

CHURCH SOCIABLES.

Yes I am going to have the sociable next Wednesday, and here it is Thursday. Well, I shan't do nothin' this week; but Monday I'll sweep, 'n' Tuesday make a mess o' cake and prob'ly a little bread; and I'll have to cook some meat vittles or old Almiry Fawkes 'll think it's awful, I s'pose. Yes, I know 'tain't none o' her business, but she makes it so an' land! you might just as well say don't notice a streak o' lightning. She's dreatful inquisitive."

And having delivered this long speech, Mrs. Abbalinda Bassett wiped her hands on her apron, and settled herself to entertain her guest. Mrs. Jonathan Charles, who had "dropped in" for a friendly chat in the afternoon.

"Don't you dread it awful, Abbalindy?" asked her guest. "Them church sociables had ought to be—well, I don't no' what hed ought to be done to 'em, but they're enough to make the hair turn grey. I hed it a year ago, an' such a lookin' house you never did see. Looked as if there'd been a hog-rastle. I tell Jonathan that if ever he has a sociable when I'm dead, I'll turn in my grave. Speakin' o' graves, reminds me of old Mis' Tubb's fun'ral last week; you wasn't there, was you?"

"No, I wasn't, an' I've been dretful sorry ever since, for they said the corpse was very lifelike. She died very sudden, didn't she?"

"Yes, ruther; but they knowed she was dead, and wasn't buried alive, the way I know Samantha Bliss was. Why, she was warm round her backbone, an' I told old John and the doctor. But John, he said, 'She's dead fast enough,' says he; but there, I allus felt's though she was buried alive."

"You don't say so?" said Mrs. Bassett. "But who was out to the fun'ral? I hain't heard nothin' about it yet."

"Well, Elden's folks was over; 'n' they arst us to stay to supper after the fun'ral, 'n' Sarah Ellen an' Marthy did; but lookin' at the corpse kinder turned my stomach, so I didn't stay, but afterwards I wisht I hed, for the girls sed they hed a real good supper—baked beans 'n' hulled corn. But the tablecloth was dretful soiled. Why, Sarah Ellen said she never see sich a nasty tablecloth. But Land, sez I, 'what can you expect? Old Mis' Tubbs was sick nigh onto six weeks afore she died, and Jeem's wife wasn't never a notable house-keeper."

"Well, what kind of an address did the parson give you?" inquired Mrs. Bassett.

"Pretty good; but to tell the truth, I didn't hear half of it, for I was lookin' at Mis' Gideon Abbott's new bonnet."

"Did he praise the corpse a gre't sight?" asked her hostess.

"Oh, yea, ruther; he allus wus a marster hand to praise and proclaim the virtu's o' his p'rishioners when they was dead. But there, I tell Jonathan I'd a good sight druther he'd praise us while we was livin'. I think he's kinder—"

"Yea, so do I; of course I don't want to say nothin' ag'in' the elder but he is kinder priggish. Why, one day last spring, durin' house-cleanin' time (an' you know what that means, everything topsy-turvy), I arst 'em here to lurch—'twas one Sunday, an' they had to go right off to meetin' at the Centre—so I hurried an' got 'em some bread an' meat vittles, an' clean forgot to ask the elder to ask a blessin'! Of course it was inexcusable o' me, but I was so flustered gettin' their lunch, an' the coffee wouldn't git done nor nothin'. Well, he would 'a' passed it over, I guess, but Mis' Stevens she cocked her head up an' shut her eyes and sez 'Josiah!' she says, as if the heavens was fallin'. But I was dreatful mortified. I don't think she had

any call to do that."

"No, she hadn't," replied Mrs. Charles. "She hain't so dretful good but going 'thout sayin' grace once'd hurt her. There goes Marthy Tubbs now. Oh, she reminds me. You'd ought to have seen how she took on at the fun'ral—almost had the hysterics, an' had to be carried out!"

"Do tell!" e claimed Mrs. Bassett. "But did Jeem's wife take on very bad?"

"She hadn't much chance, for her four children was climbin' all over her. Well, I must be goin'; I've got to get a hot supper, for Jonathan, 'n' Caleb allus comes home hungry—I'll be up ter the sociable."

