

AUNT TABITHA'S BISCUIT BOX.

DAISY! Da-l-sy! It has come at last—the present from Aunt Tabitha. Oh, do hurry down, dear, for I'm all impatience," and Daisy's mother looked at it as she stood at the foot of the staircase and contemplated the box newly delivered by the parcel van. "I knew the dear old soul would not forget her, and it's so heavy it must be something very handsome."

"Oh, mamma, what can it be?" cried Daisy, putting the finishing touches to her toilet as she hastened down stairs. "I do hope it is one of the new silver afternoon stands—they are so chic and stylish, you know, and no one hereabouts has one except Lady Hightoff. Her presents were put in the paper, you know."

"Call Susan, Daisy; we could not get this lid off ourselves," said Mrs. Elder, ignoring the fact that she helped in her father's grocery store she was an adept at opening boxes. It was baffling, however, that the arrival of a marriage present to her daughter from their one wealthy relative should be accompanied by all the pomp and ceremony at her command.

So Susan's help was invoked, and with the aid of the kitchen ax the box was opened, and the article it contained, wrapped in silk paper, was carried to the parlor. An unclosed envelope was attached to it, which contained Aunt Tabitha's visiting card with this written on it:

"With best wishes and the hope that her grand-niece will prize this for her sake."

"Lor, mum," said the maid, as she set it down on the table, "it's heavy. I do believe it's solid gold."

"It might well be, coming from Aunt Tabitha to her name child," said Mrs. Elder, smiling to her daughter, who was unwinding the paper with a dignity that would have gravely the unveiling of a public statue.

"A biscuit box!" they exclaimed in chorus, when the thing stood unveiled. It was of rather an ancient type, a relic of the days when it was considered a virtue in a biscuit box to have the properties of a mausoleum—massive and solemn. It consisted of a majolica jar about the diameter of a drain pipe, and quite as elegant, fixed in a silver-plated stand of a coffin mount style, and with a lid of similar metal.

"Isn't it hideous?" cried Daisy, on recovering her breath.

"It's—it's not what one would have expected of Aunt Tabitha," sighed Mrs. Elder, in a disappointed tone.

Susan, having heard the Elders boast so much of the old lady's fabulous wealth, and thinking she might have filled the box with sovereigns as a set-off to its ugliness, lifted the lid and peered inside. Its capacious emptiness gave Susan a brilliant idea.

"Lor, mum," she said, "it 'ud make a beautiful coal scuttle."

This was a reflection on her relative's gift, however, which Mrs. Elder resented, and the girl was thereupon reminded of some household duties that required her elsewhere.

"I could not show it among my presents, mamma; every one would laugh at it," said Daisy, petulantly.

"And I've been telling everybody that it was a solid silver tea service, Aunt Tabitha was sending you—how provoking," said the mother, peevishly; "I don't know what to say now."

"Look, mamma," pointing to a tradesman's label on the paper, "this is where it has been bought. Couldn't we exchange it for something else?"

"Yes, Daisy, we might—something useful—spoons and forks, say; that would save your papa buying them, and the old wretch need never know."

"And I don't care, suppose she did; it would only serve her right—the spiteful old thing. Prize it for her sake, indeed; I would pitch it at her if she were here."

"Do you know, Daisy, what I think we should give out that she has sent?" said the mother, suddenly brightening.

"No," replied her daughter, evincing some curiosity.

"A check."

"Oh, capital!" cried Daisy. "The very thing—a large amount; a hundred guineas, shall we say? That's what all the grand people are doing now. It will sound quite aristocratic."

And so the firm of silversmiths in the distant town where Aunt Tabitha resided, and from where she had purchased the biscuit box, were communicated with, and after some negotiations an exchange was effected. They were strictly enjoined not to let the exchange be known to their customer for fear of her being offended.

The firm in question had congratulated themselves on having got rid of a piece of old stock, and the salesman had a lively recollection of the prim old lady, with snow-white side curls, to whom he had sold it.

