

THE POLK COUNTY ITEMIZER.

DALLAS, SATURDAY, AUGUST 12, 1892.

A VEXED QUESTION.

"Charlie, can you give me some money this morning? Mary's shoes are worn out, and she needs a new pair; and Bridget's wages were due last week—besides there is scarcely anything in the house for dinner."

There was a faint smile on Mrs. Barnard's lips, but her eyes looked anxious.

"Oh, bother! Minnie. How long is it since I gave you ten dollars? Is that used up already? Seems to me women spend a lot of money."

The quick tears sprang to Minnie's eyes, but she did not allow them to fall as she said:

"You know, Charlie, that expenses must go on, if we keep house at all; and if you could bring yourself to give me a regular allowance for them I should not have to bother you so often."

"Well, that's an old story. Here's ten dollars more, and I wish you to be careful how you spend it. And Mr. Barnard took his hat, and—yes—actually kissed his wife, after such an exhibition of rudeness as he would have been ashamed to show to the nearest acquaintance. Then he went to his office feeling very generous and very virtuous."

After he had gone, Minnie went to her room and burst into an agony of weeping. She felt crushed and humiliated, and bitterly angry that her husband could bring such accusations against her at all, but particularly that he could do it in such an airy manner, as though he were giving a light touch to a wooden doll!

And after all her pinching economies, too, in order that the children might appear respectable, and that she might, at the same time, provide a generous and wholesome table, which she considered due to her husband! As for herself, she had not indulged in a new winter suit for five years; and yet she had made over, and touched up, and dyed and darned to such an extent that her obtuse better half was utterly oblivious of either her deficiencies or her sacrifices.

"If I were to appear with a market-bag on my head and the American flag for a shawl Charlie would never know it," she thought bitterly.

"What is the use—what is the use to live at all? And then to have to beg for every dollar to keep the house going, as if I were an uninterested outside party! Can Charlie know how much trouble it is to get on with the house-keeping anyway, even when the money is all provided for him? He puts this additional humiliating burden upon me! Is this the Charlie who was so eager to win me, who paid me such delicate, watchful attentions when I was pretty, free Minnie Wardfield? If married life is only a convenience to a man, in order that he may have an opportunity to throw aside, with his office coat and slippers, the ordinary courtesies of life, marriage must be a universal blunder! Marriage doesn't dull sensibilities—it only heightens them. Those fault can't be! Charlie told me that he never had been rich, but that his income would comfortably support us. Then why all this wrong and sacrifice and pinching in order to appear 'like other people,' and other people with less income too? Then she took the money, where she had been in the habit of taking her troubles for a long time, to the Lord.

Rising from her knees, the resolute little woman dried her eyes, and proceeded to think out the matter in a practical way. Charlie had given me a great deal of money 'tis true, and I have always been very careful in spending it, too. Let me see. Could I get on without Bridget, I wonder, and so save her wages? But then there's the washing and ironing. Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Barnard thought she would have to keep Bridget.

"Well, there's Mary and Phil; they must go to school, and they can't go shabby either—that's certain, and they must have books, too. How I wish I could have books!—with a sigh. 'There's my home paper! It could spare that, I suppose, though it's like a little piece of home every week. Charlie brought home a new parlor clock the other day; we could have done without that, and it makes everything else in the room look so badly, too, in contrast. There's my silver card-basket Charlie gave me my last birthday. It's beautiful, and very good of him, too. I'm so thankful I didn't hurt his feelings by telling him I didn't much rather have had the money for gloves and boots, mine are so dreadfully shabby. Charlie always looks nicely, but then I like to have him. The baby was quiet by this time, and Minnie took a pencil, in a handsome gold case, one of her husband's gifts, too. She thought again as she took it, how good he was, after all, and went to her elegant little desk—all mother of pearl and crimson velvet—for a sheet of paper. Then she made a long list of articles—wages, meat, butter, milk, flour, potatoes, sugar, oysters, tea, coffee, chocolate, pickles, cheese, sweets, wood, coal, light; it was filling up the page fast. Should she scratch out anything? Pickles—they were unhealthy, anyway, but Charlie liked them. Oysters, too. He liked to have a little supper sometimes, and a few very few, four or five—friends. It was very pleasant, and on those occasions she noticed that butter and eggs and sugar went very fast. It must be the cake. Then she made a careful computation. She drew a line through oysters, meaning to bring that question up afterward. The smallest possible allowance for a family of six seemed to be ten dollars a week, and then she must leave out the wood and wages; and where was the margin for incidentals—her own and the children's clothing, books, office, and wear and tear generally, to say nothing of charity?

