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From "Household Words."

MY BLIND SISTER.

I.

This was how I found it out. Lettie and I were sitting in the window at our work—it was some mourning we were making for our rector's family—and it had to be sent home the next day early. She said, "Jane, it seems as if the sun had given up shining; how dull everything looks! Don't you think so?"

I did not notice it; there was still an hour's daylight. She put up her hand to her forehead as if it pained her, so I bade her go out for a turn in the garden; we had sat close to our sewing all the day, and the young thing was tired: even I was, and my eyes ached wearily. She went along by the flower-bed, and gathered a few roses—we were in the middle of July then—and gave them to me through the window, saying that she would go down into the town for some trimmings we wanted to finish the dresses. I would rather she had stayed at home, and replied that the shops would be shut; but she was not listening, and went away down the path as I spoke. It was dusk when she came back; I had just shut the window, and was lighting my candle; she said, "I could not get the fringe, June," and then laying her bonnet on the dresser, took up her work. After she had sewed perhaps five minutes she dropped her hands on her knees, and such a strange, hopeless expression came into her face, that I was quite shocked and frightened.

"What ails you, Lettie? what can have happened?" I asked, suspecting I scarcely knew what.

She looked at me drearily in silence for some moments, and then said hastily, "I might as well tell you at once, Jane—I'm going blind."

My work fell to the ground, and I uttered a startled cry.

"Don't take on about it, Jane; it can't be helped," she added.

"It is only a fancy of yours, Lettie; I shall have you to Doctor Nash in the morning. What has made you take such a notion into your head all at once?" said I for I thought this was another nervous whim. Lettie had been a good deal indulged by our mother before she died, and had shown herself not a little headstrong sometimes, as well as fanciful.

"It is of no use, Jane: I have been to Doctor Nash myself, and he said plainly that I was going blind. I have been to him twice before; I knew what was coming. Oh, Janey! what shall we do? what shall we do?" and having borne up thus far she broke down, and sobbed aloud, with her face on her arms on the table.

"We shall do very well. In the first place, I don't believe Doctor Nash knows anything about it; and in the next, I shall have you up to London, to a great doctor, and hear what he says before I give in to thinking that you are to be blind all your days."

She was a little cheered by this.

"To London, Janey! but where is the money to come from?" she asked.

"Leave that to me. I'll arrange somehow." It was very puzzling to me to settle how just then, but I have a firm conviction that where there is a will to do anything, a way may generally be found, and I meant to find it.

She took up her work, but I bade her leave it. "You will not set another stitch, Lettie," I said; "you may just play on your old piano, and sing your bits of songs, and get out into the fresh air—you have been kept too close, and are pale to what you were. Go to bed now, like a good little lassie; I'll do by myself."

"But there is so much to finish, Janey."

"Not a stitch that you'll touch, Lettie; so kiss me good night, and get away."

"And you don't think much of what Doctor Nash said?" she asked very wistfully.

"No! I've no opinion of him at all." And hearing me speak up in my natural way, (though my heart was doubting all the time,) she went away comforted, and in better hope. I had put it off before her, because she would have given away to fretting, if I had seemed to believe what the doctor said; but, as I drew my needle through and through my work till three hours past midnight, I had often to stop to wipe the tears from my eyes.

There were only two of us—Lettie and myself—and we had neither father nor mother, nor indeed any relatives whom we knew.

Lettie was seventeen, and I was four years older. We were both dressmakers, and either worked at home, or went out by the day. We lived in a small, thatched, three-roomed cottage outside the town, which had a nice garden in front. Some people had told us that if we moved into the town we should get better employ; but both Lettie and I liked the place where we had been born so much better than the closed-in streets, that we had never got changed, and were not wishful to. Our rent was not much, but we were rather put to it sometimes to get it made up by the day, for our landlady was very sharp upon her tenants, and if they were ever so little behind-hand, she gave them notice directly.

I set my wits to work how to get the money to take Lettie to London; but all that night no idea came to me, and the next day it was the same. With two pair of hands we had maintained ourselves decently; but how was it going to be now that there was only one? Rich folks little think how hard it is for many of us poor day-workers to live on our little earnings, much more to spare for an evil day.

II.