"Show me something suitable for a wedding present," she had said, on entering the shop.

A number of articles had been submitted for her inspection, and at length a biscuit box was suggested.

"Could I see them?"

"Yes, mem; we have some very pretty ones just now," said the salesman, scenting a chance for getting quit of an old "shopkeeper," and producing the one that finally reached Daisy.

"Here is a really handsome one—the newest pattern—real majolica ware—and—"

"I don't want your newest pattern—new and nasty?" interposed Aunt Tabitha. "Show me something like myself—old and antiquated—the oldest thing you have in the place."

"Well, mem, this is really the very thing you want. When I say it is the newest pattern I mean the style is quite up to date—it never goes out of fashion, you understand; and it is—yes, I believe it is the oldest article we have in the shop."

"And the ugliest?" snapped the old lady.

"Well, I wouldn't say that, but—"

"Say that it is and I'll take it," she said; adding, "how do you clean it?"

"Oh, it's easily kept. You unscrew this nut at the bottom and the tinware comes out," explained the salesman, and a bargain having been struck the article was sent home to Aunt Tabitha's and then to the destination already known.

It had not been many days in the silversmith's show case after being exchanged when the old lady again put in an appearance at the shop. Her errand, she explained, was the same as before—a wedding present.

"You haven't any more 'newest style' biscuit boxes?" she asked, with a smirk, of the shopman who had served her on the previous visit.

"Yes, mem," he answered; "very curiously, there happens to be another almost identical to the one you got. It is not quite the same, as you will perhaps observe," placing it before her, and not even blushing; "but you could hardly tell the difference."

"Are you quite sure it is not the same one?" Aunt Tabitha asked pointedly.

"Perfectly certain," chirped the shopman.

"Then unscrew it and show me again how you clean it."

The young man went through the same operation as before; but this time a folded slip of paper fell out from between the ware and the stand and dropped at the old lady's feet. Picking it up she unfolded it and looked at it, and then, turning to the shopman, said:

"Do you know, young man, where llars go to? That's the same box that I bought from you about a month ago; but I suppose it's your business." And with a twinkle in her eye as if she was enjoying the joke, she paid for the article and ordered it to be sent home as before.

Stephen Elder, railway signalman, was reading in the local newspaper the account of the wedding of his niece, Miss Tabitha (Daisy) Elder, and his only daughter, also about to be married, was looking over his shoulder.

"Ay, Tabby, this will please your uncle; it's ca'ed 'fashionable marriage.' John aye wanted to be big; that's how he went to be a grocer, he couldna bide the moleskins; an' when he married the grocer's daughter an' got the business he was neither to hand nor bind. And now he's a Bailie an' a that, and they tell me he invited Aunt Tabitha to the marriage; and so she sent the present."

"Her name's on the top of the list of presents, father; see, 'Miss Tabitha Mason, grand-aunt, check.' How much would it be for, do you think?"

"Oh, maybe five pounds, or it might be ten; but you maun mind Aunt Tabitha's not so rich as John's folk make her out to be. It's their big way again."

"She'll not ken about mine, father?" said the daughter, demurely.

"Ay, Tabby, she does; I sent her word. She asked me to write her at aurin times an' let her ken what's gaun on, and I sent her word when your mother de'd, and I thocht she would like to ken about your marriage."

"She'll not think o' sendin' me anything, father; I couldna expect it, for she's never seen me."

"There's nae sayin'; you're named after her, and not thinkin' shame o' the name, an' ca'in' yourself 'Daisy.'"

While thus chatting a neighbor looked in at the door.

"Oh, you're in noo," she said. "There's been a box left wi' me; the porter brocht it doon when ye were baith out. Ye might gang ben for it, Steen, as it's geyan heavy."

"It's for you, Tabby," cried her father,

returning with the box in his arms; "and I wouldna wonder but it might be something frae Aunt Tabby."

"It'll be the waddin' cake, Tabby," laughed the neighbor.

