

LUTHER'S INHERITANCE.

The Hathorn homestead was the barest and dreariest of all the farmhouses in the region. Its plainness, too, was made more striking by the absolute neatness that characterized the premises. Its wide doorway was swept clean, its wood-pile, on the left, was primly square, and not a chip or broken shingle dared to stray from the neighborhood of the weather-beaten, battered chopping-block.

There was never a flower-bed underneath the windows, nor even a rose-bush whose blossoms could scatter their petals on the gravelled walk. The mistress of the house did not love such things. There was only a tall cluster of lilac-bushes half-way down to the road, and two or three ancient apple-trees near the well.

The unshaded house had never been painted. It stood on a tiny elevation surrounded by fields that looked as if they had hilly to yield their owner, save a scanty hay-crop, or some bushes of corn, though in one corner a garden showed its carefully kept rows, and a bit of a strawberry-bed displayed thrifty runners.

The barn, a long, low, dingy structure, was opposite the house. Behind it a wide pasture stretched, green and inviting despite its rookiness. Through the lane that led to it there filed, night and morning, a little herd of cows, well-led, sleek, and gentle. They were the dependence of the family, and Mrs. Hathorn's butter was famous for its excellence. It was the thing she prided herself on; one of the few things she could do. Therefore, with much firmness, she refused to consent to merging the little dairy into a milk route. A venture, at best; besides, they couldn't start out in it without running in debt, and that she would not do.

This had been, as it were, the key-note of her hard, toilsome life. By dint of continuous industry, of the most careful economy, and with deprivation of much that makes life sweet, they could win a maintenance from their rocky acres; could have food, and shelter, and lights, and such plain clothing as was necessary, and for it all owe nothing. So they had kept on in the old routine, mother and son, these many years. There had been other children in the family, but they had died of a neighborhood epidemic in their childhood, and the father had shortly followed them. Luther, the youngest, and in many respects the least promising, was the only one left. A stolid, shy, spare young man, who submitted for the most part to his mother's plans and followed the guidance of her management in all the work of the farm, yet who had ambitions of his own, and periodical discontents with the standing order of things.

He had wanted to try market-gardening, but she dreaded the possible failure in it. He had longed for a milk-wagon and the belongings, that he might relieve her of her heaviest tasks. He had talked of opening a small quarry that showed its stony head in the farther pasture; but all of these meant risk, and Mrs. Hathorn would not agree to them.

"We've always lived honest, and paid our debts as we made 'em, and had a comfortable living, so we could ask a stranger to a meal any time, or have our relations come. I think 'twould kill me if I owed anybody and couldn't pay 'em, or if the place had to be mortgaged or anything. I think we'd better keep right along, Luther."

And Luther would yield a silent unsmiling submission, and would not harness his gray horse to drive over on the west road of an evening for a week thereafter. It was on the west road that Mary Donaldson lived. They had been nearer neighbors once, and he had used to draw her on his clumsy sled to and from the schoolhouse in the winter weather, when both were little children. She taught the district-school herself now.

On this June day, when his story commences Luther, going into dinner, could see across lots and discern with his strong young eyes, a slim brown figure surmounted by a white shade hat, and followed closely by smaller figures in pink and blue and grey, getting all of them, as near as they could to "the teacher," hurrying along the roadside, eager to make the most of the brief morning.

It was not of this that he spoke, however, as they ate.

"Simms' folks are having a piazza put on, I guess. And I do believe Miss Trotter's having her house painted. How much knitting would it take, do you suppose. 'Taint bigger than a hand-box."

"Jotham Simms is in debt for the lumber his barn is built of, now, that new one," rejoined Mrs. Hathorn, quickly. "And his own cousin, that's sick with consumption, came there last week, thinkin' to stop a spell and visit, and was shown so plain that he wa'n't welcome that he took the stage the next day for the Corners, where there's an aunt of his lives. And he and Jotham was brought up together, like own brothers, too. I tell you, Luther, things aint always just as they seem to be."

"I could paint this house," volunteered Luther, now the ice was broken, "and the paint couldn't cost much."

