

The Oxford Democrat.

VOLUME 43.

PARIS, MAINE, TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 1876.

NUMBER 22.

THE
Oxford Democrat

Published Every Tuesday Morning, by
GEO. H. WATKINS,
Editor and Proprietor.

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Poetry.

FOR THE OXFORD DEMOCRAT.

The Last.

I hear that the aged man is dead,
That to-day he is laid in his earthy bed.
The last, last one of the pioneers,
I knew so well in my early years.

The earnest man whose constant toil
Has left its marks on my native soil.
One by one they have bowed the head,
And left the paths they were wont to tread.

'Neath the hillock they tend in youthful years
Their children have laid them down with tears;
Never again to behold a face
Able and willing to fill their place.

And this was the last of those hardy men,
This hero of four-score years and ten;
We may call them heroes, each man who came
With heart of courage and iron frame.

From the Old Bay State, to win a home
For generations yet to come.
Gardens and orchards now are seen
Where the forest lifted its heads of green.

Houses and barns now rise in pride
Where the cabin stood on the sunny side;
And broad, smooth fields stretch out to-day
Where our fathers cut the woods away.

I remember this man who has died at length,
The youngest of all that band of strength.
I remember him ere his youth had flown,
His round red cheek and peculiar tone.

When wife and children made labor light,
And brightened the hours in their steady fight.
I often think of that neighbor's fire
Atoned which gathered both son and sire.

Each drawing his chair to the genial blaze,
And telling the stories of other days;
Of market journeys, of limbs that froze,
Of many comforts and endless woes.

That fire now warms another race;
Those men have gone to their resting place.
Each bereft of sight, and axe and plow,
Helped to bury his comrades with thoughtful brow.

And now, almost in his dwelling's shade,
For the youngest and last a grave is made.
Peace to that band of hardy men,
Their voices we shall not hear again.

Their hands have left no names on history's page
To grow bright and brighter from age to age,
But still each of a younger race departs
Their names will linger in human hearts.

BUCKFIELD, Feb. 6.

OTTHONA.

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to New Bedford. Susan's children had
the measles, and she sent for me. Her
husband's father lived with them, a fine
old gentleman, smart as a cricket, (only
Susan says he does have the rheumatism
awfully.) and maybe he liked the way I
tended the children, for he asked me all
of a sudden one day to marry him. I
confess I thought for a minute how nice
my tombstone would look with 'Mrs. De-
sire So-and-So, beloved wife of So-and-
So,' on it; but then I thought of that
worthy woman who lived with him so
many years here, and perhaps is waiting
for him now in the other world."

"What did you tell him, aunt?"
"I told him I would have had him in a
minute if he had only thought of it fifty
years sooner."

"But you didn't know him so long ago
did you?"

"Oh, yes I did, and I had no thought of
tombstones then. A tony flash stole
over Aunt Desire's sunken cheeks, and
took at least twenty years from her age
for one instant."

"Now tell us about the first offer," said
Mrs. Oberreiser.

"That was the first—and last," said
Aunt Desire, laughing at Mrs. Oberrei-
ser's expectant face till tears ran down
her cheeks.

"You have proved my doctrine, that a
girl does wrong to herself down through
all her best years."

"No, I have only proved that every
woman has at least one chance to get
married."

"If Sadi's chance doesn't come till she
is seventy it might as well not come at
all."

"I don't think so," said Aunt Desire,
with a faint, sweet smile, that reminded
me of the perfume of flowers long pressed
in a book. "Let Sadi sit in her chimney
corner, and make smooth the way for my
old feet and the little ones to tread. She
is fitting herself to be a good woman,
which is a better thing, (because less sel-
fish) than a good wife. Her lover will
come sometime."

"I wonder how he will look," said I.
"If he is the right man," said Aunt
Desire, "he should have light hair and
blue eyes, because yours are black. He
must be of a hopeful and sanguine tem-
per, because you are inclined to look on
the dark side."

"If he comes with the glass slipper in
his hand, you will be the fairy god-
mother," said I.

"The prince did not come," said Mrs.
Oberreiser, "till the godmother had
taken Cinderella to the ball. He didn't
see her first in her chimney corner."

"Oh, thou of little faith," said Aunt
Desire. "Sadi's lover is to be thrown
from his horse, or likely his carriage, in
front of the house, and brought in on a
board and laid down at her feet. When
he opens his eyes and looks into hers,
full of sympathy and sublime pity—"

"The rest of the story is to be found in
the next number," said I, suddenly put-
ting out Aunt Desire's prophetic fire.
"Matrimony is the one good of women,
and you are its prophet."

When Mrs. Oberreiser was gone, Aunt
Desire sat a long time smiling over her
knitting.

"Fifty years was a long time to wait,"
said I, after a while.

