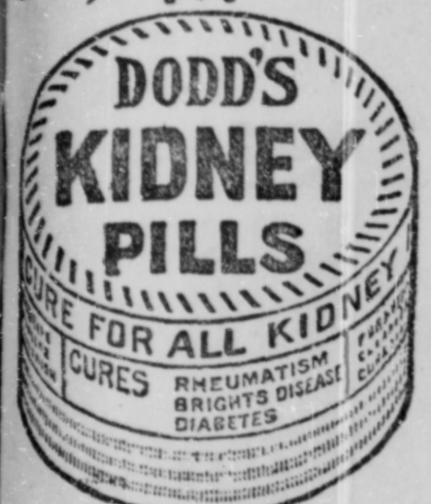


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C. C. CARLTON, JR., Secy-Treas. Souris, Aug 31, 1899

THE WIDOW TILLEY'S GREAT OUTING.

By OCTAVE THANET.

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The widow Tilley had not been out of the little Iowa city where she lived (respected by all) for ten years, but in the two years during which she was saving and reading and listening to prepare for her visit to the World's fair she often told her friend Eliza Merry that she felt as if she had traveled thousands of miles.

As she spoke she glanced around her tidy little room, which was decked with woodcuts from illustrated papers, all repeating the tale of that lovely city of a dream.

She was a tall woman, comely, almost handsome, and she had in her trim suit gown and her neat cap, in her smiling, fresh colored face and white teeth and bright eyes, in her very bearing, which was alert and vigorous as the motions of a woman of 40, although Hannah Tilley would never see her sixtieth birthday again, a kind of dignity and that calm courtesy which comes from an assured social position, whether high or low. Indeed it was well known that if Mrs. Tilley rented a flat at the Atherton it was because she wished in dependence and company combined since she had two houses of her own one occupied by her only child, a married daughter, and the other rented at a good rate. By all odds Mrs. Tilley was the most prosperous tenant in the building, the one whom the tenants always chose to proffer requests for fresh paint or plumbing, the one whom the men or the women always consulted about the spending of the bit of money that they had saved. She had "friends among the rich people," carriages were sometimes seen to halt at her door, her apartments being on the first floor. She had lived for ten years as cook in one family, and the fame of her dishes was yet great in the land. She still earned many a dollar at feasts and with her fruit cake and other delicacies, which many people of her town believe there is no one but she can make.

"Ah, you do have cause to be thankful, Mrs. Tilley," said Eliza Merry from the depths of her heart. Eliza was a little wisp of a gray haired, neutral tinted, melancholy woman, who, according to the tenants, "was born to no good luck." She had been a submissive wife to a drunken and cruel husband and a devoted mother to three wild sons, all safe under the ground now where she could praise and love them without fear. Quite alone in the world, she earned her livelihood as a charwoman, keeping offices neat. She made enough to live barely, and that was all. If she had any pleasures, they came from the woman before her.

"Yes, I am thankful," said Mrs. Tilley. "I don't mind telling I've saved for a year past, and 'lotting on going, and I don't think it's wrong, for Jim and Mercy are going to take the two biggest children, and they'll see all the glories of the world too. If it was so they couldn't, I'd feel I had no right, but ever since they put the money in the bank for it they have been at me to go with them, and fact is, 'Liza, I have been dreaming of it for a year, for says I, I ain't going no hard ways, carrying my lunch with me on the cars and living on nothing while I am trotting round. No; I got a whole room to myself that Jim's engaged for me, and

the house is on the railroad, and I can get in and out as easy and have enough to treat the children. They are only going to stay a week, but I shall stay ten days."

"Well, I do hope you'll have a good time. There ain't anybody deserves it more," declared Eliza.

The widow Tilley looked up quickly, to meet the simple admiration in the other's dim eyes. Somehow it gave her a queer pang and took all the pith out of her complacency.

"I declare, I hate to go off and leave you scrubbing behind," she said, with a frown.

"Tain't your fault," interrupted Eliza quickly. "You offered to pay my fare for a day, and I wouldn't take it. I ruther you saved it to keep for burying me when the time comes."

"Liza, you hush! Tain't so bad as that! Liza, won't you hark to the doctor? He says if you'll only go to the hospital he knows they can cure you. Tain't no mortal disease, if you'll only take it in time. And, dearie child"—unconsciously falling in her earnestness into the language she had used to her children long ago—"dearie child, it won't hurt you one bit. They'll give you ether to smell and put you to sleep, and when you wake up it'll all be gone, and you'll never need to drag around in torment, but be light and spry, like you was a young woman. Why, Lord, you do be young, 'Liza Merry—not 50 till March! Don't you throw away your life! Don't, for my sake, that wouldn't know how to git along without you!"

The tears fairly glittered in her black eyes with her eagerness, but Eliza listened heavily and shook her head. "I'm feared of them hospitals," she muttered. "William Mix, he told me himself there wa'n't no need having his leg cut off, a good doctor told him, but they took him to a hospital, and he couldn't help himself, and they took it off, and him on a wooden leg ever since."

