

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

THE WASHINGTON PREACHER ON THE DRAMA OF LIFE.

It Appears that People Used to Go to the Theater in the Days of Job—A Unique Peroration Indicating Shakespeare of Infidelity.

Causes of Failure.

Rev. Dr. Talmage in this discourse sets forth the causes of failure in life, drawing on a Biblical reference to the theater for startling illustration. His text was Job xxvii., 23, "Men shall clap their hands at him and shall hiss him out of his place."

This allusion seems to be dramatic. The Bible more than once makes such allusions. Paul says, "We are made a theater or spectacle to angels and to men." It is evident from the text that some of the habits of theater goers were known in Job's time, because he describes an actor hissed off the stage. The imperatorator comes on the boards and, either through lack of study of the part he is to take or inaptness or other incapacity, the audience is offended and expresses its disapprobation and disgust by hissing. "Men shall clap their hands at him and shall hiss him out of his place."

The Actors of Life.

My text suggests that each one of us is put on the stage of this world to take some part. What hardship and suffering and discipline great actors have undergone year after year that they might be perfect in their parts you have often read. But we, put on the stage of this life to represent charity and faith and humility and helpfulness—what little preparation we have made, although we have three galleries of spectators, earth and heaven and hell. Have we not been more attentive to the part taken by others than to the part taken by ourselves, and while we needed to be looking at home and concentrating on our own duty, we have been criticizing the other performers, and saying, "that was too high," or "too low," or "too feeble," or "too extravagant," or "too tame," or "too demonstrative," while we ourselves were making a dead failure and preparing to be ignominiously hissed off the stage? Each one is assigned a place, no supernumeraries hanging around the drama of life to take this or that or the other part, as they may be called upon. No one can take our place. We can take no other place. Neither can we put off our character; no change of apparel can make us any one else than that which we eternally are.

Many make a failure of their part in the drama of life through dissipation. They have enough intellectual equipment and good address and geniality unbounded. But they have a wine closet that contains all the forces for their social and business and normal overthrow. So far back as the year 959, King Edgar of England made a law that the drinking cups should have pins fastened at a certain point in the side, so that the indulger might be reminded to stop before he got to the bottom. But there are no pins projecting from the sides of the modern wine cup or beer mug, and the first point at which millions stop is at the gravity bottom of their own grave. Dr. Sax of France has discovered something which all drinkers ought to know. He has found out that alcohol in every shape, whether of wine or brandy or beer, contains parasitic life called bacillus potomania. By a powerful microscope these living things are discovered, and when you take strong drink you take them into the stomach and then into your blood, and, getting into the crimson canals of life, they go into every tissue of your body, and your entire organism is taken possession of by these noxious infinitesimals. When in delirium tremens, a man sees every form of reptilian life, it seems it is only these parasites of the brain in exaggerated size. It is not a hallucination that the victim is suffering from. He only sees in the room what is actually crawling and rioting in his own brain. Every time you take strong drink you swallow these maggots, and every time the imbiber of alcohol in any shape feels vertigo or rheumatism or nausea it is only the jubilee of these maggots. Efforts are being made for the discovery of some germicide that can kill the parasites of alcoholism, but the only thing that will ever extirpate them is abstinence from alcohol and teetotal abstinence, to which I would before God swear all these young men and old.

Dangers of Strong Drink.

America is a fruitful country, and we raise large crops of wheat and corn and oats, but the largest crop we raise in this country is the crop of drunkards. With sickle made of the sharp edges of the broken glass of bottle and demijohn they are cut down, and there are whole swaths of them, whole widows of them, and it takes all the hospitals and penitentiaries and graveyards and cemeteries to hold this harvest of hell. Some of you are going down under this evil, and the never dying worm of alcoholism has wound around you one of its coils, and by next New Year's day it will have another coil around you, and it will after awhile put a coil around your tongue, and a coil around your brain, and a coil around your lung, and a coil around your foot, and a coil around your heart, and some day this never dying worm will with one spring tighten all the coils at once, and in the last twist of that awful convulsion you will cry out, "Oh, my God!" and be gone. The greatest of dramatists in the tragedy of "The Tempest" sends staggering across the stage Stephano, the drunkard butler, but across the stage of human life strong drink sends kindly and queenly and princely astutes staggering forward against the footlights of conspicuity and then staggering back into failure till the world is impatient for their disappearance, and human and diabolic voices join in hissing them off the stage.

