

Young Martin and Old Martin.

YOUNG MARTIN was the son of old Martin. Both were blacksmiths, and plied their trade in Tacktown, when there was any demand; when there was none, they sat among the iron bars in the shop, or on the timber threshold, "enjoyin' themselves"—as they informed the passers-by—"most to death doin' nothin'."

Old Martin lived in his flannel shirt-sleeves, and wore rusty spectacles; young Martin and a big jack-knife were inseparable. He picked his teeth with it in his reflective moments, and whittled with it when lively. Old Martin was an everlasting talker, and drew the long bow with extreme good nature. With him, a lie was a benefit—to please, amaze, or instruct. At middle age he was seized with a mission, though he did not call it so—packed his goods, and with his family moved to New London, distant fifty miles. In five years he returned as unexpectedly as he went, unlocked his front door, made a fire of chips hung over the tea-kettle, and sat down before it a happy man; and his soul hugged the forsaken Lares and Penates. Anny, his wife, sat dumb in a corner, taking a vigorous pinch of snuff.

"Anny," said old Martin, "declare for't; if you can tell me whatever we went away for, I, for one, shall be obliged to you."

"Needn't be under any obligation to me. I ain't the one to calculate the ways of Providence."

Those five years of absence, so to speak, were the battle-ground of old Martin's tremendous hair-breadth stories—concerning the Indians, the English men-of-war, the troubles in the Revolution, and the rise and progress, sir, of the first families in New London. Young Martin at this time was twenty-two—slight, pale, with thin fair hair and a beardless chin; but he had kind, honest eyes, and a strong manly voice. Somehow, no one doubted his good sense and good feeling. Those who laughed at him, remembering his old whittling tricks, and his jolling against door-posts, or the fence, began to hear, and believe, that he was something more than a lazy mechanic. Tacktown had advanced; there was more work to do, and it was soon comprehended that young Martin "bossed" old Martin. About this time he added to his vocabulary of wonderful tales—"What his son could do"—"What they had thought on him when they were obliged to leave New London at dead o' night. Martin was in such demand—plague on them New Londoners." Anny also doled her praise day and night. She flitted from neighbor to neighbor after dark, like a fat, gray owl, or stood at her porch door of mornings clacking like a motherly hen. "As good a cretur as ever trod in shoe leather" was Martin! She told the man that came along with quinces and fall turnips that she knew he wasn't as pretty as a pieter, but the marrer on him was good. When he had the scarlet fever, she thought the Lord had called for him; but she believed the warm baths had saved him, though he was a runt of a boy.

People were attracted by old Martin's manner. He was strangely silent, yet he appeared on the point of bursting; he winked and nodded, went from store to store, moving his head from side to side, and making mysterious grimaces, as if some moment was at hand when everybody would be astonished. His secret was revealed the day the frame of a new shop was raised below the ship-yard on the shore. How he trotted up and down the one main street of Tacktown, where all the stores were, and all the horses tied, and the oxen swinging through with their various loads!

"My son did that," he made everybody hear, pointing to the frame, "How New London has missed it! But, Lord, they couldn't keep him! And Tacktown is going to be a big place." Old Martin's spectacles were dim with pride and joy.

"Pooh, sir," he cried into anybody's face that was nearest, "I ain't going to give up yet. Martin, says he to me, says he, 'Father 'tain't necessary for you to give another blow to the anvil. Cut up your leather apron to mend the joints in the hen-house door, or the pig-sty.' But I'm capable as ever; I won't eat my son's earnings yet."

To describe Anny's satisfaction over the new shop would be impossible—that new shop, with stone walls and a belfry on top! She perspired with acute joy, and wiped her face till she believed she had the "chaps." No matter who went by, she was ready; with the air of an orator who fixes his eyes on a distant audience, she began and continued, the motto in her mind, or rather its spirit being that Martin must be a living remembrance to everybody.

"Never did I consider Martin a forrard child; but I ain't surprised that he should come out at the big end of the horn at last. He ain't a bright and shining light anywhere, as I knows on; but ha' maassy, do you think that there Edgar Willis can hold a candle to him, for vertu and goodness to his parents?"

