

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT



AUNT JO'S
SCRAPBAG

Shawl-Straps

VOLUME 2

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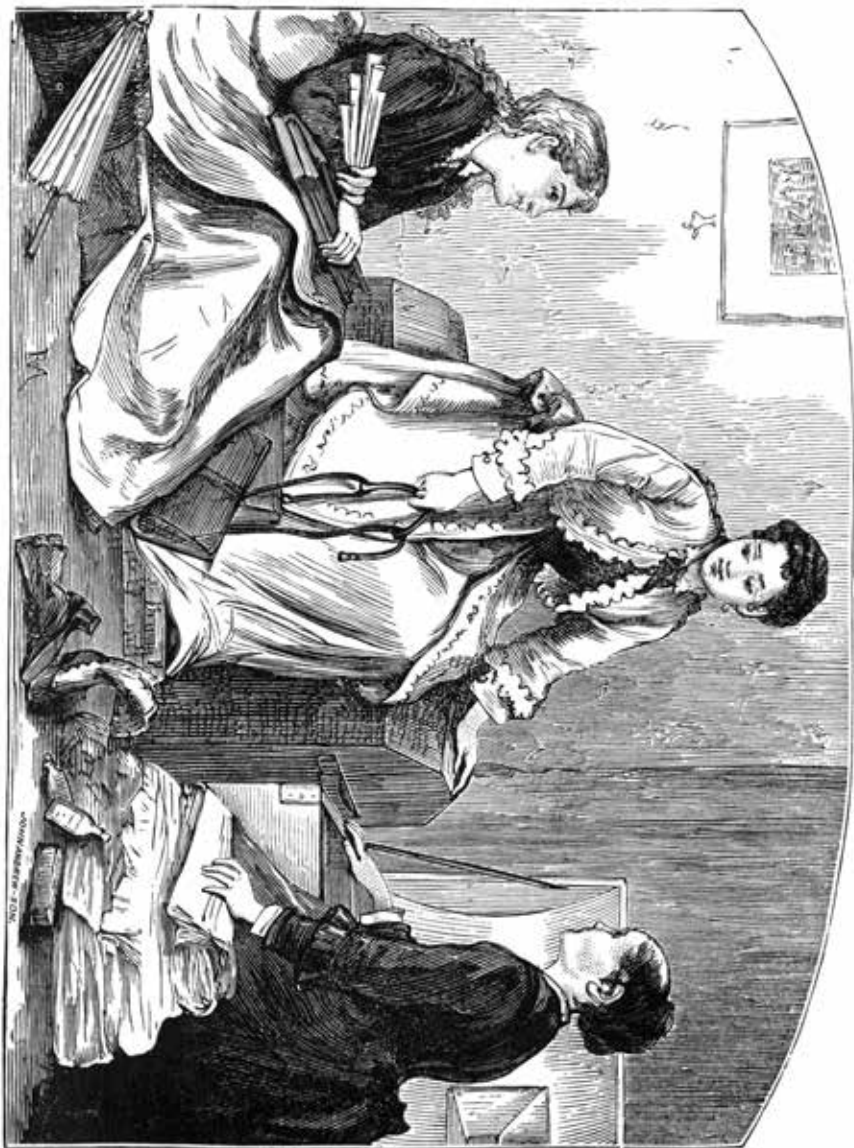
Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag

CUPID AND CHOW-CHOW, Etc



BY
LOUISA M. ALCOTT





THE CONSULTATION—TRUNKS OR "SHAWL-STRAPS."

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Off.

‘ON the first day of February we three will sail from Boston for Messina, in the little fruit-ship “Wasp.” We shall probably be a month going, unless we cross in a gale as I did, splitting sails every night, and standing on our heads most of the way,’ said Amanda, folding up her maps with an air of calm decision.

‘Hurrah! what fun!’ cried Matilda, waving a half-finished dressing-case over her head.

But Lavinia, with one sepulchral groan, fell flat upon her bed, and lay there, dumb with the horrors of such a voyage.

‘Just the thing for you, my poor old dear. Think of the balmy airs of Sicily, the oranges, the flowers. Then a delicious month or two at Sorrento, with no east winds, no slush, no spring cleaning. We shall be as merry as grigs, and get as buxom as dairy-maids in a month,’ said the sprightly Amanda.

