

## THE MINNOWS WITH SILVER TAILS.

A STORY TOLD TO A CHILD.

There was a cuckoo clock hanging in Tom Turner's cottage. When it struck one, Tom's wife laid the baby in the cradle and took a saucepan off the fire, from which came a very savory smell.

Her two little children who had been playing in the open doorway, ran to the table, and began softly to drum upon it with their pewter spoons, looking eagerly at their mother as she turned a nice little piece of pork into a dish, and set greens and potatoes around it. They fetched the salt; then they set a chair for their father; brought their own stools, and pulled their mother's rocking chair close to the table.

Run to the door, Billy, said the mother, and see if father's coming. Billy ran to the door; and, after the fashion of little children, looked first the right way and then the wrong way, but no father was to be seen.

Presently the mother followed him, and shaded her eyes with her hand, for it was hot. If father doesn't come soon, she observed, the apple dumpling will be too much done by a deal.

There he is, cried the little boy, he is coming round by the woods; and now he's going over the bridge. O, father! make haste, and have some apple dumpling.

Tom, said his wife, as he came near, art tired to-day?

Uncommon tired, said Tom, and he threw himself on the bench, in the shadow of the thatch.

Has anything gone wrong? asked his wife. What's the matter?

Matter! repeated Tom, is anything the matter? The matter is this, mother, that I'm a miserable hard worked slave, and he clapped his hands upon his knees, and muttered in a deep voice, which frightened the children—a miserable slave.

Bless us! said the wife, and could not make out what he meant.

A miserable, ill used slave, continued Tom, and always have been.

Always have been? said his wife, why father, I thought thou used to say, at the election time, that thou wast a free born Briton.

Women have no business with politics, said Tom, getting up rather sulkily. And whether it was the force of habit, or the smell of the dinner, that made him do it, has not been ascertained, but it is certain he walked into the house, ate plenty of pork and greens, and then took a tolerable share in demolishing the apple dumpling.

When the little children were gone out to play, his wife said to him, Tom, I hope thou and master haven't had words to-day?

Master, said Tom, yes, a pretty master he has been, and a pretty slave I've been. Don't talk to me of masters.

O, Tom, Tom, cried his wife, but he's been a good master to you; fourteen shillings a week, regular wages—that's not a thing to make a sneer at; and think how warm the children are lapped up o' winter nights, and you with as good shoes to your feet as ever kept him out of the mud.

What of that? said Tom, isn't my labor worth the money? I'm not beholden to my employer. He gets as good from me as he gives.

Very like, Tom. There's not a man for miles round that can match you at a graft; and as to early peas—but if master can't do without you, I'm sure you can't do without him. O, dear, to think that you and he should have had words.

We've had no words, said Tom impatiently; but I'm sick of being at another man's beck and call. It's Tom do this, and Tom do that, and nothing but work, work, work, from Monday morning till Saturday night; and I was thinking, as I walked over to Squire Morton's to ask for the turnip seed for master, I was thinking, Sally, that I am nothing but a poor working man after all. In short, I'm a slave, and my spirit won't stand it.

So saying, Tom flung himself out at the cottage door, and his wife thought he was going back to his work as usual. But she was mistaken; he walked to the wood, and there, when he came to the border of a little tinkling stream, he sat down, and began to brood over his grievances. It was a very hot day.

Now, I'll tell you what, said Tom, to himself, it's a great deal pleasanter sitting here in the shade than broiling over celery trenches, and then thinking of wall fruit, with a baking sun at one's back, and a hot wall before his eyes. But I'm a miserable slave. I must either work or see 'em starve; a very

hard lot to be a working man. But it is not only the work that I complain of, but being obliged to work just as he pleases. It's enough to spoil any man's temper to be told to dig up those asparagus beds just when they were getting to be the very pride of the parish. And what for? Why, to make room for Madam's gravel walk, that she may not wet her feet going over the grass. Now, I ask you, continued Tom, still talking to himself, whether that isn't enough to spoil any man's temper?

Ahem! said a voice close to him. Tom started, and to his great surprise saw a small man, about the size of his own baby, sitting composedly at his elbow. He was dressed in a green hat, green coat, green shoes. He had very bright, black eyes, and they twinkled very much as he looked at Tom and smiled.

Servant, sir! said Tom, edging himself a little farther off. Miserable slave, said the small man, art thou so far lost to the noble sense of freedom that the very salutation acknowledges a mere stranger as thy master?

Who are you, said Tom, and how dare you call me a slave? Tom, said the small man, with a knowing look, don't speak roughly. Keep your rough words for your wife, my man, she is bound to bear them—what else is she for, in fact?

