

"I think none the less of him on that account, though I can remember when my blood ran cold at the name of *Freemason*; but it is different now; I love the very word. To Judge Withrow I owe a debt of gratitude that nothing short of love can cancel."

"For what do you owe him gratitude?"

"For peace of mind, for a home, for bread for my orphan children, for plenty, and, to crown all, for one of the best, the noblest of husbands."

"Mrs. Wilson," said Mrs. Wheeler, "pray *do* explain y<sup>r</sup>self."

"I will. You know that Mr. Clark, my first husband, was without means, and very poor. He bought a lot in the suburbs of the village, and built a small house on it, which through the most scrupulous economy, enabled him to pay for the lot and building, as far as it was completed. After his death I fully realized the responsibility of my position. An inexperienced widow, with two little children to provide for, the eldest but five years old, the winter approaching, and no provision for our subsistence. The only resource left me to provide my children with bread was to take in sewing and washing. There was so much competition in this line of business in our little village that I could not get employment for one-half my time. The consequence was that the first December storm caught me without fuel or food. I had not a friend or an acquaintance in the country. We had been but a short time in the State, and had made no acquaintances. I had not a relative in the world but the uncle who had reared me, and he was very old and indigent, and was not within a thousand miles of me.

"On the 10th day of December I had been two days without food. I had husbanded a few potatoes, the product of our little garden, for my starving children. Oh, Mrs. Wheeler!" continued Mrs. Wilson, "you do not know the pangs of hunger, nor do you know the still deeper pangs and withering anguish that the cry of one's offspring sends to the heart of the mother when she has no bread to give. Alas! I do; too well do I.

"On the morning of the 10th of December I divided the last morsel I had left between my two little ones, and put the last chips on the fire, of a boxful which I had gathered the day before, when the snow commenced to fall. Without having eaten anything for two days I went out through the snow storm to the grove, where I found some sticks and brush; with these I started homeward. I had not gone far till I saw Judge Withrow behind me making his way to the village. I then regarded him as a proud old man, who cared for no one but himself. Embarrassed at my situation, I hid behind an old barn till he passed. I had every reason to believe that, if he knew me at all, he must dislike me, for my husband had abused him. My husband was a warm anti-Mason. His zeal had led him, on one occasion, and that, too, but a short time before his decease, to ridicule the institution of Masonry in the presence of Judge Withrow. This had no other effect than to produce a smile from the old man. My husband, as he informed me, became exasperated at his coolness, and reproached the good old man as a Mason. He treated him very unkindly, and, from what he informed me, must have allowed his feelings to betray him into very imprudent and abusive language, to which the poor old man made no reply.

"I went home with my sticks and limbs, borrowed a loaf of bread from Mrs. Lisle, and, after a day of grief and despair, went to bed at dark.

"The next morning, upon rising, I found upon the floor, under a broken pane in the window, a sealed letter. It contained a twenty dollar bank note, and ran thus: 'Poor woman, keep a stout heart, and an upright life. The virtuous have nothing to fear though they may be poor. The poor have nothing to fear if they are upright. This is your money, and there is more in store for the widow and the fatherless in the hour of need.'

"I could scarcely believe my own senses, I wept with joy, and laughed like a maniac, until I startled my children with the vehemence of my joy.

"A little longer, and this munificence would have been too late, for I was near the famishing point. I had begun to writhe under the 'hunger-pain' I had heard of as indicating the last suffering of fainting mortality among the 'famishing paupers of Ireland.'

"Ah! Mrs. Wheeler, fancy a scorpion gnawing at the heart-strings; fancy coals of fire applied to the naked flesh! No, no, you can not. It is only those who have felt Death's cold fingers stealing along their pulses, and his chill, damp breath fanning their cheeks, that can know the pangs of starvation.

"Of the source of this gratuity, and the kind, the comforting, the blessed words which the letter contained, I could not form the remotest apprehension. But there they were. I was happy.

"From that day forward, the same blessed handwriting, accompanied by a like donation, and a few brief words of encouragement, periodically found its way through