

BISCUITS AND DRIED BEEF.

A PANACEA.

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By S. H. M.

CHAPTER II.

A WEDDING AND A DISAPPOINTMENT.

The rector and his wife were very much in earnest. July 1 had dawned, and they felt that now their experiment was to be put into full operation. The little capital on hand at the date of their resolution to 'owe no man anything,' had dwindled to less than one dollar. Both were anxious to receive the cheque from the treasurer, in order to pay the two small bills outstanding, for they felt that nothing could be done in the way of a beginning so long as those debts were unpaid.

'John, the postman is coming!' exclaimed Mrs. Forest, as she spied the messenger coming up the steps. The steps.

Mr. Forest went to the door, and was handed two letters. He came back to the room where his good wife was busy with household duties, but no smile seemed to welcome the letters, as he gazed at the superscription.

'From whom do they come, John?' called the nervous little woman, not willing to wait for the slower motions of her husband.

'Nothing but statements from Brown the market-man and from Barling the dry goods dealer,' was the reply.

'Well, dear, go right down and pay them, so we can begin with a clean balance sheet,' and the sprightly woman made the duster she was using fly around the legs of the table with renewed nervous force, as much as to say, 'I'll show you what I can do!'

'Balance sheet' indeed! Where did you gain so much mercantile knowledge? 'Go right down and pay 'em,' you say! What would you advise paying with, Mrs. Secretary of the Treasury?'

The poor man was a little sarcastic, and women never can endure sarcasm. They may enjoy using the two-edged sword, but they recoil from the smart of the wounds when they feel the cut themselves. It should always be banished from the home, for it is not a promoter of peace.

The little woman dropped her work, and the duster hung limp in her hand, as her eyes looked up sorrowfully, she said:

'Why, John, what do you mean? Didn't you get a cheque from Mr. Roberts for your salary?'

'No, dear, there were only the statements,' and his tone was soft and affectionate, for he saw the unintended harshness of his former answer had hurt the tender heart of his wife.

'Forgive me, John, but I thought surely you would have the cheque, and I did not realize when you said you had two letters, and that both were bills, that you had no other; and the tears that had been welling up began to course down her cheeks.

'Never mind, dear, it will come soon,' the rector said, soothingly.

'But I'm so disappointed,' wailed his better half. 'I thought we would start off so nicely to-day by paying those horrid bills, and then all would go along so much more easily. Why do you suppose Mr. Roberts failed to send it?'

'Well, really, wife, I don't know as we had any right to expect it so promptly on the first day of the month. You know it has often been several days later before it came; and, besides, Mr. Roberts does not always mail a cheque. He sometimes hands it to me when I go into the bank. I will go down town presently, and make an errand to the bank, and the cheque may be all ready for me.'

This was consoling, and the disconsolate body went again to work, only remarking:

'I think you are right after all. We really ought not to have set our hearts on having the money so early in the day. But, John, dear, you won't think me foolish, will you, on account of these tears? The tension

was too great, and the chord snapped at the disappointment. 'I'm sure I won't do so again,' and the helpful wife, whose heart was always full of sympathy, allowed him to draw her closely to his bosom, and wipe away the last traces of tears.

Mr. Forest had a call to make on a young man who had just come to the city, who was a clerk in a store near the bank. He had discovered that this youth had a good musical voice, and he wished to invite him to attend the choir practice that night.

Mr. Roberts, the treasurer of the parish, was the cashier of the First National Bank. Just as Mr. Forest was passing the door Mr. Roberts stepped from his carriage to enter the bank. He stopped a moment to cordially shake hands with the rector, but gave no intimation that the good man should enter the door with him. Therefore, the rector passed on to do his errand in the store adjoining. He felt that it was better not to show his anxiety by asking for his month's salary, and therefore wended his way homeward, without being able to carry the cheerful news which he knew his wife was hoping to hear. Fortunately, when he reached the rectory, Mrs. Forest was busy with the baby, and so he sat down at his desk to attend to necessary writing. An hour later his wife appeared at the study door, the baby in her arms.