"'Twould be something. And when we'd begun, we'd want to do something, and a good many somethings, inside," and she glanced around the room wistfully. "I don't like the look of things any better than you do, but I guess we'd better wait. Cyrus Lane may take the corner wood-lot. That would put us in as good shape as anybody round."

But Luther shook his head dubiously. That bit of purchase had been discussed too long for him to have any hope of its speedy consummation.

"I'm going over in the further pasture mending fence. If you want me you can ring the big bell. I shan't probably be back till supper-time," he said, having finished his dinner, stroked the black cat, and filled the wood-box.

"I shan't want you, I don't imagine. But if I was you I'd come home early, and do the chores in middlin' season. It's meeting-night at the school-house, you know, and I thought we'd go, if I don't get too tired."

She watched him as he strode off down the lane, noticing that he was not whistling as usual, and that Bowser, the dog, trotting along by his side, did not get even a word of recognition, and she sighed over her dishes, glancing around, as she put them in their places in the tall corner cupboard, to see again how plain and homely the rooms were.

"If there was any way I could do anything! But I truly don't see as there is."

The butter-money just keeps us along. I don't doubt maybe Luther would make more some other way, but it's the getting into it that costs. I didn't tell him, but I had three-quarters enough to buy a milk-wagon saved out of the fleece-money and the pop-corn he laughed at, and half of it went to old Aunt Nancy when she broke her leg, and it took the other half to make us whole when Cynthia and her children came last summer. Poor, little peaked things, I declare I don't know which looked most helpless, she or the young ones. And he said as well as me, that we couldn't let 'em go back under a month. And four extra in your family does make a difference, if they are own folks and you don't have to make much difference. If I'd had a little to do with, then, Cythy'd have taken hold and helped me fix up here; but 'twain't no use then. I couldn't spare a cent. And I believe it looks worse than it did then."

She tapped disconsolately, with the toe of her coarse, worn shoe, the unpainted floor, white as frequent scrubbing could make it, but worn and slivered by years of wear. There were green paper curtains at the windows made necessary by the absence of blinds. An oilcloth cover was on one table, and the snowy table-cloth was still on the other. The stove was clean and shining, and there was no dust nor litter anywhere, but the utter absence of ornament and even of all attempts at beauty was the more striking in contrast with the loveliness outside.

On the other side of the narrow entry, a half open door revealed a room, only less bare. Here, the floor was painted, and there was a crimson table-cover on a square stand, and a patch-work cushion in the rocking-chair. It had a tidy on it, too, this chair which Mary Donaldson had given one Christmas. Mrs. Hathorn noticed as she passed the door on an errand into the entry that the tidy was sideways, and that there was a thin layer of dust on the album that lay on the table. Going in to right these matters she stopped a moment by the west window to adjust the curtains, and looked out in the same direction that her son's eyes had wandered.

"'Tis hard for Luther!" she said all to herself. "He'd have brought a wife here five years ago it was a home to bring her to. And Mary's a good, faithful girl. I haint got a mite o' fault to find with her. And I don't doubt, with the knack she has, and the things she's got ready, and what she's got saved, she'd make a very different place of it in a very little while. It's her way, and her mother's way. Their sit-in-room's as homelike and pleasant as can be, without very much in it either. If one of my girls had lived, I'd have had more faculty as well's more courage about things, and a tear or two rose in the grey eyes and rolled down the wrinkled cheek. She wiped them hastily away, however, with one corner of her gingham apron, and went on with her soliloquy. "And I don't know, sometimes, but 'twould pay, if it was a venture. Maybe a man has better courage with a cheerful homelike place to come to when his day's work's done. Luther's trusty and steady at his task, but there is folks got on faster. Though, poor boy, if he had what belongs to him there wouldn't be any need of his slavin' nor stintin'."

