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J. T. TROWBRIDGE.



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COUPON BONDS.

I.

WHAT MR. DUCKLOW BROUGHT HOME IN HIS BOOT-LEG.

ON a certain mild March evening, A. D. 1864, the Ducklow kitchen had a general air of waiting for somebody. Mrs. Ducklow sat knitting by the light of a kerosene lamp, but paused ever and anon, neglecting her stocking, and knitting her brows instead, with an aspect of anxious listening. The old gray cat, coiled up on a cushion at her side, purring in her sleep, purred and slept as if she knew perfectly well who was coming soon to occupy that chair, and meant to make the most of it. The old-fashioned clock, perched upon the high mantel-piece of the low-studded room, ticked away lonesomely, as clocks only tick when somebody is waited for who does not come. Even the tea-kettle on the stove seemed to be in the secret, for it simmered and sang after the manner of a wise old tea-kettle fully conscious of the importance of its mission. The side-table, which was simply a leaf on hinges fixed in the wall, and looked like an apron when it was down, giving to that side of the kitchen a curious resemblance to Mrs. Ducklow, and rested on one arm when it was up, in which position it reminded you more of Mr. Ducklow leaning his chin on his hand, — the side-table was set with a single plate, knife and fork, and cup and saucer, indicating that the person waited for was expected to partake of refreshments. Behind the stairway-door was a small boy kicking off a very small pair of trousers with a degree of reluctance which showed that he also wished to sit up and wait for somebody.

"Say, ma, *need* I go to bed now!" he exclaimed rather than inquired, starting to pull on the trousers again after he had got one leg free. "He'll want me to hold the lantern for him to take care of the hoss."

"No, no, Taddy," for that was the boy's name, (short for

Thaddeus,) "you'll only be in the way, if you set up. Besides, I want to mend your pants."

"You're always wantin' to mend my pants!" complained the youngster, who seemed to think that it was by no means to do him a favor, but rather to afford herself a gloating pleasure, that Mrs. Ducklow, who had a mania for patching, required the garment to be delivered up to her. "I wish there was n't such a thing as pants in the world!" — utterly regardless of the plight the world would be in without them.

"Don't talk that way, after all the trouble and expense we've been to to clothe ye!" said the good woman, reprovingly. "Where would you be now, if 't was n't for me and yer Pa Ducklow?"

"I should n't be goin' to bed when I don't want to!" he muttered, just loud enough to be heard.

"You ungrateful child!" said Mrs. Ducklow, not without reason, for Taddy knew very well — at least he was reminded of the fact often enough — that he owed to them his home and all its comforts. "Would n't be going to bed when you don't want to! You would n't be going to bed when you do want to, more likely; for ten to one you would n't have a bed to go to. Think of the situation you was in when we adopted ye, and then talk that way."

As this was an unanswerable argument, Taddy contented himself with thrusting a hand into his trousers and recklessly increasing the area of the forthcoming patch. "If she likes to mend so well, let her!" thought he.

"Taddy, are you tearing them pants?" cried Mrs. Ducklow sharply, hearing a sound alarmingly suggestive of cracking threads.

"I was pullin' 'em off," said Taddy. "I never see such mean cloth! can't touch it but it has to tear. Say, ma, do ye think he'll bring me home a drum?"

"You'll know in the morning."

"I want to know to-night. He said mabby he would. Say, can't I set up?"

"I'll let ye know whether you can set up, after you've been told so many times."

So saying, Mrs. Ducklow rose from her chair, laid down her knitting-work, and started for the stairway-door with great energy and a rattan. But Taddy, who perceived retribution approaching, did not see fit to wait for it. He darted up the stairs and crept into his bunk with the lightness and agility of a squirrel.

"I'm a-bed! Say, ma, I'm a-bed!" he cried, eager to save the excellent lady the trouble of ascending the stairs. "I'm 'most asleep a'ready!"

"It's a good thing for you you be!" said Mrs. Ducklow, gathering up the garment he had left behind the door. "Why, Taddy, how you did tear it! I've a good notion to give ye a smart trouncing now!"

Taddy began to snore, and Mrs. Ducklow concluded that she would not wake him.

"It is mean cloth, as he says!" she exclaimed, examining it by the kerosene lamp. "For my part, I consider it a great misfortune that shoddy was ever invented. Ye can't buy any sort of a ready-made garment for boys now-days but it comes to pieces at the least wear or strain, like so much brown paper."

She was shaping the necessary patch, when the sound of wheels coming into the yard told her that the person so long waited for had arrived.

"That you?" said she, opening the kitchen-door and looking out into the darkness.

"Yes," replied a man's voice.

"Ye want the lantern?"

"No: jest set the lamp in the winder, and I guess I can git along. Whoa!" And the man jumped to the ground.

"Had good luck?" the woman inquired in a low voice.

"I'll tell ye when I come in," was the evasive answer.

"Has he bought me a drum?" bawled Taddy from the chamber-stairs.

"Do you want me to come up there and 'tend to ye?" demanded Mrs. Ducklow.

The boy was not particularly ambitious of enjoying that honor.

"You be still and go to sleep, then, or you'll git drummed!"

And she latched the stairway-door, greatly to the dismay of Master Taddy, who felt that some vast and momentous secret was being kept from him. Overhearing whispered conferences between his adopted parents in the morning, noticing also the cautious glances they cast at him, and the persistency with which they repeatedly sent him away out of sight on slight and absurd pretences, he had gathered a fact and drawn an inference, namely, that a great purchase was to be made by Mr. Ducklow that day in town, and that, on his return, he (Taddy) was to be surprised by the presentation of what he had long coveted and teased for, — a new drum.

To lie quietly in bed under such circumstances was an act that required more self-control than Master Taddy possessed. Accordingly he stole down stairs and listened, feeling sure that, if the drum should come in, Mrs. Ducklow, and perhaps Mr. Ducklow himself, would be unable to resist the temptation of thumping it softly to try its sound.

Mrs. Ducklow was busy taking her husband's supper out of the oven, where it had been keeping warm for him, pouring hot water into the teapot, and giving the last touches to the table. Then came the familiar grating noise of a boot on the scraper. Mrs. Ducklow stepped quickly to open the door for Mr. Ducklow. Taddy, well aware that he was committing an indiscretion, but inspired by the wild hope of seeing a new drum come into the kitchen, ventured to unlatch the stairway-door, open it a crack, and peep.

Mr. Ducklow entered, bringing a number of parcels containing purchases from the stores, but no drum visible to Taddy.

"Did you buy?" whispered Mrs. Ducklow, relieving him of his load.

Mr. Ducklow pointed mysteriously at the stairway-door, lifting his eyebrows interrogatively.

"Taddy?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "O, he's abed, — though I never in my life had such a time to git him off out of the way; for he'd somehow got possessed with the idee that you was to buy something, and he wanted to set up and see what it was."

"Strange how children will ketch things sometimes, best ye can do to prevent!" said Mr. Ducklow.

"But did ye buy?"

"You better jest take them matches and put 'em out o' the way, fust thing, fore ye forgit it. Matches are dangerous to have layin' around, and I never feel safe till they're safe."

And Mr. Ducklow hung up his hat, and laid his overcoat across a chair in the next room, with a carefulness and deliberation exhausting to the patience of good Mrs. Ducklow, and no less trying to that of Master Taddy, who was waiting to hear the important question answered.

"Come!" said she, after hastily disposing of the matches, "what's the use of keeping me in suspense? Did ye buy?"

"Where did ye put 'em?" asked Mr. Ducklow, taking down the bootjack.

"In the little tin pail, where we always keep 'em, of course! Where should I put 'em?"

"You need n't be cross. I asked, 'cause I did n't hear ye put the cover on. I don't believe ye *did* put the cover on, either; and I sha'n't be easy till ye do."

Mrs. Ducklow returned to the pantry; and her husband, pausing a moment, leaning over a chair, heard the cover go on the tin pail with a click and a clatter which betrayed, that, if ever there was an angry and impatient cover, that was.

"Anybody been here to-day?" Mr. Ducklow inquired, pressing the heel of his right boot in the jack, and steadying the toe under a round of the chair.

"No," replied Mrs. Ducklow.

"Ye been anywhere?"

"Yes."

"Where?" mildly inquired Mr. Ducklow.

"No matter," said Mrs. Ducklow, with decided ill-temper.

Mr. Ducklow drew a deep sigh, as he turned and looked upon her.

"Wal, you be about the most uncomf'table woman ever I see," he said, with a dark and dissatisfied countenance.

"If you can't answer my question, I don't see why I need take the trouble to answer yours," — and Mrs. Ducklow returned with compressed lips to her patching. "Yer supper is ready; ye can eat it when ye please."

"I was answerin' your question as fast as I could," said her husband, in a tone of excessive mildness, full of sorrow and discouragement.

"I have n't seen any signs of your answering it."

And the housewife's fingers stitched away energetically at the patch.

"Wal, wal! ye don't see everything!"

Mr. Ducklow, having already removed one boot, drew gently at the other. As it came off, something fell out on the floor. He picked it up, and handed it with a triumphant smile to Mrs. Ducklow.

"O, indeed! is this the —"

She was radiant. Her hands dropped their work, and opened the package, which consisted of a large unsealed envelope and folded papers within. These she unfolded and examined with beaming satisfaction.

"But what made ye carry 'em in yer boot so?"

"To tell the truth," said Mr. Ducklow, in a suppressed voice, "I was afraid o' bein' robbed. I never was so afraid o' bein' robbed in my life! So, jest as I got clear o' the town, I took it out o' my pocket" (meaning, not the town, but the envelope containing the papers), "an' tucked it down my boot-leg. Then, all the way home, I was scaret when I was ridin' alone, an' still more scaret when I heard anybody comin' after me. You see, it's jest like so much money."

And he arranged the window-curtain in a manner to prevent the sharpest-eyed burglar from peeping in and catching a glimpse of the papers.

He neglected to secure the stairway-door, however. There, in his hiding-place behind it, stood Taddy, shivering in his shirt, but peeping and listening in a fever of curiosity which nothing could chill. His position was such that he could not see Mr. Ducklow or the documents, and his mind was left free to revel

in the most daring fancies regarding the wonderful purchase. He had not yet fully given up the idea of a new drum, although the image, which vaguely shaped itself in his mind, of Mr. Ducklow "tucking it down his boot-leg," presented difficulties.

"This is the bond, you see," Mr. Ducklow explained; "and all these little things that fill out the sheet are the cowpons. You have only to cut off one o' these, take it to the bank when it is due, and draw the interest on it in gold!"

"But suppose you lose the bonds?" queried Mrs. Ducklow, regarding, not without awe, the destructible paper representatives of so much property.

"That's what I've been thinkin' of; that's what's made me so nervous. I supposed 't would be like so much railroad stock, good for nothin' to nobody but the owner, and somethin' that could be replaced, if I lost it. But the man to the bank said no, — 't was like so much currency, and I must look out for it. That's what filled all the bushes with robbers as I come along the road. And I tell ye, 't was a relief to feel I'd got safe home at last; though I don't see now how we're to keep the plaguy things so we sha'n't feel uneasy about 'em."

"Nor I neither!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, turning pale. "Suppose the house should take fire! or burglars should break in! I don't wonder you was so particular about the matches! Dear me! I shall be frightened to death! I'd no idee 't was to be such dangerous property! I shall be thinking of fires and burglars! — O-h-h-h!"

The terrified woman uttered a wild scream; for just then a door flew suddenly open, and there burst into the room a frightful object, making a headlong plunge at the precious papers. Mr. Ducklow sprang back against the table set for his supper with a force that made everything jar. Then he sprang forward again, instinctively reaching to grasp and save from plunder the coupon bonds. But by this time both he and his wife had become aware of the nature of the intrusion.

