

McGreggor's Daughters

He was leaning carelessly against the low rambling shed, which did duty as a barn, whistling "Ye Banks an' Braes o' Bonnie Doon," with exaggerated cheerfulness—a cheerfulness that seemed out of keeping with the dreariness of the scene.

"Le Banks an' Braes" came to an abrupt end as I approached, leading my horse by the bridle. "Aw'm glad tae see ye, stranger. Can a w' do onythin' fer ye?" he called while I was still several yards distant.

Evidently he had seen me coming and was waiting for me. The broad Scotch dialect suited his broad Scotch face with its shaggy brows and bristling side-whiskers of a warm reddish brown.

"My horse cast a shoe, and is quite lame," I explained. "Can you tell me where I can find a blacksmith?" "I dinna ken o' ony nearer than the toon—an' that's ten mile or mair awa'."

"Oh, no; I must push on somehow," I was beginning, but he interrupted. "Hoot, mon! the beastie's tae lame tae tak' anither step an' ye canna walk it."

It was true. My horse could not make the ten miles without permanent injury. To walk that distance in my present fatigued condition seemed an impossibility.

"Coom, coom, ye'd better bide here. Ye're welcome to the best o' the hoose." "You are very kind. But I ought to push on," I began hesitatingly, but he would not listen.

"Hoot! havers! mon, bide a wee. Aw'll be glad fer company," he urged. "An' lowering his voice, and coming a step nearer, 'Aw'll be havin' two o' the bonniest lassies that'll mak' the evertin' pleasant w' playin' an' singin'; an' the four of us can be havin' a gemm o' cards; an' aw'll gie ye som' guid wheesky; an'—Havers, mon! Aw want ye tae see ma bairns! An'—an'—dinna ye ken? Aw've been fashin' fer a sight o' com' one frae the heeg outside world! Mon, ye must bide the night!"

So I consented to remain. Indeed, it was the only thing I could do. After seeing my horse safely sheltered for the night, with plenty of hay, and a dry bed, I followed my host into the house. I will confess my heart was beating rather quickly. I had not seen a young lady for so long that the prospect of spending a whole evening in the company of two pretty girls was exhilarating, to say the least.

I was on my way back to civilization after a three month's sojourn on my cousin's ranch in western Kansas, whither I had been banished for the benefit of my health. I enjoyed the long rides over the wide undulating prairie, and felt so much at home in the saddle that, when the time arrived for my departure, I determined to ride through to Emporia, a distance of a little more than one hundred miles, where I should take the train for the East.

I had expected to reach Emporia late that afternoon, but my horse's sudden lameness made it impossible to push on; and there was still a good twenty-mile ride before me. I should be obliged to catch the first train in the morning, which would necessitate my rising at an unusually early hour. But I had the prospect of a pleasant evening before me.

The house was a one-story affair, consisting of four or five rooms. I was ushered into what I suppose they called the "parlor," though was a bed in one corner of the room. The floor was covered with a rag carpet, and everything looked neat and clean. A big lump of coal blazed in the open fire-place, giving out both light and heat, and adding a touch of luxurious comfort to the homely room.

"Ye're welcome! Sit ye doon by the fire an' dry yer wet clothes," cried McGregor, pulling forward the most comfortable chair in the room.

He poked the fire into a ruddy blaze, talking all the while in his quaint Scotch dialect, with the most delightful air of hospitality. Indeed he could not have shown me more attention had I been one of his own Scotch lairds.

When he had made sure of my comfort, he went out to acquaint the "weeman folk" of my presence. He was gone rather longer than seemed necessary; when he returned his face had lost some of its beaming good humor.

We talked politics, foreign and domestic; compared the relative merits of King Edward and Roosevelt; discussed the members of Parliament and the chances of Home Rule for Ireland; and had just touched on the Spanish-American war, when there came a light tap at the door, and a voice called, "Supper!"

My heart gave a little jump. I had seen the guitar in the corner, and an unfinished piece of fancy-work, with an open volume of Tennyson beside it on the table, convinced me that the "lassies" were possessed of some culture and refinement.

