

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THE BRASS ANDIRONS.

For thirty years old Eben Farwell had lived alone in his father's homestead. Its walls had grown grayer, its roof more sunken, its furniture blacker and more rusty, while he repaired nothing and added nothing. Now he was dead, and his two nieces, children respectively of his brother and his sister, were rambling through the house with the purpose of dividing the personal effects. They shuddered and exclaimed over the dirt in holes and corners, all the evidences of the old bachelor's careless, grimy life. But the solid old mahogany chairs, chests of drawers and tables which had been the property of his respectable mother had suffered but slight injury from dust and neglect, and were contemplated by the thrifty heirs not without satisfaction. One of the young women was much more vivacious in her movements and exclamations than the other, and was apparently more deeply shocked by the disorder of the house. Her name was Lois Hewitt. The other, Sarah Lovell, accepted things more quietly. She had been better acquainted with her uncle's ways. She had penetrated his solitude during his latter days so as to be allowed some knowledge of his real life. She had entered no protests against his habits; exercising thereby a degree of prudence that would have been impossible for Lois, who could never come in contact with him without feeling an impatience of his stupid ways which she made little attempt to conceal.

Sarah and Lois were not only cousins, but had been intimate friends from childhood. They were dividing the various articles very amicably, till as they ascended the garret stairs Lois said:

"If you see anything you would like to set off against my grandmother's brass andirons, let me know. I want to keep those. Grandma used to say they should be mine because I had her name. She always set store by them."

Sarah coloured slightly and looked perplexed. If you had been near her you might have seen a slight stiffening go through her whole frame, as if she were nerving her gentle yet very stubborn nature for a combat. She asked:

"Do you mean those low ones that used to stand in the room that was hers?"

"Yes."

Sarah made a little sound as if clearing her throat. She found it an effort to speak. "Why Lois," she said, "they are not here now. The fact is I bought them of Uncle Eben one day, two or three months ago."

Lois faced about upon her. "You bought them of Uncle Eben?"

"Yes, I saw them with a lot of old things tumbled into a closet and I asked him if he had no use for them if he'd sell them to me, and he said he would. So I paid for them and took them home."

"And you never told me!" There was anger and chagrin in Lois' face.

"I—I—didn't think of it. How could I know you set store by them, Lois?"

Her words conveyed an untruth. Hers was a retentive mind, and quite clear among its memories was Lois' wish, accidentally expressed many years ago, to possess those andirons. She had remembered it when she bought them, and frequently since. But their shape and brightness had taken her fancy as well as Lois'; she had seen her opportunity and made the most of it. Lois with her keen gaze, suspected the falsity, and her sense of the unfriendliness of the act increased the anger caused by her disappointment.

"You did know!" she said. "It was just like you, Sarah Lovell. You took a mean advantage. What right had you to come here pretending to be kind to Uncle Eben, and getting away grandmother's things? I should like to know what else you have bought of him?"

"You've no right to speak so to me, Lois," said Sarah. "I bought nothing else; and I'd a perfect right to buy those."

"You had not, without letting me know! And he'd no right to sell them either."

"I don't see why."

"Because they were promised to me."

"But we did not know that, Lois."

"Well you know it now. I tell you, Sarah Lovell, I haven't expected those andirons all these years to give them up now. Since you've bought them I'll pay you your price for them; but I mean to have them. I didn't have an open fire-place built in my best chamber for nothing. I always calculated to put those andirons there, and I mean to still."

Sarah looked very logged, but she tried to expostulate reasonably:

"I don't see how you can compel me to give them up, Lois. Of course I bought them because I wanted them. I've let you have your own choice here a great deal to-day. I don't see why you should fly out about such a little thing."

Lois looked at her, angered past all forbearance.

"You've given me my choice. Well, you may take your own now. I'll divide no more property with you, Sarah Lovell. I've what you like, and leave what you like. I'm sick of your underhanded ways; I'm going home."

And she hurried away slamming the door of the silent house behind her.

Sarah thus left alone stood still a moment, striving to satisfy what she felt to be the needless faintness of her good conscience. Though pained and somewhat heartsick she wavered not from any of her little purposes. She meant always to be just and justifiable. With quiet persistence she soon resumed her business. She had had the equitable division of Uncle Eben's things long mapped out in her mind. In her friendly labours with Lois this morning her plans had been followed quite closely, though unrevealed. She had known pretty well what things Lois would best like, as well as her own compensation. She could almost always manage her cousin. But Lois must be expected to "fly out" sometimes.

