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contents every quarter of an hour, under pain of your wife's indignation, is not consistent with any steady mental labor. Yet all these small annoyances the Rev. Frederick Latimer bore like a Christian and a lamb, for he was a good, kind-hearted, domestic man, who respected the saving of the family wash, and knew that the kitchen fire was fully occupied, and that what he did was no work of supererogation.

That slapping and shaking noise in the kitchen was, he knew, Mrs. Latimer folding, and that sound portended a busy day, and in that busy day he was willing to make himself useful.

The children were out sliding—getting firey red by tumbling on the back of their heads, and performing the "cobbler's knock" on the village pond. They had been busy cutting holly-boughs for the church that morning, and the sliding was their reward.

"Jane, my dear," cried the Rev. Mr. Latimer to his wife, as he put on his great-coat and hat, and seized his blackthorn stick, "I'm just going to see old Martha Hacker; and then I shall step up to the church and see how Payne gets on with the decorations. I shall be back to lunch at one. The sheets in my study are quite dry, and the sauce-pan has been on the boil ten minutes."

"Stop a moment, Fred," cried Mrs. Latimer; "I want to speak to you before you go out."

Mr. Latimer was ruffled. "Well, now, what is it, my dear? I cannot stop now; I must be off."

Mrs. Latimer appeared and remonstrated. "Why Fred., how impatient you are. All I want to ask you is, if you wrote your usual invitation to Uncle Godfrey, for Christmas. Of course he won't come, but still we oughtn't to forget him."

"Yes I wrote on Monday. Did I ever forget to write to him—the old selfish hunk! Good-bye, darling. Send down for the children, if they are not in, in half an hour; it is now just eleven."

II. THE ELEVEN-FORTY TRAIN.

Todmorton was a pretty village in Dorsetshire. It lay in a little valley, surrounded by wooded hills and sloping fields, and was intersected by a railway.

The eleven-forty train slid out of the distance and stopped, with bragging puffs of smoke, at the Todmorton Station. It took up its load, and slid off again, with jerks of white vapor, and disappeared in the direction of Poole. The station grew again lonely; and the only sounds, the rattling of the tight cords of the signal post and the murmur of the wind against the telegraph wires.

Ten minutes after, the solitary arrival, an old-fashioned man with a wooden leg, stumped slowly up Todmorton hill. The butcher saw him, the grocer saw him, the blacksmith saw him, the guests at the bar-parlor of the Peal of Bells saw him and discussed him. One and all pronounced him to be "a regular old guy," evidently come by the train, and bound to the neighboring village.

The children from the rectory window saw him—for the rectory was on a hill, and commanded the village—and marvelled at his wooden leg.

The eldest girl, Dora, her golden fleece of back hair tossing in the air, ran to describe him to Mrs. Latimer. "O, mamma," she cried, "there is such a funny man coming up the hill—he's got a wooden leg! George says he moves it as it was a compass, and he was drawing a circle. Oh, it's such fun. Do come and see."

Mrs. Latimer allowed herself to be dragged into the parlor by Dora, George and Willy, and looked through the window. The wooden-legged man was only thirty yards off. She had no sooner seen him than she gave a hysterical scream, and exclaimed: "Uncle Godfrey!—ran Dora, and tell cook to go and take the sheets out of the study, and the sauce-pan; and George, go and tell Susan to put on a clean apron and go to the front door. Dear me, how unfortunate papa not being in!"

The next moment, there was a strange sound on the rectory gravel-walk, and a sharp curt knock at the door. Susan was

a long time answering the door; when she did so, she received a rebuke that she did not soon forget.

"Young woman," said the old gentleman furiously, "is this the way you are taught to attend to your master's visitors? Nice weather to be kept in the cold. Ugh! it bites one's nose off. Lucky you are not in my service, for you'd go this day month. Is Mr. Latimer in?"

"Nasty cross old thing!" thought Susan, as she replied. "No, sir; Mr. Latimer is out in the parish."

"Who cares where he is. If he's not in, where's your missus?"

"Upstairs."

"Very well, then tell her to come down-stairs."

"What name, if you please?"

"Godfrey Dodson."

Susan swept out of the room. She never saw such a cross, unmannerly old "thing" in the whole course of her life; and so she told Ellen the cook.

Uncle Godfrey was a short, irascible, little man, who wore a brown spencer, a low-crowned hat of the old hour glass shape, popular some twenty years ago, and long drab gaiters. He was an old bachelor recluse, who lived in the Adelphi, in rooms which he never allowed anybody to enter, and which were stuffed full of pictures, etchings, Buhl cabinets, snuff boxes and old china. Early in life, he had been a drysalter in Liverpool, and since then had devoted himself laboriously to doing nothing, and exciting the expectations of his poorer relations. Mrs. Latimer had only seen her uncle once since she was married.