'John,' the tired voice said, 'will you take the baby for a little while? He seems fretful this morning, and I'm sure his teeth are troubling him.'

Baby gave a troubled wail, and the doting mother held him closer for a moment before handing him over to his father, only saying, 'Precious little darling! And does his dear little tooth make him feel so badly?'

Disposing of the baby, Mrs. Forest went about her duties in the kitchen, for no maid was there to help. The noon-day meal would be a very frugal one, for the larder was not well stocked. She had herself gone to the meat market, and bought a 'shin bone' for soup, because she had learned that that was the cheapest thing to buy, and the most 'satisfying' when made into soup, to which plenty of rice could be added. It was embarrassing to go to the market for anything now that the statement of the old account had come in, for it seemed to her that the market-man was wondering why she did not pay the bill.

Poor woman! if the anxiety that pervaded your honest heart could only have been transferred to the hearts of scores of men who gave no thought to their bills, and yet had money in plenty to meet them, how many shopkeepers would have been overjoyed as they saw the funds coming in, so that they, too, might do the same unto others!

The days went on till the morning of the glorious 'Fourth' had dawned. In the middle of the forenoon there was a ring at the door, and the rector found on answering that two couples were there from a small mission in a farming community. They were invited to the parlor, when, after much embarrassment on the part of the visitors it transpired that one of the couples wished to be married. They were taking advantage of the holiday, and had come to town for the wedding. They were known to the rector, but it was an unexpected call. However, all preliminaries having been settled, the couple were made man and wife, the service being said in the parlor. Before leaving the room the bridegroom awkwardly stammered his thanks to the rector, and handed him two silver dollars. Mrs. Forest heard the coin jingle in her husband's hand, and her eyes looked like saucers in her eagerness to see the amount of the fee. As soon as the door closed, she cried out:

'How much is it?'

'As the wedding fees all belong to you, I'll turn this over at once,' and he placed the two dollars into her outstretched hand.

Who can fathom a woman's brain? Quick as an electric flash, this little

woman had decided what to do. Not a word did she say of her plans, and no one would have mistrusted that she was thinking of aught save the wedding just ended. The rector went to his study, the baby was asleep, and Mrs. Forest, in street dress, was slipping quietly out of the door. In ten minutes more she was at Barling's, intent, with the two dollars just received, on paying the bill that was owing them there. With a light step she went to the door, but it was closed.

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STORE CLOSED ALL DAY, JULY 4th

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was the legend on the door. 'Of course,' she said to herself, 'I might have known that, but I didn't think.'

'Didn't think!' The dear creature, of course she didn't, otherwise she would have been too masculine for a woman, and would have lacked that volatile spirit which makes woman so much the superior of man in vivacious energy.

Her husband never knew she had been out of the house, for she was back again quickly; and the two big silver dollars were burning a hole in her pocket.

'Never mind,' she soliloquized, 'I will pay that bill to-morrow.'

The morrow came, and Mr. Forest, without mentioning the matter to his wife, made up his mind to go to Mr. Roberts and ask for his salary. He went to the bank and inquired for the cashier. The teller answered his question by saying that Mr. Roberts had taken advantage of the legal holiday to go to the Lake, and, as business was always dull at that season of the year, he was intending to stay about ten days.

Did the poor man turn pale? He felt sick at heart, and at once retraced his steps for home. When near the rectory he met his wife, pushing the baby in his carriage, going towards the business part of town. The determined woman had hurried through her morning cares, and as there was no one with whom she could leave the baby she was taking him along on her way to pay out those two silver dollars to the dry goods creditor.

'Why, John, what's the matter? Are you sick? You look so pale!'

All this was said before the man could answer at all.

'No, dear, I'm not sick; but come back to the house and let us talk over matters.'

'But what is the matter?' and the little woman's voice was more penetrating than was desirable.

