

THE GRAVE'S SECRET.

Roxy Ann moved her little rocker closer to Aunt Docia's and took her knitting. The two were alone in the room. They sat at the left hand of the fireplace, opposite the windows, near a three legged stand containing a basketful of bright colored pieces. The sputter of the fire on the broad, deep hearth, the purr of the cat, the clicking of the needles, the loud ticking of the clock in the north bedroom, were the only sounds.

"What are you going to piece now, Aunt Docia?" "A cover for a holder." "For Libby—in the kitchen?" "No, for this room. I always smudge my fingers when I poke the fire."

"I wouldn't poke it, then, and if you smudge your fingers wash them off." "Water always makes me cough." "Talking makes you cough too. Don't talk."

"Everything makes—me—cough. Oh, dear, I have coughed all my life. I am worn out coughing." Any one looking at the emaciated old lady would have said that she told the truth. Life to her for the past 20 years had been burdened by a cough. It was said to be the "old fashioned kind," a kind which in these latter days, when people make haste to die, as they make haste to do everything else, has become extinct. The clock in the next room struck 2.

"Time for grandfather to waken, and I am through with my stint for today. Now I will get your wild turnip." Roxy Ann folded her knitting and brought a piece of wild turnip with a little bottle and a knife to the old lady and stood by while she scraped and mixed it.

"Bridle has been trimming his whiskers. That means that we are going to have company to tea, and here comes grandfather." Aunt Docia, feeling the soothing influence of the morphine and wild turnip, took her basket and went off to the south bedroom. The little girl gave a hop, skip and jump toward a venerable looking man, who came out from the north bedroom, his head turned slightly to one side, as is common to the aged when their "hearing is not what it used to be," and when "they look out at the windows are darkened."

"Grandfather, I'll have your flip ready in no time." "That is right. Give me my flip. Has Lebbens come?" "No, grandfather. Mother went with father. They won't be home till night." "Where are the boys?" "Boiling up under the hill. I wanted to go with them, but they said it was too speshy for me. The Alderman boys are with them."

"I am glad you did not go; better stay at home." "I would have gone, though, if I had cared about it. They are going to bring it up and sugar off in the kitchen." Meantime she had wheeled her grandfather's chair before the fire and the stand, on which had been deposited a quart bowl and a very large silver spoon. She filled a tin basin with cider and poured into a cup of molasses. Then she took a large iron and thrust it into the burning coals. While the iron was heating she toasted a slice of bread, turning it carefully when it was browned on both sides. She broke it into the bowl; then taking the redhot iron from the coals she held it in the cider, spluttering, hissing and smoking, till the cider was hot, when she poured it over the toasted bread and with a "Now, grandfather, your flip is ready," seated herself in a satisfied manner at his feet. The old gentleman took his flip with great gusto. When he had swallowed the last mouthful, he said:

"It is such a fine afternoon you may get my hat and stick. I will go down the hill and have a talk with Deacon Ford. He is a masterly hand at Scripture. No newfangled foolery about him. He believes 'as the tree falleth so it shall lie.'" It might have been the flip or the inspiration derived from the immutability of the eternal purpose which gave unusual elasticity to the old gentleman's step as he paced back and forth across the long room, repeating, "Chained to the throne the volume lies." Presently he burst into a strain familiar to octogenarians 50 years ago, marking the time with his hand:

"On cherubim and seraphim Full royally he rode, And on the wings of mighty winds Came flying all abroad."

had slept with his kindred did it occur to her that he was born during those wonderful years of the last century, when two continents were ringing with the news of Wolfe's great victory. It was not alone for England and for the honor of that statesman whose superior the world has never seen that that battle was won. We marched in the procession. "The great empire on the frozen shore of Ontario" was wrested from a foreign foe for us. It was our grandfathers and their mates who with tin horns and rags as pennants flying played "Marching to Quebec," and at night they were lulled to sleep by songs of Wolfe and his most enviable death.

"The boys with the sirup have come," said Roxy Ann, "and the Aldermans are with them." "I hope they have brought home a good complement." In his extreme age the old gentleman's taste craved sweets. West India molasses might do to sweeten cider, but maple wax, ah!

"You may be sure they've looked out for themselves, grandfather." Roxy Ann had had supreme faith in her brothers until their visit to Springfield together to see the caravan. But that, of course, is another story. The little clearing in the spring by the maple trees was not always devoted solely to the boiling of sap. A kettle is hung on two poles; a high board screen keeps the wind from the fire. The boys conclude that boiling sap will boil eggs. A dozen or two are collected; a loaf of bread, pepper and salt, a mince pie or two, doughnuts and cheese add variety to the feast. The Aldermans and Fords are often in evidence. When the sap is reduced to sirup, the remains are often brought to the kitchen to be finished off.

