

Old Jimmy's Quandary, and How He Settled It.

By SARAH ANNE CURZON.

"Well, of course, it's only natural you should want to think about it, it's took me a goodish bit myself; but if you say yes I shall want to have ye all at the house in time to get ready for harvest, so make up your mind as quick as you can." And then, as a second thought struck him, he cried, "Was you ever at Hazeldean farm, ma'am?"

"I've been past, but never there," replied the widow.

"Then I'll come an' fetch you an' Ria to-morrow afternoon, ma'am; it ain't reason that you should buy a pig in a poke. Good evenin', ma'am. To-morrow at four o'clock I'll come for you and the little gel to see the place, an' if Walter likes to come over any time, he's welcome." And Old Jimmy backed out of the cottage like an awkward lout, not even offering his hand.

But the little boys made up for everything by shouting to their mother that they were "going back with the farmer to get the log of wood," he having promised to help them. And he did help them nobly, tying his horse to a tree and lifting up the log bodily and carrying it to the widow's apology for a wood-pile, where he told them to leave it until he came again to chop it.

Polly went home quickly, probably stimulated by the prospect of supper, as well as by the light handling of the reins, a consequence of her master's light heart; for Old Jimmy was certainly happy for a man who had no ground on which to build his hopes, save, perhaps, a good impression on the hearts of two little boys—he did not know whether to count on having made the same impression upon their mother or not.

At the opening in the trees that gave a view of the "tomb-stun," Old Jimmy naturally gave a look. He started violently; a cold perspiration burst out all over him; the mare jumped at the jerk he gave the reins and nearly threw him out; for there, on the brow of the "buryin' hill" was the second appearin'! There was no mistaking it; Jenny it was, in her long, white night-gown, as she had been laid in the coffin; her fair hair loose, as it had *not* been at that time, to be sure, but there is no accounting for the toilets of ghosts; her eyes looking as large as they used to do when she was angry. Poor, poor Jimmy! he trembled so that he could hardly hold the reins, and to add to his discomfiture the moon was nearly down, and the road was very dark. What to do he did not know. If he stayed there he could not bear the sight, and the mare would not stand long. If he went on home, where might he not meet the angry wraith! Oh, why was she angry! Did she not know how miserable he had been that long year of two winters, and how wretchedly unhomey the house had got to look? To be sure, one kind hearted body after another had "put it to rights" at various times, and he kept the scrubbing done himself, for he hated dirt. Still, he acknowledged the boards looked very black, and the windows were smudgy. Why, oh why, was Jenny so angry. Because he had asked a tidy little good-tempered, industrious woman, who could do everything, to be her successor?

The mare settled the question by turning in at the gate and cantering up to the stable door in fine style. Jimmy looked, but no ghost was to be seen, either at the house door, where he had expected her to confront him, or yet about the premises. He put the mare up as well as his disordered senses would let him and ascended the three steps of the kitchen stoop, intending to shut himself in without making any further investigation. But the collie was faithfully on guard, not having even risen from his place at the sound of the returning buggy, and his quiet movements, forgotten as he was by his master in his absorption, so startled Old Jimmy that he jumped backwards, and barely saved himself from falling down the steps again. Recovering himself, and receiving courage from the fact of company, though but that of a dog, the farmer thought he would take a look at the top of the hill, if only to confirm his fears. So, giving the collie the signal, the two set off for the end of the house, whence the fatal spot could be discerned. But nothing could be seen; the stars shone brightly overhead, but their light did not penetrate the thickets below, and with a heavy sigh of relief Old Jimmy returned to his house and went to bed.

CHAPTER III.

A lovely April sunrise greeted Old Jimmy when he awoke the following morning. A soft gold haze suffused the light. The brisk call of the robin fell upon his ear and aroused a sympathetic energy in his blood. The caw-caw of the crows as they deliberately flapped their great black wings over the ploughed fields was like what the crow of Chanticleer had been to him before he had sold his poultry for want of a wife to look after it. For a minute or two he lay quiet, not immediately realizing the day it was—or was likely to be to him. Then with a bound he jumped out of bed, and, like the forlorn hope of an attack on a fortress, proceeded to assault the labours he had set out for himself to complete before four o'clock of that afternoon.

