

Poetry.

THE FARMER'S WIFE.

Oh give me the life of a farmer's wife
In the fields and woods so bright,
Among the singing-birds and the lowing
herds,
And the clover blossoms white,
The note of the morning's heavenward
hark,
Is the music sweet to me;
As the dewy flowers in the early hours,
The gems I love to see.

Oh give the breeze from the waving trees,
The murmur of Summer leaves,
And the swallows song as he skims along,
Or twitters beneath the eaves;
The ploughman's shout, as he's turning out
His team at rise of sun;
Or his merry "good-night" by the fire's
light
When his daily work is done.

And give me the root and the luscious fruit
My own hands reared for food;
And the bread so light, and the honey white
And the milk so pure and good.
For sweet the bread of labor is,
When the heart is strong and true,
And blessings will come to the heart and
home
If our best we bravely do.

Literature.

A LIFE FOURSQUARE.

CHAPTER XVII.

EDITHA BENTON'S CHARITY.

The time, for the first week or two after
Earle's departure, dragged heavily to
Editha, and then, with her usual good
sense, she resolved to fill up the months
of his absence with work—the very best
antidote in the world for all life's weariness
and ills. Consequently, she set her-
self a daily task in music and in perfect-
ing herself in the languages of German
and French, and after that time flew as if
on magic wings.

Twice every week she wrote to Earle,
and twice every week she heard from him.
And such letters as they were too long
of such deep, strong, abiding devotion as
only such men as he are capable of feel-
ing and expressing.

Whether Mr. Dalton suspected the
flight and reception of these little white-
winged messengers of love was a matter
of doubt to Editha. At all events they
were none of them intercepted or tampered
with, since she alone held the key to
lock-box 1,004, and trusted no one else
with it.

She wondered often what the nature of
Earle's business abroad could be, and
what great good he expected it to bring
him if he was successful.

She wondered if it was some law case
connected with the lords and nobles of
that country, and by which some Ameri-
can descendant expected to be elevated
to the nobility of the land.

She built many a romance and castle in
the air; but whether they would stand or
fall she could not tell until her lover's
return. He did not mention business mat-
ters to her in his letters, and there-
fore she had no means of knowing
whether he was meeting with success or
not.

"Please, miss, give me a dime; my
father is dying and we've neither fire nor
bread."

These were the plaintive words which
greeted Editha's ears one cold, threaten-
ing evening as she was hurrying to reach
the shelter of her home before the storm
should overtake her.

She had been out, as usual to receive her
German and French, and on returning
had stepped to do a little shopping, and
it had begun to grow dark before she was
there.

In passing through a narrow alley to
shorten the distance and catch a car, the
above words had fallen upon her ears.

No bread, no fire this cold, dismal night,
she thought, with a shudder, as a blue,
emaciated hand was extended to receive
the pittance craved.

Editha involuntarily stopped and turned
toward the voice, and found herself
face to face with a young girl of about
fourteen years of age.

She was tall of her age and painfully
thin, and very scantily clad. A thin and
tattered shawl was wrapped around her
shoulders, and one end also served for a
covering for her head.

Her stockings were nothing but a cover-
ing to hide her nakedness of her limbs,
while through the gaping shoes, which
had never been mended, Editha could plainly
see her cold and purple toes.

The sad face was blue and pinched,
with such a hungry, appealing look in the
large, dark eyes, that it went straight to
Miss Dalton's heart.

For an instant, as she stood there beside
the forlorn little wretch, her own rich furs
and elegant velvet cloak, with its costly
trimmings, brushing that scantily-clad
figure, a feeling of shame and self-con-
demnation rushed over her that so much
should be lavished upon herself while one
of Christ's poor was in want and suffering
so near.

"How could you look, my poor child!
Why don't you go home, instead of stay-
ing here in the dismal street?" she asked
pityingly. The girl quivered.

"We haven't got any fire at home. If
some one would only give me a dime,"
she pleaded.

"No fire on this wretched day!" Editha
repeated sorrowfully.

"No, miss; and father's dying, and
mother nearly stupid with the cold, and
we haven't had anything to eat to-day."

Oh! gasped Editha, horrified.

"I thought, miss, if I could only beg a
dime of some one," the girl went on, en-
couraged by her sympathy. "I could give
a few cents and make father a little crumb
—there is a handful of meal left."

Editha thought a moment.

Her pitying heart prompted her to go
at once to ascertain and relieve the neces-
sities of these wretched people; but she
knew it was not always safe for a lady to
enter those poverty-stricken abodes alone,
and particularly so late in the day.

