

CORDELIA.

BY FRANK H. SWEET.



CORDELIA HACKETT was out mending her back fence. This was nothing unusual, for the fence had a habit of needing mending, and for many a long year there had been no one but Cordelia to do it; and, in fact, to do all the mending and tending and baking and making for the hungry Hackett family. She had smoothed the way down into the valley for her poor, paralytic father, and had paved the way up the hill of life and into an education for her brothers and sisters, and was now thinking of performing the same office for the motherless children of an older half-brother.

But Cordelia did not look old, in spite of the 32 years. Her face was as fair and vivacious as the riotous, clamorous roses that essayed to soften and hide the dilapidated fence; and her eyes were the same merry, bewildering eyes that had proved the joy and torment of more than one susceptible heart in the days of her girlhood. But during these later years she had been too busy for such things; and her brusque, business-like manner had effectually prevented admiring glances from developing into anything verbal.

In spite of its general air of decrepitude, the Hackett place was very pretty and homelike. Bright flowers and clamorous vines had been influenced by Cordelia to screen the unsightly spots; and it would have been a poor, heartless sort of a mortal who would have looked behind them for broken weather-boarding and tottering pickets. Birds seemed to like the arrangement, for the vicinity was sure to be melodious of a bright spring morning; and butterflies and bees and fragrant odors also appeared to be well suited, for they could always be found lingering about the place.

Tap, tap, tap, rang Cordelia's hammer as she went along the fence, straightening a slanting picket here and driving a fresh nail in place of a rusty one there; and tap, tap, tap, sounded firm, approaching footsteps on the sidewalk. But the artist of the hammer did not notice. Her thoughts were busy in reviewing the past and in making plans for the future. The week before, her youngest brother had gone into the world to make a place for himself, and now she was alone—for the first time in her life. She had thought to remain in her pretty, vine-covered cottage and read and study and do just as she liked. But only this morning a letter had come from her brother John, inviting her to live with him and look after his children. Well, of course she would go; but it was with a sharp pang she made the decision.

Presently the nails gave out, and she rose with the intention of going after more. But as she did so, she saw the figure of a man leaning on her gate; and a pair of keen, quizzical eyes were looking straight into her own.

An angry flush rose to her face, but was quickly succeeded by a look of pleased recognition.

"For the land sake, Tom Rogers!" she cried, as she stepped forward and gave him her hand. "Who ever thought to see you here! And with such whiskers! Why, I declare I scarcely knew you! Let's see, it's ten years since you went out west?"

"Twelve, Cordelia; 12," he said, smiling. "You remember it was the year after father sold his farm. That was in '82. Lizzie White had a lawn party the evening before I left."

"Yes, I remember," giving him an arch look. "You went home with Sadie Adams, and folks did say—"

Two rocking-chairs were placed opposite each other on the piazza, and while Cordelia was making the lemonade Tom gazed around with boyish delight. The piazza was screened from the road by honeysuckles and wisterias, and he could count at least a dozen butterflies sailing contentedly about. Almost in reach of his hand was a robin's nest, and as he raised himself slightly to look at the eggs the owner began to scold him from one of the rafters overhead.

Here Cordelia came out with the lemonade and a small stand which she placed between the two chairs.

"There, help yourself," she said, hospitably. "And now tell me how you've been gettin' on out west."

"Oh, jes' toler'ble—as they say out there," he replied, laughing. "Only in my case, the 'jes' toler'ble, means first rate. I started as a cowboy, and then bought a few head of cattle and then some land, and after that pushed ahead pretty steady. I was always hard-working, and so got on faster than some of my neighbors. After awhile a railroad came through, and a village started up less than three miles from my place. That boosted me right to the top. Now, I've got a pretty ranch as there is west of the Missouri."

"Why, that's splendid!" she cried, her face glowing with pleasure. "I'm awfully glad you're doing so well. Folks round here have an idea that you've been sort of—of rammin' out."

"How came they to get such a notion?" he demanded, his face flushing wrathfully.

"Well, I—I believe Ed Purecell spoke of it in the first place."

"Ed Purecell!" Tom rose to his feet as though he would annihilate the absent object of his wrath. Then he sat down with a smothered laugh. "The mean liar! He don't know the first thing of what I have been doing. You didn't believe him, Cordelia?"

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A Great Man. "Does your wife ever play any compliments?" asked Frederick Jimson of his friend Benderly.

A Redeeming Feature. "My dwelling is bounded on the north by a gas works, on the south by an india-rubber works, on the west by a vinegar manufactory, and on the east by a glue boiling establishment."

IN PARIS. Waiter—Shall I bring monsieur a demi-tasse? Wilkins (from Chicago)—Yes, and a small cup of coffee.—Truth.

seen from Two Standpoints. "Aha!" said Mrs. Strongmind, as she and her husband sat in one of the Paris cafes listening to the band.

Over a Thousand. The glorious charge of the Light Brigade, by Tennyson's famous song, is nothing to that which my doctor made for taking a look at my tongue.

Breaking a Record. "Tommy," whispered his mother, as they sat down to dinner, "you mustn't say anything about that large mole on Dr. Fourthly's chin."

