

PEGGY EATON'S ORDEAL.

[Continued.]

Washington has always been noted for the scandals set afloat by gossiping tongues. The leaders of its upper society were by no means exempt from this weakness. Reports affecting the character of Mrs. Eaton were started. As is usual, they gathered in their progress many fresh additions. Indiscretions of which little was thought at the time, were magnified into criminal acts.

Timberlake, it was well known, was an intemperate man when he married her. It was also known that he had, after his marriage, lost large sums of money at play while under the influence of liquor. But notwithstanding these things it was reported that her extravagance had forced Timberlake to become a large defaulter to the government, and that her gross improprieties as a wife had driven him to drink and finally to suicide. These reports spread with amazing rapidity, and among all ranks of society. The men laughed and ridiculed them. The women generally believed them. She could not go out on the street without meeting the stare of impudent curiosity. If she went to church women would draw away from her as though contamination would follow the touch of her garments.

The wives of other cabinet officers knew little or nothing of Mrs. Eaton until after they came to Washington. The stories told them by the society leaders had their effect. They assumed a hostile attitude toward Mrs. Eaton, ceased to recognize her, and if they could avoid it would not sit next to her at presidential dinners or other parties. The wives of foreign ministers were in like manner approached, and they too were persuaded to regard her with abhorrence. One of them created great disturbance at a dinner party by refusing to sit next to her at the table.

These ladies of gentle blood had done all that they could to humiliate and make miserable the life of Mrs. Eaton. They had blasted her reputation as a woman; they had turned the great body of her sex against her and made her the object of aversion and contempt, but their triumph would not be complete unless they could have the doors of the president's house shut in her face.

Mrs. Donelson was the mistress of the White house. She was the wife of Major A. J. Donelson, a nephew of Mrs. Jackson, had been raised by Jackson, and who was his private secretary. She could not doubt the truth of the stories constantly rung in her ears by ladies of first standing in Washington. She believed Mrs. Eaton to be bad in nearly every sense. She told Jackson she would receive Mrs. Eaton when she came to the president's house, but that she would not otherwise recognize her nor return her calls. To all the remonstrances of Jackson, whose faith in the innocence of Mrs. Eaton was immovable, she turned a deaf ear. Jackson, in the presence of ladies, was one of the most courteous of men. When he believed a woman to be wronged he was one of the most chivalrous. He could not tolerate indignity to Mrs. Eaton from the female head of his own household. Finding that he could not overcome the influences that had been brought to bear on Mrs. Donelson or shake her resolution, he said to her in the gentlest manner:

"My dear, then you had better return to Tennessee."

She and her husband went back to their old home, but returned and resumed their former places a few months later, when the disturbance was over.

Jackson had a pew in the Presbyterian church at Washington, and was on friendly terms with the Rev. Mr. Campbell, its pastor. To him these ladies came with their charges against Mrs. Eaton. They urged him to see and talk with the president on the matter, but the pastor shrunk from the task.

The Rev. Dr. Ely, a Presbyterian clergyman, was in Philadelphia. It was known that he and Jackson had been warm friends for many years. In his desire to oblige the ladies, Mr. Campbell wrote to Dr. Ely, recounting all the stories he had heard about Mrs. Eaton and vouching for the high standing of the ladies from whom these stories had come, and begged him to write to Jackson on the subject.

The good old doctor, who knew nothing of Mrs. Eaton except what he had heard through the letter of Campbell, was shocked at his statements; and at once wrote to the president. The flagrant acts of immorality of which Mrs. Eaton was guilty, he

said, were notorious in Washington, and that the ladies of Washington would not and could not recognize a woman of her dissolute character. In concluding he implored Jackson, in the memory of his dead wife and for the honor of his administration, to withhold all countenance from Mrs. Eaton in the future.

Jackson had known the O'Neale family for many years, and on coming to Washington had always made his home at O'Neale hotel. Mrs. Jackson in her lifetime had usually come with him on these trips, and had shown great fondness for Mrs. Timberlake and her children. Jackson at once answered Dr. Ely. His vindication of Mrs. Eaton was complete. He showed the utter improbability of the stories against her, referred to his long acquaintance with the O'Neale family, and to the interest Mrs. Jackson had taken in Mrs. Timberlake and her little family, and said he had no doubt that these stories were the inventions of political enemies.

Troubles had been brewing in the cabinet for some time from other causes, but they might have been smoothed over. The war upon Mrs. Eaton, originally confined to the woman, made itself felt in the cabinet councils. The cabinet ladies, through the influence of the local society leaders, were resolute in their determination not to recognize Mrs. Eaton, and their husbands dutifully submitted.

The etiquette of the White house is different from that of a private house. The president is expected to give state dinners and public receptions, to which the cabinet officers and their wives are at times invited, and their attendance expected. Jackson would not quietly sit down and see a woman whom he believed to be the victim of unjust prosecution exposed to insult by guests whom he had invited. He could not degrade the wife of one of his own cabinet by excluding her from the White house and thus give the color of truth to the charges he believed to be false and malicious. The obduracy of the cabinet ladies and its effect upon their husbands brought matters to a climax. The harmony of the cabinet was destroyed, and necessity for its reorganization was apparent.

They all resigned within short intervals of each other, except Ingham, who was secretary of the treasury, who seemed disposed to stay. Mrs. Ingham had been particularly outspoken against Mrs. Eaton, and had treated her more oppressively than any of the others. After waiting a proper length of time Jackson sent for Ingham and asked why he had not resigned as the others had done. Ingham stammered out that he did not think that he ought to resign because of a quarrel among women. His resignation came the next day.

The resignation of the entire cabinet within so short a period after its appointment was something new, and public curiosity was naturally aroused as to what caused it. The Peggy Eaton imbroglio with all its circumstances was published in the newspapers all over the country, varied of course to suit the political complexion of the paper publishing it. It became the subject of editorial comment, of stump oratory and personal gossip. The name of Mrs. Eaton became known in every household, and she found herself suddenly lifted into fame. Other causes were assigned to the retiring ministers for their resignation but the people very generally believed that the real cause lay in the Eaton troubles.

Jackson, on Eaton's resignation immediately appointed him governor of the then territory of Florida, and soon after sent him as minister to Spain. Here he remained until after the close of VanBuren's administration, when he and Mrs. Eaton came back and for some time made their home in Washington. This of course recalled the gossip of former years. But Mrs. Eaton had given no room for talk when abroad nor any after her return.

In the mean time public sentiment had among her own sex reacted in her favor. The current of opinion was that her sudden elevation in the place where she grew up from an humble position to a superior social rank as the wife of a cabinet minister, had aroused wrath, and was the real cause for the savage onslaught made on her by the female aristocracy of Washington.

Mrs. Eaton did not bear meekly the scorn that was heaped upon her. She returned it with interest, and said many bitter and cutting things against the ladies arrayed against her. These things were duly reported, with the usual exaggerations, and made matters worse. They had, it is true, destroyed all pleasure to her in her new position, but she was full of fight to the last. She would not allow her husband to resign while his wife was under fire.