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The Acton Free Press

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DEAD IN "NO MAN'S LAND"

He does not ask our words of praise,
Who lies out there before:
He asks that we shall save his child,
As our "bit" toward the war.

He asks that we shall give it bread,
And clothes and shelter, too;
He asks it for the life he gave—
To square the debt that's due.

To square the debt that's due to him,
Who gave his all that we
Might live in peace through years to come,
Invincible and free.

The cold, gray dusk, the silent night,
Look down upon his face:
His little one is fatherless—
Unless we take his place.

—Anonymous.

Not Things; People

By T. D. Pendleton

IN the Pennyroyal region Amanda Lewis' great-grandfather was remembered as a man of acquisitive disposition. Amanda "took after" him. At fifty she owned five acres of fine meadow land besides the twenty that at the age of thirty-five she had inherited from her mother, and she had added to her house a spare bedroom besides a summer kitchen.

Amanda had bought the extra acres from her brother, Stephen. That was what the lawsuit was about; the boundary line question.

Stephen must have got his unfortunate inability to keep for himself what anyone else needed from the Hendersons, his mother's people. At any rate, their clear blue gaze was his, and their smile. Stephen had not wished to go to law about the boundary, but Vitula Stevens and the Widow Benton, whose farms also bordered the five acres that had caused the dispute, had asked for a new survey; Amanda had protested, and thus the whole matter had been thrown into court.

In spite of his own dire need to preserve what little he had, Stephen was sorry for his sister when the decision was made against her. "Amanda took it hard," he reported to his wife, as he ate his late supper after returning from the county seat.

"How did she act toward Vitula Stevens and Luella Benton?" asked Sally Ann.

"Same as she did to me. She just drove off without speaking to anyone."

"She'll be lonesome this winter, without Vitula or Luella or us dropping in. Don't you reckon she'll get over it after a while?"

"Amanda doesn't get over things. I wish we'd let the old survey alone."

Amanda did not get over it. When the late November rains turned the dusty yellow ribbon known as the Owensburg road into a river of mud, and virtually cut off the neighborhood from the outside world, the three other women on the adjoining farms never failed, in their cross-fields visits to one another, to speak of Amanda's loneliness; but in the neat house on the hill Amanda was telling herself over and over the advantages of the state of affairs.

"Just think," she said aloud as she sewed rags for a new carpet, "this carpet'll last three times as long for not being walked over!"

It was the same way on Saturday, when she cooked for Sunday; she knew that a batch of tea cakes would not "give out" in a fortnight, now that Stephen's little ones no longer ravaged the cake box; a baked chicken would last until she was tired seeing it on the table.

"Why, I wont have to put up any more fruit for four or five years!" she said to herself one day, when she was dusting the shelves of her storeroom. Her eyes fell with displeasure on a glass jar filled with preserves, watermelon rind cut into fancy shapes—stars, hearts, rings, ivy leaves and guitars floating in rich golden syrup flavored with thin slices of lemon and coral-shaped pieces of ginger. Amanda had always thought watermelon preserve uncommon, but every year she had made one jar for Stephen. He was a Henderson, and the Hendersons had always liked to see dainty food on their tables—"ate with their eyes," Amanda put it. Well, at any rate, she would never have to labor over another jar of the foolishness.

The first week in December Amanda made her usual monthly trip to the village store. An unwonted number of women were at the dry-goods counter matching ribbons or gay-colored wools.

"And now, Miss Amanda," said Willy Jones affably, after he had weighed the sugar and measured the lamp oil, "what can I show you in the way of materials for making your Christmas gifts? You know it's well to be forehanded in such things—Christmas always gets here before we know it."

The young clerk was wholly without guile, but a sudden silence fell on the shoppers at the dry-goods counters; woman nudged one another. Whom on earth had Amanda Lewis to make gifts for, now that she had quarreled with her brother and her neighbors?

But Amanda was equal to the situation; for even as Willy Jones spoke an idea came to her. She calmly thanked him for his suggestion, and asked for dressing-gown flannel.

