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## UNCLE DAVID.

BY MISS SEDGWICK.

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[p. 17]

The return of Uncle David, after an absence of three years, was impatiently expected by two families of nephews and nieces—the Masons and the Cliffords—who resided in New York. He was a bachelor who, at the period of which I am speaking, had fulfilled more than half of life's allotted term, during the greater part of which he had been a rover—only returning among his friends often enough to keep their memory of him fresh, and to make the acquaintance of those new claimants to his favour with which the circle was from time to time enlarged.

He was what is called a queer man; perfectly independent in his modes of thinking and acting; shrewd, a little bit sarcastic, and strict in his antiquated notions of economy, propriety, deference to superiors, and all such old-fashioned

[p. 18]

things. But he was, withal, very warm hearted, and so fond of children, and so devoted to them, as to make himself a great favourite, in spite of that sin of strictness commonly considered by the young the greatest of all offences on the part of their elders. He was, besides, rich and generous, and although he never thought of administering to the pleasure of children through their appetites, or by providing expensive sources of amusement whose attraction lasted only while they were new—and therefore never showered upon them either *bonbons* or toys, he had his own very acceptable methods of making them exceedingly happy whenever he chose to do so.

For instance, he secured the lasting gratitude of George Mason, who had quite a taste for mineralogy, by fitting up and storing a cabinet of minerals—of Mary Clifford, by his sympathy in her love of drawing, which he manifested by providing her with every possible facility for cultivating her talent, and furnishing her, from time, to time, with beautiful prints and pictures. These at length accumulated to such a degree, that he said she must have a picture-room: which was accordingly fitted up, under his direction, with great taste.

Frank Clifford had a taste for whatever was curious; and to him his uncle brought, from all

[p. 19]

parts of the world, every variety of curiosity. Sarah Mason, on the contrary, was more interested in her own species than in any thing else —had quick feelings and a tender heart. Her he made his almoner; and in nothing did she take more pleasure than in dispensing his charities. When he was at home he very often employed her in this way; and never went away without leaving with her a fund, part of which was to be appropriated to specific purposes, and the rest to such objects of charity as she could discover and her mother should pronounce worthy.

And this reminds me to mention the great importance he attached to the inculcation, upon young persons, of a wise and proper use of money. Previous to his last departure from the country, he made to each of these four children whom I have named, a present of ten dollars— saying that he was like the man in the parable going into a far country—that he should not give to one ten talents, to another two, and to another one—but should give to each a small sum, that he might be able to test, by their mode of spending it, their idea of the value and uses of money. He wished them to spend it without advice,—in whatever manner they thought best; remembering that he expected they would turn it to some good account.

[p. 20]

All these children felt quite a weight of responsibility in regard to what they called their trust-money. George Mason resolved that he would not be in haste, but would wait and see what occasions might offer for its use. Sarah Mason seemed to feel less troubled than the rest, put her money in a place of safety, and said nothing more about it. Frank Clifford declared that he should take an early opportunity to dispose of his; for he had rather fail to please his uncle, than be bothering himself about such a paltry sum: while Mary was sure she should have no difficulty, as not a day passed in which she had not a dozen opportunities for spending money usefully, if she only had it to spend.

Not long after Uncle David's departure, Mary Clifford lost a little brother, and she did not hesitate to expend her ten dollars in a locket made to contain his hair. Frank was sent into the country to school—and, notwithstanding his previous intention of a hasty appropriation, determined to leave his at home, in Mary's care. His spending money exhausted, he fell into the habit of borrowing, as one little imaginary want after another arose, and at length sent for his ten dollars to discharge his debts—saying he did not know any better use money could be put to, than paying one's debts.