"I was not waiting at all. I was hard
at work all the time. I had my little dis-
appointment, and buried it decently, and
from that time I took more interest in
men's wives than in themselves. Those
few pleasant weeks, when the sight of
my wrinkled face began to stir up the
embers of his old regard for me, were a
sort of reward of merit—something to
make a little glow in my heart when I
thought of it, but it was a free gift from
above, not asked for nor expected."

"Have you had a happy life, Aunt De-
sire?"

"Yes, Sadi. If I had to do it over
again, I don't know that I would alter a
single thread; but I suffered a good deal
because of people like Mrs. Oberreiser—
as you do, Sadi."

"I'm glad of it. I thought myself the
only girl that ever was silly enough to
mind it."

"All women mind it. It is a vulgar
cruelty that has driven many a girl into
an unhappy marriage; but don't think of
it. Go and cut the birthday cake, and
above all, don't pity yourself. Remem-
ber what you read to me about Catherine
II—she was too proud to be unhappy."

"I am not unhappy," I said, with some
scorn.

"I know you are not, but it is a very
fascinating habit to fall into."

After the cake had been cut and eaten,
and all the children laid away for the
night, some thoughts came back to me
that made me blush. I did not need Mrs.
Oberreiser to suggest that it was time
for me to marry if I meant to do so at
all, only my own thought had not taken
precisely that form. I hungered and
thirsted for a love that should be wholly
mine—not shared by a dozen others. I
had enough to do in my orphaned family
to occupy all my best years, but the sore
spot which Mrs. Oberreiser was always
probing, was the fact that no one had
ever shown the least sign of love for me
out of my own kindred.

Aunt Desire's confession was my first
intimation that other girls suffered in the
same way. I had been ashamed of the
feeling that I thought must be something
new under the sun. Continually, I said
to myself, at such times, "I don't want
to marry; that isn't it at all; I only want
somebody to say, 'I love you,' as though

he meant it.
Even our little baby, four years old,
had her little nettle ready to sting me.
"What is an old maid?" she asked one
day.

"A happy woman," said Aunt Desire.
"Why?" asked I.

"'Cause I heard Tom tell Mr. Justin
that Aunt Desire was an old maid, and
you were going to be. I guess it's nice,
I will be one too."

"How long do people talk so about a
girl?" I said to Aunt Desire.

"They kept it up with me till I was
about forty."

"And I am twenty-six—only fourteen
years."

"Just the time that Jacob served for
Rachel, and it seemed to him but one day
for the love he bore her. I wonder how
long it seemed to her? But you are
prettier than I ever was. You may
count on five years more."

We had a busy spring that year; the
children seemed to have outgrown all
their clothes in a body. They could not
spare me five minutes in the day where-
in to be disconsolate, if my heart had
been set upon it never so much. I went
out for a walk the first warm day, and as
I entered the gate on my return I saw an
unusual commotion about the house—

The front door stood open, and the doc-
tor was just going in, while the faces of
the neighbors appeared at different win-
dows.

"Oh! what is it?" I asked breathless-
ly.

"He has had his hand torn on a wheel,
but it won't be fatal."

"Who? Tom?"

"Your brother Tom. He went into the
factory and was careless; that's all."

It was enough, I thought, as I rushed
up stairs, and saw Aunt Desire with
Tom's head in her lap, and the crushed
hand held upright to stop the bleeding.
The doctor was watching for the faint-
ness to go off before beginning his work.

"I shall need two to help me," he said,
"and the rest of you must go down
stairs, and keep the house perfectly
quiet."

"I was with him when it happened,"
said Mr. Justin. "Will you take me?"

"You'll do," said the doctor. "Now
another." But the people had scattered
at the first word, leaving Aunt Desire
and me standing together.

"I want Sadi," said Tom, faintly.
"You look delicate," said the doctor.
"It will need steady nerves."

"She isn't delicate," retorted Tom.
"She's strong as a horse. I won't have
anybody else. You can stand it, can't
you, Sadi?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Stand here, then, and hold the elbow
still as death. If the boy keeps up that
spirit, he'll live through this and a good
deal more."

The first five minutes was easy
enough; but when the red stream poured
out in great gushes my own blood seemed
to gather about my heart, and for half an
instant my head swam.

"Steady!" said the doctor in a warning
tone.

"Look straight at me," said Mr. Justin;
"don't look down at all."

We were both bending forward over
the hand. I met his eyes as they were
within a few inches of mine, and clutched
them, so to speak, as if they were the
anchor that held me to consciousness. It
may have been hours, or only minutes,
that I stood rigid in this way.

"Well done, Sadi," said the doctor, at
last; and I saw only a neat bundle of
bandages at the end of Tom's arm, lying
on a cushion.

While Mr. Justin was bathing Tom's
head I went into the next room and leaned
my face against the cool wall. A sudden
rain of tears blinded me, and had the
same effect as a shower upon overcharged
air. In another minute I should have
been ready to go through the same strain
over again.

"You need not cry; he will do well,"
said Mr. Justin, speaking very gently
beside me; and you were braver than I
thought a woman could be."

