

THE SILK DRESS.

"There's Annie Beldon," said Aunt Jane, looking up from her knitting as she heard the sound of footsteps on the plank walk which lay along the front fence. "Poor soul! I never see her that I don't think of that verse in the Bible which says that 'from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath,' and she sighed deeply.

I looked from the window just in time to see Annie Beldon before she turned the corner of the next street. She was a faded, careworn looking woman, a little past middle age, with dark brown hair thickly sprinkled with gray. Her dress was a rusty black cashmere, her black shawl was decidedly shabby, and her crape bonnet was shabbier still. She looked neither attractive nor interesting, and I turned from the window and took up my crocheting again, remarking only "that she looked as if she had had her share of sorrow."

"Sometimes I think she has had a good deal more than her share," said Aunt Jane. "I know dozens of women who have sunk into the grave under only half as much. And the best of it is, she don't never complain. She is the cheerfulest soul that ever breathed."

"Does she live near here?" I asked, more out of politeness than from any real interest in the subject.

"No! but she was my next door neighbor for twenty-five years when this was a farmhouse. The town lay two miles off then, and we never looked to see it grow right up to our very doors. Annie wouldn't be wearin' such shabby clothes if there hadn't been a mortgage on their place. She could have sold every acre at a good profit if it had been free."

"Tell me all about her, Aunt Jane," I said, as the old lady paused. "You'll have plenty of time before supper."

"Dear me, child, there isn't much to tell, 'n' maybe the little there is wouldn't prove very interesting to you. I know Annie looks shabby, 'n' old, 'n' gray now, 'n' not much like she did thirty years ago. We was girls together, 'n' she was the prettiest 'n' liveliest little thing I ever saw. Her eyes was as black as coals, 'n' her hair hung in long curls to her waist. She had a laugh 'n' a good word for everybody, 'n' more beans than she could tend to. There was only two of 'em, though, that she favored at all. One was Tom Layton."

"The owner of the Layton Mills?" I interrupted.

"Yes; but he didn't own the mills then. He was only superintendent then, 'n' though he was a saving industrious young man, no one looked to see him get to be a millionaire. But he had a good salary, 'n' his father was well to do, 'n' he was reckoned a good match for Annie. For a while folks thought she'd marry him; but he warn't a professor, 'n' Annie set a deal by her church. She allowed that if she married a man who never went inside of one she'd be false to her principles, for the Bible says the righteous shall not be yoked to the unrighteous, you know. Tom took it real hard at first, but he didn't bear Annie no ill will, 'n' when she married Luther Beldon he sent her a handsome present. Luther, he was a real steady young man, but somehow or other he didn't have no luck. He had a good farm, but, work as he might, he never made nothin' more'n a bare livin', 'n' Annie had to pinch 'n' scrow to keep clothes on their back. She was a master hand at managin', 'n' she worked like a horse, but year after year went by 'n' they didn't get no better off. Drought 'n' early frost 'n' too much rain, kep' 'em allers behindhand, 'n' jest when they was thinkin' they was goin' to do better there'd come something that would put 'em back again."

"Luther he got discouraged, but Annie she never lost heart. Leastways she never seemed to. When they'd come over here 'n' Luther he'd get to tellin' how crossways things allers went for him, she'd allers have something cheerful to say. She'd tell about it was a long lane that had no turnin', 'n' it was allers darkest jest before the day, 'n' there was allers a silver linin' to every cloud, till Luther he'd get pleasant again 'n' ready to laugh with her over their troubles."

"Ain't I got a treasure in my wife?" he'd say. "Long as frost 'n' mildew 'n' floods don't take her away from me, I guess I can get along."

"They was over here to dinner the day I was 30. I was wearin' for the first time a new black silk which John had given me for a birthday present. It was thick 'n' soft 'n' mighty handsome, 'n' Luther he didn't seem able to keep his eyes off it."

"I wonder when I'll be able to give you a black silk, Annie?" he said, putting his arm around her as she stood by his chair. "We've been married seven years, 'n' I ain't been able to get you nothin' better'n a calico."

"I don't need a silk," says Annie. "I've got all the dresses I can use now." Luther looked at her real steady a minute. Then he says, sorter slow 'n' quiet, "For all that, I mean to get you one, Annie. I want to see how you'd look in it."

"No better'n I'd look in my blue delaine," says Annie.

"We'll see 'bout that," says Luther.