On this afternoon, having put the sirup over the fire, the boys re-enforced by two Aldermans, sat down by the kitchen stove to conclude a game of "Old Sledge" and to watch the sirup lest it should boil over. Roxy Ann, leaning over her brother's shoulder to watch the game, spied a tall gentleman in a long frock coat, silk hat and carrying a walking stick, making his way to the back door. "That is our company," she thought, "but what is he coming in through the wood shed for?" Hearing the back door open, she cried to her brothers, "The minister is coming through the wood shed."

With one fell stroke the cards were dashed under the table, and the boys shot through the outside door. "What ails those boys? Libby, if you will open the door for the minister, I will pick up these cards." Suiting the action to the word, disappeared under the table, but in rising she gave her head a terrible bump. At the same time the sirup boiled over, and the reverend gentleman was greeted with the aroma of burned sugar and a black smoke that, like Egyptian darkness, "could be felt."

"I hope I'm not intruding," said he, with a broad smile. "No, sir; not in the least," replied Roxy Ann, dropping a courtesy. "Father and mother are not at home, but grandfather is, and we are very glad to see you, sir. Grandfather, this is Rev. Hiram Bingham." Grandfather was in a grandiloquent mood, and he rose to the occasion majestically.

"Darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people, but the Lord said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" Sir, he exclaimed, waving his hand majestically, "we are indeed very glad to see you." "I have a Scripture conference with an everyday old friend compared to this? The Sandwich Islands, the whole of Polynesia, the American board of commissioners for foreign missions, all in one! 'Sit down, sir; sit down.' Lebbens and his wife will soon return."

To tell the truth, the old gentleman secretly hoped that they would not too soon return, for he felt that on certain theological points involving the assembly's Shorter Catechism his son's sentiments were anything but "sound." "Your son's name, sir," said Mr. Bingham, bowing courteously, "reminds me of the brig which, under Providence, conveyed our missionary party to the Sandwich Islands in 1819. It was the Lebbens, Captain Blanchard, as you may have noticed if you have taken the trouble to look over my 'History of the Sandwich Islands,' which the doctor did me the honor to add to his library. It is a name of repute in apostolic times. Providence has removed from my side the companion of my youth, but had it been otherwise, sir, and had heaven seen fit to vouchsafe me another son I think I should have called him Lebbens."

"You would have conferred honor upon the name, sir. It is, as you say, an apostolic name, but it grieves me to confess that, while my son is not wanting in gifts, they are not strictly of an apostolic order." Mr. Bingham bowed. "The Scriptures speak of a diversity of gifts, sir. Ah, my son, what have we here?" A hasty conference had been held in the kitchen over the remains of the sirup, when it was decided that as Mr. Bingham surprised it in the act of boiling over hospitality demanded that he be invited to partake. Enter, therefore, the boys as almoners of the feast, bearing respectively a six quill sauce, a spoon, forks and pickles. These were placed on the table, which was drawn up before the fire.

"We shall be happy if you will try some of our sirup on snow, sir." "You are giving me a most agreeable and unexpected treat," said Mr. Bingham, as he lifted from the snow a ball of the yellow ware, poised on the end of his fork. "Such a sight is never our privilege to see at the islands. My daughters entertained the erroneous idea that snow was red."

"They eat like cannibals. There won't be enough left to sweeten a cup of tea." The doctor sat at the head of his table that night with a thankful heart. He was never so happy as when he could entertain there a guest. I use the word "entertain" intelligently. Among the tributes to his memory 50 years after was this: "A more racy and entertaining talker in his best days it would be hard to find. His fund of anecdotes was unlimited, and a book of his stories would be as rich reading as ever his story telling profession produced."

When he was in the mood for it, no one that I ever met could provoke so much laughter. "Doctor," gasped a woman at his table, between her spasms of laughter, "please stop. If you do not let me rest long enough to get my breath, I shall choke to death." Opposite the doctor sat his wife, at his right Mr. Bingham, at the end of the board the venerable father. Large candles in shining brass stoves illuminated the scene. The doctor looked upon his three children to command quiet.

"Will you ask a blessing, sir?" The doctor never talked while he carved. He was an expert carver, and the well filled plates went round with dispatch. "I hope Miss Lucy's preserves are keeping well through the winter," said Mrs. Mollie, with a smiling face, as she handed her guest a sauce plate of yellow quince.

"For our preserves, madam, we are indebted to our parishioners, notably to your generous remembrance after we had the pleasure of sitting at your table last Thanksgiving day, and they have—in fact, we appreciated them to such an extent that nothing now remains." The doctor burst into a hearty laugh. "Good for you! My Mollie's crocks are full and she will see to it that you are supplied."

