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ST. PETER AT THE GATE.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF MANY READERS.]



ST. PETER stood guard at the golden gate. With a solemn mien and an air sedate; A man and a woman, ascending there. Applied for admission. They came and stood Before St. Peter, so great and good. In hope the City of Peace to win. And asked St. Peter to let them in.

The woman was tall and lank and thin, With a scraggy beardlet on her chin; The man was short and thick and stout; His stomach was built so it rounded out; His face was pleasant, and all the while He wore a kindly and genial smile; The choirs in the distance in echoes wake, And the man kept still, while the woman spake:

"Oh! thou who guardest the gate," said she, "We two came hither, beseeching thee To let us enter the heavenly land And play on harps with the angel band; Of me, St. Peter, there is no doubt— There's nothing from heaven to bar me out; I've been to meetings three times a week, And almost always I'd rise and speak; I've told the sinners about the day When they'd repent of their evil way. I've told my neighbors—I've told 'em all, 'Bout Adam and Eve and the primal fall; I've shown them all what they'd have to do If they'd pass in with the chosen few; I've marked their path of duty clear— Laid out the plan of their whole career; I've talked and talked to 'em, loud and long. For my lungs are good and my voice is strong; Oh! good St. Peter, you'll clearly see The gate of heaven is open to me. But my old man, I regret to say, Hasn't walked in exactly the narrow way; He smokes and he swears, and grave faults he's got, And I don't know whether he'll pass or not; He never would pray with an earnest vim, Or go to revival, or join in a hymn, So I had to leave him in sorrow there. While I, with the chosen, united in prayer, He ate what the pantry chose to afford; While I, in my purity, sang to the Lord; And if cucumbers were all that he got, It's a chance if he merited them or not. But, oh! St. Peter, I love him so! To the pleasures of heaven please let him go; I've done enough; a Saint I've been! Won't that atone? Can't you let him in? By my grim gospel, I know 'tis so, That the unrepentant must fry below; But isn't there some way you can see That he may enter who's dear to me? It's a narrow gospel by which, I pray, But the chosen expects to find some way Of coaxing, or fooling, or bribing you, So their relations can amble through. Ah! say, St. Peter, it seems to me This gate isn't kept as it ought to be; You ought to stand by by the opening there, And never sit down in that easy chair. And, say, St. Peter, my sight is dimmed, But I don't like the way your whiskers are trimmed. They are cut too wide, and outward toss— They'd look better narrow, cut straight across. Well, we must be going, our crown to win, So open, St. Peter, and we'll pass in!"

St. Peter sat quiet and stroked his staff, But, spite of his office, he had to laugh; Then said, with a fiery gleam in his eye: "Who's tending this gateway— you or I?" And then he arose, in statue tall, And pressed a button upon the wall, And said to the imp who answered the bell: "Escort this lady around to hell."

The man stood still as a piece of stone— Stood sadly, gloomily, there alone; A life-long, settled idler he had That his wife was good and he was bad; He thought if the woman went down below That he would certainly have to go; That if she went to the regions dim, There wasn't a ghost of a show for him. Slowly he turned, by habit bent, To follow wherever the woman went.

St. Peter, standing on duty there, Observed that the top of his head was bare; He called the gentleman back, and said: "Friend, how long have you been wed?" "Thirty years," (with a weary sigh)— And then he thoughtfully added: "Why?" St. Peter was silent, with head bent down; He raised his head and scratched his crown; Then, seeming a different thought to take, Slowly, half to himself, he spake:

"Thirty years with that woman there? No wonder the man hasn't any hair! Swearing is wicked, smoke's not good; He smoked and swore! I should think he would! Thirty years with that tongue, so sharp? Oh, Angel Gabriel, give him a harp! A jeweled harp with a golden string! Good sir, pass in where the angels sing. Gabriel, give him a seat alone— One with a cushion, up near the throne! Call up some angel to play their best; Let him enjoy the music—and rest! See that on the finest ambrosia he feeds; He's had about all the hell he needs; It isn't just hardly the thing to do— To roast him on earth and the future too."

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