

* * The Story Page. * *

His Extravagant Wife.

She was the minister's wife, and, therefore, the particular property of the ladies of her husband's congregation. Furthermore, she was not only young and pretty, but unmistakably stylish, which made her still more an object of criticism to the women of Brookville, who regarded her gowns as a tacit reproach to their own.

"You'll ruin my reputation with that dress, Dorothy," said her husband, as he watched her arraying herself for her first appearance at Brookville church, in a dainty lavender lawn. Every one will say that I married an extravagant wife."

"Extravagant, dear!" exclaimed Dorothy, in surprise. "Why this is nothing but seven-cent lawn, and I made it myself. The whole thing—lace, ribbons and all—didn't cost over two dollars."

"I take it all back, then," said the minister, laughing; "but if you will wear such cute, stylish little dresses, you must expect our good ladies to criticize you. The wife of a poor country parson should have her affections set far above such things as skirts with ruffles high at the back and low at the front."

As the minister had prophesied, the attention of the congregation centred that morning upon the bride, rather than upon the groom's sermon, and few of the women present but had taken in every detail of her dress, from the violets in her hat to the patent-leather tips of her shoes.

Opinion was reserved until the sewing circle met a week later, when Mrs. Blair's case was brought up, discussed, sat upon and a verdict of "guilty of extravagance" rendered unanimously.

"That purple dress she wore Sunday must have cost a heap," said Mrs. Gibbs, basting away vigorously upon unbleached muslin undergarments for the Indians.

"Well, that's just where you're mistaken, Martha," said a mild old lady, pausing in her work at the sewing machine. "She told my Jeanie that she made it herself, and it only cost two dollars."

"That may be," said Mrs. Gibbs, still more sharply, but there's no need to have so many. I've seen her wear five, six—seven—different dresses since she's been here, besides no end o' shirt waists."

"I wouldn't mind about her dressing so," said Miss Barnes, meditatively threading a needle; but, bein' as I live next door, I know somethin' o' what they have to eat, and she is a wasteful provider, I must say. Fruit every morning fore breakfast, and dear knows what all. And last night she made croquettes for supper." (Miss Barnes pronounced it "crokays.")

"Supper!" sniffed Mrs. Gibbs, scornfully. "She don't have no supper at night. She has dinner, and lunch at noon; and one night I went by when she had comp'ny from the city and she had candles on the table. Candles, mind you, with yellow paper shades!"

The mild-faced old lady paused again at the machine. "Candles?" she said, inquiringly. "Well, now, I call that right savin' of her. Candles is lots cheaper'n oil."

But her voice was lost in the general clatter of tongues, which promptly and positively denounced Mrs. Blair as wasteful and extravagant.

A few hours later, at the parsonage, the minister was vainly endeavoring to defend himself against the reproaches of his wife.

"I know it was eavesdropping, Dot," he said, penitently; "but it was such a temptation. I was in the study over there at the church, and when they started in about your fruit for breakfast and candles at dinner, I just had to listen. It was too funny."

"It was eavesdropping," said his wife, with as much dignity as a small woman can assume when sitting on a cricket at her husband's feet. "It was most disgraceful eavesdropping, but I'll forgive you on one condition."

"Which is—?" began the minister, inquiringly.

"That you let me invite Mrs. Gibbs and her husband here to dinner some evening, and I'll get up the nicest dinner I know how for the least money."

"Candles with yellow shades?" inquired her husband.

"Candles with yellow shades, and I'll wear a decollete dress if you make fun of me," said his wife decidedly.

"Then, when it's all over," I'll tell her how much the whole thing cost, and surprise her."

"Excellent!" said Mr. Blair, admiringly. "If you develop many more such original ideas, I'll have you write my sermons for me."

So the next day a note was sent from the parsonage, requesting the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs at dinner the following evening.

"I think she might have invited me, ma," said Nettie Gibbs, who had just begun to do her hair up, and considered that equal to a debut into social life.

"I think she might, too," said her mother; adding, consolingly, "but your pa'n me'll tell you all about it, 'n that'll be 'most as nice as going yourself."