Sunday found me still undecided, but that was our holiday, and I meant to see Doctor Nash myself while Lettie was gone to chapel. She had made herself very nice, for she had a modest pride in her looks, which becomes a girl. I thought her very pretty myself, and so did the neighbors: she had clear, small features, and a pale color in her cheeks, soft brown hair, and hazel eyes. It was not easy to see that anything ailed them, unless you looked into them very closely, and then there is a dimness to be seen about them, which might be disease. She had put off thinking about herself, and was as merry as a cricket when she went down the lane in her white bonnet and clean muslin gown. She nodded to me (I was watching her from the doorway,) and smiled quite happily. I was as proud of Lettie as ever my mother had been. She was always such a clever, warm-hearted little thing, for all her high temper.

When she was fairly gone, and the church bells ceased, I dressed myself in haste, and set off into the town to see Doctor Nash.—He was at home, and the man showed me into the surgery, where I had to wait maybe an hour. When the doctor came in, he asked sharply why I could not have put off my visit till Monday; was my business so pressing? He did not consider how precious were the work-days to us, or may-be he would not have spoken so—for he was a benevolent man, was, we had every reason to know; he having attended our mother through her last illness as carefully as if she had been a rich lady, though we could never hope to pay him. I explained what I had come about and he softened then, but would not alter [illegible] he had told Lettie himself.

"She has been with me three or four times," he said. "She is an interesting little girl; it is a great pity, but I do not think her sight can be saved—I don't indeed, Jane."

He explained to me why he was of this opinion, and how the disease would advance, more lengthily than needs to be set down here. Then he said he could get her admitted into the Blind Institution if we liked; and that I must keep her well, and send her out of doors constantly. And so I went home again, with very little hope left as you may well think, after what I had heard.

I did not tell Lettie where I had been, and she never suspected. There was no chapel that afternoon, and we were getting ready to take a walk along the river bank, as we generally did on fine Sundays, (for all the town went there; and it freshened us up to see the holiday people far more than if we had stopped at home reading our books, as many say it is only right to do,) when one of our neighbors came in with her son. Mrs. Crofts was a widow, and Harry was studying medicine with Doctor Nash. They were both kind friends of ours; and, between Lettie and the young man, there had been for ever so long a sort of boy and girl liking; but I do not think they had spoken to each other yet. Lettie colored up when Harry appeared, and went into the garden to show him, she said, the white moss-rose that was full of bloom by the kitchen window; but they stayed whispering over it so long, that I did not think it was only that they were talking about. Then Harry went out at the gate looking downcast and vexed, and Lettie came back into the house with a queer wild look in her face that I did not like.—Mrs. Crofts said, "Is Harry gone?" and my sister made her a short answer, and went into the bed-room.

"Harry is going up to London very soon; I shall be glad to have the examinations over and him settled. Doctor Nash thinks very well of him; he is a good young fellow Jane." I replied that he had always been a favorite of mine, and I hoped he would do well; but listening for Lettie's coming to us, perhaps I seemed rather cold and stiff; for Mrs. Crofts asked if I was not well, or if there was anything on my mind; so I told her about poor Lettie's sight.

"I've seen no appearance of blindness; Harry never said a word. You don't think it can be true?" she asked. I did not know what to think. I was sure that, in that whispering over the rose tree, my sister had told young Mr. Crofts; and I wished his mother would go away, that I might comfort her. At last she went. Then I called to Lettie, who came at once. She had been fretting; but, as she tried to hide it, I made no remark, and we went down the lane to the river meadows in silence. The first person we met was Harry Crofts. Lettie seemed put out when he joined us, and turned back. She stayed behind, and was presently in company with our landlady, Mrs. Davis, who was taking the air in a little wheeled chair drawn by a footman. Mrs. Davis had always noticed Lettie. Harry Crofts looked back once or twice to see if she was following; but, when he found she was not, he proposed to wait for her, and we sat down by the water on a tree-trunk which lay there.

"This is a sad thing about Lettie's eyes, Jane," he said suddenly.

"Yes, it is. What do you think about them? Is there any chance for her?"

"Doctor Nash says not; but Jane, next week Phillipson, the best occulist in England, is coming to stay a couple of weeks with Nash. Let him see her."

"I meant to try to get her to London for advice."

"There is nobody so clever as Phillipson. Oh! Jane, I wish I had passed——"

"Do you fancy you know what would cure her?"