She finished putting her little chalk-mark on the things her husband was to bring away for her to-night. She took no advantage of Lois' absence, leaving perhaps a more generous

share than she would have done if she had not been still resolved to keep the andirons. That night she sent to Lois the key of the old house with a little note which read as follows:

"Dear Lois:

"I send the key of the house. I was sorry to finish dividing the things without you, but I tried to consult what I thought would be your wishes, and if you feel dissatisfied about anything won't you let me know? I am sorry I made you angry, Lois, and that you were so disappointed about the andirons. I would like to give them up to you, but we have got used to having them, and Reuben likes them, and says he knows you will not think it unkind of us to keep them when you come to think it over. And I too feel sure you will not long cherish any hard feelings toward

"Your Friend and Cousin

"SARAH."

The smooth tone of this note was not at first without some effect upon Lois. But as she laid it down and her mind reverted to the circumstances of the quarrel, her anger rose again. Her grievance had a hurt in it beyond mere disappointment about the andirons. The touch of hardness and deceit she had felt in Sarah seemed to her something she could not forgive. "The artful, circumventing thing!" she exclaimed. "She thinks she can make it all right with fair words. It's just like her!"

"What is the matter?" asked her husband, who heard the soliloquy.

"She won't give them up—the andirons."

"Well, I wouldn't think any more about it. You can get some as good somewhere else."

"No, I can't. They were my grandmother Farwell's, and she promised them to me. Besides it's so mean of Sarah! It's just the way she's done over and over again all our lives. She's always been having her own way with me in some underhanded fashion. I vow she shan't do it again. I'll be even with her this time. I told her I'd have them and I will. I will do her good through and through to be come up with!"

"But what can you do?" said her husband, smiling at the vigour of her tone and the sparkle of her eye.

"You'll see what I'll do," was the answer. "I don't see what she wanted of them," she continued after a while. "She never came to this town till after Grandma Farwell died; and I grew up in the house and used to play in her room half the time when I was a child. Many's the time she tied a long apron round my neck and let me help her scour those andirons. And I used to sit whole afternoons roasting apples she hung between them for me, and watching the light flickering from the brass tops. I would have given more for them than for anything else in the house. They belong to me if she did buy 'em!"

If Lois' mind wavered from its purpose it was with reflections like these that she continued it.

The next day she asked her husband to leave the horse harnessed for her as she wanted to drive out on some errands. It was Wednesday afternoon, and she knew it was Sarah's habit to go to the woman's prayer-meeting that day. Lois' movements as she went about putting her house in order that noon were over strong and decided. As she dressed her little boy, she jerked him into his clothes with such needless energy that the child rebelled and ran away into a corner, persisting that he did not want to go to ride with mamma. He was carried screaming to the wagon-seat, and only pacified by being told that he was going to see Cousin Clara.

Cousin Clara, Mrs. Lovell's three-years-old child, was climbing upon the gate of the door-yard beyond whose precincts she had been forbidden to go till her mother's return. Mother had gone to meeting, she said, when Cousin Lois and her little Farwell drove up to the gate. Clara was one of those preternaturally good and wise little ones who can be trusted with the care of themselves from their very cradles. She had been very happy playing in the yard alone, but she looked radiant when Farwell was lifted from the wagon to sit with her on the door-steps. Though Mrs. Lovell was not at home, Lois wanted to go into the house to look for something. She knew just where to look. In the spare chamber where one might want to have a fire occasionally without the trouble or expense of putting up a stove, there were the andirons—just where Lois meant to put them in her own house. With a sense of triumph she grasped one in either firm hand, carried them down-stairs and put them in her wagon. Clara looked surprised to see them go. But she was not old enough to mistrust that her elders could do wrong, or to know the "value of property."

"Tell your mother I've left a note for her on the kitchen table," said Lois. Then she picked up the reluctant Farwell, and drove away. The note ran as follows.

"I have taken the andirons because I have the first right to them, and you know it. I will pay whatever you think right for them; but I expect to keep them."

And now the andirons stood upon the clean hearth in Lois' spare room, just as she had in anticipation arranged them ever since she had a house of her own. Flushed with victory she took her husband up to see them that night. He shrugged his shoulders at her lawless proceeding, but as she stood, handsome, laughing, and triumphant, justifying her high handed conduct with a fluent tongue, he said to himself, that a fine, strong woman like his Lois must be allowed to take the bit between her teeth sometimes.

"They'll be mad with you, Lois!" he said.

"They'll get over it," she answered. "It'll do Sarah good."

But if ever people felt they had just grounds for resentment those people were the Lovells. To have had their house entered in their absence and their property abstracted was an outrage indeed.

Reuben was more hurt and angry than his wife, and even talked of taking the law on the Hewitts. But Sarah's prudence restrained him from any such measure. "It's beneath us," she declared, "to say another word about the matter. Only," stiffening in the way peculiar to her when she felt her cause to be just, "I do not see how we can hold any more intercourse with them till Lois has made an apology."

"I'll give Hewitt a piece of my mind the first time I see him," cried Reuben; "and unless he sees right done we'll never speak to 'em again."