"Thaddens!" ejaculated the lady. "How came you here? Get up! Give an account of yourself!"

Taddy, whose abrupt appearance in the room had been altogether involuntary, was quite innocent of any predatory designs. Leaning forward farther and farther, in the ardor of discovery, he had, when too late to save himself, experienced the phenomenon of losing his balance, and pitched from the stairway into the kitchen with a violence that threw the door back against the wall with a bang, and laid him out, a sprawling figure, in scanty, ghostly apparel, on the floor.

"What ye want? What ye here for?" sternly demanded Mr. Ducklow, snatching him up by one arm, and shaking him.

"Don't know," faltered the luckless youngster, speaking the truth for once in his life. "Fell."

"Fell! How did you come to fall? What are you out o' bed for?"

"Don't know," — snivelling and rubbing his eyes. "Did n't know I was."

"Got up without knowing it! That's a likely story! How could that happen you, Sir?" said Mrs. Ducklow.

"Don't know, 'thout 't was I got up in my sleep," said Taddy, who had on rare occasions been known to indulge in moderate somnambulism.

"In your sleep!" said Mr. Ducklow, incredulously.

"I guess so. I was dreamin' you brought me home a new drum, — tucked down yer — boot-leg," faltered Taddy.

"Strange!" said Mr. Ducklow, with a glance at his wife.

"But how could I bring a drum in my boot-leg?"

"Don't know, 'thout it's a new kind, one that 'll shet up."

Taddy looked eagerly round, but saw nothing new or interesting, except some curious-looking papers which Mrs. Ducklow was hastily tucking into an envelope.

"Say, did ye, pa?"

"Did I? Of course I did n't! What nonsense! But how came ye down here? Speak the truth!"

"I dreamt you was blowin' it up, and I sprung to ketch it, when, fust I knowed, I was on the floor, like a thousan' o' brick! 'Mos' broke my knee-pans!" whimpered Taddy. "Say, did n't ye bring me home nothin'? What's them things?"

"Nothin' little boys know anything about. Now run back to bed again. I forgot to buy you a drum to-day, but I 'll git ye somethin' next time I go to town, — if I think on 't."

"So ye always say, but ye never think on 't!" complained Taddy.

"There, there! Somebody's comin'! What a lookin' object you are, to be seen by visitors!"

There was a knock. Taddy disappeared. Mr. Ducklow turned anxiously to his wife, who was hastily hiding the bonds in her palpitating bosom.

"Who can it be this time o' night?"

"Sakes alive!" said Mrs. Ducklow, in whose mind burglars were uppermost, "I wish, whoever 't is, they'd keep away! Go to the door," she whispered, resuming her work.

Mr. Ducklow complied; and, as the visitor entered, there she sat plying her needle as industriously and demurely as though neither bonds nor burglars had ever been heard of in that remote rural district.

II.

MISS BESWICK.

"Ah, Miss Beswick, walk in!" said Mr. Ducklow.

A tall, spare, somewhat prim-looking female of middle age, with a shawl over her head, entered, nodding a curt and precise good evening, first to Mr. Ducklow, then to his wife.

"What, that you?" said Mrs. Ducklow, with curiosity and surprise. "Where on 'arth did you come from? Set her a chair, why don't ye, father?"

Mr. Ducklow, who was busy slipping his feet into a pair of old shoes, hastened to comply with the hospitable suggestion.

"I've only jest got home," said he, apologetically, as if fearful lest the fact of his being caught in his stocking-feet should create suspicions: so absurdly careful of appearances some people become, when they have anything to conceal. "Jest had time to kick my boots off, you see. Take a seat."

"Thank ye. I s'pose you 'll think I'm wild, makin' calls at this hour!"

And Miss Beswick seated herself, with an angular movement, and held herself prim and erect in the chair.

"Why, no, I don't," said Mrs. Ducklow, civilly; while at the same time she did think it very extraordinary and unwarrantable conduct on the part of her neighbor to be walking the streets and entering the dwellings of honest people, alone, after eight o'clock, on a dark night.

"You 're jest in time to set up and take a cup o' tea with my husband": an invitation she knew would not be accepted, and which she pressed accordingly. "Ye better, Miss Beswick, if only to keep him company. Take off yer things, won't ye?"

"No, I don't go a-visitin', to take off my things and drink tea, this time o' night!"

Miss Beswick condescended, however, to throw back the shawl from her head, exposing to view a long, sinewy neck, the strong lines of which ran up into her cheeks, and ramified into wrinkles, giving severity to her features. At the same time emerged from the fold of the garment, as it were, a knob, a high, bare poll, so lofty and narrow, and destitute of the usual ornament, natural or false, that you involuntarily looked twice, to assure yourself that it was really that lovely and adorable object, a female head.

"I've jest run over to tell you the news," said Miss Beswick.

"Nothing bad, I hope?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "No robbers in town? for massy sake!" And Mrs. Ducklow laid her hand on her bosom, to make sure that the bonds were still there.

"No, good news, — good for Sophrony, at any rate!"

"Ah! she has heard from Reuben?"

"No!" The severity of the features was modified by a grim smile. "No!" and the little, high knob of a head was shaken expressively.

"What then?" Ducklow inquired.

"Reuben has come home!" The words were spoken triumphantly, and the keen gray eyes of the elderly maiden twinkled.

"Come home! home!" echoed both Ducklows at once, in great astonishment.

Miss Beswick assured them of the fact.

"My! how you talk!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow. "I never dreamed of such a — When did he come?"

"About an hour 'n' a half ago. I happened to be in to Sophrony's. I had jest gone over to set a little while with her and keep her company, — as I've often done, she seemed so lonely, livin' there with her two children alone in the house, her husband away so. Her friends ha'n't been none too attentive to her in his absence, she thinks, — and so I think."

"I — I hope you don't mean that as a hint to us, Miss Beswick," said Mrs. Ducklow.

"You can take it as such, or not, jest as you please! I leave it to your own consciences. You know best whether you have done your duty to Sophrony and her family, whilst her husband has been off to the war; and I sha'n't set myself up for a judge. You never had any boys of your own, and so you adopted Reuben, jest as you have lately adopted Thaddeus; and I s'pose you think you've done well by him, jest as you think you will do by Thaddeus, if he's a good boy, and stays with you till he's twenty-one."

"I hope no one thinks or says the contrary, Miss Beswick!" said Mr. Ducklow, gravely, with flushed face.

"There may be two opinions on that subject!" said Miss Beswick, with a slight toss of the head, setting that small and irregular spheroid at a still loftier and more imposing altitude. "Reuben came to you when he was jest old enough to be of use about the house and on the farm; and if I recollect right, you did n't encourage idleness in him long. You did n't give his hands much chance to do 'some mischief still'! No, indeed! nobody can accuse you of that weakness!" And the skin of the wrinkled features tightened with a terrible grin.

"Nobody can say we ever overworked the boy, or ill-used him in any way!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, excitedly.

"No! I don't say it! But this I 'll say, for I've had it in my mind ever since Sophrony was left alone, — I could n't help seein' and feelin', and, now you 've set me a-talkin', I may as well speak out. Reuben was always a good boy, and a willin' boy, as you yourselves must allow; and he paid his way from the first."

"I don't know about that!" interposed Mr. Ducklow, taking up his knife and fork, and dropping them again, in no little agitation. "He was a good and willin' boy, as you say; but the expense of clothin' him and keepin' him to school —"

"He paid his way from the first!" repeated Miss Beswick, sternly. "You kept him to school winters, when he did more work 'fore and after school than any other boy in town. He worked all the time summers; and soon he was as good as a hired man to you. He never went to school a day after he was fifteen; and from that time he was better 'n any hired man, for he was faithful, and took an interest, and looked after and took care of things, as no hired man ever would or could do, as I've heard you yourself say, Mr. Ducklow!"

"Reuben was a good, faithful boy: I never denied that! I never denied that!"

"Well, he stayed with you till he was twenty-one, — did ye a man's service for the last five or six years; then you giv' him what you called a settin' out, — a new suit o' clothes, a yoke of oxen, some farmin'-tools, and a hundred dollars in money! You, with yer thousands, Mr. Ducklow, giv' him a hundred dollars in money!"

"That was only a beginnin', only a beginnin', I've always said!" declared the red-flushed farmer.

"I know it; and I s'pose you 'll continner to say so till the day of yer death! Then may-be you 'll remember Reuben in yer will. That's the way! Keep puttin' him off as long as you can possibly hold on to your property yourself, — then, when you see you've got to go and leave it, give him what you ought to've gi'n him years before. There a'n't no merit in that kind o' justice, did ye know it, Mr. Ducklow! I tell ye, what belongs to Reuben belongs to him *now*, — not ten or twenty year hence, when you've done with it, and he most likely won't need it. A few hundred dollars now 'll be more useful to him than all your thousands will be by and by. After he left you, he took the Moseley farm; everybody respected him, everybody trusted him; he was doin' well, everybody said; then he married Sophrony, and a good and faithful wife she's becn to him; and finally he concluded to buy the farm, which you yourself said was a good idee, and encouraged him in 't."

"So it was; Reuben used judgment in that, and he 'd have

got along well enough, if 't had n't been for the war," said Mr. Ducklow; while his wife sat dumb, not daring to measure tongues with their vigorous-minded and plain-speaking neighbor.

"Jest so!" said Miss Beswick. "If it had n't been for the war! He had made his first payments, and would have met the rest as they came due, no doubt of it. But the war broke out, and he left all to sarve his country. Says he, 'I'm an able-bodied man, and I ought to go,' says he. His business was as important, and his wife and children was as dear to him, as anybody's; but he felt it his duty to go, and he went. They did n't give no such big bounties to volunteers then as they do now, and it was a sacrifice to him every way when he enlisted. But says he, 'I 'll jest do my duty,' says he, 'and trust to Providence for the rest.' You did n't discourage his goin', — and you did n't incourage him, neither, the way you 'd ought to."

"My! what on 'arth, Miss Beswick! — Seems to me you 're takin' it upon yourself to say things that are uncalled for, to say the least! I can't understand what should have sent you here, to tell me what's my business, and what a'n't, this fashion. As if I did n't know my own duty and intentions!" And Mr. Ducklow poured his tea into his plate, and buttered his bread with a teaspoon.

"I s'pose she's been talking with Sophrony, and she has sent her to interfere."

"Mrs. Ducklow, you don't s'pose no such thing! You know Sophrony would n't send anybody on such an arrant; and you know I a'n't a person to do such arrants, or be made a cat's-paw of by anybody. I a'n't handsome, not partic'larly; and I a'n't wuth my thousands, like some folks I know; and I never got married, for the best reason in the world, — them that offered themselves I would n't have, and them I would have had did n't offer themselves; and I a'n't so good a Christian as I might be, I'm aware. I know my lacks as well as anybody; but bein' a spy and a cat's-paw a'n't one of 'em. I don't do things sly and underhand. If I've anything to say to anybody, I go right to 'em, and say it to their face, — sometimes perty blunt, I allow. But I don't wait to be sent by other folks. I've a mind o' my own, and my own way o' doin' things, — that you know as well as anybody. So, when you say you s'pose Sophrony or anybody else sent me here to interfere, I say you s'pose what a'n't true, and what you know a'n't true, Mrs. Ducklow!"

Mrs. Ducklow was annihilated, and the visitor went on.

"As for you, Mr. Ducklow, I have n't said you *don't* know your own duty and intentions. I've no doubt you *think* you do, at any rate."

