

## Literature, &amp;c.

## The American Magazines.

From Graham's Magazine.

## THE WIDOW AND THE DEFORMED.

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Mr Oakly was a rich man; stately dwellings and noble warehouses were his; he owned large and flourishing farms, and the sails of his ships whitened the ocean. No man enjoyed a higher reputation on exchange; no merchant's opinion was more quoted or depended on, no man's integrity considered more spotless. Blest, too, with an excellent wife, the world pronounced Mr Oakly a very happy man. But where the mere surface of things forms the criterion of judgment, the world, wise as it is, very apt to be mistaken. Mr Oakly was not a happy man. Neither was he a favourite with the multitude; and had not the magic of riches surrounded him, he would have had fewer professed friends, and many more open enemies—for his manners were arrogant and repulsive, while his deeds of charity were but as a feather in the scale with his power of being charitable.

Mr Oakly had paid a great price for his riches—no less a jewel than his own peace of mind. He might count over his heaps of gold, and talk about the just reward of long years of industry and economy, and try to cheat even himself into the belief that his property was but his desert, yet well he knew that the foundation of his fortune was based on crime. Flatter himself, then, as he would, the whispers of conscience told him louder than the jingling of coin that it was mockery all! His only child, too, was miserably deformed and lame; thus it proved with all his great wealth, he was neither an enviable nor a happy man.

Mr Oakly, with his family, were spending the warm months at his delightful country residence on the banks of the Susquehanna; and there our story takes us on a sultry August morning. Breakfast is just over, and now, while Mr Oakly breaks the seals of various letters which the postman has just left at the door, Mrs Oakly listlessly looks over the city journals.

"So John is dead at last!" exclaimed Mr Oakly, with something of relief in his tone, and tawing down upon the table a dirty-looking letter, with a huge black seal. "Died a pauper! well I expected it, and so might he, when he refused compliance with the wishes of his friends."

Mrs Oakly looked with surprise.

"Of whom are you speaking, my dear—a relative of ours?" she enquired.

"Only my brother," replied her husband coolly.

"Your brother—and died a pauper! You amaze me. Pray how did it happen?"

"It happened, and justly, too, through his own folly and imprudence," cried the cold-hearted man—for even had his brother been the oases of criminals, he was his brother still. Death should have inspired some faint shadow of grief, if no more.

"The fact is," continued Mr Oakly, "John was too much favoured in early life. He was my father's idol, and, to my disadvantage, favour after favour was heaped upon him. Although younger by several years than myself, he was sent to college, I was kept at home—he had the choice of a profession, I was forced to stay at home and measure off tape and calico by the yard. He became dissipated, was wounded in some rowdy frolic, fell in love with, and married a girl of low family, who took care of him during his illness. Such conduct highly exasperated my father. Who avowed that unless he would abandon this low connexion forever, and return home, he not only would disinherit him, but would never see him more. John refused the terms; and the consequence was as my father had said, who shortly after died. I was his only heir, and of course, as such, was bound to hold my father's views sacred; and as he never forgave my ungrateful brother, consequently neither did I."

So much for Mr Oakly's version of his brother's history. We shall see by and by how far it may be depended upon.

"But were you not aware of your brother's destitute condition?" said Mrs Oakly, somewhat reproachfully.

"Why not exactly—at least—I did not know it for a fact. But what then—suppose I did, he choose his own path—what had I to do with it?"

Mrs Oakly shook her head and sighed.

"Did your brother leave any family?"

"Yes, so it seems—for here comes a begging letter from some country scribe, whereby it appears he has left a widow and two children—girls too; but read it yourself."

Mrs Oakly took the letter.

"Sir,—Your brother Mr John Oakly was buried yesterday at the expense of the parish. Upon his death bed he requested that notice should be forwarded to you of the event, and some assistance solicited on behalf of his destitute family. He leaves a widow in delicate health, and two small children, both girls. As they are without any means of support save the little which the mother can earn by labor, I trust this appeal to your sympathy will not be in vain."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs Oakly, looking inquiringly at her husband, as she finished reading.

"Well!" echoed her husband, "what concern is it of mine if they starve! It was all owing to his connexion with this same woman that his misfortunes fell upon him, and

now do you think I am going to encourage her arts by aiding her in her justly deserved poverty; no not I Mrs Oakly."

