

Literature, &c.

The American Magazines.

From the Lady's Book.
THE STRAWBERRY WOMAN.

BY T. S. ARTHUR.

‘STRAWB’REES! STRAWB’REES!’ cried a poorly clad, tired looking woman, about eleven o’clock one sultry June morning. She was passing a handsome house in Walnut Street, into the windows of which she looked earnestly, in the hope of seeing the face of a customer. She did not look in vain, for the shrill sound of her voice brought forward a lady, dressed in a silk morning-wrapping, who beckoned her to stop. The woman lifted the heavy tray from her head, and placing it upon the door step, sat wearily down.

‘What’s the price of your strawberries?’ asked the lady, as she came to the door.

‘Ten cents a box, madam. They are right fresh.’

‘Ten cents! I can’t give ten cents for strawberries. It’s too much.’

‘You can’t get such strawberries as these for less, madam,’ said the woman. ‘I got a levy a box for them yesterday.’

‘Then you got too much, that’s all I have to say. I never pay such prices. I bought strawberries in market yesterday, just as good as yours, for eight cents a box.’

‘I don’t know how they do to sell them at that price,’ returned the woman. ‘Mine cost nearly eight cents, and ought to bring me at least twelve. But I am willing to take ten, so that I can sell out quickly. It’s a very hot day.’ And the woman wiped the perspiration from her glowing face.

‘No, I won’t pay ten cents,’ said the lady coldly. ‘I’ll give you forty cents for five quarts, and nothing more.’

‘But, madam, they cost me within a trifle of eight cents a quart.’

‘I can’t help that. You paid too much for them, and this must be your loss, not mine, if I buy your strawberries. I never pay for other people’s mistakes. I understand the use of money much better than that.’

The poor woman did not feel very well. The day was unusually hot and sultry, and her tray felt heavier, and tired her more than usual. Five boxes would lighten it, and if she sold her berries at eight cents, she would clear two cents and a half, and that brought her something.

‘I’ll tell you what I will do,’ she said, after thinking a few moments; ‘I don’t feel as well as usual to-day, and my tray is heavy. Five boxes sold will be something. You shall have them at nine cents. They cost me seven and a half, and I am sure it’s worth a cent and a half to cry them about the streets such hot weather as this.’

‘I have told you, my good woman, exactly what I will do,’ said the customer, with dignity. ‘If you are willing to take what I offer you, say so; if not, we needn’t stand here any longer.’

‘Well, I suppose you will have to take them,’ replied the strawberry woman, seeing that there was no hope of doing better; ‘but it’s too little.’

‘It’s enough,’ said the lady, as she turned to call a servant.

Five boxes of fine large strawberries were received, and forty cents paid for them. The lady re-entered the parlour, pleased at her good bargain, while the poor woman turned from the door sad and disheartened. She walked nearly the distance of a square before she could trust her voice to utter her monotonous cry of ‘Strawb’rees! Strawb’rees!’

An hour afterward, a friend called upon Mrs Mier, the lady who bought the strawberries. After talking about various matters interesting to housekeepers, Mrs Mier said—‘How much did you pay for strawberries this morning?’

‘Ten cents.’

‘You paid too much. I bought them for eight.’

‘For eight! were they good ones?’

‘Step into the dining room and I will show them to you.’

The ladies did so, when Mrs Mier displayed her large, red berries, which were really much finer than she had at first supposed them to be.

‘You didn’t get them for eight cents,’ remarked the visitor incredulously.

‘Yes, I did. I paid forty cents for five quarts.’

‘While I paid fifty for some not so good.’

‘I suppose you paid just what you were asked?’

‘Yes, I always do that. I buy from one woman during the season, who agrees to furnish me at the regular market price.’

‘Which you will always find to be two or three cents above what you can get them in the market for.’

‘You always buy in market.’

‘I bought these from a woman at the door.’

‘Did she only ask eight cents for them?’

‘Oh no! she asked ten cents, and pretended that she got twelve and a half for the same quality of berries yesterday. But I never give these people what they ask.’

‘Well, I never can find it in my heart to ask a poor, tired looking woman at my door, to take a cent less for her fruit than she asks me. A cent or two, while it is of little account to me, must be of great importance to her.’

‘You are a very poor economist, I see,’ said Mrs Mier. ‘If that is the way you deal

with every one, your husband no doubt finds his expense account a very serious item.’

‘I don’t know about that. He never complains. He allows me a certain sum every week to keep the house, and find my own and the children’s clothes; and so far from ever calling on him for more, I always have fifty or one hundred dollars lying by me.’

