

MARRIED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

BY REDMOND DARRAGH.

Father James put down the cup of tea which he had half raised to his mouth, leaned his elbows on the table, and with an expression of severe determination on his kindly face said:

"See here, John Douglas, listen to me for a while, if you please. Not so much as a word or a move out of you till I've told you what I think about you. Oh, swallow the bite, of course, for even if I haven't got a very high opinion of your sense and discretion I wouldn't have you choke to death."

John Douglas swallowed the bite, settled himself back in his chair, and looked the picture of perfect resignation.

"John," said the priest, "I have known you now—for how many years?"

"Don't mention it, Father James," said John. "I will, Mr. Vanity. It thirty years if it's a day since you came to the school above here a greenhorn, and a homely one at that. Do you remember that time, Johnny? Of course you do, only you'd want to knock off ten years if you could. Don't be trying to hide those gray hairs, though I must say you're a well-preserved man. And what have you to thank for that, John?"

"Your friendship and advice, Father," said John, and then the friends shook hands across the table, and the priest helped him to tea while he was getting the dinnest out of his eyes.

"Well," he resumed, "you got along well as a boy, and you got along better as a man, because you were always true to God and man, though I say it to your face. When you had built up a fine business, and you weren't thirty at the time, you'll remember I had a talk with you, and what did I say to you, John? Just what I am going to say to-night, and it is that it's your duty to get married and settle down."

"Probably it was the idea of being advised to settle down that made John Douglas the most settled-down man in town," said John with a smile, and the priest noticed it.

"Well, what are you smiling at? You don't think I'm joking, do you?"

"No, no, Father James. It was just an odd thought came into my head."

"You're too odd, John, that's the trouble with you. Now, don't you think the advice I've given you is a good one?"

"Indeed, I'm not qualified to say, Father James."

"You're not, poor fellow; you plead guilty of being devoid of all sense and reason. Might I ask if you have any good argument to advance against my proposition that you take to yourself a wife?"

John suddenly braced himself up in a way that Father James knew of old, and advanced to the encounter thus:

"I have had five intimate friends outside of yourself, Father James, and I've seen them all marry. There was Tom Dent; I never saw him smile after he had been a few months married, for Mrs. Dent proved herself a domestic tyrant of the worst kind."

"Humph!" ejaculated the priest, "the more fool he. Dent never showed any firmness of character."

"Then there was Dave Cronin. Didn't he separate from his wife and leave the neighborhood after two years had elapsed?"

"Because in the first place he was a good deal of an old woman himself in listening to old women's stories, and in the second place he was too proud to seek for an explanation, which would have made everything right. When I heard of the affair I went to see him, but he had gone off like a coward in the night."

"Of course, he was to blame. But there was Charlie Fletcher, as fine a fellow as ever lived. Didn't his wife turn a drunkard, and didn't he follow suit, leaving their three children to be taken care of by yourself?"

"Well, and whose fault is it but Fletcher's own? Was he ever so happy as when he was drinking liquor or making others drink?"

"It was all good nature, and I never saw him yet that he wasn't able to take care of himself until she drove him to desperation."

"John Douglas, how dare you?" exclaimed the priest, raising to his feet, and leaning across the table, his face glowing with righteous indignation.

"Where is now the charity that has always been yours? Don't you know that it was Fletcher's convivial habits, his custom of having liquor always on the table, his influence, exerted to make his wife 'sociable' with his friends, as he called it, that led to her downfall? Don't you know that it was?"

"Well, I must admit that it had a good deal to do with it."

"You must admit that it had all to do with it. Don't you now?"

John nodded his head in assent, and when Father James had sat down satisfied, he resumed:

"Finally, there was Ben Martin, whose wife was so fond of dress that she saw him work himself to death in order to satisfy her passion, and took it as a matter of course. There's the record, and you must admit that it isn't very encouraging for a single man to contemplate."

