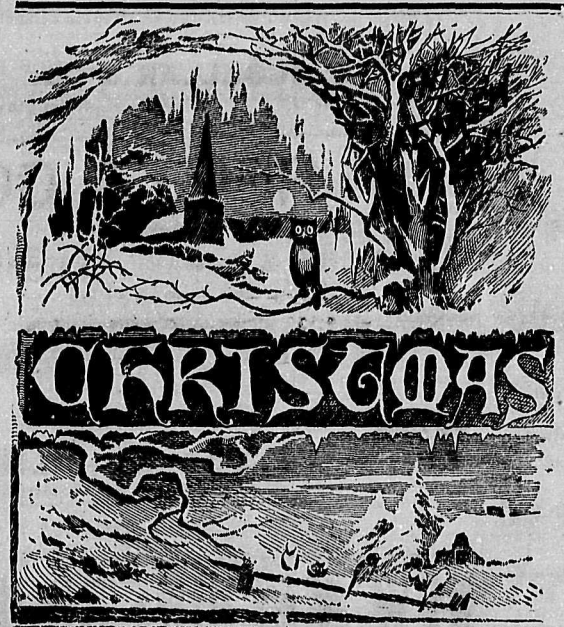
The Columbian.

HOLIDAY SUPPLEMENT.



CHRISTMAS
is here;
Winds whistle shrill,
Icy and chill,
Little we fear
Weather without,
Sheltered about
The mahogany tree.
—Thackeray.

"LONG AFORE I KNOWED."

BY JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

This delicious gem of the Hoosier poet is here presented, with due apologies to Judge, which first printed it:

Jes' a little bit o' feller—I remember still—
Ust to almost cry for Christmas, like a youngster will,
Fourth o' July's nothin' to it!—New Year's ain't a smell!—
Easter Sunday—Circus day—jes' all dead in the shell!
Lordy, though! at night, you know, to set around and hear
The old folks work the story off about the sledge and deer,
And "Santy" skootin' round the roof, all wrapped in fur and fuzz—
Long afore
I knowed who
"Santy Claus" wuz!

Ust to wait, and set up later a week or two ahead:
Couldn't hardly keep awake, ner wouldn't go to bed:
Kittie stowin' on the fire, and Mother settin' near
Darnin' socks and rockin' in the skreeky rocking chair:
Pap gap', and wonder where it wuz the money went,
And quar'l with his frosted heels, and spill his liniment:
And we a-dreamin' sleigh bells when the clock 'ud whir and buzz—
Long afore
I knowed who
"Santy Claus" wuz!

Size the fireplace, and figger how "Old Santy" could
Manage to come down the chimbly, like they said he would:
Wisht that I could hide and see him—wondered what he'd say
Ef he ketched a feller layin' fer him thataways?
But I bet on him, and liked him, same as ef he had
Turned to pat me on the back and say, "Look a here, my lad:
Here's my pack—jes' he'p yourse'l like all good boys does!"
Long afore
I knowed who
"Santa Claus" wuz.

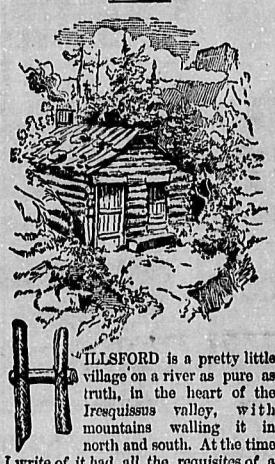
Wisht that yarn wuz true about him as it 'peared to be—
Truth made out o' lies like that-un's good enough fer me.
[illegible] I still wuz so confidin' I could jes' go wild
[illegible]in' up my stockin's like the little child
[illegible] lap to-night, and beggin' me to tell
[illegible]ndeers, and "Old Santy" that she
[illegible]ell;
[illegible] for this little-girl-sweetheart of
[illegible]
Long afore
She knows who
"Santy Claus" is!

Xmas Greetings.

A mayd soe sweete,
A byrd soe neate,
And plentye of holyday cheere.
Olde friends we'll meete
And with hand clasp greete,
For Xmas now is here.

HILLSFORD'S HERMIT.

A CHRISTMAS STORY, NOT AFTER THE REGULATION PATTERN.



HILLSFORD is a pretty little village on a river as pure as truth, in the heart of the Iresquissus valley, with mountains walling it in north and south. At the time I write of it had all the requisites of a thriving town, including a population which dripped with self satisfaction. This very comfortable commodity was so dense and universal that it fairly covered the place like a fog.

Hillsford's most remarkable citizen was a hermit, an unkempt and eccentric individual, who lived in a cabin high up on the North mountain, and was known as "Old Weaver." In winter, when the foliage was less abundant, his small dwelling could be seen from the village, a little speck of crude architecture, the smoke from which curled sometimes into the very sky. It was pointed out to visitors, who were told, without loss of time, of the hermit, his civilization defying habits and unspeakable appearance.

But it was difficult to exhibit the man himself. He came down to the village at infrequent intervals and then tarried only long enough to procure some simple necessities and departed without holding speech with any one. The townspeople had tried to break into the privacy of his home without avail. They had been repulsed with looks and gestures which inspired fear and helped to confirm the opinion that "Old Weaver was crazy and had better be let alone."

And surely no man in his right mind could live the life he lived. His hair and whiskers showed no respect for the prevailing fashion in hirsute trimming, and his clothes were a slap at all decent garments. He rarely spoke at all, but when he did his words were briefness itself.

In summer they who went near his cabin sometimes found him sitting outside reading the Bible, an occupation from which they could not easily divert him.

This caused some to decide that he was "a religious crank," and helped to dissipate the theory that he had committed some terrible crime. Hillsford was full of wonder about the hermit's past life and antecedents, but as there was absolutely no way of finding out it was obliged to remain in cruel ignorance. All it knew about him was that several years before the time I speak of he had arrived in the village, purchased a piece of land on the top of the mountain, reared a cabin and begun a life of solitude perfectly incomprehensible to the people of the valley.

At last they mostly settled down to the belief that "Old Weaver had been crossed in love." Everybody knew that love, if it did not run smoothly, could upset people completely. This gave him exceptional interest in the eyes of the young and sentimental, although the most imaginative among them could not picture him as having ever been a personage capable of inspiring the divine lunacy.

Never were they fully sensible of his value as a romantic figure until after he had been "written up" for a New York journal. A newspaper correspondent, on his summer vacation, wandered into Hillsford, and, of course, soon heard about the hermit, since he was all there was outside of the usual and uninteresting in the place. He at once spun out a column and a half of solid nonpareil, mostly speculation, tinged with sentiment, about the curious recluse.

This had a good result. It dignified the old man in the minds of the Milfordians. It lifted him from the rank of a crazy old mountaineer to an eccentric hermit, with extraordinary sentimental possibilities behind him.

* * *

It was often said that Weaver would be found starved or frozen to death some time. So every winter there was talk of "looking after him," by those in authority, but it ended in talk, as he was not exactly the kind of man to dictate to. In the vernacular of Simpson's grocery, he was "a hard one to tackle."

In the beginning of the hermit's last winter on the mountain some hunters, driven by cold to his cabin, entered and found him moaning on his rude couch. They spread the news in Milford, and "the authorities" conferred together and decided that it was time to act. But what should they do with him? Nobody could go up to his lodge on the mountain to take care of him; his wretched dwelling contained no comforts. And nobody wanted to take him into his home. There was the county house, where all paupers were sent, but that was near the county seat, seven miles away.

They who were most outspoken in the matter of having him "looked after" and who owned the largest and most comfortable houses, "hemmed and hawed" when it came to a question of taking him in. Some one, in a moment of humane feeling, suggested that the seven miles' journey to the poorhouse might prove dangerous to the sick man, and might even throw serious blame on those who became responsible for it.

However, after much thought and more talk had been put upon the subject, the poorhouse faction prevailed, and the fiat went forth that Old Weaver must be taken charge of by the county, willing or unwilling.

The expedition set forth the next morning. It was principally composed of "the authorities," otherwise hard headed and dictatorial personages, with that degree of heartlessness peculiar to the class known as "prominent citizens." A heavy snow lay upon the ground, and the mountain roads were unbroken. A big sled, generously supplied with straw and lunch baskets, was made ready.

The departure of this hermit capturing expedition was an event. The postoffice loafers gazed upon the imposing spectacle with envy in their hearts, though they cheered the noble philanthropists roundly. The people at the corner drug store were all outside waving their hats and making other demonstrations of good will and interest. The yarn spinners at Simpson's grocery held their tobacco firmly between their teeth and their hands in their trousers' pockets as the sled went by. This was their manner of expressing a very warm interest. Women watched from doors, windows and porches, as women always do, and a swarm of enthusiastic small boys hung on to the sled until driven back when half a mile out of town.

The philanthropists reached Weaver's cabin late in the day, after digging their way through great snowdrifts. All this heroic exertion made them feel more dominant in spirit than ever. The very first rap on the hermit's door had the sound of authority in it, delivered as it was by the formidable fist of the town marshal, backed by the approbation of the other prominent citizens who accompanied him.

There was no response.

The expression of decision on the marshal's face deepened as he began to beat upon the door with both fists and kick it with the thick soles of his tremendous boots.

Still there was no answer.

While they were parleying about whether it was time to use the ax or not the closed shutter of the hermit's single window opened, revealing his haggard face, in which blazed a pair of eyes whose wrathful lightning fairly annihilated the prominent citizens.

"What do you want?" he asked, after a moment of discomfiting silence, as they stood, wordless, under the spell of his unspoken anger.

"We heard you were sick," said the marshal.

"Well?"

"We know you would need help," said the justice of the peace, "and so came to try to do something for you."

"You have put yourselves to unnecessary trouble. I want nothing."

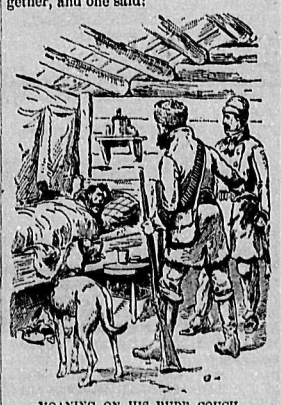
"But our duty as citizens will not allow us to let a fellow being suffer," said Deacon White.

"Your first duty is to mind your own business," said the hermit.

"Here is Dr. Horsefly, who will help you right off, if you will let us in," said Mr. Smollett, also a prominent citizen. The doctor stood silent, medicine case in hand, the rigidity of the regular's code preventing his doing any trumpeting on his own account.

"When I am weary of life I shall send for Dr. Horsefly. Until then he must excuse me," returned the hermit, with something like merriment dancing in his wild eyes.

The doctor colored under this deadly insult, feeling it the more because the earth was yet fresh over his two last patients. This offensive defiance of their authority was the tacitly understood signal for a concerted rally of the rescuers. Instinctively they drew nearer together, and one said:



MOANING ON HIS RUDE COUCH.

"Come, come, Weaver, this is no way to do. We are here in the friendliest spirit, and are sincerely anxious to have you taken care of. You are a sick man. You ought not to be alone as you are."

"Well, what do you propose to do with me?"

"Why, why—take you where you will be properly cared for, of course," answered Justice McCracken.

"Now, that is kind, I admit," said the hermit, and he looked at them with a strange, amused expression in his eyes. Believing that they were gaining ground, they grew bolder.

"Yes, we wish to be kind. We can't let you perish up here, you know."

"Well, where do you propose to take me?"

"Hem, h'm: why, you see, Weaver—you see Hillsford has no hospital—and"——

"But you have fixed upon some place for me, I presume?" questioned the hermit, in the tone of one about to surrender.

"Y-e-s," spoke up another. "We thought we would take you to Johnstown."

"Ah, that's the county seat, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And the county house is near there, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's a good enough place for any one who wants to go there. I don't. Now it is time for you to leave," and he shut the window.

The besiegers conferred together and again began to beat upon the door. Feeling more courageous when Weaver's wild eyes were not on them they called to him that he must consent to go with them, or they would take him by force.

The window opened once more and revealed the gaunt form of the hermit grasping a shotgun. Instinctively the attacking party fell back a few paces.

The hermit spoke: "I will blow the head off any man who again lays a hand upon my door. I am in my own house, on my own ground, and there is not law enough in the republic to permit you to enter and lay a hand on a man who is neither criminal nor pauper. Had you come here proffering private charity I should have resented it, but I should have respected you. As it is I will kill you like dogs if you trouble me a moment more." And he pointed the gun at them in a way that was convincing.

Grumblingly they moved away. "He's right," said the justice, who had a mortal fear of firearms; "he's not a pauper. He owns this ground and he owns the house. If he won't come with us willingly we shall have to let him alone."

"He's as crazy as a kite," piped up two or three others, anxious to cover up their chagrin.

"He ought to be confined as a dangerous lunatic," said the doctor, in whose bosom still rankled Weaver's poisoned arrow.

They reached Hillsford in a crestfallen frame of mind, all agreeing that the hermit might die a dozen times over before they would "put themselves out" to do anything for him again.

Two weeks later, when the weather was bitter cold, Robby Hart, a sturdy 12-year-old, rushed into his mother's sitting room one afternoon, bursting with news. "Old Weaver's in town," he panted.

His mother looked up from her sewing machine with interest. Like everybody else in Hillsford she knew the history of the fruitless siege of the hermit's cabin.

"Yes, he's here; awful sick, too; out of his head, and is lying on the floor in the back part of Hunt's grocery. They're goin' to send him to the poorhouse at Johnstown."

"Not in this terrible weather," said Mrs. Hart, looking alarmed.

"Yes; right off. There's no place here for him, they say."

"No place for a poor old sick man in all Hillsford? We are not so bad as that, Robby, I am sure."

"Oh, but I heard Judge Markle and Deacon White and all of them say so. It's settled."

"I WILL KILL YOU LIKE DOGS."

"Perhaps not," said Mrs. Hart as she began to put on her bonnet and cloak. She was, perhaps, the poorest person of refinement and education in the town and the most benevolent. She was a widow, whose only dower were a boy of 12 and a girl of 9 years. By sewing almost night and day she managed to keep the wolf out of sight.

Accompanied by Robby she went over to Hunt's to see the hermit, and at once knew that he was sick unto death. As the sled which was to transport him to Johnstown drew up at the door Mrs. Hart touched the arm of Judge Russell, who seemed to be clothed with more authority just then than any of the other "prominent citizens" who hovered about, and said:

"I will take care of Weaver if you will send him to my house. He is a very sick man, already greatly exhausted by his journey down the mountain. The drive to Johnstown might kill him."

