EDITOR'S DRAWER

AN ENTOMOLOGICAL WOOING.

BY MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE.

"NO, sir, I don't think so. I'm judgin' 'em by my own feelin's. If I was to keep climbin' up to a third story to find a meal, and be poked down to the street just as I got a nibble, I'd be too discouraged to do anything but set on the curb-stone and starve. I shorely would. That's jest the way I think these pertater-bugs feel. Kill 'em? No, I know I ain't doin' that, but I certainly am discouragin' 'em. Yes, killin' would be more final like, I suppose, but then I'd have to lug the water and cans and poison-stuff 'way from the house down here. It ain't hardly worth while, an' it's kinder cruel anyhow. Every farmer has his own way o' doin' things."

Martin Pope stood leaning on the garden fence, watching Farmer Esip at his arduous labors. The old man was dressed like a retired preacher from his waist up, wearing a long solemn-looking black coat and an old stove-pipe hat, but on his legs were a pair of farmer's overalls, worn to an artistic pale blue. He held a little stick in his hand, and moved with lazy patience from plant to plant discouraging the potato-beetles. This was Peachey's father. Martin had wished to ask his permission before making open love to his daughter, which he meant to do within that hour, but somehow Mr. Esip's occupation and costume did not strike Martin's artistic sense as exactly suitable for such an occasion. Therefore he only said:

"You ought to use a longer stick, Mr. Esip. Then you wouldn't have to bend your back like that. Take mine. I've done with it."

"It's more trouble to hold your back up, seems to me," said Mr. Esip, after using the long stick on several plants. "Guess I'll go back to my old way. Where's my little stick?"

Martin found it for him, and with grave delight watched his efforts toward extermination. There was nothing Martin Pope would not do to enjoy new experiences and a new sensation. His bohemianism was a true strain that in verity knew no law. It had led him into this wilderness, held him loitering in the farm-house, and made him now look on this prospective father-in-law as to costume and character with no more serious feelings than delightful amusement.

"Father! Father!"

It was Peachey's voice. She was standing looking at her sire with a face that expressed more than her indignant tone. Mr. Esip jumped, and then was plainly angry with himself for doing so.

"I wisht you wouldn't walk so soft," he said, testily. "I've been working to knock one beetle down these five minutes. He's the most set I ever struck, and now I've lost him."

"I call it a shame," said Peachey's clear tones, "bothering those poor bugs. It doesn't help the potatoes one bit, and just worries the beetles to death. No, not even to death. It don't do that much good." She looked her father up and down with a sidelong glance of disapproval. "Father, you *do* look dreadful!" she said.

Mr. Esip moved on to another swarming plant. "I calculate to sometimes," he said, with calm obstinacy.

Martin laughed aloud. Peachey flushed an offended pink that in Martin's fond eyes glorified the whole garden, not excluding Mr. Esip.

"Father," said the daughter, slowly, "you go to the house and take off those overalls and put on your broadcloth trousers, or take off that coat and hat and put on your working-blouse. I don't care which you do, but it's got to be one or the other. I won't have you going about looking like this."

Mr. Esip nodded his head sidewise rapidly and angrily. "I actually—I actually believe you think you run this house!"

"I do run it," said Peachey, firmly.

Mr. Esip took off his silk hat with one hand, and with the other scrubbed his hair over his head, as if perplexed between what ought to be and what was not. "Well, I guess you do," he admitted, pleasantly, and trudged off to his house—his in name only.

"Peachey," said Martin, leaning far over the fence, and half whispering — "Peachey, I've brought home your geese. Here they are, and —Peachey, do you love me?"

Peachey ran to the fence, in her eagerness leaning out as far as her lover had leaned in. She was very close to him. Martin could see every little curling golden hair on her neck and temples. Lydia wore her dark hair off her brow, showing the bluest veins in her temples. It was a shock of pure joy to Martin to *know* in that moment that he preferred the golden tendrils to the blue veins.

"Are they all there?" cried Peachey.

"Every one," said Martin, "just as they left you. I wanted to have their jackets cleaned and pressed before I brought them back, but I thought I wouldn't wait."

Now the history of these geese, and the cause of their wearing flannel jackets, is a long story aforetold, and not necessary to the present tale even in *résumé*. Suffice to say that the safe return of this straying flock had been made by Peachey the key to her favor, and here they were.

"Yes," she said, rapidly counting them over. "Yes, every one," and she turned and beamed on Martin with her blue eyes.

"Now, Peachey, do you love me?"

"Come into the garden," said Peachey. "Drive the geese into the paddock, and I'll meet you at the gate."

