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JONCE SMILEY

THE BOY WHO HAD NO FRIENDS.
A NEW ENGLAND TALE.
By the Author of "Sandwich"

Peltiah Perkins died and was buried. Many were the virtues which were discovered in the character of the deceased, after he had ceased to be, and long was the procession, all on foot, which followed Peltiah, father of the town, as he had been considered, under the Deacon, to his last earthly resting-place. According to the good old custom, Peltiah's remains were borne upon the shoulders of eight of those nearest his age, of sufficient strength to support the burden, four bearing the body, and the others walking beside it, ready to relieve their friends at stated intervals. Then on foot, two and two, followed all the town, the immediate relatives of the deceased first—then his friends—then his acquaintances, the latter including all the adult inhabitants of the place in which he was born, had lived, and died. Not a few children were in the solemn train; for in New England the child is early taught that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. No studied funeral pomp—no mocking pageantry of woe—no mercenary adjuncts and accidents of mourning added to the solemnity of the scene—nor could such vanity, had it been present, have increased the effect. It must rather have destroyed or diminished it. When one in the village dies, men say "It is one of us—let us all attend him to his long home," and all who can, do thus honor the dead, for they miss his step from among them. When one in a city dies, the busy worldlings say—"It is a man dead, let us pay those whose trade it is to do him honor," and the overfed sleek black horses, prance up till within a door of the house, their black plumes shaking gaily like so many dancing death's. Reluctantly pawing, as with difficulty, chieftain down to funeral pace and then to a funeral stop before the door, the horses wait impatiently for their load of mortality; and, in a gait restrained, with frequent efforts to break into a trot, they bear the dead to the tomb; and then, the ungracious task once performed, the coach of the dead, and the coaches of the living hurry away; with no farther effort to remember the duty which summoned them forth.

As Deacon Underwood bared his head at the entrance of the graveyard while the body of his friend passed in, he noticed that he was joined by a stranger—a stranger evidently, or he would have been one of the procession. The Deacon did not look up to the newcomer's face, for, as that reverent cortege entered the home of the dead, all eyes were fixed upon the earth. The body was committed to the ground; the procession wound around the grave, and moved out of the yard, each eye, as the narrow pit was passed, being strained to catch a last look at the wood which concealed all that remained of Peltiah Perkins. The stranger was much moved—and when all had passed out, remounted his horse, which had been hitched at the gate, and dusty and travel-worn, Jonathan Smiley, for he it was, followed the funeral procession home. As a couple after couple of the acquaintances of the deceased turned aside to seek their homes, many a curious eye was turned scanningly upon the stranger—but none knew him. And how should they? he recollected him. The deceased boy could not be recalled to mind by that stalwart and manly form, nor could those who caught a nearer glimpse remember the downcast and sheepish eyes of poor Jonce in the steady and manly look of Jonathan Smiley. Divers and sundry were the speculations as to whom and what this traveled apparition could be and could mean, by starting up just then and just there; and the family record of the Perkins was canvassed, to find out what distant relation, having forgotten Peltiah alive, had come to claim consanguinity with the dead man's estate. Even John Perkins, dutiful son as he was, let his father's memory fade, to trace in his own family tree, and discover, if possible, what distant branch of it had now appeared, to cry "shares" in the division. Jonathan Smiley more sincerely mourned than any other—for, remembering Peltiah with more unkindness, perhaps, than any other human being, he was entering the township of Hardscrabble, determined to punish him a little for former cruelties, when the open graveyard arrested his pace. He was shocked to hear for whom the grave was waiting. In an instant his thoughts took a better turn, and he bitterly lamented that he could not have seen, and freely, fully, and unconditionally expressed his forgiveness to his early persecutor. Having bitterly did he muse on the pitiful malice which can find place in the heart of one dying worm against another, while to both are winging the missiles of that "insatiate archer," whose arrows rise to that stalwart and manly form, while even that thought is imagining evil—and that purpose is seeking it!

But if other eyes failed to recognize Jonathan Smiley, there was one who could not be deceived. As Margaret turned with her guardian to enter the house, she too cast a glance at the apparition—but she by instinct as it were caught a knowledge of his identity. With a sharp but low cry she pulled the Deacon's arm, and both stood in the door half doubting, half expecting, to welcome him as he alighted. No assumed distance on the part of Margaret damped her welcome—no stiff ceremony prevented the Deacon from fairly hugging Jonce in his arms, as one who in his absence had deeply grown in his affections.

