

Dear Mr. Gephart

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Silent Partners.

"Don't you ever speak to me again," said Mrs. Benton, "and I will never speak to you from this hour on." John Benton and his wife Mary had been married nearly a quarter of a century at the time of this violent outbreak, and had hitherto been active and talkative matrimonial partners. They lived in the country upon their own little farm, and though they had not always held the most absolute harmony of opinion, their devotion to each other and their unity upon all the essential matters of life were undisputed. It was only in the infinitesimal objects of life that they clashed. They had, together, met and surmounted great obstacles in their common path, but they removed rocks only to stumble over a pebble. They had, united, hewn their way through an almost interminable forest of difficulties, to be stopped in their onward career by some insignificant bramble of contention. They had safely stemmed the flood of adversity, yet were occasionally almost overcome by some petty stream of wrangling that flowed from the lips of either. And finally the contemptible little rivulets that had been constantly trickling for so many years in so many different ways had seemingly met to form a great vortex in which they were doomed to be swallowed up. Those hitherto active and voluble tongues were about to rust in idleness, at least at home. They were resolved to become henceforth Silent Partners. John Benton accepted the situation without replying, for what was there to be said? Had he not been commanded to refrain forever from speaking to his wife? The first night of the self-enforced silence in the Benton cottage was awkward. The usual curtain lecture was omitted, and such a death-like, desolate stillness prevailed that sleep was out of the question. About midnight the awful silence had so worked upon the nerves of John Benton that unable to endure it longer, he arose, and going down-stairs, soon returned with the old clock, which was not only a loud tick, but also a cheerful striker. He must have something for company that would appeal to his sense of hearing, or perish with loneliness. John started and stopped as he was about to place this new companion upon the bureau; he thought he heard a sound proceed from under the bed-coverings not unlike a smothered laugh. The morrow brought its tribulations, following one another in close and annoying succession. Mrs. Benton, finding the situation too irksome to be borne without some new excitement to replace the lost art of speech, determined upon a revolution of the whole household. John Benton, coming in about noon from the field, at once saw that something unusual was under way. He knew that his wife was just then out at the barn, so he crept upstairs to ascertain the nature of the operations. There was a scene of chaos indeed. It would seem as though this energetic woman had decided, contrary to her usual wisdom, to begin at every room in the house at once. And it certainly looked as though order could not be restored to even one of these wrecked apartments by sunset. Now John was always a kind-hearted man, and noticing the carpets rolled up it occurred to him that there was a clear case in which he could anticipate the wishes of his poor tired, tongue-tied wife. With him to think was to act, so out went the carpets upon the lawn; but scarcely had he finished his task before he heard his wife tugging and panting on the stairs, trying to get the carpets into the house again, and back into their respective rooms. He had evidently been mistaken, and he hastened to make amends by restoring the carpets to their former places; then, from fear of doing more harm than good, he stood aside, and allowed destiny to take its course. The labors of the day pressed heavily upon Mrs. Benton, and towards its close she essayed the dumb language of pantomime to obtain from her husband some help in getting a room ready for occupancy before bed-time. But either John's perception of this language was somewhat obtuse, or else Mrs. Benton's manner of using it was imperfect, for she was compelled to abandon it as useless, after going through many fantastic contortions of her body, and many facial expressions that filled John with astonishment. She at last wound up with a look of disgust so full of meaning that the poor fellow he read in it plainly enough, "I should think any fool could understand that." But John was not the fool to comprehend it, so pantomime had to be given up. Many ludicrous blunders were the inevitable consequence of this abandonment of the customary mode of conveying thoughts; the double orders