She was holding the garden gate ajar for him when he came back, and Martin entered, feeling like the first man in the first garden. He murmured something of the kind to Peachey as the gate creaked open.

"Adam," said Peachey, coolly, "had an easy time in the garden: don't you think so? All his work was done for him, every way. With only one woman in the world, it was easy to choose, wasn't it?"

Then Martin knew that Peachey had guessed far more than he had ever told her about Lydia.

"Peachey," he said, ignoring the insinuation, "do you love me?"

"That's not what you ought to say first, is it?" asked Peachey.

"You know I love you, Peachey," he replied.

"No, I don't; and what's more to the point, I don't believe you do," said Peachey.

"I do," he retorted, warmly.

"How do you know?"

Martin began to laugh. "I'll tell you," he said. "Come sit in the old arbor with me, and I'll tell you just how I know I love you. You see, my mother once gave me a receipt for knowing. An old maid that got married somehow told her how she found out she loved, and it was a good enough test for anybody's use. This was the way she knew: 'Tilly Pope,' she said — that was my mother's name — 'Tilly Pope, when I look up in the sky, Nicholas Gray is there; when I walk out in the woods, Nicholas Gray is there; when I look out in the dark, Nicholas Gray is there. In fact, Tilly Pope, Nicholas Gray is perfectly identified with me.'" Martin flung back his head and laughed until the arbor rang. Then he grew suddenly serious. "It *is* a good test, though, and I ought to know, because that's exactly the way I am about you, Peachey. When I look—"

"How about when you look at—Lydia?" said Peachey, dryly.

The laugh died out of Martin's eyes; he looked depressed. He glanced up at Peachey judicially. She was sitting on the arbor seat, where the sunlight fell on her twisting golden hair. Her blue eyes were in shadow; they looked a deeper blue than usual as she glanced up at Martin. Yes, decidedly she was worth it. Martin revived. He began again, this time with a sweet candor.

"I suppose I may as well own up, as you seem to know all about it; but you might let me alone a little, I think. It was hard enough to decide, without your trying to shake my decision after I think it all done. It's been just like playing 'King William,' Peachey. I swear it has. You know how they play it—asking what you want, ices and cake, or locusts and wild-honey, or some such things. I always did hate to decide; it takes me forever. But, dear, really this time I have chosen. I can't say I don't want the ices and cake, for that man isn't born who could say he didn't want Lydia. But I know I want the locusts and wild-honey *most*. Isn't that enough?"

Peachey turned away her head, but she left her hand in Martin's grasp.

"I don't understand you. Why don't you talk like other people?" she asked.

"Because I can't. Peachey, do you love me? I'm not sure I understand about the locusts myself, but I do know wild-honey when I see it; and as for the taste of it—" He thought he had her hand at his lips, but Peachey was gone. Martin followed her out into the garden, and caught up with her at the potato-patch, where she lingered a little, looking down, frowning at the stripped stalks and riddled leaves of the potato plants.

"How's a man to prove anything to you if you won't sit still? I say these modern days are hard," urged Martin. "Here am I, Martin Pope, pining to prove my love for a woman, and the only thing I've been able to do for her is to herd geese! Now if I could rid you of a dragon or so, Peachey, you'd believe I loved you, wouldn't you?"

Peachey was still looking down, disconsolately. "I'd a good deal rather you'd rid me of potato-beetles. Just look at this patch! I declare, it makes me heart-sick."

Martin stood gazing from the potato plants to Peachey and back again. It seemed to him that his brain worked like fire.

"Peachey," he burst out, "I'll make a bargain with you. I can't kill a dragon for you, because I can't find one, but if I rid you of these potato-bugs, and do it in two days' time, will you marry me?"

Peachey flushed to the roots of her hair.

"How can you be so absurd? You couldn't do it, in the first place. Nobody could."

"All the more glory if I do—and the less risk for you. Is it a bargain?"

"Of course not. It's too ridiculous to think of; and then father's awfully tender-hearted. He won't have anything on this farm poisoned."