The girl's clear brown eyes glistened as she watched her father undo the cord and pry open the lid.

"I hope it's not a cake," she said, "for that has to be eaten; and if she sent me anything I would like to have it as a keepsake."

"There, Tabby, do the rest yourself," said her father, on placing the parcel on the kitchen table. "My hands are a wee thing coarse, an' I might maybe break it. What's that?"

"It's a card—Aunt Tabitha's," cried the girl; "and it says, 'With best wishes and the hope that her grand-niece will prize this for her sake.'"

The neighbor, as curious to see what it was as if it was for herself, fell to and helped Tabby to unwrap the paper.

At last it stood revealed—the same biscuit box that had undergone a similar ordeal of inspection a few weeks before.

"Megstie, it's grand!" exclaimed the neighbor, with uplifted hands.

"It's owre grand for me, Jennie," was Tabby's comment as she stood with wonder in her beaming eyes.

"What is't for, ava?" questioned the father, looking round as if he expected to see windows in it like a lighthouse.

"It's a biscuit box, father. It's not likely I'll ever use it; but it's awful kind of Aunt Tabitha to send it, and I'll keep it for her sake."

Some months later Daisy's husband—a commercial traveler—related to her a funny story, told him by a brother commercial, about an old lady sending an ugly old biscuit box, with a check hidden in it, as a wedding present, and the box having been exchanged without the check being discovered, and then rebought by the same old lady, and sent out anew as another marriage gift.

"And the curious thing is," he added, "that it was said to be sent to some one in our neighborhood."

Daisy bit her lip with vexation. Was that indeed the object Aunt Tabitha had in view in asking her to keep it for her sake, so that the check would be eventually discovered? And the biscuit box had been sent the second time to her cousin? She knew Tabby had got one of the same kind—servants are useful purveyors of news if the mistress is at all inquisitive—but she had not realized until now that it might be the veritable one that she had returned.

As her husband had known nothing about the return of the present—he really believing Aunt Tabitha had sent a check as announced—Daisy kept her own counsel, and determined on a plan of campaign. If the check was still hidden in the biscuit box, ten chances to one that Tabby, in her ignorance and simplicity, would not have discovered it, and Daisy felt that if she could but gain temporary possession of it she might find the hidden missive and appropriate it, for was it not just as much hers as Tabby's?

The following afternoon the latter was considerably surprised to receive a visit from her stylish cousin.

"How do you, Tabby—Mrs. Jack, I should say? And I'm really ashamed that I've been so long in calling on you after your marriage, but I've been so busy, you know; it takes such a time before one gets such a large house as mine really in order. You have such a snug little place, Tabby, and what a nice room. Everything in apple pie order." And Daisy's swift glance took in everything in Tabby's parlor, her eyes finally resting on the biscuit box placed under a glass shade on the chiffonier. "Oh, was this from Aunt Tabitha?" she continued. "I got one the very same, but as I had ever so many already I had to get it exchanged."

"Yes," said Tabby, "that was a present from Aunt Tabitha; wasn't it kind of her ever to think of me?"

"Do you know, Tabby, she's coming to visit me one of these days, and I don't know what I'm to do about the biscuit box. She doesn't know I changed it, and she'll be awfully offended if she doesn't see it set out. Would you mind letting me have a loan of yours? She would never know."

"Would there be no chance of her looking in on me?" suggested Tabby, humbly. "I'd be so vexed if she did, and the biscuit box away."

"Oh, no; she's too grand to come here; but I'd ask you up to have tea with her at my house, do you see? So if you don't mind I would just take it with me now."

"I would need to ask Tom, my husband, first," submitted Tabby.

"Goodness gracious, Tabby, can you do nothing without asking your husband's leave?" scornfully retorted Daisy. "But please yourself. When will you know?"

"Tom comes home at five."

"Well, I'll look around in the evening. I'm so frightened Aunt Tabitha might turn up at any moment. It will be so kind of you, Tabby, to let me have it."

