

The Democrat.

BY HAWLEY & CRUSER.

MONTROSE, PA., APRIL 5, 1876.

VOL. 33—NO. 14

THE FAST MAIL AND STAGE.

BY JOHN H. YATES.

Lay by the Weekly, Betsy, it's old like you and I,
And read the morning's Daily, with its pages scarcely dry.
While you and I were sleepin' they were printin' them to-day
In the city by the ocean, several hundred miles away.
"How'd I get it?" Bless you, Betsy, you need not doubt and laugh,
It didn't drop down from the clouds nor come by telegraph;
I got it by the lightnin' mail we've read about you know—
The mail that Jonathan got up about a month ago.
We farmers livin' round the hill went to the town to-day,
To see the fast mail catch the bags that hung beside the way;
Quick as a flash from thundering clouds, whose tempest swept the sky,
The bags were caught on board the train as it went roaring by—
We are seein' many changes in our first declinin' years—
Strange rumors now are soundin' in our hard of hearin' ears,
Ere the sleep that knows no wak'ing comes to wait us o'er the stream,
Some great power may be takin' all the self-conceit from steam.
Well do you remember, Betsy, when the postman carried mails,
Ridin' horseback through the forest, long the lonely Indian trails;
How impatiently we waited—we were earrest lovers then—
For our letters comin' slowly, many miles through wood and glen.
Many times, you know, we missed them, for the postman never came!
Then, not knowing what had happened, we did each other blame.
Long those love quarrels lasted, but the God who melts the proud
Brought our strayin' hearts together, and let sunshine through the cloud!
Then, at last, the tidings reached us, that the faithful postman fell
Before the forest savage, with his wild terrific yell;
And your letters lay and moulded, while the sweet birds sang above,
And I was sayin' bitter things about a woman's love.
Long and tedious were the journeys, few and far between the mails,
In the days when we were courtin'—when we thrashed with wooden flails.
Now the white-winged cars are flyin' long the shores of inland seas,
And young lovers read their letters mid luxury and ease.
We have witnessed many changes in our three-score years and ten—
We no longer sit and wonder at the discoveries of men;
In the shadows of life's evenin' we rejoice that our boys,
Are not called to meet the hardship that embittered half our joys.
Like the old mail through the forest youthful years go slowly by;
Like the fast mail of the present, manhood's years how quick they fly!
We are sitting in the shadows, soon shall break life's brittle cord—
Soon shall come the welcome summons by the fast mail of the Lord.

TWICE MARRIED.

BY MILLIE.

"HOME in good season, mother," and the loud, clear voice goes ringing up into the little chamber where Ruth Norton is stitching away on store work, that ought to have been done that forenoon. But she was tired sitting up last night for James, he came in so late now, and she could not bear to let him find the room empty and the fire out. It was her way, she said, to keep him from bad company, and it seemed to succeed very well; for, whether it was a gay oyster supper, or a game of cards with a friend, James always remembered she was waiting for him, and had a tolerably steady hand to raise the latch, and an amusing recital of the evening's adventures for the patient and cheerful listener, his widowed mother.
Ruth Norton made her appearance with the vest she was finishing off hanging over her arm, and her spectacles pushed back upon her cap. She was a quick, active little body, not over tidy in her dress, perhaps, but then, "she never had any time to attend to these things." James was making good wages it was true, but like all other generous natures, he was social and liked merry fellows about him. So, Ruth took care of the house, and earned just a bit by tailoring for her own pocket money, but which oftener went for family expenses than James was aware of.
"O, is that my best vest, mother?" he said, laying down the kindlings he always brought home from the store, behind the stove. "I forgot to tell you it wants a button; and it'll have to come in play to-night, for there will be the grand frolic at Tom Lane's wedding."
"So it is to-night. Dear me, I'd quite forgotten it was to come off so soon.—Tom is a steady young man, and I hope he will get a good wife. A good wife is the making of most young men; in my opinion. Set on the teakettle, Jimmy dear, and you shall soon have your supper. I hope you'll be bringin' home a daughter to me one of these days."
"Not I, mother; 'liberty for me,' as the play says. I haven't sown my wild oats yet."

