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THE VINDICATION OF SISTER BURTON.

[BY SHIRLEY WESTON MONTAGUE.]

Moss Hollow had a grievance. That of itself was nothing strange, for a village without such a dispensation is as hard to realize as the islands of the blessed.

As usual, it was a woman that was making all the trouble—John Burton's wife, she that was Lucy Moors. She was apparently losing interest in those good enterprises with which she had so long been actively identified; she had not been to the social gatherings for weeks; she had been rather slack in her church attendance for a year or more; and now, it was actually two months if it was a day since she had shown her face in the hollow, in church or out.

She was, therefore, apparently as indifferent to the people as to the principles. To be sure, old Squire Burton had died, after a long illness, so long that the poor man almost thought the Lord had forgotten him, and when the bell tolled 90 years one day everybody experienced a genuine surprise.

Then Grandma Burton lost her mind and became a child again, a veritable old baby, that had to be dressed and fed and tied into her chair all day long—her own rocking chair, where she had sung many a lullaby in her time.

And John Burton's wife cared for her most tenderly night and day for months, and never said she was weary, or sick or tired of her life, as well she might have been.

The old woman woke with a joyful smile one morning, reached up both trembling hands—on one her wedding ring was shining—and crying out, "Oh, James, I am so glad," over the hills and far away she went, nobody knows where, to paradise.

And now, both old people having been—as everybody admitted—tenderly cared for in life, and piously buried at death, with a funeral sermon, it did seem as if Sister Burton might get out into the world again and be like other folks; and, as she did not hurry, all sorts of speculations were rife.

Old Mrs. Brown thought likely she was low spirited; she had always been a little straggled; came honestly by it, too, for one of her uncles on her mother's side died insane or insolvent, she couldn't rightly recollect which.

The Widow Stanley hoped she didn't hurt her feelin's along of a remark she let drop about her bunnet. Such an unbecom'g thing as it was and made her look yaller as a saffron, bag, too. She had gone so far as to wonder why sister Burton hadn't put on crape for the old folks, especially seein' they left John so well to do. For her part she thought Miss Burton was duty bound to do it, and she just gave her a piece of her mind.

"Crape?" cried John Burton's wife, with wide open eyes. "I wear crape for them when they have just gone right into the Lord's own glory? Why, it is the best of all good things that could ever come to them. Dear, happy souls! I am so glad for them. It seems to me they must just be walking together all about holding hands."

"Just as if she knew what the Lord had laid out for them," said the shocked sister. "It sounded like sheer blasphemy to me, and it just made my blood run cold to hear it. Them dead and gone folks was sinners just like the rest on us. Why, the old man himself was suspended from church fellowship more'n sixty years ago for goin' to a sleigh-rind where there was supper and dancin' to wind up with. Don't tell me! I know it for a fact; and it's on the church book now. And I've seen it, too."

The ladies' circle felt aggrieved. For years Mrs. Burton had been the greatest worker for them all. They missed the piles of well made garments that fairly flew from under her slender fingers in days gone by. And stockings that women had knit for the soldiers! Why, if they had been hung to, to toe on the equator they would have reached half way round the globe.

Yes, a great worker, they all admitted; and such a mystery that now, with no old folks and no children, and nothing in the world to do, she should all at once fold her hands and sit down; a young healthy woman like her too. What had to break her health?

By common consent there was no need of it, and no sense in it; and, as occasion offered, they all meant to tell her so.

The village schoolmaster, who boarded around, was not without his views. As he was the remote descendant of a clergyman he was supposed to have inherited theology with his Roman nose, and his opinions were received with profound respect.

He thought Mrs. Burton's religious views tended toward ultraism; he had heard her say she thought there were people outside the church who would go to heaven—even Melissa Barnes.

Poor Melissa. She was only 17. And Mrs. Burton had been a mother to her when the whole world frowned. And when she died—for she said, truly, that she could never hold up her head again—it was John Burton's wife who went with her down to the deep waters and gave her into the Lord's own hands, no doubt.

Some contended that she was an out-and-out Spiritualist, because he had said, "How beautiful it was to think Grandpa Burton came back when grandma died. It seemed so much easier for the gentle soul to have him go with her up to the golden gates."

The summer boarder at the post-master's thought there might be of Swedenborgianism in that. And as nobody really knew anything about such far away heresies it was all the more likely to be true.

The shepherd over this troubled flock was a young man, acting as temporary supply. A newcomer, he had not met the offending Mrs. Burton, but so much had been said to him that he felt it to be plain duty to preach a sermon on the sin of staying away from church. In the course of his remarks he mentioned an excuse sometimes urged by certain vain and frivolous sisters—that they had no reasonable bunnet.

