



Tillie: A Mennonite Maid, a Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch

Helen Reimensnyder Martin

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Tillie's slender little body thrilled with a peculiar ecstasy as she stepped upon the platform and felt her close proximity to the teacher—so close that she could catch the sweet, wonderful fragrance of her clothes and see the heave and fall of her bosom. Once Tillie's head had rested against that motherly bosom. She had fainted in school one morning after a day and evening of hard, hard work in her father's celery-beds, followed by a chastisement for being caught with a "story-book"; and she had come out of her faint to find herself in the heaven of sitting on Miss Margaret's lap, her head against her breast and Miss Margaret's soft hand smoothing her cheek and hair. And it was in that blissful moment that Tillie had discovered, for the first time in her young existence, that life could be worth while. Not within her memory had any one ever caressed her before, or spoken to her tenderly, and in that fascinating tone of anxious concern. Afterward, Tillie often tried to faint again in school; but, such is Nature's perversity, she never could succeed. School had just been called after the noon recess, and Miss Margaret was standing before her desk with a watchful eye on the troops of children crowding in from the playground to their seats, when the little girl stepped to her side on the platform. This country school-house was a dingy little building in the heart of Lancaster County, the home of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Miss Margaret had been the teacher only a few months, and having come from Kentucky and not being "a Millersville Normal," she differed quite radically from any teacher they had ever had in New Canaan. Indeed, she was so wholly different from any one Tillie had ever seen in her life, that to the child's adoring heart she was nothing less than a miracle. Surely no one but Cinderella had ever been so beautiful! And how different, too, were her clothes from those of the other young ladies of New Canaan, and, oh, so much prettier—though not nearly so fancy; and she didn't "speak her words" as other people of Tillie's acquaintance spoke. To Tillie it was celestial music to hear Miss Margaret say, for instance, "buttah" when she meant butter-r-r, and "windo" for windah. "It gives her such a nice sound when she talks," thought Tillie.

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