"I don't care how hard times are, I mean to live till I get you a black silk dress." "She laughed 'n' told him he'd make a peacock of her if he could; but for all her brave words I knew she was down-right fond of pretty things, 'n' it really hurt her to have to wear old, faded dresses, 'n' bonnets five years behind the style. But she never said so, 'n' she'd walk into church Sunday after Sunday in her old blue delaine 'n' yellow straw bonnet, lookin' as sweet 'n' happy as if she'd been dressed like a queen."

"Well, Luther he never came over here after that without he had some remark to make 'bout my black silk, 'n' he stuck to it that he would give Annie one like it before he died."

But year after year went by, 'n' my silk was all worn out 'n' I'd got another, 'n' still Annie's best dress was but a cheap delaine 'n' it wasn't often she could afford to buy even a pair of cotton gloves to cover her hands. Things hadn't gone better with Luther 'n' they had other things to sorrow for than losing their best horses 'n' cattle 'n' their crops. They lost their six children, one after the other. Three of 'em died in one week of scarlet fever 'n' the others was sickly little things, 'n' went off in slow consumption."

"If it hadn't been that she had to keep Luther up, I believe Annie'd have give away many a time; but for his sake she didn't show one-half she felt. An' she never lost faith in the Lord. She said His ways seemed hard, but that He knew what was best for her."

"Well, time went on, 'n' about five years ago things seemed to take a turn for the better with Luther. His wheat crop turned out well, 'n' he sold it to good profit, 'n' he got his corn off the bottom lands before the river rose, 'n' that was a great help to him. He seemed real cheerful, 'n' told John he was just beginnin' to enjoy life, 'n' if things went well he'd soon have the mortgage cleared off the farm. The weather set in cold 'n' stormy just after Thanksgiving 'n' one afternoon I was out in the chicken yard shellin' corn to the hens, 'n' all muffled up to my eyes, when I heard a wagon stop at the gate 'n' there was Luther a noddin' 'n' beckonin' to me. I went down to the gate to speak to him, 'n' before I got there he was tellin' me how he'd sold Tom Layton a'coul' he'd been raisin' 'n' was on his way at last to buy Annie that silk dress. He asked me 'bout the number of yards he ought to get 'n' where he'd best go to buy, 'n' said he couldn't hardly wait to get it now he was ready. He was goin' to give Annie a surprise, he said; she didn't know what he was goin' after."

"Well, the tears was in my eyes as I watched him drive off, pleased as a child at the idea of surprisin' Annie. But I never guessed what the black silk dress was to cost her, poor soul!"

"It began to rain soon after Luther'd gone, 'n' I poured down for upward of four hours. I was at the window when he went on his way home, 'n' I noticed he didn't have his overcoat on, 'n' I wondered what he'd done with it, for I was sure he'd had it on when he stopped at the gate. Annie told me afterward that he'd taken the coat off his back 'n' rolled the black silk up in it to keep it from gettin' wet. It wasn't even damp when he unrolled it 'n' showed it to her, but he was wet to the skin himself, 'n' a few days later there was a doctor's buggy at the gate. John he went over to see what was the matter, 'n' found Luther walkin' the floor 'n' groanin' with pain. The cold had settled in his side 'n' the doctor couldn't give him no relief. But he said he guessed he'd pull through all right 'n' there wasn't no need to worry."

"Miss Parsons was makin' the silk up. Luther wasn't satisfied till Annie had gone to the village 'n' got some one to work on it, 'n' she thought best to humor him. He wasn't no better when the dress came home, 'n' the doctor was still tendin' him; but no one 'lowed he was anyway dangerous. It was John who brought the dress home from Miss Parsons, 'n' he said Luther was just too pleased for anything to see the bundle."

"I'm goin' to have Annie dress right up in it," he says, 'n' you 'n' Jane must come over after supper 'n' see how she looks."

"Well, as I heard afterward, John had hardly gone when Luther began to tease Annie to put the dress on. She wanted to get supper first, but he wouldn't hear to it."

"I've been waitin' nearly twenty years to see you in that dress," he says, 'n' I won't wait even an hour longer."

"Well, Annie she made him lie down—for he'd been walkin' the floor constant nearly all day—'n' she went into her bedroom to put the dress on. She'd got the skirt on, 'n' was fastenin' the waist, when she heard a queer sound from the spare room where Luther was lyin'. She stopped a minute to listen, 'n' then called to him to know if he wanted anything. There wasn't no answer, 'n' she crossed the hall 'n' hurried into the spare room. Well, child, she found him dead, his face turned toward the door as he'd been watchin' for her, 'n' the sound she'd heard was the death rattle in his throat."

