

THE JUDGE'S BOX.

BY AUGUSTA LARNED.

(CONCLUDED.)

"There it is," said the old man in a heat, "you are obstinate, and willful, and headstrong, and mean to have your own way if the sky falls. You'd like to get the bones of the old man that's clothed ye, and schooled ye, and keep 'em ever since you were born; but if you can't get it, no matter, take the bit between your teeth, and ride right over the feelings, and ideas, and wishes of them that brought you into the world, and then see where you'll be."

Hester covered her face with her hands, and the hot tears began to make their way through her fingers. The old man got up, and sternly took his boots in one hand and a long tallow candle in the other, and marched away to bed without another word.

Mrs. Preston, who had been mixing emptings in the buttery, with the door on the track, came out now, brushing the dust of flour from her apron. "La, children," said she, "the old Squire is more dangerous when he don't say nothing, and sets in a brown study. It looks to me as if the wind was changing a few minutes. He has been blowing north-east about long enough, and I shouldn't wonder if it got round south'ard. You see, I come from down the coast way, and there ain't no moose about. A woadler's stock and the Squire's disposition that I don't understand."

The next morning was cold and windy, but the vernal sun sent a feeling of gladness over the world. Nobody but Mrs. Preston would have detected that her husband was more placable than he had been the night before.

"You heard him scold about his coffee," she whispered to Joel; "it's a good sign. I always heard say just as long as a child cries out heartily it ain't agoin' to be the best as long as the Squire can find fault with his victuals he ain't agoin' to do bloody murder."

Joel's horse was at the door. The old man got in his high top coat, and he'll ride up to the village with you, Joel," said he; "it will save tacking my horse, and I'll chance it. I'll go to catch a ride back with one of the neighbors."

Hester stood at the window and watched them drive away up the creek. She knew how it would all end. She knew she should never falter. Having put her hand to the plow, it was not Hester's way to turn back. She was brave and strong, but a kind of mistiness crept up over her dark eyes, as the wonder rose in her mind why the course of true love never did run smooth.

The village was just one long street for stores, flanked by the Town-hall and "First Church." It was full of gardens and neat cottages, and, in summer time, very shady and pleasant.

"Drive me to Judge's office," said the old man, as they got down on Main St., "and I'd like to have you step in and witness to a little business. I'm going to transact."

They drove up to a small building, displaying a conspicuous sign. The Judge met them at the door. He was a tall, stiff man, well dressed, with heavy watch seals. His small eyes were keen and inquisitive, and the iron-gray hair was scrupulously brushed around his temples.

"Good day, Squire," said he; "I'm sorry I haven't had time to make out the papers in that cow case."

"O' 'aint a cow case, Judge; it's a love case," responded the old man, with a species of snort which made Joel's heart sink. "You're a lawyer, Judge, and if there's a knot-hole in any subject you'll be sure to take a squint through it. I don't expect to pull the wool over your eyes. Set right down, Joel; I want you to pay particular heed to what I am going to say. You see there is a severe penalty to this here love case. In the first place, Joel is your brother, and you naturally want to see him do well. You've tried to help him forward, I know. Love is a cup of kind of distemper, specially when it's took the natural way. Joel has got it pretty bad. He's been coming round my place now for a considerable spell, and I don't know but he would go on courting forever if I didn't feel called upon to put in a stay of proceedings. You see, Judge, I mean my girl, means to marry Joel. When she once got her heart set on a thing, there ain't no whoa. Hester is tidy, and snug, and economical, and you know good wife is sometimes the saving of a young man like Joel. Now, come to sum up, you see how it is, Judge. You make ten dollars where I do one. I'm an old man, and what little I have scraped together must be divided equal among my children. You're right in the prime of life, and ain't got a child in the world. I'll give Hester a good setting out, and if you want to help Joel, you can step right over there to your desk and draw up a paper to the effect that you'll never see my girl come to want. Your bond is as good as gold. Put your name to it, have it all legal and regular, and you shall never hear another word of opposition from me."

Joel sprang to his feet, his face fairly quivering with indignation. "Do you mean to insult me?" he cried. "I won't have this wretched bargaining over my affairs. Hiram, if you draw up that bond, I'll never touch another dollar of yours as long as I live. I'll show you I can support a wife without anybody's help, even if I have to do it by day's work."

"That's right, that's the kind of talk I like to hear," said the old man, chuckling. "Hoping you'll stick to that mind. Nobody's going to hinder, but just draw up the bond, Judge. It won't do a mite of harm."

"If you draw that bond," broke out Joel furiously, "I shall consider everything over between us. You have the right to shame me in such a way as that. It sounds as if you thought me an idle, shifting, good-for-nothing fellow, and as if Hester was going to throw herself away. I'll show you what there is in me. I'll show you that I can stand on my own feet and hoe my own row without the help of anybody."

"That's right," shouted the old Squire, "spoken like a man, shows real grit. But don't mind him, Judge; just you make out the bond. I like to see things done in black and white."

The Judge reluctantly put pen to paper, and he not handed the document to the old man, who scanned it through his silver-bowed spectacles. "That'll do, Judge," with a complimentary nod, and then he drew out a great leather wallet, and fobbing the paper slowly, put it away with an air of entire satisfaction.

For a long time Hester and Joel self-ridge have lived in a pretty cottage in the village, embowered in roses and honeysuckles. When the windows are open in summer time, what with music, and laughter, and the sound of children at play, it seems like a veritable music-box. The old Squire has grown garrulous and a little childish within these years. He often goes to the son-in-law's store, and watches the merchant's brisk motions and quick eye with peculiar pride. "Made every dollar of it himself, Sir," he is apt to say to any stranger who happens to be about, and more than once, much to the annoyance of Hester, he has opened his wallet and shown a paper, old, yellow, cracked at the corners. This is the Judge's bond. There are people who say that this same bond gave the needed spur to Joel's rather easy nature, and made him the man he is; but there are others, with clearer eyes, who perceive that the unflinching love and encouragement of a true wife laid the foundations of his best property.—N. Y. Tribune.

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