given to the groceryman and the butcher, the duplicate purchases of all sorts of odds and ends, led to much confusion and vexation in the Benton household. John Benton had promised his wife, previous to the unhappy occurrence that had placed this gulf of silence between them, money to purchase a new dress for herself. One day he laid a roll of bills upon the table, and called her attention to it. She nodded assent, and John was satisfied that her memory was good for anything that related to her personal adornment. But what was his surprise and disgust when she returned from town and gave him the grocer's receipted bill! One morning, upon John's return from the city, he astonished his wife by bringing with him a lad, whom he ushered into the kitchen with the remark: "Now, Teddy, this is your home, and that is your mistress, Mrs. Benton, and whatever she requires of you, you are to do, of course." John Benton, in the utter loneliness of his heart, and fearing lest his unused tongue should become paralyzed by this prolonged inactivity, or that he should lose his voice for want of practice, had, like Robinson Crusoe, brought home a little man Friday to talk to, and also to use as a mouthpiece for himself and wife. Things now went on with less blundering and uncertainty, for Teddy was made the medium for conveying the thoughts or wishes alternately from one to the other. But John monopolized so much of the boy's companionship in his new-found delight at giving vent to speech, that Mrs. Benton still led a rather lonely life. "But," thought she, "what is sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander, and I will have a girl Friday for the week is out, in order to strengthen and improve my vocal powers." And so she did. Never was there a more astonished man than was John Benton on the evening that he came chattering with Teddy into the kitchen and stopped upon the threshold to listen to the irrepressible flood of female conversation that was being poured forth within. Indeed, so intent was Mrs. Benton on unbending her long-pent-up feelings that she did not notice the transfixed figure of her husband standing there till her startled ear caught the remark: "Well, Teddy, this is a surprise party, isn't it?" "Those, Maggie," said Mrs. Benton, "are the other half of this family." It was about this time that John communicated to his wife the mistake in regard to the dress money and refunded to her the amount. She in turn, through her mouth-piece, intimated to him that his company and services in driving the family horse would be acceptable to take her to the city to purchase her gown. To this he readily assented, as he also had business in the city. They had agreed upon a plan of communication before leaving home, through a small slate such as dumb people use among those who do not understand their language. On arriving at the gorgeous store they manifested an awkward uneasiness, and a few minutes before entering, this mute business in public was evidently not relished by either of the parties. But finally they entered. Mrs. Benton was greeted by a polite salesman. She made known her wishes and soon a great mass of various fabrics of all colors was spread out for her inspection. She asked the price of a piece of a particular shade that she fancied, she priced another piece of a different color, and during all this time she was vainly trying in some indirect way to get an expression of opinion from her husband as to his preference. But she ignominiously failed. Her face grew hot and excited. She was not on speaking terms with her husband, and yet she loved him well enough; to refuse to purchase or wear a dress the color of which he might not approve. She shrank from the humiliation of the slate, but finding there was no alternative but violation of her

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part of the field, when, on looking up at the load, he saw his wife still standing. He motioned to her to sit down, but she failed to notice his signal, and the horses started; at the same time John saw her lunge backward and slide, head-foremost, from the load. Before he could stop the team and get to her, she had struck the ground, upon her head. With a faint gasp, and with semi-conscious but dazed cry, she said, "Don't you ever speak—" "Hush!" said the scared man; "for God's sake, Mary don't talk that way now!" In another moment she lay unconscious in his trembling arms, pale and still as death. "Oh!" exclaimed the unhappy man. "If I had only screamed to her to sit down instead of trusting to that confounded pantomime, perhaps it would not have happened." Taking her up tenderly in his strong arms, he carried her to the house, and all the way into her own deaf ears he poured out his love and lamentations; his tongue was loosened, and seemed to be trying to make up for lost time. And as he bathed her head, and tried to kiss back the color and to coax into action that long-silent voice, he moaned, "What would I not give now to hear her talk to me again! It would be bliss to hear her scold even. Perhaps—perhaps," and he shuddered as he said it, "she may never speak again!" The new-mown hay threatened by the coming storm was nothing to him now. He neither knew nor cared whether the sky was black or blue. All was black about him, and there was only one object that he could see. Even Teddy, who had shared his confidence, and Maggie, who had been the solace of his poor wife during the dull blank year that had just closed in such a tragical manner, were oblivious to him by their very presence. He saw in them only the go-between that served to keep up this odious silence. "If I had never brought Teddy here, perhaps we should have spoken long ago," he muttered; "for it was getting to be pretty hard to keep still any longer about that time." He was just thinking seriously about sending for a doctor, when he felt a pressure upon the hand that had all this time clasped one of his wife's, and looking into her face, he saw with delight that her eyes were wide open and bent upon him. "My dear Mary! thank God!" he said, as he bent down and kissed her pale face, while the tears dropped from his cheek upon hers. "Speak to me, Mary." She gazed around her upon the scene of masculine havoc for a few moments; the wet cloths, the blankets, the camphor and arnica bottles, the flooded floor, and then at the face of the man beside her. In the latter she saw only intense misery and unfeigned contrition, but she could not resist the impulse, in spite of the accident, in spite of John's sufferings of mind, to test him still farther. She slowly raised her limp hands, and with the forefinger of the right she began to trace upon the palm of the hand, at the same time directing a questioning look at her husband. "Good heavens!" thought he, "can it be possible that she has been paralyzed by her fall, and is now truly and in earnest dumb?" But a glance at her face dispelled that horrible thought. She was smiling, but she still continued to write with her finger. Simple, honest, John Benton caught her meaning then, and exclaimed, almost pantingly, "The slate, Mary? Confound the slate! No more deaf and dumb language for me. One word from you now is worth more to me than a year's chatter of these young ones; besides, it will do you good, my dear." "John, I really believe you are speaking to me," said his wife, while tears of joy came to her eyes. John Benton bent close to her face, and kissing her again, said, "Yes, Mary, I am going to keep it up, too, from this time on, for—" And here he put his mouth to her ear, and whispered a few words that, in spite of her tears, and pain, made her laugh outright. He had whispered, "No beggars, peddlers or book agents allowed in the Benton Cottage hereafter."

