THE OLD SPECKLED HEN.

John Highow lived not fifty miles from here,
Was large of heart and in his faith sincere,
He was a farmer very well to do,
And had a wife devoted, kind and true.
But yet one sin life's devious ways beset,
She was inclined to worry and to fret,
'Bout this or that, servants or hired men,
But just now 'bout a poor old speckled hen.

The rounding year had on their efforts smiled,
The great barn loft with sweetest hay was piled.
The yellow pumpkins 'neath September's skies
Had grown to more than their accustomed size.
The honey bees had bounteous sweets distilled,
And rip'ning apples all the orchard filled.
But in her heart there was no joyous song;
The hen with many speckles had gone wrong.

The various crops in garden and in field
Had given forth a more than generous yield,
The sheep and cattle both had multiplied,
And in the house and barn were laid aside
A good supply of all they made or grew
To meet their wants the coming winter through.
Yet she could find no comfort night or day,
The speckled hen had laid her eggs away.

And so one day when to her house there came
An aged friend, we will not call by name,
And frankly asked how they were prosp'ring now,
Poor Mrs. Highow knit her anxious brow,
And bowing down her discontented head,
Forgetting all the blessings round her spread,
Declared that she was awfully distressed,
The speckled hen had gone and hid her nest.

And so it is too many souls possess
The same great weakness that caused her distress.
The little ills that life's pathway beset
We magnify, and o'er them fume and fret.
With eyes downcast and half despondent tread,
We overlook the blessings round us spread.
Tis true alike of women and of men,
And every life has its old speckled hen.

—Thomas F. Porter.

The Carelessness of Peters.

BY LUKE SHARP.

GEORGE Peters was a very, very methodical person for so young a man. When a letter got into Peters's hands it went through a certain routine and the answer departed from him to the copying book and from the copying book to the envelope and the envelope, letter and all, with enclosures marked, went into the letter box with a regularity that nothing but the office clock could emulate, and even that, the clerks said, was not as regular as Peters, for they claimed it was always fast in the morning and mighty slow in pointing to 6 o'clock.

It is little wonder, then, that Peters stood high in the confidence of old man Bentham. Bentham was Bentham Brothers & Co. There were no brothers and no company—that was merely the firm name—it was all Bentham. Perhaps there once were brothers and perhaps there was once a company, but that is all ancient history, anyhow, and has nothing to do with this strictly modern story. And it did not intertere with the fact that old Bentham's name was a lovely thing to have at the bottom of a large check.

The clerks never speculated on the probable effect of love on Peters, because it never occurred to them that such a thing as Peters falling in love was within the bounds of possibility. Love, they argued, was not an article that can be docketed and ticketed and referred back for further information, and entered in the day book and posted on the debit or credit side of a ledger, so what on earth could Peters do with it if he had it? Manifestly nothing. If they had known as much about human nature as you or I, they would have surmised that when Peters did fall, it was time to stand from under.

And who should Peters fall in love with but the very woman of all others whom he ought never to have given a thought to—in other words, pretty little Miss Sadie Bentham, if you please. It made Peters himself cold when he thought of it, for he knew he had just as much chance of getting the moon or the laureateship as the consent of Old Man Bentham. The clerks always said that it was Miss Sadie who fell in love with Peters, principally, I suppose, because she should have known better, and I think myself there is something to be said for that view of the matter. Anyhow she came to her father's place of business very often and apparently very unnecessarily, but the old man was always pleased to see her, no matter how busy he happened to be. At first she rarely looked at Peters, but when she did flash one of those quick glances of hers at him poor Peters thought he had the fever and ague. He understood the symptoms later on.

I don't know how things come to a climax; neither do the clerks, for that matter, although they pretended to. Besides they are divided in their opinions, so I think their collective surmises amount to but very little. Johnson claims that it was done over the telephone, while Farnam says she came to the office one day, her father was not there, and proposed to Peters on the spot. One thing the clerks are unanimous about, and that is that Peters, left to himself, would never have had the courage. Still, too much attention must not be paid to what the clerks say. What can they know about it? They are in another room.

Peters knew that he had no right to think about that girl during business hours. He was paid to think about the old man and his affairs, which were not nearly so interesting. But Peters was conscientious and he tried to do his duty. Nevertheless, the chances are that unconsciously little Miss Sadie occupied some small portion of his mind that should have been given up to the concerns of Bentham Brothers & Co., and her presence where she had not the slightest business to be threw the rest of his mental machinery out of gear.

It is very generally admitted now that the sprightly Miss Sadie managed the whole affair. No one who knew Peters would ever have given him the credit of proposing an elopement—"accuse him of it," as Johnson puts it. She claimed that while she could manage her father all right enough up to a certain point, yet that in this particular matter she preferred to negotiate with him after marriage rather than before. She had a great deal of the old man's shrewdness—had Sadie. He used to say he would not like to have her as an opponent on a wheat deal.