Father James regarded his friend with a look of pity, and then said:

"So you consider yourself a coward, do you? It isn't that you don't want to marry but that you're afraid. You don't want to risk taking any trouble on your shoulders. You think so much of the prosperity that God has given you that you hate to share it with somebody else. Why, John, I am ashamed of you, actually shamed of you. You have quoted five marriages turned out badly, and for every one of them I could quote ten that turned out well. Of the men you have named not one of them had grace to deserve a happy marriage. It's all in the deserving, John, and I know that you deserve a happy married life if you want to enter into it. The sooner you do the better."

But John only shook his head and looked determinedly negative.

seated in the parlor of the snug home-stead owned by David Ross, one of the men of the town, and the father of a large family, and especially of Miss Maggie Ross. Now, while John Douglas, dislike for womankind was general it took a special form in the case of Miss Maggie Ross. A passably good-looking girl, well educated and exceedingly proper in manner, yet her reputation as a talker and an angler for a husband repelled her quiet, old-fashioned, self-satisfied bachelor. Only once in the course of a long acquaintance had he been left alone with her, and then, to her utter astonishment, he left after ten minutes had elapsed, although he had come to spend the evening. She had been talking about a young man whose dissipation—carried on privately—led to his utter ruin, and of expressing the opinion that many more were on the same road when John took his leave so abruptly.

"What could I think," said mischievous Maggie to some friends afterwards "but that Mr. Douglas was one of the young men who were going down the hill by a retired route? I sincerely hope he is not." Father James and his friend spent a pleasant evening, the former transacting some church business with Mr. Ross at the desk in one corner, while the latter listened to Maggie's performance on the piano in the other. And John enjoyed himself, for he liked music and Maggie played well. So he was not very much shocked when Father James said to him on leaving the house:

"What would you think of marrying Maggie Ross, John?"

"Suppose you give me a night to make up my mind whether I'll marry at all or not, and then I'll be ready to consider your other proposition."

"Very well, John. Take a night to think it over, a dozen nights if you like, but always bear in mind that I am bound, as a friend who has your best interests at heart, that you'll marry Maggie Ross. She's such a fine talker, John, and you're so fond of music, and better than all, the town does not possess a more economical housekeeper."

They had reached the pastoral residence, and ere the priest had concluded John was off with a muttered "good-night," and an impatient jerk that plainly showed him to be in not very good humor.

Father James watched his retreating figure with a comical smile on his face, and he fairly chuckled as he entered the house. "It will work," he said to himself. "I understand his nature better than he does himself and I know it will work. Only Maggie must not hear about it. But John won't say anything, and I'm sure I won't, and she'll never know."

Rather queer, wasn't it? Resolved to have a girl married off and equally resolved that she'll never know anything about it. What was Father James up to? We shall see.

John Douglas smoked until after the town clock tolled the midnight hour. It must not be supposed that he was positively averse to marrying. Rather had he been inclined that way for some time, but he was, as Father James said, afraid. He hadn't confidence in his ability to make the woman of his choice happy, and he was by no means confident that he could make a proper choice. Often had he said that only in some desperate emergency would he be brought to marry.

And was he not confronted by a desperate emergency to-night? Here was Father James determined that he should marry the woman of all others he disliked most. A good girl she was in her he could never be contented. Yet every way, but not his style: allied to Father James had in all kindness and friendliness—that much John admitted—set his heart on the alliance, and when was he thwarted in anything he undertook? What was he to do? Before he could answer the question satisfactorily, he fell asleep and dreamed that fifty thousand tongues all wagged at a rate that threatened sure death to the victim, filled the air.

John Douglas was a man of peculiar mould; as simple-natured as a child, he was yet one of the most successful business men in the thriving town which had been his home for thirty years. It was his simple, manly, generous nature that had first attracted Father James, then a young curate, to him, and for some years now they had been like brothers.

The priest gave Douglas advice when ever he wanted it, and whenever the priest was hard pushed for money he never had to ask John for it twice.

And while their friendship had been mutually beneficial from a worldly point of view, there been other benefits, spiritual and social, attached to it, which neither forgot and certainly did not deny.

