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THE OLD COBBLER.

I remember my surprise when the quaint little sign first attracted my attention. I stopped to look at it more attentively:

"I'll make your shoe
As good as new
& better to
J. Rogers, Cobbler."

I read it once, twice, three times, till it began to chase itself around in my head, like a cat after her own tail. I was fascinated by its faultless rhyme, by the lawless abandon of its capitals. I think it soon would have set itself into music in my whirling little brain, if a voice had not cried out:

"Wal, little girl, how do you like my new sign? Don't you call that first-class poetry?"

"Yes, it's very nice poetry," I answered. And then I went on boldly: "But I see a word in it that isn't spelled right."

"Not spelled right? How's that? I shall have to hobble out and take a look at it. You're a pretty noticin' little critter. Ain't yer?"

I hinted that this sort of "too" was usually spelled with two o's; but Mr. Rogers looked hard at the word over his spectacles, and did not seem to think favorably of the change.

"I'll tell ye what," said he, finally. "I've got a way, and no spellin' about it. What's spellin' as long as folks catch yer-idea? The idee is what yer can't git along without."

Saying which, Mr. Rogers took his fist to the objectionable "to" and wrote triumphantly in its place a huge figure 2.

I felt baffled and helpless, and went home with a vague sense that I had left Mr. Rogers' sign much worse than I had found it. It still pursued me, however, and at dinner I said suddenly:

"Mamma, don't you want my shoe as good as new, and better too?"

"Bless me!" said my grandmother, "what ails the child? She isn't beginning so early to be a poet, is she?"

"Oh, no," cried my father. "I guess she's been reading old John Rogers' sign. Wife, it is a curiosity. You must go by there. We must send him down some old shoes. You know he broke his leg last winter and he's trying to work again. We must give him a lift."

So it was that next morning I found myself again before the distracting sign, this time with a large bundle of old shoes in my arms. I lifted the latch and stepped into the little shop.

"I declare for't, if here ain't a rush of business," said Mr. Rogers, as he opened my bundle. "One pair of copper-toes. Them your little brother's? Congress, with the 'larstic give out. Guess that's yer grandmother's. And here's some o' yer pa's boots, with a nice, harnsome hole in it."

"And I'd like to buy some shoe-strings, too," I put in, feeling myself a patron of considerable importance.

"Now, them copper-toes wouldn't take more'n half an hour. Can't you sit down and wait? I ain't such a great talker, but I like somebody to speak once in a while. There's the cat. I talk to her. She will look very knowing; but the minute my back's turned she's fast asleep. That ain't flatterin', yer see, and I stop."

I sat down, and while I listened used my eyes as well. The sunlight fought its way through the dusty window-frames, and diffused itself impartially over the floor, with its wide, dirt-filled cracks. The decoration of these walls was of a humble order, although by no means uninteresting. In the first place, there were huge auction-bills, in every stage of yellowness and dirt. My grandmother kept an obituary scrapbook; but, as I afterward found out, it was Mr. Rogers' practice to cherish the auction-bills of his departed friends. Amos Belden had peacefully slept with his fathers for thirteen years or more, but in J. Rogers' shop it was still proclaimed, in giant type, that he wished to sell "ten milch cows and six healthy yearlings."

Nor was this all. Ten years before a misguided showman had come to our little town, and had solemnly retreated the next day, with more experience than profits; but his advent still lived in the handbills on Mr. Rogers' walls. Behind the old man, as he patiently bent over his work, an interesting family of lions were sporting; while on the door were set forth, in vivid pictures, the accomplishments of "The Fairy of the Ring," a young woman in very scanty petticoats. The ceiling, too, had its share of decoration. From it hung, among festoons of cobwebs, a broken bird-cage; a battered Chinese lantern, whose light had

long since gone out; odd boots, which had parted with their mates; baskets with no bottoms, and numberless straps, chains and bits of rope that had long ago outlived their usefulness.

But Mr. Rogers' work-bench baffled all enumeration. It was covered with a deposit of from six to ten inches in depth, from whose lower stratum Mr. Rogers would, from time to time, bring up an awl or a bit of wax.

It was the old cobbler himself on whom my eyes at last rested. In his most upright days he could not have been a large man; but now the years had settled heavily upon him, and he had lost several inches of his youthful height. His face was framed with a thin white fringe of beard, while cheek and chin were rough with a granite-colored stubble. There were fine, netted wrinkles, but no deep furrows, in the old man's face, and on each cheek a wintry bloom still lingered. His voice had the roughness of a nutmeg-grater, but now and then glanced off from its usual key and ended in a sort of chirp.

