A PEACEFUL VILLAGE.

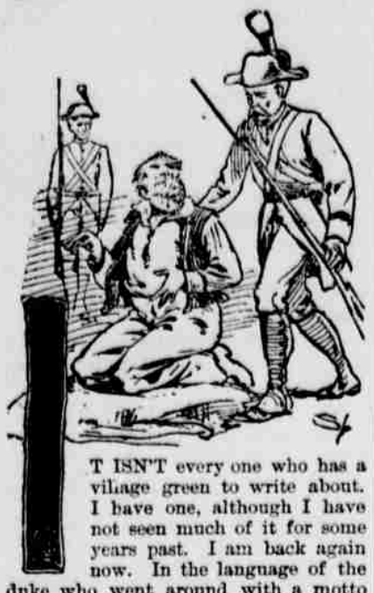
SELECTIONS FROM THE WRITINGS OF ARTEMUS WARD.

The Humorist Found Less Riot and Turmoil Than in New York City, but More of Rest, Repose and Contentment—Humble Failures and Successes.

[Copyrighted and published by special arrangement with G. W. Dillingham, New York, publisher.]

XI.

AFFAIRS AROUND THE VILLAGE GREEN.



T ISN'T every one who has a village green to write about. I have one, although I have not seen much of it for some years past. I am back again now. In the language of the duke who went around with a motto about him, "I am here!" and I fancy I am about as happy a peasant of the vale as ever garnished a melo-drama, although I have not as yet danced on my village green, as the melo-dramatic peasant usually does on his. It was the case when Rosina Meadows left home.

The time rolls by serenely now—so serenely that I don't care what time it is, which is fortunate, because my watch is at present in the hands of those "men of New York who are called riotors." We met by chance, the usual way—certainly not by appointment—and I brought the interview to a close with all possible despatch. Assuring them that I wasn't Mr. Greeley, particularly, and that he had never boarded in the private family where I enjoyed the comforts of a home, I tendered them my watch, and begged they would distribute it judiciously among the laboring classes, as I had seen the rioters styled in certain public prints.

Why should I loiter feverishly in Broadway, stabbing the hissing hot air with the splendid goldheaded cane that was presented to me by the citizens of Waukegan, Illinois, as a slight testimonial of their esteem? Why broil in my rooms? You said to me, Mrs. Gloverson, when I took possession of those rooms, that no matter how warm it might be, a breeze had a way of blowing into them, and that they were, withal, quite countryfied; but I am bound to say, Mrs. Gloverson, that there was nothing about them that ever reminded me, in the remotest degree, of daisies or new-mown hay. Thus, with sarcasm, do I smash the deceptive Gloverson.

Why stay in New York when I had a village green? I gave it up, the same as I would an intricate conundrum—and, in short, I am here.

Do I miss the glare and crash of the imperial thoroughfare? the milkman, the fiery, untamed omnibus horses, the soda fountains, Central Park, and those things? Yes, I do; and I can go on missing 'em for quite a spell, and enjoy it.

The village from which I write to you is small. It does not contain over forty houses, all told; but they are milk-white, with the greenest of blinds, and for the most part are shaded with beautiful elms and willows. To the right of us is a mountain—to the left a lake. The village nestles between. Of course it does. I never read a novel in my life in which the village didn't nestle. Villages invariably nestle. It is a kind of way they have.

We are away from the cars. The iron horse, as my little sister aptly remarks in her composition On Nature, is never heard to shriek in our midst; and on the whole I am glad of it.

The villagers are kindly people. They are rather incoherent on the subject of the war, but not more so, perhaps, than are people elsewhere. One citizen, who used to sustain a good character, subscribed for The Weekly New York Herald a few months since, and went to studying the military map in that well known journal for the fireside. I need not inform you that his intellect now totters, and he has mortgaged his farm. In a literary point of view we are bloodthirsty. A pamphlet edition of the life of a cheerful being, who slaughtered his wife and child, and then finished himself, is having an extensive sale just now.

The store—I must not forget the store. It is an object of great interest to me. I usually encounter there on sunny afternoons, an old Revolutionary soldier. You may possibly have read about "Another Revolutionary Soldier gone," but this is one who hasn't gone, and, moreover, one who doesn't manifest the slightest intention of going. He distinctly remembers Washington, of course; they all do; but what I wish to call special attention to is the fact that this Revolutionary soldier is one hundred years old, that his eyes are so good that he can read fine print without spectacles—he never used them, by the way—and his mind is perfectly clear. He is a little shaky in one of his legs, but otherwise he is as active as most men of forty-five, and his general health is excellent. He uses no tobacco, but for the last twenty years he has drunk one glass of liquor every day—no more, no less. He says he must have his tod. I had begun to have lurking suspicions about this Revolutionary soldier business, but here is an original Jacobs. But because a man can drink a glass of liquor a day and live to be a hundred years old, my young readers must not infer that by drinking two glasses of liquor a day a man can live to be two hundred. "Which, I meanter say, it doesn't foller," as Joseph Gargery might observe.