"Really, Mrs. Hart, you're always doing too much for others. Young Dr. Clay was in here a bit ago, and he said the old fellow oughtn't to be moved so far. But you'd better think twice before you take him. He'll be an awful charge."

"I know that," she answered; "but I will take him and do the best I can for him." So the hermit was put upon the sled and delivered at Mr. Hart's like a bale of merchandise. The widow's unselfishness kindled a temporary flame of the same nature in other breasts, and for the moment volunteer help was plenty. She took advantage of some of this to get her patient bathed and barbered and put to bed in a comfortable, Christian way.

Then began for her weeks of care, work and anxiety. The sewing machine was silent, with the unpleasant consequence of low finances. Contributions to the comfort of the sick man fell away as time passed and the affair became an old story. Young Dr. Clay alone remained faithful. The donations of others had dwindled down to advice. All in all Mrs. Hart had "a hard pull of it."

At last the hermit became convalescent. Finding himself in a home where refinement and kindness prevailed, he fell into the ways of its inmates as naturally as if he had been accustomed to civilization all his life. He talked genially and charmingly, and seemed possessed of as much information as any man of the world. Clad in his right mind and conventional clothes, he lost his character of hermit entirely. Many of the signs of age, too, had disappeared under the good offices of the tailor and the barber. He did not look a day over 45.

He was quite well now, but he showed no disposition to return to his semi-savage life, so far as any one outside of Mrs. Hart's home knew.

* * *

Christmas was almost at hand. Hillsford was busy buying its presents and getting up festivities. At Mrs. Hart's the preparations were on a scale so simple that they were almost pathetic.

Two days before Christmas the town had something new to talk about. A middle aged gentleman and lady of the upper class, apparently, arrived at the Hillsford hotel and asked for Weaver. While they rested and dined they were regaled with the story of the hermit's queer doings, the ineffectual attempt to send him to the poorhouse, the widow Hart's interference and everything. Then they were piloted to the Hart door, and for two days afterward, although the town was almost eaten up by curiosity, it could find out nothing at all about them.

It got the whole story on Christmas from The Weekly Chronicle.

THEIR CHRISTMAS GIFT.

Our readers will be surprised and gratified to learn that Mrs. Caroline Hart was married night before last to Mr. Vincent H. Weaver, of New York. The ceremony took place at the bride's home at 8 o'clock. The groom's sister, Mrs. C. P. Stevenson, and her husband, also of New York, and two or three of the bride's closest friends were the only guests.

Mrs. Hart, now Mrs. Weaver, as everybody knows, is one of the most highly respected ladies of Hillsford. Although far from rich, she has been philanthropic to an extraordinary degree.

Every one knows how Weaver, the hermit, fell sick one day early in the winter when he came into town to buy some supplies, and Mrs. Hart had him removed to her cottage to prevent his being taken to the county house at Johnstown. But not until recently did any one know that Herman Weaver the hermit, and Vincent H. Weaver the celebrated author were one and the same.

It has been generally believed that our hermit had been the victim of some cruelty at Cupid's hands, and for this reason had deserted the society of his fellow men. We learn from good authority that this diagnosis was incorrect. He lived in his mountain cabin because he could there devote himself to the work of writing his books without the risk of being lured away by any of the thousand diversions which tempt him from his toil in the city. His character of semi-savage was assumed to protect him from intruders.

Mr. Weaver really did not live in his mountain lodge half the time he was supposed to. Often, for months together, he would be absent, mixing with the wits and litterateurs of the metropolis. He has even been several times to Europe, while the people of Hillsford supposed him to be within his solitary cabin.

Eccentric he is, to be sure. For instance, we have been told that before he spoke of marriage to Mrs. Hart he put $30,000 in her name in a substantial New York bank and settled a handsome sum upon each of her two children. He wished to make her independent before the question of marriage was discussed, and he considered her entitled to all he could do for her for having taken him to her home, thereby saving his life when he was at death's door.

This is a true love match, without doubt. Their Christmas gift is the very best in Santa Claus' pack. It is labeled "Love," and comprehends the better part of earth and a portion of heaven.

Mr. Weaver made a final trip to his cabin on the mountain the other day, and wrote across its door in big letters, "It is not good for man to be alone." Mr. and Mrs. Weaver will build a splendid house here for their summer home, but will spend their winters in New York. They left yesterday to finish the season there. We wish them every happiness under the sun.

This startling piece of news caused many an eye to protrude when it was read. "I always thought that Mrs. Hart was a designing thing. Sly, oh, so sly. I'll warrant she knew that Weaver was a rich man or she never would have taken him in," said a woman who, only a month before, had expressed the fear that the widow "would have old Weaver on her hands for life."

GERTRUDE GARRISON.

Beautiful and right it is that gifts and good wishes should fill the air like snow flakes at Christmas tide. And beautiful is the year in its coming and in its going—most beautiful and blessed because it is always the Year of Our Lord.

MR. DAWBA[illegible]

BY T. W. ROBERTSON, AUTHOR OF "SOCIETY," "SCHOOL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"Would you have the kindnesss to step this way, sir, into Mr. Dawbarn's room?"

These words were addressed by a banker's clerk to a young man whose dress and manners were a vulgar compound of groom, betting man, and pugilist. The sporting gentleman swaggered by the desks and the clerks, looking infinite disparagement at the whole concern, and was ushered through the double doors into presence of Mr. Dawbarn.

Mr. Dawbarn was the principal banker in Bramlingdon, and Bramlingdon was the county town of the little county of Mufford. It consisted of one long, straggling street, beautified by five old churches, each a splendid specimen of architecture, which contrasted strongly with the Town Hall, the Corn Exchange, and the Market Place, which were modern buildings, and unpleasant to look at.

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn to the young gentleman of sporting appearance, "I have to talk to you, sir, very seriously; sit down, if you please."

Mr. Studden sat in a chair as if it were a saddle, shut one eye knowingly, and examined the thong of his whip with the other.

"Mr. Studden," continued the banker solemnly, "I have been informed that you have overdrawn your account to the amount of"——

"Yes; I know all about that, governor," broke in Mr. Studden. "I've been told so twice."

"I therefore gave directions that the next time you presented a check, you should be shown in here to me," said the banker.

"That is—a check of my own drawing."

"Quite so."

"Well, now I am here," said Mr. Studden, goading the side of his imaginary horse with his left heel; "respectful comps, and should like to know your little game. What's to be done?"

"Mr. [illegible]iden, I have known you from a boy."

"Well, I know that."

"And I now see you a ruined man"——

"Hold hard, Matilda," interrupted Studden; "not ruined—pushed for the moment—on my knees, but not staked. I've been unlucky on the races this last year—unlucky at play. Why, last night I lost a pot at loo, and then that girl behaved to me in"——

"Mr. Studden," said the banker, closing his eyes, "I cannot listen to a catalogue of your cri—cri—imprudences. I am the father of a family, and"——

"Cut that, governor!" broke in the amiable Mr. Studden. "What I want is money, and not preaching—no preachee and hoggee too. This is the state of the odds. I've overdrawn my account, good; will you let me have some more? tin, I mean. If you will, I am sure to retrieve myself. I've some splendid things on, but must have the ready—ti—iddity—rhino."

"Mr. Studden," said Mr. Dawbarn, "I do not understand your jargon, nor is such language the sort of thing I am accustomed to hear. You have lost the fortune left you by your father in gambling, horse racing, and—and the like. For the last seven years I have seen going to irretrievable ruin. As you had a long minority, and no friends to advise you, I have tried to help you, but I regret to say, your complete ruin is inevitable—inevitable."

"Bet you fifteen to one it isn't!" said Mr. Studden.

"What you owe me," continued the banker, not noticing the interruption—"what you owe me I shall never trouble you for."

"Bless you!" said the irreverent Studden.

Mr. Dawbarn's face reddened. "Mr. Studden," he choked out, "I am not accustomed to be treated with rudeness, and I don't mean to begin now. I would have given you some advice, sir."

"Don't want it, thank you."

"Good advice, parental advice; but it will be of no use, I can see."

"Not a bit."

"I shall leave you therefore to the pursuit of your career of profligacy, and may it—may it"—Mr. Dawbarn stammered, for he felt that he was proposing a toast at a public meeting—"may it prove to you that—that—that"——

"Out with it, governor," said the insolent young sporting man.

"No, sir, I will not out with it," said the banker, majestically. "I will not say what I was going to say."

"Are you quite clear what you were going to say?" inquired the young man, who respected neither age nor wealth.

Mr. Dawbarn covered his defeat grandly. "I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Studden." He rang the bell. "I wish you good day, sir; my servant will show you out."

"Very good, governor," said Mr. Studden, dismounting from his chair, or saddle. "You throw me over—very good; and just at the moment when I could make a colossal fortune. If I had your capital, or you had my talent and speculated—ka foccilum!—what might not be made with the tips I have! I know the way out, Chawles"—this Mr. Studden addressed to the servant—"you needn't show me. Mr. Dawbarn, I have the honor to be, sir, yours truly, ever to command, et cetera—cetera—cetera."

Mr. Studden departed with a flourish, leaving the banker in a state of the most wrathful indignation. Mr. Dawbarn was a great man in Bramlingdon and accustomed to be treated with respect and deference and servility, and though so excellent a person, Mr. Dawbarn was something of a humbug, and the young man's manners had convinced him that he knew it, and it is very annoying to men of 50 years of age to be found out by their juniors. Mr. Robert Studden, or, as he was called, Mr. Bob Studden, or Mr. Rip Studden, swaggered past the cashier and clerks with the ease of a jockey and the grace of a groom. A dozen steps from the door of the bank he met a clerk whom he stopped.

"Hallo!" he cried, with graceful badinage, "Munro, how goes it?"

"How do you do, Mr. Studden?" inquired the clerk.

"Don't be in such a hurry. Well, how is she, eh?"

"Mr. Stud—I"——

"Don't be afraid, my boy. I'm not the man to spoil sport. Why not bolt with her? Bolt! I'd lend you my last fiver to help you. I saw you the other morning. Ri-tol-de-rol, lol-de-ra."

[illegible] sudden closed one eye, thrust his [illegible] to his cheek and strolled down the [illegible] struggling street of Bramlingdon, [illegible] sporting self consious vulgarity.

CHAPTER II.

[illegible] country town it is impossible that [illegible] can be kept secret, except murder; [illegible] then rumor points to so many [illegible] criminals that justice and detection become lost in surmise, and [illegible] innocent that the guilty may go [illegible] to detect murder, the proving [illegible] is swift at the discovery of love. [illegible]meo met Juliet at a fancy Ball [illegible]ham, instead of at a masquerade [illegible]ona, and afterwards prowled [illegible] garden of his mistress' father's [illegible] Signori Capulet and Montague [illegible] been informed of the occurrences [illegible] following morning by several [illegible]d credible eye witnesses—all of [illegible]x, and the majority on the other [illegible] five-and-thirty years of age.

It was Christmas day, cold, clear and frosty. Mr. Dawbarn was dressed in his brightest black, and his cravat was as a monument to the most irreproachable of laundresses. But Mr. Dawbarn was pale and agitated, his head shook and his hands trembled, till the papers he held in them rattled and crumpled.

When a servant opened the dining room door and announced "Mr. Munro," Mr. Dawbarn turned paler, and when the young clerk whom Mr. Robert Studden had so playfully rallied a fortnight before in the street entered, the banker trembled more violently.

"Mr. Munro," said the banker, when the door was closed, "you—you—you doubtless know why I have sent for you—on this festive occa—sion—sion, today?"

The young clerk, who was as pale as Mr. Dawbarn, faltered out, "No, sir," with so transparent an effort that the banker saw that the young man perfectly understood the reason of the interview.

"Your conduct, sir, has been such that I—I—I do not know how to address you," stammered Mr. Dawbarn. "That you, sir, my servant, my paid and salaried servant, should have so abused my confidence; should have so dared to try to so injure me is—is—what I did not expect from you. I know all, sir, all. You are discharged from the bank this moment."

A pang shot over the young man's face.

"You will not be allowed to enter the[illegible] again. This quarter's salary is there, sir." The banker put upon the table a small paper packet. "As I shall not suffer you to take your place at your desk again, there is a half year's salary." The banker placed another small packet on the table, and the clerk made a deprecatory motion with one hand. "I insist on it, sir, and shall take no denial. I also insist on your leaving Bramlingdon to-night, or to-morrow morning, at the latest. Should you have any debts here, leave a list of them, and today being Christmas day, I will see that one of the clerks pays them the day after to-morrow. There can be no excuse for your remaining, and your absence, sir, is a matter of much more importance to me than a few paltry pounds; so I will hear of no objection."

Mr. Dawbarn paused and drew breath, and the young clerk looked at him and then at the window, as if out into a far distance beyond.

"My accounts, sir"—— he began, when the banker interrupted him.

"Will be found quite right, I dare say. Had you only robbed me of money, sir, I should have been better pleased. I have treated you only too well, and in return see what you have done." Mr. Dawbarn struck his clenched hand upon the table. "But no matter. Do I understand that you will leave Bramlingdon to-night?"

Munro took his eyes from the window, and, looking full in the banker's face, said:

"Lucy."

Mr. Dawbarn's face turned scarlet, and he again struck the table. "Don't mention my daughter's name to me, sir, if you please. I won't hear it! How dare you? There, sir, are the rubbishing letters you have sent to her, and if you have any sense of decency or honesty left, you will return those you have of hers—of—of my daughter's."

Munro took up the letters his former master had tossed to him.

"Did you hear me, sir?" asked the banker.

"I beg your pardon."

"I say, will you give me back her letters, and will you leave Bramlingdon to-night?"

There was a pause, and the bells of the church rang out for morning service.

"I can make no promise, sir," replied the young clerk, very clearly. "I have a duty to your daughter as well as a duty to you. If she desires that I should"——

"You set me at defiance, do you, sir?" burst in the banker. "Very good, very good; but don't suppose that if you stay here forever that you will see my daughter, or be enabled to write to her. If you stop in Bramlingdon, she goes. Next week she travels with her mother to London, abroad, anywhere, away from her father's presumptuous clerk, who, because his master asked him a few times to his house, to sit at his table, and treated him as an equal, so far forgot himself as to lift his eyes up to his daughter, his only child."

