

[Continued from page 57.]

neat practice, because dirt is so liable to get into the strainer in that way. Besides, it isn't necessary; you can milk in the other pail and pour into that just as well for ought I see," said Mistress Puffer.

Possibly Mrs. P. had a fault; if so, it was the fault of saying too much. On the other hand, possibly Mr. P. had a fault; if so, it was the fault of saying too little. One might think that, as in the case of the distinguished eaters, Jack Sprat and his wife, these opposite imperfections would prove mighty harmonious in their meetings; but not so.

Talking to little is, of the twain, though less oppressively tiresome, I think fraught more heavily with evil; for if one will not speak how is one to know wherein and wherefor an offense arises, and haste to make due apology and reparation? So while the talking partner is rattling on in all innocence, the silent partner is brooding over some unmeaning slip of the unconscious tongue.

Thus his wife had no means of knowing whether or not Mr. Puffer had any reason for preferring to milk in the strainer pail. Possibly he had; one which would have amply contented the mistress, who was by no means an unreasonable dame. But being like his fellow-beards, mightily autocratic, he considered that his doing it should be sufficient proof of the desirableness of a thing; although, being like them, also fallible, this was not always a true test; and the dame, who was a woman of common feminine sagacity—I claim no more—knew it.

Therefore the pail came in next evening bearing the usual unmistakable indications of having been within the forbidden walls of the stable; but not accompanied by the grace of a simple apology, which so easily—especially womanward—covers a multitude of sins.

Now you and I know that if Mrs. Puffer had not attained to a sufficient degree of sanctification so that she took the offending pail with a heart serene as a summer morning, as doubtless was her bounden duty, yet she ought most surely to have taken it with a saintly smile, and quietly do the best she could toward making bad better with a cloth strainer. But you remember her besetting fault was an overflow of words, so not content with having entered a remonstrance, she must needs enter another. Still no apology or reply, but a look of stolid indifference upon the countenance of her legal head, which presented as much expression as a pair of tongs or an ironing table. So detecting no sign of attention, the dame added line upon line, and precept upon precept, until at last, the legal head getting exasperated out of his defensive and offensive silence—as you have seen mosquitoes drive a hog from his corner—opened his mouth, and in a voice no smoother than oil, spoke to the effect that a milk pail was a small matter to waste so much breath and feeling upon. The tone, more than the words, came like a dividing-knife upon Mrs. Puffer's last sentence, leaving one-half forever unsaid, and the other half, which would bear dwelling upon and repetition no better than other wasp stings, constantly ringing in her ears. She felt somewhat blame-worthy and self-disgusted; for it is rare indeed that any act shows out quite without a flaw to the actor, when in stern and conscientious review; but neither did she love her husband very much, for half a day.

Ah! what, indeed, is a milk pail to waste feeling upon! What, in itself considered was the bit of fruit plucked and eaten in the Garden centuries ago? For my own part I must say I never saw any inconsistency in the quarrel of children over a grasshopper as sufficient first cause for the Shawnee and Delaware tribes meeting in deadly combat; that is, if any object is worth fighting for. It is the principle of the thing, don't you see? And, if a person is disagreeably inclined, a clover blossom or a cambric needle may serve to show up his ugliness as well as anything.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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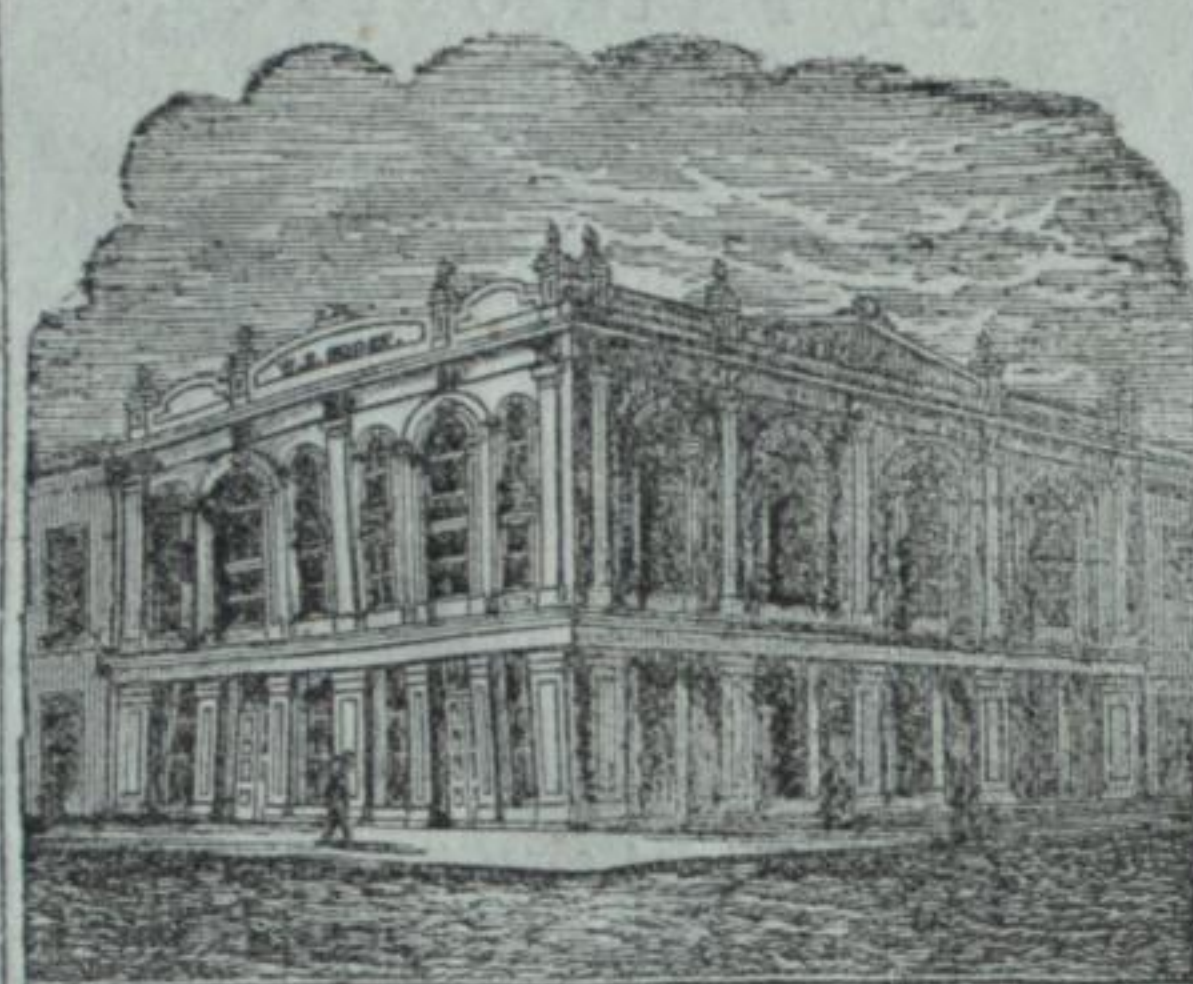
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