Douglas took his friend's word as law; he admired his learning, he revered his priestly character, and he placed his sense and discretion above those of any man, lay or cleric, he had ever known. He knew that the pastor was slow to make up his mind to undertake any work, but once done it was certain to be carried through unless development showed it was better undone.

John's marriage had long been a pet notion of the pastor's, but he had not made up his mind to undertake this work. He knew there was no use in "crying over spilled milk." But if he was to be sacrificed, he thought it better right that he should have some say in the choice of the future Mrs. Douglas.

Going about his avocations the next day he was accosted by an old customer with the salute:

"Well, John, I hear you broke the ice at the Ross's last night."

"Who told you?" demanded John, blushing up to the roots of his hair.

"O, a party who saw you coming out of there after enjoying a good time hearing Miss Maggie play and sing," answered the old fellow, laughing.

"For my word," exclaimed John, "I think people might mind their own business, and leave me to mind mine."

The customer took his departure, laughing heartily, and soon after Father James, on his way back from a sick call, dropped in.

"Do you feel better this morning, John?" he asked.

"Never felt better in my life," was the brusque answer.

"And what is your decision?" And then, after a long time to answer, the priest said: "Any time you like, John, I'll arrange for you to have a talk with old David."

"Look here, Father James," asked John, abruptly, "have you even hinted at this match to Mr. Ross?"

"Well, I don't know but I may have at some time agreed with him that it would be advantageous to all parties concerned to have his daughter allied to a sensible, settled, and prosperous man like yourself," answered the priest, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

John relapsed into silence, and Father James started to leave, when he was requested to wait. "I have business down town," said John, "and I'll be with you part of the way."

The pair walked on for a considerable distance without saying a word. Suddenly a clear, fresh voice arose on the morning air, and the priest caught his friend's arm as they approached a neat cottage, on the porch of which stood a girl busily sweeping and singing the while.

"Good morning, Miss Nellie," said Father James from the gate. "I see that industry and happiness are combined in you."

"Good morning, Father James and Mr. Douglas. I have heard it said that happiness is the reward of industry, but I'm afraid I deserve very little of it, for I never have been remarkable for industry unless under compulsion."

"Let your friends pass judgment on that point, Miss Nellie."

"Won't you step in and see mamma?"

"No, thanks; Mr. Douglas is in a hurry, else would take advantage of a few spare moments to have a chat with Mrs. Rogers."

Going up the street, John said: "I have noticed that Miss Rogers appears very little in society."

"That is a subject of general remark and matter of pity, for she is a most estimable girl and—"

"And," exclaimed John, breaking in, "one of the few girls I've ever seen who know how to behave herself perfectly."

"Ah, John, you're too hard to suit; your ideal is too hard to find nowadays. But really Nellie Rogers deserves all the praise that can be given her. You know how her father died leaving her mother and her in very straightened circumstances."

"Isn't the son around here still?"

"He is, unfortunately, and both mother and sister cling to him with touching devotion, despite his dreadful waywardness. Well, since the father's death, Nellie has, by her music teaching and fancy work, provided the support of the house, and not only that, but does all the house work, and devotes every leisure moment to the care and nourishment of her helpless mother. And you will hardly believe what is a fact, John, that after all this, not one of the members of our sewing society does more for the poor than she."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed John, "how does she stand it?"

"Look at that pale face and slim form and you can see that, brave as is her heart, the strain is killing her."

At this point the friends separated, and soon after John, deep in business details, had forgotten all about Maggie Ross, Nellie Rogers and Father James. But with the evening came back thoughts of the now all-important matter. John firmly believed that Father James had broached the subject to David Ross, and so compromised him to a certain extent. That, however, he could not help. The pastor knew his sentiments towards Miss Ross, and if he had represented them different whose fault was it?"

Now, however, John felt it incumbent on him to take some action which would indicate just what his real sentiments were. For a while his mind wandered aimlessly about in search of the proper course.

Ah, if this were an emergency in which Father James would advise him how to act; but his adviser had become to a certain extent his enemy, and now he must rely on his own resources.