WOMEN WHO HOLD OFFICE.

The Field of Woman's Work in Washington. Female Clerks and their Duties—History of the Employment of Women by the Government.

Foreigners who visit the public departments for the first time, says a Washington letter to the New York Herald, are surprised at the number of women who occupy desks and are called clerks. It is but a few years since a woman was thought fit to be a clerk in the State department; now there are a dozen or more on the rolls of its clerical force. Much of the work in a diplomatic office is perfunctory. Letters must be copied, records made up and often duplicates of dispatches of no public value have to be prepared for information in official circles. All this can be done as readily by woman as by men. In the composition of instruction to ministers and consuls, of course, only the experienced heads of divisions are employed. Though women had been employed elsewhere by thousands, there was at least a recognition of the fact that the State department was not superior to the United States Supreme court, for a woman had been recognized by that body as worthy to be "of counsel" and to appear before this most high judicial body, attired even as the judges themselves, in a black silk gown. The question is naturally asked, Do women make good clerks? Are they as competent, as skillful, as reliable as the male clerks! The experience of those who have been long in civil service is that women do not average in their work as well as men. This is not only true of the kind of labor but of the actual amount performed. There is in the Treasury department one lady who gets \$1,800 per annum—that is, she rates as a fourth class clerk. There are in this department altogether nearly one thousand women—all intelligent, and many of them have been in public service for years. But they seldom rise above the first class, or a \$1,200 clerk. Many of them are graded as copyists, receiving but \$900 a year, and there is not the slightest prejudice against their promotion. It would be invidious in such an article to specify particular talent. There are ladies in all the departments of the government who receive the same pay as their male associates, none higher than \$1,800 a year; a few at \$1,600, more at \$1,400 and a majority at \$1,200. The first employment given to woman by the government was during the war, when paper money had to be substituted for gold and silver. Redemption of the mutilated notes issued by the government and national banks made the services of women indispensable. The mass of filthy and torn currency returned to the treasury for redemption made the employment of dexterous figures a necessity, and none were found so apt at handling it as the women employed in the bureau of engraving and printing, and in the office of the United States treasurer. The counting of the new and old fractional currency gave employment to hundreds of women; and as they became accustomed to the accurate form of the genuine notes, it was next to impossible to deceive their practiced eyes and delicate touch, so that counterfeit notes had no earthly show of redemption. Not only was this true of the fractional currency, legal tenders and national bank notes, but of government bonds and the thousands of coupons that had first to pass the inspection of women before they could be credited to government account. It is in the bureau of engraving and printing, and the United States treasurer's office that the greater number of females are employed. At the government printing office there is a large number working in the folding and press rooms, and bindery. There skill is more of a mechanical than a clerical kind. This is also true of the majority of the women employed in the bureau of engraving and printing, yet there are women whose services are graded as high as those of men. In the war department, excepting the quartermaster general's bureau, the gentle voice of a woman is seldom heard. So, too, in the navy department there is a dearth of women. Whether there is a prejudice against women being employed in the war and navy departments does not appear, except that they are not employed; but the postoffice and interior departments make up for it. In the dead letter office a number of women experts are engaged whose ability to make sense out of nothing is daily demonstrated. In fact, the officials say the office could not be run without them. There is a certain kind of patience that is peculiar to the fair sex, necessary to decipher what only the stupid or ignorant writer could possibly explain. But they do it. Their explanation makes the direction on letters, which intelligent and very experienced clerks could not make out, as plain as copperplate. But it is only women who have genius who can discover where a letter ought to go; the natural sympathy between their nature

