

The St. Andrews Standard.

PUBLISHED BY A. W. SMITH.]

E VARIIS SEMENDUM EST OPTIMUM.—Cic.

[22 50 PER ANNUM IN ADVANCE]

No 47

SAINT ANDREWS N. W. BRUNSWICK, NOVEMBER 21, 1869.

Vol 36

Interesting Tale.

THE MINISTER'S SON.

The cold December wind was whistling down the wide-mouthed chimney, and Mistress Fairchild, shivering her candle from the draft, stopped to listen to its crooning, as she had listened during all the Decembers of fifty winters.

She was getting a little hard of hearing now, and some-times Keziah's snoring sounded vastly like the sighing of the wind. But to night it was old Boreas surely, driving cold and pitiless out of the north-west, rattling the quaint little window sash of the parsonage house, and swaying the great hickory tree in the back yard, until its knotted limbs scraped against the ivy eaves.

Mistress Fairchild set down her emptying jug upon the ample stone hearth that would scarcely cool off the whole winter long from the glow of the sacred household fire always burning there. She was very particular about her sponge, and nobody's skill in Barstow was quite equal to Mistress Fairchild's snowy loaves.

The tall clock in the corner, with its hour-glass and symbol serpent carved upon the door that concealed a closet as capacious as Master Humphrey's, now struck nine—a sharp decisive stroke, which conveyed something of reproach at the lateness of the hour that saw its mistress stir. She nodded back at it with an air which seemed to concede intelligence to the tall malagony case and white visage of Old Time, as much as to say, "Don't vex yourself, old comrade. It's Saturday night."

She was a spare old lady, bent a little at the shoulders, with a pale cheek, a mild eye, and an almost saintly light about her unwrinkled brow, where the smoothly lanced silver hair lay. Her dress had something of the Quaker primness about it, although she did not belong to that sect. It was a petticoat of some dark serge like stuff, and a short gown of the same, crossed at the bottom by a plain mull handkerchief. There were scissors and housewife dangling at her side, and her neat low quartered shoes, were clasped with antique buckles. The only other sign of worldliness her costume displayed was a narrow edge of real old English lace that bordered her close cap.

The kitchen was neat, modeled on the generous ideas of our forefathers, with a monumental chimney that looked ready to swallow the interior. There were kettles and fire-dogs and rooky corners holding comfortable chests cupboards, filled with household gear. The little tinkling windows, curtained with dimity, were wreathed with the good mistress' scarlet runner and musk roses, in summer time, and held in sea on their pots of balsam and sweet marjoram. But now the snow birds came to them from the gray branches of the orchard, and the ground looked white and wan under a spectral gleam of moonlight.

It stole into a corner where stood an old-fashioned high post bed of goodly dimensions, a hillock of down, covered by a blue and white counterpane of the dame's own weaving, with spotted valances, and coarse, but lavender scented linen, still holding the ironed creases. There was the lad's red chest, with its antique padlock, standing in the same corner, and a wooden stool, deeply marked by the initials "G. F.," cut, evidently, by a boy's jack-knife.

Old Keziah, a serving woman in the family of such long standing that she imagined she had acquired a right in fee simple to her master and mistress, had already gone up to her chilly little refrigerator of a bedroom, bearing a long tallow candle that corresponded to her long person, and stopping to squeeze at every third step, with a motion of a folding machine.

The dame felt a little more at ease, when Keziah was snug in bed; for, like the ancient manner, that rigid damsel held her to the practical rule of life, by a particularly alert eye. The old minister's wife had her pet notions she loved to indulge in secret and alone—foolish little notions, she thought in her heart, they were, yet no less dear to her fresh unwithered fancy.

She stepped softly across the painted boards of the kitchen floor, with due regard to the good pastors quiet, who must by this time have reached the twelfthly of the next day's sermon. The great oak door that opened outward to the drafty shed, was barred and braced with the same stout wood. It possessed that excellent invention of our forefathers, a flapped hole for the lazy house cat. The latch was wood, and beside it dangled a wooden peg, attached to a thong of leather, which was the only bolt or bar the dwelling afforded against house breakers and thieves.