"Now ain't that pretty?" exclaimed Willy, throwing down on the counter a bolt of soft crimson cloth. "I sold Mrs. Judge Wann a pattern off this piece yeste-day." He whispered in a confidential tone. "For a Christmas present for the judge. Ten yards is ample for a lady's dressing gown."

Amanda said she would make nine and a half yards do, and at Willy's suggestion matched the flannel, with inch-wide satin ribbon for binding, and a yard of piece satin—cut on the bias—for collar and pockets.

"Any worsted for crocheting?" Willy asked, lifting his scissors hand from the satin with an artistic flourish, and carelessly spreading a dozen or two hanks of colored wools over the counter. "You know knitted or crocheted slippers are a stand-by for Christmas presents."

Amanda chose two hanks of the wool crimson to match the flannel, and walked out of the store carrying her packages.

On her way home she planned her dressing gown to the smallest detail, a little rueful over the cost. "Well, I don't care," she said, as she lighted her lamp after supper. "I've wanted a dressing gown all my life. Now that I don't have to make presents to other people, I intend to give them to myself. The slippers'll be nice for me to put on with the gown at night when I'm reading my poultry journal. Making them will be pleasant work rainy days between now and Christmas."

Amanda put a great deal of work into the Christmas presents for herself; but even December afternoons have many hours when you are alone in the house, and making the dressing gown occupied only ten of them. The worsted slippers, knit in intricate pattern, filled four more; then Amanda began on her Christmas cakes.

She made three of them—a pound cake and two layer cakes, one with chocolate and the other with lemon filling. "It's no use to stint myself. Now that I don't have to divide with others, I can put more butter into the lemon filling."

By four o'clock the cakes were standing in a row on the storeroom shelf to cool, and Amanda had finished trussing her six turkeys for the holiday market when Abram Barnett stopped for them.

"Finest lot I've ever carried for you!" remarked Abram. "I reckon you'll keep one of the little ones for your Christmas dinner?"

"I shall keep the heaviest gobbler," answered Amanda with dignity and decision.

"I always did like a good big turkey on the table," Amanda explained to herself after Abram was gone. "There is so much more breast. I like breast, and I might as well eat what I like. I'm going to have jelly, too—with grape wine in it; there's nothing so satisfying for dessert, after turkey, as wine jelly."

Amanda finished the jelly the afternoon before Christmas; it was quivery gold in the big glass dish, and caught the light for all the world like a dimpling pool in June sunlight. Then the rural mail delivery brought her an unexpected summons to the village.

Amanda finished her business by four o'clock and on her way home stopped at the store for a spool of carpet thread.

"Good evening, Miss Amanda!" Willy Jones said, leaning over the counter. "I know you've forgotten some one's present. But we're up-to-the-minute people in this store, and we've provided special goods for the convenience of those who remember some one's Christmas present after it's too late to make anything. These crocheted shawls make beautiful gifts; now this gray one, I can sell you for—"

"The very thing I've always wanted," reflected Amanda, and she told Willy to wrap up the shawl.

"Well, if we ain't going to have real Christmas weather, after all. Look at those big feathery flakes coming down," Willy exclaimed, as he opened the door for Amanda.

"By the time she had walked three miles across the fields to her home the snow was an inch deep and falling faster. "Good thing I don't have to have people tracking through my house to-morrow," she thought, as she took off her overshoes on the back porch.

Her house was in perfect order; the fire only needed a little stirring to make it leap cheerfully on the hearth. She brewed her cup of tea and drank it leisurely; then she washed her three dishes and looked at the clock.

"Six o'clock!" she mused. "Well, I declare, I'd have thought it was seven! I believe I'll get out my Christmas presents."

She hung the dressing gown over the back of a chair, put the shawl on the seat, and set the slippers on it.

"When did I ever have Christmas presents so exactly to my notion?" she said aloud as her work-worn fingers caressed the soft crimson folds of the dressing gown. "All round, I'm going to have the most comfortable, sensible Christmas I have ever had in my life!"