I looked eagerly around as I followed my host into the kitchen, which served as dining-room as well. But, to my surprise, there were no young ladies in sight. A tall, angular looking woman, whom McGregor introduced as "Mrs. McGregor," took her place at the head of the table, and began pouring the weak tea, and to my great disappointment and disgust there was no mention made of the daughters!

Mrs. McGregor was a severe looking woman, who evidently did not believe in wasting her words. Under her chilling reserve her husband's cheerfulness began to waver, and finally collapsed altogether; and the meal was concluded in uncomfortable silence.

McGregor accompanied me to the parlor, but soon excused himself and returned to the kitchen. I could hear his voice, now coaxing, and now expostulating, though I could not understand anything that was said. When he came back his ruddy face was a few shades redder, and his small light eyes wore a baffled expression. He plunged at once into politics, but the conversation flagged.

Rising presently, with a quick glance toward the door, he opened the bureau drawer and took out a deck of cards. But before he turned around a sharp voice called: "John! John!" Dropping the cards back into the drawer, he turned without a word, and left the room, closing the door behind him.

When he returned his manner was quiet and subdued, and he avoided looking at me. We talked on for some time in a perfunctory sort of way about the crops, and the weather. Finally I asked: "Where are your daughters Mr. McGregor? Am I not to make their acquaintance?" "Aw—they're baith seek, seek in bed!" he said slowly, a peculiar expression crossing his face.

He looked beseechingly at me for a moment, then leaning suddenly forward, bringing his big red face close to mine, whispered, miserably: "The mither will na let them come!" I felt like laughing; but he looked so utterly squelched that I refrained.

The evening dragged. McGregor tried conscientiously to fulfill his duty as host, but it was so evidently an effort, and he seemed so subdued and ill at ease, that I was glad when bedtime came. I was to occupy that room, and it was a relief when McGregor stood up to go. He listened a moment, and then tip-toed to a sort of cupboard in the wall. Opening it he took out a bottle and two glasses. Just then a voice called: "Jo—hn! Jo—hn!"

Putting the things hastily back, he shuffled out of the room with only a shamefaced "guid nicht!" as the door closed behind him. I was up and away before breakfast the next morning. As I was mounting my horse McGregor appeared. He looked a doleful figure in the early morning light. I thanked him for his hospitality, and expressed my regret at not being able to thank Mrs. McGregor in person.

He listened in silence, one hand stuffed into his breeches pocket, and the other pulling dolefully at his whiskers.

"'Tis a sair trouble, noo, when a mon's nae maister i' his ain hoose! Her faither wur a meenister, ye ken, an' she can na fureget it!"

I looked back once. He was standing just where I left him. At one of the windows I caught a glimpse of a face peeping out from behind the curtain—a face which I felt quite sure was not that of the "meenister's daughter."—Mary M. Redmond, in the New World.

Captain Weeks Complimented

While I was a pupil in the Jackson school, in Newton, some eight years ago, says a writer in the Boston Herald, Capt. John W. Weeks, who afterward became Mayor of the city, one day visited our class. The future Mayor had not been long in the room when one of the largest boys, who had apparently been in a whisperminded wrangle with a companion, exclaimed in a voice loud enough to be overheard, "You better not be so swift about giving information."

"I heard you say something about information," said Captain Weeks, with a smile, addressing the boy who had spoken. "Now, let us see if you are well-informed enough to tell the class the meaning of the word information." But the boy was forced to admit that he was not. Thereupon Captain Weeks referred the question to the whole class. But, alas! no one seemed equal to the task until a bright-eyed, tow-headed little fellow jumped to his feet and threw up his hands.

"Well, my boys," said Captain Weeks; "what do you think is the meaning of information?" "Compliments," promptly answered the little fellow. "Good," said Captain Weeks, smiling down on the boy. "Now let us hear you give me a compliment."

The little fellow paused for a moment, looking thoughtfully at his toes; but, seeming suddenly inspired, he looked up at Captain Weeks and said, in a loud voice: "You're a slick guy, sir." The comment of the future Mayor was scarcely audible above the laughter that ensued. "That's a doubtful compliment," he said.