‘You must have a precious large allowance then, considering your want of economy in paying everybody just what they ask for their things.’

‘Oh, no! I don’t do that exactly, Mrs Mier. If I consider the price of a thing too high, I don’t buy it.’

‘You paid too high for your strawberries to-day.’

‘Perhaps I did; although I am by no means certain.’

‘You can judge for yourself. Mine cost but eight cents, and you own that they are superior to yours at ten cents.’

‘Still, yours may have been too cheap, instead of mine too dear.’

‘Too cheap! That is funny! I never saw anything too cheap in my life. The great trouble is that every thing is too dear. What do you mean by too cheap?’

‘The person who sold them to you may not have made profit enough upon them to pay for her time and labour. If this were the case, she sold them to you too cheap.’

‘Suppose she paid too high for them? Is the purchaser to pay for her error?’

‘Whether she did so it would be hard to tell; and even if she had made such a mistake, I think it would be more just and humane to pay her a price that would give her a fair profit, instead of taking from her the means of buying bread for her children. At least this is my way of reasoning.’

‘And a precious lot of money it must take to support such a system of reasoning. But how much, pray, do you have a week to keep the family? I am curious to know.’

‘Thirty-five dollars.’

‘Thirty-five dollars! You are jesting.’

‘Oh, no! that is exactly what I receive, and, as I have said, I find the sum ample.’

‘Well, I receive fifty dollars a week,’ said Mrs Mier, ‘and am forever calling on my husband to settle some bill or other for me. And yet I never pay the exorbitant prices asked for everybody for every thing. I am strictly economical in my family. While other people pay their domestics a dollar and a half and two dollars a week, I give but a dollar and a quarter each to my cook and chambermaid, and require the chambermaid to help the washerwoman on Mondays. Nothing is wasted in kitchen, for I take care, in marketing, not to allow room for waste. I don’t know how it is that you save money on thirty-five dollars with your system, while I find fifty dollars inadequate with my system.’

The exact difference in the two systems will be clearly understood by the reader, when he is informed that although Mrs Mier never paid anybody as much as was at first asked for an article, and was always talking about economy and try to practise it, by withholding from others what was justly their due, as in the case of the strawberry woman, yet she was a very extravagant person, and spared no money in gratifying her own pride. Mrs Gilman, her visitor, was on the contrary, really economical, because she was moderate in all her desires, and was usually as well satisfied with an article of dress or furniture that cost ten or twenty dollars, as Mrs Mier was with one that cost forty or fifty dollars.

In little things, the former was not so particular as to infringe the rights of others, while in larger matters she was careful not to run into extravagance in order to gratify her own or children’s pride and vanity, while the other pursued a course directly opposite.

Mrs Gilman was not so much dissatisfied, on reflection, about the price she had paid for her strawberries, as she had felt at first. ‘I would rather pay these poor creatures two cents a quart too much than too little,’ she said to herself, ‘dear knows, they earn their money hard enough, and get but a scanty portion after all.’

Although the tray of the poor strawberry-woman, when she passed from the presence of Mrs Mier, was lighter by five boxes, her heart was heavier, and that made her steps more weary than before. The next place at which she stopped, she found the same disposition to beat her down in her price.

‘I’ll give you nine cents, and take four boxes,’ said the lady.

‘Indeed, madam, that is too little,’ replied the woman, ‘ten cents is the lowest at which I can sell them and make even a reasonable profit.’

‘Well, say thirty-seven and a-half for four boxes, and I will take them. It is only two cents and a-half less than you ask for them.’

‘Give me a tip, ma’am!—there comes the candy-man!’ exclaimed a little fellow, pressing up the side of the lady. ‘Quick, ma’am!—Here, candy-man!’ calling after an old man with a tin cylinder under his arm, that looked something like an ice-cream freezer. The lady drew out her purse, and searched among its contents for her small coin her child wanted.

‘I haven’t anything less than a levy,’ she at length said.

‘Oh, well, he can change it. Candy-man, you can change a levy?’

By this time the ‘candy-man’ stood smiling beside the strawberry-woman. As he was counting out the tip’s worth of candy, the child spoke up in an earnest voice, and said—‘Get a levy’s worth, mother, do, won’t you? Cousin Lu’s coming to see us to-morrow.’

‘Let him have a levy’s worth, candy-man. He’s such a rogue I can’t resist him,’ responded the mother. The candy was counted out, and the levy paid, when the man retired in his usual good humour.