It had been a terrible Christmas morning in the banker's house. Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn had been informed that their only daughter, Lucy, rose every morning early and had an interview with the young clerk, Munro, in the kitchen garden, the door of which opened into a lane, and of which door either Lucy or the young clerk, or both, possessed a key. Lucy had been forced into confession, and had gone on her knees to her papa, and wept and implored him not to hurt her George. She had given up all his letters, which she was in the habit of placing under her pillow every night, and which letters Munro had written stealthily in banking hours and placed in a certain portion of the wall, near the tool house in the kitchen garden. Mr. Dawbarn went on wildly and frightened Mrs. Dawbarn, a good, motherly woman, into a fit. When Mrs. Dawbarn recovered, Miss Lucy went off into a swoon, and her father and mother had to recover her, and Mr. Dawbarn was in agony lest the servants of his household should be cognizant of the disturbance, which was an entirely unnecessary excitement on his part, as they, the servants, had known all about it for the last eight months. Poor Lucy was told that Munro was to be immediately sent away, but that she and her mamma were to go to church that day, as their absence might be remarked by a devout but curious congregation, and that she was to bathe her eyes and look unconcerned, easy, comfortable and composed.

As Lucy and her mamma passed the door of the dining room, Lucy heard the young clerk's voice. She knew that she should never see him again, and she could not resist her impulse. She ran to the door, seized the handle, and would have opened it, but her mamma pulled her away, and on the other side Mr Dawbarn rushed to the door and put his back against it. Munro strode to the window, that he might take a last look of his mistress as she left the house.

"Good-by, George Jear, good-by!" cried poor Lucy in the passage. "We shall never see each other again; but good-by and good-by and good-by again."

CHAPTER III.

A year had elapsed since Lucy Dawbarn had bidden farewell to her father's clerk through the dining room door. He had left Bramlingdon and gone no one knew whither. Neither letter nor message came to Lucy; she was too strictly watched. She often walked in the garden and looked at that portion of the wall where they had concealed their letters. The good old brick that they used to take out and put back again was a thing of the past. In its place there was a bran new red brick cemented by bran new white mortar that you could see a mile off. Lucy had been to London, and had been visiting not only her father's and mother's relatives but the magnates of the county, and had seen all sorts of pleasures and fashion and distraction, and at the end of six months had returned very thin and pale.

She had been home but a few weeks when the news came that young Munro had sailed from Liverpool for New York. It reached Lucy's ears through a sympathetic servant maid. The next morning she sent word that she would like to have a cup of tea sent to her up stairs in her own room, as she had a headache and begged to be excused from the breakfast table. Mrs. Dawbarn knew that she had heard of Munro's departure for America, but she did not dare to mention even the name of the objectionable clerk to her husband, who was entirely ignorant of the young man's movements. Two or three days after the doctor was sent for. The medical man hummed and hawed and said that his patient was low. Lucy grew worse and worse. A consultation was held. The young lady's disorder was pronounced to be nervous fever, and one white headed old gentleman from London suggested to Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn that if the young lady were engaged he should not advise the postponement of the ceremony.

"You see, my dear Mr. Dawbarn," said the old gentleman, "your dear daughter's malady is partly mental. She has here no employment, that is, no fresh employment for her mind. If you could substitute new duties, fresh impressions, she would recover quickly. Her energy is wearing her to pieces; she wants, so to speak, to begin her life over again. If—if her partner has not yet been chosen"—here the eyes of the father and mother met—"let her travel, let her choose an occupation, give her something to do. I know a young lady—much the same kind of case—who took to painting, and found considerable benefit from the study and the practice. Italy, now, might create a desire to cultivate some art—say music, eh? Your dear daughter is not strong; her mind is too much for her body."

Lucy was taken to Harrogate, to Cheltenham, to Leamington and Scarborough, then to the south of France and Italy. When she returned to Bramlingdon she had to be lifted from the carriage. Her father, who had not seen her for two months, was struck with the visible alteration in her face and figure. He himself carried her to her room and was hardly conscious of his burden. She said she was tired with her journey and would go to bed. Mr. Dawbarn descended to dine with his wife, and meeting on the stairs with the sympathetic housemaid who had informed Lucy of Munro's departure for America, and asking the girl why she was crying, and receiving for answer that it was for Miss Lucy, he discharged her on the spot.

It was a dismal dinner. Husband and wife spoke but little, and when one caught the the other's eye there was a great show of appetite. Mr. Dawbarn drank a considerable quantity of sherry. When the cloth was removed the conversation flagged. Neither dared begin the consultation they felt was inevitable. Before they went into Lucy's room to look at her as she lay sleeping, Mr. Dawbarn put his arm around his wife's waist and kissed her on the forehead, a proceeding which made the good old lady tremble very much and her mouth and nostrils quiver.

Side by side in the dark the couple lay awake in their luxurious chamber, starting at the reflection of the window frame upon the blinds. The father began.

"Jemima."

"Philip," said the mother.

"What do you think of Lucy?"

The mother heaved a deep sigh.

"Good God!" said the banker, "when I took her up in my arms I could hardly feel her weight. She was like a feather—like a feather. Jemima, you're crying, my love. Tell me, honestly, now, honestly, candidly, as you think. Tell me, tell me."

The wife threw her arm around her husband's neck and sobbed: "I fear that we shall lose her."

It was spoken, and death was recognized as a presence in the house.

"D'ye think there's no hope?"

"Only one, and that a very poor one."

Mr. Dawbarn felt a mental qualm, for he knew what was coming.

"What's that?" he asked.

"You'll be angry with me, Philip, if I tell you."

"Angry, my dear? no, no, not a bit," said the father.

"You know what I mean."

The banker sighed.

"Do you mean"—— he began.

"Yes, I do," replied the mother. "If Lucy could see or hear of that young man, I believe she would recover. I'm sure it would do her good."

There was a long pause. Mr. Dawbarn groaned in spirit, but he felt that his wife was right.

"I had such better views for her," groaned the banker.

"Yes, my dear, I know you had," said the wife, pressing his hand.

"Lord Landringa was most particular in his attentions, and Sir Theophilus Hawdon absolutely spoke to me about her."

"I know he did," said the acquiescent wife.

"Think of Lucy being Lady Landringa or Lady Hawdon! county people—and then of her being Mrs. —— oh!"

"It's a sad thing, dear, but what can we do now that she's so ill—poor thing! And if we could save her life"——

Mr. Dawbarn turned in the bed. "I'll ask Topham about it to-morrow." (Topham was the doctor.) "I'll hear his opinion."

"I have asked him," said the mother, "and he agrees with me."

"But how can it be done?" asked the banker, turning again restlessly. "I can't ask the fellow to marry my daughter."

"No, but you can offer him a situation in the bank."

"Suppose he refuses."

"He won't refuse."

"But how can I find him? Where is he?"

"In America," answered Mrs. Dawbarn.

"America!" repeated the banker, sitting up in bed. "Then how the deuce is he to be got at?"

"Advertise for him. If he will apply to So-and-So, he will hear of something to his advantage. I asked Dr. Topham's advice about all that."

"Advertising is not respectable," said the banker; to which his wife made no reply but the word 'Lucy.'"

"Besides," continued Mrs. Dawbarn, after a short pause, "if you don't like advertising, send somebody after him to find out where he is."

"Send somebody! Send who?

"Oh, that Mr. Studden; he's doing nothing and I dare say will be glad of the job."

"I suppose that Topham advised that too,"

"Yes, he did."

"I thought I recognized Topham's interest in that young vagabond. I suppose you and he have talked this matter over now some time."

"I and Mr. Studden?"

"No, you and Topham."

"Yes."

"And you've arranged it all between you."

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Jemima?"

"I was afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid of what?"

"Of you."

"Of me, Jemima! Don't you think I love my child as much as you?"

"I'm sure you do; but you men don't understand some things."

"But Topham's a man," remarked the puzzled banker.

"But then he's a doctor," was the reply.

Mr. Dawbarn groaned inwardly, as a possible coronet presented itself to his mind's eye—and then faded away. "I suppose you must have it your own way," he said.

"May I, Philip?" asked his wife, putting her arm around his neck a second time.

"Yes, I believe you're in the right. But won't the shock—the surprise hurt her?"

"I'll answer for that. May I tell her to-morrow?"

"Yes," sighed the vanquished father.

"Bless you, Philip!" said the good mother; and she kissed her partner, and both wife and husband slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER IV.

"Lucy, my dear," said Mrs. Dawbarn the next morning as she entered the invalid's chamber, "I and papa have been talking about you."

"Yes, mamma," said Lucy, with an evident want of interest in the subject.

"And what do you think he says?"

"Don't know, mamma."

"He's going to make some alterations in the bank."

"Oh, indeed!"

Miss Lucy had not the smallest solicitude about the bank.

"And what else do you think?"

"Oh, mamma, I am so tired," said Lucy peevishly.

"What else do you think he means to do?" continued Mrs. Dawbarn, bending her matronly head over her daughter's face, and pouring into her ear words that made the girl flush scarlet and her eyes flash.

"Oh, mamma, it can't be true!"

"My love, could I deceive you?"

"No, dear mamma, no; but oh, is it true? Kiss me, mamma dear. I am so happy and so thankful, and—and in a little time, when I've thought over how happy I am, papa may come in, and I'll kiss him and thank him, and tell him how grateful I am too, and"——

But poor Lucy could get no further, and sobbed and wept with delight.

"My darling, kiss me now," said her father, advancing from the door, behind which he had watched the effect of the news. "I'll do anything to make you happy—anything."

"O papa! my own papa!"

"My darling, you'll love me now again as you used to do, won't you? and—and—there's Mr. Bob Studden's knock. I'll send that fellow off to New York—I mean to Liverpool, this very night."

Mr. Bob Studden was waiting in the dining room. He was so changed in face, dress, appearance and manner that when Mr. Dawbarn saw him he started and said:

"Are you Mr. Robert Studden?"

"Yes, Mr. Dawbarn, it's me," said the familiar voice. "I dare say you find me changed. I do myself."

He was indeed altered. In place of the spick, span, new, natty, dressy, shiny, oily, varnished Bob, the delight of barmaids and the envy of grooms, stood a shabby, corduroy trousered, waistcoatless vagabond, smelling of straw and porter. Mr. Dawbarn hesitated before he asked him to sit down.

"I got your letter, sir," said Bob, whose manner was as deferential as his clothes were shabby, "and came on immediately. Sorry I couldn't present myself more decently; but such is fate."

"What are you doing now, Mr. Studden?" asked the banker.

"At present, sir, replied Bob, "I am stableman at the Cock and Bottle."

"Good gracious!"

"It's not what I could wish, sir, but it's better than nothing. I'm sorry to say I'm only employed there two days a week—Mondays and market days; but still, what with odd jobs, I manage to grub on."

Mr. Dawbarn looked at the ex-betting man's wan face and wistful eyes, and asked him if he would take a glass of wine.

Bob shot a quick glance, and said that he would; and in the keen look Mr. Dawbarn read hunger.

"The sherry," said the banker to a servant, "and bring lunch—some cold roast beef—and—you know; and when we've lunched, Mr. Studden, we'll talk business"

Mr. Studden's performance upon the beef was so extraordinary that the banker feared that he would commit involuntary suicide. It was with a feeling of intense relief that he saw him attack the cheese; but the attack was so prolonged that Mr. Dawbarn feared lest the suffocation the beef had left unaccomplished should be effected by the Stilton.

"Not any more, sir, thank you," answered Bob to his host's complimentary question. "I never tasted such a cheese—and as for the beef, it's beautiful. I haven't tasted animal food for these ten days. For red herring is not animal food any more than a lump of salt is, and I'm sick of red herrings. Soak 'em in as much hot water as you like, they always taste of lucifers; perhaps because they lie next to 'em in the shop. I may thank you, Mr. Dawbarn, for a real meal such as I haven't had for—for"——

The wine Mr. Studden had drunk seemed to have got into his head, and from his head into his eyes. Men are strange creatures—and even betting men are men—and whether it was the memory of bygone days, or the wine, or the bread, or the butter, or the beef, or the cheese that affected him, cannot be ascertained, but one of these causes, or some of them, or all, caused Bob Studden to lay his head upon his arms, and to cry copiously.

He then began accusing himself, and saying that he was a bad lot; that he was miserable and repented; that his life was an hourly curse to him; that he knew he had brought it all upon himself; that all his friends had deserted him, particularly those who had shared his hospitality, and even his money, when he was prosperous; that the man who owed his rise in life to him, and whom he had assisted at a crisis, had behaved to him with an ingratitude that stung him to the soul; that he was half starved and had no bed but in the stable; that he was ruined—ruined—and had no hope.

When the poor, broken down gamester had exhausted himself, the banker began. He told him that he (the banker) had been advised to offer him (Studden) employment because he knew him to be intelligent, and hoped that his past sufferings had been a warning to him for the future; that the business he wished to employ him on was difficult and delicate, being no less than to go to New York and from there to wherever else it might be necessary to travel, in search of Mr. Munro; that money would be provided and letters furnished him, and that he was required to start for Liverpool that very night; that it was hoped he would not lightly give up a chance that offered him redemption for the past and a fine prospect for the future.

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" said Bob, rising and grasping the banker's hand; "and God bless you, Mr. Dawbarn, for giving a poor outcast devil like me the chance. I'll not deceive you, sir, if I do"——

"Hush, hush, Mr. Studden."

"You'll make a man of me, sir—a MAN! I'll be true as steel. I'll not bet—not on the best horse that was ever foaled. To-night, sir—I'll start this minute, barefoot, if you wished it. I've got a decent suit of clothes to pawn, sir, quite good enough for the likes of me; I'll be faithful and true, sir, and God bless you, sir, and—and"——

Here Bob broke down again, and even stiff Mr. Dawbarn was compelled to use his cambric handkerchief as Mr. Studden used his coat sleeve. Bob was furnished with letters; among them was one from Mr. Dawbarn addressed to Munro, which inclosed a note from Lucy, which contained only these words, written in a large, trembling hand:

"Come back to me—oh! come back to me, my dear; and soon, if you would see again upon this earth your own LUCY."

A few hours after Bob was seated on the roof of the night coach, and as it rattled past the banker's house he saw a light in Lucy's chamber. Although the night was cold the window was thrown up, and a thin hand waved a handkerchief.

CHAPTER V.