"Yea, I'll bait you will," said her hostess as the door closed behind her; "an' all ready to make remarks about the tablecloth 'n' everything else. Seems 'sif this sociable would kill me. I've got so much to do; for I know old Almiry Fawkes 'll find a speck o' dirt under the spare-room bed, if it ain't no bigger'n a pin head."

The night of the sociable had come at last; the house was in good order, the children (who had been kept in the kitchen all the week) arrayed in their Sunday best, were sitting stilly on chairs in the sitting-room.

At five o'clock poor Mrs. Bassett, with trembling fingers, put on her best alpaca. There was not a speck of dust anywhere except in John's room. "But there," she thought, "nobody'll ever think to look in that out-of-the-way place, way under the eaves."

John was her grown son, and his room generally had the appearance of "chaos and ancient night," for it was very dark, with only one window, very near the floor; a box served for bureau and washstand, with a cracked piece of mirror hung above it. Rows of hooks ornamented the walls. But John was not particular as to whether his clothing was on the hooks or on the floor. But poor Mrs. Bassett hurried on her dress and prepared to meet her guests.

She gave a few touches to the "best room," as she passed through it, straightening a tdy here and a rug there. The room looked decidedly like a sepulchre opening to receive a new occupant. The air was very chilly, though a fire burned in the soapstone stove, for the room had not been opened since the April house-cleaning, and it was now nearly October. The horsehair chairs were set at regular intervals round the room. Several oval frames hung on the walls, containing photographs of the departed Bassetts; and also a silver coffin-plate bearing the name of Abraham Bassett, framed very carefully. On the large center table were a few books—the Bible, "Life of General Grant," Fox's "Book of Martyrs," and a rarely used dictionary. A very stiff silver vase, containing some fresh flowers, stood exactly in the middle.

On the mantlepiece, which was very long, and could not boast of a cover, were two more very stiff vases, some china figures, a squirrel colored a hideous brown, cracking nuts, and some more photographs that looked as if they might have been brought there from the Egyptian catacombs. The carpet was of very bright red and green, with circles and hexagons about two feet in diameter. Altogether, the room had a most cheerless look, as if the chairs and rugs were afraid of being moved an inch from their proper place.

Soon the guests began to arrive, among them Mrs. Charles in her best black silk, with her knitting work; and presently the hum of voices arose, broken now and then by sounds of laughter.

But now the odor of strong coffee began to pervade the house, and then came supper; men, women and children passed the food to those sitting around the rooms—huge slices of

bread and butter, coffee, cake and doughnuts.

With supper the "trouble began to brew," as Mrs. Bassett said afterward, for Caleb Charles dropped a pan containing the sugar bowls, resulting in the breaking of one bowl and the spilling of the sugar, which was speedily trodden into the sitting-room carpet by the many feet hurrying over it.

In the midst of supper, Mrs. Bassett had occasion to go upstairs for a clean apron, and hearing some one moving in John's room thought, "Oh, land! there's John hiding up here, he's so bashful! Well, he's got to come out, that's all."

She opened the door and was horrified to see "old Almiry Fawkes" examining things! Poor Mrs. Bassett glanced from the unmade bed to the bureau covered with every species of masculine attire. She stood for a moment speechless, and then, (in her own words,) "my temper riz; ol' Almiry raised her spectacles, and she sez sarcastically, sez she, 'Whose room is this, pray?' In the calmest of tones she said this, an', as I said, my temper riz an' I said, 'I hain't aware as it is any o' your business whose 'tis, an' you walk straight out'."

"But that wasn't the worst of it," said poor Mrs. Bassett to Mrs. Charles two days after. "for when I came down stairs I stumbled on Elder Stevens and his wife a-looking very horrified."

"Ah," sez the elder, "I b'lieve Mis' Bassett at such places as this it is customary to—to say somethin' before proceedin' to airthly things. I hain't been requested to ask a general blessin'."

"Kin you imagine how I felt? I'd told Timothy ter be sure an' arsk the elder to arsk a blessin'; an' then, after what I'd told you 'bout the other time, my forgettin' the same thing. I guess he'll think we're pretty heathen. But land o' Goshen! if ever I have another church sociable I'll be a little older than I am now—that's all!"—Daffodil in Transcript Monthly.

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