"When John 'n' I got there he'd been dead only a few minutes, 'n' I tell you, child, it was a sad sight to see her kneelin' down by that low bed in her new black silk, her arms round that dead man 'n' moanin' 'n' shudderin' over him 'n' beggin' him to speak to her."

"He isn't dead!" she says to me as I came in. "He has only fainted. O, Jane! do something for him. Get hot water, 'n' you'll find camphre in the pantry on the lowest shelf to the right."

"But I saw that hot water 'n' camphre wouldn't be no use, 'n' I told her so as

gentle as I could 'n' begged her to come away. She wouldn't listen to me at first, but after the doctor had come, 'n' he'd told her it was all over, 'n' poor Luther'd died from apoplexy of the stomach, she let me take her to her own room."

As we was crossin' the hall she heard the dress rustle, 'n' she stopped short 'n' looked at me pitiful."

"He never saw me in it, after all, 'n' she broke down and cried as if her heart would break."

"After poor Luther was buried 'n' there was a stone put over him 'n' his debts were all paid, there wasn't nothin' left for Annie, 'n' she was glad to take a place in the mills. We wanted her to come here, but she was too proud to eat bread she hadn't earned, she said. About a week ago I was out with Miss Sniper gettin' subscriptions for the church carpet, 'n' we met Annie on the street. Miss Sniper, she ain't over-sensitive herself 'n' she don't give no one else credit for being so, 'n' she up 'n' asks Annie if she didn't ever wish she'd said 'yes' 'stead of 'no' to young Tom Layton."

"Never" says Annie. "Had I my life to begin again I would not altar it as far as Tom Layton is concerned."

"But it's pretty hard to have to work for him, isn't it?" asked Miss Sniper, 'n' I felt it in my heart to hate her for asking such a thing."

"But Annie only smiled. I consider myself fortunate to be able to earn such good wages," she says, 'n' then she walked away smilin' still."

"I was glad Miss Sniper didn't know about that black silk dress. If she'd said anything about that, Annie would 'a' broke down. She's got it packed away at the bottom of her trunk, poor soul, 'n' she's never speaks about it."

Theodora.

The Contemporary Review.

Theodora was the daughter of a bear-keeper, attached to the Hippodrome at Constantinople, and was one of three sisters whom their mother sent on the stage when they were still children 7 or 8 years old. With no talent either for music or dancing, her fortune was in her face and her tongue. Her pretty features, her nimble movements, her audacious smartness in repartee, made her the most popular and notorious in the pantomimes (to use the nearest modern equivalent) which delighted a people whose taste had fallen below the regular drama. Needless to say what was the morality of the Byzantine stage, or what was the life of the young actress led. Her enemies of later years declared it to have been more than usually shameless and disgusting, but the question, if delicately balanced less or more, besides being now insoluble, need make little difference to our view of her character. After some years she accompanied a wealthy Tyrian, as his mistress, to the Governorship of Tripoli; quarreled with him, left him, and after having been reduced to sad straits in Egypt, found her way back to Constantinople, where, according to a story current long afterward in the city, she sought to support herself by spinning wool in a house near the edge of the Golden Horn. This looks like trying to turn over a new leaf. However, she did not conceal her charms. Encouraged by the words of an Oriental fortune teller, who had promised her wealth and power, she threw herself in the way of Justinian, who yielded at once to her fascinations. He was then about 40 years of age—probably some twenty years her senior—nephew of the reigning Emperor, and gathering into his hands the reins of Government which were beginning to slip from the grasp of his aged and ignorant uncle. He was an able and well-educated man, already remarkable for his fondness for theology and his assiduous attention to public business. His passion led him to promise to marry the whilom actress, but a law dating (in substance) from the time of Augustus, and re-enacted by later Emperors, forbade the union of Senators and other persons of exalted rank to women who had been on the stage. Nothing was left but to repeal the law, which the Emperor was compelled by the urgency of his nephew to do, and the statute may still be read in the Corpus Juris which so long held sway over Continental Europe, a monument of Theodora's arts and Justinian's susceptibility. There had been, however, a more serious obstacle to the nuptials of the eager pair. The Empress Euphemia was an ignorant and rustic person, who had risen in life too late to acquire the polish of the capital. But she was pious, and she was respectable to the backbone. She had probably heard of Theodora's earlier fame, for the Court was like most Courts; anyhow she knew what Theodora had been, and the idea of her nephew marrying such a person was too shocking to be considered. While she lived she held out and kept her husband to his resistance; but when she died he gave way, the law was repealed, the marriage was solemnized, and when in a few years the old Emperor died, Theodora was crowned along with her husband, and received the homage of the Senate, the priesthood and the people. A rise like this had never been seen before, not even in Constantinople, and was never seen again. That such a person should have married an Emperor was wonderful enough. But that of all Emperors she should have married Justinian, the studious and pious Justinian—here was indeed matter for a hymn to Aphrodite, had there been a poet to sing it.

