



"YOUR CONDUCT IS THE ONE GREAT BAR BETWEEN."

For MASSEY'S ILLUSTRATED.

THE BARS BETWEEN.

A THANKSGIVING STORY.

IT was a bright and beautiful Thanksgiving Day. A handsome young girl stood leaning thoughtfully against the bars which led into the orchard. Her garden hat hung over her arm and the gentle breeze lightly stirred the rippling curls which lay on her forehead; while the sun, just setting behind a great golden bank of clouds, cast soft shadows across her face. But there were other and deeper shadows there, and a look almost of pain came into her eyes as she heard footsteps approaching; nor did she turn when a fashionably dressed young man, hastening down the lane, bent over her, saying gaily: "Ah May! were you so impatient for my coming that you came so far to meet me? But wait, sweetheart, there are the bars between—"

"Oh, Tom!" interrupted May, and though there was a smile on her lips, there were tears in the bright eyes; "that is just the trouble."

"Trouble, May! what do you mean?" and Tom Scott leaned forward to look in her face. She was silent and Tom added: "Remember what you promised last night. I have come to hear my fate; and you talk of trouble. Don't you love me as you thought, May?"

"I love you dearly," May said, softly; and one look into her eyes told her lover how truly she spoke, "but father says—"

She ceased as Mr. Baldwin, who had been in the carriage-house, and so unavoidably had overheard her words, came slowly toward them. There was a kindly gleam in his sharp, grey eyes as he said:

"Let me tell what 'father says,' little May." Then turning to Tom, he continued: "Do not be offended if an old man speaks plainly. I know you love my daughter; but what have you to offer in exchange for the good home she must leave if she becomes your wife? Your farm is mortgaged to the utmost; and, so far, you have done nothing to help it. Your father gave you the best of education, but it has unmade you for a farmer, and made nothing else of you but an idle, fine gentleman,

that I can see. These are harsh words, I know; but your father was my best friend, and I cannot bear to see you stand idly by, while the home that he toiled for so long slips from your hands. You said just now there were 'the bars between you and May,' meaning only the light obstruction against which you lean. I say, frankly, your conduct is the one great bar between you and my daughter."

As the old man spoke Tom's face grew cold and hard—he drew back as if the words were blows almost. But May said:

"Don't be angry, Tom. There is no bar between our love. I will wait."

He looked into her sweet, troubled face, and his better nature prevailed.

"God bless you, darling!" he said. "Your father is right. I have been idle and wickedly thoughtless; but that is past. Only have faith in me and I will take down the bars between us, if life and health are spared."

"Spoken like a man!" said Farmer Baldwin, heartily. "There's my hand on it. And remember, dear boy, though I spoke harshly, you have no better friend."

"I'm sure of that," said Tom. "He is a true friend who speaks out frankly what he knows to be right. But I can see May surely, while I am working for her?"

"May must settle that," said Mr. Baldwin, as he hurried away. He was a shrewd, careful man, who hated debts and despised an idler; who believed that what a man honestly earned he prized doubly; and who believed, besides, that each young couple should have their own home in which to begin the new life together. If Tom disappointed his expectations, it was better to find it out before entrusting May to his keeping.

Mr. Baldwin, had never exactly approved of Tom's college education; but Mr. Scott, had always said: "It won't hurt my son. I believe that the day is surely coming when farming will be as much a profession, and as honorable, as the ministry, and farmers will be regularly educated for their profession. Why, a man needs knowledge of chemistry and geology both to understand the properties of the soil he tills."

So Tom had been sent to the best schools, and to

college afterwards; and his father had worked early and late to supply the expenses of his education. But troubles had come crowding upon one another, and striving to bear the burden alone, Mr. Scott had sunk under it; and dying suddenly, left his affairs in dire confusion.

Of course Tom came home at once. Mr. Baldwin aided him in every way, and kind, motherly Mrs. Baldwin cared for him and made much of him. But it was May, his little playmate grown now to sweet maidenhood, who proved the consoler of his grief, and for whom the childish love of by-gone days quickly grew into the deep, strong love of manhood.

But six months had gone by, and Tom had as yet made no effort toward removing the debt on his home. And this day, when having told his love to May, he had come for her answer, Mr. Baldwin had spoken as we have seen.

Talking over the matter that night with his wife, Mr. Baldwin decided that it was better for May to go away for a while, till Tom proved what he was made of. "If he fails," said he, "May will forget him sooner away from her."

"May will never forget him," said Mrs. Baldwin, with a mother's loving insight into her child's heart. But she, too, thought it best that May should go, and before the week was over, took her to Montreal to visit an aunt who had long been urging her niece's coming.

The lovers parted hopefully, thinking the separation would only be for a few weeks at most. But weeks rolled into months and months into years before they met again. Mrs. Thurston, May's aunt, was something of an invalid, and being ordered abroad for her health, insisted on her niece accompanying her, to which her parents willingly consented, when they thought of the advantages of travel to their child.

Meanwhile, Tom was working with the strength of a young giant, bending all his efforts in one direction with unflagging zeal—the freeing of his home from the debt which hung over it like a heavy cloud. And now the knowledge acquired in long years of study came into play. Soon he began to be known as a "successful farmer." His crops were the best in the market; his cattle the finest and healthiest. By and bye, articles betraying deep thought and knowledge of the subjects treated, began to appear in journals devoted to agriculture, and it was not long before "young Scott's opinions" became authority for even older and more experienced men.

Tom's writings, beside the good they did to others, were a source of remuneration to himself; and great was his joy when the day came in which he could hold his head proudly erect among his neighbors, a free man, "owing no man anything." But something strange had helped to hasten that day. Three times he had received an envelope bearing the Montreal post-mark, and enclosing each time a hundred dollars, "for payment of a just debt."

At first Tom had suspected Mr. Baldwin of trying to help him in this way; but that gentleman's unfeigned surprise when shown the letters proved his innocence.

It was again Thanksgiving day. Tom had been invited to join Mr. and Mrs. Baldwin in their Thanksgiving dinner. On arriving at their farm he was overjoyed to find May awaiting him. When the first rapturous greetings were over, he said: "Why did not your last letter tell me you were coming that I might have had the joy of anticipation."