

AUNT TABITHA'S BISCUIT BOX.

DAISY! Daisy! It has come at last—the present from Aunt Tabitha. Oh, do hurry down, dear, for I'm all impatience," and Daisy's mother looked at it as she stood at the foot of the staircase and contemplated the box newly delivered by the parcel van. "I knew the dear old soul would not forget her, and it's so heavy it must be something very handsome."

"Oh, mamma, what can it be?" cried Daisy, putting the finishing touches to her toilet as she hastened down stairs. "I do hope it is one of the new silver afternoon stands—they are so chic and stylish, you know, and no one hereabouts has one except Lady Hightoff. Her presents were put in the paper, you know."

"Call Susan, Daisy; we could not get this lid off ourselves," said Mrs. Elder, ignoring the fact that when she helped in her father's grocery store she was an adept at opening boxes. It was belittling, however, that the arrival of a marriage present to her daughter from their one wealthy relative should be accompanied by all the pomp and ceremony at her command.

So Susan's help was invoked, and with the aid of the kitchen ax the box was opened, and the article it contained, wrapped in silk paper, was carried to the parlor. An unopened envelope was attached to it, which contained Aunt Tabitha's visiting card with this written on it:

"With best wishes and the hope that her grand-niece will prize this for her sake."

"Lor, mum," said the maid, as she set it down on the table, "it's heavy. I do believe it's solid gold."

"It might well be, coming from Aunt Tabitha to her name child," said Mrs. Elder, smiling to her daughter, who was unwinding the paper with a dignity that would have graced the unveiling of a public statue.

"A biscuit box?" they exclaimed in chorus, when the thing stood unveiled.

It was of rather an ancient type, a relic of the days when it was considered a virtue in a biscuit box to have the properties of a mausoleum—massive and solemn. It consisted of a majolica jar about the diameter of a drain pipe, and quite as elegant, fixed in a silver-plated stand of a coffin mount style, and with a lid of similar metal.

"Isn't it hideous?" cried Daisy, on recovering her breath.

"It's—it's not what one would have expected of Aunt Tabitha," sighed Mrs. Elder, in a disappointed tone.

Susan, having heard the Elders boast so much of the old lady's fabulous wealth, and thinking she might have filled the box with sovereigns as a set-off to its ugliness, lifted the lid and peered inside. Its capacious emptiness gave Susan a brilliant idea.

"Lor, mum," she said, "it 'ud make a beautiful coal scuttle."

This was a reflection on her relative's gift, however, which Mrs. Elder resented, and the girl was thereupon reminded of some household duties that required her elsewhere.

"I could not show it among my presents, mamma; every one would laugh at it," said Daisy, petulantly.

"And I've been telling everybody that it was a solid silver tea service, Aunt Tabitha was sending you—how provoking!" said the mother, peevishly; "I don't know what to say now."

"Lor, mamma," pointing to a tradesman's label on the paper, "this is where it has been bought. Couldn't we exchange it for something else?"

"Yes, Daisy, we might—something useful—spoons and forks, say; that would save your papa buying them, and the old wretch need never know."

"And I don't care, suppose she did; it would only serve her right—the spiteful old thing. Prize it for her sake, indeed; I would pitch it at her if she were here."

"Do you know, Daisy, what I think we should give out that she has sent?" said the mother, suddenly brightening.

"No," replied her daughter, evincing some curiosity.

"A check."

"Oh, capital!" cried Daisy. "The very thing—a large amount; a hundred guineas, shall we say? That's what all the grand people are doing now. It will sound quite aristocratic."

And so the firm of silversmiths in the distant town where Aunt Tabitha resided, and from where she had purchased the biscuit box, were communicated with, and after some negotiations an exchange was effected. They were strictly enjoined not to let the exchange be known to their customer for fear of her being offended.

The firm in question had congratulated themselves on having got rid of a piece of old stock, and the salesman had a lively recollection of the prim old lady, with snow-white side curls, to whom he had sold it.

"Show me something suitable for a wedding present," she had said, on entering the shop.

A number of articles had been submitted for her inspection, and at length a biscuit box was suggested.

"Could I see them?"

"Yes, mem; we have some very pretty ones just now," said the salesman, presenting a chance for getting quit of an old "shopkeeper," and producing the one that finally reached Daisy.