What he especially dwelt upon was the foolishness of committing so great a sin for so small an article—for it was a time when bunnets had suffered a partial eclipse, as it were, for his part, when a bunnet was so small one couldn't tell whether a sister was bareheaded or not, or whether she had it on wrong side or to or not, and was trimmed so remarkably one could scarcely tell by the bunnet whether a sister was going out from church or coming in. He thought it made no difference whether the bunnet was in season or out of season.

All this, being aimed at Sister Burton, was lost, for, as usual, she was not at church. Dr. Sims, being interviewed at every turn, said she was not ill, not as he knew of, so her last chance for mercy was gone. Only she lived so far from the hollow nobody could conveniently investigate or remonstrate, for it was four miles or more, up hill all the way, a bad road except in mid summer, when it was delightful to creep up its cool and shady ways, where the blue harebell budded and the wood thrush sang; but autumn found it muddy and disagreeable, and it was slippery and perilous in the winter snows.

Mr. Burton went down occasionally to store and postoffice and sometimes to church, but even he was not so regular as he had been in his father's time.

And the elderly woman said, with a sigh, that that was the way with children when the restraint was gone. Though, indeed, John Burton would hardly be classed with the young and giddy; a bashful man of 45, who had married the little school-mistress a few years before.

To the oft repeated inquiries he always said: "Mrs. Burton would be down before long, he guessed." But the questioners thought he looked solemn and worried like, and it was surmised that there might be trouble at home; and family troubles we all know, are second only to a church quarrel or a cabinet circles.

It is rumored that some relative of Mrs. Burton had left her a large sum of money recently—some said \$500, some \$100. Nobody knew, but it was a large sum, anyway, and Mr. Burton couldn't touch a cent of it, either, unless she chose to let him—and folks knew he had long wanted to buy the Widder Cocke's madder lot, and Mrs. Burton was dead set against it. She'd rather have it in the bank where she could lay her hands on it at any time.

All these things having been duly commented on, the ladies of the social circles decided that Mrs. Burton ought to be interviewed; first, by the minister; second, by a committee of ladies; third by the brethren, if she proved unmanageable by the others. So the minister, like a plenipotentiary, went with full powers to treat.

Unfortunately it was the week before Thanksgiving, and on that day he was to be married. He had meant to keep it secret, but he had confidently mentioned it to the deacon's widow, with whom he boarded, and she had imparted it with equal confidence to a few choice friends, saying, "Of course Brother Swan would not mind if a few of the good sisters knew it."

Brother Swan's mind was more on the future than the present or past, for he really seemed to feel no interest in the Burtons. He only said he guessed he would come back with the birds in the spring.

So he packed his rusty portmanteau and whisked away for the wedding. But the ladies declared Mrs. Burton had just pulled wool over his eyes. What a shame! Such a nice young man, and the minister, too.

But then, it was just like a young man to be taken in by a pretty face, even if he were a minister. Some had always mistrusted that Mrs. Burton was a bit foxy.

In a happy moment they fell upon Aunt Sabrina Reed and implored her to pay Sister Burton a visit the very next time Mr. Burton came down.

She was a good little soul. Aunt Sabrina who lived alone, one of the Lord's own poor, always pinched herself in small ways to help on the charities of Moss Hollow.

"I can't do much," she said to herself, "but I can use poor tea and cheap molasses and go without butter. If the good Lord had only made me like them small charms in the minister's picture, all head and wings, and no stomach to fill now handy it would be, and so economical!"

But, alas! her appetite always seemed to grow in proportion as her means decreased. As for Sister Burton—poor, dear lamb—Aunt Sabrina had known trouble herself, and she was glad of the chance to go; and she could come back easy enough, she said, if they didn't want her.

She filled her carpetbag with some of her choice herbs, took old dress and wore the best bonnet that had been willed to her by her great aunt in Dracut and set forth cheerfully with Brother Burton, who all unsuspecting her secret mission, was heartily glad of her company.

It was two weeks before the annual meeting of the circle, and Aunt Sabrina was expected to return and make a report. But Aunt Sabrina, having ascended to the upper regions in the flesh, came back no more than Elijah of old.

When Mr. Burton finally appeared at the post office he said they were enjoying Aunt Sabrina's visit first rate and she guessed she would stop with them quite a spell.

