

The House DIVIDED Against Itself

Two Brothers Fell Out Over Who Should Have Their Grandfather's Chair. And This Was the Result: For Twenty-Three Years Neither Spoke to the Other. Each Occupied Exactly Half of the House. Their Sweethearts Rejected Them Because of the Row.



Their Table and Stove Stood Half on Luke's Side of the House, Half on Mathew's. Luke Used One Side of the Narrow Stairway; Mathew Used the Other. And Then a Storm Came Along and Undermined the Cottage and the Feud of Silence Ended.



Mathew Gregory.



Luke Gregory.

ONE of the strangest tales of estrangement and reconciliation, of the persistency of human stubbornness ever told, comes from Wilkesbarre, Pa.

It is the story of the house, divided against itself, that fell—literally—into the hands of two brothers—twins—who for twenty-two years lived in the same house, side by side, worked in the same mine, sat at the same table, each without speaking or recognizing the fact of the other's existence.

Luke and Mathew Gregory were the twins, and the scene of their strange and pathetic life drama was at the edge of Wilkesbarre, in the great colliery region from whence the great anthracite supply of America is derived by the armies of brave men delving deeper and deeper into the hills that line the Wyoming valley for its wealth of black diamonds.

They are Scotch by birth, and came as lads less than 3 years old with their father, John Gregory, from the collieries near Glasgow, the father seeking better wages and more chances for his sons in America. With Scotch thrift he saved even with the low wage of miners, and among the foreigners he rose to a position of boss in the mine, a kind of assistant superintendent. He carried insurance, and when an accident left him a cripple he had his little home on the hillside above the smoke and grime of the washeries paid for, and the accident insurance and the benefits from the union swelled his bank account.

The boys were 17 when the father became a cripple. The mother was dead, and they were going into Wilkesbarre to learn other trades and complete their education when it happened. The father did not want them to be miners, but the boys were forever in the collieries, the blood of generations of coal miners was in them and was not easily overcome. They had worked picking coal in the washery in summer, and Luke, upon whom the mining fever was strong, had served as a doerboy underground until his father discovered him.

The crippling of the father brought a crisis. The boys no longer obeyed. They informed

him of their intention of becoming miners, and that day went together to the superintendent and entered the pit.

In five years both were men, and partly because of their own strength and their father's influence, both were coal cutters, full-fledged miners, and earning as much as their father ever had been able to make as a worker.

Father Gives Each Half.

Then the father died, leaving to the boys equal shares of his belongings and to each a half interest in the house and its contents. The house was of brick, a simple story and a half cottage, with a large living room, a dining room, and kitchen downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs, each with its little gabled window. The heat was furnished by stoves—one in the front room, one in the dining room, and the cooking was on a small stove situated in the center of the kitchen and with the stove pipe entering a chimney that ran directly up to the center of the roof. The stove in the dining room was on the north of the chimney, and that in the living room to the south of the chimney that extended up the center of the house, as did the kitchen chimney. There was no basement.

After the death of their father Mathew and Luke continued to live in the cottage and work in the mines. They were thrifty and their wants were few.

In June, 1889, they celebrated their thirtieth birthday by taking a day off and inviting a few of their friends to join them at dinner. That night, after the friends had gone, the foundations of their trouble were laid. They sat smoking together on the little platform porch by the front steps, and after much hesitation Luke broached the subject he had been striving to reach for the last hour. He told Mathew he was thinking of getting married. He discussed it in the abstract, and to his surprise discovered that Mathew had been having the same idea and had postponed from day to day mentioning it to his twin brother.

They were relieved. The idea of twins sep-

They Refused to Sell the House at a Big Profit Because Both Still Demanded the Chair.

arating after thirty years with scarcely a day apart was strange, and yet they knew it must come. They talked it over earnestly, neither mentioning the fact that he had the girl he wanted to marry in mind. They discussed a division of the property. They agreed to build from their joint savings another cottage just the size and shape of the old one, on the lot they owned next door, and agreed to a penny how much more the occupant of the new house should pay for the new.

Old Chair Starts Quarrel.

They divided that property bit by bit, yielding to one another in various ways until they commenced to discuss the ownership of the great arm chair their father had brought from Scotland, a chair that had been his father's and his father's father's before him. Both claimed that chair. At first they spoke lightly of it, yet neither had the slightest intention of yielding. They joked each other about it. Then they grew serious and more serious, until they went stalking to their rooms, in black anger at each other, each charging the other with being a stubborn and unreasonable person.