Now, Sarah had been pricked in her conscience at the prayer-meeting that afternoon by the little, little wrong she had done Lois in buying those andirons; a wrong so slight she thought no one but a person of feelings as sensitive as her own could have considered it as a wrong at all. Had she been left to her conscience she might have righted the grievance, which was now so outdone by Lois' outrageous offence that it seemed more than justified.

There was something else Lois failed to take into account when she said, "They'll soon get over it." That was her own "getting over it." A wrong done us may be forgiven, but how we may forgive those whom we have injured is a grave problem. If Lois felt hard to Sarah when aggrieved by her, she felt harder now that Sarah was to her the cause of self-accusation. She grew less desirous to have the Lovells get over it, for she soon felt that reconciliation implied not only yielding on their part, but some humiliating acknowledgments on her own.

There were some angry words between Mr. Hewitt and Mr. Lovell, and then the families who had been each other's most congenial companions; whose interests were wholly alike; whose lands touched one another's; whose children were taught in the same schools, and who sat in the same church and heard the same gospel of peace and good-will, maintained hardness of heart toward one another, and exchanged no speech for more than twelve years.

About the end of that time, one pleasant spring evening, Mrs. Lovell looked up from her sewing and saw her only daughter Clara, who had been with some friends on a walk into the woods, returning accompanied by Farwell Hewitt. She dropped her work at once, and first a look of alarm, then of resolution, passed over her face. This same thing had happened about a week before, greatly to her surprise and displeasure. She had then cautioned Clara against any companionship with her cousin; but the girl was gentle and sweet-tempered; rudeness was impossible to her, her mother thought, while Farwell had a firm and eager will, and was not to be lightly shaken off. Mrs. Lovell was resolved to take the matter in hand herself.

The grounds of her displeasure were not wholly, or indeed chiefly in the long unfriendliness between the families. It was Farwell himself whom she feared as a companion for Clara. He had not a good name in the village. He was wayward and headstrong. His parents knew not how to govern him. He would not work or study with any regularity; but delighted in reckless feats of physical vigour, in the invention of wild and dangerous sports, and in the use of his personal power to fascinate or frighten children younger, gentler, and more conscientious than himself. In his childhood he had zealously shared his mother's feeling toward the Lovells, and had displayed it by making himself the very terror of Clara's life. But as years passed, and that enmity sunk in his parents' hearts to little else than proud shame, it lost its force in Farwell's also, and was gradually disarmed altogether by Clara's gentleness and beauty. In their various places of meeting, at the houses of mutual friends, he had lately begun to seek her society more and more eagerly. Mrs. Lovell was now resolved to put an end to this. She went out to the gate, where the boy and girl were standing, bidding him "Good evening" very pleasantly.

"You are late to-night, my dear," she said to Clara, very gently; "and I think you must be very tired. You may go into the house now, for I want to say a few words to Farwell."

Farwell's keen gray eyes were fixed wonderingly upon her. She cleared her throat, and hesitated a little for speech. She would have liked it if hard things might always be done without being said.

"You have been home once or twice with Clara," she said, still very gently. "Of course you and she meet one another everywhere, and I do not desire that you should meet otherwise than kindly. But you know that our families are not upon friendly terms. And I do not think your father and mother would wish you to be intimate with Clara, on that account."

Farwell was blushing hotly now with rage and shame. "They have no right—" he began, but Mrs. Lovell stopped him.

"Hush!" she said. "I want to speak with perfect frankness, Farwell. I am consulting my own feelings as well as theirs. It would not be pleasant for me to have you visiting here when your parents do not."

"You have no right—" again cried poor Farwell, and again was overborne by Mrs. Lovell's gentle composure.

"I feel it my duty," she said, "to forbid Clara your company when you meet her anywhere. It will be the best for you to have as little to do with her as possible, if you do not wish to force her to be rude to you."

(To be continued.)

THE RESTORATION OF ST. GILES' CATHEDRAL, EDINBURGH.

The operations connected with the restoration of the southern section of St. Giles' Cathedral have disclosed the existence, under the floor of what till recently was the Old Church, of an immense accumulation of human remains. Already skulls and leg and arm bones to the weight of over two tons have been gathered into fourteen large boxes, and after they have been subjected to the inspection of anatomists, will be removed for decent burial. A number of the leg bones are said to be of more than usual length and strength, and some look as if they had been broken, and had mended naturally. In some of the skulls are found clear-cut square holes, such as might have been produced by antique mace or battle-axe. In the process of clearing the Preston Aisle there was found, in the soil beneath the floor, a leaden coffin bearing the name "Brigadier Cunyngham," with the date 1697, and supposed to be the resting-place of some connection of the Dick Cunynghams of Prestonfield. Before proceeding to deal with the south transept, it was thought expedient to make some explorations of the vaults in that part of the building, where, it was supposed, the remains of the Marquis of Montrose might be discovered. After some preliminary excavations, the search took place on Thursday at