"Revoke that cruel sentence, I beseech you Alfred," said his wife, "you surely will not let this appeal to your sympathy pass without notice; do not, I entreat you, let the little ones suffer for their parents' fault!"

"Really Mrs Oakly," cried her husband sarcastically, "really I hope I may do as I please with what is mine. Those who have no money of their own and never had a cent in all their lives, may well cant upon charity."

There was evidently a bitter meaning crouched under these words, for Mrs Oakly coloured deeply, and tears filled her eyes though she made no reply, but throwing open the window upon the lawn, was about to step forth, when the nurse entered the room, leading by the hand a poor deformed little girl, apparently about two years of age. The sight of his only and unfortunate child appeared to awaken a new train of ideas in the mind of Mr Oakly. For some moments he walked the room in deep thought, now looking at the child, now at his wife, and then again resuming his measured tread. At length motioning the nurse, with her charge, to leave the room, he approached his wife, and in a much less arrogant manner, said,

"My dear, a new idea has occurred to me, which, if I mistake not, may be productive of much good, not only to ourselves, but also to those for whom your sympathy appears so foolishly urgent. The more I consider of my purpose, the better I think of it. My brother it seems, has left two little girls—very well. Now I propose taking the youngest of these children as our own."

"This is indeed noble of you, my dear husband!" exclaimed Mrs Oakly.

"In lieu of our own poor Agatha," said Mr Oakly.

Mrs Oakly screamed, and clasping her hands sat pale as marble looking up into the face of her husband.

"Nay my dear," said he, taking her hand with some tenderness, "I dare say you will feel very badly at first, but only consider the benefits that will arise from the exchange. Agatha is a poor unhappy object, and as long as she lives will be a sorrow and reproach to us. It will be very easy for me to induce this woman, my brother's widow, I mean, to yield up one of her own children to me, upon the condition that if she will take all future charge of the poor Agatha, her own shall be brought up in every tenderness and luxury. There is one proviso, however, to which I shall require an oath—that is, the transaction is to remain forever secret—she is never to claim her own child, but on the contrary to acknowledge Agatha as hers."

Mr Oakly paused, but his wife made no reply. It seemed as if surprise and grief had deprived her of speech.

"We can pursue our plan the better," he continued, "as we have always kept Agatha secluded from observation. It will be very easy for us now to give out word that she is under skillful treatment. By degrees we can report of her wonderful improvement, until at the end of some months, or even a year, we can produce our adopted child in proof of our assertions."

"But why is it necessary to do this?" cried Mrs Oakly, falteringly, "why not keep our own poor unfortunate, and at the same time adopt one or both of your brother's children? God knows, Alfred," she added earnestly, "I will be a mother to them—I will cherish and love them, but oh, not so tenderly as my own poor Agatha!"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" interrupted Mr Oakly hastily. "don't you see how much disgrace and trouble you will save yourself by my arrangement?"

"Disgrace, Alfred! and from our innocent babe?"

"Hear me if you please. You will have the double satisfaction of knowing that she will be well provided for, and kindly treated, while at the same time she can never trouble you by her agitating presence."

"And to such a woman as you have described your brother's wife to be, would you confide so precious a trust?" said Mrs Oakly, hoping this appeal might arrest her husband's views.

"Why not? she may be well enough for our purpose, but her kindness I can secure by money. As to any refinement or education, it will never be of much importance to Agatha. She will never be called upon, it is likely, for any display of accomplishment poor thing—to eat, sleep and read verses in the Bible, will fill up the measure of her days better than any thing else."

This cutting and cruel remark aroused all the mother. Rising to her feet she said slowly and emphatically—

"Alfred Oakly! can you speak thus lightly of your own flesh and blood. Now, shame upon you! God has given us this unhappy child—she is our own to love and protect. Were she the loveliest babe that ever fond mother circled to her heart, I could not love her more. I might be proud of such an one; but love—oh, I could not so deeply, so tenderly!"

"Well then we differ, Mrs Oakly—it is precisely because she is such a child that I am anxious to be rid of her," replied the heartless father. "Understand me my dear, I wish no harm to poor Agatha—it is for her good I assure you, that the change should be made. What answer then, have you to my plan?"

"That I never will consent to it," she replied firmly.

"Very well—you will not. Then it must be done without your consent. I am fixed—neither your refusal or your tears, will avail anything, so you may as well make up your mind to yield madam, without further argument."

So saying, Mr Oakly turned coolly on his heel and left the room.