Two years elapsed and there was no news of the missing Mr. Munro. Letters arrived frequently from different parts of America from Mr. Bob Studden, who evidently found his task to be more difficult than he had supposed. America was a large continent, and it was not so easy to find one particular man upon it. Poor Lucy amused herself by reading books and perusing maps. She liked to wonder if George were there—or there, and what sort of place it was. She arranged all Mr. Bob Studden's letters of intelligence in chronological order and compared them with the books and the maps, and so traced his progress. She always knew when an American letter arrived by an instinct for which she was at a loss to account herself; but for all these sources of consolation, for all her mother's and father's solicitude, she grew weaker and weaker. She took no air but in an invalid chair. Her father walked by her side grave and dejected. Stealthy shadows took possession of the banker's house. They flitted on the windows, lingered on the staircases and hung about the passages; and the good folks of Bramlingdon looked sad as they passed the banker's, over which, as over those it contained, there hung the sanctity of a great sorrow.

Two long, long years and two long, long months Lucy waited and hoped, each day her pale cheek growing paler, and her light form lighter, and toward Christmas she was unable to be lifted from her bed. Dr. Topham said that he had exhausted the resources of his science; and when the poor girl turned feverishly, and, with a slight access of delirium, asked for the fiftieth time if there were no news, the doctor beckoned the banker and his wife from the sick room and said:

"I've an idea! This cannot last long—she must be quicted somehow. She keeps asking for news; now news from America would quiet her and she might sleep."

"We have no news," said the single minded banker.

"No," replied the doctor, "but we can make some."

"Make some!"

"Fabricate it—invent it. Don't you see?"

"O doctor!" remarked the tearful mother, "to deceive a poor creature on the threshold of death!"

"To snatch her from death," said Dr. Topham. "It must be done. It is the last chance. We must write a letter from Studden this very night."

"But—but—but—it is forgery!" stammered the banker.

"Besides," said Mrs. Dawbarn, "Lucy knows Mr. Studden's hand and always examines the envelopes."

"Then," said the doctor, "we must do it by telegraph"

"Telegraph!"

"Yes. In a few minutes you will receive a telegram from Mr. Bob Studden, saying that he has just arrived at Liverpool with—with a companion."

"Who'll send it?"

"I will," said the doctor.

"But when—when she finds that Studden is not in England—what then?"

"We must think of something else," said the undaunted Topham. "The case is desperate, and something desperate must be tried. Go and talk to her, Mrs. Dawbarn, and I'll send the telegram."

With a strong feeling of conscious guilt Mr. and Mrs. Dawbarn put into their daughter's hand a telegram containing these words: "From Robert Studden, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, to Charles Dawbarn, Bramlingdon. "I have just arrived in Liverpool. I have news of Mr. M. I hope to be in Bramlingdon by Thursday."

Lucy read the telegram and sat up in her bed.

"He's come, mamma!" she said, and her eyes flashed and her cheeks flushed. "He landed in England this morning—I felt he did—about 9 o'clock. He will be here soon, George will—very soon—very soon. Mamma, please tell Eliza to put out my lilac frock. He liked lilac—and to come and do my hair—and—and—and—tell Eliza to come to me—and I can tell her what I want myself."

The father and mother exchanged glances that said: "Here is the consequence of our deception. What can be done next?" The thought had hardly been interchanged before a smart rap was heard at the street door, and a servant came in with another telegraphic dispatch, which ran thus:

"From R. Studden, Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool, to C. Dawbarn, Bramlingdon.

"Just arrived here with Mr. Munro. Shall start by night train, leaving here at 1:30. M. and self will be at Bramlingdon to-morrow. Telegraph back."

"How absurd of Topham to send two telegrams!" said Mr. Dawbarn, when he and his wife were alone, "as if one would not bring mischief enough. He must be mad."

Dr. Topham entered the house, and inquired how his plan had succeeded.

"Oh, Lucy is very much delighted and agitated," answered Lucy's father. "What we shall do with her when she finds the news not true, I do not know. But, Topham, why the deuce did you send two telegrams?"

"Two!" echoed Topham. "I only sent one."

"Yes, you did."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. Here it is."

The doctor looked at the second telegram, and said, "I didn't send this."

"No! Who then?"

"By Jove! He did! Studden, I mean. Dawbarn, he's come! he's come! I only anticipated the truth. It was a medical inspiration—and my patient will recover."

Mr. Dawbarn lost no time in telegraphing back to Liverpool. At Lucy's express desire Mr. Studden was instructed to telegraph at every station, that she might know how much nearer and nearer her George was to her. The telegraph boys were up the whole night, and Lucy kept the telegrams and read them until she fell fast asleep.

When she awoke she found herself unable to rise, so resolved to receive her future husband in state; and when she had looked in the mirror she begged her mamma in a whisper to let her have some rouge—"not to make me look better, but for fear my pale, white, white cheeks should frighten George."

The heavy hours flew by. George arrived, and was shown upstairs to his faithful, constant mistress; and the servants in the kitchen held great jubilee, and there was sweethearting below stairs as well as above.

Mr. Dawbarn found Mr. Bob Studden quite an American—according to the notion of Americans imbibed by Englishmen a few months resident in the New World. He wore a "goatee" beard, square toed boots, and loud trousers and cravat. He addressed Mr. Dawbarn as "colonel," and assumed a manner that savored equally of the quarter-deck and the counter—half pirate, half bagman.

"As I advertised you, colonel," he explained, "in the various letters from the various diggings where I fixed my temporary location when I set foot in New York, I could find small trace of G. Munro, but I followed up that trace, and dogged eternally wherever he had made tracks. At last I lost him, and was near thinkin' I was done holler—yes, sir—and do you know why I thought I was done holler? He changed his name, and what his last occupation was I could not discover. However, I traveled and traveled on: and how d'ye think, and whar d'ye think, colonel, I found him out at last?"

"I don't know."

"It was quite by accident—it was. I thought I'd heard of him in Detroit, but I couldn't find him in Detroit; and I was goin' away by the cars on the following sun up. Not knowing what to do with myself till roosting time, I strolled into the museum—that is—that was a theatre then. The first man I see upon the stage was G. Munro, dressed like a citizen, in coat, vest and pants, or perhaps I should not have known him. I hailed him, and we started off that very night. We traveled quicker than post, or I should have written. I should have diagnosed him before, but the track was cold, because he had changed his name, and gone upon the stage—a fact which I have not mentioned to any one but you, nor do I intend to do—the stage not being considered by the general as business like."

Lucy was soon seen out again in the invalid chair, but her father no longer walked by her side. He was replaced by Mr. Munro, who usually propelled it himself. Within eighteen months the young couple were married, and some time after George was made a partner in the bank. Mr. Robert Studden, by the assistance of his patron, emigrated to Australia, where he drives a thriving business in horses. Before he sailed he spent the Christmas day with the bride and bridegroom. And though our tale ends happily with marriage and dowry, as novels and plays should end, it is not for that reason a fiction, but a true story of true love.

AN IDEAL CHRISTMAS.

Events of a Day Which Made Mr. Scriggles Tired.

It was Christmas day; anybody could tell it; sleigh bells rang out more crisp and clear than usual; the sun was brighter, the air was sharper, men stepped more briskly along the streets, the chimes sounded sweeter; the sleigh bells tinkled more merrily, and if that wasn't enough to convince the most skeptical, he could look at the heading of the morning newspaper.

"Ha!" cried Mr. Scriggles as he limped out of bed; "beautiful day! beautiful; and, indeed, Christmas; Mrs. Scriggles isn't awake yet either; I'll get ahead of her this time. Merry Christ——"

"Scriggles, has the servant got that fire started yet?"

"I don't know, dear; I was just going down to see about it. Merry Christ——"

"Scriggles, I would like to have $5 to give to the church. Have you got any money left from last night?"

"Certainly, I kept $25 exclusively for Christmas. I'll leave the five on the dressing case for you."

He skipped gayly down stairs just in time to meet the new up stairs girl.

"Good mornin', Misther Scriggles, Merry Christmas and Christmas gift."

"Certainly, Bridget, here's a couple of dollars for you."

The cook was just emerging from the kitchen when he arrived at the door.

"Christmus gif', Massa Scriggles."

"Certainly, Arabella; here's $2 for you."

Breakfast was eaten and Scriggles presented his wife with a bonnet which she said was horrid, and she gave him a cane to add to his collection, which numbered something over a dozen.

He then took the street car down town.

"Mornin', Massa Scriggles," said his bootblack. "Chrismus gif."

"Yes, Sam; here's a dollar for you."

"Christmas gift, Mr. Scriggles," said the elevator boy.

"Yes, of course; here's a dollar for you."

"Christmas gift, Mr. Scriggles," said his office boy in a cheery, holiday tone, which was good for $2.

"Ah, good day, madame," said he to the lady whom he found seated in his chair. "Merry Christmas to you, I'm sure."

"I am glad to see that you have the true Christian spirit," she said. "I augurs favorably for my errand."

"What can I do for you, ma'am?"

"I am working in the cause of charity," she replied. "I am soliciting subscriptions for the new mission for the natives of Patagonia. I hope I may put you down for $10."

Mr. Scriggles said certainly, and handed her the money.

The janitor and two scrub ladies also made successful calls. He had to compromise with the latter on 50 cents apiece.

At about 3 o'clock Mr. Scriggles concluded to start for home. As he reached the sidewalk he felt in his vest pockets, then in his trousers pocket. A slight look of annoyance crossed his face.

"Merry Christmas," said a cheery voice.

"Oh, how are you, Brown; yes, to be sure. Do you happen to have a car ticket in your pocket?"

"No, I haven't."

"Any change?"

"No, not a red."

When Scriggles reached home it was about half past 6. He dragged himself wearily through the door and hung himself on the lounge.

"Did you have a pleasant Christmas?" asked his wife.

"Christmas be—blessed!" was the only reply as he flopped over on his side, with his face to the wall.

Today.

O night of nights! O night
Desired of man so long!
The ancient heavens fled forth in light
To sing thee thy new song;
And shooting down the steep,
To shepherd folk of old,
An angel, while they watched their sheep,
Set foot beside the fold.

It was so long ago;
But God can make it now,
And as with that sweet overflow,
Our empty hearts endow,
Take, Lord, these words outworn,
Oh, make them new for aye,
Speak—"Unto you a child is born,"
Today—today, today! —Jean Ingelow.

BURDETTE'S WITICISMS.

Brief and Pointed Essays on Current Topics.

The first territorial Volapuk club in America has been organized in Walla Walla, Washington Territory. There is a phonetic appropriateness in this thing. J. W. Redington's scientific journal, The Walla Walla Wah Wah, is the official organ of the society.

UNPARDONABLE CANNIBALISM.

Don't talk to us about honor among thieves. When the train robbers went through that Northern Pacific train at Custer, they refused to take any money from the train conductor and brakemen, but when they came to the Pullman car they went through all the Pullman employes twice, and then threatened to kill them if they didn't rake up a little more. Such treatment as this must cut Sir George to the heart. Why, you wouldn't be at all surprised now to learn that those train robbers, when they got safely away, fell upon and robbed each other.

OR MAY BE IT WAS THE BOULANGER MARCH.

"What makes a white cat deaf?" asks a scientific writer. Why, we always supposed it was the debate on the tariff. It makes human beings wish they were deaf or dead.

LATE IN ONE THING.

"Why did the orator speak of 'the late George Washington?'" asked Rollo. "Because he is dead," replied Rollo's mother. "But Washington was never late," said Rollo; "he was first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen." "But he was the last man to get a monument," said Rollo's Uncle George, and without coming to a vote the committee rose and the house adjourned.—Brooklyn Eagle.

A Fatal Mistake.

Mrs. Jacob S——, an estimable woman living in a small town in the west, discovered early in her matrimonial career that she had not been fortunate in her choice of a husband, for Jacob proved to be excessively lazy and shiftless, doing almost nothing for the support of his wife and the round faced little children.

Several years after her marriage Mrs. S—— heard of the approaching marriage of Jennie Krale, the daughter of a neighbor, and meeting the girl one day she said:

"Vell, Shennie, I hear you vas thinkin' 'bout getting married. Vas dot so?"

The girl, with becoming blushes, admitted the truth of the rumor.

"Vell, Shennie," said Mrs. S——, "it would be vell for you to dink dwice before you marrys anypody."

"Did you think twice about it when you were married?" asked Jennie, rather resenting the intimation that she had not made a wise choice.

"Vell, yes, I did," replied Mrs. S——, after some little hesitation. "I did dink dwice, Shennie; but I made von grade meestake, von grade meestake, Shennie. I did not dink der second time undil after I vas married."—Detroit Free Press.

Dangerous to Trifle With.

Deacon Lukers (entering crowded car)—Say, you! Hev you paid fer that young one's seat?

Count Filippi (who has left his organ in the baggage car)—Sicca him, Pippo!—Judge.

They Have No Perspective.

An American writer says the wealthy Japanese picture owner keeps his art treasures stowed away in what is called a "godown," or storehouse, and his paintings are brought up one at a time if any visitor is present, in order that a single picture may be seen by itself. We should think that one at a time would be about as many as an American could stand, if they are the work of Japanese artists. Japanese art is eccentric and mystifying, and half a dozen at a time would make the visitor think he had what in Volapuk language is called the "jamesjams."—Norristown Herald.

Unfortunately, Too Often the Case.

The minister sought to improve [illegible] by giving Bobby a lesson in mo[illegible] boy," he said, "I have lived fo[illegible] and have never used tobacco [illegible] nor told a lie, nor swore, nor pla[illegible]oy, nor"— "Have you got any little boys?" interrupted Bobby. "No, I have never had any little boys." "Well, they are mighty lucky," said Bobby.—San Francisco Wasp.

Ten Hearts That Beat as One.

Mormon Youth—Mr. Elder, I am in love with your daughters.

Mr. Elder—Which ones?

Mormon Youth—Misses Amy, Claribel, Mamie, Jennie, Emma, Polly, Bridget, Ann and Josephine.

Mr. Elder—Take them, my boy; take them and try to make some of them happy.—Town Topics.

Rather Have the Boy Whipped.

Editor—John, if anybody calls tell him I am very busy writing an editorial.

Office Boy (ten minutes later)—Man down stairs what wants to know who wrote that article in yesterday's paper.

Editor—Go back and tell him you wrote it. I'm not feeling first rate today.—Judge.

A Fine Profession.

Mr. Crupper (to his jockey)—How did it happen, Muckins? You are the sixteenth of an ounce over weight.

