

BRIGHTEST AND BEST.

Brightest and best of the Sons of the morning, Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid; Star of the east, the horizon adorning, Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.



Say, shall ye yield him in costly devotion, Odors from Eden or offerings divine, Gems from the mountain or pearls from the mine?

ONE CHRISTMAS.

BY OLIVE HARPER.

"That there Marthy Avery is the foolish-est critter that ever lived, I swan to man! Here's her father dead, and she left with all that brood of her stepmother's, young ones; and instead of sendin' 'em to their grandfater she ups and says she is goin' to support 'em herself. She won't get my Jabez if that's her idee, for I'll just put my foot down."

"There's three gals and a boy baby, and they hain't no call nor claim on her. There's them as would make her a good, forehanding provider, but no man won't take a hull family on his hands to onct. It's bad enough marryin' widders, but nobody wants a lot of sickly young ones a-eatin' up all the substance of a farm. No, indeed!"

"Wall, you know, Mrs. Hemphill, Marthy feels as if the children hes as good a right as herself to the farm; they was her father's."

"Yes; but he didn't make no will, and the farm and the settin' out was all Marthy's own mother's, so nobody can't dispute her claim. Besides, what does a slip of a girl like that know 'bout carryin' on a farm, I'd like to know?"

"It's too bad; but, as you say, she'll find how hard it is to manage a farm. I am grieved for her, and I'll ask the sisterhood to make her a subject of an address to the throne of grace," said Mrs. Pringle as she gave a little sigh, and folded up her knitting to take her seat at Mrs. Hemphill's well filled tea table, for she had ridden over to spend the afternoon and have a good visit.

Jabez, Mrs. Hemphill's only son, and his father came in and took their accustomed places, and the father asked a very long blessing, and reached his hand out and captured a biscuit at the same moment that he delivered his "amen."

Jabez was a handsome, frank young fellow, who worked very hard and had no vices, but who possessed a fair share of manly virtues.

He found time, somehow, after the multifarious duties on a farm were done, to study, and to slip over to the Avery farm very often.

Being a steady and handsome young fellow, his mother naturally looked on him with pride, and now she felt that she was doing her duty as a wise mother in discountenancing such a foolish action on Marthy's part as adopting her three little half sisters and baby brother.

Meanwhile, Marthy was working, as if her life depended upon it, over a refractory churning, and her pretty face was wrinkled into a frown and her cheeks flamed crimson, and little sparks of anger seemed to shoot from her eyes that had yet a suspicion of tears not far off.

She jerked the dasher with vindictive little movements, as if she wished she had some particular person under the dasher, and withal it did seem as if that butter was bewitched.

"I don't wonder it won't come," said Marthy, at last. "Hateful old thing! As if I depended upon her, or as if I wanted her 'Jabez.' I guess I can manage a farm; at any rate, I must try, for with God's help I will take care of these poor little children. Addie can help take care of the others—and I think she is cruel—Oh!"

This exclamation was brought forth by the sudden sight of Jabez, as he sprang over the fence and walked into the well kept kitchen without a word of warning or invitation.

He walked directly up to Marthy and clasped both of his hands around hers as she held the dasher, and said cheerily: "Well, Marthy, how are you? Here you sit down and let me do this, and I can look at you all the while, and that will pay me for my work."

"IT'S TOO BAD." Marthy had intended to be very dignified and cold, and to show that she did not need the advice, assistance nor the love of any of the Hemphill family, after the visit that Mrs. Hemphill had made, and remembering all that she had said; but in the presence of Jabez all this heroic resolution passed away like mist before the sunshine, and instead of her dignified reserve she put her two plump little hands before her face and began to sob and cry.

Of course Jabez was instantly distressed to such an extent that he dropped the dasher into the churn and sprang to Marthy's side, and there he knelt, and

wiped away her tears, and smoothed the curly tendrils of her hair; and before she knew it his strong arm was around her waist and he had kissed her.