Dame Fairchild did not even make use of this primitive device. She simply tatched the portal, and glanced with a half tender, half apologetic look up to the admonishing face of the old clock, that said as plain as words could say "Saturday night, comrade; the door has not been barred these twenty years. Who knows but my lost boy may chance to come home on just such a night as this?"

The fire upon the hearth had sunk to a deep

steedy glow, which she did not bury, as was her wont, under the heap of gray ashes. On the contrary, she threw an additional stick against the great red cave of the back log, that lit up the quaint, low studded room, with sunset splendor, and gleamed out of the frosty window, she thought, sighing heavily, "and for his sake, shall be welcome."

The vision rose unbidden to the good dame's mind, of old Tim, the tinker and country jack-at-all-trades, who in a drunken fit, had come uninvited to the parsonage, and befouled her fair linen sheets. But she had spared the vagabond all reproach had given him a warm blanket, and bound up his hurt head, and sent him away with a comfortable pair of woolen socks of her own knitting for his chilled feet. To the dame's eyes, softened, almost to the similitude of an angel's, this drunken Tim was one of those little ones of whom our Lord speaks.

The little chores were all done; and the kitchen, in the prime of its youth, looked very sweet and calm. Through the collar door came a fruity smell from where the seek-no-further and golden pippins lay resting in their snug bins. The flickering light along the wall showed the knots of yarn, and strings of drying pumpkins and apples. No speck of dust, or sign of litter revealed itself anywhere. There was a Sabbath-day quiet about the abode of the old minister and his wife, as if some token of God's love had been hung upon the door-post, whereby all care and unrest were warned away.

Dame Fairchild went at last, as was her custom, to the bed chamber, and touched the carved letters on the stool, lingering, with his old woman's hands, as if she were soothing a sick brow.

In her heart she was softly praying for her lost boy. Could it be that twenty years had slipped by since he went away from her? Yes; and still the mother's trust and tenderness did not despair. The picture of him as of boyish spirits—rose up before her in that our sacred moment.

Ah, well, she murmured, ministers' sons, they say, are likely to go astray; but it was all along of the Squire's daughter, who forgave her for playing fast and loose with my poor boy's heart.

Dame Fairchild did not lift the lid of the red chest; for she knew the faded copy books and the school-boy's kit which it contained, by heart. Slowly she opened the passage door; and with her face calm and saintly in its tapers, she looked into the minister's study.

Come in, Hannah. Why do you stop to knock? You are always as welcome as the clover in June.

And the aged minister rose from his heavy oaken chair, with an habitual air of gallantry. I feared to disturb some train of reasoning, if I entered abruptly, said the thoughtful wife. Luckily my reasonings for to night are all poisoned in my crabbed characters here, and he touched a pile of manuscript before him. God grant that they may be effectual in pointing some sinner to the way and the life. I have freed my brain from the web of doctrines that held it, and now I am at liberty to enjoy the repose of Saturday night, which is hallowed to my mind, as the threshold of to-morrow.

My thoughts were busy with old fancies and people. To tell you the truth, Hannah, I was thinking of our little girl who died years back. She was a winsome thing; and if we could have reared her in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, she would have filled our house with pleasantness. But it struck me for the first time, to night, if she had lived she would have been a woman grown by this time, and perhaps married, with her own babies upon her knee. So who knows but two old birds might have been alone in the nest, all the same? We have not forgotten how to chirp and twitter still, and make sweet music in each other's ears; so we have no shadow of repining in our hearts, for God's mercies are now every morning, and fresh every evening.

The dame seated herself in her favorite high backed rocking chair, and crossed her hands upon her lap; while in the low lamp light, her face looked paler and more shadowy than ever.

God knew what was best, she said. It needs a sight clearer than mortal ken, and more than the wisdom of the serpent to rear children up righteously, so that they go not astray.

