

SHE AND I

**A Heart to Heart Talk With Old Readers,
Especially Those in Nebraska**

It is utterly impossible for the editor with his shattered nerves and bleeding heart to reply to those who have sent their sympathy in this hour of supreme trial. Only those who came to these plains when they were uninhabited and built homes upon the prairies can understand how hearts can be bound up in a home which they have made with their own hands, or the feelings of an old man when he realizes that he no longer has a home. A "home" is not the land, the houses or the trees, however beautiful and conveniently arranged. It is the association of loving hearts of those who abide therein.

From Mrs. Tibbles' diary of July 6, 1882, I quote the following:

"I have been married nearly a year. It does not seem possible. I was married to Mr. Tibbles on the 23d of July last. Mr. Tibbles, his two daughters and I have been living here in a tent on our claim of one hundred and sixty acres. There is not a tree or shrub on the place, nothing but arrow grass everywhere. No roads, no paths, nothing but earth and sky. Towards the north is the prairie clear to the horizon with not a house or sign of cultivation. Towards the south are settlements along the Logan valley."

We thought then that our wanderings had ceased and that here we should quietly remain and build a home. But the fight for the protection of the law for the Indian tribes was not ended, and earnest requests made for us to go east again were complied with. Some years were spent upon the lecture platform, but every year we came back for at least a few months and did what we could to make a home. When all the cases concerning the Indians had reached the supreme court and congress had passed the "severalty bill," we came back again to live in our "home."

Corn was only ten cents a bushel. The farmers were in great distress. She often talked of the hardships and unending toll of the poor farmers' wives. She said that their lot was harder than that of the Indian women had ever been and she longed to help them. One day she visited a farmer's wife who had a sick little girl. When she came home she said that those three children had not a single toy, and spoke of the effort that two little ones had made to amuse themselves with a few buttons and to keep very still because their sister was sick. A letter east brought some toys and books for little children. They were sent by Mr. Flower, the editor of the Arena.

As the times grew harder and the farmers suffered more and more, Bright Eyes began to attack the great and perplexing questions of civilization. She studied political economy. In a speech delivered in DeKalb, Ind., in 1894, she told an audience of 3,000 people how she became interested in the hardships of the toil masses. A large part of that speech was printed in the local paper in DeKalb. She was as willing to give her life for the suffering whites, as she had ever been for the people of her own race. Only those who know how she loved "home" and the unspeakable dread with which she was always seized whenever she was about to appear on any platform, even after she had addressed hundreds of audiences as large as ever were addressed by any American speaker, often running up far into the thousands, can understand the sacrifice she made or how deeply she sympathized with the farmers' wives who rose at daylight, cooled, washed, sewed, mended and scrubbed until late at night each day and the only return was a home with bare floors, scanty food and poor clothing, while there were no pictures on the walls and no books on the shelves.

At first she was opposed to us taking an active part in the great contest then coming on. She wanted her home—to see the corn grow and hear the birds sing. At last she said: "We ought to do what we can." In 1893 we left home and went to Washington as correspondents of the press. For three years on the platform and with her pen she spoke and wrote for the toiling masses. The strain was too great. Her health failed and made necessary absolute retirement. Still she longed for "home." The house was repaired and improved and a year ago she came back. During that year her health improved and especially during the last three months. Every day she would tell how happy she was. She planned to entertain many friends. She wished to take them down among the hills and woods along the Missouri river and live close to nature for a few weeks, gather wild flowers and listen to the songs of the birds. Suddenly she was

stricken and died within three days. From the first hour of her sickness, although her temperature was constantly 104 and 105 degrees, she never thought of herself. It was her age, mother, her sisters, her nephews and nieces and even the animals on the place.

Her last words to me, because they may help other broken hearts and like so many of the things she said in life, of universal application, may be here repeated. After requesting that some wild flowers and lilac branches might be placed where she could see them so that she could feast her eyes upon the color, (she had a true artist's love of color), she said, among other things: "Don't worry. Please don't stay in the room long at a time. Really don't. It is better for me and for you. You can come in frequently, but don't stay long at a time." Then, after a pause: "I don't think that it is right to ask friends to make promises, which, when things change, may be difficult of fulfillment. You and I have planted every tree, shrub and flower on this place. When the big walnut trees were planted, I dropped the walnuts and you plowed them under. While you planted the shrubs I stood by you. If you can, keep the place just as it is for a little while before strangers come to inhabit it. It will be very hard for you. The only thing that will help you will be to work. Keep on working. Only work will make life endurable. Besides your writing, work in the garden. The anemone and the hollyhocks will bloom after a while. You will remember that you and I planted them together, but if you work, you

will be able to bear it. It may help you to remember that thousands wait anxiously each week to see what you write. To many thousands it makes their lives happier. But most of all, it is for your own sake that you should work."

I can only say to the readers of The Independent that I shall endeavor to fulfill these injunctions and work for the benefit of the toiling masses to which her heart went out in such measureless sympathy.

Standing by the lifeless form of her who did all that she could to make the world happier and better, I sense the coming of an hour more glorious than words can express and a life more real than that of the present.

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