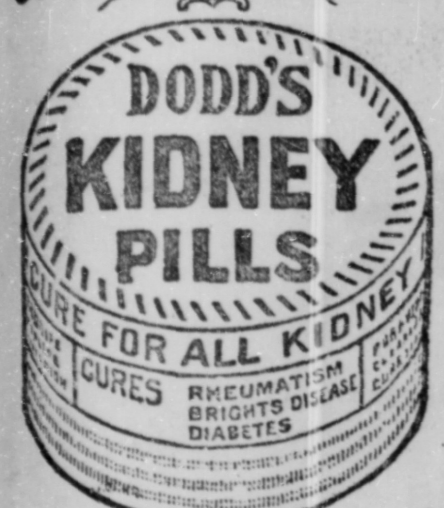


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O. C. CARLTON, J.R.,
Secy-Treas
Souris, Aug 31, 1899

A GATHERING OF LAVENDER.

By ANNIE E. HOLDSWORTH.

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The postman coming down the road could see Miss Caroline in the garden picking lavender. This lavender Miss Jane would afterward make into scent bags for sale. A good summer added so much to their income, but this year here were rumors of a blight, and Miss Caroline's eyes were anxious as she peered among the bushes.

While she picked, Joseph purred and rubbed himself against her gown, thereby hindering the work. Every few minutes the old lady stooped to stroke and admire his tortoise shell sides. Next to Miss Jane, who was still a juvenile—being ten years younger than her sister—Joseph was Miss Caroline's ideal of youth and youthful spirits. To be sure, no one could remember when Joseph was a kitten, but to Miss Caroline he was still young and delightfully frisky.

She noticed now that his pur held a horse note, and her face became still more anxious. She put up her glasses and gazed at him in concern.

"Dear, dear!" she cried. "I do hope you are not going to be ill, Joseph. What should I do without you? If we were parted—if you died!"

Here speech failed, and the quick tears of age gathered in her eyes.

She was a tall, thin old woman, that looked not unlike a sprig of faded lavender. Her gray gown was faded and matched her gray eyes and her faded hair, but her sentiment, like the fresh lavender in her apron, had a fragrant pungency. Suddenly she wiped away her tears, and her face brightened. She had seen the postman coming down the road.

It was many years since he had stopped at Lavender cottage, but Miss Jane cherished a pleasant illusion that some day he would bring tidings of a fortune, and his passing along the road was the event of the day for the sisters. So strongly did Miss Jane believe in her hopes that she had infected Miss Caroline with her expectations. Miss Jane had a practical mind. No doubt she knew that it gave zest to spare meals to believe each one the last they would consume. Hunger could be borne when hope spoke of a letter on its way that would bar the door forever against hunger. It set a halo about the parlor to picture themselves in it undisturbed and safe until death called them.

As long as they believed in the fortune they did not see the skeleton that sat all day on the hearth—the dread of the union. Confidence in the letter hid from their eyes the bare boards of the workhouse coffin.

If it was Miss Caroline who every summer spared a dozen scent bags for the old women in the workhouse, it was Miss Jane who planted daisies on the paupers' graves and tended them all the year round. She was very pitiful for the multitude of dead that charity covered so grudgingly.

Miss Caroline glanced from the postman to the window. Then she smiled and nodded meaningly. Yes, Miss Jane was there sewing. She would see the postman.

The noise of the latch gave her a shock. She could not believe her eyes. The expected had happened. The postman had stopped at the gate. He was coming up the path.

The corners of the apron fell from her trembling fingers, and the lavender sprigs poured in fragrant rain to the

door, not to take the letter, but to call Miss Jane to take it.

It was the younger sister who ruled the house. Miss Caroline never even dreamed of opening her eyes in the morning till Miss Jane had said "Now, sister, it is daylight. We must be rising."

But Miss Jane was already at the door, and Miss Caroline trembled again to see that her composure was disturbed. For all that, Miss Jane took the letter from the postman in silent dignity. They did not speak till they were secluded in the little parlor; then Miss Jane said solemnly "I don't know the writing. It must be the fortune—come at last."

She laid the letter on the table, and Miss Caroline sank into a chair greatly agitated.

"If that is the case, let us thank God," she said in awed tones. She fell on her knees, and Miss Jane, with an uncertain cough, knelt down also. But she remained silent until Miss Caroline murmured, surprised, "Sister, are we not thankful?"

Then, blushing faintly and recalling her confidence, Miss Jane thanked God for his mercy in promising them comfort and a home for the end of their days.

When they rose, their agitation had calmed, they could look at the letter with steady eyes. It lay on the table unopened, waiting Miss Jane's suggestion.

Miss Jane polished her spectacles, and her glance caressed the furniture that had grown old with them. "I was always afraid we might have to sell them," she whispered.

