

A Changed Opinion.

BY ELIZABETH ROBBINS.

Guy and Annie had been at the Blake's for two weeks, and Annie was beginning to lose courage. As for Guy, his discouragement had been chronic from the beginning of their stay and for some time before. The doctor said this depression was the natural accompaniment of the insomnia with which Guy had been tormented, and had advised his being deprived of his books and sent into the country for a few months in order that the danger of nervous prostration might be averted.

Guy had been studying too hard. The High School course required an immense deal of study at any time, but Guy had tried to gain a year, that he might graduate the next spring. With this ambitious purpose in view, he had set up late nights, hurried through his meals and neglected to exercise. So now, here he was at Brookfield, four miles from a railroad, the nearest neighbor a quarter of a mile away, with no companions excepting Mr. and Mrs. Blake and Annie, and nothing to read save a few religious books, the almanac and the Farmers' Guide.

Annie was Guy's sister, a little more than a year younger than he, and had given up her winter plans to come with him and keep up his spirits. They were sitting together in the pleasant south room of the farmhouse this morning. The January sun was streaming in at the windows, over the window plants. The door leading to the kitchen was closed, but they could hear Mrs. Blake stepping briskly back and forth about her household duties.

"Let us take a walk, Guy," said Annie. "It is lovely out, and the air will do you good."

"Oh, I don't care to," answered Guy. "There's nothing to see."

"We might write letters home," said Annie.

"Too much like work."

"Would you like to play checkers, or cribbage, or parchesi, or chess?"

"No. They bore me to death all of them."

"Shan't I bring the kittens?"

"Bother the kittens!"

"Isn't there anything you would like to do?" asked Annie, pleadingly.

"Yes, I would like to go home," answered Guy, shortly. Annie sighed, and there was a most woe-begone expression on her usually cheerful countenance.

"I think this is the dearest place I ever was in," Guy broke out after a long pause. "Country people are the dullest, stupidest people on earth. They don't know anything; they never read, and you can't talk with them, and they haven't any feelings or any ideas, as far as I can see. They are just like their cattle."

"O Guy! I don't think it is quite as bad as that," remonstrated Annie.

"Well, that Fred French that came to see me the other afternoon, did he seem to you quite bright? And that girl, Mary Osborne, that came with her mother one evening, didn't she blush and look scared if you spoke to her, and did she say anything more than 'Yes' and 'No' all the time she was here?"

"They did act queer," Annie admitted.

"Humph! I should think they did. And these Blakes," he continued, lowering his voice, "I suppose they mean well, but it sets my nerves on edge to hear them say 'we was' and 'they was,' and 'says I,' and 'ketch,' and 'growed' and 'blowed,' and—"

"But Guy," Annie interrupted, "don't you think we ought to try and make the best of it? Mamma took so much trouble to find this place, and papa left everything to come with us and see that we were comfortably settled. They're so anxious, too, it seems as though we ought to stay and try to—make it do you some good."

"Oh, I shall stay the time out—if it kills me," retorted Guy, bitterly.

Annie sighed again, then listened. "I hear wheels," she said. "Some one is coming," and she went to the window to look out.

"You are getting to be as curious as the natives," said Guy, a little contemptuously.

"It is that old Mr. Atkins, who lives over on the Cranberry," said Annie as the wheels rattled by the house, "and he's stopping." Guy closed his eyes wearily. They heard Mr. Atkins enter the kitchen.

"I had an errand to the village," he announced in a high, nasal voice, "an' the postmaster, he asked me to fetch along this 'ere letter. It's got a special delivery stamp on't. From Harriet, I judge, by the postmark. Hope there ain't no bad news."

Guy groaned. After a long conversation Mr. Atkins departed and Mrs. Blake opened and read her letter. It was apparently very brief, for almost immediately the two in the south room heard her hurry to the back door

and call "Father," her voice growing fainter as she went in the direction of the barn.

"I believe it was bad news," said Annie.

"I believe so, too," said Guy, straightening up in his chair and showing a great deal of interest. "I wonder what it can be?"

After a long time Mrs. Blake returned to the kitchen and to her work, but they did not see her till she called them to dinner. Seated at the table, there was no longer room for doubt, for the tears kept rising to Mrs. Blake's eyes and were furtively wiped away, while Mr. Blake, after barely tasting of the food on his plate, pushed the plate away, said somehow he didn't feel hungry, and disappeared out of doors. Neither could Guy nor Annie eat much, and after giving his sister a significant glance, which meant, "Try to find out what the trouble is," Guy left the table and sauntered into the other room.