I'll thank you to let my affairs alone, interrupted Tom, shortly. Tom, I'm your friend; I think I can help you out of your difficulty. I admire your spirit. Would I demean myself to work for a master, and attend to all his whims?

As he said this the small man stopped and looked very earnestly into the stream. Drip, drip, drip, went the water over a little fall in the stones and wetted the water-cresses till they shone in the light, while the leaves fluttered overhead and chequered the moss with glittering spots of sunshine. Tom watched the small man with earnest attention as he turned over the leaves of the cresses. At last he saw him snatch something which looked like a little fish out of the water and put it in his pocket.

It's my belief, Tom, he said, resuming the conversation, that you have been puzzling your head with what people call Political Economy.

But look here, Tom, proceeded the man in green, drawing his hand out of his pocket, and showing a little dripping fish in his palm. What do you call this? I call it a very small minnow, said Tom.

And do you see anything particular about its tail? It looks uncommon bright, said Tom, stopping to look at it.

It does, said the man in green, and now I'll tell you a secret, for I'm resolved to be your friend. Every minnow in this stream—they are very scarce mind you—but every one of them has a silver tail.

You don't say so, exclaimed Tom, opening his eyes very wide, fishing for minnows and being one's own master, would be a great deal pleasanter than the sort of life I've been leading this many a day.

Well, keep the secret, as to where you get them, and much good may it do you, said the man in green. Farewell, I wish you joy in your freedom. So saying he walked away, leaving Tom on the brink of the stream full of joy and pride. He went to his master and told him he had an opportunity for bettering himself, and rose with the dawn, and went to work to search for minnows. But of all the minnows in the world never were any so nimble as those with silver tails. They were very sly too, and had as many turns and doubles as a hare; what a life they led him! They made him troll up the stream for miles; then, just as he thought his chase was at an end, and he was sure of them, they would leap quite out of the water and dart down the stream again like silver arrows. Miles and miles he went, tired and wet and hungry. He came home late in the evening, completely wearied and foot sore, with only three minnows in his pocket, each with a silver tail.

But, at any rate, he said to himself, as he lay down in his bed, though they lead me a pretty life, and I have to work harder than ever, yet I certainly am free; no man can order me about now.

This went on for a whole week; he worked very hard; but on Saturday afternoon he had caught only fourteen minnows.

If it wasn't for the pride of the thing, he said to himself, I'd have no more to do with fishing for minnows. This is the hardest work I ever did. I am quite a slave to them. I rush up and

down, I dodge in and out, I splash myself, and fret myself, and broil myself in the sun, and all for the sake of a dumb thing that gets the better of me with a wag of its fins. But it's no use standing here talking; I must be off to the town and sell them, or Sally will wonder why I don't bring her the week's money. So he walked to the town and offered his fish as great curiosities.

Very pretty, said the first people he showed them to; but, they never bought anything that was not useful.

Were they good to eat? asked the woman at the next house. No! Then they would not have them.

Much too dear, said a third. And not so very curious, said a fourth; but they hoped he had come by them honestly.

At the fifth house they said, O! pooh! when he exhibited them. No, no, they were not so foolish as to believe there were fish in the world with silver tails; if there had been, they should often have heard of them before.

At the sixth house they were so long turning over his fish, pinching their tails, bargaining and discussing them, that he ventured to remonstrate, and request that they would make some haste. Thereupon they said if he did not choose to wait their pleasure, they would not purchase at all. So they shut the door upon him, and as this roused his temper, he spoke rather roughly at the next two houses, and was dismissed at once as a very rude, uncivil person.

But after all his fish were really great curiosities; and when he had exhibited them all over the town, set them off in all lights, praised their perfections, and taken immense pains to conceal his impatience and ill temper, he at length contrived to sell them all, and got exactly fourteen shillings for them, and no more.

Now, I'll tell you what, Tom Turner, he said to himself, in my opinion you've been making a fool of yourself, and I only hope Sally will not find it out. You was tired of being a working man, and that man in green has cheated you into doing the hardest week's work you ever did in your life by making you believe it was more free-like and easier. Well, you said, you didn't mind it, because you had no master; but I've found out this afternoon, Tom, and I don't mind your knowing it, that every one of those customers of yours was your master just the same. Why you were at the beck of every man, woman and child that came near you—obliged to be in a good temper, too, which was very aggravating.

Look, Tom, said the man in green, starting up in his path; I knew you were a man of sense; look you, you're all working men, and you must all please your customers. Your master was your customer; what he bought of you was your work. Well, you must let the work be such as will please your customers.

All working men? how do you make that out? said Tom, chinking the fourteen shillings in his hand. Is my master a working man? And has he got a master of his own? Nonsense!

