

The Fireside.

IF I CAN LIVE.

If I can live
To make some pale face brighter, and
to give
A second lustre to some tear-dimmed
eye,
Or e'en impart
One throb of comfort to an aching
heart,
Or cheer some wayworn soul in pass-
ing by!

If I can lend
A strong hand to the fallen, or defend
The right against a single envious
strain,
My life, though bare,
Perhaps, of much that seemeth dear and
fair
To us on earth, will not have been in
vain.

The purest joy
Most near to heaven, far from earth's
alloy,
Is bidding clouds give way to sun and
shine,
And 'twill be well
If on that day of days the angels tell
Of me: "She did her best for one of
thine."

—Helen Hunt Jackson.

"AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER."

BY HELEN H. BLAKE.

The sun was just dropping behind a huge bank of clouds in the west. It was late in the fall, and in the region of country northwest of us, which an Arctic climate hold benumbed for four or five months of the year, every sunny day that comes at that season is one more reprieve from the dreaded winter. Ranch life in winter in any of our northwestern states involves hardships that few people who have not experienced them ever dreamed of. Those who have had such trial can sympathize to a great extent with the Pilgrims in their first experience on the inhospitable shores of New England.

"Seems to me, John, I can just see them poor creatures gettin' out o' the boat in that freezin' cold weather, an' nowhere on earth to go—had to build a log hut to live in. I think they were a dreadful brave people."

"Who're you talkin' about, Hannah?"

"I was just thinkin' about the Pilgrims."

"Oh, them people that settled Massachusetts? P'r'haps 'twasn't a cold day when they landed. Besides, they came over here to get their own way; lots of people are brave enough for that."

"You're always runnin' people down, John. I'm sure I'd like to know why you came out here to this forlorn place—it's like the last end of nowhere—unless 'twas to have your own way. And you had a good business in the East, too. Folks might say hard things of you if they tried."

"What's that to me, I'd like to know? I'll go where I can run the business I want to without being meddled with all the time."

"But there's no law in Connecticut 'gainst keepin' a saloon if you kept your license paid up."

"No more there isn't, but I'd rather fight the law than have a dozen o' those women cranks naggin' at me all the time."

"I don't know sometimes but they're right, though, if they are cranky," said the woman a little sullenly. "It don't seem to me, when I think of it, as though we had any right to sell stuff to people that's almost sure death to 'em in the long run."

She ended rather defiantly, like a person who acts from a resolve to do something totally at variance with his whole previous line of conduct, and who feels at the same time a little ashamed. Her husband turned to look at her curiously. She went on with her work without heeding him. Presently he walked across the room and stood before her.

"Seems to me," he said slowly, "your're changing your mind rather late; you never used to have no objections to sellin' folks what they wanted. An' I'll jest warn ye that them airs won't do no good. I'm sellin' liquor, an' I'm goin' to do it in spite of any one. Other people an' their childrun kin take care o' themselves."

"Other people's children, yes; but how about your own? Maybe you'd better be looking after yours."

"What d'ye mean by that?" demanded the man fiercely. "I ain't got but one, an' d'ye think Mary Ann 'll take to drink? Not much; she's too much like her old father for that."

His face softened as he spoke of his child. Then he turned away and went out of the door and down towards the barns where some of the stock was housed for the winter. Far away above the prairie he saw a horseman coming. "Some one for the mail," he said to himself. "But Hannah's in there; she'll tend to him till I get through." He went on to the barn, thinking of the child of whom he had spoken—Mary Ann—the only thing that he loved. He recalled the time when she had first begun to notice him; when she had first said: "Dada," all the years when he had carried her around in his arms; then let her run after him when he was at work; all through her girlhood when she had been so much to him; up to the time of her marriage, his thoughts travelled. She had been away from home now for two years, and the house had never been the same since. It is true she lived on the next ranch, but that was a distance of ten miles away.

"Poor little Mary Ann, poor little girl!" he muttered to himself. "I must go over an' see her to-morrow. Somehow it seem'd 's though she didn't look so happy the last time I was there. If I thought that fellow was usin' her bad I'd—I'd—yes, I'd kill him sure."

