



THE TIMES.

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CONTENTMENT.

'Tis not to sit and idly wait With folded hands for tardy Fate To bring the gifts that one might prize, And cast before his sleepy eyes; To wait the coming of the ship Whose sides unto the stern waves dip, That bears, with love and glee and song, The treasures we have craved so long.

It is to do what'er we find; To sow the seed; to reap or bind; To gather, though the yield be small, With our hand the bright sheaves all; To search and find the golden mean, And hold it with a hand serene.

A BOGUS LOVE LETTER

—AND— WHAT CAME OF IT.

"I WONDER if I shall look like Miss Hannah when I attain her advanced age," said Gertrude Lorrimer, drumming idly on the window-pane with her slender, white fingers, and watching the drizzling rain. "Of course not, Gertrude. How foolish of you to ask such a question! Miss Hannah never could have been a beauty, even in her palmiest days; and you are acknowledged to be the handsomest girl in Bayville. "You are always ready with some morsel of flattery, Nettie," laughed Gertrude; "and I assure you I appreciate your kindness. Still, I am not sure that I shall not be as plain as Miss Hannah one of these days. Didn't Aunt Grace say that she was once quite a belle in Bayville?" "It must have been nearly a century ago," cried Nettie Morris, with a scornful laugh. "But what set you talking of Miss Hannah?" "I saw her go by the window with her charity basket," replied Gertrude. There was silence in the room for a few minutes, and then a sudden exclamation from Gertrude caused Nettie to look up quickly from the crocheting over which she had been busy all the morning. "What is the matter?" she asked. "Come here quick, Nettie. Dr. Astley is coming out to get into his buggy." Nettie sprang up, and stood by her cousin; and both received a bow from the tall, handsome doctor who had just closed the door of his elegant house behind him, and run lightly down the step to where his buggy stood, the servant standing at the horse's head. But, as Dr. Astley had one foot on the step of his buggy, a hand fell on his arm; and, turning, he saw the small person of Miss Hannah Graves, attired in a rusty waterproof cloak, rubber overshoes, and a plain bonnet; while on one arm hung the "charity basket." "Your face is full of trouble, Miss Graves," said the doctor, politely holding his umbrella over the little woman, "and I am sure you need my help in some case of wretchedness. "What is the particular trouble to-day?" "It is very fortunate I met you," said Miss Hannah, in the sweet voice which was one of the charms that had not vanished with her youth. "I do need you very much. I have been down to see the Brewers; and I find that the old lady has rheumatic fever, Mr. Brewer has cut his hand terribly with some glass, and poor Rachel is nearly ill with watching the poor baby. It is my belief that the child will not live many days. They have not sent for you, because they have no prospect of money to settle your bill; but if you see what you can do, Dr. Astley, I will be responsible for the bill." "I never send in bills to people as poor as the Brewers, Miss Graves," said

