I found in her other virtues as well, I was at the cottage more frequently than I had ever thought it possible I could be.

I always chose hours when I would not meet the Schroders, though I knew they were there but little, as they were hard-working people and lived at some distance. And yet, with all my care, a meeting there was. One unfortunate day I came in unexpectedly and went straight up the stairs to Wilhelmina's bedroom, which I had never done before. As I stood on the threshold, I heard a little scurry inside the room, and, opening the door, I caught a glimpse of a heavy figure hurrying out of my sight by another door. I recognized Mrs. Schroder's broad back.

Wilhelmina came to meet me with an unusual color in her cheeks; she was subdued and depressed in manner. Somehow the whole episode made me feel sick, disgusted, and degraded. When I went home, which was soon after, you may be sure, I told my husband of my encounter, with tears of self-pity. He only said, "Poor child!" and at first I thought he was speaking of me. I did not like it when I found that it was Wilhelmina he meant.

"We separate her from her own kind, and are but little to her ourselves," he said; "I feel sincerely sorry for her."

I tried to look at it in the same way, but I was dreadfully sorry for myself. The only comfort I could see was that the Schroders were soon to move yet

further away, and that Hal was really perfectly happy in his marriage. He still assisted his father on the farm—a business arrangement it had become; and as the farming season grew busy, we saw more and more of him and less of Wilhelmina. I dreaded visiting my daughter-in-law after that chance encounter with her mother, and Wilhelmina came to see us very seldom. I am afraid I liked it thus; for so matters stood, and had been standing for weeks (to my shame I say it), when, one day, in the height of the wheat season, my husband came to me looking troubled.

"My dear," he said, "Hal has not complained at all, but something he has said—very little, though evidently from a full heart—has made me realize that his duties are keeping him here with us constantly, that Mrs. Schroder now lives too far away to be anything to Wilhelmina, and the child must be living in a lonely cottage on an unfrequented roadside by herself, day in and day out, except for her negro servant. It is very bad for her. When did you see her last?"

I had the grace to be ashamed to tell him, but I did.

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" answered my husband.

Then I knew that he was almost angry with me, for that's as harsh a word as I ever receive from him.

In the same afternoon I went to see Wilhelmina, and was shocked to find her looking ill and depressed. She was almost repellent in her manner to me, though perfectly respectful. She was "quite well," she said. You know the proud way a woman refuses sympathy sometimes.

I could not blame her, for I had not striven to win her confidence; but I went home and lay awake a greater part of the night full of trouble. In the morning, the first words I said to my husband were:

"I cannot stand this. I don't know what we ought to do, and yet we must do something. Wilhelmina is fretting her heart out."

"You can't stand what?" asked my husband: "having Wilhelmina so far away, or bringing her nearer? Have you thought of the old Lodge Cottage, my dear?"

"Oh, don't!" I cried; "oh, don't! As if that Lodge Cottage has not been haunting me all night!"

"Well, after all, it is a gloomy old place," said my husband.

"It wouldn't be, if you sacrificed a few trees," I answered; "but it has too few windows."

"I could easily have a few more eyes poked in it," my husband argued, "and run up a porch or so. But the Lodge is very near the house, my dear. It would bring Wilhelmina and our boy close to us in every way. It is for you to consider and decide."

I did not need to ask my husband what his wish was. His voice told me when he spoke of our oldest boy being close to us. Yet I could not bring my mind or my heart to consent to that closeness with Wilhelmina.

"I dare not risk it," I said. "We must leave matters as they are, and I will try to see Wilhelmina more constantly where she is."

So we arranged to drive down to Hal's cottage that night as a good beginning. It was a brilliant moonlight evening, almost as bright as the night when we first had introduced Hal and Wilhelmina to their new home, months before. I was reminded of that past unhappy time in other ways also, as we drove rapidly down the familiar road. Wilhelmina had become again as a stranger to me. I felt uneasily that I was to meet her on a new and unfamiliar footing.

Nothing turns out just as we expect, does it, my dear? Why we should plan and plan as we do I cannot imagine, when but one little touch of the kaleidoscope changes all the scene. As I imagined things were to be, I had a little speech composed to repeat to Wilhelmina. It was, as I now remember it, coldly kind, a little reproachful, and all that it should not have been. This is what happened as things were in reality.

Hal met us in the road as we turned into his gateway, and stopped me as I held out my hand for him to lift me to the ground.

"No, mother," he said, gently; "we heard the wheels and saw you coming. Wilhelmina sent me out to meet you. She says she can't see you to-night. Don't get down, mother, don't get down. Wil-

helmina is far from well. She is getting everything ready for me to take her to her mother's house to-morrow for a long visit. Mrs. Schroder was here yesterday, and has made me anxious. Mother, did you think my wife looked so very ill?"

What a jealous old woman I am! I looked at my own boy's face, flushed and quivering, and my first thought was a deep resentment that never in his life with us had I seen him so deeply moved. Wilhelmina alone was able to stir those waters.

I have always been very grateful to my good angel that at least my second thought was for Wilhelmina. Absurd as it was, I resented also that Mrs. Schroder should dare to claim her.

I caught the hands which Hal stretched out to restrain me, and by them helped myself to the ground. Hal was ever slow of motion. I ran straight past him into the house and up the stair to Wilhelmina's bedroom. I did not wait to knock, but turned the handle of the door. It was locked. I could hear a step pacing back and forth, back and forth, inside. It was a sound that made me anxious.

"Wilhelmina," I said, "open the door. I want to speak to you." Then I realized, with a shock, that I had not a single familiar endearing name by which to call my son's wife to me. What I had said sounded as cold as death, showing the tones with which I must always have approached her.

