



India proof.—A bad impression !

MY AUNT DOROTHY'S LEGACY.

A Tale of the Christmas Hearth.

BY MRS. MOODIE.

“AND is this all the news you have to tell me?” said my cousin, Tom Singleton, drawing his chair closer into the family group which surrounded our cheerful fire last Christmas day. “After a fellow

has been absent from home fifteen years, — a great deal more must have happened than you have thought convenient to relate. You tell me of births and marriages, and deaths, some of which formed the nine day's wonder, and were forgotten before I went to sea; but you have never informed me how Aunt Dorothy left her money."

An ill-suppressed fit of laughing passed round the circle. "Not to *you*, Tom," said my brother John, "or you would have heard that felicitous piece of news before."

"I never expected that the old girl would remember that she had a nephew at sea," said Tom, affecting an air of magnanimous indifference; but though he said nothing, he made his disappointment apparent by the violent manner in which he stirred a good fire which required no stirring, and by the sharp ringing sound with which the poker descended to its usual station.

"I never could stoop to flatter the old woman for her money. Cousin Hook had more tact; he understood such matters better, and was always an adept in angling for gold fish. Do you remember how he bowed and smirked old Walcat out of his money? That mean rascal has found the trade of a *sneak* more profitable than I have the profession of a gentleman!"

"Hook threw out his baits to no purpose. Aunt

Dorothy left her money to those who knew better how to keep it, than Timothy did to wheedle it out of her," said my brother John.

"If it's a good story, let's have it, Jack," said the sailor, endeavouring to hide his chagrin; for he, like the rest of us, had flattered himself that he was a very great favourite with the old lady. He thought that she would have the sense to appreciate the conscientious manner in which he refrained from ingratiating himself into her good graces. He never brought her monkeys, nor parrots, China-crape shawls, curiously carved fans, shells, nor flowered muslins from the East, for fear Mrs. Dorothy should impute his generosity to a baser motive. For all these delicate omissions, Aunt Dorothy sat in judgment upon him, and this was the verdict she returned—That her nephew, Tom Singleton, was a very avaricious, unpolite young man. That as he did not choose to remember his Aunt Dorothy, she would one day convince him that *she* could forget *him*. And so it was—that when her will was read, Tom's name was never mentioned in the huge sheet of parchment which contained the inventory of her worldly goods and chattels.

John Singleton was highly amused by my cousin Tom's display of indifference. After indulging himself for some time at his cousin's expense, he commenced his relation.

"Tom Singleton, in the presence of so many pretty girls, have you the fortitude to cast a retrospective glance over the lapse of twenty years?"

"'Tis no pleasant affair, that," said the sailor, "to find all your happiest and best days on this side of time, and your hopes for the future, floating at random, without helm or compass, on a stormy sea. It makes one inclined to repay dame Fortune for her evil tricks, by casting anchor in the bay of matrimony with my pretty cousin Martha for life."

My sister Martha blushed and simpered at this sudden declaration of cousin Tom's regard, which for some days past she had more than suspected.

"Come, Tom! this is no direct answer to my question," said John, recalling him from an amatory reverie, by a smart tap on the shoulder. "Can you look back on the past for twenty years?"

"By George! can I not?"

"Do you remember bringing my aunt home, one evening, a cat, when you were a boy of ten years old?"

"Why, Jack, you are making me out an old fellow of thirty," said Tom, interrupting him, and peeping over my shoulder at my sister Martha. "Well, what of that cat? — I found it in a wild cat's nest in the wood at the foot of an old ash tree, and carried it home as a great prize to my aunt."

"That cat," said John, "was the means of destroying the hopes of the house of Singleton."

"Did that cat outlive his mistress?—Pshaw! the beast was venerable when I went to sea, and must have died with repletion long ago. Old Toby—she could not leave her money to him?"

"Aye," said John, "that cat survived to be my aunt's heir. In her last will and testament, Mrs. Dorothy Singleton, spinster, bequeathed to her cat, Toby, 500*l.* per annum, to be enjoyed by the said animal during the term of his natural life: and the said spinster further declareth Miss Dinah Pinch (an old maid who resided at the next house) the guardian of the said Toby, at whose decease the property was to descend to (one who in common with master Toby, possesses many cat-like propensities) Mr. Timothy Hook."

"And that cat actually choused us out of our share of my aunt's property?" said Tom, in a most discontented tone. "Ha, ha, ha!" from the whole group, was the only answer that Mr. Thomas Singleton, first mate of the noble East India Company's ship the Lady Louisa, received to his interesting interrogatory.