‘You promised to go, and if you back out we are lost, for we *must* have a duenna. You can lie round in Europe just as well as here, and I have no doubt it will do you a world of good,’ added Matilda.

‘I shall keep my word; but you will bury me in the Atlantic, so make up your minds to it. Do you suppose that I, a poor, used-up old invalid, who can’t look at a sail-boat without a qualm, can survive thirty days of standing on my head, and thirty nights of sail-splitting, as we go slamming and lurching across two or three awful oceans?’ demanded Lavinia, with the energy of despair.

Before anyone could reply, Amanda's little Mercury appeared with a note.

'The "Wasp" will *not* take passengers, and no other fruit-ship sails this spring,' read Amanda.

'Oh dear!' sighed Matilda.

'Saved!' cried Lavinia.

'Be calm: we shall go, sooner or later, if I buy a ship and sail her myself;' with which indomitable remark Amanda went forth to grapple with and conquer untoward circumstances.

A month of plans, vicissitudes, and suspense followed, during which Amanda strove manfully; Matilda suffered agonies of hope and fear; and Lavinia remained a passive shuttlecock, waiting to be tossed wherever Fate's battledore chose to send her.

'Exactly two weeks from to-day, we sail with a party of friends in the French steamer "Lafayette," from New York for Brest. Will you be ready?' demanded Amanda, after a protracted wrestle with aforesaid adverse circumstances.

'But that is exactly what we didn't mean to do. It's expensive and fashionable; France and not Italy, north and not south.'

'That's because I'm in the party. If you take a Jonah nothing will go well. Leave me behind, and you will have a charming trip,' said Lavinia, who had an oyster-like objection to being torn from her bed.

'No matter, we are going, live or die, sink or swim; and I shall expect to meet you, all booted and spurred and fit for the fight, April first,' said the unwavering Amanda.

'A most appropriate day for three lone women to start off on a wild-goose chase after health and pleasure,' groaned Lavinia from among her pillows.

'Very well, then; I leave you now, and shall expect to meet on the appointed day?'

'If I'm spared,' answered the sufferer.

‘I’ll bring her, never fear,’ added the sanguine Mat, as she rattled the trays out of an immense trunk.

How they ever did it no one knows; but in a week everything was ready, and the sisters had nothing left to do but to sit and receive the presents that showered upon them from all quarters. How kind everyone was, to be sure! Six fine dressing-cases arrived, and were hung upon the walls; four smelling-bottles—one for each nostril; bed-socks, rigolettes, afghans, lunch-baskets, pocket-flasks, guide-books, needle-cases, bouquets in stacks, and a great cake with their names on top in red and blue letters three inches long.

Friendly fingers sewed for them; even the gentlemen of the house—and there were eight—had a ‘bee,’ and hemmed handkerchiefs for Mat, marked towels; and one noble being actually took off his coat and packed the trunks in layers of mosaic-work wonderful to behold. A supper celebrated the last evening; and even the doleful Lavinia, touched by such kindness, emerged from her slough of despond and electrified the ball by dancing a jig with great spirit and grace.

Devoted beings were up at dawn to share the early breakfast, lug trunks, fly up and down with last messages, cheer heartily as the carriage drove off, and then adjourn *en masse* to the station, there to shake hands all round once more, and wave and wring handkerchiefs as the train at last bore the jocund Mat and the resigned Lavinia toward the trysting-place and Amanda.

All along the route more friends kept bursting into the cars as they stopped at different places; more gifts, more hand-shakes and kisses, more good wishes and kind prophecies, till at last in a chaos of smiles, tears, smelling-bottles, luncheon, cloaks, books, and foot-warmers, the travellers left the last friendly face behind and steamed away to New York.

‘How de-licious this is!’ cried the untravelled Matilda, as they

stepped upon the deck of the 'Lafayette,' and she sniffed the shippy fragrance that caused Lavinia to gasp and answer darkly,—
'Wait till to-morrow.'

