

Mr. Clutterbuck's Confession.

Some people may think that it is not a nice thing for a young lady to make a story out of an incident which happened at a friend's table where she was a guest, especially as it concerns real people who might be recognised. But I must tell it. And, besides, it concerned myself most of all.

It was a Christmas dinner at Judge Robinson's, who is one of the leading men of our town. Among the guests was Mr. Clutterbuck. He was well off, lives at the hotel, and is a regular attendant at church. He is a young man, slender in build, and wears a rather ragged, reddish moustache. In manner he is quite grave. Indeed were it not for his fashionable clothes, you might take him for a minister. I once heard him say there was nothing nicer than to have a loving wife, unless possibly, it were having two; but to propose a man should lose not only his heart, but also his head. So people considered him a complete bachelor. Pa says he is 'bookish,' that is, he reads much. I know that his learning has often awed me, but then the awe did not last long, because I could not help liking him. We girls often thought he was a good subject for fun, but in all our attempts on him I could never be sure but that he was making fun of us.

He is the hero of this story, and I am the heroine. So I must tell you a little about myself. My name is Smith. I know that it is quite a common name, but it is, also, very ancient, for Mr. Clutterbuck told me that Tubal Cain, one of the early members of the race, was a Smith. I am 17 years old. Ma thinks I am 'giddy' and tells me I must be quieter and more lady-like, but Mr. Clutterbuck says that nature, guided by common sense, is the best etiquette.

Next to Mr. Clutterbuck at the dinner table sat Susan Jones, the daughter of a minister in a neighboring town, who was spending the holidays at the judge's. She is a nice girl, but very bashful. It was her blunder at the table that caused this story.

Mr. Clutterbuck had offered her some dish and she said: "Thank you Mr. Butterbuck, I had to laugh out. I couldn't help it, the transposition of the name sounded so odd. But Mr. Clutterbuck said gravely: 'The name is Clutterbuck. I take great pride in it, for I looked through many city directories and biographical dictionaries before I selected it.' Then I said: 'Why, Mr. Clutterbuck, what do you mean? People don't select their names! They are born with them. How did you come to choose your own name?' At first he was unwilling to explain, but after some friendly teasing and begging (for he had excited my curiosity) he promised to do so after dinner.

When we had all returned to the parlor, while the old folks were chatting in groups we girls drew Mr. Clutterbuck into a corner, throned him on the sofa; and gathered about him to hear his story.

"I confess, young ladies," he said, "that I have been long carrying a cat concealed in a bag. I always had a fear that it would escape, for its whiskers, or its paw, or its tail was always getting out. Now I shall set it entirely free, but as you insist upon it, especially you, Miss Smith, you must not blame me for these painful and awful disclosures.

"You must know that the use of family names is of comparatively modern introduction. It was about the end of the middle ages that noble families first began to use family names derived from their estates; but the plebeian and vaster portion of mankind only slowly adopted them. Even in the beginning of this century the peasants of portions of Germany had none; and it can hardly be said that the Welsh peasants as yet have any.

"Whether our family names are merely the product of social intercourse and of the growth of language, or not, it is certain that no inventive faculty was exercised in the making. How poorly they contrast with the names used by the red Indians, the Australian and African aborigines, the ancient Celts, and the uncivilized races generally. Their names were full of poetry, ours are poor, prosy, practical, derived from common, rough trades, or unpleasant personal peculiarities, as Smith, Chandler, Brown, Black, Long, Short, etc. Just fancy how much more appropriate it would be to call this young lady, instead of plain Miss Smith, Miss Dawn of Day, or Miss Light of Our Eyes, or some such epithet that would befit her character and person."

"Thank you, Mr. Clutterbuck, I said. 'You almost make me wish that I were a red Indian, or an ancient Celt.' 'I am glad, indeed, that you are not,' replied Mr. Clutterbuck, 'and lest you should grow into that wish I will no longer dilate on names, but will tell you of my own case.'

"I was born about twenty five years ago and received from my parents the name of John, besides inheriting the family name, which was the source of so much annoyance to me in after life. Of course I know nothing of the matter then and had nothing to say about it; in fact, could not speak at all; so that I was helplessly at their mercy. It was a long time before I knew I had a name, especially so distasteful a one. When, in course of time, I began to notice things, I thought my name was tootsy, pootsy, because sundry ladies used to take me in their arms and coo and prattle that name to me, and print soft kisses on my cheeks. And though in later life, I recognised the silliness of that baby name, I believe I would have preferred to bear it rather than the hateful one which the fate of birth had imposed upon me.

"I first realised my misfortune when I went to school, for my name was so common that several unfortunate companions also bore it. As a result we were confused in the teacher's memory, our merits and demerits were interchanged, and on one occasion I was actually punished for some misdeed of one of my namesakes. I often wept in secret at my cruel fate.

"After I left school and mingled with the world, my lot became worse. Not only were my letters misaddressed, not only were my good deeds ascribed to

others and their evil ones to me, but I was constantly made a victim of small wit, insipid pleasantry, and historic jokes. How often, when introduced to some one, have I been told: 'Oh, indeed your name is quite familiar, sir. I have heard it before.'

"At length I summoned resolution to resist my fate and to rise above misfortune, I would no longer bear that odious, hateful, common name that confounded me with the vulgar herd. I fortified myself with the reflection that a name is but a sound, and that if a man have any right at all he should have the right of determining how he should be called. Who would control my right to choose the style of my hat or the color of my clothes. I did hesitate somewhat on the score of filial duty. It seemed criminal to repudiate the name of my parents. But Socrates enabled me to place that feeling in its proper light, for he has said 'that a man should have a care what name he gives his children. It was clear that the fault was my father's in leaving me that unfortunate name and I was really filial in undoing his error. I remember too, what Montaigne says, how convenient it is to have a well sounding name by reason that kings and other great persons do by that means the more easily know and the more hardly forget us.'

"I determined therefore, to take another name, and spent several days in a great library, poring over directories and dictionaries, and, after the research, I chose my present euphonious and remarkable name. I hope, young ladies, that you will agree with me that I made a happy selection."

"But, Mr. Clutterbuck, said Mary Robinson, 'you have not told us what was that odious, common name which you so much detested.'

"Yes, that's true; I forgot," he looked quizzically at me, the name was — Smith."

"How the girls did laugh and make fun of me! I had to laugh also. But Mr. Clutterbuck said very quietly: 'I would advise Miss Smith to follow my example, and change her name to Clutterbuck.'

"I thought perhaps he was joking, in spite of his gravity, but that afternoon, when we were going home from the judge's he asked me again if I would not change my name. I was, of course, said yes, for I do and always did admire and like him.

"In the evening I told Pa about Mr. Clutterbuck's name and the way his story ended. Pa laughed and said that he thought John was 'guying' us, for he knew John's father years ago and the father's name was Clutterbuck. Pa said he could safely intrust my happiness to John and he would say yes also to him. He hoped John would give me some of his gravity and teach me good sense. When I told that to John he said that the excellent John Evelyn when he was 27 years old married a bride of 14 and then educated her and that they were a very happy couple. And he was so good as to add that what he particularly admired in me was my 'light hearted, bubbling ways.' I don't know who Mr. Evelyn is, but John may educate me if he wants to. And I do think that Clutterbuck is a nicer name than Smith."

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