Dr. Astley, with just a trifle of hauteur in his manner; "and I will go and see them at once." "Thank you," said Miss Hannah, simply. "I have always gone to Dr. Case, but, as you know, he is too ill to leave his house at present." And she moved on, bowing slightly to the doctor as he sprang into his buggy, and took the reins. "Did you ever see such impertinence in a woman before!" exclaimed Gertrude, who had watched the scene very intently, though no words of the conversation had reached her ears. "The idea of stopping him in that manner!" said Nettie. "She didn't seem to care what we thought of such conduct; and she saw us here too. Gertrude, it is my belief that she is in love with the doctor, and is trying to attract him. You know old maids are always on the lookout for a chance to change their condition. Be careful, Nettie, if Miss Hannah is your rival. She can't fall to win." And both the cousins laughed merrily and long. Well might proud Gertrude Lorrimer be called a beauty; and it was no wonder that she was called the belle of the town. Tall, with a perfect figure, hair of a blue-black, eyes like midnight, a clear complexion, and regular features, she was a beauty, and she knew it. Left an orphan at eighteen years of age, Gertrude had only been too glad to accept the offer of her aunt, Mrs. Morris, to take her into her own home and family, where she could share the pleasures of her cousin Nettie. Not that Bayville suited Gertrude at all—she thought it much too small a town in which to parade her beauty and her accomplishments; but still for three years she had been contented if not entirely satisfied; and, being wholly penniless and dependent on her aunt for everything, she did not allow her dissatisfaction to be seen. She was anxious to marry well, and therefore Dr. Astley was looked upon by her with favor. He was young, handsome, wealthy, and stood high in his profession; and Gertrude could not ask for more. He had evidently been impressed with her beauty and accomplishments, and had paid her some attention, but never yet had assumed the character of a lover; and Gertrude inwardly fretted at what she mentally termed his "horrid dilatoriness." She had no fears as to the ultimate result of his attentions; but she was in haste to secure her prize. Her disposition was a jealous one, and she could not endure seeing even plain Miss Hannah talking to the doctor. Miss Hannah, however, would not have minded in the least if the whole village had seen her in conversation with young Dr. Astley. Her whole mind and soul were bound up in the welfare of others, and the greater part of her time was devoted to the poor and afflicted, doing what lay in her power to help them. Miss Hannah was only thirty-four years of age, though Gertrude and Nettie gave her credit for ten years more, and she was very plain indeed in appearance, and never troubled herself much about the fashions, or cared if the two frivolous girls at Mrs. Morris' made rude remarks about her clothes. She had seen very little of Dr. Astley, although her cottage was on the same street with his elegant, roomy mansion, and within a stone's throw of that of Mr. Morris. Dr. Case, who was Dr. Astley's senior by thirty years, was the one to whom Miss Hannah went with her tales of sorrow and sickness; but now the old doctor had been ill for several days with gout, and she had mustered up sufficient courage to apply to Dr. Astley for help for the Brewers in their affliction. Miss Hannah had been a pretty girl in her youthful days. Hers had been one of those soft, sweet faces which win the love of all. But, though lovers had come to her, she refused them all. Her life was devoted to the invalid mother and crippled little brother who made up the household, and she would allow no new duties to interfere with the old. So the years had flown by, taking Miss Hannah's youth, bloom, and freshness with them; and now the dear mother and poor brother, for whom she had sacrificed a woman's dream of home, were laid beneath the church-

yard sod, and only Hetty, the maid-of-all-work, who had been with her through all these years of sacrifice to duty, remained with her in the little white cottage in Bayville. Hannah Graves had been "Miss Hannah" to all the village for many a year, and her small, sprightly figure and "charity basket" were well known in the town, and there were few who did not give her due praise. But she had incurred the ill-will of Gertrude Lorrimer and Nettie Morris by giving them a booth in a charity fair which did not suit them at all.—They wanted the flower-stall, around which the young men congregated; but this Miss Hannah refused them. The flower-stall had been given to two young girls who were poorer in this world's goods than were Gertrude and Nettie, and no persuasion could induce Miss Hannah to make a change. The position and wealth of Gertrude and Nettie had no effect on her, and they vowed to have revenge for the slight they fancied had been put upon them, and from that time forth lost no opportunity to ridicule and censure the plain little spinster. The windows of the breakfast-room were wide open, the fire not made, the table destitute of dishes or repast, and it was nearly half-past eight o'clock. Dr. Astley was standing on the hearth-rug, with a decided frown on his handsome face. "This sort of thing has gone on long enough," he muttered impatiently. "I ordered breakfast at eight o'clock, and never get it until nine. My fire is never built in the study, and every one of my shirts need an overhauling. I suppose I'll have to change housekeepers or else get married." A vigorous pull at the bell-cord caused the entrance of the cook, whose face was flushed, and whose manner was hurried and cross. "Where is Susan?" Dr. Astley asked, "and why is the dining-room in such a state of disorder? Am I to have my breakfast to-day?" "Susan is with Mrs. Beck, sir; and she hasn't had a minute to see to the room. I had to go to the milkman's, and to tell Miss Sims that Mrs. Beck wanted her to-day; so my breakfast is not ready." "Does Mrs. Beck require Susan's services every morning? It appears to me that my comfort is of no moment to any one. Tell Susan to come to me at once; and let me have my breakfast without further delay, please." Susan, a plump, rosy girl, answered her master's summons after some delay. She said Mrs. Beck had a headache, and she had been required to bathe it; but Miss Sims was to come to nurse the housekeeper the rest of the day. Leonard Astley tried to keep his temper; but, as he ate his hastily prepared breakfast, he made up his mind to have a change of dynasty. "Mrs. Beck has imposed on me long enough," he thought, "and treats me as if she thought she were conferring a favor by remaining here. I pay her twenty dollars a month to lie in bed, and have Susan to wait on her, while my comfort is of no moment whatever. There's Singleton: he stood housekeepers and boarding as long as he was able and then married pretty Florrie Truedale. Now he has a pleasant, comfortable home, his buttons all sewed on, a congenial companion is always at hand, and I worry on with Mrs. Beck. I have a mind to propose to Miss Lorrimer. I wonder if she would make me happy. She seems like a pleasant, nice girl; and she is young and handsome enough to grace the home of any man. I am thirty-three years old, and it is time I was settled; to-night—no, to-night I must go to Singleton's—but to-morrow night I will call on the fair Gertrude and have my fate decided. If I am so fortunate as to win her, I can say adieu to Mother Beck, and welcome comfort, ease, happiness.—" The door opened, and the entrance of a portly woman in a showy wrapper interrupted Leonard's train of thought.—She sank into a cushioned arm-chair, with a heavy sigh, and requested Susan to hand her a cup of coffee. "Mrs. Beck," said Leonard, "a few plain words occasionally do a world of good. I find that my comfort is very much neglected. This morning the fire