Yes; it seemed as if they could not get on with less than fifty dollars a month for the running expenses; and she would ask her husband for that amount as the just due. She was convinced it would be right to do so. His income was eighteen

hundred dollars a year, and he ought to afford a regular sum for the family, the amount not being nearly as important as the regularity of its appearance.

For herself—well, she could not ask Charlie for a personal allowance, even if she had been married seven years, and might be supposed to have grown grasping and self-asserting, according to her discipline. But she would ask him for an allowance for the children; and at the rate they wore out shoes and tore up garments she thought five dollars a month little enough for the three. She would not err on the side of avarice, even if she did on that of pertinacity. So, calm in her new resolve, she bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair away from a fair though somewhat worn face, and met her husband at dinner with a cheery smile. After dinner Mr. Barnard announced that he was obliged to go down town.

"Very well, I will sit up for you then," said Minnie.

"Don't! What's the use? You'll get tired and sleep."

"Because I have something to say, Charlie, and there isn't any other time."

"Why not say it now?"

"I should like for more time than you feel able to give, with one hand on the door-knob and your hat in the other," she said pleasantly.

"What the mischief is to pay now, I wonder?" thought Mr. Barnard, but he said, "Well, I'll wait half an hour, and then I'll adjourn to the little parlor, the furniture of which looked rather dingy after several years service."

"It's about money, Charlie," she said, brightly looking up into his face. "For think I spend a good deal, you know, and I suppose I do—more, I think, than I otherwise should if I only knew how much I had to spend. But you must remember that it is not for my own individual gratification."

"Oh, please! Minnie," interrupted Mr. Barnard, impatiently. "Why are you everlastingly pestering me about money? I always give you all you ask for."

"I am not going to pester you any more, Charlie. I simply wanted to tell you so. I would much prefer never to ask you for money, and have concluded not to do so any more. I want you to please take the responsibility of the accounts and the orders yourself, if you cannot give me a fixed sum for expenses. I don't bother with these things, accounts, and find with the strictest economy that we can scarcely get on with less than this estimate, and she handed him the memorandum she had prepared that morning."

"But you know very well, Minnie, I don't bother with these things," Mr. Barnard said, looking at her.

"Somebody must bother with them, Charlie, and if you wish me to continue to do so I must know exactly how much I am to spend, and not be obliged to come to you for every dollar as I want it. The expenses are not mine, they are for the family as a whole."

"Well, if that's all, good-night," and Charlie went out, wondering what under the sun 'possession' Minnie meant.

But Minnie abided her time. She thought she had enough for one day, so she took her mending basket, and while the children were busy at their lessons, and her busy needle flew in and out, she carefully thought over her resources, by which she might be able to earn a little pocket money for her little independence, and even though she had a husband who was not ungenerous but only thoughtless of her wants. She used to play the piano creditably in her girlhood, but was now long unused to practice. She might revive her old taste for maintaining and apply it to purposes of decorative art, but that would take much time, more than she could spare from her family. Finally a question from Phil, yawning over his history lesson, gave her the dawning of an idea. Midnight found her at her desk, where for two hours, completely absorbed, she had been writing skeleton plans of simple historical articles for children, which from time to time she meant to enlarge and fill up in an entertaining style at her leisure. Here-tofore her brain and nerve had been given entirely to her family. If she could make her pen pay for the long-needed 'second girl,' why not? And how much more gratifying to her taste than the endless sewing and darning!

