

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. "Susy's Cow." In *The Boys and Girl's Library* [Edited by Mrs. Colman] 1-6. Boston: T.H. Carter & Co., 1844.

SUSY'S COW

BY MISS C. M. SEDGWICK.

The old and worldly may learn a great lesson by observing how much contentment a child gets out of a few possessions. A canary bird, a kitten, a little white mouse, will give a little girl as much real enjoyment as one of the grazing dukes of England gets from his uncounted flocks and herds.

One of my favorite twilight walks is over a grass-grown road, that, leading by a few scattered habitations through a mountain pass, is little frequented. Just on the verge of the mountain, in one end of a rickety old house, lives the widow Ely and her daughter Susan. There is a little garden-patch near the house—some peonies and rose-bushes, and round the door a few decayed apple-trees. The place looks comfortable, protected as it is by the well-wooded mountain side from the cold winds, and with the sun playing on the hop-vine that twines about the criss-cross threads passed and re-passed before the window. The widow Ely is as poor as a sensible, industrious woman can well be in New England. She is very feeble, and can earn little; but that little is so well managed, that she and Susan live independently of charity. The ladies who are mistresses of the Beacon street palaces, would as soon think of begging as Mrs. Ely.

In my evening walks towards Mrs. Ely's, I have often met Susan, driving home her cow; sometimes, unconscious that I observed her, holding the animal's tail, whisking it on one side and the other, beating time to an artless tune she was singing. Sometimes she ran alongside her favorite, patting her and discoursing with her. "Hold up your head, old lady!" she would say;

“there’s a nicer mess for you than common at home. Mother and I had corn for dinner, and we saved all the odds and ends for you. Come, trot on, dearie—mother is waiting. Poor old soul! how low-spirited you are! I don’t think Deacon Bonton is half fair to put you in that old eaten-up pasture. It sets your teeth on edge to look at it.”

“Susy,” said I one day, overtaking her, “do you think the old cow understands you?” Susan blushed a little at finding herself overheard; but we were old friends, and she answered me frankly, “I don’t know that she understands every word, but she has a feeling when I talk to her,—I’m sure she has. Now just look, ma’am, when I stop and pat her, how she stops and looks round at me, and puts her head up to my face,—poor Mooly!—there, you see! She loves me better than anybody in the world does, except mother. Oh, we have proper good times, coming home from pasture,—Mooly and I do.”

“Does she give much milk, Susy?”

Susan’s voice fell a little, as she replied, “No, ma’am,—not so much as some cows do. But that is all the fault of the pasture,—I know it is!”

“Why don’t you get better pasture for her?”

“Mother can’t afford to, ma’am. Sometimes she has talked of selling her; but I felt so dreadfully, she would not.”

This summer, times are harder with Mrs. Ely. She had a long illness last winter, and a long bill to pay to the doctor. She is a woman that, as she herself truly says, can’t sleep quietly upon a debt. A few days since, I called at her door, and was just turning round the lilac bush that on one side encloses her door-step, when I was stopped by hearing Susan say, in a mingled tone of sorrow and surprise,

“Why, mother,—you have n’t sold her, in earnest, mother?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Is she gone?”

“Yes.”

“It is not fair.” There was a sense of injustice evidently mingling with Susan’s grief. “Have not I,” she continued, “picked and sold berries enough to pay for her pasturing all summer? I think you might have spoken to me about it, mother. Why did n’t you?”

“Because I could not bear to, Susy. I knew you would feel so bad.”

Susan was much mollified by finding that her mother had tried to save her feelings, instead of disregarding them; and when her mother said, “Now do hush, child, and wipe away your tears, and listen to me, and I will tell you all about it,” she was tranquillized. I, too, wanted to hear all about it; but I felt as if I had no longer a right to listen unseen; so I presented myself, and, after exchanging greetings with Susan and her mother, I begged her to proceed, and comfort Susan if she could.