"Something has happened to make you feel badly, Mrs. Blake," said Annie, and her voice was full of sympathy. "Mayn't I know what it is? Perhaps I could help in some way."

"My daughter—" began Mrs. Blake, then broke down entirely. "Here's the letter," she sobbed, "you can read it."

Annie took it into Guy and they read it together. It was from the Blakes' son-in-law, and said their daughter was dangerously ill, and that if they would see her alive again they must come very soon. Then Annie returned to the kitchen and tried to comfort Mrs. Blake. "I am sorry," she said. "I will help you get ready. Perhaps she will get well, after all."

"I can't go," said Mrs. Blake, with a fresh outburst of grief.

"Can't go," exclaimed Annie. "Why, you must go! Why can't you?"

"I've talked it over with Cephas, and we can't think of a living soul we could get to come and do the work while we were gone," said Mrs. Blake.

"Why can't my sister and I do it?" asked Guy, coming to the door.

"We can, and we will," said Annie, decisively. Mrs. Blake was so astonished that she stopped crying to gaze at them. "Why!" she stammered, "I didn't dream you'd be willing to, or—that you was capable of taking care of yourselves, even. Both young people blushed."

"I don't wonder you thought so, for we've hardly lifted a finger since we've been here," said Guy. "But we're not really so helpless as we seem. I camped out summer before last and learned to do ever so many things, and Annie here knows a little something about housework."

"You can't milk?" asked Mrs. Blake, doubtfully.

"No, but couldn't I learn? Is it very difficult?"

"I learned when I was six years old," said Mrs. Blake.

"I'm going out to talk with Mr. Blake," said Guy, impetuously. "Where's my cap—oh, here it is," and he was out of the house like a flash, Annie looking after him in amazement. Was this her fastidious brother who looked upon all farm work with disgust, and who had been sitting about the house, languid and indifferent, for two weeks past?

"I suppose the cream would keep this weather, till I come back," said Mrs. Blake thoughtfully, "and you could buy stuff of the baker and steak of the butcher, and if you slept in the two little bedrooms opening out of the south room you wouldn't have to tend but two fires."

"Of course," said Annie in a tone of conviction. "And now I'll help do up the work, and you must tell me just what to do while you're away."

In about half an hour Guy came rushing in for pencil and paper. "Am afraid I shan't remember everything," he said, "and I want to set it down."

"I will write things down too," said Annie.

At night Guy came in with a pail of milk which he exhibited with pride. "I milked it all myself," he announced, "and I can do it all right, only it takes a long while and makes my wrists ache."

So the Blakes decide to go, and the next day, immediately after dinner, Guy and Annie went with them to the village, four miles away, where they would take the cars to a city forty miles away, then ride by boat all night to another city, some twenty miles from their destination.

"Never drove a horse before in my life," laughed Guy, when he and Annie had started back home. "But I fancy there's no danger with this animal. A snail isn't a circumstance to him." In fact it was nearly sunset when they at last drove into a barn. Annie ran into the house to see about the fires, and Guy stood and looked at the horse with a most perplexed expression on his face. He had neglected to learn to unharness. He saw a great many buckles, and he knew that if he unbuckled them

all the harness would be in a great many pieces, and he had a faint recollection of seeing Mr. Blake take it down from the pegs in three parts. He was wondering whether he had better venture, and if it were likely he would ever put the harness together again if he once began to unbuckle the various straps, when he heard voices. Looking up, he saw it was Mary Osborne and her sister on their way home from school. He hurried to the big barn door. "Miss Osborne," he called, "I'm in a heap of trouble. Would you be so good as to help me out?"

"Why, certainly, if I can," was the cheerful answer. "What seems to be the matter?"

"I want you to give me some faint inkling of how to unharness a horse," said Guy.

"Oh, I can do that," said Mary, taking in the situation with a little laugh; and, giving her books to her sister, she proceeded to do it. To Guy, looking on, it seemed like a sleight of hand performance. Mary unbuckled a strap here, another there, unfastened something else, gave the tug a twist and tugged the ends through, unbuckled another buckle, drew the bridle off the horse's head and hung it up, then the breastplate and hung that up. In less than two minutes from the time she entered the barn, she gave a "cluck" to the horse, who walked off to his stall, leaving the third piece of harness in her hands, to be quickly transferred to its peg.

"I'm very much obliged," said Guy.

"You're very welcome," said Mary Osborne.

