

**Widow Wells' Stratagem,
—OR—
Catching a Deacon.**

DEACON BANCROFT, though a very good man in the main, and looked up to with respect by all the inhabitants of the little village of Centreville, was rumored to have, in Yankee parlance, a "pretty sharp eye to the main chance"—a peculiarity from which even deacons are not always exempt.

In worldly matters he was decidedly well to do, having inherited a fine farm from his father, which was growing yearly more valuable. It might be supposed that under these circumstances, the deacon, who was fully able to do so, would have found a helpmate to share his house and name. But the deacon was wary. Matrimony was to him in some measure a matter of money, and it was his firm resolve that he would not marry unless he could thereby enhance his worldly prosperity. Unhappily, the little village of Centreville and the towns of the immediate vicinity contained few who were qualified in this important particular and of those there were probably none with whom the deacon's suit would have prospered.

So it happened that year after year passed away, until Deacon Bancroft was in the prime of life—forty-five, or thereabouts—and still unmarried, and in all human probability likely to remain so. But in all human calculations of this kind, they reckon on all who leave widows out.

Deacon Bancroft's nearest neighbor was a widow.

The Widow Wells, who had passed through one matrimonial experience was some three or four years younger than Deacon Bancroft. She was still quite a buxom, comely woman, as widows are apt to be. Unfortunately, the late Mr. Wells had not been able to leave her sufficient to make her independent of the world. All that she possessed was the small, old-fashioned house in which she lived, a small amount of money, which was insufficient to support her and a little son of seven, likewise to be enumerated in the schedule of her property, though hardly to be classed as "productive"—of anything but mischief.

The widow was therefore obliged to take three or four boarders, to eke out her scanty income, which of course imposed upon her considerable labor and anxiety.

It is surprising that under these circumstances that she should now bethought herself of a second marriage, as a method of bettering her condition? Or again, need we esteem it a special wonder if, in her reflections upon her next neighbor, Deacon Bancroft?

The deacon, as we have already said, was in flourishing circumstances. He would be able to maintain a wife in great comfort; being one of the chief personages in the village, could accord her a prominent social position. He was not especially handsome, or calculated to make a profound impression upon the female heart—this was true—but he was of a good disposition, kind-hearted, and would no doubt make a very good sort of a husband. Widows are, I take it, (if any shall do me the honor and read this story, I trust they will forgive the remark,) less disposed to weigh sentiment in the second alliance than a first and so in widow's point of view, Deacon Bancroft was a very desirable match.

Some sagacious person, however, has observed that it takes two to make a match, a fact to be seriously considered; for in the present case it was exceedingly doubtful whether the worthy deacon, even if he had known the favorable opinion of the next neighbor, would have proposed to changing her name to Bancroft, unless, indeed, a suitable motive was brought to bear upon him.

Here was a chance for finessing, wherein widows are said, as a general thing to be experts.

One evening, after a day of fatiguing labor, the Widow Wells sat at the fire in the sitting-room with her feet resting upon the fender.

"If ever I am so situated as not to have to work so hard," she murmured, "I shall be happy. It's a hard life, keeping boarders. If I only was as well off as Deacon Bancroft."

Still the widow kept up thinking, and by-and-by her face was brightened up. She had an idea, which she resolved to put in execution at the earliest practicable moment. What it was the reader will discover in the sequel.

"Henry," said she, to her son, the next morning, "I want you to stop at Bancroft's, as you go to school, and ask him if he will call and see me in the course of the morning or forenoon, just as he finds it most convenient."

Deacon Bancroft was a little surprised at the summons. However, about eleven o'clock, he called. The widow had got on the dinner, and had leisure to sit down. She appeared a little embarrassed.

"Harry told me that you would like to see me," he commenced.

"Yes, Deacon Bancroft, I do, but I'm very much afraid you will think strange of it—at least of what I have to say to you. The deacon very politely promised not to be surprised, though at the same time his curiosity was visibly excited.

"Suppose," said the widow casting down

her eyes—"mind I am only supposing a case—suppose a person should find a pot of gold pieces in their cellar, would the law have a right to touch it or would it belong to them?"

The deacon pricked up his ears. "A pot of gold-pieces, widow! Why, unquestionably, the law would have nothing to do with it."

"And the one who had formerly owned the house couldn't come forward and claim it, could he, deacon?" inquired the widow, further, with apparent anxiety.

"No, madam, unquestionably not. When the house went everything went with it, as a matter of course."

"I am glad to hear it, deacon. You won't think strange of the question, but it happened to occur to my mind, and I thought I would like to have it satisfied."

"Certainly, widow certainly," said the deacon abstractedly.

"And, deacon, as you are here, I hope you'll stop to dinner with us. It will be ready punctually at twelve."

"Well, no," said the deacon, rising; "I'm obliged to ye, but they'll be expecting me home."

