



Our Duty

THIS truth comes to me more and more, the longer we live: that on what field, or in what uniform, or with what aims we do our duty, matters very little, or even what our duty is, great or small, splendid or obscure. Only to find our duty certainly, and somewhere and somehow to do it faithfully, makes us good, strong, happy and useful men, and turns our lives into some feeble echo of the life of God.

Phillips Brooks.

The Battle

By James Oppenheim.

D. MORRIS EAST returned home at eleven p. m. "Home" was a fourth of the ground floor in an East Broadway tenement. He found his wife in his office—the front room—sorting papers at his desk beneath the brilliant blaze of a Welbach light. She wheeled in the revolving chair to get his kiss.

"Are you tired, Morris?" she asked. Her face was unusually thoughtful.

"Why—anything wrong, Nell?" He dropped wearily into a large, soft armchair.

"Nothing wrong," she said slowly, "except that you are tired—" and then she added wistfully, "but are you too tired?"

He smiled.

"Not too tired, little wife. Swing out on me."

She drew her chair nearer his. Her hands were full of papers.

"I've been reckoning all evening," she said, slowly, as he fondled her free hand, "and it's terrible."

"I know," she acknowledged sympathetically. "It is awful. I'm a wreck."

"But you really are, Morris," she said, softly touching her lips to his hand. "You've worn my husband out, and worried his wife to pieces, and we are getting poorer every day. Now listen," she went on. "How much rent do we pay?" And then she added in an undertone, "I know it's mean of me to bother you."

He smiled.

"Thirty-five dollars a month. What else?"

"Five dollars a month for gas," she went on with slow deliberation; "five dollars for laundry; forty-five dollars for table; twelve dollars for help—how much is that?"

"Guess!" he exclaimed, his eyes twinkling.

"Don't, Morris," she cried, inwardly hurt. "You must think of money to-night. You must."

"Poor little wife," he exclaimed remorsefully. "I always put the whole burden on you, how much is it?"

She looked at him gravely.

"It's one hundred and two dollars," He whistled.

"Think of it," she went on. "And between us we need five dollars a week for little things—that's twenty dollars a month—and three hundred dollars a

year for clothes—twenty-five dollars more a month. Altogether," she said, very soberly, emphatically, "one hundred and forty-seven dollars a month. And that doesn't count going to the theatre, and presents to our relatives, and vacation money, and dentist's bills, and things for your office, and



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books, and a hundred other things. We really use about one hundred and eighty dollars a month."

He took out his pipe, filled it and lit it. "One hundred and eighty dollars, little manager," he cried. "Well, you're a trump."

"Now listen," she said, glowing with pride at his words. "Here's what my doctor-man earns." She picked up a bunch of carefully compiled index cards. They were in her hand writing.

"Three months back, one hundred and thirty-two dollars and fifty cents; two months back, one hundred and ninety-eight dollars; last month one hundred and seventeen dollars and fifty cents, this month one hundred and eighty dollars."

"Pretty good, isn't it?" he smiled cheerfully.

"Wait," she said, "that's what you earned,—but you didn't get that." Three months back ninety-five dollars were paid in; two months back, exactly one hundred; last month exactly eighty; this month—so far—twenty-five dollars. But you'll get more, of course."

"Well, what have you to say?" she demanded. She seemed to be greatly troubled.

"H'm. That's pretty bad. How much have we drawn from the bank?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five dollars. In other words we're running eighty dollars behind each month."

She sat back. They were silent for a full minute.

The world outside and above them—the night and the human beings asleep in it—was intensely silent. Their nicked alarm clock throbbed as if it had palpitation of the heart.

The white light fell sideways on their faces, making them stand out in vivid relief—they were two very fine faces, the woman's oval-shaped and olive tinted, with large, dark eyes and soft rolling hair; the man's strong and dark and determined, his firm lips without moustache, his hair bushy and black.

In the silence, the light seemed to sleep upon them, pervading the room with a weird atmosphere—thick and full of the feel of home. Every motion then was full of meaning, the slight puff of the pipe, the quiver of the hands, the vibration of their breathing. So thickly charged was the air that Morris almost hesitated to whisper.

"Oh, Nell," he said at length, "it is blessed to be with you. I love you so tremendously."

"It's wonderful," she breathed

quit charity, and set yourself to it, you could earn a decent living."

"Charity?" His eyebrows went up. "Yes, charity," she continued with great emphasis. "You had me come down here with you—why? To make money? You know you didn't, dear."

You thought you owed a service to your own people, and—and—she made a grimace—they seem to think so too. Why, they've been sponging on you."

"Sponging?" He knitted his forehead.

"Yes—sponging. Haven't I seen it a thousand times?" She was fully aroused now. "You only charge fifty cents a piece for the office patients, and time and again I've heard some old schnorzer (sponger) say, 'Ach gentlemen, dear gentlemen, Doktor, you would to please wait. Ich habe kein geld (I have no money).'"

Her imitation was so lively with such life-like grimaces and gestures, that he laughed uproariously.

"Do that again?" he commanded.

She seemed a little angry.

"And what do you do?" she continued, ignoring his amusement. "Why you put him on the shoulder and say, 'Never mind—Understand!'"

He laughed uncontrollably.

"You address?" he mocked.

"Now, Morris, that would do! The whole neighborhood is fleeing you. And, worst of all, it is wearing us both out—these incessant calls, these bad hours, these money troubles, this overwork—and these vile people."

He stopped smoking; he suddenly felt how tired and worn he was.

"It's true, Nell," he said bitterly. "I'm tired to death—work, work, work—and work and no life."

"That's it!" she exclaimed. "All work and no life! This isn't life, to be on a never stopping treadmill! It's a deadly grind—it's killing all the good there is in us! What will we be in five years? And is it doing any good? Do you think that you, single-handed, can accomplish anything in this square-mile sore-spot? Why, you don't do anything! You can't change conditions—or human nature."

His face looked white and dejected.

"I've felt that lately, too," he said slowly. "I've been going through a reaction. Oh, I'm sick—sick—sick of it—the nauseous crowds, the dirty streets, the stinking tenements, the grind. I guess, after all," he added, weighing each word, "if a fellow looks out for his wife, and brings up a family decently, and does his duty towards his relatives and friends, and does his work thoroughly, and votes with a clean conscience, he's doing the State a better service than to neglect these and potter away at the infinite, eternal disease."

"Oh, you're right! Thank God you say that!" she cried fervently.

"Oh, Nell," he burst out suddenly. "If we could only get away from it all—get out to clear skies and clean meadows—and home—and find peace! Peace! That's what we need! Peace! This clamor and rush and excitement drain a man of his very soul. It is—it is killing us!"

She suddenly looked radiantly happy.

"I wanted you to say that ever since you came home! I knew you felt that way. Now, listen," she went on excitedly. "Just this evening a letter came from Minnie—Minnie Shanks—you know her—she moved up to Hartley, Connecticut, a couple of years ago and I've written her often. Listen—oh this is great news!"

She pulled out a letter and he sat forward as she read it.

"DEAR LITTLE NELL:

"Here's some good news for you—our old Nell. Now do be shocked, little Nell—I mean good news for you! You see he was the only doctor for miles around, and he made a fortune—or rather a fortune felt into