"You must come over and see us while Mrs. Blake is away," said Guy, politely as he followed her to the door. "I suppose you know about her going?"

No, Mary had not heard, so Guy told her, and she said very heartily that if there was any way in which she could help she would be very glad to, and that she would come over and see Annie. Then she and her sister walked along and Guy went into the house to put on overalls and prepare to do the chores. There were the eggs to collect from three hen-houses, the hens to be fed and shut up for the night. Then there was skinned milk to be warmed for the calf, two cows to be milked and the cows and horses to be watered and fed.

When this was done Guy and Annie ate the supper which Annie had prepared, and while Annie washed the dishes Guy brought in wood and filled the wood-boxes. Then they sat by the fire and talked till eight o'clock, when they filled the two stoves with big hard wood sticks, closed the draughts, let off the pump, locked up the house and retired to rest. Annie was awakened while it was still dark by hearing Guy opening the door of the south room stove.

"Is it out?" she called.

"Not quite," he answered.

"What time is it?"

"Six o'clock."

"Did you sleep?"

"Like a top. I was so tired I couldn't help it." Then he added, "You needn't hurry about getting up, for it will be a good while before I shall be ready for breakfast."

"It's lovely to sleep," said Annie, drowsily, and when she opened her eyes again she started up in great haste, for it was almost sunrise, and she heard the water in the kettle on the kitchen stove boiling. Mary Osborne stopped in for a moment on her way to school. "Oh, could you tell me how long milk ought to set before it is skimm'd?" Annie asked, as Mary started away. "I don't think Mrs. Blake told me." Mary gave the desired information. "Are you going to make the butter?" she inquired.

"No; Mrs. Blake thought the cream would keep."

"It won't be as good," said Mary. Then she thought a minute. "I might come over to-morrow—that is Saturday—and make the butter. I should like to do something for Mrs. Blake."

Annie was greatly pleased with this plan, and the two girls separated. It had begun to snow, and the snow continued to fall all that day and all night, so that by Saturday morning it was very deep. "Isn't it?" whistled Annie, as Guy started out, after chores and breakfast, to dig paths.

"Not like city snow, is it?" said Guy, who was in excellent spirits after another night of unbroken sleep.

He had been at work but a few minutes, when he heard a "Halloo!" and looking up saw Fred French ploughing his way into the yard. "Thought you might like to have a striker," he said. "This snow is pretty deep for working in the woods," he explained, "so I thought I'd take a holiday and wait for it to settle a bit."

When Annie looked out a little later the snow was flying from their shovels and they were talking together with the greatest animation. A little later still Mary Osborne came, with her younger sister, whose name was Ruth, and received a warm welcome from Annie. Mary brought the crocks of cream from the cellar, emptied them into the churn and began churning, while Ruth, who proved to be a young person of great energy and liveliness, helped Annie about the house.

"Now," said Ruth, when the work was done and it was decided that she and her sister were to stay all day, "let's get up a splendid dinner."

"Why, Ruth!" cried Mary, in a scandalized tone. "But I only know how to cook two or three things," said Annie, laughing.

"Oh, that doesn't matter. I can cook. Where is Mrs. Blake's cook-book, if you please," and Ruth sat down with the book and planned a manue, which as she announced, was both elaborate and inexpensive.

Guy asked Fred French to stay, and the dinner was a perfect success both from a gastronomic and a social point of view. After dinner Guy went home with Fred to see his collection of butterflies, and the three girls washed an appalling number of dishes and butter-making utensils, and then sat down to rest and talk.

After this auspicious beginning, hardly an evening

passed that either did not come in to these neighbors came home. The time they were and was indeed

"All owing to her," Mr. Blake said. "And if it had she wouldn't have been doing everything in her power to do another thing. It is going some every day."

"And chortled," said Guy, "that besides these visits of Fred and riding, and a sea time making it only part of the thing. Then came there was skating pastures."

"Annie," said time and I hate strike you as rather me, who can in hours every night country for his h

"Well," adm secured really necessary. So they packed them to the rail the old horse and down as long as the toward each other and even Guy's w passengers wonder looking girl and curly red hair and about."

"Aren't they people we ever saw?"

"Yes," assented mother couldn't help

"I hate to leave Guy," and it seemed more sincere than

"Thank you," he said. "I don't know

Fred French," he said. "has as good a head education, yet he

farm and help his sisters, and does it anything out of the

"Well," said Annie, "are going to Mrs. B

"That we are," said

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