

The Inglenook.

A Successful Failure.

BY ELIZABETH PRICE.

Swift was looking over a fat and shabby book which had once been blank but now was filled to overflowing with items and figures which—not content with keeping themselves to the lines intended to guide them—had criss-crossed each other in a most bewildering way, while foot notes and penciled marginalia abounded. Mr. Swift glanced occasionally across the round table to his wife with a look of amused perplexity on his countenance, but her eyes were bent on the needlework, and her face was so serenely unconscious of the irregularities in her method of bookkeeping that with a half smile he resumed his task alone. At last however he snapped the rubber band about the fat brown book, put his pencil in his pocket and said, "Mary, do you think we could economize a little? It seems to me—as nearly as I can make out by your accounts—that we are spending too much money these days." A little anxious pucker disturbed the serenity of the sweet face opposite.

"Why, John, are we? I thought we were economizing already a good deal. Has anything happened?"

"Nothing, my dear, out of the ordinary, but our expenses are certainly larger than they used to be."

A dimple tried to hide itself behind a plump hand.

"Well, John my dear, of course they are. Our family used to be babies, and a yard of material would make a suit of clothes or a Sunday-best frock. Then bread and milk or broth with rice were ample supplies for infants appetites; but times have changed my dear Rip Van Winkle."

"Seriously Mary, that cannot account for the entire difference."

"Seriously John, it can go a long distance toward it. With a son whose activity and general muscular strength make a suitable covering of his anatomy a constant problem not easy to solve (you never would guess how many clothes that Jack-boy wears out if you weren't his mother—and you're not,) and possessed of an appetite which does not question quality or kind, but makes a strong point of quantity; with a daughter who attends a fashionable school and whose imagination could not compass a greater depth of woe than not to be dressed as well as the 'other girls,' with a larger house to heat, light and care for, surely, John, you can see for yourself why we spend more money. Of course if you can't afford it we'll send Maizie to the High School and dress Jack in corduroys exclusively."

"Nonsense, Mary, no extreme measures are necessary and whatever we decide upon must not affect the children. That would never do. But I want to take you to the St. Louis Exposition this summer and a little economy at home would help to pay the expenses of our trip."

"That is surely an incentive, John. I have tried hard to save always, and I haven't succeeded very well—the unexpected is always happening to use up my money—but I'll do my best," was the patient reply, though Mr. Swift didn't see that the anxious pucker had come back and the dimple had disappeared.

He watched the busy fingers send the shining needle through the masses of fluffy stuff that looked hopelessly bewildering to his masculine vision. "What is that, Mary?" he asked at last.

"The trimming for Maizie's new dress. Isn't it pretty?"

"No doubt it is, my dear, but aren't you putting an unnecessary amount of work on it? You have been all evening at it and it looks just as it did when you began."

"Just like an am," sighed the little woman, smiling. "I congratulate myself I've accomplished wonders. No, it isn't unnecessary—it is one of the things that have to be done for girls—one of the demands of fashion that we conventional creatures must needs follow."

"But you look tired—are there dress-makers to be had any more?"

"Not when people are economizing, John dear."

"But nothing has been said about reducing our expense until this evening."

"True. I must have had a presentiment for I had already begun," was the demure reply, as Mrs. Swift threaded her needle. Then she went on: "Now John, you must tell me just what you want me to do—how much you can afford to spend, and I'll do my best to make the supply meet the demand."

"I am sure you will my dear, and succeed in your endeavor, for I shall ask nothing unreasonable. You have been having a pretty generous allowance, and it seems to me there ought to be some to spare. So far you have used it all, but no doubt if you had realized the necessity for saving you could have done so. I shall not ask you to do with less money. I am glad to do the necessary saving and sacrificing so as to give you all you have been accustomed to, but if you could save five or six dollars a week—put it religiously away as soon as you get it and not allow yourself to touch it—then you would have enough to get what you need in the way of clothes and furbelows, and a little left to spend when you get to St. Louis for mementoes and souvenirs. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes indeed, John I should feel rich with six or even five dollars a week to spend on myself if I could spare it honestly from other things, but—"

"No doubts about it, Mary. Make up your mind and you can do it. There is nothing like system about these things Mary, my dear. I hope you understand that it is not for me—that I should not ask or permit you to deny yourself anything for me, but the money you save is to be exclusively your own and I want you to spend it lavishly."