Many also make a failure in the drama of life through indolence. They are always making calculations how little they can do for the compensations they get. There are more lazy ministers, lawyers,

doctors, merchants, artists and farmers than have ever been counted upon. The community is full of laggards and shirkers. I can tell it from the way they crawl along the street, from their tardiness in meeting engagements, from the lethargies that seem to hang to the foot when they lift it, to the hand when they put it out, to the words when they speak.

Out of Place.

Two young men in a store, in the morning the one goes to his post the last minute or one minute behind. The other is ten minutes before the time and has his hat and coat hung up and is at his post waiting for duty. The one is ever and anon in the afternoon looking at his watch to see if it is not most time to shut up. The other stays half an hour after he might go, and when asked why, says he wanted to look over some entries he had made to be sure he was right, or to put up some goods that had been left out of place. The one is very touchy about doing work not exactly belonging to him. The other is glad to help the other clerks in their work. The first will be a prolonged nothing, and he will be poorer at 60 years of age than at 20. The other will be a merchant prince. Indolence is the cause of more failures in all occupations than you have ever suspected. People are too lazy to do what they can do, and want to undertake that which they cannot do. In the drama of life they do not want to be a common soldier, carrying a halberd across the stage, or a falconer, or a mere attendant, and so they lounge about the scenes till they shall be called to be something great. After awhile, by some accident of prosperity or circumstance, they get into the place for which they have no qualification. And very soon, if the man be a merchant, he is going around asking his creditors to compromise for 10 cents on the dollar. Or, if a clergyman, he is making trades against the ingratitudes of churches. Or, if an attorney, by unskillful management he loses a case by which widows and orphans are robbed of their portion. Or, if a physician, he by malpractice gives his patient rapid transit from this world to the next. Our incompetent friend would have made a passable horse doctor, but he wanted to be professor of anatomy in a university. He could have sold enough confectionery to have supported his family, but he wanted to have a sugar refinery like the Havemeyers. He could have mended shoes, but he wanted to amend the constitution of the United States. Toward the end of life these people are out of patience, out of money, out of friends, out of everything. They go to the poorhouse, or keep out of it by running in debt to all the grocery and dry goods stores that will trust them. People begin to wonder when the curtain will drop on the scene. After awhile, leaving nothing but their compliments to pay doctor, undertaker and Gabriel Grubb, the gravedigger, they disappear. Exeunt! Hissed off the stage.

A Moral Nuisance.

Others fail in the drama of life through demonstrated selfishness. They make all the rivers empty into their sea, all the roads of ennoblement end at their door, and they gather all the plumes of honor for their brow. They help no one, encourage no one, rescue no one. "How big a pile of money can I get?" and "How much of the world can I absorb?" are the chief questions. They feel about the common people as the Turks felt toward the Asapi, or common soldiers, considering them of no use except to fill up the ditches with their dead bodies while the other troops walked over them to take the fort. After awhile this prince of worldly success is sick. The only interest society has in his illness is the effect that his possible decrease may have on the money markets. After awhile he dies. Great newspaper capitals announce how he started with nothing and ended with everything. Although for sake of appearance some people put handkerchiefs to the eye, there is not one genuine tear shed. The heirs sit up all night when he lies in state, discussing what the old fellow has probably done with his money. It takes all the livery stables within two miles to furnish funeral equipages, and all the mourning stores are kept busy in selling weeds of grief. The stone cutters send in proposals for a monument. The minister at the obsequies reads of the resurrection, which makes the hearers fear that if the unscrupulous financier does come up in the general rising, he will try to get a "corner" on tombstones and graveyard fences. All good men are glad that the moral nuisance has been removed. The Wall street speculators are glad because there is more room for themselves. The heirs are glad because they get possession of the long delayed inheritance. Dropping every feather of all his plumes, every certificate of all his stock, every bond of all his investments, every dollar of all his fortune, he departs, and all the rolling of "Dead March" in "Saul," and all the paucity of his interment, and all the extravagance of epitaphology, cannot hide the fact that my text has come again to tremendous fulfillment. "Men shall clap their hands at him and shall hiss him out of his place."