"Here is a really handsome one—the newest pattern—real majolica ware—and—"

"I don't want your newest pattern—new and nasty!" interposed Aunt Tabitha. "Show me something like myself—old and antiquated—the oldest thing you have in the place."

"Well, mem, this is really the very thing you want. When I say it is the newest pattern I mean the style is quite up to date—it never goes out of fashion, you understand; and it is—yes, I believe it is the oldest article we have in the shop."

"And the ugliest?" snapped the old lady.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, but—"

"Say that it is and I'll take it," she said; adding, "how do you clean it?"

"Oh, it's easily kept. You unscrew this nut at the bottom and the tinware comes out," explained the salesman, and a bargain having been struck the article was sent home to Aunt Tabitha's and then to the destination already known.

It had not been many days in the silversmith's show case after being exchanged when the old lady again put in an appearance at the shop. Her errand, she explained, was the same as before—a wedding present.

"You haven't any more 'newest style' biscuit boxes?" she asked, with a smirk, of the shopman who had served her on the previous visit.

"Yes, mem," he answered; "very curiously, there happens to be another almost identical to the one you got. It is not quite the same, as you will perhaps observe," placing it before her, and not even blushing; "but you could hardly tell the difference."

"Are you quite sure it is not the same one?" Aunt Tabitha asked pointedly.

"Perfectly certain," chirped the shopman.

"Then unscrew it and show me again how you clean it."

The young man went through the same operation as before; but this time a folded slip of paper fell out from between the ware and the stand and dropped at the old lady's feet. Picking it up she unfolded it and looked at it, and then, turning to the shopman, said:

"Do you know, young man, where liars go to? That's the same box that I bought from you about a month ago, but I suppose it's your business." And with a twinkle in her eye as if she was enjoying the joke, she paid for the article and ordered it to be sent home as before.

Stephen Elder, railway signalman, was reading in the local newspaper the account of the wedding of his niece, Miss Tabitha (Daisy) Elder, and his only daughter, also about to be married, was looking over his shoulder.

"Ay, Tabby, this will please your uncle; it's a 'wonderful marriage,'" John are wanted to be big; that's how he went to be a grocer, he couldn't hide the moleskins; ah! when he married the grocer's daughter he got the business he was neither to hand nor blind. And now he's a Bally an' a that, and they tell me he invited Aunt Tabitha to the marriage; and so she sent the present."

"Her name's on the top of the list of presents, father; see, Miss Tabitha Mason, grand-aunt, check." How much would it be for, do you think?"

"Oh, maybe five pounds, or it might be ten; but you mean mind Aunt Tabitha's not so rich as John's folk make her out to be. It's their big way again."

"She'll not ken about mine, father?" said the daughter, demurely.

"Ay, Tabby, she does; I sent her word. She asked me to write her at Aunt Tabitha's, and I sent her word when your mother died, and I thought she would like to ken about your marriage."

"She'll not think o' sendin' me anything, father; I couldn't expect it, for she's never seen me."

"There's me sayin'; you're named after her, and not thinkin' shame o' the name, an' an' yoursel' 'Daisy.'"

While thus chatting a neighbor looked in at the door.

"Oh, you're in now," she said. "There's been a box left w' me; the porter brought it down when ye were bathed. Ye might gang ben for it, Steen, as it's kean heavy."

"It's for you, Tabby," cried her father, returning with the box in his arms; "and I wouldn't wonder but it might be something frae Aunt Tabby."

"It'll be the waddin' cake, Tabby," laughed the neighbor.

The girl's clear brown eyes glistened as she watched her father undo the cord and pry open the lid.

"I hope it's not a cake," she said, "for that has to be eaten; and if she sent me anything I would like to have it as a keepsake."

"There, Tabby, do the rest yourself," said her father, on placing the parcel on the kitchen table. "My hands are a wee thing coarse, an' I might maybe break it. What's that?"

"It's a card—Aunt Tabitha's," cried the girl; "and it says, 'With best wishes and the hope that her grand-niece will prize this for her sake.'"

The neighbor, as curious to see what it was as if it was for herself, fell to and helped Tabby to unwrap the paper.