was out, the room cold, and my breakfast an hour late again." "I am too ill, Dr. Astley, to listen to such complaints," sighed Mrs. Beck. "I could not spare Susan this morning to attend to her usual duties." "If you need a lady's maid, you had better hire one, not depend on Susan," said Dr. Astley angrily; "and, furthermore, if you will rouse yourself occasionally, and try to do something to earn the wages I pay you, it would be better for your health." The face of the portly widow grew scarlet with rage. She trembled from head to foot, and her eyes blazed with wrath. "You talk as if I was a servant, Dr. Astley," she screamed shrilly, "when I came here as an accommodation, simply as an accommodation, sir." "Perhaps then, as an accommodation, you will leave," said the doctor grimly. Whereupon the housekeeper burst into tears, and gave symptoms of hysterics, which sent the doctor from the room and out on his rounds with all haste possible. Meanwhile Nettie Morris and Gertrude Lorrimer were discussing, in the privacy of their parlor, a plan which seemed to afford them the opportunity to revenge the slight Miss Hannah had put upon them at the charity fair. "I would give anything if I could see her read it," said Nettie. "I declare! I can't wait with any patience for to-morrow to come." "I think I deserve some credit for imitating the handwriting so well," said Gertrude. "I am sure she will fully believe it is a genuine love-letter.—How I would like to see her answer!" "Very likely he will keep it, and, when you are his wife, he will show it to you, Nettie," said Nettie, who believed as fully as her cousin that the doctor's attentions were seriously inclined to matrimony. "Of course, and we will have a laugh over it together," replied Gertrude. "I rather think Miss Hannah will feel very much mortified when she finds out that she has accepted the doctor's bogus offer," said Nettie. "You think there is no doubt of her accepting, Gertrude?" "Not the least," replied Gertrude, in a tone of confidence. "You see, Nettie, he is a very eligible person; and I rather think Miss Hannah would not refuse a man whom I would accept. No; you may be sure she will be only too glad to say 'Yes.'" "Suppose we go up-stairs and read the letter over again," suggested Nettie; "and then you can copy it, and I'll find Johnny Brewer to-night and make him take it for us." The cousins left the parlor and spent the greater part of the morning re-writing and reading the document which was to bring such dire mortification to poor Miss Hannah. That night, as Dr. Astley was returning home after spending the evening with his friend Mr. Singleton, who had married such a pretty wife, and was not troubled with a housekeeper of the Beck order, a violent gust of wind blew into his face a sheet of paper. The doctor was deep in thought about his contemplated offer to Miss Gertrude Lorrimer the next evening, and caught the paper mechanically in his hand, and abstractedly thrust it into his pocket, where it staid, completely forgotten by the dreaming doctor, who was in the midst of fancying Gertrude in his arms, confessing her love to him; for in spite of his thirty-three years, constant work, and petty trials, Dr. Astley had not outlived all romance. He passed the white cottage of Miss Hannah and was surprised to see a light still in the window of the cozy parlor.—The curtain was drawn aside; and he stopped a moment, attracted by the comfortable aspect of the whole room. The fire was burning cheerily, and a cat lay on a rug, and Miss Hannah sat in a cozy arm-chair, an open letter on her lap, and her hands crossed idly. "How pleasant it looks there!" the doctor thought, "and, for once, Miss Hannah is idle. She is a good little woman and I like her. If I don't find a fire in my study, I'll come back here, and call on the poor little thing." And the doctor laughed at the thought.