"Very well! then why can't you leave me to do what I think 's my duty? Everybody ought to have that privilege."

"You think so?"

"Sartin, Miss Beswick; don't you?"

"Why, then, I ought to have the same."

"Of course; nobody in this house 'll prevent your doin' what you 're satisfied 's your duty."

"Thank ye! much obleeged!" said Miss Beswick, with gleaming, gristly features. "That 's all I ask. Now I 'm satisfied it 's my duty to tell ye what I 've been tellin' ye, and what I 'm goin to tell ye: that 's my duty. And then it 'll be your duty to do what you think 's right. That 's plain, a'n't it?"

"Wal, wal!" said Mr. Ducklow, discomfited; "I can't hinder yer talkin', I s'pose; though it seems a man ought to have a right to peace and quiet in his own house."

"Yes, and in his own conscience too!" said Miss Beswick. "And if you 'll hearken to me now, I promise you 'll have peace and quiet in your conscience, and in your house too, such as you never have had yit. I s'pose you know your great fault, don't ye? Graspin', — that 's your fault, that 's your besettin' sin, Mr. Ducklow. You used to give it as an excuse for not helpin' Reuben more, that you had your daughter to provide for. Well, your daughter has got married; she married a rich man, — you looked out for that, — and she 's provided for, fur as property can provide for any one. Now, without a child in the world to feel anxious about, you keep layin' up and layin' up, and 'll continner to lay up, I s'pose, till ye die, and leave a great fortin' to your daughter, that already has enough, and jest a pittance to Reuben and Thaddeus."

"No, no, Miss Beswick! you 're wrong, you 're wrong, Miss Beswick! I mean to do the handsome thing by both on 'em."

"Mean to! ye mean to! That 's the way ye flatter yer conscience, and cheat yer own soul. Why don't ye do what ye mean to do to once, and make sure on 't? That 's the way to git the good of your property. I tell ye, the time 's comin' when the recollection of havin' done a good action will be a greater comfort to ye than all the property in the world. Then you 'll look back and say, 'Why did n't I do this and do that with my money, when 't was in my power, 'stead of hoardin' up and hoardin' up for others to spend after me?' Now, as I was goin' to say, ye did n't discourage Reuben's enlistin', and ye did n't incourage him the way ye might. You ought to 've said to him, 'Go, Reuben, if ye see it to be yer duty; and, as fur as money goes, ye sha'n't suffer for 't. I 've got enough for all on us; and I 'll pay yer debts, if need be, and see 't yer fam'ly 's kep' comf'table while ye 're away.' But that 's jest what ye

did n't say, and it 's jest what ye did n't do. All the time Reuben 's been sarvin' his country, he 's had his debts and his family expenses to worry him; and you know it 's been all Sophrony could do, by puttin' forth all her energies, and strainin' every narve, to keep herself and children from goin' hungry and ragged. You 've helped 'em a little, now and then, in driblets, it 's true; but, dear me!" exclaimed Miss Beswick; and she smote her hands, palms downwards, upon her lap, with a look and gesture which signified that words utterly failed to express her feelings on the subject.

Mrs. Ducklow, who, since her annihilation, had scarcely ventured to look up, sat biting her lips, drawing quick breaths of suppressed anger and impatience, and sewing the patch to the trousers and to her own apron under them. There was an awful silence, broken only by the clock ticking, and Mr. Ducklow lifting his knife and fork, and letting them fall again. At last he forced himself to speak.

"Wal, you 've read us a pretty smart lectur', Miss Beswick, I must say. I can't consaive what should make ye take such an interest in our affairs; but it 's very kind in ye, — very kind, to be sure!"

"Take an interest! Have n't I seen Sophrony's struggles with them children? And have n't I seen Reuben come home this very night, a sick man, with a broken constitution, and no prospect before him but to give up his farm, lose all he has paid, and be thrown upon the charities of the world with his wife and children? And if the charities of friends are so cold, what can he expect of the charities of the world? Take an interest! I wish you took half as much. Here I 've sot half an hour; and you have n't thought to ask how Reuben appeared, or anything about him."

"May be there 's a good reason for that, Miss Beswick. 'T was on my lips to ask half a dozen times; but you talked so fast, you would n't give me a chance."

"Well, I 'm glad you 've got some excuse, though a poor one," said Miss Beswick.

"How is Reuben?" Mrs. Ducklow meekly inquired.

"All broken to pieces, — a mere shadder of what he was. He 's had his old wound troublin' him agin; then he 's had the fever, that come within one of takin' him out o' the world. He was in the hospitals, ye know, for two months or more; but finally the doctors see 't his only chance was to be sent home, weak as he was. A sergeant that was comin' on brought him all the way, and took him straight home; and that 's the reason he got along so sudden and unexpected, even to Sophrony. O, if you could seen their meetin', as I did! then you would n't

sneer at my takin' an interest." And Miss Beswick, strong-minded as she was, found it necessary to make use of her handkerchief. "I did n't stop only to help put him to bed, and fix things a little; then I left 'em alone, and run over to tell ye. It's a pity you did n't know he was in town when you was there to-day, so as to bring him home with ye. But I s'pose you had your investments to look after. Come, now, Mr. Ducklow, how many thousan' dollars have you invested, since Reuben's been off to the war, and his folks have been sufferin' to home? You may have been layin' up hundreds, or even thousands, that way, this very day, for aught I know. But let me tell ye, you won't git no good of such property, — it 'll only be a cuss to ye, — till you do the right thing by Reuben. Mark my word!"

There was another long silence.

"Ye a'n't going, be ye, Miss Beswick?" said Mrs. Ducklow, — for the visitor had arisen. "What's yer hurry?"

"No hurry at all; but I've done my arrant and said my say, and may as well be goin'. Good night. Good night, Mr. Ducklow."

And Miss Beswick, pulling her shawl over her head, stalked out of the house like some tall, gaunt spectre, leaving the Ducklows to recover as best they could from the consternation into which they had been thrown by her coming.

III.

A COMFORTABLE INVESTMENT.

"Did you ever?" said Mrs. Ducklow, gaining courage to speak after the visitor was out of hearing.

"She's got a tongue," said Mr. Ducklow.

"Strange she should speak of your investing money to-day! D' ye s'pose she knows?"

"I don't see how she *can* know." And Mr. Ducklow paced the room in deep trouble. "I've been careful not to give a hint on 't to anybody, for I knew jest what folks would say: 'If Ducklow has got so much money to dispose of, he'd better give Reuben a lift.' I know how folks talk."

"Coming here to browbeat us!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow. "I wonder ye did n't be a little more plain with *her*, father! I would n't have sot and been dictated to as tamely as you did!"

"You would n't? Then why did ye? She dictated to you as much as she did to me; and you scurce opened your head; you did n't dars' to say yer soul was your own!"

"Yes, I did, I —"

"You ventur'd to speak once, and she shet ye up quicker 'n lightnin'. Now tell about you would n't have sot and been dictated to like a tame noodle, as I did!"

"I did n't say a *tame noodle*."

"Yes, ye did. I might have answered back sharp enough, but I was expectin' *you* to speak. *Men* don't like to dispute with *women*."

"That's your git-off," said Mrs. Ducklow, trembling with vexation. "You was jest as much afraid of her as I was. I never see ye so cowed in all my life."

"Cowed! I was n't cowed, neither. How unreasonable, now, for you to cast all the blame on to me."

And Mr. Ducklow, his features contracted into a black scowl, took his boots from the corner.

"Ye ha'n't got to go out, have ye?" said Mrs. Ducklow. "I should n't think you'd put on yer boots jest to step to the barn and see to the hoss."

"I'm goin' over to Reuben's."

"To Reuben's! Not to-night, father!"

"Yes, I think I better. He and Sophrony 'll know we heard of his gittin' home, and they're enough inclined a'ready to feel we neglect 'em. Have n't ye got somethin' ye can send?"

"I don't know," — curtly. "I've source ever been over to Sophrony's but I've carried her a pie or cake or something; and mighty little thanks I got for it, as it turns out."

"Why did n't ye say that to Miss Beswick, when she was runnin' us so hard about our never doin' anything for em?"

"'T would n't have done no good; I knew jest what she'd say. 'What's a pie or a cake now and then?' — that's jest the reply she'd have made. Dear me! what have I been doing?"

Mrs. Ducklow, rising, had but just discovered that she had stitched the patch and the trousers to her apron.

"So much for Miss Beswick!" she exclaimed, untying the apron-strings, and flinging the united garments spitefully down upon a chair. "I do wish such folks would mind their own business and stay to home!"

"You've got the bonds safe?" said Mr. Ducklow, putting on his overcoat.

"Yes; but I won't engage to keep 'em safe. They make me as nervous as can be. I'm afraid to be left alone in the house with 'em. Here, you take 'em."

"Don't be foolish. What harm can possibly happen to them or you while I'm away? You don't s'pose I want to lug them around with me wherever I go, do ye?"

"I'm sure it's no great lug. I s'pose you're afraid to go acrost the fields alone with 'em in yer pocket. What in the world we're going to do with 'em I don't see. If we go out we can't take 'em with us, for fear of losing 'em, or of being robbed; and we sha'n't dare to leave 'em to home, fear the house 'll burn up or git broke into."

"We can hide 'em where no burglar can find 'em," said Mr. Ducklow.

"Yes, and where nobody else can find 'em, neither, provided the house burns and neighbors come in to save things. I don't know but it 'll be about as Miss Beswick said: we sha'n't take no comfort with property we ought to make over to Reuben."

"Do you think it ought to be made over to Reuben? If you do, it's new to me."

"No, I don't!" replied Mrs. Ducklow, decidedly. "I guess we better put 'em in the clock-case for to-night, had n't we?"

"Jest where they'd be discovered, if the house is robbed! No: I've an idee. Slip 'em under the settin'-room carpet. Let me take 'em: I can fix a place right here by the side of the door."

With great care and secrecy the bonds were deposited between the carpet and the floor, and a chair set over them.

"What noise was that?" said the farmer, starting.

"Thaddeus," cried Mrs. Ducklow, "is that you?"

It was Thaddeus, indeed, who, awaking from a real dream of the drum this time, and, hearing conversation in the room below, had once more descended the stairs to listen. What were the old people hiding there under the carpet? It must be those curious things in the envelope. And what *were* those things, about which so much mystery seemed necessary? Taddy was peeping and considering, when he heard his name called. He would have glided back to bed again, but Mrs. Ducklow, who sprang to the stairway-door, was too quick for him.

"What do you want now?" she demanded.

"I — I want you to scratch my back," said Taddy.

As he had often come to her with this innocent request, after undressing for bed, he did not see why the excuse would not pass as readily as the previous one of somnambulism. But Mrs. Ducklow was in no mood to be trifled with.

"I'll scratch your back for ye!" And seizing her rattan, she laid it smartly on the troublesome part, to the terror and pain of poor Taddy, who concluded that too much of a good thing was decidedly worse than nothing. "There, you sir, that's a scratching that 'll last ye for one while!"

And giving him two or three parting cuts, not confined to the region of the back, but falling upon the lower latitudes, which they marked like so many geographical parallels, she dismissed him with a sharp injunction not to let himself be seen or heard again that night.

Taddy obeyed, and, crying himself to sleep, dreamed that he was himself a drum, and that Mrs. Ducklow beat him.

"Father!" called Mrs. Ducklow to her husband, who was at the barn, "do you know what time it is? It's nine o'clock! I would n't think of going over there to-night; they 'll be all locked up, and abed and asleep, like as not."