And now was all Hardscrabble in an instant excitement. All feet of men tended to the Deacon's house to welcome home, as they said, (though they said nothing about his home, years before) our Jonce—the Hon. Jonathan Smiley. And the women, bless their hearts! who could not rendezvous at the tavern, ran from house to house, exchanging notes, and consulting recollections.

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lections as to what manner of man Hon. J. Smiley now was, and what manner of boy Jonce Smiley was once. Pretty young women, who were pretty children when he left Hardscrabble, each in her inmost heart studied whether she were too strongly affianced, if affianced, to break loose and marry a Member of Congress, provided he were so importunate as to refuse to listen to "no," at any rate. As to those who had no flame on hand, each in her own mind set the Hon. J. S. down as her sure and lawful prize, and wondered if anybody else would be so foolish as to think of appropriating him!

And what thought Margaret? In the first place, that her early friend had come home, safe, sound, and honored, and that he brought joy to the Deacon's heart, and good news of his son, and a good account of that son's wife and prospects—spread over her heart a summer time—a lassitude of joy, so to speak, which permitted her to trouble herself not one iota about the morrow. She was as entirely unselfish as a dear, good, whole-souled woman could be—she rejoiced in the joy of Jonce, and in the pleasure of the Deacon, and her only selfish thoughts rose in aspirations of praise to that good God, who had crowned Jonathan's early griefs with mercy and with loving kindness.

Hurriedly were the "tea-things" set aside in Hardscrabble that evening, and though it was Saturday, and therefore in New England the "preparation," we are compelled as a veracious historian to acknowledge that the said preparation for the Sabbath was of this occasion most sadly neglected. The women could not go in the afternoon to the Deacon's bar-room, but there was no rule in the Hardscrabble code of etiquette which could forbid them calling upon Margaret. They found Mrs. Smiley there, for Jonathan had been seen but a few minutes before waiting upon his mother to the Deacon's house—but Margaret had "just stepped out," nor was the Hon. Jonathan Smiley present. Such a coincidence with any other unmarried lady in the case would have made quite a buzz; but the Hardscrabble belles only whispered to each other that Margaret was a dear good creature; and that when Mr. Smiley was quite a nurse to him!

But as every one who came "soot and set," the Deacon at last said he would "go look up the girl." He was not long in the search, and in a moment more, Miss Margaret, with some confusion in her manner, introduced a fine sun-burnt fellow, as, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Hon. Jonathan Smiley." Etiquette might have told a more artificial lady to present the company to him, instead of him to them—but she

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took the shortest way. As she pronounced the "Honorable," with full emphasis, and regular accent, a keen observer might have suspected something from her manner—something, for instance, like a forced stippity to conceal deeper thought. But the keen observers were all looking at the Honorable at that dear, good-natured, old-fashioned creature, Margaret Smith. Margaret was forthwith elbowed out of sight by her visitors, who coming under the pretext of seeing her, were entirely taken up with a creature of another color. Common consent among her kind young friends fixed the conclusion that she, in fact a kind of upper "help," could not possibly take any interest in Hon. Jonathan Smiley, except to air his shirts and darn his stockings—for the present; and the village elite felt quite obliged to themselves for their good nature that they had honored her so far as to make a bridge of her nose to climb to the presence of Hon. Jonathan Smiley. And they also complacently remarked that she was "a dear good sensible woman" and did not renege on her place ever hinted to her." And by a strange anomaly, they considered the mother of the Hon. J. S. fit company for one whom they placed in the social scale below the so-called "Heights." To be sure her old crumpled dress was faded!

There must be an end to every evening, and there was an end to this, when Jonathan took his mother on his arm to go home, and Margaret bade Mr. Smiley "Good night, Jonathan!"

"I declare," said a young lady, "how familiar and motherly she is to Hon. Mr. Smiley! I do believe if the Deacon should die, Mr. Smiley would give her a home, as long as she lived, to take care of his children!"

On the day following, the hoary-headed pastor was amazed at the dilatoriness of his people at coming into the meeting-house; and at the words in whispers, and the significant looks which were exchanged among his usually sedate congregation. The very children (quick observers) seemed to catch the infection of the day, and never were they more troublesome. The seats which in olden time hung on hinges in New England meeting-houses, slammed ever and anon in all directions, by the restlessness of the juveniles, and altogether the reverend man never felt before so scandalized at the conduct of his people.

"What is the matter?" whispered the parson to the aged sexton, as that functionary came up the pulpit stairs as usual, to hand in the "notes" of those who "desired the prayers of the church and congregation."