Three days after, Bridget came waddling up stairs, her arms akimbo. "There's not a solitary crust for dinner, ma'am, barrin' the scraps of cold meat and peratties! Sure what'll I do, ma'am?"

"Put it on the table, Bridget; there's nothing else to do."

Charlie came home to dinner, encephalic, overflowing with good spirits, which, however, seemed to diminish perceptibly as the slim dishes one after another put in an appearance.

"Seems to me Bridget is getting rather to the end of her resources; or else it's wash-day all the week," observed Charlie.

"It is not Bridget's fault, Charlie. The butcher's bill is already so large that I dislike to add to it."

"Oh! says Charlie, sententious-ly."

The meat for next day's dinner appeared promptly. After a week of misery, of ill-cooked meals and general lach in all departments which had hitherto seemed to take care of themselves some way, Mr. Barnard came to the conclusion that there must have been a good deal of thinking done by somebody formerly; for things had never before reached this extreme chaotic stage. Then there began to dawn upon the vision of this wise man a possible vision of his dioners, ill-dressed children, and general thriftlessness and shiftlessness which even money alone would not be able to eliminate. In this condition of mind he went one morning to the from his pocket there fell out a scrap of paper in the hand-writing of his wife. It was the estimate of expenses she had given him, and which he had not even thought worth while to look at. He set himself about it now, and proceeded to give himself up to some thinking, the result of

THE CHEERFUL GOAT.

The town goat has the run of the town. He is not domestic in his habits. He is seldom ever asleep. The goat is composed of horns, hair and digestive organs. Then not engaged in busting the breath out of some member of his own family, or peeling the bark off the neighbors' fruit trees, he may be found standing on an empty bare leg, in front of the corner grocery, gleefully chewing wrapping paper and empty sardine boxes. Yet toward him is respected and feared by all who are acquainted with his eccentricities of character. He is a very reliable animal. He can be relied on to eat a week's washing, break several windows, and pursue thirty-seven dogs in the adjoining yard all in one day, and not work half the time. Policemen shoot at him. Boys try to discourage him with stones, and house-keepers empty hot water on him. As a result of these assaults, he usually has chips and splinters broken off at every curve and angle of his body, yet toward him is cheerful and frolicsome. His jaunty tail gives him a debonaire and rakish appearance, that causes some of the people to surmise that he isn't all he should be, as people of strong prejudices are prone to do.

These misadventures of the goat are suggested by an incident that happened last week to an old party named McWhirter, who lives in Wisconsin, and who owns a goat. Old man McWhirter lives on an oatmeal diet and the interest of his life is his goat. On Monday evening of last week, Mr. McWhirter was out in the yard feeding the cow. He had taken off his coat and laid it on the fence. In the pocket of his coat was a morocco pocket book containing government bonds to the amount of \$2,000. Why Mr. McWhirter carried the book in his pocket instead of placing them in a safe, we were not told. When he had attended to the wants of the cow and turned to his coat, he found that garment lying in the mud. The goat had pulled it off the fence, and now stood balancing himself on the roof of the chicken coop. As he came within the range of McWhirter's vision, and a rock that the old man propelled in his direction, he was in the act of masticating what was evidently the remnant of a red morocco pocket-book.

As the awful and disastrous character of the misfortune dawned upon McWhirter, and he realized that his two thousand dollars in bonds were fled away in the digestive machinery of a goat, he gave vent to his feelings in a yell. As the present state of the goat's mind was the will of a bag-pipe leading a funeral procession; and with dismay in every feature and a three-timed hay-fork in his hand, he went for that goat. The goat decided not to wait for him. He did not tarry, but proceeded in a self-assertive and buoyant manner to a large area of the landscape between himself and his owner. The goat was streaking down the street, the irascible old man, coatless and hatless, in full view in his wake. As the present state of the goat's mind was the will of a bag-pipe leading a funeral procession; and with dismay in every feature and a three-timed hay-fork in his hand, he went for that goat. The goat decided not to wait for him. 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