"Wal, I s'pose I must do as you say," replied Mr. Ducklow, glad of an excuse not to go, — Miss Beswick's visit having left him in extremely low spirits.

Accordingly, after bedding down the horse and fastening the barn, he returned to the kitchen; and soon the prosperous couple retired to rest.

"Why, how res'less you be!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, in the middle of the night. "What's the reason ye can't sleep?"

"I don't know," groaned Mr. Ducklow. "I can't help thinkin' o' Miss Beswick. I never was so worked at any little thing."

"Well, well! forget it, father; and do go to sleep!"

"I feel I ought to have gone over to Reuben's! And I should have gone, if 't had n't been for you."

"Now how unreasonable to blame me!" said Mrs. Duck-

low. "Ye might have gone; I only reminded ye how late it was."

Mr. Ducklow groaned, and turned over. He tried to forget Miss Beswick, Reuben, and the bonds, and at last he fell asleep.

"Father!" whispered Mrs. Ducklow, awaking him.

"What's the matter?"

"I think—I'm pretty sure—hark! I heard something sounded like somebody gitting into the kitchen winder!"

"It's your narvousness." Yet Mr. Ducklow listened for further indications of burglary. "Why can't ye be quiet and go to sleep, as you said to me?"

"I'm sure I heard something! Anybody might have looked through the blinds and seen us putting—you know—under the carpet."

"Nonsense! 't a'n't at all likely."

But Mr. Ducklow was more alarmed than he was willing to confess. He succeeded in quieting his wife's apprehensions; but at the same time the burden of solicitude and wakefulness seemed to pass from her mind only to rest upon his own. She soon after fell asleep; but he lay awake, hearing burglars in all parts of the house for an hour longer.

"What now?" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, starting up in bed.

"I thought I might as well git up and satisfy myself," replied her husband, in a low, agitated voice.

He had risen, and was groping his way to the kitchen.

"Is there anything?" she inquired, after listening long with chilling blood, expecting at each moment to hear him knocked down or throttled.

He made no reply, but presently came gliding softly back again.

"I can't find nothin'. But I never in all my life heard the floors creak so! I could have sworn there was somebody walkin' over 'em!"

"I guess you're a little excited, a'n't ye?"

"No,—I got over that; but I *did* hear noises!"

Mr. Ducklow, returning to his pillow, dismissed his fears, and once more composed his mind for slumber. But the burden of which he had temporarily relieved his wife now returned with redoubled force to the bosom of that virtuous lady. It seemed as if there was only a certain amount of available sleep in the house, and that, when one had it, the other must go without; while at the same time a swarm of fears perpetually buzzed in and out of the mind, whose windows wakefulness left open.

"Father!" said Mrs. Ducklow, giving him a violent shake.

"Hey? what?"—arousing from his first sound sleep.

"Don't you smell something burning?"

Ducklow snuffed; Mrs. Ducklow snuffed; they sat up in bed, and snuffed vivaciously in concert.

"No, I can't say I do. Did you?"

"Jest as plain as ever I smelt anything in my life! But I don't so"—snuff, snuff—"not quite so distinct now."

"Seems to me I *do* smell somethin'," said Mr. Ducklow, imagination coming to his aid. "It can't be the matches, can it?"

"I thought of the matches, but I certainly covered 'em up tight."

They snuffed again,—first one, then the other,—now a series of quick, short snuffs, then one long, deep snuff, then a snuff by both together, as if by uniting their energies, like two persons pulling at a rope, they might accomplish what neither was equal to singly.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Ducklow.

"Why, what, father?"

"It's Thaddens! He's been walkin' in his sleep. That's what we heard. And now he's got the matches and set the house afire!"

He bounded out of bed; he went stumbling over the chairs in the kitchen, and clattering among the tins in the pantry, and rushing blindly and wildly up the kitchen stairs, only to find the matches all right, Taddy fast asleep, and no indications anywhere, either to eye or nostril, of anything burning.

"T was all your imagination, mother."

"My imagination! You was jest as frightened as I was. I'm sure I can't tell what it was I smelt; I can't smell it now. Did you feel for the—you know what?"

Mrs. Ducklow seemed to think there were evil ones listening, and it was dangerous to mention by name what was uppermost in the minds of both.

"I wish you *would* jest put your hand and see if they're all right; for I've thought several times I heard somebody taking on 'em out."

Mr. Ducklow had been troubled by similar fancies; so, getting down on his knees, he felt in the dark for the bonds.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated.

"What now?" cried Mrs. Ducklow. "They a'n't gone, be they? You don't say they're gone!"

"Sure's the world!—No, here they be! I did n't feel in the right place."

"How you *did* frighten me! My heart almost hopped out of my mouth!" Indeed, the shock was sufficient to keep the good woman awake the rest of the night.

IV.

THE RETURNED SOLDIER.

DAYLIGHT the next morning dissipated their doubts, and made both feel that they had been the victims of unnecessary and foolish alarms.

"I hope ye won't git so worked up another night," said Mr. Ducklow. "It's no use. We might live in the house a hundred years, and never hear of a robber or a fire. Ye only excite yerself, and keep me awake."

"I should like to know if you did n't git excited, and rob me of my sleep jest as much as I did you!" retorted the indignant housewife.

"You began it; you fust put it into my head. But never mind; it can't be helped now. Le's have breakfast as soon as ye can; then I'll run over and see Reuben."

"Why not harness up, and let me ride over with ye?"

"Very well; mabby that'll be the best way. Come, Taddy, ye must wake up. Fly round. You'll have lots o' chores to do this mornin'."

"What's the matter 'th my breeches?" snarled Taddy. "Some plaguy thing's stuck to 'em!"

It was Mrs. Ducklow's apron; trailing behind him at half-mast, — at sight of which, and of Taddy turning round and round to look at it, like a kitten in pursuit of her own tail, Ducklow burst into a loud laugh.

"Wal, wal, mother! you've done it! You're dressed for meetin' now, Taddy!"

"I do declare!" said Mrs. Ducklow, mortified. "I can't, for the life of me, see what there is so very funny about it!" And she hastened to cut short Taddy's trail and her husband's laughter with a pair of scissors.

After breakfast the Ducklows set off in the one-horse wagon, leaving Taddy to take care of the house during their absence. That each felt secretly uneasy about the coupon bonds cannot be denied; but, after the experiences of the night and the recriminations of the morning, they were unwilling to acknowledge their fears even to themselves, and much less to each other; so the precious papers were left hidden under the carpet.

"Safe enough, in all conscience!" said Mr. Ducklow.

"Taddy! Taddy! now mind!" Mrs. Ducklow repeated for the twentieth time. "Don't you leave the house, and don't

you touch the matches nor the fire, and don't go to ransacking the rooms neither. You won't, will ye?"

"No 'm," answered Taddy, also for the twentieth time, — secretly resolved, all the while, to take advantage of their absence, and discover, if possible, what Mr. Ducklow brought home last night in his boot-leg.

The Ducklows had intended to show their zeal and affection by making Reuben an early visit. They were somewhat chagrined, therefore, to find several neighbors already arrived to pay their respects to the returned soldier. The fact that Miss Beswick was among the number did not serve greatly to heighten their spirits.

"I've as good a notion to turn round and go straight home again as ever I had to eat!" muttered Mrs. Ducklow.

"It's too late now," said her husband, advancing with a show of confidence and cordiality he did not feel. "Wal, Reuben! glad to see ye! glad to see ye! This is a joyful day I scarce ever expected to see! Why, ye don't look so sick as I thought ye would! Does he, mother?"

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Ducklow, her woman's nature, and perhaps her old motherly feelings for their adopted son, deeply moved by the sight of his changed and wasted aspect. "I'd no idee he could be so very, so very pale and thin! Had you, Sophrony?"

"I don't know what I thought," said the young wife, standing by, watching her returned volunteer with features surcharged with emotion, — deep suffering and sympathy, suffused and lighted up by love and joy. "I only know I have him now! He has come home! He shall never leave me again, — never!"

"But was n't it terrible to see him brought home so?" whispered Mrs. Ducklow.

"Yes, it was! But, oh, I was so thankful! I felt the worst was over; and I had him again! I can nurse him now. He is no longer hundreds of miles away, among strangers, where I cannot go to him, — though I should have gone long ago, as you know, if I could have raised the means, and if it had n't been for the children."

"I — I — Mr. Ducklow would have tried to help you to the means, and I would have taken the children, if we had thought it best for you to go," said Mrs. Ducklow. "But you see now it was n't best, don't you?"

"Whether it was or not, I don't complain. I am too happy to-day to complain of anything. To see him home again! But I have dreamt so often that he came home, and woke up to find it was only a dream, I'm half afraid now to be as happy as I might be."

"Be as happy as you please, Sophrony!" spoke up Reuben, who had seemed to be listening to Mr. Ducklow's apologies for not coming over the night before, while he was in reality straining his ear to catch every word his wife was saying. He was dressed in his uniform and lying on a lounge, supported by pillows. "I'm just where I want to be, of all places in this world, — or the next world either, I may say; for I can't conceive of any greater heaven than I'm in now. I'm going to get well, too, spite of the doctors. Coming home is the best medicine for a fellow in my condition. Not bad to take, either! Stand here, Ruby, my boy, and let yer daddy look at ye again! To think that 's my Ruby, Pa Ducklow! Why, he was a mere baby when I went away!"

"Reuben! Reuben!" entreated the young wife, leaning over him, "you are talking too much. You promised me you would n't, you know."

"Well, well, I won't. But when a fellow's heart is chock-full, it's hard to shut down on it sometimes. Don't look so, friends, as if ye pitied me! I a'n't to be pitied. I'll bet there is n't one of ye half as happy as I am at this minute!"

"Here 's Miss Beswick, Mother Ducklow," said Sophronia. "Have n't you noticed her?"

"Oh! how do you do, Miss Beswick?" said Mrs. Ducklow, appearing surprised.

"Tryin' to keep out o' the way, and make myself useful," replied Miss Beswick, stiffly.

"I don't know what I should do without her," said Sophronia, as the tall spinster disappeared. "She took right hold and helped me last night; then she came in again the first thing this morning. 'Go to your husband,' says she to me; 'don't leave him a minute. I know he don't want ye out of his sight, — and you don't want to be out of his sight, either; so you 'tend right to him, and I'll do the work. There 'll be enough folks comin' in to hender, but I 've come in to help,' says she. And here she 's been ever since, hard at work; for when Miss Beswick says a thing, there 's no use opposing her, — that you know, Mother Ducklow."

"Yes, she likes to have her own way," said Mrs. Ducklow, with a peculiar pucker.

"It seems she called at the door last night to tell you Reuben had come."

"Called at the door! Did n't she tell you she came in and made us a visit?"

"No, indeed! Did she?"

Mrs. Ducklow concluded, that, if nothing had been said on that subject, she might as well remain silent; so she merely remarked, —

"O yes, a visit, — for her. She a'n't no great hand to make long stops, ye know."

"Only when she 's needed," said Sophronia; "then she never thinks of going as long as she sees anything to do. Reuben! you must n't talk, Reuben!"

"I was saying," remarked Neighbor Jepworth, "it 'll be too bad now, if you have to give up this place; but he —"

Sophronia, unseen by her husband, made anxious signs to the speaker to avoid so distressing a topic in the invalid's presence.

"We are not going to worry about that," she hastened to say. "After we have been favored by Providence so far, and in such extraordinary ways, we think we can afford to trust still further. We have all we can think of and attend to to-day; and the future will take care of itself."

"That 's right; that 's the way to talk!" said Mr. Ducklow. "Providence 'll take care of ye, you may be sure!"