‘Shall I take these strawberries for thirty-seven and a-half cents?’ said the lady, the smile fading from her face. ‘It is all I am willing to give.’

‘If you won’t pay any more, I mustn’t stand for two cents and a-half,’ replied the woman; ‘although they would nearly buy a loaf of bread for the children,’ she mentally added.

The four boxes were sold for the sum offered, and the woman lifted the tray upon her head, and moved on again. The sun shone out still hotter and hotter as the day advanced. Large beads of perspiration rolled from the throbbing temples of the strawberry-woman, as she passed wearily up one street and down another, crying her fruit at the top of her voice. At length all were sold but five boxes, and now it was one o’clock. Long before this she ought to have been at home. Faint from over exertion, she lifted her tray from her head, and placing it upon a door step, sat down to rest. As she sat thus a lady came up, and paused at the door of the house as if about to enter.

‘You look tired, my good woman,’ she said kindly ‘This is a very hot day for such hard work as yours. How do you sell your strawberries?’

‘I ought to have ten cents for them, but nobody seems willing to give ten cents to-day, although they are very fine and cost me as much as some I have got twelve and a half for.’

‘How many boxes have you?’

‘Five ma’am.’

‘They are very fine and enough,’ said the lady, stooping down and examining them; and well worth ten cents.—‘I’ll take them.’

‘Thanky, ma’am. I was afraid I should have to take them home,’ said the woman, her heart bounding up lightly.

The lady rung the bell, for it was at her door that the tired strawberry-woman had stopped to rest herself. While she was waiting for the door to be opened, the lady took from her purse the money for the strawberries, and handing it to the woman, said, ‘Here is your money. Shall I tell the servant to bring you a glass of cool water? you are hot and tired.’

‘If you please, ma’am,’ said the woman, with a grateful look.

The water was sent out by the servant who was to receive the strawberries, and the tired woman drank it eagerly. Its refreshing coolness flowed through every vein, and when she took up her tray to return home, both heart and step were lighter.

The lady, whose benevolent feelings had prompted her to the performance of this little act of kindness, could not help remembering the woman’s grateful look. She had not done much—not more than it was every one’s duty to do; but the recollection of even that was pleasant, far more pleasant than could possibly have been Mrs Mier’s self gratulations at having saved ten cents on her purchase of five boxes of strawberries, notwithstanding the assurance of the poor woman who vended them, at the reduced rate, her profit on the whole would only be two cents and a-half.

After dinner Mrs Mier went out and spent thirty dollars in purchasing jewelry for her eldest daughter, a young lady not yet eighteen years of age. That evening, at the tea-table, the strawberries were highly commended as being the largest and most delicious in flavour of any they had yet had; in reply to which Mrs Mier stated, with an air of peculiar satisfaction, that she had got them for eight cents a box, when they were worth at least ten cents. ‘The woman asked me ten cents,’ she said, ‘but I offered her eight, and she took it.’

While the family of Mrs Mier were enjoying their pleasant repast, the strawberry-woman sat at a small table around which were gathered three young children, the oldest but six years of age. She had started out in the morning with thirty boxes of strawberries, for which she was to pay 7 and a-half cents a box. If all had brought the ten cents a box, she would have made seventy-five cents; but such was not the case. Rich ladies had beaten her down in her price—had chaffered with her for the few pennies of profits to which hard labour entitled her—and actually robbed her of the meagre pittance she strove to earn for her children.

Instead of realising the small sum of seventy-five cents she had cleared only forty-five cents. With this she bought a little Indian meal and molasses for her own and her children’s supper and breakfast.

As she sat with her children, eating the only food she was able to provide for them, and thought of what had occurred during the day, a feeling of bitterness toward her kind came over her; but the remembrance of the kind words and the glass of cool water so timely and thoughtfully tendered to her, was like leaven in the waters of March. Her heart softened, and with the tears stealing to her eyes, she glanced upward, and asked a blessing on her who had remembered that, though poor, she was still human.

Economy is a good thing, and should be practised by all, but it should show itself in denying ourselves, not in oppressing others. We see persons spending dollar after dollar foolishly one hour, and in the next trying to save a fivepenny piece off a wood-sawyer, coal-hea-

ver, or market-woman. Such things are disgraceful if not dishonest.

From Graham’s Magazine.

KITTY COLEMAN.

BY WANNY FORESTER.