He milked and let out his two cows into a bit of pasture whence he could readily call them, for the bush was not fit for them so early in the year. He skimmed yesterday's milk, set the tin of cream ready for the little boy to fetch, whose mother churned it for him, and set the "milk hus to rights a bit" by placing all the pans he owned upon the settles, putting the long unused churn in a prominent position, and then sweeping up the floor. Luckily, there was

little to sweep up. Next he proceeded to the delf and filled two pails with water, which he set inside, as he had heard that water cleared the air, and that the "milk-hus" wasn't altogether right he knew, though what ailed it he did *not* know. Being hungry, he got his fire lighted, the kettle boiled and made himself some tea. What a long time it was since he had eaten buckwheat cakes and maple syrup. Pork and bread had to serve. Then he tried to put the house in order. He went into each bedroom, and though all struck him as dull and dreary, he didn't know what to do to alter things, so he let them alone. The parlour puzzled him, too; he set the chairs a little closer back to the wall and pulled the rocker a little further out, and he fetched in a log to replace the dusty one that lay on the brass dogs in the hearth, and he unrolled the rug and laid it before the little settee of his own making, wondering if Jenny would think he might as well let it alone, and then he shut the door and went into the kitchen, wondering "what in nater ailed everywhere? nowhere looked right." He had thought of scrubbing the kitchen floor, but the ploughing had to be attended to, and the horses were already showing their eagerness to be at work by stamping and whinnying. So he gave that up and swept instead, and then he placed his few dishes as neatly as he could upon the dresser, the corner cupboard wherein were Jenny's dearly prized china and glass tumblers, he dared not touch, the occasion seemed too personal, somehow.

At noon Old Jimmy could hardly eat, he felt as though he expected a dinner that would make up for present denial at some near period, and it was not worth while bothering now. But he set out a very pretty repast, nevertheless; first he covered the kitchen table with one of poor Jenny's best cloths—not without a faint feeling at heart lest the "second appearin'" might make herself evident. Then he fetched a basket of fine rosy apples from the "root-hus" where also were stored many things besides roots, even some jars of maple syrup of his own boiling two years previously, and some raspberry jam, of which he took a crock, again wondering if poor Jenny's wrath would protest. All these he set in the middle of the kitchen table, and beside them he placed knives, plates and cups for five. He had no cake, but he intended to call at the village store and get biscuits on his way to fetch the widow, and of bread he had a sufficient supply for his purpose.

Four o'clock saw him all dressed as the day before, with his buckboard and team, driving up the path to the widow's little house. The little boys, Tom and Jackie, were waiting for him; within, the widow and Ria were waiting, too, and the farmer's heart gave a great bound as he received a welcoming smile from each. He was glad to find that no widow's bonnet disfigured the little woman's head, but a neat black straw had the preference. Ria, indeed, had a pretty blue ribbon on her coarse, broad hat, and her helplessness seemed no trial to her as the farmer lifted her in his strong arms into the waggon. The little boys were accommodated on a heap of clean straw at the back of the buckboard; but the widow, of course, had the place of honour by the farmer's side.

It would be tedious to narrate all that passed on this memorable journey, saving that Old Jimmy did not fail to cast a furtive glance at the buryin' lot as he passed the fatal gap, but saw nothing to disturb his equanimity, for which he was undoubtedly thankful. The farm was explored from end to end by the little boys, while Ria sat in the large old rocker on the front stoop with the collie, who at once "took to her," as her body-guard, and the widow, under the guidance of the farmer, saw the house and all its belongings, within and without, listening patiently to the long list of excuses for shortcomings which, to the farmer's anxious eyes, had never been so numerous and important before. Under the widow's superintendence, who insisted on doing the housekeeping, the meal that Old Jimmy had hoped would be at any rate a pleasure to the little hungry boys and a makeshift, at least, to the widow, became a symposium. And, though with gentle courtesy the farmer forbore to press his suit until the widow should have had time to think it over, uninfluenced by his presence or surroundings, hope grew strong, and the evening dews fell on a happy, if remarkably quiet, group as the team trotted along the road towards the widow's little cottage. Within, the widow's eldest son, Walter, was resting himself, for the miller kept him busy at out-door work when accounts were few, and though he sprang forward to meet his mother as she entered, followed by the farmer bearing poor 'Ria, who was very tired by the unusual excitement and travelling, in his arms, yet the boy, influenced more by fears born of the memories of the sad past than hopeful for a happy future for his mother, was barely more than civil, and the farmer had not sufficient confidence in the success of his suit to the widow to be genial; the combined result was, therefore, a stiff formality between the two men.

But Jimmy's heart felt light again as he drove off towards Hazeldean, for the little boys had kissed him, thus awakening a glow of affection that had slept for years, and the widow had acceded to his request to be allowed to come for his answer the following evening. He drove home fast, for it was ten o'clock, and four in the morning must see him up and at work to make up for his little holiday.

About mid-way home he saw, with much surprise, a man toiling along the heavy road with a weary gait, as though he had come far. Putting the team at a trot, he soon came up with the traveller, and at once knew by his appearance that he belonged to the Lower Province. His black hair and eyes, his dark complexion, and the striped knitted leggings he wore above his boots looked either Indian or French, or both. It was seldom that a man of either

blood was seen near Hazeldean, and as the farmer remarked, he looked "onnaterel"—his only word for unaccustomed sights. But the man was evidently tired and Jimmy's kind heart prompted the offer of a lift. To his surprise, the man responded in Scotch, but as it was strongly tinged by Gaelic, it was all Jimmy could do to understand him.