At last it stood revealed—the same biscuit box that had undergone a similar ordeal of inspection a few weeks before.

"Mogstie, it's grand!" exclaimed the neighbor, with uplifted hands.

"It's owre grand for me, Jennie," was Tabby's comment as she stood with wonder in her beaming eyes. "What is't for, ava?" questioned the father, looking round as if he expected to see windows in it like a lighthouse. "It's a biscuit box, father. It's not likely I'll ever use it; but it's awful kind of Aunt Tabitha to send it, and I'll keep it for her sake."

Some months later Daisy's husband—a commercial traveler—related to her a funny story, told him by a brother commercial, about an old lady sending an ugly old biscuit box, with a check hidden in it, as a wedding present, and the check being discovered, and then brought by the same old lady, and sent out anew as another marriage gift.

"And the curious thing is," he added, "that it was said to be sent to some one in our neighborhood."

Daisy bit her lip with vexation. Was that indeed the object Aunt Tabitha had in view in asking her to keep it for her sake, so that the check would be eventually discovered? And the biscuit box had been sent the second time to her cousin? She knew Tabby had got one of the same kind—servants are useful purveyors of news if the mistress is at all inquisitive—but she had not realized until now that it might be the veritable one that she had returned.

As her husband had known nothing about the return of the present—she really believing Aunt Tabitha had sent a check as announced—Daisy kept her own counsel, and determined on a plan of campaign. If the check was still hidden in the biscuit box, her chances to one that Tabby, in her ignorance and simplicity, would not have discovered it, and Daisy felt that if she could but gain temporary possession of it she might find the hidden missive and appropriate it, for was it not just as much hers as Tabby's?

The following afternoon the latter was considerably surprised to receive a visit from her stylish cousin.

"How do you, Tabby—Mrs. Jack, I should say? And I'm really ashamed that I've been so long in calling on you after your marriage, but I've been so busy, you know; it takes such a time before one gets such a large house as mine really in order. You have such a snug little place, Tabby, and what a nice room. Everything in apple pie order!" And Daisy's swift glance took in everything in Tabby's parlor, her eyes finally resting on the biscuit box placed under a glass shade on the chiffonier. "Oh, was this from Aunt Tabitha?" she continued. "I got one the very same, but as I had ever so many already I had to get it exchanged."

"Yes," said Tabby, "that was a present from Aunt Tabitha; wasn't it kind of her ever to think of me?"

"Do you know, Tabby, she's coming to visit me one of these days, and I don't know what I'm to do about the biscuit box. She doesn't know I changed it, and she'll be awfully offended if she doesn't see it set out. Would you mind letting me have a loan of yours? She would never know."

"Would there be no chance of her looking in on me?" suggested Tabby, humbly. "I'd be so vexed if she did, and the biscuit box away."

"Oh, no, she's too grand to come here; but I'd ask you up to have tea with her at my house, do you see? So if you don't mind I would just take it with me now."

"I would need to ask Tom, my husband, first," submitted Tabby.

"Goodness gracious, Tabby, can you do nothing without asking your husband's leave?" scornfully retorted Daisy. "But please yourself. When will you know?"

"Tom comes home at five."

"Well, I'll look around in the evening. I'm so frightened Aunt Tabitha might turn up at any moment. It will be so kind of you, Tabby, to let me have it."

When Tom Jack came home his wife explained matters, and Tom, a good-hearted fellow, said if Tabby wished to oblige her cousin by all means let her have a loan of the article.

"But it looks a trifle dirty," said Tom; adding with a laugh, "I wouldn't like your fine cousin to think that we hadn't a butler to polish up our silver plate. I'll give it a clean after my tea."

And so he set about taking it to pieces, and was in the act of doing so when Daisy paid her return visit. The kitchen blind was not drawn down, and the young couple seated at the lamp arrested Daisy's attention. She saw a slip of paper fall out as Tom unscrewed the bottom.

"What is this, Tom?" she heard Tabby exclaim.

"Let me see—it's like a bank note, wife; no, it's a check," was Tom's answer. "By gum! listen—Pay to Tabitha Elder or bearer the sum of one hundred pounds sterling. Signed Tabitha Mason. That's yours, Tabby! Good old Aunt Tabitha!"

