

## The Family Circle.

### THE AUTUMN IS DYING.

The autumn is dying,  
And leaves that are still,  
Grief's token, are lying  
On plain and on hill;  
My garden of pleasure  
Lies withered and bare,  
Oh the pitiless measure  
Of ruin wrought there.

In a hedgerow wind-shaken  
To wildest unrest,  
Forlorn and forsaken  
I see a bird's nest,  
Its soft down decaying,  
Its fledglings all flown,  
Naught save the shell staying  
Deserted and lone.

Then the thought rises, cleaving  
The depths of my mind,  
Soon we too shall be leaving  
Our loved homes behind,  
Soon the grave will enclose us—  
Life's pilgrimage o'er—  
"And the place that now knows us  
Shall know us no more."

—Mackenzie Bell.

### THE THANKSGIVING OF MARTHA AND JOHN.

"Thanksgiving will be next week, Thursday," said Martha Flynn.

"Well, I can't see that we've anything to be particularly thankful about," rejoined her old bachelor brother, John. "What with short crops and the savings bank having failed, and you being laid up more than half the time with rheumatism, I don't see but we're as badly off as any one."

"That's true enough," sighed Martha.

"And, moreover," added John, "I don't see why we should go to an expense we can't afford for extra things to eat on that particular day, and this year I don't mean to do it."

Martha looked up at him amazed, for this was so utterly going against all the old traditions.

"Why, John!" she said blankly, while a vision of disappearing poultry and sauces and pies and cakes passed before her bewildered eyes.

"I mean it," John said sharply. "So see you don't go and cook up a single extra thing. I never was less thankful in all my life."

"We've got a good roof over our heads, for one thing," began Martha mildly.

"It leaks," said John, "around the chimney. Do all I can, I can't seem to fix it tight. Them shingles shrink away and let the wet right in. And there you are—about crippled half the time with rheumatism."

Martha sighed. "But then John," she began again more cheerfully, "I ain't never had it in my hands. Look at that poor old Miss Dill with her fingers all twisted, crooked and helpless, and her knuckles like lumps of chalk. That's something I've got to be thankful for, anyhow."

"You'll have it yet," said John, "you'll see, and be as helpless as any one—and then who's to wait on you, I'd like to know! I can't do much more than I'm doing now. What, with the heavy farm work, and drawing water, and splitting and carrying in wood, I'm most tuckered out, some nights as it is."

"Poor John," said Martha in anxious pity. "You oughter have some help."

"Help," growled John. "It's all I can

do to make both ends meet as it is, and how could I afford to feed an extra mouth—to say nothing of paying the wages of an able-bodied man. No, I say we've nothing to be thankful for—two hard-working people, beginning to breakdown afore we're really old, with no one to look out for us in our old age and make things easy for us—and all our little savings swept away. The person may call it being rebellious if he likes, but I've done with giving thanks for what I haven't got."

And with that John took his hat down from its peg and went out.

Martha watched her brother until he had passed out of sight. She noticed now for the first time how bent he was beginning to be, and that all the elasticity was gone from his shuffling gait. Then she thought of the weary days to come, when she might, indeed, be helpless with rheumatism, and she wondered mournfully how, as John had said, two old and helpless people who could not afford to hire any one to take care of them, were going to get along. And she thought how dreary life had become to them, even now, and if things should indeed grow worse, what would it be!

She looked around the poor old living room with tear-dimmed eyes. It looked sordid and dingy now, but she remembered how bright and pleasant it had seemed to her twenty years ago, when she had been young and happy and free from care, when her mother and father and sister Kate had been here, too. But all were gone now, all dead and gone. And Kate's children, the boy and girl whom Martha yearned for, but had never seen, were living out far in the West with their father, a stern and self-willed man, who vowed he would never return to the East. And so Kate's children would grow up and marry and settle out there, knowing little and caring less for their poor old aunt and uncle in their distant Eastern home.

Life looked very dreary indeed to poor Martha, as she sat there thinking wistfully of dead and gone youth and happiness and prosperity. She thought of her own youthful hopes, crushed forever on the day the falling elm tree had shattered the strong young life of the man she loved and had promised to marry. And after that first awful shock and sorrow, other sorrows had come fast upon her. Her father had died soon after, then Kate married and went to live far, far away; and before the end of the second year, her mother had also died, and she and John had been left alone together in the old home.

How she had watched him then, all through those following years with anxious jealous eyes. He was all she had left to love, and she had hated the thought that he might marry and bring his wife into the old home, for then she feared that her affection might be set aside and she would be more desolate than ever.

Whenever he smiled on a pretty face or walked home with a young girl after meeting, Martha's heart had throbbed with a passion of jealous fear. But the years wore on, John's youth had slipped away from him, and in the dull middle age that had lately come upon them both she had almost forgotten those early fears.

And now with a bitter pang, she saw the awful results of her selfish mistaken affection. They would soon be growing old, unlovely and unloved, and an uncertain vision came before her tear-dim-

med eyes of what life might have been, for them both, had she with right sisterly affection counselled him wisely to choose a wife from among those fair young girls of so many years ago. She thought what the old home might have become, resounding with happy childish voices; and she saw, now that it was too late, how her selfishness had robbed of happiness and affection their two hard lives.

