Nancy's Nod

Story of an Old Piece of China.

FROM SHORT STORIES.

CLOSE TO THE SEA, perched on tall white cliffs, is the pretty village of Dainton. The old gray church mounts guard, as it were, over the inhabitants, from its position on a small hill at the back of the village street, which is as irregular and as picturesque, with its black wooden houses and red-tiled roofs, as any artist could possibly desire.

A little apart from the others, and nearer the sea, there once stood a cottage, a four-roomed little place.

It stood in a small but shady garden, which was simply crammed with fruit and flowers. There was always a cheerful hum of bees there, and delicious scents of mignonette, and lavender, rosemary and cabbage roses, which are sweeter (I maintain) than any single one of the grand blossoms we are so familiar with in these days at shows.

Some hives were ranged on one side, and "Miss Nancy's honey" was quite famous—it had a flavor quite its own. She gave as a reason the fact that the bees had a way of haunting a certain lime tree, which gave her such grateful shade on hot summer days, and whose blossoms fed her bees.

Inside, the cottage was spotlessly clean, exquisitely neat, and it bore the unmistakable air of being the abode of a lady. The furniture was all very old; indeed, the Chippendale chairs and bureau, and the tall, brass-faced clock would have fetched quite a goodly sum at a sale in London.

But they were relics of Miss Nancy's old home; the faded carpet and curtains and chintz spoke of poverty—yet the bowl which held some tea roses was of priceless "Marcolini," and the old silver on the round table, which she had taught her little maid to set so daintily, was so beautiful that one wondered how it had got into her possession.

She sat there dreaming over her breakfast one morning, her fingers absently clasped round her tea cup, which, like everything else in that queer little house of contradictory impressions, was of the most delicate kind.

She was very slender, was Miss Nancy, and rather tall than short. One's first thought on seeing her was: "What an exquisitely pretty girl she must have been." One's second: "But she is pretty still." And she was. Her complexion had kept its freshness, though the blue eyes were just a trifle faded, and held an expression of pathetic patience, the origin of which one would have liked to know. Her hair was still fair and abundant—so fair that the white threads, here and there sought out by the strong June sunlight, hardly showed as a rule.

Her expression was very sweet, and one was not surprised to hear that Miss Nancy was adored by every man, woman and child in the place, who would all willingly have gone through fire and water to do her a service or save her from any hurt.

Her family had once been a very wealthy one. Her father began life as son and heir of the "squire" of the village. But, alas! a malignant fate must have surely attended his christening, for he grew up with a mania for gambling, which broke his mother's heart, plunged his father into hopeless debt, and, finally, things became so bad that the place was sold, and his only daughter, Nancy, was left at his death with a hundred a year and some family heirlooms which nothing would induce her to part with.

She could keep them, she said, with a clear conscience, since the sale of the place had cleared off the debts—which fully explained the existence of the costly furnishings and old china in the cottage by the sea, which she rented for an infinitesimal sum from a neighboring farmer, who had known her since babyhood, and supplied her with butter and milk.

His measures and his weights were surprisingly queer, but Miss Nancy never guessed that he gave her double weight and overflowing measures, and she paid his modest bill without the least suspicion that there was anything odd in its being so small.

As she sat there dreaming a shadow fell across the table and a man stepped into the room through the old-fashioned window which opened onto the garden.

He was tall and thin, with the face of a student, and, indeed, the rather bent shoulders and the furrow between his eyebrows would have told one so much at a glance.

He had the large, dreamy eyes of an enthusiast, and his thread-bare coat seemed to point to the fact that whatever it was that he worked at, he did not find it remunerative.

Miss Nancy got up quickly and held out two welcoming hands.

"You are just in time," she said, "to have some breakfast. Rachel's scones are still hot, and this comb is fresh from the hive!"

He sat down without more ado, and let himself to be waited on, and, while he was enjoying the new-laid eggs and other homely food she supplied him with, he told her that he had brought her a new book and quite a budget of news.

The book was one she had long wished to read—a modern masterpiece—but she gave a half-sigh as she took it, and said:

"It must have cost a dreadful lot of money! You ought not to bring me such presents, Roger!"

Roger Leslie laughed.

"It's all right," he said, "because, henceforth, I won't be quite dependent on the few pounds I have made by my articles and criticisms, for I have been offered, and I have accepted, the post of village organist—not a grand one, it is true, still it means £50 a year, and sometimes, as you know, I have been sorely in need of 50 pence!"