[p. 21]

Mary wrote an account of her brother's death to her uncle, and took the same opportunity to mention the purchase of the locket. Receiving Frank's application for his money before her letter was sent, she mentioned it, together with his accompanying observations, in a postscript. In process of time she received an answer. Her uncle expressed, very kindly, his sympathy in her affliction and sorrow for the loss sustained,

he said, by himself in common with the rest,— for he always identified himself completely with each of the families. With regard to the locket he expressed himself thus—" It is certainly agreeable, and often very proper, to have such mementos of our departed friends; but considering, my dear Mary, that my very object in giving you those ten dollars, was to set your mind at work for the sake of finding out how you might do the greatest amount of good by so small a sum, I confess I am a little disappointed at the result. Men of business talk about dead capital—that is, money that yields no interest. Such is now your ten dollars. Do you think I regret this on account of the money itself? Far from it—but then it might have procured, either for yourself or some one of your fellow creatures, a lasting and substantial good—the best of all modes of preventing

[p. 22]

its becoming dead capital. As to Frank, I believe I must make the information you have given me in regard to him the subject of a special message, as the presidents say."

Accordingly, Frank received, by the same packet, a note from his uncle to the following effect:—

My Dear Frank—You may think it very strange that I should " make or meddle," as the phrase goes, with whatever disposal you may have chosen to make of the small sum with which I presented you on my departure. 'Tis true it was your own—that you had full liberty to do with it as you pleased—and were you not so well satisfied with yourself on the matter, I might let it pass. But I perceive, my dear fellow, that you are already beginning to delude yourself with false pretences, such as mankind are ever prone to, when duty clashes with inclination, and I wish to put you on your guard in this respect; because, to this very propensity at least one half of the sin, sorrow, and mortification, there are in the world, may be traced. It is certainly true that debts ought to be paid, but it is no less true that foolish and unnecessary debts ought not to be incurred; and your reasoning is very much like that of a merchant who should

[p. 23]

buy his own goods, and live extravagantly, in order to increase his business, or a lawyer, who should get into foolish quarrels, in order to give himself professional employment. Excuse me, ray dear Frank, and believe me,

Your truly affectionate uncle, David Mason.

"What a queer man Uncle David is!" said Mary Clifford, after reading his letter to her. "He was very fond of little David, his name- sake, too. I cannot conceive why he should object to my having that locket. In regard to Frank, however, I think he is quite right,"—and Frank thought so too.

Six months passed away, and neither George nor Sarah Mason had yet found a sufficient reason for parting with their trust-money. Sarah, in her capacity of almoner to

her uncle, had become acquainted with many poor families in the city; but for these objects of charity she had a separate fund, which she did not feel authorised to increase by adding to it that which had been given her to spend upon her own responsibility.

There was employed in Mrs. Mason's family a dressmaker—Miss Walker—very lovely in her character, whose parents, old and infirm, depended upon her exertions for their support. During the

[p. 24]

winter after Uncle David's departure, they had a great deal of sickness, and died late in the spring. Miss Walker, exhausted in mind, body and estate, looked as if on the very borders of a decline.

Mrs. Mason's physician, having attended Miss Walker's parents, became extremely interested in her; and speaking of her to Mrs. Mason, said it was exceedingly desirable that she should leave off work entirely, and go into the country to recruit.

Mrs. Mason took the earliest opportunity to persuade her to do so; but she replied that it was out of the question, for she had not the means.

Sarah, having overheard the conversation, immediately conferred with George; and they agreed that if their mother thought their united fund sufficient, it should be appropriated to a journey for Miss Walker. Fortunately the latter had a friend, living in a healthy village at the distance of a hundred and fifty miles, with whom she might pass some time very pleasantly; and by way of removing her scruples to accepting the money, Mrs. Mason gave her its history.

The plan took effect, and Miss Walker, after spending two months away, returned quite renewed, happy, and fit for exertion. The Cliffords did not know of this investment

[p. 25]

made by George and Sarah, until Miss Walker told them of it. Her check glowed, and a tear stood in her eye as she spoke of it; and she finished by saying, "I do believe, Mrs. Clifford, that it was not more the journey itself, than the delightful feeling which such kindness and sympathy in those dear young hearts produced, that cured me." Mary, as she looked at her animated, happy countenance, remembered what her uncle had said about—looked at her locket, and for the first time regretted the purchase.

Uncle David returned; and after this long absence was hailed, if possible, with greater joy than ever. When he left home, Mary Clifford and Sarah Mason were both just about fourteen, and therefore the three years of his absence were precisely those of their life in which that most marked change from the girl to the young lady takes place.