After she had inspected her Christmas presents in detail Amanda looked at the clock again. "Twenty minutes past six. I'd have thought it was half past seven at least!" She picked up a newspaper, tried to read, and put it back on the table "What's the matter with me? Here I am having the most sensible Christmas Eve I've ever had in my life, and fidgeting instead of settling down and enjoying it! I'll take a look at the weather—"

Amanda found that it had stopped snowing and that the stars were out; across the level fields she saw the dark bulk of her brother Stephen's house with a light streaming from the living-room window. About now the children were hanging up their stockings. To the left was another light, tiny but cheerful; Vitula Stevens was tying up the dollies she always made for Sally Ann at Christmas. To the right Luella Benton's kitchen window glowed. Luella was icing the cake that she had made for Vitula at the eleventh hour. Luella was never forehanded—

Amanda dropped the curtain, and looked at the clock again. "A quarter to seven!" she said in a flat voice. "I declare, I'd have thought it was—" She seated herself by her Christmas presents against.

Seven o'clock struck and found her sitting by a dying fire. The single stroke on the half hour cleft the silence, and a sudden flare, as the logs fell apart, showed a mist in her black eyes. At a quarter of eight she spoke suddenly:

"Amanda Lewis, you're an old goose to think you can make Christmas out of a dressing gown, a crocheted shawl, a pair of knitted slippers, a good dinner and an unpacked house. Christmas ain't in things! It's in people—friendly feelings, loving thoughts! I wish my house was full of people this minute, and tracked up and cake-crumbled all over!"

Then she went to the kitchen, opened the door and took down from its nail on the porch an ancient dinner horn and put it to her lips.

A wild blast woke the echoes in the hollow behind the far meadow and assaulted Abram Barnett's ears as he was removing his second boot—a wet and very obstinate boot.

"What in thunder can Amanda want with me this time of night?" he wondered.

He made haste to respond to the summons, but long before he climbed the path from the hollow, the jar of watermelon preserve, the crimson dressing gown, the crocheted shawl and the knitted slippers were in neat packages in a willow basket.

"Abram," said Amanda, when the old man arrived, "if you'll take these two biggest packages to Brother Stephen and Sally Ann, and then go on with the others to Vitula's and Luella's,—the littlest one is Vitula's—and tell them all I expect them to dinner at half past twelve o'clock to-morrow, I'll be much obliged to you; and I've got two pies—a pumpkin with meringue and a sweet-potato custard—and a loaf of salt-rising lightbread for you when you come back."

Dazed by the multiplicity of directions, Abram stood in the kitchen porch for some time; then he trudged off on his errands.

NO USE FOR THEM

The Irishman came home beaming. "Bridget," said he, "Oi've got a fine job."

"Glory be!" said Bridget, who was tired of supporting the family.

"I shall want a new suit," said Murphy then. "An' yez can pawn me nightshirts to get it."

"Your nightshirts!" gasped Bridget.

"Shure," said Pat. "An' what for should I be wanting them when I've got a job an night watchman, and can only sleep in the daytime?"

THE WORLD'S O. K.

In the last analysis, success is an attitude of mind. Many a man has been dubbed a failure by his neighbors who kept on believing in himself, and at last the world puts its O. K. on his verdict. We are already beaten when we begin to apprehend defeat. The right attitude of mind insures our doing everything necessary, but hard work in combination with a hopeless, discouraged mental attitude, accomplishes very little. Do not help to defeat yourself by anticipating defeat.

A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

A quiet old man in a country town died within twenty miles of where he was born, and probably few people outside of the country in which he had lived, ever heard his name. But in his youth when a school-teacher on the munificent salary of twenty dollars a month, he had in his district school a brilliant, willful lad who was admittedly a "hard case." One teacher after another had had trouble with that boy, and he was in a defiant mood from which he might easily have passed to abiding lawlessness. But this young teacher found a responsive chord in the boy's heart, won his liking, woke up his ambition, and then lost sight of him for many years. When he heard of him next, his old-time refactory pupil was a member of the senate of the United States, and a tremendous force for righteousness. He never recalled himself to the memory of his one-time pupil, but his declining years were sweetened and gladened by the realization that he had had no small share in reclaiming that boy from evil and making him a noble, useful man.