AN arrant piece of mischief was that Kitty Coleman, with her deep, bewitching eyes, that said all sorts of strange things to your heart, and yet looked as innocent all the time as though conducting themselves with the utmost propriety, and her warm, ripe lips, making you think at once of the rose’s bed that a bee would choose to dream in. And so wild and unmanageable was she—oh, it was shocking to proper people to look at her! And then to hear her, too! why, she actually laughed aloud, Kitty Coleman did! I say Kitty, because everybody called her Kitty but her Aunt Martha; she was an orderly gentlewoman, who disapproved of loud laughing, romping, and nick-naming, as she did of other crimes, so she always said Miss Catherine. She thought too, that Miss Catherine’s hair, those long, golden locks, like rays of floating sunshine, wandering about her shoulders, should be gathered up into a comb, and the little lady was once really so obliging as to make trial of the scheme, but at the first bound she made after Rover, the hairbrush cloud broke from its ignoble bondage, descending in a glittering shower, and the little silver comb nestled down in the deep grass, resigning its office of jail forever. Oh, Kitty was a sad romp! It is a hard thing to say of one we all loved so well; but Aunt Martha said it, and shook her head the while and sighed; and the squire, Aunt Martha’s brother, said it, and held out his arms for his pet to spring into; and serious old ladies said it, and said, too,—what a pity it was that young people now-a-days had no more regard for propriety. Even Enoch Snow, the great phrenologist, buried his fingers in those dainty locks that none but a phrenologist had a right to touch, and waiting only for a succession of peals of vocal music which interrupted his scientific researches, to subside, declared that her organ of mirthfulness was very, very strikingly developed. This, then, placed the matter beyond all controversy; and it was henceforth expected that Kitty would do what nobody else could do, and say what nobody else had a right to say; and the sin of all, luckily for her, was to be laid upon a strange idiosyncrasy peculiar mental, or rather cerebral conformation, over which she had no control; and so Kitty was forgiven, forgiven by all but——. We had a little story to tell.

I have heard that Cupid is blind; but of that I do not believe a word—indeed, I have a confirmation strong, that the malicious little knave has the gift of clairvoyance, aiming at hearts wrapped in the triple foldings of selfishness, conceit, and gold. Ay, did not he perch himself, now in the eye, and now on the lip of Kitty Coleman, and with a marvellously steady aim, imitating a personage a trifle more dreaded, ‘Cut down all, both great and small! Blind! no, no—he saw a trifle too well when he counted out his arrows and the laughing rogues was ready to burst with merriment as he peeped into his empty quiver, and then looked abroad upon the havoc he had made. But people said that there was one who had escaped him, a winsome gallant for whom all but Kitty Coleman had a bright glance, and a gentle word. As for Kitty she cared not a rush for Harry Gay, and sought to annoy him all in her power; and the gentleman stalked past her with all the dignity of a great man’s ghost. Bitter, bitter enemies were Harry Gay and Kitty Coleman. One evening, just because the pretty belle was present, Harry took it into his head to be as stupid as a block or a scholar, for notwithstanding his promising name, our young Lucifer could be stupid. Kitty Coleman was very angry, as was proper—for what right had any one to be stupid in her presence? The like never was heard of before. Kitty, in her indignation, said he did not know how to be civil; and then she sighed, doubtless at the boorishness of scholars in general, and this one in particular, and then she laughed so long and musically, that the lawyer, the schoolmaster, the four clerks, the merchant, and Luther Litherp the dandy, all joined in the chorus, though for the life of them, they could not have told what the lady laughed at. Harry Gay drew up his head with as much dignity as though he had known the mirth was at his expense cast contemptuous glances toward the group of nod waiters, and then, to show his own superior taste, attached himself to the ugliest woman in the room. It was very strange that Kitty Coleman should have disregarded entirely the opinion of such a distinguish gentleman, but she only laughed the louder when she saw that he was annoyed by it; indeed, his serious face seemed to infuse the very spirit, ay, the concentrated, double-distilled essence of mirth into her; and a more frolicsome creature never existed than she was, till the irritated scholar, unable to endure it any longer, disappeared in the quietest manner possible. Then all of a sudden the self-willed belle declared that she hated parties, she never would go to another, and making her adieus in the most approved do n’t-care style, insisted on being taken home at once.

Harry Gay was not a native of our village, he came from one of the eastern cities to spend a summer there, and Aunt Martha said he was too well bred to have any patience with the boyish manners of her romping niece. But Kitty insisted that her manners were not boyish, and if her heart overflowed, it was not her fault, she could not shut up all the glad feelings within her, they would