

Little Tom's Mother.

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PROBABLY a happier couple never sat under the glow of a library lamp than Mr. and Mrs. Max Dugeddon.

Mr. Dugeddon had a fair portion of this world's goods, and his charming wife a marvellous array of talents. She could sing, play, dance, row, ride, and was noted as the best player of cribbage in the county if not in the state. Max Dugeddon was very proud of her; he was pleased when she was admired, and often said he was the happiest man in the world, especially after little Tom came. Little Tom was Max Dugeddon's son and heir and extremely welcome after six years of happy wedded life.

Mrs. Dugeddon was happy also; but there was not a tinge of selfishness in her nature. Before she married him she had been interested in various charities, had taught in the Sunday School of St. Mary's Church, was a member of the Symphony Class, belonged to a Reading Circle composed of her intimate friends, and had more invitations and positive engagements than most society favorites. She was very happy in all this, save for a sense of loneliness since her widowed mother had left her as a mere child. She was sure life must be very sweet with the constant companionship of one who loved you, and when her aunt died and left her the owner of a large house with no one to occupy it but herself and old Mrs. Trott, the housekeeper, Agnes found life a very solemn thing. Max Dugeddon was one of many admirers, but Agnes said them all nay until many months of persistent devotion, she consented to marry Max Dugeddon. Every one said it was a brilliant match, every one thought they were a handsome couple, and not a few openly avowed that Agnes was quite too good for him.

Mrs. Trott thought him a very model of a man; his mother and sisters invariably spoke of him as "simply perfect," but one or two men in Tom's own club said: "It will be all beautiful until she dares to think or act for herself; Agnes Drexel is not the woman to comply with all his selfish whims which his mother and sisters had indulged him in." "Yes," said another club man, "Max is a good boy as long as you let him have his own way, but he makes things lively for any one who opposes him. He gets that from the old father who was so obstinate that his wife always condemned the thing she longed to praise, for the sake of carrying her point."

"I am dead sure of another thing," said a tall, sober-looking man, who had listened to this conversation, "and that is, if trouble ever comes to them it will not be the fault of Agnes Drexel. She is loyal to a fault and as true as steel."

The exacting man is a very lamb when in love; so it was with Max Dugeddon; he seemed to live only to please Agnes, and could easily break engagements of all kinds for her sake, if she would permit it. About six weeks after her marriage, Max insisted upon her dropping the Sunday class as it was his best day at home. Agnes consented readily, fully believing a wife must make home attractive if she desired to keep her husband there. His next step was to sever her connection with the Symphony class by making engagements of importance for her on those evenings. This was a severe trial to Agnes, but she complied without a word, since each time it had been harder and harder for her to leave home. The Reading Club came next. Max went with her a few times and then declared it was a bore, and he needed the quiet of his home after the bustle of the day. He convinced Agnes that he deserved all the reading she could favor him with, and as he would neither attend or call for her, that too was given up.

All this was very hard for a young woman who was anxious to develop herself and wished from her heart to become the

"Perfect woman nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort and command."

It was made harder when Max attended his Club whenever he wished, and accepted an official position in the city government which called him from home several evenings in the week.

Agnes thought the matter over seriously and wished she might ask the advice of some elderly friend, but she dared not lest it should seem disloyal to Max. As the years went on she made rapid progress in her studies on the evenings when Max left her, and in this way kept up with the Reading Club. Books and music however precious can never compensate one for the companionship of the man a woman has chosen from all the world to walk by her side. Agnes spent many lonely hours, when her eyes grew tired or friends failed to drop in.

The very last man in the world to find out that he is selfish is the man who is so. He who cries out loudly about hen-pecked husbands is the man who is subjugated in his own home. If any one had said in plain terms that Max Dugeddon was tyrannical or exacting in his family, Max would have fought him on the spot. He considered himself a model husband. He certainly lived well, his wife dressed exquisitely, his business integrity was well known, and his fond boast was that "he had the loveliest wife and boy in the world."

The only person who ever held a mirror up to Max was his cousin Clara Fairfax, who had been a room mate of Agnes at school, and flattered herself that she had arranged the match. She was frequently at the house and never failed to amuse herself by "taking down my lord." Max was fond of her; her bright, saucy speeches pleased him and he ignored her rebukes. It often chanced in life that help is near when we feel most forlorn, and Agnes who had spent some very lonely hours in contemplating her duties, and the duties of a husband also, was not sorry to see Clara come in one evening when Max had settled down with his evening paper. After some careless chat and mutual jokes Max exclaimed "Well, here is a surprise,—Donald Chester's wife has taken to lecturing; if I were Don I should stop her or get a divorce."

"Why?" asked his wife without looking up.

"Because I have an utter detestation of a woman who speaks in public on the stage."

"More so than if she sang in public?" asked Agnes.

"That is quite another matter."

"Yes," said Clara, "it is," as she saw a flush creeping into the cheeks of Agnes. "It is decidedly different. I can sing the same old songs for a charity over and over, but the woman who speaks must think of new topics, new questions, new phrases even, she must be creative, as well as receptive, and I think it requires marvellous talent to hold an audience with one's own written thoughts."