Now we to the poor wife—for well did she know her husband's unaltering determination. If it is possible for a woman to be too amiable Mrs Oakly was so—while her husband far from appreciating such a character, ruled over her like some petty despot. Her only hope now rested upon the belief that the widow could never be induced to give up one of her children for the unfortunate Agatha.

"O would she were ten times more repulsive!—my poor child!" cried the unhappy mother, "I should still love her, but she would shrink from an object so unsightly."

It was at the close of a chill, rainy day, near the middle of September, that a handsome travelling carriage drew up at the door of a small inn in a retired country town. Such an occurrence was rare; and no sooner therefore, was it seen entering the long street of straggling houses, than it was followed by a noisy set of bare-footed urchins, yelping dogs, and idle loungers, so that by the time it reached the inn, a motley assemblage was formed around it.

As the carriage stopped, the glass was let down, a thin, sallow face looked sharply forth, and a voice not the most gentle demanded—

"Here, some of you—can you tell me where one widow Oakly lives?"

"The landlord, who by this time had reached the scene of wonder, imperatively thrust aside all other aspirants to the honor of answering the stranger, and himself began—

"The widow Oakly—ah, yes. The widow Oakly you said, sir?"

"To be sure I did. I ask you to direct me to her residence."

"Certainly sir. Well, you see the widow lives in that small house yonder, on the bank of the creek—that is, she has a room there—an honest little woman, but poor, very poor!"

"Drive on!" cried the gentleman, sternly, without deigning further notice of the loquacious landlord.

The driver cracked his whip, and the spirited horses obeying the impulse, dashed through the crowd at the imminent risk of trampling some of the throng under their feet.

"There, I told you," cried the landlord, "there was something uncommon about them Oakly's, poor as they are—and now you see what a grand coach comes after them." Run down there, Jimmy my boy, and find out what it means."

And not only Jimmy but a dozen others set out on full trot in rear of the carriage.

In the meantime the object of so much curiosity had reached the house pointed out as the residence of the widow, and carefully mining his steps across the muddy pathway, Mr Oakly rapped loudly at the door with his gold-headed cane, for knocker there was none. After several repetitions of the same, each more vehement than the last, the door was finally opened by a middle aged woman, whose red face and scowling brows, told she was in no very pleasant frame of mind. Around her head was tied an old black handkerchief, thro' which in several places, her grizzled hair shot up like 'quills upon the fretted porcupine.' She was slipshod, and stockingless—her dress drabbed and torn.

"Well," she exclaimed, not at all daunted at sight either of the carriage or its owner, "what is all this rumpus—what do you want, that you knock a body's house down about their ears?"

"Is there a Mrs Oakly lives here?" inquired the gentleman, involuntarily retreating a step or two.

"Well, if there is—what do you want?" said the woman surlily.

"That is my business," answered Mr Oakly, looking daggers. "If there is such a woman here I must speak with her."

"Then go round to the other door, and knock that down too," replied the woman. "Eh, maybe you are one of her husband's relations, I've heard tell he had powerful rich ones."

Mr Oakly turned away without deigning reply to this half interrogatory.

"Eh," she continued, her voice becoming shriller and shriller, "and a plaguy proud set you are, I'll be bound. You can ride in your coach, can you, and let your brother as maybe he was, die on straw. Ho oo-t!" she shrieked, her face inflamed with anger, and she found her taunts unnoticed, "ho oo-t away with you off my door steps—did you ever hear of Dives and Lazarus? Your gold wout keep your back from scorching, old Dives. Faith I should like to have the basting of you myself!" Saying which she boxed the ears of the nearest unlucky wight who stood grinning with the rest at her eloquence, and then giving him a shake, which nearly sent his head off, she slammed the door and retreated.

Her last words were inaudible to the person they were intended for. Glad to escape from such a virago, he had hastily bent his steps around to the back entrance of the domicile. Here he knocked several times, but as no answer was given, he ventured at length to lift the latch, and enter.

It was a low, dark room in which he found himself, little better than a cellar. I fancy it would have been impossible even for those who dwell upon the charms and romance of poverty, and who with well-fed stomachs, in slippers and ease, on Turkey carpets, descant so eloquently upon this theme, to have found aught charming here. The floor was broken and uneven; two low windows, which could only boast of three whole panes between them, the rest being patched with paper, or their places supplied by rags, through which the rain had forced its way, and now trickled in long streams across the floor. There were two chairs, a long bedstead, miserably furnished, a pine table, and some few articles of crock-

ery and cooking utensils of the poorest kind.