"I should think you might get Ditson to renew the mortgage," observed Neighbor Ferring. "He can't be hard on you, under such circumstances. And he can't be so foolish as to want the money. There 's no security like real estate. If I had money to invest, I would n't put it into anything else."

"Nor I," said Mr. Ducklow; "nothin' like real estate!" — with an expression of profound conviction.

"What do you think of Gov'ment bonds?" asked Neighbor Jepworth.

"I don't know." Mr. Ducklow scratched his cheek and wrinkled his brow with an expression of thoughtfulness and candor. "I have n't given much attention to the subject. It may be a patriotic duty to lend to Gov'ment, if one has the funds to spare."

"Yes," said Jepworth, warming. "When we consider that every dollar we lend to Government goes to carry on the war, and put down this cursed Rebellion —"

"And to pay off the soldiers," put in Reuben, raising himself on his elbow. "Nobody knows the sufferings of soldiers and soldiers' families on account of the Government's inability to pay them off. If that subject was felt and understood as some I know feel and understand it, I'm sure every right-minded man with fifty dollars to spare would make haste to lend it to Uncle Sam. I tell ye, I got a little excited on this subject, coming on in the cars. I heard a gentleman complaining of the Government for not paying off its creditors; he did n't say so much about the soldiers, but he thought contractors ought to have their claims settled at once. At the same time he said he had had twenty thousand dollars lying idle for two months, not

knowing what to do with it, but had finally concluded to invest it in railroad stock. 'Have ye any Government stock?' said his friend. 'Not a dollar's worth,' said he; 'I'm afraid of it.' Sick as I was, I could n't lie and hear that. 'And do you know the reason,' said I, 'why Government cannot pay off its creditors?' I'll tell ye,' said I. 'It is because it has n't the money. And it has n't the money, because such men as you, who have your thousands lying idle, refuse to lend to your country, because you are afraid. That's the extent of your patriotism: you are afraid! What do you think of us who have gone into the war, and been willing to risk everything,—not only our business and our property, but life and limb? I've ruined myself personally,' said I, 'lost my property and my health, to be of service to my country. I don't regret it,—though I should never recover, I shall not regret it. I'm a tolerably patient, philosophical sort of fellow; but I have n't patience nor philosophy enough to hear such men as you abuse the Government for not doing what it's your duty to assist it in doing.'"

"Good for you, Reuben!" exclaimed Mr. Ducklow, who really felt obliged to the young soldier for placing the previous day's investment in such a strong patriotic light. ("I've only done *my* duty to Gov't, let Miss Beswick say what she will," thought he.) "You wound him up, I guess. Fact, you state the case so well, Reuben, I believe, if I had any funds to spare, I should n't hesitate a minute, but go right off and invest in Gov't bonds."

"That might be well enough, if you did it from a sense of duty," said Neighbor Ferring, who was something of a croaker, and not much of a patriot. "But as an investment, 't would be the wust ye could make."

"Ye think so?" said Mr. Ducklow, with quick alarm.

"Certainly," said Ferring. "Gov't 'll repudiate. It 'll *have* to repudiate. This enormous debt never can be paid. Your interest in gold is a temptation, jest now; but that won't be paid much longer, and then yer bonds won't be wuth any more 'n so much brown paper."

"I—I don't think so," said Mr. Ducklow, who nevertheless turned pale,—Ferring gave his opinion in such a positive, oracular way. "I don't believe I should be frightened, even if I had Gov't securities in my hands. I wish I had; I really wish I had a good lot o' them bonds! Don't you, Jepworth."

"They're mighty resky things to have in the house, that's one objection to 'em," replied Jepworth, thus adding breath to Ducklow's already kindled alarm.

"That's so!" said Ferring, emphatically. "I read in the

papers almost every day about somebody's having his cowpon bonds stole."

"I should be more afraid of fires," observed Jepworth.

"But there's this to be considered in favor of fires," said Reuben: "If the bonds burn up, they won't have to be paid. So what is your loss is the country's gain."

"But is n't there any—is n't there any remedy?" inquired Ducklow, scarce able to sit in his chair.

"There's no risk at all, if a man subscribes for registered bonds," said Reuben. "They're like railroad stock. But if you have the coupons, you must look out for them."

"Why did n't I buy registered bonds?" said Ducklow to himself. His chair was becoming like a keg of gunpowder with a lighted fuse inserted. The familiar style of expression,—"*Your* bonds," "*your* loss," "*you* must look out,"—used by Ferring and Reuben, was not calculated to relieve his embarrassment. He fancied that he was suspected of owning Government securities, and that these careless phrases were based upon that surmise. He could keep his seat no longer.

"Wal, Reuben! I must be drivin' home, I s'pose. Left everything at loose ends. I was in such a hurry to see ye, and find out if there's anything I can do for ye."

"As for that," said Reuben, "I've got a trunk over in town which could n't be brought last night. If you will have that sent for, I'll be obliged to ye."

"Sartin! sartin!" And Mr. Ducklow drove away, greatly to the relief of Mrs. Ducklow, who, listening to the alarming conversation, and remembering the bonds under the carpet, and the matches in the pantry, and Taddy's propensity to mischief, felt herself (as she afterwards confessed) "jest ready to fly."

V.

MR. DUCKLOW'S ADVENTURES.

MR. DUCKLOW had scarcely turned the corner of the street, when, looking anxiously in the direction of his homestead, he saw a column of smoke. It was directly over the spot where he knew his house to be situated. He guessed at a glance what had happened. The frightful catastrophe he foreboded had befallen. Taddy had set the house afire.

"Them bonds! them bonds!" he exclaimed, distractedly.

He did not think so much of the house: house and furniture were insured; if they were burned, the inconvenience would be great indeed, and at any other time the thought of such an event would have been sufficient cause for trepidation, — but now his chief, his only anxiety was the bonds. They were not insured. They would be a dead loss. And what added sharpness to his pangs, they would be a loss which he must keep a secret, as he had kept their existence a secret, — a loss which he could not confess, and of which he could not complain. Had he not just given his neighbors to understand that he held no such property? And his wife, — was she not at that very moment, if not serving up a lie on the subject, at least paring the truth very thin indeed?

"A man would think," observed Ferring, "that Ducklow had some o' them bonds on his hands, and got scaret, he took such a sudden start. He has, has n't he, Mrs. Ducklow?"

"Has what?" said Mrs. Ducklow, pretending ignorance.

"Some o' them cowpon bonds. I rather guess he's got some."

"You mean Gov'ment bonds? Ducklow got some? 'T a'n't at all likely he'd speculate in them, without saying something to me about it! No, he could n't have any without my knowing it, I'm sure!"

How demure, how innocent she looked, plying her knitting-needles, and stopping to take up a stitch! How little at that moment she knew of Ducklow's trouble, and its terrible cause!

Ducklow's first impulse was to drive on and endeavor at all hazards to snatch the bonds from the flames. His next was, to return and alarm his neighbors, and obtain their assistance. But a minute's delay might be fatal; so he drove on, screaming "Fire! fire!" at the top of his voice.

But the old mare was a slow-footed animal; and Ducklow had no whip. He reached forward and struck her with the reins.

"Git up! git up! — Fire! fire!" screamed Ducklow. "Oh, them bonds! them bonds! Why did n't I give the money to Reuben? Fire! fire! fire!"

By dint of screaming and slapping, he urged her from a trot into a gallop, which was scarcely an improvement as to speed, and certainly not as to grace. It was like the gallop of an old cow. "Why don't ye go 'long!" he cried despairingly.

Slap, slap! He knocked his own hat off with the loose ends of the reins. It fell under the wheels. He cast one look behind, to satisfy himself that it had been very thoroughly run over and crushed into the dirt, and left it to its fate.

Slap, slap! "Fire, fire!" Canter, canter, canter! Neigh-

bors looked out of their windows, and, recognizing Ducklow's wagon and old mare in such an astonishing plight, and Ducklow himself, without his hat, rising from his seat, and reaching forward in wild attitudes, brandishing the reins, at the same time rending the azure with yells, thought he must be insane.

He drove to the top of the hill, and looking beyond, in expectation of seeing his house wrapped in flames, discovered that the smoke proceeded from a brush-heap which his neighbor Atkins was burning in a field near by.

The revulsion of feeling that ensued was almost too much for the excitable Ducklow. His strength went out of him. For a little while there seemed to be nothing left of him but tremor and cold sweat. Difficult as it had been to get the old mare in motion, it was now even more difficult to stop her.

"Why! what has got into Ducklow's old mare? She's running away with him! Who ever heard of such a thing!" And Atkins, watching the ludicrous spectacle from his field, became almost as weak from laughter as Ducklow was from the effects of fear.

At length Ducklow succeeded in checking the old mare's speed, and in turning her about. It was necessary to drive back for his hat. By this time he could hear a chorus of shouts, "Fire! fire! fire!" over the hill. He had aroused the neighbors as he passed, and now they were flocking to extinguish the flames.

"A false alarm! a false alarm!" said Ducklow, looking marvellously sheepish as he met them. "Nothing but Atkins's brush-heap!"

"Seems to me you ought to have found that out 'fore you raised all creation with your yells!" said one hyperbolic fellow. "You looked like the Flying Dutchman! This your hat? I thought 't was a dead cat in the road. No fire, no fire!" — turning back to his comrades, — "only one of Ducklow's jokes."

Nevertheless, two or three boys there were who would not be convinced, but continued to leap up, swing their caps, and scream "Fire!" against all remonstrance. Ducklow did not wait to enter into explanations, but, turning the old mare about again, drove home amid the laughter of the bystanders and the screams of the misguided youngsters. As he approached the house, he met Taddy rushing wildly up the street.

"Thaddeus! Thaddeus! where ye goin', Thaddeus?"

"Goin' to the fire!" cried Taddy.

"There is n't any fire, boy!"

"Yes, there is! Did n't ye hear 'em? They've been yellin' like fury."

"It's nothin' but Atkins's brush."

"That all?" And Taddy appeared very much disappointed. "I thought there was goin' to be some fun. I wonder who was such a fool as to yell fire jest for a darned old brush-heap!"

Ducklow did not inform him.

"I've got to drive over to town and git Reuben's trunk. You stand by the mare while I step in and brush my hat."

Instead of applying himself at once to the restoration of his beaver, he hastened to the sitting-room, to see that the bonds were safe.

"Heavens and 'arth!" said Ducklow.

The chair, which had been carefully planted in the spot where they were concealed, had been removed. Three or four tacks had been taken out, and the carpet pushed from the wall. There was straw scattered about. Evidently Taddy had been interrupted, in the midst of his ransacking, by the alarm of fire. Indeed, he was even now creeping into the house to see what notice Ducklow would take of these evidences of his mischief.

In great trepidation the farmer thrust in his hand here and there, and groped, until he found the envelope precisely where it had been placed the night before, with the tape tied around it, which his wife had put on to prevent its contents from slipping out and losing themselves. Great was the joy of Ducklow. Great also was the wrath of him, when he turned and discovered Taddy.

"Did n't I tell you to stand by the old mare?"

"She won't stir," said Taddy, shrinking away again.

"Come here!" And Ducklow grasped him by the collar.

"What have you been doin'?" Look at that!"

"T wa'n't me!"—beginning to whimper, and ram his fists into his eyes.

"Don't tell me 't wa'n't you:" Ducklow shook him till his teeth chattered. "What was you pullin' up the carpet for?"

"Lost a marble!" snivelled Taddy.

"Lost a marble! Ye did n't lose it under the carpet, did ye? Look at all that straw pulled out!"—shaking him again.