When we talk of successful lives such men as this old teacher must not be lost sight of. He never was rich, he never became well-known, but how small his success makes the acquisition of wealth or fame seem by comparison. His was the success of the mother who puts her whole life into starting her boys and girls right, and dies, perhaps, without ever knowing how fully they have justified her sacrifice. He was successful as some older brothers have been, who have assumed a father's responsibilities toward their younger brothers and sisters, setting aside their own ambitions forever.

Does this seem to you a poor, bleak sort of success, the giving of your life to make another great or good? On the contrary, it is a double success for these self-forgetful sacrifices mean the development of the purest, highest manhood and womanhood.

THE STILT-WALKERS OF FRANCE

That stilts have a practical use in this workaday world is not generally known. But such is the case. France reveals many curious things, and among them are the only stilt-walkers who use that art in their everyday occupation. They have turned this boys' sport to a practical use. In the department known as Landes, in Gascogny, there is much lowland which at certain seasons of the year is converted into marshes. This fact does not cause the peasant farmers of France, than whom there are no more frugal and industrious people in the world, to give up their accustomed occupations. Their ingenuity has induced them to adopt the stilts in their ordinary tasks. Especially is this true of the shepherds in their duties as guardians of their flocks. The added elevation also gives them a much wider range of vision. They are also frequently employed by the peasant when he wishes to go to market. The stilts are strapped to the leg below the knee, with the foot resting in a stirrup about five feet above the ground. The stilt-walkers carry long staves with which they can prop themselves when they wish to rest. So skillful do many become that they can walk very long distances and for hours at a time without seeming inconvenience. Occasionally they will recline upon the stave, and it is not at all uncommon to see one play on the flute or fife. They are light-hearted and cheerful and dearly love music, the larger number being able to perform on some musical instrument. One of these stilt-walkers of France walked three hundred and four miles in just one hundred and four hours. This is the best record that is known. The record for long-distance walking is held by a baker of Landes, who walked the entire distance from Paris to Moscow, may hundred miles by the route he was compelled to take, and the entire journey was completed in two days less than two months.—Nevin O. Winter.

OLD HOME WEEK IN GERMANY

It's Old Home Week in Germany, the boys are coming back! They're sore and tired and verminy, and high they do not stack. No smiling maids are meeting them with laurels for their brows; no glad voiced sires are greeting them, and no rejoicing fraus. But, "Illtsen!" and "Geewhillikens!" the sad eyed people say, "You blamed slab-sided pelicans, why did you run away?" It's Old Home Week in Germany, but every one looks sour; the weary soldier Hermun, he has made twelve miles an hour; the guns behind him hammering the Allies on his trail, triumphant foeman clammering then he scorched o'er hill and dale. But in his native villages the ice tongs are his prize; they love the Hun who pillages, but not the one who flies. They love the Hun victorious, to him at any cost, they'd welcome give uproarious—the loser gets a frost. No orators are thundering a lot of phrases fine, no village bands are blundering through "Watches on the Rhine." "Our noble boys are here again," no loyal voters cry; they weep and order beer again, again, and drink it with a sigh. It's Old Home Week in Germany, to warriors who quit; no kaiser, tinsel-tired, emincy, extends the cordial mit. No kaiser, windy, sermony, is there to read a pome; it's Old Home Week in Germany—but what a welcome home! —Walt Mason.

TWENTY YEARS AGO

From the Issue of the Free Press of Thursday December 15, 1898

Acton's electric light four per cent. debentures have been sold for $1.03¼.

The roads are now broken and the sleighing is good.

Some zero weather this week. The thermometer registered 8 below on Tuesday.

Electrician Reynolds is wiring the stores on Mill Street this week for the electric light.

When a lady suddenly throws her arm about you don't gasp and wear a frightened look. She is merely taking your measure for something she is going to make for Christmas.

Contractor Evans is making improvements to the altar at St. Joseph's Church. It will be extended the entire width of the alcove and otherwise improved.

The new postage stamp designed to mark the advent of Imperial Penny Postage has been issued and several have already been received by Actonians on their letters.