While Mat surveyed the steamer under the care of Devoted Being No. 10, who appeared to see them off, Lavinia arranged the stateroom, stowing away all useless gear and laying forth dressing-gowns, slippers, pocket-handkerchiefs, with an anguished smile. *She* had crossed the ocean twice, and was a wiser, sadder woman for it. At eight she turned in, and ten minutes later Amanda came aboard with a flock of gay friends. But no temptations of the flesh could lure the wary spinster from her den; for the night was rough and cold, and the steamer a Babel of confusion.

'It's perfectly delightful! I wish you'd been there, Livy. We had supper, and songs, and funny stories, and all sorts of larks. There are quantities of nice people aboard, and we shall have a perfectly splendid trip. I shall be up bright and early, put on my scarlet stockings, my new boots, and pretty sea-suit, and go in for a jolly day,' said the ardent Matilda, as she came skipping down at midnight and fell asleep full of rosy visions of the joys of a

Life on the ocean wave.

'Deluded child!' sighed Lavinia, closing her dizzy eyes upon the swaying garments on the wall, and feebly wishing she had hung herself along with them.

In the gray dawn she was awakened by sounds of woe, and peering forth beheld the festive Matilda with one red stocking on and one off, her blonde locks wildly dishevelled, her face of a pale green, and her hands clasping lemons, cologne, and salts, as she lay with her brow upon the cool marble of the toilet-table.

'How do you like it, dear?' asked the unfeeling Lavinia.

'Oh, what is it? I feel as if I was dying. If somebody would only stop the swing *one* minute. Is it sea-sickness? It's awful, but it will

do me good. Oh, yes! I hope so. I've tried everything, and feel worse and worse. Hold me! save me! Oh, I wish I hadn't come!

'Shipmates ahoy! how are you, my loves?' and Amanda appeared, rosy, calm, and gay, with her pea-jacket on, skirts close reefed, hat well to windward, and everything taut and ship-shape; for she was a fine sailor, and never missed a meal.

Wails greeted her, and faint inquiries as to the state of things in the upper world.

'Blowing a gale; rain, hail, and snow,—very dirty weather; and we are flying off the coast in fine style,' was the cheerful reply.

'Have we split any sails?' asked Lavinia, not daring to open her eyes.

'Dozens, I dare say. Shipping seas every five minutes. All the passengers ill but me, and every prospect of a north-easter all the way over,' continued the lively Amanda, lurching briskly about the passage with her hands in her pockets.

Matilda dropped her lemons and her bottles to wring her hands, and Lavinia softly murmured—

'Lord, what fools we mortals be,
That we ever go to sea!'

'Breakfast, ladies?' cried the pretty French stewardess, prancing in with tea-cups, bowls of gruel, and piles of toast balanced in some miraculous manner all over her arms.

'Oh, take it away! I shall never eat again,' moaned Matilda, clinging frantically to the marble, as the water-pitcher went down the middle with a hair-brush, and all the boots and shoes had a grand promenade round the room.

'Don't speak to me; don't look at me; don't even *think* of me for three days at least. Go and enjoy yourself, and leave us to our doom;' with which tragical remark Lavinia drew her curtains, and was seen no more.

Great heavens, what a week that was! Rain, wind, fog; creak, pitch, toss; noise, smells, cold. Broken sleep by day, woe in every variety by night; food and drink a delusion and a snare; society an affliction; life a burden; death a far-off blessing not to be had at any price. Slowly, slowly the victims emerge from the lower depths of gloom, feebly smile, faintly joke, pick fearfully but wistfully at once-rejected dishes; talk about getting up, but don't do it; read a little, look at their sallow countenances in hand-glasses, and speculate upon the good effects of travel upon the constitution. Then they suddenly become daring, gay, and social; rise, adorn themselves, pervade the cabins, sniff the odours of engine and kitchen without qualms, play games, go to table; and, just as the voyage is over, begin to enjoy it.

Alas for poor Lavinia! no such resurrection was possible for her. Long after Mat had bravely donned the scarlet hose, cocked up her beaver and gone forth to festive scenes, her shipmate remained below in chrysalis state, fed by faithful Marie, visited by the ever-cheerful Amanda, and enlivened by notes and messages from fellow-sufferers in far-off cells.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Walmars, jun., called, and had private theatricals in the passage. Dried-ginger parties were held about the invalid's berth, poems were composed, and conundrums circulated. A little newspaper was concocted, replete with wit and spirit, by these secluded ladies, and called the 'S herald,' to distinguish it from the 'Herald,' got up by sundry gentlemen whose shining hours were devoted to flirtation, cards, and wine.