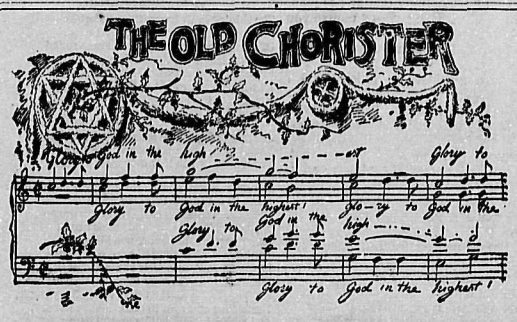
Muckins—I knowed I'd git in a scrape somehow. I stopped on me way down ter git me boots shined, sir.—Time.

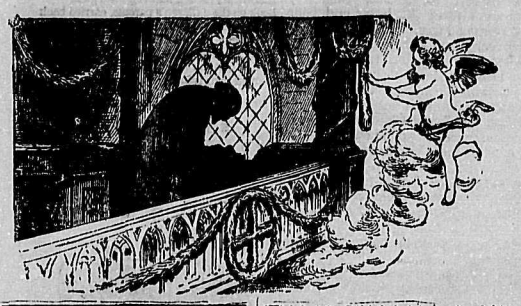
In Chicago He Might.

Examiner (to graduating medical student)—If you should make a mistake and give a patient an overdose of tartar emetic, what would you do?

Student—Try to buy up the coroner.—Chicago Tribune.

THE OLD CHORISTER





IN this commercial age there can be no good reason why Tilbury village should have been placed so near the summit of the hill, but so it is, and all but a few of the farmers around about have to toil upwards in order to reach the half dozen stores there and the three churches. Perhaps the original settlers of western Massachusetts had an eye, or two, for the beautiful, for there is not a habitation in Berkshire county that commands a more extensive or picturesque view. The natives of Tilbury seldom mention the scenery, but not many years ago it attracted the admiration of wealthy people from a distance, and they set up their summer homes there. It made a marked change in the village, the more because a portion of the new comers found it pleasureable to remain through the winter. It was thus that evil entered and brought unhappiness to Hezekiah Martin.

My mind wanders back to that time when as a child I listened to his stentorian tenor voice leading the singing from the choir loft of the ancient Congregationalist church. There were two long services every Sunday [illegible], and I recall that when the new preacher [illegible]ed in the movement to abolish the after- [illegible] sermon Hezekiah was one of those who [illegible] hardest for the old custom, and when [illegible]inevitable reform was finally accom- [illegible]ed, the sturdy chorister never looked [illegible] his minister in the same light that he [illegible]efore. He was more faithful than ever [illegible]ng all the louder as if to make up in [illegible] for lack of opportunity; but when the [illegible] divine finally went his way, and an- [illegible] preacher took the pulpit, the chorister [illegible]f a great burden had been lifted; as [illegible]arish had escaped a most dangerous [illegible].

[illegible]ears turned steadily along and Heze- [illegible]ercame every difficulty that choir [illegible]are subject to. He pacified the jealous sopranos, raised up new bassos, sung four consecutive Sundays all alone when the choir deserted him in high dudgeon because he refused to approve of a new anthem book, and in many other ways demonstrated his fitness for the work until prosperity in the shape of summer visitors fell upon Tilbury. Then began a quiet, insidious trouble, as imperceptible at first as the approach of old age, that eventually overcame him.

The first manifestation of revolution came in a division of opinion in the parish over the choice of a new preacher, for old Mr. Spooner had begun to feel that he was somehow in the way, and he resigned before the people were fully aware that they wanted to hear a new voice. There were two leading candidates for his place, a young and eloquent preacher and a zealous worker, and an elderly man against whom not a word could be said. The newcomers in Tilbury, joining hands with the younger members of the church, elected the young man, and as the contest had not been long or determined, [illegible] healing of differences and [illegible]. Even then Hezekiah [illegible]ment that all would not [illegible]t several months passed [illegible] any direct intimation that the parish would appreciate a change in the choir loft. The first he heard of it was in a discussion among his singers at a Saturday evening rehearsal. It was not meant that he should hear, but he entered the vestry unexpectedly. Sam Hinckley, one of those very bassos who had been patiently trained by the chorister, was saying:

"Wall, I shall be sorry to see the old man's feelings hurt, but he can't expect to lead singin' forever."

And pretty Maria Jasper, tacitly understood to be Sam's sweetheart, responded sharply:

"But I think it's just too mean, and if 'Kiah has to go I follow. That's all!"

And then they all saw the chorister coming down the aisle, and a painful hush fell upon them. Hezekiah bowed gravely as he approached the group and said:

"Good evening, neighbors." That was the way he always addressed the choir at rehearsals. Perhaps he avoided a greeting to each individual from fear of arousing jealousy by seeming partiality. At all events I never heard of his varying the formula. He continued, as he referred to a small slip of paper in his hand:

"When the Lord wills we will all go, and not till then. It is not our part to meddle with what is in His hands. The minister has chosen hymn 207 for the first piece. We will sing it to the tune of 'Cambridge.'"

At that rehearsal and during service next day everything went as usual, but report of the talk that Hezekiah had heard flew about the parish quickly, and not a few remarked that the chorister looked unusually grave.

"I cal'late," remarked Mr. Davis, the sheep raiser from Ram's Hill, to his wife as they drove home after meeting; "I cal'late 'Kiah Martin feels his years a growing on him; hay?"

"And I cal'late, Philander Davis," returned Mrs. Davis, with significant emphasis, "that it ain't so much his natural years he feels as the loss of his friends."

"Sho! Marthy, he ain't lost no friends, 'Kiah hain't; I think jes' 's much of him 's ever I did, an' yit I'm 'bleeged to admit that when a man gits along in years it's time for him to let stouter men hold the plough. Hay?"

Now, the fact was that Philander Davis was one of the few among the older heads in the parish who sided with the reforming element. Mr. Davis was ambitious for Tilbury and all in it, and he prided himself somewhat on being able to entertain new ideas after having passed the age of 50. At the last church meeting his support had been recognized by his election to membership of the parish committee, and he, therefore, was well informed on the restlessness of the younger members regarding the matter of music. It was the one point of serious difference between him and his wife, and she was not to be hoodwinked by his sophistry.

"Don't tell me, Philander," she replied in answer to his last expression, "I know just how you feel. You want to please the smart folks on the hill, and I haven't got a word to say against them, cept it does seem's if they needn't come to Tilbury and expect to run things in city style. They want a quartet, now, don't they? and they want to interduce new music, don't they? and not let the congregation join in, 'cept on one hymn, don't they? and they're goin' to try to make Hezekiah step down on account of his age, and he been choristor for fifty years, don't they? aint they, I should say?"

"Git up, there, Jim, g'long with ye!" exclaimed Mr. Davis. "You're putty sharp, Marthy; of you was to look through the hole in one of my millstones and see the other a grindin' you'd think you saw clean through both, wouldn't ye? hay? but I don't think you'd make much of a hand to run a church, Marthy. Hay?"

And so, with good-natured obstinacy the discussion was continued until Mr. Davis helped his wife out and led the horse into the barn to unhitch.

Now that the chorister knew that there was a feeling that his services were not required, the parish committee hoped that he would relieve them of discomfort by resigning voluntarily; but weeks passed and Hezekiah retained his place without a word. So at last it was determined that he must be approached in a Christian, neighborly spirit, and induced to consider the matter in the right light. As the oldest member of the committee, Philander Davis was deputed to do the talking, but though he had accepted the appointment with a cheerful sense of its importance, his confidence failed him when he faced the old chorister one October evening in Hezekiah's little parlor. The other members of the committee sat looking at their hats while Mr. Davis coughed awkwardly and began:

"Feelin' tolerable well these days, 'Kiah? Hay?"

"I've been enjoyin' good health all summer, Mr. Davis," responded Hezekiah with dignified asperity.

"Wall," said Mr. Davis, after a wretched pause and another cough, "we've come up to talk about the music."

Mr. Davis waited for the chorister to lead the way to what must follow, but Hezekiah kept silent. So the spokesman continued:

"You see, 'Kiah, the parish thinks they'd ought to be something of a change."

Hezekiah could hold out no longer.

"Neighbors," he said with a trembling voice, "I can't make no change. I've stood up in the loft there more'n fifty years and haven't missed but two Sundays. I've sung the good old music that you and I, Philander, was brought up on, and I can't sing much else. I've kept the choir together for you, and if the money stood in the way (Hezekiah received $50 a year) I'd keep it up for nothing. No, don't say 'taint money; I know that; I know you want a high toned quartet and that you're willing to pay. But—I've done my best, neighbors."

The old chorister bowed his head upon his hands, and the parish committeemen wished they had not come. Mr. Davis rubbed the back of his head and his colleagues looked sternly at him.

"We hate worse'n thunder to hurt your feelin's, 'Kiah, hay?" he began again, when the chorister stood up and interrupted him.

"I know," he said; "you don't want to tell me I'm too old. But, praise the Lord! I'll not stand in the way of the parish's good. I resign right here."

But the committee was not wholly lacking in human sympathy, and it was agreed that Hezekiah should sing until the end of the year, and the chorister consented, though with less appreciation of the favor extended to him than most of the committee had expected.

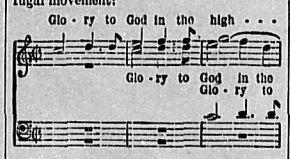
"Blessed if I didn't feel sorry for the old man," said young Deacon Goodspeed, speaking of the matter several days later. So did a good many others, but as the end of the year approached the sympathy lost its keenness, and in the same degree the ambition of the younger members increased, so that eventually the desire to have a big display of music on Christmas led to another call on Hezekiah, the result of which was that the old chorister yielded his place at once without a word of protest.

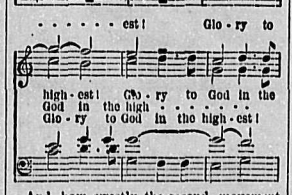
The celebration of the kindly festival began with a musical service on Christmas eve. The new quartet was in place and Hezekiah sat with the audience. In deference to old time custom some of the hymns were sung by the entire congregation. The old chorister tried to sing with the others, but after a few bars the tears somehow got entangled in his voice, and, as he could not sing and weep too, he stopped singing. When it was all over several of his neighbors approached him to say that they didn't think there'd been any improvement, and Hezekiah shook each one by the hand and answered nothing.

The last gossiping couple had left the church, the sexton had blown out the lights and locked the heavy doors behind him. Sleigh bells jingled faintly away out of hearing, and the slow footsteps of the sexton crunching on the half trodden snow mingled with the tones of the clock in the high tower striking ten. Then a door inside the vestry opened, and out of a closet where brooms and dust pans were kept an old man came hesitatingly. He made his way very slowly up the broad stairs to the main meeting room. At the door leading to the choir loft he paused a moment. His hand was on the knob, but he turned it not. More slowly than before he went down the aisle and dropped into a pew. He sat there in the darkness a long time, his head sunk forward on his breast. A half hour, may be, passed, before he rose and marched with determined step to the choir door, and up the stairs to the familiar loft. He found a match in his pocket and lit the lamp that hung near the bench, where Hezekiah for more than fifty years had sung God's praises and carried the voices and spirits of the congregation with him. The dim yellow ray threw gloomy shadows of the pew backs into relief, just disclosed the pulpit at the further end of the church, gave faint hints of evergreen festoons on the walls, and here and there the laurel worked words "Emanuel," "Glory to God in the highest," and so on, that had been placed there with great toil by the young men and women of the parish in honor of the day so near at hand; but had you been there you would have seen only the patriarchal form of the chorister with a sadly bitter look on his face gazing at the gloom about the pulpit. Was he thinking how often he had stood solemnly thus while the minister was praying? Perhaps so, for after a moment his lips parted, and a tremulous "Amen!" uttered softly on a high note, sung to the evergreens and the shadows.

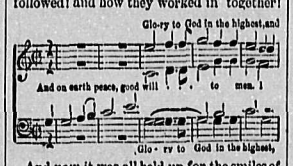
Then Hezekiah looked about the bench in front of him. He picked up one of the new anthem books brought in by the quartet. He glanced at the cover and let it fall. Taking the lamp from its socket he held it so that he could see, and presently drew forth the ancient collection of anthems, every tune in which he knew by heart, so sacred to him, and yet so speedily hidden away where it should serve nobody. He replaced the lamp and turned the pages to "Coronation," the first piece sung by a choir under his direction more than a lifetime ago. Fondly he looked at the familiar notes and then, his chest thrown out and his head held up, he sung the grand old tune and its magnificent words with all the fervor and all the power that his voice ever had commanded. From beginning to end the hymn rang through the deserted gloomy church, and Dr. Williams, driving by in haste to attend the ills of a far off patient, wondered that the rehearsal should have been continued so late. When the last note had ceased Hezekiah stood with the book still open and his head still up, but the tears were coursing down his face in steady streams.

At last he sank into a chair, and with a great pang at the heart he saw upon the bench beside the volume of newfangled tunes a little book of manuscript music. When he was a young man of not more than 50 Hezekiah had taken it into his head that he would write music, and the several anthems that he had composed in pure harmony, but with crude progressions, had been laboriously copied into books, and had been used occasionally ever since in church service. What had they been doing with his music? Was it not enough that they should discard him in his old age, and his ways and his books, without hunting up his feeble but earnest compositions to laugh at them? That could not be forgiven! With melancholy fingers he turned the leaves. His inspection stopped at an anthem for Christmas, composed on words taken literally from the Scriptures. There it was, with its introductory recitative for bass, and a double fugue, as he called it, when the angels' chorus was reached. His wife had sung the treble before she left the choir, and when with patient resignation he had laid her in the grave, his daughter had performed her part, and since she married and moved away the anthem had not been sung. With what grand emotion he had heard the voices begin the first fugal movement:





And how sweetly the second movement followed! and how they worked in together!



And now it was all held up for the smiles of a modern quartet!

The old chorister's head sank upon the bench, and his tears blurred the notes on the ancient page.

"Gracious massy! Hezekiah, wake up! wake up 'Kiah; you'll ketch your death of cold! Come!"

It was Peter Stone, the sexton, dumfounded by surprise, shaking the old chorister violently by the shoulder. Painfully Hezekiah raised his head.

"Merry Christmas, Peter; I'd rather stay here," he said feebly when he saw where he was.

