

A HAPPY LIFE

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A Happy Life by Mary Davies Steele

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"Expectant, grateful, and serenely acquiescent"

DAYTON, OHIO
UNITED BRETHREN PUBLISHING HOUSE
1895

TO THE MEMORY
OF
Robert W. Steele,
BELOVED FATHER, WISEST TEACHER, AND CLOSEST
FRIEND,
THIS ESSAY IS GRATEFULLY AND
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

A HAPPY LIFE.

“LAUGH if you are wise; be contented if it kills you,” is the advice of both an ancient philosopher and a modern author. Gaiety of heart, smiling cheerfulness, a keen sense of the ridiculous, combined with the ability to take good-naturedly a joke on one's self,— things which do not always go together,— are priceless possessions.

A woman who was as sunny-tempered as she was absent-minded and eccentric used to say she was glad her peculiarities afforded people so much

amusement, and that, though not witty herself, she was the occasion of wit in others. She never hesitated to make fun of herself, and was the first to call attention to her blunders. When she did or said some absurd thing, she hastened to give a droll report of it, joining heartily in the laugh which followed. She was a rich mine of humorous material to a locally-noted *raconteur*, always on the watch to add to his large collection of anecdotes. By the course she pursued she often blunted his weapons, extracting the sting from many a joke, and taking the edge off numerous good stories told at her expense.

Lack of beauty of face or fig-

ure is sometimes a cause of real misery. "Dare to be ugly" is the injunction of an old writer to homely people. Some persons are so ugly that they are good-looking—partly, perhaps, through originality. But these are usually the kind of homely people who face the world with a frank smile and serene temper, instead of yielding to a shrinking sensitiveness which presently degenerates into sulky suspicion of all about them.

An eye twinkling with humor, and an intelligent, benevolent, and good-natured expression often render very attractive a person devoid of beauty of form, feature, or complexion. We have known deformed peo-

ple so full of faith, courage, trustfulness, and friendliness, so interested in life and sure that health and beauty are at the heart of things, that they were perfectly happy, and their disabilities seemed never present to their minds. This was not simply the result of the law that enables us to become used to and tolerant of almost anything, but the victory of a beautiful, strong, serene spirit over a body that did it grievous wrong.

The *Spectator* says that "while it is barbarous for others to rally a man for natural defects of body, it is extremely agreeable when he can himself jest and make merry at his imperfections. When he can possess

himself with such cheerfulness, women and children who are at first frightened at him will afterwards be as much pleased with him." This is stoical resignation indeed. Jokes at one's own expense, under these gruesome circumstances, when deformed, twisted, and awry, for instance, like Scarron, could certainly not fail to have a bitter tang. Groans would be less painful to listen to than such sardonic merriment.

* Reasonable and innocent wit and humor are great sweeteners of social intercourse. It is doubtful whether Sidney Smith's suggestion by way of contrast that, if nothing better offered, man could have directed his