The invitation was for dinner at half-past six, but Mr. Blair had warned his wife that her guests would no doubt arrive early; so, promptly at five o'clock, she presented herself in his study.

"Do you think this blue silk waist is too gay," she inquired.

"Not at all, dear," said her husband, looking up from his manuscript. "It's very pretty and, if the lavender lawn cost seven cents a yard, that must have at least cost ten."

The guests arrived, and promptly at half-past six, Mrs. Blair led the way to the dining room, where the table was set with her pretty wedding silver and china.

"There wasn't a pie there," Mrs. Gibbs reported to her daughter, when they reached home, late in the evening, "but it was a mighty good dinner."

"What did you have, ma?" inquired Nettie, eagerly.

"Well," said her mother, as she carefully unpinned her bonnet strings, "first we had some tomato soup, 'n she had somethin' like toasted bread squares served with it. Then we chicken—curried chicken, I think she called it—'n rice 'n' potatoes. That was real good. Then the girl cleared away our plates, 'n' brought on a mess o' lettuce 'n' some oil dressin' to eat with it, 'n' crackers 'n' cheese. Then—let's see; what did we have next, Jim? Oh, yes, I know; some little puff things—popovers with sauce; 'n' then the queerest thing—coffee in little teeny bits o' cups about as big as Mamie's doll cups. Beside that, she had some candied ginger in a glass dish, that she passed around."

"So you had a good time, ma," said Nettie wistfully.

"Elegant," replied her mother. "And what do you suppose she told me? When we finished, she says, 'Now, Mrs. Gibbs, just for fun, I want you to guess how much this dinner cost.' I didn't know so, I gave up, 'n' she said the whole business, chicken 'n' all, only cost a dollar. I didn't see how she did it, so I asked her. 'That's easy enough,' sez she, 'n' then she asked Mr. Blair for a piece o' paper 'n' a pencil. Then she figured it out. There was tomato soup—that cost about ten cents. Then she counted up chicken 'n' rice 'd' every last thing 'n' it just came out straight, one dollar."

"Smart, isn't she?" said Nettie, admiringly.

"An' she makes all her own dresses, too," pursued her mother. "An' she says she'll show you how to make one o' them cut skirts you've been so set on havin'."

"Oh, that'll be lovely!" exclaimed her daughter with enthusiasm. "I do want one like she wore last Sunday."

"Well," said Mrs. Gibbs, reflectively, as she set her best bonnet away in its box, "I did think the minister's wife was extravagant, but she isn't a bit. She's real savin'!"—Mrs. Elsie Duncan Yale, in Presbyterian.

The Mission of Flowers.

BY M. ELLA SHERMAN.

Is it not to fill the earth with fragrance and beauty? Only a few short weeks ago the frost king reigned supreme, but now "the long, hard winter is over," ice and snow and cold have vanished at the magic touch of Spring; Earth, awakened to renewed life and activity, is gay with her softest verdure, and redolent with the breath of early flowers, sweet harbingers of the more luxuriant bloom of Summer.

So wondrous is the change, so marvelous the transformation, that it seems like the passing from death unto life.

Flowers in the garden, flowers in the field and forest, flowers on the ledges of precipitous mountain side; song of bird and brooklet join to swell nature's glorious anthem of praise unto Him that sitteth upon the circle of the heavens.

How joyously the little children search garden and woods in quest of flowers, holding tight with chubby fingers the coveted treasures! How carefully they sort and bind them!

What marvel all this raptured gladness; every season bud and blossom and leaf are as perfect as if fresh from the hand of the Creator.

Who shall say that flowers have not a mission on earth? They beautify and make home attractive. Besides being suggestive of thrift and good taste, their presence gives an indescribable air of elegance and ease.

The choicest, and, in fact, nearly all our perfumes, are distilled from flowers. To the artist and student of botany every species of plant, every blossom is a study in itself, a complete and wonderful work.

A little girl living in the slums of one of our great cities found on the street a rare geranium all in bud.