"You never come to see me before, did you? I am the J. Rogers out there on the sign. You've heard of John Rogers that was burnt at the stake? Well, I'm another John Rogers—not that one. I warn't never quite so bad off as that. So you like my shop, eh? I've got everything handy, yer see. I haven't always been so well off as this," he went on in a tremulous chirp. "When my wife was alive—, my wife was a fine woman, harnsum and pretty high-stepping when I married her, but trouble brung her down; she never took kindly to it. Her folks called me shiftless. I dunno; if shiftless means working hard and getting little 'spose I was. I warn't one of the kind ter worry, and she was. Eight children there were, and every one that come she was sorry it come; and then, when one after another they died, all but one, that was what killed her at last. They was my children, too, and—well, I—it's given me something to look forward to, seeing 'em up there, yer see; but my wife, she wasn't right exactly in her mind, it's my belief, after our troubles come. I dunno's anybody was to blame for 'em. There's more trouble in this world than I'm able to account for, I'm freeter admit. My wife, she took to her bed two years before she died; and then I had to learn a new trade or two beside shoemaking. I was hired gal and most everything else. I made a pretty bad mess of it. I don't deny it. Poor Jim—he's our boy—run off; he couldn't stand it. She died after awhile. She was one of the Budsons. A harnsum set of gals they were. It was a heavy day for me when I buried her in her grave. I've been alone since, but I've had a great many mercies."

"I thought you broke your leg last winter, Mr. Rogers," I said.

"So I did, but, on the whole, I ruther enjoyed it. I dunno when I ever lived so high or had so many visits from my friends."

And so Mr. Rogers talked on, looking sharply up at me now and then, as if to assure himself that I was a better listener than the cat.

Two days after I went for the rest of the shoes, and Mr. Rogers seemed so glad to see me that I was again flattered into staying.

"Come, now, if you'll set down and stay awhile, I'll tell yer a story. Perhaps you'd like to know how I come by them lions? Wal, I'll tell yer, child, how 'twas."

With a child's greed of stories, I was only too eager to listen.

"I told him his show'd find it pretty poor pickin's in this town," said Mr. Rogers, in conclusion. "I'd done its cobbling for twenty years and more. But he wasn't for listening to me, and so they went off, he and his menagerie, all-a-growing together."

Somehow, it appears that after all, Mr. Rogers was the hero of this story; and again it seemed that Mr. Rogers had played a prominent part in the decline and fall of Amos Belden's fortunes; and again that Jonathan Wilder would have done much better to listen to Mr. Rogers' advice, and thus have averted ruin and consequent auction-bills. It was a very artless egotism not hard to account for. For years the old man had lived alone, his own chief counselor and friend. I do not wonder that he grew a little larger in his own eyes than in other men's; that his imagination, having nothing else to do, built up the past till his memory held fiction as dear as fact. I am quite ready to forgive him his retrospective castle-building, though I happened to be its credulous victim.

Then there were marvelous tales of "my son Jim's" adventures in that

far-off wonderland, "Out West." I believe three scanty letters furnished these romances their foundation of fact; but I asked no questions, and believed with as honest a faith in the gold-paved streets of San Francisco as in those of the New Jerusalem.

"He was a good boy, Jim was," the old man would say. "I never thought hard of him for goin' off. If he only comes back to bury me, that's all I ask. He'll be coming back one of these days, rich and harnsome, I hain't a doubt. I shouldn't wonder if he'd be looking round for a wife. Let's see—how old are you? I shouldn't wonder if you was just about right for him by that time. You'd make a putty little pair."

Though Time had stood as still with Jim as his father seemed to think, the idea of my marrying him would have lost none of its uncomfortable grotesqueness.

"Don't, Mr. Rogers," I said.

"Bashful, are you," he answered, trying to look roguish. "Don't you be for not getting married, though, like the Miss Bucklands, and the Jewbury girls, and the Bassett girls, and all the rest. There's too many on 'em; too many on 'em. I used to tell my wife that I was better'n nothin' anyway. It's kind of shabby in the men to go off and leave the women die off here up-country all alone. I ain't afraid but Jim'll find somebody easy enough."

"Oh, yes!" I said; "I was afraid I had hurt the old man's feelings. I'm sure he must be very nice."

One accomplishment of Mr. Rogers I shall never forget. He not only told me stories as he worked, but he professed to be able to read them from his hands, which he held before him like the open pages of a book.

"See! You can look at 'em," he would say. "There's nothing hid in 'em. No cheating about it. Hard and tough. Don't look much like a book, do they? But just hear me read to you out of 'em."