Godfrey Dodson was one of those old connoisseurs who are to be seen any morning in the show-rooms of Messrs Christie and Manson, examining etchings suspiciously through huge glasses, opening and shutting with half delight, half distrust, remarkable agate snuff-boxes, walking backwards from spurious Raphaels, opening and shutting the drawers of inlaid cabinets, and looking for the maker's name and date of lustrous majolica plates. They know the very year every picture was painted, and where the original of it is, and what it fetched. They know every alteration that Hogarth made in his engravings, and fall into raptures over what other people would think a defect. They eye the auctioneer with a magpie look of expectancy and cunning, and the dealers with glances of hostility and distrust. They hoard and accumulate with the craft of ravens and the industry of ants, and enjoy the pleasant reflection that when they die, the sale of their effects will be held in the same room as that in which they have spent so much of their time, and will give extreme delight to a great many collectors, their old rivals during life; for the finest collection is, after all, like a heap of leaves scattered in a field, that must sooner or later be blown apart, and scattered to the four winds. Still, no doubt, in spite of this unpleasant reflection, there is great pleasure in amassing, and there will be collectors like Uncle Godfrey as long as the world goes on spinning.

Uncle Godfrey had a lean, wizened face; cold, keen, suspicious eyes; short, stubby white hair; overhanging eyebrows, and a projecting lower lip that expressed a sour contempt for all he heard and saw. He wore the frilled shirt-front of a past age, and the little scarlet under-waistcoat, with just the edge showing, such as was the fashion forty years ago. Altogether, one's impression of him was, that he was a shrewd, cynical, old hunk; eccentric, dogmatic, rich and arbitrary.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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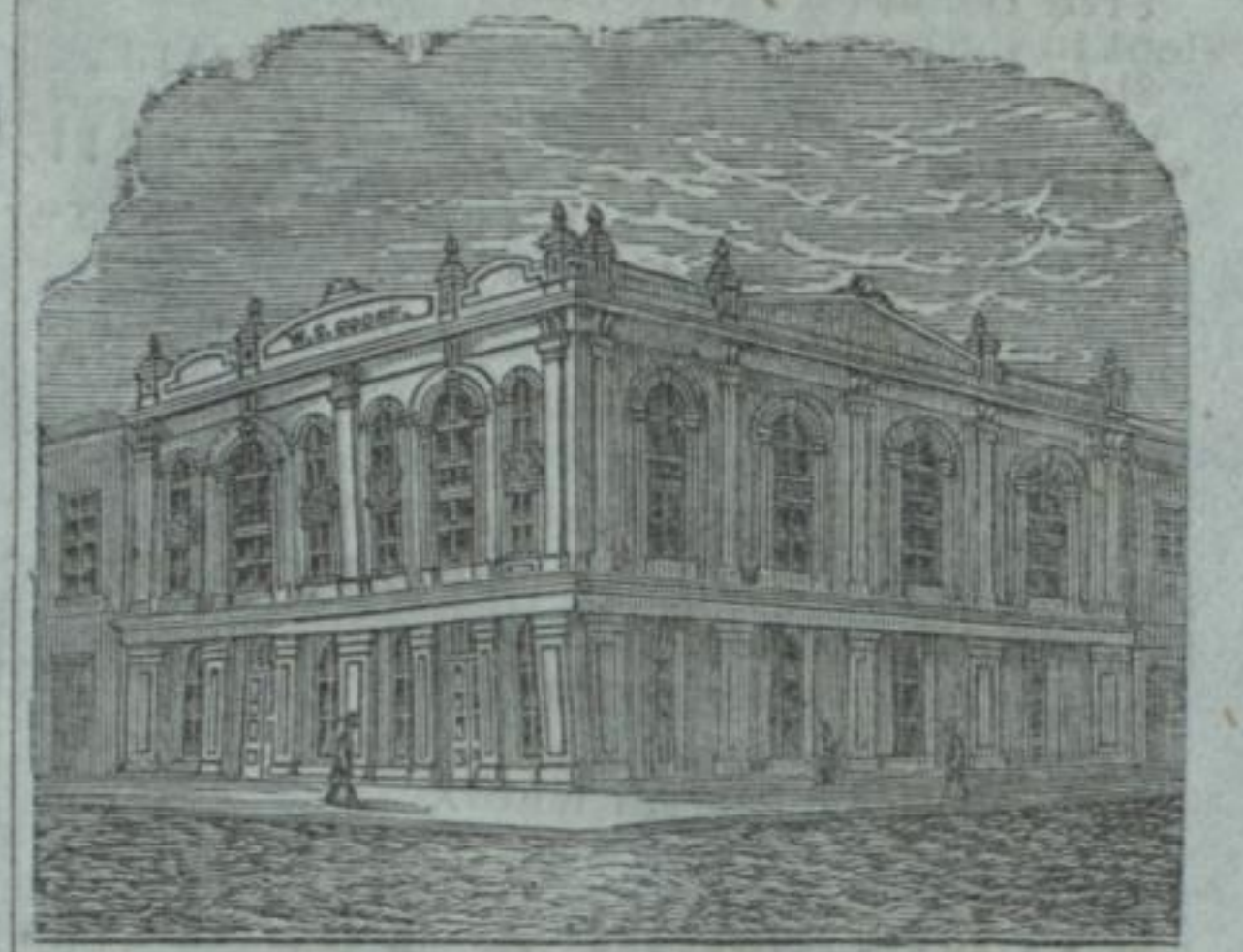
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