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The desire to appear skilled often prevents one from becoming so. There is nothing between us and hell and heaven but life, which of all things is the frailest. Education, properly understood, is that which teaches discernment, in order that one may love or hate that which is lovable or hateful.

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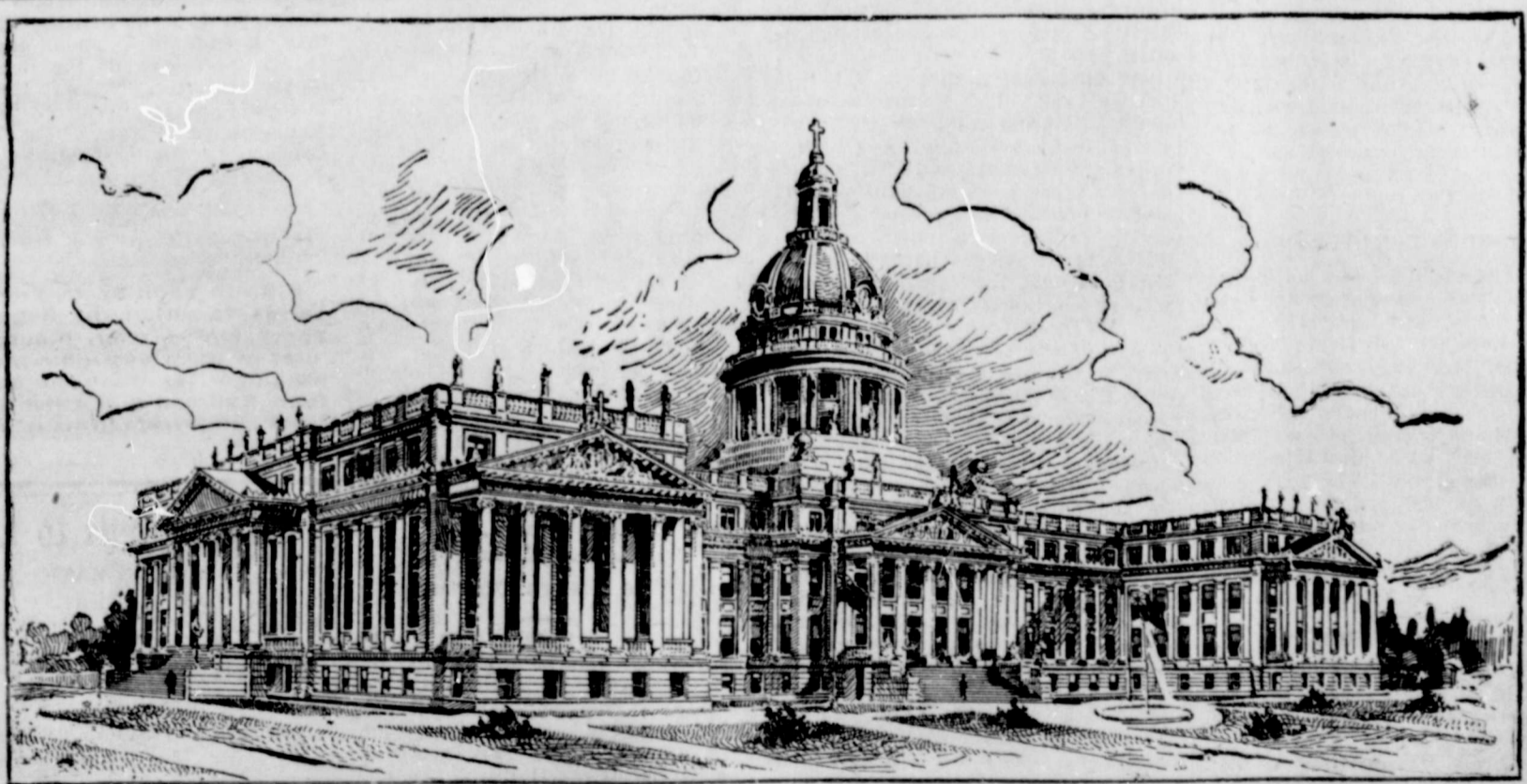
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