The old minister let his hand fall tenderly on the old dame's head. It was whiter than his own, perhaps, although he was the elder; but his expression shewed a spirit and energy which was wanting to the old woman's saintly face. His short clothes of soberest cut, with large shoe buckles of silver, were in the fashion of the time. The grave, sad air of a clergyman of the old school, sat easily by him and was much softened by benevolence.

You are always thinking of our poor boy, Hannah, he said at last. Be sure that you are appointed cross. We set such high hopes on George, perhaps some of the dross of worldly ambition stole into our hearts. We loved

young life with such fervor, that God chose we should be bereft.

I have teased myself much, said the old dame, lifting her appealing face toward his, with the thought that we did not study the temper of our boy, as we ought. It was hard for us grave and serious minded folks to enter into the feelings of an ardent young nature. Perhaps we forgot that youth is the play-spell of life, and made religion irksome and unlovely.

Nay, said the minister, it is difficult to do full justice by any human soul; but, surely, we kept in mind that George had a tender mouth, and could not be checked too high. It was the Squire's daughter, with her arts and wiles, that beguiled to his ruin; and yet who could be harsh even toward her, remembering her loveless life, wedded to a dissolute man, and her early, unwept grave?

It he could but know, said the dame, with a quivering lip, that there are no reproaches awaiting him here, no thought of shame and ignominy, only tenderest pity, who can tell but he would leave his way-forgiveness to the world, and come back, and find rest in the old home.

We can trust him in God's keeping, can't we do, that there is neither height, nor depth, nor length, nor breadth by which to measure our Heavenly Father's compassion?

Then the old man took down the great clasped Bible from its place on the shelf, under the psalm book and Dr. Watt's hymns; and with tears, such alone as a mother weeps dropped from the dame's cheeks, read the story of the prodigal son.

About four o'clock of the afternoon previous a man was being thrust out summarily from the red tavern at the cross roads, into the wintry cold. This was an event very likely to happen, when some poor wretch had lost his money and brains at the counter of Mr. Birch, who was never known to be troubled with a man who would not exercise common prudence.

His clothes were very poor, with numberless windows and loop holes to admit the light of day, and the pitiless cold. There was some suggestion of a shirt beneath his outer garment, and a tax end of a handkerchief was twisted about his throat. Thrust out upon the road, by the strong hands of Mr. Birch, he drew his tattered coat across his chest, and buttoned it with the one button remaining. His steps wavered with a weakness that easily stimulated intoxication. He had not gone many paces from the tavern, he fore he set down upon a snow bank, in the angle of a snake fence, to cough; and this time, a gush of blood came to his lips.

The tavern keeper's wife had pitied him from the depth of her woman's nature; but dread of her husband had stopped the plea of mercy on her lips. Secretly however she put on her short cloak, and hood, and with meat and bread in her apron, followed upon the road, but she did not look up. His gaunt, unshaven face almost touched his knees as he lay.

You must stir yourself friend, said the good wife, lightly shaking his shoulder, and checked at the sight; for it is piercing cold. Why then away are you bound now?

Might it be far to Barstow? the man inquired, half rousing himself at last from his stupor.

No more than a matter of two miles up the turnpike. Do you folks live at Barstow? No, no; I haven't got any folk.

Well, then go the old minister; they never were known to turn a dog from the door; and if I had my way no more would I, she added with a sigh. They say the old lady is forever taking on about a wild son of hers—that cut off from home high twenty years ago and never has been heard of since. She looks for him back still, but the story goes that he was drowned at sea.

A sudden gleam shot from the tramp's filmy eyes, and a gurgle rose and died away in his throat, as he abruptly turned and set his gray, despairing face toward the long perspective of the turnpike.

Here, said the woman eagerly, is some bread and meat. Take it and eat it on the road.

Taint no use, he replied, without turning round. I'm too far gone to keep any grog down. Last week there was a gnawing and a burning here always, and he touched the fluttering rags on his chest; but I've got past starvation. Ha! ha! and laughed feebly with a dreadful sound. All I want is a hole to crawl into; for the cold nips my bones and makes them rattle.