Peter laughed almost hysterically and tugged away persistently at the old man's shoulders.

"Come down to the fire," he exclaimed; "the choir will be here right away to rehearse for the service."

"Yes, I'll go," answered Hezekiah, and with great difficulty he dragged his stiffened limbs down the stairs into the vestry, where the furnace was already roaring with a freshly made fire. He submitted to be rubbed and slapped by Peter to induce a quicker circulation of his blood, but he gave no clear answer to the wondering inquiries as to how he came to be locked into the church over night.

Presently the organ upstairs began to sound. Hezekiah shivered and Peter rubbed him the harder. Then the voice of the bass in the new quartet was heard reciting:

"And there were shepherds abiding in the field."

The old chorister listened with staring eyes. Could it be? The long recitative came to an end, and then all the voices took up in proper order the angels' chorus.

"What does that mean, Peter?" exclaimed Hezekiah, starting up.

"Why, 'twas meant as a Christmas surprise in your honor. They're goin' to sing your piece."

The old chorister broke away from the sexton and hobbled up the stairs. When he reached the organ loft they were singing

"And on earth peace, good will to men."

Hezekiah waited until they were done, and then in a low, grave tone that startled the singers, he said:

"I wish you all a merry Christmas, neighbors. I've had hard feelings against you, and I pray that God will forgive me and cause you not to look unkindly on an old man. This is more than I deserve."

F. R. BURTON.

THE FIR TREE.

Far down in the forest, where the warm sun and the fresh air made a sweet resting place, grew a pretty little fir tree; and yet it was not happy, it wished so much to be tall like its companions, the pines and firs which grew around it. The sun shone and the soft air fluttered its leaves, and the little peasant children passed by prattling merrily, but the fir tree heeded them not. As it grew it complained, "Oh! how I wish I were as tall as the other trees, then I would spread out my branches on every side and my top would overlook the wide world. I should have the birds building their nests on my boughs, and when the wind blew I should bow with stately dignity like my tall companions." Two winters passed. In the autumn, as usual, the woodcutters came and cut down several of the tallest trees, and the young fir tree, which was now grown to its full height, shuddered as the noble trees fell to the earth with a crash. After the branches were lopped off, the trunks looked so slender and bare that they could scarcely be recognized. Then they were placed upon wagons and drawn by horses out of the forest. "Where were they going? What would become of them?" The young fir tree wished very much to know. So in the spring, when the swallows and the storks came, it asked, "Do you know where those trees were taken? Did you meet them?"

"HOW I WISH I WERE AS TALL AS OTHER TREES!"

The swallows knew nothing; but the stork, after a little reflection, nodded his head and said, "Yes, I think I do. I met several new ships when I flew from Egypt, and they had fine masts that smelt like fir. I think these must have been the trees; I assure you they were stately, very stately."

"Oh, how I wish I were tall enough to go on the sea," said the fir tree. "What is this sea and what does it look like?"

"It would take too much time to explain," said the stork, flying quickly away.

"Rejoice in thy youth," said the sunbeam; "rejoice in thy fresh growth and the young life that is in thee."

And the wind kissed the tree and the dew watered it with tears, but the fir tree regarded them not.

Christmas time drew near and many young trees were cut down, some even smaller and younger than the fir tree, who enjoyed neither rest nor peace with longing to leave its forest home. These young trees, which were chosen for their beauty, kept their branches and were also laid on wagons and drawn by horses out of the forest.

"Where are they going?" asked the fir tree. "They are not taller than I am; indeed one is much less; and why are the branches not cut off? Where are they going?"

"We know, we know," sang the sparrows. "We have looked in at the windows of the houses in the town, and we know what is done with them. They are dressed up in the most splendid manner. We have seen them standing in the middle of a warm room, and adorned with all sorts of beautiful things—honey cakes, gilded apples, playthings, and many hundreds of wax tapers."

IT WAS THE FIRST TO FALL.

"And then," asked the fir tree, trembling through all its branches, "and then what happens?"

"We did not see any more," said the sparrows; "but this was enough for us."

"I wonder whether anything so brilliant will ever happen to me," thought the fir tree.

Rejoice with us," said the air and the sunlight. "Enjoy thine own bright life in fresh air."

But the tree would not rejoice, though it grew taller every day, and winter and summer its dark green foliage might be seen in the forest, while passers by would say, "What a beautiful tree!"

A short time before Christmas the discontented fir tree was the first to fall. As the ax cut through the stem and divided the pith the tree fell with a groan to the earth, conscious of pain and faintness, and forgetting all its anticipations of happiness, in sorrow at leaving its home in the forest. It knew that it should never again see its dear old companions, the trees, nor the little bushes and many colored flowers that had grown by its side; perhaps not even the birds. Neither was the journey at all pleasant. The tree first recovered itself while being unpacked in the courtyard of a house, with several other trees; and it heard a man say, "We only want one, and this is the prettiest."

Then came two servants in grand livery and carried the fir tree into a large and beautiful apartment. On the walls hung pictures, and near the great stove stood great china vases, with lions on the lids. There were rocking chairs, silken sofas, large tables, covered with pictures, books and playthings, worth a great deal of money—at least the children said so. Then the fir tree was placed in a large tub, full of sand; but green baize hung all round it, so that no one could see it was a tub, and it stood on a very handsome carpet. How the fir tree trembled! "What was going to happen to him now?" Some young ladies came, and the servants helped them to adorn the tree. On one branch they hung little bags cut out of colored paper, and each bag was filled with sweetmeats; from other branches hung gilded apples and walnuts, as if they had grown there; and above, and all round, were hundreds of red, blue and white tapers, which were fastened on the branches. Dolls, exactly like real babies, were placed under the green leaves—the tree had never seen such things before—and at the very top was fastened a glittering star made of tinsel. Oh, it was very beautiful!

At last the tapers were lighted, and then what a glistening blaze of light the tree presented! And now the folding doors were thrown open, and a troop of children rushed in as if they intended to upset the tree; they were followed more slowly by their elders. For a moment the little ones stood silent with astonishment, and then they shouted for joy, till the room rang, and they danced merrily round the tree, while one present after another was taken from it.

"What are they doing? What will happen next?" thought the fir. At last the candles burnt down to the branches and were put out. Then the children received permission to plunder the tree.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

Oh, how they rushed upon it, till the branches cracked, and had it not been fastened with the glistening star to the ceiling, it must have been thrown down. The children then danced about with their pretty toys, and no one noticed the tree, except the children's maid, who came and peeped among the branches to see if an apple or a fig had been forgotten.

"A story, a story," cried the children, pulling a little fat man toward the tree.

"Now we shall be in the green shade," said the man, as he seated himself under it, "and the tree will have the pleasure of hearing also, but I shall only relate one story; what shall it be? Ivede-Avede, or Humpty Dumpty, who fell down stairs, but soon got up again, and at last married a princess."

"Ivede-Avede," cried some. "Humpty Dumpty," cried others, and there was a fine shouting and crying out. But the fir tree remained quite still, and thought to himself, "Shall I have anything to do with all this?" but he had already amused them as much as they wished. Then the old man told them the story of Humpty Dumpty, how he fell down stairs, and was raised up again, and married a princess. And the children clapped their hands and cried, "Tell another, tell another," for they wanted to hear the story of "Ivede-Avede;" but they only had "Humpty Dumpty." After this the fir tree became quite silent and thoughtful; never had the birds in the forest told such tales as "Humpty Dumpty," who fell down stairs, and yet married a princess.

"Ah! yes, so it happens in the world," thought the fir tree; he believed it all, because it was related by a such a nice man. "Ah! well," he thought, "who knows? perhaps I may fall down too, and marry a princess;" and he looked forward joyfully to the next evening, expecting to be again decked out with lights and playthings, gold and fruit. "To-morrow I will not tremble," thought he; "I will enjoy all my splendor, and I shall hear the story of Humpty Dumpty again, and perhaps Ivede-Avede." And the tree remained quiet and thoughtful all night. In the morning the servants and the housemaid came in. "Now," thought the fir, "all my splendor is going to begin again." But they dragged him out of the room and upstairs to the garret, and threw him on the floor, in a dark corner, where no daylight shone, and there they left him. "What does this mean?" thought the tree. "What am I to do here? I can hear nothing in a place like this," and he leant against the wall, and thought and thought. And he had time enough to think, for days and nights passed and no one came near him, and when at last somebody did come, it was only to put away large boxes in a corner. So the tree was completely hidden from sight as if it had never existed. "It is winter, now," thought the tree, "the ground is hard and covered with snow, so that people cannot plant me. I shall be sheltered here, I daresay, until spring comes."

"Squeak, squeak," said a little mouse, creeping cautiously towards the tree; then came another, and they both sniffed at the fir tree and crept between the branches.

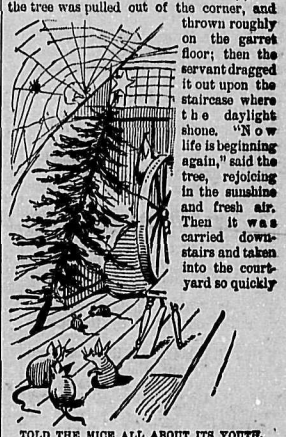
"Oh, it is very cold," said the little mouse, "or else we should be so comfortable here, shouldn't we, you old fir tree?"

"I am not old," said the fir tree, "there are many who are older than I am."

"Where do you come from, and what do you know?" asked the mice, who were full of curiosity. "Have you seen the most beautiful places in the world, and can you tell us all about them? and have you been in the storeroom, where cheeses lie on the shelf, and hams hang from the ceiling? One can run about on tallow candles, there, and go in thin and come out fat."

"I know nothing of that place," said the fir tree, "but I know the wood where the sun shines and the birds sing." And then the tree told the little mice all about its youth. They had never heard such an account in their lives; and after they had listened to it attentively, they said: "What a number of things you have seen! you must have been very happy."

One morning people came to clear out the garret, the boxes were packed away, and the tree was pulled out of the corner, and thrown roughly on the garret floor; then the servant dragged it out upon the staircase where the daylight shone. "Now life is beginning again," said the tree, rejoicing in the sunshine and fresh air. Then it was carried downstairs and taken into the courtyard so quickly



TOLD THE MICE ALL ABOUT ITS YOUTH.

that it forgot to think of itself, and could only look about, there was so much to be seen. The court was close to a garden, where everything looked blooming. Fresh and fragrant roses hung over the little palings. The linden trees were in blossom; while the swallows flew here and there, crying: "Twit, twit, twit, my mate is coming," but it was not the fir tree they meant. "Now I shall live," cried the tree, joyfully, spreading out its branches; but, alas! they were all withered and yellow, and it lay in a corner amongst weeds and nettles. The star of gold paper still stuck in the top of the tree, and glittered in the sunshine. In the same courtyard two of the merry children were playing who had danced round the tree at Christmas, and had been so happy. The youngest saw the gilded star, and ran and pulled it off the tree. "Look what is sticking to the ugly old fir tree," said the child treading on the branches till they crackled under his boots. And the tree saw all the fresh, bright flowers in the garden, and then looked at itself and wished it had remained in the dark corner of the garret. Then a lad came and chopped the tree into small pieces, till a large bundle lay in a heap on the ground. The pieces were placed in a fire under the copper, and they quickly blazed up brightly, while the tree sighed so deeply that each sigh was like a little pistol shot. Then the children, who were at play, came and seated themselves in front of the fire, and looked at it, and cried, "Pop, pop." But at each "pop," which was a deep sigh, the tree was thinking of a summer day in the forest or of some winter night there, when the stars shone brightly, and of Christmas evening. Now all was past; the tree's life was past, and the story also—for all stories must come to an end at last.—Adapted from Hans Christian Anderson.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES.

The village church on Christmas Day
Holds kindly hearts and pleasant faces
And some are seen to sing and pray
Who seldom go to such like places.

THE FRONT PEW.

But if for only once a year
Their hearts are touched, it makes them better;
And he who feels his conscience clear
Must own himself the season's debtor.

Enter here both rich and poor,
Come in simple hope and faith;
Leave behind you at the door
Love of life and dread of death.

THE FREE SEATS.

Come on this the day of days,
Humbly pray on bended knee;
Sing the fervid song of praise,
All the seats in heav'n are free.

Christmas in a Restaurant.

Mr. Wayback (spending his Christmas in town)—Waiter, for gracious sake bring me something to break up this turkey with.

Waiter—Wot'll yer have, dynamite or an ax?

ONE CHRISTMAS TIME.

WHAT CAME OF KILLING A RICH UNCLE.

By MARK LEMON.

I.

"Dance with me, Letty Green," said George Poynter, to a pretty girl with blue eyes and "hair that shamed the morn."

Her ample ball dress was of the purest white muslin, fastened at the sleeves and round the waist with blue ribbon—bluer than her eyes.

"Yes," answered Letty, "I want to dance with you."

The dance at an end, Letty tried to smooth her golden curls into order with her little hands, and then, opening her pretty blue eyes to their full, said:

"George Poynter, I should like some orange."

"Yes, Letty," said the young gentleman addressed; "and there's lemonade and negus and such a sponge cake."

"I like dancing with you better than any one, Letty," said George, to his pretty partner.

"Do you? Why?" replied Letty, her voice rather obstructed by the sponge cake.

"I think it is because I like you—you are so pretty," replied the young gallant.

"You mustn't say that, or mamma will scold you, Georgy. She scolds every one who tells me I am pretty," said the young lady.

But the words had been spoken, and from that night until the end of the Christmas holidays, George and Letty said they were sweethearts.

II.

Some four or five years had passed and Letty Green and her mamma were sitting together under the veranda of their pretty cottage, working, and talking of a pleasant day they had spent at Mr. Poynter's, when Master George came, he said, to bid them good-by, as he was returning to school on the following morning.

"And I want to ask you a favor, Mrs. Green, and Letty a favor," said George, coloring slightly.

Mrs. Green would grant it, of course, and so would Letty, if she could.

"I want Letty to ride Rufus, my pony, whilst I am at school. Papa has no use for it, and it carries a lady beautifully."

"But to accept this proposal would give so much trouble."

"Not in the least, Tom—that's our groom—says it won't, and papa says it won't, and I say the same; so please say you'll use the pony. Straps, the harness maker, will lend a side saddle."

Mrs. Green accepted George's offer, as Letty was rather fragile, and pony riding had been declared to be good for her; but Mrs. Green's income would not allow of the expense, she said. There were people who called Mrs. Green a mean woman, and hinted that she loved money better than her child.

