

THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
SEWING-MACHINE.

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# THE HISTORY OF A SEWING-MACHINE.

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THERE are persons, I suppose, who think that a sewing-machine has neither thoughts, feelings, desires, nor emotions; but they are very much mistaken. I, for instance, remember perfectly my sensations, one bright October morning, when I was placed, for the first time, in a conspicuous position, in a long, elegant sales-room on Broadway.

I had been finished with great care, placed in a handsome case, and now stood waiting with palpitating heart for a purchaser to come in and buy me. To be sure, there were others of my companions even handsomer than I, dressed in rosewood, with silver mountings and beautiful inlaid work, while I was only arrayed in plain black walnut. But then I had the vanity to think that I had an appearance of perfect neatness and great solidity, and I knew from the in-

aspiration within me that all my springs of action were bright and strong, and that, in the hands of a loving and skilful owner, I could accomplish wonders.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon that a lady and gentleman entered the store, and the moment I saw her I wished that she might become my owner. She was young, not more than twenty-two or three, and had a charming face, fair, with tender grey eyes, and light, rippling hair. I knew very little difference then between eyes, never having seen many, but I knew that out of hers looked a true, gentle, womanly soul.

They looked about at many different machines, and his choice would have evidently fallen on one of the more showy ones, but at length her eye fell upon me.

"Here, George," said she, "here's the one I want; I like it better than those that are more highly ornamented."

"O nonsense!" replied her husband, for such he afterwards proved to be. "You know I promised you as nice a one as could be got, and I should like you to have one with all the fancy fixings, silver and things."

"Yes; but, George, you know I don't care for all that ornamental work, and I have taken a great fancy to this machine; it looks so nice and good that I feel as if we were friends already."

How my pulses did throb to hear her sweet lips

say those words; I felt that I loved her, and could willingly devote my life to her.

"All right, puss!" said Mr. George, *sotto voce*, "have that if you choose. I want you to be pleased and satisfied; that is all."

But I am making this part of my story too long. To my great joy, I was bought, and that same afternoon transferred from my position in the sales-room to a space between the two windows of a cosy sitting-room, which served also for dining-room, and which was the middle one of a neat "floor" occupied by my new master and mistress.

The home was a well-kept, substantial brick one, in a good but not fashionable street, and the family consisted, besides ourselves, of a tidy servant-girl, whose quarters were, where I hoped mine would never be, up in the attic.

My master was cashier in a bank down-town, and his name was Harrington; so I found out afterwards; of course I did not know it at the time.

The day after my arrival, my mistress, or Mrs. Harrington, as I may as well call her, after dusting me all off carefully with her own hands, unlocked my doors, and called Nora, the tidy servant, to admire the finishing of my interior, and all the cunning little fixtures which accompanied me, and which the lady declared, with a merry laugh, she was sure she should never understand the use of. She sat down, however,

at once, and, after several ineffectual attempts, succeeded in remembering how to thread the needle, and put me in working order. She sighed two or three times while doing this, and, I was afraid, began already to feel weary of her task. Oh! how longed to be able to tell her of the mistakes she was making, and which she had slowly and laboriously to find out, and explain to her that a little practice would soon make the work of preparation easy and simple; and that then I would spare her delicate fingers all the pain of the interminable stitch, stitch, stitch, and make garments grow under her hands beautiful and perfect, as if executed by fairy skill.

Five o'clock found her still busily engaged in trying to understand and master the first principles of that curious and beautiful motive power, embodied in myself and my associates, which has already done so much, and is destined to do so much more, to relieve the burdens and the weight of drudgery from the shoulders of the fairer portion of creation.

Five o'clock was the dinner hour, and with it came her husband.

"What! working away already, Mary?" said he. "Dear me! what a smart wife I have got!"

"No, you haven't, George," replied his wife, almost tearfully. "I think I must be excessively stupid; for here I have been at work all the afternoon and I don't begin to understand it yet."

"Poor puss! so you expected to learn all that it has taken six thousand years to find out, in one afternoon, did you? and you have forgotten the motto, *Have patience with thyself*. But never mind; it will all come right by and by, only you must not try to do too much at a time; be content with learning little by little, and practice will do the rest; but do you think you will like your machine?"

