QUEEN VASHTI.

CHAPTER I.

MY FIRST HOME.

"Ye, therefore, who love mercy,
Teach your sons to love it too."

The first thing I can remember was being with my mother, one hot morning the last of July, 1889, in a clean, roomy box stall, with a thick bed of clean straw all over the floor, in a large barn that was well filled with cows every night and morning. This barn was on a large farm, called Riverside Farm, owned by A. T. Foster, near Sparta, Wis. It lay in one of the most beautiful and fertile valleys of the State, through which runs the winding La Crosse river, a narrow, rapid running stream of clear, soft water. It's banks being covered with a luxuriant growth of rich, green grass and beautiful flowers, and, for several rods back from the stream, was well shaded by trees. The sturdy oak and the graceful elm, mingling with the darker green of the stately pine and the light tints of the rustling poplars gave the scene a beautiful, park-like effect which was enhanced by the olive green of the willows which so closely fringed the river that their drooping boughs kissed the murmuring water, as it rippled through them on its way to join the majestic Father of Waters at the city of La Crosse. The pasture, on the south side of the farm, ex-
tended along the river for three-fourths of a mile, the north side being bounded by the highway leading to the city of La Crosse.

My mother told me that the cows were put into the barn night and morning to be milked and fed, because Mr. Foster said cows giving milk needed extra feed during the latter part of summer, as they could not give a good yield of milk and keep in good condition on grass alone, as it does not contain as much nutriment as in the early summer months. And that the cows were never kept in the barn at night during the summer, except rainy nights, because they were so much more comfortable in the open air than shut up in a hot barn.

When the men were putting the cows into the barn, the first morning I was there, one of them, called Ed, who had charge of the farm during the absence of the Foster family, looked into the stall, where my mother and I were, and called to his companion: "Oh, Jim, come here, quick, and see what a fine calf Yeksa has. It's a beauty, and a heifer too. I wish Mrs. Foster was here to see it, she would be delighted. I hope they'll come home soon. I'll write to her at once, at Hancock, Minn., where the family are visiting."

I was much afraid of the men and cows when they came into the barn, but my mother, who was such a beautiful, kind looking cow, told me not to be frightened, for the cows could not come into our stall, and that the men were kind to all the cows, and did not kick and strike them, nor scold and swear at them because Mr. Foster did not allow it. Both he and his wife told them that if they mistreated the cows they would give less milk, which would yield less butter, besides being cruel and wicked to abuse, in any way, dumb animals that were dependent upon mankind for care and protection.

After the other cows had been milked, one of the men came into the stall with a pail and stroked and petted my mother, then sat down by her side and began milking. I had previously found where my breakfast was, but there was so much that I
could not take near all of it, though I was very hungry. He milked until the pail was almost full, when he said "Well, Yeksa, you gave a pretty good mess, but I did not milk you dry, as Mrs. Foster says that should not be done for three days after a cow freshens." Then he set the pail on the floor in front of my mother saying, "Your mistress also says that a cow should always be given her first mess of milk to drink, for it has a good effect on her system." My mother put her nose right into the pail and did not take it out until she drank every drop, and she acted as if it tasted as good to her as it did to me.

My mother stayed in the stall with me for three days, but she did not have any more of her milk to drink, as the man said a cow needed only the first milking, so all the milk that I did not take he fed to the other calves. It seemed to me that I had a much better chance than the other calves, for they had to drink out of pails, and had to put their heads through some holes across the alley from us, to reach the pails.

The fourth day my mother was turned out with the other cows, but I know she came back to the barn often, for I could hear her calling me to come to her. I got very hungry before night and could hardly wait for her to come back to me, but, alas! when she did come I was disappointed, for she did not come to me, but was tied up with the other cows. One of the men milked her and brought some of the milk, in a pail, to me right away and said: "You dear little creature, you must be awful hungry. Mrs. Foster told me to always feed the baby calves at noon, but I forgot it."

Oh, how afraid I was of the man! At first I tried to get away, but he caught me, and I soon found that he did not want to hurt me. When he put his finger into my mouth and put it down into the pail the milk tasted so good that I did not try to raise my head until I had drank every drop. "Well," said he, "It beats the Dutch how easy you Guernsey calves learn to drink. I have handled many other breeds of cattle, but I'll
be blamed if I ever handled calves that learned to drink as easy as you do."
He smoothed my hair and petted me a little, and then went to help milk the other cows and feed the calves. He was careful to measure out each one's share, and gave each one a separate pail. He told the other man that was the way Mrs. Foster taught him to feed, so the older calves could not drive the younger ones away or steal their milk. He said that many calves were starved and stunted by losing the milk that belonged to them, which was the case when calves were fed altogether in a trough.

The next day one of the men put me in a nice pen by myself and so near to my mother that she could reach over and lick me and talk to me. She told me to be good and drink my milk, as it would make the men kind to me. She told me that her mistress, Mrs. Foster, was away on a visit, and that she hoped she would come home soon, because she was so good and kind to her. My mother also said that she was the special pet of the whole family and the boss of all the cows on that farm. That she was higher and better bred than the other cows, and that I was as high bred as she was, and that we were both thoroughbreds. She said she had two nice little calves before me, a full brother and sister of mine, but when the Fosters decided to take an extended trip, for Mrs. Foster's health, they were afraid they would not be properly cared for and trained if left on the farm, so sold both of them to Mr. Martenson who took them to Minnesota, which, she heard Mrs. Foster say, was a very large, rich state. My mother said I was such a fine calf she hoped they would not sell me, but would let me grow up to be a cow and be kept on the farm for company for her. My mother said when the Fosters came home they would give me a name, as I had to have one before I could be registered. She said she had a very odd name—Yeksa, one that no cow ever had before, and that how she happened to be given that odd name was an interesting little story, which she would tell me some day when I got older.
The next day when the cows came up from the pasture a man, whom I had never seen before, came into the barn. My mother said she did not like his appearance, so hurried in to see if I was all right. The cows all came into their stalls except one, and she was so afraid of the strange man that the man had to drive her in. The stranger helped them and then said: “If that fool cow was mine I would put her into the barn in double-quick time.”