"The quicker the better," was the ready answer of the mother, and she hustled about to set the tea things on the table; while James, at his toilet overhead, sang snatches of gay songs, for he added a good voice to his other advantages.

No wonder his mother was proud of him, as he came down in the most picturesque of costumes, known as "shirt sleeves," to claim the renovated vest; and closing it about him as he tried the new button, drew himself up to his full six feet in height, and shook back the clustering hair from his brown face; gay with good temper.

"Now don't be very late to-night, James," said the proud little woman, holding the light as high as she could reach that she might see that all was right but in reality to indulge the fondness of her motherly eyes with a last glance of admiration. "I shall want to know all about it, how the bride looked and what she had on. Be sure to bring a piece of the cake to dream on; and don't drink to the bride's health too often."

"Never fear, mother; and I'm bound to dance with the prettiest girl in the room, you may be sure. Don't say to hard or sit up for me after one o'clock; for may be we shall be late." He patted her on the shoulder as he said this, a caress of which he was very fond and which conveyed more affection than one would suppose. She understood it, and still proud and happy went back to "clear up," as she called it.

But mother Norton's tidying would not have pleased the most fastidious; for her organ of order had never been developed in childhood, and old habits still cling to her. James had a habit of order that was rather troubled by the innumerable catalogue of sundries that littered the tables, mantles and chairs; indeed it was the only point on which he ever ventured a remonstrance.

She sat stitching quietly for a long time; and when the vest was finished she folded up her work and read a while in her favorite book the Bible. Gradually the candle grew dimmer and the cheerful glow of the fire more indistinct; the book closed over her spectacles which she had taken off to polish, and she fell into a very comfortable reverie. As usual, it was about James; what great reason she had to be proud of him; how truthful and honest he had always been. Then their last conversation was remembered, and she thought how pleasant it would be to have a good tidy little daughter come home some day, who would make James happy and keep the house cheerful and be company for herself. She could but confess that she was a little lonesome now and then and she was not so active and young as she once was. She certainly had not intended to go to sleep, and let the light burn down and the fire go out before James came home; but these three things happened and she woke with a start and a chilled, uncomfortable sensation to hear him turning the lock.

At first she thought it must be her drowsiness that made his voice sound so strange and hoarse; but when she had lighted another candle, his face was so pale and haggard, his whole manner so excited that she could scarcely ask the reason. He did not keep her long in suspense. He had been to much accustomed to find ready sympathy in her love to conceal the cause of his sudden change. He threw himself down wearily on the floor at her feet, and said in a tone of utter despondency:

"I've ruined us all, mother!"
"My son! James! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I didn't mind you, and I drank too much, and got excited; then they dared me to do it—and—"
"What, Jimmy dear?" She scarcely dared to fill the space he made, suddenly thoughts of robbery and even murder darted through her mind.

"I was married, before them all, to a girl I have never seen before to-night; for Tom Lane's uncle was an alderman. I thought they were joking all the while, but he says it's real and her brother says so, and swears I must take her home and take care of her, for she's more than he can manage; and, of course, no one can marry her now. Ah, mother! mother! what shall I do?"

There was a weight lifted at first from the heart of poor Ruth; but these last words had brought the reality of the misfortune before her.

"Are these things against her, Jimmy?"

"Nobody would tell me anything about her, except that they laughed and joked; and I heard Nat Jones say, 'what a take in!' and I struck him in the face. We were all standing in the hall with her brother, for he was the foremost one to put me up to it; and I was almost crazy with the thought of what I had done.—Somebody parted us and said it was too bad! and she came flying out—they were all dancing yet—and I heard her call out 'Where's my husband? to go off and leave his bride!' I don't believe she knows yet; but it sounded so light and forward, and I dashed away from them;

and I've been walking the street ever since, feeling as if I should go crazy."

