



**GOOD** thoughts are best guests and should be heartily welcomed and most sought after; like rose leaves they give out a sweet smell if laid up in the jar of memory.—Spurgeon.

## The Letter of the Law

(Farm and Home)

"M<sup>A</sup>S' eyes look like lighted lamps," commented daughter Ada, looking approvingly at her mother, as that personage moved with rather more emphasis than her homely tasks seemed to warrant around the family domain.

Pa Talbot looked up uneasily. There had been times when those "lamps" had burst suddenly into scorching fire and consuming flame, and he wondered if his critical comments of the previous hour had been responsible for the scintillations that, now his attention was directed to them, held an ominous threat of possible trouble.

"It's easier to run than fight," he thought, and aloud remarked: "Guess I'll go down to Alvin's for a while; I hear he has a colt he wants to sell."

No one replied. This was a sure sign of brewing storms, so without more delay he continued his journey.

The moment he was out of the house Isabel began: "Oh, Mummie dear, can't I have a new dress for the concert? I'm ten years old next Tuesday, and I never, no never, have had a new dress in my whole life. The girls, some of them anyway, say mean things about you and papa, and they look at each other and smile whenever I wear one of my made-over rigs. I don't mind wearing them every day much, but all the class but me are going to have new suits for exhibition, and I'll be the only one that will be different. That hateful Maud Anderson will be sure to pick me if I'm going to have a new dress from your second lot, or something just as mean. I do wish I could have a new dress for the exhibition day."

Mother's eyes lost their fierce glare. They grew, instead, dewy and misty, and "ma" turned away hastily, without replying to her daughter's plea. "I'd like a new suit, too," chimed in the twelve-year-old boy, who had been an eager listener to his sister's remarks. "If Uncle Tom hadn't give me a suit on my birthday, I could say the same as sis: that I'd never had a new rig-out. Fred Fuller says that pa is the biggest taxpayer in town. Is he? Then why doesn't he let us have some new duds once in a while? What's the matter with him anyway?"

Somehow, despite the fact that so coarsely did not demand it, pa had so imbibed the idea that some things that his mother had done his wife ought also to do, that he had laid down the rule and made it a law that his children's garments must be made from these cast-off by his wife and himself.

He excepted shoes, but he was wont to say in the most honest and blundering judgment: "If my dear mother could clothe six children from party worn material, why can't my wife have gumption enough to fix up for two? Anyway, she's got to," he'd twined doggedly and with that com-



pliment of his lips that meant a long time of trouble and reprimand, if, as once or twice had happened, ma had declared war on such useless and peevish sentiments. Pa didn't like to fight, but that was the one subject in which he had not dodged warfare, and so far he had come off victor. Isabel came home full of news. The Burford twins were to have blue dresses to match their eyes. She had never had a blue dress. Her eyes were

and smiling: "I will; I will cut down our clothes for them until you tell me to stop."

"That won't be till they're lots bigger'n they are now," said the stubborn man, both rejoiced, however, that at last his wife had come around to his wise and thrifty way of thinking.

"May be sooner than you think," murmured his wife; "you poor mistake creature!"

Graduation day came. The Talbot fore, for ma was determined to win this time at all costs, realizing that their children's happiness depended on her courage.

Pa's mouth opened once or twice, but no words came. As last he turned suddenly and left the room. Ma wore him striding down the road toward the village, and she wondered where he could be going and what his object could be. She felt very uneasy and hunched the front window until, an hour later, she saw him returning. Then she sought the sitting-room and was placidly mending socks when he came.

She would have smiled if she had known where he went. Straight to the village store, where with affected indifference, he inquired the price of blue linen, "the very best," he said, and then took the front window and a child girl would need for an outfit. The knowledge gained, he had occupied some time in computing the difference between this cost and that of his wife's garment.

The perspiration poured from his forehead as he realized that a good ten-dollar bill had been sacrificed in the race his wife had adopted to secure her way, and at that he had intended saying some severe things.

"But what's the use," his good angel interposed: "she knew you'd find it out. And say, wouldn't everybody laugh at you if they knew it? Better swallow the dose like a man and not so you won't need another."