You see the clapping comes before the hiss. The world cheers before it damns. So it is said the deadly asp tickles before it stings. Going up, is he? Hurrah! Stand back and let his galloping horse dash by, a whirlwind of plated harness and tinkling headgear and arched neck. Drink deep of his madeira and cognac. Boast of how well you know him. All hats off as he passes. Bask for days and years in the sunlight of his prosperity. Going down, is he? Pretend to be near-sighted so that you cannot see him as he walks past. When men ask you if you know him, halt and hesitate as though you were trying to call up a dim memory and say, "Well, y-e-s, yes, I believe I once did know him, but have not seen him for a long while." Cross a different ferry from the one where you used to meet him lest he ask for financial help. When you started life, he spoke a good word for you at the bank. Talk down his credit now that his fortunes are collapsing. He put his name on two of your notes. Tell him that you have changed your mind about such things, and that you never

indorse. After awhile his matters come to a dead halt, and an assignment or suspension or sheriff's sale takes place. You say: "He ought to have stopped sooner. Just as I expected. He made too big a splash in the world. Glad the balloon has burst. Ha, ha!" Applause when he went up, sibilant derision when he came down. "Men shall clap their hands at him and hiss him out of his place." So, high up amid the crags, the eagle flutters dust into the eyes of the roebuck, which then, with eyes blinded, goes tumbling over the precipice, the great antlers crashing on the rocks.

Consecrated to God.

Now, compare some of these goings out of life with the departure of men and women who in the drama of life take the part that God assigned them and then went away honored of men and applauded of the Lord Almighty. It is about fifty years ago that in a comparatively small apartment of the city a newly married pair set up a home. The first guest invited to that residence was the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bible given the bride on the day of her espousal was the guide of that household. Days of sunshine were followed by days of shadow. Did you ever know a home that for fifty years had no vicissitude? The young woman who left her father's house for her young husband's home started out with a paternal benediction and good advice she will never forget. Her mother said to her the day before the marriage: "Now, my child, you are going away from us. Of course, as long as your father and I live you will feel that you can come to us at any time. But your home will be elsewhere. From long experience I find it best to serve God. It is very bright with you now, my child, and you may think you can get along without religion, but the day will come when you will want God, and my advice is, establish a family altar, and, if need be, conduct the worship yourself." The counsel was taken, and that young wife consecrated every room in the house to God.

Years passed on and there were in that home hilarities, but they were good and healthful, and sorrows, but they were comforted. Marriages as bright as orange blossoms could make them, and burials in which all hearts were riven. They have a family lot in the cemetery, but all the place is illuminated with stories of resurrection and redemption. The children of the household that lived have grown up, and they are all Christians, the father and mother lending the way and the children following. What care the mother took of wardrobe and education, character and manners! How hard she sometimes worked! When the head of the household was unfortunate in business, she sewed until her fingers were numb and bleeding at the tips. And what calculation of economies and what ingenuity in refitting the garments of the elder children for the younger, and only God kept account of that mother's sobs and the tremulous prayers by the side of the sick child's cradle and by the couch of this one fully grown. The neighbors often noticed how tired she looked, and old acquaintances hardly knew her in the street. But without complaint she waited and toiled and endured and accomplished all these years. The children are out in the world—an honor to themselves and their parents. After awhile the mother's last sickness comes. Children and grandchildren, summoned from afar, come softly into the room one by one, for she is too weak to see more than one at a time. She runs her dying fingers lovingly through their hair and tells them not to cry, and that she is going now, but they will meet again in a little while in a better world, and then kisses them good-by and says to each, "God bless and keep you, my dear child." The day of the obsequies comes, and the officiating clergyman tells the story of wifely and motherly endurance, and many starts on earth and heaven echo the sentiment, and as she is carried off the stage of this mortal life there are cries of "Faithful unto death." "She hath done what she could," while overpowering all the voices of earth and heaven is the plaudit of the God who watched her from first to last, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of my Lord!"