During the next few days Martha and John seemed to settle further and further into the depths of unthankfulness and despondency. But on Tuesday afternoon something unusual happened. John came in hasting with a yellow envelope in his hand.

"I met a boy coming down from the village," he said, "with this here telegram for me. You read it, Marthy; I ain't got my glasses."

Martha opened it with trembling fingers while her heart fluttered like a frightened bird; for it was the first telegram that had ever come within their quiet home, and she feared it as the awful portent of some strange, bad news. It bore the signature of Donald King, her dead sister's only son.

"Blanktown Junction wiped out by flood and fire," she read. "Father drowned. Kitty and I on our way East. Will reach you to-morrow night."

There was silence when she had finished full a minute's space. John's dark and weather-beaten face grew curiously white, and the hand on the arm of his chair shook visibly. He was picturing to himself the awful horror of a town swept out of existence by fire and flood, the fearful struggles for escape, the agony of the dying, and the helplessness and sorrow of those whom the awful catastrophe had left, homeless and desolate.

Martha was sobbing audibly.

"Poor Tom, poor Tom! We never liked him much, he was so set and stubborn-like in all his ways. But he was a good husband to Kate, and she was fond of him, and he was a good father. But, O, those poor dear orphan lambs! They belong to us now, John; they've no one in the world but us! And I'm so thankful they're coming right straight off. I'm so thankful that they weren't drowned. I'm thankful we've got a good home to give them. John, John, John, there'll be some one for us to love and care for now, and some one to love us and care for us when we get old and helpless! Donald is sixteen, come next spring, and Kitty, nine. Think, what they'll be to us, Kate's children! O, I'm a thankful woman, John, and God forgive me for my awful ingratitude all this past week!"

"I oughter be thankful, too," John muttered hoarsely, "and most of all, that them two poor young travellers will get here to-morrow night. Marthy, I want you to get ready as good a Thanksgiving dinner for them as ever you cooked in all your life! We'll have the big fat turkey gobbler, and I'll see to getting all the usual fixings. We'll give that poor motherless, fatherless boy and girl the heartiest kind of a welcome. They'll be weary with travelling and sick with sorrow, and I want them to remember all their lives long and feel thankful that when sorrow and misfortune came upon them, they had an old aunt and uncle who made them heartily welcome to their humble home."—*Judith Spencer in New York Observer.*

### LADY SOMERSET'S GIRLHOOD.

Lady Henry Somerset has many qualities to single her out for distinction. For instance, she has just published a little volume of stories, called "Studies in Black and White," of such conspicuous merit that were she to choose to abandon her labors of love for the poor and afflicted, she would probably make herself a great name as a novelist. A very pretty story is told of this great lady's childhood. When four or five years old a ball was given at Buckingham Palace, to be attended by none except the first-born of peers. Little Lady Isabel went with her parents the Earl and Countess Somers. Being an independent morsel of humanity, she strayed off from her guardians and went on a tour of observation through the great hall, and finally, when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert left to go to the banquet table, she seated herself on the cushioned seat the Queen had vacated. She had on a white tulle dress with real daisies pinned or fastened to it, and a wreath of natural daisies rested on her chestnut-brown hair. When Queen Victoria returned, behold, the little girl was in her seat, whereat the Queen seemed quite amused, and said, "And this is little Isabel." The child answered with quite a toss of her head, "This is Lady Isabel." When Lady Henry was eighteen years old, she was presented at Court, and wore a white dress, covered with natural flowers as before. The Queen bent over to kiss her fresh young cheek, as is the custom with the daughters of peers when they are presented, and said, "Daisies again! Lady Isabel!" She had remembered the circumstance of the ballroom all those years in the midst of her greatly preoccupied life.

### FINISHED AND FOLDED UP.

"There, that is finished and folded up, and I am heartily glad!" said Bertha, as she took off her little thimble, and laid on the table a pretty blue muslin dress, on which she had been busy for several days.

"Is it well done, too?" asked practical Aunt Mabel.

"Pretty well done for me, auntie; mother says I improve in dress-making."

"That is encouraging. Now, Bertha, do you know that something else of yours is also finished and folded up this evening?"

"What else can it be, Aunt Mabel? This is the only piece of work I have had to do this week, unless it is that tidy. I do not expect to see the end of that for six weeks."

"Still you have finished and folded up something more important than your tidy, or your dress even—something that will not be unfolded again for ages, perhaps; and yet you will see it again, with every line and fold. Your day's history is done and gone from your keeping. You may remodel the dress if it does not please you, but you cannot change one jot or tittle of the day's record."

Aunt Mabel had the fashion of dropping these seed-thoughts, which often grew up strong, vigorous plants in young hearts.

"What has the record been?" asked Bertha of her own heart, as she thoughtfully laid away the blue muslin. As little by little she tried to go over the hours, there was much she would gladly have changed if she could.