Poor Aunt Sabrina! She had never been so comfortable in her life. She had a warm little bedroom of the sitting room, with a sunny south window full of blossoming plants; a soft bed—oh, how soft to her poor old bones; a bright rag carpet, to look cheerful to old eyes; a great, deep, cozy rocking chair, and a generous open fireplace, with a cheerful fire all day.

Why, it was like heaven to her, she said, over and over again, with happy tears in her faded eyes; and there was no more cheap molasses nor weak tea. And what good naps she had in the spacious rocking chair! But, of course, the ladies felt that this was adding the last straw to their burden. It was resolved, thereof, to send a committee of good and wise men to deal with all three. Mr. Burton himself having now fallen under the ban of suspicion, as well as his wife and Sister Sabrina Reed.

It was fearful traveling. The snow had fallen and fallen and fallen again, until the roads were almost impassable. Fences were blotted out, leaving here and there black spots, where the top of the post appeared like a line of floating buoys on the sea.

Somebody had floundered through with an ox team, and a freeze having followed the tracks of the oxen were hardened into many an icy pitfall, so that it was as much one's life was worth to travel over the place where the road had been, and it was some misgiving that the three good and wise men started on their perilous errand.

They had all been made thoroughly aware of Sister Burton's alleged shortcomings—there was really no room for further conjecture, and they therefore refreshed their minds with various agricultural matters as they toiled along—such as the merits of triangular churns as compared with round ones, prospects of maple sugar and winter wheat, and some forebodings on the subject of oleomargarine, varied occasionally by one or more of them jumping out to balance the sleigh or to lead the horse over some dangerous place in the steep and slippery path.

They were rather tired, too, and we all were pleased when the cozy red farm house appeared, still at some distance away over the hills, shining in the afternoon sun like a beacon fire.

They turned somewhat doubtfully to the matter in hand. Mr. Jones being the senior member, it was decidedly his place to open the subject to the family, while Mr. Smith

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and Mr. Brown were to be the Aaron and Hur to stay his hands with appropriate remarks as they might seem to be required.

At last all being arranged, they rode with becoming gravity to the offending house. Brother Burton had seen them toiling upward for the last ten minutes. He met them with a cheerful face, although a little flushed, as though conscious of their errand and his own impending doom.

The good brethren thought among themselves that possibly he was secretly glad to have some sympathy and friendly counsel.

Meanwhile, Mr. Burton, mindful of hospitality, put their tired horse into the barn and gave him a generous feed of oats. Then he ushered them into the sunny kitchen, where the table was spread as if for company and the oven gave forth a savory smell of roast meat; but Mrs. Burton and Aunt Sabrina were nowhere to be seen. Doubtless, aware of their shortcomings, they had retreated to the uttermost limit of some interior apartment, and were tremblingly waiting to be summoned forth and dealt with.

"Take your things right off, brethren," said Mr. Burton, heartily. "Why, how pleasant this is; you are just in time for supper."

"We have come," said Brother Jones, not to be diverted from his errand, solemnly opening the meeting, "to inquire for Sister Burton and our Sister Sabrina Reed. They have been somewhat remiss of late."

"Oh, yes—yes, to be sure! Take some seats, brethren," said Mr. Burton, rather hurriedly, offering the corpulent brother his wife's chair, which was altogether too small for him.

"My wife—oh, yes—well—er—the fact is—er—I guess I'll call Sister Sabrina," and he darted out of the room, his broad face beaming like the full moon at harvest time, while the three rusty black coats sat in a row, eyeing the table as three hungry crows might survey a freshly planted cornfield in April.

The door swung slowly open, as though pulled by unwilling hands. In-stead of Sister Burton—whom they expected to see like a weeping willow on a monumental stone—Sister Sabrina Reed appeared, waxed almost fat with her good living, flushed and smiling—actually smiling in their faces.

The brethren started to their feet, and, if they had had time they would have been amazed and displeased at such a brazen conduct.

But what? How is this? She was bringing something to the table: not a turkey, nor even a goose, nor a chicken—a lamb, rather, by the soft bleat.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Brother Jones, leading the remarks as prearranged.

"Heavens and earth!" cried Brother Smith, in his capacity as Aaron.

"Oh, mercy sakes!" ejaculated Bro. Brown, as Hur mopped his face with his red and yellow bandanna.

All three at once, "It's a baby!" Sister Sabrina looked back over her shoulder and still mysteriously smiling, said, "You'd better come right out, Brother Burton."

And so, while their amazement was still at white heat, Brother Burton emerged, red and perspiring but radiant, with a second bundle wrapped in flannel like the first; and if any doubts had been experienced as to the nature of its contents two simultaneous cries from two small throats settled the question then and there as Sister Burton was vindicated.