The shop was finished. Old Martin tied on his apron daily, and hectored the two apprentices with great comfort to himself. He knew in his heart of hearts that young Martin was the king pin; but it solaced

him to play at authority with the boys, and the country folks who came to the shop to have a tire mended, or a horse shod. What discourses on New London horse-shoes he gave, hammer in hand, and the hind leg of a horse! Young Martin busied himself with greater things. He was fortunate enough to please the first merchant in Tacktown, who had his ship-work done elsewhere till now. Chains, bolts, and all a ship's iron gear, he engaged of young Martin, considering old Martin a doosed fool, and quite in the young man's way. But he was compelled, in spite of himself, to compare young Martin's filial obedience with that of his own son—the gay Edgar Willis, the beau par excellence of Tacktown. Young Martin was not particularly respectful to his father in words, but perfectly so in feeling and manner.

"There, old man," he often said, "dry up your sass; you make me sick"—accompanied these words with a pleasant smile, and a tap on old Martin's back, which, if the old man had been a Frenchman, would have made him bestow a kiss on young Martin's face. Sometimes, when he thought the old man tired, he said, "Go home, dad, and tell mother I want a short-cake for supper; you've been in the shop long enough. Wash up, you are as black as the ace of spades; and if you ain't white we can't go to Mrs. Willis's party to-night. Which was a great joke, as they were not invited."

Old Martin's "Ho, ho," and "Ha, ha," would last him the way home. Philosophers might take a lesson from the conduct of this foolish old pair, so devoutly believing in young Martin's hope of the short-cake supper.

"Father, I've a mind to cut into a ham. It is sharp to-day; he may have an edge to his appetite."

"Well, Anny, if you'll brile it; otherwise 'tain't worth while to cut into a whole ham."

"See here, now. My quince jelly—I do believe you have most forgot the taste of that. Besides, they tell me it is sovereign good to clear the throat. Singing-school to-night, you know."

"Talking about a Tacktown band, they be. Where's any old fiddle?"

"Sho, old man."

"I was going on to say," added old Martin, testily, "when you must needs put your ear in—that Martin might like it."

"No, indeed; he is going to blow on something—an offside, I think he said."

"Why, they had 'em in New London as thick as blackberries, a blowing away at one time, man and boy, like—like anything."

"Now, father," said the cunning Anny, "Martin might not like to hear of their being so plenty; for, says he to me, 'Mother, I don't know what folks will say when my instrument comes from Boston!'"

"You don't say," answered old Martin, delighted. "Of course it won't do to say a word; and mind your eye, old woman—clack is clack."

But the next day old Martin was afflicted with another mystery, which broke like a boil when the stage-driver handed from his box a huge bundle in green flannel to young Martin, who was in waiting. It contained an ophicleide—a dreadful instrument—but it filled old Martin's soul with awe and delight.

"What ails you, father?" asked young Martin. "You look as if you had catched something."

"Do let it out, Martin."

And Martin did, as full of secret delight as his father was of noisy rejoicing.

The band was formed, and after a summer's practice it played one quickstep, a march, and a Fisher's hornpipe; it then went into severe winter quarters, to learn cotillion music. It was a sight to behold young Martin with his ophicleide; as he was a slight, pale creature, the effect reminded one of a little girl totting a big doll. He was very industrious with his practice, playing off-nights at home, in his little room up-stairs. The groans of the instrument were fearful. Its boom was so dreadful to Anny that she tied a thick handkerchief over her ears, pretending she had the earache; but old Martin was game to the back-bone; he kept time with a triumphant mien, although he could not tell one tune from another. Anny noticed that he was apt to go to bed in a hurried way on the nights young Martin played at home, and, contrary to his wont, buried his head beneath the bedclothes, which proceeding made him snore so, that one night, Anny driven wild, exclaimed, "Why, father, you beller like the off—pigs, and I wish you wouldn't."