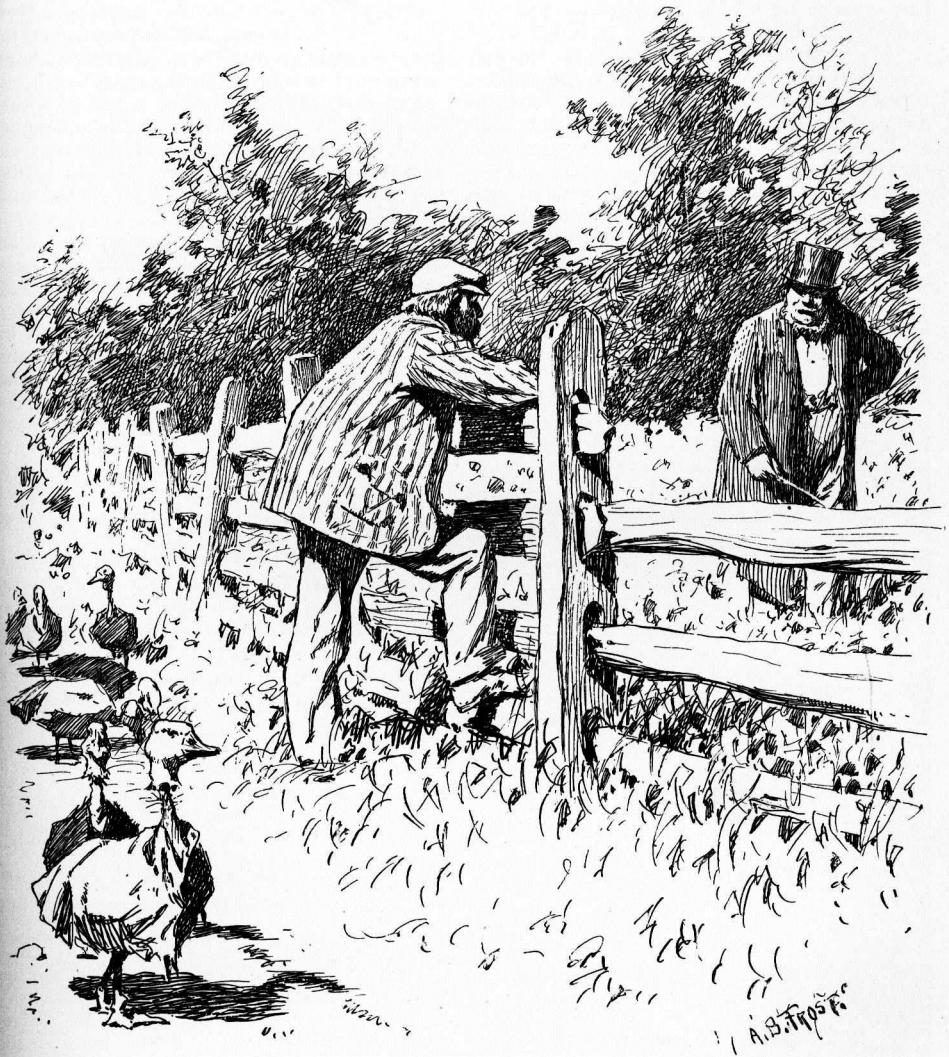
"I don't care," said Martin, obstinately; "if you'll take the risk of marrying me, I will take the risk of losing you. We'll call it a final test. I'll rid you of the potato-bugs or—or Martin Pope by the mid-day after to-morrow night, and I won't use poison either. Is it a bargain?"

Peachey laid her finger ponderingly on her lips. They were half pouting, half laughing, and she was evidently half angry, half disquieted. "How dare you mix up love and potato-bugs!"

"That's all right," said Martin, radiantly. "If that's all that bothers you, you haven't any case at all; for, you see, you don't marry me unless I kill off the bugs, and that disposes

of them before the love comes, doesn't it? Peachey, don't be stiff-necked about it. Can't you see?—it gives you a chance to yield gracefully, if you find you want to. And look here, dear, just in a whisper between you and me and the beetles: if I lay every beetle dead at your feet, and then you find you don't want me, you can kick me away, and I won't say a word. Only, if I am to be kicked, my dear, I shall wish to Heaven that the foot doing it wasn't so extremely tiny. I always did dote on a small foot, and yours is the very smallest— No, no, Peachey. Oh, no, no! Of course you know it. Then why have you called on me to tie your shoestring three times this day?" and so on and so on, until the potato-beetles seemed wholly forgotten; but in the end Martin had his way, and they were finally made the pivot on which was to hang his fate as a bachelor.