No nonsense at all—he works with his head; keeps his books, and manages his great works. He has many masters, else why was he nearly ruined last year?

He was nearly ruined because he made some new fangled kind of pattern at his works and people would not buy them, said Tom. Well, in a way of speaking, then, he works to please his masters, poor fellow! He is, as one may say, a fellow servant and plagued with very awkward masters. So I should not mind his being my master, and I think I'll go and tell him so.

I would, Tom, said the man in green. Tell him you have not been able to better yourself, and you have no objections now to dig up the asparagus bed.

So Tom trudged home to his wife, gave her the money he had earned, got his old master to take him back, and kept a profound secret his adventures with the man in green, and the fish with the silver tails.

JEAN INGELOW.

## BUSINESS FIRST, AND PLEASURE AFTER.

Put the young horse in plow, said the farmer; and very much pleased he was to be in a team with Dobbin and the gray mare. It was a long field, and gaily he walked across it, his nose upon Dobbin's haunches, having hard work to keep so slow a pace.

Where are we going now? he said, when he got to the top. This is very pleasant.

Back again, said Dobbin.

What for? said the young horse, rather surprised; but Dobbin had gone to sleep, for he could plow as well asleep as awake.

What are we going back for? he asked, turning round to the old gray mare.

Keep on, said the gray mare, or we shall never get to the bottom, and you'll have the whip at your heels.

Very odd, indeed, said the young horse, who thought he had had enough of it, and was not sorry he was coming to the bottom of the field. Great was his astonishment when Dobbin, just opening his eyes, again turned, and proceeded, at the same pace up the field.

How long is this going on? asked the young horse.

Dobbin just glanced across the field, as his eyes closed, and fell asleep again, as he began to calculate how long it would take to plow it.

How long will this go on? he asked, turning to the gray mare.

Keep up, I tell you, she said, or you'll have me on your heels.

When the top came and another turn, and the bottom and another turn, the poor young horse was in despair; he grew quite dizzy, and was glad, like Dobbin, to shut his eyes, that he might get rid of the sight of the same ground so continually.

Well, he said, when the gears were taken off, if this is your plowing, I hope I shall have no more of it. But his hopes were in vain; for many days he plowed, till he got, not reconciled to it, but tired of complaining of the weary monotonous work.

In the hard winter, when comfortably housed in the warm stable, he cried out to Dobbin, as he was eating some delicious oats, I say, Dobbin, this is better than plowing; do you remember that field? I hope I shall never have anything to do with that business again. What in the world could be the use of walking up a field just for the sake of walking down again? It's enough to make one laugh to think of it.

How do you like your oats? said Dobbin.

Delicious! said the young horse.

Then please to remember, if there was no plowing, there would be no oats.

## A TRADE A FORTUNE.

If parents would consider the welfare and happiness of the children, they would choose the virtuous mechanic, farmer or honest trader as companions and helpmates, instead of the rich, who, aside from their income, have no means of subsistence. How often does this question arise, and from parents in choosing companions and suitors for their daughters, "Is he rich?" If the daughter answers, "Yes, he is rich; he is a gentleman, neat dress, and can live without work," the parents are pleased.

Not many years ago a Polish lady of plebeian birth, of exceeding beauty and accomplishments, won the affections of a young nobleman, who, having her consent, solicited her from her father in marriage, and was refused. We can easily imagine the astonishment of the nobleman.

"Am I not," said he, "of sufficient rank to aspire to the hand of your daughter?"

"You are undoubtedly of the best blood of Poland," replied the father.

"And my fortune and reputation," continued the young man, "are they not—?"

"Your estate is magnificent," responded the father, "and your conduct irreproachable."

"Then, having your daughter's consent, should I expect a refusal?"

"This, sir," replied the father, "is my only child, and her happiness is the chief concern of my life. All the possessions of fortune are precarious; what fortune gives at her caprice she takes away. I see no security of independence or comfortable living save one; in a word, I am resolved that no one shall be the husband of my daughter who is not at the same time master of a trade."

The nobleman bowed and retired silently. A year or two afterward the father was sitting in the door, and saw approaching the house wagons laden with baskets, and at the head of a cavalcade a person in the dress of a basket maker. And who do you suppose it was? The former suitor of his daughter. The nobleman had turned basket-maker. He was now master of a trade, and brought the wares made by his own hands for inspection, and a certificate from his employer in testimony of his skill. The condition being fulfilled, no further obstacle was opposed to the marriage.

But the story is not yet done. The revolution came—fortunes were plundered, and lords were scattered as chaff before the winds of heaven. Princes became beggars—some of them teachers, but the noble Pole supported his wife and her father, who was disabled by the infirmities of age, by his basket-making industry.