R. Agnew, of the Dominion Hotel, has earned quite a reputation as a feeder of hogs. At the Guelph Fat Stock Show last week he was awarded a number of good prizes.

Miss Evelyn McKeown, of Toronto, has been engaged as teacher of Bannockburn School for next year.

The Government surveyors are returning from the Northwest. People are coming in too fast for the surveys.

Mr. Barber is again elected by the voters of Halton to represent them in the Legislature with an increased majority.

GIVING YOUR ATTENTION

It has been said that we have two ears and one mouth in order that we may listen twice as much as we talk. However that may be it is certain that we are not to use those two ears trying to listen to two people at the same time. Apparently to give attention to the person with whom one is conversing, while in reality on the qui vive to catch every syllable of the conversation going on in the next group, is to be guilty of a double breach of good manners.

But it is worth very little to give your two ears to the person with whom you are conversing if you do not give him your thoughts. The effort to walk through a stone wall is hardly more baffling or discouraging than the attempt to talk to a person who is thinking of something else. It is bewildering to look into the eyes that apparently are looking into yours to hear the correct answer, "Oh-ess," or "Oh, no," "I think so," "Certainly," and at the same time, to feel a remoteness of spirit as every sensitive person must feel it, when the one with whom he is trying hard to talk is miles away in thought. It is very much like carrying on a conversation with an automaton, constructed so as to blink the eyelids at regular intervals, and with a phonographic attachment which gives certain answers when the right string is pulled.

Some young people go on the principle that certain acquaintances are worth talking to and others are not. In the right company they become animated. Their conversation fairly sparkles. They are bright, interesting, witty. But when they do not consider the company in which they find themselves worthy their efforts, they relapse into a condition of vacant unresponsiveness in which syllable answers seem all they are capable of giving. The fact of the matter is that young people who are able to be interesting owe it to themselves to be interesting, regardless of their company. It is rather small, to say the least, to be stupid and dull in the company of an old lady with whom you have little in common.

NOBLE SAYINGS

It is not so much the being exempt from faults, as the having overcome them, that is an advantage to us.—Dean Swift.

Hast thou a friend? Thou hast indeed
A rich and large supply,
Treasure to serve your every need
Well managed, till you die.
—Cowper.

Without respect, love cannot go far or rise high; it is an angel with but one wing.—Alex. Dumas (fils.)

Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortunes; but great minds rise above it.—Washington Irving.

WHY THUNDER RUMBLES

Why does thunder rumble? The path of a lightning flash through the air may be several miles in length. All along this path the sudden expansion of the heated air—a true explosion—sets up an atmospheric wave, which spreads in all directions, and eventually registers upon our ears as thunder. Since the lightning discharge is almost instantaneous, the sound wave is produced at very nearly the same time along the whole path. But the sound wave travels slowly through the air. Its speed is approximately 1,000 feet a second. Thus the sound from the part of the lightning's path that is nearest to us reaches us first, and that from other parts of the path afterwards according to their distance. Intermittent crashes and booming effects are due chiefly to irregularities in the shape of the path.

FORGET IT

Has a friend or a neighbor been
strangely unkind,
And you're aching to make him regret it?
Don't give him in anger a "piece of your mind"—
Just hold your tongue, and "forget it."

Are your motives impugned when you stand for the right?
It will anger you sore if you let it.
Don't roar like a lion that's spoiling to fight—
Consider the source, and "forget it."

Is work never ceasing? The way bleak with toil?
Does discouragement seem to beset it?
They ne'er can o'ercome who from labor recoil—
Keep your eye on the goal, and "forget it."

Has luck been against you in ventures you've made?
Has fortune frowned grim when you've met it?
Don't give way to senseless, unseemly tirade—
Keep pegging away, and "forget it."

Does the honor you sought your rival adorn?
Just wind up your hope and reset it.
There are honors untaken and glories unborn—
So turn loose your grouch, and "forget it."

—By John L. Maynard.

THE REAL PLAN

The following dialogue was published in the Harwich, Eng., Newsman, on October 26th, and gives a fine conception of British ideas concerning war conditions just prior to the signing of the armistice.

