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"Dan's Wife":  
A Newly Discovered  
Sarah Orne Jewett Story

by PHILIP B. EPPARD

ALTHOUGH THE VAST ARRAY of American periodicals publishing short fiction in the late nineteenth century may have been gratifying to authors seeking to sell their stories, it has caused endless problems for bibliographers. Even though much bibliographical work has been done to track down all the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, Richard Cary has noted, "It is conceivable and highly probably that others appeared in obscure sources and have not yet been recovered."<sup>1</sup> "Dan's Wife" was published in *Harper's Bazar*,<sup>2</sup> not a particularly obscure source. It was, however, an outlet which Jewett rarely used. The pages of *Harper's Bazar* during the 1880's and 1890's were filled with distinguished New England stories, principally from the pen of Mary E. Wilkins, but also by Rose Terry Cooke, Annie Trumbull Slosson, and Alice Brown. Besides "Dan's Wife," however, there is only one other recorded appearance by Sarah Orne Jewett in *Harper's Bazar*.<sup>3</sup>

"Dan's Wife" is a story of domestic conflict and its ultimate resolution. Ann Parish has sacrificed throughout her life for her two children. Her daughter is dead and now her son Dan is bringing home his new bride Hannah. Ann Parish is unprepared to surrender any of her household duties and authority or to see Hannah assume the place held by her daughter. The strain of sharing the housework and of striving constantly to please her mother-in-law is too much for Hannah. Taken seriously ill, she lies near death deliriously wondering what she has done to displease Ann Parish. The harshness of Dan's mother melts in the face of Hannah's delirium. Her recovery finds a new relationship established between the two women.

Despite the title, the story is really about Ann Parish, a strong-willed country widow unable to adjust to sharing the house and her son's affections with another woman. The title of the story, however, emphasizes the point of conflict, for it is as Dan's wife that Hannah is found to be objectionable. Throughout the story there are suggestions that Ann

1. Richard Cary, "Introduction," *The Uncollected Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Colby College Press, 1971), p. iii.

2. XXII (2 August 1889), pp. 562-563, 569.

3. "The New-Year Guests," *Harper's Bazar* XXIX (11 January 1896), pp. 29-31. The title was changed to "Aunt Cynthia Dallett" when collected in *The Queen's Twin and Other Stories*.

Parish is genuinely fond of Hannah. But her past misfortunes have caused her affections to atrophy or to be restricted only to the narrow channel that flows toward herself and her son. The interjection of town comment reinforces this view of Ann. It is the crisis of Hannah's illness that proves sufficient to break the blockade of affections, however. Ann Parish redeems herself in the eyes of her daughter-in-law and also in the eyes of the community as represented by the two women gossips. By viewing the new relationship between Ann and Hannah through their eyes, Jewett escapes the maudlin sentimentality with which the scene might have been drawn, yet still succeeds in showing the resolution of the conflict with a characteristic touch of warmth.

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