

[Continued from page 61.]

This was the second point of agreement.

Then followed a long silence, filled only by the crackling of the fire, the heavy ticking of the gaunt, eight-day clock and the snoring of Bose. It was not until the clock had ticked half an hour from time into eternity that the Good-man spoke again.

"I calculate it will be your best way to take your part and go up to your brother's. William will be glad enough of you for a housekeeper, for he has had to get along most any way since his wife died."

"Yes, I expect I can be a help to William," replied Mrs. P., for the third time harmonizing. "But what do you lay out to do for a housekeeper?"

"Well, I am counting on making a shift somehow, with mother's help," returned Mr. P., drawing up his waxed thread.

Now the mother was an infirm old woman, not over-keen or energetic at the best, and Mrs. P.'s heart began to swell with pity; but of course it was not for her to object or dictate, so she only knit the faster, knowing well there would be sore need.

"I want to finish out my corn to-morrow. What, supposing we ride up to Sabin's the day after and settle up the matter?" suggested Mr. Puffer, when the clock struck nine.

"Two, four, six, eight, ten," responded the dame, counting her stitches. I don't know but that time will suit me as well as any. I have been laying out to make up the quinces to-morrow, and then you need a new frock, you know; but I guess I can fetch them both to-morrow."

There was a shade of sadness in her tone, for she was morally sure that Mother Puffer would let the preserves mould or ferment, or come to ruin in some unhousewifely way, and she was thinking, too, of the rags to be in the blue woolen frock. But then, it was not worth while to show any such feeling; so just to testify her light-hearted indifference, she began to sing softly to herself while she bound up the heel; meanwhile the husband, from his side of the dog, could but confess the sound of her voice was much more musical than his mother's asmatitic breathing.

The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Puffer were astir long before light, for they had a busy day before them. Mr. Puffer husked out his corn and ate his meals, which happened to be of his favorite kinds of food, in his usual heavy silence; and Mrs. P.—well I am afraid Mrs. P., though she hustled about with a great show of cheerful activity, mingled a few pitying tears with the beef-brine she was scalding, and even went so far as to pat Bose once or twice, and feel a thrill of affection for him in her capacious heart when he looked up with a wag of delight.

But the busy hours of the October day hastened to spend themselves, and quite too soon the old skelton clock pounded nine of the evening again.

"Do you lay out to be ready for to go to the Squire's, to-morrow?" asked Mr. Puffer at last, finding Mrs. Puffer would not speak according to her wont and save him the trouble of opening his mouth.

"Ye-es, I suppose so," returned that lady, reluctantly; "I rather thought whether or no I shouldn't manage to spin up that little handful of rolls into stocking yarn; then the pickle-vinegar needs scalding over; and I do suppose your winter flannels ought by good rights to have an overhauling; but somehow the time has slipped away, and I haven't seemed to accomplish half I meant to. The fact is, there is always something to be done in a house, and I don't know but I am as ready as I shall be. Your mother will keep up things as best she can, I've no doubt; but the poor old woman is rather wheezy and shakey and she can't do as she could once."

As a reply was not strictly necessary, of course Mr. Puffer made none, but there was an answering "Amen" deep down in his heart, which was the fourth time they two had made a point of agreement.

[ TO BE CONTINUED. ]

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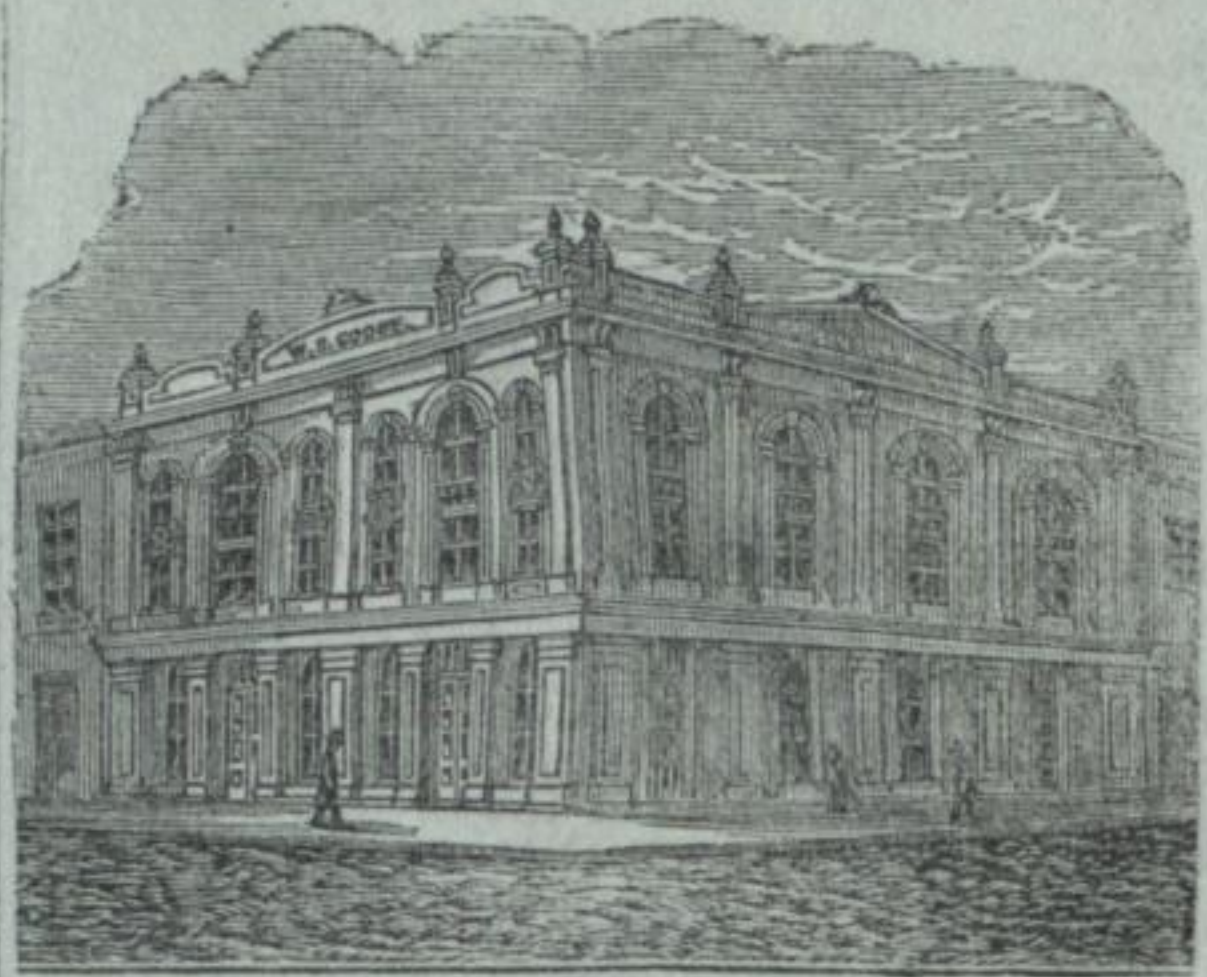
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