Forty years after it was also said of this lady by one who knew her intimately: "She was always beautiful, but never more gracious than at the head of her own table. There I like best to remember her." Amid all the sorrow that came to that home in after years—sorrow from brooding shadow or death or deeper sorrow from the shadow of life—hers is the one form that shines out like a star, grand in the love that "endured all things, hoped all things, overcame all things," strong in a faith and patience no controversy with you, sir, upon the subject of foreign missions, said the doctor when the conversation drifted, as was natural, to that channel, "but"—and a humble smile came into his eye—"I remember you." "Tinker when he returned to the land or a thousand of those who had fallen down and shimmered together did not equal the soul of one man like him."

"Lebbens," said his father, rapping on the table with the handle of his knife, as was his wont when excited, "you are wise about what is written. You are irreverent." For a moment there was silence; then the doctor, pushing back his chair, said, with a laugh, "No irreverence about it!" No one ever accused the doctor of filial disrespect. There is an old letter, carefully preserved, written by this half blind old father, addressed to his son, as follows: "Dear and well beloved and well worthy son."

After supper the doctor and his guest spoke of the first minister of the church. "This house was his home, sir, built for him about 1769. Here his children were born. This was his first and only pastorate. From here he was buried." "He chose the site of this house most wisely. It is beautiful for situation truly." "I have every reason to suppose he planted the elm trees. He passed away before my time, sir, but I believe him to have been a strong man, of dignified presence. His children and grandchildren have taken high rank in the professions—such I believe his descendants will continue to do. There was unfortunately one exception."

The doctor nodded toward the south bedroom. "You have then his daughter under your roof?" "Under the roof built for her father, sir; his youngest daughter. She was handsome, silly and unfortunate. Her husband was, I think, the first regularly settled physician in the township." "She married, then?" "The doctor married her, sir. What else could he do?" The doctor blew his nose vigorously and poked the fire. "He married her and killed himself." "Deadfall! Was it a pistol?" "No, laudanum."

In those faraway primitive times suicides in our country were happily rare. We had not attained to the degree of refinement which fills every daily paper with shocking recitals of self murder, and when a poor unfortunate did put an end to his life it was supposed, as a matter of course, that if he had a wife she "was at the bottom of it"—only a repetition of the same old wail, "The woman whom thou gavest me." And so it had happened in the irony of fate that this unfortunate lady had spent the remainder of her days in the shadow of a deep disgrace and bearing the burden of a heavy sorrow.

As the days of the new year began to lengthen in the revolving circle Aunt Docia did not come out of the south bedroom as frequently to look over her patchwork by the fire. One afternoon, when her trembling fingers had vainly tried to "over and over" a seam, she cast away the basket, and the three legged stool in the corner knew no more.

During these days Aunt Docia lay with her face to the wall and said nothing, but the south bedroom may have stretched far away to a green hill-top in the days when youth and parental care made life a happy holiday, where the birds sang first in the morning and the sun shone through peaceful afternoons, and the crickets and the stars came out together to make the long twilights glorious. Possibly she watched for the going out of her revered father as he led the congregation to the old meeting house on Sunday, and her ear may have heard again the sound of his voice from the high pulpit in prayer and benediction. All this before the shadow came into her life.

And one night in midwinter the wind swept over that old hilltop and dashed against the trees that the old minister had planted as if it would uproot them, and their boughs bent and shrieked in their resistance, but they did not break—only stretched their arms more protectively over the old house, and in the morning the youngest of his daughters lay dead under its roof—the same roof that sheltered her in the hour of her birth.

The burial plot of the minister's family was full almost to crowding, but room must be made for one more, and the doctor went with his men to see that everything was done "decently and in order." As shovelful after shovelful of earth was thrown up something large and round rolled into the open space from the adjacent grave. The doctor was on the alert. The arm that guided the shovel was seized as in a vise.

"Mike!" The doctor's voice trembled as did his strong hand that staid Mike's arm. Mike looked up bewildered, but the doctor was already in the open grave beside him. Stooping he picked up something, sprung quickly up and took off his hat, for this that he held in his hand he knew to be the skull of his remote predecessor, the first physician of the township. Half an hour after he stood in Rev. Mr. Bingham's presence.

"Talk of suicide, sir! The basest libel ever fabricated! Look here, sir! A comminuted fracture! God Almighty took this man's life, sir! He took morphine, laudanum, as he needed, to allay pain. This vile aspergenium—the character of this dead man, sir, a professional brother, must be removed over the coffin of his wife."