"Did n't know but it might 'a' got under the carpet, marbles roll so," explained Taddy, as soon as he could get his breath.

"Wal, sir!" Ducklow administered a resounding box on his ear. "Don't you do such a thing again, if you lose a million marbles!"

"Ha'n't got a million!" Taddy wept, rubbing his cheek.

"Ha'n't got but four! Won't ye buy me some to-day?"

"Go to that mare, and don't you leave her again till I come, or I'll marble ye in a way you won't like!"

Understanding, by this somewhat equivocal form of expres-

sion, that flagellation was threatened, Taddy obeyed, still feeling his smarting and burning ear.

Ducklow was in trouble. What should he do with the bonds? The floor was no place for them, after what had happened; and he remembered too well the experience of yesterday to think for a moment of carrying them about his person. With unreasonable impatience, his mind reverted to Mrs. Ducklow.

"Why a'n't she to home? These women are forever a-gad-din'! I wish Reuben's trunk was in Jericho!"

Thinking of the trunk reminded him of one in the garret, filled with old papers of all sorts,—newspapers, letters, bills of sale, children's writing-books,—accumulations of the past quarter of a century. Neither fire nor burglar nor ransacking youngster had ever molested those ancient records during all those five-and-twenty years. A bright thought struck him.

"I'll slip the bonds down into that wuthless heap o' rubbish, where no one 'u'd ever think o' lookin' for 'em, and resk 'em."

Having assured himself that Taddy was standing by the wagon, he paid a hasty visit to the trunk in the garret, and concealed the envelope, still bound in its band of tape, among the papers. He then drove away, giving Taddy a final charge to beware of setting anything afire.

He had driven about half a mile when he met a pedler. There was nothing unusual or alarming in such a circumstance, surely; but as Ducklow kept on, it troubled him.

"He'll stop to the house now, most likely, and want to trade. Findin' nobody but Taddy, there's no knowin' what he'll be tempted to do. But I a'n't a-goin' to worry. I'll defy anybody to find them bonds. Besides, she may be home by this time. I guess she'll hear of the fire-alarm, and hurry home: it'll be jest like her. She'll be there, and—trade with the pedler?" thought Ducklow, uneasily. Then a frightful fancy possessed him. "She has threatened two or three times to sell that old trunkful of papers. He'll offer a big price for 'em, and ten to one she'll let him have 'em. Why did n't I consider on 't? What a stupid blunderbuss I be!"

As Ducklow thought of it he felt almost certain that Mrs. Ducklow had returned home, and that she was bargaining with the pedler at that moment. He fancied her smilingly receiving bright tin-ware for the old papers; and he could see the tape-tied envelope going into the bag with the rest. The result was, that he turned about and whipped the old mare home again in terrific haste, to catch the departing pedler.

Arriving, he found the house as he had left it, and Taddy occupied in making a kite-frame.

"Did that pedler stop here?"

"I ha'n't seen no pedler."

"And ha'n't yer Ma Ducklow been home, neither?"

"No."

And with a guilty look, Taddy put the kite-frame behind him.

Ducklow considered. The pedler had turned up a cross-street: he would probably turn down again and stop at the house after all: Mrs. Ducklow might by that time be at home: then the sale of old papers would be very likely to take place. Ducklow thought of leaving word that he did not wish any old papers in the house to be sold, but feared lest the request might excite Taddy's suspicions.

"I don't see no way but for me to take the bonds with me," thought he, with an inward groan.

He accordingly went to the garret, took the envelope out of the trunk, and placed it in the breast-pocket of his overcoat, to which he pinned it, to prevent it by any chance from getting out. He used six large, strong pins for the purpose, and was afterwards sorry he did not use seven.

"There 's suthin' losin' out of yer pocket!" bawled Taddy, as he was once more mounting the wagon.

Quick as lightning, Ducklow clapped his hand to his breast. In doing so, he loosed his hold of the wagon-box and fell, raking his shin badly on the wheel.

"Yer side-pocket! it's one o' yer mittens!" said Taddy.

"You rascal! how you scaret me!"

Seating himself in the wagon, Ducklow gently pulled up his trousers-leg to look at the bruised part.

"Got anything in yer boot-leg to-day, Pa Ducklow?" asked Taddy, innocently.

"Yes, a barked-shin!—all on your account, too! Go and put that straw back, and fix the carpet; and don't ye let me hear ye speak of my boot-leg again, or I'll *boot-leg* ye!"

So saying, Ducklow departed.

Instead of repairing the mischief he had done in the sitting-room, Taddy devoted his time and talents to the more interesting occupation of constructing his kite-frame. He worked at that, until Mr. Grantley, the minister, driving by, stopped to inquire how the folks were.

"A'n't to home may I ride?" cried Taddy, all in a breath.

Mr. Grantley was an indulgent old gentleman, fond of children; so he said, "Jump in"; and in a minute Taddy had scrambled to a seat by his side.

VI.

MRS. DUCKLOW'S ADVENTURES.

AND now occurred a circumstance which Ducklow had foreseen. The alarm of fire had reached Reuben's; and although the report of its falseness followed immediately, Mrs. Ducklow's inflammable fancy was so kindled by it that she could find no comfort in prolonging her visit.

"Mr. Ducklow 'll be going for the trunk, and I *must* go home and see to things, Taddy's *such* a fellow for mischief! I can foot it; I sha'n't mind it."

And off she started, walking herself out of breath in her anxiety.

She reached the brow of the hill just in time to see a chaise drive away from her own door.

"Who *can* that be? I wonder if Taddy's there to guard the house! If anything should happen to them bonds!"

Out of breath as she was, she quickened her pace, and trudged on, flushed, perspiring, panting, until she reached the house.

"Thaddeus!" she called.

No Taddy answered. She went in. The house was deserted. And lo! the carpet torn up, and the bonds abstracted.

Mr. Ducklow never would have made such work, removing the bonds. Then somebody else must have taken them, she reasoned.

"The man in the chaise!" she exclaimed, or rather made an effort to exclaim, succeeding only in bringing forth a hoarse, gasping sound. Fear dried up articulation. *Vox faucibus hæsit.*

And Taddy? He had disappeared; been murdered, perhaps,—or gagged and carried away by the man in the chaise.

Mrs. Ducklow flew hither and thither, (to use a favorite phrase of her own,) "like a hen with her head cut off"; then rushed out of the house, and up the street, screaming after the chaise,—

"Murder! murder! Stop thief! stop thief!"

She waved her hands aloft in the air frantically. If she had trudged before, now she trotted, now she cantered: but if the cantering of the old mare was fitly likened to that of a cow, to what thing, to what manner of motion under the sun, shall we liken the cantering of Mrs. Ducklow? It was original; it was

unique; it was prodigious. Now, with her frantically waving hands, and all her undulating and flapping skirts, she seemed a species of huge, unwieldy bird attempting to fly. Then she sank down into a heavy, dragging walk, — breath and strength all gone, — no voice left even to scream murder. Then the awful realization of the loss of the bonds once more rushing over her, she started up again. "Half running, half flying, what progress she made!" Then Atkins's dog saw her, and, naturally mistaking her for a prodigy, came out at her, bristling up and bounding and barking terrifically.

"Come here!" cried Atkins, following the dog. "What's the matter? What's to pay, Mrs. Ducklow?"

Attempting to speak, the good woman could only pant and wheeze.

"Robbed!" she at last managed to whisper, amid the yelpings of the cur that refused to be silenced.

"Robbed? How? Who?"

"The chaise. Ketch it."

Her gestures expressed more than her words; and Atkins's horse and wagon, with which he had been drawing out brush, being in the yard near by, he ran to them, leaped to the seat, drove into the road, took Mrs. Ducklow aboard, and set out in vigorous pursuit of the slow two-wheeled vehicle.

"Stop, you, sir! Stop, you, sir!" shrieked Mrs. Ducklow, having recovered her breath by the time they came up with the chaise.

It stopped, and Mr. Grantley the minister put out his good-natured, surprised face.

"You've robbed my house! You've took —"

Mrs. Ducklow was going on in wild, accusatory accents, when she recognized the benign countenance.

"What do you say? I have robbed you?" he exclaimed, very much astonished.

"No, no! not you! You would n't do such a thing!" she stammered forth, while Atkins, who had laughed himself weak at Mr. Ducklow's plight earlier in the morning, now laughed himself into a side-ache at Mrs. Ducklow's ludicrous mistake. "But did you — did you stop at my house? Have you seen our Thaddeus?"

"Here I be, Ma Ducklow!" piped a small voice; and Taddy, who had till then remained hidden, fearing punishment, peeped out of the chaise from behind the broad back of the minister.

"Taddy! Taddy! how came the carpet —"

"I pulled it up, huntin' for a marble," said Taddy, as she paused, overmastered by her emotions.

"And the — the thing tied up in a yaller wrapper?"

"Pa Ducklow took it."

"Ye sure?"

"Yes, I seen him!"

"O dear!" said Mrs. Ducklow, "I never was so beat! Mr. Grantley, I hope — excuse me — I did n't know what I was about! Taddy, you notty boy, what did you leave the house for? Be ye quite sure yer Pa Ducklow —"

Taddy repeated that he was quite sure, as he climbed from the chaise into Atkins's wagon. The minister smilingly remarked that he hoped she would find no robbery had been committed, and went his way. Atkins, driving back, and setting her and Taddy down at the Ducklow gate, answered her embarrassed "Much obleeged to ye," with a sincere "Not at all," considering the fun he had had a sufficient compensation for his trouble. And thus ended the morning's adventures, with the exception of an unimportant episode, in which Taddy, Mrs. Ducklow, and Mrs. Ducklow's rattan were the principal actors.

VII.

THE JOURNEY.

AT noon Mr. Ducklow returned.

"Did ye take the bonds?" was his wife's first question.

"Of course I did! Ye don't suppose I'd go away and leave 'em in the house, not knowin' when you'd be comin' home?"

"Wal, I did n't know. And I did n't know whuther to believe Taddy or not. Oh, I've had such a fright!"

And she related the story of her pursuit of the minister.

"How could ye make such a fool of yerself? It'll git all over town, and I shall be mortified to death. Jest like a woman, to git frightened!"

"If you had n't got frightened, and made a fool of yourself, yelling fire, 't would n't have happened!" retorted Mrs. Ducklow.

"Wal! wal! say no more about it! The bonds are safe."

"I was in hopes you'd change 'em for them registered bonds Reuben spoke of."

"I did try to, but they told me to the bank it could n't be did. Then I asked 'em if they would keep 'em for me, and they said they would n't object to lockin' on 'em up in their safe; but they would n't give me no receipt, nor hold them—"

selves responsible for 'em. I did n't know what else to do, so I handed 'em the bonds to keep."

"I want to know if you did now!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow, disapprovingly.

"Why not? What else could I do? I did n't want to lug 'em around with me forever. And as for keepin' 'em hid in the house, we 've tried that!" and Ducklow unfolded his weekly newspaper.

Mrs. Ducklow was placing the dinner on the table, with a look which seemed to say, "I would n't have left the bonds in the bank; my judgment would have been better than all that. If they are lost, I sha'n't be to blame!" when suddenly Ducklow started and uttered a cry of consternation over his newspaper.

"Why, what have ye found?"

"Bank robbery!"

"Not *your* bank? Not the bank where *your* bonds —"

"Of course not; but in the very next town! The safe blown open with gunpowder! Five thousand dollars in Government bonds stole!"

"How strange!" said Mrs. Ducklow. "Now what did I tell ye?"

"I believe you 're right," cried Ducklow, starting to his feet. "They 'll be safer in my own house, or even in my own pocket!"