"I'd try. You know, Jane, I love Lettie. I meant to ask her to be my wife. I did ask her this afternoon, and she said 'No;' and then told me about her sight—it is only that. I know she likes me: indeed, she did not try to deny it."

"Yes, Harry, you have been so much together; but there must be no talk of marrying."

"That is what she says."

"She is right—she must just stay with me. You could not do with a blind wife, Harry: you, a young man, with your way to make in the world."

He tore up a handful of grass, and flung it upon the river, saying passionately, "Why, of all the girls in Dalston, must this affliction fall on poor Lettie?" and then he got up and walked away to meet her coming along the bank. They had a good deal of talk together, which I did not listen to: for their young hearts were speaking to each other—telling their secrets.—Lettie loved him: yes, certainly she loved him.

III.

Dr. Phillipson's opinion was the same as that of Dr. Nash. Lettie was not so down stricken as I had dreaded she would be, and she bade good-by to Harry Crofts almost cheerfully when he went up to London.

"There, Jane, now I hope he'll forget me; I don't like to see him so dull."

That day Mrs. Davis sent her a ticket for a concert at the Blind Institution, and she went. When she came home to tea she told me that the girls and boys who sang looked quite happy and contented. "And why should I not be so too? what a number of beautiful sights I can remember which some of them never saw!" she added, with a sigh.

After this, imperceptibly, her sight went; [illegible] floor, she felt her way before her, with her hands out. Doctor Nash again offered to use his influence to get her admitted into the Institution, but she always pleaded, "Let me stay with you, Janey!" and I had not the heart to refuse her, though she would have had more advantages there than I could afford her.

Not far from us there lived an old German clock maker, who was besides musical, and acted as an organist at the Roman Catholic chapel in the town. We had known him all our lives. Lettie often carried him a posy from our garden, and his grandchildren came to me for patches to dress their dolls. Muller was a grim, fantastic-looking figure, but he had a heart of pure gold. He was benevolent, simple, kindly; it was his talk that reconciled Lettie, more than anything else, to her condition. He was so poor, yet so satisfied; yet unrepining.

"Learn music—I will teach thee," he said to my sister. So, sometimes in our little parlor, and sometimes in his, he gave her lessons in fine sacred pieces from Handel and Haydn, and taught her to sing as they sing in churches—which was grander than our simple Methodist hymns. It was a great delight to listen to her. It seemed as if she felt everything deeper in her heart, and expressed it better than before; and it was all her consolation to draw the sweet sounds up out of that well of feeling which love had sounded. I know that, to remember how Harry loved her, gave a tenderness and patience to her suffering which it would else have lacked. She, who used to be so quick with her tongue, never gave anybody a sharp word now.

I do not say much about our being poor, though, of course, that could not but be; still we had friends who were kind to us; even Mrs. Davis softened, and mentioned to me, under seal of confidence, that, if I could not quite make up the rent, she would not press me; but I fortunately had not to claim her forbearance, or else I do fear she could not have borne to lose a sixpence; and when it had come to the point we should have had to go like others; she was so very fond of money, poor woman! Lettie used to go to the Institution sometimes, where she learned to knit, and net, and weave basket work. Our rector (a better never lived or a kinder to the poor) had her to net covers for his fruit trees, fishing nets, and other things, and to knit woollen socks for himself and his boys; so that altogether she contrived to make what almost kept her. Now that the calamity had really come, it was not half so dreadful as it had seemed a long way off. Lettie was mostly cheerful. I never heard her complain, but she used to say, often, that there was much to be thankful for with us. She had a quiet religious feeling, which kept her from melancholy; and though I did not find it out till afterwards, a hope that perhaps her affliction might some day be removed. Harry had put that thought into her mind, and I do not think I am overstating the truth in saying that his honest, manly affection for her was the great motive to his working so hard at his profession, in which he has since become deservedly successful and famous.

