

In Chancery

By WILLIAM D. CARTER

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When the storm of the civil war broke over the country in 1861 John Abercrombie, a young man of twenty-two, who had been preparing himself to take his father's place as president and owner of the controlling interest in the Abercrombie Manufacturing company, like most young men of spirit at that period, insisted on joining the Union army. His father, who was preparing to retire, was so disappointed and angered at this course that he told his son to go to the war and he hoped he would never come back.

"I shall keep Jane Wetherell here with me," said the old man, "to take care of the house and be a comfort in your stead and shall leave her every cent of my property."

"Do so," replied the son, "and you may count on me not trying to break the will. I shall claim nothing of you or what you leave behind you."

Jane Wetherell was not related to the Abercrombies. She was a connection of Mrs. Abercrombie, who had brought her into the house for a companion and nurse, and when Mrs. Abercrombie died her husband had continued to rely on the girl for various comforts, including reading to him, since his eyes were weak. When the old man saw John's name published among the killed at the battle of Antietam his heart softened, and he regretted his past action toward his son.

For twelve years Jane Wetherell took care of the old man. He said he would make her comfortable after his death, and it was generally supposed that she would inherit all his property, though no one knew of the parting scene between him and his son and the father's threat.

There were indications that Jennie Wetherell had had a love affair. She never accepted any marked attention from any young man, and she appeared to have suffered a blight. These were the principal reasons why those who knew her said that she had been crossed in love and would not marry.

When Mr. Abercrombie died every one was surprised at two things—first, that he left a much larger estate than it was supposed he had possessed and, secondly, that he had made no will. The latter of these surprises was the more a surprise because by not making a will he left his estate to be contested for by a host of relatives, in some of whom he had taken any interest, while Jennie Wetherell, in whose veins there was none of his blood, was left out by the law of inheritance entirely.

An account of this condition of things got into the newspapers and among other things stated was that the body of John Abercrombie had never been recovered and was supposed to lie either in a trench or under one of the mute army of headstones marked "Unknown." Instantly there sprang up as if from the grave three different men who claimed to be the said John Abercrombie. One said he had been badly wounded, taken to a hospital and, recovering, had deserted; another that he had been hit in the head by a mine ball and the memory knocked out of him till recently. The third declared that he had been captured, taken to a southern prison and on being exchanged had gone west, where he had since lived incognito.

Any one of these men if he could have established his identity with that of John Abercrombie would have inherited the whole estate. But they were all working on a very small prospect. None of them had any papers to show that he had been in the army, and only one manifested any familiarity with military affairs. Jane Wetherell at once pronounced them all impostors. Had she had any legal claim on the estate her word would have counted for little or nothing. As it was, it counted for a good deal.

Since the settlement of the estate was in a jumble Jane Wetherell was left by the chancery court in charge of the house in which she had so long lived. A year elapsed, at the end of which 107 names of relatives of the deceased Abercrombie were handed in to the court as claimants for a share of his estate, and there were more to come. It began to look as if no one would be rich from the estate unless one of these men who had risen up out of the earth could prove himself to be John Abercrombie.

One day there was a wedding at the Abercrombie house. Jennie Wetherell was the bride. Who the groom was no one seemed to know. There were no cards, no invitations. Only a few witnesses were present, and they were servants. As soon as the ceremony had been performed the groom went to the chancery court and presented discharge papers from the Union army and other proofs that he was Sergeant John Abercrombie.

The case of the relatives collapsed. John Abercrombie had gone to the war partly because Jennie Wetherell had refused to marry him. After his departure she had discovered that she loved him. Finding his name had been reported among the killed after the battle of Antietam, he had taken advantage of the error to disappear from the world. Being badly wounded, he was discharged and went to Colorado, where he had lived till in a newspaper he had seen an account of the clamor for his father's estate, when he had returned and learned from Miss Wetherell of her mistake in refusing him.

Accepting the inevitable. Wonderful are the Hindus for accepting the inevitable. Tell one of these that he must take castor oil, and he will drain the oleaginous cup to the dregs and smack his lips. Tell him that his leg must be amputated, and he will present the limb for dismemberment and smile as he sees it severed. Tell him that he is to be hanged, and with no touch of emotion whatever he will reply, "Jo hookm" ("whatever is ordered"), just as if he had been told that he must have his corns cut—Blackwood's Magazine.

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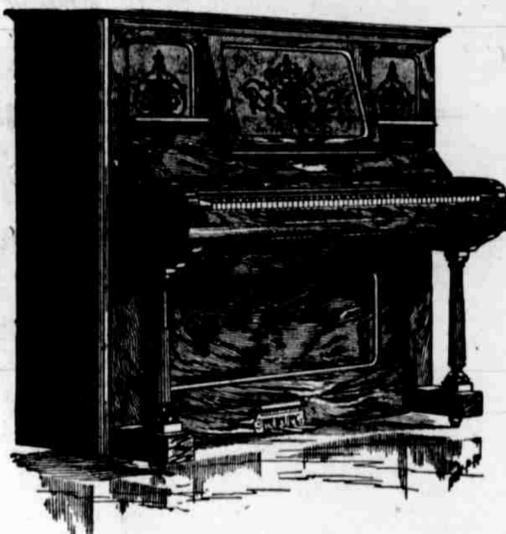
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