"Bless your soul Clara, I never knew you dipped into relative values like that," said Max mockingly.

"No? Well I have been growing wiser since you married."

"Why don't you take to the rostrum?"

"If I knew as much as Agnes did I should; for the woman who speaks a good word for suffering humanity is doing a grander work than she who sings a song, however sweet, for money."

"You are absolutely becoming eloquent," said Max.

"I might in time," said Clara, "if you vexed me as you have done since you brought Agnes here and shut her up like a bird in a cage, while you trot about wherever you please."

"Never mind Agnes," said Max, with a little temper showing in his eyes, "thank heaven my wife is not ambitious."

"How do you know?" asked Agnes with a forced laugh.

"Because you are perfectly contented and happy in your home and in my affections," said Max. "If my wife had such ambitious schemes and looked to the public for applause, I should disown her."

"Come Max, you are talking nonsense," said Clara; "if your wife had a talent for public speaking, you would be as proud as a peacock, and gaze at her with adoring silence; in fact she had been growing out of patience with Max for some time; if my wife were to speak even once on a public platform I would leave her to the public and her fate." Agnes kept her eyes upon the book where she had been diligently searching for a passage which Clara had desired her to find, she pressed her lips firmly together and said nothing.

Clara was not easily silenced; in fact she had been growing out of patience with Max for some time; he seemed to be absolutely blind to the sacrifices his wife was making for him.

"Now Max, if you were not my favorite cousin I would not waste words upon you, positively, you do not deserve it. Would you not speak whenever you felt it your duty to do so?"

"Certainly," said Max "any man would."

"Suppose a woman is placed in a position where she feels it to be a duty, must she remain dumb, or perform that duty."

"Every woman has some man to speak for her" said Max, doggedly.

"Indeed they have not, no man ever speaks for me."

"Then you might marry Sullivan, who is dying to have you."

"But I do not choose to; beside, I would be no better off than Agnes."

"I can always speak for Agnes and she knows it."

"Not if your views are diametrically opposed to hers."

"We agree on most things," said Max.

"On many Max," said his wife, "and we disagree totally on others; you know you are constantly quoting the clergyman who said, 'he did not want a wife who was a mush of concessions.'"

"To be sure and I mean it."

"Then my dear, how can you represent me when we do not agree? For instance on matters of public interest; you believe too much money is spent upon our public schools. I think that a nation which spends more on whiskey and tobacco than on education is not yet civilized."

"Education is one of your hobbies, my dear."

"Max you are sneaking and begging the question," said Clara with a laugh, "the question is, how can you represent Agnes in an important public affair, when you think your own thoughts, and she thinks hers?"

"Come, come if you are determined to hold a caucus here, I will be off, in fact we have a Board meeting this very evening. When my wife wants any public speeches made, I will make them for her. That is fair is it not?"

"No; each individual is responsible for his or her own acts; you could not suffer for a crime I committed, nor I for you," said Agnes thoughtfully.

"We should suffer vicariously," said Max.

"I am speaking now of legal responsibility," said Agnes, "as well as of moral."

"Well don't puzzle your brain over such matters my love, as long as Little Tom and I are satisfied, the world may wag." Max bent over to kiss his wife and saw that her eyes were moist.

"It is for little Tom's sake that I must think, and must inform myself, and must even utter my thoughts if occasion demands; mothers are told that the responsibility of right or wrong doing in public depends upon them in a large measure, and if so, we must think seriously of our work."

"Why my dear, you are the best mother in the land now, what more could you ask?"

"I am not sure of it Max, and I am not always as happy as you think me either."

"You are tired and nervous to-night, keep Clara here until I come back and then I think I can convince you that home is the dearest and best place on earth for a woman."

"But she must keep in touch with the world she is bringing up her boy to dwell in," said Agnes.

"My dear you are too conscientious. Good-by for an hour or two."

"Max" said Clara, as she put on her wraps two hours later, "Agnes is shut up here too much, she should get out more, go to the old reading class, meet the people she cares to meet, have her music, and in short do just as you do."

"Bless my soul, I am not my wife's jailor."

"Perhaps not intentionally Max, but Agnes misses her old liberty and she has given up everything for you."

Max was walking home with his cousin.

"See here Clara," he said in a vexed tone, "now don't put ideas in that girl's head, which she would not have otherwise. My little wife prefers to give up society for me, she tires of it as I do."

"Her soul needs an outing sometimes, and I think you were very severe to-night; you said you would leave a wife who would speak in public; now Agnes often spoke in our Literary Club, and spoke well, she is too superior not to have ideas of her own."

"Oh I mean before people of both sexes, women's talks never amount to much."

"Thank you," said Clara meekly, "nevertheless it is their talk and work which brings in most of the money used in our churches and charities."

"The truth is, Clara, I have some very strong feelings on several subjects and I would no more think of permitting my wife to open her lips in a mixed assembly, than I should of putting her up at auction."

"May heaven send you wisdom," said Clara, as she parted from him at the door. How our careless words come back to us with a new meaning

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