"My dear, my dear child," I cried desperately, "open the door to me."

There was no answer, but I could hear choked sobs, and the footsteps ceased. My heart was in actual pain, what with sympathy for the poor lonely child and with the lashes of my own accusing conscience.

"Oh, my dear," I urged, "at least come nearer to the door and listen to me."

But only the sobs answered, and it seemed to me that I could stand it no longer. I burst into tears myself. "I don't blame you," I cried. "I have been cruel to you, Wilhelmina, cruel; but I didn't mean to be. It has been terribly hard on us both, but now—I am Hal's mother, I ought to be with you, and I can't stand being locked out."

Then the key turned in the door, and Wilhelmina fell forward into my open arms.

Oh, my dear sister, it was not only the door of her room that the dear child then unlocked to me; all that was pent up in her poor proud heart came rushing out.

"My dear," I said, when I could speak, "you must come home with me to-night, and stay with us until the Lodge Cottage is made ready. You and Hal are to live there in the future. This is too far away from us; we came to-night to tell you so." Which was not in the least true, my dear, as you know; yet, indeed, at the moment, I somehow found myself honestly believing that it was.

Perhaps you don't understand my sudden change toward Wilhelmina; I could never quite account for it myself. I only know that from that hour to this Wilhelmina and I have known and loved each other. Far from separating me from my boy, she has been to me as the key of his heart, which I could never unlock; for Hal never loved me, save as a kind of matter of course, until his wife became an interpreter between us. Yes; I am very fond of Wilhelmina (in your ear, my dear, fonder than of Rowland's wife, who is a trifle too perfect for my every-day mind). She is a dear daughter to me, a sweet wife to my son, and a good mother to his children. The little ones are almost overflowing the Lodge Cottage, which is not gloomy at all, but a real sun-trap. There they live quietly and happily under our parent wings, the only ones of our nestlings building near us. Wilhelmina does not care for society, and goes out very little, though she might if she wished, as she has spent much time and labor in learning those things which seemed needful. She was pathetically humble over her deficiencies, yet proud, too, in a nice way.

After that first peacemaker baby was born in the Lodge Cottage, I took Wilhelmina with me to return all the county family calls which she had allowed to wait. She looked charmingly pretty, and was so modest and shy as to disarm unkind criticism.

And what a difference dress makes! I designed Wilhelmina's calling costume myself. In fact, on that night when she unlocked to me her door and her heart in one, I said to her: "Take the worry of the sewing off your mind, my dear; I will attend to all that for you." Then I added:

"I only promise for this one time, you know—just to start you. I want you to learn to do all such things for yourself."

I said this because I was afraid that I might spoil her; but since then, though Wilhelmina is not in the least spoiled, she hardly knows what she or her children are to wear from season to season.

"Still starting Wilhelmina?" says my husband, when he sees me absorbed with the seamstress; but I know that he loves to find me thus happily occupied. It keeps me young.

You can see from all this, dear, what a united household we are, and also how nearly we escaped something widely different. When I think that these dear little grandchildren of ours might have grown up apart from us and in surroundings most painful to us; that our eldest son might have been wholly alienated from us and our old age have found us sorrowing, I am filled with gratitude for what we have and for what we are spared. I don't even now pretend to say that it was not a hard, hard trial that we passed through. But see what it has brought for us. I have gained a new-made son, a tender, grateful daughter, and, better than all, I can look at my dear husband and know I owe the whole to him; but for his kind heart, wise head, and strong hand, the wrong would never have become the right. He was the salt that flavored the bread of bitterness I was forced to eat, and I do constantly thank God first that he has created those who are as the salt of the earth, and next that he has granted such an one to me.

And now, my dear, you know the whole story.

The Kindergarten Ideal

By Susan E. Blow

THERE are spirits seeking embodiment, and spirits embodied, and bodies from which the spirit has departed. The kindergarten belongs to the first of these classes. Hence the enthusiasm with which it inspires its votaries. Hence, too, the fact that no existing kindergarten adequately represents Froebel's ideal.

An ideal is not something dead, but something very much alive. It does not lie in the mind inert and torpid; it moves and stirs; it clashes with other ideals; it sets up a strife of emotions; it utters itself in novel deeds. Like yeast, which goes on fermenting until it has altered the whole mass through which it has been mixed, a new ideal ferments in our minds until it has modified all our previous ideas and emotions, inspired new actions, and, if it be a powerful ideal, a whole new life.

The kindergarten is many-sided. This is its greatest merit. But it has the defect of its merit. Its plays and occupations interest children, and, noticing this, many a lukewarm disciple of Froebel is content to give her pupils harmless diversion. The gifts and occupations develop industry, and hence the philanthropist seizes upon the kindergarten as a reformatory agency. The gifts lend themselves readily to exercises in form, color, size, relation, direction, and position; and when they fall into the hands of one who is rather a teacher than a kindergartner, they are diverted from their higher purpose to this secondary use. The occupations give flexibility and dexterity, and the merely utilitarian kindergartner is satisfied to carry on an easy manual-training school. The songs and games act powerfully upon the imagination, and, observing this, the moral enthusiast transforms the kindergarten into an every-day Sunday-school. All kindergarten material may be used to illustrate the ideals of organic unity and continuity; and when these ideals take possession of a kindergartner whose soul is not aflame with the higher ideals of self-activity and freedom, her practice becomes a hideous caricature of the teachings of the master. Many kindergartens of each of these types exist in every section of our country. The true kindergarten includes, harmonizes, and transcends them all. Such a kindergarten can, however, be created only by one who has consciously grasped the idea out of which the system was borne.