'Perfect gentlemen, I assure you, my dear; for, drunk or sober, they wear yellow kids from morning till night, smoke the best cigars, and dance divinely,' as Mrs. Twaddle said, sitting erect in the saloon, shrouded in fur and velvet, with five diamond-rings well displayed, as she recounted the diseases she

had enjoyed, and did the honours of a remarkable work-basket, containing eight different sorts of scissors.

‘We shall be in to-morrow, so you’d better be digging up the treasures you have buried, you old magpie,’ said Mat, appearing to the pensive Livy on the eleventh day.

‘The sun is out; come on deck, and help us get up the last edition of our paper. How will this do? Query—If steamers are named the “Asia,” the “Russia,” and the “Scotia,” why not call one the “Nausea?”’ added Amanda, popping her head into the den. Lavinia threw a pillow at her, but the undaunted joker continued—

‘Also this: Financial—This being a feminine paper, gold is no longer at Pa, but at Ma.’

‘Good! Add this: Argument in favour of the Superiority of Women—The sluggard was *not* told to go to his uncle.’

‘Thank you,’ and Amanda departed to twine with her forty-third bosom friend, while Lavinia disinterred, from holes and corners of her berth, money, nuts, and raisins; books, biscuits, and literary efforts much the worse for deluges of soap and daubs of butter.

The cry of ‘Land!’ on the morrow caused passengers unseen before to appear like worms after a shower; all heroically did up their back hair, put on their best suits, and walked forth with the delusive hope that no one would know how ill they had been.

A French Marquis, with a sickly little son, whose diet of fried potatoes and sour wine accounted for his having the temper of a young fiend, appeared, and were made much of by dear, title-loving Americans.

A Spanish opera-singer, stout, saffron-coloured, and imperious, likewise emerged from obscurity, with a meek little husband, who waited on her like a servant, and a big bald parrot, who swore like a trooper.

Several nuns languished in corners of the saloon, surveying the vanities of life with interest, and telling their beads devoutly when they saw anyone looking at them.

A mysterious lady in green velvet with many diamonds, and a shabby, speechless companion, sailed about the ship, regardless of the rumours told of her—deserted husbands, stolen jewellery, lovers waiting on the other side, and many equally pleasant little tales.

The gentlemen with orange gloves and copper-coloured noses got themselves up in the most superb style, though few were going to land at Brest, and took tender farewells of such ladies as did, each professing desolation and despair at the termination of a twelve days' flirtation.

'I am not fond of dirt, but I could kneel down and kiss this mud, so grateful am I to feel solid ground under my feet, after leading the life of a fly for so long,' said Lavinia with emotion, as the three trudged up the wharf at Brest into a sort of barn which served for a custom-house.

'Now let each sit upon her luggage and clamour till some one comes and examines it, else it will get whisked away heaven only knows where,' ordered Amanda, who was the leader in right of her knowledge of tongues.

Each perched accordingly on her one big trunk, and tried to 'clamour.' But nothing came of it save loss of time and temper, for no one paid the slightest heed to them; and it was maddening to see trunk after trunk passed and sent off, followed by its rejoicing owner. Especially hard to bear was the sight of the green-velvet sinner, who, with a smile or two, won the sternest official to pass her five trunks without turning a key, and sailed away with a scornful glance at the virtuous Three planted on their property and feebly beckoning for help.

'I shall bear this no longer. Mat, sit there and guard the small things, while you and I, Livy, charge boldly among these

imbeciles and drag them to their duty;' and Amanda marched away to clutch a cockaded victim by the shoulder with an awe-inspiring countenance.

Lavinia picked out a feeble, gray officer, and dogged him like an Indian, smiling affably, and pointing to her luggage with a persistent mildness that nearly drove the poor man mad.