The Choice.

But what became of the father of that household? He started as a young man in business and had a small income, and having got a little ahead sickness in the family swept it all away. He went through all the business panics of forty years, met many losses, and suffered many betrayals, but kept right on trusting in God, whether business was good or poor, setting his children a good example, and giving them the best of counsel, and never a prayer did he offer for all those years but they were mentioned in it. He is old now and realizes it cannot be long before he must quit all these scenes. But he is going to leave his children an inheritance of prayer and Christian principles which all the defalcations of earth can never touch, and as he goes out of the world the church of God blesses him and the poor ring his doorbell to see if he is any better, and his grave is surrounded by a multitude who went on foot and stood there before the procession of carriages came up, and some say, "There will be no one to take his place," and others say, "Who will pity me now?" and other remarks. "He shall be held in everlasting remembrance." And as the drama of his life closes, all the vociferation and bravos and encores that ever shook the amphitheaters of earthly spectacle were tame and feeble compared with the long, loud thunders of approval that shall break from the cloud of witnesses in the piled up gallery of the heavens. Choose ye between the life that shall close by being hissed off the stage and the life that shall close amid acclamations supernal and archangelic.

Astronomers calculate that the surface of the earth contains 81,025,025 square miles, of which 23,814,121 are water and 7,811,804 are land, the water thus covering about seven-tenths of the earth's surface.

THE FAMILY STORY

STORY OF A BACKWOODS WOOING.

UP the long and slanting hill-side a man's figure went slowly, plodding onward after a sturdy black mare and turning up the ground between two tall rows of corn, which at times hid him completely from view. The shoulders under the straw hat proclaimed him young and manly, and the steadiness with which he went forward and his short stop at the top of the slope bespoke him a man of purpose.

Then came galloping through the white dust of the road below a lanky boy on a roan horse, in whose veins was the racing blood of generations. Clear and fustlelike came the call, "Marion! oh, Marion!"

Marion, handsome Marion, came leaping up to the rails. He did not expect any letters and was not excited. However, the boy knew his news was worth attention and burst out impetuously, "Ter won't be so cool when ye have heard it, either. Beck Bailey's man is dead."

He had the gratification of seeing Marion grow pale to his lips. "What killed 'im?"

"The doctors air callin' it blood plizen," returned the boy. "Say, Marion, they're gittin' thar hot fut. I seen Tom Pence hitchin' up and Cunnel Will been thar high an' dry cunnel the turn kum."

Still Marion did not speak, but the boy saw his lips tremble.

"Run along, Pete, with the mail. Folks'll all be waitin'," he said, and Peter, disappointed at nothing more definite, dug his heels into the colt and dashed away.

Then the man unlatched Dolly and, mounted on her bare back, rode down the lane into the sunlit woods, on, on, without path or guide post, deep into the woods until he was sure he was far enough from human beings to be safe. And then, with a shout jubilant enough to frighten the black mare, he threw back his head and laughed, a sonorous peal that astonished himself. He knew he was happy and he had come away here to fight the impetuous demons of newly aroused passion and eagerness until he could subdue them enough to be decorous before the world. For he had loved Beck Bailey when she was a slip of a girl, and as a young woman, and when she had married another he had come away here in the woods to fight out his hatred and misery and rebellion. Nature, dear mother, had calmed him and he even became resigned. But Beck Bailey's man was dead, and she was free, and the heart of the man went after her as a bird after the home nest. Beck! slim, sweet Beck, with her laughing, mocking mouth and wonderful, changeful eyes! She should be his—for what cared he for Tom Pence and even Colonel Will, the old, bowing, smirking beau. He would go down with the country side and see Beck at the "berryin'", but not before, oh, no!—he could wait awhile now.