"Well, Tom," said my brother, goodnaturedly, "it cannot be denied that *you* were instrumental to this extraordinary bequeathment."

"Bu I tell you, John, that cat—and I should



An old Cat!

know the fellow again anywhere — must have paid the debt of nature long ago.”

“Like the great Lama, it never dies!” said John; “it has already outlived its nine lives, and will continue to live as long as Miss Dinah Pinch continues to exist in this mortal sphere.”

“How does she contrive to keep the animal alive?”

“I have been let behind the scenes, and I will tell you,” said John; “but first you must promise not to betray this most sagacious virgin, for, between ourselves, she has made her will in our favour, and if she should outlive Mr. Hook, ‘the king may chance to have his own again.’ I am her executor, and to me she confided the important secret of Toby’s miraculous longevity. When Toby first came into her possession, Miss Pinch was constantly apprehending his sudden demise. Mr. Hook came daily to see him, and had formed so many atrocious plots for his assassination, that she never suffered him a moment out of her sight. He was fed upon the best of food, and regaled with new milk and chicken broth; but in spite of these luxuries, he daily declined, and grew so thin and consumptive, that Miss Pinch sent, in great perturbation of spirits, for the family doctor, and begged him to write a prescription for him. Dr. K—— condescended to inspect his four footed

patient, and declared that no earthly skill could save his life. That Toby was dying of that incurable disease—old age.

“Miss Pinch burst into a flood of tears; and after the man of medicines departed, ordered her carriage, and drove to the Life Insurance Office. A bevy of clerks came bowing to the door to assist her to alight.

“Take care of my cat!” said the cautious Miss Pinch, as Toby poked his head out of the muff into which she had inducted him for fear that the change of atmosphere should affect his lungs. One of the clerks received the muff and its living enclosure with a grin. “Oh yes, Madam, I assure you that I have a very great respect for the feline species,—all sensible people are fond of cats.—Did you ever hear of such an old fool? (whispering to a companion); I verily believe that she has come to insure the life of her cat!”

It was even as the imp of mischief guessed. After a long preliminary speech, Miss Pinch drew Toby from her muff, and asked, with a sigh, “if it were possible to insure the life of a cat?” A peal of laughter shook the room. The gravity of Mr. M., the actuary, was, for once, nearly overturned.

“Indeed, Madam,” he replied, “this is the first application of the kind that ever was made to this office; and were there an office for insuring the

lives of cats, that poor beast would never obtain a certificate from our attendant surgeon."

"Alas!" said Miss Pinch, "what shall I do?" The actuary, in spite of the gravity of his office, loved fun; and thinking that some mystery was concealed within the antiquated virgin's muff, he dismissed his clerks, and contrived to coax the secret out of her. The case of Toby and his guardian was of so novel a description, that he was both amused and interested by it; and after cautiously patting the wealthy, pampered invalid, he gave Miss Pinch, in a confidential whisper, the following advice.

"If I were in your place, Madam, I would insure his life by procuring another cat exactly like him; and I would, at the same time, take good care that the animal is not too juvenile to awaken the suspicions of the residuary legatee. Toby being a tabby, is so easily matched, that you may prolong his life to the age of Methuselah."

Miss Pinch took the hint. She confessed to me, that she was greatly alarmed lest Toby should expire before she had substituted another Grimalkin in his stead. However, she succeeded in procuring a fine middle-aged cat, the very prototype of master Toby: and though Mr. Hook immediately suspected the fact, so strong was the resemblance between the living and the defunct cat, that he

could not get a witness to swear positively to the animal.

"And what became of poor Toby?" said Tom; "she surely was not so ungrateful as to discard him in his old age?"

"He was carried up into the garret, where he peaceably departed this life, and was privately interred in the garden."

My cousin Tom started from his chair and seized his hat. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"To congratulate Miss Pinch on her ingenuity in outwitting that sneaking fellow, Hook — and to look at the cat."

Strange are the revolutions that take place in the affairs of men. Before the year has drawn to a close, Miss Pinch, Mr. Hook, and Toby's substitute, have all paid the debt of nature. My aunt Dorothy's property has been equally divided among the members of the Singleton family; and last week I had the pleasure of dancing at the wedding of Mr. Thomas Singleton (now captain of the Lady Louisa) and my pretty sister Martha.