

**A SUBURBAN
PASTORAL,
AND OTHER TALES**

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A suburban pastoral, and other tales by Henry A. Beers

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HENRY A. BEERS

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And Other Tales

BY

HENRY A. BEERS



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I.

A SUBURBAN PASTORAL.



A SUBURBAN PASTORAL.



IN their walks about Southwick it was often agreed between Sproat and Clitheroe that the one or the other of them ought to have an uncle living somewhere in the environs. But each insisted that the duty of providing him lay with the other : Clitheroe on the ground that he had come to town several months the later and was therefore a comparative stranger ; Sproat because, as he maintained, Clitheroe carried about him nepotic suggestions.

"You look like a man with lots of uncles," said Sproat, "and I don't."

It must be acknowledged that the credit of inventing this avuncular fable belonged to Sproat. It happened on a windy March twilight, when Clitheroe looked at his watch and said :

"Quarter of six. Come, we must be getting back to the boarding house."

"Now," answered Sproat, who was balancing dreamily on the top rail of a fence, "if you only had an uncle somewhere out this way, with a well-stocked sideboard and a lot of pretty daughters ! Then we could fetch up at his house and take dinner, and spend the evening around the fire. And about — G. M., when

we were good and sleepy, the old gentleman would have the hired man hitch up and drive us in. Wouldn't that be better than tramping back to Mrs. Barker's cold meat and stewed prunes? Why don't you have an uncle, Clitheroe?"

The pleasing fiction thus propounded soon took on the proportions of a full-grown myth. Fancy added detail to the picture of this imaginary uncle, until the idea of his life did sweetly creep into their study of imagination; and his household, his generous mahogany, his stables, hothouses, and wide verandas acquired a certain definiteness. At times they would pause before the gate of some uncommonly inviting villa, and exclaim: "What a place for an uncle!"

In the absence of the real article they went as far as to discuss the feasibility of creating an artificial one. Adopting a hint from the catalogue of the Neophogen University, they wondered whether it might not be possible to hire some "learned man who had failed in business," rent a convenient country house, and set him up as an uncle. His sole duty would be to dispense an open hospitality to his nephews, from resources secretly provided by themselves. But this scheme was too expensive to be seriously thought of. It remained a beautiful dream.

The two friends had few acquaintances in Southwick. They had come to the little city not long before—Sproat to take the position of