No matter where he went, or what he did; no matter how thick the crowd about him, or how loud the din; still, like a relentless ghost, that mild old lady was ever at his side, mutely pointing and affably smiling. Of course he gave in, lifted one tray, saw much flannel, nearly blew his venerable nose off sniffing at one suspicious bottle, and slamming down the lid, scrawled a mysterious cross, bowed and fled.

Proudly returning to Amanda, the victorious one found her friend in a high state of indignation; for no officer there would touch her trunk because some American Express had put little leaden stamps here and there for some unknown purpose. Not even in her best French could the irate lady make the thick-headed men understand that it was not a high crime against the nation to undo a strap till some superior officer arrived to take the responsibility of so rash a step.

If they had comprehended the dire threats, the personal remarks, and unmitigated scorn of those three fair travellers, the blue-coated imbeciles would have been reduced to submission. Fortunately the great man came in time to save them from utter rout; for the ladies were just trying to decide whether to go and leave the luggage to its fate, or to haul it forth and depart *vi et armis*, when a stout old party came, saw, said, 'It is nothing; pass the trunk; a thousand pardons, Madame,' and peace was restored.

Instantly the porters, who till then had stood back, eyeing the innocent, black ark, as if it was an infernal machine liable to explode at a touch, threw themselves upon it, bore it forth,

and heaving it atop of an omnibus, returned to demand vast sums for having waited so long.

Then was Amanda sublime; then did her comrades for the first time learn the magnitude of her powers, and realise the treasure they possessed. Stowing Matilda and the smaller traps in the bus, and saying to Lavinia, 'Stand by me,' this dauntless maid faced one dozen blue-bloused, black-bearded, vociferous, demonstrative Frenchmen; and, calmly offering the proper sum, refused to add one sou more.

Vainly the drivers perjured themselves in behalf of the porters; vainly the guard looked on, with imposing uniforms, and impertinent observations; vainly Mat cried imploringly, 'Pay anything, and let us get off before there is a mob'—still the indomitable Amanda held forth the honest franc; and, when no one would take it, laid it on the post, and entering the omnibus, drove calmly away.

'What should we do without you?' sighed Lavinia, with fervent gratitude.

'Be cheated right and left, and never know it, dear,' responded Amanda, preparing for another fight with the omnibus-driver.

And she had it; for, unwarned by the fate of the porters, this short-sighted man insisted on carrying the ladies to a dirty little hotel to dine, though expressly ordered to go at once to the station. Nothing would induce them to alight, though the landlord came out in person and begged them to do so; and, after a protracted struggle and a drive all over the town, they finally reached the dépôt.

Here another demand for double fare was promptly quenched by an appeal to the *chef de station*, who, finding that Mademoiselle was wide awake, crushed the driver and saw justice done.

Exhausted but triumphant, the three at length found themselves rolling slowly towards Morlaix through a green and blooming country, so unlike the New England they had left behind, that they rejoiced like butterflies in the sunshine.

Brittany.

AFTER a late dinner, at which their appetites were pretty effectually taken away by seeing dishes of snails passed round and eaten like nuts, with large pins to pick out the squirming meat; a night's rest somewhat disturbed by the incessant clatter of sabots in the market-place, and a breakfast rendered merry by being served by a garçon whom Dickens would have immortalised, our travellers went on to Caulnes-Dinan.

Here began their adventures, properly speaking. They were obliged to drive fourteen miles to Dinan in a ram-shackle carriage drawn by three fierce little horses, with their tails done up in braided chignons, and driven by a humpback. This elegant equipage was likewise occupied by a sleepy old priest, who smoked his pipe without stopping the whole way; also by a large, loquacious, beery man, who talked incessantly, informing the company that he was a friend of Victor Hugo, a child of nature aged sixty, and obliged to drink much ale because it went to his head and gave him commercial ideas.

If it had given him no others it would have done well; but, after each draught, and he took many, this child of nature became so friendly that even the free and easy Americans were abashed. Matilda quailed before the languishing glances he gave her, and tied her head up like a bundle in a thick veil. The scandalised Lavinia, informing him that she did not understand French, assumed the demeanour of a griffin, and glared stonily into space, when she was not dislocating her neck trying to see if the top-heavy luggage had not tumbled off behind.