It seemed to her then as if the bedclothes shook—or was it the vibration of the walls? for that night it was a dreadful "storm and stress" period with young Martin. He was overcoming "Hull's Victory!" From the window outside he was watched by a pair of irreverent young persons, who gave him up for lost, declaring him to be floored, after some involuntary escape of sound. Little did he know who was outside. The girl he adored, but of whom he had no hope,—Matilda Northwood, the tallest girl in Tacktown, with a brilliant complexion, an aquiline nose, bright, dark eyes, a clear voice, and a gay laugh; a violent contrast to him in every way. She was the daughter of a rich farmer, who lived on Tacktown Neck, three

miles from the village, so secluded a place that when Matilda came up to the Shore, as the village was called, she felt a metropolitan excitement; there was zest in church-going and singing-school; and a stray lecture, or a dance, was just absolute satisfaction. Young Martin had always known her, or thought so, till she burst in upon all his awakened senses one night at the singing-school; but he had never addressed a word to her. She knew him quite as well, and had never bestowed a thought upon him,—but many a laugh, and alas! did he but know, she was now laughing at him. Edgar Willis was with her, and he was making himself witty at young Martin's expense. The house stood in the angle of two streets; there was a yard in front, with a picket fence round it. The side street was a dark, crooked road, with houses scattered along it, and ending in a broad field which had that very afternoon been the scenes of the performance of a traveling circus, attended by Matilda. The wagons were now loading, and from time to time one of them thundered by, and turning the sharp corner by old Martin's house, passed through the main street fronting the harbor, and so out of the village. There had been some fighting among the men, and much savage swearing over the heavy loading of the wagons, till the proprietor, who happened to be partially intoxicated, lost patience. He struck with his whip at one of the drivers, who instantly jumped into his seat, and swearing he would take no more on, lashed his horses into a gallop along the road. The proprietor sprang into his buggy; and dashed after him, with the intention of stopping his wagon. Martin heard the noise, opened his window, and ran down stairs. As short as the distance was between the door and the gate of the little yard, he never forgot the scene. The harbor below the street lay white in moonlight, its silver sheet unruddled by a single breeze. A wagon lurched round the corner, and rolled by. He heard a scream, and saw a figure flying over the fence,—safe inside,—Edgar Willis,—then he saw a buggy swaying toward him, and toward Matilda; he cried out in terror, seized her in his arms and almost threw her over the fence toward Edgar. Then he picked up the proprietor, who was thrown out, but not nearly so much injured as his carriage and horse were. Anny came to the door in perturbation, and begged everybody to come right in, while old Martin, hardly awake to the state of things, murmured that he guessed New London would have something to answer for arter this. Edgar Willis declined, muttered something about attending to the proprietor, and, glad to be intimate with a celebrated man, offered him his services. Matilda, wondering whether young Martin had observed his cowardice, could not help altering a proverb for his benefit. "I have heard," she said, "about people laughing on the wrong side of their mouth, and now I am going to laugh on the right side of the fence."

"I thought the wagon fellow did not see us, and I sprang over without knowing it hardly, Matilda. I could have helped you; but good gracious, you never could have expected me to lift your weight over the fence. I am not a blacksmith."

That speech killed all the riches and family position of the Willis family forever with Matilda. She turned to Anny, young Martin still standing beside her in silence, and, as Edgar Willis walked slowly down the street, said, "I will go in, Mrs. Pell, for a few minutes. I think your son must be used up, trying to put me over the fence. You did it like lightning," turning her face toward him.

"You see, my son strikes when the iron is hot," said old Martin. "He did so when he was in New London." Young Martin put his hand on his father's shoulder; the gesture was enough,—old Martin was mum from that moment.

"Mother," asked young Martin, can't you give Miss Northwood some refreshment?"

"Oh, I am so put by! What will you have—a cup of tea?"

"Nothing in the world, thank you. Do you suppose that my brother William will hear anything from Mr. Willis, and bring the wagon for me? I expected to meet him at Mrs. Miller's about this time."

"Martin might go around with you," said Anny. "I am afraid your folks' way down on the Neck will worry if you are late. I should worry, if I had such a darter out all alone." The sharp old woman looked at young Martin, and he knew that then and there she had divined his hopeless secret. Matilda, also, intercepted these glances, and was astonished and disturbed. Was a circus man to be thrown out of his buggy at Mr. Pell's door, that she might discover a secret impossible to learn otherwise? What did it mean? Young Martin, too, was miserably flustered; he had a painful sense of his mean home, the homelessness of his mother, the commonness of his father. Not in this fashion would he have selected to make Matilda's acquaintance. A shade fell upon them all. Old Martin got up for his pipe, also embarrassed. Young Martin telling her to sit still, found it, and held a match for him to light it. Well, it was something to see this little fellow so gentle, and through goodness so refined, Matilda thought, rising to go. She held her hand to Mrs. Pell,

and then kissed her. There were tears in Matilda's eyes; why, no mortal could guess.