I was completely mystified, especially when the reader stopped to spell out a word, and when he held his hand up to the light, and complained that it was rather fine print for such old eyes; but still the story went on without a break, and, in spite of myself, I was brought to the belief that Mr. Rogers possessed some supernatural reading powers, perhaps akin to the mystery of my parsing lesson, which told of "sermons in stones and books in the running brooks."

The summer and fall went by, and the winter came, with frolics without number; but alas! to the poor and old it brought only a chill that crept into their bones and took up its abode there. Poor old John Rogers! I lifted his latch one day but the awl lay idle on the bench. It was only the rheumatism that had taken a mean advantage of the infirm knee; but week after week he lay on his bed and the dust gathered thicker in the little shop. The neighbors were kind; but the best people find a sameness in the constant repetition of good deeds, and by degrees it grew plain that the old man's friends would feel a sense of relief if he got well. It was about this time that my grandmother declared with a sigh that she had great respect for Mr. Rogers.

"He's borne up under affliction like a man; but rather shiftless—rather shiftless. I don't know how to reconcile his virtues with the dirt and disorder he lives in. I don't wonder his wife took to her bed."

"They say she was a perfect shrew," said my mother, placidly threading her needle. "Half crazy—so I've heard. Mr. Appleton thinks there's no use in Mr. Rogers trying to stay by himself this winter. He'd much better go to the poorhouse and be taken good care of. Mrs. Simons, the woman over his shop, says he's hardly a cent left, and she can't be expected to provide for him. I suppose the thought of it will be rather hard for him, at first, but he'll be much better off. Lucy, dear, won't you hand me my scissors?"

I gave my mother her scissors, but felt that by the act I became a conspirator in this plot for the final degradation of my poor old friend. I sat by his bed next day, when who should appear at the door but my father. I felt that the plot was thickening.

"Well, how are you, Mr. Rogers?" said my father in his hearty voice. "Are you feeling pretty smart today?"

"Yes, I'm pretty smart, thank ye. I hain't got them boots o' yourn quite ready yet, though. I'll try and take hold of 'em to-morrow. I'm sorry you had the trouble of coming after 'em for nothing. I can send 'em by your little gal. I dunno's you know what

a good little gal she is to come and see me."

"I like to come," I said. My father seemed in no hurry to go, and said, at length:

"Rather lonely here by yourself, isn't it, Mr. Rogers?"

"Well, I dunno's I've got much to complain of. Mrs. Simons, upstairs, looks after things, and I tell her to spend the money in the black teapot. There's other folks worse off."

My father looked puzzled.

"I declare, Mr. Rogers, you've known what trouble was, haven't you? See! How many years was your wife laid up? And you've lost about all your children, and now here you are yourself."

"Yes, yes," said the old man. "But those ain't the sort of things I try to let my mind dwell on while I'm a-laying here. I try to count up my mercies."

My father looked puzzled.

"Well, now, Mr. Rogers, I think, and my wife thinks that you ought to go somewhere else."

"I ain't got nowhere else to go, sir. I'm all alone in the world. It's true, what you say."

"But, Mr. Rogers, to be plain, you know I'm one of the selectmen, and I'd see that the town took care of you—better care than Mrs. Simons does."

"I dunno's I quite catch your meaning, sir. Does anybody find fault with Mrs. Simons?"

"No, no. I don't mean that. I mean we think you'd better go down to Mr. Miles' to spend the winter. He keeps the town farm, you know."

"You mean to the poorhouse, sir? I warn't very bright ter see."

The old man turned his faded eyes imploringly up to my father's face.

"Well, yes, that's what they call it, though I must say I never quite liked the name."

The old cobbler's face seemed to grow white and aged before our very eyes. With the instinct decently to hide his trouble, he drew up the old bedquilt with a tremulous hand and turned his face to the wall.

"I dunno but I've asked too much," he said, in a broken voice. "I've sort o' hung onto the idee that I should die before I come ter that."

"Lucy," said my father, "didn't I hear somebody in the shop? Go and see."

Two strangers had just entered the door—a tall young man dressed in a suit of plaid, and accompanied by a pleasant-faced young woman in a white bonnet.

"Mr. Rogers is sick," I said. "He can't mend shoes now."

"Sick, did you say he was? Where is he?"

"He's in there. I don't believe he wants anybody to come in."

The young man gave me a queer look.

"I guess you don't know who I am. I guess he'll be willing to see me."

By this time he stood in the door between the two rooms. Mr. Rogers' face was turned away and my father was looking intently into the little back yard. The stranger glanced uneasily about and said not a word. I am sure it must have been a relief to him, as well as to me, when at last my father turned suddenly round and said:

"Why, who's this?"