He spoke in the matter-of-fact way of a person who knows that what he is stating is nothing new to his companion, and also nothing to be in the least ashamed of.

They were both intimately acquainted with poverty and all its restraints; yet it had neither soured nor stunted them—but it explained the pathetic patience in Miss Nancy's eyes.

Roger Leslie and she had loved each other for 15 long years, but had always been too poor to marry. The son of an Oxford professor, he had been given a splendid education, and then his father had suddenly gone bankrupt and died, leaving his boy to fight his way in the world as best he could.

An uncle gave him a small allowance, and a cycling tour had landed him in this quaint old village, which had so charmed him that he took up his abode there, had fallen in love with "Miss Nancy," and ever since had been the brightness and comfort of her life, which she allowed to herself, had hitherto been rather lonely.

But as to marrying her—of course, it was impossible. So he bided his time and waited, hoping that his book would some day be accepted by some publisher—meantime, he wrote scientific and literary articles for magazines, and so eked out a small income.

He had honestly tried to get work; indeed, he would willingly have taken employment of any description, but for every post which was empty there seemed to be hundreds of candidates, and Roger was never the one who was selected. He had no influential interest for one thing, and was too dreamy and absent-minded to push himself forward at the crucial moment, so there he remained in the old world village. "Wasting his life," said the relations who had never lifted one finger to help him—but who shall dare say one life is wasted which sweetens and comforts another?

"That is a piece of news, and of importance" said Miss Nancy. "You are right to have taken the post—how diffently the organ will sound on Sunday now! Of course, it was the vicar who offered it to you?"

"Yes. He told me he would have liked to ask me long ago, but while old Matthews was alive he simply couldn't, for, as you know, he has spent his life here, and nobody can remember any other organist, but now the poor old chap is dead—"

"Of course, that makes all the difference," she said quickly.

"Yes. Now for my other bit of news—old Matthews' things are to be sold by auction next week in the market place. They say it will be the queerest collection of nondescript articles ever seen in this countryside."

"I have never been at an auction," said Miss Nancy, absently. "I wonder what it is like."

"Oh, very commonplace as a rule—but sometimes, when one has known the people, as on this occasion, it is rather pathetic."

Then the talk drifted away to the chapter of his book on which he was engaged—the book which was his life's work, yet never seemed quite complete. Somehow Miss Nancy rather hoped it never would be. When it had gone into the world something would have gone out of her life. Yet, of course, she would dearly like Roger to succeed, to be recognized in his true character, as she knew him—something more approaching a genius than anything else, but fearfully handicapped by circumstances in the race which to some men is made so easy!

* * * * * * *

A week later Miss Nancy was walking through the village, a basket on her arm. It was a Saturday and she had been doing her marketing. She held in one hand her purse, in which was more "change" than usual; everything had been cheap that morning, somehow, and she was meditating whether she could send for that book she knew Roger wanted. To give each other such things was an old-established custom between these two—to buy them each one for him or herself would have seemed such a dull proceeding!

As she approached the market place she saw that something unusual was going on; then she suddenly remembered it was the day on which old Matthews' effects were to be sold, and she paused on the edge of the crowd. When the people saw her they made way for her at once, and there were many touchings of caps and greetings.

The auctioneer was a stranger. He had an oddly-shaped head, and a curiously rasping voice which attracted Miss Nancy's attention.

A big jar had just been "put up" for sale, and somebody had bid a shilling for it. Another cried "two" and the auctioneer, who had noticed that a lady had come upon the scene, and knew their fancy for "oddments" of china, looked toward Nancy, and bowed insinuatingly:

"Make it five madam, and have it."

Nancy hardly heard the words, but she saw the bow, and bent her head with the instinctive kindly courtesy which had won her so many friends.

She had scarcely done so when down came the hammer, and she was asked:

"What name, and the address?"

"Netherby, Rosemary Cottage," she gasped out, confusedly and wondered vaguely why she was presently asked to hand over five shillings, which she meekly did, and then followed a boy, who volunteered to carry her jar home, in a very hazy frame of mind.

She met Roger Leslie just as she reached her garden gate.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "And what on earth is that?"

"I've been at an auction," she said, weakly, "and—and—they made me buy that!"

Roger Leslie shouted with laughter. His intimate knowledge of Miss Nancy's ways and Miss Nancy's character gave him the clew to the whole thing, and he laughed himself into the house, and into his favorite chair.