In a few minutes she recovered her calm, but her dignity had flown. She was only a weak woman after all, who was striving to do her plain duty; and she tried to free herself from the strong young arms that held her in so close and so comforting a clasp; for, poor child, her father was only a week dead!

"Don't, Jabez," was all she could say. "And why not, Marthy? Why shall I not love and comfort my dear little wife that is to be?"

"Oh, dear!" said Marthy, despairingly. "Oh, dear! Oh, Jabez, please don't, for this is not possible."

"And why not, Marthy? Ever since we were able to talk I have known you and loved you; and all my life I have been trying to deserve you. You have loved me, too, haven't you? Well, then, why isn't it possible, please tell me?"

"Haven't you heard? Don't you know? Jabez, I feel as if it is my solemn duty to take care of these poor little children, and not let them suffer. Father left nothing but the farm; but there was always enough for us all, and I must try to do the best I can for them. And you—you—I think we had better not see each other any more, for—"

"There, that's just enough. You are willing to throw me off for the sake of those children who have no earthly claim upon you. You could send them to their poor old grandfater, but you prefer to shoulder the burden yourself, and devote all your dreams of happiness, and devote all your life to them, and forget the life long love I've had for you?"

"It is my duty, Jabez." "And you are willing to sacrifice all to them, and they may turn out ungrateful or wicked; and you know me, and that I love you dearly, little Marthy, and always will."

"I can't help it, Jabez. I can't see it in the same light. I feel as if the hand of the dead lay upon me, and I must obey. Besides, I do it because I feel it is right. Don't make it harder for me than it is, Jabez."

"Martie, my little wife." "I would be very happy so, Jabez; but I know your mother never would consent, and I couldn't bear to cause a disagreement in your family."

"I can manage that, Marthy, if you will agree to be my wife next Monday. We will go over to Wilkesbarre to get married there quietly, and return and settle down at once into a new edition of Darby and Joan. What do you say?"

Poor little Marthy hung her head, and reflected as well as she could. Mother and father were both dead, and she had no one to advise or counsel her; all she could do was to let him have one swift glance from her downcast eyes, which was all the answer he needed.

"I thought you liked Marthy!" One long embrace, and one shy, sweet kiss ratified this silent promise.

"Put on that pretty lilac dress, Marthy, Monday morning, and meet me at 8 o'clock just beyond the Swayle brook, and in one hour we will be one, and say nothing to anybody. Oh, yes; one other thing. Will you trust the children to me to bring up? Will you give them into my guardianship completely? Answer yes, without question."

"Why certainly. Since we're—"

"All right. Now I must really go, for there's a thousand things to do. You will be there?" and as she answered yes, he caught her plump little form to his heart again, and kissed her again for goodby; and he leaped the fence at a bound, and in a few minutes was at home about his "chores," with a light heart, for he loved Marthy truly and well, and he now saw his way to happiness with the one girl he loved.

Sunday he went away in the morning, and was gone all day, and only returned in time for supper.

After the table was cleared, and Mrs. Hemphill sat down to rest, with a clean pocket handkerchief folded over her knees, to save her black silk dress, and her Bible in her hands, for she always held her Bible thus every Sunday evening, though no one could remember ever seeing her read in it, Jabez arose from his seat and walked up and down the room in silence. His mother watched him uneasily.

At last he spoke: "Mother, I am thinking of getting married."

It was out at last! Her fear was well placed, and the shock was great.

"Mother, how would you like Lucinda Rosencranz for a daughter?"

In all her imaginings she had never let her fancy run riot to an extent that could have permitted Lucinda Rosencranz to enter her head as the possible choice of her son.

Pretty enough, but coarse and ignorant; daughter of two idle, dissolute parents; lazy and slovenly herself, and fond of dancing and party going, and all the very things that Mrs. Hemphill abhorred, it is no wonder that she sat pale and shocked and speechless.