Meantime, the horseman John had seen away in the distance had arrived, tied his horse and disappeared within the house. He was in the rough ranch dress, but his voice when he spoke and his words betrayed the gentleman.

"Good-day, Mrs. Simpson. Isn't it good that winter holds off so long?"

"Yes, sir, it is that," replied Hannah. "I only wish it wouldn't come at all; but that's not to be thought of."

"No, and it's coming soon, too. It will be a tough night to-night unless I'm mistaken."

"Here's your mail, sir; an' what'll you have to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you," was the grave reply.

The woman reddened as she said: "I know you don't take anything; I

didn't think, I'm so used to askin' that question of everybody that comes in."

"That's all right, Mrs. Simpson. I know you wouldn't tempt me. I don't need the stuff, you see; and as I know I'm better without it, I don't take it."

Hannah said nothing. The man started toward the door, but turned before he reached it and spoke.

"When have you seen your daughter, Mrs. Simpson?"

"It must be goin' on two weeks now, sir, since John was over there, an' I hain't seen her for longer yet. And somehow she don't find time to come here. A married woman's time ain't her own always, you know."

"I saw her as I came by this afternoon, and she looked—" the man hesitated—"rather lonely. Why don't you go and see her oftener?"

"She ain't sick, is she?" asked the mother anxiously.

"She don't look well," replied the man evasively.

"John an' me'll go over to-morrow or next day," said the mother. "We was goin' there anyway."

"Be sure you go to-morrow, if possible," said the man earnestly as he left the house. "She's alone a great deal, you know; her husband has to be away so much."

To himself he said: "I'll stop and see the girl on my way back, and tell her they are coming; perhaps that will keep her straight until to-morrow." But when he reached the ranch, no one was to be seen. "She's gone already, and taken the baby with her, poor girl! I'd go after her if my wife wasn't looking for me at just such a time. She'd be frightened to death if I didn't get back to-night. I must go home first anyway." So he took the trail back to his own ranch, while poor Mary Ann was already well on the road to a post-office station fifteen miles away in a direction opposite to her father's house.

"What's that you said, Dan? A woman found dead? Where?"

John Simpson asked the question listlessly.

"Over near Miller's station, 'bout half-way 'tween there and your gal's house."

"I'm glad it wasn't nearer hers; 'twould about frighten her to death if she knowed it. Mary Ann was an awful skeery little thing! Who found the woman, Dan?"

"That fellow that came out here last spring; I've forgot his name; lives 'bout ten miles tother side o' Mary Ann's."

"I know; Robinson, you mean; he was here yesterday. Nice kind of feller, I guess, though I couldn't never get no money out of him for liquor. He giv' me a lecture w'en he first come out for sellin' liquor, but he hain't never meddled with me since, an' I don't know as I bear him any grudge."

"What did he say ter you?"

"I don't know. He preached a reg'lar sermon; took for his text: "Am I my brother's keeper?" an' an' at the end he ast me how'd I like to have some one sellin' liquor to my gal, and see her drinkin' herself to death. I told him there warn't a grain o' sense in talkin' o' that. My child was all right, an' I didn't feel to call to look after other people's childrun. They must shift for themselves."

"Guess if Robinson 'd gone on that plan you'd never known what become o' your gal," said Dan bluntly.

He had been trying in this way to break the sad news gently to old John. But he saw through the window the

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rude wagon coming over the plain with its burden, the young mother with the babe in her arms, both dead—frozen to death on the plains in the fierce cold of the night before. He felt John must know the fact before the sad sight met his eyes. So he continued:

"If Robinson hadn't gone to hunt her up, the snow'd mighty soon have buried her, an' you'd never have found her."

John turned savagely upon the speaker.

"Dan Jones, are yer luney? Do yer know yer talkin' about my gal?"

"That's jest the one I'm tellin' yer about," he persisted. And incensed by John's words and expression, he burst forth with the naked truth. "Your gal went over to Miller's station yesterday an' got drunk, an' comin' home, she laid down on the ground an' froze to death—her an' the young un, too." He sprang aside as he spoke, or John's fist would have felled him to the floor.

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