When Tom Jack came home his wife explained matters, and Tom, a good-hearted fellow, said if Tabby wished to oblige her cousin by all means let her have a loan of the article.

"But it looks a trifle dirty," said

Tom; adding with a laugh, "I wouldn't like your fine cousin to think that we hadn't a butler to polish up our silver plate. I'll give it a clean—er my tea."

And so he set about taking it to pieces, and was in the act of doing so when Daisy paid her return visit. The kitchen blind was not drawn down, and the young couple seated at the lamp arrested Daisy's attention. She saw a slip of paper fall out as Tom unscrewed the bottom.

"What is this, Tom?" she heard Tabby exclaim.

"Let me see—it's like a bank note, wifey; no, it's a check," was Tom's answer. "By gum! listen—'Pay to Tabitha Elder or bearer the sum of one hundred pounds sterling. Signed Tabitha Mason. That's yours, Tabby! Good old Aunt Tabitha!'"

"The dear old darling!" cooed Tabby.

"The old wretch!" was echoed from the outside as the baffled Daisy turned on her heel, having no further interest or concern in Aunt Tabitha's biscuit box.—People's Friend.

VICTIM OF A CONSPIRACY.

Wherever He Goes Death Seems to Be Hot on His Track.

In the adventures of Carlo Cattapani, Marquis de Cordova, now living in New York, there would appear to be ample material for a dozen novels. The marquis belongs to one of the oldest of the titled families of Italy. Some two years ago he started to secure certain papers to be used in substantiating his claims to a large Spanish estate. Since then in every city he has visited his life has been one of perpetual terror, and murderous assaults have been made on him.

The Spanish estate is valued at \$2,500,000 and belonged to another branch of the marquis' family. Before setting out on his quest for the lost papers, which had been stolen from the Cattapani home in Italy, he employed French detectives. These, after a time, summoned him to London, believing that they had located the papers there. The marquis was then at Monte Carlo. One night before he set out for London he was fired on. The incident did not greatly alarm him, as he was then ignorant of the conspiracy against his life.

On reaching London he received an anonymous letter in Spanish, threatening him with death if he persevered in his efforts to secure the estate. He laid the matter before the Italian ambassador, but no clew could be found to those who threatened his life. A little later, while in Birmingham, he was assaulted by three men on one of the streets of the city. He was found, later, lying on the pavement unconscious. When he recovered he returned to London and there received word from one of his detectives in New York that on reaching that city, apparently his enemies learned of his intention of sailing for the new world, for a few nights before his departure he was assaulted in his room. His assailants bound and gagged him and then tied him securely to the bed, after which they lighted a fire in the grate and turned on the gas at full pressure. Meantime they had ransacked his papers. Fortunately the father of the building smelled the gas and traced its escape to its source in time to release the marquis.

During April, 1901, the marquis sailed for New York and took up his quarters well uptown. Here, one day, he received a letter asking him to meet the writer at South Ferry and take his papers along. The letter went on to state that if the marquis' claims were well founded he could have the missing papers then and there.

On reaching South Ferry he saw a carriage in waiting and was invited by two men to step in and drive with them to an office where the matter could be arranged. This was at 10 o'clock on a Monday morning and when again the marquis was conscious of anything it was Friday night and he found himself lying in bed in a hut, near what he subsequently found was Prospect Park, Brooklyn. When he entered the carriage he was apparently hit in the head by some weapon, for he carries a scar as a memento of the occasion. He believes he was also drugged.

When he regained consciousness in the hut he heard voices in an adjoining room and heard the question of his killing discussed. This thoroughly aroused him and he made his escape through a window. Subsequently he tried to find the hut, but failed. The police were also unable to solve the mystery.

The marquis has not yet found the lost papers and apparently is as far from attaining the Spanish estate as ever.

The Drug Store at Fault.