He obeyed the advice. When he walked in ma knew her troubles were over, and she almost wished she did not have to inflict another blow. She was wondering how to do it and give the least suffering, when pa himself gave her the chance.

"It's a wonder," he said, somewhat bitterly, "that you didn't get a new suit for me and cut it up for Harold."

"I didn't need to," said wife, smiling, though with inward qualms of remorse. "I took your best suit. It was so nearly new that he was quite satisfied."

"My best suit," groaned the forlorn man. "Why, it was good for two years, yet I had to wear it, and I gave thirty-five dollars for it."

"Yes, it was pretty good," replied Ma, wilfully misunderstanding him. "If it hadn't been, I might have had to buy a new one. I'm fully converted to your ideas now. Benji thought the children looked as nice as any of their mates to-day."

"They ought to," wailed the desperate man. "With a good fifty dollars on their backs. Say, if you ever sell this to a living creature I'll light out for Alaska or some such place! And hereafter you buy stuff for those youngsters, do you hear?"

Ma peacefully replied that she did and had no idea of selling any more, but meekly added that she had just as soon keep on "cutting down and making over" if Benjamin preferred.

To which bit of submission he only replied by a shrug, a snort, and then stalked off to bed, with his wife, like most of her sex, relieved her feelings by throwing down the unoffending socks and bursting into tears.

"Oh, I know it was dreadful of me," she said, "but I was in the right and I just thought I'd poor Benji!" A fifty-dollar lesson was cheap—I could have made it a hundred, if I'd wanted to."

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**How Many Back Yards are as Nest as this One?**  
One of the neatest, tidest farms we have ever seen, is that of Mr. Chris. Bowen, Peterboro Co., Ont. Tidiness on this farm does not stop with the front of the house but is extended all the way around as may be seen by this illustration of one of the side doors.  
—Photo by an editor of Farm and Dairy.

blue, too, like Daddy Talbot's for all the world, and why couldn't she have a blue dress? Her father listened uneasily.

"Pears as if women folks didn't think of nothing but dress, he commented, but her brother broke the criticism by rushing in with a demand for a blue serge suit to match Ben Tilden's, and pa with a muttered sentiment that they would all ultimately live in the porchouse with such extravagant notions, went off to the post office.

Next day ma went to town. She needed a new dress, she said, and pa was willing.

"Get a good suit, mother," he said, "while you're about it." His wife, with a queer look, half scared, half amused, answered that she certainly would. Pa Talbot approved of her buying good garments, as they left more and better material for his pet "made-overs."

For a week after her journey to town ma was very busy sewing. "No new duds," had been her husband's injunction when she made one last appeal to him. "You have plenty of clothes, and I don't begrudge them, either. You've surely got plenty of things to cut down, and if the boys needs a suit, take one of my old one and fix it up for him."

"Very well," said ma, her face calm

visiting minister was making. Going home he scarcely spoke, though ma's sharp eyes saw him take surreptitiously a corner of Isabel's dress between forefinger and thumb and test its texture.

She sniffed audibly, and something of the "damp" flame came into her big brown eyes.

As soon as the children were abed pa accused her of her duplicity.

"That's brand new cloth in Isa's dress," he said; "you can't fool me. Ma Talbot smiled grimly.

"Come here," she said, loading the way to the sewing room. She opened a drawer. The remnants of a light blue suit were there. "I made Isabel's dress from a suit of mine," she said calmly; "there is what is left of it."

"You never had a blue suit," he declared, lifting as he spoke the mangled pieces of what had surely once been a woman's blue linen suit.

"I bought it," she answered. "The last time I went to town." Light burst upon the bewildered man's mind.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you bought a linen suit and then cut it up for that child."

"That's exactly what I did," his wife answered with a calmness she did not really feel in the uncertainty of

how her husband would take her stratagem.

He was apparently so amazed as to be speechless for a season during which he fingered feebly the pieces of the cut-up suit. Then recovering his senses he asked: "What did the suit cost?"

"Fifteen dollars," replied ma; "you told me to get a good one, you know."

Pa gasped. He looked up angrily, but ma's danger signals were out. Pa had never seen her eyes so bright before, for ma was determined to win this time at all costs, realizing that their children's happiness depended on her courage.

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