Take my cloak, said the woman impulsively, the hot tears brimming her eyes; and she stripped the garment from her shoulders and laid it upon the shivering wretch with a motion of pitying love that I think must have the angelic smile from out the scene's heavens.

The man's "God bless you" ended in a great sob; and this time he did not turn back, but drew his languid steps away from the tavern, resting when he must, while the woman watched him with dim eyes, wondering if that

"God bless you" would lighten Mr. Birch's curse.

How he reached the parsonage, long after midnight, who can tell? He had crawled part of the way. There were times when his reason left him, and he fancied oddly that he was a gay, careless boy. There was the willow fringed brook, where he had fished at every turn; and the gray stone walls, where squirrels whisked their tails; and the maple grove, and the cow lane; yes, and he should know it well; there was the low roof of the parsonage, with its gable end painted red, and the row of cherry trees along the garden fence, where he had often held his little sister Faith to pick the fruit in her apron. He wondered if he should see Faith's rosy face at the window. No—there was the old knot red hickory that chafed the mossy eaves. Many a night he had swung himself down from his chamber by its limbs, so secretly to dancings and junk-tings. His mother never reproached him, but looked paler and soberer every day. They wanted him to get religion; and who knows but he might have got it, but for some great trouble—it was so long ago he had almost forgotten what—that crazed him and took him off to the tavern. It might be all true what the old man preached, though Sunday was such a long and tiresome day. Eternity seemed very near now, he could almost touch it with his hand. There were some words he must have heard years back that kept sounding in his ears. They were "Lord have mercy upon me a sinner." It wasn't the first time he had haunted about the old place. He had seen his mother's shadow and heard her voice. He knew where old man kept his drawers; they laid up in the till of a chest of drawers, but that God, he had never got so low as to touch any of it. He must steal away now to the shelter of some hay rick, where they might find him cold and stiff on the morrow. He would not burden the old folks with his carcass. He crept to the window, put his knees into the snow bank by the rose bush, and then the glow of the fire must have outlasted him long when they found him he was kneeling by the bed, with his matted locks scattered, and a wonderful look of George Fairchild's on cheek and brow, and a little dark stream showing where his life blood had ebbed away. The calm of Sunday-morning had come; and in trembling hope, with her child's head upon her lap, the old dame turned to him who said "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Mr. DANIEL A. LANGE, the London representative of the Suez Canal Company, has communicated to the Times the results of some experiments recently made on the canal with the Egyptian corvette Latif, a vessel carrying 10 Armstrong guns and driven by engines of 300 nominal horse power. The object of these experiments was:—1st, To ascertain the speed required to steer a vessel of the dimensions of the Latif so as to keep her course straight, in navigating the canal. The experiments showed that this can be effected at a speed of 3 2 and 3 7 knots an hour. 2. It was further important to ascertain by practical trials the rate at which a vessel could proceed through the canal without disturbing the embankments. The result proved that a speed of 5 4 and 6 4 knots an hour no harm is done to the banks. 3. The last question to determine was the loss of speed incurred by a vessel navigating in the canal, compared with the open sea, in smooth water. It was found that the loss of speed owing to more confined water area of the canal amounted to one fourth, using of course the same power in both cases. Mr. Lange confirms the official announcements already made—viz, that the navigation of the Suez Canal would be opened on the 17th of November, to all vessels without distinction of nationality, provided they do not draw more than 24 feet 7 inches English, the canal being then (eight meters) equal to 26 1/2 English feet in depth. Messrs. Horns, also directors of the Societe Maritime des Messageries Impériales, have announced that the steamship "Godavery" will be despatched from Marseilles on the 10th of November to Port Said, where she was expected to arrive on the eve of the inauguration of the canal. After the opening ceremony she will pass through the canal and continue her voyage direct to Calcutta. The Godavery's extreme length is 305 feet. Her tonnage (English) is 1380 gross and 965 register, and her draught with a full cargo is 17 feet 9 inches. [Engineering.]

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