Of all the girls that she knew, or had ever heard of, Lucinda was the last one that she would have chosen, and she could not bear it.

"I thought you liked Marthy," she said, tremulously. "I do like Marthy; but you said so much—"

"I rather you'd a picked her out!" "She refused me."

"Refused you! I guess you're as good as she any time. Any gal ought to be proud to get you."

"She did not think so, and her refusal did not hurt me long. What do you think of Lucinda?"

"Oh, Jabez, don't ask. I never can give in to your marryin' into that awful family. Just think of what a set they are, and Lucinda'll be just the same. There ain't another girl that can hold a candle to Marthy if it wasn't for them three children."

"She gave them all away yesterday, I heard, to a guardian."

"Jabez, don't you think you could change her resolution? Ye ain't bound to Lucinda, ye ye!" "You know, mother, I never break my word."

Mrs. Hemphill groaned. "I'd rather you had a took Marthy with ten young uns to feed and raise than

Lucinda," and she began to cry, whereupon Jabez hurried off.

The next morning Jabez was gone, no one knew where, and the whole farm seemed to wait him back; though it was noonday, there was no work done, and Mr. and Mrs. Hemphill sat dejectedly in the "best room."

"Father," said at last, knocking the ashes out of his pipe: "I knowed Saturday that sumpin was up, but I never guessed what, and I'm blamed if I ain't sorry for him to go and take up with that shiftless Lucinda, when he might a' had Marthy, only for your bein' so sot agin' them poor little youngsters; and I think Marthy was a-doin' her duty. I'm blimed sorry."

"Mr. Hemphill, don't swear, and don't say I broke off the match. I never done nothin', only Friday I told Marthy my opinion about it, and she got mad, and I s'pose said something that maddened Jabez, for the next day he went off, and I s'pose he asked Lucinda."

"Oh, what on earth shall I do? He is such a good boy, and to throw himself away so!"

"Well, if you told her your mind in the same way you tell it to me I don't blame Marthy a bit for gittin' mad."

At this juncture Mrs. Hemphill gave way to tears, until the noise of wheels on the gravel outside aroused them both, and they looked out to see Jabez and Marthy both looking very happy in the buggy, and Marthy was not in mourning, and something glittered on her wedding finger.

"Mother, father, let me introduce to you Mrs. Marthy Hemphill. I hope you will be pleased to form her acquaintance."

"Pleased ain't no word, Jabez," said his mother, who caught happy little Marthy in her rather long arms, and the father shook Jabez's hands like pump handles, while he tried hard to speak without tears.

After a while everything was explained, and it was a merry Christmas dinner to which they all sat down the next day. Mrs. Hemphill, Sr., said she was thankful above everything that Marthy had upheld her principle, and she added sotto voce, and saved her from that awful "famblay."

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

Keen blew the wind across the naked wood, Glimmered the snow fields white, Awery with longing, doubt and pain, I watched the silent night.

Ah, me! Joy comes and goes, but grief remains; My days shall comfort bring; But bark! Upon the frosty winter air The Christmas chimings ring.

And, like a guilty ghost at breath of dawn, My coward moanings fly; Echoes again th' adoring song that woke Beneath Judea's sky.

And sweeter, clearer, louder, chime on chime, Ring out, O happy bells! For every peal with jubilant refrain, The wondrous tidings tell.

The Mummings of Scotland.

The mummings, guisers or guizards occupied a prominent place in all Christmas observances in the early history of Scotland, and this form of Christmas amusement was evidently a survival from the Roman Saturnalia. In 1877 there were mummings on Christmas Eve in London. Later masking, or "mumming," was forbidden by royal edict. An old piece of verse about the mummings reads:

To shorten winter's sadness, See where the folks with gladness Disguised are all a-comin', Right wantonly a-mumming, Fa la.

Whilst youthful sports are lasting, To feasting turn out fasting, With revels and with wassails, Make grief and care our wassals, Fa la.