An individual, who from his clothes and the dinner pall which he carried appeared to be a laboring man, recently walked into a drug store on Eleventh avenue and requested to be given a marriage license.

"You'll have to go to the city hall to get that," said the druggist.

"I don't see why. Isn't my money good here? I'm in a hurry, too."

"We don't handle that kind of license," answered the drug store man.

"Well, I was told I could get one here sure, and that d—n justice won't marry me without a license," angrily snapped the fellow as he walked out.

The druggist said that people often come in with requests which would make a stone man smile, "and if you do laugh they get mad," he concluded. —Milwaukee Sentinel.

"White Wings" of London.

The street sweepers of the borough of Westminster, London, have been dressed in so gorgeous a uniform that Maj. Gen. Trotter of the Grenadier Guards recently complained that when guardsmen go out they are frequently taken for dustmen and their feelings are consequently hurt. The Mayor of Westminster, whose official robes outshine even those of the King, has promised to add a blue band to the cape of the sweepers as a distinguishing mark.

WATCHING FOR CYCLONES.

Westerners Fear Them as the Islanders Do Volcanoes.

Recent disturbances by volcanic eruption in the island of Martinique and Guatemala bring out in full measure of sympathy of the residents of the cyclone district of the Southwest. The cyclone is by far the worst form of disaster that visits this country, coming at unexpected times and dealing death and destruction in widespread manner.

When the summer days bring waves of heat across the stretches of hot sod, then the residents of the prairie West begin to cast their eyes to the windward. They are watching the formation of the clouds, and he who could not distinguish a cyclone bank from any other is indeed a tenderfoot. Then the cry of warning is carried across the plains and the members of every family make for their cyclone cellars. These cellars differ in various communities. The popular cyclone cellar on the plains of western Kansas, where cyclones a few years ago were almost a daily occurrence, are ordinary sod houses, built low and strong.

In the Russian communities of Kansas these cyclone houses serve as the family residence the year around. They are about seven feet high, and built exceptionally strong. The roofs are slanting, and the houses are set to the wind, that is, the ends are faced toward the east and west.

In Oklahoma every farmhouse is backed up by a cave, a hole dug into the ground, and covered by an earthen roof. Some farmers have gone so far in protecting themselves against cyclones that they have a small cannon loaded with salt and buckshot, which is fired into the whirling clouds as they approach. This has been known to turn the course of a storm. It is a common event to dismiss school on the plains of Oklahoma when a bank of clouds begins to arise in the southwest. These wind and rain storms are becoming more uncommon every day, and it is believed that the planting of trees and the settlement of the barren sod has had much to do with it. Before Oklahoma was thoroughly well settled dozens of cyclones were reported every day in the hot months. The writer was in the Newkirk one day in the early period of that town's existence, and saw seven cyclones form in the afternoon. All of them followed the course of the Arkansas river, and "struck" in the Osage Indian reservation, far to the westward.

New Faces on Postal Issues.

Within a short time two new faces will appear upon the postal issues of the United States. One of them is a postal card officially known as the "McKinley card," and a postage stamp of the new denomination of 3 cents, having as its central picture the likeness of former President Harrison, will follow soon after.

The new card has a medallion at the upper left hand corner precisely of the same size as the oval at the right containing the portrait of President McKinley. The medallion contains a figure of an eagle with outstretched wings, and bearing in its claws a bundle of arrows and an olive branch. Altogether the design is very attractive, and the card will be the finest ever produced by this government.

The department has finally decided that the portrait of a woman shall adorn one of the stamps of the new series, although what distinguished American now represented upon the postal issues shall suffer retirement to make way for the lady has not been determined.

Long hours have been spent by officials in the department in the effort to hit upon a woman in every way suitable and satisfactory. No decision has been reached, but one point has been settled; she must have been a married woman. Although there are objections to her, the indications point to the final selection of Martha Washington.

Very few people hide their talent under a bushel; most of them drag it out and try to sell it at five times its value.

When a woman has a fine house, how the other women impose on her!