To his question if the man was going far, he replied: "Tiss, indeed, lang enaf, tiss to the Lake Huron to tak ther oorsight o' a raft for the gude firm of Cockburn, till Quebec."

"And where do you sleep to-night?" asked Jimmy.

"Tiss in a barn or the bowdy iv a cart, likely, or the tawvern."

"No tavern or hotel is within ten miles' reach, and you can sleep wi' me and take a good rest," said Old Jimmy. "I have a farm a little way on."

The man looked at him in surprise for a minute and then replied, "But tiss a kind man it iss. The womans will na be to likin' that."

"There is no woman at my house; the wife is dead, and I am all alone—at present," he added, thinking it due to the widow that he should not ignore his hopes, even to this stranger. But at this point the gap in the trees had been reached, and a glance showed Jimmy that the "second appearin'" was not only there, but aggressive, for she was slowly descending the hill, white night-gown and all, and Jimmy gave a great gasp that aroused the attention of the stranger; the horses, checked by the sudden pull on the reins, began to dance, and for a minute things looked bad.

"An' what wuss the matter, freend?" asked the stranger. "Man, it's the 'Second appearin',' and she's coming to punish me!" moaned Jimmy.

"Wass it the ghaist or the second-sight? Man!" he cried with energy, "What ha' been at?" for Jimmy was trembling so that he could hardly drive, and the perspiration stood in drops on his forehead.

"Oh, but it's Jenny! and she's angry wi' me for thinkin' o' marryin' another ooman and she's makin' her second appearin'; it says so on the epitaf. O Jenny, ooman, 'tis a lonely man I've been, and things is spoilin' all to mischief, but I won't hurt yer feelin's, Jenny, I'll make it up to the poor little widow, and ye shall rest in peace."

The horses had walked in at the accustomed gate, and as they proceeded towards the stables Old Jimmy ventured a look ahead, and there, sure enough, was the "second appearin'" standing like an accusing angel ready to condemn. The stranger saw it, too, but it awakened no fear in him, for he said:

"Tiss the first Indian woman I've set e'en on this fower week, her lifs here, na doot, wi' her fowk i' the summer makin' the creels?"

Jimmy now took a look at the wraith with the power of a freed mind, and saw that it was indeed an Indian woman, and one that he knew. She was clothed as usual in a blanket, one that had once been blue, but exposure to the weather had spoiled its gay tint and turned it almost white, so that in the low moonlight and at a distance, as when he had just seen her, it looked ghostly both in colour and outline, and might easily be mistaken for the wrappings of the grave. Wawasa was no ghost, however, but an Indian woman to whom Jenny had been kind. She had not been near Hazeldean during the preceding summer—at any rate, that Jimmy knew of positively, though he had more than once thought that he had seen indications of other care than his own at Jenny's grave. She now came forward smiling and holding out to the farmer a couple of baskets for his acceptance.

The tears came into Jimmy's eyes, for his wife had been fond of the Indian's pretty baskets, and had many of them in the house.

Telling the woman to wait while he put up the horses, he accepted the help of the stranger, who told him to call him Angus-dhu, and the two soon joined the Indian woman at the door of the house, where Nelson was, as usual, on guard. Then they all went in and had a bit of supper, the woman taking hers on her lap, sitting on her heels just within the door.

But there was a difficulty yet to be overcome. Jimmy had seen the "second appearin'" at the grave the night before, and it was as certainly descending the buryin' lot hill when he saw it as he passed coming home. Things did not fit to his satisfaction, and he was decidedly nervous. Angus-dhu told several weird stories of wraiths and "appearances," but happily for Jimmy he could not understand half his guest said, and the two went to bed, leaving Wawasa to choose her own couch, according to Indian ideas.

In the morning Jimmy rose early, but Wawasa was up before him, and as he opened the door to go out she went first, saying, "Come? Wawasa show." Wonderingly, Jimmy followed where she led, and it was to the buryin' lot, indeed to the very grave of which he had come to have such dread. His fears vanished at once when he saw what the poor heathen had to show him. She had planted a tall stick, beautifully carved, opposite the centre of the "tomb-stun," and by means of a little cross-bar that, indeed, gave it almost a symbolic aspect, had fixed a thick wreath of immortelles, those soft, pretty, silvery flowers that grow in such profusion on clear or open ground, and now she signified to Jimmy that it was an offering to the memory of Jenny, and she wanted him to be pleased. Her command of English was very small, but her soft words, "Kind—Wawasa—white lady—white man," and the caressing action of her brown hands upon the wreath and tomb stone spoke more eloquently than any words would have done.