That was the queerest mess! I think likely a lawsuit would have won it, but I wouldn't favor it, against his own father's brothers, too. Let 'em keep it if they've mind to. We can get along without it. And I wouldn't swap my conscience for Silas Hathorn's, for he's at the head and foot of it, being the oldest, and a good deal stronger willed than Ephraim. I haint seen either on 'em for twenty years, nor since Enoch was buried. And I shan't ever be likely to. If they wouldn't take notice when Luther was little, and me a having a hard time to face things, why of course they won't now. But just a little money—a few hundreds where they've got thousands—would make this world such a different place to Luther. He'd have a home then! I don't care so much for myself. I'm hardened to it, I guess, and the honest lips, which never could be unkindly, no matter how much sorrow or anxiety or disappointment they had shut into their patient heart, refusing to complain,—parted now in a broad, pitying smile.

"But I don't see," she added, "how it can be helped, nor just now."

It was not ten minutes later that wheels sounded in the yard, and Mrs. Hathorn, opening the door, saw an old-fashioned, dusty wagon, with a robe laid on the back of the seat, country fashion. In it sat a withered-looking old man, thin and brown, with piercing dark eyes under his gray, shaggy lashes. The hands that held the reins looked weak and tremulous, too feeble, Mrs. Hathorn thought, to guide the strong young horse.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked, stepping out on the door-stone.

"Nothing, nothing—unless you give me a drink of water here. My colt is restless, and I don't like to leave him. I had my lunch down beside the spring here, and not being able to get out to get a drink with it, I'm rather thirsty."

"My son should hold him, and let you get out and rest," she said, "if he was round home this afternoon. You look beat out."

"A little tired, that's all," he answered, as he drank the milk she brought out with the asked-for water. "I've ridden quite a good bit today, more than I'm used to. And I'd forgotten these roads were so ledgy."

"Somebody that knows the place," thought Mrs. Hathorn, as she took back her glasses. "But I can't place him anywhere. May have been before I came here; he looks old enough. But if 'twas my folks, I wouldn't let him ride round alone with that colt prancing and skittish, and them thin, tremblin' hands! It aint safe. And how sharp he does look at anybody. I'd be almost afraid if he didn't seem so old and feeble."

"Won't you sit and rest awhile," she asked, coming to the door again. "It's shady, this side of the house after dinner. May be your horse will stand."

"No, I thank ye," he answered, and she noticed that his quavering voice had a familiar ring to it. "No, thank ye, I guess I must go on. Good day, ma'am!" and he bowed courteously as he drove off.

Half an hour later she sat at her window with some mending in her lap, and started at the sound of voices and hurrying feet at her door. Some one had been hurt, they were bringing him in. Of course it was Luther.

"No, it isn't Luther, Mrs. Hathorn. It's an old man got thrown out down the road here, and got hurt a little. I think he's broken his ankle, but he sticks to it. It's only a sprain. A stranger, ain't he? Anyway, he is to us. But he wouldn't let us carry him into Gratton's—it happened just a little way below there—but made us bring him up here. And where'll we put him?"

Of course Mrs. Hathorn's spare bedroom was opened, the curtains tied up hurriedly, and the blue and white spread turned down from the comfortable-looking bed.

"I don't know him from Adam," she was explaining excitedly. "He came along here a little while ago and wanted a drink. I thought that horse was too smart for him. And does anybody know who his folks are?"

This inquiry was made, of course, out of hearing of the injured stranger; nobody could answer it, nor was it answered for a long time thereafter. The injury proved rather a serious one, especially to be sustained by so old a man.

"For," said Mrs. Hathorn, "I don't believe he's a day under seventy, and I'd be willing to put five or ten years on to that. It'll make your work harder, Luther, this time o' year, too, but there's no help for it. He don't look to me like a poor man, and he'll most likely be able to pay for staying here, if not for the care. And if he was poor," she declared with vehement and generous energy, "and couldn't pay a cent, why, I'd keep him all the quicker. I do feel a little worried, though," she added, "about the doctor's bill. That leg will have to be attended to, right along, for some time now, and I s'pose I will be responsible."

But her anxiety was lessened that very evening by seeing their visitor himself pay the physician for his services when the latter left him, a practice which he followed at every subsequent visit. The old leather wallet from which he took the money was singularly gaunt in its appearance. And, though payment was always forthcoming for the few medicines he needed, and for whatever his condition rendered necessary, he never indulged in any luxuries, and seemed to crave anything beyond the simple fare that Mrs. Hathorn provided for him.