Joyfully she carried it home, planting it in a broken pitcher and placing it on the window-sill. So dark and begrimed was the glass, the light could scarcely struggle through. This defect was soon remedied; then the window-sill took its turn. Every day she watched the plant, until it seemed to her nothing was so beautiful.

Finally, that all things might be in keeping, she cleaned the whole room, making it cheery and homelike.

Thus, a tiny flower shed a gleam of light in one of the dark places of the earth.

For some time flowers have been gaining in popularity, both in the home and in the schoolroom, where, silently but sweetly, they exert a subtle and refining influence; for, be it known unto you, every child is a lover of flowers.

In the depth of winter a busy teacher received an exquisite bouquet of rare flowers, which she placed on her desk.

Not a pupil but looked at and admired them. All through the trying day their calm beauty and fragrance were a benediction to the heart of care.

It has long been customary to use flowers for personal adornment and for the ornamentation of wearing apparel. In these times of practical ingenuity, artificial flowers of great beauty are manufactured.

How much more suitable they are for trimming than birds, or the plumage of birds cruelly destroyed in the love season of the year to satisfy a useless and foolish caprice?

Before scientific investigation had reached its present development, decoctions of herbs and flowers were almost the only known remedies. As it is, they form the basis of many of the best medicines.

The world of flowers is the home of the bee and bird. Strangely out of place would they seem were Nature robbed of her fair children of light, the flowers; and great would be the loss to man, who so ingeniously appropriates the stores of the little busy bee.

In the age of chivalry flowers were not unknown to valor and to fame. Powerful nations chose them as emblems—for instance, the rose of England, the thistle of Scotland, the shamrock of Ireland, and the lilies of France. With the choosing of each of these is associated some legend or romance.

The hardy, but homely, thistle seems a strange emblem. The story goes that when a body of invaders were climbing up a steep to assault a Scottish castle, one of them stepped upon a thistle, causing him to cry out with pain, and awaken the sentry. Thus was Scotland saved from ignominy. Ever since, the thistle has been honored as her national emblem.

From all time flowers have been immortalized by poet and bard. They have been aptly alluded to in illustration of many important truths. "Life, how like a flower, lasting for an hour."

What can be more pleasing or restful to those wearied in body or in mind than bright, refreshing flowers? Their great variety, perfection of form and brilliancy of color, their sweet fragrance, combine to delight the senses and to make them more attractive than any other natural production. How they have interwoven themselves with our lives. From youth to old age, rich and poor alike, in sickness or in health, welcome the beautiful flowers.

Fitting emblems of weal or of woe, tributes of affection to living and dead, they appeal strongly to the emotional side of our nature, and it seems to us a most suitable thing that they should be expressive of sentiment, should have a language of their own. They remind us of the frailty of man. They tell us of purity—love and truth of the infinite—tenderness and watchful care of Him who clothed the lilies of the field.—N. Y. Ledger.

The Fox and the Rabbit.

Once a fox, being driven by some dogs, and getting far ahead, entered a wall. Then he met a gray rabbit.

"Good-morning, Bob!" said the fox, with his most gracious smile.

"Good-morning, Ren," answered the rabbit, elated that his family, the Grays, were at last recognized by the fox folks.

The fox chatted very pleasantly, asked how burrowing was, if berries were plenty, and if he ever saw any hens straying out from farmyards into the woods.

The rabbit answered all the questions as a good rabbit should. Burrowing, he said, was slow, but berries were very red, especially the checker-berries, and as for hens, he avoided them. He never could bear a cackle! Simplicity was his motto.

"The harvest moon and frosty nights for me!" he added. "The autumn puts new life into my bones," he continued, "and braces me right up!"

"Yes," said the fox, "I saw one of your folks braced up this morning, hanging by the neck from a sapling. But," he added, "the life was all out of him. It was at Snagg's snare."

The rabbit turned pale.

The fox now thought of the delightful breakfast he was driven from when those vulgar hounds came upon him an hour ago, but he refrained from speaking of it. He was naturally too polite and too well brought up to

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