"Was it possible," thought he, "that the widow could have found a pot of gold in her cellar? She did not say so, to be sure, but why should she show so much concern to know as to the proprietorship of a treasure thus found, if she had not happened upon some?" To be sure as far as his knowledge extended, there is no one who would be in the least likely to lay up such an amount of gold; but then the house was one hundred a fifty years old, at the very least, and undoubtedly had many occupants of which he knew nothing. It might be, after all. The widow's earnest desire to have him think it was only curiosity, likewise gave additional probability to the supposition.

"I will wait and watch," thought the deacon.

"At any rate, deacon," said the widow taking steaming mince-pie out of the oven, "you won't object to taking a piece of my mince-pie. You must know I rather pride myself on my mince-pie."

The warm pie sent forth such odor, that the deacon was sorely tempted, and after saying, "Well, really," with the intention of refusing, he finished saying, "On the whole, I guess I will, as it looks so nice."

The widow was really a good cook, and the deacon ate with much gusto the generous slice which the widow cut for him, and after a little more chatting upon some unimportant subjects, withdrew in some mental perplexity.

It so happened that Deacon Bancroft was one of the directors in a Saving's Institution, situated in the next town, and accordingly used to ride over there once or twice a month, to attend meetings of the Board.

On the next occasion of this kind, the Widow Wells sent over to know if he could carry her over with him, as she had a little business to attend to there.

The request was readily accorded. Arrived at the village, Mrs. Wells requested to be set down at the bank.

"Ha! ha!" thought the deacon "that means something."

He said nothing, however, but determined to come back and find out, as he could readily from the cashier, what business she had with the bank.

The widow tripped into the office, pretending to look very nonchalant.

"Can you give me small bills for a five dollar gold piece?" she inquired.

"With pleasure," was the reply.

"By the way," said she, "the bank is in quite a flourishing condition, is it not?"

"None in the State on better footing," was the prompt response.

"You receive deposits, do you not?"

"Yes, madam, we are receiving them every day."

"Do you receive as high as five thousand dollars?"

"No," said the cashier, with some surprise; or rather we do not allow interest on such a sum. One thousand dollars is our limit. Did you know of any one who—?"

"It is of no consequence," said the widow, hurriedly; "I only asked out of curiosity. By the way did you say how much interest you allowed on such deposits as came within your limit?"

"Five per cent, ma'am."

"Thank you; I only asked for curiosity. What a beautiful morning it is!"

And the widow tripped lightly out. Shortly afterwards the deacon entered.

"How's business, Mr. Cashier?" he inquired.

"No; she exchanged a gold piece for small bills."

"Ha!" pondered the deacon, reflectively. "Did she give any reason for her inquiries to them?"

"No; she said she only asked from curiosity."

The deacon left the bank in deep thought. He came to the conclusion that this "curiosity" only veiled a deeper motive. He no longer entertained a doubt that the widow had actually found a pot of gold in the cellar, and appearances indicated that its probable value was at least five thousand dollars. The gold piece which she had exchanged at the bank appeared to confirm the story.

"I rather think said the deacon, complacently, I can see into a mill stone about as far as most people,"—a statement the literal truth of which I deny any one to question, though as to the prime fact of people's being able to see into a millstone at all, doubts have now and then intruded themselves on my mind.

Next Sunday the Widow Wells appeared at church in a new stylish bonnet, which led to such remarks as these—

"How much vanity some people have to be sure!"

"How a woman that has kept boarders for a living can afford to dash out with such bonnets is more than I can tell! I should think she was old enough to know better."

This last remark was made by a young lady just six months younger than the widow, whose attempts to catch a husband hitherto proved utterly unavailing.

"I suppose she is trying to catch a second husband with her finery. Before I would condescend to such means I'd— I'd drown myself."

In this amiable speech the young lady unwittingly hit upon the true motive. The widow was intent upon catching Deacon Bancroft, and she indulged in a costly bonnet, not because she supposed he would be caught with finery, but because it would strengthen in his mind the idea that she had stumbled upon hidden wealth.

The widow calculated shrewdly, and the display had the effect she anticipated.

Monday afternoon Deacon Bancroft found an errand that called him over to the widows. It chanced to be about tea-time. He was importuned to stay to tea, and some what to his own surprise, actually did.

The politic widow, who knew the deacon's weak point, brought out one of her best mince-pies, a piece of which her guest partook with zest.

"You'll take another piece, I know," she said, persuasively.

"Really, I'm ashamed," said the deacon, but he passed his plate. "The fact is he said, apologetically, "your pies are so nice, I don't know when to stop."

"Do you call these nice?" said the widow modestly.

"I shouldn't want any better," said the deacon, emphatically.

"Then I hope if you like them you'll drop in to tea often. We ought to be more neighborly, Deacon Bancroft."

Deacon Bancroft assented, and he meant what he said. The fact is, the deacon began to think the widow was a very charming woman. She was comely, and then she was such an excellent cook! Besides, he had no doubt in his mind that she was worth a considerable amount of money.

What objection would there be to her becoming Mrs. Bancroft? He brought the question before her one evening. The widow blushed—professed to be greatly surprised—in fact, she had never thought of such a thing in her life—but, on the whole, she had always thought highly of the deacon, and to cut short the matter, accepted him.