Miss Nancy pretended to be highly offended, but ended by laughing too, and the little maid who presently brought in the tea tray inwardly wondered what could be the cause of all the merriment.

When they had had their tea Miss Nancy hunted out a book she said she knew she had somewhere, which told one all about old china, its marks, and value.

At last she found the book, and Roger hunted through it until he found a description which exactly suited her purchase.

When he had found it he dropped the book and stared at her.

"Nancy," he said, solemnly, "that jar to a connoisseur is worth anything you like from 1,500 to 2,000 guineas!"

Miss Nancy grew white.

"Not really!" she gasped.

"Yes, really, and if you want to sell it, I know one of the men at Christie's, and will communicate with him."

"Want to sell it!" said Miss Nancy. "Of course, I want to sell it, but I certainly didn't want to buy it!"

This fact seemed rather to rankle, much to Roger's amusement, in spite of the other more important fact that it was worth a small fortune!

Well—my story is almost told.

The man from Christie's came down in a state of wild excitement. A client of theirs had asked them to look for the jar, which he believed was still in existence, and which was the fellow of the one he already possessed.

Roger, luckily, was present at the interview, and took the whole matter into his own hands. When he mentioned the sum Miss Netherby would consent to take for her jar the man from Christie's rather opened his eyes. However, as he presently allowed, it was worth every penny of it. There was no equal to the jar in Europe, except the one in the possession of his client, and the end of it was that he sat down there and then and wrote a check. Then he packed up his treasure and departed, leaving Miss Nancy and her lover together.

It wouldn't have been Miss Nancy if she hadn't held out both hands to Roger as the door closed behind the stranger and said impulsively:

"Now, Roger—we can be married!"

Just for a moment he hesitated—could he live on the money? But such a thought between two such people could not live long. He just took her in his arms and kissed her, not once, but many times, so that question was answered in the best possible way.

It really seemed that everything all of a sudden had begun to prosper—for the next thing that happened was the acceptance by a well known publisher of Roger's book, which caused a great stir, and many literary people sought the honor of knowing the author.

The latter (said his relations) did "such a foolish thing"—he built a house quite close to Rosemary cottage. The cottage itself he bought from the farmer who owned it, and formed part of "Miss Nancy's" new home.

"What they wanted to live in such an out-of-the-way kind of a place for," said his relations, "they could not understand.

But Roger and his bride didn't care in the least whether they understood or not. They had lived 15 years of their lives in that sunny, old world spot. They loved the sound of the sea lapping against the cliffs in summer, or tossing, and moaning unendingly restless in the stormy seasons of the year.

The simple village folks always had been and always would be their friends. They were delighted to make the acquaintance of the literary and scientific people who were anxious to meet the talented author, and soon there was an interchange of visits. But when they were once more alone Nancy and Roger would look at each other and laugh—and what Roger said meant lots of things to Nancy, but would have sounded like nonsense to outsiders. It was always the same time-honored joke:

"All this is the result of Nancy's nod."

ORGANIZED WORK IN MISSION FIELDS

AMERICAN RELIGIOUS ENTERPRISE IN THE LEAD.

Of the Seven Great Organizations Doing Foreign Missionary Work Four Are American—Ecumenical Conference on This Subject to Be Held in New York in April

There are 350 organizations, big and little, doing some form of work in foreign mission fields, but there are seven great societies, four American and three British, that do vastly more than all the rest put together. By great is meant the amount of funds which they annually expend, and the number and size of the missionary enterprises which they maintain. These seven are, in order:

The Church Missionary Society, London, the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church in America; the American Presbyterian Board, the London Missionary Society, the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the American Board, Boston, and the American Baptist Missionary Union of Boston. But while four of these seven are American, the three British societies have larger annual resources than have the four American ones. Not only so, but two of the British societies are organizations in the Church of England, while all of the four American represent different religious bodies.

LARGEST OF ALL.

The largest single missionary organization in the world, the Church Missionary Society of London, was a fruit of the evangelical movement in the Church of England. A part of its work is the maintenance of a vast training school for missionary workers. One of its largest fields is West Africa, where its missionaries gave the first impulse to the exploration of that vast continent. It is now following up these explorations with Gospel stations, so that whole pages of its reports read like a chapter out of Henry M. Stanley's book. Its other great field is India. Here it stands for British rule and prestige. But it has gone to other fields, notably to China, and its $2,000,000 a year spent in the cause of the Gospel, circle the globe with their up-lift influence.