"I was not brave at all; I only strained
my will; and this is the way I get over
it. Women cry for a great many reasons
besides grief."

"Do they? I know very little of their
ways."

"I could not have gone through it but
for your help. I thank you very much."

He smiled and held out his hand, giving
mine a cordial shake, as if I were a man,
somehow, to whom he had taken a fancy.

"I will come back in the evening and
watch with Tom." Then he went away,
and I am afraid I thought far oftener in
the next hour of the way that rare smile
lighted up Mr. Justin's plain face than of
poor Tom's troubles. For Mr. Justin's
face was exceedingly plain; at first sight
it seemed all of one color—hair, skin,
eyes, and eye-brows, of uniform yellow-
ish-gray, a second look detected the line
between hair and forehead. A peculiar-
ly well shaped mouth and teeth were the
only redeeming traits about it.

The rarity of his smile proved that he
had no vanity.

Tom's hand had to be examined and
rebandaged every day for many weeks.
Mr. Justin assisted when he was in the
house, which was very often, but some-
times Tom would have no one but
myself. He exacted more attention than
a baby.

The first inquiries, I saw the arch look
that was so disagreeable to me gathering
in her face, and tried to make my escape,
but Tom held my hand and would not
let it go.

"Aunt Desire's prophecy almost came
true, did it not, Sadi? Only it was a
brother instead of a lover that was
brought in on a board and laid at your
feet. What a pity!" said Mrs. Oberrei-
ser.

"What's all that about?" said Tom,
while Mr. Justin lifted his eyebrows.

"Some of Aunt Desire's nonsense;
that is all," said I.

"But I want to know Sadi needn't
be having any lovers. I want her my-
self. Have you got a lover, Sadi?"

"No, no, Tom; don't be silly."

"Well, I knew nobody but women
ever came to see you."

I felt rather than saw Mr. Justin's
amusement at this home truth.

"Your aunt thinks that Sadi will get a
husband just as quickly if she sits in the
chimney-corner tending the baby and
mending your stockings all the time, as
she would if she went about and enjoyed
herself like other girls."

"I agree with Aunt Desire," said Mr.
Justin.

"Oh, indeed! Perhaps you are like
those very sensible men that she knew
in her youth, who looked for nothing but
solid qualities in their wives."

"I hope so," said Mr. Justin, looking
straight and serious into Mrs. Oberrei-
ser's mocking face. I looked up at him
gratefully, and his face grew suddenly
bright with that rare smile. It was as if
the sun had all at once flashed through
red curtains into a dull, empty room. He
looked absolutely handsome for the first
time.

"Then Sadi would do for you excel-
lently," said Mrs. Oberreiser.

"Come now," said Tom, "that's going
a little too steep. Sadi hasn't been
married twice, if you have, and she has
some delicate feelings left."

Mrs. Oberreiser was going to be very
angry, but Mr. Justin said gently, "A
sick boy has privileges," and the storm
blew over.

I had become accustomed by this
time to Mr. Justin's quiet way of always
stepping into the breach at the critical
moment. He spoke very little at any
time, but usually to break some awkward
pause in the conversation; but his mere
presence in a room gave me a sense of
security.

In spite of his own perfect self-pos-
session, I could not meet him with quite the
same freedom after Mrs. Oberreiser's
call as I did before. Tom grew better,
and Mr. Justin's visits became less fre-
quent—the idea which had begun to
suggest itself to my mind that part of
them were meant for me was nipped in
the bud. I blushed more than ever over
my innermost thoughts. Two years be-
fore, we had placed Tom in the counting-
room of a factory in which Mr. Justin
was book-keeper.

Tom had immediately conceived a
boyish passion for him, and of course I
had heard his praises every day. I had
never met him, except for a brief intro-
duction in the street, until Tom's accident
made us intimate friends.

It seemed to me we must always be
that, we had so many thoughts in com-
mon. I was not in love yet, or at least,
if I were, the feeling wore a different
face from that which I had been looking
for.

"I haven't seen you for three days,"
said Tom to him fretfully. "By-and-by
you won't come at all. I have tried you
out."

"No, my boy, you are better now, and
I find I can not quite stand the night-
work."

"Night-work! What do you mean?"

"Of course, if I spend so many hours
here, I have to make it up some time."

"Oh, forgive me, said Tom; I will
never ask you to come again. Will you
Sadi?"

"Not unless he likes it," I stammered.
"I like it too well," said Mr. Justin in
a very low voice.

"What's that you said?" said Tom.

"Nothing worth repeating, Tom. I
will come again soon," said Mr. Justin,
and he went away at once.

A few minutes after, I went into Aunt
Desire's sitting-room, and found Mr.
Justin standing on the hearth-rug before
her in a very dejected attitude. For once
his upright, cheerful mask (if it were one)
seemed to have fallen away from him.

"I thought you were gone," said I in
some confusion.

"I thought so