"Shall I wait upon you to Mrs. Miller's?" asked Martin, simply.

"If you please."

And the pair walked down the yard. Mrs. Pell saw with a kind of dismay that Matilda's bonnet was just above Martin's flat cap. "I wish, father, he had on his tall hat," she said. Old Martin pounded his knee with his fist, and broke his pipe.

"Lord, I used to smash pipes in New London. But it's no use, Anny, we ain't high enough up in the world for them Northwoods. Martin must have blowed out his wits with that darned offside; he has gone from one big thing to another, and now if he ain't trying to reach up to that six-foot gal."

"I'll tell you what he's got to. He put that gal over our fence when he thought she was in danger, when that Edgar Willis jumped over, and left her behind him."

Old Martin's cup was full. He could say nothing, but stared at the fire till Anny began to be alarmed. Then she said, solemnly, "Suppose I go there."

"Where upon arth, father?"

"To New London, to tell 'em his circumstances, you know. There was a man there who used to advise me on just such pints."

Anny put old Martin to bed at once, with a spoonful of picra and gin, and he was himself next day.

Matilda shook hands with young Martin at the Millers' door, and saying the simplest thing she could conjure up, told him that but for his impulse that night she might have been much farther off—and showed him the skirt of her dress; there was a rent in it which turned him cold to look at.

"Yes," he replied, "I thought the horse was bearing down on you when I caught you. Oh, heavens!" and he clasped his hands with passion. "I am all gratitude. But you mustn't thank me. Yes, you may, but I only did what I ought to have done for my helpless person."

"And Edgar Willis?"

"He is not a blacksmith, and is to be excused. This was Martin's first sarcasm."

"Well, good night"—and Matilda put out her hand again; she only felt the tips of his fingers, and could not decide whether his hand was rougher than her father's. She was silent on the way home; her brother entertained her with an account of the circus trouble and upset. He had seen Edgar Willis with the man that had been turned out of his buggy, and he could not tell who looked the most scared.

The world went on the same afterward. Martin drove work like the very old *chopie*, old Martin remarked to Anny; but he fell off on his musical evenings, appearing restless of nights, and went about more. One night he brought home a bran new suit of clothes, with a blue neck-tie, and told his mother he had joined the Cotillion party. Every week there was to be one, and he had engaged to play in the band alternate weeks; the other nights he should go on the floor.

Now who was that plaguy chap in New London," said old Martin, musingly—"who used to cut such tremenjis pigeons-wings?"

"Martin," said his mother, sadly, "I almost wish father and I had stayed in his New London it might have forrarded your plans, and you been the better for it. I feel as if we were your drawbacks—and how could we help being poor ignorant creatures? And oh, Martin, I see how you are eddicating yourself; we did not think of doing so, and I don't know how to make things out."

"You see," interpolated old Martin, "he has got stammin, and status, and a sinking fund of character, which we haven't."

"Never you mind, old man—got baccas, haven't you? Smoke it. Mother, jist go right on helping me. It's all right, I tell you. Where's my biled shirt?"

Unfortunately, at the first party Martin played, perched upon the little platform behind one fiddle, a clarinet, and a flute, he looked very small and his dreadful instrument very large. It was remarked how very mild young Martin played that night. Somebody told Matilda Northwood that he was staring his head off at her.

"My," exclaimed another, "if the musicians are going in for staring, Tilly will have conniptions."

"By no means," calmly replied Matilda, turning her full regards upon Martin, who did not happen to be playing at that moment. His quiet, fair face was flushed, and his fair hair, brushed off his forehead, was curled with the heat. He was dressed like a gentleman, too; she thought his dress as well fitting as that of Edgar Willis, though the tailors were not the same. Martin shivered at her glance, then he looked back and gave her a grave bow in return for hers. He was melancholy, and reflected upon what his mother had said; it was all true. The only way her father (meaning Matilda's) would allow him to approach her, would be with money, and by the time he had earned enough, somebody else would be her husband. More than once Matilda looked in his direction, and perceived that his heart was not in his playing. He was afraid to look at her; he might burst into tears if he did, she was so pretty, and he was so far from her. She

danced every set of course. Once, when the company was marching round the hall, she came with her partner close to the side of the platform, and stood for a moment near him. He heard her say that she was tired, and warm, and didn't think it was so very pleasant after all. Martin felt so comforted that a great gulp came in his throat, so loud that the flute looked up and asked if that 'ere offside wasn't pulling him down.