The second largest of the world's great missionary organizations is the American Methodist, which spends about $1,000,000 a year. Its fields are China and India, although it has work in many other lands. Methodists of Canada outstrip all other religious bodies of the Dominion in missionary contributions and activity, so that if there be added together the contributions of Methodist North America the total reaches $1,450,000 a year.

Presbyterians North stand third of the seven organizations, and spend $875,000 a year. Its largest field is India, if number of missions be the test, but in number of communicants China surpasses all. It has important work in Korea, Japan and Persia, and in the far east it has, in educational and political ways, exerted marked influence, often at critical times. It leads all other boards in the number of its medical missionaries, both men and women.

UNDENOMINATIONAL.

Two of the remaining four societies are British and two American. The London Missionary had in its early days ,as did the American board, its counterpart on this side of the Atlantic, supporters in many religious bodies, and had and still has a constitution strictly undenominational in its wording. But it has in practice come to represent the British Congregationalists. While China and India are its great fields, its peculiar field is Madagascar, where the work of its missionaries was far-reaching and wonderful. The South Seas and also South Africa have seen many of its workers. It spends $675,000 a year, or about the same sum as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the American board.

The "S. P. G.," as everybody calls this famous society for short, is the oldest of Protestant bodies for strictly missionary work, and grew out of the need for the planting of missions in North America. It planted, for example, famous Trinity parish, New York city, and through its influence gave that now vast corporation its financial start. For many years its labors were confined to British territory.

The American board, now Congregational, grew out of the haystack conference, as everybody knows, and dates from 1810, the oldest of American missionary organizations. So early did it get started and so wisely has it administered its trusts that it now makes the largest showing on its $650,000 a year of any missionary body. Its work in India and in China makes those countries its main fields, but more famous is its history in Turkey, where it fought for humanity, as well as for religion, and in the Sandwich Islands, where the story of its deeds since about 1835 reads like some missionary air castle. The way in which the first party of missionaries came to go to Hawaii, and what came of their trip, these are tales in themselves.

BAPTIST SOCIETY.

The greatest Baptist foreign organization is the Missionary Union of Boston. In one important respect it beats every other missionary body in the world, namely, the number of so-called "heathen" that it has induced to turn Christian. The union came into existence in a curious manner. Two young men who had gone out under the American board changed their views on baptism while on the long sea voyage. To support them, being in the field and now Baptists, an organization was formed in 1814, and it has since grown, as stated, to be one of the seven great missionary forces of the world.

These vast missionary interests, vast in operation and expenditure, and far-reaching in their influence upon affairs both in the United States and in foreign lands, are to hold an Ecumenical conference on the general subject of foreign missions. The date is the ten days following April 21 and the place New York. All of these great missionary interests will be represented, of course.

NOTHING SERIOUS.

Unsatisfied.

Fretful Child—"I want to look at the moon!"

Weary Father—"Well, why don't you? It is right up there in the sky. Look at it as much as you please'.'

Fretful Child—"Aw, I want to look at the other side of the moon now!"—Harper's Bazar.

Kindred Shocks.

"Why so downcast, Jack? You look as blue as an English general."

"Say, Dick, did you ever have a girl you were sure loved you turn you down when you proposed?"

"No; but I've been hit in the ear with a snowball."—Harper's Bazar.

A Long-Felt Want.

"Oh, my friends, there are some spectacles that one never forgets!" said a lecturer, after giving a graphic description of a terrible accident he had witnessed.

"I'd like to know where they sells 'em," remarked an absent-minded old lady in the audience.—Collier's Weekly.

Called His Bluff.

One of the boys was bragging of his manifold accomplishments, until one of the company at the round table lost patience, and said, in a gruff tone:

"Now, we've heard enough about what you can do. Come, tell us what there is you can't do, and I'll undertake to do it myself."

"Well," replied the student, with a yawn, "I can't pay my account here. So glad to find you're the man to do it."—Collier's Weekly.

A Certainty.

Lady—"Will you guarantee these bulbs to grow and bloom?"

Florist—"Yes, mum. You'll find 'em as full of lillies as an Easter sermon."—Harper's Bazar.

The Uncertainty Ended.

"Now honestly, Maud, didn't Jack propose last evening?"

"Why, ye-e-es! But how did you guess?"

"I noticed that you didn't have that worried look this morning."—Harper's Bazar.

More Than Innocent.

"You say you were on unwilling witness of the quarrel between this man and his wife? Did you interfere in any way?"

"No, Your Honor. I was merely the incensed bystander."—Chicago Tribune.

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