

The Inglenook.

Falling From Grace.

BY MARGARET SHERWOOD.

The sudden change in the weather had brought on a theological discussion. Yesterday had been glorious with June sunshine, but to-day there was a chill in the air, and the sky was grey. Bad weather often ended in metaphysics in the Prior household.

"It's faith," asserted Presbyterian Mrs. Prior.

"It's works," insisted her Methodist husband.

They sat facing each other across the dinner-table, in their own cheerful kitchen. The warmth from the cooking stove, the whiteness of the tablecloth, the odor from the crisp broiled ham on the platter, between them gave indescribable suggestions of comfort, yet a cloud rested on both wrinkled brows. The old, old bone of contention, the only one that they had been unable to bury in twenty years of affectionate married life, had been dragged from his hiding-place, to be gnawed once more.

"Your own righteousness is filthy rags," asserted Mrs. Prior. "You were bought with a price. You can't add to it, nor take nothing from it. The law is the law. Acts make no difference."

Eben Prior paused, with a piece of potato half way to his mouth. The rule was, an argument and a mouthful of food in decent alternation.

"I maintain," he said, "that you can fall from grace. Acts does not make a difference. If you sin after you're saved, what then?"

"Then," exclaimed Mrs. Prior, her double chin trembling with eagerness, "then you want never really saved."

The discussion was interrupted by the sudden arrival of a letter. It came through the window, just as Mrs. Prior, rose to get the currant pie. A neighbor, who had driven over to the village of Ashley, stopped outside the window with a prolonged "Whoa," commented on the weather, and was gone.

Mr. Prior eyed the letter in silence while he ate his pie, then he rose, took his spectacles from the mantel-piece, and opened the yellow envelope. An expression of astonishment came into his little thin face.

"Ben's died, out West," he announced.

The look that came into his wife's countenance was singularly like his own. Neither difference in avoirdupois nor disagreement in theology could stamp out the likeness resulting from long years of united existence.

"And he's left," Eben continued, with an air of importance, "he's left his entire property to me."

"The more shame to him," remarked Mrs. Prior.

"The letter is from Lawyer Saunders. Seems Ben got him to make his will before he left, and somebody out there had instructions to write on if anything happened."

"I only hope his dyin' will be some relief to Julia," remarked Mrs. Prior vehemently. "If I was a man, and had brought three innocent children into the world, and had a wife that had done for me for sixteen years without sayin' a word, and then went and willed my money away from her to my brother just because I was a fool and had

quarrelled with her, I'd want to die, so I could have some place to cover up my head."

Mrs. Prior's full lips were working and her gingham apron went to her eyes.

Her husband looked on meditatively.

"Now I can put up the new barn," he said.

His wife dropped the dinner plate she had in her hand, and it broke on the yellow floor.

"Eben Prior," she gasped, "you don't mean that you're goin' to take that money out of a poor widder's mouth?"

He flinched before the expression of her eyes. That look of disillusionment had never been there before.

"It's willed to me," he said doggedly, nervously playing with the arms of his spectacles, "and the law is the law. I guess Ben had good reason for what he had done."

"He never had no reason," said Mrs. Prior, with passionate conviction. "He went and got jealous out of his own evil imagination. You'd find it out, if you'd only consent to see Julia jest once. Here its six months since he went, and there's Julia in that house on the ridge, without a cent she can get a, and too poor to buy herself a gingham apron, and two of the children girls, and them the biggest. Don't go and be as mean as he was! One in the family is enough."

The tears were rolling down her cheeks now and making dark spots on her gray calico dress.

"He made that will when he was mad," pleaded Mrs. Prior. "If he'd lived he'd a' changed it. Do hitch up Pete and drive to the village and fix it up with Lawyer Saunders so Julia can have every cent of it."

But argument only checked the wavering of the man's soul toward generosity and right.

"I'll hitch up Pete and drive to the village and get the deed to that farm to keep," announced Eben, "and to-morrow I'll begin the new barn."

The woman who held that action makes no difference in the measure of one's righteousness and the man who believed that works are the determining factor in the salvation of one's soul stood and looked at each other. It never occurred to either of them to connect their abstract problem with the concrete issue at hand.

Fifteen minutes later the old-fashioned, low hung wagon lumbered out of the gate at the heels of the reluctant Pete. Eben had not gone into the house to ask his wife what groceries she wanted, for he was angry.

"I'll do just as I please about it," he remarked, with manly pride, tickling his horse with the whip.

He had three miles to drive. The air weighed heavily down upon him, and there was no stir of life in grass or leaves. The dark green of pines and cedars and the pale green of grass and new grain stretched out to a far horizon, as distant as a speculative theology from the actual issues of life.

"I don't need that money," he muttered to himself, "but Ben willed it to me. I've got a right to it, and I'm goin' to take it, just to show Sarah who is the man of the house. She's as contrary as a hen. Git up Pete! Now, there's that pint of doctrine.

I've labored with her for twenty years, but she sticks like tar to her own notion and I can't make her leggo. To this day she says that your actions don't make no difference and that you're saved whatever you do. That don't stand to reason."

He leaned back wearily, his face fretful with the clearness of his conviction.

"I don't know what we can be judged by if it ain't works," he thought.

Pete drew the wagon wheels out of the deepest rut in the road into the shallower ones, and the driver's mind came back with a jerk from the old grievance to the new.

"I'll take every cent of that money, and do just as I choose with it."

The business with Lawyer Saunders took but a short time. In the bare floored, scantily furnished room of the country lawyer Eben was shown his brother's will. Benjamin Prior's childish signature was affixed to a document stating that all this property, consisting of seventy five acres of land and \$2,400 in the bank, was hereby bequeathed to his brother, Eben Prior.

Eben tipped his chair back, and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"You got the deed of the farm?" he asked.

The lawyer nodded, and produced it from the safe in the corner.

Eben thrust it into the breast pocket of his coat.

"Goin' to work the farm or let it?" asked Lawyer Saunders. His little, sharp black eyes were watching the heir with their usual expression of amused distrust in human nature.

"Too far away to work. I cal'late to get a tenant, and maybe I'll let his wife, Ben's wife, live in the other part of the house. Do you know if she knows he's dead?"

Lawyer Saunders shook his head.

"I doubt it. They were't on speaking terms when he left. Why dont you ride over and tell her?"

"I will," said Eben.

The lawyer stood by his office window and watched his client as he drove toward the hill road that led to his brother's farm.

"I didn't think Eben Prior would have done that," he murmured to himself.

Pete plodded up and down three hills. At the top of the fourth he stopped in front of a yellow house set around with maples. The paint was gone in places, but house and yard bore an air of cleanliness and order. A face peeped out of the window, then a brown-haired woman, in a faded blue calico gown and a patched green gingham apron came running down the path.

"Why, Eben!" she exclaimed. "This is real good of you. Put your horse right up in the barn and come and stay to tea. I'd almost given up expecting you. Why didn't you bring Sarah?"

She was a comely woman of thirty-five or six. Grief lurked in the corners of her mouth, but her gray eyes were gentle and unafraid. Two barefooted children had followed her, and the smaller of the two stood holding a fold of her gown. Eben noticed the expression of tenderness in the hand which she laid on the boy's curly yellow head.

"Bennie," she said, "run open the wagon-house door for your uncle."

Eben stood irresolute, with the bridle in his hand. Pete was looking round with eyes that asked his master why he didn't do either one thing or the other.

"I do know," he said. "I didn't cal'late to stay. I jest come on business."

He was seeing more than he wanted to see: Julia's thin face, the patches on the