"Shut up, you fool," answered Martin, "or I'll pitch you headlong into the middle of the next dance."

Matilda heard this, and she felt better, too. She admired pluck, and every time she came near this little fellow he gave her an instance of it.

The second party young Martin joined as a dancer. Nobody knew where he had learned to dance at all; but no man went through his paces with more grace.

"He learned on the anvil, and old Martin made him dance on the hot iron, I suppose," sneered Edgar Willis.

"Down in New London, maybe," laughed another.

"I wish," said Matilda Northwood to Edgar Willis, "that Martin Pell heard your speech; but there is no fence for you here."

"Well, Tilly, if you are going to keep on punishing me I must bear it; a fellow can't always control his nerves," he answered. "Your preserver is close by, I see; going to take him out?"

Matilda was stung. Martin kept aloof, and she understood that the advance must come from her. Martin was on the alert, and at a motion from her, he was bowing, and asking her for the next set. It was an ordeal for him. Matilda was at the head of the hall, above the salt which divided those "who worked for their living," and those who had money enough to live without actual labor. The male and female ancestors of every person in Tacktown was a laborer or tradesman of some sort; but there was not common sense enough for anybody to blow those airs away, till Matilda and young Martin did that night.

"Where shall we take our place?" asked Martin, very pale, and his lips shut so tight, and his eyes so determined, that Matilda's heart beat with pleasure. She knew that he could be tested.

"At the head of the first set." There they stood the first couple on the floor—all eyes upon them. Matilda kept her face toward him, and smiled resolutely. Her spirit passed into his. *He grec.* She was fluttering her fan carelessly.

"Let me fan you," he said, and took it from her, and no polite dandy could have flirted it with more grace than our young Martin; twirled it first before her face, and then bestowed a whiff on his own.

"Well, I never!" gasped the lookers-on. "Should think his face would burn! Just like Matilda Northwood to amuse herself so."

But Edgar Willis did not agree to this; and he felt she was in earnest. They were all aware Matilda and Martin, that they were the objects of criticism. As the sets slowly formed they ventured to look into each other's eyes. Martin's face flushed, and he did not feel quite so self-possessed. Matilda went pale, but each knew that the look exchanged happiness. She wore a pretty bracelet.

"How would you like to have me forge you one?" he asked, and she twisted it around her wrist.

"I will wear it," she answered. "What if it be of iron, and I could give you ornaments of no other sort?"

"All the same."

"Oh, Matilda, be careful, I can bear but little."

She took the fan and somehow their hands touched.

"Not from me, Martin? I might ask you to bear a great deal from me."

The tender accent of her voice was unmistakable. She kept her face concealed from the crowd with her fan and handkerchief, and Martin stood very near her, almost face to face; in fact, they were as much alone as if they were in the wilderness which blossoms as the rose. The heart alone knows how to discover that matchless solitude where love is first revealed. Again he began, and so did the violins and flutes.

"The other day when I went over to Begham for this suit of party clothes, I made a resolution. I put something in this vest pocket, and determined that if ever you would dance with me, I would offer it to you, and that if you refused me, I would never wear the suit, nor dance again."

He was so nervous that he put his hand on his neck-tie, as if he would denude himself of the Nessus apparel at once. Matilda was never so moved. Every demonstration that this obscure little young Martin made pleased her more and more. She slyly put out her hand to take his gift. It was a ring, and he not only slipped it into her hand, but on her finger. It was a pretty ring, too,—an emerald circled with pearls.

"You know what I mean," he whispered.

"How becoming your suit is," she whispered; "do wear it. The next dance is yours—'Hull's Victory'—and the next—"

"All, Matilda?"

"Every one."

"Balancez!" shouted the conductor.—From *The Aldine* for June.