

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE HUNTER."*

"Louis Buttress was the nobody of Alamanca Creek. He was best described by his own remark, 'I'm a natural sort o' man.' He lived near the water in an excuse for a cabin, which had cost about a dollar in the making, and he spent his life with the dumb creation.

Money-making had no pleasure for him at all; but the eyes of a coon, a fox, a ground hog or a mouse had power to arrest the whole man.

"Silvia Lake was the beauty of Alamanca Creek, and her father, Sylvester Lake, had endless callers at their home at Creek Point. He took the honour to himself, being an important feeling man; but Silvia had reason to know that she was the star for pony-riding boys to dream of." It seemed a far cry from pretty Silvia to Louis Buttress, but it is the unexpected that happens.

He came upon her one day inadvertently as she was bathing in the pool. "Plumb as the Almighty planned her."

"A water hen, disturbed by his intruding and unguarded feet, called loudly, and went into the lake. The girl looked in that direction, and her eyes met the man's just as a fox's eyes had done a minute ago.

"Her eyes reached him with their force, and she gave him her whole attention. Buttress put it in one word, 'trust.'

"Great God in Heaven, she's clothed from my poor eyes by that faith of hers," he said. He waved his hand to her and disappeared amongst the brush.

"'Tis true," he said to himself, "I saw nothing but her beautiful soul after that first look when she was unknown of my presence."

Hitherto the wild hunter had known nothing of women; but from that moment he was obsessed with the thought of Silvia.

Silvia was under no illusion concerning Louis or his antecedents, when she decided to listen to his primitive wooing and run away and marry him.

Previously he had told her: "My father was a poacher in Lincolnshire. The vicar of the parish had said that he was 'cureless,' so he said to mother, 'You take father where poachin' is right, and thus you stop the sin. Father said he'd rather go once or twice to gaol and stop in England, but he says the Church and the woman were too much for any man to fight alone, and he found himself at last in U.S.A. But the queer thing is that father don't like it when it's lawful. 'Drat it, Louis,' he says to me, 'there's nothing to run up against, the hul thing's as stupid as a suet pudding.'"

The nature studies in the book are a most attractive feature.

"Sometimes Louis and Silvia sat outside the cabin watching evening as it melted into night.

The sky might be studded by stars; it might be swept by the moon; it might be soft and misty, with some orange-hued dusky cloud where the sun had set; but it was received with pleasure."

Married life with them began as an idyll, but tragedy was not long before it clouded their happiness. Silvia had been promised to Bill Din the pony boy before Louis swept her off her feet and she had neither told Louis of her entanglement with Bill, nor Bill that she intended to break faith with him. It was when Louis discovered what he had done to the man who was his friend that "he came slowly home with an indifferent listless movement, which even the shadows of evening could not disguise.

Silvia lit the lamp, putting it on the table. She looked at Louis after she had done it. The light showed the man's face, and his blue eyes were strange looking. His hair was dishevelled. He took up her crochet work and began to unravel it.

Silvia got the supper ready and put coffee on the table. Louis continued to unravel the work.

Silvia moved away from him and went to the door. Night had descended; the sky was brilliant with stars; the dog was barking."

All night these two kept vigil.

The cocks crowed at three o'clock, then stopped as if they had made a mistake; and did it again, with more life, at five."

Louis, like many gentle men, was implacable at the thought of her want of trust in him; and for a while they parted, but only for a while, for these two were predestined for each other.

She tells him "You gave me peace when I looked at you, even after I started to make mistakes. It got to be a prayer with me to hold this feelin' of beauty about why we was made different from each other, and how it was our part of God. I can't tell you how it came to be a prayer, but it grew out of the silence, and I wanted to make sure that the deep, deep voice was the real one.

"So I was a-watchin' for a man—watchin' with my soul dependin' on it, instead of believin' and waitin' on God to show me. That's how I started goin' with the boys. Yet there was no fire in them—no love of God's works. I wanted the man whose soul would rage when God's laws were mocked in either word or action. Creation ain't a crumpled leaf turned down to be hidden or despised. I wanted the man who thought it was a perfect law, because it was the law that created the best thing on earth—souls. And then, Louis, out of the silence of Ari-wa-kis North Bank spoke to South Bank. You were close by all the time. You were there, feelin' it perfect!"

"It was God, Silvia."

"Don't I know it! You was my answer."

"Silvia, paradise, ain't it?"

A really refreshing book, which we can heartily recommend to all nature lovers.

H. H.

* By Watson Dyke. (Putnam's Sons: 24, Bedford Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2.)

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