He lay quite patiently on his bed while the horse was knitting, yet seemed as pleased as a child when he could be lifted to the lounge, and a little later, occupied the great rocking-chair in the family room. Here, by the east window, that looked out over pleasant fields and pasture lands to the low hills of the sun rising, he would sit, strangely content, day after day.

Mrs. Hathorn used to begin him to sit in the other room.

"It's cooler there, and fixed up to be a little more seemly," she would say. "You must be tired of this homely place. Now do let me move your chair in there."

"No, no," he would answer, "I like this best."

"I've meant this dozen years to have things different," she went on. "And maybe I shall get to it some time. I like the place because my husband brought me here when we were married. And some of his folks had lived here for I don't know how long before that. They moved away about that time, over east here, somewhere near where you came from, I shouldn't wonder. Hathorn, the name is, and they all descended from Jabez Hathorn; that was my husband's name, too."

But the old man did not seem inclined to talk about his neighbors, if, indeed, any of the Hathorns were among them, nor did he ask many questions, though he noticed curiously every detail of the family life. He was delighted when one afternoon Mary Donaldson came over and brought him a cluster of small, spicy pinkies tied up with a bit of southernwood.

"There was a root of that here, once," said Mrs. Hathorn, "yes, and of the south ernwood, too. But you know I'm no hand with flowers, and I believe they both died, long ago. 'Twas just in that corner by the front door that the pink root was," pointing out where, indeed, the man's eyes seemed to have been turned before. "I'd like to go out a little while," she went on, "so if you don't mind, I'll get Mary to sit with you. Mr. Tullock."

"What did you say? Oh, certainly, certainly. I shouldn't mind being alone here," he answered.

And though he enjoyed the afternoon with his young guest, he seemed either anxiously lest Mrs. Hathorn should stay in too closely, or a little disturbed by their careful surveillance, and both he and they were glad as the injured limb grew daily stronger, and the days of his confinement fewer.

He was evidently not a demonstrative person, and Mrs. Hathorn was not surprised or disturbed because, when he left them, his thanks, though warm and hearty, were few and somewhat constrained.

"Poor old man," she said, "I should like to know what sort of a home he's got, to like this place so well. For he did like it, and hate to leave it, somehow. I found him crying at that east window this morning. Of course I didn't let him know I saw. I'm going to inquire of Cynthia. Tullock—I believe that was the name of your father's grandmother, Luther."

"That valise that had the name on it might have belonged to her," said Luther, irreverently. It was in this way that they had learned their visitor's name. 'Twas old enough, I'm sure."

It was in the evening of the day on which the old man had gone, and the young man was in excellent spirits. Mr. Tullock had paid well for board and care for himself and his horse. And indeed it was not often they had had a sun so large as this modest amount.

"It's as good as summer boarders," said Mrs. Hathorn, "and I never could take them on account of the house."

One of the first things planned was the painting of the house. And before the first coat was fairly dry, a letter came to Luther, which contained important news. His share of the property of his grandfather, it stated, having awaited certain formalities of law, was now at his disposal. It was necessary only for him to prove his identity at the Hayford bank, where the amount was now deposited.

Of course changes came thick and fast thereafter, and the Hathorn farmhouse suffered transformation at once.

"I hate to have the old place changed, after all," said Mrs. Hathorn. "Twon't ever seem the same, of course. But there, I've had my home in it as it was, and my life. And if Luther and Mary's going to have theirs together, I think it's time they begin."

This was to cousin Cynthia, who was making a little visit in early September,

helping Mrs. Hathorn move and make and plan, as the bare old house was made to take on a new aspect. She was coming again by and by, for the wedding.

"I suppose," she said, "Cousin Silas will be here. Though you haven't told me you liked him."

"Silas who?"

"Why, Silas Hathorn, of course."

"I haven't seen the man for over twenty years," said Mrs. Hathorn. Cynthia laughed merrily. "Except when you took care of him, when he was thrown out and hurt here at your door."

Mrs. Hathorn stood bewildered. "I do believe it was, and I might have known," she said. "But I truly never knew it, Cynthia."

