Our Boys and Girls.

MAKE SUNSHINE IN THE HOME.

EVA WILLIAMS MALONE.

The sky is dark, I know, my dears;
The air is chill today;
The birds are fled, the flowers dead,
The sun seems gone astray!

But never mind, my little dears,
The cloud and rain must come—
Yet darkest day is bright as May
With sunshine in the Home!

Sunshine of Love, my little dears,
And gentle, patient words
Make you forget the outward fret,
And hear the singing birds.

The birds that sing in happy hearts,
Where clouds may never come,
Will always bring the joy of spring,
And sunshine in the Home.

—*Christian Observer.*

MISS MARIA JANE'S SPELLING MATCH.

BY SIDNEY DAYRE.

"In my young days," said Miss Maria Jane Gridley, "the people used to know how to spell."

"Don't they know now?" asked her neighbor, Mrs. Ray, to whom she was speaking.

"Well, maybe some do; but I've just had a letter from my niece in town—Hattie Gridley. I'm 'most ashamed for the credit of the family, to tell of it, but she, a high-school girl, studying French and botany, and I don't know what other high-toned things, spells two words wrong."

Mrs. Ray shook her head.

"If there's one thing I stand for," went on Miss Maria Jane, "it's the good old-fashioned foundations. If a body can read and write and spell, and do ciphering in four rules, I'm ready to say he or she's got a fair education."

"I'm with you there, Miss Gridley," agreed her friend. "And talk about spelling! there's a little slip of a thing out there that I am willing to say can spell down anybody in this neighborhood."

"Not that child! She's never had any chance."

"You just try her."

The two were gazing through the window at a slender girl of about thirteen who had come to the well in the side yard of Miss Gridley's comfortable cottage for a pail of water. She wore a gingham apron cut straight from her neck to her ankles, covering her entirely, and had flaxen hair braided and tied with a pink string. Her patient, demure little face brightened as she saw Mrs. Ray at the window.

"Yes," went on the latter, "she's the best little speller you ever saw. Old Mrs. Grimes, that took Polly Teeter three years ago when her mother died, and the child hadn't a soul to care for her, used to be a teacher in her younger days—long ago days, when they didn't teach much else but the three R's in country schools—but they taught those well.

"Now she's bedridden, and Polly does everything about the house. Mrs. Grimes thinks she knows all there is to be taught, and all the let-up Polly ever gets from work is learning spelling lessons."

"Well, well, well, Polly," and she tapped on the window, "you come in here!"

Polly came shyly in and sat down, her narrow gingham apron drawing tightly about her.

Polly spell 'separate.'"

Polly obeyed.

"Now spell 'turquoise'—'flagellation'—'necessary'"—

Polly spelled them fluently.

"I declare," Miss Maria Jane smiled with the stirring of old memories in her heart, "It makes me think of by-gone days when we used to have spelling bees and people would come miles from all the country around."

"I've heard say they're having just that sort of thing in the town nowadays," said Mrs. Ray; "real old-fashioned spelling matches."

"You don't say! I declare, I have half a mind to get one up near the close of this year. I wonder what the best way would be to go to work. I'd be willing to offer a prize of a ten-dollar gold piece to the best speller."

"My!" Mrs. Ray gazed in admiration on the woman who was able to gratify a whim at such expense. "I guess all you'd have to do would be to let it be known you'd do so."

Would you compete, Polly?" asked Miss Maria Jane, with a friendly smile. Polly colored as she replied:

"I'd like to."

"And what would you do with the money if you got it?" she asked, curious to know what might be the choicest desire of the child whose life was cast in such a narrow mould of hard work and entire absence of all that would seem to make child-life a thing to be desired or enjoyed. Her questioner expected a little hesitation, in the answer, but there was none as Polly looked straight into her eyes, saying with the color deepening and a slight tremble on her lips:

"I'd go over to Warren County and see David. David's my brother. He was took by a farmer, and I haven't ever seen him since"—

There was a pause, as the lips had to be pressed together.