She was not sure either that the girl
was telling her the truth, though she un-
doubtedly was an object of charity, and
should not be left to suffer in her thin
clothing—and there was no mistaking the
look of hunger in her face.

Looking up, she espied a policeman not
far distant. She beckoned him, and he
immediately responded to her summons.

"Do you know much about the people
in this street?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; I know that they're a
miserable set, mostly," he returned,
politely touching his hat.

"Miserable—how?"

"Why, so poor they can hardly keep
soul and body together, while some of
them are desperate and vicious."

"This girl tells me that her father is
dying, and they have no fire, nor any-
thing to eat. Do you know her?" Editha
asked, calling his attention to her com-
panion.

"Oh, this is Milly Loker," he said, re-
cognizing her at once. "Yes, I know her
well, and I reckon she's told you the
truth, for they've had a hard time of
it along here."

"If this is the case I will go home with
her and see what I can do to relieve their
suffering. I am alone, and it is growing
dark, so if you will please have a look
upon this vicinity for the next half-hour
or so, I shall be obliged to you," Editha
said, as she turned to go with Milly.

"Yes, miss; I'll see that no harm comes
to you, and the house is only a few steps
from here," he answered respectfully.

"Thank you. And now, my poor child,
I will see what I can do for your comfort,"
Editha said, turning to the girl.

She found her wiping away the great
tears with a corner of her shawl, and her
heart was deeply touched at the sight.

Without saying anything in reply, she
turned and walked a miserable
looking tenement-house only a few steps
away, making a dismal, creaking noise
beneath her feet.

Passing up a flight of dirty, broken
stairs, Milly opened another door, which
led into a bare and wretched-looking
apartment, having only one window,
and that broken in several places, the
holes being stuffed with rags. Upon a rude bed
in one corner lay the wasted form of
an old man, his head buried in his arms,
making an unsightly spectacle against the
too clean pillow on which it lay.

He was sleeping, and a woman, scarcely
older than Milly, sat by his bedside, her
broken chair by his side, her elbows rest-
ing upon her knees, and her head bowed
upon her hands. A small, cracked stove,
upon which stood a kettle, was the only
other piece of furniture in the room.

"Mother," whispered Milly, as soon as
Editha had entered and she had closed
the door, "here is a lady who says she
will help us."

The girl passed lightly over the floor
and stood by the woman's side, placing
one hand on her shoulder to attract her
attention.

She lifted her haggard face in a bewil-
dered way, and gazed with a vacant stare
first upon Editha, and then upon Milly.

"Help!" she muttered, her hands work-
ing nervously. "We'll need help soon
enough."

A shudder finished the sentence more
impressively than words could have done,
and then, without taking any further
notice of her strange visitor, she relapsed
into her former indifference and position.

Editha was appalled at what she saw.
She had not dreamed of such misery as
this, and her face grew white and grave
with sorrow and pity. Drawing her purse
from her pocket, she took a bill from it
with eager, trembling fingers.

"Milly," she said in a low tone, press-
ing it into her hand, "go quickly and get
something with which to make a fire and
something to eat; you know what you
need better than I can tell you."

The words were scarcely uttered when
the child's thin fingers clutched the
money, and, with a smothered cry of
thankfulness, she was gone like a flash of
light.

Editha then turned her attention to
the mother. Going to her side, she
touched her gently on the shoulder.

"My dear woman," she said, kindly,
"how long have you been like this?"

She looked up again, with the same
vacant stare as before.

"What is she said, in hollow tones,
Editha repeated the question.

"We've had no fire for a week, miss,"
she said, with an effort to arouse herself;
"but I haven't been quite so bad until to-
day, for the cold is in at the window
when it's pleasant, and we could sit in
that and keep comfortable."

"Comfortable!"

Editha thought of the cheerful fire in
her grate at home, while the house was
also heated from attic to cellar with steam
and her heart smote her painfully.

"And have you absolutely nothing to
eat?" she asked, her eyes filling with
tears.

"We have not been entirely without
food until to-day; we ate our last penny's
worth of bread yesterday," the woman
answered, with a deep-drawn sigh, and
from her manner of speaking, Editha
instinctively knew that some previous
time in her life she had known "better
days."

"Has your husband been ill long?" she
asked, with a glance toward the ghastly
sleeper.

"Two or three months; he had a bad
fall while ago, and lay out in the rain
for several hours. The fall
strained him, and he has been ever since
weak, threw him into a quick consump-
tion. He will only live a few days longer,"
she concluded, with a deep-drawn sigh.