The Masons and the Cliffords were brought up under very different influences. The Masons were made to respect themselves and others only for what is intrinsic and permanent; while the Cliffords were taught, indirectly, to place the highest value upon externals. The Masons were led to find their greatest happiness in useful improving occupation, and in devoting themselves to the happiness of others; the Cliffords to depend upon

[p. 26]

others, rather than upon themselves, for happiness, and to consider amusement as the chief end of man, or at least of woman.

Uncle David was struck with surprise and deep interest in seeing the change which had come over his two nieces. They were both good-looking, graceful, and lady-like; but there were intrinsic differences in them which became more marked as they advanced in life. Their uncle closely watched them both, and was not sparing in his criticisms whenever he thought there was occasion for them. Mary affected, a little, the blue stocking—that is, without any great taste for literature, or love of knowledge, she liked to have the credit of both. She always walked to school with a pile of books under her arm, and when sitting at home had always some book about her, to make it appear that they were her constant companions.

She used, too, occasionally to hint that the paleness of her countenance was owing to her intense application—although the fact was that Sarah surpassed her in scholarship, as much as in flesh and colour.

"Mary," said Uncle David, one day, "since you hang out your flag so constantly, why don't you prove to us your right to your colours? I have sometimes seen pictures with explanations

[p. 27]

appended—as, 'This is a cow—This is a bunch of roses;' your books are *your* inscription, which is I suppose intended to run thus: 'This is a literary, learned lady.' Now I think it should be with the lady, as with the true, fine picture, which explains itself. Miss Edgeworth it is, I think, who says that knowledge is like a deep stream, known not by the noise it makes but by the rich verdure and vegetation which it produces. Now if you really have a well improved, highly cultivated mind, let us perceive it in your conversation and conduct, but don't be for ever hanging out a sign."

Poor Mary used sometimes to be not very submissive to her uncle's reproofs, and declared that he was the only person in the world from whom she would endure them. His manner was not that of a grave censor, but of a regular *tease*, and teasing, though it may be just as severe as scolding, is generally much less offensive, perhaps because it is usually carried on in a jesting manner, and therefore the subjects of it have the apparent liberty of taking it in jest, if they choose.

Another of Mary's infirmities was an excessive sensitiveness upon the subject of gentility. The fear that she should not be strictly genteel, in every thing, was a constant source of annoyance, and led to the commission of many follies.

[p. 28]

One day Uncle David was walking in Broadway, with a niece on each arm. They were directly joined by a fashionable young man of their acquaintance who offered his arm, to Mary. Soon after, they met Miss Silsby, a charming young woman, who taught the girls drawing. Mary hardly seemed to recognise her, and passed on—while Sarah stopped, took her cordially by the hand, and had many kind enquiries to make as to what had happened to her in a period of some five or six weeks that she had just been absent from the city.

Uncle David was much attracted by Miss Silsby's appearance, and learned from Sarah the circumstances of her history, such as have been told of many a young person reduced, by misfortune, from affluence, to the necessity of earning her own livelihood.

Nothing connected with his nieces ever escaped his observing eye. He had perceived Mary's contemptible pride, and determined, if possible, to make her ashamed of it. "Mary," said he, a few days after, "what sort of a young lady is Miss Silsby; is she cultivated, and pleasing?"

"Yes; very."

"And she draws beautifully?"

"Yes."

"And her pupils are quite attached to her?"

[p. 29]

"Yes, they like her very much."

"Does she visit you?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Why it is not the custom, you know, to associate with one's teachers."

"Associate with one's teachers!—but you do constantly associate with them, else how could they teach you?"

"Oh ! that is not what I mean; I mean that you don't invite them to your house."

"But I am sure I have heard Sarah speak of Miss Silsby's visiting her."

"Oh, well—Sarah is different from the rest of the world, and does as she chooses."

"Then you don't do as you choose in excluding Miss Silsby from your visiting circle?"

"Oh, yes, I do—I feel and think differently and as the rest of the world do—not as Sarah does."

"Well, if you do not choose to admit Miss Silsby to your intercourse upon terms of equality, it must be on account of some superiority on your part. Are you better than she?"

