

Select Tale.

PARLOR AND KITCHEN,
OR,
MRS. POTTER'S MISTAKE,

BY HAP HAZARD.

In most sections of the Western States, twenty years ago, abundant means did not always bring relief from domestic duty and drudgery, especially to females. In the country all were independent farmers, on their own wild land, requiring all the labor of every member of the household, and in the towns social orders had nothing of the acknowledged position belonging to older communities; the poor expected soon to be rich, when according to their favorite phrase, they would be as good as anybody, and it was rare indeed that any one could be induced to undertake the duties of household service. Gentlemen were compelled to groom their own horses, and drive their own cows or dispense with the comforts from the possession of these useful animals, and ladies were obliged to sacrifice inclination and taste, and often give their entire time to cooking, house cleaning and sewing, or suffer the consequences.

Pre eminent among those who never allowed their household to feel the need of comforts they could provide, resulting either from their own labor, or that of others under their direction, many an old inhabitant of Deerville, Indiana, will remember Mrs. Thomas. True, the village of those days has now become a city of no small pretensions or actual importance; has changed its name for one less suggestive of border life, and is become quite cosmopolitan in many respects; yet Mrs. Thomas lives there still; loving the tender vines, shrubs and trees which she planted a quarter of a century since, and from that quiet retreat holding converse with the more active world, only through papers, books and letters, and the visits of children, who have made other homes, or the friends of earlier days who are still left to receive her cordial welcome. If in the months when the ruddy or russet fruit is dropping from the branches, or the 'shocks of corn fully ripe' are gathered into the garner, she feels that her autumn of life is also come; in the glad Spring, as the buds burst, the flowers unfold and the birds build nests in every bush on her grounds, she renews her youth, and is again, in heart and spirit, in the morning of her days; and time that touches her, yet touches her gently, in face and form, in the winter, seems anxious to repair his work, and restore entire freshness to one whose heart will never grow old.

It is the rare preservation of interest in the affairs of active life in which she no longer participates, admiration of the good, love for the beautiful, joy with the successful and happy, and sympathy for the afflicted and unfortunate, that makes her society sought more than she always desires. A remark once addressed to her by Judge Sinclair, who never failed, when holding court in town, to be the welcome guest of her husband, formed a comprehensive commentary upon her qualities, as a wife, mother and friend, and which is applicable now as then, although called out before her family circle was at all broken.

'Mrs. Thomas, I have just arrived at a solution of what has often been rather mysterious about you,' said the judge, smoothing his napkin as was his custom after a satisfactory dinner, and folding it carefully before putting it in the ring.

'I wish you would give me the benefit of it. There are some matters about me which I do not fully understand myself, and perhaps this is one of them,' said Mrs. Thomas, very quietly.

'I have often wondered how your house should be such a pleasant place, both for its constant and its casual inmates; and I believe I have hit upon it. You always treat your guests as if they were members of your own family, and the members of your own family as if they were your own guests.'

'I do not know of any one who has a stronger claim upon my best efforts than my husband and children,' said she tenderly, 'and I never invite any persons to my house whom I cannot receive cordially, and strive to render happy so long as they remain.'

But Mrs. Thomas did not devote her entire time to domestic duties, even when unassisted in their performance. Although very far from enjoying perfect health, yet she could 'do all her own work,' as her neighbors expressed it, and still have some leisure for reading; care of the poor, sympathetic and consistent action in many enterprises of benevolence and social improvement, friendly intercourse, and proper attention to religious observances.—But to accomplish this, it was necessary to be industrious. In such a life there is found much labor for the head and hands, as well as oall for great expansion of the heart.

When it was possible to procure 'help,' Mrs. Thomas was always most willing to have assistance in the kitchen and chambers, that she might have more time to devote to her husband, children and friends, and for those

elevating enjoyments and pursuits in which she delighted. But the girls and women who, from time to time, entered her service, were so poorly qualified for the position, that they often occasioned her more labor than they relieved her from, and if they proved sadly incorrigible or unimprovable, she would dismiss them, and resume her labors alone.