For youth it well becometh, That pleasure be esteemeth, And sullen age is hated, That mirth would have abated, Fa la.

A Christmas Comedy.

Mrs. Porter gives Mr. Porter a gentle hint that she would like a sealskin sack for her Christmas.



She gets a sealskin handbag, and her innocent husband can't imagine what she is crying for.



Christmas. As commemorating the birth of the founder of the Christian religion, it is a religious feast. But in the popular apprehension its religious character has been superseded by its social and charitable significance. It has become the feast of good fellowship in the highest sense—good fellowship with a religious sanction. Nominally it is the birthday of the founder of Christianity. Practically it is the day of St. Nicholas, the feast of Santa Claus, the patron of all children.—Harper's Weekly

United States Postage Stamps.

The United States has been, without doubt, the most prolific of all countries in the world in the issue of postage stamps, having put forth over 500 different varieties together. The number of distinct varieties issued by the various governments throughout the world is variously estimated, but 5,000 would probably cover the whole.—Chicago Herald.

PETER PERKINS' DREAM.

BY EMILY ARTHUR.

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my children, ye have done it unto me.

"There is that ham, it is too old to sell, and this barrel of wormy dried apples, and a barrel of meal and one of flour, which are both a little moldy, but still good enough to give to the poor, and that half barrel of sugar that the kerosene was split in, and those two sacks of rice that has weevils, and you might add all that stale bread. They will make a good show-thing, and I guess my name will head the list, for nobody else would give so much. These things you can set aside, Mark, and to-morrow I want them carried round to the society's rooms with my compliments. Aha! This will help many a poor family to enjoy a good Christmas dinner, and will help me with my customers. Everybody likes a generous man, but few of the brethren will make as good a display as I shall to-morrow. I guess I'll go home now, Mark, and, ah, here are \$2 for your Christmas. I can't afford more. You know business is slack. Well, good night."

"When all of these shall have passed," And he had to stand there with the great unknown weight upon his shoulders for long hours, or days, or years, he did not know which, while all these people came by.

He noticed a man who staggered by and laid a heavy weight of gold chalices and church candlesticks and other emblems at his feet, and Peter Perkins saw with surprise that they flew up in the balance as if of air. Another offered a church, which was as so much paper, and then a poor old woman in rags staggered along with a cup of cold water as her only offering. This sent the scales down, down, as if it weighed a ton, and then a pale, thin man came and offered only a tear. This, too, weighed heavier than gold. Sometimes an old broken toy, or some old, worn garments, or even a crust of bread was laid at his feet, and these, too, were very heavy on those wonderful scales.

Peter Perkins noticed, too, that those whose gifts were light disappeared from view, and he watched until he saw them fall into space and fade away in distance, while the angels sent pitying glances after them.

Suddenly the Saviour said: "Now, Peter Perkins, what gift have you brought to the Lord on this his birthday?"

"Oh! I am willing to give you all I have, but this bundle upon my back was not intended for you, but for the poor. If you will let me go back I will return with something more worthy of you."

"But what have you in that bundle?" "Only some flour, and meal, and sugar, and ham, and rice, which are not quite fresh and good, but I thought they would do for the poor!"

"And have you never heard of my words, when I said: 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, my children, ye do it unto me?' Look, that cup of water was given by a sick and suffering woman to one who suffered worse. That holy tear was given from a pure heart that had nothing else to offer, but you, out of your abundance, offer only that which is unfit for food, and in offering that to the unfortunate poor you have offered it to me."

"I did not know! Oh, please let me go back and I will do differently!"

"Alas! you have lived your life, and you must, like all that through you have seen, take your deeds with you to plead for or against you. You can return no more than they. All men bring their passports of good or evil actions with them here, and once they have come naught can change. They must bear their fate. Some of them did not know but you had a mother who taught you wisdom or put them aside. So, now, go your way."