and desire makes the cleverest of experts in putting misssent or badly directed letters of packages on the way to the owner. Visitors to the dead letter office say that the greatest curiosity there is the system by which a "gone wrong" package is put in the path of right. The industry required to convert an apparently meaningless superscription into a direction which a strong-minded man can understand and a postoffice clerk obey is solely the possession of women clerks in the dead letter office. Are they all young? Are they middle aged? Are they spinsters? These four thousand female employes in the government offices? All of them old enough to vote, and at that matter have arrived at a marriageable age. For the most part the women are widows or maidens many of them are the main support of aged or infirm parents. They come from all parts of the country, but mostly from the North and New England States. Are they pretty? Well, some of them are, but as a general thing the beautiful women don't stay clerks very long. Some stunning young man who is clerk in the office where the pretty one is employed makes up his mind to marry, and married women are, with very few exceptions, ruled out of government service. To one familiar with department life but very few changes can be noticed from year to year in the ranks of the women clerks. Few die, none resign, and a small percentage only drop out on account of matrimony. The interior department perhaps affords the finest field for women clerks. Probably three-fourths of the women have been found especially expert as typewriters, and the correspondence of the interior department and its bureaus is sent out in printed form. It not only makes it easy for the checking clerks to scan the matter, but saves in bulk and letter paper beside. The patent office necessarily has a great mass of business which is matter of record, hence there is scarcely room in this overcrowded bureau, where the rattle of the typewriter is not heard from morning until night, the fair fingers of the operator making the machine a very thing of life. A woman has not yet been appointed an examiner, but it is certain that one-half the labor performed in the patent office is done by women. The attorney-general has found that woman is a very useful assistant in keeping the records of the department of justice, and if he desired, he could even employ a woman to write legal opinions, for such a one lives in this city, whose ability no one will question. At present, however, the female employes are mainly occupied in copying the opinions of the learned jurists who are called assistants to the attorney-general. A Startling Confession. 'Sir,' said the business manager of a Wilmington daily paper, coming with drooping head into the presence of the proprietor, 'I have a startling confession to make to you.' 'What can it be?' asked the proprietor, trembling with excitement that could not be concealed. 'Oh, sir, spare me,' said the business manager. 'I know I have done wrong but the temptation was very great. I have spent the year's profits of this paper for my own private use.' 'What have you done with the money?' gasped the proprietor, as he clutched the back of a chair to steady his quivering frame. 'I—' answered the business manager, as his head fell lower and lower upon his breast and a blush of shame came to his cheek—'I have spent it for two plates of ice-cream.' Condensed Sermons. True wealth consists in health, vigor, and courage, domestic quiet, concord, public liberty, plenty of all that is necessary, and contempt of all that is superfluous. The erection of Christ's kingdom is purity in His church, and thrusts out the outward pomp and magnificence that we naturally like so well. His kingdom of grace can not be in the soul without the forsaking of all our accustomed and pleasing ways of sin. But they who know the excellency of His kingdom are well content to forego all that suits not with it. Thus, that His kingdom of glory may come, the world must be burnt up; and that we particularly may come to it, we must pass through death. But it is worth all. A patent medicine manufacturer advertises for bald men, who are willing to have advertisements painted on the tops of their heads, "for a high pecuniary recompense."