"The dear old darling!" cooed Tabby. "The old wretch!" was echoed from the outside as the baffled Daisy turned on her heel, having no further interest or concern in Aunt Tabitha's biscuit box.—People's Friend.

"White Wings" of London.

The street sweepers of the borough of Westminster, London, have been dressed in so gorgeous a uniform that Maj. Gen. Trotter of the Grenadier Guards recently complained that when guardsmen go out they are frequently taken for dustmen and their feelings are consequently hurt. The Mayor of Westminster, whose official robes outshine even those of the King, has promised to add a blue band to the cape of the sweepers as a distinguishing mark.

As a man gets older, he bates the words "quite spry" more than any other in the English language.

HOW TO FORETELL THE THUNDERSTORM

THE weather man does not keep all his wisdom a secret, nor all the tricks of his maps. They are yours and all the world's for the reading. The "weather man" has pointed out the atmospheric conditions, the features of the sky and the clouds, and the time of day which must be taken into consideration when attempting to forecast the approach of a storm, and which, if rightly interpreted, are certain signs. The leading conditions to be considered are the aspect of the western horizon, the presence or absence of the cirrus and cirrus stratus clouds, the temperature, with sultriness and humidity, and the distance from the turning point in the day's temperature. If these different conditions are correctly understood there should be no difficulty, he says, in foretelling a thunderstorm.

There is one feature of an uncertainty, however, about the actual appearance of a storm correctly predicted, and this is due to the fact that all thunderstorms are distinctly local features, having to do with extremely limited areas, and all of short duration. This renders it possible for one to see a storm coming and really on its way, but to be disappointed of its arrival in one's own locality. Its energy has been spent before it has had time to come sufficiently far. Thunderstorms rarely cover more than thirty to forty miles in a stretch, generally no more than eight miles, while some are much shorter. A hailstorm, which always signifies the expenditure of tremendous force, seldom covers more than one-eighth of a mile. Less severe storms are sometimes no longer. In looking for a storm the western sky is the only sky point of value. This is because storms always have been known to travel from west to east. If you see a storm due north or due south, it is more than probable that it will not reach your locality, but if it is due west or west of north, or perhaps west of south, you may look for its arrival unless it should happen to expend its energies on the way before reaching you.

Look Out for Mares' Tails.

The clouds which foretell a storm are the cirrus clouds, "mares' tails" the country folk call them—hair-like shreds threaded across the heavens, later gathering into the cirrus stratus, white and gray cloud sheets, which are the true rain clouds. The atmosphere is always heated with a sultry humidity. It is warm and moist, thick, heavy, muggy. It sometimes almost feels wet. People often then speak of "feeling" the rain in the air. There is rarely any wind preceding a storm for any length of time; the air is exceptionally still. As the tempest approaches nearer, however, a soft, thick, "wet" sort of "whirr," characteristic as a harbinger of the rainstorm at its heels, is felt stirring abroad. This is most familiar to all those who have made a study of weather conditions and as easy of recognition as the awful oracles of the weather prophet monstrosities on feet. The time of day when a rain is most likely to fall is about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, or again between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning. These are the two turning points in the day's temperature. At 3 o'clock the maximum heat usually has been reached for afternoon, while at night the coolness has thoroughly set in. In case of a succession of thunderstorms they usually occur about twenty-four hours apart, that being apparently the time necessary for them to accumulate sufficient moisture to break. So, if a storm series begins in the afternoon, the remainder of the series will likely take place in the afternoon, while if it begins at night the storms are likely to continue to be at night.

It is considerably easier to foretell accurately the arrival of a thunderstorm than to explain it after it has come. Wiser than any man now known would be he who could follow understandingly the magical metamorphosis of the charming summer landscape, with its lake like glass and air as motionless as marble, from the time the first misty sultriness arises as the threatening breezes begin to stir; as the sky darkens frowningly the winds break boisterously from their fetters, the cloud streams pour out in catenacts, and the fires of heaven illuminate the tempestuous night with their terrible play. And finally, as the elements again calm themselves, the sun breaks out and revived nature becomes doubly lovely.

First Sign of Storm.