And with these words Peter Perkins felt himself falling into perdition, weighted down by the moldy flour and spoiled bread and sugar. Down, down he went, faster than many others who were on the way, and he cried out in his agony of fear, when suddenly with that cry he awoke and sat up in bed. This then had been a dream! But it had opened his eyes, and he began to see things as he never had done before. He remembered his mother's teachings, and he slept no more that night. But as soon as daylight dawned he dressed and went to the store where poor, faithful Mark, who had slaved ten years for him, was packing those wretched things into the wagon.

"Why don't city folks learn to make crullers like this? For love nor money you couldn't buy anything like this in all this great city. They taste just as mother used to make them. Her tin cruller box was never empty and how good they were; the older they were the mellower and better they were. I remember she used to make me a boy and a mouse every time she fried crullers, and always two P's for my letters. And Christmas and New Year's she put caraway seed candies all over mine. I wonder how she did it. That mince pie was good. I think I will take another piece. It hain't cost anything and it makes me think of old times."

And so the miserly old man sat and ate until his usual bedtime came, when he lit his candle, for he never would have gas, and went to bed.

Scarcely had he got warm and comfortable when he saw standing by his bedside a stranger whose face was carefully turned away, and who wore a long, loose garment of some unknown fashion, and instinctively Peter Perkins put his hand under his pillow after his revolver, thinking of robbers, but the stranger said in a low voice, which yet had such authority in it that the wretched man dared not disobey:

"Arise, dress yourself and follow me." As in a dream the little miser followed, but they went so swiftly that he could not see where they were going until at last the stranger said:

"Open your eyes and tell me what you see."

Peter Perkins stood and gazed with his widened face pale and frightened. He seemed to be in a vast place, so vast that it appeared to be visible limitless space. There was no beginning nor end to anywhere, and yet he was there in the midst of this infinity of distance, and before him upon nothing stood great tables upon which was piled a heterogeneous collection of everything imaginable, and while he was trying to understand this confusion, he noticed that there had appeared, rank on rank and file on file, limitless, countless numbers of cherubim and seraphim, and in the midst of this throng sat upon a crystal throne Christ, the benign, the loving, the pitiful, and his features seemed to exude sweetness and mercy from every lineament, and his smile was ineffably tender.

The cherubim and seraphim sang: "Glorv, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and good will to men," and as Peter Perkins watched this beautiful countenance he saw its expression change. Sometimes it became that of a little child, sweet and infantine, again it was tender and pitiful, then it looked as if it must have done when he said, "Come to me, all ye weary and heavy laden," then it was filled full of sorrow and merciful goodness, and then it grew stern and awful.

Then Peter Perkins noticed that there was a throng ever increasing and reaching far below them so that the end of them was far out of sight, and these people came singly to the foot of the Saviour and there laid a gift which was instantly taken by the angels and laid upon a pair of scales, which did not measure by the weight of the gift itself, but the motive which lay like a living heart inside it.

Then Peter Perkins saw that all who had not yet offered their gift had a burden to carry, large or small, and he suddenly became aware that the burden fastened upon his own back was enormous and was very heavy. But he turned to the stranger and said: "When will it be my turn?"

"When all of these shall have passed," And he had to stand there with the great unknown weight upon his shoulders for long hours, or days, or years, he did not know which, while all these people came by.

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DAUGHTERS OF EVE

Mrs. M. Louise Thomas, president of Scripps, is a bee keeper, and gathers 10,000 pounds of honey a year.

Little Miss Lizzie Bell Sinclair, of Everett, N. J., celebrated her twelfth birthday recently by completing a bed quilt that contains 11,210 pieces.

Belva Lockwood has annexed to her law office at Washington a bureau for finding wives for men who are too busy to spend their time in courting.

Queen Victoria keeps always in her private apartment a statuette of the lamented John Brown, which goes wherever the queen herself travels. Its usual place is on her private writing desk.

On Jenny Lind's coffin was placed by Mr. Goldschmidt a wreath of myrtle made from a tree planted years ago by the great singer herself in the shape of a ring placed there from her wedding with her husband.