He wiped his forehead, still heated from the excitement of feeling and his quick hurried walk. His mother did not know what counsel to offer, and only held his hand and looked down into his face as if she did not yet comprehend it.

"I noticed her when I first went into the room," James said again, as if it was a relief to talk. "She was one of the bridesmaids, and dressed elegantly, and danced better than anybody in the room. And Tom Lane and I must dance with her. And it seems she had made a bet to flirt with me; and then they joked us at supper and I wasn't going to be outdone and called her my sweetheart, and said fifty silly things; and they said two weddings were better than one, and dared us to be married on the spot. She laughed and said yes and I thought it was good fun and so I was married; and now it can't be helped, they all say. It makes me almost hate her every time I think of it, if she knew to marry a man she knew nothing about, and had never seen in her life before. And I was so light hearted when I went off, and now I feel twenty years older. What shall I do, mother? Tell me."

"Go to bed now, Jimmy dear, and we will talk it over in the morning. Perhaps it will turn out a trick; after all; or maybe she's heard about you and loves you"—the fond mother could have understood that, and forgiven her—and she may make you a good wife, after all; who knows? But go to bed now, for you're all worn out, and you'll be sick—Come, do now Jimmy."

He went up to the little room by the side of her own to please her; but she heard him walking up and down until she fell into an uneasy slumber.

It was, as James said, a reality; she came home to them after the end of a week; apparently thinking they should be compensated for all by the honor of her presence, and seeming neither to know or care how much trouble she gave, or how unwelcome she was.

Ruth had done her best to make the house look bright and cheerful, but the plain, old-fashioned furniture seemed to Nora a poor exchange for the showy veneering of her brother's parlor. She missed the excitement of dances and balls to which she had always been accustomed. James had no heart to go, and, indeed, shrank from appearing anywhere with her. Her chief amusement and employment seemed to be a review of her stock of finery, visiting her old friends or sitting at the front window watching the few passers-by.

It was a dreary change in that once contented little household. Ruth did her best. She bore the impertinence and carelessness of her daughter-in-law without complaint; she tried in her quiet way, to make her as comfortable as she could, sharing even her clothes with her; for, with all her finery, she had not comfortable garments for the inclement season that had now set in. James seemed utterly broken in spirit. He never sang or whistled as had been his wont. Then meals were eaten in silence when Nora was there, or with desponding complaints when she was absent. He avoided her in every way. Sometimes he seemed like himself, when he found a cheerful fire and his mother waiting for him; but oftener he came home with a clouded brain and disturbed temper, too plain tokens that his troubles were driving him into bad company.

All this was hardest on poor Ruth; that is, the every day recurring perplexities were more wearying, perhaps than the unwelcome bonds which the young people had as yet only chafed at. Nora would have gone back to her brother's home, but that was closed to her, he only saying it was her own fault and not his if she did not get along well with her husband. So she would come back, her eyes swollen with crying, more sullen and disagreeable than ever; and the mother was obliged to put up with it, while her son's altered habits were almost breaking her heart, and his wife grew daily more hateful to her as the cause of it. Her faith was sadly put to test in these dark days; but she read the Bible and the Pilgrim's Progress more and more, now beginning to comprehend the harsh imprisonment of her favorite hero in the dungeon of Doubting Castle.

She was sitting in a silent, downcast mood, one afternoon when a light rap at the door was followed by the sunshine of a face that plainly told of "peace within."

Five years ago Ruth had lost a daughter, a bright cheerful girl of fifteen, just beginning to be all the world to her. She died after a lingering illness, and to the last her bedside was cheered and the lonely mother comforted by the visits of Martha's Sunday-school teacher, who had first led her to think of another home, where there would be neither pain or weariness. Since then the teacher had never forgotten her old pupil, who had learned more of the life to come than ever before at her daughter's bedside; and this was the unexpected but most welcome visitor.