George Poynter went to school very cheery, because he had made such a capital arrangement about his pony, and he often thought, when the weather was fine, of Rufus, and wondered if Letty were riding him. George had not forgotten, perhaps, that years—years ago he and Letty had called themselves sweethearts.

III.

More years had passed, and brought their changes. George and Letty were alone together in a small book room in Mrs. Green's house, the windows opening to the garden. George was attired in deep mourning, and there were strips of black ribbon here and there on Letty's white dress. They had been talking of death and sorrow until both had become silent. After a time Letty took George's hand, and said:

"Dear George, you must strive to meet your great affliction with a brave spirit—indeed you must."

"I have—I do strive," replied George, looking away from Letty; "but remember what has come to me. Two years ago my father died. A year before that villain, Jackson, ruined my father—broke his heart—killed him. O Letty! what have I done to deserve this? What can I do?"

"Trust still to the father of the fatherless," replied Letty. "We do not know why great afflictions are permitted to overtake us any more than we can tell why great good comes to us when we least expect or deserve it, dear George. You are young, clever, good and have many friends, and one—who is more than a friend."

She raised George's hand to her lips when she had said this (they were true sweethearts now), and he—what could he do but press her to his bosom, and kiss her cheek burning with blushes?

Mrs. Green had been walking in the garden, evidently busy with her thoughts. She had stopped near the book room window, near enough to hear what the sweethearts were saying to each other, and she appeared to be made more thoughtful by what she heard.

When Mr. Poynter was a thriving merchant Mrs. Green had been more than a consenting party to her daughter's acceptance of George Poynter's attentions—indeed, she had by several indirect means encouraged the young people to think lovingly of each other. But now matters were changed. Master George, as he was generally called, had neither houses nor lands, nor had he "ships gone to a far countrie," and Mrs. Green was perplexed how to act. She knew that Letty loved her first sweetheart, and would perhaps love him more now that he was poor.

Mrs. Green was relieved from her perplexity more agreeably than she deserved t have been, as George Poynter called the next day, bringing with him a letter from his uncle, rich old Silas Cheeseman, promising to provide for his only sister's only son, and hinting that George might by good conduct look to be heir to all his thrifty savings.

Silas was a bachelor, having been blighted in his youth. He then took to loving money, and had been a most successful wooer, as those clever people who know everybody's business but their own declared old Silas Cheeseman to be worth his hundred thousand pounds—"more or less."

Uncle Silas had also procured a situation for George in the neighboring town of St. Gnats—merely a probationary situation, as clerk to a timber merchant, who was under pecuniary obligations to Silas. All this was very cheering, and very kind of Uncle Silas, although Mr. Bawk, the timber merchant, was indelicate enough to surmise that George was placed in his establishment as a spy, and to watch the interests of his uncle. George would have scorned such a position for all Uncle Silas had to give.

IV.

Before we pass on to the events of the next few years, we will introduce Chauncey Gibbs, a friend of George Poynter.

Chauncey—his patronym of Gibbs was rarely mentioned—Chauncey was a good natured, good for nothing, unsettled, amusing fellow, who contrived to live a gypsy kind of life on £200. a year, steadfastly refusing to encumber himself with any employment or to incur responsibilities more (to quote Chauncey) than his hat would cover. He was a native of St. Gnats and known to everybody in the town, but he had no regular abiding place, as he chose to wander at will, and George Poynter would not have been surprised to have received one of Chauncey's brief letters dated from London, Paris, Vienna or Pekin. He mostly affected England, however, and London especially in the winter. When money was scarce Chauncey walked; when he was in funds he availed himself of any cheap conveyance which offered, sometimes never inquiring its destination, but making himself equally at home wherever he was stranded. At Christmas time he always returned to St. Gnats, and was a welcome guest at many hospitable tables in that thriving town, making his headquarters, however, with his old friend and school chum, George Poynter. He had written to announce his return to St. Gnats for the Christmas approaching the end of the two years which had intervened since George Poynter had assumed the stool of office at Mr. Bawk's, and supplies of tobacco and bitter beer were already secured for the welcome pected guest.

Chauncey had a favorite lounge in London, a tobacconist's in an out of the way street in the neighborhood of St. Mary Axe.

The proprietor was a beadle, or some official of that character, to one of the companies, and the tobacco business was conducted during the early part of the day by the beadle's wife and daughter. It was Chauncey's pleasure to sit on a snuff tub in front of the counter and smoke, in turn, all the varieties of tobacco sold at the beadle's, beguiling the time, also, with animated conversations with the daughter, whose powers of repartee were more ready than refined. It is not our intention to chronicle more than Chauncey's parting interview and what came of it, as slang from a woman's lips is our abhorrence.

Chauncey was about to leave the shop after one of his long sittings, when the younger lady said:

"You won't see me again, I expect, Mr. Chauncey; I'm going to be married."

"You married!"

"Yes, me; why not, I should like to know?" asked the lady, a little piqued.

"I'm sure I envy the happy man," replied Chauncey. "It's not the Scotchman at the shop door, is it?"

"Well, I'm sure!" said the young lady, and without another word she bounced into the little parlor at the back of the shop.

"Now you've regularly offended Becky," said Mrs. Beadle, "and such old friends as you was—and she to be married to-morrow, and so respectable."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Chauncey. "Where's the wedding to be? I'll buy a bundle of water cresses and strew her way into church as an apology for my rudeness."

"Oh! she won't want no apology from you—she knows what you are Mr. Chauncey; but she's to be married at 10 to-morrow, at St. Mary Axe's, but we don't want it spoke of, as the bridegroom's nervous," said Mrs. Beadle, in a whisper.

"I'll be there in time," replied Chauncey. "I suppose her father will give her away—in full costume, cocked hat, staff, and all that."

"He will do all things that is proper, Mr. Chauncey," said Mrs. Beadle, with much dignity, and Becky at that moment calling "Mother!" in rather an hysterical tone, Chauncey was allowed to find his way out of the shop as he pleased.

On the following morning Chauncey was at the church of St. Mary Axe a quarter of an hour before the time appointed for the ceremony which was to unite Miss Beadle and somebody to their lives' end.

A hale old gentleman between 60 and 70, perhaps, was the next arrival. Having made some very confidential communication to the old pew opener, he was conducted, evidently in great trepidation, to the vestry, and there immured until the arrival of the tobacconist and family—but without the emblematical Scotchman. Chauncey concluded, therefore, that Miss Beadle had captivated the old gentleman now awaiting his doom in the condemned cell called the vestry.

The Beadle was in mufti, but his costume still partook of the splendor of his office, and a canary colored waistcoat with glittering buttons of ruby glass rendered him somewhat conspicuous even in the gloom of St. Mary Axe. His general expression and bearing was that of a tempered indignation, as though he were about to consent to the infliction of some injury which he could avoid if he pleased. A word, a look, might have provoked him to have torn the license from the parson's hands and to have dragged his daughter from the altar. He was therefore allowed to walk up the aisle unmolested.

Mrs. Beadle was very lively on her entrance to the church—more lively, perhaps, than black tea and the occasion warranted; but, whatever had been the stimulating cause of her cheerfulness, it ran in plenteous drops from her eyes as she approached the altar, and must have been exhausted entirely by the end of the ceremony. Niobe weeping for her children would have been a dry nurse compared with Mrs. Beadle.

Miss Beadle was resigned, as became her to be at 31. With closed eyes and drooping head she leaned upon her mother's arm until, with pardonable confusion, she released her hand to put up her parasol as she drew near the altar. Chauncey rushed to her relief, and with some difficulty possessed himself of the incumbrance, and as there were no attendant bridesmaids the impudent fellow attached himself to the wedding party, to be, as he said, "generally useful and to pick up the pieces."

The ceremony proceeded with all proper solemnity, but there was some association with the name of one of the contracting parties which made Chauncey fairly start, and then determine to witness the signing of the certificate, to satisfy a doubt which had suddenly entered his mind.

The wedding party retired to the vestry when "Amazement" had ended the ceremony, and proceeded to sign the registers attesting the union which had just been solemnized. Mr. Chauncey Gibbs being, as he said, a friend of the family, signed also, and there read—what had better be revealed in the next chapter.

V.

Any one had only to have walked down the High street of St. Gnats to have known that Christmas was at hand. The grocers' windows were overrunning with lusciousness; the butchers' shops were so choke full of beef and mutton that the butchers themselves would have to cut their way out into the street; the poulterers had laid in such stocks of turkeys, geese and chickens, that Mr. Babbage's calculating machine could alone have computed them—mere human intellect would have failed. The window frames of the houses seemed sprouting with holly and "the ivy green," and no doubt but mistletoe hung, kiss provoking, within.

Mrs. Green had made every room in her cottage an anagram of her name, as it was holly decked everywhere. Nor was the sacred bough forgotten—"on the young people's account," she said, "though Letty and George had long ceased to want an excuse for a kiss."

George Poynter was waiting the arrival of his friend, Chauncey Gibbs. A glorious fire blazed within the grate; the table was spread to welcome the coming guest, for whose delectation a faultless rumpsteak pie was browning in the oven. The train, punctual to its time, was heard screaming into the station close by, and in a few minutes after the two friends were together.

If you are hungry it is tantalizing to listen to the particulars of a dinner you are not to share; if you are sated, you are bored by the recapitulation of dainties you care not to touch, and therefore we will allow the friends to take their meal in peace. Neither will we join their after revel when two or three old cronies came in and made a night of it, until George and Chauncey sought their beds fairly tired out with jollity.

When breakfast was over the next morning, and Chauncey found that George had excused himself from attendance at the timber yard, he said:

"I am glad you can give the morning to me, as I have some news for you that may, perhaps, surprise and annoy you."

"Indeed!" replied George. "What is it?"

"I would not touch upon it last night, although I think some immediate action should be taken by you or your friends," continued Chauncey, looking very serious.

"Pray speak out," said George.

"Oh yes. I must do that, for I have no tact, never had, to make an unpleasant matter agreeable. Have you heard from your uncle lately?"

"Yes, two days ago—principally on Mr. Bawk's business," replied George.

"My old boy, your uncle never intended you any good when he shut you up in that log house of Bawk's. He put you there for his own selfish purpose and nothing else."

"Why do you say that?" asked George.

"He has led you to suppose that you were to be his heir some day, has he not?"

"He has never said that in direct terms; but he certainly has hinted at such a possibility."

"Then he's an old scamp, if he don't deserve a harder name," said Chauncey, thumping the table. "Two days ago he did his best to disinherit you. You may stare, but I saw with my own eyes, heard with my own ears, that old ragamuffin marry a bouncing woman of thirty."

"Marry! Uncle Silas marry!"

"Fast as St. Mary Axe could do it, to a snuffseller's daughter;" and then Chauncey, to the astonishment of his friend, narrated what we already know of the wedding at which Mr. Chauncey had so officiously assisted.

"This is indeed a terrible blow," said George, "an unexpected blow."

"Yes; I am afraid, knowing the hands he has fallen into, that he won't have a will of his own when a few months have passed," said Chauncey. "I found out how the matter came about. Old Silas was very ill, and wouldn't have a doctor; but—a Beadle, I call him—got at him, and then introduced his daughter as nurse. They first physicked him nearly to death, and then brought him round with bottled porter. They told the old fool they saved his life, and he believed it; and out of gratitude, and the want of a nurse, he proposed to Miss High-dried, and married her."

"This hits me harder than you know, Chauncey—much harder. Poor Letty and I can never hope now"——

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Chauncey. "Keep your uncle's secret, as he will if he can, marry Letty, and let Mother Green storm afterwards."

George shood his head, and then said:

"Chauncey, you advise that which is dishonorable."

"All fair in love, old boy," replied Chauncey, with a laugh; "and if I were you, to gain the woman who loves me, whom I love, I'd kill my uncle."

"Great heaven! what do you say? But I see you were joking. No; my course is perfectly clear so far as Mrs. Green and Letty are concerned. I go to them at once, and tell what has taken place. If I am forbidden to continue my visits by Mrs. Green she shall be obeyed. Letty, I know, will be always true to me; and when I can make a home for her, I can claim her with honor."

"Devilish pretty speech," said Chauncey," and all right, I have no doubt. I still say, kill old Silas Cheeseman, and get married; or, stay—perhaps—yes—you shall write to him, now that he's honeymoon struck—tell him you want to follow his example, and require ten thousand pounds to do it."

"I understand this nonsense, Chauncey," replied George, with a sad smile. "Your friendly chaff is well meant; but my case is very serious. And so good-by for an hour or two. You will find me here after that time."

The road to Mrs. Green's cottage never seemed so long before to George Poynter as it did now that he felt his fate. The happiness, for a time at least, of his darling Letty depended upon the interview he was seeking with her mother. He was not without some justification for the misgivings which beset him, as Mrs. Green had more than twice or thrice casually hinted at what a mother's course should be to prevent a child "marrying into poverty." Indeed, she had once told him, when Letty was not present, how glad she was when his uncle's recognition of him produced such a favorable turn in George's fortunes, as it had spared them all the pain which she should have felt it her duty to have inflicted. The crisis had only been deferred. There were tears from Mrs. Green—regrets and pity; but there were were also cold, cruel words, which were not to be gainsaid, unless Letty could disobey the mother who had loved her all her life, and lived only to see her happy.

George spared his Letty and her mother any contest as to the decision to be made. He promised to obey Mrs. Green in all she required of him; but he promised Letty also, when they were left alone, that his love never should change, nor should a doubt ever have place in his thoughts that she could change one tittle in her love for him. And as he held her to his beating heart—not for the last time, no! no!—he told her how he would strive to make a home for both—that their probation would be short if a brave resolution could only find the means to work with. And they would come—they always did; for had not they been promised by the one which could not lie?

Poor hearts! they parted very sadly; but a good angel was already busying himself for their reunion. And such an angel!—Chauncey Gibbs!

"He won't write to old Silas?" Then I will," said Chauncey, half aloud, when George had left him. "He won't kill his uncle—an old fool? Then I will." He opened the long blade of his penknife and—trimmed a quill which he found on George's desk.

There were paper and ink, as may be supposed, and there was also the ready writer, Chauncey, who began:

"ST. GNATS, Dec. 20, 18—.