Suddenly a pale, sweet face confronted his wandering mind and brought him to a standstill.

Without intending any slight to the owner of the sweet face we might say that John caught at an idea that then and there suggested itself as a drowning man does a straw.

That evening the usual tele-a-tele of Mrs. Rogers and her daughter was interrupted by the entrance of John Douglas, who spoke about a dozen words during the evening, listened to Mrs. Rogers talk and Miss Rogers sing, and on his way home vowed that he had ever spent a pleasanter evening. And what would Father James say if he knew it?"

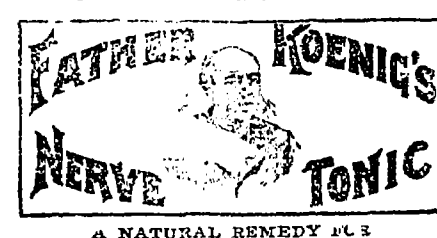
Well, he did know it soon enough. Across the way from the Rogers' cottage, in an old-fashioned homestead, lived the Nicholsons, an equally old-fashioned Catholic family. Thither the pastor was called a few days afterwards, and from behind the closed blinds Father James saw John Douglas and his wagon in front of the house over the way, while Nellie Rogers appeared at the gate. They were going driving evidently, and John seemed the most at ease of the two.

With a long drawn-out whistle Father James rose from his seat at the window, took several turns around the room, and then resuming his seat watched them drive off. When they were out of sight Father James laughed a quiet, hearty, enjoyable laugh, such as comes from one who has accomplished a cherished work.

Two months later the pastor had occasion to write to a former curate of his, and it is not a breach of confidence for us to give the following passage therefrom:

"And now let me insert an oasis in the desert of parental facts and figures. Of course you know how adverse John Douglas has always been to marriage, mainly because of his extreme bashfulness and want of the courage necessary to come to the point. Well, I determined some time ago that the work could only be accomplished by strategy. The plan I hit upon has succeeded admirably. I knew what an aversion he had to Maggie Ross, because of her long tongue and her too great anxiety to make some miserable man happy. I gave John to understand that Maggie Ross was a proper life companion for him, and hinted that I would in view of his own great bashfulness, fix matters for him. The ruse succeeded so well that within a week poor John had proposed for the hand of Nellie Rogers, just the end I had in view. He has been wooing her industriously for two months now, and last night over tea he told me that they would be married in three months more. 'But, John,' I asked, 'whatever drove you to Nellie Rogers when I was about to fix everything at Ross's?' 'Well, Father James,' was his reply, 'I don't want you to fix things there at all. I knew you would if nothing happened to prevent you, and so in desperation I put in a veto in the shape of a marriage proposal to Nellie Rogers.' And so, you see, John is to be married in spite of himself!"

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Live Stock Markets.

LIVERPOOL, April 20.—There was an easier feeling in the cattle market today owing to the increased supplies, and although prices for best States show no change, Argentines have declined 1c per lb. Trade was slower, best States selling at 10½c, and Argentines at 9½c. The market for sheep was steady at 13c.

MONTREAL, April 21.—During the past week business in export live stock circles has been rather quiet, owing to that fact shippers generally are holding back until the opening of navigation, when it is expected that considerable activity will prevail. The corner in ocean space referred to by our Liverpool correspondent, engineered by a London and Toronto combination, has no foundation whatever; in fact, it is doubtful if the first steamers sailing for Liverpool and London have been taken up yet, as it is reported that space for the above two ports is offering on the market at 35s to 40s. The demand for export cattle so far this season has been of a limited character, and it is stated that few purchases have been in the country for future delivery, on account of the high prices asked by farmers, in face of the low prices and discouraging advices from abroad. A few lots of choice steers were bought here this morning for shipment at 3½c to 4c per lb. The steamship Lake Superior, sailing from St. John, N.B., this week, takes out 350 cattle, 500 sheep and 30 horses.