This store, in which may constantly be found calico and nails and fish and tobacco in kegs and snuff in bladders, is a venerable establishment. As long ago as 1814 it was an institution. The country troops on their way to the defense of Portland, then menaced by British ships-of-war, were drawn up in front of this very store and treated at the town's expense. Citizens will tell you how the clergyman refused to pray for the troops because he considered the war an unholy one; and how a somewhat eccentric person of dissolute habits volunteered his services, stating that he once had an uncle who was a deacon and he thought he could make a tolerable prayer, although it was rather out of his line; and how he prayed so long and absurdly that the colonel ordered him under arrest, but that even while soldiers stood over him with gleaming bayonets the reckless being sang a preposterous song about his grandmother's spotted calf, with its Ri-fol-lol-tiddery-i-do; after which he howled dismally.

And speaking of the store reminds me of a little story. The author of "several successful comedies" has been among us, and the store was anxious to know who the stranger was. And therefore the store asked him.

"What do you follow, sir?" respectfully inquired the tradesman.

"I occasionally write for the stage, sir."

"Oh!" returned the tradesman in a confused manner.

"He means," said an honest villager, with a desire to help the puzzled tradesman out, "he means that he writes the handbills for the stage drivers!"

I believe that story is new, although perhaps it is not of an uproariously mirthful character; but one hears stories at the store that are old enough, goodness knows—stories which, no doubt, diverted Methuselah in the sunny days of his giddy and thoughtless boyhood.

Sometimes I go a-visiting to a farm house, on which occasion the parlor is opened. The windows have been close shut ever since the last visitor was there, and there is a dingy smell that I struggle as calmly as possible with, until I am led to the banquet of steaming hot biscuit and custard pie. If they would only let me sit in the dear old fashioned kitchen or on the door stone—if they knew how dismally the new black furniture looked; but never mind, I am not a reformer. No, I should rather think not.

Gloomy enough, this living on a farm, you perhaps say, in which case you are wrong. I can't exactly say that I pant to be an agriculturist, but I do know that in the main it is an independent, calmly happy sort of life. I can see how the prosperous farmer can go joyously a-field with the rise of the sun, and how his heart may swell with pride over bounteous harvests and sleek oxen. And it must be rather jolly for him on winter evenings to sit before the bright kitchen fire and watch his rosy boys and girls as they study out the charades in the weekly paper, and gradually find out why my first is something that grows in a garden, and my second is a fish.

On the green hillside over yonder there is a quivering of snowy drapery, and bright hair is flashing in the morning sunlight. It is recess, and the Seminary girls are running in the tall grass.

Looking at these girls reminds me that I, too, was once young—and where are the friends of my youth? I have found one of 'em, certainly. I saw him ride in the circus the other day on a bareback horse, and even now his name stares at me from yonder board fence in green and blue and red and yellow letters. Dashington, the youth with whom I used to read the able orations of Cicero, and who, as a declaimer on exhibition days, used to wipe the rest of us boys pretty handsomely out—well, Dashington is identified with the halibut and cod interest—drives a fish cart in fact from a certain town on the coast back into the interior. Hubertson, the utterly stupid boy—the lunkhead who never had his lesson—he's about the ablest lawyer a sister state can boast. Mills is a newspaper man, and is just now editing a Major General down South.

Singlinson, the sweet-voiced boy, whose face was always washed and who was real good, and who was never rude—*he* is in the penitentiary for putting his uncle's autograph to a financial document. Hawkins, the clergyman's son, is an actor, and Williamson, the good little boy who divided his bread and butter with the beggar-man, is a failing merchant and makes money by it. Tom Slink, who used to smoke short-sixes and get acquainted with the little circus boys, is popularly supposed to be the proprietor of a cheap gambling establishment in Boston, where the uncertain prop is nightly tossed. Be sure, the Army is represented by many of the friends of my youth, the most of whom have given a good account of themselves. But Chalmerson hasn't done much.

No, Chalmerson is rather of a failure. He plays on the guitar and sings love songs. Not that he is a bad man. A kinder hearted creature never lived, and they say he hasn't yet got over crying for his little curly haired sister who died ever so long ago. But he knows nothing about business, politics, the world, and those things. He is dull at trade,—indeed, it is a common remark that "everybody cheats Chalmerson." He came to the party the other evening, and brought his guitar. They wouldn't have him for a tenor in the opera, certainly, for he is shaky in his upper notes; but if his simple melodies didn't gush straight from the heart, why were my trained eyes wet? And although some of the girls giggled, and some of the men seemed to pity him, I could not help fancying that poor Chalmerson was nearer heaven than any of us all!

A Beggar Journal has been started in Paris and meets with success. The cost of a number is two cents, and it contains articles on the best methods of pursuing the business and advertisements of use to those soliciting charity.