"O, it is you, Miss Lewis? It's a long

time since you have been to see me. I was almost afraid you would never come again," Ruth said eagerly, dusting a chair with her apron.

"You could not have thought I should forget you, Ruth?" Miss Lewis said, in a pleasant, friendly voice. "But have you been sick this winter? Why did you not let me know it? You look so thin and downcast. I hope there's nothing the matter with James."

It needed but little sympathy to draw forth the troubles of poor Ruth, and she had a most interested and patient listener.

"But are you sure she doesn't love James?" she said. "Love works wonders some-times, you know; and she may be a comforter to you yet."

"God forgive me, if I'm wrong in saying it, Miss Lewis, but I don't believe she'll be anything but a torment to us—and James is breaking his heart from morning till night. I tried to be good to her, and would be a mother to her; but she'll ruin my boy, my only comfort—since poor Martha died."

"But, you know, good came even out of that great sorrow, Mrs. Norton as you have often told me. He who sends us trials can make them end in blessings; the key of promise—don't forget that; and besides, I'm a great believer in the law of kindness. Unless she is utterly unworthy, James must in time win her."

"I'm afraid I'm not always kind, poor Ruth said, self-reproachfully; "sometimes it's so hard to put up with, and I fret a bit, and then she's quick-tempered, and so it goes. She's up there now, I dare say, braiding her hair or fixing some finery; it's all she does from morning till night."

"But do you ever ask her to help you? I should think there was a great deal she might do, and James likes to see things tidy."

"True enough, he does," and here a sigh followed the glance around the disorderly room. But I can hardly get time to have his meals ready now. If it was real God-sent trouble, I shouldn't mind it so much."

"But it certainly seems to be so," Miss Lewis answered. "All troubles are given us to try our strength. Take this as a trial of your patience, Ruth, as Martha's death proved your faith. It will never do for James to see you give up."

Miss Lewis did not know as she returned to her own pleasant home, the good seed that had been sown with her words of cheer. As it was, Ruth went more cheerfully about the next days task, taking "patience" as her talisman; and when she remembered that Miss Lewis had asked her, she forced herself to take some notice of the poor girl, whom from her heart she pitied.

"You have never told me anything about your mother, Nora," she said, as in her usual idle way, the girl was sitting with folded hands by the window.

It was a chance touch, but it proved the right one. It did not seem so at first however for the only answer was a sullen stare, astonished at hearing herself voluntarily addressed. But Ruth did not seem to notice this, and finally was rewarded by seeing a more pleasant expression in her face; and afterwards, when she laid aside her work and rose to set the dinner table Nora for the first time offered to help her. This was done a little awkwardly, and not so cheerfully as Ruth could have wished; who, when she commended her for her assistance, was a little surprised to hear her say, "Don't tell him, though," as sullenly as before.

This was the beginning of pleasanter times for Ruth. When James was away Nora was sociable and willing to do anything she could for his mother, only she repeated the injunction not to tell him.

She left off most of her rings and broaches, and dressed more plainly, and one afternoon as she sat, stitching away as fast as she could—for she had taken a fancy to Ruth's trade—Ruth found her self telling about Martha's death, and how hard it had been to part with her, and how James missed her. That afternoon when she came home from her brother's she had a little rosebud one of the children had given her. Ruth noticed it when she passed through the room. When James came down to tea he had it in his hand, and thanked his mother for putting it in the little vase on his bureau. Ruth would have disclaimed, but she caught a quick warning glance from Nora, and the blush on her face as she placed it in his button hole.

He sat in the kitchen a little while after tea, and even noticed the improvements and complimented his mother on them. Ruth longed to tell him it was all Nora's taste and neatness, but the meaning of that look restrained her.

That night Ruth found Nora sobbing in bed, and asked if she was ill, and she said, "No, not ill, only a little nervous." Ruth did not question her, but stooped down and kissed her for the first time.