"But how do you happen to be here?" she asked a moment
after, with a stare of surprise at Editha's
rich garments. It had but just come to
her that she was entertaining a very un-
usual guest.

"I met your daughter in the street, and
she told me of your suffering; so I came
to see what I could do for you," was the
gentle answer.

"Poor Milly!" the woman sighed, and
then, seeming to be overcome by stupor,
fell back into her former position.

She was so weakened by hunger, and
cold, and the fatigue of watching, that she
was scarcely conscious of Editha's pres-
ence, and had answered her questions in
mechanical way.

Ere long a quick, light step sounded on
the stairs, and the next moment Milly en-
tered, bearing a basket of coal in one
hand, a pair and two or three packages in
the other.

"Here, mother, come quick," she said,
in an eager whisper; "help me make a
fire and warm this broth for father. I
will fetch the coal to the corner at the oyster-
house."

She had deposited her burdens in the
middle of the floor, and was down upon
her knees before the wretched stove, and
nimbly yet quietly laying the kindlings,
which in another instant she kindled, and
a cheerful roar came, and crackling
through the room, giving promise of
warmth and comfort ere long.

"The sweetest music we've heard for
a month, and it's in the kitchen!" Milly
said in a cheery whisper; and Mrs. Loker,
as if aroused by the unaccustomed sound,
arose and dragged her weary steps across
the room, where she sat.

But her strength was exhausted before
she reached her, and she sank down be-
side the stove, helpless and nearly faint-
ing.

Milly, meanwhile, has produced a
candle from somewhere, which she lighted
and set upon the mantle over the stove.
"A little of this mother," the child
said, springing to her feet and putting
the pail to her blue lips.

The woman eagerly grasped it and
swallowed a few mouthfuls of the oyster
broth which it contained.

"Poor mother!" Milly said, pityingly.
"I know you feel as if the bottom had
dropped out of your stomach. I did, and
I couldn't help sobbing a little on the
way home. Now eat this."

Oh! gasped Editha, horrified.

"I thought, miss, if I could only beg a
dime of some one," the girl went on, en-
couraged by her sympathy. "I could give
a few cents and make father a little crumb
—there is a handful of meal left."

Editha thought a moment.

Her pitying heart prompted her to go
at once to ascertain and relieve the neces-
sities of these wretched people; but she
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enter those poverty-stricken abodes alone,
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She was not sure either that the girl
was telling her the truth, though she un-
doubtedly was an object of charity, and
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Looking up, she espied a policeman not
far distant. She beckoned him, and he
immediately responded to her summons.

"Do you know much about the people
in this street?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; I know that they're a
miserable set, mostly," he returned,
politely touching his hat.

"Miserable—how?"

"Why, so poor they can hardly keep
soul and body together, while some of
them are desperate and vicious."

The sick man now stirred and coughed
feebly, then becoming aware that some-
thing unusual was transpiring, he opened
his sunken eyes and looked around.

Editha, who had turned toward him, was
moved, and who looked like some fair,
beautiful creature from another sphere, as
she stood there with the flickering
light falling full upon her face, her gold-
den hair, and rich robes.

The man no sooner saw her than an ex-
pression of recognition and fear stole over
his features.

"She has come! She has hunted me
down at last!" he cried, in hollow tones,
and shrinking further down in the bed,
but his eyes still fastened as if by
magnetism upon Editha.

"Father," cried Milly, cheerfully, "I'll
have something nice for you in a mo-
ment."

"No, no; don't let them take me away
to jail; I ain't able to go to prison," he
moaned, feebly, and trembling as with
fear.

His wife hastened to his side.

"No, John; no one shall disturb or
harm you," she said, soothingly. "His
mind is weak, when he first wakes,
she continued, turning to Editha.

"No, my mind isn't weak," the man re-
plied, impatiently. "I know her and she's
found me at last; and, raising his
emaciated hand, he pointed with one long
bony finger at their visitor.

"John," he said, "you do not know
the lady; she is a stranger, who came
with Milly to help us," returned his wife,
trying to quiet him.

"She's found me out at last," he re-
sponded, his eyes still fixed upon Editha.
"She's the rich chap's daughter, and she
wants to know what I've done for the
last four years ago. She was asleep when
we went into her room and stole her
trinkets; but she looked so beautiful that
I never forgotten her face. I tried to
make Tom leave her bracelets and rings,
but he wouldn't. It's Miss Dalton, Maria,
and I tell you she's come to send me to
prison."