"Oh! I know I shall," answered the young wife, enthusiastically. "With all my want of knowledge, I can see that the fault, whatever it is, is not in the machine, but in myself; and that, as soon as I am thoroughly acquainted with it, I shall enjoy it very much indeed."

"All right, you're a brave girl," said her husband, kissing her. "Now, I will tell you what I have done that will please you. I have bought tickets for the opera; so hurry Norah with the dinner, while you change your dress, for the carriage will be here at half-past seven."

"Oh! you dear, good, thoughtful darling," said Mary, throwing a pair of white arms about his necktie, and bringing her lips into suspicious proximity with his mustache. "The dinner and I will be ready in five minutes."

From this time, for many months, my life was a very easy and pleasant one. I became very much attached to my mistress, and she to me. Household

cares occupied only a very small portion of her time, and nearly all the rest was divided between attention to her flowers, books, birds, and myself.

Evenings she devoted to her husband, to music which pleased him, and to the friends who sometimes dropped in upon them. Fond of society, she yet loved her home, and was in all respects the best and most conscientious of young wives.

Three months from the day I first became installed in the house, Mary presented her husband with an elegant pair of slippers, which she had exquisitely embroidered with my assistance.

She had now become expert in executing all kinds of sewing; and, for my part, I felt a pleasure in the possession of those qualities which enabled me to be always bright and ready, always quick to respond to the deft and graceful movements of her delicate fingers.

It was on the occasion of his birthday that the slippers were presented. The breakfast-table was adorned with flowers and fruit, and Mary had playfully made a garland and hung it over where I stood, in honor of my achievement.

In the afternoon there was company to see her, and several ladies were present, who were brought into the sitting-room to see me and the wonders I had performed.

"Well," said one of them, "sewing-machines have

not been of much use to me. I have got one. I never let my husband have a moment's peace till he bought me one, and now I don't use it. I don't dare to tell him, but, upon my word, it stands there month in and month out, and I never touch it."

"Why, what is the excuse, Mrs. Crawford?" asked several of the ladies in a breath.

"Well, it was so much trouble," answered the lady; "there was so much fastening of threads and unssing. At the commencement and close of every little seam the ends had to be fastened and finished. It was almost as much trouble as sewing it right straight along. Then the winding of thread on bobbins every little while, and there was always some little thing or other out of order, and that had to be fixed before it would work smoothly. I must confess I got heartily tired of it. How do you manage to make yours work so nicely?" she said, addressing Mary.

My mistress replied that after the first effort she had had no difficulty; that she considered herself fortunate in the choice of a Grover & Baker Machine, which required no winding of thread, and which left no ends of thread to fasten, but sowed direct from the spools and completed each seam itself, thus saving not only time, trouble, and vexation, but waste of thread.

A pretty, stylish-looking lady here interposed with

the remark that she had nothing to say against her machine, except that it made a very tight, inelastic seam, which would break when stretched in washing, but could not be inticed to come out in any other way; and that it was a real detriment in making up children's clothes, never to be able to take out tucks or seams without actually cutting the cloth all to pieces. To be sure, she concluded, she did not know much about it herself, as her seamstress always operated, but she knew these as two serious faults.

My mistress proudly exhibited my superiority in these respects by stitching on a piece of cloth, showing the strength, elasticity, and beauty of the seam; the clean, secure fastening at the ends, without waste; and the singular mechanism of the stitch, which permits the seams to be taken out by one who knows the secret, but resists all the efforts of one who does not, even though it were cut in a hundred places.

This evidence, and the beautiful sewing and embroidery exhibited, made all the ladies enthusiastic in my favor, and the two before mentioned, Mrs. Crawford and pretty Mrs. Lawton, announced their intention of exchanging their machines without delay.

About this time there was a secret existing in the breast of my mistress, of which I alone was the depository, and many were the happy hours we spent together. The moment her husband was out of the house, she flew to me, and I was really afraid she

would impair her strength by her untiring attention and assiduity.

One after another, the daintiest of little garments were completed and laid aside, tucked and stitched with the most delicate nicety. Sacs, shawls, and a little pair of white merino boots had been embroidered satisfactorily; but the crowning glory of all was to be a white merino cloak, embroidered with white silk, and lined and quilted as handsomely as if it cost seventy-five dollars in a store.