"DEAR SIR—As my friend, Mr. George Poynter, is unfortunately suffering at this time from a severe blow in his chest—('That's perfectly true')—I have placed myself at his service; and although I shall not express myself as he would have done on the subject—('That's true again, I fancy')—I hope you will take the will for the deed. News has reached us here, dear sir—('He'll like that dear sir')—that after many years of deliberate calculation—('No, not calculation')—consideration, you have discovered that man was not made to live alone, and therefore, with a wise regard for your own happiness, you have sought connubial felicity at the altar of St. Mary Axe. ('Very good!' muttered Chauncey; 'the name of the church will show that his secret is known to us.') I know not whether it is your wish that your blissful union should be made generally known; but I cannot hesitate (on the part of my friend, I mean) to offer you my sincerest congratulations, and to wish you all the happiness you deserve. ('That's true; and I should like to add, all you are likely to find.') I am aware that what you have done must necessarily interfere largely, if not entirely, with those expectations which you once or twice—('Shall I say promised? No')—encouraged me to entertain—('What would old George say to that?')—and though I descend from the clouds—('Good figure that')—to the substratum of daily toil and permanent anxiety, I shall know that you are sitting happy at your domestic hearth, smoking the pipe of peace—('It wants something else to round off the sentence')—and—and—('Oh, blow it!')—rocking the cradle.

"May I request—if not asking too much at this blissful period of your life—a line, to tell me that I may add to my affectionate remembrances an Aunt Cheeseman?

"I remain, dear sir,

"Your affectionate nephew,

"FOR GEORGE POYNTER"—

Chauncey paused. "It won't do to sign my name, or Mrs. C. will remember it. Yes—I have it—they never heard the name of C. GIBBS."

Having sealed and directed his letter, Chauncey proceeded to post it.

In traveling down from London Chauncey had learned that a projected branch railway from St Gnats was in high favor with all the moneyed interest of the place; and when he suggested the propriety of killing old Silas he had this railway in his mind, as on the following day the allotment of shares was to take place. Chauncey knew—as he knew everybody—Mr. Golding, the banker and chairman pro tem. of the projected company. Without the least misgiving or hesitation he called upon that highly respectable gentleman, and, after a few minutes' interview, gave the conversation an extraordinary twist, or jerk, as thus:

"You've heard of the great windfall to our townsman, George Poynter, I suppose," said Chauncey. "No? Well, perhaps it was hardly to be expected, seeing what a retiring fellow he is."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Golding. "He is a young man for whom I have the greatest respect. I shall be glad to hear of any good fortune to him."

"And it is a good fortune! His uncle, you know, was immensely rich," said Chauncey. "The old bachelor is no more—went off three days ago—and my friend George was long ago his appointed heir."

"Silas Cheeseman gone!" remarked Mr. Golding, with a shrug; "a very money getting man; and must have died very rich—very rich."

"E-nor-mously rich! Single man many years; no expenses, you know," said Chauncey. "I witnessed the last moments of the old bachelor at St. Mary Axe. Went off quite composedly after his will was accomplished. By the bye, it strikes me you might secure the interest of young George."

"How, my dear sir?" asked Mr. Golding; "we are always glad to secure a good client"——

"And with such wealth!" said Chauncey. "You allot shares in the St. Gnats Junction to-morrow, do you not?"

"Yes," replied the banker; "and the applications exceed anything I ever knew; the shares will be five or six premium before to-morrow is over."

"That's your plan, then! Secure him a thousand."

"A thousand!" exclaimed Mr. Golding.

"Well, half a thousand—say five hundred—for George Poynter; I'll let him know whose influence he has to thank for them. You'll be the banker of his immense wealth—his friend—adviser."

"But he has not applied," said Mr. Golding.

"But you have. What's a paltry five hundred to you in comparison to after gain—or to him? He won't care for the money, but the friendliness of the thing," said Chauncey, with a flourish of the hand, as though he were proposing the merest trifle of a sacrifice.

"And you, my dear sir?" asked Mr. Golding.

"Oh, nothing; I want nothing; and you may rely upon my secrecy."

Mr. Golding pressed Chauncey's hand, and thanked him for the friendly suggestion.

Mr. Golding had but one confidant, Mr. Baxter, who at that moment entered the bank, and was announced as being there.

"Do you object to my naming the matter to my friend Baxter?—great influence at the board," said Golding.

"Not in the least; perhaps he may help you to make the allotment a thousand," replied Chauncey.

"Oh, impossible, my good friend," said the banker. "Show in Mr. Baxter."

Chauncey's communication having been repeated to Mr. Baxter, the diplomatist thought he had better retire; but he had not gone many yards from the bank when Mr. Baxter overtook him.

"Delighted to hear what you have told us concerning your friend Poynter—an excellent young man, and deserves all he gets."

"I am sure of that," said Chauncey, "whatever good it may be."

"He'll reside at St. Gnats, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Chauncey.

"And will want a house suitable to his new position?"

"Yes."

"Now I am wanting to sell Prospect House yonder—fine garden, abundance of water and all that—would it suit him, do you think?"

Chauncey was rather posed by this inquiry, and said therefore, "Perhaps."

"I think it would; £3,500 is what I ask—and could get it, but I dislike the man. You know Capt. Ranger?—of course you must," said Baxter, with emphasis.

Chauncey did not and would not know Capt. Ranger.

"He is a troublesome fellow, and I should be glad if he would leave the place," said Mr. Baxter. "If Mr. Poynter will buy he shall have the preference."

Chauncey saw no objection to that, and promised to speak to his friend if Mr. Baxter would make the offer in writing; but £3,000, he thought, would be the utmost that Mr. Poynter would give for a house.

Mr. Baxter paused for a moment, and as they were opposite his counting house he invited Chauncey in, and subsequently gave him a letter to Mr. George Poynter, containing an unconditional offer of Prospect House for £3,000. Chauncey carefully put away the letter and bade Mr. Baxter good day.

Poor George had returned to his lodging when Chauncey had transacted all the important business we have recorded, and not all his friend's good spirits could rouse him from almost despondency.

"My old boy," said Chauncey, "you'll sink down, down, if you show the white feather in this way. You're young enough to work, and like it—I never did."

"It is not hard work—hard fighting with the world, that I am fearing; it is the effect of this day's cruel trial upon poor Letty."

And then George told Chauncey all that had passed.

"Well, you would be so hastily honorable," replied Chauncey; "you had better been advised by me—waited a day or two until you had killed your uncle."

George looked at his friend and saw a cunning twinkle in his eye; but Chauncey had his own reasons for saying no more on the subject.

George was very ill the next morning—too ill to go to the timber yard; so Chauncey offered to see Mr. Bawk, and, if business pressed, to supply George's place for a day or two. Mr. Bawk declined Mr. Chauncey's services, and was so excessively polite and anxious in his inquiries about Mr. George that Chauncey thought the story of yesterday had reached Mr. Bawk.

It was not so; but Capt. Ranger had been to the timber yard to see Mr. Poynter, and had surprised Mr. Bawk by assuring him that his clerk must have come into money, as he had bought Prospect house at a sum which he (Capt. Ranger) had refused to give. He had, however, left a commission with Mr. Bawk; and Chauncey wormed out of the timber merchant the following particulars:

Captain Ranger, it appeared, had married a lady with money—not always a desirable exchange for a man's life—and the lady never allowed him to forget the pecuniary part of their engagement. She had taken a fancy—the word is not strong enough—a longing for Prospect House, and the captain had undertaken to obtain it; but, being fond of a bargain, he had disgusted Mr. Baxter with a tiresome negotiation, and the house had slipped from him. To confess this to Mrs. Captain Ranger would be to invoke a conjugal tempest; and in his extremity he had come to Mr. Bawk to intercede with his clerk to transfer his purchase.

"Well," said Chauncey, "George is a good natured fellow—too good natured—and I will undertake to say that the captain shall have Prospect House for £4,000."

"Four thousand pounds!" exclaimed Mr. Bawk.

"And not one shilling less," said Chauncey firmly. "The house is worth it as it stands; but compute its value to Captain Ranger, and it is cheap at any money."

Mr. Bawk pleaded to a stone agent when he tried to soften Mr. Chauncey; and Captain Ranger coming into the counting house at the moment, heard the terms proposed, raved like a maniac for ten minutes, and then consented to be swindled—robbed, for the sake of peace and quietness.

Chauncey could be a man of business when he pleased, and he was now in a business mood. He therefore trotted off the angry captain to an attorney's, made the transfer, and secured a prospective £1,000 for his friend George by killing his uncle.

As the day wore on, Chauncey waited upon Mr. Golding, and found that gentleman writing to Mr. Poynter, and expressing the great pleasure it gave him to hand him a letter of allotment for 500 shares in the St. Gnats Junction, etc. etc. etc. Railway; adding a hope that the firm of Golding, Silverton & Co. might have Mr. Poynter's name on their books as an honored client.

Chauncey undertook to deliver the letter, and to use his influence with his friend to make the only acknowledgment he could for such disinterested generosity.

Poor George was very ill at ease when his friend Chauncey returned, and at first was disposed to be angry at what he felt to be his inconsiderate raillery.

"I am serious, old boy, quite serious," said Chauncey, throwing Golding's letter and the transfer on the table. "I have killed old Silas Cheeseman, and there are some of the proceeds of the transaction. Open—read and satisfy yourself."

George opened the envelope containing the transfer, and then Mr. Golding's letter. He was in a mist. He thought he was delirious and had lost his reason; and Chauncey was a long time making him comprehend how he had come to be possessed of—

Profit on transfer	£1,000
Profit on 500 shares, premium 5 per share	2,500
Total	£3,500

and all by killing old Silas Cheeseman!

Poor George was hard to satisfy that these large gains were honorably come by, and when he went to sleep he dreamt that he had robbed the bank and had set Prospect House on fire. The following morning brought a letter from Uncle Silas.

The poor old dotard expressed himself so pleased at his nephew's forgiveness of an act which he had thought would have provoked only revilings and wicked wishes, that he enclosed a check for £1,000 as a avuncular blessing.

Was ever another fortune made by such means?

George had all the money; Mr. Golding begging his retention of the shares, as his commercial acuteness might be damaged by a disclosure of the trick which had been practised upon his cupidity, and Capt. Ranger was submissively satisfied, having told his cara sposa that he had bought Prospect House a decided bargain.

Mrs. Green would have had to endure many mortifying reflections had it not been Christmas time when Letty and George, and all other estranged friends, are willing to forget their old grievances, and, in thankfulness that such a season was vouchsafed to erring man, humbly imitate the Great Forgiver.

A Christmas Group.

The shining holly hangs upon the wall,
Its scarlet clusters gleaming in the light
Of ruddy fire glow, and the welcome sound
Of silver laughter; ripples through the room,
From youthful voices, whilst the mistletoe
Its white, tranparent beadlets tempting!y
Hangs o'er their sunny heads.

Now kith and kin
Are grouped in circle round the cheery hearth,
Each telling his experience of the year,
For some there be that only meet at Yule.

The gray haired grandsire sagely nods his head
What time the prattle of the four-year old—
The golden tressed youngling of the flock—
Is poured into his ear; and on his knees,
Eager to prate, doth she, wee fairy, sit,
The household darling of a score of hearts.
In yonder snug armchair sits grandmamma,
Whilst ten-year Tommy steals beside her knee,
Knowing full well, the bright eyed, saucy rogue,
The hidden soft spot in the old dame's heart;
And with a loving, half regretful gaze,
Look on the children's parents, carried back
To the "lang syne" when they themselves were bies!
In childhood's happy, glad unconsciousness
Of ills to come; and so, forgetting Time,
They in their treasured blossoms bloom again.

—A. H. B.

Seizing a Christmas Chance.

Do you blame him?

The mince pie was a Christmas favorite in the time of the poet Herrick, who wrote of it:

The while the meet is a-shredding
For the rare mince pie,
And the plums stand by
To fill the paste that's a-kneeding.

The Day Before Christmas.

Fat Turkey—I've been living high lately. Wonder what's the matter. What is this Christmas business anyway?

Thin Turkey (who has consumption)—You will know before night; ta, ta!

Sweet and Bitter.

How sweet and fresh the soft spring air—
A balm, an appetizer.
It makes me feel like—but, oh! whew!
Consarn the fertilizer!

—Burlington Free Press.

A Stranger Among Strangers.

New York Belle—Do you know that [illegible] as New York is there are only four hundred people there who can claim to really belong to the elite?

Omaha Man—Shouldn't wonder. It's the loneliest place I ever got into.—Omaha World.

Ethel's Diploma.

That Ethel is an artist.
All must a limit with grace;
How could one ever doubt it
Who'd ever seen her face?

—London Tid Bits.

SPICE OF THE SEASON.

The Christmas time comes on apace and charity begins to hum.

The prettiest thing in a stocking Christmas morning is a pretty girl's foot.

When Kris Kringle comes down the chimney it soots Kris and the children as well.

Santa Claus is said to be of German origin. His favorite oath, "By Chimney."

The pawnbroker knows [illegible] is coming, and so does the [illegible] and so does the girl.

A facetious divine got so many Christmas slippers that he said: "Do ladies think me a centipede?"

A Christmas belle—The girl with the ring in her voice who will always chime in when anything is told.

With many people Christmas presents will only come through the imagination, which will enable them to exhibit great presents of mind.

There is nothing the matter with the small boy who presents his mother with a pair of felt slippers for Christmas. He is just a smart boy, that's all.

The custom of having a rousing Christmas dinner is not only an ancient one, but it is the most universal of any custom known to the civilized world.

Talk about oil trusts, rubber trusts, coal trusts, etc., as much as you like, but what we want about holiday time is a turkey or goose trussed.—*Boston Courier.*

Remember that a Christmas gift gains nothing in significance by being costly, and that to seek to outdo others in pecuniary outlay, simply because you have the means, is vulgar.

"Ah, my son," said the minister, "I'm glad to see you in the Sunday-school at last. Is this your first Sunday?" "Yes, sir." "How do you like it?" "Oh, guess I kin stand it until after the Christmas tree."—*Tid-Bits*

As Christmas approaches, the young man who has been toasting his toes and lounging on the best parlor sofa, tries to get up a quarrel with his girl so as to escape bankrupting himself on a Christmas present.

Monetary: Clarksby—"Good morning, Mrs. Gadby. Shopping, I see?" Mrs. Gadby.—"Yes; I've been picking up a few little things for Christmas." C.—"I haven't seen Mrs. Gadby on 'change lately." Mrs. G. (laconically)—"I have."