The first clue to the mystery of a storm comes from water. If a glass of water is stood on a window sill on a hot day it gradually evaporates. The hot, dry air sucks it up. Similarly the hot, dry air above a large body of water sucks up its water, transforming it into a fine vapor, which imparts a mistiness to the atmosphere. The distant atmosphere now gradually screens itself in a veil of vapor, which becomes thicker and thicker. This leads to the next phenomenon in a thunder storm. Every one knows that when steam comes in contact with cold objects it condenses, finally forming tiny drops and resuming its original form of water. In the same way on a warm summer afternoon the upper layers of the atmosphere are cooler than those immediately above the earth. Hence the higher vapors rising as they come in contact with the cool air condense, thickening into the form of clouds, which are nothing else than condensed steam. The particles of water forming the clouds are so minute and light that they float in the air. The movements of the vapor as it rises and the action of the cooler upper strata of air upon it generates currents of air, the wind. This at first is just strong enough to ripple the surface of the water and stir the foliage of the trees. In the meantime, another element is at work. Every one presupposes an accumulation of electricity at a thunder storm. Electricity is present in the atmosphere all the time, but, as has been observed, it is always more powerful when any strong perpendicular currents of air are in action, such as cyclones, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, waterspouts, thunder storms. Electrical manifestations are always accompanied by the down-pour of water. This means that the condensation of vapor is closely connected with electricity. Why is it not an instance of electricity generated by friction? Rub two pieces of paper vigorously against each other and electricity is generated. Open the safety valve of a steam engine giving out vapor and electricity is produced by the friction of the steam and valve. In a thunder storm electricity may thus be generated by the friction of individual particles of water which have been driven about by the wind.

The two kinds of electricity, positive

and negative, always try to unite. The ascending portions of the air and the clouds generally are charged with negative electricity, while the surface of the earth over which they swim are charged with positive electricity. Each seeks to unite with the other. The majority of the particles are not strong enough in electricity to span the space of air lying between, and can do so only under high tension. As the friction increases, electricity accumulates on the brims of the clouds and the projections of the earth's surface, trees, houses and mountains. The currents of air become sturdier. They bend the boughs of the trees, scourge the waves, lash the ships. The last feeble sun rays break through the massy clouds, casting an unusual, threatening, and uncanny light over the scene. The clouds gather more and more thickly, transforming themselves from the light cumulus clouds to rain clouds. The struggle of the negative and positive poles of electricity become more savage. If a metal ball is charged with electricity only the surface becomes magnetic. The interior is not electrified, similarly the microscopic drops of water forming the clouds are electrical only on their surface. Through the ever greater condensation they come nearer and nearer, and finally many together form one large raindrop. This larger raindrop contains all the electricity of the many smaller drops, but as its surface is more limited than their combined surfaces its electricity is of greater power.

Storm in All Its Fury.

The raindrops, too large and heavy to hover in the air, fall to earth. As the clouds merge, raindrops form more and more rapidly and the rain falls more violently and copiously. The storm 'a now fully developed, and unbends itself with fury. Brilliant flashes of light produced by powerful electric sparks illuminate the darkness, and the thunder growls in the sky. The tension between the surface of the earth and that of the clouds has become stronger. The tracts of air which at first were too vast to be traversed by electricity are now the pathway of lightning, not only between earth and clouds, but also between cloud and cloud, negative and positive poles meeting whenever strong enough to cross the necessary space. The lightning comes in three forms. Zigzag lightning with its crooked, branch-like forks, is produced when electricity amassed in small proportional points opposite each other wishes to meet. The electricity seeks to spring across by the shortest route in a straight line, but is hindered by the resisting masses of air and clouds. Hence it goes as best it can, leaping to those spots charged with electricity, whereby it assumes its characteristic aspect.

Lightning Flashes 17,000 Yards.

Flashes a thousand yards long are not rare, while those 10,000 and 17,000 yards in length have been seen. The vast force of these long flashes may be guessed at when it is known that a streak a yard and a half long is the largest that our stoutest apparatus permits our eyes to inspect. Besides the familiar destruction of the bolt in houses, trees, beast, and man, it has been known to charge iron fences with magnetism. A single flash, as a scientific man has calculated, if utilized with customary illuminating apparatus, would yield enough power to light a city for a month.

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