"Good conscience!" cried Brother Jones. "It's twins!"

"O Lord, what a fools!" cried Brother Smith.

While Brother Brown fell in with the "Doxology," "The Lord be praised!"

"You see how it is, brethren," said Mr. Burton, deprecatingly, his face glowing like a double heated furnace, giving the child an awkward swing as he spoke, and putting its life in imminent peril. "And she says," he continued, jerking his thumb over against the bedroom door, "that she hopes you'll all overlook it this time, and now, just set right down to supper!"

That was some time ago, but Sister Sabrina still inhabits the sunny bedroom, and out of the old carpetbag of herbs she prepares many a healing draught for the Burton twins.

While Parson Swan, in his distant parish, smiles softly to himself sometimes, when he thinks of his first case of church discipline and the vindication of Sister Burton.

Some Good Advice to the Wheat Growers of the County.

As the time is drawing near for preparing land for seeding wheat, every farmer who is going to sow wheat this fall should take the advantage of the weather from now on and not wait until he wants to sow and then commence to prepare his land. If he does he must not expect much wheat the next year. I hear complaints from farmers on all sides about the extremely low price of wheat. That the price of wheat is low we all admit, but this will not be the case always. Wheat has not been so cheap in thirty years, and I doubt if any one ever saw wheat sell at 60 cents and corn at 65 cents before. If they did I should like to know when it was. Farmers say they can't grow wheat at 60 cents. Now I am going to show you that it can be done at that price. I know a farmer in this county who made 306 bushels on 21 acres on ordinary land. We all know this is not a big yield. Now let us figure on this crop and see if this man made money or not. In the first place, the value of his land is \$15 per acre—this makes \$315. The seed to sow the 21 acres cost \$21, or one dollar per bushel, which was about the ruling price last fall for seed wheat. The plowing and seeding, \$2.50 per acre, and the harvesting and threshing \$25, making a total of \$413.50 invested, for which he got 306 bushels of wheat at 60 cents, which amounts to \$183.60, the market price at the time of threshing. The straw, the value of this amount of wheat we value at \$20, making a total of \$203.60. Now just figure a bit and see the dividend this bit of farming paid. Interest on \$315 is \$25.20 plus other expenses makes \$123.70. Compare this with what was realized you see that the profit is 64 per cent, a bigger profit than can be realized in any other business.

Supposing that wheat was worth one dollar per bushel and he had made 25 bushels per acre (which was made in this state on some farms), he would have cleared a bigger dividend than anything else he could have invested his money in. This ought to show any farmer that he can grow wheat at 60 cents. Daly-rymple, the great bonanza wheat grower of Dakota, said several years ago that wheat could be raised at a profit and only get 35 cents per bushel. I could give you cases where farmers could not have made money this year had they gotten \$1.25 per bushels for their wheat, because they only made three or four bushels per acre. A farmer who sows twenty acres and only gets 60 or 80 bushels is a failure as a wheat grower. It is better for him to cut down his crop to five acres and put his extra time and the value of his extra seed in manure or commercial fertilizer on his five acres. He can then expect to get as much or more than on his twenty acres. Farmers as a rule do not calculate. Every farmer ought to keep account of everything he sells or buys, barters or pays out. It is just as necessary for him to do this as it is for a merchant or any other business man to keep a strict account of his business. Suppose a merchant did not keep account of all his transactions, how could he tell at the end of the year whether he had gained or lost?

Now is the time to look at wheat and see that there is no vermin in your wheat. Don't look once or twice, but often. Now is the time that weevils and worms commence to do harm to wheat. That is, if the wheat is not in a good dry condition, if this rule is followed for several years you will see a vast difference.—G. T. Crowell in Concord Times.

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THE TRUTH AS LAST ABOUT THE HOOPENAKE. Tom Lanier says he was attacked by a hoopsnake near the Drury brickyards. He was going out to the brickyards to apply for a job, when he saw the snake come rolling toward him. He darted behind a tree, which the snake struck with great force, sinking its fangs into the trunk of the tree an inch. The tree immediately commenced to swell, and in fifteen minutes was twice its natural size. The leaves on the trees soon withered, and next day when Lanier returned it was dead.—Aitchison Globe.

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where you will find Mr. John Burch and Henry Winstead who are always ready and willing to show you anything in my line. Call early before the bargains are all gone—at the prices I am offering they won't remain long. Respectfully, J. C. PASS.

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