Ed, Mr. Foster’s man, said to him: “How would you have done it?” The man said, “I would have set the dog on her, and she would have been glad to go in, to get away from him, when he caught hold of her heels.”

In reply Ed said, “Mr. Foster says a dog has no business driving cattle, especially dairy cows, and although he has kept from one to three dogs on the farm they were not allowed to worry the cows, and the cows were never the least bit afraid of them, but were afraid of strange dogs. That cow is one of the best ones in the herd, and if a man should set a dog on her, he would have to get off from this farm in a hurry.”

Ed then asked the stranger what his business was, and he said he had a new kind of apple trees, called Minnetonka, that he wanted to sell to Mr. Foster. Ed told him that he had heard Mr. Foster say that he had a poor place for apple trees, but if he did buy any more trees he would first consult a friend of his at West Salem, who was an experienced apple grower, as to which were the best varieties, before he bought any new high-priced trees. Then the stranger got angry and went away, and Ed said to the other men, “That man is able to work and earn an honest living, and he had better be doing it, instead of trying to sell apple trees, at a dollar apiece to the farmers, who ought to have more sense than to buy them. And you can just bet that dogs are not allowed to chase the cattle on this farm; yet the dogs are never mistreated and the Foster family are just as kind to the dogs and cats as they are to the cattle, and the dogs are taught to be kind to the cattle and not chase
the cats, and to protect everything on the place, and they do it too.

"For a couple of years before the Fosters went off on their trip they had three dogs and, for quite a while, twenty cats, all but one of the cats stayed at the barn, that one stayed at the house. Every time the cows were milked those cats were given all the new milk they could drink. It seemed as if everybody in the neighborhood, that had more cats than they wanted, would drop them over the road fence and they would soon find their way to the barn, where they got such good treatment that they sure must have thought they were in cat heaven. Harry, the only son of the Fosters, and Nellie, the only daughter, several years younger than him, each had a little black and tan dog, and Nellie had a pet lamb and two beautiful white kittens, but one day the dog of a neighbor's boy, the same age as Harry, and who often came to see him, killed both of them. One day he chased one of them up a tree, then stood on his hind feet at the foot of the tree with his fore feet as high up on the tree as he could reach and barked at the kitten, till the poor little thing was so frightened that it jumped from the tree, as if to run to Nellie, who stood near begging Stub, as the boy was called, to make Carlo, his dog stop teasing her kitten, but it had not much more than touched the ground till the dog grabbed it by the neck and bit its head almost off before Stub could make him let loose of it.

"Oh! my poor little Lily," cried Nellie, "just see what your cruel old dog has done!" Killed my prettiest Kitty. This makes two of my pet kitties he has killed, and if you let him come here again I will have Papa shoot him, for a mean cruel dog like him is not fit to live. He is a big coward, too, mamma says all cruel people are cowards, and like master like dog; so if you let Carlo do cruel things you are just as cruel as he is. He never does fight anything that can fight him back, that is the reason he never tries to catch Grover (the large maltese house cat) or the big cats at the barn, for he knows they
would scratch his eyes out, and that the little kittens can’t defend themselves. Now, please Stub, don’t bring Carlo here any more till you have learned him not to chase the cats. My poor little Lily was worth more than a dozen mean dogs like him.”

“That’s your opinion,” said Stub, “but I wouldn’t give Carlo for all the cats in the county, for I hate cats as bad as he does. And if I was Harry, instead of feeding and petting that mob of tramp cats, like he does, I would kill every one of them and make a nice, fur robe for the sleigh out of their skins.’ “Oh, you cruel boy! Ain’t you ashamed of such heartless talk!” replied Nellie. ‘Now, mind what I tell you about Carlo, and don’t let him come here any more.’

“Stub did not let his dog come with him for a few days, but one morning he came with him again, and when close to the house the first thing he spied was Nellie’s other pet kitten, and before she could get to it the dog had killed it the same as the
other one. Nellie called to her papa, who happened to be in the house, and said, 'O, papa, come and kill this hateful old dog. He has killed poor little Snowdrop, my last pet kitty. Carlo has killed every one of them. Kill him! so he can't kill any more kittens!'

'Mr. Foster came out on the lawn and said, 'Young man, Nellie told you not to let your dog come over here any more; now, mind what I say, don't you let him come into this yard again, until you have taught him to behave himself. It is your fault that he is so mean, you ought not allowed him to form such a cruel habit.'

'Stub said 'I guess it is my fault, but it was such fun to see how the cats would bristle up their hair and run when Carlo chased them, that I never thought about it being any harm, I am sorry he killed Nellie's kittens and won't let him come over here any more.'

'Mr. Foster gave Stub a good lecture and told him that a cruel boy made a cruel man, and if he wanted to grow up to be a good, kind man he must be kind to every living creature.'