Being always careful that her house should be at least healthfully clean, and conducive to elegant comfort, dismissed servants and their confederates and slovenly neighbors seemed to feel personally solaced, if they called her 'very particular.' With economy in the use and taste in the selection of furniture and costume for herself and family, all generally presented so good an appearance, that many who disbursed double the amount in a year which she expended, and never looked half so well, at home or abroad, called her 'extravagant.' Exercising an independent choice among her acquaintances, for the frequent association of those only whose habits, tastes, feelings, intelligence and aspirations, harmonized with her own, those acquaintances who would not pretend to any affinity with her in these matters, thought her 'very proud.' These various charges never annoyed her an atom. She was satisfied that they were current among those only who knew simply her name or face. She remembered that she had a right to be particular; that her husband's ever open purse was sufficient contradiction to the assertion that she was extravagant; and she believed that God would never accuse her of being very proud; she cared for none of these things, and all who in any way became familiar with her inner life, were convinced of the utter falsity of the carefully whispered accusations.

Mrs. Thomas was one of those useful women of a passing period, if not already passed, who never hesitated to send word to morning callers that she was 'engaged in the kitchen,' if it so happened, and she should be compelled to keep them waiting a few minutes; or, that it was 'washing day,' and that unless upon some very urgent matter, they must excuse her entirely. If she really must see the company at an inconvenient hour, she never ran from the kitchen to her room to tear off her calico clothes, jump into an embroidered petticoat and silk morning gown, and sail into the parlor as if just called from some exceedingly light and dainty employment, but met her visitors frankly and freely in the costume of the moment, always neat and appropriate, deeming the kind of duty in which she was engaged, a sufficient explanation of fabric or style. And yet like all refined of her sex, she loved 'soft raiment,' and when other duties did not prevent, found a sort of genuine pleasure in wearing the 'choicest wonders of the loom,' or products of the fingers, if they were really beautiful in themselves.

But this is wandering, or rather keeping too long away from the simple object of this writing—the narration of an incident in her domestic experience, which Mrs. Thomas used to relate herself with great glee and such pantomimic illustrations as set the scene vividly before her listener.

She and her only daughter, just returned from her four years absence at the seminary, were dividing the domestic duties of the morning between them, and it so happened that the care of arranging the chambers, sweeping and dusting, and laying the table in the dining room fell to the younger lady; while Mrs. Thomas essayed alone the preparation of the dinner. She had brought it to a near conclusion, and was just preparing to dish up the vegetables, when a rap at the kitchen door surprised her, and opening it she saw an old lady, attired in a black bombazine bonnet and dress, a faded shawl on her shoulders, and an old silk work-bag of huge capacity hanging on her arm.

'Is Square Thomas at hum?'

'He is not at the house, but will probably be here directly, as it is nearly dinner time; will you walk in?'

'No, thank you; guess I'll set in my wagon and wait for him.'

'Oh, no, you had better come into the house,' said Mrs. Thomas persuasively.

'Well, I reckon I'll just step in here,' said the old woman, and entering the kitchen, dropped into the chair nearest the door, to the surprise of Mrs. Thomas, who was leading the way through the dining room to the front part of the house. She returned and asked the visitor to go into a cooler room.

'No, thank you, I'd rather stay here; s'pose he won't be long coming.'

'Very well, if you prefer it; he can come out here, though I presume he would rather see you in the library.'

Mrs. Thomas went on with the dinner, closely watched by the visitor, in whom she thought she recognized, merely from description, a client of her husband, who annoyed her exceedingly about the settlement of the trifling estate of her 'dear departed Potter.' She was just about to venture a semi-inquisitive remark on the relic in black bombazine, based upon this supposition, when the somewhat venerable widow forestalled her, by asking sharply, 'How long have you lived with Mr. Thomas?'

'Oh, a great while. So long that I hardly know—'

'Possible!' interrupted the visitor. 'And where did you come from here?'

Mrs. Thomas started at the oddity of the question, but said—'From New York; why you ought to know.'