The "berryin'" was a great affair. The Baileys' house had been thronged for days, and Beck kept up by a continual state of excitement. It was all grist for her mill, for she loved "somebody's" goin' on, and in this case was almost wild, besides, with a sense of freedom and relief. Her new black clothes made her look "mighty peart," as the women said, and she was the adored and center idol of everyone, petted and consoled with, cried over and appealed to for advice and assistance in planning the great funeral.

Never had quiet Edward Bailey made such a stir in the world as now, when, quieter than ever, he lay in state in his black coffin, one "with solid handles." The traditional ceremonies were all gone through with, the weeping, wailing, the dolorous wailing of quavering voices, the sermon, long and full of eulogy, the farewell to the dead, at which Becky fainted dramatically into her father's arms, and the slow walk to the graveyard near, a long procession of the country people following. It was all over and as nightfall came on the crowd dispersed, wondering what "Beck wud do jist at fust, an' who'd git er." For not one had missed Tom Pence at the "berryin'" with his pleasant, jovial face and smiling eyes, nor Marion Moore, silent and watchful, nor the "ole Cunnel mussin' aroun'." They had all been to "berryin'" before and they all knew Becky Bailey. It was only four years since she set the country mad with her beaux and her fun and her daring escapades. And now she was a widow, rich, handsome than ever. "An' of the ole Nick hain't let loose in these parits, I'm a coon," said her own uncle in the bosom of his family.

In four weeks some one met Beck out riding with the "Cunnel." The news went like wildfire. Aunt Dilsey went over to see Beck. She found her in her white dress, lying in a hammock reading a novel.

"Whatever air you doin', Beck?" she said.

"What I please and plum enjoyin' it," said Becky.

"Yeh able to be lazy," sighed Aunt Dilsey, "but I wouldn't go ridin' jist yit."

Beck's handsome eyes smiled. "I wud," she said, "do jist exactly what I pleased. I'm rich an' I'm free, an' I'm goin' to enjoy life, an' yer can sare yerselves a power by shettin' up."

"Then," said Aunt Dilsey, "she curled up like a young cat an' I cudn't get another word out'n her."

The next Sunday night there were ten saddle horses and buggies tied to the posts and the fence. Beck never enjoyed anything so much in her life. She treated everyone alike, gave them cake and home-made wine, laughed, joked and turned them all out at 10 o'clock, inviting them to call again. But the next Sunday night there was no Becky at home, and she electrified the small audience at the Methodist church at the cross-roads by appearing among them with a stripling cousin of 17.

During these days Marion Moore never appeared at the Bailey house, nor formed one of the young men, aye, even the middle-aged and old men, who never failed to crowd about the young widow whenever she rode into the county town on Sunday afternoon. Being the only man she missed, Beck grew restive, and one October day, when Marion was clearing up a new bit of ground for the spring tobacco, she came riding down the lane toward him, her black skirts flying, her cheeks blazing and her tendrillike curls all falling down from under her black cap. He saw her coming, away off, and he knew the errand on which she came, and he had to steel his heart against her to hold his vantage ground. Handsome, stalwart, rawny, he rested on his ax calmly, though the blood in his veins ran as riotous a course as is a brook's after a storm. How Beck laughed as she drew up!

"I haven't been up here for years," she said. "Come over to the cliff, Marion. I'll walk Black Nell."

"I must work, Beck," he said. "Life isn't play all around, ye know."

"Which means ye won't," she smiled. "But I know yer want to go, plum bad! Yeh're playin' a losin' game, Marion, fur I know by yer eye that yeh're jist the same as ye were," and she laughed tantalizingly. "Don't think yer can fool me, Marion."

He threw his ax down with angry vehemence and stood looking at her.

"I don't know whether yeh're a witch or what," he said, hoarsely. "I am jist the same, Beck, an' yer want to look out. I can't stand foolin'."

"I won't marry ag'in. I'm goin' to enjoy life," she mocked. "What's the use of my marryin'? I've got money and land and years of good times ahead o' me. What'd I git in exchange?"

Marion never answered except by his persistent gaze.