The discussion was renewed over the early breakfast in the morning, and they argued hotly as they walked down to the lift that was to take them to the pit. They quarreled

again at night, and each grew more and more determined. For the next month they were quarreling constantly and growing more angry. Then Luke one evening came home radiant and announced that the girl with whom he was in love had promised to marry him.

"Ye maun gie me the cheer as a weddin' geeff," he suggested.

"I willna," snapped his brother.

Two days later the brother returned home and, after announcing his success in love, made the same request and was refused.

The chair balked all efforts at division of the property. Neither man would yield. Two months, four months passed. First one girl, then the other grew nettled, then angry, and finally dismissed the suitors who were fighting over an old chair.

It was in December, 1890, just before New Year's, that after a particularly heated argument Luke declared that they would divide the house and all within it and that he never would speak to Mathew again. Mathew retorted as angrily.

And So the House Was Divided.

Grimly the two men went about the task. A line was drawn up the center of the front walk, up the porch steps, across the porch, and through the middle of the house. The stove in the front room was on Luke's side of

the dividing line, that in the dining room was on Mathew's. The dining room table was placed exactly across the center mark, the mark was drawn through the center of the cook stove and up the pipe. Chairs and all was equally divided, save the great arm chair. That was placed exactly in the center of the front room, and it was agreed that on alternate days it could be used first by one brother, then the other. The grimly angry brothers set to work, sawed the front and back doors in halves, and hinged them so that either could open his own half without touching that of the other. Bricks and metal divided the cook stove in the middle, oven, fire space, and all.

When the preparations were complete the brothers retired to their own portions of the house and commenced their long silence.

For twenty-three years neither man spoke to the other nor crossed the dividing line. In the early mornings they cooked their own breakfasts, each on half of the stove, carried the food to their own ends of the table, ate, washed the dishes, and set out together for the mine, side by side, but speechless.

On the days when Luke was entitled to use the arm chair he drew it to his own side of the cottage and for long hours sat smoking in silence. The next night Mathew enjoyed the same privilege. Many nights they sat each on his own side of the front steps, smoking, until the cool night air drove them inside. Then they rose together, each to enter his own side of the door, climb on his own side of the little stairway to the bedrooms.

When the kitchen stove burned out and a new one was needed Luke laid money upon it, half to a penny of what was needed, Mathew covered it, and without a word they went together to the store and ordered it sent up and set up. The stovemen carelessly moved the stove an inch or two farther into Luke's territory than he should have done, and Luke moved it over, measured to make certain, and said nothing.

Besides the arm chair, only one other thing they shared—the Bible that had been their

mother's. One night Luke would read his chapter and shove the book over to Mathew. The next night Mathew read first and pushed the book back. In the daytime the Bible rested half on one side, half on the other, of the dining room table.

As Told in the Scriptures.

The property on which the little cottage was built had grown valuable. The colliery buildings had approached nearer and nearer to it, and the great company that operated the mines wanted the site of the cottage for new offices and executive buildings. The brothers would not sell. Each time the company's representative approached Luke he agreed to sell at any figure Mathew would accept, provided he got the arm chair. When the buyers came to Mathew he met them with the same proposition. The office buildings were to be built anyhow, and preparations were made to erect them so that they almost surrounded the cottage and the little lots around it.

The excavations were started, and a big one was made right alongside the cottage, which stood almost on the north edge of the lot line. The work was in stone, and the heavy blasts shook the cottage and the filled in earth upon which it was built.

In January a heavy snow melted quickly. Mathew and Luke were asleep in their rooms, when without warning the earth under one wall of the cottage gave way and slid into the trench. The cottage cracked, slid, and collapsed, sliding and falling to the north into the excavation.

Before the crash of falling bricks and rending timbers ceased Luke's voice was heard calling, "Matty, air ye hurted?"

That cry broke the silence of twenty-three years. When the rescuers reached the scene Luke was dragging Mathew from the ruins. The chair was crushed and wrecked.

"A house divided against itself maun fall. 'Tis scripture an' a warnin' upon us sinfu' men," said Luke the next day, when the reconciliation was complete.