Some weeks after the ceremony, the deacon ventured to inquire about the pot of gold which she had found in her cellar.

"Pot of gold!" she exclaimed in surprise. "I know of none."

"But," said the deacon, disconcerted, "you know you asked me whether you could claim it."

"O, lor! deacon, I only asked for curiosity."

"And was that the reason you made inquiries at the bank?"

"Certainly. What else could it be?"

The deacon went out to the barn, and for about half an hour sat in silent meditation. At the end of that time, he ejaculated as a closing consideration. "After all, she makes good mince-pies."

It gives me pleasure to state that the union between the deacon and the widow proved a very happy one, although to the end of his life, he could never quite make up his mind about "The Widow's Stratagem"

After all there is something in a name; and something also in the art of putting things. As a Doctor of Divinity was earnestly holding forth to one of the suburban congregations a few Sabbath evenings ago, a bat suddenly woke up, and began to gyrate above the heads of the congregation. Whereupon the preacher paused, and said:

"We will wait a moment; peradventure the little bird will fly out." It was at this point that the gravity of the congregation made a surrender.

SUNDAY READING.

A Faithful Shepherd Boy.

GERHART was a German shepherd boy, and a noble fellow he was, although he was poor.

One day, while watching his flock, which was feeding in a valley on the borders of a forest, a hunter came out of the woods and inquired:

"How far is it to the nearest village?"

"Six miles," replied the boy, "but the road is only a sheep track and very easy missed."

"The hunter looked at the crooked track, and said:

"Ay lad, I am hungry, tired and thirsty. I have lost my companions and missed my way. Leave your sheep and show me the way. I will pay you well."

"I cannot leave my sheep, sir," replied Gerhart. "They would stray into the forest, and be eaten up by wolves, or be stolen by robbers."

"Well, what of that?" queried the hunter.

"They are not your sheep. The loss of one or more would not be much to your master, and I'll give you more than you have earned in a whole year."

"I cannot go, sir," rejoined Gerhart, very firmly. "My master pays me for my time, and he trusts me with his sheep. If I were to sell my time which does not belong to me, and the sheep should get lost, it would be the same as if I stole them."

"Well," said the hunter, "will you trust your sheep here, while you go the village and get some food and drink, and a guide? I will take care of them for you."

The boy shook his head. "The sheep don't know your voice, and"—Gerhart stopped speaking.

"And what? Can't you trust me? Do I look like a dishonest man?" asked the hunter, angrily.

"Sir," said the boy, "you tried to make me false to my trust, and wanted me to break my word to my master. How do I know that you would keep your word with me?"

The hunter laughed, and he felt the boy had fairly cornered him. He said:

"I see, my lad, that you are a good, faithful boy. I will not forget you. Show me the road, and I will try and make it out myself."

Gerhart now offered the contents of his script to the hungry man, who, coarse as it was, ate it gladly. Presently his attendants came up, and then Gerhart, to his surprise, found that the hunter was the Grand Duke, who owned all the country around. The Duke was so pleased with the boy's honesty that he sent for him shortly after, and had him educated.

Honesty, truth and fidelity, are precious jewels in the character of a child. When they spring from piety they are diamonds, and make the possessor very beautiful, very happy, very honorable, and very useful.—May you, my readers wear them as Gerhart did. Then a greater than a king will adopt you as his children, and you will become princes and princesses royal in the kingdom of God.

The River Nile.

The bed of the Nile, like that of the lower Mississippi, is higher than the valley through which it passes. Wharburton said:—

"The Nile's bed is a sort of savings bank by means of which the deposits of four thousand years have enabled him to rise in the world and run along a causeway of his own." It is the only river in the world that runs upward of twelve hundred miles, in undiminished volume, without a tributary stream. It moves on its long course without the help of even a creek, tapped by innumerable canals and thirsty gardens with which it is fringed, absorbed by hot sand banks and hotter sun, and empties greater bulk at its mouth than it has between the cataracts. The products of Egypt are the gifts of this stream. The land on which the towns and hamlets of Egypt repose is foreign soil, brought from the far south by this public carrier. For more than four thousand years he has faithfully brought his burden and deposited it at the feet of Egypt. The Rameses and the Ptolemies come and go, and the Nile remains unchanged.

The Mysteries of Nature.

The primary forms, colors and sounds of nature are but few, and yet their modifications and combinations are infinite. So far as human knowledge and research extend, the changes of time have never produced two forms exactly alike, whether in the mineral, vegetable, or animal kingdoms.—No two grains of sand on the shore, to say nothing of larger objects, of natural division; and portions of the earth's surface, are precisely alike. There are no two plants, flowers, seeds, or even leaves, in the whole universe allotted to man, that exactly resemble each other in form, size, weight and color. No two animal creations, no two voices are identical among all the living works of God.

Human ingenuity has constructed no two musical instruments that gave forth the same identical sound; and the microscope detects a marked difference of color in every leaf of every flower, and every thread of the finest fabric produced and colored by human skill. In short, the dissimilarities of similarity of all things, natural or artificial, is the most mysterious of all the hidden and yet clearly visible mysteries.

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