"If you was going to put 'em in any safe, why not put 'em in Josiah's? He 's got a safe, ye know."

"So he has! We might drive over there and make a visit Monday, and ask him to lock up — yes, we might tell him and Laury all about it, and leave 'em in their charge."

"So we might!" said Mrs. Ducklow.

Laura was their daughter, and Josiah her husband, in whose honor and sagacity they placed unlimited confidence. The plan was resolved upon at once.

"To-morrow 's Sunday," said Ducklow, pacing the floor. "If we leave the bonds in the bank over night, they must stay there till Monday."

"And Sunday is jest the day for burglars to operate!" added Mrs. Ducklow.

"I 've a good notion — let me see!" said Ducklow, looking at the clock. "Twenty minutes after twelve! Bank closes at two! An hour and a half, — I believe I could git there in an hour and a half. I will. I 'll take a bite and drive right back."

Which he accordingly did, and brought the tape-tied envelope home with him again. That night he slept with it under his pillow. The next day was Sunday; and although Mr. Ducklow

did not like to have the bonds on his mind during sermon-time, and Mrs. Ducklow "dreaded dreadfully," as she said, "to look the minister in the face," they concluded that it was best, on the whole, to go to meeting, and carry the bonds. With the envelope once more in his breast-pocket, (stitched in this time by Mrs. Ducklow's own hand,) the farmer sat under the droppings of the sanctuary, and stared up at the good minister, but without hearing a word of the discourse, his mind was so engrossed by worldly cares, until the preacher exclaimed vehemently, looking straight at Ducklow's pew, —

"What said Paul? 'I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, *except these bonds*.' 'Except these bonds'!" he repeated, striking the Bible. "Can you, my hearers, — can you say, with Paul, 'Would that all were as I am, *except these bonds*'?"

A point which seemed for a moment so personal to himself, that Ducklow was filled with confusion, and would certainly have stammered out some foolish answer, had not the preacher passed on to other themes. As it was, Ducklow contented himself with glancing around to see if the congregation was looking at him, and carelessly passing his hand across his breast-pocket to make sure the bonds were still there.

Early the next morning, the old mare was harnessed, and Taddy's adopted parents set out to visit their daughter, — Mrs. Ducklow having postponed her washing for the purpose. It was afternoon when they arrived at their journey's end. Laura received them joyfully, but Josiah was not expected home until evening. Mr. Ducklow put the old mare in the barn, and fed her, and then went in to dinner, feeling very comfortable indeed.

"Josiah 's got a nice place here. That's about as slick a little barn as ever I see. Always does me good to come over here and see you gettin' along so nicely, Laury."

"I wish you 'd come oftener, then," said Laura.

"Wal, it's hard leavin' home, ye know. Have to git one of the Atkins boys to come and sleep with Taddy the night we 're away."

"We should n't have come to-day, if 't had n't been for me," remarked Mrs. Ducklow. "Says I to your father, says I, 'I feel as if I wanted to go over and see Laury; it seems an age since I 've seen her,' says I. 'Wal,' says he, 's'pos'n' we go!' says he. That was only last Saturday; and this morning we started."

"And it's no fool of a job to make the journey with the old mare!" said Ducklow.

"Why don't you drive a better horse?" said Laura, whose pride was always touched when her parents came to visit her with the old mare and the one-horse wagon.

"O, she answers my purpose. Hoss-flesh is high, Laury. Have to economize, these times."

"I'm sure there's no need of your economizing!" exclaimed Laura, leading the way to the dining-room. "Why don't you use your money, and have the good of it?"

"So I tell him," said Mrs. Ducklow, faintly. — "Why, Laury! I did n't want you to be to so much trouble to git dinner jest for us! A bite would have answered. Do see, father!"

VIII.

WHAT MR. DUCKLOW CARRIED IN THE ENVELOPE.

At evening Josiah came home; and it was not until then that Ducklow mentioned the subject which was foremost in his thoughts.

"What do ye think o' Gov'ment bonds, Josiah?" he incidentally inquired, after supper.

"First-rate!" said Josiah.

"About as safe as anything, a'n't they?" said Ducklow, encouraged.

"Safe?" cried Josiah. "Just look at the resources of this country! Nobody has begun yet to appreciate the power and undeveloped wealth of these United States. It's a big rebellion, I know; but we're going to put it down. It'll leave us a big debt, very sure; but we handle it now easy as that child lifts that stool. It makes him grunt and stagger a little, not because he is n't strong enough for it, but because he don't understand his own strength, or how to use it: he'll have twice the strength, and know just how to apply it, in a little while. Just so with this country. It makes me laugh to hear folks talk about repudiation and bankruptcy."

"But s'pos'n' we do put down the rebellion, and the States come back: then what's to hender the South, and Secesh sympathizers in the North, from j'inin' hands and votin' that the debt sha'n't be paid?"

"Don't you worry about that! Do ye suppose we're going to be such fools as to give the rebels, after we've whipped 'em, the same political power they had before the war? Not by a

long chalk! Sooner than that, we'll put the ballot into the hands of the freedmen. They're our friends. They've fought on the right side, and they'll vote on the right side. I tell ye, spite of all the prejudice there is against black skins, we a'n't such a nation of ninnies as to give up all we're fighting for, and leave our best friends and allies, not to speak of our own interests, in the hands of our enemies."

"You consider Gov'ments a good investment, then, do ye?" said Ducklow, growing radiant.

"I do, decidedly, — the very best. Besides, you help the Government; and that's no small consideration."

"So I thought. But how is it about the coupon bonds? A'n't they rather ticklish property to have in the house?"

"Well, I don't know. Think how many years you'll keep old bills and documents and never dream of such a thing as losing them! There's not a bit more danger with the bonds. I should n't want to carry 'em around with me, to any great amount, — though I did once carry three thousand-dollar bonds in my pocket for a week. I did n't mind it."

"Curious!" said Ducklow: "I've got three thousan'-dollar bonds in my pocket this minute!"

"Well, it's so much good property," said Josiah, appearing not at all surprised at the circumstance.

"Seems to me, though, if I had a safe, as you have, I should lock 'em up in it."

"I was travelling that week. I locked 'em up pretty soon after I got home, though."

"Suppose," said Ducklow, as if the thought had but just occurred to him, — "suppose you put my bonds into your safe: I shall feel easier."

"Of course," replied Josiah. "I'll keep 'em for you, if you like."

"It will be an accommodation. They'll be safe, will they?"

"Safe as mine are; safe as anybody's: I'll insure 'em for twenty-five cents."

Ducklow was happy. Mrs. Ducklow was happy. She took her husband's coat, and with a pair of scissors cut the threads that stitched the envelope to the pocket.

"Have you torn off the May coupons?" asked Josiah.

"No."

"Well, you'd better. They'll be payable now soon; and if you take them, you won't have to touch the bonds again till the interest on the November coupons is due."

"A good idee!" said Ducklow.

He took the envelope, untied the tape, and removed its contents. Suddenly the glow of comfort, the gleam of satisfaction, faded from his countenance.

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"Hello! What ye got there?" cried Josiah.

"Why, father! massy sakes!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow.

As for Ducklow himself, he could not utter a word; but, dumb with consternation, he looked again in the envelope, and opened and turned inside out, and shook, with trembling hands, its astonishing contents. The bonds were not there: they had been stolen, and three copies of the "Sunday Visitor" had been inserted in their place.

IX.

FOOD FOR REFLECTION.

VERY early on the following morning a dismal-faced middle-aged couple might have been seen riding away from Josiah's house. It was the Ducklows returning home, after their fruitless, their worse than fruitless, journey. No entreaties could prevail upon them to prolong their visit. It was with difficulty even that they had been prevented from setting off immediately on the discovery of their loss, and travelling all night, in their impatience to get upon the track of the missing bonds.

"There 'll be not the least use in going to-night," Josiah had said. "If they were stolen at the bank, you can't do anything about it till to-morrow. And even if they were taken from your own house, I don't see what 's to be gained now by hurrying back. It is n't probable you 'll ever see 'em again, and you may just as well take it easy, — go to bed and sleep on 't, and get a fresh start in the morning."

So, much against their inclination, the unfortunate owners of the abstracted bonds retired to the luxurious chamber Laura gave them, and lay awake all night, groaning and sighing, wondering and surmising, and (I regret to add) blaming each other. So true it is, that "modern conveniences," hot and cold water all over the house, a pier-glass, and the most magnificently canopied couch, avail nothing to give tranquillity to the harassed mind. Hitherto the Ducklows had felt great satisfaction in the style their daughter, by her marriage, was enabled to support. To brag of her nice house and furniture and two servants was almost as good as possessing them. Remembering her rich dining-room and silver service and porcelain, they were proud. Such things were enough for the honor of the family; and, asking nothing for themselves, they slept well in

their humblest of bed-chambers, and sipped their tea contentedly out of clumsy earthen. But that night the boasted style in which their "darter" lived was less appreciated than formerly: fashion and splendor were no longer a consolation.

"If we had only given the three thousand dollars to Reuben!" said Ducklow, driving homewards with a countenance as long as his whip-lash. "T would have jest set him up, and been some compensation for his sufferin's and losses goin' to the war."

"Wal, I had no objections," replied Mrs. Ducklow. "I always thought he ought to have the money eventooally. And, as Miss Beswick said, no doubt it would 'a' been ten times the comfort to him now it would be a number o' years from now. But you did n't seem willing."

"I don't know! 't was you that was n't willin'!"

And they expatiated on Reuben's merits, and their benevolent intentions towards him, and, in imagination, endowed him with the price of the bonds over and over again: so easy is it to be generous with lost money!

"But it 's no use talkin'!" said Ducklow. "I ha'n't the least idee we shall ever see the color o' them bonds again. If they was stole to the bank, I can't prove anything."

"It does seem strange to me," Mrs. Ducklow replied, "that you should have had no more gumption than to trust the bonds with strangers, when they told you in so many words they would n't be responsible."

"If you have flung that in my teeth once, you have fifty times!" And Ducklow lashed the old mare, as if she, and not Mrs. Ducklow, had exasperated him.

"Wal," said the lady, "I don't see how we 're going to work to find 'em, now they 're lost, without making inquiries; and we can't make inquiries without letting it be known we had bought."

"I been thinkin' about that," said her husband. "O dear!" with a groan; "I wish the pesky cowpon bonds had never been invented!"

They drove first to the bank, where they were of course told that the envelope had not been untied there. "Besides, it was sealed, was n't it?" said the cashier. "Indeed!" He expressed great surprise, when informed that it was not. "It should have been: I supposed any child would know enough to look out for that!"

And this was all the consolation Ducklow could obtain.

"Just as I expected," said Mrs. Ducklow, as they resumed their journey. "I just as much believe that man stole your bonds as that you trusted 'em in his hands in an unsealed wrapper! Beats all how you could be so careless!"

"Wal, wal! I s'pose I never shall hear the last on 't!"

And again the poor old mare had to suffer for Mrs. Ducklow's offences.

They had but one hope now, — that perhaps Taddy had tampered with the envelope, and that the bonds might be found somewhere about the house. But this hope was quickly extinguished on their arrival. Taddy, being accused, protested his innocence with a vehemence which convinced even Mr. Ducklow that the cashier was probably the guilty party.

"Unless," said he, brandishing the rattan, "somebody got into the house that morning when the little scamp run off to ride with the minister!"

"O, don't lick me for that! I've been licked for that once! ha'n't I, Ma Ducklow?" shrieked Taddy.