How Ike Reubenstein Joined a "Secret Society."

"I believe I'll shoust belong to one of dose seegret societies," said Ike Reubenstein who keeps a store in a suburb of Austin. "Den I be brothers mit lots of peoples already, und it vill help my peesiness. I reads in dose bapers about a Mason vat was going to haff his head cut off by a Turk, ven dot Mason some signs made, and dot Turk did not dot Mason's head cut off, but he took him home und made him shustis off de beace und married him mit a gouble off young womans for wives. It was a nice dinz to be a Mason, don't it? I vill join von off dose societies."

Ike was recommended to join the Order of the Arctic Circle, a new society lately started. He sent in his application. A night was appointed for his initiation. Ike was much embarrassed when he was admitted to the ante-room of the Lodge to find that besides the door-keeper, who was in his shirtsleeves, there were six men who were dressed in blue gowns, tin helmets on their heads, masks on their faces, and drawn swords in their hands. The door-keeper put a green flannel night-gown on Ike, blindfolded him with a handkerchief that smelled of tobacco and made his eyes smart, and then one of the knights took Ike by the arm and led him into a darkened chamber where he was marched around eleven times, while Grand Marshals and the Past Pluperfect Chaplain read all manner of wise admonitions to him out of a book, and the knights' swords clanked as the procession moved around. There was an air of mystery surrounding everything, and a premonition of something dreadful yet to come took hold of Ike.

He sincerely wished that he had never heard of a secret society, and he registered a solemn vow in his own mind that if he got out of this with his life he would never join another.

His guide made him kneel down on the floor, and with his right hand on his throat and his left hand on a human skull made him swear that he would never divulge the secrets of the Order. The bandage was taken from his eyes and he was conducted out to the ante-room.

A gray Mother Hubbard dress was put on him and he was escorted back to the chamber of mysteries. Here, after some preliminaries, he was led in front of a small circular saw that was revolving with extraordinary rapidity. A walking cane and a piece of stove wood were successfully saved in pieces that Ike might see how effectively the saw did its work. He was then marched around the chamber, brought up in front of the saw again and informed in a sonorous voice, by the Grand High Past Something-or-other, that as a test of his courage, he would be required to place the index finger of his right hand in front of the saw and allow it to be cut off at the second joint.

"I vill not any such dings do," said Ike, his hair standing on end with terror. "Vat sense is dot for seegret societies to cut a man up? Off I had been acquainted mid dose dings you seegret society men does, I would not had nodings to do mit you already. I vant to go away from here und stop dose foolishness."

The Past Grand Guardian of the Post-ern Gate now told Ike that he was acting in a manner that if he persisted in would draw down the dire vengeance of the Knights of the Arctic Circle. He said that by Ike's lack of confidence he had already incurred an additional penalty, and it would now be necessary according to the laws and by-laws of the Order, that he put two fingers to the saw to be cut off before he could be admitted to full fellowship, and the P. G. G. of the P. G., advised him as a friend to proceed at once and saw them off.

Ike said, "I want no such fellowship. It would be a tam fool fellowship to cut off my fingers to please you fellows mit tin waterin' pots on. I tells you I vants to go from this place away."

"Brethern, it pains me to use harsh measures, but as this candidate refuses to obey the orders of the Lodge he must suffer the penalty. I command you to take him, bind him, and hold his wrist against the saw until his hand is cut off. See that a doctor is in attendance." Four Knights caught Ike. He struggled and howled, but it was of no avail. His legs were tied, his left arm was secured to his waist, and he was brought in front of the saw. He begged for mercy, but no mercy was shown him. One Knight suggested that a vote be taken to determine if it was not better to saw the candidate's head off. Then they brought his right hand closer and closer to the revolving saw, and the closer it came the louder Ike begged for mercy. There was no mercy for him. At last his hand was pushed violently against the teeth of the saw and the Knights yelled as the soft paper saw, polished with black lead—and had been substituted for the real saw while Ike was being escorted around the room—was torn to pieces and Ike fell back breathless and faint but unscathed. Loud and long was the laugh of the Knights, and Ike soon joined the hilarity. He was so happy to find that it was only a "joke off" dose tin helmet fellers."

