

## Social Problems.

## BETTY'S LITTLE SPECS.

Betty sat sunning herself one gorgeous day in June outside her cottage door, yet she sat in darkness.

The old woman was blind; one sightless eye and one red-rimmed socket were carefully hidden by a faded green shade.

Even so the patient creature enjoyed the delights of summer, and made no murmur because with the scent of the rose its colour was hidden from her; serenity crowned her wrinkled brow, and endurance sat solemnly on her closed lips.

By-and-by the old woman cupped her ear in her hand, and a slow smile crept across her quiet face; the garden gate swung on its hinges, and two little feet fluttered over the flags.

"Blest if it ain't Betty's little Specs," she cried, rising to her feet, and holding out two trembling hands.

"Oh! you dear, dear old Betty, how did you know?" a child called gaily, dancing into the old woman's embrace. "Can you see just a wee, wee bittie? I only came home to-day, and I just tiptooed all the way. I wanted to s'prise you."

Betty sat down "all of a pother," as she expressed it.

"Bless yer tinkling feet," she said; "them as is blind 'ears clear, cos' they 'ears with the 'eart. I've been listening for yer these days and days. I've not seen nobbody, nor no flowers, nor nothink sin' yer've been gone away. 'I wants my little Specs,' I says to myself a 'undred times a day. The fields is all aflower and I ain't seed 'em once, and 'ark! they's begun the reaping!"

"Oh! poor, poor Betty!" says little Specs, "Give me your hand this very minute as is; let us go into the meadows, and I'll see for you. Gowans is out, and cockscombs and red nobs, and the grass is all silver and gold, and so high—so high it just tickles my chin, and all swaying and waving in the wind; and eggs and bacon is out on the river's bank, and meadowsweet and ———"

"And the whole world's a-growing and a-blowing," laughs the old woman, clasping the child's hand with faith supreme, and so away out into the gay world.

For gay indeed it appears to the blind woman who lives in darkness, as she listens to the ceaseless chatter of her little "Specs," whose imaginative and descriptive powers are amazingly vivid.

First they pass through the old Hall gardens, spick and span, and "exquisitely kept." "I just hate it," the Squire's little daughter whispers, "and so do the flowers; they mayn't grow a bit as they please, twitched here and nipped there, and nailed to the wall—it's very kind of them to bloom at all; and then the poor trees, clipped all shapes—lions and peacocks and butterflies. Oh! if I was a tree I would *not* be turned into beasts and birds; I'd just get a kind little worm to nibble my root, and droop, and fade, and die. And oh! Betty, what d'yer think—little Tom, father's jockey, caught a lark and hung it in a wicker cage on the stable wall, cos' he says 'the 'orses is fond of music,' and Moggs, the ratcatcher, told him to burn out its poor eyes with red-hot skewers to make it sing the better—(I do so wish his ferrets would worry old Moggs)—and so I creeped up, oh! so quietly, and

opened the cage door, and away it flew, and I was so glad I clapped my hands, and up comes little Tom and says swear words, and I—I put me tongue in me cheek, and then he flared out.

"You just wait, little madam, till yer pa comes 'ome. I'll tell of yer imperence, and won't there be a 'urricane!"

"I ain't got no pa," I said, very stiff—"it's father," and I made my back very straight and walked away. And when I peeped round little Tom was rubbing down Firefly and hissing like an engine, and she whinnied and smiled at him, and he kissed her nose—and you know, Betty, horses has noses softer than satin—so I turned back and said to Tom, "Perhaps, Tom, you are not such a cruel little man as I thought, and perhaps you do not know as there is stokeholes in great ships—down, down at the very bottom—where poor men feed fiery furnaces and are almost roasted alive, and come up black like niggers, and gasping just like fishes out of water, to gulp down a little fresh air, and then down again for hours and hours, and their poor eyes nearly burnt out of their heads." ("Oh! deary me," ejaculates Betty). "How would you like to be took away from your horses, Tom, and caged in a stokehole, and never ride and win races any more—for that's what will happen to you if you puts wild birds into cages and breaks their hearts?" And Tom, he says, quite respectful, "Thank yer for telling me, little Miss; that's a werry convincing argerment of your'n; it's do as you'd be done by, it is, and I will say as your 'eart's in the right place."

"And I said, 'Thank you, Tom,' and ran away without any backbone; and when we are in the meadows you will hear my lark singing Hallelujah, 'cos it's free, and can fly right into the sun."

And sure enough, when these two come into the meads, and wade through sweet flowering grasses—ripe and ready for cutting—up starts a lark, and dips and soars, and dips and soars again—singing, singing all the time, so that its tiny throttle is like to burst, it is so full of melody.

And the child lifts up her voice and makes music too, and chants, "Oh! little birdie, that I, too, had wings, and together we would fly—beyond the blue, blue sky."

And then the bird is swallowed up in light. And having passed through seas of lush grasses, and gathered honey-sweet posies, the child leads old Betty into green grazing fields, where milch cows are chewing the cud, and clumsy-legged foals caress their dams, and together they climb up to the summit of the pasture lands, where stands the great six-sailed mill, from whence you can see across a beauteous valley, where hamlets nestle in purple haze, and through which their church spires point on high. Here on these uplands the breeze is fresh and strong, and the old woman and the child stand hand in hand, "listening to the still."

After silence, the child turns her soft, inquiring eyes upon the woman's face, and whispers, her throat pulsating as she speaks, "How was you made blind, dear Betty?"

The woman in darkness stands very still, and says without emotion—although her lips are pale:

"It was very misfortunate; 'e 'appened to 'ave 'ob-nails in 'is boots."

Again for a long, long time there is silence, and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)