We had six very quiet years. It seemed to me as if Lettie had always, from the first, gone softly groping her way, and I had always led her to chapel and back. Harry studied in London; then we heard of him in Edinburgh; and at last his mother said he had gone to Paris; and she was half afraid he would settle there and marry a French wife. Lettie looked sorrowful and restless for a day or two after that, but presently recovered her cheerfulness. We had not much change or variety at home. There was I for ever at my work, and Lettie at her music. She had gained a great deal of skill now; and many a time have I seen a knot of people standing at the corner of our garden hedge to listen to her singing. I have heard several grand public performers since then; but never one who could touch my heart and bring the tears into my eyes as my poor blind sister did. On Sundays, at chapel, we could hear her voice, clear and sweet, above all the rest; and, though our tunes were wild and simple—sung by her, they were beautiful. Sometimes she would go to St. John's church for the sake of the organ and the chanting, but I did not feel it right to change; habit is strong in slow, untaught people; and it did not seem as if I had kept my Sabbath, unless I said my prayers in the homely little chapel to which our mother had led us by the hand when we were children. Lettie loved the grand church music, and who could wonder at it, poor lassie? Once or twice when she begged me to go with her, it had seemed to fill my heart with pain almost; so how much more must it have excited her who was all fire and enthusiasm? She said it made her feel happier and better, and more thankful to God. Perhaps in losing one sense her enjoyment through the others grew more intense.

IV.

At the end of these six years Harry Crofts came home. He was often at our house, and we liked having him; but, though Lettie seemed happy enough, he was uneasy and discontented. I have seen him stand beside the piano, and never take his eyes off her by the half-hour together; but his face looked quite gloomy. At last he one day said to me: "Jane, are you timid—I do not think Lettie is? She seems strong and well." I knew he meant more than a simple inquiry after our nerves, and I asked if he thought he had found out a cure for sister. He turned quite red.

"Yes. I believe I have; I saw an operation performed in Paris on a girl's eyes similarly affected. It was successful."

[illegible] The prospect seemed too good, too beautiful to be true! Just at this minute Lettie came in through the doorway; there was sunshine behind her, and she appeared to bring it into the parlor with her. "Are you here, Harry?" she immediately asked.

It was a strange thing, that although she never saw nor heard him speak, she was at once aware of his presence. He got up and took her by the hand, and brought her to me. "Tell her, Jane, or shall I?" he whispered. I signed to him to speak himself, which he did without hesitation.

"Lettie, have you courage to undergo an operation on your eyes which may restore your sight?"

She clasped her hands, and such a beautiful color came flushing up into her face—you would have said it was like an angel's face, it changed so brightly.

"Oh, yes! anything, anything, Harry, only give me that hope!" said she, softly.

I looked at him questioningly to ask if he had not better warn her of possible disappointment, and he said at once:

"Lettie, I ought to tell you that this operation may fail, though I do not fear that it will. For my sake, Lettie," he added, in an under-tone.

"Well, then, for your sake, Harry," she replied, with a low sigh. "Even if it should not give me back my sight, I shall only be as I am now."

They went out into the garden together; and, from the earnest, gentle way in which Harry talked to Lettie, I know that he was preparing her for what she had to undergo. She did not want for courage in any circumstances, and I did not look for her being weak now.

The operation was performed during the following week. Doctor Phillipson and Doctor Nash were both present, but Harry Crofts himself did it. His nerve was wonderful. Lettie behaved admirably too; indeed, nobody was foolish but myself, and when it was over I fainted. It was entirely successful; my sister has her sight now, as good as I have. For several weeks we kept her in a darkened room, but she was gradually permitted to face the light, and the joy of that time is more than words can describe.

Harry Crofts soon after claimed her as his wife; and really, to say the truth, nobody had a better right to her. The report of the singular cure he had made, lifted him at once into consideration; and, as he made diseases of the eye his particular study, he is now as celebrated an occulist as Dr. Phillipson himself; many persons indeed give him the preference. The operation, then thought so much of, is now of frequent occurrence; Lettie's kind of blindness being no longer irremediable.

And this is all I need tell about our history; it is not much, or very romantic, but I am often asked about it, so I have just set down the truth.

☞ "The times are hard, wife, and I find it difficult to keep my nose above water." "You can easily keep your nose above water, husband, if you didn't keep it so often above brandy."

☞ A letter from Naples says: "Standing on Castle Elmo, I drank in the whole sweep of the bay." What a swallow the writer must have.

SPEECH OF A. H. STEPHENS,

Vice-President of Southern Confederacy.