"Oh ! no, not half so good."

"Are you better educated?"

"No."

"More accomplished?"

"No—not half so much so."

[p. 30]

"Are you of better parentage?"

"No."

"What then! your circumstances do not compel you to turn your talents to account in procuring you a livelihood?"

"Yes, sir"—Mary was compelled, though half reluctant, to reply.

"Then a person is more respectable who uses her talents not at all, or for show, or for amusement, than one who uses them for a useful and necessary purpose?"

"So the world has it."

"And accomplishments, which, while they are merely ornamental, command admiration and respect, the moment they are turned to useful account, become a source of degradation?"

"Oh ! uncle!"

"Make their possessor unfit for the society of elegant idlers—unworthy of being spoken to in Broadway—when a young lady has a fashionable beau in her train?"

Mary blushed.

"Oh, how I should like to see both my nieces superior to this ridiculous nonsense of the world, which makes people esteemed just in proportion to their total want of every useful aim and occupation in life; which holds them in honour, not for what God has endowed them with, but for

[p. 31]

what they or their friends for them have accumulated of this world's dross."

Not long after this conversation, Uncle David planned, for his nephews and nieces, including Frank and George, who were just now at home during a vacation, an excursion to West Point, and he requested Sarah that she would invite Miss Silsby to make one of the party. He then informed Mary of this last arrangement, saying, "I hope we shall not lose your company in consequence of it, my dear."

All the Masons and all the Cliffords, little and big, were of this joyous party; but Miss Silsby was evidently the nucleus of the whole. The little ones sought her, instinctively, as one ever ready to devote herself to their happiness. She could tell the best stories, sing the prettiest songs, and attend to them when every one else was too busy to notice them at all. Nor were the elder ones less dependent upon her. She was always ready for a ride, a walk, or a scramble—the most courageous, the most resolute, the most agile, and the most enthusiastic of the party. Her pencil was ever at hand to sketch a pretty scene which any one of the party was particularly desirous to retain fresh in his mind; she would rise early and sit up late, or vice versa, according to the humour of her companions; a pleasant

[p. 32]

joke called forth, on her part, that joyous peal of laughter, which rings so pleasantly upon the ear; and her sympathy was equally prompt and hearty when any occasion arose of trouble or sorrow.

Nor was this all: being extremely well versed in the history of our country, and especially of its most eventful period, the revolution, this circumstance of course added to her attractions as a companion at West Point, so famous in our revolutionary annals.

It was one afternoon when they were sitting in Kosciusko's garden, that Frank and George began to beg her for a story, saying they did not know why she might not indulge them, as well as the little children, in that way. She replied that she could not possibly



draw upon her invention as in their case; but, if they liked, she would give them some history of Kosciusko's romantic and noble career.

They accepted the proposition most gladly, and she detailed the events of his life from its commencement to its close, in such a manner as awakened the deepest interest in every one of her audience, especially in the boys. "How much pleasanter and more interesting this garden seems now," said George; "I wonder I have never had more curiosity about Kosciusko." After this, the boys gave Miss Silsby no rest

[p. 33]

until they had obtained from her the whole story of Arnold's treason and Andre's capture and execution, and every historical fact associated with West Point. Uncle David was not always present when these stories were told, but the children did not fail to tell him of all their pleasures, and he said to Mary, "Why Miss Silsby is a literary lady too, it seems, although she never hangs out a sign, that I can perceive."

"Oh! do be still, uncle," said Mary.

Uncle David had never been a very great admirer of women. In fact, he had known very few, but he seemed to be particularly attracted by Miss Silsby. He planned many little excursions of pleasure from time to time, in which she was always included, and he hardly ever failed to offer Mary in explicit terms the alternative of remaining at home, if she objected to the ungentility of her companions; for "I think," said he, "by this time we must all, in your eyes, come under the same condemnation." Now and then, she had more than half a mind to take him at his word, but could not resist the attraction of a party of pleasure.