Well, to come to the awful point where Peters's methodicalness nearly upset the apple cart. The elopement was all settled, Peters quaking most of the time, and he was to write her a letter giving an account of how arrangements were progressing. It will hardly be credited—and yet it is possible enough when you think what a machine a methodical man gets to be—that Peters wrote this epistle to his girl on his desk and put it in the pile of letters that were to be copied into the old man's letter book! The office boy picked up the heap at exactly the usual hour, took them to the copying press, wet the thin leaves and squeezed them in; the love letter next to the one beginning:

"DEAR SIR—Yours of the 231 received and contents noted."

Peters got the corner curled letters still damp, and put them all in their right envolopes, and Sadie got hers in due time, but did not know enough about business correspondence to know that her first love-letter was written in copying ink and had been through the press.

Next day when old man Bentham was looking over the leaves of the previous day's letters he suddenly began to chuckle to himself. Old Bentham had a very comfortable, good-natured, well-to-do chuckle that was a pleasure to hear. Even Peters almost smiled as he heard it.

"Peters!"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you all the letters, Peters, that these are the answers to?"

"Certainly, sir."

"There is one I want to see, Peters."

"What is the name, please?"

"Petty. I did not know that we deal in this line of goods, Peters."

"H. W. Petty, sir."

"I don't know the initials. Here's the letter."

Peters was stricken. He was appalled—dumb—blind. The words "Darling Petty" danced before his eyes. He felt his hair beginning to rise. The book did not fall from his hand simply because he held it mechanically—methodically. Old Bentham roared, then closed the door so that the clerks would not hear his mirth.

"That's one on you, Peters. It's too good to keep. I must tell that down at the club."

"I wouldn't if I were you, sir," said Peters, slowly recovering his senses as he saw the old man had no suspicion how the land lay.

"No, I suppose it wouldn't be quite the square thing. But of all men in the world, Peters—you. Why do you elope? Why not marry her respectably at the church or at home. You'll regret going off like that all your life."

"Miss——she—that is—prefers it that way, sir."

"Oh, romantic, is she? I wouldn't do it, Peters."

"There are other reasons."

"Father or mother against, as usual, I suppose. Well, you refer them to me, Peters. I'll speak a good word for you. But what am I to do while you are away?"

"I—I thought perhaps—perhaps—Johnson would take my place."

"All right. I can put up with Johnson for a week, maybe, but think of me and get back as soon as she'll let you."

If old Mr. Bentham did not mention it at the club he did at home.

"You remember Peters, Sadie. No! no! that was Johnson. Peters is in my room, you know. No, the red headed man is Farnam. He's in the other room. Peters has the desk in the corner. Staidest fellow on the street. Ever so much older than I am—in manner of course. The last man in the city you would suspect of being in love. Well, he wrote"—and so Mr. Bentham told the story.

Sadie kissed him somewhat hysterically when he promised to say a good word for Peters and said he was very kind hearted.

"Besides, papa, you ought to have a partner in the business. There is no Co., you know."

"Bless me, child, what has Peters's wedding to do with the company? He is taking the partner, not me. I can't take Peters into partnership merely because he chooses to get married."

"Oh, I thought that was customary," said Sadie.

* * * * * * *

There was no elopement after all. The clerks say that it was the conscientious Peters that persuaded Sadie out of it. But as the old man found he had to give way, it came to the same thing.

"Sadie," the old man said, "I think I'll change the name of the firm. I'll retire and it will be after this 'Bentham, Husband & Co.'"—Detroit Free Press.

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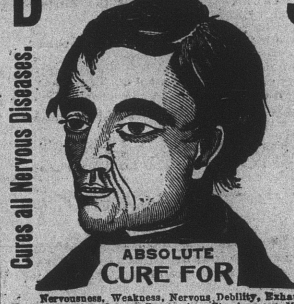

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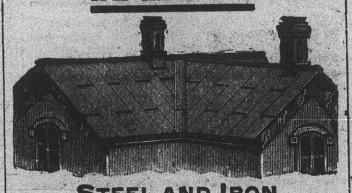

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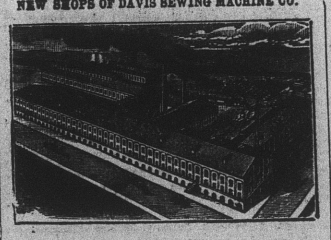

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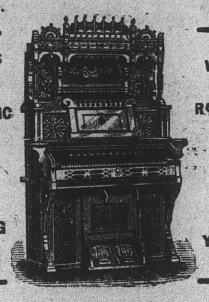

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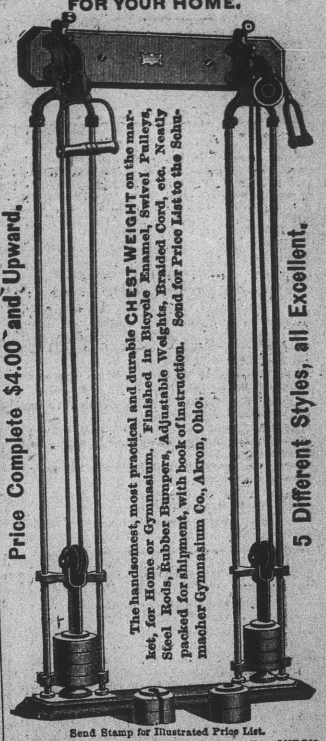

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