Poor Amanda was thus left a prey to the beery one; for, having at first courteously responded to his paternal remarks and expressed an interest in the state of France, she could not drop the conversation all at once, even when the friend of Victor Hugo became so disagreeable that it is to be hoped the poet has not many such. He recited poems, he sung songs, he made tender confidences, and finished by pressing the hand of Mademoiselle to his lips. On being told that such demonstrations were not permitted to strangers in America, he beat his breast and cried out, 'My God, so beautiful and so cold! You do not comprehend that I am but a child. Pardon, and smile again I conjure you.'

But Mademoiselle would not smile; and, folding her hands in her cloak, appeared to slumber. Whereat the gray-headed infant groaned pathetically, cast his eyes heavenward, and drank more ale, muttering to himself, and shaking his head as if his emotions could not be entirely suppressed.

These proceedings caused Lavinia to keep her eye on him, being prepared for any outbreak, from a bullet all round to proposals to both her charges at once.

With this smouldering bomb-shell inside, and the firm conviction that one if not all the trunks were lying in the dust some miles behind, it may be inferred that duenna Livy did not enjoy that break-neck drive, lurching and bumping up hill and down, with nothing between them and destruction apparently but the little humpback, who drove recklessly.

In this style they rattled up to the Porte de Brest, feeling that they had reached Dinan 'only by the grace of God,' as the beery man expressed it, when he bowed and vanished, still oppressed with the gloomy discovery that American women did not appreciate him.

While Amanda made inquiries at an office, and Matilda had

raptures over the massive archway crowned with yellow flowers, Lavinia was edified by a new example of woman's right to labour.

Close by was a clean, rosy old woman, whose unusual occupation attracted our spinster's attention. Whisking off the wheels of a *diligence*, the old lady greased them one by one, and put them on again with the skill and speed of a regular blacksmith, and then began to pile many parcels into a *char* apparently waiting for them.

She was a brisk, cheery old soul, with the colour of a winter-apple in her face, plenty of fire in her quick black eyes, and a mouthful of fine teeth, though she must have been sixty. She was dressed in the costume of the place: a linen cap with several sharp gables to it, a gay kerchief over her shoulders, a blue woollen gown short enough to display a pair of sturdy feet and legs in neat shoes with bunches of ribbons on the instep and black hose. A gray apron, with pockets and a bib, finished her off; making a very sensible as well as picturesque costume.

She was still hard at it when a big boy appeared, and began to heave the trunks into another *char*; but gave out at the second, which was large. Instantly the brisk old woman put him aside, hoisted in the big boxes without help, and, catching up the shafts of the heavily laden cart, trotted away with it at a pace which caused the Americans (who prided themselves on their muscle) to stare after her in blank amazement.

When next seen she was toiling up a steep street, still ahead of the lazy boy, who slowly followed with the lighter load. It did not suit Lavinia's ideas of the fitness of things to have an old woman trundle three heavy trunks while she herself carried nothing but a parasol, and she would certainly have lent a hand if the vigorous creature had not gone at such a pace that it was impossible to overtake her till she backed her cart up before a door in most scientific style, and with a bow, a smile, and a

courteous wave of the hand, informed them that 'here the ladies would behold the excellent Madame C.'

They did behold and also receive a most cordial welcome from the good lady, who not only embraced them with effusion, but turned her house upside down for their accommodation, merely because they came recommended to her hospitality by a former lodger who had won her kind old heart.

While she purred over them, the luggage was being bumped upstairs, the old woman shouldering trunk after trunk, and trudging up two steep flights in the most marvellous way. But best of all was her surprise and gratitude on receiving a larger fee than usual, for the ladies were much interested in this dear old Hercules in a cap of seven gables.

When she had blessed them all round, and trotted briskly away with her carts, Madame C. informed the new-comers that the worthy soul was a widow with many children, whom she brought up excellently, supporting them by acting as porter at the hotel. Her strength was wonderful, and she was very proud of it—finding no work too hard, yet always neat, cheery, and active; asking no help, and literally earning her daily bread by the sweat of her brow. The ladies often saw her afterward, always trotting and tugging, smiling and content, as if some unseen hands kept well greased the wheels of her own diligence, which carried such a heavy load and never broke down.