At the East End Abattoir this morning the offerings of live stock were 550 cattle, 40 cows, 500 calves, 10 sheep and 20 spring lambs. Owing to the increased receipts, the lack of any export demand, and the supply being in excess of local requirements, the tone of the market was weaker, and prices show a decline of 1c to 1c per lb. as compared with those paid last Thursday. There was a large attendance of butchers. The demand, however, was slow early in the day, as holders tried to maintain prices which buyers would not pay; consequently, sellers, in order to dispose of their stock, made the above reduction in values, and towards noon the demand improved considerably, and a fairly active trade was done. Choice steers and heifers sold at 3½c to 3¾c; good, 3c to 3½c; fair, 2½c to 3c, and common, 2c to 2½c per lb. live weight. Cows met with a slow sale at prices ranging from \$20 to \$40 each as to quality. There was a good supply of calves, for which the demand was active, and sales were made freely at from \$1 to \$8 each as to quality. Old sheep were scarce and dear, selling at 4c to 5c per lb. live weight. The demand for spring lambs was good at \$2.50 to \$5 each as to size.

At the Point St. Charles cattle market this morning there was a fair supply of cattle offered, but sales were slow and the bulk was forwarded to the above market. The feature of this market was the demand for export account, and a few small purchases were made at 3½c to 4c per lb. live weight. There were also a few small lots of sheep offered which sold at 4c to 5c per lb. live weight. The market for live hogs was stronger and prices advanced 10c to 25c per 100 lbs. The receipts were 300 head, which met with a good demand at \$1.25 per 100 lbs. fat.

New York, April 20.—Receipts for last week's stock, \$2.30 to \$2.45; cows and stags, \$2.25 to \$2.45; bulls, \$2.10 to \$2.35; dr. cows, \$1.50 to \$2.05; dressed beef in fair demand; 10c to 10½c for good prime cuts. Cattle from Great Britain (Guaranteed American stock) 10c to 11c dressed weight; American sheep, 11c to 12c, dressed weight. Poor stock to be sold or sheep sold \$2.62 to \$2.85; clipped, \$3.00 to \$3.75; unsold lambs, \$1.50 to \$3.00; clipped lambs, \$2.85 to \$4.00; spring lambs, \$3.50 to \$5; dressed hogs, 6c to 7c; dressed hogs, 7c to 1c. 1c prior to good state hogs, \$4 to \$4.20; pigs, \$4.40 to \$4.50.

Chicago, April 20.—Cattle—common to extra steers, \$3.10 to \$4.40; stockers and feeders, \$3 to \$3.30; cows and bulls, \$1.70 to \$2.25; calves, \$2.50 to \$4.75; Texas, \$2.25 to 2.85. Hogs—cave packing and shipping lots, \$3.40 to \$3.55; common to mixed, \$3.40 to \$3.75; choice asorted, \$3.80 to \$3.95; light, \$3.55 to \$3.85; pigs, \$2.10 to \$3.10. Sheep—superior to choice, \$2.00 to \$3.25; lambs, \$3.50 to \$4.50.

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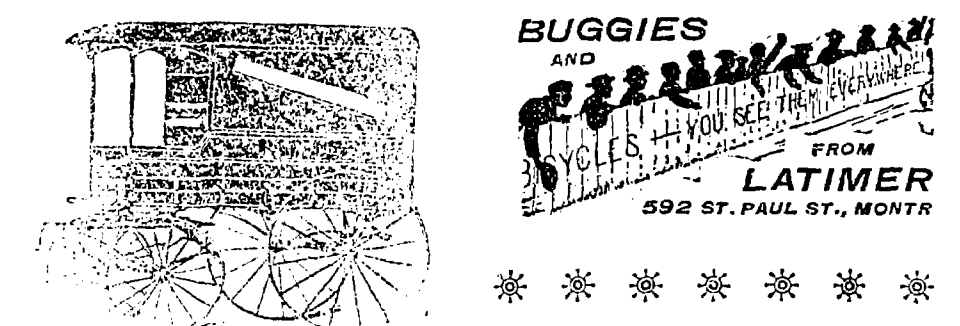
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