Miss Caroline lifted Joseph to her knee. "Now we can afford cats' meat for Joseph," she laughed. "and peppermints for the old people in the workhouse. And I should like to give them a little shawl each. We know what it is to miss warmth."

"Can we afford them for ourselves, yet?" said Miss Jane. She hated to cast doubt on Miss Caroline's confidence. "Ah, sister," she went on, "if we could purchase liberty!"

"Who knows?" said Miss Caroline, blithely. "We might have enough to build amshouses!"

"Or an infirmary!" cried Miss Jane, forgetting her doubts. "I should like the poor to have a strong young nurse when they are ill. I thought of that when I had bronchitis last year."

"I forget that I must seem very old to you, Jane," said Miss Caroline, humbly.

"Not old, sister, but aging," said Miss Jane briskly. "I wonder what is in that letter!"

"What can it be but the fortune?" asked Miss Caroline. "It is the gift of Providence; just now, too, when the lavender has failed. And we shall be able to put ribbons on the bags after all."

"Ah, sister, you are growing extravagant already," Miss Jane protested. "And you remember you did not believe in the fortune."

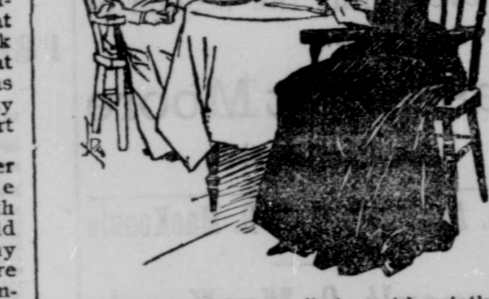
"But you taught me to believe in it," exclaimed Miss Caroline. Miss Jane colored again. She could not deny her guilt.

"I think we ought to open the letter," she said dryly.

Miss Caroline's excitement subsided. She settled herself in her chair and folded her hands meekly.

"I am ready," she said at last.

Miss Jane was a long time wiping and adjusting her glasses. Then she



"It is from William," she said quietly, had to find her paper knife and insert it under the flap of the envelope. To cut the envelope required care and great deliberation, but at length it was done, and the sheet of note paper shook in Miss Jane's fingers.

She looked at the address, and then turned slowly to the signature. "It is from William," she said quietly.

"From William," echoed Miss Caroline. "and we thought him dead." She wondered how Miss Jane could speak so calmly with a letter from her old lover in her hand.

"He is dead," said Miss Jane, "but recently—there is a postscript!"

"And left you a fortune," quavered Miss Caroline joyfully.

"I will read the letter," said Miss Jane.

But when she had read it aloud the sisters stared at each other with stricken faces from which the life had died.

have barely enough for two—and a lame child!" she repeated.

"It is she who writes the postscript," said Miss Jane. "She comes tomorrow at 3."

"And if Joseph were not a good mouser he would often go without meat," Miss Caroline continued her reflections. "and with barely enough! Jane, Jane, we expected a fortune, and it is a burden!" Miss Jane remained silent.

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," sobbed Miss Caroline. "It's not the money, but the poor creatures in the workhouse. And this year we shall not have even scent bags to give."

"It is a comfort that William's child need not go there," said Miss Jane, and her face worked.

"William's crippled child! Impossible!"

Before Miss Caroline's eye came the picture of lame Susan, who sat all day in the hard workhouse chair, and her tears rushed forth.

"That will never, never be!" she cried. "Where there's enough for two there's enough for three."

"Where there's enough for two there's certainly enough for three," repeated Miss Jane firmly. And silence fell.

After awhile Miss Jane rose. "I will go into the village to get muslin for the bags," she said composedly.

(To be Continued)

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Faculty of Medicine Tue. 5th Sept,
Faculty of Law, and Veterinary Science, Sat. 16th Sept

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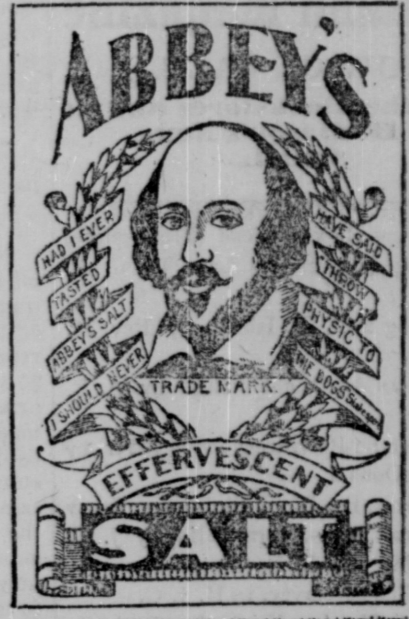
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