Miss Lavinia being interested in Woman's Rights and Wrongs, was much impressed by the new revelations of the capabilities of her sex, and soon ceased to be surprised at any demonstration of feminine strength, skill, and independence, for everywhere the women took the lead.

They not only kept house, reared children, and knit every imaginable garment the human frame can wear, but kept the shops and the markets, tilled the gardens, cleaned the streets,

and bought and sold cattle, leaving the men free to enjoy the only pursuits they seemed inclined to follow—breaking horses, mending roads, and getting drunk.

The markets seemed entirely in the hands of the women, and lively scenes they presented to unaccustomed eyes, especially the pig-market, held every week, in the square before Madame C.'s house. At dawn the squealing began, and was kept up till sunset. The carts came in from all the neighbouring hamlets, with tubs full of infant pigs, over which the women watched with maternal care till they were safely deposited among the rows of tubs that stood along the walk facing Anne of Bretagne's grey old tower, and the pleasant promenade which was once the *fosse* about the city walls.

Here Madame would seat herself and knit briskly till a purchaser applied, when she would drop her work, dive among the pink innocents, and hold one up by its unhappy leg, undisturbed by its doleful cries, while she settled its price with a blue-gowned, white-capped neighbour as sharp-witted and shrill-tongued as herself. If the bargain was struck, they slapped their hands together in a peculiar way, and the new owner clapped her purchase into a meal-bag, slung it over her shoulder, and departed with her squirming, squealing treasure as calmly as a Boston lady with a satchel full of ribbons and gloves.

More mature pigs came to market on their own legs, and very long, feeble legs they were, for a more unsightly beast than a Breton pig was never seen out of a toy Noah's ark. Tall, thin, high-backed, and sharp-nosed, these porcine victims tottered to their doom, with dismal wailings, and not a vestige of spirit till the trials and excitement of the day goaded them to rebellion, when their antics furnished fun for the public. Miss Livy observed that the women could manage the pigs when men failed entirely. The latter hustled, lugged, or lashed, unmercifully and

unsuccessfully; the former, with that fine tact which helps them to lead nobler animals than pigs, would soothe, sympathise, coax, and gently beguile the poor beasts, or devise ways of mitigating their bewilderment and woe, which did honour to the sex, and triumphantly illustrated the power of moral suasion.

One amiable lady, who had purchased two small pigs and a coop full of fowls, attempted to carry them all on one donkey. But the piggies rebelled lustily in the bags, the ducks remonstrated against their unquiet neighbours, and the donkey indignantly refused to stir a step till the unseemly uproar was calmed. But the Bretonne was equal to the occasion; for, after a pause of meditation, she solved the problem by tying the bags round the necks of the pigs, so that they could enjoy the prospect. This appeased them at once, and produced a general lull; for when the pigs stopped squealing, the ducks stopped quacking, the donkey ceased his bray, and the party moved on in dignified silence, with the youthful pigs, one black, one white, serenely regarding life from their bags.

Another time, a woman leading a newly-bought cow came through the square, where the noise alarmed the beast so much that she became unruly, and pranced in a most dangerous manner. Miss Livy hung out of the window, breathless with interest, and ready to fly with brandy and bandages at a minute's notice, for it seemed inevitable that the woman would be tossed up among the lindens before the cow was conquered. The few men who were lounging about stood with their hands in their pockets, watching the struggle without offering to help, till the cow scooped the lady up on her horns, ready for a toss. Livy shrieked, but Madame just held on, kicking so vigorously that the cow was glad to set her down, when, instead of fainting, she coolly informed the men, who, seeing her danger, had approached, that she 'could arrange her cow for herself, and did not want any help,' which

she proved by tying a big blue handkerchief over the animal's eyes, producing instant docility, and then she was led away by her flushed but triumphant mistress, who calmly settled her cap, and took a pinch of snuff to refresh herself, after a scuffle which would have annihilated most women.

When Madame C.'s wood was put in, the new-comers were interested in watching the job, for it was done in a truly Bretonese manner. It arrived in several odd carts, each drawn by four great horses, with two men to each team; and as the carts were clumsy, the horses wild, and the men stupid, the square presented a lively spectacle. At one time there were three carts, twelve horses, and six men, all in a snarl, while a dozen women stood at their doors and gave advice. One was washing a lettuce, another dressing her baby, a third twirling her distaff, and a fourth with her little bowl of soup, which she ate in public while gesticulating so frantically that her *sabots* clattered on the stones.