"William Mix 'ud of been a dead man in a coffin if he hadn't lost his leg!" cried Mrs. Tilley stoutly. "And they treated him good as gold, and well he knows it, but he loves to talk and criticize. Ain't I heard him criticizing the president of the United States only yesterday? Him that don't know enough to run a chicken yard, for all his chickens died when he tried to have a incubator, and his poor wife working all winter, she did, to pay for the thing, because it burned up! You know it yourself, 'Liza Merry. And he criticised my cake, that's never before had a hard word from any one ever bought it and paid money for it, but him that got it for nothing thought it wanted

the least bit more spice"—Mrs. Tilley panted to take breath, and Eliza rose.

"I ain't defending him, but sich things frighten a body, you know," she ventured to say as she edged to the door. "I get to go now, Mrs. Tilley."

She would not stay, although Mrs. Tilley proffered coffee and coffee cake. She pleaded engagements and presently the widow saw her plodding wearily across the yard with a great basket.

"She's killing herself!" cried Mrs. Tilley angrily. "Well, it ain't my business. She ain't no kin."

Still frowning, the widow went to a chest of drawers (she called it a chiffonier) and took out a book of photographs and a red book labeled "Guide of the Fair." "Now, I'll enjoy myself," she said. "I'll look at all the places I'm going to see. The Midway—ain't that a name! I'll see the panorama. It will be most like going to Switzerland. Won't Mary Frances open her little eyes when I take her in? I mean to take her into all the shows, bless her little heart! I wish Jane would dress that child more sensible. Like's not she won't have any long sleeved flannels 'long, and the lake breeze so cold as 'tis. Oh, well, Jane's a good girl and she has got a good man, that keeps his job even in the hard times, God be praised! Won't Liza open her eyes when I tell her about all the things I'll see!" She frowned again. "Why won't she tend to that? I know very well it's pride, that's what it is, cause she ain't got money to pay. It would cost money; that's it, and that's why she was asking William Mix what it cost, and he told her what he paid—which I'll bet anything he didn't, for it's a sad heart his doctor has waiting for his bill—I know that. And I mind now how she went round with her face all kind of drawn up the day after. The day was little Mary Frances' birthday, too, and she gave her a whole quarter. Yes, I mind it well. It was 'cause he said so much, the lying scallawag, that she fairly give up all hope of saving the money and, kind of desperate, gave that quarter to the child. Oh, dear! And the decent, quiet, willing body she is! She'll go on working till she drops. I know there's many and many a day she can hardly drag one foot after another. But she works on just the same. But she hadn't ought to be so proud!"

Suddenly she stopped short. She remembered a time of sore distress in her own past, yet she had lived hungry for many a day that time rather than take the county aid or even tell her friends of her needs. "God forgive us all," she added. "I know how she feels."

She took out her purse. There was money in it and a little slip of paper written over with figures. It represented the money waiting in the bank. There was enough to pay for Eliza's stay in the hospital. She looked at it. "I've been thinking of going to the fair for a year," she said. "I'd most rather die than not go." She bundled purse

and book in the drawer together and began to prepare her evening meal. She was a lover of good living even when alone, and there were hash and strawberries and fried mush. She had a mind to ask Eliza to share the tea, but instead she petulantly told herself that Eliza looked so wretched it gave her the horrors and asked Mrs. Mix, the erring and critical William being a printer at night work and not needing to be asked also.

Mrs. Mix was very grateful and very talkative.

"Have you seen how sick Mrs. Merry looks?" she began. "I saw her setting down outside of the courthouse step, her face that white you stopped to look at it, kinder rocking herself to and fro. That big policeman, down there, he knows her, and he come up while I was speaking. And he was real kind. He helped her home to the house, and he got a glass of beer for her. But he says to me, 'That woman looks struck with death,' says he, 'and a better woman there never was!'"

"Nor there wasn't, neither," said Mrs. Tilley gruffly. "Where is she now?"

"Oh, I put her to bed and told her she wasn't to get up, neither."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mix," said Mrs. Tilley. "Eliza's got good friends, and you're one of 'em."

(To be Continued)

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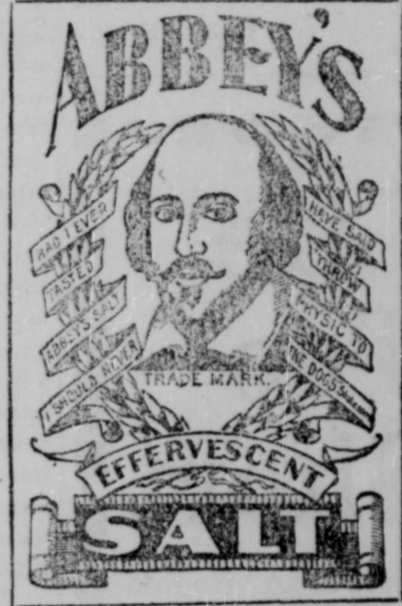
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