'Oh, yes, I thought as much,' broke in the old lady again, 'you come from a distance; Mrs. Thomas can't get nobody around here to live with her long.'

Mrs. Thomas was perplexed and puzzled for a moment, but instantly surmising that her visitor took her for a 'third girl,' she forgave the impertinence of the old woman, while her enjoyment of an innocent joke allowed her to sustain the character a little while for her own edification, and subsequently that of her visitor.

'Do you know Mrs. Thomas?' asked she

'Oh, law! yes; that is, I've never seen her, but I've heard tell of her, and that's enough.'

'Well, what do you hear of her?' asked Mrs. Thomas, as she sat down to peel the potatoes.

'She's orful partickler about her work, it has to be done jist so; and she's so stuck up, she thinks her ways better'n anybody else's; nobody can never suit her anyhow.'

'She does like to have her work done according to her own idea, but I never had any trouble in pleasing her, as I think when I work for others I should strive to do as they desire, not as I may want to.'

'Well—yes; but girls as has been well brought up, has jist as good a right to their way as anybody else, if they aint quite so rich.'

'To be sure they have about their own affairs, but when a girl undertakes to do another's work, it is not her own work; and her will should not be set up in opposition to her employer. Is not that reasonable. Now, after I know how Mrs. Thomas wants work done, I try to do it so, and we have never had a word of difficulty since I lived with her.'

'You aint like most girls, that's all.'

'No, I suppose not; but if they would do as I do in this matter, they would get along much better. I always advise those that I know, to try it, and a great many have found out it is the best way, and in fact, the only way.'

The potatoes being peeled, and the dinner done, Mrs. Thomas was so busy for a few minutes in carrying it to the dining-room that any further conversation was prevented, beyond a few short questions and answers, such as 'Do you make tea every day for dinner, for Miss Thomas?' asked by the ever inquisitive Mrs. Potter, as the urn came out for hot water and Souchoing.

'No, but whenever she wants it I do.'

'Well, I would'n't—there!'

'Not if you knew a cup of tea was very refreshing to her?'

'No, if she wanted tea for dinner she might make it herself,' said the old lady, spitefully.

Dinner was served, and Mr. Thomas had not yet come from town. Mrs. Thomas asked Mrs. Potter to walk into the other room, lay off her things, and take some dinner; probably Mr. Thomas would come in while they were eating. There was no one in the house but Mrs. Thomas and her daughter, and she need not hesitate at all.

'No, I'd rather stay here. Her daughter's jest home from the seminary, ain't she?'

'Yes, a few weeks ago.'

p>'She don't do nothing, I s'pose, but lay abed and play on her pianer?'

'Oh! yes, said Mrs. Thomas, nearly convulsed with laughter, 'she is a real worker; gets up early, and would do all the housework, if her mother and I would let her; she says she wants to learn over again what she has partly forgotten at school.'

'Du tell! well she must be uncommon!'

'Perhaps she is. But come; come into dinner.'

'No! I'll stay out here and eat with you, after they're done.'

'I eat with the family.'

'You do? I thought Mrs. Thomas would not let her girls set at the table with her. That's what they say in our parts.'

'They are mistaken. Mrs. Thomas never makes any strong objection, if girls want to do it, or insist upon it; but she lays it down as a rule, that every body at her table must be neatly and cleanly dressed, and if they sit there they must be so too; which she knows is very hard for them at all times in doing kitchen work; and she knows also it is better for them every way to prepare a table for and by themselves, where they can look and act as they like; that if they sit at the table with the family, they have no freedom of action, because she will have that time for social conversation with her family unless invited guests are present, it being the only time when they are all together and they have a right to enjoy it.'

'I s'pose she thinks she's better than her girls. Of course she won't want me intrudin'.'

'No, she does not think she is any better, if they do well; but, that she has a right to en-

joy the society of her friends and family at the table, and that it is convenient for all, and most so for themselves, for them to sit with the family. No, she won't think you are intruding; she wants me to make you come in. She is anxious to get acquainted with you, and thinks she shall like you very much.'

'Me!' exclaimed the old lady all in a flutter, how does she know anything of me?'