"It's somebody come to see Mr. Rogers," I answered, faintly.

"Don't you know me? Don't you know me, father?" the stranger burst out. "It's me. It's Jim come back. And out there's my wife. Come home to you."

I laugh now to think of the absurd sense of relief this last revelation caused me.

"Jimmy! Come home!" the old man murmured, in a dazed, scared way. "I ain't out of my head. I'm awake. I know what you're going to do with me. You're going to take me to the poorhouse."

"Take you to the poorhouse, father? What are you talking about? You're going to my house. You are going to live in style. No poorhouse about that. Ain't you glad to see me? Say, Mame, come in here and see my poor old dad!"

There was a moment's silence. Slowly, very slowly, the old man understood; slowly he raised himself in bed, and, holding up his trembling hand, said, solemnly:

"God be praised!"

GLOOM TO GLEAM.

There's a ripple of rhyms
On the river of time,
As it floats thro' the years and the ages,
And a sunny gleam
Or a golden dream
In the saddest of life's sad pages.

There's a sad refrain
To the sweetest strain,
The longest day soon closes,
And so we'll take,
For their sweet sake,
The thorns 'mid life's sweet roses.

The daylight fades
In deepest shades,
And life has many phases;
The falling dew
And sunbeams, too,
Make buttercups and daisies.

—Eliza M. Sherman.

HUMOROUS.

Bell(e) boys—Mashers.
Always going to balls—Babies.
The head man—The phrenologist.
"Yes, sir," said the wood dealer, "I prefer to sell wood to men who do their own sawing. You can't convince a man who has worked all day at a wood pile that there isn't a full cord of it."
—Boston Post.

The eagle feels best soaring hundreds of feet above the earth, but the minute you get a man on a platform ten inches high his knees weaken, his face looks like the shell of a boiled crab, and he can't remember a word beyond "fellow-citizens."—*Philadelphia Bulletin*.

"I wonder what is the matter with Mr. Brown," said the landlady; "he seems to be very angry about something. Why, you should have seen him grinding his teeth just now in the hall." "Perhaps," suggested Fogg, "he is only getting them in order before tackling one of your beefsteaks." The landlady smiled, but there was murder in her heart.—*Boston Transcript*.

A woman recently applied for State aid, and the blank was produced and the usual questions asked. She answered them freely until it came to, "Your age?" "Have I got to tell that?" she asked. "The blank requires it, ma'am," was the reply. "Well, then," she said, "I don't want any State aid." And she bounced out of the office in high dudgeon.—*Boston Transcript*.

Statistics of a quail-hunt in Georgia, gathered by the *Atlanta Constitution*: The Marietta and North Georgia road is the great route for quail-hunters. The other day there were \$2,000 worth of dogs (cash valuation) in the baggage car on that road, attended by \$6,000 worth of negroes (old valuation). In the coach were \$1,400 worth of guns and fifty dollars worth of hunters. On the return trip they had five dollars and eighty cents worth of birds, and they ate a twenty-dollar lunch.

THE HOME DOCTOR.

CURE FOR SMALLPOX AND SCARLET FEVER.—Sulphate of zinc, one grain; foxglove (digitalis), one grain; half a teaspoonful of sugar; mix with two tablespoonfuls of water; when thoroughly mixed add four ounces of water. Take a tablespoonful every hour. Either disease will disappear in twelve hours. For a child smaller doses, according to age. It is harmless if taken by a well person.

CURE FOR CORNS.—The *Scientific American*, a reliable paper, gives the following recipe as a sure cure for corns. As the remedy is very simple, if any of our readers are afflicted with corns, it would probably be well for them to give it a trial: Take one-fourth cup strong vinegar; crumble into it some bread. Let it stand half an hour, or until it softens into a good poultice. Then apply on retiring at night. In the morning the soreness will be gone, and the corn can be picked out. If the corn is a very obstinate one it may require two or more applications to effect a cure.

USE OF NARCOTICS.—The *London Lancet* says: "It is high time that attention were directed to the subject of narcotics generally, and the use of chloral and bromide of potassium in particular. Incalculable injury is being done, and public opinion is being grievously misled by the tolerance given to the use of 'sleeping draughts,' falsely so called. In regard to this matter and that of the reckless use of hypodermic injections of morphia, the profession should seek to form a deliberate judgment, and gravely deliver itself. At the present moment we are under a heavy responsibility, which it is idle to deny and vain to disown."

Horse cars run between El Paso, Texas, and Paso del Norte, Mexico.