But, for a wonder, he found a fire in the study, and so did not have an excuse for calling on Miss Hannah. Perhaps, if he had done so, he would have been the recipient of a surprise as great as hers; for the letter which he had seen lying on her lap of the spinster ran as follows— "MY DEAR MISS HANNAH—During the past three weeks we have seen more of each other than ever before, and I have learned to love you devotedly. Dare I hope that I may win you for my own? Your grace and loveliness of person have stirred this heart, which has never before succumbed to woman; and my only fear is, that you will not think my love worthy your acceptance. If you can give me a favorable answer, write it and bring it to my door to-morrow at four o'clock. Susan will see that it is given to me at night, for I shall be away all day. "If your answer is unfavorable, if you feel that I am not worthy the blessed boon of your pure young love, send me no reply. Your silence will be sufficient to tell me that my hopes, my ambition, are blasted and ruined forever and my heart blighted evermore. "Yours devotedly, "LEONARD B. ASTLEY." This was the letter over which Miss Hannah was dreaming in the firelight. Perhaps to a young lady with whom offers were plenty this letter would have been stamped as counterfeit at once, but it had been years since Miss Hannah had received a love-letter, and the language to her did not sound unnatural. During the three weeks which had elapsed since she had stopped in the rain to tell Dr. Astley about the afflictions of the Brewer family, they had met very frequently. Dr. Case was only just beginning to grow better, and Dr. Astley had his hands full. In the hotel of every poor patient, in the town hospital, and among the needy of every grade, Dr. Astley had seen Miss Hannah; and, while she had learned to admire and love him for the gentleness and patience he showed on every occasion, he had learned to know how noble and generous a heart beat in the breast of the little old maid. But he imagined that the woman he was to marry was Gertrude Lorrimer, whose bright dark beauty and graceful manners were to make his home an earthly Eden. Miss Hannah was astonished at receiving her letter. A continued rapping on her cottage door caused her to open it, to find the letter tied to the knob, but no one in sight. Johnny Brewer had done his errand well, and had spent, in tops and marbles, the money Nettie had given him. Miss Hannah had seen the handwriting of the doctor very frequently, and Gertrude's clever imitation would almost have deceived the doctor himself. When the little old maid read the joint production of the girls, the tears came into her soft blue eyes. She never doubted the genuineness of her love-letter. As she read what it said of her grace and loveliness, a sigh escaped her lips. "How I wish, for his sake, that I was lovely and graceful!" she mused as she sat by the glowing fire. "How can I really believe that he loves me! He is so noble, rich and handsome; and I've thought he loved Gertrude Lorrimer, and pitted him, for she will never make any man happy. And to think, that, after all, I am his choice! I never dreamed that such happiness could come to me. "He was telling me, only yesterday, how lonely he often felt in that elegant house of his, and how Mrs. Beck neglected his comfort in every respect. I felt sorry for him then; and to think that now I have the chance to make his home bright and happy!" So Gertrude Lorrimer was right. The letter of acceptance was written before the little woman slept that night; and, at four o'clock the next day, the two girls, who were eagerly watching, saw her give the precious missive into Susan's hands. How they laughed and rejoiced as they saw her move slowly away, in deep thought!—their little old maid, whom they had so cruelly deceived. They were delighted at the success of their plan, and speculated as to what the doctor would do and say, and whom Miss Hannah would accuse of the deception. When Dr. Astley returned home at