The material was bought, the pattern selected, and I must say I shared the anxiety of my mistress that this should be a *chef-d'œuvre*. We both put our best efforts upon it, and succeeded splendidly; the cloak was equal to the finest that could be procured; and Mary was so delighted with the result that she hugged and kissed it, and seemed never tired of looking at it.

It was this enthusiasm, however, that betrayed our secret. Her husband came in before she had time to hide it, and said: "Why, Mary, what is this?" And then, a sudden light breaking in upon him, he caught her in his arms and said: "My dear, dear wife, why did I not know of this before?"

After that Mary was not allowed to occupy herself so steadily as she had done; her husband insisted on her taking out-door exercise; he took her out himself, procured her all the pleasures possible, and every day brought her home fruit and flowers.

A few months afterward and a "baby tender" was added to the furniture of the sitting-room, and a fat, rosy, little infant boy, with wonderful lungs, revolutionized the quiet habits of the household. Norah, fortunately was very fond of children, and took a great deal of care of the baby. This relieved my mistress, and allowed her still to devote part of her time to me, who, during her illness had missed her sadly.

Thus passed a happy year, at the end of which time Master Harry had begun to run alone, and showed signs of remarkable intelligence in the eyes of his delighted father and mother.

One day Mr. Harrington came home at an earlier hour than usual, and gave evidence, by his deathly paleness and agitation, of intense mental anxiety. His wife entreated to know the cause, and with some reluctance he at last told her that an enormous deficit had been discovered in the bank accounts, of which he had no knowledge, and could not by any means understand; that the matter was undergoing investigation, and, in the mean time, a certain amount of suspicion rested upon him, as the responsible person, and the one through whose hands all notes passed.

This occurrence did not trouble Mary so much as it did her husband; she had such unbounded confidence in his judgment and integrity, that she was quite sure the mistake would be rectified, and the onus of it transferred to the proper shoulders. Overwhelming,

therefore, were her first feelings of shame, disappointment, and distress, when one week afterward her husband came home dismissed, and in disgrace; not that any thing had been proved against him, but the transaction could not be cleared up, and, under the circumstances, the company did not feel justified in retaining him in their confidence.

"And Mary," said he, as he closed the sorrowful story, "what do you think? The sewing-machine is partly to blame for this trouble. One of the directors thought appearances were strengthened against me by the elegant clothes that my child was 'paraded' in; he said no fifteen hundred dollars per year would allow the purchase of magnificently embroidered cloaks in these times."

"Oh! what a shame," cried Mary indignantly. "Did you not tell him, George, that I embroidered it all myself, on my sewing-machine?"

"No, I did not," replied her husband. "I felt too angry, too much discouraged at the thought that all my labors and my efforts had been thrown away, and that I must commence anew, or fight for subsistence, with a stigma upon my name."

For many days the unfortunate young man struggled against the misfortune that had fallen upon him; early and late he traversed the city in search of employment, but all to no purpose; everywhere he was met by the story which had preceded him, of the mis-

ing funds, and no one was willing to place him in a position of trust on the strength of his previous good character.

At last, under these repeated failures, under the pressure of anxiety of mind and fatigue of body, his health broke down, and he was confined to his bed with a disorder which soon developed the worst form of brain fever. Now all the woman in her nature came out strong in the devoted wife. Constantly and tenderly she nursed her husband through the dangerous crisis of his illness, and then set to work seriously to consider what she should do to assist in tiding over this trying portion of their lives. She could not, somehow, despair of his innocence some time being made apparent, and she determined not to succumb without an effort to relieve their adverse circumstances.

Without consulting her husband, who was still very weak and unable to leave his bed, she took the beautiful but obnoxious cloak, and went straight to the wife of the director who had made use of it to strengthen the doubts of Mr. Harrington's honesty. The lady proved to be a kind-hearted, intelligent woman, who had thoughtlessly repeated to her husband words which she had heard another person say. She immediately became extremely interested in the story of the young wife; her graceful, modest, and lady-like manners charmed her, and she promised

faithfully to do all she could to forward her object. This was neither more nor less than to obtain fine sewing and embroidery; which she could execute with my aid, and in this way with such rapidity, as to make it a valuable source of revenue. The lady also intimated to her that affairs at the bank were not yet in a satisfactory condition; that other smaller defalcations had taken place since her husband's dismissal; that detectives were at work, and it was not impossible that such discoveries would be made as would exonerate her husband, and restore him to his former position.

