

through the forms of breakfast; but the poor fellow, who knew his guest, had little satisfaction in his repast, and would not have pretended to any except to blind his family. That, however was labor lost, for they were as quick of perception as he was. To make a short story, we may merely say that P. Pettifogg, Esq., had commenced proceedings to obtain in due course of the forms of law what he had failed to secure by a trick.

Martin, though the event was certainly not unexpected, was as much confounded and astonished as if it had been an unforeseen calamity. A pause was placed on the scarcely commenced improvement of matters at Tumble Down Farm, for if they were to be dispossessed, there could be little inducement to leave the premises in particularly good order for their successors. Martin found little comfort from his wife. She was sullen and desparate. She had so long threatened and brooded over the probable visitation of some catastrophe, that the occurrence gave her a sort of savage satisfaction. It vindicated her character for foresight, and furnished her with a positive object of lamentation. It enabled her to go from generals to one great particular; and particularly good use she made of it.

Martin Meeker was fretted with the din she made, almost beyond endurance. Rising and retiring, resting at labor, in eating and in drinking, in sleeping and in walking, whatever he did and wherever he went, within his wife's approach, she presented the one subject to him in all its aspects. It was the nightmare of his dreams, and the torment of his day light. If he paused she wondered why he did nothing, with such ruin impending. If he put his hand to any work, she asked what was the use now. If he ate, she sarcastically congratulated him on his appetite; and if he fasted, she inquired if he meant to make himself sick, and take to his bed, and thus escape trouble. Poor woman! She had reason for her uneasiness, but a very unreasonable use did she make of it. Martin was beside himself. He knew no one to whom he could apply for relief or comfort, and he could himself discern no hope, and no escape.

He was in a dilemma; vulgarly speaking, in a tight place. His boys relapsed from their short reformation into worse than uselessness, and his girls could not bear up under so much surrounding difficulty. Only the elder—not because she was better than the others, but because she had more years, was of service to him. She hinted at the continued improvement of his farm—so suddenly suspended—advised the repair of fences, the removal of weeds, and preparation for harvest.

"To what purpose," he asked. "The place is ours no longer."

"Do you mean to give it up without an effort to keep it? Even if you do, it must be a year at least before you can be dispossessed. Take advice, father, and find out what may be done."

"Your mother is so wearisome!"

"Who can wonder at that? Excuse me, father, but have you not wearied her for many a year? Every day of neglect and carelessness—every fully and extravagance. But, my dear father," said the girl, astonished at herself, "I am using very strange language for a child to a parent. Forgive me, for I did not intend to increase your unhappiness by seeming undutiful."

"I know what you would have said, and can supply the rest," said Martin, in a voice choking with emotion. "But how does it happen, child, that you are so superior to all of us?"

"Ma! O, indeed I am not," said Cecilia blushing—and there the conversation ceased. But Cecilia was superior, as her father said, to all the household. She had not been so much exposed to wasting influences. Her whole youth had not been spent in the lethargic atmosphere of Tumble Down Farm. One of the greatest lacks in that atmosphere was the religious element; for Martin Meeker for many years had lived in forgetfulness of the use, the benefits, and the privileges of the Christian Sabbath. Neglect of the godliness which is profitable even in this present world, is sure at the last to bring its sad rebuke and retribution here. Cecilia, who was the god-child and protegee of her father's sister, had for the most part resided with that relative, and was now at home, upon a visit. An ordinary child would have hurried away from circumstances so unpleasant. But Cecilia prolonged her visit that she might do good.

While things were in this condition at Tumble Down Farm, Pettigrew Pettifogg, Esq., was not unmindful of his toils. The snares he had spread he watched with great intentness, and he began to be disturbed that his victim did not struggle a little more in the net. He did not doubt the final result—but law was tedious, and he might be exposed to troublesome questions and investigations. To go into Court would wrest a portion of the plunder from his clutches, if not for Martin's advantage, for the benefit of some brother Attorney. Pettifogg hoped that the Sheriff's visit would terrify Martin Meeker into propositions for an adjustment; but as, thanks to Cecilia's encouragement, no such proposition came, the uneasy rogue wrote a very smooth and conciliatory note expressive of his unwillingness to proceed to extremities, and "all the rest of it." Martin offered the document to his wife and eldest daughter for their counsel.

"O," said his wife, "go directly to him and give him all! Don't let me be near to interrupt your business again. But he can't get my third of the real estate without my consent. That's my comfort."

"A Sheriff's title does not need the wife's signature," said Martin, stung to bitterness.

"And that's your comfort," said Mrs. Meeker, rising and flouncing away. "You'll beggar us all if you can, I have no doubt."

Martin mechanically walked to the sideboard. He had forgotten that a few days before he had consented that Cecilia should take the seal off the bottle imp, and let him escape where he could do no mischief. Nerveless and trembling, he turned to take up his hat. Cecilia placed her hand upon his arm. "Ride over to my aunt, father, and consult her before you make any reply to this man."

Martin hesitated—but though his pride revolted, he saw his daughter's advice was good and followed it. The result was a very spirited correspondence between Pettigrew Pettifogg, Esq., and an honest lawyer to whom Martin was recommended. Our friend P. I., who was disposed at first to ride a very high horse, came down to his feet, and at last to his knees, under an awkward intimation of proceedings against him for barratry. Pettigrew denounced his brother law-