On the day set for Martin's experiment, the potato-patch was a most remarkable-looking field. In the first place, about its not very large area ran a wall made of a bolt of unbleached muslin. One end of the muslin was tacked neatly to the trunk of a flowering plum-tree, and the other end to a twin brother of the tree that grew but a few feet away. Stakes driven in the soft earth at intervals supported the muslin walls beyond the trees. The narrow space between the two trunks was a natural door. Inside this enclosure lay rows and rows of prostrate potato plants, each



IN THE GARDEN PATCH.

stalk pinned firmly to the earth by innumerable hair-pins—supplied under protest by Peachey. Furthermore, with the sweat of unwonted labor on his brow, Martin had by entreaties and exhortations so wrought upon Peachey's mind that she had actually lent him not only hair-pins, but the services of Joey, the hired man; and lastly, when Martin, so absorbed in his work that he seemingly forgot what was the prize he worked for, rushed into the house imploring, nay, demanding Peachey's added assistance, she really hesitated to remind him of the delicacy of her position, and hastily followed him into the potato enclosure. There, unquestioningly, and for no possible purpose that her imagination could conceive, she feverishly helped him and Joey pin down potato stalks, running a race with the summer light, and beating it by half a row of potatoes.

"We've done it," shouted Martin, rising, sunburnt and weary, from the last plant. "Peachey, we've as good as won— No, I've—no—well, it doesn't matter." He looked hard at Peachey, and his eyes suddenly began to twinkle.

Peachey made no reply. She walked into the house in silence, and Martin did not see her again until the next morning. That crucial day found Martin an excited and very tired man. He had told Peachey that he wished, for the furtherance of his plans, to have in his hands the control of the whole farm for the time being, and to this she consented the more easily because there was no control to hand over. Farmer Esip, as he said, had his own ways of farming. He did not know of the change of dictatorship, because a county fair had required all his attention from noon to night the previous day; but on the fateful morning, after early breakfast, from which Martin was absent, he sought Peachey, hidden in the cool recesses of the dairy, and announced, from the open door:

"Honey, maybe you don't hold it cruel to starve dumb folks, but I do. I don't say it wasn't smart, but I do say it was bitter hard on the fowls, and hard on the beetles too. There's nothin' that's more a lesson to me than pertater-bugs—busy as yallerjackets all the time, eatin', breedin', workin', trudgin' all the way from Colorado to here, and nobody wantin' 'em there or here or anywhere. There's such a thing as bein' entirely too enterprisin'. All the way from Colorado to here to be eat up by ducks and geese and hens and keats and turkeys! There won't be a bug in that field by noon."

"Peachey!" It was Martin's voice at the doorway. A great pan of milk slipped from Peachey's hands, and a white wave splashed across the floor to Martin's feet.

"My soul, honey!" said Mr. Esip, and Peachey sat down on the milk-bench and burst into mingled tears and laughter. "What's a pan o' milk?" said her father, wondering. "'Cept for the trouble o' wipin' it up. It's nasty to clean up, milk is. I guess you've been in this dark hole too long, honey; I'll tend to this moppin'. Take her to the pertater-patch, Mr. Pope, and show her what's goin' on. It's a murderous sight, but it's mighty interestin'. I don't know how you ever thought o' such a thing."

Peachey stood between the two flowering plum-trees and looked into the enclosure. There, scrambling from prostrate vine to vine, cackling, crowing, gobbling, quacking, hissing, but eating beetles all the time as if life depended on hurry, was every beaked creature on the farm, a great flock, including the jacketed geese. The noise was deafening.

"They've had nothing to eat, nothing at all, for twenty-four hours," said Martin, complacently. "You see, I remembered that there were more fowls on this farm than anything else, including potato vines. It was a simple question in arithmetic and hunger."

Peachey stood staring for a moment, then she suddenly began to laugh; she laughed until the tears ran down her face, and she had to lean against the trunk of the plum-tree for support. Martin regarded her anxiously.

"It's nothing," gasped Peachey, wiping her eyes, "only it's so absurd. Don't you know how to be anything else?"

"I must have worked you too hard yesterday," said Martin, tenderly. He spread his coat under one of the plum-trees and insisted that Peachey should rest upon it, while he lay at her feet, resting also. Joey, his eyes popped with amazement, stood in the plum-tree doorway. Thus they watched the murder of the beetles.

Mr. Esip was right; before the clock struck twelve those beetles were no more; or, rather, so few remained in the patch that it would have been hypercritical to mention their existence. At Martin's word, Joey drove the replete fowls from the enclosure and away to the barn-yard, while Martin himself rolled up the muslin. It was a long white bundle when he brought it back to Peachey, now standing under the plum-tree, and laid it at her feet.

"Here is the shroud of the beetles," he said, significantly, as he bent one knee on the muslin and bowed his head, waiting.

"Can't you be sensible for once?" said Peachey. There was something wistful in her tone, though she was laughing.

"No, I can't. This is the way I am made; and if you like me at all, you ought to like what I am."

"Well, I don't," said Peachey.

Martin looked up quickly. For a brief moment his face was as serious as could have been asked. Then he saw Peachey's irrepressible blushes and dimples against the white blossoms above her. Martin's gaze was fixed upward admiringly.