'She has heard Mr. Thomas speak of you and besides she has seen you.'

'Well, now the Squire is a right sociable kind of a man; allers has a pleasant word for every body; but I guess she's never seen me; she's never been in our neighborhood.'

'Yes she has, often; come along, the dinner is growing cold, and she is waiting for you; and Mrs. Thomas fairly drew the old lady into the dining room, where, with the assistance of Jennie Thomas, she was relieved of her bonnet, bag and shawl, and seated at the table.

Mrs. Potter regarded Jennie with much interest, who, although attired in the simple and tasteful dress in which she first left her room in the morning, looked very elegant in the widow's eyes.

Jennie knew not a word of all that had passed in the kitchen, and could not understand the merry expression playing around her mother's features. As her father did not come she sat down where she could carve, and help the others, while Mrs. Thomas, of course, took the seat at the head of the table by the tea urn, and began to prepare the beverage.

It was impossible to fix the old lady's attention. She was bewildered; whether most at the suavity of Jennie, or the familiarity with which the 'third girl,' handled the silver tea things, and consulted her taste in preparing the cup for drinking or at the attention they both paid to herself, it was hard to determine.

Jennie's wonder was most excited by the look of expectancy with which Mrs. Potter regarded the diffident doors of the apartment as if from some of them a wonderful vision was about to open to her sight.

The dining room was central to a large house, and there were fourteen or fifteen doors opening into it from various rooms, passages and closets. Mrs. Thomas knew well enough that her guest was watching for the appearance of the lady, of whom she had heard tell so much, but knew so little, and while she enjoyed the passing moments infinitely, she would return no explanation to the enquiring look of Jennie.

Mrs. Potter could not with hold her eyes from the different doors long enough to eat anything, or make coherent replies to the remarks of her companions at table. The least noise about the house threw her into the utmost confusion and occasioned renewed and close scrutiny of the numerous doors. In vain the mystified Jennie, and the amused Mrs. Thomas, pressed upon her acceptance the various articles composing the repast, and urged her to taste them. It was very evident that not for the gratification of her palate had she ventured, or rather allowed herself to be drawn into the dining room.

Jennie became uneasy, if not positively alarmed, at the appearance of her companions. The expression of mischief or mirth, she was uncertain which, in her mother's face, grew more intense every moment; while the while the wondering eyes of Mrs. Potter, and her apprehensive matter, affected Jennie most unpleasantly. A silence settled over the whole group. Mrs. Potter finally paid some little attention to the contents of her plate, but more to those of her tea cup.—Mrs. Thomas proposed to substitute a fresh hot cup full for that which had grown cold in the interim, but the widow persistently refused to make the exchange. Pouring half the beverage into the saucer, probably from the force of habit for it was impossible to cool it any more, without ice, she raised the saucer to her lips still keeping her eyes on one or another of the doors.

Just at this moment Jennie very innocently inquired—

'Mother is it not very strange that father does not come?'

'No, I think not; court may not have adjourned yet.'

Down fell the china saucer from the widow's lips and fingers with a crash, while the cold tea trickled from her mouth and spread over her black bombazine; her body fell heavily against the back of the chair, her hands flew into the air and then dropped powerless at her side; and in the relaxation of the muscles of her face, her lower jaw might as well have been unhinged for any practical good that she could derive from its possession.

Jennie sprang up and screamed with fright, certain now that the woman was a crazy old creature, subject to fits; and yet, the remarkable composure of her mother somewhat reassured her. Just then her father entered, and she ran to his side, sure of protection there, in any event.

Mrs. Thomas watched the widow closely and anxiously, but did not discover signs of anything more dangerous than a fainting fit or possibly a short attack of hysterics; but even at this prospect, the kindness of her heart

made her feel some compunctions of conscience, and she was rising to reach some restorative from the medicine closet, when an attempt of the old lady at utterance, arrested her steps. Mrs. Potter was indeed rapidly recovering herself, but yet, her lower jaw would only come up to a speaking position occasionally. Whenever it would do so, she fixed her eyes on one and another of the trio:—

'Ah—ar—are you are you her—her daughter?'