After this Ruth knew there were brighter days before them; that is, if James would return the love that she knew was springing up in Nora's heart for him; and this she nursed by long

tales of his childhood, to which Nora listened eagerly, and which brought the same tender, loving light to her eyes as she bent over her needle. She would have tried to win her son by the same simple means; but the boast of Nora's tidiness and industry was always checked by the feeling that the time had not yet come. James could not but have noticed the improvement in her appearance, but he never spoke of it. She earned for herself some neat chintz dresses, for she invariably refused the money he put in his mother's hands, at first from obstinacy, and lately from womanly pride. The broad cotton-lace collars were replaced by narrow cambric ruffles, and with her hair parted smoothly over her forehead, and a smile of good nature lighting up her face, Ruth was never wearied of admiring her. Love had, indeed, worked wonders. Whether she went singing with her sweet voice about the household tasks, or sewed diligently by Ruth's side, it was all the same; but the instant James was heard coming the song was hushed, the smile was clouded, and she either went to her own room or sat in silence.

The whole house betokened a change. The books and newspapers of which James was fond were neatly piled up on the bureau or in the window-seat; the brushes and towels had their appointed places; "chips of cloth" no longer littered the floor. Though James enjoyed the change, and even brought home a new table-cover and a box of mignonette for the now open window he never seemed to connect Nora with the improvement. Something of his old cheerfulness came back in the spring sunshine, but it was fitful and easily driven away.

He came home one evening earlier than usual, and after tea, as if he had something important to disclose drew his chair up, in the old familiar way, to his mother.

Ruth's heart beat a little quicker. She was sure it was something about Nora, for he had seemed to watch her lately. She had noticed it several times. But she was not prepared for the proposal he made, which was that they should find a home for her among her friends.

She's not happy here, mother, and no wonder; and I think perhaps I ought to do something for her. The poor girl was no more to blame than I was; and since it is as it is, I ought to make her as comfortable as I can. I think she seems different lately; and, at any rate, she hasn't gone gadding off with others, disgracing me, as many would have done. Then you wouldn't have so much to do; and on the whole, since we can't love each other, perhaps it's best we should separate."

"But why can't you love each other, Jimmy?"

He looked up, startled by the anxious tone of his mother's voice. "If I love her ever so well, she hates me. She never would love me."

"Did you ever ask her if she did?"
"Oh, mother! and we worse than strangers. I could love a wife dearly that you know. Any one who would have cared for me, and tried to help you, and make you happy, I could love any one that would do that."

Nora's secret could not keep longer and Ruth set forth her improvements in the most glowing light; how she had taken care of the rooms, because he liked them tidy; how she had earned two dollars a week rather than be dependent on him; and the story of the rose-bud came out now.

"Oh, James, go to the poor girl," said Ruth, "and tell her you will try to love her at any rate."

He saw all that his mother said must be true, and blamed himself for not discovering it sooner.

"Go and tell her so," his mother urged again.

"But to-night—"
"Yes, to-night, for it will be the hardest to-morrow, I know, and I'm sure she loves you."

She had not yet retired, and was leaning her head on her arm, and did not look up when he entered the room but said, in a voice that showed she had been weeping: "James came home early to-night, didn't he, mother? I have been laying here, listening to his voice. You have been talking a long time."

"Yes, Nora, of you, my poor girl," said James, with a voice of emotion; and he stooped down and raised her in his arms. "Do not try to go away from me; do not be frightened. There you will not send me away" and he drew her head down upon his shoulder as they stood there. "I was coming to tell you that you might leave us; but now I ask you to stay, if you can love me and be my wife."

"Oh, James, I have loved you so long!" she said, sobbing; "and I was content, or tried to be, to live just seeing you every day and working for you. I know I was wild, and vain, and selfish; but I was not wicked; and everybody loved you, and how could I help it?"

"Do not try to help it, Nora. It is I who have been wrong; but I will try to [Continued on Eighth Page]