



CHARACTER is like bells which ring out sweet music and which when touched accidentally even, resound with sweet music.—Philip Brooks.

The Leak in the Morse House Roof

By ROSE D. NEALLEY
(New England Homestead)

THE Morse house stood on the eminence of a sun-kissed hill. In the distance on either side other hills, purple or blue against the horizon, reflected the sunshine or lay dark in the shadows as the case might be. Sometimes, as to-day, a mist rolled up from the valley and curtained those other hills from view. The mist betokened rain; and Phoebe Morse, gazing past the scarlet geraniums that brightened her sitting-room window, noted anxiously the gathering clouds.

"It's goin' to rain," she muttered, "an' he ain't mended the roof yet. That leak grows bigger an' bigger. I expect we'll be lit'ally drowned out if I can't get him to mend it soon."

She turned to her sewing for a few minutes, then again she scanned the horizon. The mist was growing thicker, the clouds heavier; even the valley had disappeared from view. Indistinctly at first, the figure of an old man took shape and finally emerged from the mist. He ascended the hill leisurely and turning into the dooryard, paused to caress a sleek old cat which sat in comfortable solitude on the doorstep. Then he entered the house slowly and disappeared in the sitting-room door.

"Well, Phebe," he greeted his wife cheerfully, "how goes it?"

Phebe's firmly-set mouth did not relax. She answered with apparent irrelevance, "It's goin' to rain."

"Well, what of it?" he returned blithely. "I ain't to blame, be I? Besides, we need it."

"We need somethin' else, too."

"Well, what?"

"You know 'well enough what I mean. You ain't mended the roof yet."

But Alonzo Morse looked only slightly crestfallen. "I clean forgot, Phebe! Honest, I did."

"I should think I had reminded you times enough."

"Well, now, Phebe, be reasonable. It's just like this. When it rains I can't go out in the wet to mend it and when it don't rain, it don't need mendin'."

But Phebe refused to be placated by any facetiousness on her husband's part.

"It ain't rainin' for more'n three weeks," she reminded him, "an' we've had time enough to 'tend to it."

She folded up her work as she spoke, and going into the kitchen began preparations for supper. She was considerably hindered in her work by six kittens of playful disposition that were running about and constantly getting under foot. She had requested her husband to drown them while they were yet in the blind stage, but he had, as usual, deferred the unpleasant task until the kittens

had developed such attractive and cuddlesome qualities that he hadn't the heart to end their innocent careers. Phebe sputtered to herself as she tossed first one and then another on the top of her boot.

The kitchen was a marvel of shining cleanliness. The walls were freshly papered, the tin teakettle shone like silver, the stove was nicely polished, and the kitchen table with



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its snowy cloth and wholesome food looked tempting enough to her hungry husband.

"You certainly be a master-good cook, Phebe," he complimented her.

"There's nobody I know of that can make such gingerbread as yours."

Phebe was not indifferent to her husband's appreciation of her cooking. Her mouth relaxed into a smile.

"An' there ain't an egg in it, either," she explained, "an' no milk; only hot water. Cookin's jest a knack."

After supper Phebe washed the dishes while her husband took care of the stock, and her grievances were sang a gospel hymn while she set mending stockings by the big kerosene lamp. She awoke in the middle of the night, and hearing a mighty pattering on the roof, remembered the leak and that she had forgotten to place a pail beneath the spot to catch the water. Alonzo was slumbering as peacefully as though his negligence had not been the cause of all this trouble.

She arose, put on her bed shoes, and went after the pail and a mop.

She mopped up the rivulet of water that was meandering across the sitting-room carpet, and having placed the pail in the right position to catch

the water from the leak, she again retired to bed. Twice during the night she got up and emptied the pail while her husband slept on tranquilly as before. In the morning the rain had ceased. The leaves on the great poplar in front of the house looked as if they had been dipped in the sea.

The flower cups were full of water and the old fir tree was decorated with diamonds and pearls.

The hills across the valley seemed smiling a "good morning" to the Morse farm. Phebe was not indifferent to the beauty of the scene as she gave the chickens their breakfast in the barnyard. But such a barnyard! It was strewn with cart wheels, tumbled-down carts, an old hayrack, broken tools and odds and ends of every description.

There was not a day of her life but Phebe was reminded of the fact that she had married a shiftless man, although he had proved an affectionate husband, a tender father to her children, and honest and kind as he was good-natured.

"I ain't been strict enough with him," she told herself. "I should have put his foot down hard at the beginning."

To atone for her delinquency in this respect she determined to "put her foot down hard" now, even

get somebody besides me to do your cookin'."

"Why, Phebe, how you talk!"

"I mean it," returned Phebe.

But Phebe's threats had seldom been carried out. "Wimmin have to talk," he said to himself as he drove up the road toward Jim Stebbins'.

It was supper time when he returned home, but there was no light in the window. The kitchen was empty, and there was no sign of supper on the table. There was a fire in the stove, but the empty kettle stood in the kitchen sink.

A sudden fear shot through his heart. He remembered that Phebe had threatened to leave him. "But not for a week—not for a week," he repeated, to himself.

"Phebe," he called in a terrified voice.

A feeble response came from the sitting-room through the closed door.

"That you, Lonzo? I thought you'd never come. I've sprained my ankle."

There was beside the couch in a moment, "How'd you sprain it, Phebe?"

"Caught my foot in one o' them holes in your floor," was the curt reply.

"Oh, Phebe! I'm so sorry."

"That don't mend worn-out floors nor sprained ankles," she snapped.

In the days that followed Alonzo proved himself the most attentive of nurses. No woman could have been more tender or efficient. Phebe could not step on her foot for several days.

Meanwhile a carpenter with hammer and saw was laying a new kitchen floor. The sound was music to her ears, and more efficacious than ointment to the wounded ankle.

"No great loss without some small gain," said Phebe to herself. "A sprained ankle meant a new kitchen floor. I guess I've got him started on the right road at last."

By the end of the week she could hobble about with the sprained ankle.

"I'll resign in your favor," she said, "but I don't want to see my husband, delighted to have her about once more."

Her reply was plainly irrelevant.

"Have you mended the roof yet?"

"Why, Phebe! You know I ain't had no time."

"My week's up to-morrow."

"What week?" Then remembering her threat, he added: "Good land! You must give a feller time."

Phebe hobbled to the door and glanced at the barnyard. "The barnyard ain't cleaned up either," she went on.

"What a hustler you be, Phebe," he said, "you'll keep a man bumpin' all the time."

The next day nothing more was said about the roof or the barnyard.

On the second morning Alonzo remembered that he was out of "feed" and must go to see what he had.

"You'd better favor that foot to-day and keep off from it. What do you want me to bring you from town?"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'?"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

"Nothin'!"

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