"Sure enough, she did have a brother. Well, now, Polly, you keep on with your spelling, and we'll see."

"No need to tell her to do that," said Mrs. Ray, as Polly went out. "Mrs. Grimes keeps her at it every spare minute she has—which are'nt so many.

True to her word, Miss Gridley proceeded to carry out her intentions of having an old-fashioned spelling match. The trustees of the thickly settled country neighborhood and the teacher of the district school gave her their cordial co-operation, the plan was well noised abroad, and great interest excited as the close of the winter drew near. Pupils who had long since passed beyond the spelling classes did not disdain to brush up their knowledge. People who had not looked at a speller for a score or more of years opened it now.

"Not," they said, "that I expect to win the prize, but it's open to all, and the more the merrier."

A jovial crowd gathered at the schoolhouse on the night of the great spelling contest. Mrs. Ray took Polly with her.

"Because," said Miss Gridley, "I'm set on her winning that gold piece, and I don't want it to appear that I am partial."

In the morsel of a room she called her own, Polly dressed for the occasion with trembling hands. She could not remember that she had ever before been out after dark. The gingham apron was laid aside, for Mrs. Ray had given Polly a white one to wear over her one dark dress, which was, though she did not realize it, far shorter than those worn by other girls of her age. Mrs. Ray had also given her some hair ribbons; but as Polly braided her hair with small, trembling fingers and unusual care, her mind was not running on clothes. She clasped her hands together before leaving the room, murmuring to herself:

"O David! David!"

Polly Teeter was not quite the smallest speller who waited to be called in the "choosing sides," but she was called last of all. Before long, however, the end of the line moved up, for words which sent others to the wall were easily mastered when tackled by Polly. As the competition went on, she stood her ground against some of the best spellers in the district, until the two or three left on each side stood up so long that it became wearisome, and a tie was declared.

"Spelling down" came next. Again there was the laughable shrinkage as the poor spellers were rapidly weeded out.

Half a dozen of the stalwart, including Polly, stood long at the close. The contest was sharp. No hesitation allowed, no repeating, or any suspicion of a second attempt. Attention was strained to the nervous pitch as, all the favorite catch-words being exhausted, the person who was putting out words struck into the teasing, perplexing ei's and ie's.

Back and forth flew the words, quickly given and as quickly spelled. Ears were alert and tongues ready. Three, then four, silently took their seats, and with sighs of repressed excitement, attention was riveted on a young school teacher and Polly Teeter.

"Believe."

"B-e-l-i-e-v-e, believe."

"Deceive."

"D-e-c-e-i-v-e, deceive."

More words of the same sort were given and then—

"Bereave."

The transition was too sudden for the teacher. A helpless, confused struggle between "ie" and "ei" and she took her seat; but under the cover of good-humored laughter she with a sudden impulse, without thought, half under her breath, exclaimed—

"Oh—it's rea"—

"B-e-r-e-a-v-e."

As Polly spelled it a round of deafening applause arose for the small, bashful girl whom so few knew, and Miss Maria Jane's kindly face beamed with satisfaction.

"Miss Polly Teeter is declared the champion speller of the district," was announced by the master of the exercises. "She has won against all the best spellers. Miss Polly, will you please walk up to the platform?"

The shy, shrinking figure slowly advanced to where Miss Maria Jane sat with a few of the dignitaries, her face a curious mixture of pleasure and misgiving.

With a few kindly words Miss Gridley held out the gold piece: but Polly did not offer to take it, standing still in painful embarrassment under the gaze of so many eyes.

"I don't think it's fairly mine," she stammered.

"Why, Polly, you spelled the word."

"Yes'm; but just as I did it, I heard her," motioning to the teacher, "spell it to herself."

"And didn't you know how to spell it?"

"I thought—I guess I did, but how can I tell whether it was that or whether I knew it?"

"I ought not to have done it," said the teacher. "I did it without thought, all in a second. Of course she knew it!"

Polly returned to her seat amid a perplexed silence. What was to be done?

The assembly resolved itself into a

(Continued on page 11.)

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