Upon an old quilt, thrown down upon the floor in one corner of the room, two little children, entwined in each others arms, were sleeping. At this sight the knees of Mr Oakly trembled, his teeth chattered, and for a moment he leaned for support against the wall—for a voice seemed whispering in his ear, "Look wretch! thy brother's children—this is thy work!"

And perhaps it will be as well here as elsewhere, here in the scene of that brother's death, relate the events which led to so sad an end.

In Mr Alfred Oakly's summary of his brother's life, there was some truth. John was the favorite of his father; for beside that his mind was of much higher order than his brother's, his disposition and deportment were also far more amiable and respectful. Mr Oakly preferred not sending both his sons to college, so he very wisely resolved it should be the younger, as one whose talents would most honor the expense. This excited the envy and jealousy of Alfred, and from that moment he resolved to work his brother's undoing. It happened that at the same college—and in the same class with John Oakly, was a wild dissipated fellow of the same name, who was continually getting into disgrace. Accident furnished Alfred with this clue, which he determined should lead to his desired wishes. By degrees whispers of misconduct began to reach the father's ears. Then came letters to corroborate these rumours, filling the heart of Mr Oakly with sorrow. Letters too, were continually being received, demanding money, which if forwarded, it is unnecessary to say never reached its destination. Mr Alfred took good care of that; for of course, the letters his father received, purporting to be from his brother, originated in his own wicked mind, while those actually penned by John, as also his father's, were suppressed by the same crafty power.

When Alfred first originated this scheme, it is probable he had no idea its success would end in so much misery; his desire was as much to be revenged on his father, for his partiality to his brother, as upon his brother for being the object of his partiality; but when once he had entangled himself in the meshes of deceit he could not break through without sure detection of his wickedness. The father and son met but once after the latter went to college. He was then received with coldness and reproaches. Conscious of his innocence, John was too proud to make any explanations, and left his father's house in bitterness. Soon after Mr Oakly went abroad, as wretched as his son, leaving Alfred in sole charge of his business. The constitution of John was never strong; and no doubt the unmerited treatment of his father hastened the work of disease. He commenced the practice of the law, but in pleading his first cause unfortunately ruptured a blood-vessel, and was borne from the courtroom to his lodgings in apparently a dying state. Through the kindness and careful nursing of the lady with whom he boarded, he at length partially recovered; or it may be that the beauty and gentleness of Louisa, her only daughter, contributed somewhat to his restoration. Certain it is, a mutual affection sprang up between them, and, though in no situation to marry, the death of her mother a few months after by which Louisa was left alone and destitute in the world, brought the event about.

And now love and poverty were henceforth to bear them company on their life journey—for a final blow was put to any expectation which John might have indulged secretly of a reconciliation with his father, through the machinations of his brother. It seems the other John Oakly had, in the meanwhile absconded with a girl of low character. Of this fact Alfred availed himself, and communicated the same to his credulous father, who immediately wrote to his youngest son, that unless he renounced at once, and forever, the disgraceful connection, he would disinherit him. This letter as referring to his darling Louisa, the most amiable and lovely of wives, filled John with indignation and anger. He answered the letter in terms which nothing but his feelings as a husband could excuse—and the rupture was complete. Mr Oakly soon after returned home in miserable health, and died, cutting off John entirely in his will, and leaving the whole of his property to Alfred. This event the latter communicated to his brother, generously enclosing a fifty dollar note, with the assurance that his father had died so incensed against him, out of respect to that father's memory he must decline all further intercourse with him.

When sickness and poverty meet, the path of life's pilgrimage is hard. Too unwell to practice his profession, John attempted writing, but this at best was precarious, beside that the exertion again brought on pain in the side, and difficulty of breathing. He had fine talents, and had health permitted, no doubt might have succeeded as a writer. Some times he would dictate, and his faithful Louisa commit his ideas to paper; but this could not continue. New and precious cares were added, which required all her time, so that his resource was abandoned. He soon grew so feeble as to be unable to leave his room. A kind physician recommended country air, and through his assistance the unfortunate couple, with their two little ones, were enabled to reach a small country town. Here living would be cheaper, and hope whispered to Louisa that by industry and economy, she might support comfortably her dear husband and little ones. Poor girl! on offering herself