"Why, nothing at all," said the sexton, "only the intentions of matrimony are first published to-day, between Jonathan Smiley, and Margaret Smith."

"Oh!" said the parson with a suppressed scream, as he let his pulpit Bible fall from his knees upon his toes. The truth was that everybody was astonished—except Deacon Underwood. As, on the evening previous, he had seen Margaret's head start from Jonathan's shoulder, when he found them together at the early trysting-place in his garden; and as he had picked up on the grass, that very moth-eaten Bible of which the reader has heard before; and furthermore as he had carried a written message from Hon. Jonathan Smiley, to the town-clerk, with strict injunctions of secrecy, he was not at all surprised. With a face full of grave fun, he stole peeps at the disturbed congregation, as he sat alone in his pew, modestly having kept the lovers away from church; and with a most iron look of "don't you wish you knew all about it?" he met all glances. But when he saw the parson let the Bible fall, for the first time in his life and the last, the Deacon "laughed in meeting"—and no very silent laugh either, though it reverentially turned into a distressing cough by way of finale.

Now, when the parson was to be said. Of course, the couple were married; and Hardscrabble forgot its surmises, and its momentary assumption of misplaced aristocracy, to be present at the wedding and witness the couple's joy; and sincerely too, did all congratulate good Margaret Smith, though some protested they did not know that "white would make her look so young." As to Peltiah's heir, he could not be present, but he took an early opportunity to make a call. Previously thereto he lauded Jonce to the skies, and exalted Margaret with him. Subsequently he humphed—and said "an old maid would do well enough for a Western Congressman." It was pretty cheap to get into Congress from the West, as you might know by that Jonce doing it. "Sacrilege! That Jonce Smiley! But Jonce was a new politician—a straightforward, honest man, or else when Peltiah's heir had asked the M. C. to give him the Hardscrabble post-office, he would not have answered that it was not his to give.

The Deacon sold out in Hardscrabble, and at the close of the session of the congress, went out with Hon. Jonathan Smiley, his lady and his mother, to live in the West—where, at this present writing, we trust they are well and happy. As to John Perkins, he remains still in Hardscrabble, and there we fancy he will remain; for the overseers of the apoor have long counted on him as a resident in their Public Manse whenever sickness shall complicate his helplessness, the fine Perkins farm having already come under mortgage for much more than it is worth.

THE END.

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1. Suet, butter and sugar become liquid when boiling. It is upon their excess that puddings often break.
2. Puddings containing much bread crumb must be tied loosely to allow for swelling.
3. Baking puddings must be tied firmly.
4. The basins must be full and well greased.
5. Be scrupulously careful that puddings are absolutely clean.
6. Immediately before using dip cloths into boiling water, wring out, and sprinkle with flour.
7. In cooking meat puddings the first and most important point is to be sure the meat is entirely fresh, as the least bit affected will taint the whole lot, as the gradual heat hastens decomposition.

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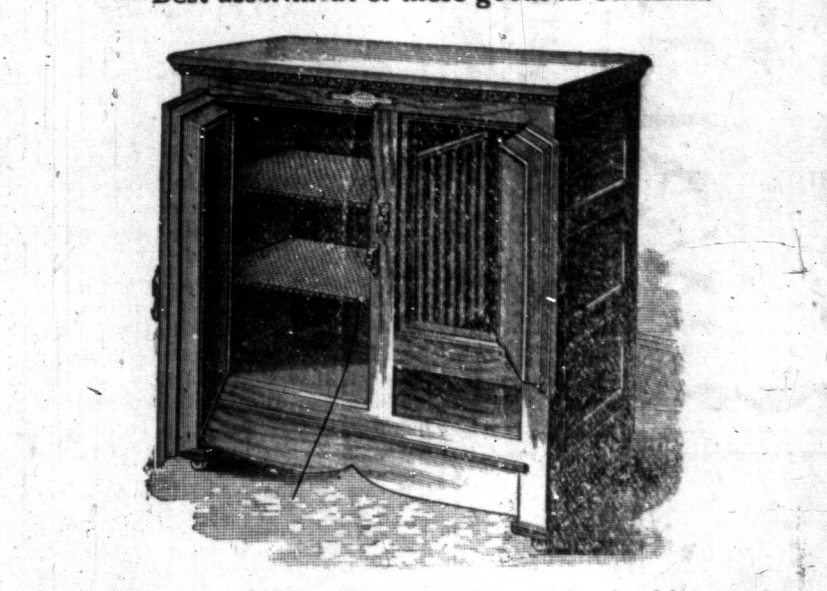
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