HE KNEW WHAT HE WAS ABOUT. Charley—Oh, doctor, Laura just told me that she thought you had a beautiful mustache.

His Mistake. Ned—You never know what to tell a girl. Ted—Now what is the matter? Ned—I got turned down the other night for telling a girl that I had never loved another.

Advanced Philosophy. Vassar Student—Is marriage a proper noun? Be-bloomered Professor—Oh, yes, it is proper, but certainly not expedient in this enlightened new-woman age.—N. Y. World.

One or the Other. Mrs. Muchblest (indignantly)—Just because the baby cries all night is no reason why you should get drunk every evening, so that you won't hear her.

Unanswerable. A rolling stone gathers no moss, it is said. But the saying's repeated in vain to the youth who remarks, with a shake of his head, "What of that? The stone doesn't complain."

As to Disagreements. "Henderson and his partner seem to have a good many serious disagreements." "Yes; they couldn't quarrel worse if they were brothers."—Puck.

Too Much Sameness. Judge—You are sentenced to imprisonment for life. Prisoner—Oh, don't say that, judge! Give me something different. I'm a married man already.—N. Y. Recorder.

Not Quite Suits. "Professor, how does the hair cut suit you?" "The hair is altogether too short—a little longer, please."—Flying Eagle Blaceter.

A Last Hope. First Lawyer—Both the law and the facts are clearly against you. Second Lawyer—Ye-es. We'll have to use great care in selecting the jury.—Puck.

First Real Confidences. "Now that we are married, Penelope, and have nothing to conceal from each other, how—" "I'm 29, George. How much did you give the preacher?"—Chicago Tribune.

Not a Mere Clerk. Wealthy Parent—What, engaged yourself to young Tapester? Outrageous! The idea of a Van Junesberry marrying a mere store clerk!

Where the Pugs Missed It. "Corbett and Fitzsimmons can't be very smart. Why it would be the easiest thing in the world for them to arrange to pull off their fight right in New York."

The Time for Romance. Groom—Well, that umbrella is gone and I'll have to get another one. We'll stop in Bigg, Store & Co's.

What Other Kind? "What a nasty smell burnt powder has!" said Johnny. "Powder?" exclaimed his elder sister, Miss Maud, looking up. "Why it hasn't any sm—O, you mean gunpowder!"

The Force of Habit. On the day before the execution the keeper informs a doomed man that a visitor wishes to see him.

Confinement and Hard Work. Indoors, particularly in the sitting posture, are far more prejudicial to health than excessive muscular exertion in the open air.

An Enigmatical Bill of Fare. For a dinner served on the Dining Cars of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, will be sent to any address on receipt of a two-cent postage stamp.

HEARD at a public school.—"What word or words are synonymous with falsehood?" Chorus of Scholars—"Circus posters!"—Golden Days.

Where They Fall Down. They're very, very masculine. But likely try to fall. When they try to look sardonic Upon a bargain sale.

Cruel. Mrs. Ray—Why are you so despondent over your cook leaving you? Aren't there others? Mrs. Bay—Yes; but when I asked her to give me a good recommendation, the wretch absolutely refused.—N. Y. World.

A DELICATE TASTE. Shorter Grubb—I wish yer would help me, ma'am. Me ole pal died yesterday an'— Mrs. Easy Fruit—What killed him? Shorter Grubb—He tried ter eat turkey widout cranberry sauce.—Chicago Record.

He Didn't Have to Like It. Stern Father of the Girl—I saw you kiss my daughter as I passed the parlor awhile ago, and I want you to know I don't like it.

Spare Moments. Young Man—You may not, but I do. He Had. "I understand your employer has a very uniform temper?" "He has—uniformly bad."—Chicago Times-Herald.

BOYS ARE CRITICAL. In Writing Stories for Them Authors Must Be Sure of Facts. In an interesting article on "How to Write Stories for Boys," in the Writer, James Otis, the popular juvenile writer, gives an amusing illustration of the necessity of accuracy in stating facts in boy's stories.

The incorrect statement made was regarding the depth of water at a certain point on Tampa bay, and I gained my information from an old chart of the Florida coast, carelessly giving no heed to the fact that there might be a later publication bearing on the subject.

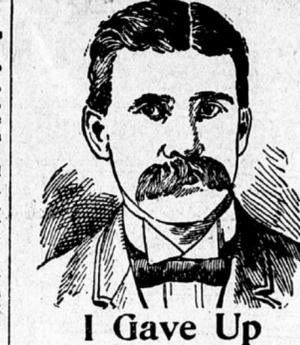
The latest coast survey had discovered that this particular portion of the bay was dry at low water, and at least four boys had made themselves acquainted with that fact.

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"I NEVER could understand," sighed Adam, "why that oldest boy of mine turned out so badly. He hadn't any grandparents to spoil him."—Golden Days.

THOLEY Motorman (to Conductor)—"Say, Bill, the old gent behind has just fell off." Conductor—"That's all right. He's paid his fare."—Pathfinder.

HEARD at a public school.—"What word or words are synonymous with falsehood?" Chorus of Scholars—"Circus posters!"—Golden Days.



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