“Susan,” she said, “can’t feel worse than I do about parting with the cow. My father gave her to me when I was married,—she was a heifer then. My husband died two years after, and, for the first eight years of Susan’s life, that cow more than half supported us. There was not a better cow for milk in the town.”

“Nor half so good a one for company,” interrupted poor Susy. “Oh, how lonesome we shall be!”

“Yes, we shall feel kind of lonesome,” said the mother; and I observed she turned away, to wipe a tear from her cheek. “But we must be rational, Susy. The old cow has fallen off in her milk the last two years, and I could not make her profitable as I used to do.”

“Profitable!” echoed Susan, “you would not think of selling me, mother, because I was not profitable.”

“O hush, Susy! Poor folks can’t humor their feelings like rich ones. To come to the real truth of the matter, I had no way of paying the doctor, but by selling the cow. And now I have the money to pay him, and I feel as if I had done my duty; and if you will only stop crying, Susan, and own you think I have done right, I shall feel better and happier than I have done all summer.”

Susan tried her best for resignation. She began to see that her mother was right, and before I left the house she had dried her eyes, and said “she supposed mother knew best, but it was cruel hard.”

The story of Susy’s cow is not quite ended. It was purchased by a gentleman in the next town to ours, seven miles from the widow Ely’s. A boy was sent to drive the cow to its new owner. She was known to be near calving, and he was desirous to have her at home before the calf was born.

The cow seemed very unwilling to leave her old haunts. She was continually turning back, and, when about half way to her journey’s end, she got away from her driver, and he could not manage to change her course; so he returned to his employer, and the next morning a man was sent with him.

The cow was found on the edge of a swamp, near Mrs. Ely’s, and from there driven to her new quarters. The stupid man who drove her did not find out that she had calved during the night. This was soon afterwards ascertained, and search was made in the swamp for the poor little lost calf, but no calf could be found.

All the day of her arrival—the next night, the following day, and the second night, the cow continued the most piteous moaning, such as cows make when their young are taken from them. The neighborhood was disturbed. People were kept awake in their beds; some of them pitied her, thinking there was a wailing in her cries that sounded like human love; and some wished her to the deuce.

Towards the second morning, the cries ceased; and when the time came for the cow to be fed, she was missing. Again a messenger was despatched for her. She had been seen, by the earliest stirrers on the road, going towards her old home, and bellowing as she went. Nothing more could be heard of her till the messenger reached the widow's, and there, in her little yard, was the cow and her calf—the widow rubbing, with some medicinal ointment, the poor animal's bag, and Susy alternately patting the mother and calf, and repeating again and again, "I always said she knew as much as folks!" while the old cow, if she did not talk, expressed, as plainly as words could, her perfect satisfaction. It was a picture that Fisher should have painted. And it seems to me an instance of the force of the maternal instinct in a dumb animal, that deserves recording. The cow, after a separation of forty-eight hours from her calf, returned to the swamp, and there, in its intricacies, found her still living, and went with her to her best friends.

The cow was the same day taken to her new owner, and the calf tenderly conveyed in a wagon beside her. There is a rumor about the village, that the purchaser of the cow has been told the story of Susy's fondness for her, and that his kind heart is so much touched by the animal's faithful love for her young, which seems to justify Susan's opinion of her remarkable character, that he has intimated an intention of presenting the calf, at some future day, to the good little girl.

We hope that our young friends will be touched by this true story (we vouch for its truth without color or exaggeration) of a brute animal's devotion to its young. We have often

wondered to see boys, and even men, abuse cows—kick them, and throw stones at them. A cow is one of Heaven's rich gifts to man. She not only gives us milk,—pure and agreeable food to sustain life,—but from her we derive the luxuries of cream, butter and cheese,—luxuries so abundant, that we have almost come to consider them as necessaries. Not a pie, pudding or cake comes upon the table, but the cow has contributed one component part to it. These generous supplies she gives us. Be grateful to her, then, as a benefactress, and consider well her gentleness, patience, intelligence and affection, and you will not laugh at our little friend Susy for calling her company, nor be surprised when you are told that she is held *sacred* by some nations in India.