"Good-by," she said presently; "yeh're in too bad a humor. Yeh're takin' life too serious, Marion. There's more'n gray skies above my head. Give me the blue ones." Then she galloped away to the bluffs and Marion's temple of nature, high in the woods above the river. He half fancied she would come back his way; but no. The afternoon wore away and no lithic, slim figure on a black mare appeared on his horizon.

So she knew, and, since she knew, she mocked him. Well, he had always loved the brier rose. How could he tame this untamable tigress, this guesser of men's secrets and mocker of men's loves? The intuitions of Marion Moore were better than his knowledge or his reason. He guessed that only a real, lasting affection would ever make her more faithful, more tender, more true than any other woman—but how, how, indeed, was this to come to her?

The mad reports went flying hither and thither. Becky was here, there, everywhere. It was Colonel Will and Tom Pence and Arthur Smedley and Henry Carroll. The widow's bonnet was now never worn, and bows of lavender and elaborate black and white toilets were sent for to Cincinnati, and cooking and feasting and fun went on in the Bailey house, Thanksgiving came and Beck was the queen of the Pence family gathering that day.

One morning Marion Moore was near his favorite wood haunt, and stopped to look over the fair valley and the infinite hills spread out before him, like a beautiful winter picture. As he stood quiet there fell from the great tree beside him something rustling and dark and green, a lovely piece of the native mistletoe, with its waxen berries thick and plentiful. A smile came to Marion's face. He had been sent a token, and one he would accept. He would hesitate no longer. He took his bunch of mistletoe and walked away. He would become the wooer, for nature, whom he trusted, had sent him a token. He dressed himself with care and rode his fine chestnut horse up to the side gate in the lane, leading to the cluster of cabins that long ago have been the "quarters," but now were turned to various uses. Becky, wrapped in a gay shawl he well remembered, was giving directions to some men at work inside the nearest building. It was just sunset. Perhaps nothing in the world had ever seemed so fair to Marion Moore as this saucy and careless creature, who greeted him with a cool triumph which he had expected and ignored. He accepted her invitation to supper and walked by her side to see the promising colts in the barn lot. Then they went into the house, and Marion proceeded to make himself comfortable in a very matter of fact way. He looked critically about, much to Becky's astonishment.

"Whatever air yer lookin' about fur, Marion?"

"Seem' of this house is as comfortable as mine," he made reply.

"Well, it plum is, Marion," she replied, forced into earnestness. "The outlook is better with yer all, but this house has more comforts."

"We could soon put some of 'em inter mine," he replied musingly.

"We?"

"Yes, yer an' I."

"Yeh takin' a deal fer granted, 'pears ter me. I don't intend ter leave here."

"Oh, well, we could live here. It is all one ter me, so it is where yeh're livin'."

"I'm bespoken yer askin' by two, Marion. 'Pears like the men are all crazy."

"Yeh're good temptation, Beck, but no one else shall have ye," he said.

Her eyes grew luminous. "Well, now, what would yer do ef yeh heard I was off on the marry with one o' the others?"

"Don't yer try it!"

She was up in arms in a minute. "I'm not tellin' yer anything, but yer all air too heady with me, Marion. I got an engagement to go to Cincinnati to-morrow, an' ef I say the word what's ter prevent me comin' back married?"

Marion was quite white, but was equally determined. "Ef yer go, of course I'll know it's all up. I'll be at the turn of the road at any time set. That'll end it fer me, whichever way. Lord, yeh're a hard one! I won't stay to supper. I'll never sit down ter supper here 'less it's as master. What time'll yer go?"

She set her lips. "Noon!" was all she replied.

He put on his coat and hat. "I wish when I think o' some things I'd never seen yer, little or big, girl or widdow, but when I go out in the woods and see the wild, sweet things runnin' riot around I can't help lovin' yer. It is born in me."

Then he went out, having tossed to her the fresh branch of mistletoe, and thus left her the memory of a day, long ago, when they were little more than children and he had taken her out to gather some of the weird, waxen-berried growth, and had kissed her, the first kiss of love and desire she had ever known, and the memory of which had never left her.