Mary came home with a heavier bundle, but with a lighter heart. Mrs. Burgess (which was the lady's name) had given her at once a blue cashmere morning dress, and a table and a piano-cover to embroider; a package of plainer work was to be sent by a servant; but Mary was so eager to begin to earn money, that she insisted on bringing them home herself.

How thankful now was I that I could be of use to her. What a pleasure it was to send my bright arms and steel fingers up and down and in and out, like lightning, at her bidding. Work poured in upon us, and our praises were sounded everywhere. The beautiful sewing that we accomplished brought high prices comparatively, though it was done for less than it could possibly have been done by hand, and our receipts supplied the house with all necessaries, and paid Norah's wages, which had been in arrears.



The invalid, who was now able to walk out for a short distance, would sometimes complain of the time spent at the sewing-machine; but Mary was so bright and cheerful, took such thoughtful care of the comfort of both her husband and child, that he could not but let her have her way.

"Where do you get all these nice things from, Mary?" he would say, as he sat down to the tender chop and tempting dish of asparagus she had prepared for him. "It is a long while since we had any income, and the little money we had must have been pretty well exhausted long ago. I have been afraid to speak of it; but, dear, we must not go in debt without prospect of paying."

"We have not gone in debt one cent, George," replied Mary, her heart in her mouth for fear he would press his question still further. "Be content to know that for the present, dear, and also that we are not living upon any body's bounty."

But George was not content, and the next day he came down stairs, evidently determined to know who the good-natured ravens were that fed him on broiled chops and asparagus. Mary managed to parry his questions for some time, but at last his sternness and persistency overcame her resolution, and she burst into tears, telling him between her sobs that it was her sewing-machine that had been their good angel; that had supplied them with food and all else that was

needed, and that she had not told him before, fearing that he would be angry,

He was not angry, but it was evident that the knowledge that his wife had felt obliged to resort to any means to earn money stung him to the quick, and the knowledge that came back upon him in full force of the struggle that must be renewed reduced him to a state of despondency that alarmed his wife more than any thing else had done.

"I will tell you," said he, one day to her. "We must emigrate; I can not stay here making ineffectual attempts to gain employment, and be looked upon suspiciously by all my old friends and associates. I hate to break up our home, and take you away from all you know and love, but I see no help for it."

"O George! don't do that yet," said Mary tearfully. "I always feel as if that difficulty of yours would be all set right in time, and I want you to be here to have your integrity acknowledged."

George shook his head, and went to answer a ring at the door. It was a note to Mary from Mrs. Burgess, requesting her to come round to her house immediately. She put on her bonnet and shawl, and went.

In an hour she returned. The guilty party, a defaulting clerk, an adept at altering figures, had been discovered, and was in jail; he it was who, for many months, had systematically robbed the bank, and the directors, anxious to atone for their previous injus-

tice, were ready to offer Mr. Harrington his old position, at a considerable increase of salary.

It was a happy party that assembled round the table in the little sitting-room that evening. "God bless you and your sewing-machine, my darling," said George over and over again. "I wish every man had such a wife. But, dear, remember hereafter you must embroider slippers upon it for no one but me, and cloaks for no one but Harry here, or Harry's sister, if he should ever have one." At which Master Harry, who sat up late, in the excitement of the occasion cheered lustily, and was forthwith taken to bed.

My sweet mistress, so far from doing sewing for pay, could now very well afford to confide her own to the hands of an operator, but she preferred to do it herself. I was not a servant to be used, but a friend to be trusted. I was elevated to a place of honor in the household. My excellences were recounted to friends, and not a few helpless women were made helpful and efficient by being persuaded to obtain a companion in all respects like myself, "quick, available, abundant in resources, even tempered, requiring nothing, and never sick, even for a day or a minute."

It is not likely that all will have the good fortune to fall into such gentle hands as those that, I am happy to say, guide my destiny. But it is, at any rate, a perpetual pleasure to belong to a new race, capable of conferring so much happiness and such great good upon mankind as SEWING-MACHINES.