The horses had a free fight, and the men swore and shouted in vain, till the lady with the baby suddenly went to the rescue. Planting the naked cherub on the door-step, this energetic matron charged in among the rampant animals, and by some magic touch untangled the teams, quieted the most fractious, a big grey brute, prancing like a mad elephant; then returned to her baby, who was placidly eating dirt, and with a polite '*Voilà, messieurs!*' she whipped little Jean into his shirt, while the men sat down to smoke.

It took two deliberate men nearly a week to split the gnarled logs, and one brisk woman carried them into the cellar and piled them neatly. The men stopped about once an hour to smoke, drink cider, or rest. The woman worked steadily from morning till night, only pausing at noon for a bit of bread and the soup good Coste sent out to her. The men got two francs a day, the woman half a franc; and as nothing was taken out of it for wine or tobacco, her ten cents probably went further than their forty.

This same capable lady used to come to market with a baby on one arm, a basket of fruit on the other, leading a pig, driving a donkey, and surrounded by sheep, while her head bore a pannier of vegetables, and her hands spun busily with a distaff. How she ever got on with these trifling incumbrances was a mystery; but there she was, busy, placid, and smiling, in the midst of the crowd, and at night went home with her shopping well content.

The washerwomen were among the happiest of these happy souls, and nowhere were seen prettier pictures than they made, clustered round the fountains or tanks by the way, scrubbing, slapping, singing, and gossiping, as they washed or spread their linen on the green hedges and daisied grass in the bright spring weather. One envied the cheery faces under the queer caps, the stout arms that scrubbed all day, and were not too tired to carry home some chubby Jean or little Marie when night came; and, most of all, the contented hearts in the broad bosoms under the white kerchiefs, for no complaint did one hear from these hard-working, happy women. The same brave spirit seems to possess them now as that which carried them heroically to their fate in the Revolution, when hundreds of mothers and children were shot at Nantes and died without a murmur.

But of all the friends the strangers made among them they liked old Mère Oudon best—a shrivelled leaf of a woman, who at ninety-two still supported her old husband of ninety-eight. He was nearly helpless, and lay in bed most of the time, smoking, while she peeled willows at a sou a day, trudged up and down with herbs, cresses, or any little thing she could find to sell. Very proud was she of her 'master,' his great age, his senses still quite perfect, and most of all his strength, for now and then the old tyrant left his bed to beat her, which token of conjugal regard she seemed to enjoy as a relic of early days, and a proof that he would long be spared to her.

She kept him exquisitely neat, and if anyone gave her a plate of food, a little snuff, or any small comfort for her patient old age, she took it straight to the 'master,' and found a double happiness in giving and seeing him enjoy it.

She had but one eye, her amiable husband having put out the other once on a time as she was leading him home tipsy from market. The kind soul bore no malice, and always made light of it when forced to tell how the affliction befell her.

'My Yvon was so gay in his young days, truly, yes, a fine man, and now most beautiful to see in his clean bed, with the new pipe that Mademoiselle sent him. Come, then, and behold him, my superb master, who at ninety-eight has still this strength so wonderful.'

The ladies never cared to see him more than once, but often met the truly beautiful old wife as she toiled to and fro, finding her faithful love more wonderful than his strength, and feeling sure that when she lies at last on her 'clean bed,' some good angel will repay these ninety-two hard years with the youth and beauty, happiness and rest, which nothing can destroy.

Not only did the women manage the affairs of this world, but had more influence than men with the good powers of heaven. A long drought parched France that year, and even fertile Brittany suffered. More than once processions of women, led by priests, poured through the gates to go to the Croix du Saint Esprit and pray for rain.

'Why don't the men go also?' Miss Livy asked.

'Ah! they pray to the Virgin, and she listens best to women,' was the answer.

She certainly seemed to do so, for gracious showers soon fell, and the little gardens bloomed freshly where the mothers' hard hands had planted cabbages, onions, and potatoes to feed the children through the long winter.