The Rev. Mr. Bingham preached such a funeral sermon in that meeting house the following Sunday as was never preached before and never will be again on earth. He held up the skull in the pulpit and showed to his people the comminuted fracture, indicating it with his finger. The older ones remembered having heard that the doctor had fallen from his horse and that he suffered from a comminuted fracture of the skull. And so it came to pass that the grave gave up its secret, that the true history of this man's death was read, and the shadow which had rested so heavily over his name and house was lifted—"after many days."—Sarah de Wolf Ganwell in Springfield Republican.

An Evasive Answer. "John," said a clergyman to his factotum, "I shall be very busy this afternoon, and if any one calls I do not wish to be disturbed." "All right, sir. Will I tell them you're not in?" "No, John. That would be a lie." "An' what'll I say, yer reverence?" "Oh, just put them off with an evasive answer."

At supper time John was asked if any one had called. "Yes, there did," he said. "And what did you tell him?" asked the clergyman. "I gave him an evasive answer." "How was that?" queried his reverence. "He asked me was yer reverence in, and I sez to him, sez I, 'Was your grandmother a boot owl?'"—London Answers.

ERIE & HURON GOBBLED. Lake Erie & Detroit River R. R. Now in Control. Chatham, Aug. 13.—The Erie & Huron Railway, which runs from Sarnia to Rondeau, a distance of 74 miles, has passed into the hands of the Lake Erie & Detroit River Railway. The Walker line connects at Blenheim. The Walker line and it is expected trains will run through from Sarnia to Walkerville, via Chatham. The Michigan Central and L. E. & D. R. R. have been negotiating to get control of the E. & H., but the Walker proved to be the most successful. The selling price is to be \$750,000. This road was owned by the Blockford Estate. The papers have all been signed and the L. E. & D. R. R. are now practically in control.

A Farmer Killed by an Engine. Inglewood, Ont., Aug. 15.—About 4.35 Saturday afternoon John Clarridge, a prosperous farmer near here, was struck and almost instantly killed at a crossing on Main street by a northbound Grand Trunk engine. In making the crossing he failed to notice the approach of the engine, and the engine's repeated whistling and the excited shouts of persons who witnessed the accident. The wagon was completely demolished and the contents scattered in every direction. The horses alone escaped without injury. Dr. Emmerson of Gloucestre was immediately summoned, but when he had been fractured, the collarbone broken in several places, and a number of ribs broken. After hearing one witness the coroner's inquest was adjourned till Thursday evening, Aug. 18.

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France Will Back Russia. Paris, Aug. 13.—The papers are full of the significance of the Chinese question. The Matin says: "In China the greatest game in the world is being played, and French intervention should be efficacious and decisive." The Solr has a sensational article head "War Between England and Russia imminent." Journal des Debats says: "England is now seeking an arrangement with Russia. The understanding is impossible unless Russia remains mistress of the north and England is ensured her influence on the Yang-Tse River. In short, the lines of the section with the disruption which would occur whenever China falls to pieces. Clearly neither France, Germany nor Japan could hold aloof from such an agreement." The article hints that France would support Russia in the event of war, and says in conclusion: "France will be content with the southern provinces bordering on Tonquin."

Prorogued Until Oct. 29. London, Aug. 13.—The House of Commons met yesterday at 10.30 a.m. A host of questions on the subject of China and relations with the Government, declined to pledge the Government to prevent the ratification of the Franco-Belgian, Peking-Hankow concession. But Mr. Balfour promised that in the event of British capitalists purchasing railroad concessions obtained by French or Belgian syndicates in the Yang-Tse-Kiang Valley, Her Majesty's Government would support and assist them, both in London and at Peking, in this and in all other legitimate British commercial enterprises. The China appropriation bill then passed its third reading and the session was suspended until 3.30 p.m., when Parliament was prorogued. The Queen's Speech at the prorogation of Parliament among other things stated that relations with other nations continue friendly, and that arrangements had been made to establish an early date penny postage between the United Kingdom, Canada, Newfoundland and elsewhere. Parliament was formally prorogued until Oct. 29.

MR. SEMLIN ACCEPTS. He Will Endeavor to Form a Government in British Columbia. Vancouver, Aug. 13.—Hon. Robert Beaven, who was called upon by Lieut. Gov. McInnes to form a Cabinet, has called, and the political affairs of the province have reached a crisis. In an interview yesterday Mr. Beaven refused to say what he would recommend the Lieutenant-Governor to do under the circumstances, but said that the latter had decided to call Mr. Semlin, the present leader of the Opposition, to form a Ministry. Hon. Joseph Martin is therefore out of the race for the Premiership, for the time being at least. Although Mr. Semlin has accepted the call doubts prevail in some quarters as to whether he will succeed in forming a Government, but local Oppositionists believe nothing will occur to prevent Mr. Semlin from forming a strong Cabinet. It is doubtful if Mr. Martin will accept the Attorney-Generalship under Mr. Semlin.

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