Alexander H. Stephens, Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy, made a speech at Augusta, Georgia, on the 11th July, in which he said:

Upon the adjournment of the Congress from Montgomery to Richmond, the estimate was for one hundred thousand men for the first fiscal year. The amount estimated by the Secretary of the Treasury to meet the requirements to support an army of this number was fifty millions of dollars—a large amount. This amount must be raised.—How to do it is the question. But since that adjournment—since that estimate—this war has assumed a wilder and broader range. It has taken on large and more gigantic proportions, and instead of one hundred thousand men we may have to send two hundred thousand men to meet the enemy; instead of fifty millions of dollars, we may have, and we shall have, to raise one hundred millions; and it may be, if it goes on and increases, that we shall have to raise more. The estimate, however, of the Secretary of the Treasury was fifty millions of dollars, and whatever number of men and whatever amount of money shall to necessary must be raised. We do not intend to be subjugated. Mr. Lincoln has increased his call from seventy-five thousand to four hundred thousand men. He has increased his demand for money from the five millions first asked for (the amount I do not exactly recollect,) and asks his Congress, now in session, for four hundred millions of dollars. Whether he will raise his men or his money I know not. All I have to say about it is, that if he raises his four hundred thousand men, we must raise enough to meet him, and if he raises his four hundred millions of money, we must raise enough to meet it.

It is a war of political and social existence, and unless we intend to be overridden and beaten down and subjugated, and to become the vassals of his mercenaries and myrmidons, we must, every one of us—every man, every boy, and every woman—be prepared to do our duty. Our means in men and money are ample to sustain our independence. We have, upon a reasonable estimate, at least 700,000 fighting men.—Whether all these will be required to drive back his armed myrmidons, I know not; but if they are, every man must go to the battle-field. He may think, and doubtless does, [illegible] and overrun us. He should recollect, however, as we should, and reverentially, too, that the "race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but that it is God that gives the victory.

Four hundred thousand men may be a formidable army against us; but it is not as formidable as the 600,000 led by Darius against the Grecian States; and we there have the example of much fewer numbers than we are fighting a battle for right, for justice, for independence and for liberty.—We have an example worthy of our imitation. 600,000 Persians invaded Greece. These small States could bring against them but 11,000, all told. The 11,000 met the hosts of Persia, not the 600,000, but all that could be brought against them, on the common plata. The 11,000, with valorous hearts, fighting for home, fighting for country, fighting for everything dear to freemen, put to flight the hosts of Persia, leaving 60,000 slain upon the field. Men of the South, therefore, let this war assume its most gigantic proportions, its most threatening aspects—nerving our hearts with the spirit of our Revolutionary fathers, when they were but three million, and coped with Great Britain, the most powerful nation in the world—animated by these sentiments, fighting for everything dear to us, fear not the result, recollecting that "thrice armed is he who has his quarrel just;" and as our fathers in the bloody conflict of the Revolutionary War, appeared to the God of Battles for success in their cause, so may we, since we have the consciousness, in any event, that this in no war of our seeking. * *

The men are ample; the means to support them is the subject upon which I am to address you, and how is the money to be raised? War, I tell you, costs blood as well as treasure. Have we the means? Can we cope with the North? That is the question. We have not less than four thousand millions taxable property within the Confederate States, upon the last minimum estimate. At last year's rates, we therefore could raise from one hundred millions to two hundred millions, for years to come, and yet survive. The wealth of nations, the ability of nations to sustain war, depends not so much upon its taxable property as its productive capital. It is to the latter we must look for the means and ability to sustain war, for in times of war generally all business is interrupted. In this particular of productive capital, perhaps there is no people in the world more favored under Heaven, and for which we ought to be grateful, not boastful, and it is one of those blessings for which we should return thanks. No nation in the world, with the same population, has such a continuous annual productive capital. I have not stated the wealth of the North, but it is not my purpose to detract from it. They were a people of wealth. Most of it, however, came from their connection and trade with us.—They were an ingenious and manufacturing people. We are an agricultural people. * * * * * * * *