Then he received a lecture on Obedience, and was given the signs and passwords of the Order.

When the Lodge adjourned Ike was

so overjoyed at finding that he had got through without the loss of any of his limbs that he recklessly invited the whole Lodge to accompany him to a saloon and join him in a glass of wine. Some of the members stayed with Ike, who was determined to make a night of it, in commemoration of his escape from bodily mutilation. They took many drinks, and when about to leave, Ike was in a very mellow condition. He discovered that he had no money, but he ordered a parting drink, and felt rich enough to buy a distillery.

"Charge does to me," he said to the bar-keeper.

"I don't know you, sir," said the bar-keeper.

"Maybe you recognizes dot," said Ike, and he placed his right hand behind his ear, moved his left leg three times from north to south, and fell up against the lunch counter.

The bar-keeper said he didn't recognize anything but cash.

"O, then, you haff not does degrees all taken yet?"

Ike had got the idea into his chaotic brain that everybody in town was a Knight of the Arctic Circle.

"I make you understand this," and Ike gave the grand hailing sign by holding one hand over his head and putting the other behind his back.

The bar-keeper thought that Ike was signing to hold up his hands and that he was, with the other hand, reaching back to his hip pocket for his pistol, so he knocked Ike down with a bung starter and set on him until a policeman came and put handcuffs on him.

"Let me up, boliceman, till I make does signs of distress. Dake does handcuffs off right away. How can I does distress signs give unless I can hold up my hands?"

"Take the desperado to the lock-up," said a hackman. "I saw him trying to get out his pistol to shoot the bar man."

"I was not vanting to shoot nobodies. I supposed he was one of does tin waterin' pot seegret society fellers. Dot seegret society was a fraud."

He was locked up.

Next morning he was still intoxicated when brought before the recorder who adjudged him a harmless imbecile (and discharged him), because he made such extraordinary signs at the court and the lawyers.

"Does seegret societies was not as much goot for my peesiness as I thought. It was all tam lies about does brothers helping one another in trouble."—Texas Sittings.

Industrial Pursuits in Paris.

Philadelphia Press: Statistics show that more than half a million of Parisians are employed in commerce, trade and banking operations, while of the artisan class there are considerably more than a million and a quarter. The liberal professions seem to occupy but a small proportion of the population. All combined do not amount to 200,000. The great majority are in public service, which employs more than medicine, law and divinity combined. But after the public service it is art which gives employment and livelihood to the greatest number of Parisians. Forty-two thousand get their income from this branch of industry. The doctors come after, but a long way after. Medicine, in its branches, supports 18,000, the branches, of course, including chemists and all compounders and vendors of medicine. Then comes the law, with its 16,000 votaries, from judges to crier. Literature figures very low on the list, for, grouped with science and journalism, it gives employment to only 11,000 people, while all the clergy of all the persuasions amount to but half that number. On the whole, Paris would seem to be more industrious, more artistic, less literary and less religious than the ordinary visitor would suppose, while the proportion in which the working class exceeds those who live on their income is more remarkable, as Paris is the recognized center of expenditure and extravagance for all France.

A Bad Break.

Texas Sittings.

Sam Peterby, a merchant from the interior while attending the Mardi Gras festivities at Galveston, united business with pleasure by purchasing a bill of goods from a prominent firm. He was very politely received and one of the proprietors showed him over the immense store. On reaching the fourth floor the customer perceived a speaking tube on the wall, the first thing of the kind he had ever seen.

"What is that?" he asked. "O, that is a speaking tube; it is a great convenience. We can converse with clerks on the first floor without the trouble of going down stairs."

"Can they hear what you say through that?" asked the visitor.

"Certainly; and they can reply at the same time."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the visitor. "May I talk through?"

"Certainly," was the reply.

The visitor puts his mouth to the speaking tube and asked:

"Are Sam Peterby's goods packed up yet?"

The people in the office must have supposed it was somebody else speaking, for a moment later the distinct reply came back:

"No. We have not packed them yet. We are waiting for a telegram from his town. We believe he is a slippery cuss."

Tableau.