The house was searched in vain. No clew to the purloined securities could be obtained, — the copies of the "Sunday Visitor," which had been substituted for them, affording not the least; for that valuable little paper was found in almost every household, except Ducklow's.

"I don't see any way left but to advertise, as Josiah said," remarked the farmer, with a deep sigh of despondency.

"And that 'll bring it all out!" exclaimed Mrs. Ducklow.

"If you only had n't been so imprudent!"

"Wal, wal!" said Ducklow, cutting her short.

X.

REUBEN'S MISFORTUNE.

BEFORE resorting to public measures for the recovery of the stolen property, it was deemed expedient to acquaint their friends with their loss in a private way. The next day, accordingly, they went to pay Reuben a visit. It was a very different meeting from that which took place a few mornings before. The returned soldier had gained in health, but not in spirits. The rapture of reaching home once more, the flush of hope and happiness, had passed away with the visitors who had flocked to offer their congratulations. He had had time to reflect: he had reached home, indeed; but now every moment reminded him how soon that home was to be taken from him. He looked at his wife and children, and clenched his teeth hard to stifle the emotions that arose at the thought of their future. The

sweet serenity, the faith and patience and cheerfulness, which never ceased to illumine Sophronia's face as she moved about the house, pursuing her daily tasks, and tenderly waiting upon him, deepened at once his love and his solicitude. He was watching her thus when the Ducklows entered with countenances mournful as the grave.

"How are you gittin' along, Reuben?" said Ducklow, while his wife murmured a solemn "good morning" to Sophronia.

"I am doing well enough. Don't be at all concerned about me! It a'n't pleasant to lie here, and feel it may be months, months, before I'm able to be about my business; but I would n't mind it, — I could stand it first-rate, — I could stand anything, anything, but to see her working her life out for me and the children! To no purpose, either; that's the worst of it. We shall have to lose this place, spite of fate!"

"O Reuben!" said Sophronia, hastening to him, and laying her soothing hands upon his hot forehead; "why won't you stop thinking about that? Do try to have more faith! We shall be taken care of, I'm sure!"

"If I had three thousand dollars, — yes, or even two, — then I'd have faith!" said Reuben. "Miss Beswick has proposed to send a subscription-paper around town for us; but I'd rather die than have it done. Besides, nothing near that amount could be raised, I'm confident. You need n't groan so, Pa Ducklow, for I a'n't hinting at you. I don't expect you to help me out of my trouble. If you had felt called upon to do it, you'd have done it before now; and I don't ask, I don't beg of any man!" added the soldier, proudly.

"That's right; I like yer sperit!" said the miserable Ducklow. "But I was sighin' to think of something, — something you have n't known anything about, Reuben."

"Yes, Reuben, we should have helped you," said Mrs. Ducklow, "and did, did take steps towards it —"

"In fact," resumed Ducklow, "you've met with a great misfortin', Reuben. Unbeknown to yourself, you've met with a great misfortin'! Yer Ma Ducklow knows."

"Yes, Reuben, the very day you come home, your Pa Ducklow made an investment for your benefit. We did n't mention it, — you know I would n't own up to it, though I did n't exactly say the contrary, the morning we was over here —"

"Because," said Ducklow, as she faltered, "we wanted to surprise you; we was keepin' it a secret till the right time, then we was goin' to make it a pleasant surprise to ye."

"What in the name of common-sense are you talking about?" cried Reuben, looking from one to the other of the wretched, prevaricating pair.

"Cowpon bonds!" groaned Ducklow. "Three thousan'-dollar cowpon bonds! The money had been lent, but I wanted to make a good investment for you, and I thought there was nothin' so good as Gov'ments —"

"That 's all right," said Reuben. "Only, if you had money to invest for my benefit, I should have preferred to pay off the mortgage the first thing."

"Sartin! sartin!" said Ducklow; "and you could have turned the bonds right in, if you had so chosen, like so much cash. Or you could have drawn your interest on the bonds in gold, and paid the interest on your mortgage in currency, and made so much, as I ruther thought you would."

"But the bonds?" eagerly demanded Reuben, with trembling hopes, just as Miss Beswick, with her shawl over her head, entered the room.

"We was just telling about our loss, Reuben's loss," said Mrs. Ducklow, in a manner which betrayed no little anxiety to conciliate that terrible woman.

"Very well! don't let me interrupt." And Miss Beswick, slipping the shawl from her head, sat down.

Her presence, stiff and prim and sarcastic, did not tend in the least to relieve Mr. Ducklow from the natural embarrassment he felt in giving his version of Reuben's loss. However, assisted occasionally by a judicious remark thrown in by Mrs. Ducklow, he succeeded in telling a sufficiently plausible and candid-seeming story.

"I see! I see!" said Reuben, who had listened with astonishment and pain to the narrative. "You had kinder intentions towards me than I gave you credit for. Forgive me, if I wronged you!" He pressed the hand of his adopted father, and thanked him from a heart filled with gratitude and trouble. "But don't feel so bad about it. You did what you thought best. I can only say, the fates are against me."

XI.

TADDY'S FINANCIAL OPERATIONS.

"HEM!" coughing, Miss Beswick stretched up her long neck and cleared her throat. "So them bonds you had bought for Reuben was in the house the very night I called!"

"Yes, Miss Beswick," replied Mrs. Ducklow; "and that 's what made it so uncomfortable to us to have you talk the way you did."

"Hem!" The neck was stretched up still farther than before, and the redoubtable throat cleared again. "'T was too bad! Ye ought to have told me. You 'd actooally bought the bonds, — bought 'em for Reuben, had ye?"

"Sartin! sartin!" said Ducklow.

"To be sure!" said Mrs. Ducklow.

"We designed 'em for his benefit, a surprise, when the right time come," said both together.

"Hem! well!" (It was evident that the Beswick was clearing her decks for action.) "When the right time come! yes! That right time was n't somethin' indefinite, in the fur futur', of course! Yer losin' the bonds did n't hurry up yer benevolence the least grain, I s'pose! Hem! let in them boys, Sophrony!"

Sophronia opened the door, and in walked Master Dick Atkins, (son of the brush-burner,) followed, not without reluctance and concern, by Master Taddy.

"Thaddeus! what you here for?" demanded the adopted parents.

"Because I said so," remarked Miss Beswick, arbitrarily. "Step along, boys, step along. Hold up yer head, Taddy, for ye a'n't goin' to be hurt while I'm around. Take yer fists out o' yer eyes, and stop blubberin'. Mr. Ducklow, that boy knows somethin' about Reuben's cowpon bonds."

"Thaddeus!" ejaculated both Ducklows at once, "did you touch them bonds?"

"Did n't know what they was!" whimpered Taddy.

"Did you take them?" And the female Ducklow grasped his shoulder.

"Hands off, if you please!" remarked Miss Beswick, with frightfully gleaming courtesy. "I told him, if he 'd be a good

boy, and come along with Richard, and tell the truth, he should n't be hurt. *If you please,*" she repeated, with a majestic nod; and Mrs. Ducklow took her hands off.

"Where are they now? where are they?" cried Ducklow, rushing headlong to the main question.

"Don't know," said Taddy.

"Don't know? you villain!" And Ducklow was rising in wrath. But Miss Beswick put up her hand deprecatingly.

"*If you please!*" she said, with grim civility; and Ducklow sank down again.

"What did you do with 'em? what did you want of 'em?" said Mrs. Ducklow, with difficulty restraining an impulse to wring his neck.

"To cover my kite," confessed the miserable Taddy.

"Cover your kite! your kite!" A chorus of groans from the Ducklows. "Did n't you know no better?"

"Did n't think you'd care," said Taddy. "I had some newspapers Dick give me to cover it; but I thought them things 'u'd be pootier. So I took 'em, and put the newspapers in the wrapper."

"Did ye cover yer kite?"

"No. When I found out you cared so much about 'em, I dars'n't; I was afraid you'd see 'em."

"Then what did you do with 'em?"

"When you was away, Dick come over to sleep with me, and I—I sold 'em to him!"

"Sold 'em to Dick!"

"Yes," spoke up Dick, stoutly, "for six marbles, and one was a bull's-eye, and one agate, and two alleys. Then, when you come home and made such a fuss, he wanted 'em ag'in. But he would n't give me back but four, and I wa'n't going to agree to no such nonsense as that."

"I'd lost the bull's-eye and one common," whined Taddy.

"But the bonds! did you destroy 'em?"

"Likely I'd destroy 'em, after I'd paid six marbles for 'em!" said Dick. "I wanted 'em to cover my kite with."

"Cover your — oh! then you've made a kite of 'em?" said Ducklow.

"Well, I was going to, when Aunt Beswick ketched me at it. She made me tell where I got 'em, and took me over to your house jest now; and Taddy said you was over here, and so she put ahead, and made us foller her."

Again, in an agony of impatience, Ducklow demanded to know where the bonds were at that moment.

"If Taddy'll give me back the marbles," began Master Dick.

"That'll do!" said Miss Beswick, silencing him with a gesture. "Reuben will give you twenty marbles; for I believe you said they was Reuben's bonds, Mr. Ducklow?"

"Yes, that is —" stammered the adopted father.

"Eventooally," struck in the adopted mother.

"Now look here! What am I to understand? Be they Reuben's bonds, or be they not? That's the question!" And there was that in Miss Beswick's look which said, "If they are not Reuben's, then your eyes shall never behold them more!"

"Of course they're Reuben's!" "We intended all the while —" "His benefit —" "To do jest what he pleases with 'em," chorused Pa and Ma Ducklow.

"Wal! now it's understood! Here, Reuben, are your coupon bonds!"

And Miss Beswick, drawing them from her bosom, placed the precious documents, with formal politeness, in the glad soldier's agitated hands.

"Glory!" cried Reuben, assuring himself that they were genuine and real. "Sophrony, you've got a home! Ruby, Carrie, you've got a home! Miss Beswick! you angel from the skies! order a bushel and a half of marbles for Dick, and have the bill sent to me! O Pa Ducklow! you never did a nobler or more generous thing in your life. These will lift the mortgage, and leave me a nest-egg besides. Then when I get my back pay, and my pension, and my health again, we shall be independent."

And the soldier, overcome by his feelings, sank back in the arms of his wife.

"We always told you we'd do well by ye, you remember?" said the Ducklows, triumphantly.

The news went abroad. Again congratulations poured in upon the returned volunteer. Everybody rejoiced in his good fortune, — especially certain rich ones, who had been dreading to see Miss Beswick come round with her proposed subscription paper.

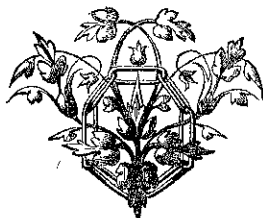
Among the rest, the Ducklows rejoiced not the least; for selfishness was with them, as it is with many, rather a thing of habit than a fault of the heart. The catastrophe of the bonds broke up that life-long habit, and revealed good hearts underneath. The consciousness of having done an act of justice, although by accident, proved very sweet to them: it was really a fresh sensation; and Reuben and his dear little family, saved from ruin and distress, happy, thankful, glad, was a sight to their old eyes such as they had never witnessed before. Not gold itself, in any quantity, at the highest premium, could have given them so much satisfaction; and as for coupon bonds, they are not to be mentioned in the comparison.

"Won't you do well by me some time, too?" teased little Taddy, who overheard his adopted parents congratulating themselves on having acted so generously by Reuben. "I don't care for no cowpen bonds, but I do want a new drum!"

"Yes, yes, my son!" said Ducklow, patting the boy's shoulder.

And the drum was bought.

Taddy was delighted. But he did not know what made the Ducklows so much happier, so much gentler and kinder, than formerly. Do you?



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