Jennie, not yet entirely recovered from her fright looked at her parents, as if they had better answer that question.

'Are you—are you—oh! dear me!—are you Mrs. Thomas?'

Mrs. Thomas who was now addressed, seeing that Mrs. Potter's eyes were of more service to her just at that moment than her ears, simply nodded assent, without speaking.

'Mis—Mis—Mister Thomas—are you her husband—husband—her husband.'

'I think so,' said he coming forward; 'I am not aware of any divorce being decreed. But, Mrs. Potter what is the matter, my dear woman; will not your boys allow you to plant potatoes in the orchard? Wife! Jennie!—what does all this mean? Do explain.'

'Oh! dear me!' broke in poor Mrs. Potter, with more firmness of voice, but with no abatement of distress. 'What have I said, what did I say? Oh! I shall die! I know I shall!'

Between repeated assurances to the old lady that not the least harm had been done, that nothing had been said that need give her any distress, Mrs. Thomas proceeded to explain to her husband and Jennie the little prelude that had been introductory to this scene.

Mrs. Potter was at last brought to a tranquil state, and was induced to remain the entire afternoon, during which many more of her impressions of Mrs. Thomas and Jennie were corrected, and they all became great friends. Indeed Mrs. Potter, at one of her subsequent visits which were often repeated until her last sickness, begged of Mrs. Thomas that she would receive Polly Potter, her youngest daughter, then about fifteen, into her family as a domestic for a few years. She acceded to the request, and while Polly's mother was a life-long friend and admirer of Mrs. Thomas, Polly herself became the most useful assistant she ever employed, and in time a most skillful housekeeper, and an intelligent, handsome young woman.

Reader; one word; (that is provided any reader has continued on to this paragraph.) If you attend winter evening parties of the most desirable character on Michigan or Wash-bash avenue, you meet at any if not all of them, the former Polly Potter, now the sensible and agreeable, though not highly accomplished, Mrs. ——— who makes good use of the abundant possessions which have rewarded the early and honest ventures of her husband in Chicago real estate.—Although I do not suppose she will thank me for making it so very public, neither is she ashamed of the fact I here disclose her humble origin. If she were, I, Hap Hazard, would never leave another card at her door, or put my foot again upon her velvet carpets. In a country where a 'Mill Boy of the Slashers,' may become the most accomplished of statesmen and polished of orators, a lady surely need not blush to own that in her youth she filled the position of a domestic, if she filled it well.

Mrs. Thomas very rarely comes to the city. You may have seen her at the almost palatial residence of Mrs. ———, who often asks to be called 'Polly,' by her, so suggestive is that name—by her kindly spoken—of many instructive lessons she has found so beneficial in her subsequent life. Mrs. Thomas, however, will not yield this point, saying that present position, whatever it may be, is most deserving of regard and appropriate consideration, neither to be shorn of honor or respected by what may have preceded it, nor so walled about by arbitrary distinctions as to prevent rising to any other to which inclination and capacity can carry the individual, so she ever addresses Polly as do you and I reader, when we are so happy as to meet her.

HUNTING SNAKES.—Dr. Thomas of Monticello, Ind., reports a case of rattlesnake bite. Mr. J. H. S., (age 88, who stands six feet in his stockings; who, by the way was very fond of brandy) who had just been bitten on the inside of his left heel by a large rattlesnake—both fangs had been well inserted in the muscles. I gave him, in the short time alluded to, one quart of brandy and one and a half gallons of whiskey—all without intoxication. He wanted more, and I refused to supply his wants.

The next day Mr. H., his next door neighbor, saw him passing along, and saw him with his pants rolled to his knees, barefooted, and walking round in some weeds and grass with his feet. He asked if he had lost anything. 'No, sir.' 'What are you doing then?' I am hunting a snake. There ain't any liquor only what Dr. Thomas has, and he won't let me have any unless I am snake-bit, so I am hunting one.'—North-Western Medical and Surgical Journal.

He who gains the victory over great insults is often overpowered by the smallest.