'Not so loud, dear. I'll tell you all about it as soon as we go in,' and having reached the door, they passed in.

The story was soon told. Ten days more, at least, of waiting before any salary could be collected, and nothing in the house to provide with. Yes, the two dollars were still in the pocket of the 'Secretary of the Treasury.' This amount would do till Mr. Roberts returned.

'And Barling's bill must wait,' said the honest woman to herself.

When Mr. Roberts returned the rector called at once, and asked for his month's salary.

'Well, I declare,' said that functionary, 'I forgot all about it,' and he went to the book-keeper, asking him to turn to the 'Church account.' Soon he returned to his private office, where Mr. Forest was anxiously waiting.

'The fact is,' he said, 'collections have been pretty light lately; there are so many out of town for the summer. I will give you forty dollars to-day, Mr. Forest, which is all there is to the credit of the account, and—'

'It is a disappointment, Mr. Roberts,' said the rector, interrupting, 'not to have it all.'

'Yes, doubtless,' said the great banker, 'but I can't do any better. You see, he continued, 'the directors of the bank had a meeting on the first day of the month, and passed very

stringent resolutions that no overdrafts must be allowed. The teller has been so instructed, and I can't well break the rule myself, or else I would overdraw enough to pay you in full.'

'Very well,' meekly replied the rector, completely awed by the statement as to how a great financial institution was managed. And, taking the forty dollars, he went back to his waiting wife.

The story was all told and plans were made for the future. The money to pay the two statements was counted out, and soon carried to the respective creditors. The receipted bills were placed away as souvenirs, 'for, you know, dear,' said the cheerful body, 'that we are never to have another bill.'

'I hope not,' said the less sanguine man.

(To be Continued.)

[For the 'Messenger']

TWO NEW YEAR'S DAYS.

(By the Rev. P. M. Macleod, Victoria, B.C.)

Eccles. i., 9; Matt. ix., 17; Rev. xxi., 5.

Look at this house. It is old and battered with the storms of many a winter and the scorching sun of many a summer. This fence round it is crooked and full of unsightly gaps, and the garden is only decent-looking when the snow out of pity covers up the weeds and rubbish with its beautiful white mantle.

The inside of the house corresponds with the outside. The floors are marked with the grime of years. The furniture is worn out and in a chronic state of giving way, so that it is dangerous to sit down. The kitchen is in a sad mess, and the stove is of an old-fashioned pattern calculated to waste the wood and spoil the food. The sitting-room is like a tomb rather than a living room, and has not only old furniture but is rendered more interesting by having a very old smell.

Ah! when, years ago, the young couple furnished that room they took great pride in it, but now it is never opened except when a stranger calls. But now you want to know the people who live in this house, and so I will describe them to you, but I will only tell you the names of the children. The father is sitting in the kitchen, and he is worth looking at. He is not good looking, but there are marks of intelligence in his face, and when he smiles he shows that once he must have been prepossessing in appearance. He is a middle-aged man, somewhere about fifty years old, and looks older than he really is. He is a disappointed man. He once was in a better position, but he has come down in the world, and so of course he considers that the world is all wrong. His wife is a poor, tired out, disheartened woman, who has lost her beauty and her brightness, and whose life is without a single gleam of the sunshine that once lit up her path.

The children, a little boy and girl, were such as you would expect to find in such a home. Old in bitter experiences of the trials and hardships of life, though but young in years. Why, Johnny could not have been more than ten years old, and yet that boy sat at the fire with such gravity that you might have thought him as old as his father. And Mary was only eight, and she, too, had a pinched and hungry look that hid her childishness.

Now, it was Christmas time, and the children had that day got their holidays, and as they had heard the other children talking about the grand times they were to have during the holidays they thought it would be a good time to ask their father some questions. So Johnny said:

'Father, will Mary and I get any presents?'

'No,' was the answer, in a gruff voice.

'Will we get any new clothes?'

'No.'

'Will we have a new year? I