At the appointed hour Ludendorff attended at his Emperor's headquarters, bringing the initiative with him.

"Well, Ludendorff," said the Kaiser, "how goes it?"

"According to plan, your Majesty."

"Yes, so you're always saying," said the Kaiser, fretfully. "I suppose that means that we are still retreating?"

"It means that the war of movement is still going on, your Majesty."

"Movement in an easterly direction?"

"It depends upon where we are being attacked, your Majesty. Sometimes the movement is in a northerly direction."

"Yes, yes. Well, what I want to know is this. What's the meaning of it all?"

Ludendorff cleared his throat respectfully.

"The art of war, your Majesty," he began, "as laid down by Clausewitz—"

"Yes, you can keep that for the war correspondents, my dear Ludendorff," said the Kaiser impatiently. "The art of war as laid down by Clausewitz doesn't include losing 10,000 prisoners and 1,000 guns in a month. If it does, it is quite time you practised the art of war as laid down by somebody else."

"I can only say, your Majesty, that if we had not retreated, or rather, if we had not kept up the war of movement, we should have lost considerably more prisoners and guns."

"That is all very well, but what is it going to lead to? Have you any plan up your sleeve? We have retreated 35 miles in some places; are we going forward again? What is the great plan? I am your Majesty, I command you to be frank with me."

Ludendorff came a little closer to his Emperor and lowered his voice.

"Your Majesty," he said, "there is a plan. It is, of course impossible that German soldiers should retreat simply because the enemy made them retreat. As you have often told the world, German soldiers are invincible. And so when I announce that we are retiring according to plan, I speak the truth. But it is not a plan which I can tell to the people." At least, I do not tell them the true plan. Some think that we are retiring to a shorter line in order to practice a victorious defence. Others think that we are going backwards in order to shorten our lines of communication. It is well that they should think these things, for then they will not be surprised when they see us back on the Rhine."

"On the Rhine?" asked the Kaiser anxiously.

"Yes, that is the plan. And why?" Ludendorff paused impressively. "Because [illegible] will be wanted in Germany. Wanted badly, your Majesty."

"Wanted? How?"

"Do you not feel it in the air? Can you not hear it coming? Our people have not been educated up to a victorious defensive. We have taught them many things, but we never thought of teaching them that. By the time our armies get back to Germany they will be wanted in Germany, in order to put down the Rev—"

The Kaiser jumped up hastily.

"Ludendorff," he cried, "I forbid you to mention that word! I won't have it!"

Ludendorff bowed.

"Still," he said, "your Majesty understands now my plan. Does your Majesty approve of it?"

The Kaiser twisted his moustache nervously.

"I suppose," he said, with an anxious glance at Ludendorff, "that my old plan is—is impossible now?"

"Which plan was that, your Majesty?"

"Oh, the one about smashing Paris and capturing the Channel ports and—and all that."

Ludendorff smiled.

"Yes, yes," said the Kaiser hastily. "I've no doubt you're right. In that case your plan is certainly a wise one. Er—have you had the Order of the Retreating Hedgehog with Palms?"

"No, your Majesty," said Ludendorff, hopefully.

"Then I award it to you now, together with a signed photograph and your Emperor's gratitude."

"Thank you, your Majesty." He saluted and went to the door.

"Er—Ludendorff!"

Ludendorff stopped at the door and turned around.

"Yes, your Majesty?"

"Er, you quite understand that if there is a rev—you know what I mean—if any thing of the sort happens, your Emperor's place is with his army. With his army—somewhere right in the middle of it."

"Quite so, your Majesty."

Giving his Emperor a final salute, Ludendorff went out with the initiative, and prepared to write up his afternoon communique.—By Lieut. A. A. Milne.

CIVILIZATION AND LUXURY

We must not confuse civilization and luxury. The latter is not even the measure of the former. Civilization has nothing to do with dress-suits and taxicabs, with flowers and fruit out of season. We could go back to the simple living of fifty years ago without any loss of civilization. It is the chivalry in the souls of men, their loyalty to their ideals, their kindness to the weak, their acceptance of human brotherhood as a basic fact in life, which are the measure of the civilization that produces them.