"By George! if women knew how becoming a flowering plum-tree is, there'd be one growing in every drawing-room."

But Peachey turned her head away. "Couldn't you just—just for one moment be like other people?"

"Suppose I was—"

"Why, then"—a hesitating sigh, half serious, half comical—"why, then—I might— If only," she cried out—"if only I were sure about Lydia!"

"I know just how you feel," said Martin, with sympathy. "I was just that way myself."

There were no more blushes and smiles under the plum-tree.

"I think," said Peachey, haughtily, "that this had better end. I don't really care for you, Mr. Pope, and won't pretend I do. I wish you'd stop kneeling there. Perhaps Lydia—"

"There she is now!" said Martin.

Yes, there she was, sitting in a carriage that was slowly passing the farm-house. By her side was an old friend of Martin's. They both beckoned to him. The carriage stopped, and Martin sprang up and ran out into the road. Peachey watched them from the garden, saw them talking earnestly, and then Martin suddenly began shaking the hand of one and the other, then the other and the one, over and over. At last they drove off, and Martin came slowly back to the garden.

"They're engaged," he said, shortly. "Lydia's engaged to my best friend. She told me herself. She said you looked like one of those plum blossoms dropped from the tree. Lydia never was mean. I always said that for her. Now she's engaged."

"What did you say to her?" asked Peachey. Her voice was forced, but Martin seemed not to notice it. His gloom deepened.

"I told her you were a heartless girl. Haven't you let me do everything to win you, from herding geese to killing potato-bugs? And now you say calmly you don't care anything for me. I believe you have been laughing at me all the time."

"Did you tell Lydia that too?"

"Yes, I did," said Martin, savagely. "I told her you had ruined my life—and you have; that you didn't care a pin for me, and you never had, and you never would. I told her all that too."

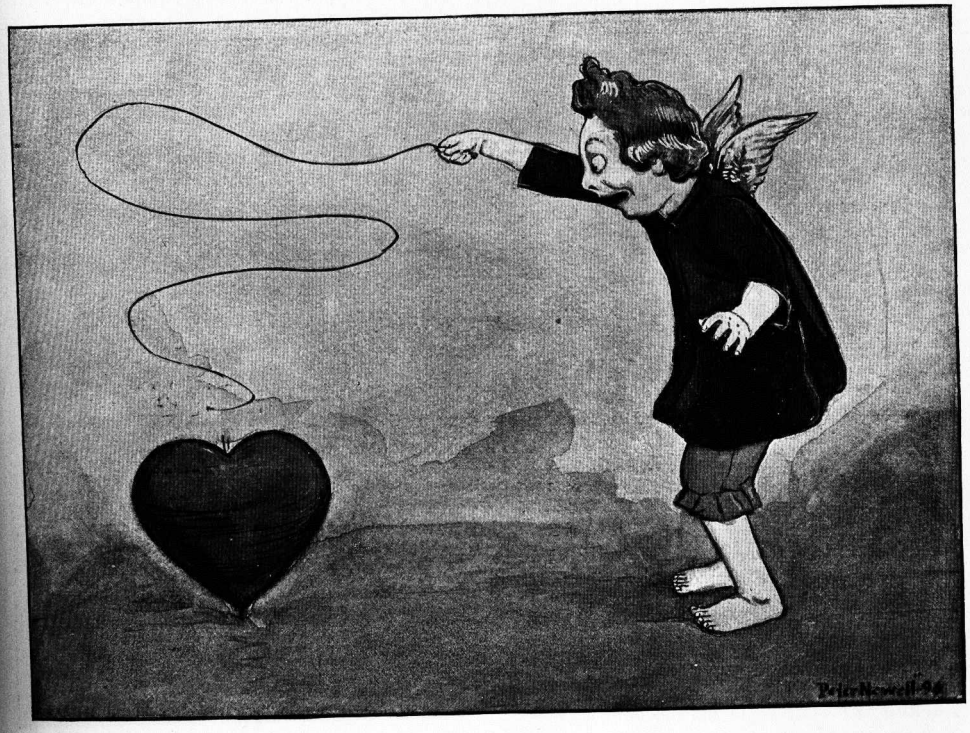
"You did? Oh, Martin, I love you!"

Peachey was stretching out her hands to him with a dazzling smile and fascinating abandon.

"I do love you," she repeated.

Martin turned with a smile as radiant and a laughing triumph in his eyes.

"There!" he cried. "I knew that would settle it! Of course we love each other." And they did—in their way.



CUPID'S TOP.