The next day at noon Marion sat grim and silent on his horse at the turn. He held his slight whip in his hand, but he grasped it like a weapon. He could not keep one thought from returning itself again and again. He could not let that man live who would carry Becky Bailey away from him. When he heard the sound of wheels he got off from the restless horse he rode, fastened him, stood erect, and braced himself for the ordeal. The buggy came nearer. He drew an awful breath as he recognized the horse. It was Colonel Will's Flighty Dan, famed through the country. It was that old profigate, was it, who was to win the brier rose? An awful singing rhythm in his brain went saying: "Kill him, kill him, kill him!" What Marion would have done he never knew, but the buggy stopped and Becky, in all her dark furs and fluttering feathers, came running toward him, holding out her hands and crying.

"I don't want ter go to Cincinnati, Marion, an' we'll live in whichever house yer like, for I've been fightin' my feelin's for you all the time, an' I won't give up ter no other one. Take me home, Marion, an' I'm plum tired o' bein' widder. I want ter live quiet'er'n anyone."

The colonel drove Flighty Dan on into Cincinnati alone, and Becky went with Marion along the homeward road, she riding the chestnut and Marion walking, and there was no wild bird that had ever built nest in the woodlands near that was as contented as this wayward creature who had at last been conquered by her best feelings.—Household Words.

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She set her lips. "Noon!" was all she replied.

He put on his coat and hat. "I wish when I think o' some things I'd never seen yer, little or big, girl or widdow, but when I go out in the woods and see the wild, sweet things runnin' riot around I can't help lovin' yer. It is born in me."

Then he went out, having tossed to her the fresh branch of mistletoe, and thus left her the memory of a day, long ago, when they were little more than children and he had taken her out to gather some of the weird, waxen-berried growth, and had kissed her, the first kiss of love and desire she had ever known, and the memory of which had never left her.

The next day at noon Marion sat grim and silent on his horse at the turn. He held his slight whip in his hand, but he grasped it like a weapon. He could not keep one thought from returning itself again and again. He could not let that man live who would carry Becky Bailey away from him. When he heard the sound of wheels he got off from the restless horse he rode, fastened him, stood erect, and braced himself for the ordeal. The buggy came nearer. He drew an awful breath as he recognized the horse. It was Colonel Will's Flighty Dan, famed through the country. It was that old profigate, was it, who was to win the brier rose? An awful singing rhythm in his brain went saying: "Kill him, kill him, kill him!" What Marion would have done he never knew, but the buggy stopped and Becky, in all her dark furs and fluttering feathers, came running toward him, holding out her hands and crying.

"I don't want ter go to Cincinnati, Marion, an' we'll live in whichever house yer like, for I've been fightin' my feelin's for you all the time, an' I won't give up ter no other one. Take me home, Marion, an' I'm plum tired o' bein' widder. I want ter live quiet'er'n anyone."

The colonel drove Flighty Dan on into Cincinnati alone, and Becky went with Marion along the homeward road, she riding the chestnut and Marion walking, and there was no wild bird that had ever built nest in the woodlands near that was as contented as this wayward creature who had at last been conquered by her best feelings.—Household Words.

"Whatever air yer lookin' about fur, Marion?"

"Seem' of this house is as comfortable as mine," he made reply.

"Well, it plum is, Marion," she replied, forced into earnestness. "The outlook is better with yer all, but this house has more comforts."

"We could soon put some of 'em inter mine," he replied musingly.

"We?"

"Yes, yer an' I."

"Yeh takin' a deal fer granted, 'pears ter me. I don't intend ter leave here."

"Oh, well, we could live here. It is all one ter me, so it is where yeh're livin'."

"I'm bespoken yer askin' by two, Marion. 'Pears like the men are all crazy."

"Yeh're good temptation, Beck, but no one else shall have ye," he said.

Her eyes grew luminous. "Well, now, what would yer do ef yeh heard I was off on the marry with one o' the others?"

"Don't yer try it!"

She was up in arms in a minute. "I'm not tellin' yer anything, but yer all air too heady with me, Marion. I got an engagement to go to Cincinnati to-morrow, an' ef I say the word what's ter prevent me comin' back married?"

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