The period allotted for his visit at home passed delightfully away, and the time fixed for his departure was rapidly approaching. Loud and frequent were the lamentations poured out by the

[p. 34]

whole tribe of nephews and nieces, and all joined in an unanimous petition for what they called a reprieve. At length he told them that his future plans depended on what he should hear from a correspondent to whom he was shortly to write. They begged the letter might be sent without delay, and he gave his promise to that effect.

The following evening, there was an assembling of the two families in honour of Mary Clifford's birthday. Contrary to his usual custom Uncle David took his leave early in the evening. When all remonstrated, he told them that the correspondent of whom he had spoken was in the city, and he must have an interview; but would return, if possible, before they dispersed.

When he came in, late in the evening, he was immediately asked his decision.

"I shall not go," said he; "I am about to form a partnership in the city, and shall give up going abroad, at least for the present."

"Oh! rejoicing, rejoicing!" cried all the little ones.

"Dear uncle! how glad we are," said Sarah, throwing her arms around his neck, while all the rest closed around him, with looks and expressions of great pleasure.

"Bless your dear hearts," said he, "I did not know that I was of so much importance among

[p. 36]

you; but I shan't be contented, for all that, unless you like my partner as well as me."

"Your partner as well as you! that is a droll idea," several of them exclaimed.

"An ungenteeled partner, too, Mary," he continued.

"O, uncle," said Mary, "now I suspect you. I know, I know."

"Know what, know what?" asked one and another, impatiently.

"Is it not so? uncle?"

"Is it not how, my child?"

"It is a matrimonial partnership you are going to form?"

"Ah-ha! uncle," said Sarah, "I might have known as much. I wonder that I could have been so stupid; children, Uncle David is going to be married, and I guess I know to whom."

"Well, I know who I had rather have for an aunt than any body else," cried little Julia Mason, "and that is Miss Silsby."

"And, God willing, you shall have her, my darling," cried Uncle David, embracing her, "for she has given her consent."

And then there was a clapping of hands, a jumping, and shouting among the little folks, and the most indubitable testimonies of sympathy and satisfaction on the part of the seniors of the

[p. 36]

company, saving Mary, who it must be confessed felt a little awkward.

"If you are only half glad, Mary," said her uncle, "it is all that I can possibly expect, and therefore I shall be quite satisfied."

"Well, I am at least that, and perhaps I may, in time, become entirely so," she replied, kissing him.

The wedding was, of course, a most important affair to the young folks. Indeed it would have been no wedding to Uncle David, without the presence and sympathy of his nephews and nieces.

On the morning of his wedding day he enclosed, to George and Sarah Mason \$100 each, in an envelope, on which was written "we must celebrate our wedding with good works." To Frank Clifford he enclosed ten, saying, "If you have debts, my dear boy, pay them; if not, make what use of this little sum you please."

Frank was delighted to be able to say that he owed nothing, and never had incurred the most trifling debt, since his uncle's reproof and advice. Mary Clifford received, on the same occasion, a pretty ring. She felt the delicate reproof, but was, nevertheless, pleased with her gift.

George and Sarah regarded their gift almost as heaven-directed. Miss Walker, the dress-maker, had, for some time, been engaged to a very worthy young man, who, from no fault of his

[p. 37]

own, was as poor as herself. He had, at one time, amassed by his industry a sum sufficient to set himself up in his trade, and the marriage was to take place very soon; but a long and severe fit of illness involved him in expenses, by which his little capital was so much reduced as to be altogether insufficient for his purposes. The two hundred dollars made good the deficiency, and Miss Walker's marriage followed closely upon Uncle David's. Of course the pleasure of this charity, was one in which Uncle David felt peculiar sympathy just at this time.

*Aunt Fanny*, Uncle David's wife, became a greater favourite than ever, with all the nephews and nieces; and would not, for any thing, that their uncle should cease to have the same fond familiar intercourse with them as formerly. Her house was ever their chosen place of resort; her influence over them was highly valued by their parents, and delightful to themselves. She was charming in her own home, and occupied a commanding position in society.

Uncle David firmly believed himself the happiest man in the world. "What a pretty mistake I should have made," said he, after he had been married about a twelvemonth, "if I had weighed my wife only in the balance by which your genteel people measure merit; hey, Mary?"