"Thank you, John." That was all Mrs. Swift said, but she folded her dainty work away as if her interest in it had suddenly given way to weariness.

In her own room, while John was still downstairs locking up for the night, she laughed hysterically and said to herself, "That dear, blessed, ignorant, blind goose. He wants me to begin to economize! I don't see how I'll ever buy a piece of 'furbelow' with my savings, but if system will do it I'll systematize to the last degree. It isn't for him—it's all for me. I hope I appreciate my blessings."

Monday morning Mr. Swift handed his

wife her week's allowance. "Put six dollars away Mary, instead of five," he advised her as he bade her good-bye. "You can save six as easily if you plan for it."

"Very well, John," was the meek rejoinder and six dollars went dutifully into a private drawer in her desk. She looked ruefully at the remainder and sat down with pencil and paper to "readjust her finances," she said to herself, adding, "It is a fortune the family is fond of 'Poor Man's Pudding,' and that it is a nourishing dish as well as appropriate."

For several days all went smoothly. By dint of diligent use of pencil and pad, by hours of close planning to make a necessity bear the semblance of a luxury, by deciding against a modest little dinner party on John's birthday, which came just then, by buying sirloin steak instead of porterhouse and pretending not to notice when Mr. Swift whittled the carving knife anew with a most resigned expression as he attacked the stringy end, by these and many other applications of the "system" the first dollars were intact when the second sum was added thereto. Mrs. Swift drew a deep breath as she closed the little drawer. "I hope I'll live through it, for the children really need their mother." "I am sure there are new gray hairs in my pompadour—and no wonder. It's the gray matter in my brain oozing out from over exertion. Come in, Bridget. This latter aloud in response to a vigorous rap at the door.

"It's the spicket is pulled out intirely, mum, an' me wash'n' an' the kitchen that flooded it looks like No'h's Ark, mum!" exclaimed Bridget, wringing her hands at remembrance of the havoc wrought in her spotless domain.

"I'll send for the plumber at once. Until he comes turn the water off," and Mrs. Swift sprang to the telephone, while Bridget departed, loudly lamenting.

No sooner had the plumber promised to appear immediately than Mrs. Swift's mind flew to his bill. "I ought to pay it," she thought, anxiously. "John said expressly that our circumstances wouldn't admit of greater expenditure, and plumbers always find a great deal to do that no one ever dreamed was necessary. Oh, well, I can do without a new dress. My street suit is plenty good enough to travel in after it's been rebound and brushed and pressed. As John is doing the sacrificing and saving in order to give me this money (I know he is, because he said so), I couldn't ask for more. He'll never notice."

So the plumber was paid, enormously, of course, being a plumber, and the children rebelling against a too frequent repetition of "Poor Man's Pudding," ice cream had to be ordered as a compensation, and prime ribs of beef for the delectation of Mr. Swift, whose injured silence over the latest stringy steak smote his wife's conscience as with a sledge hammer.

"Not much left of my savings," she confessed to herself in strict privacy. "But never mind, I can freshen up my old silk waist and with new touches here and there, I'll do. Shoes and gloves and immaculate neckwear count for more than dresses almost, and of course I'll get a new hat—a really nice one—John always notices hats, and a stylish going-away bag with my name on a little silver plate. That touch of elegance will please John more than its intrinsic value."

"How goes it, dear?" asked Mr. Swift when Monday came again.

"Ve—very well, I—I—"

"Of course it goes well," interrupted the