"He said you didn't, and he liked it all the better. He was so pleased to think you should pick up that name off the old valise and tack it on to him! But, don't you know, that's where Luther's property comes from."

"When we was married," put in Mrs. Hathorn, "my husband's father moved off this home place and gave it to us. And he took his two other boys and moved over east here, where he had another farm, ever so much better, and some mill property, and I guess some land besides. He said we should have our share, just the same. And he did well there. But he died suddenly, and things was mixed up, and a good deal of the property in Silas's name, and nothing ever came to us at all. And I wouldn't fight for it, nor even ask. Here we was, and they knew it. But what started Silas out?"

"Why," replied Cynthia, "I don't hardly know what 'twas at first. He took a notion he'd ride over this way and see how you was situated. You know he wanted Ephraim's children to have it, he thinks so much of 'em. But I suppose his mind wasn't quite easy. And then coming here, and being sick, and sitting there by that east window in his mother's chair—oh, he told me all about it when I was over that way this summer—it made him think maybe that Luther's as near of kin as anybody. For you know he put on quite a slice out of his own share, to make things even, he said."

"No," said Mrs. Hathorn, "I didn't know that. I thought 'twas just in the straight line of inheritance. But I ain't sorry, I think Luther and Mary will make a good use of it."

"That's just what he thought," said Cousin Cynthia.—Portland Transcript.

We have started this competition partly to revive an interest in a useful study, and partly to increase the interest of the young folks in PROGRESS. The questions will be given every week, and the publisher of PROGRESS will give One Dollar for the first correct answer that reaches PROGRESS office. The rules and conditions that govern the Bible Question Competition will also regulate this. Answers will be received until the Saturday following publication, and the successful competitor will be announced the next Saturday. Answers should be addressed to "History Competition," care PROGRESS, St. John, N. B. All letters addressed otherwise will not be considered.

Harry F. Black of Main street is the prize winner for "History Questions No. 19. These competitions closed last week, and the last prize will be awarded today. Those who answered the questions correctly last week were: Mamie Patton, 1 Elliot row; Flossie McLean, 222 Princess street; Gertrude Wales, 46 Paradise row; Elia T. Smith, St. Stephen; Godfrey Newnam, St. Stephen; Claire Bryden, Adelaide road; Lena Murray, 20 Orange street; "Canada," 199 King street east; Annie M. Bain, 19 Richmond street; Helen Cowan, Marble cove road; Birdie Patton, city; Maggie McLean, city; Mabel Allan, West end; Alice Hegan, 13 Wright street; "Marie," Fredericton; "Louise," city; Mamie Appleby, Bloomfield, Kings county; Buddie McDermott, 118 Duke street; Gladys McLaughlan, 86 Orange street; Arabella Garfield Wilson, North end; Stanley Emerson, 190 Germain street; Ella Pitts, 134 Brittain street; S. Murray, Collina, Kent county, N.B.; Etta Millican, 8 Forest street; Nellie A. Whitehead, Fredericton; Clara Mirey, North end; Minnie Lawton, Shediac; Florence Mitchell, St. Stephen; Mary Wallace, Halifax; Bridget Donnelly, North end.

Answers to History Questions, No. 19.

1. What was the chief event of Henry II's reign?

Ans.—The chief event of Henry II's reign was the invasion of Ireland.

2. How many years does the period of the Plantagenets proper include?

Ans.—The Plantagenets proper includes 245 years from 1154-1399.

3. In whose reign was the linen manufacture introduced into England?

Ans.—In the reign of Henry III, the linen manufacture was introduced into England.

4. In whose reign was the weaving of cloth and blankets introduced?

Ans.—The weaving of cloth and blankets was introduced in the reign of Edward III.

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2. Creates an appetite.

3. Strengthens the nerves.

4. Makes the weak strong.

5. Overcomes that tired feeling.

6. Cures scrofula, salt rheum, etc.

7. Invigorates the kidneys and liver.

8. Relieves headache, indigestion, dyspepsia.

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SPECIAL NOTICE.

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St. John, N. B., March 2nd, 1891.

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