A shudder finished the sentence more
impressively than words could have done,
and then, without taking any further
notice of her strange visitor, she relapsed
into her former indifference and position.

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"Yes, miss; I know that they're a
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"Why, so poor they can hardly keep
soul and body together, while some of
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"This girl tells me that her father is
dying, and they have no fire, nor any-
thing to eat. Do you know her?" Editha
asked, calling his attention to her com-
panion.

"Oh, this is Milly Loker," he said, re-
cognizing her at once. "Yes, I know her
well, and I reckon she's told you the
truth, for they've had a hard time of
it along here."

"You look very ill, sir," she answered
gently.

"What's become of that young chap
who was sentenced for that robbery?"
he demanded abruptly, after a moment.

"He is in Europe now,"

"He had true grit in him; he never
wincing nor showed the white feather
once during the trial," he said, in an
admiring tone.

"How do you know?" asked Editha,
in surprise.

"Tom Drake and I sat by and heard
the whole thing."

"You did?" she cried out in pain.
"How could you?"

Only to think of it; the real criminals
so near to justice and Earle convicted
instead. It was horrible!

"Yes, we heard the case clear through;
we heard the sentence passed upon him;
and he stood up so proud, and calm, and
handsome, and bore it without a whim-
per."

"How could you?" Editha again
asked, reproachfully.

"I don't know, Miss Dalton, but folks
get hardened to almost anything now-
days," he replied, sighing. "It was
cheap, risky business for us to sit there,
with some of those very diamonds and
trinkets hidden away on our persons,
and let another man be tried for what
we had done."

Editha shuddered.

"I must confess," he went on, "that
I never felt so mean in all my life as
when I saw him turn white about the
mouth when the jury brought in their
verdict; and then, when you jumped up
so brave and eager, and declared he was
not guilty, was so near confessing the
whole thing that Tom laid a heavy hand
on me and told me, with a look in his
eye that meant business, that he'd kill
me on the spot if I made so much as a
sign. Of course, I did not dare to move
after that; he went on, and with a de-
precating look into the fair girl's re-
proachful eyes."

"But there is such a thing as turning
State's evidence," Editha said quickly.

"I thought of that, miss, and I know
Tom suspected me, too, for he dogged
me all the time; and then, I'd been
troubled in so many other things, I should
probably have got deeper into the mire."

We reasoned that they would be easy
with the young chap, and only have a
short sentence—when, if they'd caught
us, we'd have had ten or fifteen years
for being old hands at the business."

"It was a wicked, cruel thing to do,
to let an innocent man suffer as he suf-
fered!" Editha exclaimed, forgetting for
a moment, in her indignation, that she
was speaking to a dying man.

"I know it—I see it now, miss, and
I've been afraid to die with that on my
mind; perhaps, if I confess the whole,
I shall feel easier. I'll tell you the
whole story, if you like," he returned,
humbly.

"Yes, do," she cried, eagerly. "It
can do no harm to confess it now, and
it will be an act of justice to the in-
nocent—it will clear Mr. Wayne from the
disgrace that otherwise must always
rest upon him."

"Wayne! Yes, that was his name.
What was the other? It was a sort of
high-sounding one, if I remember right,"
he asked.

"Earle Wayne was the name," Editha
replied, with a rising flush as she pro-
nounced it.

Whether it was "high-sounding" or
not, it was the dearest name in all the
world to her, and she could not speak it
without a thrill.

"He was a charitable friend of yours,
wasn't he?" he inquired, with a quick,
searching look into the glowing face.

"Yes, but I am ready to hear your
story now."

She did not deem it at all necessary
to enter into the particulars of her
relationship with Earle for his benefit.

"Well, as you say, it can do no harm
to confess it now, and Tom Drake can't
hurt me either—nobody will dare touch
a dying man, though he did swear he'd
kill me if I ever said a word of it. I
know he meant what he said; and, miss,
though I've been driven to stealing for
a living, yet I always loved my wife and
child."

He paused abruptly and glanced at
those two faithful ones—the only ones
in all the world who cared that he was
dying, and who would miss him when
he was dead.

"It's a terrible torture to me lately,"
he said, with a gasp, "to see that I
went on, with emotion, "to see that I
going cold and hungry, taking the bread
from their own mouths to keep life a
little longer in my worthless body; but,
miss, folks that are down in the world
and driven into the corner can love just
as strong as those who never knew a
want."

"Indeed, I do not doubt it," Editha
said, feeling a deep pity for him, not-<