The great difference between the North and the South to carry on the war—and this I say to you in prospect of a long war, for I wish our people to see the full magnitude and to feel the full responsibility that rests upon us in it, and to see our responsibility to meet it—is this:—The North sold us some two hundred and fifty millions annually. This was their riches; hence came their wealth; hence grew their cities. Their wealth was but the accumulation deposited from our commerce, just as the delta of the Nile was enriched above the lands of any other portion of Egypt, by the deposit of the rich alluvial soil brought down from the mountains and deposited in it. The riches, money and power of the North came in the same way. Our cotton was the source of it, and how Mr. Lincoln is to get his four hundred millions, I do not know. That is a matter for him to determine, though I may say more about it before I get through, but at present it is sufficient to say that Lincoln has dammed up the water that turns the mill of Northern prosperity. How long the mill will run time alone will determine.—But it is not so with us. We grow breadstuffs enough to supply all our wants. We live in a heaven favored land, for all the cereals grow here equally as well as in any other portion of the world—wheat, rye, oats and corn, in a great abundance. We could compete with the world in the production of these. We grow also the tobacco plant and rice. We live in the land of the fig tree, the pomegranate and the vine. Hardly anything used as food but is grown in the Southern Confederacy, and we could, if need be, grow an abundance of everything except coffee. We, therefore, have the means, under the blessing of Heaven, to support ourselves and keep upon the field every variety of cattle, suitable for food or draft.—We, therefore, can sow bread enough to support our people and keep from one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand men in the field. Let the blockade last; let the Northern people be cut off from trade with us within the eleven Southern States, we could for years carry on the war, support ourselves and our armies, and, rather than to be subjugated and become vassals of Lincoln's power, fight it out beleaguered by blockade all around. * * * *

I meet many asking about the blockade. I cannot, to-day, tell you how the blockade is to be raised. But there is one thing certain—in some way or other it will be obliged to be raised, or there will be revolution in Europe—there will be starvation there.—Our cotton is the element that will do it. Steam is powerful, but steam is far short in its power to the tremendous power of cotton. If you look out upon the ocean to-day and inquire into the [illegible] you will find that it is cotton that drives it, and the spindles and looms, from those in your own State to the remotest quarter of the world—it is this element of cotton that drives them, and it is this great staple which is the tremendous lever by which we can work out our destiny, under Providence, I trust, against four hundred thousand, or against four times four hundred thousand. (Applause.) Upon a reasonable and ordinary estimate we grow four millions of bales of cotton. I am here to-day to discuss before you the fifty million loan, but I am frank to tell you it may be one hundred millions, and I think it probably will be. The proposition that the Government makes is not to tax the people. The object of a wise and good government is to make the burndens fall as light upon the people as possible to meet every emergency. The proposition the Government makes, therefore, is to take the loan in produce. In the grain growing sections the members of Congress solicit the loan in grain, army subsistence, meat, corn wheat and flour. We are not a grain growing country. Our supply is cotton. I address you, therefore, solely on the subject of cotton.

* * * * * *

I will now read to you, just at this part of my address, the proposition upon which I shall make some comments, for I wish every gentleman to understand it. It is not asking a donation, the government simply wishes to control the proceeds of your cotton. The government proposes to give you a bond bearing eight per cent. interest, paying the interest semi-annually. It is not a gift or donation, but simply your surplus cotton, as much as you can spare. This is the proposition:—"We, the subscribers, agree to contribute to the defence of the Confederate States that portion of our crop set down to our respective names; the same to be placed in warehouse or in the hands of our factors, and sold on or before the —— next." Fix the day of sale as soon as you please, the first of January, the first of February, or the first of March, if you please, though I am aware the government wishes you to sell it as soon as convenient; but let each planter consult his interest, and in the meanwhile consult the market. But to proceed:—"And the net proceeds of sale we direct to be paid over to the Treasurer of the Confederate States for bonds for the same amount bearing eight per cent. interest." There is the whole of it. The cotton planter directs his cotton to be sent into the hands of his factor or his commission merchant. He only tells the government in the subscription the portion he can lend.—He directs it to be sold and the proceeds is to be invested in Confederate bonds. I understand that a committee will be appointed before this meeting adjourns to canvas this county. Every planter, therefore, of Richmond county, will be waited upon and afforded an opportunity to subscribe. I wish, therefore, to say to that committee and everybody, subscribe. I prefer you putting down, first, your name; second, the number of bales, and I prefer you putting down the proportion of your crop. I want, especially, the number of bales, but would like also to know the proportion it bears to your crop.

[Continued on 4th page.]