Before going to Oak Ridge, Tenn., to give Day Mrs. Cleveland the annual offering of flowers from the House of Representatives to the Central Union, President and several churches and charities institutions.

Miss Susan B. Anthony is engaged in organizing woman suffrage clubs at various points in Indiana, and her appeals and personal efforts have resulted in many accessions to the army of women who believe they have a right to vote.

Milwaukee has a bowling club of eighteen fair damsels who practice religiously seven times a week and have become strong and robust from the exercise. They are very expert at the game and confidently expect to vanquish any club of gentlemen that they challenge them.

When the principal for a seminary for girls in Washington, Pa., started to take her scholars home from church the other day evening she found the usual crowd of young men waiting outside the doors. She made the girls go back, not against their will, and would not budge until a policeman whom she sent for, made the boys go away.

BASEBALL TALK.

The league salary limit for umpires is said to be \$1,500.

The California league has adopted the double umpire system.

Catcher Henry Yalick, of Detroit, has signed with Wheeling.

The Browns and Detroiters contemplate a spring series of exhibition games.

The Yale pitcher, Hutchinson, received \$1,800 from Des Moines last season.

The new Chicago club is said to be contemplating the engagement of Larry McKon.

The New York combination, it is stated, will remain in Frisco until Feb. 15 at least.

Not one of the original Browns will play with St. Louis next year. Bill Glenn was the last to go.

After refusing many eastern offers, Big Ham, the Harvard college pitcher, has signed with the St. Paul club.

President Day intends sending his southern next spring. This will give his men a chance to show what they can do.

The American association is going to make its games doubly attractive next year by having all of the best umpires in the country.

The Washington club has already made arrangements for the spring opening of the season. The Cleveland club will be the opening attraction.

President Von der Ahe says that Brooklyn and Cincinnati will have matches next year, and both should make a fight for the pennant.

Buck Ewing is doing some phenomenal pitching since the New York combination started for California. It is a great pity he was not given a trial during the summer.

When President V. n. der Ahe was asked Director Doyle if he wanted his club Mr. Doyle said: "Yes, and you include I will give \$50,000 for the whole business."

SPORTING AND ATHLETIC.

Sir Dixon is the most popular candidate for the next Kentucky Derby.

The Dwyers have engagements for \$200,000 of stakes next season.

James Quirk, the Canadian sprinter, has gone to England to try his luck in the local caps.

It is not at all improbable that Donnie McCaffrey and Peter Nolan will meet in a neapolitan some time next month.

W. Byrd Page, the world's champion jumper, has decided to quit public life and go on with his post graduate course at the University of Pennsylvania.

Randigo, the great English race horse, whom an offer of \$100,000 was refused years ago by his owner, a wealthy brewer, now has nearly that amount to his credit in stakes won, and is still sound and useful.

California now has the honor of having the best trotting records at 1, 2, 3 and 4 mile, viz.: Yearling, Norland, 2:31; 2-year-old, Wildflower, 2:21; 3-year-old, Wilkes, 2:18; 4-year-old, Mammoth, 2:14.

"Reddy" Gallagher, of Cleveland, and Riley, of Franklin, O., met in Dayton, Nov. 22, and signed articles of agreement for a six round glove fight on Dec. 11. Gallagher's weight is 155 pounds and Riley's is 160.

Toff Wall, the middle weight champion of England, after making a tour through the latter part of December to fight Jack Sey for from \$1,000 to \$2,500 a side and middle weight championship of the world.

POLITICAL PICKINGS.

The formation of Republican clubs in Maine.

All but four of the 175 newspapers in Georgia are against the continuation of the war taxes.

Senator Toller, of Colorado, will be perfectly satisfied with the Republican vote for the presidency if he is a good enough man to win the fight against Cleveland.

It is true that we have had fairly good luck with our national convention, but doubtful whether the big